

# The Canadian Postmodern

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A Study of Contemporary  
English-Canadian Fiction

LINDA HUTCHEON

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- <sup>14</sup> This list is gleaned from *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962).
- <sup>15</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *Counterblast* (London: Rapp and Whiting, 1970), pp. 13-14.
- <sup>16</sup> For open avowals of the influence of this book, see Robert Kroetsch, *The Crow Journals* (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1980), pp. 11, 18, 29; and Jack Hodgins, in an interview with Geoff Hancock, *Canadian Fiction Magazine* 32/3 (1979/80), especially pp. 39, 62, 63.
- <sup>17</sup> See Suzanne Lamy, *d'elles* (Montréal: l'Hexagone, 1979). The theory behind much of this can be found in views such as those of Kristeva in 'D'une identité à l'autre' (*Tel Quel* 62 [1975], pp. 10-27), where she contrasts the (male) homogeneous 'symbolic' forces of language to the heterogeneous 'semiotic' ones—the rhythm, nonsense, etc. of infantile, psychotic, and poetic discourse. This latter she links to the pre-mirror stage (in Lacanian psychoanalytic terms) and thus to the instinctual and the maternal.
- <sup>18</sup> Northrop Frye, *The Great Code* (Toronto: Academic Press, 1982). See, in particular, pp. 6-25.
- <sup>19</sup> Rudy Wiebe, *The Temptations of Big Bear* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973), p. 28. All further references will appear in parentheses in the text. For a related and most interesting reading of Wiebe's *The Scorched-Wood People* in the light of Harold Innis's *Empire and Communications*, see Stan McMullin, 'Wiebe, History, and Fiction', *Journal of Canadian Fiction* 28-9 (1980), pp. 249-52. McMullin shows how this novel (like *Temptations*, I would argue) illustrates the way literate cultures can command territorial space in different ways than oral cultures can, because centralized power (made possible by bureaucracy) is more easily brought into being with writing. The clash of the two cultures leads to a loss of tradition and stability for the oral one.
- <sup>20</sup> Wiebe recounts an even more obvious progression from written historical fact to oral legend (ballads) to prose fiction in his telling of the tale of Albert Johnson, the 'mad trapper'. See 'The Death and Life of Albert Johnson: Collected Notes on a Possible Legend', in *Figures in a Ground*, ed. Diane Bessai and David Jackel (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1978), pp. 219-46.
- <sup>21</sup> Jack Hodgins, *The Invention of the World* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1977), p. 69. All further references will appear in parentheses in the text.
- <sup>22</sup> Julius Champney, in the novel, reverses Becker's process. As a former mapmaker (an activity associated with the written imposition of a false and limiting order upon nature), now a poet, Julius enacts the oral/written and fiction/fact contradictions by imagining the voices of real history. He hears and sees in his mind, in detail, a scene he knows only in broad outline from the history of the region.

## Chapter 4

### Historiographic Metafiction

In Chapters 1 and 2 I argued that today's metafiction—those novels that, by definition, are self-referential or auto-representational—suggest that the mimetic connection between art and life (by which we still seem to want to define the novel genre) has changed. It no longer operates entirely at the level of *product* alone, that is, at the level of the representation of a seemingly unmediated world, but instead functions on the level of *process* too.<sup>1</sup> We as readers make the link between life and art, between the processes of the reception and the creation of texts: the act of reading participates in (and indeed posits or implies) the act of textual production too. The focus here is not on the reader and author as individual, real, historical agents or on the text as the product of action, but on the processes involved in what French linguistic theory calls the *énonciation*, or what I earlier called the discursive context of the writing and reading of the text.<sup>2</sup>

In his book *The Discourse of Modernism* Timothy J. Reiss claims that it is precisely this process, or 'discursive activity', that has been suppressed by our present dominant cultural model: the model that provides 'the conceptual tools that make the majority of human practices meaningful'.<sup>3</sup> Since the seventeenth century, Reiss argues, this model has been what he somewhat awkwardly calls an 'analytico-referential' one that has functioned equally powerfully in science, art, and philosophy. In all these domains the process (and the agents) of the act of *énonciation* have been ignored—for example, in the name of scientific objectivity and universality, or in the name of novelistic realism or critical, anti-romantic formalism. In Reiss's view, however, any such suppressed 'discursive practice' will gradually resurface and subvert the reigning dominant model. It will do so by creating (or revealing) such conflicting internal contradictions in that model that it will itself soon be called upon to form the replacement, the new tools of analysis. This, I suspect, is what we have been

witnessing in the rise of reader-response criticism over the last fifteen years: at least one of the agents of the *énonciation* is being recognized as part of our accepted analytic model. But, as Constance Rooke has argued in responding to Roland Barthes's 'The Death of the Author':<sup>4</sup> 'the reader has been exalted at the expense of the writer; the author has had to die so that the reader may live. This revolution seems to me unnecessarily bloody in one sense and bloodless in another.'<sup>5</sup> Indeed, if literary (as well as critical) practice were heeded, as we have been seeing, then we would have to take into account not just the reception of the text but also its production, since both are thematically part of most metafictional texts.

Witness the narratorial/authorial voice in George Bowering's *Burning Water*, explaining to the reader the conditions of his writing: 'We cannot tell a story that leaves us outside, and when I say we, I include you.'<sup>6</sup> In order to write of George Vancouver off the West Coast of Canada, 'George Bowering', the narrator, self-consciously goes in the opposite direction, eastward to Trieste. His story alternates between the narration of the process of writing or preparing to write (in the present tense) and the telling of Vancouver's past trials and exploits. Through his meditation on art and life he sees the difference between himself as novelist and Vancouver as namer, as the one who wanted to write 'all over the globe' and to 'be a famous story' (p. 62). Until his story is *told* by someone, though, Vancouver remains a man who can chart and name, but who cannot become a true 'man of imagination' (p. 75), despite his claim that the work of the imagination is not the opposite of his search for facts: 'The imagination depends upon facts, it feeds on them in order to produce beauty or invention, or discovery' (p. 155).

Gradually the controlling and obtrusive narrative voice is silenced and the story for a while appears to tell itself, just as in the 'good old days' of the realist novel for which the narrator has earlier been yearning (p. 23). But here there is a difference: 'as the voyage grew longer and the book got thicker he felt himself resting more and more on his faith in the readers: would they carry him, keep him afloat? He thought so' (p. 173). The difference is that this narrative voice, wondering about its reader, is 'thematizing' or allegorizing, in a sense, the act of *énonciation*, the interaction of textual production and reception, of writing and reading. Reading this is not unlike looking at Velázquez's

famous painting of *Las Meninas*, another inscribed allegory of *énonciation*: we look at a painting of a painter looking at us. Yet the real subjects of the work *being painted* (rather than *being viewed* by us) are the historical king and queen situated in our position but perceived by us only in a background mirror. *Las Meninas*—like *Burning Water*—is a work of art that presupposes the viewer's presence and then plays ironically with it; it also includes a representation of the producer at work.

There is clearly little attempt in this novel to attain even what Barthes called the 'effect of the real'.<sup>7</sup> As Bowering once wrote:

A realist fiction was intended to produce a window on the world. Hence the value of invisibility, or more properly of transparency. One did not so much read the novel as read through it to the world. Post-modern novels, on the other hand, are in a way decorative. If they are windows they are stained-glass windows. . . .<sup>8</sup>

And the maker of the window—and its viewer—are often figured within it. As we have seen in Chapter 2, or as Bowering (again writing as critic) has put it:

In the post-modern novel you do not identify with the characters. If you are to identify with anyone it is likely to be the author, who may lay his cards on the table & [sic] ask for your opinion or even help in finishing the book. In any case you are offered a look at the writer writing, not left in the dark waiting for the stage lights to be lit upon the scene for you and left there for your imagined occupation.<sup>9</sup>

As in the Bakhtinian carnival, in the postmodernist novel there are no footlights separating art and audience.

In a novel like Timothy Findley's *Famous Last Words* the situation is both the same and significantly different: Mauberley, the producer of part of the text within the text, is a writer whose 'whole and only ambition' in life, we are told, has been 'to describe the beautiful'.<sup>10</sup> Yet what he chooses to inscribe on the walls of the Grand Elysium Hotel is, as we shall see, anything but beautiful. The artist as aesthete is, in the end, only a voyeur; fittingly, if horribly, he dies with an ice-pick in his eye, a silver pencil in his hand. Readers too, however, are also in a sense voyeurs, though here ones whose vision of the protagonist's text, at least, is quite literally controlled by another character within

the novel, Quinn. We only read Mauberley's inscriptions as Quinn does; we too watch. As complicitous voyeurs we cannot be exempt from the implications of the novel's theme of culpable voyeuristic silence and the responsibility of action. Just as the sceptic, Freyburg, punches Quinn in the stomach (and then denies the act) in order to teach him a lesson about the falsity of the recording of history, we too are made to feel almost viscerally the enormity of the consequences of the historical events recounted. However, more subtle than the overt Brechtian technique of *Burning Water*, the self-consciousness of *Famous Last Words* points as well to reading as more than voyeurism, as an act in itself, an act that brings to life words on a wall or a page (and through them, their writer); through reading, the word is figuratively made flesh. This collaboration of receiver and producer, as allegorized in the relation of Quinn to Mauberley and his text, situates the novel's *énonciation*, its context of the joint creative acts of reading and writing . . . and of their potential ideological consequences.

Both of these novels are, however, more than just self-consciously fictive constructions that thematize their own 'discursive processes', in Reiss's terms. Both are also examples of what I have been calling historiographic metafiction, and both are concerned with the reader as much as with the writer.<sup>11</sup> The 'messages' of both their form and content are even intended to apply to more than just the single individual. In other words, they complicate what Robert Harlow's *Scann* asserts: ' . . . there is no such thing as history. There is only individual consciousness expanding.'<sup>12</sup> In historiographic metafiction the collective often balances the individual, just as the portrayal of reading balances that of writing. In contrast, however, to the case with documentary fiction (such as that of Thomas Keneally or of the New Journalists, as they were known in the sixties), the entire act of *énonciation* itself is never suppressed: in many of these novels there is a clearly defined and precisely situated narrating voice that overtly addresses a reader. There is none of the authorial self-effacement characteristic of *cinéma vérité* or of some non-fictional novels—a suppression of the agent of textual production that Reiss sees as typical of 'analytico-referential discourse'.

The other narrative technique used by this kind of historical metafiction is not to have one overt narrating voice (Pierre Falcon

in *The Scorched-Wood People*), but many (as in Skvorecky's *Dvorak in Love*). Readers of Rudy Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear* are left to pull together the various and fragmentary points of view we have been offered and, like the jury at the end of the novel, we (also at the end of the novel) must make an evaluation and interpretation of all we have been told. Similarly, in Chris Scott's *Antichthon* the narrative perspective on Giordano Bruno's life and death is constantly changing (as are the time and place coordinates), as new testimony is established, then cancelled out, then re-established, only to be put in doubt once again. Yet all points of view are ultimately united in and by the text's readers, who in this case resemble the protagonist, who says to himself: 'A man should know his own mind, Giordano. And I do, Cardinal, I do. For I am you; and Fra Giovanni, the French King and the Holy Roman Emperor; friend Zuan and my lord Archbishop Priuli; I am Michel de Castelnau and Francis Walsingham, Pope Clement and the angel Michael (even she!), the one and the many, a unity and a diversity—myself!<sup>13</sup> Readers have a second surrogate in the novel as well—Kaspar Schopp—who shares with us both a certain foreign distance from the complex Italian proceedings and a keen desire to learn the 'truth' about the circumstances leading up to the death of Bruno. When, in Chapter 8, he pieces together the puzzle of the *real* reason why Bruno must die, within a few pages readers do as well. We, like Kaspar, have been manoeuvred by the text into the proper position from which to see what we might call an anamorphosis<sup>14</sup>—the death's head that has always been visible, but could be understood only from one particular perspective.

What is perhaps most interesting about this emphasis on the complex situation of the *énonciation* is the way this kind of metafiction thematizes its own interaction both with the historical past and with the historically conditioned expectations of its readers. If, as these texts suggest, language in a sense constitutes reality, rather than merely reflecting it, readers become the actual and actualizing links between history and fiction, as well as between the past and the present. They do so not in the mode of traditional historical fiction (where history is meant to authenticate fiction on the level of *product* or representation), but in a new (or at least newly articulated) mode. It is not just a matter of life and art both being fictive, as Borges

and Nabokov taught us. Historiography, claims historian Hayden White,<sup>15</sup> is a poetic construct; fiction, suggest Bowering, Wiebe, Scott, Findley, and others, is historically conditioned. Therefore to write history (or historical fiction) is (equally) to narrate, to re-present by means of selection and interpretation. History (like realist fiction) is *made* by its writer, even if events are made to seem to speak for themselves. For example, as Dennis Duffy has noted, the effect of reading in fragmented form about the thematized archival researching process in Findley's *The Wars* is to make us aware that stories 'do not tell themselves. They do not come to us with beginnings, middles, and ends waiting to be bevelled neatly against each other. They come from scraps and tags, and we order them according to our notions of meaning rather than out of a certainty that it had to have been this way.'<sup>16</sup>

What historians call 'narrativization'—making experience into a story—is a central mode of human comprehension. As Fredric Jameson argues, it is one of the ways we impose meaning and formal coherence on the chaos of events.<sup>17</sup> Narrating solves 'the problem of how to translate *knowing* into *telling*'.<sup>18</sup> Such statements as these are possible only in the context of yet another attack on the empirical, positivist assumptions of 'analytico-referential discourse'. 'The traditional devices for constructing a comprehensive view of history and for retracing the past as a patient and continuous development must be systematically dismantled,' challenged Michel Foucault.<sup>19</sup> If these devices have not yet been totally dismantled, they have certainly been granted intensely self-conscious attention recently—both by historians and by Canadian novelists.<sup>20</sup>

Hayden White, for instance, sees the link between the novelist and the historian in their shared 'emplotting' strategies of exclusion, emphasis, and subordination of elements of a story, but he feels that the difference in their tasks lies in the historian's confrontation with 'a veritable chaos of events *already constituted*'.<sup>21</sup> Yet as Foucault and Jameson have repeatedly stressed, in a very real sense history, while it had a real 'referent' once upon a time, is accessible to us now only in textualized form, that is, through documents. Therefore postmodern historiographic metafictionists, who also deal with 'events *already constituted*' but who self-consciously signal this textual nature within their novels, are perhaps in an even more complex position than the historian: they are constrained by the demands of narrative

fiction as much as by those of historical events. They must deal with literature's intertexts as well as history's documents.

Joseph Skvorecky's authorial acknowledgement is typical and revealing of this complicated state of affairs:

*Dvorak in Love* is my first attempt at writing a historical and biographical novel. It is not a scholarly life of Antonin Dvorak, and therefore I have used poetic licence where historical reality really does not rule out historical possibility, and I have been inspired by many works which space does not allow me to acknowledge. To those interested in an exact factography, I would recommend the standard biographies of Dvorak, and in particular John Clapham's *Dvorak* (1979).<sup>22</sup>

This novel, however, contains within itself a wonderfully apt metaphor (actually a *mise en abyme*) of the difference between history as 'factography' and historiographic metafiction. The Buffalo Bill Wild West Show, intended to acquaint the American public with 'the mighty drama of American civilization' (p. 202), consists of a series of tableaux vivants portraying everything significant from 'The Primeval Forest of America before Its Discovery by the White Man' to 'Sitting Bull Defeats General Custer'—in which Sitting Bull himself plays the title role, thereby creating 'through a daring piece of casting . . . a unity of the truth of the imagination and the truth of reality, of reality and history' (p. 202). This 'effect of actuality wedded to poetic vision' is the result of what is called a 'new form of art' brought about through 'compromises in fine art necessitated by the uncontrollable elements of the human actor in drama' (p. 203). The 'individual voice' of the historical 'human actor' becomes subsumed, however, into 'the total harmony of elements' orchestrated by a single narrating historian.

Foucault claimed, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, that we can never describe our own archive, our own discursive history, because we always speak from within it. Yet it is also true for Foucault that the historicizing of the historian's consciousness is a condition of historical study. That this same insight has not yet had an impact in literary studies (at least, in what Stanley Fish calls our particular 'interpretive community') can be seen by the fact that there was such an outcry a few years back at D.M. Thomas's (acknowledged) incorporation of a historical, eye-witness account of Babi Yar in his novel *The White Hotel*. For weeks,

accusations of plagiarism littered the Letters to the Editor column of *The Times Literary Supplement*. Yet no one, to my knowledge, sought to chastise the 'parasitic' novelist for his fictional parody of a Freudian case-history. Perhaps this marks only a certain willingness today to recognize the place of fiction and interpretation in psychoanalysis, a place we may seek to ignore in our 'analytico-referential' view of historiography and biography, as if these forms of writing have somehow been granted some more direct and unmediated access to 'reality', or as if they are more objective and, in the end, more 'scientific'.

Many metafictional works investigate this 'ontological' issue of what exactly can be said to constitute fact and fiction—of life and art. They challenge what Wolfgang Iser once dismissed as 'the basic and misleading assumption . . . that fiction is an antonym of reality'.<sup>23</sup> And often this challenge is made operative through the novels' use of intertextuality. For example, Bowering works entire sections of George Vancouver's *A Voyage of Discovery* into the textual fabric of *Burning Water*, but this does not stop him from playing fast and furiously with the known 'facts' of Vancouver's voyage (and, in general, his life—and death).<sup>24</sup> At one point the narrator finds just the word he wants in Vancouver's journal. Using the third person he tells us: 'When he found those things he knew a book was going well . . . it was happening to itself rather than waiting around for him to think of it' (p. 145). At another point, after directly citing the formal prose of the historical Menzies, the narrator self-consciously reminds us of both the distance and the illusion of nearness evoked by such intertextual authenticity: 'In the eighteenth century they were fond of Latinate abstractions' (p. 101). While at times aiming for historical accuracy of detail and tone, the novel often deliberately rejects any realist pretence. An Indian is made to say, 'In the winter it rains all the time, but we always say that at least you don't have to shovel it' (p. 141).

While a book like *Famous Last Words* appears to attempt a more consistently accurate evocation of a particular historical period, it too relies on intertextuality to signal both its oblique relation to historical fact (that is, through documents or texts) and its essentially literary nature. Findley mixes the historical and the fictive in various complex ways: some characters are pure fiction (Paisley); others are fictive but their associates are verifiably real (the fictional Lovero and the historical Matteotti); many others

are somewhat fictive versions of known historical personages (Pound, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, von Ribbentrop, Schellenberg, Hess, Lindbergh, Sir Harry Oakes).<sup>25</sup> The added complication is that some events as well as characters (including Mauberley himself) are *literarily* (rather than historically) verifiable—through intertexts that range from Pound's 'Hugh Selwyn Mauberley' sequence to the Bible's Book of Daniel, via Dante's *Inferno* and even Matthew Arnold's poem 'The Last Word' (1867), where we read of the protagonist's fate:

Charge once more, then, and be dumb!  
Let the victors, when they come,  
When the forts of folly fall,  
Find thy body by the wall.

In fact, the text's complex interrelations between fact and fiction are given a formal (and almost moral) *mise en abyme* within the novel itself. Mauberley recounts that, one evening, '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*' (p. 177). Of course, readers of the novel may well recall Mauberley's remark about his own writing on the wall: 'All I have written here is true; except the lies' (p. 59).<sup>26</sup>

The relation of fiction to historical fact in novels like this is made even more complex than any simple binary opposition between fact and fiction can suggest, because of the textual role of the *énonciation*. For instance, *Antichthon*'s title at once suggests (meta)fictive rather than historical dimensions because the strange word actually signifies 'a world opposite to our own'. Yet the novel itself purports to tell the tale of the real historical heretic/martyr Giordano Bruno. In doing so, however, it calls into question the nature and value of so-called historical fact, even of eye-witness accounts (and of their place in the production and reception of the text). Kaspar Schopp tries to render facts as accurately as possible: as readers we are provided with letters, transcripts of conversations, and other documentation revealing Kaspar's belief that the human heart, if not the mind, could be 'a great fabricator of lies, and it was important for the correct historian to maintain the distinction between fact and

fiction' (p. 142). Yet, as one character cynically proclaims, 'Truth and falsehood are what men believe them to be, neither more nor less' (p. 223). Schopp's own integrity as a clerk who records history accurately is undermined when an ecclesiastical authority, after washing his hands of Bruno's fate ('I've done all I can, the record will show'), adds: 'The record, what's that? Posterity, that makes sinners of wise men and saints out of fools. We pay our clerks to write it, pay them according to the need. Ours is spiritual, theirs material. This German now, Scioppius [a.k.a. Schopp], he's in Rome. We're watching him, expecting some promise there' (p. 181). This 'promise' inevitably becomes, for readers, 'compromise'.

This relationship between historical fact and the act (and permanence) of writing is, as we have seen, a common theme in historiographic metafiction: in *The Temptations of Big Bear* the fixed permanence and arid factuality of written treaties and of newspapers (not to mention of the aptly named Scriptures) of the white world are pitted against the oral, unrecorded, and thus undefendable discourse of the Indian world. In *The Scorched-Wood People* Wiebe continues to probe these same issues.<sup>27</sup> Louis Riel, as a Métis, is caught between these same two worlds: 'his people mere pemmican-eaters, not a word about them necessary anywhere in the libraries of the world, while their words crowded upwards in him until he felt his head would burst! He *must* write their words down, the persistent sound of their words rising, vanishing with the grass, the fading buffalo; and who would hear them if he did not speak, did not write, write?'<sup>28</sup> Part white (and trained by the Church), Riel feels the need to write, but the culture he will record lives on in an oral tradition of legends and songs that exist 'to help you remember' (p. 38), as in the world of Big Bear. The desperate need to give a recorded voice to the 'voiceless, unheard of' Métis (p. 106) is what drives Riel at the end of his life. Although 'magnificently tireless with talk' (p. 190), Riel was also madly writing: 'words to fill the leather suitcase, to give his unwritten people a place on paper before the frozen earth closed them away one by one and no one would hear them, the words they cried to each other lost like the cry of gulls turning trackless over the river, words to be used against him, for every written word called to judgement' (p. 245).

As we saw in the last chapter, this permanence is rarely accepted without ambivalent responses: Riel seeks it for his

people, and yet he knows its negative power only too well ('The words crouch black on pale paper, unchangeable and deadly' [p. 170]). He is careful to have Schmidt read aloud to the people all the written declarations, but *we* read them as written text, as we do the entire 'song of Riel', granted to and narrated by the Métis singer Pierre Falcon, a song we read in English, of course:

So, even [Riel's] vision I can only offer in the words which he so clearly borrowed from the Bible he read both in Latin and French: and sometimes, desperately, in English. . . . For the violent and silly acts of our people I received songs; for this, our greatest vision and commitment to a hard road, nothing. I must leave the words to stand in all their unmemorable bareness: their unearthly power will have to be seen in the effect they had on Riel, on our people, and on Canada during those *last* ten years. (pp. 140-1)

Added to the metafictional self-consciousness about language and its relation both to fact and to narrative in this passage is something else: an awareness of the potential *power* of language, and of written language in particular. McDougall, the 'paper man', arrived to act against the Métis armed with 'a sheet of paper and two boxes of guns' (p. 28); and since the paper 'would prove everything' (p. 16), it was actually the more dangerous. The narrator, however, presents only as ironic 'fact' Sir John A. Macdonald's politically opportunistic interpretation of Riel's situation and its usefulness to him:

. . . [Macdonald] smiled his patented double House of Commons smile which in one expression could contain regret for the sorrow of mothers and wives and children weeping their dear hearts out when men are called to arms and at the same time the blessed relief that finally something drastic had been perpetrated and even the dullest voter will comprehend that now guns can provide their simple, direct solution. . . . And the political capstone: no Opposition would now dare vote against the last gigantic loan which could complete the financing of the Canadian Pacific Railway for the massive benefit of Canada from Sea to Sea and, quite incidentally, for the benefit of CPR shareholders. Riel had created the catastrophe, an outbreak worthy for Conservative purposes of elevation to rebellion, as the Prime Minister would explain carefully to the Governor General as soon as the fighting was over. . . . (pp. 246-7)<sup>29</sup>

Historiographic metafiction, therefore, in a very real sense, is ideological fiction, taking ideology as meaning 'those modes of feeling, valuing, perceiving and believing which have some kind of relation to the maintenance and reproduction of social power'.<sup>30</sup> To write either history or historical fiction is equally to raise the question of power and control: it is the story of the victors that usually gets told. And, as Hayden White has remarked, 'the very claim to have discerned some kind of formal coherence in the historical record brings with it theories of the nature of the historical world and of historical knowledge itself which have ideological implications.'<sup>31</sup> The creator or discernor of that formal coherence is in a position of power too—power over facts, clearly, but also power over readers. We come back to the metafictional reinstating of the *énonciation*, then, but this time to look at its potential for ideological manipulation.

That this is a potential inherent in the writing itself of both history and fiction is evident in a novel like *Famous Last Words*. The name of the protagonist, Mauberley, is an intertextual marker of fictionality from the start,<sup>32</sup> yet this fictive character offers as 'fact' some events that we know to be historically accurate, intricately linked to others that are clearly invented. In the context of the novel as a whole, however, this fact/fiction relation also operates on an ideological level: although directly (if peripherally) involved in great political events and moral issues of his age, Mauberley falls victim to his own aestheticism, his life of aesthetic contemplation and absorption in subjective impressions of beauty. His culpable silence, his hesitations and procrastinations, are paid for with that final ironic testimony and confession written on the walls before his death.

Hayden White sees this 'condition of Irony' as the true content of the current 'crisis of historicism',<sup>33</sup> a state that I think defines the postmodern. For White, though, irony, seen as a basis for an absurdist world view, is a negative. In his words, it 'tends to dissolve all belief in the possibility of positive political actions', because it 'tends to engender belief in the "madness" of civilization itself and to inspire a Mandarin-like disdain for those seeking to grasp the nature of social reality in either science or art'.<sup>34</sup> But Findley's novel turns against Mauberley's 'Mandarin-like' attitudes, sceptically turning its irony against irony itself in order to reinforce its didactic message about the ideological consequences of the refusal of political action.

Chris Scott's *Antichthon* is yet another example of historiographic metafiction that addresses political issues through its questioning of the relations between fact and fiction, between truth and imagination. It is a novel about the fear of the subversive power of the visionary. Not unlike F. in *Beautiful Losers*, Giordano Bruno is presented here as a threat, not because of his doctrines (false or true) but, as one character explains, because 'he could show men what they wanted to see, enticing them on with their reflections until they were captivated. He was oblique and evasive like a mirror, a dealer in illusions, not false so much as superficial' (p. 21). Mirrors usually reflect some reality, however. Yet Bruno himself constantly insists that he is speaking 'as a philosopher', by which designation he means 'speaking figuratively' (p. 35). We are told that he speaks the 'language of allegory' (p. 36), a language that is not to be taken literally. Nevertheless Bruno is executed by those in power who are themselves not above using blackmail, spying, and finally torture to assert their authority over the 'truth': 'Question not the Word, Giordano' (p. 184).

Obviously, this kind of metafiction represents something beyond a post-colonial Canadian need to reclaim the past,<sup>35</sup> because it is not necessarily Canada's past that is always sought out: witness Scott's Bruno or Skvorecky's Dvorak. Instead, postmodern novels appear to signal another need: the need to investigate the ontological nature as well as the function both of their literary products and of the processes that created them and keep them alive. The institution of literature is comprised of writers and readers, producers and receivers of texts, and also of the 'circumstantially dense interchange'<sup>36</sup> between them, an interchange that has social, historical, and ideological dimensions. The narrator of *Burning Water* addresses the reader: 'We are making a story, after all, as we always have been, standing and speaking together to make up a history, a real historical fiction' (p. 9). The placing of these last two terms in apposition is not so much a teasing contradiction as a kind of affirmation of the common nature of both history and fiction: both are discourse, and by 'discourse' I mean here language as active *énonciation*, and not as fixed and static text. With that affirmation comes an awareness of the potential for ideological manipulation of readers—through rhetoric or through the power of language and of the vision it can create. And with this awareness comes,

too, the realization of the possibility, if not the permissibility, of evasion through silence of the responsibility implied in the act of *énonciation*.

What the apparent paradox of this notion of historiographic metafiction brings to the fore might really be a characteristic of all novels: the fact that a work of fiction is never only an autonomous structure of language and narrative, but is always also conditioned by contextual forces (such as society, history, and ideology) that cannot or should not be ignored in our critical discussions. The (formalist) critical move away from history has recently come under serious attack.<sup>37</sup> And it is clear from postmodern metafiction that the strongest force operating within the art itself to establish our awareness of the 'wholeness' of the literary context (besides that of the *énonciation*) is its overt historical and political determination. In different ways, in novels as diverse as Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* and Heather Robertson's *Willie*, fictional and traditionally non-fictional genres interpenetrate in this paradoxical metafictional form through our realization (as readers) of their shared identity: both are discourse, that is, language in operation. We owe to Roland Barthes the strong formulation, if not the concept, that language is always fascist and that power is involved in even the most subtle mechanisms of social exchange.<sup>38</sup> Literature is no exception to this rule; and neither is Canadian literature. And, *pace* Robin Mathews, it knows it.<sup>39</sup>

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> For a fuller explanation, see Linda Hutcheon, 'Process and Product: The Implications of Metafiction for the Theory of the Novel as a Mimetic Genre', in *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (1980; rpt. London and New York: Methuen, 1984), pp. 36-47.

<sup>2</sup> A standard, clear definition of *énonciation* would be that of Tzvetan Todorov in *Les Genres du discours* (Paris: Seuil, 1978), p. 48 (my translation): 'A discourse is made not of sentences, but of enunciated sentences, or more simply, of *énoncés*. Now the interpretation of this *énoncé* is determined on the one hand by the sentences enunciated, and on the other, by the *énonciation* itself. This *énonciation* includes a speaker who enunciates, a listener whom one addresses, a time and a place, a discourse that precedes and follows; in brief, a context of *énonciation*. In still other terms, a discourse is always and necessarily a speech act.'

- <sup>3</sup> Timothy J. Reiss, *The Discourse of Modernism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 11.
- <sup>4</sup> 'The Death of the Author', in *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), pp. 142-8.
- <sup>5</sup> Constance Rooke, 'Fear of the Open Heart', in *A Mazing Space: Writing Canadian / Women Writing*, ed. Shirley Neuman and Smaro Kamboureli (Edmonton: Longspoon/NeWest Press, 1986), p. 258.
- <sup>6</sup> George Bowering, *Burning Water* (Don Mills, Ont: Musson, 1980), p. 9. All further references will appear in parentheses in the text.
- <sup>7</sup> Roland Barthes, 'L'Effet de réel', *Communications* 11 (1968), pp. 84-9.
- <sup>8</sup> *The Mask in Place: Essays on Fiction in North America* (Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1982), p. 25.
- <sup>9</sup> *The Mask in Place*, p. 30.
- <sup>10</sup> Timothy Findley, *Famous Last Words* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1981), p. 5. All further references will appear in parentheses in the text.
- <sup>11</sup> In modernist texts the writer tends to be the main focus of self-reflexivity; in postmodernist ones the reader is added.
- <sup>12</sup> Robert Harlow, *Scann* (Queen Charlotte Is.: Sono Nis Press, 1972), p. 87.
- <sup>13</sup> Chris Scott, *Antichthon* (Montreal: Quadrant, 1982), pp. 126-7. All further references will appear in parentheses in the text.
- <sup>14</sup> The allusion here is to Holbein's famous anamorphosis in his portrait of the 'Two Ambassadors', specifically as used as an allegory by Hubert Aquin in his novel *Trou de mémoire*.
- <sup>15</sup> Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1973), p. ix: history is 'a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse'.
- <sup>16</sup> 'Let Us Compare Histories: Meaning and Mythology in Findley's *Famous Last Words*', *Essays on Canadian Writing* 30 (1984-5), p. 190.
- <sup>17</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981). See also Hayden White, 'The Narrativization of Real Events', *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1981), pp. 793-8; Louis O. Mink, 'Narrative Form as Cognitive Instrument', and Lionel Gossman, 'History and Literature: Reproduction or Signification', in *The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding*, ed. Robert H. Canary and Henry Kozicki (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), pp. 129-49 and 3-39 respectively.
- <sup>18</sup> Hayden White, 'The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality', *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1980), p. 5.
- <sup>19</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', in his *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 153.
- <sup>20</sup> See Stephen Scobie, 'Eye-Deep in Hell: Ezra Pound, Timothy Findley,

- and Hugh Selwyn Mauberley', *Essays on Canadian Writing* 30 (1984-5), pp. 212-13: 'Canadian writers especially, in both prose and poetry, have been fascinated by the documentary style, in which historical events and personalities are used as a framework, or set into a complex dialectical relationship with the writer's imagination and subjectivity.'
- <sup>21</sup> White, *Metahistory*, p. 6n.
- <sup>22</sup> Joseph Skvorecky, *Dvorak in Love: A Light-hearted Dream*, trans. Paul Wilson (1983; Toronto and Orpen Dennys, 1986), unpaginated acknowledgements page. All further references will appear in parentheses in the text.
- <sup>23</sup> Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 53.
- <sup>24</sup> Ian McLaren has suggested to me that Bowering has amusingly generated a homosexual relationship between Vancouver and Don Quadra out of mere innuendo in Vancouver's description of their brief contact as 'very friendly intercourse'.
- <sup>25</sup> For verification many texts can be consulted. See, for example, the Duchess's autobiography called *The Heart Has Its Reasons* (1956; New York: Fawcett, 1957); Walter Schellenberg's *The Schellenberg Memoirs*, ed. and trans. Louis Hagan (London: Andrew Deutsch, 1956); James Leasor, *Who Killed Sir Harry Oakes?* (London: Heinemann, 1983); the autobiography of Charles Lindbergh, *Autobiography of Values* (New York and London: Harcourt, Brace, and Jovanovich, 1976); James Douglas-Hamilton, *Motives for a Mission* (London: Macmillan, 1971).
- <sup>26</sup> Stan McMullin, in 'Wiebe, History, and Fiction' (*Journal of Canadian Fiction* 28-9 [1980], pp. 249-52), has made the same link between what I am calling historiographic metafiction and the issue of lies (and fictions) in the work of Rudy Wiebe: 'The inherent Mennonite fear of the fiction, of the lie, which seems to be the essence of creative writing, has led Wiebe to evolve his own distinctive genre' (p. 249).
- <sup>27</sup> In 'Rudy Wiebe's Approach to Historical Fiction: A Study of *The Temptations of Big Bear* and *The Scorched-Wood People*' (in John Moss, ed., *The Canadian Novel: Here and Now* [Toronto: NC Press, 1978], pp. 182-200), Allan Dueck offers a stronger formulation. He sees Wiebe as rejecting 'the common conception that historical facts are knowable and objectively verifiable by reference to historical data. In his view, the objective rendering of an historical story is impossible because both those who initially recorded the "facts" and those who subsequently interpret them are biased' (p. 182).
- <sup>28</sup> Rudy Wiebe, *The Scorched-Wood People* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), p. 80. All further references will appear in parentheses in the text.
- <sup>29</sup> It is interesting, by way of context here, that Wiebe once wrote: 'It should not be surprising to central Canada that in the prairie fictions

- of the Sixties and Seventies Sir John A Macdonald (born in Scotland) becomes a conniving bastard . . . and Riel a saint. For telling our story on the prairie is different from telling our story in the Maritimes or Ontario or British Columbia.' (In *A Voice in the Land: Essays By and About Rudy Wiebe*, ed. W. J. Keith [Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1981], p. 211.)
- <sup>30</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), p. 15.
- <sup>31</sup> White, *Metahistory*, p. 21.
- <sup>32</sup> See Scobie, 'Eye-Deep in Hell', pp. 206-27 for a fuller treatment of this.
- <sup>33</sup> White, *Metahistory*, p. 41.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.
- <sup>35</sup> See Graeme Gibson's 'Gothic Shocks from History: The Birth of a New Novel', *Globe and Mail* 4 June 1983, p. E17.
- <sup>36</sup> Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 45.
- <sup>37</sup> Besides the recent works cited above of both Said and Eagleton, perhaps the best-known attack on anti-historicism is that of Frank Lentricchia in *After the New Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).
- <sup>38</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Inaugural Lecture, Collège de France', trans. Richard Howard, in *A Barthes Reader*, ed. Susan Sontag (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), pp. 461, 459.
- <sup>39</sup> See Mathews, 'Literature and Politics: A Canadian Absolute', in *Journal of Canadian Fiction* 35-6 (1986), pp. 44-55. Mathews makes a very common—if undefended and indefensible—claim that the (never defined) postmodern is apolitical and ahistorical (p. 46) and does not see that things like 'sexual politics' (which he denigrates) are directly linked to what he calls 'real politics' (p. 54). See Chapter 6, below.