The Fantastic, The Uncanny, and The Marvelous: Aspects of the Unreal in Three Canadian Novels

by

Joseph J. Voros

A thesis
presented to the University of Manitoba
in fulfillment of the
thesis requirement for the degree of
Master of Arts
in the
Department of English

Winnipeg, Manitoba
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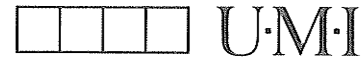

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THE FANTASTIC, THE UNCANNY, AND THE MARVELOUS: ASPECTS OF THE UNREAL IN THREE CANADIAN NOVELS

BY

JOSEPH J. VOROS

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an investigation of three Canadian novels. The thesis examines Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale, Timothy Findley's Not Wanted On The Voyage, and Robert Kroetsch's What The Crow Said in relation to structural paradigms established by Tzvetan Todorov and Sigmund Freud. The investigation will follow the method of analysis developed by Tzvetan Todorov in The Fantastic: A Structural Approach To A Literary Genre. This structuralist method allows for an analysis of texts within the boundaries of "The Fantastic" genre, which includes the neighboring genres of "The Uncanny" and "The Marvelous". "The Fantastic" is a name given to a kind of literature, to a literary genre. When we examine works of literature from the perspective of genre, we engage in a particular enterprise. We discover a principle operative in a number of texts, rather than what is specific about each of them. Genres are precisely those relay-points by which the work assumes a relation with the universe of literature. The method of analysis developed by Sigmund Freud in Art and Literature -- specifically in his essay titled "The Uncanny"-- modifies Todorov's paradigms. Freud's paradigms help to place the text within a psychoanalytic perspective.

I will argue that each text employs specific paradigms of "The Fantastic" genre as a strategy for the text's framework. Oftentimes "The Fantastic" is a pretext for some critical end -- some social position -- offering a kind of social commentary on power, politics, phallocentrism and logocentrism. The reader discovers that a fantastic text's ontology explores questions of epistemology; this exploration challenges the reader to grasp what such a narrative strategy signifies.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. David Arnason for his patience and help in the writing of this thesis.

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Why do people all over the world and at all times, want marvels that defy all verifiable fact? And are the marvels brought into being by their desire, or is their desire an assurance rising from some deep knowledge, not to be directly experienced and questioned, that the marvelous is indeed an aspect of the real? (Fifth Business 234)

The most interesting things are not laws but exceptions. (Julio Cortazar)

The word "genre" defines a category or grouping of things that share certain common characteristics. A genre may be identified by something as evident as its visual medium; a film differs from a poem. Critics who define specific genres come up with taxonomies of characteristics that define the differences between genres; but inevitably the boundaries begin to blur. As these borders between genres become less apparent (and ultimately as the disparities between singular texts become less and less), we must elaborate more. We must do this in order to determine what the special nature of the text is. We may ask ourselves, for example, what distinguishes a short story from a novella? Once we sift through the available information -- identifying the common characteristics and then explicating the differences -- we resolve questions of genre that will help us see the text we are studying more clearly.

Holman, in A Handbook to Literature, attempts to define what a genre means. He states "genre" is a term used in literary criticism

> ...to designate the distinct types of categories into which literary works are grouped according to form or technique or, sometimes, subject matter. The term comes from French...it means "kind" or "type". In its customary application it is used loosely, since the varieties of literary "kinds" and the principles on which they are made are numerous. [1]

Holman notes the customary, loose usage of "genre" is problematic; Tzvetan Todorov's approach to genre is less concerned with etymology -- and more concerned with how a genre functions. Holman's definition explains that principles governing genres are "numerous" -- since there are an infinite number of combinations of forms, techniques, and subject matters performing in any one individual text. Possibly a single execution of one combination or pattern might offer a formula for a specific genre. Todorov argues that the exponential nature of literary texts constantly challenges these formulaic genres. Todorov would sympathize with a graduate student; as he attempts to assimilate a genre, new texts

keep being written. Unless he reads several books a day, he will never manage to absorb them all.

Holman's subsequent assertions extend the relationship of genres and texts to their logical outcome: classification. The practice of critics is to classify genres, he states, because that is how one makes sense of a specific work -- in relation to others of similar structure. Holman's discussion of genre classification shows the evolution of the study from historical to contemporary:

> Genre classification implies that there are groups of formal or technical characteristics existing among works of the same generic "kind" regardless of time or place of composition, author, or subject matter; and that these characteristics, when they define a particular group of works, are of basic significance in talking about literary art. Prior to the Romantic Age in England, there was a tendency to assume that literary "kinds" had an ideal existence and obeyed "laws in kind", these laws being criteria by which works could be judged. In the Romantic Age, genre distinctions were often looked upon merely as restatements of conventions that were suspect. Today critics frequently regard genre distinctions as useful descriptive devices but rather arbitrary ones. [2]

We know a novel differs from a novella; the reason we know this stems from cultural, social, and historical experiences that have shaped our assumptions. Every individual text belongs to a class of similar texts, and not only the similarities, but also the differences help refine the criteria by which we might define it. The range of shared characteristics between individual texts may be few, or many and varied. Hence, we might classify The Handmaid's Tale and 1984 as dystopian fiction. Yet, only The Handmaid's Tale can be classified Canadian. In the same vein, only 1984 can be classified as a British novel. We might see this relationship as follows:

individual text ----> class of similar texts ----> similar-yet-different text refines criteria even further

Once we have thought through the process that distinguishes texts from other texts, we enter a precarious field of endeavour where we are in danger of developing prescriptive rules and principles to such an extent that no two texts can ever be classed together.

Yet this situation is not altogether futile. At the same time that we are making works of literature analogous by grouping them, we identify certain things out of which we can develop a workable theory. Whether that theory is sustainable depends on the texts in question. As a case in point, we may be able to create a workable theory about the British Gothic novel. The body of literature has been placed; it is located in one geographic area -- Britain. It has been produced in the past during the late eighteenth century. The texts are written in English only -- though we know the Gothic novel spread to literatures of many other countries. Certain elements such as trap doors, catacombs, and ghosts identify the Gothic text. The authors writing the genre are now dead and cease to produce any new texts. With all of these conditions in mind, we might configure a genre theory based on the British Gothic novel with the texts available to us.

Jonathon Culler states that genre classification is a way of naturalizing texts. He defines genres as classes

> ...which have been functional in the processes of reading and writing, the sets of expectations which have enabled readers to naturalize texts and give them a relation to the world or, if one prefers to look at it another way, the possible functions of language which were available to writers of any given period. [3]

Culler suggests genre study and classification serves to establish a common ground for any given set of texts. In this thesis, I wish to look at the texts written by Timothy Findley, Robert Kroetsch, and Margaret Atwood. The texts belong to a field we call Canadian Literature. Because the texts or the authors share some common vision -- that critics acknowledge and identify -- they are recognized as Canadian. Beyond that, they share other characteristics that define them as Canadian. One evident relationship between Robert Kroetsch, Margaret Atwood, and Timothy Findley is that they were all born in

Canada. Birthright is merely one factor. Other attributes of the novel, such as a Canadian theme, will characterize it as part of the Canadian genre.

The methods of structuralist analysis are useful in the study of genres. A structuralist analysis attempts to find a place for a text in a class of similar texts -- but also explicates the text at the same time. Structuralist theory has influenced the Russian critic Tzvetan Todorov. His ideas about literary texts come from an attempt to classify texts within larger frameworks -- such as social themes or historical patterns. Structuralism attempts to see literary conventions and forms as a system of codes that, in turn, disclose meaning in the text.

According to Leonard Orr in A Dictionary of Critical Theory, structuralist studies historically have concentrated on prose fiction. Obviously, the novel has generated the greatest amount of structuralist criticism, since it remains the dominant form of prose fiction. According to Orr, structuralism

> ...sees literary conventions and forms as constituting a system of codes that contribute and convey meaning. The special interest here is on the organization and function of distinctively literary elements, on how meaning is conveyed rather than what meaning is conveyed, on how a literary device or even genre functions rather than how it imitates an external reality or expresses an internal feeling. [4]

Structuralist methodology forms the basis of Tzvetan Todorov's work entitled The Fantastic: A Structuralist Approach To A Literary Genre. One criticism of structuralism addressed by Todorov in his study is that the theory places prescriptive, pre-existing notions on texts that may very well be trying to change that notion. How might structuralism address the use of experimental forms in writing if the focus is on pre-existing notions? Todorov shows how a new text can alter the content and form of a genre beyond the limitations of existing texts. Further, Todorov addresses the way in which the ephemeral nature of literature challenges structuralist theory's capacity to cope with experimental forms in writing.

Tzvetan Todorov's analysis of the "fantastic" genre in prose fiction, particularly the novel, in his major work titled The Fantastic: A Structuralist Approach To A Literary Genre, offers a useful method for reading texts that fall outside the parameter of realist fiction. I will use Todorov's structuralist paradigms to explicate three texts of Canadian fiction. My thesis will examine three contemporary Canadian texts: Robert Kroetsch's What The Crow Said, Timothy Findley's Not Wanted On The Voyage, and Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale. The analysis of the novels in question will be shaped by two major critical ideas: Todorov's notions of the fantastic, the marvelous, the supernatural, and the uncanny as expressed in his work The Fantastic: A Structural Approach To A Literary Genre and Freud's notion of "Das Unheimlich" as expressed in his essay "The Uncanny" in Art and Literature. I will argue that each text employs specific paradigms of the fantastic genre as a strategy for the text's framework.

Not much has been written on the topics of the marvelous, the fantastic, and the uncanny in Canadian Fiction. Except for Margot Northey's book The Haunted Wilderness, which addresses the fantastic in supplement to the grotesque, few critics have chosen to discuss these elements in Canadian fiction. For instance, Todorov's critical discussion of the fantastic genre fails to cite a single Canadian text, though his pre-1975, Eurocentric view of the genre may account for this deficiency.

Specifically, I will address Todorov's and Freud's critical approaches. Drawing from their critical framework, I will first examine and explain their paradigms, then show how these paradigms -- and the generic distinctions under which they operate -- can be applied to the Canadian texts under investigation. Dealing with the paradigms in this way, I will propose definitions for the purpose of the study. Subsequently, these definitions will help inform the investigation.

To make the "fantastic" genre a useful category, it is important to know the ontology of each text as a discrete unit instead of as an amalgam of its systems and codes. For example, if an opening scene hints at a character emerging from a dream-like state,

then a suspension of belief in the plot might be necessary: is he dreaming or is it real? The text's ontology is the assumed system of beliefs established in the introduction that consequently operates toward closure of the text. For example, in an uncanny text such as Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale, unicorns and fairies are not characteristic of the text's ontology. Yet unicorns and fairies are essential to the ontology of Findley's Not Wanted On The Voyage. The establishment of the text's ontology is paramount to Todorov's theory as the text moves toward a uniform closure. If the ontology is not uniform, then the effect of the fantastic text is undermined. In a detective story by Sherlock Holmes, the text's ontology does not allow for the figure of a dragon to become a potential killer. Such a character would negate the intrigue which has its origins in crimes of humanity; the human interaction exhibits the extremes of human nature. Yet in the story of The Knights Of The Round Table, a rampaging dragon is an almost expected element of the text's ontology. Each fantastic text introduces its own ontology and maintains it toward closure.

To understand the laws of a genre, it is necessary to consider a wide sample of literature within that genre. One author of one era may only give a limited version of the generic code. Choosing the sample is as complicated as formulating the rules governing the genre once the data has been compiled. Furthermore, the rules governing a genre are open-ended as long as anyone still chooses to produce new works within the genre's boundary because each new work has the potential to extend that genre's boundary. Such change and evolution poses problems for the theorist, and imposes limitations upon the degree to which any definition of a genre can be trusted to be reliable over a long period of time.

Critics have difficulty classifying fantastic texts when they either attempt to be too inclusive or too restrictive. The goal of the critic should be to come to know the ontology of the text as a discrete unit. That usually involves distinguishing between the limits of the human world and the start of the supernatural world. For the purposes of this discussion, the ontology of the text will be established by distinguishing the primary world -- the

human world -- from the secondary world which extends past human experience into the supernatural. For the purposes of this discussion, the primary world will be defined as the human world -- the palpable and ineluctable world of everyday experience -- and the secondary world will be defined as the supernatural world.

Todorov discusses the question of genre in his work The Fantastic: A Structural Approach To A Literary Genre. He claims that a grammar of literary forms is as necessary as a grammar of narrative itself. All writing takes place in the light of other writing, and represents a response to the world of writing that pre-exists it. As Todorov points out, the literary genre is not only generated by the pre-existing notion of what a novel is, but it can also change that notion, and so itself generate a modified one. The genre therefore does not altogether observe a prescriptive pattern.

Nevertheless, a world without a theory of genre is unthinkable, and untrue to experience. We can tell the difference between a comedy and a tragedy, even if those terms are not as precise and as exclusive as we might wish them to be. The definition of genres, Todorov concludes, cannot be fixed: there is a continual oscillation between the description of facts and the abstraction of theory.

For instance, Todorov describes the genre of the fantastic as bounded by the neighboring genres of the uncanny and the marvelous but never straying into either region, however much a reader's interpretation may be drawn in one direction or the other. The reader's hesitation when it comes to assigning events to the real world or the world of the supernatural creates skepticism. This is further complicated by the protagonist whom the reader follows through the text. The reader then interprets the reality that befalls the protagonist. The fantastic genre fluctuates in this reckoning of the real or the unreal. Only the text's closure determines the placement of the text within the fantastic genre.

Thus when a reader approaches a novel and understands it to belong to the genre of the fantastic, he expects the narration of a strange event, but he is also committed to a certain way of reading it: to allow an allegorical or poetical reading of the events would

normalize them, but it would also dispose of them. So the hesitation between reading events in the text as natural or as supernatural, an uncertainty which the narration both creates and requires, must be repeated in the responses of the character the narration describes, and then echoed in the culturally available alternatives for a reader's response. At the end of the story the reader is able to resolve his hesitation by opting to classify the events of the story in one or other of the neighboring areas, the uncanny or the marvelous, depending on the way in which he feels matters have been resolved, and according to a scale that Todorov cites as follows:

pure uncanny	fantastic-uncanny	fantastic-marvelous	pure marvelous

Ultimately, Todorov argues, the role of the fantastic has always been to set that which is "real" -- capable of rational explanation -- against that which is imaginary or supernatural. Hence it can only exist as a genre in terms of that simple dichotomy. The terms of the dichotomy can be set in doubt by asking the question "...are these events real or imaginary?" and logically "...how can we be sure?" . The art of indecision holds that precarious balance. Only by a reading towards closure of the text will indecision be resolved.

Todorov's analytic model relies exclusively on the hesitation felt by the reader -- in light of "natural" or "unnatural" laws acting upon the characters in the text. The hesitation may be resolved as the reader acknowledges the event to be configured as an illusion. Furthermore, a fantastic novel requires a certain way of reading. Suspending the norms of hesitation merely shifts the work to a purely poetical or allegorical reading. The fantastic genre's role is to identify singular interpretations inside fictive forms of the uncanny, the fantastic, or the marvelous.

The content of the fantastic text helps establish the belief system -- the ontology -- but the form of the fantastic text prompts another question. Todorov's model helps answer the question "what is the fantastic?", but the text's form raises a different question: "why the fantastic?". The first question dealt with the structure of the genre: the second one deals with its functions. Answering the question "why?' serves to bring the text toward the viewpoint of literature in general, or even of social life. If literature mirrors reality, then there must be a reason to write a fantastic text.

If we are looking at the larger perspective of literature and society, then Freud's theory of "Das Unheimliche" -- the uncanny -- can shed some light on Todorov's model. Freud, in his essay "The Uncanny" states:

> The uncanny is undoubtedly related to what is frightening -- to what arouses dread and horror; equally certainly, too, the word is not always used in a clearly definable sense, so that it tends to coincide with what excites fear in general. Yet we may expect that a special core of feeling is present which justifies the use of a special conceptual term. One is curious to know what this common core is which allows us to distinguish as "uncanny" certain things which lie within the field of what is frightening. [5]

The essay describes how the German word "heimlich" translates roughly to the word "home" in English. The word "unheimlich" then connotes something out of the home or apart from the home. Freud's psychoanalytic writings show how children are influenced by homely and unhomely events in their developing years. Hence, that which is safe and happy is homely and those experiences that are unhomely are unsafe and unhappy. Childhood fears then influence the structuring of stories and literature since, as Freud argues, characterization in fiction mirrors real events. Reflecting these dreadful experiences, fiction arouses fear from the childhood unconscious and the readers relate through their own personal experience or through the author's description of the experience.

Freud identifies uncanny feelings in a psychoanalytic framework which can then be transferred to literary themes. Since in Freud's thinking literature so crucially mirrors human reality, and since the psychoanalysis he directs toward that reality so tellingly reveals it, Freud does not hesitate in transposing his findings about the human psyche into his reading of literary texts. He states that being buried alive is one of the most uncanny events a person can face. He bases this belief on the fact that the inter-uterine / extra-uterine existence is so paradoxical. In infancy it is comforting. After infancy it is claustrophobic. Further, no physical injury is so much dreaded by humans as an injury to the eye. This fear is especially acute in children. For the male, castration of the penis is also highly feared.

In addition, Freud argues, psychological complexes can elicit uncanny feelings. An Oedipus complex in young boys and an Electra complex in young girls, initiated in early childhood, stand behind the writing and the reading of these themes, subsequently uncanny in literature when they reappear there. Moreover, genitals of both sexes create uncanny feelings in some patients according to Freud. The phenomenon of the double person interrupts the narcissistic nature of children since their belief is that the world revolves around them only. The possibility of a double provokes uncanny feelings. As well, the unintended recurrence of the same situation -- coincidences and the like -- produces uncanny feelings. What Freud surmises, then, is that infantile trauma generates anxieties from which the majority of human beings never quite free themselves.

Freud's model, as I shall demonstrate later in this study, goes beyond Todorov's model to examine both the social function and literary function of texts. Todorov addresses the social function of literature in his discussion on the fantastic genre. Getting past the structural "what" of the text, the discussion can extend to the functional "why" of the text. The text is no longer studied as a work for its internal structure, but as a signifying work of fiction within a larger social, political, and cultural framework. And for

that matter, it is no longer an isolated piece of fiction. The text gains meaning as the author enculturates the events to his own experience.

The fantastic genre, then, can be seen as a pretext for some other purpose. For many authors, this type of suspension of reality in fiction offers a freedom for other concerns. Peter Penzoldt takes this theory of fantastic fiction to be functional when he states "...for many authors, the supernatural was merely a pretext to describe things they would never have dared mention in realistic terms." [6] Certain taboo themes ingrained in the implied reader's society perhaps could now surface under the guise of a fictional text.

Historically the realist novel boasts a stronger tradition than the fantastic novel; the fantastic text in its present form is a relatively new phenomenon. To write in a mode not common to society is a risk for any author. Taboo acts in society may forbid the author to approach explicitly taboo themes in literature. More than a simple pretext, the fantastic provides a means to combat this kind of censorship. Todorov notes how sexual excesses will be more readily accepted by any censor if they are attributed to the devil.

According to post-structuralist critics, psychoanalysis has replaced the literature of the fantastic. There is no need today to resort to the devil in order to speak of carnal desire, sexual dysfunction, corpses, necrophelia, bestiality, scatology and so on. For novelists of the past, however, the fantastic genre offered the medium to express these taboo subjects. It should come as no surprise, then, that the novels under consideration in this discussion still invoke the taboos still current in Canada -- in North American society -- as seen today. Contemporary taboos may differ from taboos of the nineteenth century, but North America still has them.

North America has learned to live with an agnostic vision, free of religious taboos. But North America has taboos -- with a history of corrupt patriarchy and new-world nuclear plague. Atwood addresses nuclear waste dumps in The Handmaid's Tale, for example. Findley addresses the insanity of religious fundamentalism in Not Wanted On The Voyage. North America is well aware of recent fundamentalist cults and

televangelism that mirrors that mode of thinking. We enculturate our own taboos -- Kroetsch, Findley, and Atwood make us aware of them.

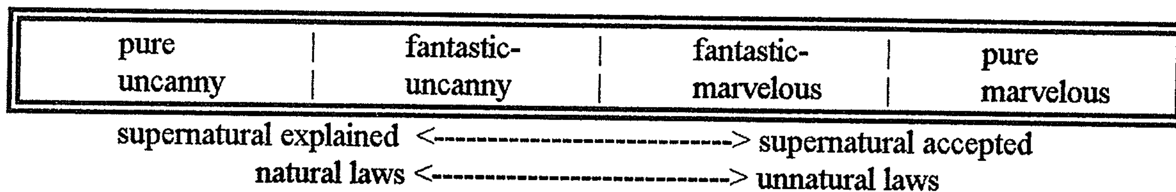
Todorov alludes to a curious coincidence between the authors who cultivate the fantastic and those who, within their works, are especially concerned with the development of the action; authors who want to tell stories. Kroetsch offers this type of story-creating in his western mythos: the spirit is originary, the story-telling creates legend, and the land is fabled. For Atwood, her story-making serves a social function which most critics have identified. Findley's stories also serve a strong social function.

Kroetsch's What The Crow Said un-names, un-tells, and un-structures through its postmodern conventions. Todorov offers a theory of adaptation to deal with such fantastic texts that do not allow recognizable patterns of form and content. Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale, with its futuristic dystopia, accords with Todorov's model of the uncanny -- and proves to have a social function as it criticizes politics and patriarchy. Similarly in Findley's Not Wanted On The Voyage, the marvelous tale serves a social function in condemning fundamentalist thinking. It twists the biblical story of The Flood to relate its own myth.

The rise of the novel, as Todorov asserts, has been influenced by great fantastic texts of the past such as The Odyssey. According to Todorov, such texts have served as precursors to European writers such as Kafka and Balzac. Yet, even as they have modelled their own work on those texts, they have enculturated them within their own more immediate traditions. Each culture, Todorov claims, formulates distinctive markers that identify texts within a culture's myth-making tradition. The British Gothic novel provides a particularly good example of the pattern.

Potentially, the fantastic text starts from a perfectly natural situation to reach its climax in the marvelous (the acceptance of the supernatural). Through the process, causal principles lead the reader to reject natural laws -- after a certain hesitation -- and accept the supernatural, thus entering the realm of the marvelous.

Todorov's theory offers a starting point for the analysis of "fantastic" texts. A text can be placed in relation to Todorov's scale, illustrated below, depending on whether the supernatural is explained (which places the text in the realm of the uncanny) or whether the supernatural is accepted as the text's ontology (which places the text within the realm of the marvelous).



Texts follow historical modes of fiction and usually do not break the rules. But some texts do. In The Fantastic: A Structuralist Approach To A Literary Genre, Todorov addresses how a theory of adaptation is necessary to account for non-conforming texts. Todorov cites Kafka's The Metamorphosis which starts from a supernatural event, the protagonist's discovery that he has turned into a cockroach. Causal principles and their relationship with natural and unnatural laws develop the direction of the text toward closure.

The Metamorphosis starts from a supernatural event. It grows increasingly toward a natural atmosphere; the text, in effect, works in reverse to conventional fictional texts. There is no hesitation because the outcome is known. Hesitation would have prepared the way for the perception of the unheard-of event, and characterized the transition from natural to supernatural. Instead, the text moves from supernatural to natural. Todorov calls this reversal "adaptation". Hesitation and adaptation designate two divergent processes. Here, it is the reader who undergoes a process of adaptation: at first confronted with a supernatural event, the reader comes to acknowledge its "naturalness".

What does such a narrative structure signify? In the fantastic text, the uncanny or supernatural event is perceived against the background of what is considered normal and

natural; the transgression of the laws of nature make us even more powerfully aware of them. In Kafka, the supernatural event no longer provokes hesitation, for the world described is entirely bizarre. The fantastic genre -- a literature which postulates the existence of the real, the natural, the normal, in order to attack it subsequently -- Kafka has managed to disrupt. He treats the irrational as though it were part of a game: his entire world obeys a counter logic, which has nothing to do with the real. Even if a certain hesitation persists in the reader, it ceases to affect the character.

According to Sartre, Kafka redefines the world as utterly strange. For him, there is now only one fantastic object and that is man himself. [7] The fantastic being becomes the rule, not the exception. Todorov's model allows us to understand such a shift in form by adapting to its ontology. This shift is also apparent in postmodern texts such as Kroetsch's What The Crow Said where the plot is entirely bizarre.

In summary, we can see, then, that Todorov's Primary World is the world of humans -- the reader's reality. The Secondary World is the world that contravenes human experience. This model creates the boundaries for fiction -- and helps to place a text somewhere in Todorov's uncanny-fantastic-marvelous paradigm. With this idea, the texts can be better addressed as they stretch the limits of human imagination. What in the Primary World was an exception becomes the rule for Kroetsch in his tall tale of Bigknife. Atwood and Findley conform more closely to Todorov's theoretical model and this will be explained later. Todorov's model embraces the antithesis between the real and the unreal. Literature traces both itself and what is not itself. This operation questions ontology and epistemology. Kroetsch's What The Crow Said pursues an irreconcilable solipsism. Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale challenges Todorov's notion of the uncanny to its limit, and Findley's text Not Wanted On The Voyage offers a radically different form of the marvelous.

Tzvetan Todorov proposes that the fantastic-uncanny occupies the duration of a character's hesitation between natural and supernatural explanations of an event. If the character overcomes his hesitation to conclude that he is a victim of an illusion of his own senses, then the fantastic moves to the realm of the pure uncanny. If, on the other hand, an event's nature cannot be explained by natural laws, then the event enters the realm of the marvelous.

When Todorov designates the event or phenomenon that confront the characters in a fantastic tale as uncanny, the world he assigns is the Primary World. It is the world of human beings. The uncanny feelings generated by these events are based on limits of human understanding and experience. In his essay on the uncanny, "Das Unheimliche", Freud defined these human experiences as "something familiar or old-established in the mind that has been estranged by the process of repression".[1] Uncanny events have the power to provoke a sense of dread precisely because they have both strange and familiar qualities. In The Handmaid's Tale, Aunt Lydia leads the handmaids to the Execution Wall where several doctors' bodies in lab coats hang dead on metal spikes for crimes against a "foetus" (31). The doctors' crimes become retroactive; what used to be normal and legal is now punishable by death. What was ordinary is now sinister; what was sinister is now ordinary. Aunt Lydia evokes this uncanny feeling when she addresses the handmaids:

> Ordinary...is what you are used to. This may not seem ordinary to you now, but after a time it will. It will become ordinary (32).

The execution of doctors has the semblance of humans gone insane. Yet the event's familiarity in Gilead, once recognized and understood, brings the event back down to the characters' own Primary World. The process of recognition that establishes abnormal events as ordinary events arouses a sense of the uncanny.

Uncanny events are situated at the heart of the uncanny tale. Their ambiguous character generates hesitation between Primary and Secondary worlds -- as a matter of

course this hesitation helps to define the uncanny tale. On the one hand, the uncanny designates what is familiar and congenial; on the other that which is concealed or kept from sight, and hence sinister. Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale is written in the same tradition as Huxley's Brave New World and Orwell's 1984. Dystopian fiction, by its very nature, sketches a deteriorating human condition. Dystopias elicit uncanny feelings because they overturn the norms of the human condition. Dystopias confront scenarios not found in the ordinary world, and hence disrupt expectations of what is well-known. The well-known world is transformed into an unrecognizable world.

Freud's theory attempts to explain how human beings react to uncanny events. According to Maria Tatar, Freud's definition of the uncanny

> ...rests on a number of subtle psychological and metapsychological premises that are complex; ...the definition in abbreviated form -- "something familiar made strange by the repression of knowledge" -- can prove fruitful for a literary analysis of uncanny events.[2]

Here Freud invokes the causal relationship between the repression of knowledge and the arousal of uncanny feelings. Freud also notes how these themes of the uncanny are fruitful for literary analysis. Todorov likewise states "...the absence of knowledge evokes the presence of the uncanny." [3]

Uncertainty heightens feelings of anxiety. In fiction, such a strategy of uncertainty has its origins in

> ...writers and critics of supernatural fiction [who] have consistently favoured the chilling uncertainty of terror over the grisly reality of horror...The gruesome physical effects of a horror story can rarely match in power the dread of intellectual uncertainty inspired by the uncanny tale of terror. [4]

It is precisely this element of intellectual uncertainty that defines the fantastic for Todorov. A story is more uncanny if resolutions aren't supplied and intellectual uncertainty persists: horror merely follows a horrible event, but terror is a psychological quality that endures before, during, and after that event.

The brand of uncanny that Freud describes is psychoanalytic in nature. Nevertheless Todorov endorses Freud's scientific approach by appropriating it for his own literary theory. Freud describes how childhood experiences produce uncanny feelings in adulthood. June (Offred) as an adult recalls her childhood quite frequently in the text. She remembers her mother taking her to the park on a Saturday for example. But she soon realizes the reason for the trip is a book-burning protest.

Offred's zealous mother burns pornographic magazines and feels "ecstatic" about her protest (36). Uncannily the Gilead regime later imitates this behaviour -- with consequences that no one could have foreseen. Soon every book is forbidden, not just pornography. All universities close and intellectuals are massacred. Subsequently no woman is allowed to read or write. Frederick Judd, the market analyst who synthesizes the Republic of Gilead, is quoted as saying "...our big mistake was teaching them to read. We won't do that again" (289). Judd is quoted in sociobiologist Wilfred Limpkin's private diary -- though in cipher. Judd is such a hard-liner that he apparently executes Limpkin, since Limpkin "...did not long survive the inception of Gilead" (288). Fortunately Limpkin "...saw his own end" (288) and sent his diary of ciphers to his sister-in-law in Calgary. The censorship that Offred witnesses in her mother's life backfires. Systematically Gilead does more than censor, it purges the whole domain of literature. By taking away all books, Gilead takes away the choice to read. Aunt Lydia states quite uncannily:

> There is more than one kind of freedom,...[f]reedom to and freedom from. In the days of anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from. Don't underrate it (24).

The days of anarchy that Aunt Lydia is alluding to are the 1980s in North America. Aunt Lydia describes the North America of the 1980s as a society "...dying...of too much choice" (35). The way Atwood deals with the issue of civil liberties becomes uncanny. When the American Constitution is suspended after the "...army declares a state of emergency" (162), all personal freedoms are rescinded. Gilead's brand of censorship

forbids all printed material. Offred's childhood memories of her mother's small "c" censorship, in comparison to Gilead's censorship, arouses uncanny feelings in her.

Freud's theory can be used to show how June's childhood awakens uncanny feelings in her Gileadean adulthood -- as the handmaid Offred. Freud's real patients provided him with psychoanalytic case studies which later became documented cases of "uncanny" behaviours; but Todorov is concerned with authorial intent of implementing "uncanniness" in a fictive environment. Todorov's model is more concerned with the external function of the uncanny -- such as an author's use of the social uncanny -- as opposed to Freud's purely psychoanalytic view of the uncanny. According to Coral Ann Howells, The Handmaid's Tale has "...strong didactic elements which are both feminist and humanist." [5] Hence, Atwood's use of the uncanny as a structural element in The Handmaid's Tale follows Todorov's notion of the social function of the uncanny. W.F. Garret-Petts states that The Handmaid's Tale

> ...conforms to a consistent rhetorical purpose (didactic in nature) that informs all of Awood's novels...[that characterize] her desire to teach her audience how to read the world. [6]

The social function of the uncanny is very much a part of Atwood's vision. Atwood is openly critical of experimental authors who work towards a private aesthetics and stop writing for readers. W.F. Garrett-Petts adds that Atwood

> ...is a writer for whom fiction writing is the guardian of the moral and ethical sense of the community. As an author, she wants her reader engaged in interpretation, not lost in the funhouse of perpetual confusion. Atwood's [content] ...concerns power structures and how they work to confine and often determine the individual's ability to communicate and interpret. Power determines freedom, or the absence of freedom.... [7]

The power structure inherent in The Handmaid's Tale results from Atwood's view of North American history from the perspective of her own Puritan ancestors in New England. [8] According to Sandra Tomc, one of Atwood's ancestors was hanged in New

England during Puritan times. In an uncanny twist of fate, the sinewy woman survived the hanging: the drop-floor was not widely used then. Because of the law of double jeopardy, she could not be retried and so was let free -- and lives. Atwood's ancestor survives; she defies the logos, she defies "The Word" of law as Cowart defines it. Cowart calls logocentrism "...the myth of the west" [9] by which the patriarchy justifies all action through "The Word". This reality influences the background for The Handmaid's Tale. Patriarchy and religious fundamentalism are unmistakably a part of Atwood's vision. The social uncanny offers Atwood a thematic framework for presenting her futuristic dystopia which has an uncanny resemblance to today's North America. The social uncanny underlies the text where the progenitors of Gilead impose their own logocentric power through expulsion or genocide of other groups: Baptists, Jews, Catholics, Quakers, and Mayday supporters.

The quasi-mythical world of the United States that Atwood describes definitely turns in on itself -- with uncanny results. C.I.A. practices of destabilizing foreign governments are thrown back at them by the Sons of Jacob as they overthrow the U.S. Congress. Biological warfare experiments conducted during the Cold War to introduce new disease-strains in Russia backfire, causing widespread sterility in the U.S. population. Waste disposal sites and nuclear waste, coupled with a major earthquake on the San Andreas fault, throws chaos into the U.S. population. The elimination of paper money through supercomputer networks freezes the free economy. The uncanny aftermath of Atwood's Primary World is conspicuous. The basic supposition of The Handmaid's Tale is that Gilead stages a coup during a time of chaos -- and establishes a self-serving Old Testament fundamentalism. Disasters in this fictional world are noteworthy since they closely resemble news items in the contemporary world: Chernobyl's aftermath, David Koresh's cult in Texas, the current monotheocracy in Iran, the bomb at the World Trade Centre by Islamic fundamentalists, Russian ships dumping toxic waste in the Sea of Japan, and the reported rise in child pornography rings in North America to name a few. When Atwood wrote The Handmaid's Tale similar news items -- along with her concerns about

patriarchy and environmental issues -- influenced her point of view and this is reflected in the social uncanny nature of the text.

The text represents many ideals of the social uncanny that have their origins in the satire of Swift or Orwell. Atwood's dystopian vision, according to W.J. Keith, is concerned with "...female responses to a male-dominated society, and an analysis of socio-political situations." [10] The narrator Offred exposes the male-female hierarchy through her comments about her position as a handmaid for Commander Frederick Waterford. Yet Joseph Andriano questions this very same existence of hierarchy in contemporary society. He quips: "How much worse is it, after all, to call a woman Offred than it is to call her Mrs. Frederick Waterford?" noting that "...her name, her essential identity is still erased." This uncanny revelation begs a rethinking of contemporary North American tradition whereby women's names are appropriated by men.

Linda Hutcheon agrees with Keith when she speaks about women's complicity in the Gilead hierarchy. She notes that in The Handmaid's Tale

> ...men still rule, women still collude. It would not be hard to read this novel in terms of the catastrophic extreme of the imposition of a certain kind of female order: Women are respected most of all for their mothering function....[11]

Banerjee Chimnoy states that Atwood's dystopian vision offers a reductionary view of women as mere objects of the state. Chimnoy states that Atwood presents

> ...a retrospective sense of women's oppression in North America, the fundamental motivation of this dystopia being the reduction of women to mere possessions of men, to decorations, workers, breeders, and whores. [12]

Whether we agree with Hutcheon or Chimnoy, Offred's university friend, the handmaid Moira, exemplifies the limited choices that women possess in Gilead. Of the two choices she is offered when she is recaptured, the Colonies or Jezebel's, she chooses to become a whore at Jezebel's:

> I almost made it out. They got me up as far as Salem, then in a truck full of chickens to Maine...They were planning to get me across the border there; not by car or truck, but by boat, up the coast...I don't know what happened...they picked us up just as we were coming out the back door to go down to the dock...when that was over they showed me a movie...about life in the Colonies...They figure you've got three years maximum, at those, before your nose falls off and your skin pulls away like rubber gloves...All of them wear long dresses, like the ones at the Centre, only grey...I had my choice, they said, this [Jezebel's] or the Colonies...So here I am...You'd have three or four good years before your snatch wears out and they send you to the boneyard. The food's not bad and there's drink and drugs, if you want it, and we only work nights...the Commanders don't give a piss what we do in our off time....(234)

Moira's capture and placement at Jezebel's reduces her to working as a whore for men's "trade delegations" (223) that come to do business with Gilead. Moira is repatriated in an uncanny way; she is brought back again to the pater in Gilead to serve his sexual whims.

The choices are few for infertile women, the Commander notes, so some prefer prostituting themselves at Jezebel's to working in the Colonies. Oblivious to the brutality and hypocrisy of his own regime, the Commander boasts about the previous life of the whores. The reader shudders at the uncanny satisfaction he gets from pimping former intellectuals into common whores for the state:

> That one there, the one in green, she's a sociologist. Or was. That one was a lawyer, that one was in business, an executive position...I'm told you can have quite a good conversation with her if all you feel like is talking. They prefer it here...[t]o the alternatives....(223)

The total collusion manifests itself when the women are monitored by other women -- the Aunts -- who enforce only one "rest break" (226) per hour. The collusion with the male system is absolute.

Dystopias, Atwood's included, show characteristics of the uncanny -- for several reasons. Dystopias by their very nature overturn the current world and displace it with one that is worse. Few dystopias are written without a social purpose. Atwood hopes that her dystopia confronts the status quo in the contemporary world by extending current problems

to their worst possible conclusions in the future. The strategies used by dystopian fiction can be traced to what Todorov calls the social uncanny within the genre of the fantastic. In what we can read as a supplementary argument, Maria Tatar notes that dystopias and the fantastic-uncanny tale achieve their effect through what Freud calls radical homelessness. Tatar states that the fantastic-uncanny tale

> ...draws its very lifeblood from an event that defying reason, shatters the stability of the world to create a condition of radical homelessness. A world once safe and secure becomes hostile and treacherous. This new world is situated at the crossroad of heimlich and unheimlich, at the point where the two words converge in meaning to suggest the sinister and oppressive. [13]

Radical homelessness is exactly what Atwood describes in The Handmaid's Tale. One's home is appropriated by Gilead. Gilead's institutionalized monotheocracy takes away women's homes, jobs, bank accounts, identity, family lives, civil liberties -- things taken for granted in the 1980s -- and replaces private homes with homelands for the state. What was once considered home now becomes something outlandish and rewritten. The changes are perfectly in keeping with dystopias which commonly arouse uncanny feelings with just such anachronisms and palimpsests. These mixed zones of past and present arouse the most uncanny feelings. Just when the new world is becoming commonplace, flashbacks disrupt it. What characters are becoming accustomed to suddenly is transposed -- the forgotten past modifies the present.

Anachronisms and palimpsests take on many forms in The Handmaid's Tale. A disc chants the beatitude "Blessed are the meek..." but uncannily drops "...they shall inherit the earth" from the original version. Offred states:

> "Blessed are the silent." I knew they made that one up, I knew it was wrong, and they left things out too, but there was no way of checking. (84)

Gilead engineers these new versions. The regime knows that older people will carry the old world to their graves. Gilead will succeed, diabolically, to fool the newborn, illiterate

population since they'll never be taught the correct version. Joseph Andriano notes this reality in Gilead:

> The handmaids are forbidden to read anything, even the Bible. In its efforts to achieve the ultimate logocentrism -- a whole society constructed on the word -- the logocracy must erase other words that might create aporia. [14]

Re-writing the Old Testament for its own end is Gilead's strategy; it picks and chooses what it deems appropriate. Handmaids in Gilead adopt the greeting "blessed be the fruit" to which the customary response is "may the Lord open". (19) The Lord does not open their vaginas however, the Commanders do. Moreover, the fruit of their wombs -- children -- become the sole property of the state. Rehashed pieces of scripture are uncanny because Offred realizes their true purpose is only to sustain the state. Uncannily, the true believer is one who no longer has any beliefs.

Gilead forces Offred to become a handmaid for Serena Joy because it has a biblical precedent in the Old Testament story of Billah and Rachel. However, surrogate motherhood in Gilead is quite uncanny compared to its representation in the Old Testament story. The resulting children are given only to certain husbands and wives for the maintenance of the regime. Lucy Friebert notes how Atwood writes about "...a time of underpopulation' [15] but Gilead is responsible for this uncanny situation since it kills Baptists, Catholics, Quakers, and sends away the Jews. Gilead is underpopulated only because the regime requires a population of automatons.

Palimpsests and anachronisms sustains the uncanny. Throwbacks to the past contrast with the present. Offred is keenly aware of how it used to be in the pre-Gilead era. She states:

> Doctors lived here once, lawyers, university professors. There are no lawyers anymore, and the university is closed. Luke and I used to walk together, sometimes, along these streets. We used to talk about buying a house like one of these, an old big house, fixing it up. We would have a garden, swings for the children. We would have children...Such freedom now seems almost weightless. (23)

Martin Kuester notes that the closed university now provides "...centres for political synchronization and religious monologism." 16 The university gymnasium holds the handmaids until they are placed with a Commander of the Faithful to produce children. When the handmaids are held in this former university they are given army-issue blankets that still say "U.S." on them. Twice daily they walk "two by two around the football field" (3) in sight of the armed Angels. The uncanny is sustained because traces of the old world contrast with the current world. The university used to provide liberal education -- but the Rachel and Leah Re-education Centre teaches monotheocracy and totalitarianism.

Michele Lecombe states that the Gilead regime uncannily develops its own canon by appropriating a variety of texts. She states that "...the falsification of biblical texts" 17 such as the Beatitudes merges with the Gilead canon. New beatitudes such as "blessed are the silent" (84) reinforce assent to the state. Likewise, an adage from Marx is transmogrified: "...according to her ability...according to his needs". Slyly, these words are ascribed to St. Paul. (111) Further, the Gilead canon is fond of any biblical precedent to justify its efficacy. Offred states:

> They can hit us, there's Scriptural precedent. But not with any implement. Only with their hands. It's one of the things we fought for says the Commander's Wife, and suddenly she wasn't looking at me, she was looking down at her knuckled, diamond studded hands...it was worse than I thought. (16)

Like all other actions of the state, punishment is given a biblical precedent. In much the same way, the Commander gives a standard speech at wedding ceremonies, prayvaganzas, and ceremonies where nuns are forced to recant their celibacy. This speech relates that women's only salvation from Eve's Original Sin is to bear children for the State:

> Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding she shall be saved by childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness and sobriety. (207)

The Commander cites his theory of polygamy as a naturally occurring part of mankind's existence. He justifies this by explaining to Offred that the whorehouse Jezebel's is the place for polygamists to satisfy their natural urgings:

> It means you can't cheat Nature. Nature demands variety for men. It stands to reason, it's part of the procreational strategy. It's Nature's plan...Women know that instinctively. Why did they buy so many different clothes, in the old days? To trick the men into thinking they were several different women. A new one each day. (222)

The commander reduces the role of women to childbearers or sexual objects. His reductive view shows that the Gilead canon is phallogocentric -- written for men by men.

For women, the man's phallogocentric power and the Name-of-the-Father biblical precedent causes some envy. When Offred plays Scrabble with the Commander, she is delighted to hold a forbidden pen in her hand again. She describes it this way:

> The pen between my fingers is sensuous, alive almost, I can feel its power, the power of the words it contains. Pen Is Envy, Aunt Lydia would say, quoting another Centre motto, warning us away from such objects. And they were right, it is envy...one more thing I would like to steal....(174)

Uncannily, Atwood is writing about a two-level position of envy. Though no woman is allowed to write, the possession of a pen does not guarantee power of any kind. What Offred really wants is to be a man: she has "penis envy" according to Freud's theory. To be a man is everything; to be a woman means little or nothing. This is uncanny because Gilead only grants power to women over other women. Coral Ann Howells notes this:

> What the Aunts' tyranny demonstrates is the danger that patriarchal authority may merely be delegated to become matriarchal authority if the psychology of power politics with its traditional patterns of domination and submission remains unchanged...The Handmaid's Tale may be read as an argument that feminism has not been radical enough to effect a change in either men's or women's traditional gender attitudes. [18]

The conclusion of The Handmaid's Tale reinforces the Name-of-the-Father in the year 2195. Professor Pieixoto and his academic audience attempt to analyze Offred's text -- a set of cassette tapes she hides in a U.S. army foot locker. Phallogocentrism is rekindled in the year 2195 when the professor contributes sexist innuendo, and volunteers crude analogies during the symposium about Gilead.

After Offred's story closes, the text shifts to the future at the University of Denay, Nunavit. This institution is holding a historical symposium titled the "Twelfth Symposium on Gileadean Studies" as part of the "International Historical Association Convention". Most critics concur that Atwood maintains the social uncanny to drive the point home that patriarchy is ageless.

Coral Beran states that the epilogue to the novel reinforces the folly of academics who try to analyze Offred's story as a historical anomaly instead of a woman's account of a patriarchy that attempts to silence her. Beran states that at the symposium

> ...Offred is an object of scientific study, to be dissected in order to add to the world's store of knowledge about the Gilead republic...Offred is a human being struggling for survival...this colors the ending of the novel as we see Offred again being victimized, objectified by the male professor. [19]

Arnold Davidson essentially agrees, arguing that the story becomes "...grotesquely transmogrified" [20] since women's bodies are still the object of silly sexist jokes in the twenty-second century at the symposium. Professor Pieixoto makes a joke about enjoying the charm of the symposium Chair -- Professor MaryAnn Crescent Moon -- that implies enjoying her sexually as well. He later quips that Professor Wade, in calling Offred's tapes The Handmaid's Tale, plays on the intentional pun of her story being about her vagina -- her tail. (283)

Ken Norris adds that Professor Piexoto is concerned with Offred's tapes as they construct Gilead's history -- not her history:

> Offred has told us everything we need to know about life under the Gileadean regime, but to Piexoto that is not valid history...for him history is Hitler's working papers, not Anne Frank's diary. [21]

Indeed Professor Piexoto accuses Offred of "...malicious invention" (291) on one occasion and later states "...[w]hat we would not give, now, for even twenty pages or so of printout from Waterford's personal computer!". (292) Davidson iterates that Atwood here parodies academics but also the workings of the historical symposium. Davidson summarizes these critical views when he says "...how we choose to construct history partly determines the history we are likely to get." [22]

Certainly Offred's narrative is constantly suspended for she herself continually questions her own account. Todorov's model of the fantastic-uncanny maintains that the hesitation found in the text ideally sustains the text toward closure. She states at different times in the text:

> I would like to believe this is a story I'm telling...Those who can believe that such stories are only stories have a better chance (37)...things I believe can't all be true (100)...whether this is my end or a new beginning I have no way of knowing.... (277)

Offred's narration seems intentionally questionable at times. Nevertheless her core of detail about Gilead sustains the fascination that a dystopian fiction creates. The text's uncanniness in view of the contemporary world is undeniable. The futuristic symposium questions Offred's authority, but since the indigenous professors themselves appear to be remnants of a Caucasian decline, the uncanny is maintained right until the last paragraph of the novel.

Not Wanted On The Voyage's prologue signals a biblical reference from the book of Genesis. Here the book of Genesis recalls the well-known Noah's Ark episode. The prologue cites the story in this way:

> And Noah went in, and his sons,
> and his wife, and his sons' wives
> with him into the ark, because
> of the waters of the flood....[1]

Before the novel begins, the prologue offers this excerpt with premonitions of an antediluvian world. As a story of origin, the narrative recalls mankind's fall from grace. Similarly, the epigraph to Book One of Not Wanted On The Voyage redirects Findley's text back to the causal principles of The Flood. The text suggests a possible reason for God's contempt of mankind: man rejects God so God rejects man. By making a connection between The Flood and its apparent causal principle, the vision establishes itself as apocalyptic. The epigraph offers this prophetic truth:

> And God looked upon the earth,
> and, behold, it was corrupt;
> for all flesh had corrupted
> His way upon the earth.

This corruption on earth speaks of a dilemma facing the characters in the novel. If the novel is based exclusively on the accounts of Genesis, it might attempt to recount Noah's deliverance from The Flood. Or perhaps the text might offer a dystopian vision of the world which ends in an apocalypse. In fact, Findley's story proves to differ markedly from the Genesis story. Findley's story offers its own prophetic truths about the modern age. Uniquely his truths face today's corruption -- in a world not even the writers of the Genesis story could have foreseen.

The prologue and epigraph, however, are interrupted by two short introductory quotations, each of about one page in length. These two short accounts backdrop a

seemingly apocalyptic vision. Effectively, these two small independent texts, one in italics and one in plain type, elicit more questions than they answer. Arguably, Findley's narrative hasn't opened to page one, yet the mood is unmistakable. In the first short interlude, a modern narrator addresses a modern audience. The launching of Noah's Ark is framed much like the H.M.C.S. Britannia leaving port. Here the omniscient narrator travels through time and addresses a modern audience. The narrator assumes a reader might disregard the seriousness of the excursion. With an acerbic disposition, the narrator tells the reader:

> Everyone 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: SPECTATORS WILL NOT CROSS THE YELLOW LINE and: THANK YOU FOR YOUR CO-OPERATION. With all the baggage neatly labelled: WANTED OR NOT WANTED ON THE VOYAGE. They also make it sound as if there wasn't any dread...everyone being piped aboard and a band playing *Rule Britannia!* and *Over The Sea and Skye*. Flags and banners and a booming cannon...like an excursion. Well. It wasn't an excursion. It was the end of the world. (3)

The narrator reveals that indeed the end of the world is at hand. The modernity of the text directs Noah's family to a more recent time.

The second interlude deals with the ravages of smoke and flames -- not an impending flood. After a modern twist of The Flood, the narrator portrays a fire. No fire appears in the Genesis story, but it appears in Findley's text:

> Mrs. Noyes went running -- headlong down the darkening halls -- her skirts and aprons yanked above her thighs -- running with the blank-eyed terror of someone who cannot find her children while she hears their cries for help. Smoke was pouring through the house from one open end to the other -- and at first Mrs. Noyes was certain the fire must be inside, but when she reached the door and saw the blazing pyre, she knew it was not the house but something else -- alive -- that was in flames...everything was floating -- heaving up through the waves of smoke, like beasts who broke the surface of a drowning-pool, then sank and broke again.

> And again -- and then were gone...she was frozen before a single piece of knowledge. (4)

These two separate incidents chronicle a sense of distress. These two events shape the novel even before page one. The sequence shows mutability in the text -- the book of Genesis mingles with the present. Nevertheless, dread, pain, and fear are fundamental to this text. Only Mrs. Noyes is suffering thus far.

Preliminary feelings aroused in the text are distinctively negative. Those feelings specifically arouse dread and fear. And the events relate closely to the mythic world of Noah's Ark and The Flood. According to Todorov's model, the pure fantastic ceases to exist when the hesitation in a reader no longer exists. If a reader decides that fantastic events can be explained by natural laws, then the text is within the realm of the uncanny. If the reader decides that the fantastic events can only be explained by unnatural laws, then the text is within the realm of the marvelous. Findley formulates a bibilical leitmotif in the text. Thematically the biblical analogies give rise to the marvelous.

If we refer back to Todorov's model, the text remains in the realm of the fantastic as long as the reader lingers in a state of oscillation -- struggling to explain events in the text using either natural or unnatural laws. In maintaining the pure fantastic, the reader's uncertainty must not dissolve until closure of the text; or else the text enters either the uncanny or the marvelous.

After a prologue, an epigraph to Book One, as well as two precursory events of approximately one page each, a reader only now enters page one of Findley's narrative. The shadowy, illusory nature of these pretexts sustains the intellectual hesitation Todorov maintains is so crucial for the art of the fantastic in the text. So absolutely necessary is this skepticism and uncertainty in Todorov's structural model of the fictive text, that any other feeling would negate the special quality of the fantastic. Todorov's model privileges a reader's hesitation -- that is the theory's quintessential framework.

Findley's novel quickly asserts the supernatural. If a reader accepts the supernatural immediately then the work falls at once into the realm of the marvelous. If a reader remains in an uncertain state of oscillation that Todorov advocates, then the text maintains his ideal of the fantastic. Findley structures his fiction to advance the supernatural almost immediately:

> No sooner had the messenger deposited the missive in Doctor Noyes's hands than she flew up over his head, gave a great cry, and fell at his feet like a stone. (8)

It is not unreasonable for a homing pigeon to deliver a note to its master. But this pink and ruby dove in Not Wanted On The Voyage is exhibited as a messenger directly sent from God. This assertion is understood because the reader is told "...Yahweh himself would descend from His carriage in this very spot" (9) where the dove plunged to its death after accomplishing its mission. Noah has no hesitation in confirming that this spent animal is "...one of the ten thousand names of God." (9) Todorov notes:

> [e]ven if a certain hesitation persists in the reader, it ceases to affect the character; and identification, as we have previously noted it, is no longer possible. [2]

Hence the text is no longer definable as part of the fantastic genre and thus now leans closer to the pure marvelous genre.

The supernatural strikes the text here unequivocally, so the emphasis now shifts: the structural issue of the text transfers from identification (what is the supernatural?) to explication of it (why the supernatural?). As Todorov outlines, when a reader accepts unnatural laws for resolution in the text, the work moves into the realm of the marvelous. At this point The Primary World has departed from Not Wanted On The Voyage and The Secondary World is now wholly accepted. Supernatural events are now expected to function in the text, so the crux of the discussion now turns to the Secondary World's thematic rationale in the text.

Thematically, Findley's Secondary World would seem to disrupt the expected order found in the Bible. A dove dropping dead after delivering a message from God speaks of disintegration. Conversely, in the Genesis story of Noah's Ark, the dove delivers an olive branch as a sign of deliverance from The Flood. As the Genesis story concluded, the inhabitants of the Ark welcomed the dove as an acceptance that life would begin again as the animals could go out two-by-two to renew the earth and multiply. In contrast, the dove in Not Wanted On The Voyage does not seem to be a sign of salvation, but rather a sign of collapse.

Findley's use of the supernatural and the Secondary World does more than simply disrupt and confound. Findley's use of his own stylized Secondary World with its supernatural elements in the text seeks to undermine our own corrupt version of the established order: western patriarchy, the historical subjugation of women and animals, religious fundamentalism, totalitarian politics, violence, and generally male ways of looking at, and controlling, the world coming from the whole Judaeo-Christian culture.

With this in mind, the Genesis story's paradigm declines. Findley superimposes his own version of the supernatural in the text. A new flood is in the works; consequently Findley will offer an antediluvian world in his own terms -- not the Bible's. The authorial voice of the narrator is accepted as reality and offers background to the story unfolding in the novel. The narrator quickly builds integrity and frankness. At the opening of the first chapter, the narrative voice instructs "...answers, in times like these, could only be troubling and thus were better left unknown." (7)

The supernatural elements in Not Wanted On The Voyage are multi-faceted. On one level the supernatural serves a narrative function. A story that owes its origin to the Genesis story will inevitably structure a supernatural world. On another level, it provides Findley with the necessary range of characters to operate on alternating dimensions -- intermingling characters from both the Primary and Secondary worlds.

According to Todorov, a supernatural motif provides fantastic texts with themes that transcend the Primary World. In Todorov's model, the text can now approach "...the existence of beings more powerful than men." (110) The range between mind and matter is widened since the supernatural furnishes a pretext for frequent Primary World / Secondary World transgressions. The time and space of the supernatural world is not the time and space of human life.

The very existence of supernatural beings such as genies and fairies allows for isolated causality. The angel Lucifer becomes a woman and marries Ham. Eventually, Lucy helps the women to battle the human patriarchy. This causal series shows heaven coming to earth, and non-humans joining humans in a common goal. The physical world and the spiritual world interpenetrate, and their fundamental categories are modified as a result. Moreover, themes of the supernatural further structure the relation between man and his world. Freud calls this the perception-consciousness system. This perception relates to a theme of vision -- a faculty of seeing. Todorov states that the supernatural texts theme of vision is a "...play of dream and reality, mind and matter." (173)

Hence the human characters and their "sights" -- that is, their perception-consciousness systems -- are modified by supernatural elements in the text. This supernatural penetration alters the tale as the reader must grasp its purpose. The fallen angel Lucifer, now Lucy, according to Smith, acts as a freedom fighter for "human oppression". [3] Her iconoclastic entrance into the political arena is achieved by entering the Primary World in disguise and marrying Ham -- a human being.

As alluded to before, Findley's story scrutinizes the patriarchy's stranglehold. In much the same way, the novel is a larger statement for the oppression and servitude in contemporary society to this same patriarchal force. From the beginning there is an intimation of apocalypse when the narrator states that "...in times like these" (7), "...the order of things had become unhinged" (24) and that there were fires "...burning in the Cities".(22) The rivers are polluted and the world is rife with violence and prejudice

shown through Noah's son Japeth, who returns humiliated from the city "...naked and blue and almost silent". (23)

The reader discovers that Findley's pseudo-biblical frame is situated after The Fall but before The Flood. Literatures of many countries abound with mythical creatures in this period of historical ambiguity. Findley plays on this notion as we see the world of fairies, demons, and angels to be commonplace before the flood in a world that looks much like a Southern Ontario farm. Keith addresses this notion by suggesting that Findley, like Milton in Paradise Lost, rewrites the story of The Fall for his own times. Keith suggests Findley

> ...expands the account into a full-length work...weaving anachronisms, absurdities, and parallels to the 1980s into the very fabric of his fictive vision...creat[ing] an imaginative and (in a literal sense) antediluvian world. Theologically, it is a fallen world, but also one of rich, inventive fantasy, a world peopled by "Faeries", dragons, demons, angels, and unicorns, a world where lambs can sing and animals can communicate with human beings as well as with each other. [4]

An antediluvian world has captured mankind's attention and imagination for centuries. With that world were assumptions about the flood's origins, its effects, and ultimately how the postdiluvian world was changed. Donna Pennee notes that our history cannot be trusted to a single set of "words" and that the Genesis story itself is merely another text:

> Though the fact of a flood at some point in the planet's history lies behind the flood story of all peoples, the Genesis text remains like them only a creation of man, a text, words. [5]

Findley plays with this notion of "testament" and "scripture" as a man-made creation instead of a divinely inspired text. And hence the novel is a search for a sum total meaning of that existence. Woodcock asserts that this search for truth in scripture is not just Findley's preoccupation:

> ...the Gnostics recognized the startling differences of tone and spirit between the New and Old Testaments, and, while they did not deny the historicity of the Old Testament narrative, they decided that its cruel, vengeful, and tyrannical deity,

> Jehovah or Yahweh, could not be the true God. On the basis of their Old Testament readings they concluded that the physical world was evil. [6]

And ironically the supernatural figure of Yahweh himself -- in Findleyesque fashion -- adds his own warning against human interpretation of words when he recalls the words of a rabbi. Yahweh warns his subjects of

> ...the dangers that lie in words...in the injudicious and incautious use of words, in the prideful use of words; those words that even We do not utter, lest We bring Creation to a halt -- or cause it to veer down some darkened channel from which it might not be retrieved. (99)

In much the same way that words can become befuddled, so too can signs. Of course, Findley utilizes Noah to mis-read the signs as he is the exemplary assigner of rules and meaning -- the sign master of his own patriarchal holy war. After a peacock fans its tail and then sings its song, Noah feels that a sign from God is being sent -- so the slaughter of a sacrificial lamb is his response. What is a regular occurrence on the farm turns into a sign for sacrifice according to Noah:

> The peacock, still maintaining the display of his tail, now lifted his head very high on his neck and gave a piercing scream. "You see?" said Doctor Noyes. "By every sign and signal, my decision is confirmed." He smiled but had to draw the smile back against his wooden teeth, which had almost fallen out of his mouth. (13)

Noah continues this tyrannic stronghold on all events and people. When Mrs. Noyes scolds Noah for making Ham kill the lamb -- since this killing contravened Ham's scientific principles -- she is rebuffed. Noah chortles "I'm sick of Ham and his science" and adds "...the only principles that matter here, madam, are ritual and tradition." (13) Of course, Mrs. Noyes responds to this ludicrous edict by verbally exposing the undermining principle at work in the novel. Findley's key paradigm -- Noah as oligarchy -- is exposed when Mrs. Noyes decrees "...the only principles that matter here are yours." (13)

Lorraine York points out that Noah deliberates not only by modes of signification through the signifier / signified relationship, but also in binary modes of opposition. York cites an instance where binary opposition is taking place in the politics of Noah's planning:

> As early as the family "treaty conference" (208), Mrs. Noyes realizes that Noah's thinking has reverted exclusively to the binary mode: "He was drawing a line between them," she thinks, "right down the centre of the table, we and thee, ...us and them...four and four make eight". [7]

And his binary oppositioning is intentional as Mrs. Noyes soon realizes. She realizes the other four of the binary opposition -- Noah's oligarchy -- had already been given a privileged briefing about the Ark beforehand. When Noah says "draw closer" it is only her side of the table that draws closer. Clearly the "us and them" opposition has implications that even Mrs. Noyes couldn't have imagined after the Ark is launched. That binary pegs the Lower Order versus Noah's oligarchy.

Findley is offering an antediluvian society that places little value on beauty or life. But alongside this brutal order the Lower Order seeks to improve the future. That textualized "lower order" soon proves to be a misnomer, for they consist of the common-sense females, both human and animal, who genuinely dream of -- and strive for -- a better world. Findley supplants the Lower Order as the rational, enlightened, and reasoning individuals. These logical characters oppose the malevolent established order set up by Dr. Noah Noyes as the narrator empathizes with Mottyl the cat's bewilderment at Dr. Noyes' evil ways:

> Hadn't Doctor Noyes set himself above everyone else? Hadn't he blinded her? Hadn't he killed her children? Hadn't he sentenced his wife to the life of a prisoner? Hadn't he turned away the Faeries and all those countless animals? (279)

The vision of a holy war is now firmly established, and with it, the autocratic dictatorship that Noah propagates -- oftentimes with a subjugating hand. Yet the scope and purpose of the holy war falls apart when the reader sees the foundations of Noah's

belief system. The main proprietor of the belief system, Noah, is an elderly male patriarch -- who beseeches a visiting Yahweh on tour around the world. According to Nicholson, Noah's persona is indicative of cultures "who profess to take the Bible literally" [8] through a sort of selective choosing of edicts.

When Yahweh visits the Noyes farm, on a world tour of his people, he comes pre-empted by a messenger dove that dies. Thus, the notion of God coming from the Secondary World to the Primary World evokes a confusing reaction. The essence seems to be decay and death rather than life-giving. Elizabeth Seddon describes God's degenerate role in Findley's text as

> ...that of a dotty, cranky grandfather who does not have much time for Noah's wife. He comes to dinner at the Noyes' household, reminiscent of Gabriel's visit to the earthly Paradise of Milton's Adam and Eve...[9]

Donna Pennee sees that God in this text is merely looking for a little respect and attention. He arrives with his entourage and marvels at the beauty of Noyes' farm because he has just come from the City where his caravan was pelted with eggs. For the time being -- and the nature of this visit is explicated by Pennee -- he feels dissatisfaction but not vengence. It is a result of Noah's willful and arbitrary reading of signs that the mention of retribution even comes up in the conversation -- Noah presupposes that Yahweh would want to "punish" mankind. The idea clearly is not God's, but Noah's. The text describes Yahweh's feeling this way:

> Elsewhere -- and everywhere! -- Our voice has been drowned with derision and We have been turned away with gestures of violence and rudeness beyond your imagining. Cries of "Go Home!" and "Get Out!" and "Leave Us Alone!" have been the single order of the day...What He wanted -- and all He wanted -- was a haven until He recovered....(90)

Pennee suggests that typically the archetypal Noah figure functions as a Biblically enculturated voice, whose language is scripture and whose life's goal is to appease a vengeful God. Instead of functioning on a relational level -- as two figures sitting face-to-

face as is the case here -- Noah maintains that hierarchical contortion in every word and deed. Pennee speaks of that hierarchical relationship in this way:

> His subjects having been introduced to anticipate the wishes of authority (and in a display of how we contextualize and anticipate meaning), fill in ...His speech....[10]

Hence Findley's creation of Noah -- and his supernatural relationship with Yahweh -- symbolizes Todorov's manifestation of the supernatural as an experience of limits. This state of supernatural constituents restructures the relation between man and his world. In Todorov's model of fiction, the supernatural serves a "social function" (163). According to Todorov, the reader will better comprehend man's motives as he interacts in supernatural situations. We see how Noah interacts with the physical manifestation of Yahweh and ludicrously twists words and signs to figure into his established order. The death of God -- in his physical body -- is the largest conspiracy of all as only Mottyl and Mrs. Noyes acknowledge his death on a relational level when they see the flies buzzing around the corpse.

The complex use of the supernatural disturbs the Primary World. Here, in Not Wanted On The Voyage, the characters are forced to accept the world in the old, patriarchal terms. 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. Mrs. Noyes realizes, after interacting with the supernatural world and being sent into The Flood, that the regime of 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. (352)

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 The Flood to continue and guarantee 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 characters feel. She wants The Flood to wipe out everything -- all of barbarous humanity. Her final prayer is, sardonically, for rain.

Themes of the supernatural are crucial to the message that Not Wanted On The Voyage espouses. The oppression of the patriarchy comes out full force by use of the supernatural. Related to this, according to Findley himself in an interview with Barbara Gabriel, the story of the Faeries is "...very much allied to the idea of the force of the imagination...the imagination to do the dangerous thing." [11] The reader realizes that Noah kills imagination because he kills the Faeries. Killing the supernatural is analogous to killing free-thinking.

Domestic power relations hardly seems a supernatural theme -- as we witness in the Noyes clan. After all, this is only one family's story. Yet, underlying this, there is a larger global perspective of historical maleness and religious fundamentalism. Nicholson states the reader draws many necessary revelations by the tale of the Noyes clan. He asserts the reader understands there are

> ...two kinds of religion: religion as phallogocentric hierarchy that sees itself as outside of the life cycle, and in control of it; and an oppositional spirituality that is dramatically different...A decentred spirituality demands a decentred politics, a decentred art, a decentred cosmology; a de- and re-construction of social relations generally. [12]

Yet without the supernatural as a part of man's social relations, the text loses its ability to satirize. Todorov's model which shows the supernatural as a catalyst for social relations deals appropriately with questions in the text. Specifically, the text criticizes man-made regulations: politics, religion and spiritual guidance, and Judaeo-Christian heritage.

Hence, Not Wanted On The Voyage is concerned with the relationship between cultural maleness and violence. When Noah performs an impromptu clitoridectomy on Emma, the reader is sent reeling as Emma is poked with the unicorn's horn. Noah, while probing Emma's vagina, says "...no wonder the poor boy can't get in...a pin could hardly

enter her." (263) Findley sets up an antediluvian world of male control and a phallogocentric socio-politic. With the Noyes clan embarking for a new world on the Ark, little hope is offered on the horizon. When Mrs. Noyes prays for rain in the final text of the novel, the reader senses the postdiluvian world will be just as barbaric. With Noah as helmsman of the Ark and usurper of the new postdiluvian world, Mrs. Noyes tragically knows that history will repeat itself.

Todorov notes that authors of fantastic fiction have always been interested in the structuring of the relation between humans and the world. Humanity's relationship with its own world -- as described in fiction -- contributes to the grouping of texts with similar themes. A person with an excess of hubris, for example, sparks the classical Greek tragedy. A person with humour and cleverness propels the comedy. Though both genres were created through human relationships to the world, the genre exists as a form through the expectations of plot, theme, and character.

Textual worlds make themselves known in a variety of ways. One assumption is that the world they present is like the one the reader experiences every day. The world these texts create is a familiar one, so most authors neglect to explain the implications of an ontological narrative. In Kroetsch's What The Crow Said, however, the world set in the text differs radically from the everyday world of the reader.

The fantastic genre must have some fluid boundaries to account for texts that go beyond the norms of established fiction. Texts predicated on twists of the ontology require a reader to suspend typical reactions to structured texts of fiction. In Kroetsch's What The Crow Said, the text defies normal conventions of fiction. Kroetsch's text must be seen as a metafictional genre -- which Todorov addresses in his theory of adaptation. Kroetsch's paradigms bend the generic rules of fiction. Indeed, a major concern of metafiction is the nature of fiction itself; the process by which fiction makes its statements. A metafictional text is an elaborate working out of a game -- in playing out its own game it is characteristically self-reflexive.

In Todorov's model, the game revolves around constitutive rules. In metafiction the rules evolve as the text evolves, and the development of those rules is the constitutive rule. What The Crow Said operates under this method. The norms of fiction may be thought of as a series of signals that leads the text to follow a certain path. When an author employs certain conventions or patterns, he develops a framework whereby he challenges a reader to make choices. There are two options for the reader: first, a reader may see a clue and

react to it in a way characteristic of the expectations of a certain genre, or else, the reader may see the convention as being used hyperbolically or ironically within the given context and will see it operating strictly as a device of the genre. Irony and hyperbole act as triggers for closer attention to the mechanisms of text and to the conventionality of the traditional pattern.

Kroetsch has discovered this game the world of fiction plays. He composes a text in response to the norms of fiction. Kroetsch's composition manifests an alternate ontological system. Kroetsch's complex ontology gives the reader the means by which he may come to know the alternate world offered him within a blurred vision of the text. In other words, the problem confronting the author is an ontological one. The reader is invited to become a participant in an impossible game. The reader should know that principles of the Primary World are being contravened; to make sense of this new Secondary World requires an alertness to supernatural events. The Secondary World extends past human experience -- past a reader's known world.

For example, the first sentence of Franz Kafka's Metamorphosis marks a totally bizarre world that is definitely not like the Primary World:

> As Gregory Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect. [1]

Likewise, Kroetsch sets up the first sentence in What The Crow Said to establish an immediate entrance to the Secondary World. As is the case with Kafka's oeuvre, Kroetsch contravenes the Primary World, offering an alternate ontology in the event of Vera Lang's impregnation:

> People years later, blamed everything on the bees; it was the bees, they said, seducing Vera Lang, that started everything...it was all because one afternoon in April the swarming bees found Vera Lang asleep, there in a patch of wild flowers on the edge of the valley...into silence she lay transfixed as death, the bees hunching headlong into the first resistance of her blond pubic hairs....[2]

The game Kroetsch plays is an intellectual act. It forms the basis of the exchange between reader and writer. The verisimilitude that Kroetsch develops forces ontological questions in the text. Without them, the reader will be unable to understand the Secondary World the text invites him to encounter.

Eric Rabkin feels that the world of fantastic fiction must be internally consistent and follow the rules the author sets up -- an interchange between Primary and Secondary Worlds.[3] In fantastic fiction, the author must include realistic elements of the Primary World. If an author were to present only the Secondary world exclusively, a reader would not have the tools to understand it. A reader could not identify an object in the Secondary World if there wasn't a similar thing in the Primary World to which to relate it. Through the process of analogy, a reader learns the "language" of a text by relating its patterns to those they already know and by deciding if the new world is similar to or different from the Primary one they know.

Once a reader enters the ontology created by the author, he must come to terms with a central issue governing both his responses to, and his understanding of, the text. In one way or another, the reader must account for the "why" of the fictive world he has entered; he must be able to answer to his satisfaction why events and characters are shaped in ways contrary to people and events he encounters every day. If the author has fulfilled his part of the contract with a reader, the rationale for what characters do and why the fantastic world operates as it does will be found in the text. Recognizing that a text's ontological structure exists apart from the Primary World is the first step in categorizing fantastic fiction. The complex task comes, however, in understanding what controls the text's altered ontological system and in identifying the textual elements the author uses to shape and define the Secondary World.

Structuralist critics believe that one part of the act of reading involves making implicit comparisons between the ontology of the text and that of the reader's own Primary World. A reader's ontology is formed from experience and knowledge of his own milieu as

well as from his understanding of the historical past. These two perspectives may work in unison or may afford a reader different perspectives from which to interpret the text. Readers, however, have been conditioned to expect conclusive statements, resolution of conflicts, and solutions to problems. When ambiguities reamain unexplained, the conventional reader finds it difficult to interpret the metafictional world. In dealing with a metafictional text, however, the reader must discard his conventional notions of what a text is expected to do, what a reader should realistically expect to accomplish, and what the nature of a metafictional text's vision is.

Metafiction deals as much with the act of writing, of creating, as it does with the singular text. Metafiction calls attention to itself, to its existence as a text; in this respect it is said to be self-referential. Metafiction calls attention to its world as one whose existence is very much set apart from the Primary World of a reader. A reader must first realize that the structure of the metafictional text implies that there are rules to violate, and second, what those rules are. A work of metafiction may appear to describe a comprehensible ontology at first, but that world rapidly turns into one about which a reader cannot be certain. Metafiction forces a reader to recognize the text as a text, as a sign system made up of component parts and assembled according to some plan. In this case, however, the plan excludes the establishment of ontological certainty.

In metafiction, a reader struggles to determine what the ordering pattern of the text's ontology might be, but the structure of the text prevents him from making a conclusive judgement. And, instead of becoming more predictable as it moves toward its conclusion, a metafictional text remains as puzzling and elusive at its final paragraph as it was in its first. We naturally assume the narrator -- or storyteller -- is speaking honestly to us. But any expectation the reader might hold that the narrative voice will lead him on his quest to understand this world are soon disappointed. Metafiction, therefore, succeeds in extending the generic range past texts dealing strictly with the presentation of a Secondary World whose causal principles and ontology differ markedly from those of the Primary

World, to those who somehow manage to distort the familiar world of an implied reader and call into question the ways in which he comes to the seemingly "familiar" world of the text. In other words, with metafiction the genre undergoes a significant transformation, shifting the primary focus from questions of ontology (what do I know?) to questions of epistemology (how do I know what I know?).

Metafiction's ability to incorporate epistemological paradoxes within the genre forces a reader to accept an ontology in which single explanations do not exist for the events that take place within the text. By doing so, such texts also insist that the reader calls into question the methods by which he has confronted the fictive world. In other words, epistemological ambiguity also faces the reader. The metafictional text ultimately pushes one back to the text's own congruities -- facing the reality of an irreconcilable solipsism.

Mary Ellen Barth, in her discussion on metafiction, discusses Todorov's idea that what he calls "natural and unnatural laws" determine whether a work belongs to the uncanny genre or the marvelous genre. Her thesis studies a wide variety of texts and establishes their nature through a series of categories, which she illustrates in diagram form. While incorporating Todorov's theory in her thesis -- whether a text is uncanny (natural) or marvelous (unnatural) -- Barth seeks to explain this relationship. Barth constructs the binaries of uncanny / natural and marvelous / unnatural in a diagram as follows:

NATURAL LAWS		UNNATURAL LAWS
rational sciences	versus	irrational sciences (alchemy/magic)
traditional sciences	versus	supernatural and black magic
socio-historical frames	versus	mythological frames

4

However, in What The Crow Said, the factor to consider in Barth's paradigmatic diagram is the socio-historical frame versus the mythological frame. Kroetsch's interest in western myth overshadows the fantastic event -- any unnatural act is attributed to Bigknife's mythical quality. In her diagram, Barth's remaining categories are most concerned with science fiction that is not applicable to Kroetsch's text.

Kroetsch works to undermine traditional notions of the novel. Critics such as Peter Thomas call What The Crow Said a prototype for the Bakhtinian novel -- typifying the postmodern funhouse. Alluding to Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque, Thomas cites Kroetsch's use of the hidden and subversive text. Kroetsch's motives, then, clearly favour the anti-novel and embrace an anti-establishment outlook. Peter Thomas asserts that Kroetsch denies the conventions of the novel in favour of the oral tale:

> [What The Crow Said] is the least compromising book Kroetsch has written, the one furthest from novelistic tradition, which it actively seeks to subvert. It owes more to the oral tale of wonder than to the Rise of the Novel....[5]

Since What The Crow Said's agenda is the "plot against the plot" [6], it requires Todorov's theory of adaptation to accommodate its destructured plot.

What The Crow Said disallows resolution of ontological and epistemological issues -- it remains always in the sphere of the Secondary World. Todorov's theory of adaptation enables a reader to accept the world of the text as entirely bizarre and to accept an atypical closure. The ordering and structure of What The Crow Said dispels any notion of resolution. Though plot is an artificial construct in any work of fiction, the temporal and causal principles still connect the action. Unifying incidents are conspicuously absent in What The Crow Said. In What The Crow Said the seasons are confused. It may be summer and then winter at the turn of a sentence. That season may last years, or a couple of minutes. Martin Lang freezes to death on horseback in the middle of June. People are reduced to archetypes; yet those archetypes defy meaning or purpose in the text as they

would in other works of fiction. One of the Lang girls throws a ball against the barn wall -- and does this throughout the novel with no causal principle attached to it.

For men marriage is quickly followed by death. Liebhaber's opinion of the world reinforces chaos: he states "...no man could be certain of anything on this lunatic, spun and dying planet." (207) Women hold the real power in Bigknife. All the white men over age nineteen are placed on the "Indian List" for drinking. Yet Joe Lightning, a native in the municipality of Bigknife, is sober. Kroetsch is stereotyping the stereotype. Religion and history are equally distorted as competing theories of existence are offered simply as a free-for-all. Metaphysics is parodied in "the war between the earth and the sky".

Liebhaber is cursed by Gutenberg, the inventor of fixed type. Liebhaber as editor of the newspaper "...watched his fingers as if...they were not his own." (15) Kroetsch makes a statement about language as malediction. The printer is trapped in an unending battle that Gutenberg once started. Liebhaber revolts against writing. The newspaper pages are left blank, graphically exposing a "...language yielding to silence". [7] Liebhaber revolts against "...the vast novel that all the printers in the world were gallantly writing for Gutenberg's ghost." (73) Liebhaber remembers the future instead of the past -- temporal principles are thrown out. Liebhaber feels trapped by Gutenberg's "vast design" (116) to write the past, so he remembers the future instead, feeling better that at least "...the future...just barely, was free of Gutenberg...." (116)

Skandl's biblical tower of Babel, called a tower of "babble" instead, is an example of Kroetsch's fantastic text. The men are desperate to assert their dwindling masculinity; the tower is an effort to reinsert the phallus into Bigknife. The tower of Babel is also a means to beseech heaven and transcend the unbearable earth. Further, the tower's name of "babble" refers to the men's language being reduced to cawing like crows at the Schmier game. (87)

Tiddy determines the men "...are trying to get to heaven". (50) They fly, they get shot out of cannons, they build flying machines. They are flying through the air looking to

heaven, yet they always fall to their own deaths. In this incoherent fiction, these events distort any semblance of temporal or causal unity. Time is elastic. Seasons and years go by unknowingly or they last an eternity. Temporal unity is reduced to timelessness. Some people age rapidly and others not at all. And the reasons are unknowable. Time is so distorted that "...citizens of the town, because of secession moves, claimed to be on Mountain Standard Time." (111)

Causal principles in the text remain unknowable when the reader considers the characters' paroxysms and the distorted nature of their lives. The text sketches an expose of fumbling men who try to stay alive and not surrender to the real power brokers of the municipality -- the women. Vera Lang's famous axiom "men are a bunch of useless bastards" echoes through the text. Christine Jackman states that males in What The Crow Said are reduced to morons who "...struggle against death, domesticity, and closure." [8] They fight using boundaries, structures, language, and philosophies. The fantastic text is underlied by attempts to understand life through speculative and superficial theories. Father Basil theorizes about the ideal condition of "...total inanimateness for the entire universe." (137) Liebhaber rationalizes winning immortality by speculating "...might not death, too, one day, get sick of everything and die?" (131) Bigknife is devoid of temporal or causal principles -- leaving the fantastic world to run its course. Christine Jackman notes "...the ease, the purely natural way" [9] the fantastic world functions in What The Crow Said. Todorov notes in his theory of adaptation that the fantastic can "...swallow the entire world of the book and the reader along with it." [10] Kroetsch's text so easily accedes to the Secondary World that the fantastic world is no longer foreign to a reader -- it is presumed.

A reader can now read the text knowing the true nature of Kroetsch's fantastic world. The Secondary World -- that extends past human experience -- will influence how a reader reacts to the disintegrating text. All events dissolve toward death for men -- that consistency remains true. Liebhaber survives death and makes love to Tiddy, but she

reduces him to a single representative of "...every man who had ever loved her." (214) Liebhaber is content to finally beat Skandl in competing for Tiddy's sex. But the victory is worthless since "...after all, he is only dying." (218) He is the "...final male, horny to die."

Hence, in What The Crow Said, we are working with a fantastic text that is volatile and chaotic. The text backgrounds the events of this distorted world. The distinction must be made here that the events in What The Crow Said correlate with each other to produce dissolution -- not closure. Events in the text of What The Crow Said differ categorically from the type of events found in the fiction that Todorov extrapolates in his uncanny-marvelous scale. And so Todorov's theory of adaptation -- which discusses texts that "swallow up the entire world of the book and the reader" -- offers an alternate vision to study the text. As noted, temporal and causal principles are thrown out. Fortunately, Kroetsch offers counsel in The Crow Journals. He states that in the text of What The Crow Said a reader is given only the "hard core of detail." [11]

This core of detail offers cohesion to a text where events have no causal or temporal principles. The text derives a kind of "meaning" from the core of detail. When Vera Lang announces spontaneously and frequently in the text that "men are a bunch of useless bastards", this detail contributes meaning to the overall dynamics of the text where male characters surely prove her right. Old Lady Lang has her own axioms that contribute meaning to the text. She is described as always wearing "...a black dress", caused by her "...endless mourning not at any particular death but at the inevitable absence." (10) Perhaps she is lamenting the very absence of meaning in life -- this contributes to the text's ontology because characters always want to discuss questions of a solipsistic nature. Old Lady Lang admits that existence "...is too sad" and she always says "I don't want to think about it." Thematically, Kroetsch's fantastic text confronts the question of man's existence in much the same way that Old Lady Lang laments existence in her speech.

Kroetsch's hard core of detail serves a syntactic purpose by framing events. Paroxysms in the text all have a purpose. Witnessing any of the Lang girls lusting after a

husband -- whether he's an inmate in a prison or a seminarian of a church -- speaks of unceasing human desire. The schmier game's purpose seems unclear -- it shows only that the men want to play cards above anything else. Incidentally the game does save Jerry Lapanne from death since the players manage to detain Marvin Straw, his hangman. Further, Father Basil suggests the money might pay off the church debt when the game moves to the church basement. However, the fantastic four month game of schmier makes the men realize something first and foremost: "...they knew...those men, studying their cards...they knew there was no meaning anywhere in the world." (94) This core of details about the schmier game constructs a coherence: though only when a reader finally realizes the novel's statement focuses on man's unknowable existence. In What The Crow Said events occupy the space of man's uncertain existence -- succinctly that is what the novel is about. Kroetsch's text addresses thematic concerns about man in relation to his world. This fact alone leads to the realization that Kroetsch builds this text thematically instead of typical narrative structures.

Kroetsch is concise in his statements about What The Crow Said. He is mindful of structural theory and seeks to create a fantastic text unlike anything found in contemporary fiction. The text decomposes instead of composing; the text unnames instead of naming; the text untells instead of telling. When a reader considers the text mindful of its incongruity, he adapts to it as Todorov suggests in his model. The premises of Todorov's model in opposition to Kroetsch's form of unstructuring compels a reader to adjust to Todorov's theory of adaptation. To explicate what a reader confronts in the text -- and how a reader adapts -- is the premise of Todorov's theory of adaptation.

In What The Crow Said the sheer number of inconsistencies relegates a reader to a way of reading the text which confronts "...the world described [as] entirely bizarre, as abnormal.... [12] In Bigknife, a small prairie town somewhere on the Alberta-Saskatchewan border, life is supernatural all of the time. As Todorov alludes to in his adaptation theory, "...what in the first world was an exception here becomes the rule." [13] There is a minimal

recognition of Bigknife as a space somewhere. This gives a reader a locale to distinguish -- however convoluted it appears.

Moreover, the normal man is precisely the fantastic being: the fantastic becomes the rule, not the exception. Liebhaber remembers the future. Vera Lang is impregnated by bees. A man missing one leg and his genitals impregnates Rose Lang. JG is born silent and communicates with the crow instead of human beings. Skandl builds an ice tower higher and higher into the air. Joe Lightning is the first person ever in Big Indian to marry for love. These are just a few of the fantastic beings that make up the regular folk of the municipality of Bigknife. In his Crow Journals, Kroetsch notes how he is concerned to make the tall tale and the mythological part of the book, at the same time maintaining a "hard core of detail" [14]

In the space, somewhere Bigknife seems to exist. The narrator who we assume is the only teller of the tall tale explains:

> The Municipality of Bigknife lay ambiguously on the border between Alberta and Saskatchewan; no one, due to a surveyor's error, had ever been able to locate conclusively where the boundaries were supposed to be. The south end of the municipality beyond the poplar bluffs and fields of grain, faded into bald prairie and a Hutterite colony; the north end vanished into bush country and an Indian reserve...the Bigknife river...divided the municipality into two equal halves. (36)

Things are further complicated by a sense that Bigknife does indeed have its own laws that do not necessarily have a direct referent to the Primary World. Kroetsch's communal third person narrator gives little clue as to what laws actually exist in Bigknife. However, women are not allowed into the beer parlour. But even that is contested at the bar:

> It was against the laws of the municipality for a woman to enter the beer parlour. Tiddy Lang was standing behind her husband, behind Liebhaber, facing Skandl. She lifted a scarf off her red hair and the snow fell on her husband's shoulders, fell on Liebhaber. "Someone must take a wife," she added....(18)

Father Basil adds to the hilarity of lawless havoc because he represents the organized church and is actively engaged throughout the text in becoming an apparent authority of law. He pronounces:

> Yesterday morning...I went out to start my car...[a]ny fool could see that the car had...[s]quare wheels...The world...lacks sufficient centrifugal force to maintain its roundness. (52)

In response to this confusing state of affairs, Father Basil announces that "...the sprocket wheel of being is jammed...The bull pinion of existence has jumped the heifer gear of eternity." (53) Father Basil continues to lament the unknowable state of the world in his own vernacular.

The existence of some of Bigknife's citizenry are used to reflect multiplicity -- characteristic of Kroetsch's text. Tiddy names Liebhaber: "Child. Husband. Son. Brother. Old man. Friend. Helper. Enemy. Lover." (218) But he is also farmer, hockey referee, paper editor, cattle breeder, politician, and town drunkard. If Liebhaber's existence is multi-faceted, Gladys Lang's existence is certainly curious in another way:

> Gladys loved to throw a ball against the wall and catch it when it bounced back. She was like that in adolescence, and had been from early childhood. Some days the endless thumping of a ball against Tiddy's bedroom wall, against the barn door, against a granary or a car shed, nearly drove the others insane. When Gladys was upset, or happy, or depressed, or merely bored, or something else, or nothing, she took her ball and went outside and began to throw it and catch it. When she saw the puck lying unguarded on the ice she wanted to pick it up and throw it against the boards and see if it would bounce for her, see is she could catch it. (72)

Temporal laws of nature in Bigknife are equally as confounding. Skandl "...can't cut ice because it's almost summer, and can't sell ice because it's almost winter." (17) It seems time is darting around the text and Liebhaber is apt to remember the future and others forget the past:

> Skandl, turning fiercely from where he watched the doorway to the dining room, reaching past the coal oil lamp, across the table, to touch Tiddy's hand. He

> repeated what he'd said the night before, and the night before that, and the week before. And maybe the month before that too. He was losing track. Everyone was losing track of time. (38)

Not only do the people lose track of time, but so does nature. The Lang household is described as dead to nature in the middle of a so-called summer. The disrupted season of Bigknife is described this way: "...it was August first. The house was quiet as a tomb, for no birds had come to that summer." (39) The elasticity of time is also apparent when "...the people of the municipality of Bigknife could feel themselves, each day, growing older" (55) and also when "...everyone was growing older by the hour." (156) Temporal unity then is undermined. And with it, nature as the reader knows it in the Primary World, does not exist in Bigknife.

Disunity then, is notably the undercurrent in What The Crow Said. This schema accomplished what Kroetsch intended. It disrupts structural notions and relegates the text to a fragmentariness that Kroetsch supports in his definition of the novel. Todorov's idea of reader adaptation where the text is "swallowed up" approaches the type of fiction Kroetsch has written. Like Kafka, Kroetsch starts and ends with the supernatural -- which disregards Todorov's notion of intellectual hesitation in the text. Hoeppner states:

> Picaresque fiction, because it does not give a structured vision of life, tends to be basically antiphilosophical and antithematic because it focuses on details, on surfaces, on fragments, and on discontinuous and fleeting experiences and reactions. [15]

Edwards concurs on the point of fragmentariness, and adds that the narrator is responsible for presenting a chaotic reality:

> The omniscient narrator exercises characteristics of Coyote AND God, with power to compress, make leaps backwards and forwards, predict and summarize, in ways that dislocate linear progression and simple perspectives on temporal-spatial relations. The strategy produces complex structures that involve cyclical patterns, the idea of time repeating itself and the pervasive sense of myth. What The Crow Said ...is a novel about story-making, about the stories that people create, bullshit and beauty that arise from explorations of self and society; and within the linguistic

> play which deconstructs fixed definitions, character is as certain a concept, a literary construct, as any other. [16]

What the text then expresses is a complex game in which Kroetsch is the master rule maker. Edwards describes the activity in reading the text in a gaming analogy:

> We know enough about the rules to be in the game but we don't know enough to really play the game and that's where we're at...Endgames are complex, and Kroetsch's comment implies his advocacy of a type of play...involving writer, text, and reader....[17]

Robert Kroetsch's ability to confound the conventions of fantastic texts along with dismantling the structuralist approach to the fantastic text has given him a unique position in Canadian letters. According to Creelman, Kroetsch

> ...has resisted the full impact of post-structuralism, but he has constructed a very strong postmodern position from which he will continue to decenter and disrupt Canadian traditions. [18]

Kroetsch believes that older conventions of narrative limits the scope of fantastic fiction. In a personal interview with Linda Kenyon he states:

> ...older conventions of narrative, really, were deceiving us about our world, were imposing a coherence that isn't there and imposing limitations that aren't there as far as I am concerned. [19]

Finally, Kroetsch submits that narrative should be uncertain because that is what predicates the tall tale and the western myth. He states that his fiction works in the act of "...asserting itself as anecdote, as an uncertain historical trace, as myth." [20] Kroetsch's style in What The Crow Said disallows closure typical of other fantastic texts. To study What The Crow Said in Todorov's view requires his theory of adaptation -- only an analysis in these terms can account for the irreconcilable nature of the text.

Chapter One Notes

[1] Hugh G. Holman and William Harmon. A Handbook To Literature. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1986.) p. 220.

[2] Holman and Harmon, pp. 220-221

[3] Johnathon Culler. Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature. (London: Routledge, 1975.) p. 111.

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