

**Not Just the Past, But History:
Researcher-Historian Characters in Canadian Postmodern Historical
Fiction**

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ABSTRACT

Since the mid-1980s, the study of Canadian postmodern historical fiction has been dominated by Linda Hutcheon's "historiographic metafiction." Emphasizing historiography and textuality, critics of historiographic metafiction have flattened the past to text and image, inadvertently severing its active connection with the present and removing it from historical process. This is problematic for the ideological intentions of the texts in question because it is an awareness of the past/present dialectic that incites awareness that present action can lead to future change. This thesis, therefore, examines three novels that have overwhelmingly been viewed as historiographic metafiction for their inclusion of researcher-historian characters: Findley's *The Wars*, Bowering's *Burning Water*, and Marlatt's *Ana Historic*. By opening up these texts to criticism that acknowledges history as *process*, I demonstrate that there is no need to limit these novels to this problematic framework and that researcher-historian characters are valuable for more than their foregrounding of historiography.

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CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

In 1981, Canadian critic W.J. Keith was able to write, “[S]erious historical fiction does not yet form a prominent part of Canadian literature” (qtd. in Wyile, *Speculative Fictions* 4). This may have been an accurate statement in 1981, but since the early 1980s, some of Canada’s most celebrated and prolific authors have altered the landscape of Canadian literature considerably. Writers like Michael Ondaatje, Joseph Boyden, Joy Kogawa, Douglas Glover, Rudy Wiebe, Margaret Atwood, Timothy Findley and many others have emerged as Canadian authors of “serious historical fiction,” and their contributions have established historical fiction as one of the most prominent Canadian genres. In fact, in the past thirty years (1984-2013), fifteen Governor General’s literary awards for English-language fiction have been awarded to historical novels, and seven of those were awarded in the last ten years alone (“Cumulative Winners List”). Given the GG’s stated aim of “encourag[ing] the growth of a truly Canadian literature,” it is significant that historical novels have made up the majority of recent wins: historical fiction clearly holds a prominent place in the contemporary Canadian canon (“History”). Given the prominence and popularity of this genre over the last three decades, it is not surprising that the critical study of historical fiction has flourished as well. Among the many Canadian critics who have theorized the writing of historical fiction in this period is Linda Hutcheon, who, in the mid-1980s, established a mode of criticism that would come to dominate the study of Canadian historical fiction: historiographic metafiction.

“Historiographic metafiction” is a genre based on the works of theorists such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Hayden White and exemplified by texts by George Bowering, Rudy Wiebe, and Robert Kroetsch, among others. According to Hutcheon, who

first described the genre in a 1984 essay and later developed her theories in her 1988 monograph *The Canadian Postmodern*, historiographic metafiction involves the self-conscious foregrounding of historiographic processes within fiction, and it is based on an understanding of postmodern art as supremely self-reflexive: “art that is self-consciously art (or artifice), literature that is openly aware of the fact that it is written and read as part of a particular culture” (Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern* 1). By reflecting on itself, this postmodern art problematizes the nature of art in general, challenging “our traditional humanist beliefs about the function of art in society” and questioning “‘what goes without saying’ in our culture” (2, 3). In terms of the historical novel, this self-reflexivity involves a questioning of the nature of historical knowledge, historical “fact,” and historical narrative. Most importantly for Hutcheon, historiographic metafiction draws into question the nature of historiography itself: how narratives of history are inherently discursive, somewhat arbitrary, and definitely biased. Drawing on the work of historian Hayden White, Hutcheon states, “[T]o write history—or historical fiction—is equally to narrate, to reconstruct by means of selection and interpretation” (“Canadian Historiographic Metafiction” 231). She argues that, while the past certainly once existed, it is impossible to know for sure the details of that past. The past is only accessible in the present day, she argues, through the documents—the texts—that have survived: the past exists only as discourse.

Hutcheon’s main focus in examining postmodern historical fiction is historiography: the process of “selection and interpretation” by which a narrative of past events is created. According to Hutcheon, “[h]istoriographic metafiction questions the nature and validity of the entire human process of writing—of both history and fiction. Its aim in so doing is to study how we know the past, how we *make* sense of it” (*The Canadian Postmodern* 22). By

questioning this process of narrativization, historiographic metafiction also calls into question traditional narratives of history, questioning the authority by which “official” histories have been determined. In doing so, historiographic metafiction often highlights what Hutcheon calls the “marginal or ‘ex-centric’ position with regard to the central or dominant culture” (3). Joy Kogawa, for example, takes up this “ex-centric” position in her novel *Obasan*. In that novel the reader is led to question both the actions of the state in regards to Japanese internment during World War Two and the nature of the official history which seems to cover up or brush over those actions. Similarly, in Rudy Wiebe’s *The Temptations of Big Bear*, the novelist uses multi-voiced narration to compel readers to mediate between competing accounts of history and thereby to question the validity of the authoritative version of aboriginal history. This provokes readers to see historical events from the point of view of aboriginal peoples and told through oral—as opposed to written—history. In this way, readers are acquainted with the “ex-centric” history that lies outside of the dominant Caucasian, Eurocentric viewpoint that is most often taught.

One principal narrative technique used in historiographic metafiction to “investigate this ‘ontological’ issue of what exactly can be said to constitute fact and fiction” is a device that critic Herb Wyile describes as “the figure of the researcher/historian” (Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern* 68; Wyile, *Speculative Fictions* 141). This device has also been referred to as the “storyteller-historian” (Tolan 276), the “writer-researcher” (Jones 143), and the “researcher-narrator” (Pennee 40). For the purposes of this project, I will use the term “researcher-historian,” since the character is not necessarily also narrator, writer, or storyteller.¹ In his book *Speculative Fictions: Contemporary Canadian Novelists and the*

¹ I occasionally simplify this term to either “researcher” or “historian.” Both refer to the same entity.

Writing of History, Wyile briefly discusses the tendency in some novels to “repre[n]s[t] the past not ‘as it really was’ but as it is being constructed by some interpreting agent” (141). He specifically points to *The Wars* and *Ana Historic* as prime examples of this form of narrative, but several other works exist which also use a “researcher-historian” character who participates in and/or narrates the development of the story. In historiographic metafiction, researcher-historian characters serve to foreground the process of what Hutcheon, following French linguistic theory, terms “the *énonciation*” or the writing and reading of the text (*The Canadian Postmodern* 61). They allow the reader to overtly view the construction of the narrative and therefore examine all of the epistemological issues which arise in the construction of historical narratives. This device is by no means exclusive to Canadian literature, but its prominence in both Canadian fiction and literary criticism over the last three decades makes this an ideal ground on which to examine the treatment of researcher-historian characters in historiographic metafictional criticism.

Perhaps the earliest example of this researcher-historian device in Canadian historical fiction is in a short story by Rudy Wiebe called “Where Is the Voice Coming From?” (1974). In this short story, the narrator attempts to piece together the story of a Cree man named Almighty Voice from artefacts kept at the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Museum in Regina, Saskatchewan. While the artefacts present many pieces of the story—presumably the “facts” of history—the researcher-historian becomes frustrated by the gaps in the official history and, in fact, the contradictions present within that official history. Fed up with the contradictions—in particular a photograph that does not match either official description of Almighty Voice—the researcher states that he “can no longer pretend to objective,

omnipotent disinterestedness” and constructs an imagined realist narrative of Almighty Voice’s last stand (Wiebe 142).

The use of a researcher-historian figure in “Where Is the Voice Coming From?” has made it a text ripe for criticism based on Hutcheon’s theoretical framework. Unfortunately, like almost all of the criticism of Canadian historical fiction in the past quarter century, the criticism on “Voice” has been largely *limited* to that framework. Indeed, writing in 2010, Andrea Cabajsky and Brett Josef Grubisic credit Hutcheon’s 1984 essay for “two-and-a-half decades” of critical work in which “the most influential vocabularies for re-thinking the historical novel’s aesthetic features and social role have been provided by literary postmodernism and post-colonial theory” (xiii). That this is true is clear in criticism from the late ‘80s through to the new millennium. Writing in 1993, Manina Jones uses this vocabulary to support her arguments about “documentary-collage”: “The ‘documentary,’ therefore, paradoxically reminds readers both of the ‘factuality’ of history and of the construction of that factuality through the collection and interpretation of textual or materially ‘documentary’ evidence” (8). Marie Vautier, in *New World Myth* (1998), similarly references how Margaret Laurence “foregrounds her narrator’s self-conscious problematization of the past as well as that narrator’s challenge to the related notion of ‘Truth’” (22).

Writing in 2002, Herb Wyile celebrates the experimental nature of Canadian postmodern historical fiction:

In the wake of the questioning of mimetic models of representation, the hybridity of the historical novel, so troubling for those insistent on distinctions between the fictional and the real, has provided the departure

point for a sustained challenging of the epistemological and ontological assumptions behind that insistence. The result is not just a more historiographically liberated form, in which the materials of history are highly malleable, but a much more diverse, heterogeneous, and self-conscious form. (*Speculative Fictions* 17)

Beyond these few examples, Martin Kuester's *Framing Truths: Parodic Structures in Contemporary English-Canadian Historical Novels* (1992); Glenn Deer's *Postmodern Canadian Fiction and the Rhetoric of Authority* (1994); Ajay Heble's "Putting Together Another Family: *In the Skin of a Lion*, Affiliation, and the Writing of Canadian (Hi)stories" (1995); Daniela Janes's "Truth and History: Representing the Aura in *The Englishman's Boy*" (2002); and many other critical works are all clearly built on the foundation of Hutcheon's historiographic metafiction. Indeed, it is often difficult to find any critical text on Canadian historical fiction that is not indebted in some way to Hutcheon's theories: historiographic metafiction has overtaken the critical discourse.

My intention in identifying this overwhelming trend in criticism is not to criticize or demean Hutcheon's theories or the work of any of the critics who have followed her lead. Indeed, the focus on the experimental and speculative nature of postmodern authors' engagement with history has led to useful insights into Canadian national identity and to the exploration of non-traditional—or ex-centric—narratives of history dealing with important issues such as postcolonialism, gender, and ethnicity. However, it is evident from an examination of criticism of Canadian historical fiction since the mid-1980s that historiographic metafiction has dominated this field of criticism for the better part of three decades. In fact, there is so much emphasis on the presentation of historiography in

Canadian novels that it is sometimes made to seem as though the only reason the novels were written was to comment upon historiographic—that is to say, textual—processes.

With so much emphasis on historiography, other considerations such as *historical process* seem to have fallen by the wayside. Jennifer Blair aptly discusses this phenomenon in her article “‘The Postmodern Impasse’ and Guy Vanderhaeghe’s *The Englishman’s Boy*”:

Scholars may have become skilful at identifying the discursive processes of history, and may successfully argue that the contradictions within these processes signal resistances to dominant ideological paradigms, but these arguments have succeeded at the expense of a critical acknowledgement of the social experiences and effects of history, as well as a fuller appreciation of the dynamics of the active processes of time and memory. In other words, criticism has lost those aspects of ‘the past,’ of the passage of time, that are distinct from the textual.... Rather than exploring the complexity of that crucial difference between text and lived experience, critics seem to have become caught up in a somewhat limited approach that assesses the relationship between ‘art’ and ‘reality’ only after reducing both to their discursive qualities and functions. (204)

As Blair points out, the critical focus on historiography—“the discursive processes of history”—that has dominated the study of Canadian literature over the last quarter century has worked against a fuller consideration of history itself: the past separate from the uniquely textual. With the critical emphasis solely on the historiographic aspects of historical narratives, the novels’ depictions of historical experience and historical process are often obscured.

From the point of view of historical theory, this primary focus on discourse and textuality is problematic because, by reducing the past to text, historiographic metafiction loses its grasp on history both as lived experience and as process: two elements that are essential to “a critical acknowledgement of the social experiences and effects of history” (Blair 204). By perceiving history as solely discursive and textual, critics risk giving the impression that “history” can be resurrected in the present or, more importantly, changed: as though “the past” were a story to be rewritten at the author’s will and not an authentic experience of time, just as unchangeable as our present moment. Moreover, these critics risk eliminating any sense of difference that exists between past and present—the sense that, though connected, each moment in time is historically conditioned and therefore cannot be revised or revisited in the present. This is what Terry Eagleton has called the “pastness” of the past: an understanding of “the literal irretrievability and irredeemability of the past” (“History, Narrative, and Marxism” 275). It is this understanding of the past that often seems to be neglected in the criticism of historiographic metafiction. Politically, this is problematic since it is the recognition of past wrongs that incites present action and leads to future change, and if history can be “corrected” in the present, then there is little impetus for actual, concrete change. As Eagleton asserts, “Any cultural or literary theory which represses this ultimate irredeemability [of the past] by dissolving the stubborn reality of the past into discourse or metaphor, which hopes to redeem and resurrect by semiosis, also risks suppressing the tragedy of the past and so striking itself impotent in the present” (275). It is important, then, to the political messages of any historical novel, to examine history as lived experience, as difference, and as process.

It is in this realm of political intention that the claims of historiographic metafiction become murky. Hutcheon has emphasized that one of the values of historiographic metafiction is as “ideological fiction” because “[t]o 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” (*The Canadian Postmodern* 72). Similarly, her emphasis on the importance of “ex-centric” narratives places value on the political intentions of these texts. Paradoxically, however, Hutcheon has also argued that the nature of postmodernism—as she defines it—works against any sort of actively transformative politics: “Postmodernism cannot *do* that something...; it can *un-do* but, without a metanarrative to direct its political agenda, that is all it can do” (“Incredulity Towards Metanarrative” 42). In other words, historiographic metafiction has only the power to identify and break down dominant narratives of the past but no power to further the cause of ex-centric or minority groups in the present or future. Through Hutcheon’s brand of criticism, therefore, the political intentions contained within postmodern fiction seem to be rendered impotent.

Several critics have identified the lack of attention to politics in Hutcheon’s theories. Sylvia Söderlind, for example, in her 1995 article “The Contest of Marginalities,” criticizes historiographic metafiction for its appropriation of texts solely for their formal characteristics and for thereby neglecting the particular political agendas and intentions of each individual work: “Every book on postmodern literature that I have consulted defines its object in terms of formal properties, and this is what permits one to talk about Nicole Brossard and Robert Kroetsch in the same breath” (n.p.). In other words, with so much emphasis on the stylistic characteristics of postmodern texts, their political intentions get left behind. Blair concurs with Söderlind, adding, “By now such arguments are familiar: so long

as postmodernism operates in the realm of the symbolic only, actual social existence is dispensable” (207). Other critics like Larry MacDonald, in “I Looked For It and There It Was—Gone: History in Postmodern Criticism” (1995), and Gabriele Helms, in *Challenging Canada* (2003), have, at various moments, sought to call attention back to the specific political intentions of individual texts. There is still, however, an overwhelming drive in the general body of historiographic metafictional criticism to view these texts as politically valuable while simultaneously severing their active engagement with history and therefore their ideological potential.

My objective in this thesis, therefore, is to demonstrate that the metafictional aspects of postmodern historical fiction texts are not the only ones worthy of study. While Hutcheon and other critics have put forth intriguing and valuable arguments about historiography, self-reflexivity, and discursiveness, those arguments have tapped only some of the critical potential of the texts in question. My goal is to open up the critical discourse on these texts to comprehend what Blair calls “a fuller appreciation of the dynamics of the active processes of time and memory” and to thereby revive their ideological potential (204). In order to do this, I will focus on a subset of texts which have been predominantly and overwhelmingly viewed as historiographic metafiction: *The Wars* by Timothy Findley, *Burning Water* by George Bowering, and *Ana Historic* by Daphne Marlatt—those texts which, like Wiebe’s short story “Where Is the Voice Coming From?,” contain researcher-historian characters.

As mentioned earlier, researcher-historian characters are characters who construct and/or narrate the historical events of a novel through their own processes of research and study. The researcher in “Voice,” for instance, gathers information from the artefacts at the RCMP museum and communicates it to the reader, acting as a bridge or dialogical

connection between present and past. Unsurprisingly, much work has been done about the significance of those figures to historiographic metafictional texts, but there has been almost no mention of any significance these characters may have beyond the foregrounding of historiography and discursive processes. By re-examining these historiographic metafictional texts for their engagement with and depiction of history itself, this project aims to demonstrate that these texts are valuable for their treatments of history and historical process, not just historiography. It will also attempt to demonstrate that the value of researcher-historian characters lies not only in their utility for foregrounding historiography, but also in the potential they have for establishing the relationship between the past and the present in those stories and in the new opportunities they provide for representing historical process within the narrative, providing a more encompassing view of history.

Postmodernism

In order to demonstrate how these postmodern novels and their researcher-historian characters are valuable for more than just their metafictionality, it is necessary to re-examine the use and meaning of the term “postmodernism.” “Postmodernism” is a trampled-on term. It has no single, unifying definition, and different critics and theorists often amend its definition to suit their purposes. According to one critic, “Postmodernism embodies an attack upon Enlightenment and modernist assumptions about the nature of knowledge and the relation between knowledge and ‘reality.’ Above all, it concerns epistemology and ontology—that is, the nature of our ability to know and the nature of being—and it takes as its special mission the destabilization of both” (Fox-Genovese 46). While this is an excellent summary of the sort of postmodernism espoused by Hutcheon and other Canadian critics, it

is not the only definition, and it is not a definition conducive to a broader understanding of *history* in postmodern texts.

Fredric Jameson, a contemporary of Hutcheon, has posited a more nuanced view of the postmodern which encapsulates an understanding of history and culture, as well as art. Jameson's definition of postmodernism is, as he puts it, "a historical rather than a merely stylistic one" (*Postmodernism* 45). He frames his definition instead as "a genuinely dialectical attempt to think our present time in History" (46). What he means by this is that postmodernism corresponds to a unique period in history. Specifically, he defines it as "the formal features in culture" which correspond with "the emergence of a new type of social life and a new economic order—what is often euphemistically called modernization, post-industrial or consumer society, the society of the media or the spectacle, or multinational capitalism" (Jameson, *The Cultural Turn* 3). In other words, the features of postmodern culture and art reflect the characteristics—the logic and the form—of contemporary, postmodern society: a society defined by the overarching, all-encompassing nature of global capitalism.²

A prime example of the sort of characteristics that develop in the wake of global capitalist society is the postmodern aesthetic feature Jameson calls *pastiche*. This feature involves nostalgic reference to the past not *as it was*, but to a stylized, stereotyped version of the past. He uses the example of "nostalgia films" like George Lucas's *American Graffiti* and Roman Polanski's *Chinatown*, which "approa[ch] the 'past' through stylistic connotation, conveying 'pastness' by the glossy qualities of the image, and '1930s-ness' or '1950s-ness' by the attributes of fashion" (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 19). For Jameson, this

² Jameson outlines this definition of postmodern culture in his essay "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," published in the collection *The Cultural Turn*. He later expanded that text and those ideas into his monograph *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*.

stylized and superficial reference to the past is symptomatic of the postmodern age because it reflects the contemporary inability to see outside of the present economic reality, the all-encompassing system of late capitalism. Similarly, self-reflexivity may be an aspect of postmodern culture: Jameson states that “in a world in which stylistic innovation is no longer possible, all that is left is to imitate dead styles.... But this means that contemporary or postmodern art is going to be about art itself in a new kind of way” (*The Cultural Turn* 7). It is not this stylistic characteristic, however, which determines postmodernity; like pastiche, it is only a symptom of the postmodern age. The novels I have chosen to study in this project are postmodern, therefore, but not, as Hutcheon argues, because they are self-reflexive. They are postmodern because, like Hutcheon’s own theories, they originate in the culture of late capitalism.

Jameson is by no means alone in his observations about postmodernism and the global capitalist system. Notably, Michel Hardt and Antonio Negri state explicitly their allegiance to these ideas in *Empire*, published in 2000: “We certainly agree with those contemporary theorists, such as...Fredric Jameson, who see postmodernity as a new phase of capitalist accumulation and commodification that accompanies the contemporary realization of the world market” (154). As is discussed in a later chapter, Hardt and Negri use and expand on many of Jameson’s theories of postmodernity, demonstrating their continued applicability in the decades since they were first advanced. Although many other theorists have continued and furthered Jameson’s work on postmodernism in recent years, I have chosen to rely primarily on his own texts, published in the 1980s and early 1990s, because of their contemporaneity to Hutcheon’s work and to the novels on which this project centres.

The historical period of postmodernism of which Jameson speaks is the same one in which we must situate those novels and the criticism that has followed them.

A Crisis in Historicity

One of the primary features of the postmodern age which Jameson identifies is particularly relevant to any discussion of history in these postmodern novels: the postmodern crisis in historicity. Discussing the phenomenon of pastiche, Jameson states, “It seems to me exceedingly symptomatic to find the very style of nostalgia films invading and colonizing even those movies today which have contemporary settings, as though, for some reason, we were unable today to focus our own present, as though we had become incapable of achieving aesthetic representations of our own current experience” (*The Cultural Turn* 9). What the culture of postmodernism is faced with, he states, is both the inability to represent the present and the inability to access and represent the past as it was: it is locked in a state of “perpetual present” without the ability to contextualize or make sense of that present in any way. This is indicative, Jameson asserts, of a loss of “historicity” within contemporary society: a loss of consciousness of historical process. According to Jameson, “Historicity...can first and foremost be defined as a perception of the present as history; that is, as a relationship to the present which somehow defamiliarizes it and allows us that distance from immediacy which is at length characterized as a historical perspective” (*Postmodernism* 284). Specifically, “historicity” involves a consciousness that the present moment in time is connected to every other moment in time and that each of those moments carries with it its own distinct character. Jameson argues that, in the postmodern age, that

“perception of the present as history” and that sense of historical distance and *difference* have been lost.

Jameson asserts, “The crisis in historicity now dictates a return, in a new way, to the question of temporal organization in general in the postmodern force field” (*Postmodernism* 25). By “postmodern force field,” Jameson means the arena in which “very different kinds of cultural impulses—what Raymond Williams has usefully termed ‘residual’ and ‘emergent’ forms of cultural production—must make their way” (6). Williams had earlier divided these “cultural impulses” into three forms: the dominant, the residual, and the emergent.

According to Williams, “The complexity of a culture is to be found not only in its variable processes and their social definitions—traditions, institutions, and formations—but also in the dynamic interrelations, at every point in the process, of historically varied and variable elements” (121). In other words, the various forces, which are comprised of different elements at different times, remain in constant flux through history, creating both continuity and the distinct cultural character of any given moment in time. In postmodern culture, the dominant force, which attempts to assimilate all other aspects of culture, is global capitalism. However, this overarching dominance of capitalism in contemporary society has led, as Jameson points out, to a crisis in historicity in which people are trapped in the impression of a perpetual present and are unaware of the existence and movement of cultural forces through history. Jameson therefore calls for a return “to the question of temporal organization” because, by losing its grip on the concept of historical process, postmodern culture has lost its vision of a possible future: a future different from the present, rendering any drive for political change impotent.

Terry Eagleton has posited a solution for this loss of historicity, a perspective on the present that would allow for recognition of these cultural forces and their movement within the postmodern “force field.” According to Eagleton, Marxists—like him—are preoccupied by the future, not in a teleological sense, but “as a vantage-point from which the relations between past and present are deciphered and assessed” (“Marxism and the Past” 272). Even though it is impossible to truly know the future, he argues, by examining the present from the point of view of its possible effects, one can see a fuller picture of the present moment in time: how it is part of the larger process of history, not divorced from it. In this way, “for Marxism the present is always somehow past as well, always seized and interpreted under the sign of goals which might surpass it” (272). By viewing the present from the vantage point of the future, therefore, the present is “always somehow past as well”: the present as history.

This is not, however, how historiographic metafiction views the present. By reducing all of history to text, this brand of critical discourse disconnects the lived experience of the present from the textualized past. If the past is reduced to text, then it is difficult to view the present as past or the present as history because text is something which we observe, but do not participate in. In this way, Hutcheon’s theory is symptomatic of the postmodern age: turning towards the past but able to view it only through the nostalgic glasses of prior narrativization. Furthermore, because of its emphasis on textuality that severs the active and dialectical connection between past and present, the pervasiveness of that theory may also *contribute* to the crisis in historicity, directing readers’ attentions away from historical forces and the political potential of the texts in question. Fortunately, just because historiographic metafictional theory is grounded in the postmodern crisis in historicity does not mean that

historiographic metafictional novels are similarly limited. Certainly, those novels may contain elements which align them with that dominant, capitalist understanding of the past and history, but that does not override the possibility that they also contain elements of more latent or nascent theories of history which have thus far been overlooked due to the critical focus on textuality rather than historical process. Though not all postmodern historical novels can successfully break out of the perpetual present to a view of the present as history, some may, with the help of skilful narrative devices like the researcher-historian character, incite readers to recognize the temporal organization of a past time period or, perhaps, to become conscious of the historical forces present in their own postmodern age.

Historical Consciousness

To examine how postmodern historical novels might inspire the sort of historical consciousness necessary to break out of Jameson's "perpetual present," I look to the work of other theorists and critics of the traditional historical novel and their discussions of how fictions might engage with history. Perhaps most prominently, Georg Lukács's *The Historical Novel*, first published in English in 1962, provides an overview of nineteenth-century historical novels from Sir Walter Scott onwards, including Flaubert, Balzac, and Tolstoy. In his praise of Scott, Lukács emphasizes the importance of the concept of "totality" for the depiction of historical processes. According to Lukács, the depiction of history must address the "totality" of the historical event or time period, meaning a whole and complete depiction of a moment in the past. For Lukács, this depiction is meant to encompass a notion of historical development and process, primarily in relation to class structures and conflict: "a total historical picture depends upon a rich and graded interaction between different levels

of response to any major disturbance of life. It must disclose artistically the *connection* between the spontaneous reaction of the masses and the historical consciousness of the leading personalities” (44). This “total historical picture” does not necessarily rest on historical “facts” —as Jameson notes, “for Lukács the typical is never a matter of photographic accuracy” (*Marxism and Form* 194). The important thing is that the narrative displays the ongoing process of history through the interaction of historical and social forces: a dynamic interaction which encourages readers to consider how these forces might develop through time.

This recognition of historical and cultural forces is important to consider in relation to the political intentions and ideologies of any historical novel because, as several critics have argued, it is consciousness of one’s own present position in relation to those forces which permits one to imagine a future in which that position might have changed. In a Marxist viewpoint, like that of Jameson and Lukács, for instance, an understanding of these forces is generally tied to class structures and it is the proletariat that becomes aligned with Williams’ “emergent” force working against the “dominant” force of the bourgeois. The importance of this consciousness holds true for any political ideology, be it feminism, postcolonialism, or any other: what determines an emergent force is its historically subordinated position under the dominant force(s) of society. What allows that emergent force to even have a chance to actually emerge is *knowledge* of its identity: “it is when the proletariat is able to give itself and bourgeois society a certain *description* that it is able to become the practical force which will transform the situation it describes. The proletariat cannot ‘know the future’; but it can know itself as the potential non-identity of the present, which is all that knowing the future can mean” (Eagleton, “Marxism and the Past” 275). To

put this back in the context of Jameson's understanding of postmodernism, the loss of historicity in contemporary society means that people are no longer able to recognize the dominant and emergent forces of history, no longer able to identify themselves as the "potential non-identity of the present" and thereby to make potential their own emergence, create the possibility of future change.

For Lukács and others, the dynamic interaction of these social forces is often depicted through the use of characters who represent those forces within the microcosm of the narrative; there is not, however, only this one way to examine the presentation of history in historical novels. Similarly, the view of history espoused by Lukács, Jameson, Eagleton, and others is clearly not the only possible way to understand history. Some theorists, such as Walter Benjamin, see any understanding of history as linear as potentially problematic. For Benjamin, "[t]he present... comprises the entire history of mankind in an enormous abridgement" and allows individuals and groups in the present to seize hold of a moment in the past which incites them to seek change in the present because both "hatred and... spirit of sacrifice... are nourished by the image of enslaved ancestors rather than that of liberated grandchildren" ("Theses" 265; 262). Giorgio Agamben frames this as a shift in the understanding of time itself, from homogeneous, linear chronology to a *cairology* of freedom and pleasure. He states, "True historical materialism does not pursue an empty mirage of continuous progress along infinite linear time, but is ready at any moment to stop time.... It is the time which is experienced in authentic revolutions, which, as Benjamin remembers, have always been lived as a halting of time and an interruption of chronology" (Agamben 105). Though these theorists have different views of what history is and how to relate to it, the primary concern with historical consciousness remains constant. No matter

what view of history is espoused, it is important to examine how postmodern historical novels engage with history as an active process as opposed to static and textual historiography.

Based on this understanding of postmodern culture and the development of historical consciousness, it is clear that to effect political change, or to even have the *possibility* of effecting that change, authors working from within the confines of postmodern society must encourage their readers, first, to become aware of the active nature of history and time and, second, to identify themselves in relation to the dominant forces present in society at the time. Without this ability to locate themselves in the broader contexts of history and historical forces, readers will remain caught, unknowingly, in the perpetual present of postmodern society. Jameson has expressed doubts as to whether this form of political postmodern art—one which could actually inspire the historical consciousness necessary to effect true political change—is even possible, but that does not mean that those texts which at least attempt to incite action are not worthy of examination.

“Where Is the Voice Coming From?”

In order to determine the full political potential of so-called “historiographic metafiction,” one must resituate their postmodern textuality within a larger understanding of literary mediations of history and historical process. To do so is often to expose meanings and potentialities that remain suppressed or otherwise latent in more Hutcheon-inspired readings. Thus, even the most “obviously” historiographic texts can be read in terms that supplement or even contradict a purely textual understanding of history. “Where Is the Voice Coming From?” for instance, has been viewed predominantly in terms of Hutcheon’s

“ideological fiction,” as an ex-centric narrative of aboriginal peoples in Canada. In the existing criticism on “Voice,” the predominant strategy has been to examine the epistemological and historiographical issues raised by the first line: “The problem is to make the story” (135). Many critics have argued that this statement problematizes the notion of a “received...official history” in that it indicates that stories are made and, therefore, can be “made” in many different ways according to the storyteller’s bias (Bowering, “Wiebe and Bail”). George Bowering has written about how the researcher-historian’s ironic tone in the first section of the story leads readers to question the metanarrative of the white man’s nationalist, official history: “[T]he talk of testimony and evidence are attributes not of privileged author but of Socratic narrator. He is trying to trick his audience into asking the title question, to help make the story, to problematize the museums” (“Wiebe and Bail”). He asserts that the emphasis on the voice in the second section further deconstructs “authoritarian history” by privileging the voice—the aboriginal oral tradition—over the “answering noise of the gun explosions”—the sound of authority (“Wiebe and Bail”).

This deconstruction of the official historical metanarrative which shows clear bias against aboriginal peoples is an important element of the text, certainly. However, if the focus in this story rests solely on historiographic elements, the researcher’s own political intentions are undermined as well. As Coral-Anne Howells has noted, “The narrator’s voice which has given the story its pattern provides only one possible interpretation[;] for the truths of history, though they can be recreated and rewritten, can never be fully recovered” (102). As Hutcheon has argued, an “incredulity toward metanarrative” is limited in its ability to serve the political intentions of a text: “it has no strategies of real resistance” (“Incredulity Toward Metanarrative” 43). It is important, then, in my re-examination of these postmodern

texts, to expand on the existing critical discourse to include the possibility of “real resistance.”

In the case of “Voice,” this “real resistance” seems to come, at least in part, via Wiebe’s emphasis on the importance of the oral tradition. In his article on “Voice,” Bowering asserts that the story places value on voices and the oral tradition because of their connection to “Truth.” Even the voice of the RCMP officer Constable Dickson becomes valuable because “it speaks more openly the white attitude toward the Plains Cree than did all the printed proclamations. The oral tradition insinuates its authenticity” (Bowering, “Wiebe and Bail”). This emphasis on the “authenticity” of voice and its resulting value is misleading. Yes, texts may be contradictory, inaccurate, or downright false, but cannot verbal accounts be as well? Eagleton has argued that we cannot know the past “in the sense of some Context of contexts which would secure a single total meaning of the past for all time” because there is no such entity: the past can be understood through a variety of contexts, none necessarily more or less “truthful” or “authentic” than any other. It is not because voice is more reliable or authentic than text that it matters in “Voice,” but because it emphasizes history as lived, bodily experience.

The clue to this lies in the researcher character’s reference to a quotation by Teilhard de Chardin at the turning point in the narrative. In the second paragraph of the story, de Chardin is quoted as stating, “We are continually inclined to isolate ourselves from the things and events which surround us...as though we were spectators, not elements, in what goes on” (Wiebe 135). Then, immediately before his abrupt transition from contemporary research to historical narrative, the researcher calls the reader back to de Chardin’s statement, arguing that the quote “cannot explain the storyteller’s activity since, despite the

most rigid application of impersonal investigation, the elements of the story have now run me aground” (142). These two passages, taken together, indicate that the investigation described in the first section is meant to display the researcher-historian as “spectator,” isolated “from the things and events which surround [him]”—isolated, that is, from historical process. The textualized history he observes in that section—the photographs, the artefacts, the written documents—is therefore set at odds from the lived experience of history—the experience of being an “element” in historical process rather than an outside observer. The reduction of history to a series of texts and images removes the dynamic relationship between past and present. In section two, however, the researcher-historian declares that he has “become *element* in what is happening at this very moment” (143). In his ensuing focus on voices—the voice of Constable Dickson and, above all, the voice of Almighty Voice himself—the researcher-historian character draws attention to those aspects of history that cannot be reduced to text: the voice and the body.

Although it is not often considered in the existing criticism on “Voice,” any discussion of the voice is also connected to the body as well. The title of Wiebe’s story asks the question “Where is the voice coming from?” This question has been answered in many different ways in the forty years since its publication, and the answers have incorporated a variety of topics including language, authority, historiography, and silence. The word “voice” connotes all of these concepts. What should be borne in mind when considering the answer to that question, however, is that voice itself cannot exist alone: it must originate from a physical body. Where is the voice coming from, then? It comes from the body. This fact is significant to a discussion of historical process and the lived experience of history because it is the corporeal nature of voice that distinguishes it from texts. Texts, as has

already been discussed, are stagnant entities which are removed from the dynamic processes of history. Bodies, on the other hand, are active participants in the movement of historical and cultural forces: they are connected to the dynamic cycle of life and death which moves history forward and cannot be preserved or changed the way texts can be. This dynamic nature of physicality and corporeality is intimately connected to any discussion of voice and, especially, oral tradition, in which stories are passed on from one body to the next, changing and evolving through history. In placing value on the voice, then, Wiebe is not only demonstrating the superiority of an alternative version of history: he is demonstrating the superiority of an alternative *form* of history.

This interpretation seems to be supported by the presence—and noted absence—of bodies in the narrative itself. The body is a ubiquitous image in the first section of the story, the contemporary narrative focused on the researcher-historian figure. The researcher begins his quest for the “facts” of history by stating, “An affair seventy-five years old should acquire some of the shiny transparency of an old man’s skin. It should” (135). This passage connects history to the body; it reminds the reader of the changes that a body undergoes as the result of the passage of time. What is ironic about the researcher’s statement here is that he is about to find that, in fact, in a text-based account of history like the one displayed in the museum, past events do not get more transparent with the passage of time: texts are either preserved or lost, but they do not evolve to reveal new perspectives or contexts. As he explores the museum, the researcher-historian draws the reader’s attention to the idea of the body repeatedly. Most significantly, he is shown to be extremely interested in burial records—both where the bodies of the police and where the bodies of the Cree have been buried. He finds the graves of all four men killed by Almighty Voice, but the burial places of

the Cree men—Dublin, Going-Up-To-Sky, and Almighty Voice—are left in doubt.

Almighty Voice's body, apart from a single skull fragment, is lost: only a record of the body having been given to his mother, Spotted Calf, remains. These missing bodies of the Cree men—parallel to the missing voices of aboriginal peoples in the official history—highlight for the reader not only missing pieces in the puzzle of historical narrative, but missing persons, voices, and perspectives in a larger historical understanding.

In his essay "History, Narrative, and Marxism," Eagleton draws on Benjamin's essay "The Storyteller" in which he asserts, "Death is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell. He has borrowed his authority from death" (94). For Benjamin, death is the moment in which a person's "real life...the stuff that stories are made of—first assumes transmissible form" (94). Narrative, therefore, is dependent on mortality, but also on a sense of death, an awareness of mortality which Benjamin argues has slowly been forgotten (93). Eagleton expands on this in order to discuss historical process and historical consciousness. He states that the finality of death "is at once tragic...and exactly what enables a certain transmissibility, a relatively determinate story to tell.... The dead perpetuate themselves into the future through narrative as difference, but that narrative will only *make* a difference if its frozen, tragic finality is grasped in the very process of its differential transmission" (Eagleton, "History, Narrative, and Marxism" 277). What he means by this is that narratives—those made complete and unchangeable by death—can be told and re-told through generations as the remnants of the oppressed and dispossessed of history. It is only by maintaining that sense of mortality, though, that narratives of past oppression can make a difference in the present. With the sense of mortality comes a sense of the irredeemability of

the past, a sense of anger about past events, and a determination to avoid that sort of oppression in the future.

In the first section of “Voice,” this “transmissibility” does not exist. So much confusion exists around the artefacts in the museum and so many questions are left unanswered that there is no “relatively determinate story to tell”: no sense of “tragic finality” that will allow the story to “*make* a difference.” It is only in the final section where the researcher-historian returns the body, the voice, and mortality to the story by narrating Almighty Voice’s death, that the story can finally be told. In that section, the narrator abandons his attempt to impartially interpret “the facts” and creates a narrative of Almighty Voice’s last stand. As mentioned earlier, this narrative draws readers into the *experience* of that past moment: no longer is the past presented as a series of artefacts, documents, and photographs. In this section, the narrator gives Almighty Voice a voice in the form of a final death chant: “a voice so high and clear, so unbelievably high and strong in its unending wordless cry” (Wiebe 143). By narrating the final standoff between the “bristling surround of thirty-five Prince Albert Volunteers, thirteen civilians and fifty-six policemen” and the Cree men and ending that scene with the death chant of Almighty Voice, the narrator underlines the “frozen, tragic finality” of this scene in a way that his analysis of artefacts in the museum could not (Wiebe 143; Eagleton, “History, Narrative, and Marxism” 277). In doing so, he establishes a story that might be told and re-told, allowing that sense of finality to resound in the present.

This “frozen, tragic finality” of Almighty Voice’s story is also aided by the use of present-tense narration in that final section of the narrative. The present-tense narration of the historical scene is, on first reading, jarring to the reader who might expect historical

narration to be in the past tense. This is particularly noteworthy early in the section, when the narrator uses the present tense to refer to not only one given moment in the past, but several: “[A]n implacable Cree warrior long after the three-hundred-and-fifty-year war is ended, a war already lost the day the Cree watch Cartier hoist his gun ashore at Hochelaga and they begin the long retreat west” (Wiebe 142). This consistent use of the present tense recalls Benjamin’s assertion that “[t]he present... comprises the entire history of mankind in an enormous abridgment” (“Theses” 265). In this use of the present tense is a sense that all of history can be seen and understood from this vantage point. The narrator’s remark connects this relatively minor standoff between a few aboriginal men and the RCMP to the much larger context of the white man’s long-time dominance over the Cree. More than that, though, the present-tense narration, in which the narrator asserts that “the three-hundred-and-fifty-year war [was] already lost” from the very moment of colonization, communicates a consciousness of historical process: a recognition of the Cree as the perpetually and continually downtrodden element of society. In this sentence, the narrator identifies the Cree as Eagleton’s “potential non-identity of the present,” the potentially emergent force.

From this analysis, it is evident that the privileging of oral tradition over authoritative history in “Voice” is not merely the privileging of one version of history over another: it is more a statement about the *forms* of those histories. The “official” history, it has been seen, relies on texts: flat, stagnant artefacts that force us, as de Chardin identifies, “to isolate ourselves from the things and events which surround us,” the dynamic experience of history (135). Oral tradition and voice, on the other hand, denote a distinctly different engagement with history, one which is active and evolving as it passes from one voice to another, one body to another. One voice, therefore, becomes metonym for the entire process of history,

just as the narrator's present tense description of Almighty Voice's last stand becomes metonym for the centuries-long process of oppression suffered by aboriginal peoples. In this way, the death chant of Almighty Voice serves as a moment in which his death becomes transmissible and, therefore, able to incite anger: anger at the "perpetual present" in which the Cree are so consistently downtrodden. By returning the body and the voice to the stagnant, text-based "history" of the RCMP museum, the researcher leads readers to observe and recognize the forces of history at play in those events, perhaps inciting them to break out of the postmodern paradigm of "perpetual present." In this way, it is clear that this text, which has long been seen as valuable principally for its historiographic elements, is also valuable for its interaction with history itself.

My work in the rest of this thesis follows the same structure as the preceding analysis. For each of the main novels including researcher-historian characters—Findley's *The Wars*, Bowering's *Burning Water*, and Marlatt's *Ana Historic*—I draw on the theories and concepts discussed here, among others, to analyze the existing criticism on those novels and to explore their depictions of history and historical process as opposed to historiography. Specifically, in my discussion of *The Wars* in Chapter 2, I examine how the researcher-historian's engagement with photographs and oral testimonies both indicates the limitations of a text-based understanding of history and actively encourages recognition of the past/present dialectic of memory. In Chapter 3, I analyze how *Burning Water*'s researcher-historian allows readers to contextualize the historical narrative within the larger processes of economic and imperial history through an emphasis on mapping. Finally, Chapter 4 is devoted to an examination of how, in *Ana Historic*, the researcher-historian's active

participation in the narrative and her foregrounding of natality come together to draw attention to historical process and to thereby make effective the novel's political intentions. My intention in examining such a wide range of issues in these novels is to demonstrate that the critiques presented in this project are only the tip of the iceberg of the latent critical potential contained in these texts. My goal is to demonstrate that these texts are worthy of study for more than just their presentation of historiography and that, more generally, the figure of the researcher-historian is a valuable trope in the presentation of history and not just in the foregrounding of discursive processes. Given the prominence and popularity of this genre within the body of Canadian literature in recent years and decades, this is clearly a field that deserves critical attention and which should not be limited by any one critical apparatus. It is time, therefore, to expand the critical horizons of Canadian historical fiction to fully comprehend "the active processes of time and memory": not just the past, but *history*.

CHAPTER TWO

“Through Memory Without a Sound”

The Dialectics of Memory in Timothy Findley’s *The Wars*

Published in 1977, *The Wars*, by Timothy Findley, is one of the earliest Canadian novels to be identified as historiographic metafiction. Emerging three years after “Where Is the Voice Coming From?” it is the first full-length Canadian novel to prominently include a researcher-historian figure. Strictly speaking, *The Wars* is the fictional story of Robert Ross, a young Torontonian who joins the Canadian Field Artillery in 1915 and goes to Europe to fight in World War I. The historical narrative follows Robert as he trains on the Canadian prairies and then fights in Europe. In the central event of the text, Robert attempts to save a large number of horses from a shell barrage and shoots his superior officer who has ordered him to stop. Ultimately, his attempts to save the horses fail, and Robert dies several years later from injuries sustained in the barrage. These are the barebones of the narrative, but, as Diana Brydon puts it, “Such a bald paraphrase summarizing events clearly does no justice at all to the experience of reading *The Wars*, and inevitably distorts in the re-telling. It is not the story as such, but *how it is told* that matters” (65, italics mine). What makes the telling of the story so remarkable is the inclusion of the researcher-historian character, an unnamed researcher who works in an archive, examining old texts and photographs and interviewing surviving witnesses, attempting to reconstruct the history of Robert Ross. The contemporary narrative of the researcher-historian stands as a counterpoint to the more traditional, realist historical narrative of Robert’s participation in the war, and the fragmentary dialogue that exists between the two narratives foregrounds an engagement with time, memory, and history that is often shrouded in more traditional historical novels.

The contemporary narrative of the researcher-historian has led many, if not most, critics of *The Wars* to examine how the research performed foregrounds the discursive processes involved in the construction of historical narratives. They have read the researcher-historian as a metafictional device, and it is this feature that seems to be most valued. This is evident in Herb Wyile's comment that *The Wars* "has been widely and rightly recognized as a ground-breaking historical novel in Canada because of its deheroicizing of the traditionally heroicized role of Canadians in World War I, but more so because of the metafictional strategies that Findley deploys in the novel to denaturalize the presentation of history" (*Speculative Fictions* 141-142). This understanding of *The Wars* as historiographic metafiction is supported by Diana Brydon when she remarks that "Findley foregrounds the problematic nature of both 'telling' and 'showing' ...to draw our attention to the question of how we know anything, and to remind us that what we do not see... may be as important or more important than what we see. Similarly, what cannot be told may prove more important than what can" (64). Similarly, Evelyn Cobley asserts, "Findley's postmodern strategies acknowledge that all narrative practice involves mediating processes; this foregrounding of mediation demystifies the illusion of the text as a direct reflection of reality which is still operative in traditional First World War literature" (99). Finally, Hutcheon herself refers to *The Wars* and its "thematized archival researching process" in her seminal chapter "Historiographic Metafiction" (*The Canadian Postmodern* 66). Clearly, upon examination of the available criticism on *The Wars*, there is a consensus that the foregrounding of archival research by the researcher-historian is primarily—perhaps even solely—meant to assert the discursive nature of history writing.

This emphasis on the metafictional and historiographic nature of the novel, however, tends to underplay the extent to which a constructivist view of history is undermined by the primary narrative. Wylie identifies this issue:

The troubling question *The Wars* raises, then, is whether the ultimate effect of the metafictional, historiographical structure of the novel is to undermine or at least question the authority of the text as a reconstruction of the ‘history’ of Robert Ross, or whether it simply defers the representational authority assumed by historical realism to the level of historiographical mimesis, suggesting that this version is the inevitable result of researching the story.

(*Speculative Fictions* 144)

If the interpretation of the researcher-historian’s primary role in the novel is to destabilize traditional narratives of history, then the cohesion of the traditional narrative and the inclusion of unverifiable details is difficult to reconcile. Martin Kuester attributes this to Findley’s essentially Modernist mindset—“even if he cannot help living in a postmodern world, Findley strives for a coherent universe”—and Cobley asserts that “Findley’s anxiety about making himself clear illustrates a nostalgic yearning for certainty and order,” though she argues that “his actual narrative practice is sufficiently driven by postmodern imperatives to counter-act this nostalgia” (Kuester 94; Cobley 121). Despite these attempts to smooth over or reconcile the contradiction, the fact remains, as Wylie notes, that “the ultimate effect is undeniably ambivalent” (*Speculative Fictions* 144). In the face of this contradiction, I propose that historiographic metafiction may not be the optimal critical framework through which to evaluate *The Wars*. It would be more valuable to examine the

novel, not as an “ambivalent” attempt at historiographic metafiction but instead as a genuinely dialectical engagement with history, the past, and memory.

“A Multitudinous Photographic Simulacrum”

Findley’s engagement with history comes across in several ways in *The Wars*. The standard approach in the existing criticism has been to identify Findley’s critique of the *content* of the dominant portrayal of WWI: the suppression of minority and ex-centric perspectives by the nationalist, official narratives that treat war in general as supremely heroic and supremely masculine. This sort of portrayal is particularly prevalent in Canada, where WWI has traditionally and predominantly been seen as an identity-defining moment for our country. Critics like Diana Brydon, Simone Vauthier, Donna Pennee, and many others have noted Findley’s resistance in *The Wars* to these dominant, heroic, nationalist representations of WWI through discussion of how Robert’s actions at the end of the novel, which would ordinarily be seen as treasonous, are complicated by the presentation of non-traditional masculinities and Robert’s connection with animals. These critics have identified Findley’s desire to unearth those parts of history that have been forgotten or oppressed, but they have done so largely by focusing on the metafictional aspects of the novel, and this emphasis on metafictionality often brushes over how Findley’s ideological position might be weakened by reducing his engagement with history to solely a matter of textuality. In fact, by emphasizing the construction of “history” through texts and images, these critics participate in the postmodern crisis in historicity, foregrounding history as text as opposed to lived experience. I contend, however, that it is not only on the level of content that *The Wars* seeks to critique the dominant representations of WWI; the novel also works against the

form of those representations to affect how the reader perceives and understands both the events of the story and a larger perspective on history and the past.

Findley's interaction with both the form and the content of dominant history begins on the earliest pages of the novel, as the researcher-historian is confronted with history as a collection of images: "You begin at the archives with photographs.... Boxes and boxes of snapshots and portraits.... Spread over table tops, a whole age lies in fragments underneath the lamps" (Findley, *The Wars* 3). These images are not simply photographs here; they are referred to as "a whole age." Somehow, in the form of these images, the past is able to exist in the present, spread out on a table: "a spatial, rather than temporal, order of simulacra" (Bennett 262). Fredric Jameson has addressed the problems associated with this postmodern, image-based understanding of time:

The new spatial logic of the simulacrum can now be expected to have a momentous effect on what used to be historical time. The past is thereby itself modified: what was once, in the historical novel as Lukács defines it, the organic genealogy of the bourgeois collective process—what is still...the retrospective dimension indispensable to any vital reorientation of our collective future—has meanwhile itself become a vast collection of images, a multitudinous photographic simulacrum. (*Postmodernism* 18)

What he means by this is that "historical time" is no longer recognized as a process but as a spatial order of images which echo historical reality, but which are not actually connected to it. This image-based conception of history is symptomatic of a nostalgic view of the past, one in which an idealized image of the past—only superficially distinct from the present—stands in for reality. This is problematic, Jameson argues, because it undermines "the

retrospective dimension indispensable to any vital reorientation of our collective future,” the understanding of the past that is necessary for any political change (18).

The form of history with which the researcher-historian is confronted at the archives is this sort of “multitudinous photographic simulacrum,” in which the photographs are meant to stand in for reality, eliminating any sense of historical distance that might be present. Similarly, when the researcher begins to describe the year 1915, he cannot separate the content of the photographs from their form, stating, “The year itself looks sepia and soiled—muddied like its pictures” (Findley, *The Wars* 4). Kuester has attributed this to the fact that, for the researcher, “Memory...exists in the form of textual and photographic documentation only” (56). Lorraine York has similarly argued that, in *The Wars*, “Photography...becomes a type of surrogate memory...” (85). These passages are all symptomatic of the dominant postmodern aesthetic: the flattening of history and memory into two-dimensional images that are asked to stand in for reality. What Kuester, York, and many other critics have neglected to mention, however, is how the researcher’s interaction with these photographs actually indicates a resistance to this type of text-based “history.” In order to truly understand how Findley engages with and subverts the dominant view of WWI, it is necessary to also acknowledge how his novel works against the postmodern understanding of history as text/image and breaks through that representation to what Blair calls “the active processes of time and memory” (204).

Memory is an essential term here. It is closely tied to history, but unlike words such as “history” and “the past,” which can conjure images of something static or lost, “memory is, by definition, a term which directs our attention not to the past but to the *past-present relation*” (Popular Memory Group 211). Because memory is formed in retrospect, it

inherently implicates the past moment of action, the present moment of remembering, and the time that has passed between those moments. No matter whether it is a memory of yesterday, last year, or last decade, memory creates a connection between time periods while still maintaining a sense of difference and distinction between those periods. In addition, the term “memory” also comprehends diverse understandings of the past, understandings which arise from various contexts and are preserved and developed in unique ways. Private memories, for instance, are almost always of a distinctly different quality than those of dominant or public institutions, and rarely does either type of memory exist alone.³ By looking at how memories of past events are developed, on both public and private levels, it is possible to see how a sense of history is formed as well. Moreover, memories are influenced by the passage of time, re-framed and re-worked by the knowledge of what came later and by how others perceived events. In this way there can be no reduction of the past to text—or past to image—because the form of memory is so inherently connected to the dynamic, lived experience of history.

The Wars provides intriguing ground for an analysis of memory and its implications for historical reality and process because memory is an important concept for Findley. In his article “The Countries of Invention,” Findley states, “Memory provides a ground...on which we can face reality, accommodate reality and, possibly, even survive it,” and his interest in memory is apparent in his frequent use of that term throughout the novel (106). Most importantly, the past-present dialectic created by memory is also political in nature. Findley

³ The Popular Memory Group asserts that institutional or dominant memory, which is aligned with the dominant representations of WWI which Findley critiques, attempts to impose an often nationalist identity in a top-down system while private or individual memory is based on subjective experience and leads to a much more private identity. Collective or popular memory, on the other hand, is formed through an amalgamation of those other forms and creates an identity that may be separate from the one imposed by institutions. By observing both the top-down memories of societal institutions and the bottom-up memories of individuals, it is possible to identify those groups and those memories which may have been omitted from the dominant representations of history.

himself has remarked that “[b]y promising continuity, [memory] gives the future an odds-on chance of making an appearance in our lives” (“The Countries of Invention” 108). In other words, by recognizing the link between past and present, one becomes conscious of the link between present and future as well: the reality of the present in history.

This past/present dialectic is presented in many ways through Findley’s novel, not least through the presence of the researcher-historian character who stands as a figure of the present. Far from simply foregrounding research, the presence of this character—who actively interacts with many different forms of memory—inherently encourages readers to consider this relationship between past and present and, by extension, the relationship between present and future too. Through its active and dialectical nature, memory in *The Wars* incites readers to mediate between two distinct dialectics: private/public and past/present. In this way, the novel engages with all aspects of memory and with a *form* of memory distinctly different from the nature of texts and images. This is demonstrated in the following pages through an analysis of the researcher-historian character in *The Wars*. In particular, the researcher’s interactions with photographs and with the oral testimonies from two women who knew Robert highlight the form and content of public/institutional memory and then complicate it through an emphasis on private memory and oral testimonies.⁴ By examining each of these features in depth, I demonstrate how the emphasis on the active nature of private memory complicates the traditional and limited understanding of WWI and simultaneously undermines the understanding of history as a stagnant “collection of images.”

⁴ Ideally this critique would encompass many more aspects of the novel including Robert’s own experience of memory and the researcher’s interactions with and comments on the historical narrative. For the purposes of this project, however, I have largely confined my focus to the researcher’s interactions with photographs and oral testimonies since those are the aspects of the text that have most prominently been viewed solely from a metafictional angle.

Photography and Public Memory

Findley's problematization of both the content and the form of public history emerges in the first pages of the novel as the researcher character grapples with the "[b]oxes and boxes of snapshots and portraits" which lie "[s]pread over table tops" in the archives (*The Wars* 3). This collage-like depiction of 1915, which attempts to summarize the character of a year into a series of images, is one constructed from the public photographs to which the researcher has access: the photos that were meant for official record, the photos of public spectacle. What is underlined in this collage is the dominant character of the time: "April. Ypres.... This is where the pictures alter—fill up with soldiers—horses—wagons. Everyone is waving either at the soldiers or the cameras. More and more people want to be remembered. Hundreds—thousands crowd into frame" (5). The statement "more and more people want to be remembered" points to an impression, seemingly held by the subjects of these photographs, that "to be remembered" means to be photographed or to become an object in a photo. This assumption is contradicted, or at least complicated, however, in the researcher's interactions with these photographs.⁵

Following the presentation of photographs depicting the frenzied enthusiasm of public support for the war, the description dramatically shifts. In italic font—separating the passage from its surrounding descriptions—the researcher describes another picture, one which the reader doubts could actually exist. The picture is of Robert Ross on the back of a

⁵ The standard approach to these photographs in the existing criticism has been to emphasize their mediated nature, to focus on how they impede access to "reality." These photos, however, actually serve to highlight the medium of photography in another way, one that actually conveys a significant message about historical process and experience. The photos point specifically to a unique moment in time, one in which these sepia-toned photographs were a relatively new phenomenon: a medium that marked an historic transformation in communications technology and record keeping. The distinct nature of that time period is underlined by these photographs in the same way that a photo taken on an iPhone would carry with it the distinct nature of our contemporary time. They may both be images that impede access to "reality," but they are also intimately connected to the active process of time.

horse: “*There is mud on his cheeks and forehead and his uniform is burning—long, bright tails of flame are streaming out behind him. He leaps through memory without a sound*” (Findley, *The Wars* 5). This is a picture of Robert’s final transgression, the event that the researcher seeks to explain, but the reader knows it is not a real photograph since the narrator comments, “*You lay the fiery image back in your mind and let it rest. You know it will obtrude again and again until you find its meaning—here*” (6). Although this image is described in the same section as the public photographs, it stands dramatically apart in both its content and its character. It is an image of Robert that does not fit with the dominant representations of the time seen in the preceding photographs and, more importantly, its form stands in contrast as well.

Rather than being a stagnant image meant to represent a lost and spatialized past, in which subjects stand frozen, “silenced at the edge of wharves and time,” this vision of Robert is dynamic: though it is still an image, it “leaps through memory” and “will obtrude again and again until you find its meaning” (5, 6). “Leaping” and “obtruding” are dynamic verbs which stand completely at odds with the earlier images which “li[e] in fragments underneath lamps” (3). This sort of dynamic image is not out of place in Findley’s work. Discussing Findley’s use of photographs in various works, York notes that “Findley always emphasizes process and flux rather than fixity and stillness” and that “[t]his preference is deeply embedded in Findley’s notions of reality and realism and . . . affects the way in which he uses and views photography in his fiction” (56). The narrator makes no comment about this more active image that interacts directly with memory or how it may stand apart from the photographs, but by setting them side by side he incites the readers to consider how the one may complicate the other and to be aware of this contrast as they move towards the next

paragraph in which the institutional memory of the war is overtly complicated for the first time.

In that first description of the year 1915, Findley's researcher-historian sees the photographs that represent the dominant, public memory of the time, but in the one that follows Robert's appearance "through memory without a sound," he sees something more. The photo is of "A Band... assembled on the Band Shell" (6). Amidst the presumably patriotic crowd listening, we are told, to "Soldiers of the Queen,"⁶ is Robert Ross. According to the researcher, Robert is "[s]tanding on the sidelines with pocketed hands—feet apart and narrowed eyes. His hair falls sideways across his forehead. He wears a checkered cap and a dark blue suit. He watches with a dubious expression; half admiring—half reluctant to admire. He's old enough to go to war. He hasn't gone" (6). These are the physical facts reported about Robert in the photograph, though how it is possible to discern the "dark blue" colour of his suit in a sepia-toned photograph is not clear. No more evidence is given, but the researcher continues: "He [Robert] doubts the validity in all this martialling of men but the doubt is inarticulate. It stammers in his brain. He puts his hand out sideways: turns. He reaches for the wicker back of a wheelchair. 'Come on, Rowena. There's still the rest of the park to sit in'"⁷ (6).

Other scholars have questioned the relationship between fact and fiction in this and other historical novels. That is not my project here. The reader is led to wonder in this passage, however, why the researcher-historian would continue beyond the physical description of the photograph to a description of Robert's mental state that can only be

⁶ How that is known we are not told, and the reader is led to wonder if the researcher is manipulating the unknowns of this photo to fit his purposes.

⁷ This is the first reference in the novel to Robert's sister Rowena. The reader is unaware of her existence to this point.

conjecture. Why does the researcher-historian assume that Robert “doubts”? (If the doubt is truly inarticulate, it cannot have been communicated to anyone). Why does he assume Rowena, Robert’s hydrocephalic sister, to be there, but not in the photo? Most importantly, why did Findley include this conjecture in the final lines of a section devoted to the dominant/public memory of that time? I argue that the passage serves two main purposes. First, the doubts—stammering though they are—provide an alternative to the dominant memory, coming from a character the reader already recognizes to be a protagonist and is therefore more likely to identify with. Second, the introduction of Rowena here, in the context of a photograph in which she is hidden, prepares the reader to be interested, in the next paragraph, when it is revealed that “Rowena, the eldest,...is never in photographs that are apt to be seen in public. In fact, she is not much admitted into the presence of a camera” (6). This awakens the reader to the division of public and private in the novel but also to the idea that some aspects of history have actually been lost: “It is not only unrecorded, but actually silenced. It is not offered the occasion to speak” (Popular Memory Group 210). Private, in this way, comes to mean something more than “not public”; it comes to mean also “suppressed.”

What the researcher’s interactions with these photographs demonstrate is that “public” photos highlight the dominant memory of WWI, the nationalist ideologies that Robert, the non-traditional soldier, resists. In drawing readers’ attention to the suppressed and unrecorded elements of history, the researcher problematizes that dominant memory. Similarly, by drawing attention to the “fixity and stillness” of photographs in contrast to the more dynamic image of Robert, the researcher demonstrates the inadequacy of the image-

based conception of public history, how the reduction of history to text and images can obscure the lived experience of history.

This opposition to both the content and the form of dominant history can be discerned in nearly all of the researcher's interactions with photographs, but rarely more so than in Section 1, Chapter 20, when he describes an official, military photograph of Robert in uniform. In this passage, the narrator ironically adopts Robert's own voice, drawing specific attention to the absurdity of this image:

Dead men are serious—that's what this photograph is striving to say.

Survival is precluded. Death is romantic—got from silent images. I lived—was young—and died. But not real death, of course, because I'm standing here alive with all these lights that shine so brightly in my eyes....

5 x 9 and framed in silver. (Findley, *The Wars* 48-49)

York asserts that this photograph, placed beside a box of letters, signals "Findley's belief in the power of document and memory to preserve the spirit of the dead," but given the ironic tone of the passage, this seems unlikely (85). In the researcher-historian's interaction with this photograph, both the content and the form of public memory are criticized. First, the narrator ridicules the "romantic" perspective on a soldier's death that is communicated by this photo, which he implies was taken with the assumption that Robert would die and that this would be his official memorial: the institution has determined how he will be publically remembered, removed from the realities of war and brutal death. Second, he draws attention to the problematic contradiction in any image-based conception of history: the erasure of the dynamic and continuous cycle of life and death. By interacting with the photograph in such an ironic tone, the researcher highlights for the reader the absurdity of this "silent imag[e]"

which seeks to “remember” Robert while simultaneously removing him from the lived experience of time and memory, leaving him two-dimensional and unchanging: somehow simultaneously both alive and dead.

Oral Testimonies and Private Memory

Rather than simply highlighting the limitations of this image-based understanding of history, the researcher-historian also provides an alternative to those images through his interaction with and preference for oral testimonies. From the earliest pages of the novel, the researcher character indicates a preference for first-hand accounts over “public facts” as he first attempts to piece together the story of Robert Ross by talking to those who knew him. The researcher searches for information from people who “can still be met in dark old rooms with nurses in attendance” (Findley, *The Wars* 3). These interviews produce little to no information as the interviewees hide their knowledge from the researcher: “They look at you and rearrange their thoughts. They say: ‘I don’t remember.’ The occupants of memory have to be protected from strangers” (3). It is only when these personal memories are rendered inaccessible that the researcher turns to the photographs at the archives: “In the end, the only facts you have are public. Out of these you make what you can, knowing that one thing leads to another. Sometime, someone will forget himself and say too much or else the corner of a picture will reveal the whole” (3). In this first scene with the researcher-historian character, it is clear that he would prefer to get his information from first-hand accounts. Why he prefers those private memories to the “public facts” is never stated, but from their very first impressions of the researcher, readers are aware that there is a preference: for some reason, oral testimonies are perceived as more valuable.

Several possible explanations for this preference are established in greater detail as the researcher interacts with the testimonies of Marian Turner and Juliet D’Orsey over the course of the novel. These are examples of “oral history,” a form distrusted by many dominant historiographers because of its largely subjective and non-empiricist nature. Oral histories, however, can be extremely useful in working against both the content and the form of dominant memory because “they are the product of *social individuals*. Their authors speak out of particular positions in the complex of social relations characteristic of particular societies at particular historical times” (Popular Memory Group 234). The researcher-historian in *The Wars* stands in a unique position to interact with these accounts and to mediate their effects within the novel. By including testimony from two such “social individuals,” *The Wars* allows its readers to consider not only the “public facts” that would be available in the archive—the sort of “facts” that have been compiled by dominant institutions—but also the private memories of those who lived at that time and their retrospective analyses of both those private memories and the public facts.

Critics who have addressed the use of oral testimonies in *The Wars* have predominantly addressed how the fact of transcribing the interviewees’ original words draws attention to “the fact that this ‘evidence’ is many times removed from any historical ‘reality’” (Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern* 50). Hutcheon, in particular, emphasizes how the use of these transcripts demonstrates the difficulty of accessing a “true” historical referent:

The tape-recording (like the camera) has provided an obvious but problematic mimetic device for literary realism. While it records, it also frames and automizes. By definition, it is exclusive: it excludes the recorded object from

the presence of the replaying (except in the capacity of listener), but it also excludes the receiver from the presence of the ‘reality’ *when* it was being recorded. (49)

In this way, Hutcheon focuses primarily on the formal techniques of the novel—the literary transcription of oral histories, for instance—and how those techniques highlight the discursive nature of historiography and the inaccessibility of history. However, oral histories themselves actually fight against a purely textual understanding of history because they act as a bridge between past and present. Although the process of narrating history in any way is a discursive act, in oral histories that process cannot be so radically divorced from the lived experience of history as other forms of narrative. Because the narrator *lived* the moment in history being narrated (it is the narrator’s own memory), there is no veil of inaccessibility: only a connection. Even when those oral narratives are then later transcribed—filtered and selected by another narrator—they still maintain their original connection to the past.

In drawing attention to this dialogue between past and present, *The Wars* also works against the *content* of that image-based history. Having the researcher-historian demonstrate a preference for these oral histories over the public photographs, Findley leads his readers to consider the public/private dialectic as well. Juliet D’Orsey’s private perspective on the war, found in the diaries she wrote at the age of twelve, is useful in this way because it is at once removed from violence and yet close to it too. Growing up in a hospice, she is separated from the war but surrounded by its products: wounded soldiers. Not preconditioned by expectations of hyper-masculine heroism, her impression of Robert, who she met in that hospice, is a private, domestic one. She does not expect him to be “heroic;” she remembers instead a sensitive man who likes walking, running, and animals. Her impression of war is

from her brothers—one of whom, Clive, later dies in the war—and from Clive’s pacifist friends: being a female child she has very little direct interaction with the effects of the war or its dominant public representations. Simone Vauthier has commented on the utility of this sort of perspective to the telling of a non-dominant version of history:

[T]he dominant narrative concerned with Canadians in World War I naturally tended to suppress the disturbing memory of an aberrant violence which followed neither the approved channels of patriotic murder nor the more customary ways of resistance to ‘the wars.’ Because the two interviewees never shared in the male code of war and the interviewer belongs to a different generation with different cultural assumptions, they can re-define Robert Ross’s gesture and through their combined (re)telling, make available to the present day its positive affirmation within negation. (15)

In other words, the private version shows an alternative interpretation of past events to the one that has been carried forward by dominant memory. This is what Juliet’s diary presents: how disconnected her life was from the dominant understanding of the war. The presentation of this perspective allows the readers to recognize that there are alternatives to the dominant representations of history.

In these ways, Juliet’s diary entries interact with the historical narrative and the researcher-historian’s research to complicate the dominant form and content of WWI history, but the novel’s use of oral narratives to advance the cause of the active process of memory does not end there. The past/present dialectic is emphasized even more in the other section of Juliet’s testimony. This section differs from her diary excerpts in that her account of how Robert met her sister Barbara is not really her own memory: it is a memory of Robert telling

her the story. It is a secondary account which has passed through decades, only to be reconstructed by an old woman at a much later time. Here the reader sees that “[m]emories of the past are, like all common-sense forms, strangely composite constructions, resembling a kind of geology, the selective sedimentation of past traces” (Popular Memory Group 211). In Juliet’s memory lies the embodiment of this “selective sedimentation of past traces” as she analyzes the memory and its subjects in retrospect. Her perspective on her sister Barbara, for instance, is coloured by years of knowing her: they are not the evaluations of the young girl who knew Barbara at the time. Similarly, her perspective on war and death is conditioned retrospectively: “I know ‘the bomb’ is terrible. But if the bomb falls, we all die together. In the war you had to face it day after day—week after week—month after month—year after year” (Findley, *The Wars* 115). The importance of these memories is not whether they are “real” or not: the process by which they are created, remembered, and passed on reveal valuable details about society and social individuals.⁸ In this way, Juliet’s understanding of one specific story, one memory from the past, is encased in all of history.

The three short fragments of Marian Turner’s testimony demonstrate similar ideas about memory in a more concentrated form. Though her utility to the actual story of Robert Ross is mostly confined to her third and final transcript, in which she describes how she offered to help Robert die and he refused with the words “not yet,” two other segments are included earlier in the novel. The first is introduced immediately after the overview of photographs from the Ross family which is instrumental in initially establishing the importance of the public/private dialectic in the novel. The researcher-historian then

⁸ Critics of historiographic metafiction have tended to get caught up in discussions about the “factuality” or “authenticity” of given accounts, as though there were only one valid perspective on or understanding of any given historical event. What seems to be suggested through the inclusion of these oral accounts is that the reliability of the accounts is very much beside the point: “authentic” or not, these testimonies provide useful insights into the experience of history.

comments, “This is perhaps a good place to introduce Miss Turner, whose importance lies at the end of this story but whose insights throw some light on its beginnings” (9). The transcript that is shared, however, includes very little solid information about Robert or his story: it is an account of her impression of Robert, but it is largely drowned out by ramblings about war and heroism—a larger picture of the history in which Robert was involved. What makes her testimony so valuable to the novel is how she foregrounds memory, underlines private memory and non-dominant versions of history, and links the past to what came after it. Marian draws specific attention to the dynamic process of memory and the past-present relations inherent in it and therefore directly encourages readers to understand the implications of Robert’s story to a broader understanding of history, the present, and even the future.

In her first fragment, Marian also emphasizes the way memories may be affected by the passage of time: certainly they may degrade in accuracy over time, but they are also enriched by other factors. As the Popular Memory Group states, “Oral history testimony... is profoundly influenced by discourses and experiences in the present. That is the standpoint from which oral accounts (and formal histories) are constructed. Memory is therefore itself a profoundly complicated construction and a very active process. In memory past events, in their own complexity, are worked and reworked” (243). Because of working and reworking, Marian’s testimony is completely unlike Juliet’s diary entries, although they supposedly originate from the same time. Instead, Marian’s testimony is less about WWI specifically and more about war in general:

Well—I saw both wars. And I’m here to tell you the passions involved were as ordinary as me and my sister Bessie fighting over who’s going to cook the

dinner.... Those people in the park—you—me—everyone—the greatest mistake we made was to imagine something magical separated us from Ludendorff and Kitchener and Foch. Our leaders, you see. Well—Churchill and Hitler, for that matter! (Findley, *The Wars* 11)

In this passage, Marian connects the leaders of both world wars, both sides of each, and she lumps them all together with all who have come before or who will come after.

She establishes that “the past” is not “a given ‘thing’ which we must preserve, but... a force constantly resonating in the present, producing new layers of sound and meaning” (Popular Memory Group 243). In drawing attention to this fact, Marian establishes the inadequacy of photographs in maintaining a dynamic relationship with the past: while memory grows and evolves, amending its contents and understandings based on the passage of time, photographs are one-dimensional, severed from the active processes of memory. Perhaps this is why, at the end of Marian’s final transcript, the researcher notes, “(LATER, MARIAN TURNER SENT ALONG A PHOTOGRAPH IN WHICH SHE IS SEEN WITH HER FRIEND OLIVIA FISCHER AND THE WHITE CAT. ‘I thought you might like to have this,’ SHE WROTE. ‘At my age, you don’t need pictures any more.’)” (Findley, *The Wars* 216). Perhaps, “at [her] age” she has realized that the quality of her memories exceeds that of any pictures.

“[A] Particular Way of Moving in the World”

In addition to presenting dynamic, private memories that problematize the image-based past depicted in public photographs, the oral testimonies in *The Wars* also underline the novel’s opposition to the flattening of history to text and image through their connection

to the orality, and therefore corporeality, of memory. As I discuss in relation to “Where Is the Voice Coming From?,” orality by its nature works against a textual or image-based understanding of reality because it is inextricably linked to corporeality: there cannot be a voice without a body, and a body is most certainly not a text. A body carries with it a sense both of life and of death, the process which creates the lived experience of history. The researcher-historian’s direct interactions with women who lived through WWI and who knew Robert establish an active connection between past and present. This connection established by the orality of these memories is particularly apparent in the section of Juliet’s testimony in which she reads passages from her diary. The researcher character draws specific attention to this past-present relation as he describes Juliet’s voice: “The effect of this singing the passages where Lady Juliet reads from the diaries she wrote when she was twelve years old is both magical and devastating—for you know that what you hear is the voice of someone near to death—and the wisdom remains a child’s” (Findley, *The Wars* 158). He emphasizes the gap between past and present, but also the connection created by the fact that the diary is read by the same woman who wrote it. The emphasis on this connection compels readers to consider how the orality of the memories subverts the idea of an inaccessible, image-based past.

This connection is further emphasized through the prevalence of bodies throughout the narrative. As one might imagine, this novel about war is filled with bodies: dead bodies, wounded bodies, disabled bodies, male bodies, female bodies, animal bodies, bodies that assault other bodies, and bodies that act seemingly without the sanction of the mind. Findley emphasizes the importance of these bodies in countless sections of the novel, giving them agency separate from that of the mind. When Robert visits the brothel in Lousetown, for

example, the narrator remarks, “Robert had ejaculated coming up the stairs. His body hadn’t waited for his mind. It did things on its own” (Findley, *The Wars* 40). Similarly, when Robert is assaulted and gang raped by his fellow soldiers, the narrator refers, not to “people,” but to “bodies”: “He felt their bodies going away and his own being rolled and dumped face down on the stones” (193). There are many explanations for Findley’s prominent inclusion of physical bodies in his novel, but in a novel so closely engaged with history and images, it is important to consider how this emphasis on bodies and physical movement affects the readers’ understanding of historical process.

As I discuss in the first chapter of this project, any discussion of the body inherently works against a text or image-based conception of history and relates instead to the lived experience of time. Blair discusses something similar in “The Postmodern Impasse” in relation to Henri Bergson’s emphasis on the significance of bodily movement in relation to memory and an understanding of the past and present. Discussing this in the context of *The Englishman’s Boy*, Blair points to the protagonist Harry’s limp, which dramatically affects how he experiences life but which would not be evident in “his reflection in a window” or in a photograph (218). She argues that Harry’s “particular way of moving in the world” makes him more inclined to be aware of the movement of time because he is already aware of “the distinction between movement and visual representation” and recognizes “that both are necessary to identity” (Blair 217, 218). The emphasis on bodies in *The Wars*, then, especially juxtaposed against the fixed and frozen nature of the photographs, raises interesting considerations about the significance of the body and physical movement to the novel’s engagement with history. In the case of Robert’s sister Rowena, for example, her physical disability affects both her “way of moving in the world” and Robert’s, as he is

enlisted to push her wheelchair. It is therefore worth considering whether, by reading Rowena into the photograph of the band early in the novel, the researcher character incites some recognition of physical movement into this example of visual representation. Like Harry's limp, perhaps the inclusion of Rowena's disability and Robert's associated actions point to the importance of physical movement to any dynamic understanding of time.

Furthermore, this emphasis on bodies, especially those like Rowena's which are often shielded from public view, contributes to the novel's critique of the nationalist content of dominant memory. The narrator's treatment of Robert's official memorial photograph illustrates the sort of body that institutional memory hopes to promote: "In paintings—and in photographs—there's never any blood. At most, the hero sighs his way to death while linen handkerchiefs are held against his wounds. His wounds are poems" (Findley, *The Wars* 49). The bodies that actually appear in the novel are not like this. Soldiers are wounded, horses are killed, and Robert is brutally violated, but those traumatized bodies are not acknowledged in the official images that the researcher finds in the archive because they do not conform to the stereotyped, stylized image of "the hero" that the public wants to see. An interesting demonstration of this preference for unafflicted bodies is depicted in the character of Barbara D'Orsey who has a series of relationships with "heroic" soldiers. When each of those soldiers—first Jamie Villiers, then Eugene Taffler, and then Robert Ross—get wounded, she quickly replaces him with another "hero." This pattern highlights the fact that the sort of idealized "hero" Barbara seeks out cannot exist forever: like the image of Robert in his memorial photograph, the stereotype may be an accurate representation of a body at a specific moment in time, but the very nature of the passing of time means that the body will not remain whole and vital forever. The prominence of wounded and otherwise traumatized

bodies in the novel therefore problematizes both the image-based form and the stereotyped content of dominant memory, advancing an understanding of history much more connected to the body itself and to the “active processes of time and memory.”

“A Shout of Recognition”

The importance of corporeality to *The Wars* continues to resonate in the final pages of the novel as Robert’s final years, his death, and his burial are recounted. With that account, the historical narrative comes to a firm close with a description of a photograph: a domestic scene in which Robert—“his face a mass of scar tissue”—and Juliet D’Orsey hold hands and smile (Findley, *The Wars* 217). This final image of Robert in the novel proper is a private one—a domestic scene with an injured soldier. The researcher’s description of the photo draws attention to Robert’s wounded body, so close to death, but this is then contrasted sharply with another image—the first in the Epilogue—in which Robert is suddenly whole and healthy again. In that photo, which was taken while Robert was in training at Lethbridge in 1915, Robert is portrayed in a military scene, with “tent flaps—bedding—camp cots,” and with Robert in “his uniform...done up tight” (217). He is holding the skull of a small animal and “[t]o his left there is a fascio of guns: tall old-fashioned rifles stoked and bound as if for harvest” (218). This photo stands in stark contrast to the domestic scene of the paragraph before in that it highlights the institutional memory of the war: a handsome soldier in uniform surrounded by symbols of violence, his body still unaffected by the trauma which the reader knows will come.

The introduction of this photograph so late in the novel leads the reader to wonder what its purpose may be. Immediately after the readers learn of Robert’s death, they are

thrown back to this picture from before his arrival in Europe, to a moment before his story was so set apart from the dominant representations of the war. The only comment from the researcher character is that “it seems important,” with no explanation as to why (218). The narrator then remarks that the photo reminds the researcher of something:

Then you remember something written long after Robert Ross was dead. It was written during another war—in 1943—by the Irish essayist and critic Nicholas Fagan. This is what he wrote: *‘the spaces between the perceiver and the thing perceived can...be closed with a shout of recognition. One form of a shout is a shot. Nothing so completely verifies our perception of a thing as our killing of it.’* (218)

This is not a real quotation; it was created by Findley—there is no such person as “Irish essayist and critic Nicholas Fagan.” There is no analysis of the quote in the novel, no indication of why it may be linked to the photo of Robert as traditional soldier. To what situation in the novel does it refer?

Surprisingly, very few critics have addressed the use of this quotation, despite its prominent position in the penultimate paragraph of the novel. David Williams, in his book *Media, Memory, and The First World War*, attributes it to “the narrator ‘verif[y]ing’ his perceptions of the war, first by ‘killing’ off the old-style warrior, and then by closing the distance with a ‘shout of recognition’ at Robert who is made the ‘hero’ of a new age” (181). This interpretation corresponds with an understanding of the novel as a mediation between public and private memories of the war. By reacquainting the reader with the dominant version of history after having been immersed in the private and popular understandings of history that came from Robert’s and the two women’s stories, the researcher draws attention

to how alien that “old-style warrior” now is and leads the reader to more fully accept the alternative version of history. This reading, however, seems to cover only some of the potential meanings set forth by the Fagan quote. Fagan states, “*One form of a shout [of recognition] is a shot. Nothing so completely verifies our perception of a thing as our killing of it*” (Findley, *The Wars* 218). So many possibilities for interpretation are left open because there are so many shouts, shots, and deaths in these final pages. Does “killing” refer to Robert? to the “old-style warrior”? to the animal whose skull Robert holds? Maybe the quotation from Fagan is not meant to point to a literal death at all.

Since war is on the reader’s mind at this point in the novel, it makes sense that first instinct would read the word “shot” as the action of a gun: but what if that is only part of the story? In a narrative so fascinated by photographs, it is important to remember that a photograph is also shot. When Findley writes that “*the spaces between the perceiver and the thing perceived can...be closed with a [shot],*” does he refer to the photograph, which attempts to capture a moment in the past, to make that moment more perceivable in the future?⁹ If this is the case, then he seems to be making an important comment on the nature of the photograph and its relationship to the past. If “*[n]othing so completely verifies our perception of a thing as our killing of it,*” then the photograph here is in some way killing that past moment, even as it attempts to preserve it. In this quote the camera becomes parallel to the gun as it shoots a moment, kills its dynamic relationship to history, and leaves behind a corpse: the image, which is only a shadow of the living body. With this reading, the

⁹ According to York, Findley’s “early attitude” toward photography in novels like *The Last of the Crazy People* can be “sum[med] up” by the “equation of the gun and the camera” and notes specifically that “[f]or Timothy Findley, photography itself is ‘violent stillness.’” (69). She asserts that this attitude had changed by the time he wrote *The Wars*, that he saw the photograph in that novel as a “positive and creative alternative...which preserves [life],” but this quotation in fact leads the reader to wonder if his attitude toward the medium of photography really had changed so drastically.

reader may see why the photo of Robert is important to the researcher, why it reminded him of Fagan's passage; this harsh picture of Robert with guns and an animal skull may be a faithful representation of one moment in Robert's life, but it does not comprehend the nuance of Robert's life and personality that can be discovered through more active sources, like oral histories. By shooting this photograph, the photographer closes some of the space between past and present, but kills the moment's dynamic relationship with history at the same time.

In this examination of the role that the researcher-historian plays in *The Wars*, it is evident that this device is by no means limited to foregrounding the writing of history. Indeed, far from being solely an agent of textuality, this character functions as a consistent reminder of the present and of the active process that connects past and present. Moreover, his engagement with both photographs and oral histories undermines the content and the form of dominant, institutional memory in a way that would have been next to impossible with a more traditional narrative style. In this novel so focused on memory, with an author who has consistently displayed a preference for "process and flux rather than fixity and stillness," there is still much potential for history-focused criticism that has been left untapped (York 56). Perhaps future scholars of *The Wars* will take their cue from the researcher-historian and examine why some elements and images "lea[p] through memory" while others lie stagnant, "silenced at the edge of...time" (6, 5).

CHAPTER THREE

“He Hopes to Cover All of It”

Spatial and Temporal Mapping in George Bowering’s *Burning Water*

Published in 1980 and awarded the Governor-General’s literary award for fiction that year, *Burning Water* is one of the mostly widely recognized examples of Canadian historiographic metafiction. The novel is principally the story of George Vancouver, the eighteenth-century explorer who mapped much of the west coast of Canada, including the island that would eventually bear his name. The historical narrative follows Vancouver through his more than four-year expedition during which he searched for the entrance to the Northwest Passage, mapped the coastline of what would become British Columbia, and negotiated the Nootka Convention—a treaty with the Spanish that would give the British partial trading rights to Nootka Sound, opening the door to British mercantile operations in the Pacific. As in *The Wars*, this barebones account of the historical narrative fails to encapsulate the novel’s rich complexity, which goes beyond that of a traditional historical novel. This complexity is the combined effect of a researcher-historian character and a fragmentary dual-narrative structure that pushes the readers back and forth between past and present. The researcher-historian character, who is actually an author-persona named George Bowering, interacts with the historical narrative, breaking into the flow of the narrative at odd moments and narrating his own process of writing while traveling around the world. Like in *The Wars*, the presence of this contemporary research narrative combines with the historical narrative to create a dialogue between present and past that proves infinitely more valuable than either narrative would have been on its own.

While all novels containing researcher-historian characters qualify as historiographic metafiction, *Burning Water*'s use of a researcher character who is also an author-persona has ensured its prominent place within that form of criticism. Indeed, along with Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear* and *The Scorched-Wood People* and Findley's *Famous Last Words*, *Burning Water* actually forms the basis for Hutcheon's original theories about the self-reflexivity of Canadian historical novels put forth in her seminal chapter in *The Canadian Postmodern*. In that chapter, Hutcheon focuses particularly on how the use of the author-persona, one who actively comments on his own writing process, clearly foregrounds historiography and the discursive nature of fiction-writing. She notes that "the controlling and obtrusive 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" (Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern* 62). This emphasis on the "textual production" of historical narratives is underlined in the novel's prologue, in which Bowering writes, "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" (*Burning Water* 2). As Hutcheon notes, this reference to "a history, a real historical fiction'...is not so much a teasing contradiction as a kind of affirmation of the common nature of both history and fiction: both are discourse..." (73). Given the prominence of this analysis in Hutcheon's seminal work, it is unsurprising that much of the criticism surrounding *Burning Water* has similarly emphasized the historiographic elements of the text.

One historiographic element that has been the focus of many critics is the novel's manipulation of the "facts" of history. It is generally accepted that the novel's historical narrative is largely based on historical fact: Bowering's thorough research is evident as he

draws on and directly incorporates excerpts from the journals of George Vancouver, Archibald Menzies, and other members of Vancouver's crew. The novel contains, however, several departures from historical fact that have attracted controversy. For instance, the novel depicts a homosexual relationship between Vancouver and Don Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra ("Quadra") that has no factual basis. Nor does the murder of Vancouver by Archibald Menzies on the final page correspond to the historical record, Vancouver having actually died uneventfully in England, as Bowering himself writes in his long poem *George, Vancouver*.¹⁰ Even more curiously—and preposterously—Bowering describes an imaginary flight of Vancouver's ships, the *Discovery* and the *Chatham*, over North America in section two. These deliberate deviations from historical record go without explanation, leading to much discussion of why Bowering may have chosen to include them when his reliance on research is so evident in the rest of the novel.

Hutcheon attributes this manipulation of fact and reason to the larger tendency in historiographic metafictional texts to "investigate this 'ontological' issue of what exactly can be said to constitute fact and fiction—or life and art" (*The Canadian Postmodern* 68). Other critics like Marie Vautier and Owen Percy have asserted that Bowering's willingness to play with the "facts" of history displays a desire to break down an understanding of "history" as a single master-narrative or "Truth." Vautier, for example, argues that for Bowering, "[imagination] is ...the element that most strongly destabilizes the notion of *one* truth of the past. Certitude in the present with regard to our knowledge of 'what really happened' in the past keeps sliding away" (258). Similarly, Percy asserts that "[b]y rewriting historical master-narratives and filling in historical gaps, Bowering...encourage[s] a reopening of the

¹⁰ "George Vancouver. / (Was dying in England / when Coleridge began to write / *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.) / ... / Vancouver, unmarried, died over his work, / a hyperthyroid, though some / blamed consumption" (Bowering, *George, Vancouver* 18).

possibilities of the potential past, never outright denying historical truth or fact so much as unseating the assumptions that those abstractions are concrete” (185). These analyses, consistent with the “incredulity toward metanarrative” that Hutcheon so values, present an understanding of history that comes across as an unfair weighing of options, as though history *can only be* a unified, coherent, single narrative *or* a relativist playground in which nothing can be known and the imagination can be given free reign. Either way, “history” is seen only as text. Jennifer Blair observes this trend in criticism in her article “The Postmodern Impasse.” Noting how, for Hutcheon, “historiographic metafiction foreground ‘the processes of writing, reading and interpreting’ (13) yet remain committed to the narration of the events of history and their attendant political consequences,” Blair suggests that this paradox has since been “reduced to a simple opposition between the writing of history and the self-reflexive interpretation and critique of this writing—in other words, two aspects of one and the same phenomenon: text” (204). By focusing primarily on the destabilization of master-narratives, critics like Vautier and Percy inadvertently neglect the novel’s engagement with the “events of history and their attendant political consequences.”

These critics are by no means alone in this tendency, however; Bowering himself has made it clear that his own critical allegiance lies with textuality, and it is unsurprising, therefore, that critics of his novels have tended to follow his lead. In his essay “A Great Northward Darkness: The Attack on History in Recent Canadian Fiction,” for example, Bowering rails against realist historical fiction: “You cannot get history in your book. You can get only the child of history and yourself. If you could get the world of space and time right in your story, you cannot do it anymore because the world now contains that story. History is impossible. Fuck it. Pardon my language” (12). This passage is indicative of the

confusion that often comes to surround the term “history” in the work of postmodern critics like Hutcheon and Bowering. In this passage, Bowering uses “history” to refer both to the real, lived experience of the past—“You cannot get history into your book”—and to the textual product of historiography—“History is impossible.” By using the same terms for both the lived experience of history and its textual counterpart, Bowering allows the two to become conflated and confused, giving the impression that since there is no one, singular “Truth” of history, it is entirely impossible to engage with history in any way. Just because this denial of history is the norm for postmodern critics, however, and just because Bowering himself declares that “[h]istory is impossible,” does not mean that history—in the sense of a broader, non-textual process—has been left out of *Burning Water*. The fact is that, intentionally or not, Bowering does engage with history in his novel, and not just to say “fuck it.”

With so much emphasis on the epistemological issues surrounding the writing of history in the criticism on *Burning Water*, it sometimes seems as though the historical narrative is present only to serve textual concerns: as though the *content* of the narrative is only significant to the extent that it highlights the novel’s metafictional *style*. The considerations of textuality alone seem to lead critics to forget that the choice of Vancouver as subject was unlikely arbitrary. In the Prologue, Bowering puts forth a somewhat doubtful, though enlightening explanation for his choice of topic:

When I was a boy I was the only person I knew who was named George, but I did have the same first name as the king. That made me feel as if current history and self were bound together, from the beginning.

When I came to live in Vancouver, I thought of Vancouver, and so now geography involved my name too, George Vancouver. He might have felt such romance, sailing for a king named George the Third. What could I do but write a book filled with history and myself, about these people and this place? (1)

Though the idea of writing first a poem, then a radio play, and finally a novel about one historical figure just because he shares with the author a relatively common given name may well strike most readers as slightly ridiculous, this passage does serve an important role in establishing the significance of Vancouver as subject of the novel.

By emphasizing the importance of names, of history, and of geography, the researcher character highlights how Vancouver's name simultaneously evokes both person and place, both historical figure and present-day metropolis. The sentence, "When I came to live in Vancouver, I thought of Vancouver..." directly compels readers to contemplate the double-connotation of the name as they scramble to understand why the word is repeated. Similarly, Bowering chose to mention only four "Georges": himself, Vancouver, and two kings. The matter of imperialism is thereby made explicit. While both King George III and King George VI were kings of Great Britain, they reigned over very different geographic entities. The connection of these kings to George Vancouver, who helped to extend the power of the British Empire to the west coast of Canada, and to George Bowering, who lives on a west coast of Canada that is no longer directly part of that empire, draws attention to a long and complex imperial history. In choosing Vancouver specifically as subject for his novel, then, Bowering implicates both past and present: the historical politics of imperialism that Vancouver the person represents; the present-day, post-colonial, globalized world that

Vancouver the city represents; and all the time and social development that has passed in between.

Imperialism and Empire

It is generally accepted that a critique of colonialism and imperialism forms the basis for many of the events in the novel, but the focus on textuality and the discursive nature of “history” that has occupied most critics has limited their engagement with how the novel and this critique participate in the active process of history. Speaking about both *Burning Water* and *Ana Historic*, Owen Percy states, “The critiques of imperialism and empire...are difficult to miss, though both Bowering and Marlatt ensure that, like the possibilities they see in creating new and present histories, the critiques are not themselves aimed entirely at the past” (188). Marie Vautier has similarly argued that “[a] slippage between historical time periods, which allows for political commentary on events of the present day in a supposedly historical narrative, is foregrounded in *Burning Water*” (241). By recognizing Bowering’s intent to critique imperialism both in the past *and in the present day*, these critics demonstrate awareness that this critique is historically situated—there is a direct relationship between the events of the past and a present-day political environment. Even so, they fail to fully appreciate the implications of this fact because of their focus on the discursive processes of history. In this chapter, I demonstrate that the novel’s critique of the colonial/imperial system is genuinely connected to the active process of history, whether Bowering realizes it or not. I do so, first, through an examination of how the events of the historical narrative, especially Vancouver’s mapping and his rivalry with Archibald Menzies, are located within a larger temporal context of imperialism and, second, through an

analysis of how the researcher-historian character's presence and his international travels connect Bowering's critique of eighteenth-century European imperialism to the political and social realities of the present-day, postmodern, globalized world.

In order to discuss how *Burning Water* engages with imperialism in this way and how the existing criticism on the subject has only scratched the surface, I draw principally on two theoretical texts: Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire*. When Jameson published *Postmodernism* in 1991, he wrote about postmodernism not as a set of stylistic characteristics, but as a "genuine historical (and socioeconomic) reality as the third great original expansion of capitalism around the globe (after the earlier expansions of the national market and the older imperialist system, which each had their own cultural specificity and generated new types of space appropriate to their dynamics)" (49). In doing this, he established postmodernism as both connected to and distinct from the temporal and spatial realities of imperialism. Writing nine years later, Hardt and Negri extend Jameson's approach by describing the progression from what they call "modern sovereignty" to what they call "Empire." For Hardt and Negri, "modern sovereignty" corresponds with the global system in which nation-states were still the dominant political powers. Imperialism was an aspect of that system because it "was really an extension of the sovereignty of the European nation-states beyond their own boundaries" (Hardt and Negri xii). "Empire," however, is a new form of sovereignty: one which has supplanted the system of nation-states. Empire is distinct from imperialism in that it "establishes no territorial center of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers" (xii).

Like Jameson's understanding of postmodernism, Hardt and Negri's Empire is a concept whose best descriptors may be "totalizing" or "all-encompassing." It transcends the traditional geography of nation-states and creates a sort of homogenous global space. This homogenizing impulse is not limited to geography, however; Jameson argues that, in this world defined by the overarching nature of global capitalism, *history* too has become spatialized. As David Bennet puts it, "History...has become 'depthless;' the past as referent has been effaced, time has been textualized, leaving only representations, texts, pseudo-events, images without originals: a spatial, rather than temporal, order of simulacra" (262). In the words of Hardt and Negri, "Empire presents its rule not as a transitory moment in the movement of history, but as a regime with no temporal boundaries and in this sense outside of history or at the end of history" (xiv-xv). In this way, the time and space of multinational capitalism become intertwined: Empire exists beyond traditional conceptions of space and time, and, therefore, traditional attempts to contextualize a given place or, especially, a given moment in time often fail. A sense of "perpetual present" impedes the possibility of locating oneself in history.

This consideration of the shift from modern sovereignty to Empire is significant to a discussion of *Burning Water* for many reasons, not least because Hardt and Negri specifically discuss postmodern and postcolonial theory—which Bowering himself espouses—as symptomatic of that shift. Hardt and Negri argue that what has been framed as the postmodern attack on the Enlightenment can actually be understood more specifically as an attack on modern sovereignty and the binary oppositions—"Self and Other, white and black, inside and outside, ruler and ruled"—that characterize it (139). Postmodernist theory, then, aims to break down those binary hierarchies, but not by replacing them with new ones:

“If modern power itself is dialectical, the logic goes, then the postmodernist project must be nondialectical” (140). While this attack on modernist binaries has been useful in many ways—challenging sexist, racist, and colonialist constructions—Hardt and Negri argue, this “postmodernist politics of difference” actually gives rise to Empire, which “too is bent on doing away with those modern forms of sovereignty and on setting differences to play across boundaries” (142). The standard analysis of *Burning Water*, then, and its attack on the binaries of the imperial/colonial system that Vancouver represents has as its consequence the furthering of Empire: its homogenization of global space and its spatialization of history. While it has been already established that Bowering’s own critical allegiance lies with the “postmodernist politics of difference,” as evidenced by his attempts to break down the authoritative, master-narrative of “history,” my objective in this chapter is to examine if certain elements of the novel do actually work against the radical relativization and differentiation that is characteristic of both postmodernism and Empire. It is my belief that the novel does in fact problematize this postmodern trend through the use of the researcher-historian character and what Jameson has called “[a]n aesthetic of cognitive mapping” (*Postmodernism* 54).

In *Postmodernism*, Jameson asserts that, in the postmodern world, “We are submerged in its henceforth filled and suffused volume to the point where our now postmodern bodies are bereft of spatial coordinates and practically (let alone theoretically) incapable of distantiation” (*Postmodernism* 48-49). What he means by this is that, from within this geographic and temporal totality, it is difficult to comprehend an individual’s place or location within that larger reality. Without the ability to see an “outside,” it is next to impossible to understand or contextualize the “inside,” and without that awareness—a

consciousness of one's own location in relation to history and the world—there is no possibility of breaking out of the perpetual present. Jameson asserts that this consciousness is only possible through what he calls “cognitive mapping,” which he summarizes as “a pedagogical political culture which seeks to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system” (*Postmodernism* 54). He bases this idea, which he argues is essential to any politically progressive postmodern art, on Kevin Lynch's idea of a cognitive map allowing individuals to understand and visualize their own positions within the larger, abstract totality of a city (51). Jameson expands Lynch's concept to comprehend the space of global capitalism: “cognitive mapping in the broader sense comes to require the coordination of existential data (the empirical position of the subject) with un-lived, abstract conceptions of the geographic totality” (52). In *Burning Water*, this cognitive mapping takes place in two ways: first, in the location of George Vancouver in relation to the economic realities of imperialism and, second, in the location of both Vancouver and the researcher-historian character in relation to global space and Empire.

Vancouver and Imperialism

Throughout *Burning Water*, there is an emphasis on empirical location, especially in Vancouver's careful mapping of the minutiae of the British Columbian coastline. This focus on mapping highlights for the reader, in various ways, the greater, more abstract, spatial and temporal concerns in which Vancouver is involved. In particular, Bowering frequently places emphasis on the colonial and imperial system which is the reason for Vancouver's expedition in the first place. The historical narrative revolves around Vancouver's mapping, which will benefit the international trading economies of all imperial powers; Vancouver's

negotiations with the Spanish, which will open the Pacific coast to British mercantile interests; and Vancouver's search for the Northwest Passage, which, if successful, would give Britain the pre-eminent claim over trade in the Pacific. The novel's focus on Vancouver's map-making, then, is an important one to consider in this analysis because of the importance of cartography to how space is understood and produced in a given historical period. In his work *Rethinking the Power of Maps*, Denis Wood observes the history of map-making worldwide and remarks that, across the world, maps have long been understood to be "artefact[s] that *constructed* the state, that literally *helped* to bring the state into being" (32). By visually demarcating the position of a given state, nation, or empire, maps have the incredibly powerful ability to affect how a given space is perceived.

The history of Vancouver's expedition specifically indicates both this universal power of maps to produce space and the actual production of imperial space that was the result of Vancouver's own mapping and his interactions at Nootka Sound. Daniel Clayton, a historian whose interest lies in "the spatiality of imperialism"—"[how] visions of empire, tactics of territorial appropriation, claims about sovereignty, and attitudes of dominance over distant lands [are] shaped geographically"—specifically discusses Vancouver's role in creating maps that "enabled politicians and merchants to visualize imperial and commercial prospects, and featured names and vignettes that domesticated foreignness and conveyed distant places to the West" (103). Though both the British and the Spanish lost interest in Nootka Sound itself by the mid-1790s, Clayton argues, "the Nootka Sound crisis launched a process of imperial abstraction that broadened and deepened over the next 60 years" (110). Furthermore, even though Vancouver himself died in disgrace soon after his expedition, decades later, his work still remained influential:

British sovereignty was secure and colonists viewed the region through Vancouver's lenses, remarking that Britain's new colonial possession was an empty and alluring land "full of promise and hope".... Cook, Vancouver, and politicians who drew on their texts, had shaped an anticipatory geography of colonialism. They fostered a process of engagement that resituated the meaning of contact and denigrated Native people. (119)

The events of the historical narrative in *Burning Water*, therefore, are clearly linked to a larger process of history involving the production of a particular kind of British-imperialist space that would encourage further colonization and oppression of aboriginal peoples and set the stage for the development of later periods of global development, including multinational capitalism.

Clayton's historical analysis makes it clear that Vancouver's mapping is part of a much larger process of economic and imperial history. Though readers of *Burning Water* may not be aware of Clayton's analysis, they are made aware of this process through the contemporary narrative of the researcher-historian as well as snippets of other historical narratives, which frame and contextualize the story of Vancouver's expedition. The historical fragments serve to provide context to the historical narrative, drawing out and expanding upon themes, like colonization and imperialism, in the principal historical narrative. Perhaps the most notable examples of such fragments are the dialogues between two aboriginal men from Nootka Sound known as "the first Indian" and "the second Indian." In these dialogues, the two "Indians" playfully banter about various subjects including art, fancy and imagination, and their impressions of the newly arrived strangers with "that thin transparent skin," including "that chief, Bam Goober" (Bowering, *Burning Water* 125, 208).

These dialogues serve varied purposes within the novel, as do the other historical fragments, but principally they serve as an often satirical or parodic counterpoint to the European, colonial perspectives of Vancouver and his crew, highlighting the colonial oppressions of Native peoples that Vancouver's expedition foreshadows.

Perhaps the most significant historical dialogue—insofar as it frames the larger economic context in which Vancouver's expedition participates most directly—involves “a couple of important English politicians” who discuss Britain's possibility of soon entering a war with the Spanish, the French, and/or the Americans over the issue of trade in Nootka Sound: “‘It is called a Pacific sea otter,’ said Charles, rippling it like silver velvet in the glow. ‘They frolic only in the waters off the coast in question [Nootka]. My sources tell me that the celestials in Canton will barter a lap-full of ivory carvings for a middling-good example of this’” (176, 177). The other man responds: “‘So this skin has brought the kingdoms of the civilized world to another armament?’” (177). This dialogue establishes clearly the economic impulse behind all of the colonial and imperial actions of the novel: Vancouver's entire expedition is centered around international trade and a competition for global economic hegemony, and the reader is made, via this dialogue, to be keenly aware of that fact.

Through the use of these historical side-narratives, Bowering contextualizes Vancouver's mission and directly critiques imperialism for its greed, its war-mongering, and, especially, its oppression of Native peoples. This critique continues more subtly throughout the novel, in the form of Vancouver's rivalry with Archibald Menzies, around which the principal events of the historical narrative revolve. Vancouver's distaste for Menzies, the reader is told, is rooted in his dislike for all scientists, a prejudice adopted from

his mentor, James Cook, who detested his own ship botanist Sir Joseph Banks. His hatred for Menzies in particular, however, is more specific than just a universal dislike of scientists. Over the course of the novel, various possible explanations for this hatred are posited, especially the two men's similarities and Menzies' refusal to respect Vancouver's authority.

The conflict between Vancouver and Menzies and its importance to the novel's overall message—and particularly Vancouver's murder—has long been a source of frustration for critics. Aritha van Herk has argued that the conflict is centred on different approaches to facts and imagination: “That Menzies (fact, science, records) defeats/kills Vancouver is the ultimate metaphor for Bowering's map of a mapper. Because Bowering imposes his own vision on the facts, imagination triumphs” (83). Like so many critics of historiographic metafiction, van Herk sees Bowering's novel solely as a commentary on the writing of history, even going so far as to claim that “this is not an historical novel” (82). She therefore interprets the rivalry in that light, seeing Vancouver, who in his maps imposes his own imagination on the landscape around him, as analogous to the postmodern author who asserts that “facts” are only the bones upon which an imagined narrative should be constructed. Glenn Deer, on the other hand, argues that the conflict is based on competing masculinities: “By making the murder of Vancouver into the conclusion, the implied author moves from ludic post-realism into direct criticism: this implied author sees Vancouver as a tragic example of the male will-to-power, the male competitive mode” (108). That so many interpretations may be advanced about this one conflict speaks to the complexity of Bowering's text, but in the context of a novel that places so much emphasis on the historical process of imperialism, it is important to examine the rivalry in that context as well.

In large part, the conflict between Vancouver and Menzies centres on their competing approaches to imperialism: Vancouver works for British economic and political expansion, and his personal identification with that goal largely dictates his opinions and actions throughout the novel¹¹, while Menzies values scientific exploration and study. Early in the novel, for example, Vancouver specifically displays his opposition to such scientific pursuits: “But carving and daubing trees is not a useful pursuit in the affairs and government of men, and I will not waste my time upon them. We are not here upon the grand tour” (Bowering, *Burning Water* 31). Though Menzies is not *anti-imperialist*, by any means, he does continually present an alternative to Vancouver’s personal and imperialist ambitions, often making Vancouver’s actions and opinions seem irrational and childish.

Meanwhile, Vancouver repeatedly emphasizes the exceptional nature of British supremacy, demonstrating and discussing his dislike for all non-English imperialist nations, and his rivalry with Menzies also becomes implicated in that hatred: “Vancouver might have anticipated his feelings about Menzies. He knew, for instance, that when it came to exploring and trading in British North America, first it had been the French, and then it had been the Scotch. Everyone knew that” (40). While it is not entirely clear from this passage *why* past Scottish trade exploits might affect Vancouver’s personal biases, the fact that it is implied directly ties Vancouver’s imperialist project and his rivalry for trade dominance with the other imperial powers to his rivalry with Menzies. That this rivalry, which is so central to the text, could be based on such a negligible distinction, however, must cause readers to question Bowering’s motivation in aligning Vancouver with specifically English imperial

¹¹ Vancouver frequently displays an enthusiasm for the imperial project that goes beyond his official mission. For instance, it is mentioned that “Vancouver loved to jump out of a boat, stride a few paces up the beach, and announce: ‘I claim this new-found land for his Britannic Majesty in perpetuity, and name it New Norfolk!’ even though the discovery of new lands was not his mission (*Burning Water* 17). This enthusiasm points to Vancouver’s desire to become a famous imperial figure like his mentor, James Cook.

interests while Menzies becomes the “other,” the imperial rival. In this passage, Vancouver displays equal disdain for the Scotch and the French, but in other passages he asserts *Britain’s*—and not *England’s*—dominance.

Readers might well wonder whether the differences between Vancouver and Menzies (imagination/facts, politics/science, English/Scottish) are really as relevant as the narrative might have them believe. Bowering is well known for being a “highly playful” author, and he openly invites his readers to maintain a sceptical eye through the ironic and playful tone and comments of his researcher character (Deer 97). When he sets up this key rivalry in the text, the one which results in the final, climactic confrontation and Vancouver’s ahistorical death, on such shaky logic, it stands to reason that the reader is expected to question the sincerity of that rivalry. Moreover, the possibility that this rivalry may be one of Bowering’s “tricks” opens up the novel to a variety of unexplored critical avenues. On one hand, there is still the possibility of examining the rivalry as Bowering sets it up: with Menzies as protagonist who triumphs over Vancouver by killing him. On the other hand, it is also possible to read the rivalry as entirely arbitrary: both men stand as different poles (politics/science) of the *same* colonial exercise, arguing over minutiae. Both of these perspectives are comprehended in Bowering’s playful narrative and both yield valuable critical perspectives on the imperialist critique around which the novel centres. Never is this clearer than in the fact that the novel’s climax is set up in the rivalry between Vancouver and Menzies, not over any life or death matter or even over serious ideological differences, but over the issue of space on the deck of the *Discovery*. Over the course of the novel, this conflict over the deck space becomes a sort of conceit for the imperial game, the struggle for power over a given area of land. Although sceptical readers are aware of the childish

pettiness that seems to fuel this conflict, the conflict also effectively critiques the sort of militaristic colonialism with which Vancouver is aligned.

Early in the novel, the reader is told that Menzies uses space on the deck of the ship to store various scientific instruments and, especially, plant specimens, and that Vancouver resents this occupation of space:

The little fucker has the deck cluttered up with his stuff, and he is taking over more and more space every day....

The vessel is ninety-nine feet long, and he hopes to cover all of it, I'm certain.

(24)

In many ways, this issue of deck space is set up as a conflict over competing views of the value of the expedition: economic/imperial power versus scientific research. The conflict comes to a head, for example, over Vancouver's disregard for the wellbeing of Menzies' plants in the face of potential imperial and personal gains. Sailing back to England and caught in the middle of a war between Britain and France, Vancouver chooses to participate in the war, seizing a Dutch merchant vessel in the harbour of St. Helena, even though he was under no obligation to do so: "It was not a very ennobling or even exciting act of war, but it was nevertheless a military deed" (213). Menzies is outraged at this decision to take part in the skirmish and worries that involvement will risk the safety of the specimens which he has spent more than four years collecting and which still occupy a large amount of space on the ship's deck. Vancouver's response solidifies his allegiance to British global expansion: "Mr. Menzies, those wild rhubarbs and cedar bushes will be growing out of the soil of New South Wales or Queen Charlotte's Islands a hundred years from this day. We naval persons sail fervently into battle with the ships of the regicide so that we might fairly expect the

existence of a Great Britain a century hence” (214). In defending his position in this way, Vancouver places his own present in the context of historical process, envisioning a future in which Britain has succeeded in expanding across the globe, and his and Menzies’ conflict seems to circle around their opposing approaches to that imperial project.

The conflict between Vancouver and Menzies, spiralling around their opposing views on the purpose of the expedition and the related occupation of deck space, reaches its breaking point in the final chapter when Menzies returns to the ship only to find that “[t]he hundreds of plants that should have been under tarpaulin were strewn about the deck, or remained only sodden stumps in the mud” (221). Vancouver, amused at his rival’s outrage, attributes the incident to the fact that, “During the threat of a possible Dutch encounter [sic], [the guard] was called away to more pressing military duty” (222). Beside himself at the fate of his plants, and reeling from this latest and most outrageous example of their disagreement over the purpose of the expedition, Menzies shoots Vancouver with a pistol and kills him. It has already been established that this murder of George Vancouver is not historically factual: Vancouver died from hyperthyroidism in England. Why, then, in these circumstances, did Bowering choose to have him murdered in such a dramatic way? No comment is made in the book itself: the narrative simply ends as Vancouver “seem[s] to be lifted by some strength unwitnessed, over the rail and into the unsolicitous sea” (224).

Aligning himself with a postcolonial perspective, Martin Kuester has proposed that Vancouver’s ahistorical murder may be an attempt on Bowering’s part to critique Vancouver’s imperialist actions. Kuester recognizes and never reconciles, however, the flaw in his argument: “We have to admit, though, that it is the enlightened colonizer Menzies rather than the colonized Indians who takes history into his own hands and kills Vancouver.

And Bowering and his audience are not exactly representatives of the autochthonous Canadian population” (122). It is unclear how the murder of one colonizer by another is meant to represent a postcolonial perspective. There can be no doubt that Bowering is criticizing the colonial project, but to limit our understanding of the novel’s politics to this one theme is overly simplistic and fails to take into account the complexity and irony of the central conflict between Vancouver and Menzies. Moreover, to look only at the interactions between Vancouver and Menzies is to forget one of the most important and influential elements of the novel: the researcher-historian character who, through his travels and his dialogic interactions with the historical narrative, broadens the critique of 18th century imperialism to comprehend a much larger understanding of postmodern global space and Empire.

The Researcher-Historian and Empire

Far from being uniquely a tool of textuality and discursiveness, the researcher-historian character in *Burning Water* demonstrates the historical transition from imperialism to Empire. This is principally accomplished through a form of Jameson’s cognitive mapping, as the contemporary author-persona’s travels to different countries worldwide aid in locating both author and reader in the time and space of multinational capitalism or Empire. As discussed earlier, the narrative’s engagement with history is closely tied to its engagement with geography. In addition to the emphasis on Vancouver’s literal mapping, this connection is made clear in Chapter 1 when the researcher-historian states, “It was his idea, crazed in all likelihood, that if he was going to write a book about that other coast as it was two hundred

years ago, he would be advised to move away in space too” (Bowering, *Burning Water* 9).¹² This statement seems to be an acknowledgement by the researcher-historian character that space and time are intimately connected in the contemporary world, and it indicates a desire to locate both himself and his subject in global space as well as in history. Over the course of the novel, therefore, he travels around the world while writing. Just like the novel, these travels are divided into three sections: in “Bring Forth a Wonder,” the researcher travels to Italy; in “The Devil Knows How to Row,” he travels home to Vancouver; and in “The Dead Sailors,” he travels to Central America. Over the course of these three sections and segments of travel, the novel encourages the reader to locate both the researcher character and Captain Vancouver in relation to their roles in the larger, abstract conceptions of history and global space. In doing so, Bowering’s researcher-historian incites readers to become aware, first, of how the postmodern world is a direct product of the historical process that drove Vancouver’s expedition and, second, of how that world of Empire is simultaneously distinct from the colonial/imperial space in which Vancouver lived.

The link between these two periods is clearly established in the first section of the novel, when the researcher visits Italy—specifically Trieste, Florence, and Venice. In that section, Bowering locates himself and Vancouver in relation to the origins of the imperialist system and thereby underlines the processional nature of history. This is especially the case in Florence, where he contextualizes Vancouver’s expedition historically in relation to the age of the Santa Maria del Fiore cathedral: “He walked all the way round the Santa Maria del Fiore and thought that it had been standing a few hundred years when Vancouver sailed, that in fact it was a couple of hundred years old when, in 1592, Juan de Fuca...claimed that

¹² The researcher-historian refers to himself here in the third-person, like he does throughout the novel, except in the prologue.

he had found north of latitude 48° a vast inland sea” (Bowering, *Burning Water* 21). This statement encourages to the reader to consider the historical changes that have taken place during the lifetime of that building, and it leads directly to a discussion of how the possibility of finding “gold, silver, and pearls...on persons and handicrafts of the north coast savages” greatly encouraged expeditions to that area (21). The researcher’s description of his empirical location, then, becomes connected to a much larger spatial and temporal totality.

In the second section of *Burning Water*, in which the researcher-historian travels home to Vancouver, Bowering emphasizes the *distinct* natures of global space in the two periods of economic development as his persona interacts with the international space of global capitalism in which he “fl[ies] over the Rockies and the Alps in one day” and “over the ocean and the Northwest Passage and through nine time zones” (Bowering 88, 75). Meanwhile, in the historical narrative, Vancouver works from within the confines of imperial, as opposed to postmodern, international space. Through Vancouver’s search for the Northwest Passage, the reader is reminded of the imperialist desire to expand which will eventually lead to the later capitalist systems, but through the fantastical flight of Vancouver’s ships over North America situated against Bowering’s real one, the reader is reminded of the historical distance and difference between those two moments in time. The researcher draws attention to the distinct type of space that exists in the present-day: a type of space in which travelling across the world and interacting with many nationalities is not remarkable, one which “does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers” (Hardt and Negri xii). He details his journey home in which he takes an Italian plane to Milan, catches a Dutch plane to Amsterdam, drinks with Irishmen in an American hotel in Amsterdam, and takes a Canadian plane to Vancouver, all in the space of “a couple of long days” (75). This sort of

clearly multinational space stands apart from the type of space depicted in the historical narrative, but through the juxtaposition of the flights, the reader is encouraged to consider the process that led from one form of space to the other and perhaps the potential for that same process to lead to new kinds of space in the future.

In the final section of the novel, the researcher-historian's travels bring him to Central America, to Guatemala and Costa Rica, and it is in this section that Bowering brings together his critique of historical imperialism with its significance in the present day. In the opening passage of the third section, the researcher-historian remarks, "Europe has been building for a thousand years, and the people there have made their choice of what to keep. In the Americas the Indians would have begun to do that, but they were interrupted.... Here in Guatemala de la Asunción they are to be found sitting on narrow sidewalks, as close to the storefront wall as possible, and they all look very patient" (151). This mention of patient-looking "Indians" is in reference to an earlier section of the novel, one of the Indian dialogues, in which the narrator states, "A lot of people think that Indians are just naturally patient, but that's not true. Before the white 'settlers' arrived there were lots of impatient Indians. It's only in the last two hundred years that Indians have been looking patient whenever there were any white men around" (76). The implication in this latter passage is that the understanding or perception of aboriginal peoples as "patient" is a stereotype that has been imposed by the "white 'settlers'" and is therefore not reflective of the realities that aboriginal peoples have faced throughout history.¹³ Furthermore, "patience" specifically

¹³ Terry Goldie, in his book *Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand Literatures*, describes this sort of stereotype as an "Image," a "signifier [which] does not lead back to the implied signified...but rather to other images" (3-4). These images are, Goldie asserts, used by authors and other producers of social texts to convey certain messages, such as those related to orality, violence, and mysticism (3-18). Like the images of which Goldie writes, Bowering's patient Indians are not reflective of reality, and his readers are keenly aware of that fact. Specifically, Goldie notes that these images

invokes a sense of anticipation, like the “Indians” are waiting for something: maybe a future in which the Europeans are gone. By including these patient Indians both in the historical narrative and in the contemporary one, Bowering incites his readers to recognize how the issue of Native peoples in Canada has not been resolved, even after two hundred years and dramatic changes to global space and power.¹⁴

Not coincidentally, it is also in this third and final section of the novel that the historical and contemporary narratives come together to demonstrate the homogenous nature of global space in the present day. In this section, the researcher-historian character, who has now traveled to Europe, North America, and Central America, focuses on the wide-reaching influence of many colonial powers in the Americas, noting how, in Limón, “The European-looking people speak Spanish and the African-looking people speak English” (188). This corresponds, in the historical narrative, with an increasing number of encounters between Vancouver and other agents of colonization in the region and elsewhere in the world: the Spanish and the “Yankees” on the West Coast and the French and the Dutch near St. Helena. What is interesting to note in this section is the dramatic difference between the sorts of powers each of the characters encounters. While the historical narrative is filled with rival nation-states fighting each other for imperial dominance, in the contemporary narrative there is very little difference noted: all of the colonial powers blend together into a largely

often play off stereotypes that homogenize not only the various tribes and cultures of Native peoples within North America, but also those of many colonized nations worldwide. He uses the example of an Australian television commercial which depicts indigenous peoples, but not those of Australia: “Australian cultural history offers a number of similar examples of an indigenous people reacting against white invaders...but when the advertisers did their creating they turned to the American context or, more precisely, to no context, at least in terms of what might be called historical fact” (3). The homogenization and commercialization of these images is indicative of a homogenous global space disconnected from the realities of history, and it is perhaps this global space to which Bowering points through his inclusion of “patient” Indians.

¹⁴ There is no clear indication in the text of how Bowering might expect his readers to productively escape from this cycle of oppression, but by drawing his readers’ attention to that cycle in the context of a process-based understanding of history, he opens the door to the possibility of a future in which aboriginal peoples may no longer need to “look very patient.”

homogenous global space. Although distinctions exist, the differences are largely nominal as people like the researcher move easily between continents and cities. Italy, Britain, Spain, and the other imperial powers have transformed the world by mapping and colonizing it, leaving behind them large populations of “patient Indians” and global cities bearing the names of their explorers, but they themselves do not occupy the same global space anymore. Their rivalries have ended, just like Vancouver and Menzies’, not through the exceptionalism of one, but through homogenization: the homogenous nature of their original goals and the development of a homogenous global space.

Like those of many postmodern authors and critics, Bowering’s objective in this novel may have been only to problematize and break down the essentialist binaries and master-narratives that characterized modern sovereignty, but his text is by no means limited to that deconstruction which, as Hardt and Negri identify, so often becomes unconsciously implicated in Empire. Similarly, critical readings of *Burning Water* need not be limited by the historiographic approach that acknowledges Bowering’s critique of colonialism but fails to fully understand the postmodern/global dimension of the text. By widening the scope of the narrative to comprehend the global space of Empire and by leading readers to contemplate how the events of the historical narrative may relate not only to the larger economic reality of Vancouver’s time but also to the reality of the present day, Bowering historicizes his critique of imperialism. In doing so, he counteracts to a certain extent the impression of Empire as “outside of history.” Though Bowering may not have intended to engage with history in this way, through his use of a researcher-historian character who seeks to locate himself and his subject in both history and multinational space, he does

succeed in presenting a form of global cognitive mapping which allows the reader to engage with the present-day implications of Bowering's historical critique.

CHAPTER FOUR

“We Give Birth to Each Other”

Nativity, Temporality, and Political Action in Daphne Marlatt’s *Ana Historic*

Published in 1988, Daphne Marlatt’s *Ana Historic* emerged during the heyday of Linda Hutcheon’s work on postmodernism and historiographic metafiction. It contains many of the stylistic elements on which Hutcheon focuses: self-reflexivity, intertextuality, and the critique of traditional historiography. As such, it has been, from the time of its publication, inextricably associated with historiographic metafiction. Though critics have written extensively about the wide range of issues covered in the novel, such as language, narrative, creation, colonization, gender, and sexuality, there is almost always an underlying acceptance in these works that “*Ana Historic* fits well the category of novel Linda Hutcheon has defined as ‘historiographic metafiction’” (Booth 45). Herb Wyile, in particular, has categorized the novel as historiographic metafiction, arguing that the presence of the researcher-historian character makes the novel “clearly historiographical rather than historical” (*Speculative Fictions* 145). While the novel certainly does centre on the creation of a historical narrative, I strongly disagree with Wyile’s categorical labelling. I argue that there is no need to adhere to this sort of false dichotomy and that the novel *is* historical: in fact, it is largely that connection to history that allows *Ana Historic* to make effective its clearly political objectives.

While the majority of critics have approached *Ana Historic* as a postmodern novel, Hutcheon herself has actually claimed that the novel’s political objectives disqualify it from that categorization. In her article “Incredulity Toward Metanarrative: Negotiating Postmodernism and Feminisms,” Hutcheon writes that “postmodernism’s stand is one of

wanting to contest cultural dominants (patriarchy, capitalism, humanism, etc.) and yet knowing it cannot extricate itself completely from them: there is no position outside of these metanarratives from which to launch a critique that is not in itself compromised” (40).¹⁵ Because of this, Hutcheon claims, there can be no truly feminist postmodern since, no matter what postmodern techniques a feminist text may use, it is essentially political:

Feminisms will continue to resist incorporation into postmodernism, largely because of their revolutionary force as political movements working for real social change. They go beyond making ideology explicit and deconstructing it in order to argue a need to change that ideology, to effect a real transformation of art that can only come with a transformation of patriarchal social practices. (43)

In other words, because feminist texts like *Ana Historic* seek to participate in an actively transformative politics, they do not conform to Hutcheon’s definition of postmodernism, no matter what stylistic characteristics they use or what historical period they emerge from.

While Hutcheon precludes the possibility of a politically progressive postmodern art, however, Jameson does not. For Jameson and other critics who see postmodernism as a historical period as opposed to a set of aesthetic characteristics, the possibility exists for a new “aesthetic practic[e]” that would theoretically allow us to “regain a capacity to act and struggle which is at present neutralized by our spatial as well as our social confusion” (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 50, 54). Jameson asserts that a postmodern political art would work from within the space of postmodernism to incite readers to locate themselves in the

¹⁵ Interestingly, Hardt and Negri have argued that it is precisely this lack of an “outside” which makes the *world* postmodern: “We define postmodernity as a situation where the antagonistic relationship of capital dominates all social relationships, all nexuses of life, whether in production, culture or ways of living” (Negri 164). Unlike for Hutcheon, for Hardt and Negri, postmodernism is not something which one can choose to opt out of by simply choosing different stylistic characteristics.

larger context of historical process and thereby to recognize the possibility of change.

Similarly, Antonio Negri argues in *Empire and Beyond* that it is the very recognition of the all-encompassing nature of global capitalism that allows “the multitude” to create rebellious art: “Perhaps what the multitude produces is no longer utopias but dis-utopias [*disutopie*], that is to say, a capacity for living within them, the possibility of carving out languages from the inside and of facilitating an emergence of the material desire for transformation” (65).

With its clearly political motives, its experimental form, and its attention to history and temporality, *Ana Historic* is a prime example of an attempt to break through the cultural dominant of postmodernism, the perpetual present, and to establish the possibility of future change.

Ana Historic's attempt to participate in this form of transformative politics is primarily accomplished through the unique presentation of its researcher-historian character. Of the three novels discussed in this project, it is *Ana Historic* that most breaks with the form of traditional, realist historical novels by prominently incorporating its researcher-historian character into the body of its historical narrative. Unlike in *The Wars* or *Burning Water*, in *Ana Historic* the contemporary narrative is interwoven almost constantly with the historical narrative, and the researcher-historian takes on an active, participatory role in the story, not just as the creator of the historical narrative but as a separate protagonist in her own right. This researcher-historian is Annie Anderson, a woman living in present-day British Columbia with her historian husband, Richard, and their two children, Mickey and Ange. Having left school after becoming pregnant, Annie spends her time helping Richard with research for his book. While doing this research, she stumbles upon an archival record of a British widow named Mrs. Richards. The details of Mrs. Richards' life are scarce:

Annie learns that she immigrated to Canada in 1873, became the schoolteacher in the town of Hastings Mill, bought a piano, and eventually was remarried to a man named Ben Springer. Those are the only details known about her life: even her first name has been lost from public record.

Annie is fascinated by this lack of detail, especially when she is told that a journal, ostensibly written by Mrs. Richards, is not regarded as a valid historical source. Annie interprets the diary entries as Mrs. Richards' personal reflections on the world surrounding her and attributes the archivists' refusal to accept the journal as a historical source to their belief that "history" cannot be private or subjective in this way:

she writes as if she were living alone in the woods.... we cannot see her and so she is free to look out at the world with her own eyes, free to create her vision of it. this is not history.

and this is why, perhaps, they think her journal suspect at the archives.

'inauthentic,' fictional possibly, contrived later by a daughter who imagined (how ahistoric) her way into the unspoken world of her mother's girlhood.

(Marlatt, *Ana Historic* 30)

Inspired by the personal account contained in the possibly inauthentic diary, Annie begins to imagine what Mrs. Richards' life may have been like: she begins to construct an historical narrative about her.

It is not only Annie's and Mrs. Richards' narratives, however, which make up the novel. A third story is also included: that of Annie's mother, Ina. As the novel opens, Ina has recently died, and Annie, distressed at the loss of her mother, attempts to make sense of that loss by reflecting on her life. It becomes clear, however, that Annie knows as little about her

mother's life as she does about Mrs. Richards'. In the first pages of the novel, Annie professes to be trapped in her sense of loss, unable to contextualize or make sense of Ina's death, and she frames that inability to contextualize by referring to narrative: "I-na, I-no-longer, i can't turn you into a story. there is this absence here, where the words stop. (and then i remember—" (Marlatt, *Ana Historic* 11). She wants to "turn [Ina] into a story," but she is unable to: "and now you're dead, Ina, the story has abandoned me" (11, 17). Annie's drive to impose narrative structure on her mother's life raises interesting issues about the nature of storytelling in relation to history and historical process. This "story" she seeks is not a textualization or a flattening of history: it is an attempt to understand her mother's place *in history*.

Hannah Arendt has argued that this sort of narrative, this biography of Ina that Annie wants to create, is indeed historical:

The chief characteristic of this specifically human life, whose appearance and disappearance constitute worldly events, is that it is itself always full of events which ultimately can be told as a story, establish a biography.... For action and speech...are indeed the two activities whose end result will always be a story with enough coherence to be told, no matter how accidental or haphazard the single events and their causation may appear to be. (*The Human Condition* 97)

In other words, this sort of biographical narrative frames the "single events" of a given life teleologically so that it might be told and re-told. Moreover, there is a sense that Annie is trying to make sense of how the "plot" of Ina's individual story fits in with a broader historical plot—the same one in which Mrs. Richards acts. Faced with the reality of her

mother's death, Annie discovers that she cannot contextualize the events of Ina's life in this way: she cannot make sense of how the "single events" of Ina's life may be connected to the larger process of history. Instead, Annie turns to her research into Mrs. Richards and her lack of history. As with Ina, there are many events missing from the story of Mrs. Richards' life, but in this life more removed from her own, Annie is more comfortable imagining the details that will fill the gaps, imagining a narrative "with enough coherence to be told." She prefaces her first section of Mrs. Richards' narrative with a statement that establishes this contrast: "there is a story here" (14).

The two historical narratives are therefore set up as both opposite and parallel; Annie is not able to gain perspective on her mother's life or death because it is so recent, but by exploring Mrs. Richards' life she seeks to gain some understanding of her mother by extension. It is no coincidence, then, that "Ana," the name Annie chooses for Mrs. Richards, is only one letter different from her mother's name.¹⁶ The two narratives take on distinct forms as Ana's story is told through excerpts from the journal found in the archive and third-person narrative (the only sections in which standard grammar and capitalization are used), while Ina's story is almost entirely implied through Annie's imagined dialogues with her mother in the present. The overlapping and intertwining nature of Ina's dialogues and Ana's stories, all tied together by the researcher's own imagination, develop over the course of the novel to create three distinct narratives, with each feeding the others. As Sherry Booth notes,

¹⁶ According to the OED, "ana" is a prefix meaning "up, in place or time, back, again, anew," while "ina" is a suffix used to form feminine titles and names (i.e. "*tsar-ina*" and "*Christ-ina*"). In a novel concerned both with the revision of history and with women's place in that history, these definitions are clearly significant. However, various critics have proposed other explanations for Marlatt's use of these two names. Notably, Pamela Banting argues that "Ana with one 'n,' [is marked] as a kind of cartouche between Annie and Ina" and that "Ina" is comprised of two significant parts: "I-na: I plus the negation of I. I/not I. The mother who is not the mirror of the self" (125, 126). C. Annette Gris , on the other hand, has proposed that "Ina's narrative is told again through new eyes and by this process she moves from her identity as I-not to i-ana; re-versed, this transformation becomes ana-i, or Annie" (96). That these layers of meaning are all comprehended in the characters' short names demonstrates Marlatt's complex use of language in her novel.

“Personal memory and facts coalesce in Ina. Annie can put flesh on the ‘bones’ of fact of her mother’s life only when she grapples simultaneously with the difficulties of writing Ana’s story. The absence of Ana’s history brings the absence of her mother’s forward, inextricably linking them” (51). Meanwhile, Annie’s own narrative develops as she grapples with her own choices, her own position as wife, mother, and unpaid research assistant. She meets a woman named Zoe—whose name means “life”—who reads and comments on her “history” of Mrs. Richards and dares her to challenge her acceptance of social norms in Mrs. Richards’ story and, by extension, in Annie’s own life. Annie’s narrative therefore binds the three narratives together, developing a reciprocal and intertwining relationship between past and present.

“The Tradition of the Oppressed”

Many threads tie these narratives together, but none is more prominent than that depicting the place of women in society through history.¹⁷ The readers are awakened to the issue of gender norms in the first pages of the novel, as Annie speaks to her now-dead mother, making comments such as, “(and why weren’t there Lost Girls in Never-Never Land, only Lost Boys and Wendy who had to mother them all, mother or nurse—of course they fought the enemy, that’s what boys did)” (Marlatt, *Ana Historic* 11). Ina is presented first as a “tomboy” who was taught by her mother to stay inside and clean her room instead of playing outside with boys. Then, as a mother, Ina in turn enforces those same gender norms on her own daughter: “you would never admit it wasn’t ‘fair’ that girls weren’t

¹⁷ Feminism is the major, but by no means the only, ideological issue present in the novel. However, for the sake of simplicity, I mostly focus on feminism as an example of how the narrative encourages recognition of historical process. Admittedly, similar arguments could be advanced in relation to colonialism, nature/ecology, narrative/creation, and sexuality, to name a few.

allowed to do the things boys did” (13). Like her own mother, Ina tries to teach Annie to be a “lady”: “ladies do not draw attention to themselves. (is that you speaking or your mother or all the mothers?) ladies keep to the background. ladies *are* the soothing background their men come home to” (34-35).¹⁸ Over the course of the novel, it is revealed that Ina, who immigrated to Canada with her husband, was lonely—“and so you closed down, closed in on yourself, thinking it was all your fault—your solitude was retribution, wasn’t it?”—and that loneliness fed a depression which doctors chose to treat with a hysterectomy and electric shock therapy—“they erased whole parts of you, shocked them out, overloaded the circuits so you couldn’t bear to remember” (100, 148-149). Annie blames the patriarchy for establishing in Ina unrealistic expectations of herself as wife and mother and the male medical establishment for taking away Ina’s memory, personality, and imagination.

Simultaneously, Annie develops Ana’s narrative out of the void left by male historians who believe that “history is the real story the city fathers tell of the only important events in the world” and who therefore leave out the stories of “the city mothers” because the stories of women are not “world events” (28, 29). Annie imagines what it would have been like for a young British woman to immigrate to Canada alone at the end of the nineteenth century, how she would have encountered pressure to remarry and leave her position as schoolteacher as soon as possible. She includes an excerpt from a historical document as evidence of this: “*Miss Sweney was shortly succeeded by Mrs. Richards, who soon became Mrs. Ben Springer and cast her lot with the struggling little hamlet, giving place to a Miss Redfern...great difficulty was experienced in keeping a teacher longer than*

¹⁸ Even in these early sections of the novel, Annie’s dialogues with Ina acknowledge the fact that the issues existing between them are not unique to their relationship. By making comments like “(is that you speaking or your mother or all the mothers?),” Annie points out the pervasive nature of these gender norms and encourages the reader to recognize that the issues presented in the Ina/Annie dialogues may be applicable to other mother/daughter relationships too.

six months” (39). Ana’s friend Susan also perpetuates this societal expectation, stating, “But surely...you plan to remarry? I cannot imagine a woman as good with children as you who would wish to remain childless” (119). It is through Ana’s situation in the male-dominated colonial world that Annie finds parallels in Ina’s story of immigration to Canada in the 1950s: Ina too feels societal pressure to be the perfect wife and mother. The parallels between the stories encourage Annie—and by extension the reader—to recognize the underlying continuity between the two historical periods, almost one hundred years apart. While much has changed since 1873, some things have remained constant.

Through the fragments of these two historical narratives, the reader is led to piece together an understanding of history that is locked in a seemingly unending cycle in which women are always already downtrodden and forgotten. This sort of unending cycle is what Benjamin refers to as “the tradition of the oppressed.” He states, “The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the ‘state of emergency’ in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight. Then we shall clearly realize that it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency, and this will improve our position in the struggle against Fascism” (Benjamin 257). What Benjamin means by this is that we must recognize that oppression is continuous—a constant “state of emergency”—not one which arises only periodically. More precisely, it is the very fact that this oppression continues that is the crisis: history is not “a chain of events,” Benjamin argues, but “one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage” (257). By demonstrating the parallels between Ana’s and Ina’s stories, *Ana Historic* encourages readers to recognize the tradition of the oppressed and incites anger at the injustices of the past: Ana being written out of history by male historians and Ina having her memory and

personality taken by male doctors. By intertwining these narratives of oppression, Marlatt demonstrates how the underlying nature of society remains unchanged, and how everything will continue to be the same—with only superficial changes to the environment and fashion—unless something is done to change the underlying issues.

One of the most prominent elements of the researcher-historian's role in the novel is as a sort of guide. Although she creates and narrates Ana's and Ina's stories, Annie is largely portrayed as someone *discovering* these narratives along with the reader. This medial position between reader and narrator allows Annie to guide readers through their own reactions by serving as an example. This can primarily be seen as a didactic tool as readers are expected to uncover the same revelations and come to the same conclusions as Annie. In this way, the researcher-historian serves as a device which participates in furthering the political intentions of the novel. This is specifically evident as, over the course of the first four sections of the novel, Annie becomes gradually more aware of the oppressions signified by the two historical narratives.¹⁹ This becomes especially apparent in her treatment of Ana's story as she begins to contemplate its inevitable conclusion: Ana's remarriage to Ben Springer. To that point in the historical narrative, Annie has, as Booth writes, "put flesh on the 'bones' of fact of her mother's [and Ana's] life" (51). She elaborates on historical fact, imagining a personality and a life for Ana, but she does not interfere with the established "facts" of her life. When it comes to Ana's remarriage, however, Annie encounters difficulty accepting the inevitable "ending" and considers other options. She imagines Ana conflicted over her future:

¹⁹ Although Annie is aware of the oppressions suffered by both Ana and Ina, for most of the novel she is still unconscious of how those oppressions participate in the larger "tradition of the oppressed" about which Benjamin writes. Over the course of the novel, Marlatt leads both Annie and her readers to recognize more and more that underlying continuity.

the question is: will you let yourself be escorted home...by this eager and voluble man....

or will you manage to live in hotel rooms where you give lessons and become Gastown's first music teacher, solitary, skirting mud puddles on your own, a secret friend perhaps to Birdie Stewart... (Marlatt, *Ana Historic* 108)

This conflict indicates in Annie recognition of the oppressions signified by Ana's life and a desire to change that version of history: to rewrite history and give Ana a new ending.

Many if not most critics of *Ana Historic* have identified the oppressions in Ana's and Ina's stories as symptomatic of patriarchal discourses: a world *constructed* by men in which women have little place. They argue that these oppressions can be remedied by constructing alternative discourses, ones which conform to feminist understandings of the world and history. These critics have focused primarily on how Marlatt, in various ways, breaks down patriarchal "official" accounts of history to demonstrate how "history" is subjective and can therefore be re-created to fit feminist discourses: "A rereading of the documents in *Ana Historic* shows that their discourses, which have supported official history and thereby silenced and objectified women, are not fixed; placed in a new context, they can be challenged and exposed as constructions" (Helms 80). In fact, in a 1993 interview, Marlatt herself supports this interpretation, arguing, "If history is a construction and language is also a construction—in fact, it actually constructs the reality we live and act in—then we can change it.... When we change language, we change the building blocks by which we construct our reality or even our past 'reality,' history" (qtd. in Helms 86). Based on this understanding, Annie should be able to reconstruct Ana's "reality," to change the end of her story. The issue encountered in these interpretations, however, is that they focus solely on a

textual understanding of history. Certainly, texts constructed by male historians are likely to contain patriarchal biases, and it is a good idea to remain sceptical about those historical accounts, but to focus exclusively on these texts and how we might re-construct them is to turn our backs on the future and the potential for real change. Rewriting the texts of the past will not change the past, and I argue that this is exactly what *Ana Historic*, with the help of its researcher-historian character, teaches its readers. Far from being uniquely historiographical, Annie's engagement with the two historical narratives actually underlines the active and processional nature of history. Her imagined dialogues with Ina, in particular, literally create a dialogic connection between past and present in which Annie is eventually able to recognize the underlying continuity not only between Ana's and Ina's stories, but also between Ina's and her own.

Although Annie's first instinct when recognizing patriarchal dominance in Ana's story is to rewrite history—to “construct...our past ‘reality,’” as Marlatt states—this instinct is later counteracted, specifically with the help of Marlatt's emphasis on the importance of birth and natality. In my project, I have frequently revisited the key role that an awareness of mortality plays in narratives with political intentions because of its ability to inspire anger at the injustices of the past. As Eagleton asserts, a sense of the “frozen, tragic finality” that comes from death is essential for any narrative that seeks to “*make a difference*” (“History, Narrative, and Marxism” 277). What I have yet to discuss, however, is that the possibility for actual reform rarely comes uniquely from a sense of death. Instead, we must turn to another aspect of life, one which nourishes hope instead of anger: birth.

Nativity and History

Many theorists, including Marlatt herself, have discussed the interconnectedness of nativity and history, the active process of time. For instance, Hannah Arendt writes in *The Human Condition* that “[b]irth and death presuppose a world... whose durability and relative permanence makes appearance and disappearance possible, which existed before any one individual appeared into it and will survive his eventual departure” (97). What she means by this is that both mortality and nativity are intimately connected to history because there is an underlying continuity that exists beyond the cycle of life and death of any one person: regardless of the individual lives that may come and go over the course of time, the processional nature of history remains constant. This continuity is also underlined in the fact that nativity and birth are inherently linked to the body. The corporeal dimension of birth, in which one body labours to produce a new body, links it to both the lived experience of history and the active process of time.

Nativity is a crucial theme in *Ana Historic*, as is evident in the prominent, extended description of a labour and birth which forms the entirety of section six. This birth scene stands at the very centre of the novel’s exploration of the historical and political value of nativity, and it plays a key role in concretizing the novel’s understanding of history. In that scene, Ana has been invited to attend Jeannie Alexander’s labour with a small group of other women. She is initially apprehensive of the female body, of interacting with Jeannie’s “transform[ed]” body the way the midwife Susan so competently does (Marlatt, *Ana Historic* 122). As the labour progresses, however, she begins to admire the process—“I had never before seen a woman’s body truly at work.—Not *labour* as we commonly use it—I mean its inner work, this bringing forth”—and she describes the scene with awe (125). As the

moment of birth approaches, Ana's narration highlights more and more the agency of the body, the body that is something more than the person: "This was Jeannie, this was something else not Jeannie, not anyone, this was a mouth working its own inarticulate urge, opening deep" (125). The body, specifically the vagina, becomes a mouth about to speak. Marlatt's language here recalls Hélène Cixous' assertion in "The Laugh of the Medusa" that women's writing "will also be marked by woman's *seizing* the occasion to *speak*, hence her shattering entry into history, which has always been based *on her suppression*" (880).

Indeed, the advent of a specifically female language is an important factor in this re-valuation or reclamation of the body. In her essay "Musing with Mothertongue," Marlatt argues for "a language that returns us to the body" (56). This recalls Cixous' argument that women's bodies must be at the centre of their own writing, a "writing that inscribes femininity" (878). Cixous recognizes a cycle of patriarchal oppression similar to Benjamin's tradition of the oppressed and, like Benjamin, she seeks to break out of it. She argues that the remedy to this tradition of the oppressed is for women to recognize the value of their bodies, their own unique feminine characteristics and to speak out, to *write* that femininity:

She must write her self, because this is the invention of a *new insurgent* writing which, when the moment of her liberation has come, will allow her to carry out the indispensable ruptures and transformations in her history....

.... By writing her self, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her....

.... A woman without a body, dumb, blind, can't possibly be a good fighter.

(880)

The female body is thus inexorably tied to history and to political action.

In “Musing with Mothertongue,” Marlatt further demonstrates how the concepts of natality, corporeality, and temporality are closely intertwined, tied together by language, which she calls “a living body we enter at birth” (“Musing with Mothertongue” 53). She asserts that verbal communication is linked “with the body’s physicality” because “to mouth (speak)” is connected to “the mouth with which we also eat and make love” and that “like the mother’s body, language is larger than us and carries us along with it” (54). In language, according to Marlatt, “we discover a history of verbal relations...that has preceded us and given us the world we live in” (54). Like Arendt’s understanding of natality, language for Marlatt “presuppose[s] a world...which existed before any one individual appeared into it and will survive his eventual departure” (Arendt 97). Language is therefore inherently connected to a larger process of history. Like history, language is an immense process which interacts with and is affected by individuals, but it pre-dates and will outlast any one individual. Thus, when Jeannie’s body “[speaks] the babe, and then the afterbirth, a bleeding mass of meat,” she enters history and re-claims the value of the body to connect to life, history, and the potential for political action inherent in speech *and* birth (Marlatt, *Ana Historic* 126).

The problem for Marlatt, however, is that the language which we encounter at birth is a “patriarchally-loaded” one (“Musing with Mothertongue” 55). She asks, “where are the poems that celebrate the soft letting-go the flow of menstrual blood is as it leaves her body? how can the standard sentence structure of English with its linear authority, subject through verb to object, convey the wisdom of endlessly repeating and not exactly repeated cycles her body knows?” (55). She indicates here that there are two types of language and two types of history, corresponding to the two types of bodies: male and female. The “patriarchally-

loaded” language is linear and unchanging, while female language is connected to the experience of the body’s natural cycles: “endlessly repeating and not exactly repeated” (55).

This dichotomy, this conflict between male and female bodies/language/history, is contained in *Ana Historic*’s birth scene through the fragmentary dialogue between historical documents depicting a boat race and Ana’s narration of Jeannie’s labour. In the historical documents, a boat race takes place between the “Annie Fraser” and the “Pearl.” Annie’s commentary highlights the significance of the use of female names for these racing boats, as though the bodies of the ships were somehow analogous to women’s bodies. The juxtaposition of these two types of “female” bodies is significant to Annie’s growing consciousness of patriarchal dominance in two principal ways. First, the comparison draws attention to male oppression of women as Annie comments, “the ships men ride into the pages of history. the winning names. the nameless women who are vessels of their destiny” (Marlatt, *Ana Historic* 121). This passage alludes to the way these ships are seen as tools for male success while “nameless women” like Mrs. Richards are similarly relegated to the background; in fact, the ships are better known. Second, the juxtaposition of the boats and the birth scene demonstrates the unique nature of female bodies: the ones linked, as Marlatt notes in “Musing with Mothertongue,” to “the wisdom of endlessly repeating and not exactly repeated cycles...” (55). This is implied through Annie’s description of male interactions with ships: “loading, they sing out ‘drop ’er there,’ ‘heave away,’ ‘let ’er go.’ a pride of muscle, frame, handling all these female pronouns there in the theatre of history..., a body armature that can be counted on, a body that doesn’t secretly transform itself (from month to month)...” (118). The bodies of ships, she asserts, are stagnant entities, sturdy and unchanging, and this is what men value about them. The implication is that women’s bodies,

on the other hand, are dynamic and changing and, therefore, from the point of view of men's history, cannot "be counted on." Women's bodies, which "secretly transform [themselves] (from month to month)," which grow new life and give birth to it, are therefore perceived as inferior to those reliable ships.

Through the juxtaposition of the boat race and the labour, Marlatt therefore succeeds in communicating to the reader the flaws in the traditional, male understanding of female bodies and in placing new value on the woman's body as it is connected to natural cycles. Though Marlatt's discussion of language has encouraged many critics to focus on the discursive nature of history-writing, discussing the "phallogentrism of historical documentation" and other textual issues, the way she broaches the issue of language—so closely connected to bodies, birth, and history—works strongly against any textual understanding of history (Grisé 94). As Zoe says in the following section, "the real history of women...is unwritten because it runs through our bodies: we give birth to each other" (Marlatt, *Ana Historic* 131). This "real history of women" is not historiographical; it is process that continues as one generation gives way to another.

Indeed, Marlatt's emphasis on female bodies that are connected to natural cycles and processes, which "secretly transform [themselves] (from month to month)," inherently works against textuality: placing value on the genuinely historical—and corporeal—experience of time (*Ana Historic* 118). Unlike the boats in the race, which either win, lose, or tie, the woman's birthing body interacts with time in a different way: "woman a rhythm in touch with her body its tides coming in not first nor last nor lost she circles back on herself repeats her breathing out and in two heartbeats here not winning or losing labouring into the manifest" (125). In the race there is emphasis primarily on the end result, but in the depiction

of the body in birth, the emphasis is on the process. There will of course be an “ending”—the baby’s birth—but the focus on the body brings to the forefront the lived experience whose significance is not only as a means to an end.²⁰

Trying to make sense of what she has narrated (or witnessed) in the section before, Annie discusses her ambivalence at the birth of a male child. Like Ana, who is surprised to discover that the newborn child is a boy—“I must confess I was taken aback by the babe’s equipment”—Annie has difficulty reconciling the articulate agency of the female birthing body with the fact that the product of that labour is a boy who may grow up to perpetuate the cycle of patriarchal oppression (126). Zoe’s counterargument, however, underlines the hope and potential inherent in birth: “we give birth to boy babies and men make men of them as fast as they can. they try to make us think they make women out of us too but it’s not true. it’s women imagining all that women could be that brings us into the world” (131). In having Zoe—who is perceived by both Annie and readers as a sort of guru—argue this, Marlatt draws the readers’ attention to three main assertions. The first is that birth *is* essentially tied to hope, since “boy babies,” it is implied, have the potential to become something other than “men” if other men do not “make men of them as fast as they can.” In other words, it is socialized gender norms that turn “boys” into “men”: the categories are not biologically but socially determined, and therefore there is potential for change in that socialization. Second, however, is that the potential that existed in the birth of Jeannie Alexander’s son was wasted in that fact that, presumably, that baby did grow up to be a man, to participate in the patriarchal system that erased Ana Richards from historical record. Third, it makes Annie and the readers aware of a potential that still exists for women to give birth in another way:

²⁰ This corporeality is particularly significant to a discussion of *Ana Historic* because, as I discuss further on, it is often the nature of women’s bodies, the potential they have for giving birth, that has historically led to their oppression.

to “imagin[e] all that women could be,” to act on that potential and change their own position in society (131).

The birth scene therefore marks a radical transformation in Annie’s own understanding of history and the “tradition of the oppressed.” Jeannie’s labour in this way serves as a climax of the novel, a moment of violence and pain that shocks Annie into a change in perspective. Prior to the birth scene, Annie is conflicted over Ana’s future, wishing Ana could remain independent, perhaps being a “secret friend” of Birdie Stewart, the town madam, instead of marrying Ben Springer (108). She expresses to Zoe her “disappointment in [Ana’s] fate,” recognizing that “maybe she didn’t have any [choice]” (91). She is conscious of the “state of emergency” present in both Ana’s and Ina’s lives, and she wants to break them out of it, but it is not until after the birth scene that she begins to see how to actively instigate that change (or what exactly that change should be). Before Jeannie’s labour Annie had recognized the oppressions of the past, but it is only afterwards that she accepts, as Benjamin would say, “that it is [her] task to bring about a real state of emergency” (“Theses” 257).

“Unspoken, Unenacted—Half Born”

The first two pages following the birth scene principally follow Annie as she tries to make sense of this potential inherent in birth, both literal birth of the body and figurative birth of the imagination. She thinks about her own narrative, the one she is writing about Ana, and how she imagines both Ana and Ina. She is attempting to use her narrative to change Ana’s and Ina’s stories, to save them from the oppressions they suffered. According to Zoe, “it’s women imagining all that women could be that brings us into the world,” and

Annie wants to imagine Ina: “in my imagination, Ina i would give birth to, enter her into the world. but it is Zoe’s hand that rests beside mine on the table top” (132). The sharp contrast between Annie’s two statements—between a wish to resurrect Ina and the stark reality that Ina is not present, despite her imagined dialogues—demonstrates her growing awareness that this potential that lies in birth and imagination does not come retrospectively. As Cixous writes, “[W]riting is precisely *the very possibility of change*...the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures” (879). Imagination and writing are both strong instruments of change, but they cannot—as Annie discovers—change the past. In order to fight against the “tradition of the oppressed,” Annie must fully recognize that the oppressions suffered by Ina and Ana are not “the exception but the rule” (Benjamin 257). Ina is certainly gone, but perhaps by inciting Annie to recognize the underlying continuity between past and present oppressions, her death can bring about a birth.

The real shift in Annie’s perspective happens after this realization. Although she is still unsure about how to deal with either her mother’s story or Ana’s, she realizes in what direction she needs to go. Examining Zoe’s demeanour, how she “speaks fiercely—as if she were used to fighting her way through the world, or through the thicket of others’ definitions she resists,” Annie remarks, “i think of Ange and think that she [Zoe] is, in some way, like her. that shifts me suddenly, i feel old, as if i were talking to a woman so much younger. no, as if i see myself through her eyes—stuck in the unspoken, unenacted—half born” (132). At first reading this passage comes across as contradictory: first Annie feels much older than Zoe, like a mother, and the next moment she feels “half born,” implying that Zoe is “fully born” or older. In the face of Zoe’s vibrant, assertive nature, Annie is made to feel both old—perhaps stuck in her ways—and “half born”—untapped potential. For this moment of

revelation for Annie, it is significant that Marlatt chose the words “unspoken” and “unenacted” to accompany “half born” because, in that passage, she draws attention to the connection between natality and political action. Arendt has written extensively about this link, specifically stating that birth is “the political activity par excellence” (Arendt 9). She argues that “the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting. In this sense of initiative, an element of action, and therefore of natality, is inherent in all human activities” (9) With each new birth, therefore, there is the potential for new action and change, and that creates hope. If Annie is “stuck in the...unenacted,” then she has not fulfilled that potential, not in the way that Zoe has by “fighting her way through the world, or through the thicket of others’ definitions she resists” (Marlatt, *Ana Historic* 132).

It is interesting to note here Marlatt’s choice of the name “Zoe” for this strongly political character. As mentioned earlier, the name “Zoe” means “life,” but it is a particular kind of life, one which philosophers like Arendt, Giorgio Agamben, and Aristotle have argued lies outside of the political arena. In the work of these theorists, “zoe” is natural life and is therefore set apart from “bios,” political life which is aligned with history, biography, and world events. Readers of *Ana Historic*, then, must wonder why Marlatt would choose to give her most political character a name rooted in an unpolitical, unhistorical type of life. The answer, it seems, lies in Marlatt’s intent to historicize and politicize the female body, especially as it carries out its most natural processes. As has been identified in the birth scene, Marlatt clearly pushes for a re-valuation of woman’s labouring body in the novel, not just as a tool or a vessel for new life, but as an articulate being, speaking a baby into the world. As cited earlier, Arendt asserts that “action and speech, which...belonged close

together in the Greek understanding of politics, are indeed the two activities whose end result will always be a story with enough coherence to be told, no matter how accidental or haphazard the single events and their causation may appear to be” (97). When Jeannie Alexander’s body “speaks” the baby, therefore, it enters the realm of political life. This attempt to re-value labour as political is also evident in Ana’s narration of the birth scene: “I had never before seen a woman’s body truly at work.—Not *labour* as we commonly use it—I mean its inner work, this bringing forth. The pains were hard enough to break her, I feared. But she was not only at their mercy, she was labouring *with* them...” (Marlatt, *Ana Historic* 125). In this way, Marlatt asserts that these two spheres may not be as distinct as Arendt and other thinkers might have us believe. Following this logic, it seems likely that Marlatt’s choice of the name “Zoe” may be another way of asserting the political nature of the “natural life” that has traditionally been relegated to the private sphere. By politicizing female bodies, by allowing them to speak and act, Marlatt brings “zoe”—both the character and natural life—in line with “bios”—political life and history.

In calling herself “stuck in the unspoken, unenacted—half born,” Annie indicates her recognition that speech and action are necessary for change: she is alive, certainly, but in living according to the patriarchal norms with which she was brought up, she is removed from the realm of action and speech, “the two activities whose end result will always be a story with enough coherence to be told” (Marlatt, *Ana Historic* 132; Arendt 97). By extension, it can be understood that the same lack of political action and speech in both Ana’s and Ina’s lives is what led to the difficulty in creating their biographies. In realizing her own lack of action, Annie’s attitude immediately shifts. She states, “i know why i’m here” (Marlatt, *Ana Historic* 132). “here, Ina,” she clarifies, “in a way you couldn’t be”

(132). In saying this, Annie indicates her recognition of the fact that she has an opportunity to do something that her mother was unable to, that she has an opportunity to become fully born, to act. These two pages do not lead directly to Annie's actual political actions, but they are the pages in which, inspired by the birth scene of the previous section, Annie combines her anger at the past and her hope for future action to realize that she must be the one to change something. She makes this overtly clear when she outlines the change in her research methods: "Richard is a good historian, known for the diligent research behind his books. one missing piece can change the shape of the whole picture—you see how important your part in it is? but i'm no longer doing my part looking for missing pieces. at least not missing facts. not when there are missing persons in all this rubble" (134). From this point of the novel on, Annie does not seek to reconstruct the past as it was—she knows that past and she does not like the future it leads to. Instead, she attempts to change it, to change the future as a result; she will discover, however, that the past cannot truly be changed.

"Right up to the Impossible"

After Annie chooses to take action, she becomes obsessed with "the end": the end of her narrative but maybe "the end" of history too. She asks Ina, "how should this one [story] end? and is there one? (yours hasn't ended with you)" (138). She writes a section of her historical narrative titled "Not a Bad End" in which Ana begins a relationship with Birdie Stewart, but she does not finish it, uncomfortable with changing history like that. Even so, she also cannot accept ending the story with fidelity to historical facts, seeing Ana give up her independence and marry Ben Springer: "what if that life should close in on her like the lid of a hope chest? if she should shrivel and die inside, constricted by the narrow range of

what was acceptable for Mrs. Springer?...no, it wasn't a choice anyone sane would make" (146). While she fights with herself about how to end the story, Annie flashes back to her mother's electric shock treatments for hysteria, making the tragedy of Ina's life all the more poignant and final, and emphasizing the reader's awareness that no matter how Ana's story ends, nothing will change Ina's future. Annie's final words to Ina outline Ina's suffering and Annie's determination to use her story to change things:

you'd gone flat, like a balloon at the end of the party. it wasn't just your memory they took. they took your imagination, your will to create things differently.

and so you went on, a character flattened by destiny, caught between the covers of a book.

i don't want to do that to you. i don't want Ana to do that to herself. (149-150)

This passage seems to fight against the textualization of the lived experience of history: to be flattened is to lose a grasp on life, to lose the potential of future change. Ina, at this point, is not dead, but she is not alive either, and so she cannot effect change in any way.

This final address to Ina leads Annie to her major realization of the novel, her realization that it is her own "ending" that can be changed, her own "ending" that can lead to a future different from her present:

(there goes Annie, assuming she's different from each of them. safe in her parentheses, her own cover story. conservatively smug and untouched. meanwhile dreaming bridges that collapse, her daughter drowning, her

husband's body thrown into the sea as the ship of state blows up, as the fire begins and she is swimming, swimming to save herself...

break the parentheses and let it all surface! falling apart. we are, i am. we have fallen apart. the parts don't fit. not well. never whole. never did.

Zoe! (150)

This is Annie's awakening, her recognition that she need not separate herself from the past. "[S]afe in her parentheses," it seems, she has been cutting herself off from connection to the past. She knows she wants to create a different future, but until this point she does not recognize that it is she who needs to change. She identifies that Zoe—both her friend and the implied politicization of natural life—will be necessary to that change.

Entering Zoe's house, Annie is confronted with the reality of the changes she wants to make. She does not fully articulate exactly what those are, what action she wants to take, but in Zoe's house she sees a more concrete picture of what change and political action might mean: women living together without men, sending flyers, discussing committees and a crisis centre. She repeats three times that she had not imagined how Zoe lived, recalling for the reader Zoe's comment about how it is "women imagining all that women could be that brings us into the world" (131). This house with its concrete political action stands in contrast to Annie's much more abstract and implied desires for action and change, and perhaps it is that concrete nature which allows her to fully articulate her desires: for a new identity, for a relationship with Zoe:

i want to knock: can you hear? i want to answer her who's there? not Ana or Ina, those transparent covers. Ana Richards Richard's Anna. fooling myself on the other side of history as if it were a line dividing the real from the unreal.

Annie/Ana—arose by any other name, whole wardrobes of names guarding the limitations—we rise above them. Annie isn't Richard's or even Springer's. (152)

In this passage, Annie clearly admits that both Ana's and Ina's stories were “transparent covers” for her own, and that she “fool[ed]” herself by thinking that she could disconnect herself from the tradition of the oppressed. She appropriates the issues she has been ascribing to Ana, and in response asserts her independence and a new identity by renaming herself Annie Torrent and beginning a relationship with Zoe.

The final page of the novel sees Annie's desire for action come to fruition in the start of her relationship with Zoe. In the poem that occupies that page, Annie reminds readers again of the importance of natality: “we give place, giving words, giving birth, to / each other—she and me” (153). This statement, recalling Zoe's earlier assertion, indicates that Annie no longer sees herself “stuck in the unspoken, unenacted—half born”: she has instead taken action against both the status quo of her life and, symbolically, against the pattern of patriarchal domination that she identified in both Ina's and Ana's narratives. In taking this action she has become fully born. This lesbian sexual awakening, however, has long been a challenge for critics who are intent on seeing Annie's “re-birth” as solely a feminist action. Many of those critics have criticized the conclusion of the novel as essentialist: a “displacement of ‘phallogocentrism’ by ‘vulgocentrism’” to create an “unexpectedly conventional...utopian vision” (Tostevin 38). To read the conclusion in this way is to cut off the intertwined and polyvocal nature of Marlatt's text; as Heather Milne asserts, this limiting reading of the novel's final pages “undermine[s] the book as a coming-out text” (93). Referencing Teresa de Lauretis, Milne identifies that the “blurred distinction between lesbianism and feminism turns ‘lesbianism into the sign of an implicitly heterosexual female

resistance and desire” (94-95). The final scene is clearly political in nature, but to reduce its intentions to simply “feminist” is to erase the complexities of the polyvocal and intertwined nature of Marlatt’s work that draws together a wide range of concerns including nature, imperialism, motherhood, gender, and sexuality in a genuinely historical way.

Rather than seeing Annie’s awakening as a “conventional...utopian vision,” then, it is important to see the assertion of her lesbian desire as an important and valuable addition to the various political intentions of the novel. Milne argues that Annie’s “re-birth” can be understood instead as a “discourse of certainty” which is constructed to make sense of a new identity: “As many queer theorists have noted, coming out entails constructing a teleological narrative that retrospectively reframes one’s experiences prior to coming out as leading up to the one’s proclamation of her queer/gay/lesbian/trans/bi identity” (93). This “teleological narrative” is not a re-writing of history, but a re-framing: recognition of a pre-existing but previously unrecognized element of reality, one which has consequences for both the present and the future. This newly formed consciousness is clearly historical in nature. Eagleton has argued that what allows an emergent force to even have a chance to actually emerge is knowledge of its identity: “[I]t is when the proletariat is able to give itself and bourgeois society a certain *description* that it is able to become the practical force which will transform the situation it describes. The proletariat cannot ‘know the future’; but it can know itself as the potential non-identity of the present, which is all that knowing the future can mean” (“Marxism and the Past” 275). To this point in the novel, both Annie and the reader have become aware of patriarchy as a dominant force, perpetuating the tradition of the oppressed, but with the assertion of this new identity, both Annie and the reader are compelled to re-examine that history, to see that desire for the female body has existed all along. In this

moment of re-birth there is an identification of another dominant force: heteronormativity. By reframing her identity as queer, Annie thereby incites considerations of history as a dynamic collection of cultural forces and situates herself with a force that is prepared to emerge.

This emergence does not signal the end of history: it is not a “utopian vision” or a “happy ending” in which the reader might imagine a new “perpetual present” adhering to a new status quo. Instead, Annie leaves the reader with hope for the future, stating, “it isn’t the dark but the luxury of being / has woken you, the reach of your desire, reading / us into the page ahead” (153). After all of her obsession over the “end” of her historical narrative, this ending is not really an ending. As Milne states, the sort of teleological narrative that is often constructed to proclaim queer identity is in fact a “projectio[n] that, in effect, mask[s] an unstable self, one whose ‘undoing’ is always a possibility” (93). Annie’s narrative frames this “emergence” or “re-birth” as historically conditioned, but she does not cut off the potential of the future. This ending that is not an ending recalls Cixous’ assertion that “Women must write through their bodies...they must...get beyond the ultimate reserve-discourse, including...the one that, aiming for the impossible, stops short before the word ‘impossible’ and writes it as ‘the end.’” (886). Cixous adds, “Such is the strength of women that...women will go right up to the impossible” (886). By refusing to “end” the narrative and instead promising future “pages,” Annie finally refuses to shy away from her potential, looks towards the future, demonstrates her reconnection with the process of history, and “go[es] right up to the impossible.”

Other critics have noted in this final scene Marlatt’s “counter-hegemonic impulse that needs to be linked to a transformative politics,” but none have specifically identified the

power that the researcher-historian character brings to those transformative politics through her interaction with the past (Helms 91). Though the tradition of the oppressed is clearly present in both Ana's and Ina's stories, it is Annie's dialectical engagement with the past, her own gradual recognition of her place in that tradition, that establishes the orientation towards the future with which the story ends. By including this character, Marlatt is able to mediate between the anger at the past which mortality incites and the hope for the future which natality inspires, and by mediating between those forces, Marlatt simultaneously dismantles the patriarchy as a cultural dominant, demonstrates the political nature of women's lives and bodies, and attacks the postmodern perception of history as textual and changeable by replacing it with an orientation towards the future.

CONCLUSION:

“reading / us into the page ahead”

The orientation towards the future with which *Ana Historic* ends is clearly an essential one to the political intentions of the novel—opening up the possibility that Annie, and by extension the readers, might succeed in breaking out of the tradition of the oppressed—but it is an orientation that many critics have missed while determinedly highlighting Annie’s historiographic project. In the course of this thesis, I have repeatedly emphasized the dangers of seeing the past this way: as something lost, flattened, and textualized. If we understand the past only through texts and the stylized and stereotyped images they contain, how can we properly understand or contextualize our present in relation to that past? If our past can be rewritten, how can we recognize that the injustices of the past are worth being angry about? If we cannot see the connections between past and present, how can we hope that our present actions might change the future? The criticism surrounding Canadian historical fiction in the last three decades has unwittingly implicated itself in these issues. Focused on discursiveness and historiography, on epistemology and textuality, the critics of historiographic metafiction have severed the connection between the past and the lived experience of history. Even while highlighting the ideological intentions of the texts in question, these critics have inadvertently rendered those ideologies impotent.

In examining *Ana Historic* along with *The Wars* and *Burning Water*, I have attempted to demonstrate that this sort of approach to historical texts is not only limited and problematic, but also unnecessary. Far from asserting a solely textual understanding of the past, these texts engage with *history* itself, and their researcher-historian characters are key to that engagement. What I have proposed in these chapters is a new way of reading

researcher-historian characters: as a device valuable for more than just the foregrounding of historiography. For instance, the researcher-historian in *The Wars* is instrumental in foregrounding the active process of memory; the researcher-historian in *Burning Water* asserts an aesthetic of global cognitive mapping that extends the author's critique of colonialism to resonate in the present day; and the researcher-historian in *Ana Historic* directly interacts with and participates in historical process, demonstrating the potential for future change. In all of these cases, it is in the use of that type of character that these novels are able to establish an active engagement between past and present. It is with the help of this type of character that these novels and so many others are able to move beyond a flat, textualized understanding of the past to a dialogical engagement with the dynamic process of history itself. The presence of these contemporary characters in historical narratives inherently draws readers' attention to the relationship between past and present, and, even more than that, they have the potential to affect readers' engagement with both the form and the content of history.

The analyses and critical avenues explored in this project have barely scratched the surface of the potential that exists for opening up the genre of Canadian postmodern historical fiction to "a critical acknowledgement of the social experiences and effects of history, as well as a fuller appreciation of the dynamics of the active processes of time and memory" (Blair 204). Beyond establishing the value of researcher-historian characters for more than just their foregrounding of historiography, in analyzing these three novels, I have sought to demonstrate that it is important to extend this sort of history-focused criticism to all those historical novels which have, for the past thirty years, been considered almost solely for their metafictional attributes. I chose these novels in particular not because they

are the only Canadian historical texts featuring researcher-historian characters, but because they are representative of the many historical novels whose critical potential has been limited by historiographic metafictional criticism. Other postmodern historical novels like Rudy Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear* (1973), Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion* (1987), Guy Vanderhaeghe's *The Englishman's Boy* (1996), Wayne Johnston's *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* (1998), Jane Urquhart's *The Stone Carvers* (2001), Douglas Glover's *Elle* (2003), and numberless others would all benefit from the sort of criticism that would examine their engagement with history specifically, and not just the past.

In particular, critics should bear in mind the importance of these considerations as they turn to examine the plethora of new historical novels that continue to inundate the Canadian literary stage. Long gone is the day when W.J. Keith was able to write, “[S]erious historical fiction does not yet form a prominent part of Canadian literature” (qtd. in Wylie, *Speculative Fictions* 4). Today, the major Canadian literary prizes like the GG’s and the Giller are repeatedly awarded to historical novels, and new books by Joseph Boyden, Michael Ondaatje, and other authors of “serious historical fiction” frequently find their way to the top of the bestseller charts: readers and authors alike are turning towards the past. With so many readers looking to Canadian historical fiction—be it for entertainment or education—it is important to recognize, more than ever, the influential position this genre holds over Canadians’ perceptions of their history and, by extension, their present and their future.

This is especially significant as the contemporary political culture in Canada turns more and more towards the past for some sense of Canada’s present identity. Writing in the 1980s, Fredric Jameson identified the loss of historicity in postmodern society, the growing

inability to contextualize the present in the larger process of history and the resulting reliance on stereotypes and stylized images to represent both past and present: “[T]here no longer does seem to be any organic relationship between the American history we learn from schoolbooks and the lived experience of the current multinational, high-rise, stagflated city of the newspapers and of our own everyday life” (*Postmodernism* 22). A quarter century later in Canada, this postmodern crisis in historicity is still alive and well as the government departments of heritage and defence continue to direct Canadian attentions nostalgically towards stereotyped images of the past in preparation for Canada’s 150th birthday celebrations in 2017.

In July 2013, for instance, the Canadian government launched the first annual “Canada History Week” and announced that millions of dollars would be spent to return the Canadian Forces ranks to “the original British Army and Commonwealth designations,” including “the complicated system of pips and crowns worn during WW II [sic]” (The Canadian Press; Cudmore). This change, according to then Defence Minister Peter MacKay, was made in order to “strengthen [Canada’s] bond with the past,” especially “the First and Second World Wars, when Canada achieved some of its greatest military triumphs” (The Canadian Press). In other words, the Canadian Defence Department’s attempt to connect Canadians to their past is based on reviving a long-obsolete fashion to symbolize past “triumphs.” Not long after, in December 2013, the Canadian Museum of History was officially established to “highlight the national achievements and accomplishments that have shaped our country, including the “Last Spike” from the construction of the Canada Pacific Railway, Maurice “Rocket” Richard’s hockey jersey and items from Terry Fox’s Marathon of Hope.” (“Promoting Canadian History”). Again, this statement underlines a nostalgic

perception of the past that relies on stylized images like hockey jerseys and railroad spikes to stand in for actual historical experience. These are only a few of the initiatives put forth by the Canadian government in preparation for Canada's 150th, but they indicate the strong institutional push to view these images as representations of a past that is not only disconnected from the lived experience of the present, but also stereotyped and idealized to the point that it has become what Jameson called the "simulacrum": "the identical copy for which no original has ever existed" (*Postmodernism* 18).

With this orientation towards a stylized past in contemporary Canadian society, it is increasingly important to consider how these representations of the past perpetuate the postmodern crisis in historicity of which Jameson wrote so many years ago. Fortunately, historical fiction stands in an ideal position to affect how Canadians understand those representations. With the immense popularity of historical fiction among contemporary Canadian readers, authors who write historical fiction and critics who study it have the capacity to affect how those readers understand and engage with history. It is for this reason that, in writing this thesis, I have provided examples of how critics might examine the presentation of history in postmodern historical novels with an eye to the effectiveness of the novels' ideological positions. I do not mean to imply that all historical novels can be successful in breaking out of the postmodern "perpetual present" or, indeed, that any of the texts I have discussed in fact break out of that paradigm. What is clear, however, is that, in the contemporary culture of postmodernity, authors and critics looking to participate in any form of transformative politics must seek to understand not just the past or the present, but *history*, the active experience of time—an experience that is simultaneously social and corporeal. As the researcher-historian character in *Ana Historic* demonstrates, it is not

enough to identify the injustices of the past: one must seek change in the present and the future as well, “reading [it] into the page ahead.”

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