WHAT HAPPENED TO HISTORY? MIMETIC TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE
CONTEMPORARY HISTORICAL NOVEL

by

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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In the last decades of the twentieth century, a vehement debate in contemporary literary theory emerged over the question of referentiality in historical fiction: on the one side, Marxists and traditional historiographers, both adamant in their affirmation of an extra-textual referent to which historical discourse presumably always has access; on the other side, poststructuralists and their descendants, equally adamant that historical discourse has recourse to nothing but other texts, other signifiers. In the midst of these two extremes, a number of critics have advocated a moderate stance which gives due deference to both positions: to the ontological claims of an extra-textual historical reality, but also to the inexorable implication of that reality in the modes of discourse through which it comes to have meaning.

A significant number of contemporary historical novelists proffer narrative visions which reflect quite well this middle position. E. L. Doctorow (*Ragtime*),
Graham Swift (*Waterland*), Louise Erdrich (*Tracks*), and Timothy Findley (*Famous Last Words*) all, though in subtly different ways, explore the relationship between history and the narrative forms through which history is articulated. What emerges from the analysis of their work is the complex and inextricably intertwined involvement of fictive elements in any endeavour to construct an historical narrative. Ultimately, the separation of empirical "fact" from the imaginative elements these writers employ in their work proves to be an illusory prospect.

In this light, the vituperative polemic launched against contemporary historical fiction by critics such as Fredric Jameson (for its ostensible dearth of "real history") becomes a fruitful opposition. Far from avoiding "real history," the novels examined in this dissertation illustrate the processes involved in the construction of history as a discourse. Erich Auerbach's argument that mimetic standards shift from age to age, that verisimilitude is an evolving concept, is invoked to help refute the charges Jameson levels against contemporary historical fiction. The static model of mimesis proffered by Jameson does not permit the genre of the historical novel to evolve, and thus to be "commensurate" (to use the Lukácsian phrase) "with the requirements of the age."
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Table of Contents

Abstract.................................................................ii
Acknowledgments.......................................................iv
Table of Contents......................................................v

Chapter 1: Historiographic Metafiction and the
            Problem of Reference.................................1

Chapter 2: E. L. Doctorow and the Spaces of the Past..37

Chapter 3: Of Fact and Fairy-tales: The Uses of
            Narrative in Graham Swift's Waterland......77

Chapter 4: Misshepeshu's Mistress Versus "Death's Bony
            Whore": The Critique of Logocentrism in
            Louise Erdrich's Tracks.........................112

Chapter 5: The Dialectic of the Aesthetic: Reading the
            Readings of Mauberley's Narrative in
            Timothy Findley's Famous Last Words.......142

Chapter 6: Fiction, History, and Narrative: Some
            Speculations on the Future of the Past....174

Works Consulted.....................................................203
Chapter 1

Historiographic Metafiction and
the Problem of Reference

When we try to examine the mirror in itself, we discover in the end nothing but things upon it. If we want to grasp the things, we finally get hold of nothing but the mirror.--This, in the most general terms, is the history of knowledge.

--Friedrich Nietzsche

How does one advocate a mimetic function for a sub-genre of postmodern fiction now commonly referred to as "historiographic metafiction"? In attempting a response in this study, I will have to contend with a plethora of vituperative polemics directed against postmodern fiction in general for its alleged dearth of referentiality. What makes the task seem even more formidable is the recognition that, among the detractors of postmodern fiction (and among those who champion it as well), one inevitably finds a host of disparate and conflicting ideological positions in which the various critiques ground themselves. It is a virtual

1The term is Linda Hutcheon's (see Poetics ix) and is used widely in contemporary criticism.

2The question of a "postmodern politics" is, for this reason, one of the most hotly contested debates among critics of contemporary fiction (and has been for several years). From both the left and the right, however, postmodern fiction has had to suffer attacks on its "aestheticism," its emphasis on textual play, and its ostensible abandonment of the historical and the political. For reasons that become clear in this chapter, postmodern
requisite of contemporary criticism that it no longer discuss fiction apart from the underlying and frequently inextricably intertwined political, historical, and sociological premises which inform it. Indeed, one of the distinguishing features of postmodernism in general is its deliberate transgression of the traditional boundaries between disciplines. Historiographic metafiction in particular intentionally crosses various borders to challenge and provoke entrenched ideas about history and even the so-called science of historiography itself. What this fiction does, among other things, is directly challenge its readers to question and reflect on the way the past comes to be known.

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3 The recent challenge in contemporary historiography to traditional methods cannot be separated from the one undergone in much contemporary postmodern fiction. Both stem from a change in the way in which the relationship between the referent and its representation is understood. Hayden White aptly assesses the situation within the discipline of historiography in claiming that historians must be prepared to accept that history "may lose its status as an autonomous and self-authenticating mode of thought. It may well be that the most difficult task which the current generation of historians may be called upon to perform is to expose the historically conditioned nature of the historical discipline, to preside over the dissolution of history's claim to autonomy among the disciplines" (Tropics of Discourse 29). Postmodern fiction, White argues, does more than its share to illustrate the historically conditioned nature of historiography by drawing attention to the way the narrative process informs the representation of reality in both fiction and the writing of history (The Content of the Form ix).
It is this questioning of the nature of historical knowledge that clearly brings to the forefront the need to re-examine the world-referential function that critics like Gerald Graff, John Aldridge, Charles Newman, and Fredric Jameson have found lacking in the fiction that has been produced over the last thirty years. Far from abandoning the attempt to represent reality, texts like Doctorow's *Ragtime*, Swift's *Waterland*, Findley's *Famous Last Words*, and Erdrich's *Tracks* draw attention to the ways in which we construct reality--and historical knowledge--in the first place. My selection of these particular novels is based on the fact that each one (in its own way) acknowledges conventional forms of historical discourse while pointing to the arbitrary nature of that discourse, relegating it to a domain in which other forms exist with it simultaneously, in an endless movement of play. While this notion is explored in greater detail later, it is important here to distinguish between the various types of fiction that have been referred

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'My selection of critics here is based on two criteria: one, that each maintains (intentionally or not), a neo-Lukácsian bias, the basis of which this chapter attempts to delineate; two, that an evolution of the debate over mimesis and the problem of reference can be witnessed in the arguments of these four, from the late seventies to the late nineties. The assertion made by Jameson that we have forgotten how to think historically in the postmodern age seems to follow from a line of criticism originating with Lukács but picked up again by Graff, Aldridge, and Newman. By tracing this line of thinking, I hope to show how the concept of mimesis employed by all of these critics is one which does little justice to the innovative fiction of our time.'
to as "postmodern" over the last four decades.

As already mentioned, the novels I will discuss, although postmodern by almost any standard, are better labelled under the sub-genre of "historiographic metafiction." Graff, Aldridge, Newman, and even Jameson, however, use the general designation "postmodern" for a wide variety of fiction. Irving Howe, in a 1959 essay entitled "Mass Society and Postmodern Fiction," attributes the term "postmodern" to the more progressive writing of the day. As Jerry Varsava points out, "the earliness of this essay perhaps accounts for Graff's and others' use of 'postmodernism' as broadly descriptive of a literature preoccupied with 'narcissistic isolation' or 'escapist gamesmanship'" (191), to use Graff's terminology. Like Varsava, I would support a definition of postmodernism that applies to the more innovative fiction since the mid-sixties, specifically that kind of fiction which incorporates and then challenges various conventions such as historical discourse itself. Contemporary criticism generally seems to adhere implicitly to such a definition. One cannot, of course, fix a precise date at which postmodern fiction suddenly appeared--the attempt to deny the continuity that exists between modernism and postmodernism would be a highly untenable position in the light of current scholarship. But it may be of some use to distinguish between the narcissistic self-reflexive fiction
that falls into Howe's category of postmodernism and the type of writing Hutcheon calls historiographic metafiction, a designation better suited to that kind of fiction which refers back to the real, historical world--albeit in a way that problematizes the very notion of historical fact. In any case, the aim of this study is to defend postmodern fiction in general against claims that it has no mimetic function by using four historiographic metafictional texts which illustrate the evolving techniques literary works incorporate to comment critically on the world in which we live and the ways in which we perceive it.

Even those texts preoccupied with "narcissistic isolation" or "escapist gamesmanship" are not devoid of mimetic significance. Autoreferentiality does not necessarily preclude real world references. As Hutcheon argues in defense of metafiction in general:

[Auto]reference and intertextual reference actually combine to direct readers back to an outer reference; in fact, they direct the readers outside the text, by reminding them (paradoxically) that, although what they are reading is only a literary fiction which they themselves are creating through language, this act itself is really a paradigm or an allegory of the ordering, naming processes that are part of their daily experience of coming to terms with reality.
What follows from this is that the mimetic potential of metafictional texts, far from falling prey to a solipsistic textual formalism, emerges visibly as long as one does not insist on employing a concept of mimesis grounded in naive reflectionism. Yet it is precisely this latter, reductive kind of mimetic theory which is propagated in some of the criticism of contemporary historical novels, finding in them (in Jameson's terms) a new "depthlessness" and "a consequent weakening of historicity. (5).

Historiographic metafiction should not be derided for failing to satisfy criteria which themselves have not adjusted to developments in current historiographical scholarship. If historians have had to respond to challenges to conventional methods which point out the inherently narrative structure of historical writing, then why should historical fiction not suffer a comparable scrutiny? The mimetic significance of contemporary historical fiction must be understood in the context of a revised concept of referentiality itself--a revision based on a crisis experienced within the discipline of historiography as well as that of literary studies. We would do well to recall Auerbach's insistence that great literature is responsive to historical circumstance. Heavily indebted to Vico, Auerbach appreciated what Isaiah Berlin refers to as Vico's
"anthropological historicism," the notion that "ideas evolve, that knowledge is not a static network of eternal, universal, clear truths, either Platonic or Cartesian, but a social process..." (qtd. in Costa Lima 476). Mimesis as a concept, then, cannot be limited to a fixed definition, for it necessarily changes according to the demands each age places on its literature (Auerbach 548). Despite the many critical studies which have attempted to locate and identify the various characteristics of "postmodern" fiction over the last decade or so, few have focused exclusively on the problem of mimesis as it relates to the critical evaluation of historical fiction. Yet it is precisely at this intersection of historical narrative and the concept of mimesis that the fiction of our time has so much to tell us about the ways in which we structure the world. If the epistemological and ontological crises that have emerged in the fiction and criticism of the last two or three decades have been resolved--more or less--then the evolution of mimetic criteria (against which this fiction is read) has had much to do with it. But what are these mimetic criteria

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5Brian McHale, espousing a belief in the "underlying systematicity" (7) of postmodernism, posits the concept of an ontological "dominant" as that which characterizes postmodern fiction. Whereas modern fiction had been concerned with epistemological questions, postmodern fiction, McHale maintains, is less concerned with problems of knowledge than it is with the making of autonomous worlds. The postmodern text, according to this view, is grounded only in its own textual mechanisms. That postmodern fiction does not extend beyond its own textuality is a claim the validity of which will be called
and on whose authority have they been established? It is one of the aims of this study to provide an archaeology of sorts which might articulate the conditions of emergence of these new mimetic criteria. While a thorough excavation (to stick to the archaeological metaphor) of both the structuralist and poststructuralist movements (or sites) is beyond the scope of this project, a little digging into the theoretical debates surrounding Derrida's deconstructionism and the now (in)famous claim that 'there is nothing beyond the text' (Of Grammatology 158) might provide us with some interesting artifacts.

Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth has enumerated a number of the challenges postmodern writing makes to traditional notions of time and history. "We are asked to give up logocentric, dialectical, dualistic, and other transcendental habits; we are asked to give up plot and character, history and individuality, perhaps even meaning as we have long conceived it" (212). In place of history Ermarth posits the notion of "rhythmic time" which "incorporates the convention of history--internalizes it as one game, one set of rules among many. Confined to a rhythmic sequence, history is a thematic formulation, like any other, and no longer a ____________

into question later in this chapter. What seems to be untenable, however, is McHale's simplistic reduction of modern and postmodern fiction to their respective epistemological and ontological "dominants." If anything, postmodernism is characterized by an increased sensitivity to epistemological questions which is only amplified by the concomitant problematization of ontological concerns.
commanding (determining) premise" (212).

Ermarth's position is of tremendous import to the concerns of this study. She is aware that her arguments have far-reaching significance, but is unable to pursue some of the consequences of her claims. One unexplored area concerns the ways in which the concept of "rhythmic time" can be incorporated into a response to Fredric Jameson's attack on postmodern fiction for failing to represent the historical past. Ermarth's treatment of Jameson is limited to a footnote and a remark concerning his characterization of the postmodern as "a condition saturated with nostalgia for full presence" (Ermarth 59). It seems to me that there is room here for a fuller discussion of the implications of "rhythmic time" in light of Jameson's position. The ultimate objective of this study is to show how historiographic metafiction fulfils its responsibility as mimetic fiction, successfully responding to the historical circumstances out of which it has emerged. The primary way in which it does this is by highlighting—both directly and indirectly—the convention of historical discourse as precisely this yearning for "full presence" which we cannot attain but never have been able to attain. Historiographic metafiction often parodies this desire but almost always subverts the idea of its very possibility. In many ways the quest for historical knowledge is like a murder mystery. As the inspector in David Arnason's The Pagan Wall explains, "You
see, the event is over. It has disappeared into time. I am left with a story. I wish that story to be as complete as possible. I wish to have the biography of the story teller, to know the other stories he has told" (41-2). What the novels I discuss ultimately say about our access to history is strikingly similar. The historical events they draw on for their subject matter are over. They have disappeared into time. What both the writers and we are left with is a story or stories (and always the possibility of new stories) and the complicating factor of the trustworthiness or credibility of the story teller.

To Jameson's lament that we have "lost the experience of history, and also--since history is narrative--the capacity to tell stories" ("Eternal Returns" 154), novels like Ragtime, Waterland, Tracks, and Famous Last Words resolutely reply that narrative is all we ever have had, stories are all we ever have had. But these novels make a point of divesting the narrative process of any privileged perspective through which any totality of vision might be attained. The self-consciousness of the narratives proffered in these novels maintains its integrity by drawing attention to the limitations of any narrative structure and by pointing to the multiplicity of narratives which can (and everyday are) construed from the same raw historical event--whatever that might be. Jameson, by standing firm in his commitment to "real history" (read: "objective" history)
unfairly evaluates a novel like *Ragtime* by measuring it against mimetic criteria based on the concept of a totalizing history.

Such a concept, of course, is not peculiar to Jameson alone. Before going any further, I want to set out the groundwork from which the mimetic criteria underlying his own position as well as those of Graff, Aldridge, and Newman have sprung. All four position themselves around a theoretical framework heavily indebted to Georg Lukács's studies on realism. Jameson, of course, has assumed the mantle of apologist for Lukács and substitutes Lukács's polemic against modernism with his own castigation of postmodernism. Though Graff is the only one of the other three to openly admit to a Lukácsian bias, it is clear that Aldridge and Newman both subscribe to an inflexible version of Lukácsian novelistic reflectionism. A brief elucidation of Lukács's views here will foreground the extent to which his influence has pervaded contemporary criticism of the novel as well as illuminate the ultimately rigidifying effects of his literary aesthetics.

Jameson suggests in *Marxism and Form* that "Lukács's work may be seen as a continuous and lifelong meditation on narrative, on its basic structures, its relationship to the reality it expresses, and its epistemological value when compared with other, more abstract and philosophical modes of understanding" (163). The notion that there is a reality
which can be expressed without distortion is, of course, a tenet of Marxism Lukács clearly takes for granted. Mimesis, as Lukács understands it, is a process that depends on the representation of certain historical laws operating within a teleological world view. Social realism is achieved when the phenomena of everyday life are depicted within the broad fabric of history. Lukács's key criteria are typicality, totality, and exemplarity. For him, mimetic efficacy, or the ability of a work of fiction to represent reality competently, depends on the proper fulfilment of all three: the depiction of a protagonist who is a synthesis of all the humanly and socially "essential determinants"; the contextualization of that character within a social setting reflective of the (so-called) real historical world; and finally the utopian resolution based on the protagonist's increased knowledge of his relation to the world and his role in the working of history.

The epitome of this kind of representation is found first in the work of Sir Walter Scott whom Lukács praises for his mastery in depicting genuine historical-social types from the past (35), and later in that of Balzac, praised for his representation of contemporary bourgeois society (84). What Lukács cannot accept, however, is what he deems to be a withdrawal from the social to the private on the part of bourgeois writers after the political upheavals of 1848. What he laments is the perceived disappearance of the
historical process itself and with it the disappearance of man as the real actor in world history (225). What had replaced the historical, he argues, was an unholy subjectivism which had been bred out of the privatization of history (205). It is no surprise, then, that Lukács could find little value in the modern fiction of the early twentieth century. Literary montage and the interior monologue are denounced as "subjective distortions and travesties"--ironically even as Lukács himself calls for "effective artistic forms which are commensurate with the requirements of the age" (Studies in European Realism 18). What seems to be a dogmatic reductionism prevents Lukács from responding favourably to a modernism which, for him, violated the criteria against which the realist fiction of the mid-nineteenth century had been evaluated.

In the same way that Lukács approaches modernism with a mimetic theory grounded in the realism of a previous age, Aldridge, Newman, Graff, and especially Jameson, all bring to their evaluation of postmodern fiction an *a priori* interpretive code stamped with the seal of a modernist conception of what constitutes efficacy. In exploring their respective protestations, this study will demonstrate the need to develop a new understanding of the ways in which contemporary fiction is mimetic in a way which is indeed "commensurate with the requirements of the age."

John Aldridge prefaces *The American Novel and the Way*
We Live Now with the pronouncement that contemporary fiction is moving away from representing the character of its age:

Perhaps no responsible critic any longer takes seriously the old idea that the novel at any given moment in history can be considered a dependable fictive representation of the way of life prevailing at that moment....The expectation that the novel will realistically reflect the experience of its time is not only fatigued, but has gone conspicuously unfulfilled, at least in this country, for a good many years. (v)

One does not have to read much further to discover that what Aldridge is primarily concerned with is what he perceives to be a loss of "intellectual and imaginative leadership" among contemporary writers like Pynchon, Mailer, Bellow, and Roth, to name a few. Unlike the major novelists of the twenties and thirties, these writers fail to "instruct us in the possibilities of freedom, adventure, or individual integrity" (3). In short, by straying too far from Horace's conception of the poet's responsibility--to instruct and to delight--contemporary fiction finds itself condemned as being morally entropic.

What Aldridge valorizes in the modern novel amounts to a nostalgic longing for a golden age when things were more certain, when the commitment to a moral framework guaranteed
the mimetic function of a work. Aldridge's favourite writers--Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Faulkner--depicted this concern with the "moral authenticity" of an age long gone. Consequently Nick Carraway, in *The Great Gatsby*, because he derived "a sense of the fundamental decencies" from his father, is able to "condemn a society in which such decencies no longer have meaning" (150): he proclaims by the end that Gatsby is better than "the whole damn bunch of them." Aldridge is probably correct in his claim that contemporary fiction no longer tenders the moral authority to which the work of Hemingway, Faulkner, and Fitzgerald made implicit appeal. But he is mistaken if he thinks that it could. Postmodern fiction, with its abandonment of moral certitude (as well as its questioning of historical authority), is only reflecting what Western society is experiencing *en masse* as a monumental shift in its understanding of the foundations of thought (on both an epistemological as well as ontological level).

Robert Pirsig's renowned brand of what could be called "philosophiction" describes this transformation in terms of patterns of value. Phaedrus, his narrator in *Lila*, postulates the history of the twentieth century as a struggle between intellectual patterns and social patterns, the outcome of which is responsible for the twentieth-century collapse of morals. What distinguished Victorian culture from the culture of today, Phaedrus maintains, is
the Victorian belief in the subordination of patterns of intellect to patterns of society. The Victorians were bound together by this social code: "They called it morals, but really it was just a social code" (266). What has emerged in the twentieth century, however, is a new culture which has reversed the hierarchy so that social patterns are subordinate to intellectual ones: "The one dominating question of this century has been, 'Are the social patterns of our world going to run our intellectual life, or is our intellectual life going to run the social patterns?' And in that battle, the intellectual patterns have won" (266).

Looking at the history of the twentieth century in this way, we can see how modern fiction has progressed in the way it has: from the appeal to a former generation's moral certitude in order to deal with the loss of (Victorian) "decency" in contemporary society (exemplified in Fitzgerald and Hemingway) to the gradual recognition that this certainty will never return and the concomitant acknowledgment of the loss of authority (exemplified in the writers which Aldridge censures: Mailer, Bellow, Pynchon).

Postmodern fiction meets the challenge of our age mimetically by assuming responsibility for representing the lack of stability that follows from an inversion of the social and intellectual orders. Rather than retreating from the situation, postmodern fiction depicts it with an integrity that should be admired instead of admonished. The
"intellectual and imaginative leadership" Aldridge finds lacking in contemporary fiction, then, is actually fully present in the demand this fiction makes of the reader to acknowledge our age's problematization of intellectual and social structures and institutions. There is little doubt that we have indeed entered a new era, although there is no room within the scope of this study to elaborate on this shift. Stanley Aronowitz, however, articulates aptly the widespread acceptance of modernism's transition to another period as a fait accompli:

By now, nearly everyone agrees that the shift in sensibility that Nietzsche announced about a century ago has finally arrived. Postmodernism, the name given to this shift, is marked by the renunciation of foundational thought, of rules governing art, and of the ideological "master discourses" liberalism and Marxism. (46)

In the mid-to-late 1980s, however, postmodernism as a cultural phenomenon was meeting (and welcoming) challenges from a number of ideological quarters. Some critics viewed it as an obstacle which a continuing modernism would successfully overcome. Charles Newman was one who thought that this "shift in sensibility" was more an illusion than a genuine crisis. In The Post-Modern Aura: The Act of Fiction
in an Age of Inflation, Newman proffers a conceit of postmodernism grounded in economics. The term he proposes is that of "climax inflation--not only of wealth, but of people, ideas, methods, and expectations" which contributes to "the increasing power and persuasiveness of the communications industry, the reckless growth of the academy, the incessant changing of hands and intrinsic devaluation of all received ideas" (6). Quoting GNP figures, per capita income statistics, college enrolment numbers, and the decreasing value of the dollar, Newman affirms a correspondence between the fiscal inflation of the U.S. and the concomitant intellectual inflation of ideas that is responsible for the illusion of crisis which exists in academic institutions. Suffering from "chronic inflation," Newman argues, we experience symptoms in the form of "market distortions" and "cultural incoherence of the most destructive sort" (6).

Newman argues further that the inflation of discourse in conjunction with "the continuous circulation of diverse and contradictory intellectual elites" and "an unprecedented nonjudgmental receptivity to Art" works out, in the balance, to "a tolerance which finally amounts only to indifference" (9). It may be the case, however, that Newman himself is capitalizing here on the rhetoric of crisis, inflated as it may well have been during the mid-1980s when he wrote these remarks. The extent to which Newman's literary economics are
justly applicable to postmodern fiction is certainly worth questioning.

The "inflation of discourse" is, according to Newman, the most prominent feature of postmodernism, "manifesting itself in literature through the illusion that technique can remove itself from history by attacking a concept of objective reality which has already faded from the world, and in criticism by the development of secondary languages which presumably 'demystify' reality, but actually tend to further obscure it" (10). These are strong words indeed, and I do not propose to dispute them with any single proposition that would pretend to discredit the premises on which Newman's position is based. However, his firepower can be reduced significantly by illustrating what seems to be a categorical misattribution in his argument which becomes clear precisely when his disparagement of postmodernism achieves an unprecedented level of rhetorical prolixity. Newman's caustic rebuke of "inflationary postmodernism" reaches its pinnacle in attributing to our era a "new level of inconsequentiality...brought so wilfully to the point of crisis by a subtle rhetoric of emptiness which suggests nothing so much as a furious stupor" (183-4). If Newman's terminology is too nebulous to respond to here, he takes a more solid stand in what follows:

The sense of the postmodern is quintessentially one of
instability within immobility. In cultural matters, inflation abstracts anxiety, suspends judgment, multiplies interpretation, diffuses rebellion, debases standards, dissipates energy, mutes confrontation, undermines institutions, subordinates techniques, polarizes theory, dilates style, dilutes content, hyperpluralizes the political and social order while homogenizing culture. Above all, inflation masks stasis. (184)

To respond to each of these charges as they apply to postmodern fiction would be an undertaking of stupendous proportions were it not for the fact that Newman, as suggested above, incorrectly attributes to postmodernism a stasis ostensibly derived from the rejection of stability.

Postmodern fiction's preoccupation with destabilizing received notions of historical authority, undermining traditional faith in institutions, and challenging those axiological structures which impose on us an ostensibly objective view of reality cannot, as Newman seems to think, be equated with stasis. Nor, for that matter, can this fiction be said to withdraw from the historical through its emphasis on technique. Postmodern fiction is resolutely committed to the historical--but it is equally committed to a problematization of history as we have come to know it. Far from masking stasis, postmodern fiction as exemplified
in the works of Doctorow, Swift, Erdrich, and Findley (as representative of a legion of others) actively challenges the dominant structures and institutions in which we live and reminds its readers that they, too, can question and challenge these same structures and institutions. As Hutcheon argues, it is not the postmodern but neo-conservatism itself which promotes stasis for the sake of stability and tradition (Politics 16).

To be fair, Newman is not alone in identifying neo-conservatism as a defining characteristic of postmodernism. His equating of the two can be partly explained by the general confusion which has ensued from the debate centring round the question of which cultural forms are postmodern and which are not. Gerald Graff claims to understand the source of this confusion in arguing that the perception of our culture as one which is based on "scintillating 'dialogue,' dissonance, and pluralism" is a delusion. As

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6 Andreas Huyssen outlines the reasons why the rise of neo-conservatism in the late sixties and seventies became increasingly associated with developments in postmodernism. The left, he argues, "took them to be compatible with each other or even identical, arguing that postmodernism was the kind of affirmative art that could happily coexist with political and cultural neo-conservatism" (199). Huyssen acknowledges the need, however, to "salvage postmodernism from its assumed total collusion with neo-conservatism" or otherwise face the risk of becoming the "Lukács of the postmodern by opposing a 'good' modernism to a 'bad' postmodernism" (After the Great Divide 200). Such a project has already been undertaken in the work of Linda Hutcheon, Jonathan Arac, Ihab Hassan, and Jerry Varsava, as well as, of course, in Huyssen's own work. This study proposes, however modestly, to contribute to such a project.
Graff sees it, "lack of agreement" is not the same as "real disagreement," the latter having become rare because "the multiplicity of tongues leads not to confrontation but to incommensurability and talking at cross-purposes" (191). Graff articulates what is admittedly a characteristic experience of our age. The proliferation of discourses in our time has unequivocally given rise to numerous instances of debates in which respective parties, grounding their arguments in incommensurable paradigms, wind up "talking at cross purposes." Ironically, perhaps, Graff himself falls victim to his own diagnosis. For in his own dialogue with postmodern fiction, Graff persistently refers to a "reality" that is "out there" which postmodern fiction and our discourses about it allegedly do not believe exists (191). This kind of paradigm, one which lends itself to a faith in an unmediated referent, sharply contrasts with the model this study will offer.

Graff's evaluation of contemporary fiction, however, must be contextualized within the temporal period of its origin if we are to appreciate the nature of his concerns for the discipline of literary studies. Writing at the end of the seventies, he finds himself up against the rising popularity of deconstruction, on the one hand, and the fashionable status of surfictionist writing on the other. Of the latter, Raymond Federman typifies the prevailing sentiments of the time concerning contemporary fiction. The
authentic fiction writers of our day, Federman proclaims, "believe that reality as such does not exist, or rather exists only in its fictionalized version." As William Gass puts it, "the novelist, if he is any good, will keep us kindly imprisoned in his language--there is literally nothing beyond" (both quoted in Graff 60).

Unperturbed by such extreme remarks, Graff calmly reassures himself that the literary techniques endorsed by Federman and Gass do not necessarily lead to "the dismal ontological conclusions which such critics have derived from it" (60). Where Graff does get flustered is in his attempt to deal with Paul de Man's deconstruction and the "elegant hedging" of Frank Kermode and Jonathan Culler, both of whom want to have it both ways in dismissing "mimetic models" of fiction but at the same time retaining a belief in some kind of external world which permits us to recognize the illusion of mimesis in a work of fiction. To this kind of hedging

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7 Jameson's celebrated analysis of structuralism and Russian formalism, The Prison House of Language, comes to mind here, of course. Gass's remarks come from his Fiction and the Figures of Life. Both works were published in the same year, 1972, making it difficult to determine who first, if either, coined the metaphor.

8 Graff's frustration with Kermode is evident in the following passage: Take, for example, this Kermode statement: "The show of satisfaction" given by literary fictions "will only serve when there seems to be a degree of compliance with reality as we, from time to time, imagine it" (The Sense of an Ending 63). Here Kermode takes back with one hand what he has seemingly given with the other: fictive satisfactions must comply with reality, but then only seemingly, and only with reality as we
Graff puts the query, "If we reject the mimetic model, we leave unclear the position from which we are offering the rejection. How can we know that mimesis is a myth unless we can view from outside, mimetically" (171)?

Graff finds it harder to discredit de Man's position than Culler's or Kermode's because de Man "does not so much defend a thesis as propose one as given and already understood" (174).9 Nevertheless, de Man's views on the relationship between literature and reality, between "sign and meaning" are repudiated by Graff as being unconditionally intolerable. In Blindness and Insight, de Man had articulated a theory of literature that characterized the work of fiction in terms of a "self-reflecting mirror-effect by means of which a work of fiction asserts...its separation from empirical reality, its divergence as a sign, from a meaning that depends for its existence on the constitutive activity of this sign" (17). This separation of sign from meaning amounts, for Graff, to the claim that "all meaning is open and undecidable and bears no stable relation to its apparent origin or object" (Graff 174). As already noted, Graff finds little ground on which to dispute de Man's position because de Man "shows no interest in giving reasons or evidence for his

imagine it from time to time. (170)

9 Jameson, as I argue later, falls under a similar charge with regard to Marxism.
interpretation" (175).

Graff is firmly committed to defending a mimetic theory of literature, to maintaining that there is a reality "out there" which fiction represents. But his mimetic theory is reminiscent of Lukács's reductionist approach in the assertion that objective representation is possible, or at least very nearly possible. Graff's commitment to the Lukácsian ideal is never more clear than it is here:

The technique of what might be called methodological neutrality, of "getting the facts right" before leaping in with our value judgments, is one of the progressive achievements of civilization....[O]bservational neutrality is relatively approachable as an ideal...and the technique of methodological detachment is something that can be acquired and improved by training. (86-7)

What Graff expects of the novelist is essentially a faithful rendering of "reality" through the exercise of "observational neutrality." Though he is aware of the naivety behind simple mimetic theories based on a mirror reflection of reality, he does affirm the novelist's responsibility to an "objective social realism" without which fiction degenerates into a "trivial playing with the infinity of imaginative possibilities" (238).
Graff equates postmodern fiction with the abandonment of the referent. The chapters which follow, however, will attempt to show that postmodern fiction returns to the referent with vehemence. The crucial factor resides in the manner in which one understands how that referent can be represented. It has been suggested that the association of postmodernism with the attack on representation (an association Graff clearly makes) has arisen from a "misreading of the early Derrida" (McGowan 25). What Derrida argued in "Structure, Sign, and Play," was that representation could not be grounded, its truth could not be secured, by reference to the thing-in-itself to which it corresponded. This statement, however, is not at all a denial of the real-world referent, but rather a description of how we come to know the referent.

The point becomes that representation,...the order of signifiers, cannot be abandoned in favour of some direct relation to things in themselves. As Arac puts it, "the inescapability of representation is Derrida's deconstructive point against the metaphysical fantasy of pure presence." (McGowan 26)

Arguing for the "inescapability of representation" is in no way tantamount to abolishing the referent.

Historiographic metafiction, with its representation of real
historical persons and events, in no way challenges the ontological integrity of those historical persons and events it represents. Rather than effacing the referent, it self-consciously acknowledges its own existence as representation (and as interpretation) of the referent by drawing attention to its inability to offer direct access to the "real." What makes postmodern fiction the subject of attacks from so many diverse quarters, in fact, is its refusal to succumb to either a naïve reflectionist theory of representation or a surfictionist refutational one. It neither privileges nor denies the referent, but instead points to its own contingent process of assigning meaning to a world which indubitably exists but can only be known through the discourses we construct to represent it. Postmodern fiction, consequently, eludes the pitfalls of "analytico-referential discourse," which aims for "maximal transparency between reference and referent, representation and thing represented," while also steering clear of the "metafictional solipsism" which ensues when "discourse itself [is seen as] the sole object of all representation" (Herman 171).

In his reproach of Culler and Kermode for failing to see that a rejection of mimesis implies a privileged position from which such a rejection could be offered (171),

\[^{10}\text{Herman attributes this term to Hutcheon. It originates, however--as Hutcheon points out--in Timothy J Reiss's The Discourse of Modernism (see Poetics 74).}\]
Graff sees only one side of the problem. The other side of the problem concerns the question of the precise nature of the referent. Hutcheon assesses the issue in regard to historiographic metafiction:

Generally speaking, all metafictional self-reflexivity and auto-representation act to question the very existence as well as the nature of extratextual reference. But *historiographic* metafiction complicates this questioning. History offers facts--interpreted, signifying, discursive, textualized--made from brute events. Is the referent of historiography, then, the fact or the event, the textualized trace or the experience itself? Postmodernist fiction plays on this question, without ever fully resolving it. (*Poetics* 153)

What can be discerned from this is the recognition that arguments over whether or not postmodern fiction has forsaken the referent will necessarily beg the question of the very constitution of the referent as long as they ground their premises in the traditional vocabulary of Western metaphysics. Historiographic metafiction explicitly draws its readers' attention not only to epistemological questions (how we come to know history) but also to ontological questions about the status of historical material itself.
(the composition, one might say, of the referent). While the empirical reality of historical events is not rejected, historiographic metafiction emphasizes, through a variety of techniques and strategies, the textualized form in which knowledge of these events is most often obtained. At the same time, this fiction frequently incorporates (and subverts) the metaphysical fantasy of pure presence. The status of the referent hovers indeterminately, assuming a polymorphous form which illustrates our complex relation to the past.

In Swift's *Waterland*, for example, we see how the continuous deferment of the attempt to essentialize the referent becomes the preoccupation of the narrator, Tom Crick. Experience itself (the "Here and Now"), if it is to be taken as the proper referent of historiography, is seen by Crick to be transient and erratic. What we do to compensate for its instability is tell stories and so create a stable (but provisional) narrative that offers some comfort in the midst of the Dionysian flux of experience. As Crick sees it, "life is one-tenth Here and Now, nine-tenths a History lesson. For most of the time the Here and Now is neither now nor here" (52). Fascinated with the discipline of history itself, the young Crick oscillates between the belief in history as mythical narrative and the conviction that "history was no invention but indeed existed":
So I began to look into history—not only the well thumbed history of the wide world but also, indeed with particular zeal, the history of my Fenland forebears. So I began to demand of history an Explanation. Only to uncover in this dedicated search more mysteries, more fantasticalities, more wonders and grounds for astonishment than I started with, only to conclude forty years later—notwithstanding a devotion to the usefulness, to the educative power of my chosen discipline—that history is a yarn. And can I deny that what I wanted all along was not some golden nugget that history would at last yield up, but History itself, the Grand Narrative, the filler of vacuums, the dispeller of fears of the dark? (53)

Crick's desire for a "Grand Narrative" is no subtle reference on Swift's part to Jean-François Lyotard's work on the demise of the grand récits (master narratives) of the Western world. In The Postmodern Condition, Lyotard argues that we are in an age of petit récits, or small scale narratives.11 Competing narratives effectively challenge

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11 The questioning of the master discourses does not, of course, originate with Lyotard. Foucault, Derrida, and Jean Baudrillard, contemporaries of Lyotard, all contest the notion of the metanarrative, expanding on the earlier work of Nietzsche. In The Postmodern Condition, Lyotard seeks to re-establish the preeminence of narrative which, he argues, has always been the means by which the human sciences have disseminated knowledge.
each other without the appeal to any external legitimizing narrative which might settle the dispute. In the absence of a master narrative, individual particular narratives must rely on the cogency of their own terminology to address effectively the subject matter at hand. Richard Rorty adumbrates the case with characteristic lucidity:

The trouble with arguments against the use of a familiar and time-honored vocabulary is that they are expected to be phrased in that very vocabulary. They are expected to show that central elements in that vocabulary are "inconsistent in their own terms" or that they "deconstruct themselves." But that can never be shown. Any argument to the effect that our familiar use of a term is incoherent, or empty, or confused, or vague, or "merely metaphorical" is bound to be inconclusive and question-begging. For such use is, after all, the paradigm of coherent, meaningful, literal, speech. Such arguments are always parasitic upon, and abbreviations for, claims that a better vocabulary is available. Interesting philosophy is rarely an examination of the pros and cons of a thesis. Usually it is, implicitly or explicitly, a contest between an entrenched vocabulary which has become a nuisance and a half-formed new vocabulary which vaguely promises great things. (Contingency 8-9)
I quote Rorty at length here because, although his subject is philosophical discourse, his account sheds a great deal of light on the nature of debate within the humanities in general, including the discipline of literary studies. The success of my own attempt to advance for postmodern fiction a claim to mimetic efficacy would depend, according to Rorty, not on my competence in discrediting Graff, Aldridge, and Newman but in demonstrating that the terms in which I propose to evaluate postmodern fiction are more effective in accommodating the various conventions which characterize it than are the ones employed by Graff and company.

The conventional method of attempting to discredit one's adversaries by illuminating contradictions within their own arguments is, I readily admit, one to which most of us still resort and one which I do not deny having used here. The genre of the doctoral dissertation, in fact, strongly encourages such a practice. Yet it seems to me that the fate of postmodern fiction, in the midst of the multiple and competing discourses which aim to describe it, rests to a greater extent on this conception of a contest between an old, "entrenched" vocabulary which has become a "nuisance" and a half-formed new vocabulary which "vaguely promises great things." Hutcheon's "historiographic metafiction" fits this latter category while Graff, Aldridge, and Newman all premise their arguments on a conception of mimesis deriving
from an outdated "entrenched" vocabulary.

Fredric Jameson, in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, tenders a vocabulary grounded in Marxism with which he attempts to explain and describe postmodernism. "It is safest to grasp the concept of the postmodern," he tells us, "as an attempt to think the present historically in an age that has forgotten how to think historically in the first place" (ix). In an interview with Anders Stephanson, Jameson denounces postmodernism for "blocking historicity" through the substitution of "images, simulacra," and "pastiches of the past" for "real" history (60). In a curious strategical move, however, Jameson proposes that postmodernism be used to undo itself (so that history may be once again grasped in its immediacy). Douglas Kellner summarily describes the technique:

Jameson proposes a strategy similar to what Baudrillard called "fatal strategies": pursuing the logic of a phenomena to the end, beyond its boundaries, to explode or turn against established trends or elements of the existing society....Jameson's example is the work of the novelist E.L. Doctorow who in novels like *Ragtime*, *Loon Lake*, and *Daniel*, attempts to use postmodernist techniques of pastiche, historical nostalgia, and cliche to recover a genuine sense of history and to overcome the limits of postmodern fragmentation, loss
of a sense of history, and so on. (36)

The next chapter outlines some of the limitations in Jameson's reading of what Doctorow is trying to do in *Ragtime*. Jameson fails to acknowledge an entire semantic plane in which a discourse about history plays itself out open-endedly. As Ralph Cohen aptly remarks, "his desire to replace Hutcheon's key term 'parody' with 'pastiche'...makes 'parody' blank, 'a statue with blind eyeballs'" (22).

To Jameson's relentless insistence that we have lost our sense of the past, one might reply that we have awakened from a dream to discover precisely how it is that we ever came to have a sense of the past in the first place. Historiographic metafiction holds up the mirror Nietzsche refers to in the epigraph to this chapter. It show us the means by which history comes into existence. As Amy J. Elias points out, "[t]he postmodernist historical novel presents history as an 'open work.'...[I]t implies that the historical record itself is engaged with 'readers' in a process of movement and becoming. It posits, in Pousseur's words, a 'field of possibilities' where the historical record once stood" (108).

What is ultimately at stake in the various debates about postmodern fiction is a contest between entrenched traditional vocabularies (Liberalism and Marxism) and new, incipient vocabularies which "vaguely promise great things,"
as Rorty puts it. Such a contest is not peculiar to the discipline of literary studies alone, or even to the humanities in general. Thomas Kuhn has shown how the scientific community relies on a revolution of "paradigms" through which the idea of scientific progress comes to be understood. Such a claim has considerable relevance to the arguments made in this chapter. "[N]ew paradigms ordinarily incorporate much of the vocabulary...that the traditional paradigm has previously employed. But they seldom employ these borrowed elements in quite the traditional way." The consequence, as we might imagine, is "what we must call, though the term is not quite right, a misunderstanding between the two competing schools" (380). Eventually, Kuhn argues, the new paradigm wins more and more supporters. Far from there being a single group conversion, however, what occurs is "an increasing shift in the distribution of professional allegiances" (387). Such a shift, it seems, is happening in the discipline of literary studies with regard to postmodern fiction. The Graffs, Aldridges, Newmans, and Jamesons may hold out for a while longer, but I suspect they will find fewer supporters in the near future. Gradually, the field of literary studies as we know it will have accepted wholeheartedly that "what seems to be disorganization and crisis in the knowledge and practice of literature and literary criticism may be rethought as a new 'positivity' or a (re)construction through deconstruction of
what we know and how we know it" (Morgan 274). Such an acknowledgment will at the very least give us a better insight into postmodern fiction's mimetic value and enhance our appreciation of the integrity with which postmodern writers--as Lukács once requested of an earlier generation--create artistic forms which are commensurate with the requirements of the age.
Chapter 2

E. L. Doctorow and the "Spaces" of the Past

What we do in dreams we also do when we are awake: we invent and fabricate the person with whom we associate--and immediately forget we have done so.

Friedrich Nietzsche

The conclusion reached in the previous chapter requires for its justification a comparative analysis of vocabularies used in evaluating certain works of fiction. The notion that contemporary historical fiction yields a mimetic significance when evaluated in a critical discourse commensurate with "the requirements of the age"--an admittedly vague criterion which will acquire more precision later in this chapter--needs now the test of a practical application. The four novels treated in this dissertation all, in very different ways, support the primary tenet of my thesis.¹ Perhaps none more colourfully than Ragtime.

¹It may be of some interest that I almost wrote "faith" instead of "thesis." In many regards the arguments against postmodernism's (and poststructuralism's) treatment of history become as serious, and adopt the internal structure of, religious arguments. Underlying all the rhetoric and ostensible logic of these "academic" debates there seems to lie a naive faith in the unquestionable existence of "History" (God). This is remarkably evident in Marxist criticism from both sides of the border, some of which will be brought into my discussion at a later stage. It is tempting, at times, to bring this phenomenon into the open and adopt, in response, the appropriate rhetoric: "These are the articles of my faith: I believe that history does not have a unified and singular essence; I believe that history has no meaning outside of the conceptual structures humans
however, confronts the questions of history which unfold upon and through each other in Doctorow's narrative.

The title of *Ragtime* lends itself quite well to the match proposed in the last chapter, one which would pit Elizabeth Ermarth's concept of "rhythmic time" against Jameson's notion of "History" or "the Real." According to Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, ragtime is "a rhythm characterized by strong syncopation in the melody with a regularly accented accompaniment," while syncopation is defined as "a temporary displacement of the regular metrical accent...caused typically by stressing the weak beat." The implications of these definitions in terms of the novel's treatment of history are of considerable interest here. Ermarth's theory that postmodern fiction dispenses with a model of "linear" time in favour of "rhythmic" time seems almost to have sprung from a close reading of Doctorow's narrative itself.2 "Multi-level thinking," a phrase Ermarth

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use to give it that meaning..., etc.

to the extent that some kind of fervour akin to that of religious commitment prevails in this debate, any hopes for "retractions" or admissions of "heresy" remain bleak in the face of critics such as Fredric Jameson, or, here in Canada, Len Findlay (see his "Otherwise Engaged: Postmodernism and the Resistance to Theory"). My hope (and assumption) is that the fiction of our time will illustrate in unequivocal terms--as it now seems to be doing--the shift in consciousness which has led to the postmodern conception of history, and illuminate the problems associated with an appeal to a "History" extraneous to the textual form through which it comes to us.

2Ermarth herself, however, makes no mention of *Ragtime* (or Doctorow, for that matter) in *Sequel to History*. The
borrows from Nabokov's *The Gift*, is the mode which is required to comprehend the nature of rhythmic time. "Multi-level thinking holds out the possibility of reimagining 'the past' not only by pluralizing it but by releasing it from the dialectical and linear relationships to which it is constrained by historical narrative" (87-8). What Ragtime does especially well is precisely this. It liberates the past from the strictures of conventional historical narrative by creating new spaces in which multiple narratives can co-exist, consequently breaching the regulative control of linear time. And yet within the field of imaginative possibilities presented in the narrative we still find the conventional mode of historical discourse playing itself out (as "the regularly accented accompaniment") against the "strong syncopation" of Ragtime's beat. As Ermarth observes, far from repudiating conventional historical discourse, rhythmic time instead "incorporates the convention of history--internalizes it as one game, one set of rules among many" (212).

Yet some interpretive attempts to decipher Ragtime's melody seem to keep time to a different beat, so to speak, by implicitly subscribing to a line of thinking which is heavily biased toward conventional historical narrative and a concomitant faith in the accessibility of an historical theoretical framework of her analysis--each of the three parts of her book ends in a "rhythm section"--clearly has a strong affinity to Ragtime's own structure.
world extraneous to the text. It is not only Jameson in his explicit commitment to a Marxist history (a collective, totalizing history) who whistles a different tune here. Emily Budick, for example, observes that the novel is a masterpiece of skillfully interwoven ontological realms. Remarking on the young boy's premonition of World War I early in the novel, which prompts him to tell Houdini, "Warn the Duke," Budick advances the theory that the prophecy is "a communication from a voice outside the world of the novel. It writes into the book the author who is excluded from the fictional world because, like the history that the novel also absents, he occupies a different and discontinuous ontological plane" (187). Budick recognizes the multiple levels of historical existence present in the novel but insists that a distinction is always (or ultimately) maintained between them. The implied assumption here is that an historical world extraneous to textuality is accessible in some way. Doctorow's treatment of the novel's multiple ontological levels translates into the repeated insistence that it is an illusion that these levels can be delineated so easily, if at all.³

³The concept of illusion, in fact, is one that serves a number of functions in the novel, not the least of which is the left-wing critique of capitalism which is offered alongside the critique of conventional history. The politics of the novel are in one sense an entirely separate issue from the historical concerns and yet the concept of illusion is one with which Doctorow plays to produce both political and historical commentary. Although I disagree with Jameson's treatment of history in Ragtime, my own sense of
Lars Sauerberg also feels that attempts to delineate the fictional from the historical in *Ragtime* are misguided. In a sense, the novel does indeed "exist in two dimensions," he argues. "It is a work of fiction with a multiple plot self-consciously exploring the boundaries of fiction," but also a "an account of world/American/New York history exploring the nature of historiography." However, "Doctorow does not scrutinize the difference between the novelistic (fictional) and historical visions in the same way as Mailer in *The Armies of the Night*" (72). Budick's assertion that a distinction is maintained appears to be a problematic one.

Yet Budick's position, my main objection to it notwithstanding, is particularly relevant to this chapter for a number of reasons. First, her insights reveal a finer sense of Doctorow's style than do Jameson's with his one-sided assertions about Doctorow's rejecting or undoing postmodernism by using its techniques (pastiche, historical nostalgia, and cliché) against it. Second, however, and more important, is that, like Jameson, she appeals (however indirectly) to a notion of history as "world history," a single, great, collective narrative. Her interpretive strategy, while adept enough at locating many of *Ragtime's* subtle nuances, thus falls prey to a thematic limitation in Doctorow's politics is more or less compatible with Jameson's. As suggested below, reading the novel as a "left-wing critique of capitalism" (Jameson's words) does not necessarily contradict the postmodern conception of history as outlined in the last chapter.
its unquestioning attitude towards conventional history.

Once more, a fundamental disagreement among critics over *Ragtime*'s treatment of history has its roots in the differences between Rorty's "old" and "new" vocabularies. The "misunderstanding between the two schools" (Kuhn 380) which emerges stems from the common use of terminology which has slightly (sometimes vastly) different meanings for the respective schools. Terms such as "history," "mimesis," and "realism" become sites of semantic confusion as the "new" vocabulary, borrowing terms from the "old," begins to be used more and more. Subscribers to the "old school" are invariably dumbfounded, sometimes outraged, to find that "history" as they understand it, is nowhere to be found in postmodern fiction and "realism" has been abandoned in favour of fantasy or escapist gamesmanship. Understood in this way, critical debates over the presence or absence of "history" in certain novels stand little chance of a resolution. Budick argues that *Ragtime* is a novel which "incorporates real people and real controversies into its story" and "assumes responsibility for the history that it traces." Yet it also "stretches believability beyond mimetic realism" because "[t]he coincidental intermingling of characters defies reason" (186). One is left to ponder the possibility of such an enterprise: how can the novel cross over the line of rationality, violating all known codes of "mimetic realism" and yet still be responsible to "the
history that it traces)?

Doctorow's narrative is indeed one which assumes responsibility—not only for the history it traces but also for the means by which that history is traced. The key to *Ragtime*'s hermeneutic heart, however, lies in the newer vocabulary of postmodernism and its sense of history. As we have seen, Ermarth's account of "rhythmic time," which she posits as a replacement for traditional concepts of historical time, helps elucidate the processes at work in *Ragtime*, processes which both use conventional historical methods while also challenging the structures which support the validity of these methods. At the same time, the concept of "rhythmic time" necessitates a reworking or redefining of what actually constitutes "mimetic realism."

Any interpretation of the novel which clings to a conventional definition of history will be unable to reconcile Doctorow's sense of responsibility (that is, to the events—real and fictional—which unfold in the narrative) to his ostensible violation of the standards of conventional mimetic realism. The new vocabularies tendered by Hutcheon's "historiographic metafiction" and Ermarth's "rhythmic time" provide a more accurate account of what is happening in *Ragtime*, specifically in regard to the historical referent which is problematized rather than banished, in a way that is at once serious and yet playful. Doctorow removes for us the burden of the "official"
historical record (by incorporating dialogue and meetings between "real" historical persons that are not verifiable by any records known at present), without abandoning responsibility for the historical and political events which occur in the novel. All of this, rather than "stretching believability beyond mimetic realism" (Budick 186), instead clears the space for a new conception of mimetic realism and a new understanding of how we construct "the past." Before exploring further the possibility of a new mimetic realism which is explicitly called for by the works discussed in this dissertation, it is worth examining the tenacity of the belief in a single collective history, as well as how an unflagging commitment to such a concept precludes the full appreciation of the techniques at work in Ragtime, techniques which pave the way for an alternative understanding of history (and hence mimetic realism).

Jameson, in the interview with Stephanson, outlines what he sees to be Doctorow's agenda:

Here we have a radical leftwing novelist who has seized the whole apparatus of nostalgia art, pastiche and postmodernism, in order to work himself through them instead of attempting to resuscitate some older form of social realism, an alternative which would in itself become only another pastiche. Doctorow's is not necessarily the only possible path, but I find it an
intriguing attempt "homeopathically" to undo postmodernism by the methods of postmodernism: to work at dissolving the pastiche by using all the instruments of what I have called substitutes for history. (61-2)

Jameson is quick to observe here the impossibility of reviving "some older form of social realism," an effort that he rightly argues would be viewed as a form of "pastiche" itself. But because he is so committed to the ideal behind social realism (the ideal of a history depicted as a totalizing phenomenon), he views the contemporary historical novelist's choices as being restricted to a simplistic "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em!" type of strategy by which the enemy (postmodernism) might be quashed from within ("homeopathically") by using its own weapons (techniques) against it.

What Jameson consequently sees in Ragtime is, essentially, "a seemingly realistic novel which is in reality a nonrepresentational work that combines fantasy signifiers from a variety of ideologemes in a kind of hologram" (Postmodernism 23). Ragtime is, for Jameson, a novel which epitomizes the "disappearance of the historical referent." Instead of representing the historical past, "it can only 'represent' our ideas and stereotypes about that past," thus pointing to the postmodern predicament: being forever "condemned to seek History by way of our own pop
images and simulacra of that history, which by itself remains forever out of reach" (25).

Jameson's assessment of Doctorow's agenda seems to be problematic—not to mention just yet his assessment of the "postmodern predicament." If Doctorow has indeed "seized the whole apparatus" of postmodernism, it is not with the assumption that it consists of "substitutes" for history (simulacra, pastiche, nostalgia, etc.). It is, quite the contrary to Jameson's claims, with the understanding that history, the past, is not as directly accessible as it was previously assumed to be (especially when "social realism"

"There is more than a little irony in what I would argue to be a misunderstanding--of both Doctorow's strategy and of postmodernism. Cornel West has been more succinct than anyone in summarizing Jameson's position. Jameson's primary concern, West argues, is maintaining the Marxist paradigm without succumbing to Lukacs's "nostalgic humanism." This concern finds its general formulation in the question, "How to take history, class struggle, and capitalist dehumanization seriously after the profound poststructuralist deconstructions of solipsistic Cartesianism, transcendental Kantianism, teleological Hegelianism, genetic Marxism, and recuperative humanism?" West further reduces the question, in "Anglo-American common-sense" language to, "'How to live and act in the face of the impotence of irony and the paralysis of skepticism?'" (124).

Ragtime is a novel which goes a long way toward answering such a question. Even as it pays tribute--with its parody and irony--to the postmodern sensibility, it also initiates a political critique of American culture. Irony need not cause impotence, or skepticism paralysis. As Hutcheon points out, "The irony that allows critical distance is what here refuses nostalgia. Ragtime's volunteer firemen are anything but sentimental figures, and many American social 'ideals'--such as justice--are called into question by their inapplicability to (black) Americans like Coalhouse Walker" (Poetics 90).
was the master narrative). That the historical past can no longer be represented in any unmediated, transparent fashion is less a flaw in the fabric of contemporary art for Doctorow than it is an acknowledgment of the epistemic evolution which has transformed historical thinking across a broad range of disciplines in the humanities. There is nothing either in the novel itself or in Doctorow's interviews to suggest a subversive intention on his part with regard to postmodernism's conception of history. In defending his fictionalization of events and conversations between J.P. Morgan and Henry Ford, Doctorow himself has said: "I'm satisfied that everything I made up about Morgan and Ford is true, whether it happened or not. Perhaps truer because it didn't happen" (qtd. in Trenner 69). 5

What Doctorow is attesting to here is the fundamentally constructive role of both writer and historian in their attempt to take the bare events of history and endow them with meaning. 6 History, as we see it depicted in Ragtime, is a construction, one which the characters--both real and

5It is difficult to be certain whether or not this last remark, "perhaps truer because it didn't happen," is not uttered without some measure of tongue in cheek--although Findley seems to take it at face value (see "Interview" 5). Contrary to Jameson's notions about Doctorow's agenda, there is little question that, if anything, Doctorow is criticizing conventional historical accounts and asserting his own belief in the integrity of narrative as the basis for truth claims (a concept explored more fully in the next chapter on Swift's Waterland).

6See chapters three and four for a discussion of Hayden White's work on this subject.
fictive—as well as author incorporate into their relation to the world, their Dasein.\footnote{My use of Heidegger's term here is in no way an endorsement of his views on history—or politics, for that matter. The concept of Dasein is one for which we have no equivalent in English and yet is uniquely appropriate to questions of an ontological nature. Roughly translated, it means "there being." The term originated with the German rationalists (led by Christian Wolff) around 1700 and simply referred to the "existence" as opposed to the "essence" (Wassein, or "what it is") of a person or object. For Heidegger, the term becomes exclusively related to human existence and the understanding of existence. He puts it the following way in Being and Time: "This being, which we ourselves in each case are and which includes inquiry among the possibilities of its Being we formulate terminologically as Dasein" (Basic Writings 48). Heidegger's particular use of the term has considerable bearing on the fundamentally questioning nature of historical being and historical knowledge as it is presented by historiographic metafiction. In McHale's "dominants," as we have seen, modern fiction is more concerned with the limits of knowledge and asks questions such as "What is there to be known?" and "Who knows it?" Postmodern fiction, on the other hand, is more preoccupied with ontological issues, with the nature of Dasein, and asks such questions as "What is a world, and how many kinds of worlds are there?" Also—and crucial to the concerns of this study—"What happens when different kinds of world are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated?" (9-10).}

Doctorow's agenda, then, explicit or implicit, is not focused around a critique of the postmodern sense of history. If anything, it is an exposé of the naivety with which conventional historical narratives have depicted the past. Ragtime plays with the conventional form by first incorporating it, and then blatantly discrediting its claims to representation. What we begin to see in the novel is nothing less than the cognitive process by which historical narrative is constructed. Far from rejecting the possibility
of historical representation, the novel shows us how this representation is formed. Because history always comes to us as text, it always selects, omits, distorts, and downplays by the very nature of discourse itself: this is the lesson Doctorow teaches us.

*Ragtime*'s opening pages bear the first traces of a critical devaluation of conventional historical narrative. The narrator describes the aura surrounding the events in New Rochelle, New York, in 1902:

Patriotism was a reliable sentiment in the 1900's. Teddy Roosevelt was President. The population customarily gathered in great numbers either out of doors for parades, public concerts, fish fries, political picnics, social outings, or indoors in meeting halls, vaudeville theatres, operas, ballrooms. There seemed to be no entertainment that did not involve great swarms of people....That was the style, that was the way people lived. (3)

Before readers become comfortable with the familiar confidence of conventional historical narrative, however, they are confronted with the claims that: "Everyone wore white in summer. Tennis racquets were hefty and the racquet faces elliptical. There was a lot of sexual fainting. There were no Negroes. There were no immigrants. On Sunday
afternoon, after dinner, Father and Mother went upstairs and closed the bedroom door" (3-4). Yet on the following page we are told, "Apparently there were Negroes. There were immigrants" (5). The casual framing of the initial denial is significant. Couched in between innocuous descriptions of clothing styles, sport, and sexual habits is a political generalization of considerable importance, one which is in no uncertain terms directly contradicted only a page later. Doctorow could have waited (perhaps five or fifty pages). The effect is magnified, however, with the proximity of the contradiction. It alerts us to the extent to which historical discourse is subject to all kinds of generalizations which intermingle indeterminately with more or less aesthetic ones. One reads about old-fashioned tennis racquets without for a minute doubting the accuracy of the description. The image, a familiar one, wins our trust in the narrator's reliability and subsequent proclamations go unchecked. The ostensible validity of several remarks effaces the fallacies inherent in a couple which are deliberately imbedded among the "true" ones. The almost immediate refutation of the initial erasure of African Americans and immigrants from early twentieth-century America serves two crucial functions in the novel. First, as I have argued, it discredits the license taken by conventional historical narrative to make generalizations of all kinds and depict an unproblematic and continuous past.
Second, it serves as a critique of the dominance of white American historical narrative as well as the capitalist system which has operated to ensconce white America so firmly within the structures of power. This is only the first instance in the novel which supports these functions. There are a number of subsequent moments which provide the same critiques.

Doctorow's agenda, it would appear, is not quite what Jameson asserts in his reading of the novelist. One reason which helps account for Jameson's position stems, from his understanding of "the postmodern predicament" itself. Jameson levels several accusations against postmodernism, most serious among them the crime (for a Marxist) of "blocking historicity" by substituting "pastiche[s of the past]" for "real history" (Stephanson 60). What postmodernism does, however, and what novels like Ragtime actually do, is to get as close as possible to whatever it is that constitutes "real history." The apparent falsification or fictionalization of the past in a playful and parodic manner (if this is what Jameson understands to be "pastiche") is done in the service of establishing the limits of our knowledge about the past.

This is an important point, here. Arguably, Jameson is right about Doctorow's politics, but wrong about his agenda. Postmodernism isn't Doctorow's target. In fact, postmodernism's a questioning of conventional historical
narrative is enlisted by Doctorow as a political strategy to discredit the right's dominance in the capitalist regime. Doctorow parodies John Dos Passos' *USA* trilogy with its "unproblematized view of historical continuity and the context of representation" (Hutcheon, *Politics* 95) but without necessarily inverting Dos Passos' political partisanship. There is little doubt that Doctorow's political sympathies are, as Jameson argues, leftwing. Yet there is no reason to suppose that the novel's theme (according to Jameson)—the Left's experience of defeat in the twentieth century via the "depoliticization of the workers' movement" caused by "the media or culture generally"—is incompatible with Doctorow's problematizing of the historical referent. In fact, what makes the novel such a technical masterpiece is the way Doctorow seems to be able to do both at the same time: to satirize politically while problematizing historiographically. For example, the boy in *Ragtime* (we are not given names of the family members, only Father, Mother, etc.) is described at one point as being obsessed with staring into the mirror:

In fact he continued the process not from vanity but because he discovered the mirror as a means of self-duplication. He would gaze at himself until there were two selves facing one another, neither of which could claim to be the real one. The sensation was of being
disembodied. He was no longer anything exact as a person. (98)

This ontological fragmentation (arising from duplication) finds its parallel in the critique of capitalism's mass production of goods: "All across the continent merchants pressed the large round keys of their registers. The value of the duplicable event was everywhere perceived" (111). And yet, this duplicable event, the driving force of capitalism (Ford's assembly line) is, on a completely different level, questioned by Doctorow in an ironic underscoring of the impossibility of historical duplication, of representing the historical past "as it was," so to speak. The boy's childlike wonder at his own fragmentation and continual reconstitution is an analogue of the author's own fascination with the nature of historical reconstruction: "It was evident to him that the world composed and recomposed itself constantly in an endless process of dissatisfaction" (99). This kind of observation mirrors Doctorow's own acknowledgment that the representation of a given historical period becomes a new composition in itself with each successive attempt, a new reworking of the textualized historical traces.8

8There is also some significance in the boy's preference for anything discarded. For him, "the meaning of something was perceived through its neglect" (89-90). Sauerberg links this to the preferences and omissions involved in the process of narrative composition--both
For Doctorow, in fact, it is a virtual miracle that anything remains the same for very long. This is not so much an explicit orientation toward a particular philosophy as it seems to be an intuitive belief that seeps into his narrative from time to time. In *The Book of Daniel*, there is a passage which parallels the boy's experience with the mirror in *Ragtime*. It is the description of the Lewin family's move into their new house, a two-family house in which "every sound had echoes, every image bore another. The very first day in the house, before anything was unpacked, the new family went exploring, running down the one hundred forty-seven wood steps of Winthrop Path (always to be that number, the same each time, a source of great satisfaction)...." (74). The discovery of an empirical constant is experienced as an anomaly in comparison to the daily experience of flux and change, of one image giving way to another. The continual deferment of image and experience is contrasted with the admission of desire for some permanency.

Jameson does not take into account a subtle undercurrent in both *Ragtime* and *Daniel*. Doctorow is not using Baudrillardian fatal strategies at all to subvert postmodernism and to recover in some fashion a genuine sense of history (i.e. a sense of history commensurate with the requirements of Marxism). He is instead illustrating the fictional and historiographical (72-3).
sense of life, history, and memory characteristic of twentieth-century North America (i.e. a sense commensurate with the requirements of our age). There is no "genuine" history to which we have unmediated access. In an age of proliferating information systems abounding with increasingly briefer messages, it is little wonder that Daniel, in trying to recall parts of a childhood dominated by media coverage, discovers only "two or three images left from this period of our life" (148) (instead of a totalizing history replete with Lukácsian exemplarity and problem resolution). Access to the past is thus fragmented, partial, provisional, and always already mediated by the discursive forms which are used to construct narratives out of which the past is given meaning. Ragtime's emphasis on ontological fragmentation is in perfect accord with an age in which the

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3That the shifting sense of history and memory is more than a creation or distortion made by postmodern art forms has been argued by Andreas Huyssen in Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia. Huyssen maintains that the contemporary obsession with memory in postmodern art is not merely another characteristic of "postmodern pastiche" but is actually indicative of a crisis in the structure of temporality as we know it. In an age when philosophies of history based on totalizing teleologies are no longer acceptable, Huyssen discusses the relationship of history to memory, maintaining the position that, as the borders between the real world and its construction in information systems merge, the more our sense of temporality will be affected. The waning of historical consciousness, he argues, is thus an historically explainable phenomenon.

One could qualify this last assertion by stating that the waning of historical consciousness as history has traditionally been understood is thus an historically explainable phenomenon. Historical consciousness is being transformed, not eradicated, by the merging of the "real world" and the information systems which represent it.
conditions of being in the world (Dasein) have been increasingly destabilized by the institutional powers of capitalism, in concert with the mass media which act to enforce the terms of such destabilization. Doctorow plays with precisely this.

Capitalism, in its valuing of the duplicable event, along with historical narrative and its alleged ability to represent (to duplicate on paper) in all its immediacy the historical referent, is everywhere parodied in Ragtime. At times there is no way of distinguishing between Doctorow's targets. The ubiquitous ideal behind Western thinking in general, its propensity for universalisms, at times receives the brunt of Doctorow's caustic wit. The conversation mentioned by Doctorow between Morgan and Ford certainly suggests such an aim. In a parodic scene which comically links Morgan's esoteric, philosophical investigations to Ford's mobilizing of the masses, Doctorow effects a subtle satire. "Suppose I could prove to you", Morgan says to Ford, "that there are universal patterns of order and repetition that give meaning to the activity of this planet....Has it occurred to you that your assembly line is not merely a stroke of industrial genius but a projection of organic truth?" (122-3). Doctorow exposes here the self-justificatory faith capitalist society has in its origins which ostensibly derive their legitimacy organically from the cosmos. At the same time we cannot help but acknowledge
the implications for historical narrative effected precisely through Doctorow's destabilizing of received notions of "universal patterns of order and repetition", patterns used by Marxists and Liberals alike to substantiate representations of the historical past.

While it is tempting to explore further the political theme of the novel, my analysis here will now focus on Doctorow's treatment of the historical referent--indeed, on his treatment of the conventional concept of history itself.¹⁰ It remains to be shown how the concept of "rhythmic time" functions in concert with the vocabulary of historiographic metafiction to open a new space in which Pousseur's "field of possibilities" replaces the static structure of conventional historical narrative.

In defining the modus operandi of conventional historical time, Ermarth outlines a number of constitutive elements--foremost among them, the mutual continuity of time and consciousness. The "historical convention of temporality," she argues, uses a "Nobody" narrator to thread

¹⁰It is especially tempting to pursue further the connection between the leftwing politics of the novel and the problematization of history in light of certain characterizations of postmodernism as "neoconservative." The attack led by Jürgen Habermas against postmodernism for its complicity with neoconservatism has been explained by Andreas Huyssen as arising out of the particular German context of Habermas' reflections. (See After the Great Divide 201.) Still, critics have found other reasons to establish the same correlation. Chapter one, addressed the limitations of any categorical assessment of postmodernism's politics.
together "a whole series of moments and perspectives" which implicitly rely on a "consensus, that is, the formal agreement among viewpoints that produces 'space' and 'time'" (28). In a novel such as War and Peace, for example, the multiple perspectives all "agree"--"not in the trivial sense of agreement about particular issues but in the most powerful sense of constructing and inhabiting the 'same' time, which is to say, a medium in which what happens in one moment has influence upon another moment" (28).

An initial reading of Ermarth's argument here may quite likely lead to the realization that it is causality itself which is being deconstructed or at least challenged here. Ermarth is not at all so direct. Her aim is to lay bare the previously unchallenged power of the "narrator" (the "Nobody narrator" and hence "Nobody's power") who "maintains the communication between past, present, and future, and thus the possibility of causal sequences from one to the another" (28, my emphasis). We need to denaturalize the notions of "space" and "time." Ermarth claims, because, while common sense supports their ostensible neutrality and homogeneity, a "historicizing of historical conventions" illustrates that "the realistic 'consensus' has itself created the media of space and time...." It is only "a collective act of faith" and precisely not a "condition of nature" which upholds their status in our culture (29-30).

Ragtime, both explicitly and implicitly, denaturalizes
conventional assumptions about time and history. As noted earlier, the young boy's words to Houdini, "Warn the Duke," serve to disrupt the continuum of causal sequence, alerting the reader to the fact that a specific narrator is in control of the particular relationship of events presented in the narrative. The narrative contradictions regarding the presence or absence of African Americans, also noted earlier, serve a similar purpose.

Historiographic metafiction attempts to expose and critique these conventions as conventions to reveal, in a sense, the discursive relations from which they derive their legitimacy. The problem, however, is in finding a place from which to disclose these discursive relations which circumscribe the conventions in question here. It is not so easy to find a crack in what appears to be a seamless web of associations constituting the Dasein of Western existence. Yet, Doctorow finds one. Swift finds one. Findley finds one. Erdrich, and a host of others who for various reasons refuse to submit to the conventional criteria of literary and historical narrative, locate themselves and their work in a space from which it is possible to articulate a new mimetic realism.

Two and a half decades after *Ragtime*'s publication, the obstacles to be overcome in challenging the conventional form were perhaps more formidable then than they are now. Experimentation with the historical novel was nothing new,
even at the time. Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, with its fragmented narrative and disregard for temporal linearity, is most notable among the experiments with historical material already occurring in the sixties. Vonnegut abandons "the direct mimetic devices," Jerome Klinkowitz observes, "because such conventions no longer appear applicable to a world where behaviour has outstripped all the measures of nineteenth-century order and realism" (68). The deliberate transgression of the conventional rules of narrative is therefore simply a response to the requirements of the age. Klinkowitz states the case clearly: "Vonnegut has to reinvent the novel and its methods of order and reference so that it can remain, in fact, a form of realism, true to contemporary life" (68). But *Ragtime*'s subject matter is not the unspeakable atrocities of World War Two. While Vonnegut's intrusive narrator permits him to convey directly to the reader the difficulties faced in his attempt to make sense of the Dresden bombing, and hence indirectly to offer a justification for his narrative experimentation, *Ragtime*--at least superficially--provides no rationale for its departure from convention.

Yet if it is unchartered territory which Doctorow attempts to navigate, transcending the spatial and temporal limits which have circumscribed conventional narratives for centuries, then the primary obstacle he faces is a crucial one. How does one articulate a concept external to the
discursive formation which constitutes and regulates the domain of discourse from the start? Or (as Richard Rorty might rephrase the question), "How does one really say something new?"

The answer is that one can't--at least not immediately. There is a process through which any genuine challenge to the entrenched conventions of any discourse must go before something "new" is understood to have been said. What Doctorow accomplishes in Ragtime's narrative is the beginning of this process. Novels like Swift's Waterland and Findley's Famous Last Words also contribute to the process, as do literary critical debates about these novels. In challenging a certain convention which resides, as Foucault would say, at the limit of discourse, one must begin by working with and against the conventions long regarded as the sine qua non of the discourse (or genre) in question.

A complication, however, occurs in the critical reception of this intentional act. As I have already said, both Jameson and Budick interpret Doctorow's literary strategy as an appeal back to "real" history. However, Doctorow's use and parody of conventional historical narrative are most properly appreciated as an attempt to deconstruct and question the authority which historical discourse has maintained for itself for centuries. At the same time, the narrative strategies he employs open up (or
at least point toward) the space from which an alternative
to conventional historical narrative might assert itself.
The most obvious critique of the authority and life-
sustaining qualities of historical narrative appears in the
subplot of Father's expedition to the north pole. As part of
Peary's third expedition to "the Pole," Father seeks to
ensconce himself within the broad fabric of history. But to
his appropriation of the historical record, Doctorow sets up
an opposing force that proves, ultimately, to be the victor.
"Father wrote every day during the long winter months,
letters for delayed transmission which took the form of
entries in his journal. In this way, he measured the
uninterrupted flow of twilight darkness" (61). Here we see a
microcosmic parody of the tradition of modern history
itself. Both historical and social conventions, however, are
undermined in what confronts Father at the Pole. His
inability to function outside the domain of either lead to
his demise.

In no uncertain terms does Doctorow trace the limiting
perimeter of "history" and "sexuality," clearly suggesting
that the Western conception of both are inadequate. Father
is appalled by what he finds in Eskimo culture. While he
maintains his sanity by writing in his journal, thus
depending on a "system of language and conceptualization,"
the Eskimos, "who had no system but merely lived here,
suffered the terrors of their universe" (63). Ironically
(and this is how Doctorow makes his point), it is Father who suffers "the terrors of their universe" as he comes upon an Eskimo couple engaged in intercourse. Father is "shocked to see the wife thrusting her hips upwards to the thrusts of her husband....The woman was actually pushing back. It stunned him that she could react this way." In contrast to this uninhibited display, Father thinks of "Mother's fastidiousness" and consequently finds himself "resenting this woman's claim to the gender" (63). Father's "system" is one which excludes the conceptualization of sexuality in any terms other than those predicated on masculine dominance and feminine passivity.

Father's reliance on a narrowly defined conception of sexuality is closely tied to his faith in the sustaining power of the historical record. "Father kept himself under control by writing in his journal," appealing to the system which "proposed that human beings, by the act of making witness, warranted times and places for their existence other than the time and place they were living through" (63). Yet upon Father's return, he finds his existence far from warranted in any respect. Distanced from every member of the family, "he felt altogether invisible" (182). Budick characterizes Father's journalistic endeavours as "an empty meaningless gesture. Reducing truth to a bare minimum of notations, it is a pantomime or parody of historicization, like the newspaper accounts of Gatsby's death or the ledgers
in *Go Down, Moses*" (189).

In opposition to the sterility of Father's historical entries, Doctorow sets up characters whose sexual and artistic productivity constitutes a more salubrious existence. Mother escapes the sterility of her marriage with Father through imaginative fantasy. Though she does not engage in extra-marital sexual relations, the result is the same as if she had: she takes in Sarah's baby as if it were her own. After Father's death, her marriage to Tateh and subsequent adoption of both Walker's baby and Tateh's daughter consummates and legitimizes her sexual desire. Tateh, himself, embodies the productive energy of artistic desire, albeit one which, in view of Jameson's assessment of the politics of the novel, is contained and shaped by the forces of capitalism in which it eventually flourishes. Tateh's transition to cinematography (though a transition endorsed and contained by the capitalist system) marks a break from the sterility of duplication and a leap into the realm of unlimited representative possibilities, a move that is paralleled by the boy's obsession with change and

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*Tateh's silhouettes are thus a problematic issue in certain respects. On the one hand, they derive from the creative desire which eventually liberates Tateh from his poverty. On the other hand, they fit into the endless production of the same, another version of Ford's assembly line. In that sense, they work against the imaginative possibilities of genuine art. This tension recedes, however, as Tateh progresses to film, a medium which opens up the arena of interpretive activity, liberating itself from the monolithic character of Ford's and Morgan's theories.*
duplication.

The boy's suspicion of the duplicable event is, I have suggested, the fictional product of Doctorow's own suspicion of historical duplication. From his image in the mirror to the Victrola on which he "played the same record over and over...as if to test the endurance of a duplicated event" (98), the same theme presents itself in parodic duplicable form. From listening to his grandfather's paraphrased narrations of Ovid, the boy learns that "the forms of life were volatile and that everything in the world could as easily be something else." And as his grandfather unwittingly drifts from English into Latin, the boy suspects that "nothing was immune to the principle of volatility, not even language" (97).

Ragtime oscillates between patterns of repetition and the freedom which comes from transcending those patterns. While repetition brings comfort and predictability, it also maintains the hegemonic status of the ruling class through a variety of strategic means. Ford's assembly line is an obvious example. Morgan's esoteric formulations on reincarnation are a subtler but more persuasive demonstration of how repetition serves only the elite. His exuberance reaches a pinnacle in his postulation that the rise of Newtonian science was a conspiracy to eliminate "our awareness of the transcendentally gifted among us." And yet, he argues, "They are with us in every age. They come back,
you see? They come back!" (125). Ford, overwhelmed and inspired, is convinced of the truth of Morgan's claims and the two go on to "found the most secret and exclusive club in America" (127).

The African American Coalhouse Walker suffers from the repetition of social inequality. The vandalism done to his car by the local firemen is an indignity he refuses to tolerate. But because he refuses to acknowledge the identifying quality of the oppressed class, he is able to break the cycle, if only within the realm of his own subjective perception: "It occurred to Father one day that Coalhouse Walker Jr. didn't know he was a Negro. The more he thought about this the more true it seemed. Walker didn't act or talk like a colored man. He seemed to be able to transform the customary deferences practised by his race so that they reflected to his own dignity rather than the recipient's" (134). While Walker is ultimately defeated by the social forces of repetition that enforce white dominance and drive oppressed blacks to violence, his perception of his own worth remains an exemplary triumph over the perpetual recurrence of racism which effects his suppression (and erasure) on a physical level.

White attitudes towards blacks around the turn of the century are highlighted on numerous occasions. The attempt to essentialize Walker as a black, to define him according to an a priori stereotype, is nowhere more clear than in the
following passage: "It seemed to be his fault, somehow, because he was a Negro and it was the kind of problem that would only adhere to a Negro. His monumental negritude sat in front of them like a centerpiece on the table" (155). Walker's refusal to locate his identity within the oppressive limits of the white conception of "negritude" is a political victory the reader shares with him, regardless of the plot's outcome.

The character of Houdini, too, can be located within the paradigmatic process of repetition, a syncopation playing itself out against the dominant beat of official history. While "the great escape artist" successfully extracts himself from voluntary confinement, the exact nature of which he determines himself, he remains, in quite another capacity, trapped within a psychological or spiritual repetition: "Every feat enacted Houdini's desire for his dead mother. He was buried and reborn, buried and reborn" (170). For Houdini, there is no escape from this process. His repetition is a futile one, perhaps because "he could no longer distinguish his life from his tricks" (171). In some ways Houdini is Father's counterpart, failing with his art, as does Father with his historical record, to integrate productively the personal and the public.

Both failures stem from inflated egos, overextended perceptions of self worth. Houdini's obsession with fame occludes his participation in meaningful history. Doctorow
underscores this in the meeting of Houdini with the Duke (whom Houdini had been told to warn by the boy). When asked to provide a demonstration of his new flying machine for an unidentified dignitary in a luxury sedan, Houdini proudly obliged. After landing, he was escorted to the vehicle to meet his audience. "Sitting in the car was the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne" along with "his wife, the Countess Sophie." However, "The Archduke Franz Ferdinand didn't seem to know who Houdini was. He congratulated him on the invention of the aeroplane" (87). A potentially significant meeting in terms of world politics and history is thus reduced to a farcical encounter.

Father witnesses his own painfully slow erasure from meaningful existence in quite a different way. Having sought his fame by joining Peary's expedition to the pole, Father returns to find, ironically, that his social importance has been diminished, rather than augmented: "And now that Sarah was dead he felt altogether invisible, Mother's grief having directed her attention solely on Sarah's boy" (182). Father's fate is the same as his grease-stained letter, sent from Greenland, acquiring a disempowering translucence which contrasts sharply with the implacable intensity of Coalhouse Walker's determination and will. And while Houdini entertains with illusions, Father is entertained by illusions, among them, when he and his son are at the baseball game, "the illusion that what he saw was not
baseball but an elaborate representation of his own problems accounted, for his secret understanding, in the coded clarity of numbers that could be seen from a distance" (194-5). Father's overestimation of his social and historical significance is thus grotesquely illustrated, a farce of similar calibre to Houdini's humiliation with the Duke.

The experience of each character in the novel is a microcosmic representation of the rhythm of ragtime, itself. Against the repetition of the historical and the social, the characters contrive a syncopation through which to integrate the personal and the public (with varying degrees of success or failure). Music, and by extension, art itself, becomes the liberating and life-giving force which governs the world of Ragtime. Coalhouse's performance for the family clearly articulates this paradigm: "Ill-tuned or not the Aeolian had never made such sounds....There seemed to be no other possibilities for life than those delineated by the music" (132). Even Younger Brother's obsessive devotion to Evelyn Nesbitt, when it deteriorates into severe melancholy, is characterized in musical terms. Listening to the rhythm of the train wheels, and considering throwing himself under them, he hears a "suicide rag"-- the life-giving force of art now appropriately reversed in direction.

As suggested from the outset of this chapter, the concept of "rhythmic time" tendered by Ermarth is one which accounts rather well for the destabilization of historical
continuity in the novel. Rhythmic time opens up spaces for events which conventional history excludes. Morgan's meeting with Ford, Houdini's warning of the Duke's danger, Freud's experiences in New York all seem "true" to Doctorow because they can co-exist in the myriad spaces rhythmic time makes available. In stark contrast to the restrictions linear time places on the historical record, rhythmic time provides access to the innumerable claims of the artistic imagination, liberating the past from the oppressive domination of those who held power and therefore determined the agenda of the "official" historical record at the time it was written. Nowhere is the process through which rhythmic time functions better described than in the boy's first experience of ragtime during Coalhouse's performance. "The boy perceived it as light touching various places in space, accumulating in intricate patterns until the entire room was made to glow with its own being" (133). Is this not what the novel itself accomplishes? Ragtime's narrative world consists of "intricate patterns" which do, indeed, make it "glow with its own being." The intersection of ontological realms, ostensibly "real" and "fictive," meet in a hermeneutic embrace, warranting a status independent of the polar opposites, history and fiction. Life and art, history and fiction, become mutually interdependent in the realm of rhythmic time. What they combine to create takes on an existence which resists conventional classification.
There is no easy delineation of "fact" from "fiction." If anything, the novel shows us the error in assuming the distinction exists categorically in the first place. **Ragtime** explores the field of possibilities which open up in the new **Dasein** which constitutes the postmodern moment. Historical existence is liberated from its sterile prison in a simultaneous act of affirmation and aesthetic proliferation: "There were no Negroes. There were no immigrants."-- "Apparently there **were** Negroes. There **were** immigrants."

Exclusion, inclusion, world history, private fantasy: all of these Doctorow weaves together in blatant defiance of the internal coherence characteristic of conventional historical narratives. He does this in order to shatter the illusion this coherence has always created, to challenge, as Ermarth describes the old system, "the teleology, the transcendence, and the putative neutrality of [conventional] historical time" (14).

In returning to Jameson's assessment of Doctorow's work, the claim that Doctorow is using "substitutes" for history seems all the more unlikely now. Far from abandoning history and taking refuge in pastiche or simulacra, Doctorow gives us a lesson in the anatomy of history. The bare bones, we find, can be arranged to make a number of probable skeletons. Hutcheon has argued that postmodern fiction was doing all along precisely what Jameson accuses it of not doing--regrounding the formal experience of art in the
social and the historical:

To Jameson's lament that the historical novel can no longer "set out to represent the historical past"... *Ragtime* repl[ies] that it never could--except by means of seemingly transparent conventions. To his lament that all fiction today can do is "represent" our ideas and stereotypes about that past",...these novels reply this is all they ever have been able to do, and that this is the lesson of the entire crisis in contemporary historiography. The postmodern problematizing of historical knowledge prevents such statements as: "The past, simpler than the present, offers a kind of model from which we can begin to learn the realities of history itself."...This, if anything, is nostalgia. The past was never "simpler"; it has only been simplified. *(Poetics* 212)

The "crisis" in historiography of the seventies and eighties has now, in the dawn of a new millenium, been mostly resolved. But the anatomy of the debate (to return to a favorite metaphor) holds a special interest to those seeking to determine the epistemological principles which governed it. How and why has our understanding of history and historical representation changed? Jameson, as the leading Marxist critic in North America over the last three decades, is a key factor in the answer to this question. His response
to the poststructuralist obsession with language and representation brought the debate to a climax which lasted several years and prompted the appearance of a prodigious number of critical studies. In *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson argues that contemporary criticism of fiction must begin "with the recognition that there is nothing that is not social and historical" (20). Such a project is one for which I, like many others, have considerable sympathy. But it is Jameson's conception of the "historical" and the "social" which is problematic. The "Lukács of postmodernism", or so one is tempted to label Jameson, remains resolute in his commitment to a social and historical reality to which we have unmediated access but somehow fail to capture. Yet his insistence that the Marxist hermeneutic assert its "ultimate philosophical and methodological priority" (21) is fraught with a subtle but severely disabling paradox.

At the risk of digressing, I want to summarize here an argument made by Robert Young which might allow us to put Jameson's notion of "real history" to rest, once and for all. Tracing the development of Marxism in this century, Young shows that history has always been a problematic concept for Marxism, ostensibly having a concrete existence outside theory, but never being grasped. Part of Jameson's success with *The Political Unconscious*, Young suggests, derives from his appeasing poststructuralist supporters by
conceding that Marxism has been remiss in dealing with issues of representation and epistemology, that "the larger issue is that of the representation of History itself" (28). Jameson thus distinguishes himself from other Marxists who assume "that it is possible to criticize contemporary theorists in terms of a neglect of a 'history' that is positioned outside the framework of their argument" (28). Ostensibly, then, Jameson seeks to avoid "the transcendentalizing gesture" from the outset. And yet, "while realizing that the problematic of history and representation prevents any simple claim for its exteriority, [Jameson] nevertheless goes on to produce what is simply a more sophisticated form of the same argument" (100).

Jameson seems to want it both ways. He admits that knowledge of history only comes to us through representation, but still invokes "a supratextual History as the Real or Absent Cause beyond it" (100). On one hand, Jameson concedes the status of history as interpretation, as narrative; on the other, he retains a notion of concrete history beyond the text which cannot be felt in its immediacy but can be felt in its effects. History is what hurts. As Young describes the scenario Jameson has created, "History is now no longer meaning or even narrative, but a final cause beyond knowledge" (101). The implications of this argument are many. Most significantly, it allows
Jameson to subsume all other interpretive strategies into what he constantly refers to as "the collective logic of History." There is a problem, however, in the category of "History" or "the Real" as Jameson defines it, obliquely alluded to in his preface. Young addresses the matter with clarity: "the real is itself a category constructed as an ontology through discourse. This is not to say that there is nothing outside language. Rather it is to point out that even the invocation of a category beyond discourse must nevertheless ipso facto itself be a discursive category" (109). If Jameson comes to terms with this situation, he must concede the failure of any attempt to invoke History as a category outside or beyond discourse because it is itself constructed through the discourse it seeks to transcend.

A novel like Ragtime, whether implicitly or explicitly, attests to the relentless nature of representation where history is concerned. In various ways--some playful, some serious--Doctorow works his narrative through the premise that history comes to us through representations, that it is invariably partial, and constantly in a process of revision. What constitutes mimetic realism, therefore, in an age where

12 The preface to The Political Unconscious is troubling because it seems as if Jameson admits from the outset the impossibility of what he sets out to prove in the work. Young provides an explanation for this by pointing out that the preface is usually written last and that Jameson must have discovered, some way through the enterprise, that his argument led to the same problem as those Marxists from whom he initially distinguishes himself.
history has come to be understood in these terms, will be a far cry from what Jameson, like Lukács before him, expects from the contemporary historical novel. The "collective logic of History," the great code, is a myth that few take seriously any longer. In the next chapter, this is explored in greater detail in regard to Swift's Waterland. Here we move into another stage in the crisis of historiography. To borrow a phrase from Young, we might aptly call it, "Postmodernism--or, The Cultural Logic of Late Jameson. As we shall see, the idea of history as the great code, as a master discourse, is not surrendered without a price.
Chapter 3
Of Fact and Fairy-tales:

The Uses of Narrative in Graham Swift's *Waterland*

I've tried to say nothing but sometimes a fact or what I remember as a fact slips out...
Each instance
today seems connected to something in the past, and I think sometimes this is a pattern almost like the figure
of imagination itself, the way imagination is the recognition of unacknowledged correspondences, things lining up
--Charlie Smith

Children, I always taught you that history has its uses, its serious purpose. I always taught you to accept the burden of our need to ask why. I always taught you that there is never any end to that question, because, as I once defined it for you (yes, I confess a weakness for improvised definitions), history is that impossible thing: the attempt to give an account, with incomplete knowledge, of actions themselves undertaken with incomplete knowledge. So that it teaches us no short-cuts to Salvation, no recipe for a New World, only the dogged and patient art of making do. I taught you that by forever attempting to explain we may come, not to an Explanation, but to a knowledge of the limits of our power to explain. Yes,
yes, the past gets in the way; it trips us up, bogs us down; it complicates, makes difficult. But to ignore this is folly, because, above all, what history teaches us is to avoid illusion and make-believe, to lay aside dreams, moonshine, cure-alls, wonder-workings, pie-in-the-sky--to be realistic. (Waterland 94)

So speaks Tom Crick, the troubled narrator of Graham Swift's Waterland, to a classroom full of students who have lost faith in the value of history. Of the many significant meditations on history found in the narrative, the one above serves best as a launching point for this chapter in a number of respects. First, it encapsulates and problematizes the thematic contradictions and paradoxes which underscore the narrator's theory of history. Second, it proffers an epistemological and ontological framework through which is intimated an incipient philosophy of subjectivity.¹

Yet it also does much more than this. It articulates the central tenets of a group of writers and theorists who have argued with increasing vehemence that the boundary between historical narratives and fictional narratives is a

¹The mental breakdown of Tom Crick, the narrator, is itself a process which reflects the contemporary eroding of conventional forms of historical understanding. Andreas Huyssen's arguments in Twilight Memories shed some light on Crick's struggle to make distinctions between history and memory, fact and private fantasy. See the concluding chapter of this dissertation for a fuller discussion of Huyssen's work. See also note 9 in chapter 2.
difficult one to establish—if it can be done at all. So-called "historical" accounts use narrative and rhetorical strategies common to those of fiction to such an extent that the two types of discourse are by nature mutually dependent. This chapter will explore how Swift's novel plays on this mutual dependency, and how a larger, overarching process is inextricably intertwined with it—that of the construction of subjectivity itself.

Swift's narrator, Tom Crick, espouses what perhaps could be considered the postmodern credo when he says, "by forever attempting to explain we may come, not to an Explanation, but to a knowledge of the limits of our power to explain" (94). Such a knowledge is accompanied by an appreciation for the role of "stories" in our lives, for the absolutely essential need for stories in our lives—stories which fill in the gap when the power to explain eludes us or when that which can be explained is too painful to bear. Stories pick up where history leaves off precisely because they employ the same structure, the same narrative process, the particular function of which is to constitute our humanity. Already, here, I am ahead of myself and ahead of Swift's novel which presents no simple or univocal dissertation on history and fiction, fact and fairy-tale.

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2 See the discussion later in this chapter on Calvin O. Schrag's The Self after Postmodernity in which the notion of selfhood is seen to be ontologically rooted in the structure of narrative.
The sum of Tom Crick's rantings--at times lucid and cogent, at other times muddled and incomprehensible, amounts to a polymorphous discourse of digressions, deviations, convolutions, and contradictions. Many differing interpretations of the text have emerged since its first printing precisely because of the paradoxes which lie at its heart, rendering it amenable to a number of interpretive stances.

John Schad, for instance, in a cleverly titled article, "The End of the End of History: Graham Swift's Waterland," enumerates some of the labyrinthine convolutions which inform and compose the narrative: "The most obvious lesson of Waterland is that the "Grand Narrative" of history ends more than once, or rather it is always already ended. It first ends with the French Revolution which, as Tom Crick informs his pupils, in rejecting the past and tradition thereby rejected history itself" (911). Schad goes on to argue that young Price's interruption of Crick's lecture adds an additional confusing layer to the matter. Crick himself has already departed from the topic at hand to begin a new history, albeit a private account, when Price intervenes: "The only important thing about history, I think, sir, is that it's got to the point where it's probably about to end" (6). Price's disruption of Crick's digression, Schad concludes, is no less than the attempt "to end the end of the end of history" (911).
And yet, the dangers in reading the novel in this fashion are obvious. Schad himself refers to Baudrillard's insistence on distancing himself from the term, "end of history," because it is so embedded in a linear view of history.4 Invoking Foucault's dictum that "the true historical sense confirms our existence among countless lost events, without a landmark or a point of reference," Schad avoids a teleological historical perspective, a perspective which the novel itself derides, he argues (912).

Indeed, the setting of the novel supports the notion that the protagonist is in the middle of nowhere rather than at "the end" of somewhere. The shifting ground of the fenlands parallels to a great extent the shifting epistemic bedrock of history itself—and there is no shortage in the novel of equations made between the two. In chapter 3,

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3As Alison Lee observes, the novel repudiates a linear view of history but does not commit entirely to a circular view. "Just as the structure of Waterland suggests a circular reading of both the novel and of history, so does it, paradoxically, suggest reading for rupture. Some chapter breaks mark moments of change from past to present or present to past. Yet what they point to is not return, but discontinuity" (43).

4The last chapter invoked Ermarth's concept of "rhythmic time" to explain the philosophy of history articulated in Ragtime. The "multi-level thinking" Ermarth proposes, through which one can appreciate rhythmic time, seems likely the requisite mode of thought for appreciating Waterland as well: "Multi-level thinking holds out the possibility of reimagining the past...by releasing it from the dialectical and linear relationships to which it is constrained by historical narrative (87-88).
Swift's narrator bluntly, if metaphorically, lays out what is, in fact, the theory of history the rest of the novel is to convey—only the ostensible subject is the physical geography of the Fens, themselves:

For the chief fact about the Fens is that they are reclaimed land, land that was once water, and which, even today, is not quite solid.... The Fens were formed by silt.... Silt: which shapes and undermines continents; which demolishes as it builds; which is simultaneous accretion and erosion; neither progress nor decay. (7)

The significance of this image of the Fens and its analogue, history, is in its unequivocal repudiation of a teleological view of history. The novel's chapter, "De la Révolution," enunciates with unquestionable clarity the tenets of the narrator's perspective on the issue:

[History] goes in two directions at once. It goes backwards as it goes forwards. It loops. It takes detours. Do not fall into the illusion that history is a well disciplined and unflagging column marching unswervingly into the future.... There are no compasses for journeying in time. As far as our sense of direction in this uncharted dimension is concerned,
we are like lost travellers in a desert. We believe we are going forward, towards the oasis of Utopia. But how do we know--only some imaginary figure (let's call him God) can know--that we are not moving in a great circle? (117)

One crucial question to which the text yields no easy answer concerns the extent to which the narrator's repeated disavowal of a teleological historical view might constitute, ironically, a nostalgic yearning for such a history. Crick's neurotic obsession with taking history apart is only one half of what goes on in Waterland. If we think of it conceptually, Crick couldn't keep deconstructing history if he wasn't continuously reconstituting it, or reaffirming its value. The entire novel is an oscillation, a vacillation, a hedging of bets. Crick has located the bedrock of the conventional historical account, and has found a false bottom, a hole through which he falls or, more appropriately, is "thrown," in the Heideggerian sense of the term. In his freefall, his existential terror, he is able to see from a posthistorical perspective precisely what was so comforting, reassuring, and life-affirming: narrativity, the process of telling stories.

Waterland is, in fact, a novel which presents a number of binary opposites, with no simple resolution. From the outset, there is an attempt to distinguish "history" from
"stories" or "fairy-tales." Furthermore, the histories recounted in the novel fall into one of two categories, "private" or "public." To complicate matters, there are also digressions on the concept of "natural history," which is described as circular, because it "perpetually travels back to where it came from" (177). The novel's mixture of accounts, stories, histories, and "fairy-tales" is potentially kaleidoscopic. Whether or not Swift insists on maintaining distinguishing lines among them is debatable. Critical response in assessing this issue, in fact, has bordered on the equivocal. "Although Waterland does not confuse personal with public history," George Landow writes, "it intertwines them, making each part of the other" (197). In doing so, the novel explores both the limitations and advantages of conventional historical discourse. The passage quoted at the opening of this chapter is ostensibly a plea, on Crick's part, for history's value, the power of explanation. He enjoins his students to acknowledge that "history teaches us to avoid illusion and make-believe...to be realistic." And yet, two paragraphs later we read that

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Del Ivan Janik's analysis of the novel also points to an inexorable collusion between personal and public history. "The study of history is...based on the desire to 'discover how you've become what you are. If you're lucky you might find out why. If you're lucky--but it's impossible--you might get back to where you can begin again.' (W, p.235). History is a matter of reflection, the attempt to retrieve or find or impose logic and order on what is neither logical nor orderly; it is the creation of public reality" (85).
Crick has "already reached the limits of his power to explain....Because it's the inexplicable that keeps him jabbering on nineteen-to-the-dozen like this and scurrying further and further into the past...and although he's trying to explain he's really only telling a--" (94).

A story? Crick's obvious embarrassment and reluctance to confess that his need to provide a narrative framework has transcended the domain of that which is explicable within conventional historical structures is a key component in enhancing the reader's appreciation of the tonal subtleties of the novel. No doubt aware of the debates in historiography, Swift is careful to bestow on his protagonist an appropriate sense of shame over having taken recourse to the realm of--dare we say it--fiction? And yet, despite Crick's sheepish acknowledgment that imaginative narration must take over when historical analysis fails, there is a celebratory sense in which story-telling--in all

See Hayden White's response (in La Torré) to Gertrude Himmelfarb's article, "Telling it as you like it: Postmodernist history and the flight from fact," *Times Literary Supplement* (16 October, 1992). Himmelfarb repudiates the postmodern refuge from "the real" in a polemical defense of the conventional historical commitment to "fact." White takes great pains to articulate the misconceptions in Himmelfarb's claims about postmodern representations of history. "Postmodernist history...recognizes no reality principle, only the pleasure principle--history at the pleasure of the historian," Himmelfarb contends (qtd. in White 198). Since her conception of "reality," is based on the specific form of "truth" produced by historical research and writing, Himmelfarb cannot condone the postmodernist interest in conceiving new ways of thinking beyond the conventional historical model.
of its forms—is elevated to an almost sacred status as the
defining feature of the human experience. Humanity separates
itself from the natural world by virtue of its narrative
capacity:

Children, only animals live entirely in the Here and
Now. Only nature knows neither memory nor history. But
man—let me offer you a definition—is the story-
telling animal. Wherever he goes he wants to leave
behind not a chaotic wake, not an empty space, but the
comforting marker-buoys and trail-signs of stories. He
has to keep on making them up. As long as there's a
story, it's all right. (53)7

One of the major themes in the novel also surfaces
here, as it does from time to time before submerging again
in the murky, shifting silt of the Fens: that of the
difference between nature and human history. Young Tom Crick
learns from an early age that it is not always desirable to
live and think within a temporal framework. His mentally
challenged brother, Dick, seems to exist outside of history
and, therefore, as part of nature. Tom seems to envy Dick's
capacity to inhabit a realm outside of history, and, by
extension, responsibility.

There are, in fact, a number of episodes in the novel
which establish Dick's connection to (and symbolic
representation of) nature. Foreshadowing his final "return"
to nature is the scene in which Dick, in order to win
certain rights to Mary's person, dives into the river and
remains submerged for an unbelievable period of time.
Swift's hyperbole here fulfils much more than an aesthetic
function. After Dick dives we are told, "Then nothing. For a
long time nothing. For fifteen, for thirty seconds, nothing.
Then nothing again. Then when nothing must surely have gone
by for the utmost period allowed to it, still nothing" (164). The rhetoric continues in this fashion, an extensive
reminder that Dick inhabits a special realm in which the
constraints of time cease to operate. Dick lives in an
unending present. While Tom and his father deal with the
The last vestiges of humanity lie in the capacity to create--or at least to participate in--narrative. Driven beyond the bounds of ratiocentric analysis to the furthest edges of sanity, Crick hangs on only by his incessant story telling. Having lost his job, his pride, his marriage (for all intents and purposes), Crick clings to his stories. Over some scotch at the local pub, Crick, having coerced young Price to come in with him, is reminiscent of Beckett's Molloy who, bereft of almost everything, is only too willing to hear a story--"I believe all I'm told...now I swallow everything, greedily. What I need now is stories..." (Beckett 13). Crick, too, is virtually desperate for stories--only here, as a former teacher, Crick is the one telling the stories: "It helps to drive out fear. I don't

fatal events of Freddie Parr's death, trapped as they are within the temporal parameters of their "daily homage to history," Dick rides his motorcycle home, oblivious to the crushing weight of past remembrances. "And is it possible that for Dick this is just another day? Home after six. That he has forgotten--? That for him present eclipses past. That he possesses those amnesiac, those time-erasing qualities so craved by all guilty parties--? No Before, no After. Just another day" (116-17).

Yet if Dick is unencumbered by the burdens of history, he remains accountable to the laws of the natural world, to the ebb and flow of tidal forces which constitute a circular pattern of departure and return. Inculcated inextricably within the interior of all that belongs to nature is an instinctive and irrepressible urge to comply with this directive, the return. (Crick's digressions on the mating patterns of the Atlantic eel further support this theme.) Dick's final gesture--an ostensible suicide--is a "coming home" of sorts, less to be lamented than to be stoically accepted as part of the natural cycle: "He's on his way. Obeying instinct. Returning. The Ouse flows to the sea..." (310).
care what you call it--explaining, evading the facts, making up meanings, taking a larger view, putting things into perspective, dodging the here and now, education, history, fairy-tales--it helps to eliminate fear" (208).

The fear-dispelling qualities of storytelling are enumerated almost ad infinitum in the novel. The primary significance of storytelling seems to reside in this element, along with "curiosity" as a close second. And yet, is there not something which binds these two together, which, ipso facto, constitutes a larger process through which the derivative processes of quelling fear and satiating curiosity are both concomitantly satisfied? The answer to this question provides the key to appreciating one of the less obvious thematic concerns of the novel, but one which is particularly germane to the central concerns of this dissertation. Swift's narrator constantly forces us to question the reliability of the stories we are told. And yet, as I have suggested, and as Crick, himself, claims in no uncertain terms, the stories that he tells, and the "histories" he recounts, also function to sustain and maintain his cerebral well being (to whatever extent that might be) in such a way that the process of narration and the sense of self which constitute Crick's identity, may well prove to be one and the same thing.

Crick first makes an oblique equation between narration and self-identity early in the novel. Addressing his
students for the last time, he calls them "children,"

to whom, throughout history, stories have been told, chiefly, but not always at bedtime, in order to quell restless thoughts; whose need of stories is matched only by the need adults have of children to tell stories to, of receptacles for their stock of fairy-tales, of listening ears on which to unload, bequeath those most unbelievable yet haunting of fairy-tales, their own lives.... (6)

The grandest narrative of them all is, it turns out, the story of one's own life. And yet, Swift's particular choice of diction here strikes me as somewhat circumspect, if not altogether disingenuous. The notion of bequeathing or bestowing upon suggests that the benefactor of such an action is the recipient, Crick's "children." Even though Crick admits that children's need for stories is, in fact, 

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6The irony here is intentional. Lyotard's term, grand récit, refers to the master discourses of the Western world which have sought to encapsulate a totality of subject positions. Crick's life, emanating as it does from a singular subject position, can at best constitute a petit récit. The entire novel, of course, comprises an intersection of these two Lyotardian paradigmatic concepts inasmuch as "official" history, private history, "natural" history, and stories of an undetermined nature (i.e. which fall outside--or across--these categories) alternate, and sometimes combine, as the primary formulation in which the narrative is conveyed. The novel seems less concerned with Lyotard's distinction, however, than with promoting the value of narrative in all its forms.
"matched only by the need adults have of children to tell stories to," perhaps the greater truth is that the need to tell stories supersedes the need to hear them. In this respect, Waterland is less a treatise on the limitations of history than it is a discourse on the variety of narrative forms--including the historical--to which humans have recourse in fulfilling their need to tell stories. But it is no less significant that at the same time that Waterland enumerates and explicates the multiple forms of narrative expression available to us, it also exposes and deconstructs the putative claim to objectivity proffered by conventional historiography. History, as one particular form of narrativity, is susceptible to, and partly determined by, the same processes of meaning-making by which other, unambiguously "fictional" modes of narration are also constructed. The hyperbolic expression of human life as a "fairy-tale" is not entirely unwarranted. It highlights the extent to which the imaginative faculties are invoked as much as--and perhaps more than--the faculties which facilitate so-called empirical observation. Not only is this the case for the narrativization of one's life, but also for the narrativization which underlies the basis of conventional historiography. One of the key deconstructive passages occurs in the novel when Crick tries to locate the cause of the French Revolution:
Where then does the revolution lie? This starting-point of our modern age. Is it merely a term of convenience? Does it lie in some impenetrable amalgam of countless individual circumstances too complex to be analysed? It's a curious thing, Price, but the more you try to dissect events, the more you lose hold of what you took for granted in the first place--the more it seems it never actually occurred, but occurs, somehow, only in the imagination.... (121)⁹

Crick's point is never more clear. We may speak of an "event" as if it possesses an ontological validity independent of its discursive form.¹⁰ The "event," however, proves no more impervious to the influence of the imagination than any other form of discourse. Waterland, in fact, strips bare the metaphysical guarantees of

⁹The parallels here to the Nietzschean dictum quoted as an epigraph to chapter 1 are striking: "When we try to examine the mirror in itself, we discover in the end nothing but things upon it. If we want to grasp the things, we finally get hold of nothing but the mirror.--This, in the most general terms, is the history of knowledge." One of the lessons Crick seems to be trying to impart to his students is that the closer we try to get to an historical event such as the French Revolution, the more we become aware of the conceptual strategies we employ to endow the event with meaning. These conceptual strategies are, it seems to me, precisely what Nietzsche refers to with the metaphor of the "mirror."

¹⁰Roland Barthes' seminal essay, "Historical Discourse," written in 1970, makes clear the paradoxical feature of historical discourse, which, while purporting to refer to an "extra-structural 'reality,'" in fact has no access whatsoever to such a domain (153).
conventional historiography and celebrates the Nietzschean deconstruction of knowledge for its own sake. Not only is history seen to be a narrative constructed with the same methods with which fictional forms of narrative are also constructed, but its value for the sustenance of life is equally made clear. The value of each and every narrative account in the novel can be construed only in terms of the extent to which it fills a place in the overarching narrative which is life itself.

If this seems too bold a claim, consider Crick's description of "reality" in the Fens: "Realism; fatalism; phlegm. To live in the Fens is to receive strong doses of reality. The great, flat monotonity of reality; the wide, empty space of reality. Melancholia and self-murder are not unknown in the Fens. Heavy drinking, madness and sudden acts of violence are not uncommon" (15). "Reality," as Crick understands the term, threatens to assault one with a host of life-threatening side effects. But as an "empty space," reality can be combatted, or "outwitted," as Crick puts it, by filling it with "stories": "While the Atkinsons made history, the Cricks spun yarns" (15). And while a distinction is made here between history and "yarns," both serve the same function: both "surmount reality," becoming life-affirming and danger-dispelling processes for the respective clans. The wealth of the Atkinsons merely lends a more authoritative quality to their narratives: "If you are
an Atkinson...if you can look down from your Norfolk uplands and see in these level Fens--this nothing landscape--an Idea, a drawing board for your plans, you can outwit reality" (15). Crick defines "reality" in terms of a negation here. "Reality is uneventfulness, vacancy, flatness. Reality is that nothing happens" (34). History, stories, yarns, and fairy-tales are all narrative forms whose origin lies in the need to fill this "wide, empty space of reality" (15). The implication here consists of no subtle rhetorical insinuation. The "real" is the domain of experience which, because "nothing happens," remains non-narrated. The "real," inasmuch as it is vacant, remains outside of the realm of meaning, the realm within which the narratival formation of subjectivity always already finds itself at work.

The "real" is meaningless, to put it bluntly. But it is certainly not irrelevant. The potential ill effects of "reality" have been enumerated above by Crick (self-murder, madness, etc.), and only through the formation of a narrative structure is one able to defend oneself. And yet, Crick's derisory remarks on "History" as a substitution for "reality" prompt the reader to question the value of such a substitution. "How many of the events of history have occurred," Crick asks his students, "for this and for that reason, but for no other reason, fundamentally, than the desire to make things happen? I present to you History, the
fabrication, the diversion, the reality-obscuring drama" (34). History does indeed rescue the subject from the perils of reality but it does so through "fabrication" and "diversion."

There are, to be sure, a plethora of quotations to be extracted from Waterland which fall in more or less equal measure into pro and con arguments regarding history and story-telling. But this ostensible ambivalence can be accounted for by the dual nature of Swift's thematic concerns: on one hand, the illustration of the significance of narrative forms to the formation of subjectivity; on the other, the deconstruction of traditional history as a form of objective knowledge. With these two themes in mind, it is less confusing to the reader that history is both lauded as the vehicle through which the dangers of "madness," "sudden acts of violence" (15), and the "prison of idiocy" (93) are circumvented, as well as denounced as a "rag-bag of pointless information" (19), a "fabrication" (34), and a "thin garment, easily punctured by a knife-blade called Now" (31). Whether history is being commended or condemned depends on which of the two thematic concerns is being drawn to the forefront of the narrative. The varying attitudes toward history in the novel is thus attributable to an oscillation which ultimately creates its own sense of symmetry, one which is not quite apparent until the final
scene has unfolded.\textsuperscript{11}

Of central significance in Crick's observations on combatting "reality" in the Fens is the implication that subjectivity is essentially grounded in the ability to form narrative. There are a number of other passages which warrant close scrutiny inasmuch as they also delimit the field or scope of subjectivity according to similar criteria: in each case, it appears that a healthy, fully functional subject exists only where full access to a narrative construction is granted the individual character. Where narrative does not exist, illness, or brute animalism prevail. This is the lesson of Waterland. Time and again, story-telling is invoked by Crick as the requisite \textit{sine qua non}--if not the \textit{ne plus ultra}--for the survival of the human species. As much as the air one breathes, stories sustain one's being-in-the-world. The immediacy of present experience, something we share with the animals, constitutes but a fraction of our lives. "Life," as Crick observes, "is only one-tenth Here and Now, nine-tenths a history lesson." Neither lauded nor lambasted here, history is invoked as a means by which we exist in the world, by which we partake of that which makes us \textit{human}.

The genius of Waterland lies in its ability to

\textsuperscript{11}The sense of symmetry to which I refer is embedded in Swift's concept of "natural" history. Dick, of course, with his amnesiac qualities, exemplifies the processes of natural history, fulfilling, as he does, the imperative of "the return."
deconstruct the foundations of Enlightenment thinking, to oust the notions of historical progress and universalist modes of thought from their privileged seats, while reinscribing within the ruin and wreckage an empowering concept of subjectivity commensurate with the requirements of our age (to recall once again the Lukácsian phrase).

Calvin O. Schrag, in *The Self After Postmodernity*, delineates the pitfalls of postmodern conceptions of subjectivity, targeting Lyotard as the primary suspect for the infamous "death of the subject." Schrag locates Lyotard's latent homocidal instincts in the celebration of "plurality, incompleteness, and difference," which "leaves us with a subject too thin to bear the responsibilities of its narratival involvements" (27-28). Such a claim should be weighed against some of the cultural phenomena which have emerged out of (or alongside) the Lyotardian school of thought. The case can be made that *Waterland* is in fact one of these phenomena. Swift, at one point, does all but conjure up the Frenchman himself, invoking Lyotard's concept of a grand recit in the following passage: "And can I deny that what I wanted all along was not some golden nugget that history would at last yield up, but History itself, the Grand Narrative..." (53). Crick's nostalgic yearning for the "Grand Narrative" of "History itself" is also parodic of Jameson's position in the midst of a postmodern (or "late capitalist," as Jameson would have it) renunciation of
History as a Grand Narrative. But Crick has already admitted (unlike Jameson) that history is a "yarn," one more story alongside the fairy tales and private histories we construct which endow our experience of the world with meaning.

Lyotard's proclamation of the demise of the grand narratives of Western culture does not necessarily bring with it a concomitant demise of the subject. Like early reports of Mark Twain's death, such a conclusion is surely premature, if not logically flawed in the first place.

Swift's Waterland certainly embraces the Lyotardian challenge to Enlightenment thought, but also sustains a workable notion of subjectivity which derives its force from narrative forms--forms which are based not on the concepts of continuity, totality, and universality privileged by Enlightenment thought, but on the concepts of discontinuity, provisionality, and particularity celebrated by postmodern thinking.

The irony here--and the remainder of this chapter will illustrate it more fully--is that, in the wake of the so-called "death of the subject," the terms with which Schrag attempts to resurrect a newly empowered subject are already latent in the very form Schrag claims is responsible for the subject's demise in the first place. Schrag tries to pull from the ashes of postmodernity a phoenix which has already risen of its own accord--and the ashes have long since been cold. While it must be granted that facets of postmodernity
have indeed placed under erasure the concept of subjectivity in an attempt to deconstruct metaphysical notions of unity, totality, and identity, it must also be acknowledged that other facets have given serious attention to affirming the re-emergence of the subject in a different garb, divested of its metaphysical apparel. Beyond sartorial tastes, however, there seems to be a problem with Schrag's characterization of postmodernity in general, one which is best delineated against the backdrop of postmodern fictions such as *Waterland* which problematize notions of the self and reinscribe them within parameters conducive to and commensurate with postmetaphysical contexts.

The ways in which narratives—both fictional and "historical"—sustain subjectivity and endow it with a sense of itself is, as has been shown, a central concern of Swift's novel. Schrag's invocation of *narrative* as the key component in his understanding of the self surprises few who have any familiarity with postmodern fictions: "To be a self is to be able to render an account of oneself, to be able to tell the story of one's life. Sometimes we are at the mercy of the stories that we tell, and at other times, the stories suffer the inscription of our own agenda" (26). Though less colourful (but no less poignant) than some of Crick's observations in *Waterland*, the similarity—in terms of content—is striking. The latter remark, in particular, constitutes a distinct parallel to Crick's adumbrations on
the differences between "History" and stories or yarns. Yet whatever the nature of the story being told, what is crucial to acknowledge, Schrag reminds us, is that the subject must always be viewed as emergent.

This recognition of the self as emergent from and implicated by the variegated forms of discourse provides a sheet anchor against recurring tendencies to construct a sovereign and monarchichal self, at once self-sufficient and self-assured, finding metaphysical comfort in a doctrine of an immutable and indivisible self-identity. Such a doctrine has become a prime target for the protagonists of postmodernism. (27)

This last claim could not be more true. The profusion of contemporary fictions featuring self-consciously unreliable narrators points unquestionably to one of the primary characteristics of postmodern fiction in general. But the rejection of a "self-sufficient and self-assured" subject, one possessing an "indivisible self-identity" is not the rejection of subjectivity altogether. Long before philosophers were called in to assess the situation, postmodern writers had not managed too badly on their own to forge a notion of subjectivity which no longer depended upon metaphysical comforts in any form. While the "selves" represented in the narratives of postmodern fiction are
tentative, provisional, and uncertain, they are nonetheless selves whose existential claims are validated by the narratival forms through which they attempt to make sense of themselves and the world. A Cartesian Crick might hypothesize, "Narro ergo sum." Schrag, however, in his targeting of Lyotard's privileging of difference and multiplicity as the root evils leading to the self's disappearance, finds little to celebrate in the Lyotardian view. Observing that "Lyotard's version of postmodernism pretty much rests on his claim for a 'heterogeneity of language games,'" Schrag concludes that within this paradigm the self becomes "dispersed into a panorama of radically diversified and changing language games." This claim, while in some sense accurate, needs to be contextualized within the domain of postmodern notions of the self. Schrag, however, invokes the traditional notion of the self in light of which Lyotard's celebration of plurality and difference immediately appears culpable for the disintegration of the self into irreducible fragments: "If indeed the [traditional] grammar of the 'self' continues to be employed, it would need to be said that it is in each case a different self that makes assertoric claims, evaluations, moral judgments, inquiries, aesthetic judgments, and emotive utterances" (27). Yet Lyotard himself nowhere invokes a notion of subjectivity dependent upon "monarchichal" or "sovereign" notions of the self for which a heterogeneity of
language games would pose a threat. There are, I suspect, a fair number of continental philosophers for whom the celebration of plurality and difference constitutes a terrifying prospect. It is arguably their refusal to abandon Enlightenment notions of subjectivity which constitutes the problem Schrag faces.

Lyotard's notoriety, of course, stems from his controversial report commissioned by the Québec government, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. In it, Lyotard defines the postmodern as "incredulity toward metanarratives" (72). Such scepticism, however, is also imbued with a positivity emanating from the proliferation of language games: "Postmodern knowledge ... refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable" (73). If any conclusion can be drawn from this, it is that the postmodern self, far from fragmenting into a kaleidoscope of language games, draws strength from its capacity to endure heterogeneity. Local

At the head of this procession one finds the foreboding figure of Jürgen Habermas, who has consistently chastised postmodernists who refuse to honour Enlightenment notions of substantive reason and subjectivity. Both Richard Rorty (*Essays* 164-77) and Andreas Huyssen (*After the Great Divide* 199-206) help contextualize the Habermasian position. Huyssen points to the political events of Germany's past as a motivating force in Habermas's work, while Rorty, with his characteristic appreciation for the ironic, observes, "we find French critics of Habermas ready to abandon liberal politics in order to avoid universalistic philosophy, and Habermas, trying to hang on to universalistic philosophy, with all of its problems, in order to support liberal politics" (165).
narratives, replacing metanarratives, are not without the power to absorb and contain any number of games: "the narrative form, unlike the developed forms of the discourse of knowledge, lends itself to a great variety of language games" (76). When the metaphysical underpinnings of knowledge are removed, in other words, chaos does not ensue. While Lyotard does not explicitly articulate a notion of the self which emerges through narrative, the implications of his work do not rule out such a possibility. Indeed, the power he attributes to narrative should not be underestimated.¹³ The narrative form, he seems to suggest, provides a seamless web in which a kind of provisional unity is established, dissipating any threat of dissolution or fragmentation on the part of the knower (as Schrag fears).

Waterland constitutes a self-reflexive example of the provisional unity which narrative bestows upon the postmodern knower in his/her effort to assimilate the variety of language games which constitute "the postmodern condition." As suggested earlier, there are two processes at work in Waterland. Even a superficial reading of the novel cannot fail to locate a blatant critique of "History," based as it is on establishing relations of cause and effect. And

¹³In The Postmodern Explained, Lyotard reiterates his original definition of the postmodern as the demise of metanarratives, but with the following qualification: "Their decline does not stop the countless other stories (minor and not so minor) from continuing to weave the fabric of everyday life" (19).
yet the privileging of history, yarns, stories, fairy tales—in short, any form of narrative—is also lauded as life-affirming, even life-sustaining. The novel effectively operates on a level which enshrines the Lyotardian notion of postmodern knowledge (as an incredulity toward metanarratives), while also identifying a locus of power (in the form of provisional unity and identity) which emanates from the narrative form.

Schrag, in acknowledging the postmodern repudiation of the epistemic bedrock upon which traditional notions of subjectivity are based, also takes into account the postmodern deconstruction of an empirically based theory of "fact":

This is the theory that facts are brute givens, somehow simply there, data that we stumble on like pebbles on the beach. This theory, which is basically a construct of an abstract empiricism, should be jettisoned, and attention should be shifted to what it is that goes on in the actual practice of scientific and philosophical inquiry....There are no facts without interpretation. (92-3)

Putting two and two together, Schrag, like "old Cricky," himself, points toward the constructed nature of the past, of memory, of the discourse of history: "The narrating self,
as at once a sediment and a project of discourse, constitutes and understands itself as emplotted within the interstices of stories already told and stories yet to be inscribed" (71). These stories, of course, are always subject to revision. Fragments are forgotten or dispensed with intentionally. Relations of cause and effect are seen to be tenuous, if not arbitrary. History is, after all, just a "lucky dip of meanings. Events elude meaning, but we look for meanings. Another definition of Man: the animal who craves meaning--but knows--..." (Waterland 122; ellipsis in original). Like the land which must constantly be reclaimed from the river banks of the Ouse--"land that was once water, and which, even today, is not quite solid" (7)--meanings, too, are subject to revision, or reclamation in another form: they are never final and always provisional. Crick's niggling propensity to stop in media res, just at the point of ostensibly making a significant claim, is, in fact, a rhetorical manifestation of the epistemological scepticism underlying his treatise on history and narrative.

Waterland, it has been argued, consists of a main plot around which narrative digressions serve to frustrate the reader's desire and to defer tension. "Tension is deferred," Robert Irish maintains, "so the only increase in tension may be the reader's anxiety that the original plot could remain unresolved" (921). And yet, such a claim is based on the unspoken assumption that an "original plot" exists in the
first place. The reader is, of course, lead to expect the existence of one—"Your history teacher wishes to give you the complete and final version..." (6). And while it is generally understood that "narrative itself, as a mode of conceptualization, anticipates an end (which may be revised) and aspires to order (which may be provisional)" (Worthington 15), what Crick's repeated digressions constitute is a demonstrative testament to the denial of origin, primacy, and teleology altogether. Dipping in and out of the rivers of history, memory, and the past, "old Cricky" shows us that there are many narratives, that the "digressions" he engages in have an ontological status equal to any ostensible proper history expected by the reader. Any frustration felt by the reader is partially compensated for by the willful acknowledgment—as opposed to a reluctant acquiescence—that any narrative is comfort enough, able as it is to defeat "the empty space of reality." This seems to be both Crick's point and Swift's. The desire for a totalizing narrative, then, displaces or diffuses itself in the multiplicity of narrative options available to the novel's characters (with the exception of Dick—see note 7), options which are in fact ordered, but only provisionally, and only with arbitrary origins, subject to the whim of "the complex and unpredictable forms of our curiosity. Which doesn't want to push ahead, which always wants to say, Hey, that's interesting, let's stop awhile, let's take a look-
see, let's retrace--let's take a different turn" (168-9). The different turns take the form of different discursive genres, so that the reader must contend not only with variations in the content or plot, but also with variations in the form with which the plot is conveyed: at times "History" proper, at times the private memories of Crick--memories which are not always consistent with previous reports or accounts.\(^{14}\) While the heterogeneous intermingling of narrative forms may frustrate or playfully tease readers accustomed to a traditional narrative structure, there is more than simple seduction at stake here. In Irish's discussion of Swift's rhetoric, he identifies a number of strategies employed by Swift to first arouse, and then frustrate, the reader's desire for a continuous narrative. And while Irish revels in the \textit{jouissance} of the novel, envisioning the titillating

\(^{14}\)It is not easy to determine which of the inconsistencies in the narrative are intentional and which are not. A glaring error which is probably unwitting on Swift's part occurs during a narration of Atkinson family history: "When can we fix the zenith of the Atkinsons? Was it on that June day in 1849? Or was it later in 1851...Was it before that in 1864...Or was it 1848 (two years later)..." (78). Surely, instead of 1864, Swift (or Crick?) intended 1846. Another equally striking inconsistency can be found in two references to the date of Freddie Parr's death: "For that night (July the twenty-fifth, 1943)" (22) is certainly not the same night as the one which occurs "that July day in 1942" (52). While the reliability of Crick's narration thus falls into further disrepute, the strength with which his narrative endeavours help him to combat the "here and now," the "empty space of reality," suffers no diminishment. The fact that memory provides no "objective" certainty is a point Crick himself, of course, makes time and again.
prospect of finding "myself naked, exposed with only a
dangerous and slippery (eely) collection of signifiers able
to undo not only its own narrative but mine as well" (932),
there is a constructive motif which such an interpretive
stance overlooks. Even if one interprets Crick's pedagogical
strategy as a kind of game in which students (and readers)
are led on, given one clue at a time, until all the pieces
of the puzzle are put together, there is something greater
at stake than a perpetual deferral of closure. Life, as the
young Crick too soon finds out, is not all fun and games.
There is, after all, the daily work of land reclamation,
metaphorically connected to the work of historiography, of
narrativization itself. Digressions are only digressions if
there is a solid centre, an origin, to which one can return.
(If there is no centre, then these "digressions" constitute
significance of another order.) And while nature (and
natural history) possesses a circular structure, it is the
fate of a fully functioning subjectivity to be denied the
possibility of a return to an origin. There is only the
continual task of beginning anew to form a narrative
structure out of which both the world and the self come to
have any meaning.

Earlier, I discussed the poignant metaphorical value
found in the novel's geographical setting: "The Fens were
formed by silt....Silt: which shapes and undermines
continents; which is simultaneous accretion and erosion;
neither progress nor decay" (7). Similarly, the various stories Crick intertwines with his history of the French Revolution, simultaneously contribute to and replace previous stories. The history of the Revolution itself, as we have seen, is undermined so that the notion of progress, or a teleological view of history, is also undermined. In coming to terms with "the limits of our power to explain" (94), Crick convinces us that narrative, in all of its varieties, is the modus operandi of the human species, the means by which we make meaning of ourselves and the world. This seems to be presented neither as a pessimistic view, nor, obviously, as a utopian vision, but rather as a general assessment of the mundane condition of life. "There's this thing called progress," Crick explains. "But it isn't progress. It doesn't go anywhere. Because as progress progresses the world can slip away. It's progress if you can stop the world slipping away. My humble model for progress is the reclamation of land. Which is repeatedly, never- endingly retrieving what is lost" (291). Swift's narrator is not unlike the narrator of Eliot's "East Coker" who also senses the significance (and futility) of the struggle to

15See Ronald McKinney's "The Greening of Postmodernism: Graham Swift's Waterland," in which he argues that the ecological metaphor of land reclamation is a metaphor for a postmodern praxis which can steer between the extremes of naive optimism and utter despair. McKinney sees the novel as a successful challenge to the illusion of progress without lapsing into despair. It is enough that a daily struggle is maintained, that no ground be lost.
put meaning, that is, narrative order, into life: "There is only the fight to recover what has been lost / And found and lost again and again: and now, under conditions / That seem unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain nor loss. / For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business" (V, 15-18). The crucial difference, of course, is that Eliot's narrator struggles to recover eternal truths, whereas Swift's narrator has no such delusions about the provisional nature of the knowledge he attains or the stories he tells. Nor does Crick struggle--as Eliot's persona does--to find the right words. His aim is not so much a "raid on the inarticulate" (V, 8) as it is a raid on the already articulated, the "official" versions of history against which and through which his own private histories are narrated. Crick's task is the perpetual struggle to relate the narratives which comprise his own life to the broader ones which constitute public history.

Like the oxymoron which is the title itself, Waterland consists of both deferral and presence. While knowledge of the past is uncertain, provisional, always already receding before our grasp, the attempt to seize hold of it is not an empty gesture. Yes, history is "that impossible thing: the

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\(^{16}\) The comparison of Swift to Eliot yields some interesting coincidences. The beginning and ending of East Coker find a parallel in the ending of Waterland when Dick makes his own "return." "In my end is my beginning" is the poetic expression of Dick's return to where he belongs, and is compatible with Crick's cyclical version of natural history (see note 7).
attempt to give an account, with incomplete knowledge" (94). Yet one is not thereby excused from the business of trying. If anything, Waterland teaches us that there is accountability, that there is an obligation for the subject to partake of the daily work of narrative formation. Crick clearly feels this most strongly. Even after he is sacked by Lewis, the school principal, he continues to render an account of his life, to make sense of how things got to this point. His wife, Mary, who has stolen a baby, believes it was given to her by God. But with Crick's support, she is convinced to return it, and Crick is left with the work of providing an account to the police. The novel's most obvious call to accountability, of course, concerns Dick, Freddie Parr's murderer. Yet Dick, who suffers from amnesia, is unable to form a narrative, and his "return" at the end of the novel--he drowns himself--is a just one in that it situates him where he belongs. We recall, "only nature knows neither memory nor history" (53). As Janik points out, "[t]he 'Saviour of the World,'" as Dick is called (Waterland 268), "drowns himself, and the 'child of God' is restored to his natural mother and ordinary life. The world cannot afford saviours, cannot support them. The only salvation is the continual task of reclamation of the land" (87).

History, stories, myths, fairy tales--all narratives--function to endow the subject with equipment for making meaning in the world. History is that impossible thing, in
an absolute sense. Yet history, like the other narratives invoked to combat the "here and now," is the map and compass of the postmodern explorer, the dredger scraping the memory banks of subjectivity to forge (and reforge) the paths of meaning in the text which is our world. In the next chapter, we will observe once again how significant this process is, as we witness a conflict between two particular types of history.
Chapter 4

Misshapeshu's Mistress Versus "Death's Bony Whore":

The Critique of Logocentrism in Louise Erdrich's Tracks

In the beginning was the Word...and the Word was God.

John 1:1

If Swift's Waterland illustrates the problems associated with adhering to a conventional historical model, it does so, at times, in an abstract and theoretical fashion. As the focus now shifts to Louise Erdrich's Tracks, we will have the opportunity to observe in more concrete terms the specific personal, political, and cultural effects of the dominance of conventional historical discourse, especially as it manifests itself in the privileging of the written word over the spoken.

There are several reasons why Tracks remains one of the most significant works to emerge out of a body of contemporary fiction specifically concerned with the revival of the stilled voices of native North Americans. It attempts--and succeeds--to reinscribe a displaced historical account of the last days of the Anishinabe Indians before their way of life was permanently altered by the rape of their land and culture by white settlers.
with logging interests. It merits much praise, too, simply for its literary value: its sensuous magic realism and its elegant, lyrical prose. Yet a further attribute for which the novel has been much acclaimed concerns the extent to which it reconciles the divisive imbroglio in contemporary literary theory over the question of referentiality in historical fiction: on the one side, as we have seen, Marxists and traditional historiographers, both adamant in their affirmation of an extra-textual referent to which historical discourse presumably always has access; on the other side, poststructuralists and their followers, equally adamant that historical discourse has recourse to nothing but other texts, other signifiers.

Indeed, Nancy J. Peterson seizes precisely upon this last issue in what is probably the most informed and insightful analysis of the novel to date, a PMLA article entitled "History, Postmodernism, and Louise Erdrich's Tracks." Peterson champions Erdrich's fiction as a praiseworthy compromise between two extremes. She sees the difficulties Erdrich faces in writing the novel as being "symptomatic of a crisis: the impossibility of writing traditional history in a postmodern, postrepresentational era" (982). Rej ecting a naive faith in the representational claims of conventional documentary history, while steering clear of the linguistic abyss proffered by poststructuralist
antirepresentationalism, Erdrich, Peterson maintains, negotiates a path down the middle which gives due deference to both the political need for an Anishinabe history as well as the inexorable textuality of that history. The narrative link between Nanapush, one of the main narrators, and Lulu, Fleur's daughter and the addressee of Nanapush's narration, "signifies a kind of history writing and history telling that neither relinquishes nor oversimplifies its referential debt to the past, that is grounded in tradition and ready to adapt to (post)modern conditions" (990-1).

Peterson's assessment of the way in which Erdrich navigates the minefields of historiographic metafiction is meticulous, apt, and timely. Her analysis of the novel's two narrators leads unequivocally to the conclusion: "[t]he new historicity that Tracks inscribes is neither a simple return to historical realism nor a passive acceptance of postmodern historical fictionality"

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'As we shall see, however, to "adapt" is not always a good thing. While a number of critics, including Peterson, have applauded and celebrated Nanapush's adaptability, another critic points to the dangers inherent in adaptation: "Certainly, survival depends upon adapting, yet in Erdrich's view adaptability can also lead to assimilation and even to a collapse of identity. Although Nanapush's knowledge of English makes him an authority within the tribe and a tribal representative to the government, his attitude toward his own bilingualism is deeply ambivalent" (Smith 82). Pauline's own assimilation is, of course, much more radical than Nanapush's and unequivocally appears to lead to a collapse of identity--or, more specifically, a complete erasure of identity.
(991).² Such a view is a welcome affirmation, a bridge over the widening chasm separating poststructuralist thought from postcolonial imperatives.³ As well, the novel acknowledges the perspective that native writing is still implicated in strategies of containment which do not yet warrant the label "post" (colonial or modern). The novel deftly addresses the paradox facing native writers in our time. Suppressed histories of native

²The argument can be made that the absence of Fleur's own narrative voice constitutes an "absent presence" which inhabits a narrative realm of its own, albeit inaccessible to the reader. The significance of such an absent narration, I would argue, lies in its inviolability. That it does not appear in the pages of the novel as written words protects it from implication in the colonial oppression the novel seeks to indict. The disappearance of Fleur's footprints, or "tracks" when, it is rumoured, she becomes an animal or fowl, is metaphorical support for this view.

³To a large extent, the widening of this chasm has been exacerbated by a misunderstanding of that (in)famous Derridean claim that there is nothing beyond the text (158). As we have seen, however, poststructuralism has never denied an extra-textual reality. It has merely insisted that our access to historical "reality" is necessarily mediated by discourse. Such a claim does not have to lead to political quietism or despair but may very well, on the contrary, provide a basis for effective political critique and action. Pérez Castillo's analysis of Erdrich's fiction clarifies this issue. Of the plight of the Anishinabeg, she says, "[w]hat is naive is to insist that we can somehow accede to their suffering without recourse to language, and that resistance to hegemonic or totalitarian systems of discourse which have excluded or attempted to diminish them can be carried out beyond discourse itself" (291). Pérez Castillo suggests what seems to me the only reasonable course of action: "Rather than yielding to the nostalgic desire to return to a pre-lapsarian world in which there existed an immutable, one-to-one correspondence between sign and referent, it might be more productive to analyze the discursive systems that authorize some representations and suppress others" (291).
peoples must be inscribed within the archive of human discourse. Yet the ontological claims of the historical records should not be accorded any greater status than those to which any other discourse lays claim. A very fine balancing act is required here.

Indeed, the novel's two narrators offer the reader an oscillating view of history, a view which outlines the complex relations of ideological forces at work in the (re)construction of historical narrative. Whereas Pauline's narration embraces the Western tradition of historical progress, Nanapush's narrative resists assimilation by disdaining the written word of the bureaucrats, "the storm of government papers" which threatens to engulf his people (1). Nanapush, however, is forced to acknowledge that if the Anishinabeg are to survive, they must learn to wield the white man's tools--most significant among them the pen and paper.‘ Reluctantly, he acquiesces on a number of occasions in order to secure a future for Lulu and, by extension, the descendants of the Anishinabeg.

And yet, to view the evolution of Nanapush's narrative as a capitulation to the Western paradigm would

‘I adhere here to the distinction Gerald Vizenor makes, cited by Peterson, between the terms Chippewa and Anishinabe. The former is a name invoked by white Americans while the latter is the original tribal name, the plural of which is Anishinabeg. As Peterson points out, only Nanapush uses the latter term in the novel (991-2).
be to miss some of the subtle rhetorical strategies employed by Erdrich, as well as to misconstrue the significance of a number of episodes in the novel. Tracks may not be as bipartisan in its compromise as Peterson suggests. According to Peterson,

Erdrich's novel holds Nanapush's and Pauline's antithetical views in tension, showing point of view to be inherent to any historical narrative. Moreover, these conflicting stories and visions reflect a tribal vision of the world that allows for competing truths and, according to Paula Gunn Allen, for gender balance rather than gender oppression. (989)

On a formal or structural level, this point is certainly valid. The novel's resistance to a monologic narrative depends to a great extent on the tension created by the "conflicting stories and visions" offered by Nanapush and Pauline. Furthermore, the gender equilibrium maintained by this tension provides a basis for favourable feminist readings of the novel. A close textual reading, however, yields some significant disparities in the relative strengths of Nanapush's and Pauline's narratives. While the former is one which is empowered by an intersubjective matrix through which it derives significance, the latter attains only a superficial
validity and is undermined by its dependence on a logocentrism disconnected from the intersubjective relationships which constitute community and a shared narrative vision. While Pauline's narrative is alienated and weakened by isolation, Nanapush's narrative is consistently linked with healing, growth, and life-sustaining powers. If both narratives are held in tension, it is only on a formal level.

Both narratives derive from a logocentric impulse, from the power of the word. Indeed, the ineluctability of orality is one theme which runs through the novel, along with its problematic relationship to the written word, as Nanapush begins to acknowledge the latter's threat to the oral tradition. And while it is true that Nanapush acknowledges the necessity of learning to write, his commitment to the traditional form of oral narrative

5Catherine Rainwater sees the opposition of Pauline's and Nanapush's narratives as that between "privileged narrative voices" and "dialogical or polyphonic narrative development" (407).

6Claudia Egerer offers an opposing view, arguing that Pauline, not Nanapush, is ultimately triumphant: "Pauline's attempt to combine two different religious views into an amalgam that both fits and ameliorates her own position on the margins singles her out as one of the survivors. It is important to remember that, however incongruous her composite religion seems to us, Pauline manages to do what Nanapush does not: she makes a life for herself in the face of her community's disapproval and ridicule" (91). Pauline does manage to eke out a living, if that is what Egerer means by making a "life for herself." The quality of that life, however, in comparison to Nanapush's, is certainly debatable.
subverts in its own way the Western privileging of the written word, divorced as it has become from the originating act of orality. As Jennifer Sergi points out, "Nanapush's narrative style points to the novel's roots in Chippewa oral tradition. Erdrich is sensitive to the immediate difference between the printed word and the spoken, and she effects an accommodation between her printed text and her narrator's delivery" (279).

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida traces back to Plato the originary impulse to subjugate writing to speech. He follows the development of this impulse to its evolution in twentieth-century linguistics, in the work of Ferdinand de Saussure. In deconstructing the hierarchical relationship of speech to writing, Derrida's goal is not to reverse it (to elevate writing over orality), but to liberate the written word from its relationship to a determinate signified. Peterson herself invokes this very work to support a different point: "Derrida demonstrates the degree to which historicity is linked to writing: 'Before being the object of a history--of an historical science--writing opens the field of history--of historical becoming'" (983). While such a claim can be viewed within the context of the liberating and much desired goal of postcolonial writers, seeking their share of the historical pie, so to speak, *Tracks* also illustrates the ways in which the written word oppresses and closes off the field of historical becoming to those
who are oblivious to its uses and abuses.

In the hegemonic domain of American and Native Indian relations, *Tracks* articulates clearly the immanent dangers in such a scenario, and reaffirms the significance of orality to narrative. In Nanapush's view, the main enemy is the written word, the white man's documents, which inscribe his people's culture in terms foreign and incomprehensible to them. The creation of a written history on the white man's paper becomes synonymous with the systematic destruction of the Anishinabe culture. The loggers who consume the forests and land of the Anishinabeg are a metaphor for the paper made from the lumber which consumes the lifestyle (and by extension, the lives) of the last Anishinabe descendants. The novel, at times, proffers a savage indictment of the written word, used as it is to oppress and deceive, to structure and contain, to order and delineate a discursive form which perpetuates a system antithetical to the Anishinabe cultural lifestyle. It contests and deconstructs the logocentric impetus underscoring the discourse of the whites, a logocentric impetus degenerate and corrupt, cut off from the orality and intersubjectivity which are seen to constitute and sustain the Anishinabeg. The novel launches this critique in a way that deconstructs the suspect dichotomies or divisions of self from world, self from other, and self from narrative which characterize the Western/Judeo-
Christian tradition and which are exemplified in Pauline's narrative version of events in the novel.7 "Nanapush," Catherine Rainwater points out, "declares that whites imposed their ideas of measurement and boundaries on the Native Americans, and he implies that the separation of experience into real and imagined events, and of time into past, present, and future, is part of an alien and oppressive world view which, together with writing, makes communication extremely difficult" (418).

Nanapush, whose narrative voice opens the novel, immediately sets up the confrontation between the written word and the oral. The "storm of government papers" which besieges his people in 1912, after they had already faced disease of plague-like proportions, is the first symptom of a conflict. Nanapush's rejection of the papers is unequivocal: "I spoke aloud the words of the government treaty, and refused to sign the settlement papers that would take away our woods and lake" (1-2). In contrast to the government papers, the power of his own voice is

7At least one irony becomes apparent in pursuing the implications of this theme. The biblical origins of logocentrism are not difficult to find. God, or "the Word" precedes all. "In the beginning was the Word" (John 1:1). Yet, "the Word was made flesh" (John 1:14). As we shall see below, Pauline, despite committing her life to Christianity, is forever cut off from her own body, her flesh. Even giving birth does not permit her a connection to her embodied sense of self, for she gives the child away. Nanapush, Fleur, and Eli, however, are connected to their bodies and experience an integration of body and mind Pauline cannot know.
affirmed by Nanapush repeatedly in this opening chapter. Discovering that Fleur Pillager alone remained of the Pillager clan, he rescues her, but barely saves himself in the process. When Father Damien finds them on the verge of death, "strong tea and lard" awaken in Nanapush the real sustaining force within him, language: "I gathered speed. I talked both languages in streams that ran alongside each other, over every rock, around every obstacle. The sound of my own voice convinced me I was alive. I kept Father Damien listening all night.... Occasionally, he took in air, as if to add observations of his own, but I pushed him under with my words" (7). From the outset, Nanapush is conscious of the extent to which language constitutes not just his knowledge of the world, but the life-force within him, a force which manifests itself through narrative. When he finds the young Fleur, for example, she is a source of worry for him because "[s]he was too young and had no stories or depth of life to rely upon" (7). In telling all this to the young Lulu, Nanapush hopes to provide her with a depth of life, with stories upon which she can depend for strength.

It is crucial to point out here the intersubjective quality of Nanapush's narrative. He is always conscious of the fact that the story he tells has relevance not simply or primarily to him but to the addressee of the narrative. This contrasts sharply with the anonymity of
Pauline's audience or listeners. Her narrative has no social grounding, no framework through which it attains a greater relevance. Nanapush never loses sight of the relationship of his past to those to whom he speaks, or about whom he speaks. As Fleur is restored to health, she becomes clearheaded, and recalls the events which led to her family's deaths. "With her memory," Nanapush observes, "mine came back, only too sharp" (5). Always cognizant of the connectedness of his memories of the past to others', Nanapush forges a narratival vision informed by an ethical impetus reminiscent of Emmanuel Levinas' philosophical ethics of alterity, an ethics which begins with the acknowledgment of an ontologically prior "otherness" with which subjectivity must contend. The subject is (partly) constituted by a process of ontological and epistemological embeddedness in already narrated stories, and as such is always open to the reception of other narratives. As we saw in Waterland, the subject relies for its well-being on a mixture of public history and private stories (fairy-tales).

The way Nanapush conveys this sense of interconnectedness is subtle but definite. The narrative of the Anishinabeg he conveys to Lulu is consciously aware of its indebtedness to other stories, to imaginative projections, as much as to any ostensibly real events. Indeed, the novel, in its varied uses of magic realism, forces the reader to relinquish
conventional distinctions between the real and the imagined, as both collapse into a melting pot of ingredients which in fact go into any narrativized account of the past. "The place of memory in any culture," Andreas Huyssen points out, "is defined by an extraordinarily complex discursive web of ritual and mythic, historical, political, and psychological factors" (Twilight Memories 250). Or, as Mario J. Valdés argues, in linking memory to remembrance through "the narrativization of incidents" (218):

we ought to be reminded that the collective memory of people is a vast tapestry with many elements of fact woven together with other elements of imagination or belief. The reality of our sense of the past is dependent on our narrativization of memory as Wittgenstein has shown us; or, as Ricoeur has said, there is a constant interweaving of history and fiction in our refiguration of the lived world on which our consciousness of human time rests. (219-20)

Such a description captures perfectly the means by which the history of the Anishinabeg is conveyed in Tracks, the intermingling of elements which constitute the reconstruction of the past. Karen Castellucci Cox has pointed to Erdrich's use of magic realism as the precise
means by which Erdrich conveys the historical consciousness of a culture radically different from our own: "Erdrich insert[s]...into the open-ended story cycle 'magical' episodes that we can perceive as giving shape to a revised historical consciousness" (158). Cox cites as an example one of the final scenes in the novel, in which Fleur causes the entire forest to crash down around the loggers who have taken her land: "The image fleshes out the truncated story so that the reader can perceive with Erdrich not the true story of the Chippewa but the truth of their desires--an interruption that celebrates Chippewa history in a fantastical gesture of power" (158). Cox's comments here help explain why the intermingling of both historical and imaginative material conveys a greater meaning than that which conventional realistic modes of fiction are able to convey:

It is no accident that this meshing of genres--the real world images of fiction with the magical elements of folk legends and supernatural superstitions--has becomes so prevalent in the works of contemporary ethnic writers....Because the communal memory exists outside historical progression in a nether-world of dreams and desires meant to shape the whole, it often constructs its stories from family secrets, folk legends, ghost tales, and the like. The community maintains this
body of narrative which defines and orders it, but which does not exist within a literal, linear framework. Rather, the stories the members share act as an ahistorical communal identity, a reservoir of beliefs, memories, stories, and visions from which any member can recover a past. (159)

Likewise, "American Indian thought," as Paula Gunn Allen describes it, is "essentially mystical and psychic in nature. Its distinguishing characteristic is a kind of magicalness...an enduring sense of the fluidity and malleability, or creative flux of all things" (68). Erdrich herself has argued that "[t]here is no quantifiable reality. Points of view change the reality of a situation and there is a reality to madness, imagined events, and perhaps something beyond that" (in Chavkin and Chavkin 224). In this sense, what Erdrich does so well is to provide "an alternative way of remembering that does not categorize pieces of a story as 'true' or 'false' but opens up the possibility to include the events that, regardless of their proof or probability, can best represent an imaginative consciousness that would otherwise go unnoted and ultimately unreported" (Cox 160).

The gist of both Erdrich's and Cox's statements here is reminiscent of the thematic concerns of both Ragtime and Waterland. We recall Doctorow's claim that there is
no meaningful distinction to be made between fiction and non-fiction, that there is "only narrative." Thus, the ostensibly fictional conversations between Ford and Morgan have as much reality as if they had actually happened. Similarly, in Waterland, we see an even more overt attempt to deconstruct the boundary between history and imagination: "It's a curious thing, Price, but the more you try to dissect events, the more you lose hold of what you took for granted in the first place--the more it seems it never actually occurred, but occurs, somehow, only in the imagination..." (121). Where Erdrich's novel is unique, perhaps, is in its emphatic illustration of the communal component which constitutes the essential character of the oral historical tradition. Erdrich illustrates this process in a passage that accentuates Nanapush's and Fleur's mutual dependence:

Since I saved her from the sickness, I was entangled with her. Not that I knew it at first. Only looking back is there a pattern. I was a vine of a wild grape that twined the timbers and drew them close. Or maybe I was a branch, coming from the Kashpaws, that lived long enough to touch the next tree over, which was the Pillagers, of whom there were only two--Moses and Fleur--far cousins, related not so much by blood as by name and chance survival. Or maybe there was just me, Nanapush, in the thick as
ever. The name had a bearing on what happened later, as well, for it was through Fleur Pillager that the name Nanapush was carried on and won't die with me, won't rot in a case of bones and leather. There was a story to it the way there is a story to all, never visible while it is happening. Only after, when an old man sits dreaming and talking in his chair, the design springs clear. (34)

This passage is an almost Proustian account of the connection between memory and narrative, evoking as it does a sense of the power with which present recollection can order the events of the past into a configuration, a mixture of imagination and "fact" which constitutes the narrative of one's life. It also illustrates the connectedness of the self which remembers to others which are remembered. Valdés points to this relationship as a significant one in the formation of narrative accounts:

The dialectic between self and other is the most fundamental relationship in the unfolding of the reflective imagination, and memory plays a central part in this dialectic. The other is not an external add-on to self. My argument, following Ricoeur, is that the other is the internal basis of self and that this dialectic structure is established in the singular and collective memory that constitutes
personal and collective identity. Just as memory of self and memory of others are indistinguishable from each other, so too is personal memory entwined with the collective memory that is history. Therefore, the narrative of memory and of remembering is the ground for the narrative of identity which we interpret in the hermeneutics of life. (221)

There is in this passage a great deal to consider, more than the scope of this chapter will permit. What I wish to focus on here is what it tells us about the relationship of narrative to history which emerges in Nanapush's and Pauline's narration of events. At stake in the critique of logocentrism in Tracks is a particular attitude which informs the strategic use of the word, of language. It is, perhaps, not so much the written word which is to be feared, as Nanapush begins to understand, but the philosophical and ethical underpinnings of the Western approach to language which fosters the destructive use of the written word, and thus the inscription of Anishinabe history within a narrative form hostile to native historical consciousness. Therefore, what strikes the reader as a simple antipathy has a much more profound significance than might first be suspected.

Nanapush's narrative does, as we have seen, begin with the outright repudiation of the written word. The
history encoded in the government papers with which Nanapush is forced to contend is one which he is none too willing to embrace. It is a narrative which threatens all that he is, all that he represents. He will not even allow his name to be written in the files. "My girl, listen well. Nanapush is a name that loses power every time that it is written and stored in a government file" (32). Yet it is not out of ignorance or an inability to participate in the written system that Nanapush rejects it: "I could have written my name, and much more too in script. I had a Jesuit education in the halls of Saint John before I ran back to the woods and forgot all my prayers" (33). Nanapush, as his name suggests, is capable of the "trickery" required to combat the government papers. His strategy is to rely for as long as possible on the orality which sustains his narrative from the start and which connects him to the others with whom his narrative is shared.

One poignant example of this interconnectedness occurs when Nanapush sends Eli out to hunt. Both men are near starvation when Nanapush begins to sing, "calling on my helpers, until the words came from my mouth but were not mine, until the rattle started, the song sang itself, and there, in the deep bright drifts, I saw the tracks of Eli's snowshoes clearly" (101). The words "were not mine," Nanapush maintains, a testament to the sense with which his narrative is not viewed as a possession, but
instead as a vehicle through which communication occurs. Indeed, Nanapush not only communicates with Eli but actually sees and hears him, and helps him in killing the moose that will sustain not just Eli and himself, but Fleur, Lulu and Margaret as well. Beating a drum to help Eli find his way home, Nanapush "strengthened the rhythm whenever he faltered beneath the weight he bore. In that way, he returned, and when I could hear the echo of his panting breath, I went outside to help him, still in my song" (104). Another time, it is Lulu with whom Nanapush merges in a narrative lullaby which saves her and restores her to health.

Once I had you I dared not break the string between us and kept on moving my lips, holding you motionless with talking, just as at this moment....I talked on and on until you lost yourself inside the flow of it, until you entered the swell and ebb and did not sink but were sustained. I talked beyond sense--by morning the sounds I made were stupid mumbles without meaning or connection. But you were lulled by the roll of my voice. (167)

Nanapush is not only connected to others, he also enjoys a physical connection to the geographical setting of his narrative, to the land itself. This is why the rape of the land by white settlers is tantamount to a
rape of the Anishinabeg: "From where we now sit, granddaughter, I heard the groan and crack, felt the ground tremble as each tree slammed earth. I weakened into an old man as one oak went down, another and another was lost, as a gap formed here, a clearing there, and plain daylight entered" (9). Later, in "the dream I had in those days after my family was taken," Nanapush articulates an even stronger connection between the Anishinabeg and their land: "I stood in a birch forest of tall straight trees. I was one among many in a shelter of strength and beauty. Suddenly, a loud report, thunder, and they toppled down like matchsticks, all flattened around me in an instant. I was the only one left standing. And now, as I weakened, I swayed and bent nearer to the earth" (127). Pauline, in contrast, has no connection to the land or, indeed, to any particular geographical location. Dispossessed of house and home, she finally goes to the Nuns. Her acceptance into the Catholic Church functions as a metaphor for the sterility of her narrative, for the absence of fruitful relations her account reveals.

Earlier, I claimed that Tracks accommodates a paradox stemming from the need for Anishinabe culture to establish for itself an historical record, while placing that record within the domain of a postmodernist historical sensibility. That paradox is maintained through the extent to which Pauline's purely written
historical narrative is undermined in various ways. One of these ways concerns the extent to which her narrative version is disconnected from the physical world which has such prominence in the Anishinabe world view. For example, while the narratives of Nanapush and Pauline stand in opposition to each other in a number of respects, it is Fleur (who has no narrative voice) who better represents all that Pauline is not, and who maintains a strong connection to the physical world and to her physical body. Pauline is virtually invisible to the men around her. "The men would not have seen me no matter what I did, how I moved," she realizes early in the novel (19-20). Fleur, however, does not escape anyone's gaze. While Pauline narrates and fills the pages of the novel with her logocentric structure, Fleur remains a centre, a symbol of pure presence whose power is virtually unlimited.

Pauline's narration begins with an account of the first time Fleur "drowned" (10) and quickly establishes Fleur's status as the lake monster's mistress: "[I]t was clear that Misshepesheu, the water man, the monster, wanted her for himself" (11). Fleur is restored to life by assigning "her place" in death to others. "You take my place," she hisses to George Many Women, who soon drowns in his bathtub. Indeed, the subsequent targets of her wrath are all representative symbols of patriarchal domination. What draws Fleur to Argus, Pauline observes,
is the tall steeple of the Catholic Church: "For if she hadn't seen that sign of pride, that slim prayer, that marker, maybe she would have just kept walking" (13). When Fleur leaves Argus, it is only after the town has been decimated by a tornado, the Catholic Church steeple "ripped off like a peaked cap and sent across five fields" (29), and the men who had raped her are dead (with the exception of Dutch, who is permanently maimed). If Fleur has no narrative voice, she speaks throughout the novel with highly suggestive gestures. The men who had violated her, for example, are rendered impotent in every sense of the term. Pauline's last description of them, when they are found in the meat freezer, frozen in the act of discourse, is a striking image of silenced speakers: "Their faces were set in concentration, mouths open as if to speak some careful thought, some agreement they'd come to in each other's arms" (30).

Pauline compensates for her sense of inferiority by her (mis)use of narrative. "Because she was unnoticeable, homely if it must be said, Pauline schemed to gain attention by telling odd tales that created damage," Nanapush observes (39). Elsewhere, he claims, "she was a born liar, and sure to die one. The practice of deception was so constant with her that it got to be a kind of truth" (53). It is more than appropriate that Pauline finds employment with the local undertaker, a gesture which finds a parallel in the will to deception or non-
being underlying her uses of narrative. Hence, when Sophie Morrissey calls her, "death's bony whore" the reference is not only to her position as assistant to Bernadette, but to the intentional deception in the story she has narrated about Sophie and Eli. Compared to Nanapush's stories which breathe life into those who are involved in them, Pauline's stories destroy and detract, isolate and alienate, even in regard to Pauline herself. Her relentless commitment to the Church, to God, to the Word, is a commitment to an alienating narrative cut off from the intersubjective relations which fulfil Nanapush's narrative. The Catholic Church, one of the greatest monoliths of the Western World, here proves too vacuous an entity to fulfil the life-sustaining functions which the local narratives of Nanapush do so well.

This is nowhere more evident than in the ways in which Pauline fails to connect with her own body as well as with the bodies of others. Her adherence to "the Word" prevents her from appreciating her embodiment as a woman. The failed encounter with Napoleon illustrates this clearly. As he takes off her clothes, she does not even come close to revelling in the pure immediacy of the physical. Instead, she is dismayed by the sight of her own flesh. Lying naked with Napoleon, Pauline tries to go through with it, but a moment later Napoleon senses something wrong--"like a dog sensing the presence of a tasteless poison"--and he leaves (73). Yet Pauline
remains behind and narrates an imagined version of the affair:

In my picture, we coupled in a blinding darkness, moved too fast to think. We howled like cats in a manger, dove and bucked like horses in their heat. I snapped him in my beak like a wicket-boned mouse. He crushed me to a powder and spread me across the floor. Yet when morning invaded the empty windows and doors, we woke whole, unhurt, prepared for more pleasure. (73)

While the encounter is postponed, it eventually does occur. Nonetheless, Pauline remains trapped, narrating a story which is inexorably cut off from an authentic connection to others. In her fantasy, "we moved too fast to think," but in reality Pauline's problem is that she thinks too fast to move; she narrates with a view to a logocentric ordering which precludes the freedom accorded the spontaneous action of bodily existence. Consider, for example, her sense of exclusion when she observes the bodily connection between Fleur and Eli:

Yet what was between them was more obvious to me than if they touched. I could not pass between the two of them--the air was busy, filled with sparks and glowing needles, simmering. Their bodies, like
ore and lodestones, drew together and repelled me, or, if I stubbornly resisted, loomed close enough to crush....In the morning, before they washed in Matchimanito, they smelled like animals, wild and heady, and sometimes in the dusk their fingers left tracks like snails, glistening and wet. (71-2)

At stake here is the division of self from world, self from other selves, mentioned earlier. Fleur and Eli, connected as they are to each other, to their own bodies, even to the natural and animal worlds, stand in stark contrast to the alienated Pauline. Yet Pauline is relentless in her sterile application of a narrative order bereft of its connectedness to others. She forces an ordering onto events which causes both herself and others grievous harm. Her narration of the encounter between Eli and Sophie is an example: "I turned my thoughts on the girl and made her do what she could never have dreamed of herself....I was pitiless. They were mechanical things, toys, dolls wound past their limits" (83-4). Soon after this, Pauline again perceives the interaction of subjects as a mechanized process. Watching Fleur's reaction to Eli's return after the encounter with Sophie, she says: "I watched closely, saw the workings clearly for a moment, as I had the time Dutch James pried off the back of his watch" (90).

"Pauline's and Nanapush's narratives," Peterson
argues, "correspond to the need to comprehend both textual and oral history. Nanapush tells the story to Lulu, but Pauline addresses no one in particular and thus implicitly addresses a reader, not a listener. The lack of an immediate audience also signifies Pauline's distance from oral tribal culture" (989). There is much more at work in the novel, however, than simply a mediation between the need for both oral and written histories. Pauline's "distance from oral tribal culture" is implicated in a distancing she experiences from others, from the natural world, and from her own embodied existence. It is not only Nanapush, as Peterson maintains, who "deconstructs the West's reverence for the written word as the stabilizer of meaning and tradition" (989). Pauline's reliance on the textuality dominating the Anglo-American worldview also serves to deconstruct the written word--perhaps more effectively than does Nanapush's narrative. What emerges from the totality of Pauline's narrative amounts to a seamless web of associations in which the attempt to reduce historical being to textuality is ultimately linked to alienation, deceit, and the annihilation of a minority culture. Lying ineffably behind Pauline's narration of isolation is the sense that historical narrative--to have validity--must be rooted in a shared understanding and memory of the world which draws on common myths, beliefs, and values. Anishinabe oral history, the novel illustrates, is
predicated precisely on these things.

It is both lamentable and ironic that Pauline gets to write the history of her own exclusion from her culture, using the very form of narration which is responsible for that exclusion. Everything for Pauline is an object to be structured, to be written into the text of life, like the workings of Dutch James' watch. Even her own body becomes a text within which her child is inscribed: "The skin on my stomach tightened to a white transparency. Through that parchment, I tried to read the child" (133). But "death's bony whore" reads only that which is already dead, like Fleur's baby whom she fails to save: "I've read its name in the pattern of wet black twigs" (163).

The juxtaposition of the dualisms proffered by Erdrich's novel generates a definitive concept of what constitutes Anishinabe historical consciousness. First and foremost, the oral narrative tradition is shown to be irrevocably rooted in an intersubjective matrix through which the "remembering self" (to use Valdés's term) is inextricably intertwined with others who are remembered. Second, however, and not so obvious, is the importance of the connection of mind to body, a connection absent in Pauline--an absence supported and further encouraged by the Judeo-Christian worldview Pauline embraces. As the novel progresses, so too does the distance between Pauline and her own body, which increasingly becomes an
object to be mistreated, abused and rejected. Citing Gabriel Marcel, Schrag tries to deconstruct the mind/body dualism which has plagued Western philosophy for centuries: "My body is my body just in so far as I do not consider it in this detached fashion, do not put a gap between myself and it. To put this point in another way, my body is mine in so far as for me my body is not an object, but rather I am my body" (48-9). Such a perspective seems to be inherent in the Anishinabe view of the world. Pauline, however, in her commitment to an Anglo-American worldview, consistently reverts to a narrative form which separates her body from herself. Furthermore, as we have seen, Pauline's narration is cut off from the intersubjective connections characteristic of the oral tradition. Her insistence that the events around her (and the bodies around her) can be encoded in a text and ordered according to the view of an autonomous subject leads to her alienation from community in almost every form. Her failure is the failure to recognize that historical narrative--and the sense of personal and collective identity which derives from it--depends on a "dialectic of self and other," as Valdés argues (221), as well as on the resources of imagination, local myths and beliefs, a combination clearly evident in Nanapush's narrative.

At issue here seems to be the question of the
sovereign subject itself which informs the structure of Western thinking and the logocentrism of Western texts. The Anishinabe oral tradition is predicated on the belief in a subject which first comes to know itself in its relation to the stories handed down by others. A connectedness is immediately established between narrative, the self, and relationships with others which structure the subject's understanding of itself and the world: "I do not create the discourse and the action of others. I encounter the entwined discourse and action of the other and respond to it, and in this encountering and responding I effect a self-constitution, a constitution of myself, in the dynamic economy of being-with-others" (Schrag 84).

Tracks negotiates a path between and among a number of issues pertinent to both historiographic metafiction and native American historical consciousness. In frequent conflict are the epistemological insights of the former with the political demands of the latter. If Erdrich is endorsing the necessity of native peoples to embrace the Western tradition of written discourse, she does it with reluctance and with a clear warning embedded in the fabric of her narrative. As discussed in the next chapter, there are often compelling reasons to be suspicious of the written word.
Chapter 5
The Dialectic of the Aesthetic:
Reading the Readings of Mauberley's Narrative
in Timothy Findley's Famous Last Words

So many wars had come and gone through the 1920s and '30s, each interlocking with the next--Mauberley's "boxed set of wars"--and with them down went all the old necessities for literature; all the old prescriptions for use of the written word; all the old traditions of order and articulation fading under the roar of bombast and rhetoric. And Ezra, somehow adoring it, had said: "You see? There's no place left for a man who writes like Mauberley. Mauberley's whole and only ambition is to describe the beautiful. And who the hell has time for that anymore?" (Famous Last Words 5)

There is more than a little irony in the fact that it is Timothy Findley's (fictional) Ezra Pound who asks the question, "who the hell has time for that anymore"? Evidently, the historical Pound certainly did. But the question is not merely rhetorical, and a more or less complete answer to it is the novel itself, Famous Last Words, a work which reaffirms the role and power of art
In our culture, while also articulating the pitfalls and dangers which accompany an unsuspecting faith in the inherent benevolence of imaginative expression. Inextricably intertwined with this issue is the less obvious but no less significant relationship between history and fiction, a relationship both overtly and indirectly problematized in the novel, most notably through the juxtaposition of Captain Freyberg's and Lieutenant Quinn's respective hermeneutic approaches to making sense of the war and their responses to the account of it etched into the walls of the Grand Elysium Hotel by Mauberley. Like *Ragtime*, *Waterland*, and *Tracks*, *Famous Last Words* stands as a paean, a homage of sorts, to the role of imagination in civilization, to the extent to which fictions play a constructive role in our daily lives. Unlike the other three novels, however, *Famous Last Words* issues a definitive caveat to the potential dangers of privileging an aesthetic engagement with the world. The novel is, in many ways, a response to its intertextual forebear, Pound's "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley."\(^1\)

\(^1\)It is also a response to the debate surrounding the separation of Pound's poetry and politics, a separation which has been perpetuated until recently. As Anne Geddes Bailey observes, *Famous Last Words* creates "an extradiegetic dialogue between the novel and the academic critical community." It "challenges the academy with serious questions. What sort of interpretation leads to the inclusion of a self-acknowledged fascist and anti-semite into a central position in the literary canon?" (122). Pound, if it is any consolation to his admirers,
The fictional Mauberley, as Pound presents him, is "out of key with his time," and "unaffected by 'the march of events,'" phrases echoed in Findley's novel when the reporter Julia Franklin publishes a piece on Mauberley in The New York Times, a piece Findley's fictional Hemingway is only too delighted to pass on to the unwitting Mauberley. "The age demanded an image / of its accelerated grimace," Pound writes. Findley's response to Pound's poem is to provide for us not an image, but a narrative of the age's accelerated grimace, and two very

is not the only one to be singled out in recent years. T.S. Eliot has been accused of anti-semitism, while Heidegger and Paul de Man have been vilified for their complicity with Nazism. Pound's fascist sympathies are not a new discovery, but for the longest time his place within the canon of modern literature has remained indomitable and untarnished despite a prison term he served for his involvement with fascist forces before and during the Second World War. The issue, to say the least, is a delicate one, and the debate over the role personal politics should play in the reception of an artist's or intellectual's work continues to engage supporters from diametrically opposed quarters. Findley himself articulates the dilemma clearly: "This is the war that I fought when I was writing the book--the war with me--my hatred of everything that Ezra Pound stood for and my absolute devotion to his poetry" (Interview 1).

2In this episode, like many in the novel, a subtle commentary on the production of historical records is tendered, along with a critique of the justice with which history indicts and exonerates particular individuals. Mauberley, scanning the papers for some account of the scandal between Hemingway and Estrade which had occurred the previous evening, finds nothing: "Not a word....It seemed somehow unfair that I must be made to pay for my sins while Ernest got off scot free. And then I remembered. Of course. He had taken all those reporters into the bar and kept them drinking all night long" (129).
different ways, in the form of Freyberg and Quinn, of dealing with it.

Mauberley's narrative is both a reenactment of and a corrective to the faults attributed by the real Pound to his fictional character. Findley's Mauberley does indeed have a penchant for the sublime, but he is nevertheless cognizant, if only on a gradually increasing scale of awareness, of his complicity in one of the great horrors of modern civilization. The great triumph of Famous Last Words, however, is in the way Mauberley's narrative balances his collusion with fascism with the redemptive power of the literary/historical reconstruction of his inexorable fall into evil. In the end, Mauberley is profoundly apologetic (and still pays with his life). The unequivocal manner with which he indicts himself as a conspirator in the fascist cabal is itself a redemptive act. While his words do not exonerate him—as Freyberg fears they all too easily might—they serve as a signpost for the readers of his narrative, a beacon in the dark night of Nazi terror, signalling the danger which awaits the unsuspecting admirer of the fascist aesthetic.

Mauberley, like Findley himself, knows that "we are all a collective hiding place for monsters" ("My Final Hour" 11). His narrative deconstructs the dangerous binary of "we" and "they" by showing how a person of ostensible good will can become an integral part of so
insidious a force as fascism. Lieutenant Quinn's
curiosity foregrounds this issue early in the novel:

All his life in the army since his induction after
Pearl Harbour, Quinn had been deeply suspicious of
the propaganda machine into which he was thrown with
all his fellow soldiers. "We and "they" were words
about which he was paranoid. So when Quinn thought
of Hugh Selwyn Mauberley, it wasn't good enough
simply to say "he was one of them". It didn't help
Quinn understand how Mauberley, whose greatest gift
had been an emphatic belief in the value of
imagination, could have been so misguided as to join
with people whose whole ambition was to render the
race incapable of thinking.... (48)

Unlike Freyberg, for whom the entire war is about "us"
versus "them," and for whom Mauberley is simply one of
"them," Quinn reveals a keen appreciation for the
processes of construction through which concepts--such as
history--are produced. Freyberg, one could say, with his
epistemological orientation towards a valuing of
empirical evidence only, is entirely product-oriented,
while Quinn's hermeneutic is process-oriented, mirroring
the reader's own attempt to render an understanding of
the novel itself. While Freyberg's character serves as a
relentless reminder of the materiality of history. Quinn's character reminds us of the interpretive process through which history is passed from generation to generation. *Famous Last Words*, in fact, is a novel which is obsessed with the production of the image and the sign. There are a number of scenes--most notable among them the one where the Duke fractures into three separate people--centred around the concept of reflection, the mirroring of reality (or something, at any rate). Numerous references to an obfuscation of the distinction between "reality" and film also abound, suggesting a preoccupation with the Baudrillardian dissolution of any hard and fast line between reality and its simulacra. Findley's point, however, is misconstrued if one imputes to his diagnosis of the Baudrillardian condition a concomitant apathy and indifference. Nothing could be

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3In Findley's view, the collapse of this distinction has its origins--and terminus--in a period localizable to the era of the Great Depression and extending throughout the Second World War. The larger-than-life character of Hollywood figures had the beneficial effect of helping people get through "an unimaginably difficult time" (Interview 3). Yet the identification people made with the characters on the screen also provided the forum into which Hitler would make his commanding debut: "Hitler...or whoever was in charge of what he was about--Goebbels--arrived in the perfect moment for the delivery of a mass hysteria, and it was equal to the mass hysteria of the rage for Clark Gable and Lana Turner" (4). Thus, the infiltration of the public consciousness by Hollywood is not in itself, for Findley, a negative phenomenon. It was merely appropriated and exploited, in his view, by the Nazis and fascists.
further from the truth. Instead, and as the debate between Freyberg and Quinn inexorably affirms, one is led toward a realization of hermeneutic responsibility, toward an obligation to be responsible for the processes of one's own interpretive experience, whatever the nature (real/simulated) of the subject matter under analysis.‘

Freyberg, with his relentless insistence on the classification of people and events based solely on empirical evidence, signifies a simplicity out of which premature (if not false) judgments arise. His view of the world is black and white, and the values he holds are never subject to the scrutiny of the processes through which he comes to hold them. Quinn, however, is acutely aware that the world is not so simple, that the polar opposites of good and evil, truth and falsity, fact and fiction, are, in fact, false dichotomies, conveniently invoked for the service of one power or another. To maintain, however, that the novel wholeheartedly endorses Quinn's interpretive stance, while repudiating that of Freyberg, is to take a position which might prove hard to

‘Donna Krolik Hollenberg argues similarly, claiming that Findley employs two artistic strategies: "first, he blends fiction with history in order to underscore the power of storytelling to evade as well as to accept moral responsibility; and second, he inscribes into the text a chorus of opposing 'readers' whose views differ." This latter strategy, Hollenberg maintains, forces us, as readers, "to engage in an internal debate that brings into focus our responsibility for the story's reception and transmission" (144-5).
defend. E. F. Shields argues that "Freyberg's perspective, while different from Quinn's, is not necessarily wrong or invalid. Quinn emphasizes understanding....Freyberg, on the other hand, responds with passionate moral indignation, asserting that in light of the corpses piled at Dachau an apology is not sufficient" (93).^5 Critical debate over this issue thus lends a great deal of support to the prospect that a genuine dialectic exists: on the one hand, the Freybergian worldview, consisting of the imperative that one must accept that the Holocaust did in fact occur, based on the accumulation of "evidence," and that there are a specific number of people responsible for the event; on the other hand, the Quinnian hermeneutic, an insistence on the analysis of the narrative process through which events and signs come to have meaning.

This dialectic, in fact, stands as a microcosmic

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^5Shields also observes that "Freyberg seems to have little or no aesthetic sense." But her subsequent assertion that Quinn is "excessively concerned with the aesthetic, valuing it over the human" (93) is problematic in a number of respects, not the least of which concerns the novel's thematic integration of the moral and the aesthetic, as Donna Pennee points out (74-76). The aesthetic, as the novel illustrates, is an integral part of what makes us human, and does not exist as an extraneous category. While Quinn certainly places great value on the aesthetic, he does, ultimately embrace a moral stance. As Barbara Gabriel points out, Quinn is "closer [than Freyberg] to the novel's point of view: one that insists on the Fascist germ in each and every one of us" (155-56).
encapsulation of the central concerns raised in the
previous four chapters. Questions concerning ontology,
epistemology, and representation come to the forefront
once more as the debate between Freyberg and Quinn
reaches its pinnacle. Yes, the past did indeed occur, as
Freyberg relentlessly illustrates through his
accumulation of artifacts. But what status is to be
accorded it now, in the present, when all that remains
are narratival accounts of what happened? The artifacts
Freyberg collects have little meaning without such
narratives. Freyberg clearly has formed his own narrative
account of the war--based on his own experience and the
reports of his superiors (one presumes). But the primary
source through which most people learn about history--
through others' narratives--is one which Freyberg refuses
to consider, and in so doing cuts himself off from
humanity, veering dangerously close (if not completely
falling in) to the gaping abyss of a cataclysmic
solipsism. 6

The denotation of Mauberley as fascist is an a
priori designation for Freyberg, while Quinn repeatedly
pleads for a suspension of judgment until Mauberley's
narrative has been read: "It's just that we haven't
finished reading, Captain. And it doesn't seem fair to

6See notes 7 and 8 for the rationale behind this
claim.
condemn a lot of people whose stories have only half been told" (155). Freyberg, however, counts as "evidence" only that about which an immediate and definitive judgment can be made. Narrative clearly transcends his criterion and falls into the category of a vilified aestheticism. Like the Schubert record Freyberg snaps in half, Mauberley's narrative is for Freyberg an aesthetic object for which he has little respect and of which he has considerable suspicion. He is aware of the seductive power of the aesthetic, and repudiates both the redemptive potential of Mauberley's narrative as well as the mass appeal of other art forms, such as the cinema.

Quinn vehemently protests Freyburg's rejection of the interpretive possibilities which await them both on the walls of the Elysium hotel:

"Jesus. God damn it, sir!" he said. "I mean, why the hell...? I mean--look at what we've just discovered here! Look at it! Two whole rooms of evidence. Not even classified. Not even read. And you're so god damn sure he's guilty, you might just as well have put that thing through his eye yourself! What are you so god damned scared of? He might be innocent for Christ's sake? Might not be what you want him to be?" (S2)
But Freyberg's ears are closed from the start to even the best counter-argument (the sign of a strong character, Nietzsche would remind us, but thus the occasional will to stupidity--an aphorism not at all irrelevant to the plot in question here). His suspicion of the aesthetic is manifested nowhere more clearly than in his initial assessment of the two rooms filled with writing:

"Think about it," he said. "There's all this writing on the walls, all very neat, all very ordered, all lined up in rows, all very...careful."

"He was an artist," said Quinn.

"That's right. An artist." Freyberg looked around the walls. "Something of a con-artist, too, for all we know. The bigger the lie, the more we are bound to believe it...didn't one of them say that? Something like that? And twice told lies become the truth....Years, we've had of it now. The Nazi con-game...." (53)

Freyberg has already decided that Mauberley is "one of them," and that his narrative is part of the Nazi propaganda machine whose notorious use of "bombast and rhetoric" had contributed to the death of millions. Even when Quinn corrects Freyberg, there is no swaying from
the a priori conviction of guilt which Freyberg had bestowed upon Mauberley long before his corpse, and the narrative were discovered:

"Mauberley wasn't a Nazi....He hated Nazis," said Quinn.
"Mmmmm-hmmm..."
"He did."
"Yes. Yes. I'm sure he did." Freyberg's smile was pinched and demeaning. "Why, from what I hear, they all hated Nazis. Didn't they? I mean, I hear that every day. And if I was fool enough to believe it every time I heard it, I'd have to believe there weren't enough Nazis to form a quorum. Were there, Quinn? And the war never happened. And Hitler was just an actor with a moustache made up to look like Charlie Chaplin. So, when Charlie says we should all fall down--we all fall down....Pratfalls. Yes? And no war. How wonderful. Just to walk out into the lobby and leave it all behind us on a giant movie screen. With the music playing and everyone applauding...I'd like that. I really would." (53)

The implied insistence in Freyberg's invective, here, on a division between art and life, between concrete historical reality and artistic forms which merely
imitate or weave fabrications, is a significant aspect in the novel. It will come up in several more scenes, each with its own emphatic critique of the art/life polarity, the sum total of which points toward the unviability of maintaining the distinction. Freyberg's character, however, serves as the instantiation of the distinction, the installation which must come before the deconstruction, to put it in postmodern terms. In a sense, he is a tragic figure. Unwilling to make the imaginative leap into the salutary embrace of the aesthetic, he remains locked in an unyielding homage to a toxic empiricism. By denying himself the imaginative possibilities which reward a commitment to the emancipatory potential of the aesthetic, Freyberg unwittingly consigns himself--and humanity--to repeating the past. 7

7Without imagination we are unable to break the patterns of the past. As Mortimer Crail points out: "Our chief exemplar is always the person we were just a moment before" (cited by Murphy 135). Within the domain of imagination lies the key to breaking these patterns.

That Freyberg is an isolated and alienated figure, however, in no way compromises or decreases the significance of his stature as an inexorable reminder of the materiality of history. While Findley himself sees the dialectic between Freyberg and Quinn as one of equal force on each side, he does, ultimately, place greater emphasis on Freyberg's stance: "Basically, Freyberg is right because it's people that matter more than anything else... No poetry, no art, nothing is worthy of the death of all those people" (Interview 1). And yet, without Quinn there is no understanding, no reconciliation, and nothing to prevent an eternal recurrence of the same.
Not quite the papier-mâché Mephistopheles of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, nor one of T. S. Eliot's "hollow men." Findley's Freyberg is nevertheless a symbol of the pathology plaguing contemporary humanity, a pathology stemming from a dearth of imaginative engagement and an inability (or refusal) to connect empathically to the rest of humanity.¹ Quoting one of his mentors, Thornton Wilder, Findley reminds us that "cruelty is nothing more than a failure of imagination" (My Final Hour 14), a claim which seems to imply that imagination and cruelty compete for the same receptor sites (to borrow a metaphor from biology), engaged in a dialectic of their own. In this respect, it is Quinn's transformational hermeneutic experience which alone

¹I do not think this is an extreme interpretation of Freyberg's character. Findley himself views Freyberg's plight as symptomatic of a general deficiency in the generation of people who lived through the Second World War: "It [Freyberg's perspective] is tragic. That's what's wrong with all of us, that we shut out the possibility of reconciliation.... I mean, I grew up in the generation that experienced that war, and I still have memories of people of the same generation who would say things to me like, 'I never want to see another German as long as I live, and if anyone who's German comes up to me I will turn away and I will refuse to speak to them.' Well, that's slamming the door, it's shutting one inside" (Interview 2). Granted, Freyberg's first-hand experiences with the horrors which awaited him at the death camps no doubt had a profound effect on him. But his single-minded pursuit of the perpetrators is devoid of a larger picture or worldview which, Findley seems to imply, is requisite for the possibility of humanity's salvation. As mentioned in the previous note, without the empathy and understanding characterized by Quinn, humanity is doomed.
offers hope for a divided humanity.

And yet, Freyberg, for all his anti-aesthetic, isolating solipsism, cut off as he is from everything except the materiality of historical evidence, serves a crucial function in the novel—precisely because of his obsession with historical materiality. He serves as an inexorable reminder that history is what hurts. Both Freyberg's vituperation of the aesthetic and Quinn's defense of it have their origins in an experience Findley himself had as a young, aspiring writer (making the transition from acting) in the famed hills of Hollywood some ten years after the Second World War. Findley had—quite by accident—come across a collection

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9 It would not be too great an imaginative leap, in fact, to see a reflection in the debate between Freyberg and Quinn of the debate between Jameson and poststructuralist theorists. Like Freyberg, Jameson is wary that the real, political effects of history get lost in the discourse of discourse, so to speak. We cannot forget that "history is what hurts," Jameson reminds us, quoting one of Lenin's great slogans. Freyberg, in his relentless quest for physical reminders of the pain inflicted by the Nazis, embodies the Jamesonian motto to its fullest extent. To make his point to Quinn, in fact, and to issue a warning of the seductive and deceptive nature of Mauberley's narrative, Freyberg punches Quinn in the stomach. Falling to his knees in pain, the bewildered Quinn looks up to his commanding officer:

Freyberg looked at him without a trace of passion. "What are you doing down there?" he said. Quinn had to fight for his breath—but he said; "you hit me."

"No I didn't," said Freyberg. "The wind did it."
And he walked away. (393)
of photographs taken by Ivan Moffat, an acclaimed screenplay writer and producer, and one-time army photographer during the Second World War. The photographs he found had been taken at Dachau, the site of one of the most notorious Nazi concentration camps. In an address given at Trent University, Findley tried to convey his response to those photographs:

How can this be explained to those who were not alive before there was a war, before there was a Dachau, before there was a Bomb? How, for instance, can a person explain there was a time when Nagasaki was just a city in a song? Perhaps in a world where Nagasaki and Hiroshima, Dachau and Auschwitz are names that tell of horrors distant as the Inquisition, it cannot be told what it meant to see those photographs that night.

Such images, in all their appalling intimacy, had not yet entered the public domain. The pictures we had seen--the ones the public saw--the ones they showed at Nuremburg--were bad enough. But these in Ivan Moffat's books were beyond all comprehension. Someone--a part of me tried to believe--must have been creating a fictional obscenity. Surely, no one could actually do such things....[N]othing--not my nightmares, not the worst of my imagination, not the
worst of my experience--had opened the door on the remotest possibility of what I saw that night.

I was looking into hell--and hell was real. (11)

This seminal event, which occurred before Timothy Findley had written the first word of his first novel, would leave an indelible imprint on his entire oeuvre. The rupture he experienced would forever infuse into his writing a committed engagement with the political event of the century and the concomitant problems of representation in the domain of art which arose after the Holocaust. How is representation possible after the unthinkable has occurred? How can there be room for art? Or, as Freyberg would say, "How the hell can eloquence come into it?" (47).

Indeed, the cruelty lying ineffably behind the Holocaust, the cruelty which stealthily stole its away into the heart of Mauberley until at last his "fall was over" (375), seems to transcend reason itself. The oft-quoted and enigmatic epilogue of Mauberley's narrative seems to say as much--and I quote it in full because it is of paramount significance to one of the novel's central thematic concerns:

Think of the sea....

Imagine something mysterious rises to the surface on
a summer afternoon--shows itself and is gone before it can be identified.

The people on the shore sit beneath their umbrellas, comfortable and dozing. Half of them are asleep. Of the other half, perhaps only two or three have seen the thing. None of them points: none of them shouts. None of them dares. After all, one could be wrong.

By the end of the afternoon, the shape--whatever it was--can barely be remembered. No one can be made to state it was absolutely thus and so. Nothing can be conjured of its size. In the end the sighting is rejected, becoming something only dimly thought on: dreadful but unreal.

Thus, whatever rose towards the light is left to sink unnamed: a shape that passes slowly through a dream. Waking, all we remember is the awesome presence, while a shadow lying dormant in the twilight whispers from the other side of reason: I am here. I wait. (395-6)

The implication here, if one has not deduced it earlier in the novel, is that the phenomenon of the Holocaust has its grounding in an extra-rational dimension. The dialectic of the aesthetic which plays itself out in Famous Last Words does so precisely within this
dimension. Mauberley's fall into fascism does indeed occur because of an unchecked faith in the sublime, the beautiful—as well as its sexual, visceral attraction which consumes him. But the only possible redemption for humanity after the holocaust does not lie in the rejection of the aesthetic, as Freyberg would have it, but on an exercise of the imaginative faculty which lies within the purview of a variety of aesthetic forms. The novel, it seems, presents the aesthetic as a double-edged sword: on the one hand, and as Mauberley's narrative illustrates all too well, there is an omnipresent danger in an unreflective indulgence in the aesthetic—for Mauberley as well as humanity. As Diana Brydon points out, "Mauberley is a writer whose life and words become inseparable, and who pays with his life for that relation" (67). Furthermore, there is a critique of the film industry's infiltration of the interior life of the individual, characterized most notably in a number of Annie Oakley's responses and gestures. The most significant of these occurs when Rudecki, having been literally castrated by Estrade, is running down the hallway, one hand covering his mutilated genitals. In a darkly humorous way, Findley illustrates the blurring of individual consciousness with the inexorably pervasive
influence of popular culture. Oakley, half in a fantasy film world and half in the real world, responds to the crisis without having to withdraw from either. Rudecki's interruption merely blends into his fantasized foreplay with Lana Turner:

Out in the lobby, Lana Turner dragged her mink coat

10Famous Last Words, to be sure, is no Dialectic of Enlightenment. Nevertheless, it offers its own critique of Hollywood's film industry, of the extent to which it has infiltrated and/or replaced any notion of "the real" for citizens of the Western world. Another satiric example occurs during the air bombing by Lorenzo de Broca, when 100 of the Duke's and Duchess's guests are sitting in a Cinema Marquee, "watching the battle of Britain and the fall of France. Now, in a Movietone Voice, they were caught themselves in the hordes of struggling refugees who clogged the roads on the screen while the dive bombers strafed them in the ditches down between the rows of chairs. Real flames caught at their hair and their clothing. Real screams mingled with the screams of falling bombs and the rising flames over London echoed the rising flames that leapt towards the sky above the lawns at Nassau. Suddenly the screen was filled with the image of a Spitfire squadron rushing towards the camera. Just as it took off, the whole marquee exploded" (285). In one sense, this scene can be viewed as an attempt to affirm a division between art and life. Yet it also affirms the regularity with which one is confused for the other (especially, as Findley believes, during the era of the Second World War). Hollywood's domination of American consciousness seems to be a recurring theme. Yet unlike Horkheimer and Adorno, Findley doesn't seem to view Hollywood's predominance negatively. On the contrary, he cites a number of salutary effects that Hollywood's influence on American culture produced during the periods of the Great Depression and World War Two (see note 3). What Findley does acknowledge with horror, as noted earlier, is Hitler's appropriation of Hollywood's strategies to seduce and enrapture an audience--the entire German nation--for an unequivocally terrifying purpose. This is a theme he explores in detail in The Butterfly Plague.
down the stairs behind her--moving her hips in
perfect time to the music....

Annie pressed his groin against the bar.
He closed his eyes.
He opened them.
Someone was running. Someone was calling.
"Help! Help! Jesus! Jesus! Help me! Help!"

Annie leapt across the bar.

Lana Turner froze against the rail. She had
reached the bottom step. But someone real was
falling through the lobby. Someone real. A man. With
his hand on his crotch--and his crotch all
bloodied....

"Kill her!" Rudecki screamed. "Kill the fucker!
She cut my balls off! Kill her!"

Annie stopped dead in his tracks....

He raised the Browning Repeater, making a
short, clean sweep of the woman's path and he fired.
And she fell. In her moleskin coat.

And her razor spun out--whirring like a
propeller--all the way across the floor until it
stopped at Lana Turner's feet. (299-301)

As argued earlier, the blurring of life and art, the real
and the simulated, is not viewed by Findley as a negative
phenomenon. The experience of art, despite the novel's
avowed critique of the modernist aesthetic, is a fundamental facet of fulfillment for Findley's characters. Without it, they are less than human. Furthermore, there is in Famous Last Words a pronounced endorsement of the reconciliatory potential of the imaginative faculty in its creation of aesthetic forms. While most critics have little problem locating the negative critique of aestheticism in the novel, few have identified the salutary character of the aesthetic which is, perhaps, established between the lines. It is less visible because the endorsement resides in the critique of an aesthetically impoverished positivism informing Mauberley's narrative and providing the basis for Freyberg's character. A lucid instance of this critique occurs when Mauberley first meets the majority of the cabal's members and observes:

So this is history as she is never writ, I thought. Some day far in the future, some dread academic, much too careful of his research, looking back through the biased glasses of a dozen other "historians," will set this moment down on paper. And will get it wrong. Because he will not acknowledge that history is made in the electric moment, and its flowering is all in chance. (180)
Mauberley's point here is that the order historians place on past events is a forced and arbitrary one which can easily fail to capture the randomness and spontaneity with which real history occurs. Hutcheon, in The Politics of Postmodernism, claims that Famous Last Words "raise[s] the issue of how the intertexts of history, its documents or its traces, get incorporated into such an avowedly fictional context, while somehow also retaining their historical documentary value" (82). At times, as the passage above illustrates, the novel goes even further, disavowing altogether the claims to validity of conventional documentary history. In another passage, as Mauberley is recalling a series of pleasant evenings spent with Wallis, the Duke, and Isabella Loverso, he observes that selective omissions also form the basis of any narrative, personal or public. "One night, Wallis told the story of her life and left out China. I was very hurt. Then the Duke told the story of his life and left out having abdicated. Wallis was very pleased. Nonetheless these stories told the temper of the times and the motto we had adopted: the truth is in our hands now" (177).

While the truth about which Mauberley writes leads to ignominious ends, the point here, as in the other three novels studied in this dissertation, is that history is as much invented as observed. The corollary is
that historiography must also employ the exercise of the imagination in order to render meaningful a particular account. Quinn, in reading Mauberley's narrative, is aware from the start that it's "a matter of interpretation," that Mauberley's narrative is as much a work of construction on the part of both reader and writer as it is an historical document to be either "verified" or "refuted." Like Swift's narrator, Quinn has an appreciation for the power and function of narrative as a vehicle through which human subjectivity comes to know itself as well as its role in the world. Mauberley, through his words, is a constant reminder to Quinn—and by extension the reader of the novel—that history is an inexorably heterogenous compilation, and whoever might attempt to sort out the "truth" from the "lies," the "fact" from the "fiction," will stand, at long last, empty handed, duped, deceived. For history is made "in the electric moment," and in the attempt to simplify it, to break it down, to order it, it slips out of our grasp entirely. As Crick reminds his students in Waterland, "the more you try to dissect events, the more you lose hold of what you took for granted in the first place—the more it seems it never actually occurred, but occurs, somehow, only in the imagination" (121). Quinn, too, can in no way ignore the role his own imagination plays in making sense of Mauberley's story. Sitting down to read
it, he finds himself "in another time, another idiom. And the voice he heard was hoarse with the distance it had journeyed in order to be heard" (60). Quinn knows only too well that the history he reads requires for its understanding the exercise of the imagination--on Mauberley's part and on his own.

Quinn's close identification with Mauberley does, arguably, bias his convictions from the start. Both men place great emphasis on their appearance, on aesthetics--arguably Mauberley's tragic flaw. Mauberley's "fall" is indeed, as Lorraine York points out, both a fall into evil as well as "a specifically artistic fall." Pound, however, placed great faith in "the healing powers of aestheticism," and believed that "the artist's word is a potent antidote to 'falling'." Invoking Pound's Cantos, York points to a passage which reads, "'Se casco,' said Bianca Capello / 'non casco in ginnocchiom' [I fall, but I do not fall to my knees] / and with one day's reading a man may have the key in his hands (Cantos LXXIV, 427)" (93-94). When Quinn finishes reading Mauberley's narrative, some sort of cathartic transformation has taken place, not just in Quinn, but in the reader too. Critics who argue that Quinn's interpretive strategy is as flawed as Freyberg's invariably seize on the same early remark from the outer narrator: "Quinn was absolutely certain he would exonerate Hugh Selwyn
Mauberley" (58). Yet what they all, without exception, fail to comment on is the fact that Quinn's hermeneutic experience actually refutes his preconceptions so vehemently that, at one point, he comes to loathe himself for "having made the mistake of thinking [Mauberley and the other members of the cabal] were human beings" (292). Freyberg, however, goes through no transformation and, as mentioned earlier, dooms humanity to an eternal recurrence of the same. The redemptive quality of Mauberley's narrative, then, lies not so much in Mauberley's self-denunciation, as it does in Quinn's reading of that experience--and by extension the reader's experience of reading Quinn's experience of reading Mauberley's narrative. The interpretive process at the heart of the novel is reflected and deflected from the centre of the narrative, outward, via Mauberley and then Quinn, to the reader, who becomes responsible, as a co-creator of the narrative, for integrating the fractured elements into a provisional whole.

The distinction between fact and fiction in the novel, far from being maintained, as some critics have argued, gives way to an overarching embrace of a transforming aesthetic, grounded in the transference of hermeneutic responsibility from the characters in the novel to the reader. Mauberley's prefatory caveat, "All I have written here...is true; except the lies," like the
epigraph to chapter five attributed to Pound, "End fact. Try fiction," turn out, ultimately, to be facetious or tongue-in-cheek tributes, parodic invocations, to an outdated epistemology. What they really do, as Findley himself argues, is alert the reader, if only indirectly, to the imaginative constituents involved in any narrative construction, on the part of both reader and author. The reader has no way of separating all the "truths" from all the "lies" in Mauberley's narrative, and the imperative, "End fact. Try fiction" helps us no great deal either.¹¹

Underlying the intentional problematizing of the fact/fiction and truth/lie distinctions is a message of tremendous significance. The disruption of conventional categories draws our attention to the ways in which the central characters respond to such displacement. In Freyberg we find a relentless refusal to abandon a moral commitment to identifying and delineating the nature and

¹¹Findley's position on the fact/fiction distinction is virtually identical to that of E. L. Doctorow. Admiring Doctorow's characterization of J. P. Morgan in Ragtime, Findley remarks, "He's telling us the truth and he's found a way of telling it in fiction by telling us who Morgan really was--the user of humanity for his own ends. And that's what he was about--that's not a lie. It's just a wonderful fictional encapsulation of the spirit of who he was" (Interview 5). The novelist's truth, Findley believes, runs deeper than superficial distinctions between fact and fiction. Truth, as both Doctorow and Findley view it, is comprised of narratival forms which intertwine fact and fiction to provide a more meaningful understanding of a given person, place, or era.
number of the crimes against humanity perpetrated during the Nazi reign of terror. But in Quinn we discover an earnest desire to comprehend the means by which a man of good will, a man whom he respected, could have partaken of so evil an undertaking as the Holocaust. Freyberg's quest leads to the single-minded pursuit of branding and punishing the guilty. Quinn leads us deeper into a general understanding of the entire phenomenon and its roots not just in one man or several men, but in the soul of all humanity. What both men stand for are integral requirements for the future of civilization. Without Freyberg, evil cannot be identified. Without Quinn, it cannot be understood.

Against this backdrop the reader becomes aware that just as Freyberg and Quinn take a position with respect to Mauberley's narrative, so too must the reader. In between Freyberg's sharp distinctions between "us" and "them" and Quinn's dangerously close identification with Mauberley, there is a great deal of space in which to situate oneself. Like Findley himself, perhaps, the reader finds a Freyberg and a Quinn arguing within him/herself (Interview 1). Both men represent diametrically opposed forms through which is established the collective memory of our past. And while Freyberg's righteous indignation is a significant and just response to Mauberley's participation in the cabal, it is Quinn's
desire to understand which contributes more to establishing a collective memory which might help to prevent further atrocities from occurring. Findley, partial as he is to the Jungian worldview, places great store in the power of our collective unconscious--but also our collective memory. If we would only pay attention to it, things might get better in this world, he believes. As the title character of Findley's latest novel, Pilgrim, puts it (in a letter to Jung, appropriately enough): "At every given opportunity, we have rejected the truth of our collective memory and marched back into the flames as if fire were our only salvation" (468). In very different ways, both Quinn and Freyberg stand as tributes to "the truth of our collective memory." Freyberg's holocaust museum affirms the materiality of a history we cannot by any means afford to forget. Quinn's determination to understand Mauberley's narrative exemplifies our role in (re)creating that history in the narrative forms which constitute our collective memory. Is the conflict thus resolved? For the reader, perhaps, a resolution or

12In a sense, it is Freyberg who, because of his obsession with creating a shrine of Holocaust artifacts, contributes more to a remembrance of the past. His lack of compassion, however, along with his alienation from others, precludes any real possibility for a collective understanding.
integration occurs inasmuch as he or she perceives the significance of both the Freybergs and the Quinns of this world. And yet, as Findley himself notes, both Freyberg and Quinn as individual types "will never, never never make it" (Interview 2). On a very concrete level, a fundamental impasse characterizes the central thematic concern of the novel.

Irving Howe, in a 1986 epilogue to *The Political Novel*, laments the disappearance of "first-rate novels dealing with political themes" in Western countries since the Second World War. "Political fiction," he writes, requires wrenching conflicts, a drama of words and often blood, roused states of being, or at least a memory of these" (254). And while Howe observes a widespread dearth of such novels in Western countries since the Second World War, it is no hyperbolic claim to affirm the inclusion of *Famous Last Words* in Howe's definition of political fiction. The "literature of blockage" or of "impasse"--a term he employs to describe the works of writers as diverse as Solzhenitsyn, Naipaul, Kundera, and García Marquez--is a category not inappropriately applied to Findley's *Famous Last Words*. The enigmatic ending of

13 There are, to be sure, a number of other contemporary Western writers who might justifiably fit Howe's criteria--among them, Americans Don DeLillo and Robert Stone seem likely candidates. See Bull.
Famous Last Words obliquely highlights an impasse around which no going seems possible. On more than one level, Findley's inquiry comes up against a wall.

Furthermore, in identifying a "literary moral problem" in the work of Naipaul, Howe muses: "one may wonder whether, in some final reckoning, a serious novelist can simply allow the wretchedness of his depicted scene to become the limit of his vision" (268). One of the great strengths of Famous Last Words is that it's hermeneutic strategy affords a way out of such a dilemma. Unlike Naipaul, whom Howe deems to be "beleaguered by his own truths" (268), Findley, in his depiction of Freyberg's and Quinn's opposing interpretive positions in regard to Mauberley's narrative points toward, as I have argued, the reader's own hermeneutic responsibility. A paralyzing apathy is thus sidestepped, or at least muted, as the reader's role as a crucial participant in historical (re)construction is invoked, questioned, and interrogated. The central characters of Famous Last Words may cleave to their own respective political commitments, but this does not lead, as it did in an earlier era--in Koestler's Darkness at Noon, for example--to an ideological stalemate. Findley opens up the arena of both history and politics with more questions than answers, in both the content and form of
his work.

"Famous Last Words," argues Anne Geddes Bailey, "refuses to rewrite history or literature as it is conventionally known or accepted. Instead, the legendary texts of these historic figures' lives are disrupted within a fictional frame which makes readers uncomfortable with history and literature, forcing them to reconsider the political nature of both" (125). Bailey touches here on the key process at work in Findley's novel. I would add only this: along with any discomfort the reader experiences in the disruption of traditional distinctions comes an appreciation for the possibilities of aesthetic expression to restore imagination to its rightful place in the narratives of our collective past.
Chapter 6

Fiction, History, and Narrative:

Some Speculations on the Future of the Past

Alas, and yet what are you, my written and painted thoughts! It is not long ago that you were still so many-coloured, young and malicious, so full of thorns and hidden spices you made me sneeze and laugh--and now? You have already taken off your novelty and some of you, I fear, are on the point of becoming truths....

Friedrich Nietzsche

The last decades of the twentieth century have witnessed a radical revisioning across a broad spectrum of disciplines in the humanities. Philosophers, historians, and literary critics alike have all sought, in their respective fashions, to describe, analyse, and chart the course of an epistemic shift which has taken hold of the Western world's collective consciousness as well as the imagination of its greatest writers. And yet, the term "postmodernism," many would agree, is now too general, too vague, and too overused to have any utility within the scope of a single study. Indeed, many would
agree that what now exists is a widespread proliferation of postmodernisms. This diverse multiplicity has consequently brought about new imperatives for criticism. As the horizon of what constitutes "the postmodern" expands, transcending the bounds of existing nomenclature, the questions of the day have necessarily become more particularized, magnifying and attempting to elucidate one or more of the many facets which constitute the postmodern age. The present study has evolved in this fashion. Focussing exclusively on the genre of historiographic metafiction, a case has been made for the mimetic character of four contemporary novels, for the extent to which they reflect the processes through which a narrativized past comes to have meaning for readers.

In retrospect, the potential terrain to be covered is now visibly greater than first conceived at the start of this project. Where possible, footnotes have been provided to indicate where untrodden paths might lead. "Mapping the postmodern," as at least one critic has observed, is no easy business.¹ Navigating the minefields of historiographic metafiction, though more restricted in scope, has its own problems. Like the shifting Fenlands of Swift's Waterland, the landmarks of subjectivity,

¹The reference is to the title of the article by Andreas Huyssen which subsequently became the final chapter in his book, After the Great Divide.
epistemology and ontology are, in this particular genre, fundamentally unstable—but perhaps intentionally so.

In defending the mimetic character of these novels, I have argued against the imposition of a static paradigm of "history." By freeing these novels of an a priori concept of historical representation to which they should conform, a space can be opened up for a dynamic unfolding of radically new possibilities for historical representation which are inextricably bound up with contemporary changes in the current Zeitgeist's appreciation of the concepts of temporality and history. It may prove fruitful, at this point, to take note of some correlations between the fiction discussed in this study and contemporary theoretical debates over time, history, and the nature of "the real."

As much as possible, I have tried to let the novels treated here speak for themselves, illuminating through their own multiplicity of instances the space within which a reconceptualization of historical representation has been occurring. The assembly of quotations selected from each novel voices a definitive objection to the conventional criteria used in evaluating historical narratives. And yet, more than negation is at stake here. As I have tried to show with each novel, the intentional violation of established conventions leads not to escapist gamesmanship, postmodern pastiche, or moral
entropy—to cite just a few accusations emanating from contemporary criticism over the last few decades. Instead, the productive contradictions in which each of these novels has engaged point towards a revaluing of the historical sense in much more salutary terms.

In the first chapter, a critical survey was presented which illustrated the variety of charges which have been levelled against postmodern fiction over the last three decades. In proposing to analyse the particular genre of historiographic metafiction, I suggested that a mimetic character could be found in a variety of works from this subset of postmodern fiction. In chapter two, the concept of "rhythmic time" was offered as an apt model to account for *Ragtime*'s mode of historical representation. Doctorow's particular strategy, it was argued, is to liberate the past from the strictures of conventional historical narrative by creating new spaces in which multiple narratives can co-exist, effectively breaching the regulative control of linear time.

In chapter three, conventional historiography as an "objective" (or scientific) model of narrative was challenged through *Waterland*'s repeated illustrations of the dangers in adhering to such a model. Swift's narrator consistently undermines the concept of historical causality, while at the same time affirming the
significance of narrative in all of its forms. In chapter four, the significance of an intersubjective oral history was weighed against the value of an autonomous but alienating written history. Erdrich's *Tracks* illuminates the subjugated histories of Native culture, and points toward the incalculable importance of orality to Native North American historical consciousness.

Chapter five's analysis of *Famous Last Words* is well positioned in a number of respects. While it further explored the dissolution of the fact/fiction distinction in contemporary historical narrative, it also revealed the dangers which accompany an unsuspecting faith in the power of historical narrative to convey "the real." Yet the novel also reminded us--and is itself an example--of the ineluctability of historical narrative as an access point to the historical event. Even the artifacts collected by Freyberg require a story, a narrative account, in which they become contextualized and come to have a meaning. Furthermore, Freyberg's repeated and emphatic affirmation of the materiality of history is not only counter-balanced by Quinn's appreciation of Mauberley's narrative as the most important piece of historical evidence, but is itself undermined by the means through which it is conveyed to the reader of the novel: as a narrative form.

What each of these novels establishes in varying
degrees and through differing strategies is twofold: first, the significance of historical narrative to subjectivity, community, and civilization in general; second, the increasingly acknowledged use of fictional material in the construction of those historical narratives. While the former issue, I suspect, will not draw much opposition, it is the latter claim which has become the subject of an animated (to say the least) debate among literary critics, historians, and philosophers. The interdisciplinary nature of the debate is, to a large extent, responsible for its complexity. In light of this, it is no surprise that interdisciplinary critics and cultural theorists have provided the more thorough analyses of the phenomenon.

Andreas Huyssen, in Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia, cites the increased speed of information technologies as the primary reason for the current cultural obsession with memory and with the past. He also observes that as Enlightenment ideals and the ideologies of progress and modernization have gradually lost ground, "memory as a concept" has increasingly drawn interest from a variety of disciplinary quarters. "[T]he shift from history to memory," he argues, "represents a welcome critique of compromised teleological notions of history rather than being simply anti-historical, relativistic, or subjective" (6). We are in the midst,
Huyssen reasons, of "a reorganization of the structure of temporality within which we live our lives....The way our culture thinks about time is far from natural even though we may experience it as such" (8).²

Such a view goes a long way toward explaining the narrative strategies and thematic concerns of contemporary historiographic metafiction. These novels need to be examined within the context of the shifting structure of temporality our culture is experiencing. What these novels are telling (or showing) us is that the past is as much "constructed" as it is an event or series of events which "happens." Huyssen's claim that there has been a shift in emphasis from (conventional) "history" to "memory" thus gains credibility in view of contemporary fictional obsessions. Collective, "public" history recedes to the background as private historical accounts based on a dependence on "memory" take centre stage.

This is not to say that the concept of a collective, public history is no longer relevant or possible. It is, rather, a call to retheorize the process through which any public history is constructed and to identify the contributing factors involved. The extent to which subjective, imaginative, and fictional content permeates

²Hayden White similarly argues: "while events may occur in time, the chronological codes used to order them are culture specific, not natural" (Figural Realism 9).
such histories cannot now be denied or ignored. What remains in question, perhaps, is the substantiation of the salutary character of these features. Does the disappearance of history as a master narrative warrant emergency sirens or does it herald the blossoming of new genres capable of responding to the crisis in temporality identified by Huyssen?

If Huyssen is right, the obsession with memory is actually a "defense...against the attack of the present on the rest of time"--a peculiar variation of the modernist defense against the burden of the past on the present, as articulated by Nietzsche (88). Far from lamenting the disappearance of (a Marxist sense of) history, we should welcome postmodern versions of history as a refuge from an overwhelming present. And while the new paradigms reject most of the Enlightenment ideals (rational transparency of cognition, universalism of many kinds, etc.), they nonetheless embody the utopian energies of that era, rather than signalling their atrophy (89).

Huysssen is quick to admit that most poststructuralists remain reluctant to align themselves with any notion of utopianism, "which they blame for all the evils of modernity." Yet Huyssen sees a faulty logic in such a position: "For only if one collapses all differences between the utopian imagination at the core of the enlightenment and the historical mission perpetrated in the name of rationality, democracy, and freedom, would the poststructuralist critique of utopia have a point" (89).
This is a bold claim to make, especially in light of Baudrillard's cynical assessment of the postmodern condition. As Baudrillard sees things, utopia becomes an impossible target in postmodern society because our culture "has made reality itself u-topian a no-place, the site of a vanishing act" (Huyssen 90). Summarizing the Baudrillardian view, Huyssen outlines the dilemma:

Postmodern media culture deterritorializes and deconstructs, delocalizes and decodes. It dissolves reality in the simulacrum, makes it vanish behind or rather on the screens of word and image processing machines. What is lost according to this account is not utopia but reality. At stake is the agony of the real, the fading of the senses, the dematerialization of the body, both figuratively and literally. Utopia is no longer needed, or so it is claimed, because all utopias have already fulfilled themselves, and that fulfilment is fatal and catastrophic. Thus goes the argument of Baudrillard's Les Strategies Fatales. (90)

While Baudrillard's account is "improperly totalizing," and "suffers from excessive extrapolation from just one sector of our society, the sector of high-tech cyberspace, to our contemporary life-world," it
does, Huyssen admits, "make us rethink the relation of reality and utopia in our age" (91). It prompts a reconceptualizing of the utopian impulse in an era when "reality can no longer be represented, understood, or conceptualized in terms of a stable episteme" (91). The consequence, as Huyssen observes, is that "the search for the real has itself become utopian, and this search is fundamentally invested in a desire for temporality" (101). Baudrillard's cynicism thus ironically opens the door to a radically new utopian impulse. I quote Huyssen at length once more for both the clarity and explanatory power of his observations:

[W]hen media saturation wipes out spatial and temporal difference, by making every place, every time available to instant replay, then the turn to history and memory can also be read as an attempt to find a new mooring.... The desire for history...is parallel, I think, to the desire for the real at a time when reality eludes us more than ever. The old opposition between reality/utopia has lost its simple binary structure because we acknowledge that reality is not just simply out there, but is also always at the sight of some construction, just as utopia is, and yet different from it. At the same time in literature, the old dichotomy between
history and fiction no longer holds. Not in the sense that there is no difference, but...in the sense that historical fiction can give us a hold on the world, on the real, however fictional that hold may turn out to be. (101)

Huyssen touches here on a point that both Doctorow and Findley have adamantly defended in interviews and have illustrated in their fiction. Both writers have argued against the distinction between fiction and history--not because there is no difference between the two (as Huyssen also points out), but because the difference is greatly outweighed by the similar functions they serve and perhaps have always served. Are we, as readers, deluded and deceived by the fictional conversations between Morgan and Ford? Or are we given insight into a reality which can no longer be accessed directly? If Quinn undergoes a transformation in Famous Last Words, is it because he has successfully distinguished between the "truth" and the "lies" in Mauberley's narrative? Or is it because he has made a connection, has been given a "hold on the world" at a time when very little made sense? And what else is Swift's Waterland, if not an example itself of the commonalities shared by history and fiction, the life-sustaining function embodied by each? Tracks, perhaps most clearly of all, illustrates the power of
historical narrative when it invokes mythical (fictional) elements.

In a sense, what Huyssen claims historical fiction does for us is not all that radically new. A number of critics for a long time have maintained that the responsibility of historical fiction is not so much to get the facts straight as it is to convey the sense of an epoch or era. Irving Howe is representative of this group: "That a novel includes an accurate report of an historical event is not necessarily a point in its favour. What would be a point in its favour is the presence of that quality which we loosely call 'true to life'" (99). Howe would find little opposition to such a claim in the current academic and cultural milieu. Implicit within his assertion, however, is an undefined (but obviously assumed) subscription to the possibility of an "accurate" report of a given historical event. What all four novels examined here repeatedly undermine is this certainty traditionally attributed to historical knowledge. Findley's Quinn and Freyberg illustrate poignantly the contradictions and complexities of ascertaining historical accuracy. "Accurate according to whom?" would be the question posed by Erdrich's Nanapush, mindful as he is of the power of the white man's paper documents. Swift's Crick would remind us that history is "just a yarn," while Doctorow's narrator playfully
illustrates the contradictions between different versions of a given historical epoch: "There were no Negroes.... Apparently there were Negroes."

Echoing Howe's sentiment, Avrom Fleishman defines the historical novel as one which conveys "the feeling of how it was to live in another age." But he also cites criteria such as "the presence of a realistic background" and "the presence of a specific link to history" (3-4). Once again, such criteria beg the question of just what it is, exactly, which constitutes "reality" and "history." The genre of the historical novel, according to this model, must take for granted the legitimacy of an unquestioned "official history" so that it might adequately represent that history. But, as Martha Tuck Rozett observes, what contemporary historical fictions almost all share is a "resistance to old certainties about what happened and why; a recognition of the subjectivity, the uncertainty, the multiplicity of truths inherent in any account of past events; and a disjunctive, self-conscious narrative, frequently produced by eccentric and/or multiple narrating voices" (146).

The genre of the historical novel now finds itself characterized by a perplexing paradox. On the one hand, it exerts a demonstrable resistance to conventional modes of historical discourse (shared by a number of historians
as well). Yet, on the other hand, as Huyssen's remarks illustrate, there exists in this ever-burgeoning genre a resistance to the overabundance of information, of "media saturation," of "the attack of the present on the rest of time," manifested by a profound desire to return to history, to memory, as a stabilizing counterforce. Swift's narrator exemplifies the confusion such a paradox imparts as his nostalgic longing for ordering his past conflicts with his professional scepticism of historical continuity. Among his rhetorical tics is an insistence that he tell his stories in the proper order--"let me begin at the beginning"--and yet he is equally certain that history does not go in a straight line, but goes "in circles."

Fleishman, writing in 1971, was well aware of the growing mistrust of conventional historical discourse among contemporary writers. He observed that, "with the passing of the sense not only of progress but even of comprehensible relationships among historical events," the future of the historical novel held only two possible alternatives: it would either have to "join the experimental movement of the modern novel or retire from the province of serious literature" (255). Three decades later, Fleishman's forecast seems a little too extreme in its bipolar divisiveness. To be fair, one could say that contemporary historical fiction has done a little of
both. It certainly has enlisted a number of experimental strategies in the service of a reconceptualization of the process of writing history. A number of writers have also indulged in a playful attitude in their reconstruction of a given time or place. And yet, at the same time, it cannot be said that historiographic metafiction has withdrawn from the domain of "serious literature." If a work such as *Famous Last Words* can be described as a novel which is not serious literature, then the question could reasonably be asked, where can one find a serious contemporary novel? All four novels examined in this dissertation, in fact, address moral and political issues which unequivocally belong in the category of serious literature—even as their (occasionally) playful attitude towards history manifests itself from time to time. The genre of historiographic metafiction has emerged in a multifaceted body of literature among whose primary characteristics are paradox and contradiction. Sometimes playful, sometimes serious, sometimes intensely political, and more than occasionally laden with moral concern, this particular genre, over the last three decades or so, has manifested with decisive frequency the major preoccupations of our time and of times past. Rather than joining the ranks of experimental literature, it has, instead, selectively incorporated experimental strategies in order to draw attention to a shifting
concept: that of history, itself. If, as Huyssen suggests, the contemporary obsession with memory is a reaction to the attack of the present on the rest of time, it is certainly not an obsession characterized by naive nostalgia. If, caught up in a whirlwind of information systems and various forms of media, citizens of the Western world find refuge and solace in novelistic historical narratives, it is with a concomitant awareness of the constructed nature of not just fictional narratives, but of all narratives.

The question this study has tried to answer, however, concerns the extent to which this very constructedness diminishes, obscures, or otherwise precludes altogether the claim these fictions might make for possessing a mimetic function. In *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hutcheon defines historiographic metafiction as a body of work which "does not mirror reality; nor does it reproduce it. It cannot. There is no pretense of simplistic mimesis in historiographic metafiction. Instead, fiction is offered as another of the discourses by which we construct our versions of reality" (40). Indeed, these fictions do not "mirror reality" or lay claim to a "simplistic mimesis." Yet, as Hutcheon also points out, this kind of fiction does make "a claim to some kind of (newly problematized) historical reference. It does not so much deny as contest the
'truths' of reality and fiction—the human constructs by which we manage to live in our world" (40). Historical reality, in other words, is not simply "out there." What we know as history comes to us in the same form as pure fictions (if there is such a thing) do, and a considerable amount of inventiveness is required in both forms of discourse.

Hayden White, in his recent work, Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect, tries to establish the "mutual implicativeness" of historical and literary writing. "Each in its own way," he argues, "is an example of a distinctly Western practice, not so much of representation as of presentation, which is to say, of production rather than of reproduction or mimesis" (ix). Yet White, like Hutcheon, still locates in fictional discourse a world-referential function. In the opening paragraph of his preface, he wastes little time in stating his primary objective, which is "to show how figurative language can be said to refer to reality quite as faithfully and much more effectively than any putatively literalist idiom or mode of discourse might do" (vii).

What seems to be at issue, then, is the precise way in which one defines the term "mimetic." From the outset of this study, I have invoked the Aristotelian view on the matter, which unequivocally defines mimesis in terms
which allow for a broad range of interpretive strategies on the part of the author in his or her quest to represent reality. Hutcheon, in *Narcissistic Narrative*, takes note of the rigidity with which proponents of traditional realism have invoked classical mimetic theory. "Even Aristotelian mimetic theory," she points out, "...allowed room for the imitation of creative process"--narration, or diegesis (40). However, "[w]hat classical exponents of 'traditional realism' ignored, when they turned to classical mimetic theory for support, was that the instinct to imitate is complimented, in the *Poetics*, by an equally strong impulse toward ordering (7: 2 and 4)" (41).

Jerry Varsava also invokes Aristotelian mimetic theory, arguing that Aristotle ascribes to it "a general quality that is often denied it in subsequent criticism....He very clearly assigns to the poet the responsibility--indeed, the right and privilege--to determine the manner of mimesis" (2). Paul Ricoeur, Varsava argues, "is correct in seeing a conflation of mimesis and poiesis in Aristotelian aesthetics" (3) and quotes Ricoeur as claiming:

On the one hand, it [Aristotle's concept of *mimesis*] expresses a world of human actions which is already there; tragedy is destined to express human reality,
to express the tragedy of life. But on the other hand, *mimesis* does not mean the duplication of reality; *mimesis* is not a copy: *mimesis* is *poiesis*, that is, construction, creation. (*Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* 179-80). (Varsava 3)

Hutcheon, Varsava, and Ricoeur all seem to agree that we should move away from a simplistic view of *mimesis* based on naive reflectionism and an implicit subscription to an essentially static view of history. Such a perspective, as Varsava warns, leads to the view that the novelist can effectively "freeze reality between the covers of his or her text. The reader of Balzac need not long for time-travel in order to experience Restoration France; the price of one's admission into Rastignac's world is not so inflated--one need only buy *Pere Goriot*" (5).

At some point in the history of criticism, Aristotelian mimetic theory was rendered much narrower in scope than perhaps originally intended. Mimesis, as Hutcheon points out, became a matter of "the relation of subject matter to empirical reality and truth" (*Narcissistic Narrative* 41). Diegesis, the narrative process, was excluded from the concept by the advocates of traditional realism. Contemporary metafiction, in many respects, is not so radically different from its
progenitors.¹ The challenge for contemporary criticism, as Hutcheon views the matter, is to reinsert the diegetic process within our understanding of what constitutes mimesis. "It is not that the emphasis has shifted from mimesis to the creating imagination, but rather that the critical terms in which we discuss that which is imitated in fiction must be opened again to make room for the new novels being written and read" (41).

Perhaps no one has done more work in the service of such a goal than Hayden White over the last few decades. White's recent work reiterates some of the claims he has been making for some time, but in a more accessible fashion than ever before. His scholarly competence in a number of disciplines lends his arguments a compelling cogency, and helps to illuminate with uncommon clarity the relationship between language and narrative which underlies his own views on mimesis. White's primary focus has, for a long time, been on "tropology" which, he explains, "is a more or less systematized cluster of notions about figurative language deriving from neoclassical rhetorics."² What it offers is a "perspective

¹One need only think of the reflexivity found in a work like Sterne's Tristram Shandy to see that metafiction is by no means a recent invention.

²The four general types of trope identified by neoclassical rhetorical theory are metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony (White 11).
on language from which to analyze the elements, levels, and combinatorial procedures of nonformalized, and especially pragmatic, discourses" (10), among which, he argues, historiography can be said to belong. Since the rules of discourse formation are not fixed in the human sciences, White points out, "efforts to construct a logic or even a grammar of narrative have failed" (10). Consequently, White maintains, we are left with no other recourse than to employ tropological analyses where historiography is concerned.

The implications which follow from all this are singularly relevant to the primary focus of this study. First, a general principle, perhaps the guiding principle underlying any serious discussion of the mimetic character of historiographic metafiction presents itself, as White puts it, in the following claim: "[O]ur experience of history is indissociable from our discourse about it; this discourse must be written before it can be digested as history; and this experience, therefore, can be as various as the different kinds of discourse met

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6White further explains: "Indeed, it is only by troping, rather than by logical deduction, that any given set of the kinds of past event we would wish to call historical can be (first) represented as having the order of a chronicle; (second) transformed by emplotment into a story with identifiable beginning, middle, and end phases; and (third) constituted as the subject of whatever formal arguments may be adduced to establish their 'meaning'--cognitive, ethical, aesthetic, as the case may be" (8).
with in the history of writing itself" (1). It is therefore no hyperbolic stretch to conclude that the "constitution of a chronicle as a set of events is an operation more poetic than scientific in nature. The events may be given, but their function as elements of a story are imposed upon them--by discursive techniques more tropological than logical in nature" (9, my italics).

What this means is that the conventional distinction between fact and fiction must be reconceptualized. "If there is no such thing as raw facts but only events under different descriptions," reasons White, "then factuality becomes a matter of the descriptive protocols used to transform events into facts" (18). What this does, in effect, is place figurative descriptions and literalist descriptions of a given event on the same continuum. One is no less "factual" than the other, they are merely "factological," as White puts it, "in a different way" (18).

White, underneath the extensive array of disciplinary terminology, is conveying a straightforward message. The great events of history are rendered comprehensible to us through a variety of discursive forms: both historiography and literature are two of these. The former, however, has no greater grasp on reality than the latter because, while the raw event must
be granted an ontological status, the "facts" consist of a linguistic structure, construed in one way or another according to a given set of rules. Events happen, but it is only through the tropological modalities of metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony that events are shaped into a discourse through which alone they come to have meaning for a given subject.

From the rich history of literature, an almost infinite resource of examples may be enlisted to illustrate White's point. "Ask for me tomorrow, and you shall find me a grave man," utters Mercutio, narrating, with an obvious ironic sensibility, his own demise. In the midst of tragedy, a comic remark radically changes our perspective on the event. One can only contemplate with horror the prospect of a history of the Holocaust presented in a similar tropological fashion. The choice of tropes fundamentally affects the meaning of any narrativized history. So it is with all historical and fictional narration.

Other tropological elements play an equally important role in both fictional and historical narrative. For example, whether events are depicted as parts of a whole or as isolated occurrences profoundly affects their consequent meaning as historical events. Swift, in Waterland, plays with this concept in a number of ways, challenging, or, at least, bringing to our
conscious awareness, the conventions by which we habitually employ the trope of synecdoche. Doctorow, perhaps even more subtly, achieves a similar feat by including within "the whole" parts which do not seem to belong, while at the same time inserting parts which either may or may not belong, instilling in the reader an awareness of the possible inclusion of fictional content in any ostensibly "strictly historical" narration. In Findley's narrative, a similar process is at work, but, as in Erdrich's novel, a much more pronounced political implication makes its way to the forefront, inextricably intertwined with the discourse on history. The overarching feature all four novels possess is a pervasive sense of how various tropes shape our understanding of the past.

In returning to Huysssen's observations, it might just be possible to locate, however imprecisely, the direction in which the contemporary historical novel is heading. Despite recent eulogies from a variety of quarters, the serious novel is not dead, or even in poor health. Much less is the historical novel in grave danger of any sort. As the borders between life and art, history and fiction, collapse, and as the very ground beneath our feet loses the stability it appeared to have in an earlier age, opportunities have emerged for the historical novel to redefine its role within a culture
besieged by increasingly invasive (and pervasive) information technologies. The contemporary historical novel may well become one of the few moorings in a tempest of unknown magnitude.

Yet, if the current obsession with memory is indeed "a defense against the attack of the present on the rest of time," it is also a defense characterised by a concomitant awareness of its own strategies of rebellion. The deliberate obfuscation of distinctions between fiction and reality is blatantly paraded in shameless fashion before the reader. Historiographic metafiction, as Hutcheon points out, flaunts its own paradoxes: "The interaction of the historiographic and the metafictional foregrounds the rejection of the claims of both 'authentic' representation and 'inauthentic' copy alike, and the very meaning of artistic originality is as forcefully challenged as is the transparency of historical referentiality" (Poetics 110). In its challenging of conventional distinctions, historiographical metafiction opens up the domain of "the real" in such a way that readers perceive both the importance of the past and also the ways in which it is constructed. Such a process is nothing if not empowering. If, as Huyssen argues, fiction can give us a hold on the world, it can continue to do so with abundant vigor as readers are shown, time and again, that we construct our
histories--our sense of ourselves--in the same way that we construct our fictions.

In the embryonic dawn of a new millennium, it is by no means easy to characterize the prevailing sentiment concerning the direction in which our "serious literature" (among which the contemporary historical novel, I would argue, still belongs) is leading us. At the very least, it can be said that pessimism and despair are somewhat less in favour after a non-eventful January first, 2000. As the overinflated fears of apocalyptic doom have dissipated in an all too flaccid anticlimax, attention has returned to charting the course of generic trends which have had little interest in paying tribute to such a numerical contingency. Most fiction writers over the past thirty years have gambled on the probability that the end of the world is still some time away, and those concerned with history have focussed instead on a number of other issues: the problem of representation, the role of fictive invention in historical narrative, and the influence of hegemonic forces on the historical record, to name but a few. Most of these issues have been at the forefront of debates for decades, and what can now be said about them may well ring true, but perhaps, on occasion, will also bear with it a stale air--the prosaic effluvium of the already said. Still, even ostensible redundancies serve a purpose
in underscoring the possibilities inherent within the
genre of the contemporary historical novel. Against
relentless vilification by traditional historiographers
and proponents of a narrowly defined literary realism,
such repetition constitutes welcome support for an oft
beleaguered and unduly maligned genre—a genre, it is no
great stretch to claim, which contains within it the
hopes of Western civilization.

As attention now turns to the road ahead, and as the
fractured façade of millennial endtime—effete, but not
forgotten—is sheepishly swept under the cultural carpet,
two processes seem to dominate the present course and
probable future of "the past" in contemporary historical
fiction. First, along with an increasing awareness of the
constructed nature of all narratives has come the
liberation (and dismantling) of entrenched historical
records from the grasp of oppressive cultural forces,
manifested (one would hope) in the dissolution of the
hegemonic hold such forces have perpetuated in the name
of "progress," "democracy," and "freedom" (to name but a
few of colonialism's nefarious euphemisms for the
wholesale obliteration of native cultures all over the
globe). There seems to be no shortage of oppressed
peoples and subcultures emerging to reclaim their own
versions—their own constructions—of their past. The
relative success of these historical (and political)
initiatives may be a question for debate, but it cannot be denied that as a direct consequence of the Western world's shifting sense of historical consciousness a political reconfiguration of some magnitude is indeed underway. That this process will continue seems certain, and with it, in all probability, will also come the complete dissolution of a sense that a single, univocal "official" historical record is possible at all. At the very least, there will certainly be a number of competing "official" versions.

Second, the increasing emphasis on the imaginative faculty as it contributes (and, in part, constitutes) historical consciousness opens up regions of infinite expanse for the representation--the presentation--of historical reality. What the historical fiction of the last few decades has illustrated is the power--personal, cultural, and political--of the imagination to shape the world in which one lives. Fiction, far from the status Plato once accorded it (as twice-removed from the real), has now come into its own as a reality as "real" as any other. The richness and multiplicity of the Western world's understanding of historical reality will, in the future (if it is not already widely believed to be the case today), be limited only to the fictive constructions, the tropological modalities, through which we make meaning out of that inexorably enigmatic mystery
known as human existence.

As White exclaims with some finality, "[a] failure of historical consciousness occurs when one forgets that history, in the sense of both events and accounts of events, does not just happen but is made" (13). Through both their content and their form, the four novels treated in this study have all attested to the veracity of White's claim. If the writing of history is more poetic than scientific in nature, these novels have born witness to the multiplicity of forms in which a given historical event is rendered meaningful by (and for) a variety of human subjects.

For a select number of culture-specific purposes, many of the citizens and institutions inhabiting the Western world will continue striving to separate fact from fiction. But in the minds of a growing number of historiographers, literary critics, writers, and readers, the distinction has given way to an appreciation of the fundamental role imagination plays in our understanding of history. Few serious-minded thinkers will question the ontological status of the great historical events of our epoch. But even fewer will be able to defend credibly a position which denies imagination its vital role in endowing the Western world with a sense of where it has come from, and where it might be going.


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