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# Archaism, or Textual Literalism in the Historical Novel

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Linell B Wisner entitled "Archaism, or Textual Literalism in the Historical Novel." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

Amy J. Elias, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Thomas Haddox, William Hardwig, Jeri L. McIntosh

Accepted for the Council:

Dixie L. Thompson

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges  
Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

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**Archaism, or Textual Literalism in the Historical Novel**

**A Dissertation**

**Presented for the**

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**Degree**

**The University of Tennessee, Knoxville**

**Linell B. Wisner**

**August 2010**

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## Abstract

This dissertation examines the technique of archaism as it has been practiced in the historical novel since that genre's origins. By "archaism," I refer to a variation of the strategy that Jerome McGann calls textual "literalism," whereby literary texts use "thickly materialized" language and bibliographic forms to foreground their own "textuality as such" (*Black Riders* 74). Archaism is distinguished from Blake's, Pound's, or Robert Carlton Brown's literalism by its imitation of older literary idioms, yet the specifically historical quality of its intertextuality also seems different from primarily formal imitations such as pastiche and parody.

Although archaism appears to have originated as part of the special language of romance, this study focuses on the technique as a representational strategy within historical fiction. Thus I begin by interpreting Thomas Chatterton's faux-medieval forgeries (ca. 1770) as a kind of poetic antiquarianism, after which I trace the legacy of Chattertonian archaism in nineteenth-century historical novels including Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819) and Thackeray's *Henry Esmond* (1852). The last two chapters address the twentieth-century return to archaism in John Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor* (1960), William Golding's *To the Ends of the Earth: A Sea Trilogy* (1980-1989), and William T. Vollmann's *Argall* (2001).

Throughout, I rely extensively upon Georg Lukács's *The Historical Novel* (1937), approaching the latter novels as historical fiction rather than as specimens of such post-1960s genres as Linda Hutcheon's "historiographic metafiction" or Amy J. Elias's "metahistorical romance." Lukács is especially useful because of his sense that historical fictions are animated by the mimetic imperative to represent historical "reality." Furthermore, the historical novel frame of these novels often serves to historicize literary form, disciplining both the simulation and the metafictionality that exemplify postmodern cultural praxis. Ultimately, I argue that archaism within the historical novel models a historical "real" that is always *constructed* in a manner analogous to the construction of literary texts, positing a historicity in which imaginative literature offers a key figuration of social experience. Unlike Hutcheon, who advances similar claims for historiographic metafiction, I contend that these novels often use archaism to represent their historical referents as reality—a practice that recalls the "classical" historical fiction of the nineteenth century.



By drawing equally on historical novel theory and on Hutcheon, Elias, and Fredric Jameson's analyses of post-1960s historical fiction as a representative form of aesthetic postmodernism, I synthesize two theoretical discussions which have typically been seen as incompatible. Similarly, this study emphasizes the continuity between old and new forms of historical fiction, expanding on Elias's salient observation that "postmodern historical fiction stands in the refracted light of nineteenth-century historical novels" (*Sublime Desire* 6). Concepts of theoretical and aesthetic continuity, therefore, shape both the argument and the organization of this dissertation.

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## Introduction

In the last decade of his life, William Morris embarked on the “adventure” of the Kelmscott Press, an endeavor that according to William S. Peterson represented the “final phase” of Gothic Revivalism in England (*The Kelmscott Press* 5). Beginning in 1891, the highly-decorative, experimental books handcrafted at Kelmscott added “printer” to Morris’s lengthy résumé—one that already included poet, architect, weaver, stained glass artisan, cultural critic, and political activist. The Kelmscott books relied on artistry and skilled artisanship at all stages of book design and production, with production methods and aesthetics hearkening to those of fifteenth-century printers, in particular William Caxton and Venetian Nicolaus Jenson, an approach that contrasted sharply with late Victorian printing practices characterized by what Morris saw as utilitarian ugliness.<sup>1</sup> Ultimately, the Kelmscott Press produced fifty-three works in sixty-six volumes, an output that Phillip Henderson dubs a “remarkable achievement” for six years and three hand presses.<sup>2</sup>

The books designed, hand-printed, and issued by the press generally fall into one of three categories. Many are monumental editions of fourteenth and fifteenth-century literature, such as an elaborate *Works of Chaucer* and a reprint of Caxton’s *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye*. Others include editions of Romantics and Victorian neo-medievalists such as Shelley, Ruskin, and Swinburne. The third group of Kelmscott books comprises elaborate editions of Morris’s own romances. These can be seen as the consummation both of Morris’s lengthy literary career and of his engagement with arts and crafts, with the press allowing him total control over his

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<sup>1</sup> According to Phillip Henderson, “It was against [ . . . ] a drab poverty of design, with its thin, pinched type-faces, its characterless title-pages, its miserable papers and binding-cloths (usually of dirt color) that Morris asserted his heavy black type, his thick paper, his exuberant decoration of title-pages, his bindings of plain light blue boards and canvas spines ” (*William Morris* 330). See also Peterson, pp. 9-40.

<sup>2</sup> *William Morris* (349). For more on Kelmscott, see Peter Faulkner’s *Against the Age: An Introduction to William Morris* (1990), and the relevant sections of biographies by E.P. Thompson (1955) and Fiona MacCarthy (1994).

literary works throughout all phases of their production. Hand-printed by methods that would have been familiar to Caxton and Jenson, the Kelmscott romances feature neo-fifteenth-century bibliographic norms such as woodcut illustrations and ornamental borders, illuminated initials, and fonts modeled upon medieval typography. Morris's approach to book-design was both an example of Gothic revivalism and a reaction against contemporary printing practices. As Henderson observes, "Morris used woodcuts for his illustrations because the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century printers did so, but also as a protest against the spidery quality of contemporary illustrations printed on smooth paper by the new line-block process" (330-31). The elaborate design of such Kelmscott romances as *The Story of the Glittering Plain* and *The Well at the World's End* provided those wealthy enough to purchase them specimens of book design and manufacture that were utterly at odds with the typical late-Victorian book. Thus in her biography of Morris, Fiona MacCarthy emphasizes the romances' effect of "establishing connections with a half-recognized medieval landscape, and of drawing the reader into a new world of strange visual juxtapositions" in order to "create another world which is a critique of all that Morris hated in Victorian visual culture: its shams and its stolidity" (619).

Yet Morris's bibliographic experimentation at Kelmscott cannot be divorced from the romances' linguistic content, which is similarly exotic and evocative of medieval and early modern fashion. Peter Faulkner argues that Morris employed romance forms as revolt against the "fashionable naturalism of the 1890s," in particular the novels of George Gissing, "with their emphasis on the sordid realities of everyday life among the genteel or industrial poor" (165). The romances feature a highly formal prose style that generally suggests that of pre-modern English, attempting, as Amanda Hodgson argues, to reproduce "a language as far as possible undamaged by the intrusion of Latin and French influences, closer to the pre-Conquest English

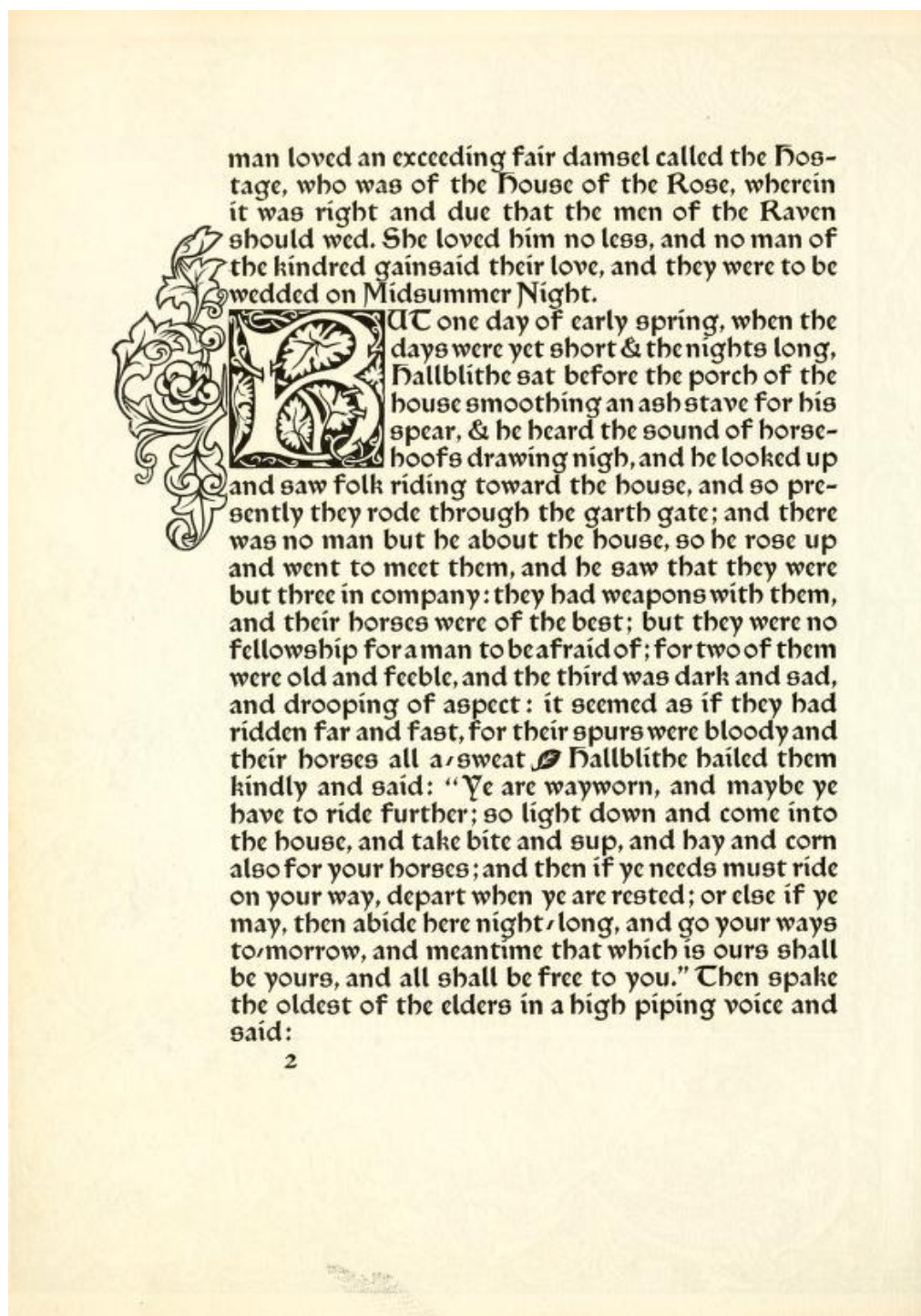


Figure 1. Page from the Kelmscott edition of William Morris's *The Story of the Glittering Plain* (2).

which Morris admired” (*The Romances of William Morris* 164). Similarly, Morris’s characters resemble those of Marie de France far more than those of contemporaries such as Flaubert or James, while the romances’ plots—like those of his models—methodically follow their protagonists on long, edifying journeys through exotic lands. For Hodgson, the Kelmscott romances illustrate Morris’s project of recapturing both the utopian ideals and structural intricacy of such prototypes as Malory’s *Le Morte D’Arthur*—first printed, of course, by Caxton (167-69).

A romance such as *The Well at the World’s End* presents itself as an archaic artifact at all levels of the text, from its bibliographic to its linguistic features. For this reason, Jerome McGann refers to it and similar works as “poetic literalism,” writing that in Morris’s text, “the effect is to foreground textuality as such, turning from words to ends-in-themselves. The text here is hard to read, is too thick with its own materialities. It resists any processing that would simply treat it as a set of referential signs pointing beyond themselves to a semantic content” (*Black Riders* 74). McGann envisions Morris as the generative spirit of poetic literalism in Modern literature, yet the latter’s experiments in textual literalism are distinguished from the work of precursors such as Blake and descendents including Yeats and Pound by their evocation of specifically historical textual norms.

Throughout this dissertation, I use the term “archaism” to describe historicized textual literalism of a piece with, or recalling the techniques of, Morris’s “poetic literalism.” Archaism not only foregrounds its own textuality “as such,” but it does so by imitating the textual conventions of recognizably historical literatures. Archaic texts draw upon the logic and appearance of the pseudo-artifact and the forged relic to evoke the literary mannerisms of a specific historical period. In his Kelmscott romances, for instance, Morris revives the literary



idioms and bibliographic principles shared by the first generation of European printers.

Archaism similarly emulates textual artifacts to create a kind of “artifiction.”

This dissertation considers how archaism has been employed as strategy for representing the past in the historical novel, from its origins in the late eighteenth century through what seems to be its international renaissance two hundred years later. At least as early as Thomas Chatterton’s faux-medieval Rowley poems (approximately 1768-1770), authors of historical fiction have used archaism to portray historical societies, a practice which sometimes intersected with those of what Georg Lukács calls the “classical” tradition of historical fiction,<sup>3</sup> in such novels as Walter Scott’s *Ivanhoe* (1819), William Makepeace Thackeray’s *Henry Esmond* (1852), and William De Morgan’s *Alice-for-Short* (1907). More recently, archaism became a widespread practice in late twentieth-century historical novels such as John Fowles’s *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* (1969) and *A Maggot* (1985), William Golding’s *To the Ends of the Earth: A Sea Trilogy* (1980-1987), A.S. Byatt’s *Possession* (1990), Thomas Pynchon’s *Mason & Dixon* (1997), and William T. Vollmann’s *Argall* (2001).

All of these novels combine a representation of historical societies, characters, and events with a sustained—in most cases given here, almost a total—imitation of the bibliographic and linguistic codes of a period-specific literary idiom,<sup>4</sup> using textual conventions that range from graphic design, typeface, and literary style to such larger structural categories as narration, character, and the shape of plots. This dissertation analyzes archaism as a technique for representing the past in historical fiction, providing a genealogy of its practice, comparing it with

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout the dissertation, the terms “classic” and “classical” refer to Lukács’s use of them in *The Historical Novel*, where they refer to the historical novels of Sir Walter Scott and his successors, in which structural elements such as character and plot realistically portray historical crises and societies.

<sup>4</sup> The concept that a text is composed of “bibliographic and linguistic codes” comes from McGann’s *The Textual Condition*. See especially pages 77-83.

“Oh, do not tease them so,” Tenebræ prays him.

“Ludgate, then? whichever, ’twas Gaol. It took me till I was lying among the Rats and Vermin, upon the freezing edge of a Future invisible, to understand that my name had never been my own,— rather belonging, all this time, to the Authorities, who forbade me to change it, or withhold it, as ’twere a Ring upon the Collar of a Beast, ever waiting for the Lead to be fasten’d on.... One of those moments Hindoos and Chinamen are ever said to be having, entire loss of Self, perfect union with All, sort of thing. Strange Lights, Fires, Voices indecipherable,— indeed, Children, this is the part of the Tale where your old Uncle gets to go insane,— or so, then, each in his Interest, did it please ev’ryone to style me. Sea voyages in those days being the standard Treatment for Insanity, my Exile should commence for the best of Medical reasons.”

Tho’ my Inclination had been to go out aboard an East Indiaman (the Rev<sup>d</sup> continues), as that route East travers’d notoriously a lively and youthful World of shipboard Dalliance, Gale-force Assemblies, and Duels ashore, with the French Fleet a constant,— for some, Romantic,— danger, “Like Pirates, yet more polite,” as the Ladies often assur’d me,— alas, those who controll’d my Fate, getting wind of my preference at the last moment, swiftly arrang’d to have me transferr’d into a small British Frigate sailing alone, upon a long voyage, in a time of War,— the *Sea-horse*, twenty-four guns, Captain Smith. I hasten’d in to Leadenhall Street to inquire.

“Can this be Objection we hear?” I was greeted. “Are you saying that a sixth-rate is beneath you? Would you prefer to remain ashore, and take up quarters in Bedlam? It has made a man of many in your Situation. Some have come to enjoy fairly meaningful lives there. Or if it’s some need for the Exotic, we might arrange for a stay in one of the French Hospitals....”

“Would one of my Condition even know how to object, my Lord? I owe you everything.”

“Madness has not impair’d your memory. Good. Keep away from harmful Substances, in particular Coffee, Tobacco and Indian Hemp. If you must use the latter, do not inhale. Keep your memory working, young man! Have a safe Voyage.”

Figure 2. A page from Thomas Pynchon’s *Mason & Dixon* (10).

other representational strategies (especially those of the classical historical novel), and offering some conclusions about the type of historical imagination that obtains in those novels which use it. Thus, in analyzing archaism in the historical novel, I am exploring a technology (archaism) within another technology (the historical novel).

I argue that in writing history by re-writing historical literary idioms, novelists create a textual iconography of the past, representing social-historical *milieux* through their own literary norms and thereby generating a self-consciously textual turn on both the classical historical novel and its underlying historicist principles. The historical novel, from Scott's *Waverley* novels to those in Vollmann's Seven Dreams cycle, has been first and foremost a technology for imagining and representing social-historical experience. The historicity that historical novels posit, however, varies considerably. For instance, Lukács observes in Scott's novels a sense of historical reality shaped in response to post-Revolutionary Europe: by ideological conflict on a grand scale. The movement of vast citizen armies throughout Europe during the Napoleonic Wars meant that historical change became for the first time "the mass experience of hundreds of thousands, of millions" (*The Historical Novel* 24). For Fredric Jameson, on the other hand, a postmodern historical novel such as E. L. Doctorow's *Ragtime* demonstrates the debased historicity of First World societies under multinational capitalism (*Postmodernism* 21-25). In both cases, the historical novel remains a technology for mapping both the specific and universal aspects of historical experience.

Within the historical novel, archaism functions as a strategy for portraying the structures that shape human experience in a specific historical milieu. If fiction by such novelists as Scott, Manzoni, Fowles, or Pynchon is admitted as works of history, then historian Hayden White's description of the tropological nature of historical writing can be used to describe its

representational semantics. Adopting the vocabulary of Peircean semiotics, White argues that historical narratives provide a “*complex of symbols* which gives us directions for finding an *icon* of the structure of those events in our literary tradition,” informing “the reader what to take as an icon of the events so as to render them ‘familiar’ to him” (*Tropics of Discourse* 88). Thus, imitating a historical literary idiom creates an icon for the novel’s historical referent. To this end, John Barth establishes *The Sot-Weed Factor*’s historical setting by mimicking Henry Fielding’s comic epic mode and eighteenth-century style, making sense of the eighteenth century by using, in White’s phrase, its own “figurative discourses” (*Tropics* 94).

Yet “familiarity” applies in only a minimal way to radical archaism like that of De Morgan’s *Alice-for-Short* or Vollmann’s *Argall*. Instead, archaism foregrounds its exoticism with respect to contemporary textual norms, choosing opacity and strangeness above transparency. Through archaism, the contemporary reader encounters the object of history as “other” rather than as living memory. Raymond Williams therefore distinguishes archaic cultural values and practices on the basis of their felt alterity, defining “the archaic” as “that which is wholly recognized as an element of the past, to be observed, to be examined, or even on occasion to be consciously ‘revived,’ in a deliberately specializing way” (122). In essence, archaism foregrounds the “pastness” of the past, which it voices as an alien, antiquarian territory that resists the linguistic or narrative transparency common to much historical writing. Archaism’s tendency to contaminate “narrative purity” through literalist alterity recalls James A. Knapp’s description of how early modern printers supplemented historical accounts with lavish illustrations, a practice which imagined the past through a textual field marked by competing authorial voices and ideological positions (29-34). Archaism presents the historical past as

textual spectacle while espousing a sense of historical experience that resembles antiquarianism in many respects.

While archaism thus aims to represent the historical past, the historicity it models differs significantly from the realism of the classical historical novel. Instead, archaism portrays a social-historical experience in which text becomes the key signifier of historical ideologies and modes of production. Drawing from Blake, Morris, and Brecht, McGann explains the continuing appeal of poetic literalism as a technique that implicitly asserts that social reality is always mediated by texts, a “world made by (and discovered as) language, through unceasing acts of textual intercourse” (*Black Riders* 141). McGann’s sense of textuality as historicity, while articulated in the context of post-structuralist literary theory, recalls the much earlier work of Neapolitan philosopher Giambattista Vico, who in *The New Science* (1725) argued that all gentile<sup>5</sup> societies are undergirded by a cultural logic expressed through legal codes and rhetorical tropes. From a comparative cultural analysis of ancient law, myth, and poetry, Vico sought to derive “universal axioms” of social-historical being and change, contending that men’s minds, and hence the societies that they constructed, were shaped according to tropological logic; thus tropes or figures of speech reveal the cultural logic of specific cultures. Culture itself is tropological from this view: as societies pass through the *ricorso* of history, its three ages of the divine, heroic, and human, each age adopts the logics of the rhetorical master tropes (metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, irony). For Vico, historical *milieux* chart their values in a semiotic field that changes as societies advance into a new age; through the study of these figures of language, the modern scholar can learn about the nature of bygone society. According to Vico, poetry

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<sup>5</sup> Vico nominally excepts from his analysis all cultures which are or were directed by divine providence, such as both the ancient Hebrew and his own Christian, European civilization (xxxii).

originates from the fact that, as in his axiom, “Men are naturally impelled to preserve the memories of the laws and institutions that bind them in their societies” (*The New Science* 73).

White, of course, is known for translating Vico’s theory of culture into historiography. While monographs such as *Tropics of Discourse* (1978) and *The Content of the Form* (1990) have come to be regarded as classic articulations of a postmodern philosophy of history, White attracted a considerable amount of controversy in his own field for insisting that historical narratives are “verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much *invented as found* and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences” (*Tropics* 82). In place of the objectivity encouraged by earlier historiographers, from Ranke to Collingwood, White argued that all historical accounts impose the elements of storytelling on history’s “raw materials”: the accumulated facts and chronological records of historical events that can be found in the archive. Thus the writing of history depends upon “emplotment,” the structuring of a historical narrative according to literary tropes—tragedy, comedy, romance, or irony.<sup>6</sup>

The specific trope that a historian uses to emplot his or her account derives not from factual evidence discoverable through archival research, but from the historian’s predisposition to imagine historical events—the French Revolution, the Holocaust, the fall of the Roman Empire—in tropological terms. According to White, historians choose the tropes that structure their narratives because of cultural and personal preconceptions about historical events. Thus historical accounts, because they deal in stories, not facts, are unavoidably saturated with value judgments, a fact that may contest the idea that histories offer any kind of factual truth, yet

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<sup>6</sup> In her forthcoming article “History,” to be published in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Pynchon*, Amy J. Elias summarizes White’s theory of historical emplotment with admirable succinctness and clarity.

ironically also means that history itself can be re-claimed as a human science dedicated to interpreting historical experience. Ultimately, White extends Vico's tropological conception of historical time and social-historical experience towards a tropological theory of historiography.

From these kinds of theories about the textuality of historicity and historical discourse derive archaism's unique mimetic logic, its basis for representing historical reality in a way that bears little resemblance to either the sociological objectivity associated with nineteenth-century realism or the pure self-reflexivity association with twentieth-century "self-conscious fiction."<sup>7</sup> Archaism *is* in its way metatheoretical, offering a form of hyper-mimesis predicated on textuality as a figure for social-historical experience. Like the tropological history of Vico, and White's theory of historical emplotment, archaism implies that the assumptions about history adopted in a specific historical time are wedded to specific types and means of expression. Unlike Vico's historical tropes, however, archaism is a rhetorical device of the present that comments on the past. In this sense, archaism is appropriate to what White would understand as the present's "ironic" emplotment of history: it is a rhetorical strategy that essentially constructs a "double" or bifurcated view of history, simultaneously as it is recorded in the past and present. Discussing a variant of late twentieth-century fiction that he terms "novels of poietic history," David W. Price argues similarly that novelists such as Carlos Fuentes or Salman Rushdie use metaphor and/or myth to "reimagine the reality of the past" by exploring language's capacity for embodying the historical struggle to create values. For Price, "to comprehend fully the reality of the past, we must participate in the processes whereby individuals, peoples, and entire cultures and societies

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<sup>7</sup> This term is Robert Alter's, from *Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1975.

*figured* their futures through imaginative projections of their wills” (*History Made, History Imagined* 3).<sup>8</sup>

However, archaism, while a metafictional strategy, nevertheless holds significant mimetic potential—derived from the premise that historical texts are artifacts of the imagination, coming to us saturated with representations of the material realities that attended their origins. Thus one might say that when Morris emulated the language, narrative structures, and bibliographic conventions of the fifteenth-century romance, he was making an effort to imagine the lived reality of pre-Capitalist England, a reality inherent in its textual artifacts. When a novelist merges a sophisticated imitation of an antiquated literary idiom with the formal principles of historical fiction, the resulting work aims even more directly at representing a specific historical experience. Such novels suggest that historicity is best understood as a kind of textual experience, consisting not of a naively-imagined “belonging” to a cultural unconscious, but of existing within an elaborate social-historical world analogous to that of the text.

## I

The following discussion of the productive, complex function of archaism in the historical novel stands at the intersection of two theoretical dialogues which have too often been held to be mutually exclusive: the small but crucial body of historical novel criticism that followed the English language publication of Lukács’s *The Historical Novel* in 1962, and the debates about postmodern historical fiction that figured prominently in efforts to define aesthetic postmodernism in the 1980s and 1990s. Because the widespread practice of archaism in late

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<sup>8</sup> Price’s endorsement of this figuration ultimately leads him toward an avowedly anti-foundationalist, Nietzschean rejection of disciplinary historiography and mimetic representations of the past. Yet insofar as he claims Vico, White, and Paul Ricoeur as his models for conceiving historical reality as the (individual and collective) figuration of social-historical experience, Price maintains the possibility for obviously non-mimetic fiction to represent historical experience.



twentieth-century historical fiction is at the center of my argument, I will briefly describe the latter discussion—and its problematization of archaism as a representational strategy—before turning to the former.

Critics have often focused on the expanded presence of self-consciously fictive elements in late twentieth-century historical fiction, most of them concluding that the presence of such metafictional techniques as parody and pastiche in the context of historical fiction illustrates a rupture with earlier attitudes toward history. In *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logical of Late Capitalism*, Fredric Jameson argues that most late twentieth-century historical fiction illustrates the most objectionable aspects of postmodernism, representing the triumph of a conception of the past as “a vast collection of images, a multitudinous photographic simulacrum” within a literary genre that had once played a vital role in politically-grounded culture (*Postmodernism* 18). However, he defends one kind of self-reflexive fiction—that of E.L. Doctorow, importantly one of the most “realist” of postmodern historical novelists—on the grounds that Doctorow focuses on significant historical moments of class conflict and presents just enough historically verifiable detail to render the historical moment, and its presentation as literature, as problematical. This “problematizing” of history Jameson links to his own concept of “cognitive mapping,” which enables “a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality [capitalism] which is the ensemble of society’s structure as a whole” (51). Thus Jameson largely discounts postmodernist fiction’s ability to represent the past in socially responsible ways, but allows for one kind of historical mimesis that has the potential to at least gesture towards a politically empowering representation of the past.

Defending postmodern aesthetics in general and the contemporary mix of history and fiction specifically, Linda Hutcheon argues that the most characteristic form of late twentieth-

century fiction is “historiographic metafiction,” a genre that brings together postmodernist innovation and historical themes to refute both naïve pretenses to historical truth and totalizing “official records” of historical events (*Politics* 49-51). Differing from Jameson, she sees a vast array of fiction as “historically responsible.” Hutcheon defines historiographic metafiction as postmodernism, a literature that differs from the Modernist experimental literature of the early twentieth century because of its return to historical themes as a valid subject for social critique in fiction. For both Jameson and Hutcheon, however, the realist historical novel is inadequate: for the latter in particular, the overt intertextuality and metafictionality of newer forms of historical fiction exemplifies, ironically, a more genuine approach to history than was offered through the realistic lens of the classical historical novel.

Many critics feel that metafiction and fabulation in late twentieth-century historical fiction reflect a new-found uncertainty about historical reality itself. In his study *Postmodernist Fiction*, Brian McHale argues that the modeling of reality in genres such as science fiction, fantasy, and historical fiction has become the dominant concern of postmodernist fiction. For him, new kinds of historical fiction render realism obsolete by exploiting the arbitrary “seam” between historical reality and literary invention in historical novels, “making the transition from one realm to the other as jarring as possible” and “violating the constraints on “classic” historical fiction” (90). While she envisions an important continuity between Scott’s fiction and post-1960s “metahistorical romance,” Amy J. Elias argues the romance elements of novels such as Fuentes’s *Terra Nostra* or Jeanette Winterson’s *The Passion* offer evidence for a postmodern conception of history as a form of the “secular sacred.” That these novels (often ironically) return to historical romance “signals a longing for the past—not a longing for a past simpler time or a past simpler culture, but for the past itself as a situating, grounding foundation for

knowledge and truth” (*Sublime Desire* 23). So while the preoccupation with history as a source of political and philosophical truths was revived in the late twentieth century, a realist form of historical fiction, by most accounts, was not.

Archaism in historical fiction appears to be characteristic of this phenomenon. Since archaism is a species of textual imitation—a genus that includes parody and pastiche—and prone to hybridization with other types of imitation, examples have often been cited in discussions of parody or other ironic intertextual strategies. As such, most critics recognize historical novels that use archaism as part of an anti-realist impulse in postmodernist fiction. Discussing *The Sot-Weed Factor*’s break from its generic predecessors, for instance, Charles B. Harris argues that Barth’s use of archaism amounts to a rejection of both the “conventions of realism and the assumptions that give those conventions validity” (*Passionate Virtuosity* 56). Yet regardless of the intentional irony which may or may not accompany archaism, the historical novels that use it share a sense that the language they imitate provides a substitute for the “real” past. As Harris says of Barth’s effort: “his novel should suggest the essentially fictive (which is to say, linguistic) basis of all reality constructions without at the same time denying the existence of the corporeal world. All the while it should reflect our postmodern self-consciousness about this fictiveness through a style and form that is itself self-consciously artificial” (58). For Jameson, this use of literary imitation as a substitute for the historic past reveals the de-politicized historical imagination obtaining under multi-national capitalism, and sustained archaism—as an image of an image of the real—represents the effacement of an older sense of history by postmodern depthlessness: “Faced with these ultimate objects—our social, historical, and existential present, and the past as ‘referent’—the incompatibility of a postmodernist ‘nostalgia’ art language with genuine historicity becomes dramatically apparent” (*Postmodernism* 19).

Because they imitate the stylistic and structural conventions of a historical literature—even, in some instances, by replicating its typeset—historical novels which use archaism would seem to represent an example *non pareil* of postmodern nostalgia for older textual forms.

The late twentieth-century historical novels I will discuss in this dissertation, however, sidestep some of the charges that have been leveled at other forms of postmodernist pastiche by adhering to the framework of the historical novel. This point is reflected in the differences between these novels and other postmodern simulations of the aesthetic past, such as Stephanie Barron's *Jane Austen Mysteries*. Beginning with *Jane and the Unpleasantness at Scargrave Manor* (1996), these ten novels feature a skillful pastiche of Austen's style, presented in the form of journal entries that recount the fictional Austen's crime-solving prowess. Whereas Barron's novels are structured (ironically) according to the conventions of the classic detective novel, Golding's *To the Ends of the Earth* trilogy, which similarly appropriates Regency literary idioms, abides by the constraints of the historical novel, an inherently historicist framework that disciplines Golding's own pastiche of Austen's forms by emphasizing their origins in the socio-political matrix of the early nineteenth-century British empire.

As Elias has noted, the historical novel genre derived from Scott and his diverse successors figures prominently in post-1960s historical fiction, imbedding historicist ideals and offering a generic continuity lacking in many other late twentieth-century art-forms, making those novels with any connection to Scott's tradition different from other forms of postmodernist culture, including nostalgia films, "historicist architecture,"<sup>9</sup> or even historiographic metafiction. Likewise, I claim that Vollmann's *Argall*, Golding's *To the Ends of the Earth* trilogy, Pynchon's

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<sup>9</sup> This use of "historicist" in relation to architecture, a practice Jameson calls the "random cannibalization of all the styles of the past" (18), should not be confused with the broad historicist project of the nineteenth century, as described by Hayden White in *Metahistory*.

*Mason & Dixon*, and Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* may be celebrated as historiographic metafiction or castigated as depthless pastiche, but they retain—to some degree—the generic markers of historical novels. This (partial, at least) allegiance to an older type of discourse has largely gone without comment from critics who stress the contemporary concerns or “presentism” of late twentieth-century historical fiction, and who have invested much space to drawing the sharp distinction between “old” and “new” models of the historical novel.<sup>10</sup> On the contrary, the late twentieth-century novels mentioned above have a number of antecedents in mixing archaism and historical fiction, dating at least to Chatterton's eighteenth-century pseudo-medieval poetry, a fact which reflects as much continuity as schism between these late twentieth-century examples and conventional historical fiction. Historical novels that use archaism often work within the constraints of the conventional genre, and their methods of embodying historical meaning owe much to these constraints.

However, given these caveats within contemporary novel criticism, many notable critics see much of value in canonical historical fiction. Since these critics generally regard the genre as a kind of historical discourse, most judgments about the forms and value of historical fiction derive from historicist principles, criteria endorsed in varying degrees by such otherwise

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<sup>10</sup> The continuity I choose to emphasize represents a departure from the numerous critics who perceive only rupture between late twentieth-century historical fiction and the earlier historical novel tradition. McHale, for instance, argues that the historical novel—the realist, historicist model springing from the nineteenth-century tradition of Walter Scott—has been displaced by a new type of fiction which is essentially fantastic and works out its opposition to the realist novel by undercutting the conventions of historical fiction (90). Likewise, Jameson opposes the impoverishment of postmodern fiction with the rich historicity of the realist historical novel (*Postmodernism* 18), while Diana Wallace in *The Woman's Historical Novel* sets up the classic form of the genre as a repressive, masculine discourse (8-15). Hutcheon argues that historiographic metafiction violates the principles of the classical historical novel by stressing the margins of history and focusing on its least typical individuals (*Poetics* 113-15). Two exceptions to this are Elias and Elisabeth Wesseling. Elias sees the post-1960s metahistorical romance as a continuation of Scott's historical novel, particularly in its mixture of romance and realism (*Sublime Desire* 12-23). In what amounts to a prehistory of late twentieth-century historical fiction, Wesseling describes the historical novel as it moves through first the realist and then the modernist literary models in her significantly subtitled *Writing History as a Prophet: Postmodernist Innovations of the Historical Novel*.

dissimilar theorists as Lukács, Herbert Butterfield, and Avrom Fleishman, who despite differences in national origin and ideological orientation are, as Harry Shaw recognizes, “united in believing historical fiction to be fundamentally a mode of knowledge” (*The Forms of Historical Fiction* 8). For these critics, proper historical novels must illustrate the ways in which material and ideological forces influence the historical trajectories of societies and individuals. In other words, the major theorists of the historical novel agree that the genre is at its core historicist (*Forms* 25). For them, the historical novel provides a kind of poetic counterpart to academic historiography in which the structural coherence of a past epoch and the dynamics of its development can be represented through literary form, as when Lukács argues, “The historical novel therefore has to *demonstrate by artistic means* that historical circumstances and characters existed in precisely such and such a way” (43). The historicist conception of the historical novel stresses both form and value, past and present; the novel’s literary structures should model the social-historical structures of the society which forms its subject, and its didactic aim should be to instill an understanding of all human life—even contemporary life—as historical.

While Lukács claims that the forms of Scott’s novels (including representative characters, passive protagonists, and plots portraying the dialectical processes of historical crises) reflect a materialist understanding of historical societies and progress characteristic of the early nineteenth century, his sense of the range of “artistic means” available to practitioners of the historical novel is limited by his endorsement of a narrowly defined classical realism and by his strictly ideological conception of the uses of history. Even so, his theory of the historical novel contains the seeds for an evolving critical perspective that examines how such novels employ aesthetic strategies to represent their historical referents. For instance, Shaw balks at Lukács’s

ideological assumptions<sup>11</sup> while refining the latter's ideas about form into a definition of the historical novel as one in which the work's "fictional probability" reflects the "historical probability" of its subject matter (*Forms* 20-21). In a related fashion, Wolfgang Iser interprets the forms of Scott's *Waverley*—focusing especially on eyewitness accounts and on the titular protagonist—as a pattern of communication which serves to "filter" historical reality: "Historical reality, then, is a cohesively patterned phenomenon that has to be communicated" (90). My analysis of archaism in the historical novel proceeds in a similar vein. Archaism maintains the genre's conventional imperative of asserting what it assumes to be the phenomenological cohesiveness of the past while simultaneously employing an opaque, exotic textuality to contest the genre's conventional mimetic transparency.

This dissertation is thus a study of archaism in the historical novel: one fictional technology within another. By examining how these two combine, producing a unique pattern of communication, I hope to suggest the variety of representational strategies in, as well as the inherently self-conscious textuality of, the historical novel. Like Lukács, Fleishman, Shaw, and Elias (and unlike many late twentieth-century theorists), I am concerned with both the generic trajectory and the uses of the past within the historical novel as it has existed since Scott. In bringing together dialogues about postmodernism and about the conventional historical novel, I hope to bring late twentieth-century ideas about textuality into the discussion of conventional historical fiction, thus spanning a gulf which appears, to me at least, artificial.

## II

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<sup>11</sup> While Shaw does address the "uses of history" in historical novels, these are inessential to his definition of the genre: "the definition's greatest strength is that it does not specify which role history must play in a novel's structure if we are to consider that novel a work of historical fiction" (*Forms of Historical Fiction* 22).

This dissertation attempts both theory and critical analysis, with more of the former in the initial chapters, and more of the latter toward the end. The theoretical component features most prominently in the examination of the formal properties of archaism, while my conclusions about the functional value of this strategy are primarily expounded through readings of late twentieth-century historical fiction. I have selected my primary sources on the basis of two criteria: first, they demonstrate global, rather than localized, use of a historical literary idiom (i.e., they embody “extreme examples” of archaism), and second, they exemplify wider formal and functional trends. For example, the late twentieth-century novels I have chosen to discuss represent positions within a broad continuum of reaction to historicist values.

The dissertation is divided into two basic parts, reflecting the temporal distance between older and newer forms of historical fiction. The break between nineteenth and late twentieth-century historical novels at the dissertation’s midpoint also embodies a movement from historical novel theory by Lukács, Fleishman, and Shaw to postmodern theory by Jameson, Hutcheon, Elias, and Price. Thus Chapter 1 begins outside of the historical novel frame, addressing the origins and uses of archaism as a kind of historical mimesis. I argue that archaism, while similar to pastiche, parody, and other types of diachronic intertextuality, historicizes language, consequently enabling a kind of hyper-realist representation of the historical past. I support this hypothesis by investigating the eighteenth-century forgeries of Thomas Chatterton, who created an imaginary fifteenth-century Bristol by writing poetry in a medieval idiom and attributing it to both real and fictitious historical authors. Chatterton’s forgeries demonstrate two definitive qualities of archaism: they evince an awareness of the material and ideological origins of textual artifacts, and they represent a specific social-historical reality by imitating its literary conventions.



Chapter 2 explores how archaism was used in the nineteenth-century classical historical novel, referencing genre theory by Lukács, Fleishman, and Shaw to examine the strategy in novels including Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819), Thackeray's *The History of Henry Esmond* (1852) and William De Morgan's *Alice-for-Short* (1907). *Esmond*, which imitates not only of Addison and Steele's English but also the bibliographic norms of the preceding century, shows Thackeray working within Scott's tradition while at the same time appealing to the strangeness of eighteenth-century textual practices in an effort to characterize England as it was under Queen Anne.

Chapter 3 turns to the practice of archaism in late twentieth-century historical fiction, entering the debate about the functional value of novels which blend historical themes and metafictional strategies. I argue that some historical novelists turn to archaism in an attempt to negotiate the competing claims of postmodernist linguistic experiments on one hand, and a renewal of interest in historicist values on the other. Through a reading of William T. Vollmann's *Argall: The True Story of Pocahontas and Captain John Smith*, I argue that archaism allows for a recuperation of the historicist values too often neglected or condemned in postmodernist historical fiction.

In Chapter 4, I offer readings of two late twentieth-century historical novels, John Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor* and William Golding's *To the Ends of the Earth: A Sea Trilogy*, which use archaism to advance contradictory appraisals of the historicist principles inherent in the classical historical novel. I argue that these novels represent two distinct positions within a continuum of response to the relationship archaism establishes between textuality and the past. Barth advances an ironic repudiation of historicist values while Golding asserts that the distanciative similarities

between historicity and textuality engender both a new standard for historicist value and a linguistic turn upon the Lukácsian historical novel.

## Chapter One

### What is Archaism? Oldspeak as History in Thomas Chatterton's Rowley Poems

Archaism in English has most often been associated with romance. This perhaps originates with Spenser, who wrote *The Faerie Queene* in partial imitation of his medieval predecessors. According to Noel Osselton, many of the poet's contemporaries felt him to have strayed from tastefulness and proper usage in his experiments with an antiquated manner:

In following his models Lydgate and Chaucer [ . . . ], Spenser was felt by Sidney to have gone too far in his experiments; and the famous rebuke by Jonson, that 'Spenser, in affecting the ancients, writ no Language,' expressed a distaste for Spenserian devices felt by some writers in the earlier part of the seventeenth century who [ . . . ] had come to prefer a poetic style closer to the common usage of their own day. (52)

As part of what Harry Berger, Jr. calls the poet's "retrospective" sense of literary history, Spenser revives the native English tradition of Chaucer, Lydgate, and Malory by raiding *The Canterbury Tales* for old words and employing the romance conventions of *Le Morte D'Arthur* to create what is in many ways a neo-medieval romance.<sup>12</sup> Others in the romance tradition who used antique language include William Blake, who often imitated "ancient" scripture; Coleridge, who in the first edition of his "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (1798) mimicked both the vocabulary and prosody of the ballads he had seen in collections such as Percy's; nineteenth-century neo-medievalists, including The Pre-Raphaelites and Morris; and the twentieth-century

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<sup>12</sup> Harry Berger, Jr. "The Mutabilitie Cantos: Archaism and Evolution in Retrospect." Other analyses of Spenser's language include Willy Maley, "Spenser's Languages: Writing in the Ruins of English"; David Lee Miller, "The Otherness of Spenser's Language"; and, from *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, Osselton, "Archaism"; Barbara M.H. Strang, "Language"; and Patricia Ingham, "Dialect."

fantasy writers who inherited that tradition, such as Lord Dunsany, E.R. Eddison, and J.R.R. Tolkien.<sup>13</sup>

Romance writers rarely write about an actual past; thus much archaism in romance can be seen as a variation upon neoclassicism or as a kind of textual exoticism. The former applies to all revivalist works that assert historical literary practices as superior to contemporaneous ones—the Pre-Raphaelites, for instance, who privileged medieval aesthetic forms as part of an aesthetic response to nineteenth-contemporary realism. Additionally, romance writers frequently adopt an archaic manner to reflect the exoticism of such settings as the primitive Middle-eastern hinterlands of Charles Doughty’s *Arabia Deserta* (1886) or the planet Mercurium of E.R. Eddison’s *The Worm Ouroboros* (1922). In his *Secular Scripture: Studies in the Structure of Romance*, Northrop Frye argues that such specialized languages (including archaism) epitomize the alternate reality or “other-worldliness” of the romantic heterocosm:

Closely related is the use of special language, often with a large amount of the antiquated in it, which helps to enclose a romance like a glass case in a verbal museum. The invented languages of Tolkien come at the end of a long tradition which includes the synthetic Gothic of *Ivanhoe* and the yea-verily-and-forsooth lingo in which William Morris wrote his later prose romances and translations. [ . . . ] Such phenomena are related to the general theme of “charm,” the use of words for emotional purposes derived from the magical casting of a binding spell.

(110)

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<sup>13</sup> In her influential essay about style in fantasy, “From Elfland to Poughkeepsie,” novelist Ursula K. Le Guin both extols the virtues and warns of the dangers inherent in “archaizing, the archaic manner, which [Lord] Dunsany and other master fantasists use so effortlessly [ . . . ] they know instinctively that what is wanted in fantasy is a *distancing from the ordinary*. They see it done beautifully in old books, such as Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur*, and in new books the style of which is grounded on the old books” (149).

Though the synthetic languages of romance often come from a culture's "verbal museum," a comparative glance at these romances reveals that typically their archaism is only vaguely historical. Yet in historical fiction—from Scott's use of romance motifs in *Ivanhoe* to Pynchon's pastiche of Sterne's sentimental novel in *Mason & Dixon*—archaism not only helps establish exotic historical "other-worlds" analogous to those of romance, but also functions as a strategy for representing an actual historical past. This chapter investigates the interstices between romance and historical fiction to discover some of the ways in which archaism can function as a form of history.

Because it appropriates the conventions found in old books, archaism is engaged in a dialogue with its textual predecessors and thus falls under the rubric "intertextuality." Yet while late twentieth-century critics and novelists commented extensively on allusion, parody, pastiche, and other kinds of literary symbiosis, they typically have little to say about archaism, appearing to prefer the ironic subversion or ludic re-contextualization of older literary texts that characterizes these other intertextual relationships. In his comprehensive *Palimpsests*, for instance, Gérard Genette privileges massively "hypertextual" productions like Joyce's *Ulysses*. Similarly, in *A Theory of Parody*, Linda Hutcheon argues that parody became a major mode of cultural production in the twentieth century because of its politics of "ironic inversion" or "repetition with critical distance" (6). While it can incorporate irony and playfulness, archaism does not by definition embody an ironic, paradoxical, and critical self-consciousness like that which Hutcheon finds in parody.

In fact, archaism less resembles parody than allusion insofar as it evokes for its reader a pre-existing, ostensibly familiar text. Like allusion, archaism relies on its reader to detect traces of previous texts, but there are important differences between the two. Gregory Machacek has

recognized allusion as “being brief, discrete, and local and evoking a single text that the culture of the alluding writer associates with an identifiable earlier author” (525). Archaism, on the other hand, may allude to individual texts, but it does so in service to a broader imitation of an historical idiom. Additionally, if allusion functions at the local level within a text, the full-fledged “archaicist” texts I analyze in this dissertation do not merely sprinkle their narratives with obsolete mannerisms. Instead, by comprehensively adopting an antiquated literary idiom, fully archaicist texts resemble—formally at least—forged examples of historical literature, such as a neo-Sophoclean tragedy authored in the eighteenth century or a pseudo-Victorian novel published in the twentieth.

In a manner distinct from other types of intertextuality, archaism carries on a dialogue not simply with precursor texts, but with historical literary practices considered more broadly. In its most historically ambitious examples, archaism engages the historical past in two ways. First, archaism embodies at a textual level the wide range of differences between historical and contemporary cultures. Its exoticism estranges the past while reflecting the historicist concept that social-historical *milieux* are defined on the basis of their material and ideological singularity.<sup>14</sup> Secondly, archaism clarifies the relationship between the imitated idiom and the historical past by suggesting that all cultural artifacts, from individual texts to genres, reflect the material and ideological circumstances of their production. By imitating the conventions of a historical literary idiom, authors desire to encapsulate some characteristics of the “real” society which originally produced it. This directly contests the related practice of neoclassicism, in which modern artists imitate classical (or, more broadly, historical) texts and genres not to

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<sup>14</sup> In *The Forms of Historical Fiction*, Harry Shaw calls this the concept of “the past as past” (26).

demonstrate an awareness of a particular set of historical circumstances, but rather to emulate what they presume to be universally valid aesthetic practices.<sup>15</sup>

Delineating the forms of and measuring archaism's potential as a means of representing the past is best begun outside of the dual frames of the historical novel tradition and postmodern aesthetic practice. If the simulation of aesthetic artifacts has proliferated over the past several decades of postmodern culture, archaism dates to Spenser at least—if not to such secondary epics as Virgil's *Aeneid*. Furthermore, archaism exists independently of the historical novel. More importantly, archaism of the kind practiced in the eighteenth century appears to be a significant influence on Scott and thus an important technology in the prehistory of the classical historical novel. My discussion of archaism in the historical novel, therefore, begins by investigating the strategy as practiced just before the advent of that genre.

In this chapter, I contend that in the eighteenth century, with the development of a new sense of the historical past and the rise of manuscript culture, archaism began to be conceived as a form of historical writing, a conception that culminated in Thomas Chatterton's (fake fifteenth-century) Rowley poems, which iterate medieval textual norms as a form of antiquarian discourse. To this end, the first part of the chapter demonstrates how archaism originated in eighteenth-century literary antiquarianism, while the second part considers a number of Chatterton's poems to demonstrate, first, how archaism relates to its sources, and, secondly, how the poems' literalist poetics—embodied by their exotic lexicon, antique spelling, and “primitive” prosody—signify Chatterton's central strategy for representing Bristol's medieval past. Throughout the chapter, I argue that archaism, by locating historical change and difference in the text, comprises an

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<sup>15</sup> Charles Jencks, for example, has discussed postmodern architecture as a kind of twentieth-century neoclassicism. See Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*. London: Academy, 1977.

inherently mimetic strategy that nevertheless relies on a sense that historicity is largely lived through and mediated by discourse.

### **Textual “Reliques”: Archaism’s origins in Literary Antiquarianism**

Archaism as a kind of historical writing grew out of an enthusiasm for literary antiquities that also gave birth to such important eighteenth-century achievements as Horace Walpole’s gothic romance *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and Thomas Percy’s ballad collection *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765). These works and others like them embodied an emerging historical sensibility in which the literature of the past was recognized as preserving the lived experience of historical people and cultures, joining other remnants of antiquity—monuments, coins, inscriptions, political documents, and personal effects—which had for the previous two hundred years played an important role in discovering the manners, customs, and institutions peculiar to previous stages of European societies.

Moreover, the gothic romances, ballad anthologies, and primitive pseudo-epics that characterized historical fiction in the half-century before Scott’s *Waverley* novels appear to be among the earliest literary works to imagine the historical (*versus* the legendary or mythic) past *as such*, and many of them evoked a historical past that was obscure, semi-intelligible, and consequently mysteriously seductive. This conception of the past as essentially *different* from the present recalls what Michel de Certeau saw as the foundation of a recognizably modern historical consciousness. Certeau argued that this sensibility—in both disciplinary historiography and popular imagination—originated in a post-Renaissance insistence upon a radical discontinuity between past and present. In Certeau’s Lacanian formulation, a death-obsessed modernity imagines the past as a dissociated, objectified Other, one he describes as an “unknown immensity that seduces and menaces our knowledge” (*The Writing of History* 3). As



Gabrielle M. Spiegel explains, historical writing—as opposed to the discourses of memory or tradition—has “as the very condition of its possibility the status of being discourse about the dead, a discourse with which historians fill the void between past and present created by history’s founding gesture of rupture” (161). Eighteenth-century authors such as James Macpherson, Walpole, and Chatterton built upon this fascination with the material remains of an alien historical society, reviving antiquated textual forms—with emphasis upon their bibliographic and linguistic exoticism—as an attempt to represent the dissimilarity between the present and a lost, dissociated antiquity.

Furthermore, eighteenth-century archaism relied upon then-current convictions about the capacity of historical objects to signify “pastness,” originating in the antiquarianism that reached its zenith in England during the latter part of the century.<sup>16</sup> Until at least the turn of the nineteenth century, inquiry into the unique character of life at various points in history was typically left to a collective of intellectuals, scientists, amateurs, and enthusiasts who were more or less united in the effort to represent antiquity “as it really was” by acquiring, collating, and systematically describing its material remains. While antiquarians were frequently lampooned for what seemed like a morbid fascination with decay, obscurity, and “disparate facts,”<sup>17</sup> they were united in an effort to discover the structural coherence of human antiquity. As Arnaldo

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<sup>16</sup> Antiquarianism in turn stemmed from what J. G. A. Pocock characterizes as a profound innovation in the European historical consciousness that originated in sixteenth-century humanist thought. As Pocock recounts, humanist legal scholars wrestling with the vestiges of Roman and feudal law in the context of contemporary constitutional politics began to postulate “that there existed, in the past of their own civilization, tracts of time in which the thoughts and actions of men had been so remote in character from those of the present as to be intelligible only if the entire world in which they had occurred were resurrected, described in detail and used to interpret them” (*The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law* 1). The methods cultivated by these jurists eventually flowered, according to Pocock, as modern historiography: “the historian’s art took on the characteristic, which has ever since distinguished it, of reconstructing the institutions of society in the past and using them as the context in which, and by means of which, to interpret the actions, words and thoughts of the men who lived at that time” (1).

<sup>17</sup> See Rosemary Sweet’s *Antiquaries: The Discovery of the Past in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (2004), pages XIII–XV for a brief overview of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century tendency to regard antiquarianism through the lenses of caricature and satire.

Momigliano observed, if the antiquarian devoted his energies to collecting and studying strange, macabre relics, he did so with the knowledge that “he was supposed to add to the picture” of a “mysterious and august Antiquity” (*Classical Foundations* 58). From the first half of the sixteenth century until its absorption into the emerging fields of archaeology, philology, and post-*Decline and Fall* historiography around 1800, antiquarianism flourished in Britain, where its increasingly fetishistic attitude towards material relics and its importance in constructing both local and national historical imaginations provided the intellectual framework within which archaism began to operate as historical fiction.<sup>18</sup>

In the 1760s, however, *literary* antiquarianism—and its descendent, literary history—had only recently begun in earnest. For perhaps the first time, literary antiquities were admitted alongside such revered relics as buildings, funerary monuments, inscriptions, coins, and legal documents as artifacts of antiquarian interest. The elevation of non-classical literary antiquities was also affected by contemporary developments in aesthetic taste. Several decades of British neoclassicism had waned by the middle of the eighteenth century, supplanted by literary forms often marked by an opposition to neoclassical principles and increasingly gesturing towards what were thought of as the counter-traditions of the empire’s “Gothic” and “Celtic” inheritances. Meanwhile, continental philosophers applied proto-historicist insights to temper the luster of classical antiquity and its literary monuments. In *The New Science* (1725), for instance, Giambattista Vico contested the neoclassical portrayal of Homer as a natural philosopher attuned to the universal human capacity for noble action, re-situating the poet as an historian of barbaric

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<sup>18</sup> For particularly edifying accounts of British antiquarianism, see not only Pocock’s *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law*, but also Sweet’s *Antiquaries* and Arthur B. Ferguson’s *Clio Unbound* (1979) especially Chapter IV, “Antiquities and the History of Society.” The Society of Antiquaries was first established in London in the late sixteenth century, only to be dispersed in 1604 by James I, who was (understandably) suspicious of the society’s political overtones. A reconstituted Society convened in 1707, wielding considerable influence throughout the next century.

manners and customs. Vico emphasized the primitivism of Homer's imagination, concluding, "the truculent and savage style in which he describes so many, such varied, and such bloody battles, so many and such extravagantly cruel kinds of butchery," could never "have originated in a mind touched and humanized by any philosophy" (303). Yet Vico sought not to denigrate the poet, but to discover the "True Homer"—the *historical* one—by reading the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as documentary evidence of the institutions, customs, and mental habits of the early Greeks.<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, English literary historians working in the second half of the eighteenth century cultivated an increasingly historicized attitude towards Chaucer, Spenser, and Shakespeare. Consequently, these and other national literary classics began to be admitted as evidence for antiquarians researching Britain's past. This in turn allowed for a conception of the literary work as an artifact of the society that produced it. In his ground-breaking *Observations on the Faerie Queene of Spenser* (1754; revised 1762), a romance which had for generations epitomized "Gothic" crudeness and barbarity, Thomas Warton contended that chivalric romances preserve "many curious historical facts" about medieval antiquity, casting "considerable light on the nature of the feudal system. They are the pictures of ancient usages and customs; and represent the manners, genius, and character of our ancestors" (*Observations* II.268). To this end, Warton sought to restore Spenser's poem to its context within the romance tradition, noting the previously undetected influences of Chaucer, Malory, and Ariosto and arguing that Spenser should be read in light of his age, rather than through the considerably different lens of the eighteenth century:

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<sup>19</sup> Explicit in Vico's schema, of course, is an identification of these savage Greeks with analogously savage stages of other gentile societies.

In reading the works of an author who lived in a remote age, it is necessary that we should look back upon the customs and manners which prevailed in his age; that we should place ourselves in his situation, and circumstances; that so we may be the better enabled to judge and discern how his turn of thinking, and manner of composing were biass'd, influenc'd, and, as it were, tinctur'd, by very familiar and reigning appearances, which are utterly different from those with which we are at present surrounded. (*Observations* II.87-88)

In his *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762), Richard Hurd made even bolder claims for the historical evidence provided by chivalric romances. Like Warton, Hurd endeavored to explain the historical logic of what then seemed to be “Gothic barbarism,” alleging, “Nothing in human nature, my dear friend, is without its reasons. The modes and fashions of different times may appear, at first sight, fantastic and unaccountable. But they, who look nearly into them, discover some latent cause of their production” (*Letters* 1-2). Hurd looked beyond the fantastic veneer of medieval romance to its origins in the “outlandish” institution of chivalry, a code he understood to be founded upon the medieval realities of unceasing warfare, religious fervor, and extremist attitudes about sexuality. In characteristically historicist fashion, Hurd recognized the so-called Gothic culture as a manifestation of medieval political structure, claiming that both chivalry and romance “[seem] to have sprung immediately out of the FEUDAL CONSTITUTION” (7). Both Warton’s *Observations* and Hurd’s *Letters* proved extraordinarily influential to popular and academic conceptions of the past in the eighteenth century. As David Fairer observes in the introduction to his recent, combined edition of the studies, Warton and Hurd “helped to establish a historicist mode of criticism which challenged the classic canons of

critical judgment” while pioneering a “new taste for Elizabethan poetry and medieval chivalry” (v).

The historical evidence provided by classics such as Spenser or Shakespeare was supplemented by a corpus of obscure textual artifacts attributed to England’s ancient bards and minstrels, two classes of ancient poets who combined song and history in documenting a primitive age. The conception of bards and minstrels as historians of antiquity encouraged a widespread enthusiasm among readers and antiquarians who envisioned their recorded works as historical relics with much to contribute to the still-inchoate sense of British social history. Literary antiquarianism, therefore, centered upon the acquisition and cataloguing of centuries-old manuscripts as well as the related activity of transcribing ballads and folk-tales from the peasant storytellers of such rustic locales as the Scottish islands. For a number of literary figures, including Samuel Johnson, manuscript-hunting and ballad-collecting became hobbies which occasioned visits to estate libraries throughout the island and to picturesque strongholds of oral culture as far afield as the Hebrides. Hitherto-neglected textual relics were retrieved from obscurity and oblivion, including the *Beowulf* manuscript, which was first transcribed in 1786. Ian Haywood describes “a new note of urgency” in such efforts, which he attributes to the emergence of social history and to “an increased awareness of the fragility and potential for decay of the MS, the editing of ancient poetry became literary archaeology. A task of national importance, each new poem rescued from oblivion was seen as the restoration of a ‘monument’ of antiquity” (*Making of History* 105).

In short, a great deal of historical truth was presumed to lay enshrined in half-forgotten literary relics that were to be found all over Europe in the collections of noble families, in moldering piles of cheaply-printed broadsides, or in oral form in the most provincial environs.

Embodying the creative efforts of their long-dead makers and testifying through mold, decay, and corruption the passage of time, literary manuscripts came to be regarded as evidence for the existence of an effaced past. And in much the same way that Vico sought to discover the realities of primitive Greek society by carefully reading the *Iliad*, other scholars pored over disintegrating copies of ballads such as “The Chevy Chase” to discover historical clues about the English past. In Chatterton’s time, Haywood observes, “the MS was made the empirical unit of historical knowledge” (19). The traditions of narrative, political, and philosophical histories maintained much of their prestige, yet they were often “superseded” by efforts resembling literary archaeology, so that “the MS became the touchstone of truth about the past” (20).

The quintessential document of these efforts is Thomas Percy’s anthology *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765), the three volumes of which compile 180 ballads from various sources. *Reliques* brought together legitimate literary history, innovative literary production, and a sense of Britain’s heroic past that surpassed the efforts of such contemporaries as Walpole, Warton, Hurd, and Macpherson while managing to avoid the scandals over authenticity that plagued both Chatterton and the latter.<sup>20</sup> Percy introduced his anthology with an anecdote—archetypal if not verifiable—of how he saved a folio manuscript full of antique ballads from parlor maids who were using it to light a fire.<sup>21</sup> Percy’s anthology illustrates the process by which the literary relic achieved its status in the eighteenth century as both collectible artifact

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<sup>20</sup>In the introduction to his recent edition of *Reliques*, Groom notes that Macpherson’s success provided the impetus for Percy and his collaborator William Shenstone: “The sudden appearance of the *Fragments* in time for Percy, who arrived with the ‘folio manuscript’ tucked under his arm, seems to have galvanized the two” (15).

<sup>21</sup> Despite the fact that this folio manuscript provided less than half of the material for the three volumes of *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, its discovery remained of central significance to Percy, who jealously guarded its contents and describes it in both his dedicatory epistle to the Countess of Northumberland and the *Reliques*’ prefatory essay. In the introduction to his edition of *Reliques*, Nick Groom gives a detailed account of the relationship between the folio manuscript and the contents of the published volumes, while biographer Bertram H. Davis provides further information about Percy’s acquisition of the folio (*Thomas Percy* 24).

and simulacrum of by-gone eras, a characteristic evident even in the title *Reliques*, which according to Nick Groom suggested to its first readers, “something archaic, something tangible and solid” (*Making of Percy’s Reliques* 102). Percy’s salvaged folio came to symbolize the fragility of historical texts as well as a presence and an authenticity which attained nearly the sanctity of religious relics; the idea of the “recovered” manuscript “was not really an artefact, but an artefiction” (102).

As a compilation of ballads and romances drawn from antiquated manuscripts, Percy’s finished anthology is a literary history characteristic of its time, offering a glimpse into British antiquity through a series of sensational literary depictions. The more imperfect or obscure these appeared, the more they appealed to the eighteenth-century conception of the past; this, of course, culminated in the Gothic novel, which generally represented the past in terms of the superstitious, irrational habits of mind its authors typically saw in medieval literature.

Organizing and collating the fragmentary evidence for the “Gothic character” of England’s past became the chief task of literary antiquarians like Percy. Through careful arrangement of the relics that they had acquired with patience, good fortune, and healthy pocketbooks, connoisseurs of literary relics hoped to articulate a coherent image of the past. Of all such collections, Percy’s anthology remains the principal achievement of eighteenth-century literary antiquarianism.<sup>22</sup>

Writing from a late twentieth-century perspective, Groom claims that the three volumes of the *Reliques* themselves represent a sort of textual equivalent for contemporary conceptions about the British past: “perhaps the fragmentary, unfinished, manuscript state of the first edition of the *Reliques* acted like a Gothic charm. The printed pages were slightly awry, there were small but

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<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of Percy’s significance to the development of the modern study of Middle English, see the chapter “‘Barbarous Productions’: The Making of Thomas Percy” in David Matthews’s *The Making of Middle English, 1765-1910*.

persistent confusions, strings of Shandean notes, and vertiginous Borgesian addenda” (*Making of* 147). Encountering *Reliques*, one finds a systematic reconstruction of British antiquity which functioned as a record of English poetry outside of the recognized classics while also portraying what its author described as “the peculiar manners and customs of former ages” (Percy “Preface” ix).

### **Archaism as Intertext, Archaism as Historiography: Chatterton’s Rowley Poems**

It should come as no surprise that Percy’s nonfiction *Reliques* (and the antiquarian passion for literary manuscripts generally), so freighted with both literary charm and historical significance, proved the genesis of a new form of imaginative literature. As Haywood notes, “The ascendancy of the MS as historical source made literary forgery (in its broadest sense) an unavoidable issue” (24). By the end of the century a number of authors had imitated the exotic language and conventions of older poetry as a way to “make” history. The most accomplished examples of the eighteenth-century phenomenon of forged historical/literary texts are those authored by Thomas Chatterton, who produced a number of counterfeit medieval documents, many of them purported to be the work of a fictitious fifteenth-century monk named Thomas Rowley, and James Macpherson, who published spurious “translations” from the Gaelic oral tradition, attributing them to legendary warrior-poet Ossian. In addition to Chatterton and Macpherson, a number of other notable counterfeiters briefly gulled eighteenth-century readers, including Lady Wardlaw, whose “Hardyknute” (1718) for a generation formed the cornerstone of an emerging ballad canon; John Pinkerton, who in the latter part of the century authored an apocryphal sequel to this ballad as well as numerous other fraudulent texts intended to substantiate his rabid Scots nationalism and anti-Gaelic racial prejudice; and the teenaged William Henry Ireland, who in the 1790s produced a trove of fraudulent Shakespearean letters,



poems, and even a tragedy, *Vortigern and Rowena*, which played briefly in Drury Lane. Yet neither Macpherson nor Chatterton appear to have merely wished to turn a profit at the expense of a credulous reading public and publishing industry whose appetite for historical literature exceeded the volume of bona fide antique poetry. Instead, both authors have begun to be recognized as important figures in English literary history,<sup>23</sup> and Chatterton's forgeries in particular can be seen as representative of archaism at its most radical and its most significant.

Chatterton's brief career is most remarkable for the corpus of apocryphal texts that embody the poet's imaginative reconstruction of his native Bristol's medieval past, a project that made him a precursor both for Scott's similar effort in the Waverley novels and for later authors who created what Donald S. Taylor in *Thomas Chatterton's Art: Experiments in Imagined History* calls "countries of the mind": constructs such as Hardy's Wessex, Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha, and Tolkien's Middle-earth (45). From early childhood, Chatterton frequented the neighborhood church of St. Mary Redcliffe (where his family had for generations held the office of sexton), becoming familiar with tombs, ornaments, and parchments dating from the church's medieval past. Inspired by the grand effigy and epitaph of William Canynge, a fifteenth-century merchant, mayor, and patron of the church, Chatterton began to supplement Bristol's scant historical record with poems and documents supporting his conception of the city's Saxon heritage and its late medieval political, mercantile, and cultural "golden age," a literary project that involved, according to Taylor, "first, inventing a language, second, imagining in detail a physical city through over a millennium of history, and, third, composing authenticating documents" (*Chatterton's Art* 45). These documents included letters between

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<sup>23</sup> Haywood's *The Making of History* (1986), Donald S. Taylor's *Thomas Chatterton's Art: Experiments in Imagined History* (1978), and Nick Groom's *The Forger's Shadow* (2002) offer relatively recent re-evaluations of the forgeries. Peter Ackroyd's notable novel *Chatterton* (1986) also revived interest in the poet.

fictitious personages, legal documents, fragments of sermons and inscriptions, heraldic drawings, conjectural maps, architectural notes, genealogies, historical sketches of medieval life, and—of central importance—neo-Medieval poetry.

While he claimed some of his earlier, less-skillful medieval pastiches, Chatterton attributed most of the poems, drawings, and documents to a small group of the city's fifteenth-century literati, the most important of whom are the re-imagined William Canynge, who serves as the group's patron, and a poet-monk of Chatterton's own invention, Thomas Rowley. Creating a generally "period correct" voice for Rowley, Chatterton illuminated what he envisioned as the cultural and political life of medieval Bristol, crediting the poetical monk—whom E. H. W. Meyerstein calls "the Bristol Lydgate" (170)—and his companions (whose contributions are considerably less vital) with a wide variety of poetry in what he took to be medieval forms, including tragedy, pageant, ballads, fables, epitaphs, and morality tales, all written in a quasi-medieval language of the eighteenth-century poet's invention. Groom describes the project with a keen eye for its imaginative detail:

Chatterton's invented Rowley corpus was enormous, and much of it was laboriously fabricated by the teenage boy. He inscribed Rowley's poems and prose in cod-medieval lettering on parchments he decorated with heraldic devices and aged with ochre and soot, and, with an autodidact's acuity, Chatterton laced these beautifully baroque creations together with editorial comments and antiquarian annotations. ("Introduction" *Thomas Chatterton and Romantic Culture* 3-4).

Separating Chatterton's Rowley world from other adolescent imaginary worlds—such as the Brontës'—is its foundation in an *actual* past. Even while this world exudes the aura of romance,

Chatterton's fabricated medieval Bristol is to a considerably greater extent a *realistic* historical society peopled by merchants, scholarly clerics, and urban laborers, all of them preoccupied with political and economic actualities. Throughout, the fictitious Rowley's poetic gifts—an eye for sociological detail and a consistently moralistic social conscience—vividly animate the customs, manners, and institutions of the city's antiquity.

The fate of what Meyerstein calls “the Rowley Idea” in the eighteenth-century “real worlds” of antiquarianism and literary publishing is, however, far more complex and much less happy than this sketch of the Rowley poetry's imaginative scope.<sup>24</sup> Having since his early adolescence shown to friends and family his own poems as well as parchments presumably gathered from the dusty coffer of St. Mary Redcliff's muniment room, in 1768 the poet—an impetuous, meagerly-educated, teenaged son of a fatherless family—sought to turn his faculty for imitation to profit by offering what he claimed to be transcriptions of ancient documents to amateur researchers engaged in the systematic description of Bristol's antiquities. Soon, the teenager found himself in virtual indenture, forging textual relics for the use of local antiquarians William Barrett and George Catcott. By August of 1769, Chatterton, who sought to escape what he felt to be repressive treatment by these nominal patrons, had sent copies of some of the poems to Horace Walpole in London, with the aim of publication. Walpole was initially enthusiastic about the newly-unearthed arcana, but he soon recognized that Chatterton had authored rather

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<sup>24</sup> Because of his singular history, the impostor-poet has inspired many generations of biographers. Such works include John Dix's fraudulent *The Life of Thomas Chatterton, Including His Unpublished Poems and Correspondence* (1837), David Masson's sensationalized, novelistic *Chatterton: A Story of the Year 1770* (1874), Charles Edward Russell's *Thomas Chatterton, the Marvelous Boy: The Story of a Strange Life, 1752-1770* (1908), John H. Ingram's *Chatterton and His Poetry* (1916), Esther Parker Ellinger's short psychoanalytic pamphlet *Thomas Chatterton: The Marvelous Boy* (1930), John Cranstoun Nevill's *Thomas Chatterton* (1948), Linda Kelly's *The Marvellous Boy: The Life and Myth of Thomas Chatterton* (1971), analyzing the “myth of the marvelous boy” and his poetic legacy, and Louise J. Kaplan's less-than-useful psychological case study, *The Family Romance of the Imposter-Poet Thomas Chatterton* (1988). Meyerstein's challenging, poetic *A Life of Thomas Chatterton* (1930), despite its conventional, since-questioned narrative of the poet's final days, remains the standard biography.

than transcribed the verses. The teenager's hopes for making a literary career through the Rowley poems proved illusory, and the young poet, living alone in London and struggling to support himself as a Grubb Street hack, either committed suicide or accidentally poisoned himself at age seventeen, on August 24<sup>th</sup>, 1770.<sup>25</sup>

Chatterton's death attracted little notice at the time, but a fierce debate over the authenticity of his poems had arisen by the end of the ensuing decade, engaging many of London's most celebrated poets and literary historians, including Walpole, Goldsmith, Johnson, Thomas Warton, Percy, and Thomas Tyrwhitt—many of them fresh from the bitter Ossian controversy. By the end of the 1770s, the efforts of Tyrwhitt and Warton seem to have established the consensus that Chatterton, not Rowley, had authored such poems as “An Excelente Balade of Charitie.” For generations, Chatterton's legacy followed one of two paths struck in the wake of the controversy. Some rushed to condemn Chatterton as a mere counterfeiter and would-be opportunist, consigning his Rowley poems to a curious footnote in English literary history. Others, however, saw the teenager as the “Marvelous Boy” of Wordsworth's “Resolution and Independence,” an icon of Romantic genius hounded to death by a conservative, aristocratic literary establishment. Only recently have critics begun to look behind these myths to take stock of what remains the most impressive feature of the Rowley poems: the manner in which they purport to represent an unfamiliar historical reality. As Taylor argues, “Though Chatterton deceived many, deception was not his ultimate goal [ . . . ] [he] took his fictional Rowley world as historically and topographically true, and he meant it to be so taken by others [ . . . ] Chatterton must, therefore be studied both as artist and as *some* kind of

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<sup>25</sup> The latter theory has become popular since Richard Holmes's “Thomas Chatterton: The Case Re-opened.” *Cornhill Magazine* 178 (1970): 244. In his noteworthy novel *Chatterton*, Peter Ackroyd argues that Chatterton accidentally overdosed on arsenic and laudanum taken as a cure for venereal disease. This account has been granted credibility by Taylor and Groom, the central figures in Chatterton studies over the past four decades.

[ 130 ]

## ENGLISH METAMORPHOSIS :

By T. ROWLEIE.

## B O O K E III.

**W**HANNE Scythianes, salvage as the wolues their  
 chace,  
 Peynced in horrowe <sup>1</sup> formes bie nature dyghte <sup>2\*</sup>,  
 Heckled <sup>3</sup> yn beaftkyns, flepte uponne the wast,  
 And wyth the morneyng rouzed the wolfe to fyghte,  
 Sweste as descendeynge lemes <sup>4</sup> of roddie lyghte <sup>5</sup>  
 Plonged to the hullfred <sup>6</sup> bedde of laveynge <sup>7</sup> seas,  
 Gerd <sup>8</sup> the blacke mountayn okes yn drybblets <sup>9</sup>  
 twighte <sup>10</sup>,  
 And ranne yn thoughte alonge the azure mees <sup>11\*</sup>,  
 Whose cyne dyd feerie sheene, like blue-hayred deffs <sup>12</sup>,  
 That dreeric hange upon Dover's emblaunched <sup>13</sup> clefs. 10

<sup>1</sup> I will endeavour to get the remainder of these poems. <sup>2</sup> Un-  
 feemly, disagreeable. <sup>3\*</sup> *Drifid*. <sup>4</sup> Wrapped. <sup>5</sup> Rays. <sup>6</sup> Hidden,  
 secret. <sup>7\*</sup> *Washing*. <sup>8</sup> Broke, rent. <sup>9</sup> Small pieces. <sup>10</sup> Pulled, rent.  
<sup>11\*</sup> *Meadows*. <sup>12</sup> Vapours, meteors. <sup>13</sup> Emblaunched, *whitened*.

Soft

Figure 3. The first page of Chatterton's "Englysh Metamorphosis," as it appeared in Tyrwhitt's 1799 edition of *Poems, Supposed to Have Been Written at Bristol* (130).

historian” (*Chatterton’s Art* 48). While Chatterton was clearly not a historian in the professional sense, the works of his imagined monk Thomas Rowley prefigure the synthesis of literary form and historical account that Scott is typically credited with effecting a generation later. Thus Chatterton’s Rowley poems form nearly as important a chapter as Scott’s *Waverley* in the history of the literary historical imagination, representing, as Haywood argues, a “complex and unique [form] of historical fiction” (11). One major goal of this chapter, therefore, is to analyze the forgeries as historical fiction, discovering what “kind of history” Chatterton produced in his tragically short life.

### **Archaism and Intertext: The Transtextuality of the Rowley Poems**

Like all instances of archaism, the Rowley poems reflect the dominating influence of their sources, and must be first examined in light of those older texts. Because archaism requires the reader to make a connection between the text that he or she reads in the literary present and the historical idiom which the author attempts to evoke by employing its linguistic and bibliographic conventions, theories of intertextuality—espoused by such disparate theorists as Julia Kristeva, Harold Bloom, Michel Riffaterre, and Gérard Genette—can help illuminate Chatterton’s practice by providing maps for the relationship between his texts and their precursors. Archaism is symptomatic of the practice of creating a new text through conspicuous borrowing from earlier texts, a kind of production Genette calls the *hypertext*, a new text shaped out of pre-existing *hypotexts*.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Genette’s own list of radical examples includes Joyce’s *Ulysses*, and he argues that such massively hypertextual novels constitute their own genre: “Above all, hypertextuality, as a category of works, is in itself a generic or, more precisely, transgeneric architext: I mean a category of texts which wholly encompasses certain canonical (though minor) genres such as pastiche, parody, travesty, and which touches upon other genres—probably all genres” (8).

As Geoffrey Machacek recognizes, the study of intertextuality<sup>27</sup> moves along two axes within current critical practice, and both of them are central to the discussion of archaism. On one hand, critics use the terminology to discuss how any given author/text relates to a previous—or precursor, to use Bloom’s formulation—author/text. Machacek calls this approach to intertextuality *diachronic*, as the relationship is between texts across different times (524). Major analyses of diachronic intertextuality include Bloom’s studies of poetic influence (particularly *The Anxiety of Influence* and *A Map of Misreading*), Genette’s detailed work on what he calls the “palimpsestual” nature of literature (*Palimpsests*), Linda Hutcheon’s study of parody (*A Theory of Parody*), and Machacek’s own essay (“Allusion”). The other axis Machacek calls *synchronic* intertextuality. Associated with Saussurean linguistics, the synchronic approach examines a given text, as Machacek notes, “in connection with a contemporaneous semiotic field made up of literary and nonliterary texts” (524). Kristeva’s theory exemplifies this methodology, as does the work of Jonathan Culler, Tzvetan Todorov, and numerous other structuralist and post-structuralist critics. The subject of historical mannerism requires attention to both of these approaches. Archaism distinguishes itself from a (usually self-defined) literary “norm” of synchronic literary practice, yet also by definition relies on the imitation of earlier works and thus must be examined diachronically.

### **Synchronic Intertextuality**

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<sup>27</sup> While Genette’s detailed analysis of the relationship between a hypertext and its hypotexts shapes many of my insights about the link between archaism and its sources, I shall follow the lexical example of Geoffrey Machacek in choosing the more useful term “intertextuality” (in place of “hypertextuality”) in discussing what Genette calls the *transtextual* function of archaism. Machacek states with admirable clarity his reasons for preferring “intertextuality” despite the vagaries created by the distance between the term’s current usage and Julia Kristeva’s original intent in coining it: “Despite poststructuralist origins,” the term intertextuality “has become [in general critical parlance] a catchall, referring to various sorts of textual interrelation: the relations between authors and their precursors as well as the relations between texts and the reigning semiotic practices of a given historical moment” (“Allusion” 524).

Archaism always distinguishes itself from presumed norms of contemporary literary practice, relying on its readers to discern the intentional obsolescence or antiquity of its idiom. This has engendered the idea that because archaic texts often reject the literary constraints of their own time they are “sub-literary,” an assumption that inheres in a wide range of critical responses, from Sidney’s reservations in *A Defense of Poetry* about the rustic vocabulary of Spenser’s shepherds to Burton Raffel’s contention that J.R.R. Tolkien’s old-fashioned narration, characters, and plots are “not literature.”<sup>28</sup> Yet neither Spenser nor Tolkien adopted historical literary idioms because of a defect in sensibility, but as a revaluation of contemporary cultural or aesthetic values. William Morris’s late romances perhaps provide the most significant example of archaism as a rejection of contemporary aesthetics. The beautifully hand-made, woodcut-illustrated volumes produced at Kelmscott revive as much as possible the book-making methods of the early decades of the printing press while simultaneously rejecting the conventions of the realistic novel and the naturalism that then dominated English and continental fiction.

Unlike Morris’s later romances, Chatterton’s Rowley poetry was not primarily a rebellion against the literary fashion of his own day.<sup>29</sup> Instead, the poems were part of a broad movement in eighteenth-century literature toward native and “primitive” forms. As noted above, anthologies of older literature such as Percy’s *Reliques* had created a taste for historical, though exotic, British poetry. The Rowley poems transform the *Reliques*’ antiquarian appeal into original literary production,<sup>30</sup> while exhibiting the broadly fashionable primitivism that was popular for several decades in the latter half of the eighteenth century, a sensibility that included

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<sup>28</sup> See Sidney’s “An Apology for Poetry” (113) and Burton Raffel’s “*The Lord of the Rings* as Literature” in *Tolkien and the Critics* (241-42).

<sup>29</sup> Georges Lamoine contends otherwise. See “The Originality of Chatterton’s Art” in *Thomas Chatterton and Romantic Culture*, ed. Nick Groom (32-47).

<sup>30</sup> See Groom’s “Fragments, Reliques, & MSS: Chatterton and Percy” in *Thomas Chatterton and Romantic Culture*, ed. Nick Groom (188).



Gothic romance, Burns's dialect poetry, and stylistic "barbarity" of Christopher Smart, William Blake, and Ossian, all of which might be seen as a reaction against the neoclassical forms that had dominated the earlier part of the century.

Though the Rowley poems should not be considered the eccentric production of an author at odds with the literary norms of his own time (like Morris's or Tolkien's romances), they nevertheless feature what would have been an "alien" texture for the eighteenth-century reader. Chatterton exploited this texture, yet adopted Percy's editorial persona to mitigate this textual strangeness to some extent. In the first published edition of "An Excelente Balade of Charitie," for instance, Chatterton's glosses along with the few added by editor Thomas Tyrwhitt total 54 mostly lexical glosses for the poem's 74 lines. The unfamiliarity of diction, prosody, imagery, and figurative language that characterizes the more advanced Rowley poems creates an aura of authenticity derived from their literalist opacity. In the "Letter to Mastre Canynge" that prefaces the tragedy *Aella*, Rowley defends his deviation from pure history toward poetry, but he might as well be foregrounding the text's syntactic and lexical opacity when he writes "A man ascaunse uppon a piece<sup>31</sup> maye looke, / And shake hys hedde to styre hys rede<sup>32</sup> aboute" [ . . . ] "Pardon, yee Graiebarbes,<sup>33</sup> gyff I saie, onwise / Yee are, to stycke so close & bysinarelie<sup>34</sup> / To hystorie" (17-18; 25-27). Taylor describes Chatterton's Rowleyan language as one instance of what he calls "authenticating density": linguistic exoticism lends the poems credibility by being both relatively historically sound and as different from eighteenth-century usage as possible while retaining a large degree of legibility. Chatterton raided medieval literature and antiquarian sources to invent a special language of about 1800 words, yet "contrary to what has been hitherto

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<sup>31</sup> A literary text

<sup>32</sup> Wisdom

<sup>33</sup> Greybeards

<sup>34</sup> Curiously

assumed, this vocabulary is never, apparently, free fantasy. It is thoroughly true to what Chatterton himself knew of pre-eighteenth-century English, being collected entirely from what were to him authentic sources” (*Chatterton’s Art* 49). The poems exploit the difference between their own idiom and contemporary textual, linguistic, and literary constraints, partly in an effort to satisfy the eighteenth-century appetite for primitive literary sensations, and partly to insist on the essential difference between the contemporary and the medieval experiences.

Not only did Chatterton write pseudo-medieval poems, but he also produced forty-two manuscripts intended to authenticate his claims that he had found the Rowley poems in the muniment room of St. Mary Redcliffe. These manuscripts include sketches of presumably long-vanished Bristol buildings and monuments, numerous heraldic designs, and various imagined artifacts such as coins. Many of them also feature poems and inscriptions, supposedly in the hands of Rowley, Canynge, and others of their circle. While the manuscripts must have been intended as material proof of Rowley’s existence (Chatterton must have been well aware of Macpherson’s failure to produce Ossianic originals), they are considered on the whole amateurish, and neither Chatterton’s method of aging new parchment to resemble old nor his bibliographic artistry proved convincing. After surveying the manuscripts in an essay included in his 1803 edition of the poems, Joseph Cottle concludes, ““At present, so decided is the controversy, that to advance any new argument against Rowley, appears almost ungenerous, and like the smiting of a prostrate foe” (519).<sup>35</sup>

Yet, clumsy as they are, the manuscripts must be seen as another aspect of what Jerome McGann would call Chatterton’s poetic literalism. The parchment containing “The Accounte of

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<sup>35</sup> Cottle then turns his disdain for the manuscripts into praise for Chatterton’s poetic genius: “the Laurel be awarded to that illustrious Youth, who reflects honor on the Age and Nation which produced him, and whose melancholy story will never be remembered but with a sigh” (520).



William Canynge's Feast," for instance, was deemed significant enough to be reproduced (by copper-plate engraving) for all of Tyrwhitt's eighteenth-century editions of the Rowley poems (see figure 4). Chatterton's faux-medieval lettering is decoratively illegible, the letters cramped and virtually impossible to decipher. As Cottle describes them, "the characters are large and distinct, but they are so irregular and so run into each other that they seem impossible to be read by any other person than he who wrote them. It is difficult to believe that so unnatural a hand should've been the familiar writing of any human being" (505). Yet this lettering mirrors the poem's linguistic archaism, comprising a major strategy in Chatterton's literalist representation of what he took to be the essence of Bristol's Gothic past. Sharing the manuscript with Chatterton's poem are two clumsily-sketched shields that feature primitive heraldic devices that beg to be decoded while echoing the bibliographic literalism of the poem itself.<sup>36</sup> Thus the manuscript's calligraphic crudeness, orthographic idiosyncrasies, linguistic exoticism, and rude illustrations presage the literalism of such descendents as William Blake.

### **Diachronic Intertextuality: Chatterton's Sources in Medieval Literature**

By its nature, archaism shapes itself in contrast to concurrent linguistic and literary norms, but the various ways that archaic texts constitute themselves in relation to older textual models, or diachronic intertextuality, prove of arguably greater importance. Over the past four decades, structuralist and post-structuralist textual analysis has provided a number of paradigmatic approaches to the connection between literary texts and the texts which came

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<sup>36</sup> Inga Bryden argues that Chatterton's obsession with heraldry is of central importance to his Rowley world, allowing him to authenticate his own pretensions of a noble inheritance while also echoing the archaism of his poetry. She writes, "In the eighteenth century the antiquarian record was perceived as both visual and verbal, and heraldic signification had a particular relevance amidst social fluidity. As a 'shorthand' for history, heraldry seemed to preserve the ideology of the gentry" ("The Mythical Image" 67-68).

before them.<sup>37</sup> One widely-read theorist of diachronic intertextuality is Harold Bloom, who often employs a Freudian allegory to explain how all “strong poets” (he uses “poets” in the older sense of “creative writers”) work toward literary achievement through a process of imitating, recasting, and rejecting the “influence” of their literary “precursors” in much the same way that individuals develop their personalities in opposition to parental authority. Another is Linda Hutcheon, who argues about a significantly different kind of diachronic intertextuality, “parody in this century is one of the major modes of formal and thematic construction of texts” (*A Theory of Parody* 2). Out of a rather large family of formal practices that could be termed “textual appropriation,” including allusion, borrowing, echo, parody, pastiche, and others, archaism such as Chatterton’s is often considered one of the lesser siblings, typically seen as part of a writer’s nostalgic practice rather than a sophisticated species of “textual transcendence.” Nevertheless, any definition of the relation between archaism and its models must be articulated in relation to other twentieth-century theories of diachronic intertextuality.

Chatterton’s archaism is a variant of what Genette calls textual *imitation*. As Genette explains in his comprehensive study of intertextuality, *Palimpsests*, imitation represents one of two branches of *hypertextuality* (his term for diachronic intertextuality), a concept he illustrates by analyzing two difference appropriations of Homer’s *Odyssey*. Genette describes one branch of hypertextuality, (*direct*) *transformation*, as it functions in Joyce’s *Ulysses*, which takes the raw material of Homer’s story and shapes it to a new context, generating ironic tension between the ancient and modern by “transposing the action of the *Odyssey* to twentieth-century Dublin”

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<sup>37</sup> These in part should be understood as a reaction against the previously-hegemonic New Critical method of examining poems, novels, and plays as textual microcosms notable for the singularity of their inner logic. Genette’s definition of poetics as the study of “textual transcendence,” or the relationship between texts, summarizes the distinction between New Critical and structuralist attitudes in this regard (*Palimpsests* 1).

(5-6). In a different manner, argues Genette, *imitation* (or indirect transformation) appears in Virgil's *Aeneid*, where the poet writes about non-Homeric subject matter but tells it in Homer's style: according to Genette, "[Virgil] does so by drawing inspiration from the generic—i.e., at once formal and thematic—model established by Homer in the *Odyssey* (and in fact also in the *Iliad*): that is, following the hallowed formula, by *imitating* Homer" (6). While Joyce's novel engenders the irony associated with parody, Virgil's adoption of the Homeric idiom establishes Aeneas's journeys in the same realm of legendary history as the Homeric heroes, lending mythic and historical authenticity to the Latin material. Genette explains imitation as the adoption of an idiom, defined as "an expression pertaining to a specific language or a linguistic state, which may obviously be an individual style: an idiolect (*idios* precisely means 'individual' or 'particular')" (81). Yet he imagines the idiom chiefly in terms of an individual author's idiolect, and to engage in pastiche is to imitate an author's linguistic traits that for Genette become "Marotisms if I am Marotizing, Flaubertisms if I am Flaubertizing, or Proustisms if I am Proustifying" (81).

Though it bears some resemblance to Virgil's use of the generic markers of epic, archaism differs from this form of imitation because it adopts the idioms not merely of individual authors, but of historical literary periods. Nevertheless, archaism often relies upon specific texts and authors for its models. For his Kelmscott typography, for instance, Morris borrows from Jenson and Caxton's, just as Spenser appropriates from Malory or Tolkien recycles passages from *The Elder Edda*. When archaism imitates the idiolect of specific authors and works, it typically does so in order to reconstruct a historical literary idiom. Archaic texts from the Rowley poems ("medievalizing") to E.R. Eddison's *The Worm Ouroboros* ("Jacobeanizing") subordinate frequent borrowing from individual texts to an over-arching pastiche of historical

literary idioms. While he may be imitating Caxton in some particulars, Morris uses the Kelmscott books to offer an endorsement of the intertwined aesthetics and production techniques of late medieval printers understood more generally.

Two poems, “An Excelente Balade of Charitie” and “The Storie of William Canynge,” epitomize Chatterton’s practice of borrowing from specific models in order to imitate a generalized historical idiom. Of pastiche writers, Genette notes that they “[get] hold of a style—an object that is a bit less easily, or less immediately, to be seized—and this style dictates the text” (*Palimpsests* 82). By style Genette means the sum of the literary constraints that make up an idiolect; therefore “The Storie of William Canynge” is dictated by the medieval genre of the dream vision, which Chatterton probably derived from Chaucer’s “The Book of the Duchess” (Taylor 146-48). While the speaker in that poem falls asleep to the sound of birds while reading a story about the lovers Ceyx and Alcyone, Rowley rests by a brooklet, where he listens to its “mottring Songe” and muses on Bristol history before being visited by “Trouthe,” who puts the poet to sleep in order to inspire a dream about his patron Canynge’s life. While the poem specifically draws from Chaucer, Chatterton’s use of “The Booke of the Duchesse” is generic rather than specific.

Similarly, Chatterton’s most famous lyric, “An Excelente Balade of Charitie,” echoes Chaucer and other medieval sources to produce a faux-fifteenth-century poem. The poem’s opening stanza emulates the seasonal description that commences *The Canterbury Tales* (“Whan that aprill with his shoures soote”), while using the rime royal stanza form introduced to English by Chaucer and often considered the standard narrative meter of the late Middle Ages:

In Virgyne the sweltrie sun gan sheene,  
And hotte upon the mees did caste his raie;

The apple rodded from its palie greene,  
 And the mole peare did bende the leafy spraie;  
 The peede chelandri sunge the lyvelong daie;  
 ‘Twas nowe the pryde, the manhode of the yeare,  
 And eke the grounde was dighte in its mose defte aumere. (*Poems* 173;7-13)

The “Balade” recasts the biblical parable of the Good Samaritan as a medieval moral *exemplum* that demonstrates the virtues of Christian charity. As the poem opens, a thunderstorm (“the black tempeste swolne and gatherd up apace”) descends upon a “hapless pilgrim” who cowers moaning beside a path that runs toward “Seyncte Godwine’s covent.” Just as these grim elements threaten the pilgrim’s life, the monastery’s Abbot rides by upon a richly festooned palfrey. Though the distraught almer begs for lodging, the abbot abjures him for his poverty and rides past. A short while later, when all hope seems lost, a “limitoure,” or friar of an inferior order, comes running along the pathway. When the pilgrim begs aid, the limitoure gives the last coin he possesses, offering even his own cloak to shield the beggar from the storm, with the words, “Here take my semecope, thou arte bare I see / ‘Tis thyne; the Seynctes will give me mie rewarde” (87-88).

The poem’s characters represent an amalgam of those of Christ’s parable and the social types that populate the prologue of *The Canterbury Tales*. The description of the abbot particularly recalls Chaucer, as Rowley portrays the moral corruption of ecclesiastical authority through a description of the abbot’s worldly appearance:

Spurreynge his palfrie oere the watrie plaine,  
 The Abbote of Seyncte Godwynes convente came; (43-44)

...



His cope was all of Lyncolne clothe so fyne,  
 With a gold button fasten'd neere his chynne;  
 His autremete was edged with golden twynne,  
 And his shoone pyke a loverds mighte have binne;  
 Full well it shewn he thoughten coste no sinne:  
 The trammels of the palfrye pleasde his sighte,  
 For the herse-millanare his head with roses dighte. (50-56)

Rowley/Chatterton's abbot resembles the dishonest clergymen of Chaucer's "Prologue," but the poem itself neither ironically inverts Chaucer's poem in the manner of parody nor explicitly recalls it as does allusion. While Chatterton borrows from Chaucer, the fourteenth-century poet provides a generic model for the eighteenth-century one. Chatterton, then, uses Chaucerian forms to arrive at a generally medieval idiom, a manipulation of sources that distinguishes archaism from other types of diachronic intertextuality.

### **Archaism as Social History in the Rowley Poems**

The difference between imitating an author's idiolect and a historical literary idiom delineates archaism as a unique form of historical intertextuality. Genette recognizes the similarities between archaism and other forms of imitation (80), but the formalism of his method precludes an engagement with the former's representation of historical past, a dimension inherent in the fact that Chatterton does not use *The Canterbury Tales* or "The Booke of the Duchesse" for examples of Chaucer's poetic idiolect, but for generic models of late medieval literary idiom. Archaism as a kind of historical discourse is in Genette's terms more a *function* than a *form* of textual appropriation. Appraising archaism as a variety of historical representation, then, owes less to Genette's *Palimpsests* than it does to a more hermeneutics-

based approach like that of Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Parody* or Gregory Machacek's "Allusion."

In his article, Machacek argues that allusion's importance begins where the formalist definition<sup>38</sup> leaves off and the "hermeneutic process of comparing the allusive text with the evoked text" begins (529). In his theory, allusions create the sense of a shared tradition between the reader and author, in which "author and reader must have been exposed to the same text, which must therefore be highly valued by the author's and reader's cultures—valued, moreover, in a way that encourages minute attention to verbal detail and the remembering of such detail" (526). He offers as an example Alexander Pope's re-working of Miltonic material in *The Rape of the Locke*, concluding, "together, the numerous allusions to *Paradise Lost* in Pope's poem evoke the whole of Milton's epic—as a way of emphasizing how trivial the conflict between Belinda and the baron is" (530). For Machacek, this requires that the reader recognize the author's strategy; whenever an author reprises an older text, the focus is on the new interpretive context, and consequently, "most studies of allusion are resolutely hermeneutic" (531).

Furthermore, Machacek reasons that allusion should be integrated into cultural studies:

Whether and how one [a reader] interprets an allusion, in other words, is a function of one's historical moment. Allusions to earlier authors are not some diachronic phenomenon rendered obsolete by synchronic cultural study; they are no less cultural than any other textual phenomenon. (533-34)

Similarly, archaism depends upon the reader's ability to identify its references, yet the more radical efforts to write in an historical idiom, such as Chatterton's, require that a text avoid

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<sup>38</sup> Machacek: "Allusion" includes two distinct phenomena: 1) indirect or learned reference 2) phraseological adaptation or appropriation (526).

localized and specific allusions as much as possible. Too great a reliance upon Chaucer or other generative texts, for instance, would dispel the authenticity of the Rowleyan poems' faux-medieval idiom by making them too obviously a pastiche of specific Chaucerian poems. Still, archaism is close kin to allusion, succeeding only when the reader recognizes the generic markers of an historical literary idiom.

Like allusion, parody derives its meaning from the reader's interpretation of textual appropriations. In *A Theory of Parody*, Linda Hutcheon departs from the traditional formal definition of parody—generally understood as the imitation of a particular text in order to ridicule it or its subject—to establish a theory based upon the hermeneutic function of any textual borrowing. Hutcheon argues that parody is not necessarily defined by an attack upon or mocking of either precursor texts or literary convention; instead she sees a basic continuity between twentieth-century examples and older intertextual strategies.<sup>39</sup> For Hutcheon, the basic formal requirement for parody is any kind of diachronic intertextuality; what turns such appropriation or transformation into parody is the extent to which it creates meaning by fitting older texts into new interpretive contexts. According to Hutcheon, parodies do not necessarily critique a precursor text: “Modern artists seem to have recognized that change entails continuity, and have offered us a model for the process of transfer and reorganization of that past. [ . . . ] They signal less an acknowledgment of the ‘inadequacy of the definable forms’ than their own desire to ‘refunction’ those forms to their own needs” (*Parody* 4). This focus on this “refunctioning” defines Hutcheon's sense of parody, and the irony created by the tension between a text's

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<sup>39</sup> Hutcheon: “The more positive method of dealing with the past recalls in many ways the classical and Renaissance attitude to the cultural patrimony. For writers like Ben Jonson, it is clear that imitation of previous works was considered part of the labor of writing poetry. After being repressed by the romantic or post-Enlightenment emphasis on the need for something else (genius, and so on), this stress on craft and knowledge of the past has come back into focus today” (4).

previously understood meaning and its meaning in a new context, which she calls the “integrated structural modeling process of revising, replaying, inverting, and ‘trans-contextualizing’ previous works of art” (*Parody* 11). Hutcheon concludes that parody is “repetition with a difference,” a form that is by definition ironic (11) and which requires a sophisticated and substantial hermeneutic act by the reader (*Parody* 32).

Chatterton’s forgeries employ literary and linguistic imitation to represent the sum total of the customs, manners, and institutions that he believed to constitute the historical world of fifteenth-century Bristol, a proto-materialist sense of the medieval past that makes the his Rowley poems (considered in their totality) a variety of antiquarian or even historical literary text. Chatterton relied on the eighteenth-century fascination with antique literary manuscripts both to authenticate and to frame the aesthetic efforts of his poems, a strategy typifying the phenomenon Haywood describes as “the paradoxical idea that imaginative literature of the past could be a more authentic source of history than history writing itself” (105). If the Rowley poems are read as a kind of historical fiction (as Haywood, Taylor, and Groom envision them) rather than merely as forgeries perpetrated to deceive the English literary establishment, then Chatterton was a “pioneer of modern historical fiction in the way he mixed fiction with large amounts of documented source material and authentic historical fact” (Haywood 121). Since Chatterton—whatever his motivation in seeking publication for the poems—undoubtedly aimed to depict social-historical experience in medieval Bristol, the question remains as to how archaism serves this representational strategy.

The linguistic and literary exoticism of the poems’ medieval idiom symbolizes the differences between the poet’s own century and that of Rowley and Canynge. Archaism, therefore, functions as *the* constitutive element of Chatterton’s imagined fifteenth century. He

aims to develop the unique and strange customs of Rowley's milieu, and to this end the Rowleyan texts embody a whole range of cultural differences, from fifteenth-century social stratification to medieval ideology. Behind their linguistically exotic veneer, the Rowley poems often attempt other methods of historical mimesis. Of particular interest is the poems' use of social pageantry. Decades before Scott built the historical novel upon picturesque descriptions of historical places and people, Chatterton in his early ballad "Bristowe Tragedie" uses the death march of the ballad's hero "Syr Charles Bawdin" to demonstrate the city's social stratification. As his executioners convey Sir Charles to the gallows, an elaborate, deliberately organized procession of regal, municipal, and ecclesiastical authorities accompany him. At the head of the parade come "the council-menne, / Ynne scarlett robes and golde, / And tassils spanglynge ynne the sunne, /much glorious to behold" (*Poems* 166; 265-68); behind them a group of Augustinian friars, six minstrels, twenty-five archers escorting the doomed man's sled, then another squadron of bowmen, a group of St. James's friars, more minstrels, the mayor, aldermen, and attendants, and finally a multitude of non-official citizenry (265-300). Chatterton details the sights and sounds of this parade, his description extending to the vestiture of the officials and the sounds of the monks and the minstrels as they pass by.

This strategy is repeated in a number of earlier poems, including "The Tournament" as well as two different attempts to describe the Battle of Hastings. "The Tournament" is literally a pageant, featuring set speeches by a herald, the King, and numerous knights, all of which dramatize the heroic deeds of a "Syrr Symonne de Bourtonne." The play opens with the entrance of a "herawde" (herald), who describes the sport:

The Tournamente begynnes; the hammerrs sounde;

The courserrs lysse about the mesuredd field;

The shemrynge armoure throws the sheene arounde;

Quayntyssed fons depicted onn eche sheelde.

The feeries heaulments, wythe the wreathes amielde,

Supportes the rampyng lyoncell orr beare,

Wythe straunge depyctures [ . . . ] (*Poems* 137; 1-7)

While chivalry might be regarded today as a hackneyed subject for a poet writing about the Middle Ages, Chatterton lived in the age in which antiquarians first began to grasp the material and ideological significance of this martial code. Thus the strangeness of chivalry—represented here most forcefully by the “straunge depyctures” of heraldic conventions—embodies the exoticism of the medieval past for Chatterton as it had for Richard Hurd less than a decade earlier. In “The Tournament,” heraldry, martial customs, and the rules of the joust are incorporated within a sustained textual archaism which proves the determinant form of the poet’s conception of the past.

The decidedly non-chivalric “The Accounte of W. Canynges Feast” similarly features a medieval *tableau vivant*. In this poem—attributed to Canyng—the mayor of Bristol describes the behavior of Bristol’s less-polished aldermen, whose company and tables manners compare unfavorably with the civilized deportment of Canyng’s preferred company—Rowley and the rest of medieval Bristol’s literati. Like “The Tournament,” “Canynges Feast” begins by raising the curtain on a scene of medieval life:

Thorowe the halle the belle han sounde;

Byelecoyle doe to Grave beseeme;

The ealdermenne doe sytte arounde,

And snoffelle oppe the cheorte steeme,

Lyche asses wylde in desarte waste

Swotelye the morneynge ayre doe taste. (*Poems* 199; 1-6)

“The Tournament” and “The Accounte of W. Canynge’s Feast” resemble one another in bringing together archaism and vivid imagery of medieval customs. Writing about one of the prose documents that Chatterton routinely appended to his poems to explain such old customs, Haywood describes how the poet’s technique marks the transition from antiquarianism to social history: “Chatterton wrote social history in a way that would surely have delighted Percy, Warton, and later Scott. Antiquarian details brought the past vividly to life. More ‘manners and customs’ were presented [in the Rowley works] than in the whole of the *Reliques*” (141-42). Chatterton’s archaism, then, complements his detailed depictions of Rowley’s Bristol, its textual exoticism emphasizing the strangeness of historical life.

### **Conclusion**

As examples of antiquarian fiction, Chatterton’s Rowley poems are significant because—though written as poetry—their technique places them at the boundary between romance and the classical historical novel. By employing archaism as a means of representing a real historical past, the poems signify an important refinement upon the imitative poetics of previous works—such as Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*—that used antiquated literary conventions primarily to emphasize their adherence to an established genre. Furthermore, Chatterton’s conception of the past as reflected in the Rowley poems remains significant because it embodies what Mark Salber Phillips sees as the emergence of sentimentalist history during the eighteenth century. According to Phillips, the increasing desire of eighteenth-century writers “to explore the *inward* lives of individuals and the *everyday* life of societies” resulted not only in new forms of fiction, including the comedy of manners, the epistolary novel, and the fictionalized memoir, but also in an altered

conception of historical experience and of the scope of historical writing (298). This sentimentalism encouraged a reevaluation of classical history as the record of the distinctiveness of ancient life, a change exemplified by a new appreciation of Tacitus as “a philosophical historian of primitive manners” (311). Most importantly, Phillips contends, the textual relic—in the form of letter, document, or literary work—was increasingly read as “as an expressive and dramatic text—something produced in the moment, rather than recollected and narrated” (313). Similarly, David Fairer argues that Warton and Hurd’s innovative literary histories originate in this sense of the affective power of historical texts, noting that “the literary productions of a former age came to be seen as possessing a historical character that partly conditioned the way they were read” (vi). Moreover, reading itself began to involve “an extra degree of imaginative projection” that generated a subjective response to history that Fairer calls “a ‘historical’ sympathy” (vi). Because they employ archaism as a means of imagining the past from a fictitious historical perspective, the Rowley poems represent an aesthetic counterpart to what both Phillips and Fairer understand as eighteenth-century sentimentalist history.

Chatterton’s forgeries demonstrate two concepts important to the texts discussed in the ensuing chapters of this dissertation. First, their linguistic and bibliographic exoticism constructs a definitive rupture between present and past. Second, they equate the forms of cultural expression with the material and ideological characteristics of the societies that produced them. Because they established textual imitation as a kind of historical writing, the Rowley poems arguably represent the most historically significant example of archaism. Chatterton’s practice of imitating old texts survived in romantic poetry for several generations, from Blake’s illuminated faux-scriptures and the first edition of Coleridge’s *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798) to Rossetti’s nineteenth-century medieval revivalism. At the end of that century, his



descendant William Morris greatly expanded the range of archaism by replicating not only historical aesthetics but historical means of production. Yet because Chatterton's poems collectively embody a kind of creative antiquarianism, they proved equally important to the emergence of the historical novel over the next half century. Ultimately, Chatterton created faux-medieval texts in order to depict what he took to be social experience in fifteenth-century Bristol. He employed archaism as the central strategy in his effort to imagine a historical society through its own cultural practices. Thus the Rowley poems demonstrate archaism at its most technically radical and historically ambitious while dramatizing the moment at which the technique veered from romance practice on its way towards influencing the emergence of the historical novel.

## Chapter Two

### Archaism in the Historical Novel, 1819-1907

Archaism is the imitation of those linguistic and bibliographic codes that make up an historical literary idiom. Carried to its radical extreme, archaism results in forgeries like Chatterton's Rowley poems, which constructed a largely-imaginary medieval Bristol through a corpus of authenticating maps, drawings, documents and poems composed in what Chatterton presumed were medieval language and medieval literary forms. Not surprisingly, forgeries like these are rare in English literary history. More often, archaism has been framed by or embedded within modern genres, performing a "slanted" or indirect historical function. For example, archaism figures prominently in romances such as Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, E.R. Eddison's *The Worm Ouroboros*, and Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* as an example of what Northrop Frye envisions as the special language of romance (*The Secular Scripture* 110). Only in a few cases, such as William Morris's faux-medieval *The Well at the World's End*, does romantic archaism approach the imitation-as-history aesthetic of Chattertonian forgery.

Because imitating a historical literary idiom is always at least in part historical, shedding some light onto the "real" society which originated its conventions, archaism provides one of the chief stylistic and structural techniques for authors writing historical fiction, a genre which addresses the changing forms of societies across time. Archaism as a technique of historical fiction may have reached its zenith in late twentieth-century historical fiction, but despite much argument to the contrary the practice was not then new, having predated even the genre's early flowering in post-Napoleonic Europe. All historical novels use the rhetoric of fiction to represent a historical event or society; those which use archaism, however, whether

circumscribed by a modern point of view, as in Scott's *Ivanhoe*, or closer to Chattertonian simulation, like William Golding's *To the Ends of the Earth* trilogy, follow Chatterton's example in equating the linguistic, literary, and textual conventions of the past with the past itself. Novels such as John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), with its extended mimicry of Victorian fictional conventions, or William De Morgan's *Alice-for-Short* (1907), which employs Dickensian characters, style, narrative voice, and plot structures in accordance with its mid-nineteenth-century setting, portray Victorian England at two removes, representing the past *as it was represented in the novels of the past*. Archaism offers a set of rhetorical strategies for the historical novelist. Archaism can shape nearly every aspect of an historical novel's form, including voice, style, character, and plot, resulting in a textual literalism that suggests its literary models' origins in a concrete historical reality.

In this chapter, I advance three hypotheses. 1) The historical novel that uses archaism constitutes a linguistic turn on Lukács's model of classical historical fiction. All historical novels use novelistic form to model the material and ideological characteristics of "real" historical societies, but "archaist" novels draw their concepts of style, character, plot, theme, etc. from the literary artifacts of the past. 2) Archaism does not simply execute a realist strategy of establishing verisimilitude or "period flavor." Instead, it represents a hyper-realist, or even metafictional, technique that avows its own textual "constructedness," suggesting by analogy the artificial, distanced quality of historicity itself. 3) Archaism has been used extensively in historical fiction since before the time of Scott, from Chatterton's historical poetry to Gothic novels. The examples in this chapter, therefore, prefigure what became a more common practice in late twentieth-century historical fiction. Scott, Thackeray, and William De Morgan use

archaism to work out a relationship between text and history, facing much the same set of representational complexities encountered by Barth, Fowles, and Vollmann.

Drawing from theorists of historical fiction from Lukács to Shaw, this chapter first defines the formal characteristics that obtain in historical novels. It then offers an account of archaism as a strain of self-conscious textuality that has been part of the genre since its origins, referencing Scott's *Ivanhoe* to demonstrate how the technique differs from other representational strategies in historical fiction. Finally, I offer an extended reading of *The History of Henry Esmond*, in which Thackeray imitates not just the linguistic but the bibliographic codes of the eighteenth century, generating a historicized textual literalism that employs the exoticism of the preceding century's textual practices both as a demonstration of historical difference and as a trope for the customs and manners of the Queen Anne's England.

### **The Forms of Historical Fiction: a Definition**

Attempts to define historical fiction in any comprehensive sense are surprisingly few, complicated by the inherent difficulties of formalist generic classification and by the apparent fact that the historical novel "does not have a significant history apart from the history of the novel as a whole" (Shaw 23).<sup>40</sup> Fleishman similarly muses that "everyone knows what a historical novel is; perhaps that is why few have volunteered to define it in print" (3). These studies form part of a small but important body of historical novel criticism, much of it rooted in

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<sup>40</sup> Shaw continues, admitting in the process a debt here to Lukács' similar perspective in *The Historical Novel*: "The authors who produce the best historical novels after Scott tend [ . . . ] to be masters of other kinds of writing, who enter the field with one or two attempts, as Dickens, Thackeray, and Hugo do. Georg Lukács is in my opinion essentially accurate in describing the history of the novel as a great stream from which tributaries branch off, only to rejoin and further enrich it in due course. Scott's works form such a tributary: he branches off from the eighteenth-century novel, discovers in artistic terms the rich significance of history, and then reunites with the mainstream of nineteenth-century fiction through his influence on Balzac, enriching it with new materials, insights, and techniques" (23).

Georg Lukács's masterful reading of the early nineteenth-century historical novelists (Scott in particular), whose works he terms "classical historical novels."

Two contradictory impulses complicate these theorists' attempts to define the historical novel. One impulse might be called "historicist" because it delineates historical fiction on the basis of their historical perspective; as a result, historicist critics reserve the term "historical fiction" for those books whose historical perspectives match their own. This impulse characterizes the studies by Fleishman and Lukács. Fleishman offers formal criteria as definition: a setting of at least two generations before the author's lifetime (drawing from the subtitle of *Waverley*: "'tis sixty years hence"); a number of "historical events"; and the presence of at least one historical personage amongst a novel's characters. Nevertheless, he argues that historical novels are ultimately defined by their historicist value: "What makes a historical novel historical is the active presence of a concept of history as a shaping force—acting not only upon the characters in the novel but on the author and the readers outside it" (15). On the other hand, Lukács reserves the term "classical historical novel" for those novels—forerunners of the nineteenth-century realist fiction of Balzac and others—which exemplify a materialist historical imagination. For Lukács, the classical historical novel represents a stage in the development of European ideology. Shaped in response to the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, Scott's fiction epitomizes the kind of historical consciousness that ultimately found expression in aesthetic Realism, Marxist social analysis, and revolutionary politics. The classical historical novel possesses a number of unique formal features—including mediocre heroes, socially typical characters, and plots predicated upon the dialectical resolution of historical crises—which combine to create what Lukács imagines as the aesthetic counterpart to Marxist historiography.

However, as Shaw demonstrates, defining historical fiction on the basis of its historical perspective undermines the effort to offer comprehensive formal analysis of the genre. As a result, Shaw prefers to locate issues of historical didacticism within discussions of the value rather than the form of historical fiction. With his “minimally historicist” view of historical fiction,<sup>41</sup> he aligns himself with Herbert Butterfield, who in 1934 recognized that historical fiction is defined by its subject. Thus any novel which uses historical materials to offer a glimpse into the customs and manners of a bygone era can be called a historical novel. Shaw notes that, “according to Butterfield, the historical novel attempts to ‘reconstruct a world, to particularise, to catch a glimpse of human nature.’ The task of the historical novelist is to render the unique ‘atmosphere’ of an age in the past, to ‘recapture the fleeting moment’ [ . . . ] what we might call a minimal historicist vision” (25). Shaw’s own attempt to define historical fiction even more emphatically stresses that the genre is defined by the imperative to represent historical reality rather than by any particular attitude toward its subject matter; for him, “the term historical novel denotes a kind of novel” whose differentiation from other novels “involves the milieu represented” (20). This elemental feature of historical fiction leads Shaw to conclude that the logic of any given novel—what he calls “fictional probability”—must reflect the logic of the milieu represented: “Though many kinds of novels may incorporate a sense of history, in historical novels history is, as the Russian Formalists would put it, ‘foregrounded.’ When we read historical novels, we take their events, characters, settings, and language to be historical” (20). Recognizing that definitions are right only insofar as they avoid sweeping prescriptions,<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Shaw, *Forms of Historical Fiction*: “it seems important for a number of reasons to oppose the idea that historical novels, or even standard historical novels, embody a defining vision of history in more than a minimal way” (28).

<sup>42</sup> Shaw: “the definition’s greatest strength is that it does not specify *what* role history must play in a novel’s structure if we are to consider that novel a work of historical fiction” (22; my emphasis).

Shaw defines historical novels simply as “works in which historical probability reaches a certain level of structural prominence” (22). Deriving from Shaw’s notion that historical fiction relies upon an implicit connection between historical and fictional probabilities is the related idea that historical fiction advances an implicit analogy between the novel itself and the historical milieu it represents. Historical novels are dominated by the impulse to match their fictive elements (existents and action) with those societies and events that form their subject, as for instance the formal elements of *Waverley*—characters, plot, narration, description—combine to reflect Scott’s conception of the national crisis precipitated by the second Jacobite rebellion in 1745. Historical novels, then, are works in which the text is configured as a means of structuring a social-milieu as a coherent totality.

### **Archaism as a Rhetorical Strategy in Historical Fiction**

Form in historical fiction performs two basic and interrelated functions. The first of these, discussed more fully in chapter three, is that form advances beliefs or claims about history. The second function is what James Phelan might call rhetorical technique, or strategy: historical fiction employs the techniques of fiction to negotiate the distance between the reader and the milieu the novelist hopes to represent. Lukács’s study of historical fiction, for example, owes its continuing interest not only to his dialectical approach to literary history, but also to his reading of the rhetorical strategies of Walter Scott’s novels, how Scott uses fiction to convince readers of what he believes to be historical reality. While Scott’s technique—especially his use of plot and character—became typical of nineteenth-century realist fiction (which is high praise indeed when it comes from Lukács), Scott sought to imagine the lived experience of historical societies, “*demonstrate[ing] by artistic means that historical circumstances and characters existed in*

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precisely such in such a way” (Lukács 43). These “artistic means” are familiar to any of Scott’s readers and to all scholars of historical novels; they include characters who illustrate social-historical types, “synthetic” heroes who embody their society’s conflicting forces, and plots which move dialectically through national crises. These collected artistic means must be seen first as a rhetorical strategy by which Scott conveyed his own perspective on specific historical moments.

As yet another rhetorical strategy, archaism provides a rhetorical alternative to this classical model. Lukács concludes that language and style are more or less irrelevant in the classical historical novel, at least compared to the interactions between characters and their social circumstances.<sup>43</sup> Yet historical fiction writers since the earliest efforts in the genre have been aware that style presents significant problems in narrating the past. Chatterton’s poetry represents one attempt to maintain or create linguistic verisimilitude by imitating the literary conventions of the past. The controversy surrounding the forgeries, coupled with the obscurity sometimes consequent upon the forger’s use of old forms, served as warning to early historical novelists who might have found a similar formal strategy enticing. Scott says as much—without, perhaps, much fairness to Chatterton—in the “Dedicatory Epistle” to *Ivanhoe*:

[I]f our neophyte, strong in the newborn love of antiquity, were to undertake to imitate what he had learnt to admire, it must be allowed he would act very injudiciously, if he were to select from the Glossary the obsolete words which it contains, and employ those exclusively to all others. This was the error of the unfortunate Chatterton. In order to give his language the appearance of antiquity,

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<sup>43</sup> See *The Historical Novel*, pages 30-63. The following is typical: “The colourful and varied richness of Scott’s historical world is a consequence of the multiplicity of these interactions between individuals and the unity of social existence which underlies this richness” (45).



he rejected every word that was modern, and produced a dialect entirely different from any that had ever been spoken in Great Britain. (10)

The passage demonstrates that in constructing his most ambitiously exotic setting to that point, Scott wrestled with the adequacy of archaism within the historical novel. In *Ivanhoe*, as not in *Waverley* or his other Scottish novels, Scott's sources for reconstructing twelfth-century England were largely (romance) fictions, causing Scott's project to overlap Chatterton's and requiring that he define for himself the value of the archaism that informs the earlier poet's compositional strategies.

Scott knew that Chatterton's forgeries represented a kind of historical poetics, and that his approach reflected the concern with textual artifacts common to Gothic romance and many of the historical novels following in its wake. Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), of course, remains the most influential and perhaps best known of the eighteenth-century Gothic romances, and the novel's claim to be a recovered text is central to its conceit and its historical vision. Walpole published the tale as "*The Castle of Otranto: A Story, Translated by William Marshall, Gent. From the Original Italian of Onuphrio Muralto, Canon of the Church of St. Nicholas at Otranto,*" authoring—in the guise of the supposed translator William Marshall—a preface to that first edition which concentrates on the origin and date of the book from which the tale purportedly derived. Resembling the "recovered text" narratives of his contemporaries Chatterton and Percy, the preface begins thus:

The following was found in the library of an ancient catholic family in the north of England. It was printed at Naples, in the black letter, in the year 1529. How much sooner it was written does not appear. The principal incidents are such as were believed in the darkest ages of christianity; but the language and conduct

have nothing that savours of barbarism. The style is the purest Italian. If the story was written near the time when it was supposed to have happened, it must have been between 1095, the aera of the first Crusade, and 1243, the date of the last, or not long afterwards. (3)

The found text conceit, of course, has become one of the most widespread conventions of novels in general, but in particular the historical novel, from Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1851), which begins with the recovery of an old document in the Salem Custom House, to William T. Vollmann's first Seven Dreams novel, *The Ice-Shirt* (1990), whose introductory passage is both a historical and poetic description of its chief source, the fourteenth-century Icelandic *Flateyjarbok* (7-10). Another notable example comes from Alessandro Manzoni's *I Promessi Sposi* (1827), which opens with an excerpt from an apocryphal antique manuscript beginning, "Historie may be verilie defined as a mightie war against Time, for snatching from his hands the years emprisoned, nay already slain by him, she calleth them back unto life, passeth them in review, and rangeth them once more in battle array" (xi).<sup>44</sup> After more than a page of the tortuously old-fashioned prose, the narrator breaks in, abruptly begging our leave to translate rather than transcribe: "But when I've had the heroic patience to transcribe the story from this scratched and faded manuscript, and brought it to light, as the saying goes, will there be anyone found then with enough patience to read it?" (xii). Manzoni's introduction re-fashions the temporal dimensions of his novel—the historical distance between the events recorded, the manuscript, the translator/author, and the reader—into stylistic differences which must be overcome for the sake of clarity.

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<sup>44</sup> Interestingly, translator Archibald Colquhoun chose these particular English archaisms to reflect Manzoni's seventeenth-century Italian idiom.

The authors of historical novels have used this and similar conventions to achieve two ends. First, claiming a manuscript or similarly historical source lends the novel the kind of authority reserved for historical research. As a relic of the past, the manuscript continues to stand, as it did in the eighteenth-century, as evidence that the past existed. Secondly, the manuscript helps to justify the fictitious quality of historical novels, excusing those elements that strain belief. Walpole utilized this principle in *The Castle of Otranto*, in which his reliance upon “miracles, visions, necromancy, dreams, and other preternatural events” ostensibly reflects the superstitious credulity of what he calls the “darkest ages of Christianity” (3-4). The plot’s supernatural occurrences, then, are presented as historical, reflecting the world-view of medieval Europe.<sup>45</sup>

Additionally, the found manuscript convention attempts to balance two diametrically opposed narrative perspectives in historical fiction. The most radically archaic texts narrate the past entirely from within, employing the past’s own literary conventions. On the other hand, “found manuscripts” are often framed as such by a modern narrator, who demarcates past and present by examining the novel’s subject matter from across an historical divide, establishing an objective, modern perspective. Thus while Scott acknowledged Chatterton and Walpole as touchstones, his *Ivanhoe* is narrated not from the twelfth century, but from the nineteenth, establishing its historical settings and characters through an accumulation of sensory detail available only to a “objective” narrator who possesses a vast comprehension of his subject matter

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<sup>45</sup> The idea of *The Castle of Otranto* as a novel with an historicist as well and romantic purpose stems from Scott’s introduction to an 1823 edition of the novel, in which the author of *Waverley* claims, “It was [Walpole’s] object to draw such a picture of domestic life and manners, during feudal times, as might actually have existed, and to paint it chequered and agitated by the action of supernatural machinery, such as the superstition of the age received as matter of devout credulity” (“Prefatory Memoir” 276).

and speaks from the seemingly omniscient perspective of modernity.<sup>46</sup> The novel opens memorably in a wooded glade with the conversant figures of two Saxons, the swineherd Gurth and the fool Wumba. Scott's narrator proceeds to describe the Gurth's dress and manner in extensive detail before directing his eye toward Wumba in a number of paragraphs that elucidate the nature of life in medieval England. The narrator's command of detail affords him a privileged perspective on his social-historical experience, setting the tone for much nineteenth-century realist fiction.

Yet *Ivanhoe* is characterized by considerable tension between the narrator's retrospective point of view and archaism's potential for establishing narrative immediacy. Finding inspiration in *The Castle of Otranto*, which to him employed romance as an antiquarian investigation of the customs and manners of feudal Europe, Scott sought to narrate from *within* twelfth-century England as much as possible without violating the more modern, objective perspective he had developed in his previous novels. Scott embedded within his modern perspective a number of episodes in imitation or direct transformation of medieval sources, which he hoped to use without falling victim to the "error of the unfortunate Chatterton"—using a specialized language too exotically artificial to be believed ("Dedicatory Epistle to *Ivanhoe*" 10). According to Scott, Walpole rather than Chatterton provided the chief model for *Ivanhoe*, for while narrating within the past, Walpole communicated the essence rather than the outward forms of antiquity:

[W]hile conducting his mortal agents with all the art of the modern dramatist, he adheres to the sustained tone of chivalry, which marks the period of the action.

This is not attained by patching his narrative or dialogue with glossarial terms, or

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<sup>46</sup> My use of the term "objectivity" in referring to such narration derives from Hugh Kenner's *Joyce's Voices*, which briefly traces the pseudo-empirical narrative stance from one presumed origin in *Gulliver's Travels* through its conventional status in nineteenth-century realistic fiction before discussing the use that Joyce makes of it in his early fiction.

antique phraseology, but by taking care to exclude all that can awaken modern associations. In the one case, his romance would have resembled a modern dress, preposterously decorated with antique ornaments; in its present shape, he has retained the form of the ancient armour, but not its rust and cobwebs. (“Prefatory Memoir to Walpole” 280)

Similarly, *Ivanhoe* imitates medieval romance, but with an eye to modern literary sensibility. Scott’s is not a “pure” archaism like Chatterton’s, but one modified by an objective, modern mode of narration characteristic of emerging nineteenth-century realism.

In developing his own medieval romance, Scott relied as much upon medieval literature as upon contemporary histories of the time period, and through a poetics of imitation *Ivanhoe* carries out an extended dialogue with medieval literature.<sup>47</sup> Adhering to the “found manuscript” convention, Scott’s authorial persona Laurence Templeton claims in the “Dedicatory Epistle” that the novel’s sources “may be chiefly found in the singular Anglo-Norman MS., which Sir Arthur Wardour preserved with such jealous care in the third drawer of his oaken cabinet” (12). Perhaps because so much of the novel shares the techniques of the antiquarians who illuminated England’s Middle Ages before him, including Chatterton, Walpole, and Percy, Scott dedicates most of the novel’s introduction to distancing his narrative language from the more radical archaisms employed by these predecessors, arguing, “the same motive which prevents my sending forth to the public this essay printed with the types of Caxton or Wynken de Worde, prevents my attempting to confine myself within the limits of the period in which my story is laid” (9). Such a position gives Scott the latitude to narrate from within the past but also to

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<sup>47</sup> In his *Scott, Chaucer, and Medieval Romance*, Jerome Mitchell traces evidence of Scott’s “vast knowledge of medieval literature” (1) throughout his novels, including—of course—*Ivanhoe* (126-37).

employ a modern perspective, and while he uses a number of historical ballads and romances, he incorporates them naturalistically rather than as exotic relics.

Part of this is accomplished through what Gérard Genette would call Scott's paratexts, in particular the introductory notes to each of his chapters, and his intertexts, including a number of characters appropriated from medieval literature rather than from the historical record. One such character is Prior Aymer, a well-to-do, sophisticated churchman who makes his first appearance in Chapter Two, introduced with lines from Chaucer's portrait of the Monk in the prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*.<sup>48</sup> Likewise, Scott's Richard I is drawn from poetic rather than historical accounts, in particular the romance *Richard Coeur de Lion*, in which the king "appear[s] at a tournament in disguise, wear[s] black armour, defeat[s] various knights and disappear[s] into the forest just as he does at the tournament in *Ivanhoe*" (Tulloch xv). Grasping the relationship between Scott's medieval borrowings and his historical purpose, Graham Tulloch contends that "Scott creates this from romance sources but uses it to portray what he sees as a central facet of Richard's historical character" (xx). In *Ivanhoe*, Scott also uses medieval literature to shape his narrative. Jerome Mitchell has detailed a number of parallels between the novel's plot and episodes in chivalric literature, including Ivanhoe's arrival at Rotherwood disguised as a palmer, Isaac of York's less-than-hospitable-reception at Cedric's home that same night, and the pageantry of the tournament at Ashby (127-29). Scott's paratexts make such intertextual borrowings clear and allow him to narrate from "within" the past.

The most famous romance borrowing in *Ivanhoe*, however, is the episode in which Richard, in his disguise as The Black Knight, looks for lodging in Sherwood Forest and forces

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<sup>48</sup> "A monk ther was, a fair for the maistrie, / An outridere, that lovede venerie, / A manly man, to been an abbot able" ("General Prologue" 165-167).

Friar Tuck, who has claimed to be an anchorite, to house him and provide board from a secret store of wine and poached game. In his introduction to the novel's 1830 edition, Scott admits, "An incident in [the novel], which had the good fortune to find favour in the eyes of many readers, is more directly borrowed from the stores of old romance. I mean the meeting of the King with Friar Tuck at the cell of that buxom hermit" (*Prefaces* 140). Scott begins with a great number of cognate stories from Arabic, French, and Scottish traditions before identifying an old romance, *The Kyng and the Hermite*, as his chief source. Fully half of the introduction is then devoted to a synopsis of that romance and an explanation of how the author used it for *Ivanhoe*, illustrating the centrality of romance borrowing and imitation to that novel's uniqueness compared to Scott's earlier fiction.<sup>49</sup> According to Tulloch, the characteristic feature of Scott's use of medieval literary sources is that in the novel, "romance is realized as history" (xxi). Essentially, as Walpole before him used miraculous and supernatural events partly to exemplify the historical fact of medieval superstition, Scott uses romance forms to represent the characteristics of feudal society. These romance characters and motifs demonstrate what Scott imagined to be nascent chivalry in Richard Plantagenet's England. Considered as a compendium of romance borrowings and imitations, *Ivanhoe* utilizes a number of structural archaisms—namely, plot details and characters—as part Scott's effort to craft a novel whose inner logic, or fictional probability, reflects the cultural logic, or historical probability, of the twelfth century.

Scott's archaism, however, is moderated by a retrospective narrative point of view as Chatterton's Rowley poetry is not. While Scott compromises what Lukács envisions as the *realistic* quality of his other novels by utilizing the structural conventions of romance, *Ivanhoe*'s

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<sup>49</sup> *Ivanhoe*'s departure from the method of the earlier Waverley novels provides the central subject for the 1830 introduction.

archaism is nevertheless constrained by Scott's nineteenth-century perspective and realist aesthetic. Thus Kenneth Sroka argues that the romance elements which seem to dominate the novel prove superficial as "Scott's fidelity to the conventional romance form is tempered by altered conventions and deflations of idealistic imaginative elements—variations which create a more realistic romance" (645). For Sroka, these alterations include such ironic deflations as the finale in which *Ivanhoe* and Sir Brian de Bois-Gilbert ride against one another to decide Rebecca's fate. Before their lances meet, generic expectations of the chivalric joust are thwarted when Bois-Gilbert tumbles from his horse, dead of apoplexy caused by conflicting passions.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, because of the novel's essentially realistic pageantry, which Scott uses to depict social stratification in medieval England and to dramatize a crisis embroiling those classes, Lukács lauds the novel as an exemplary classical historical novel (49-50). Perhaps *Ivanhoe*'s lasting appeal stems from the balance it achieves between romantic and realistic elements. While archaism shapes many of the novel's events and characters, it remains circumscribed by Scott's continued adherence to the model of the historical novel he had developed in the earlier *Waverley* novels. *Ivanhoe* balances an impulse to archaize—derived from Chatterton and Walpole—against the retrospective narration of most historical writing.

A number of later nineteenth-century novels, however, use archaism more radically. These novels lie on a spectrum somewhere between the mild archaic patterning of *Ivanhoe* and the complete imitation of Chatterton's Rowley poems. William Makepeace Thackeray's *The History of Henry Esmond* (1852), for instance, features a more extensive use of archaism: the novel's adoption of archaic style, voice, characters, and plot structure illustrates how archaism

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<sup>50</sup> The 1954 Hollywood version "remedies" this ruined expectation, however, as Robert Taylor's *Ivanhoe* engages George Sanders's Templar in epic (and brutal) man-to-man combat to decide the fate of Rebecca and of England.



functions as history, shaping its readers' understandings of the people, institutions, and events of the past. Moreover, *Esmond* anticipates many of the formal techniques of such well-known post-1960s novels as John Fowles's *A Maggot* (1985), Peter Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor* (1985), and A.S. Byatt's *Possession* (1990). Thackeray's adoption of an early eighteenth-century idiom in *Henry Esmond* prefigures similar developments in twentieth-century historical fiction while modifying the representational strategies of the realist historical fiction then in fashion.

### **William Makepeace Thackeray's *Henry Esmond***

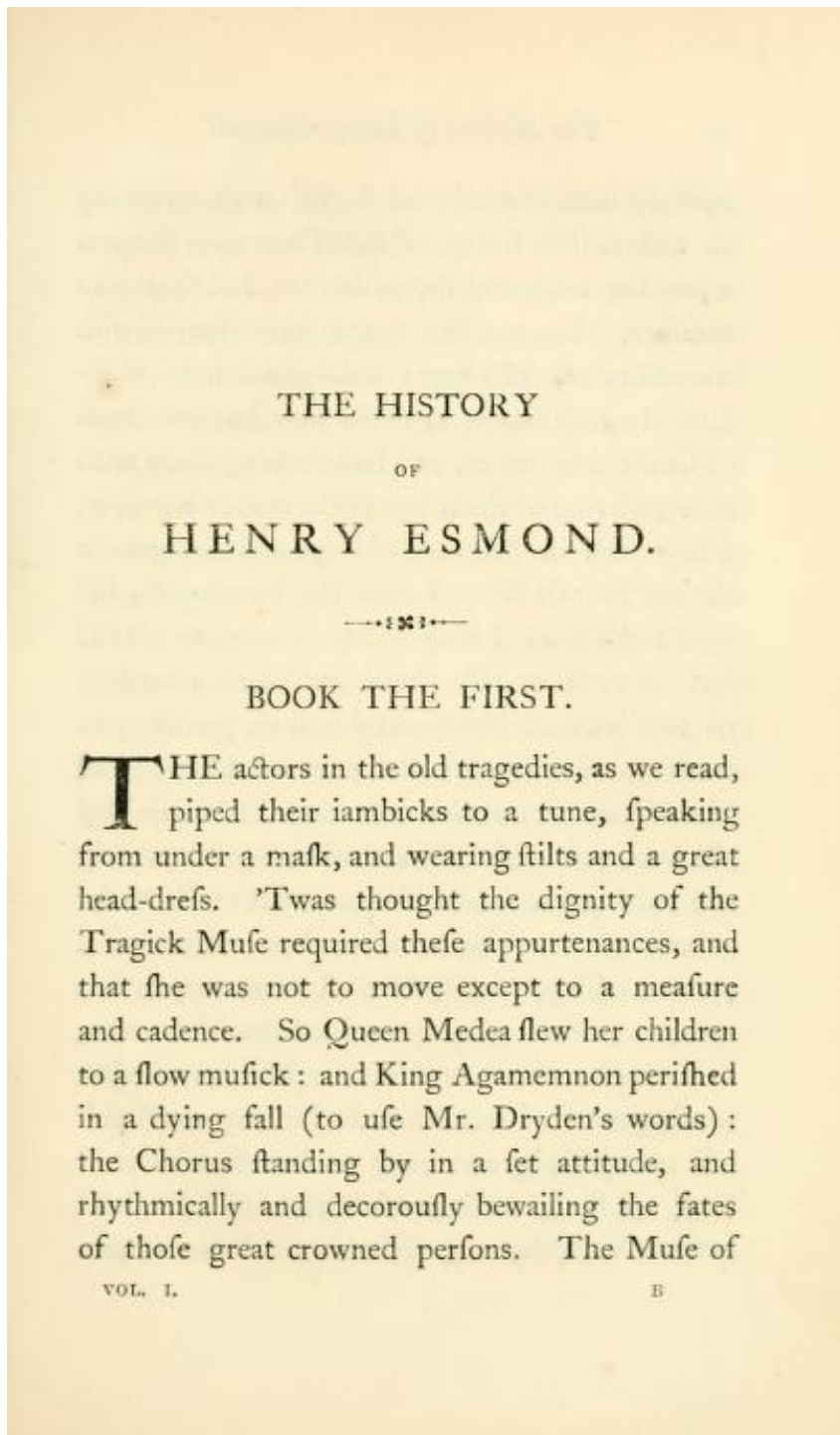
Along with William De Morgan's *Alice-for-Short* (1907), *Henry Esmond* exemplifies how Scott's successors employed archaism. Unlike *Alice-for-Short*, however, *Esmond* remains widely read and often cited as one of the best nineteenth-century historical novels in English. Thackeray's novel chronicles the adventures of an orphaned gentleman whose fortunes wane after the Glorious Revolution of 1688 due to his family's Catholic sympathies and enthusiastic loyalty to the Stuarts. Esmond's career spans the early decades of the eighteenth century, and he counts among his friends such real-life personages as Richard Steele and Joseph Addison, and among his enemies the greatest general of the day, John Churchill, the Duke of Marlborough. Esmond is at home among the wealthiest and most culturally sophisticated class of society in England, but as an officer in Queen Anne's army, he also is privy to both the martial and political intrigues of numerous continental campaigns, among them Marlborough's zenith at the Battle of Blenheim (1704). As with Scott's protagonists, Esmond's internal conflicts reflect the contending social ideas of his time, and throughout the novel he struggles to reconcile the Catholicism and Jacobite ideals taught him by his Jesuit tutor, Father Holt, with the Whig sentiments toward which his own experiences lead him. The novel climaxes with a disheartened Henry losing his inamorata Beatrix to the failed Chevalier James Francis Edward Stuart and

renouncing his own nobility as a symbolic rejection of that prince's claims. With the accession of the Elector of Hanover as George I, Henry marries Beatrix's long-suffering mother Rachel and emigrates to Virginia, from which vantage point he details his private and public career in an account that makes up the novel.

The basic pattern of Thackeray's historical novel, with its balancing of its characters' personal and historical circumstances, derives from Scott's classical form of the genre, but *Esmond's* key distinction is a tour-de-force performance of what A.S. Byatt calls ventriloquism, or the "sustained recreation" of the "voice, vocabulary, and habit of mind" of a particular era (*On Histories and Stories* 43).<sup>51</sup> This strategy grew out of Thackeray's successful series of lectures, *The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century*, delivered in 1851. These lectures were primarily personality sketches—as opposed to historical accounts or literary criticism—of Thackeray's favorite wits, including Swift, Congreve, Addison, Steele, Prior, Gay, Pope, Hogarth, Smollett, Fielding, Sterne, and Goldsmith. Thackeray felt that these personalities illuminated English character in the previous century, and owing to his approbation—or sometimes condemnation, as with Swift—of their personality quirks, he integrated several of them into *Henry Esmond* as minor characters. Of these, only Dick Steele makes more than a cameo appearance. Edgar F. Harden observes that what he calls the "imaginative recreations" of the *English Humourists* led directly to *Esmond*: "the minute and extensive historical awareness that these recreations had articulated in the *English Humourists* suffuses his later narrative, after having undoubtedly demonstrated to Thackeray his capacity to write a novel that would in its own way allow—indeed, necessitate—the imaginative recreation of a life immersed in these

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<sup>51</sup> Byatt chooses "ventriloquism" to "avoid the loaded moral implications of 'parody', or 'pastiche'" (43). My own attempts to wrest the practice of textual imitation away from the terms "parody" and "pastiche" can be found in Chapter One.



**Figure 5.** The first page of Thackeray's *Henry Esmond* (I.1). Observe how the passage's typographical archaism reflects the narrator's comments about the "style" of classical tragedy.

realities” (*Thackeray the Writer* 38). Anthony Trollope, who in his book-length study contends that *Henry Esmond* is its author’s greatest novel, likewise notes the suitability of using literary conventions to capture historical essence: “He had devoted himself to the literature of Queen Anne’s reign, and having chosen to throw his story into that period, and to create in it personages who were to be particularly concerned with the period, he resolved to use as the vehicle for his story the forms of expression then prevalent” (*Thackeray* 124). *Esmond* demonstrates Thackeray’s capacity for bringing to life what he understood as the material trappings, personalities, and ideologies of a social-historical milieu that predated the novel by a century and a half. As a whole, the novel’s ventriloquistic appropriation of an eighteenth-century idiom demonstrates Thackeray’s idea that the historical differences between Esmond’s England and his own are reflected in the differences between their textual practices.

### ***Esmond’s Archaic Voice***

In an essay on Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair*, James Phelan defines “voice” as the narrating personality that “exists in the space between style and character,” fusing style, tone, and values into a generally unified narrating consciousness (*Narrative as Rhetoric* 43-47). Thus voice articulates individual or even social values by investing the elements of a given narrative—from diction and syntax through the structure of the action—with a narrating consciousness. In *Henry Esmond*, Thackeray narrates from the perspective of an eighteenth-century Englishman who, while unavoidably espousing some of the values of his Victorian descendants, sees Queen Anne’s England through the eyes of a contemporary. As biographer Gordon N. Ray notes, this eighteenth-century voice represents the culmination of the novelist’s tendency to adopt narrative masks:

It can be argued, indeed, that the form in which Thackeray presents *Esmond* enables him to surpass even Scott in the veracity of his delineation of the past. [ . . . ] So entirely does he transform himself for the occasion into a polished Augustan gentleman, formed by a rich traditional culture, that his novel becomes a triumph of sustained imitation, a tour-de-force of the utmost difficulty executed with superb ease and elegance. (178)

As a narrator, Henry revives the sentiments and intellectual manners of the age, and should be seen as a representative and more-or-less realistic eighteenth-century consciousness. It should be emphasized, however, that this realistic consciousness is foregrounded through literalist textuality.

Henry's archaic voice embodies a departure from the classical historical novel by narrating from within the past rather than from the present. *Esmond* narrates from the viewpoint of its historical milieu rather than looking backwards at it from the perspective of Thackeray's Victorian present, a strategy that closes the temporal distance between reader and character through the immediacy of the eye-witness account. As Henry recalls the London of his youth while introducing the memoir:

Shall we see something of France and England besides Versailles and Windfor? I saw Queen Anne at the latter place tearing down the Park slopes after her flag-hounds, and driving her one-horse chaise—a hot, red-faced woman, not in the least resembling that statue of her which turns its front back upon St. Paul's, and faces the coaches struggling up Ludgate Hill (I.26-27).

As a narrator, Henry seems neither a mouthpiece for Thackeray's values, nor a Victorian gentleman masquerading in a periwig and lace, but an eyewitness to history. He is a fictitious

eighteenth-century Englishman whose *weltanschauung* derives from his author's studies of literary and artistic personalities in *English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century*. According to Harden, the legitimacy of Thackeray's eighteenth-century mask is illustrated best in the depth and sophistication of Henry Esmond's learning, in particular his neo-classicism: "As is appropriate for an 18<sup>th</sup> century English consciousness, Esmond repeatedly draws upon prototypes from classical literature and mythology" (65). In short, *Esmond* is a novel written by Thackeray as he thought a contemporary of Addison and Steele might have written it. He adopts the trappings of eighteenth-century literature for a fictitious memoir that evokes the first-person narratives of Defoe, though Henry's society is that of officers, Lords, and Ladies instead of merchants, rogues, and prostitutes.

To some extent, the verisimilitude of Thackeray's first-person narration obscures the linguistic self-consciousness or hyper-reality of its archaism. Surprisingly, few canonical historical novels employ first-person perspective, probably due to the difficulty of creating an authentic first-person historical voice. This should not imply, however, that this point-of-view is the only authentic kind of archaic voice. Archaic voice is a narrating personality derived from "period" literature; thus a historical novel set in the 1920s might conceivably appropriate interior monologue or stream-of-consciousness techniques. Though written in third person, for example, William De Morgan's *Alice-for-Short* (1907) adopts a neo-Victorian narrative persona that evokes the novels written at the time of the book's setting, in particular those of Dickens. Frank Kermode's essay "The English Novel, circa 1907" offers a reading of the synchronic intertextuality of De Morgan's novel, arguing that, during a year which saw the publication of such canonical modernist fiction as Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*, *Alice-for-Short* indicates that "the Modern was a trouble to De Morgan, and its presence in his thoughts produces some

odd twists in his novels” (39). While Kermode does not dismiss *Alice* as nostalgia, the novel plays this part in his scheme of early twentieth-century fiction, a landscape dominated by what he calls a “technical arms race” (39). De Morgan’s use of Victorian voice is designed to be in keeping with his depiction of mid-nineteenth-century England, just as *Esmond*’s neoclassical personality illustrates Queen Anne’s.

*Alice-for-Short* features a distinctively personable voice that takes Dickens as its chief model, one that is blithely confident and un-apologetically fond of the novel’s central characters.

One chapter beginning is typical:

Thus it came about that Alice Kavanagh, who made her appearance in this story less than a month since as a small waif carrying home a beer-jug through a London fog, became an object of concern and sympathy to very opulent friends. You will be quite right if you infer that she must have been a pretty and attractive little girl. She certainly was that, with her clear blue eyes and pale brown hair, and her appearance of observation and reserve—of keeping silence about something she was all the while making mental notes on. For you may have noticed that Alice has so far said very little to any one. (67)

Published in the midst of a decade notable for the subtle obscurities of James’s prose and the nascent imagism of Conrad’s experimental fiction, De Morgan’s narration immediately drew comparisons to Dickens. Yet Helen Thomas Follett and Wilson Follett argue that the voice is more properly designated “Early Victorian” insofar as it combines the mannerisms of several period novelists: “The truth is that De Morgan cannot be summed up as an imitator of any one influence. What he mastered was the whole spirit and contribution of a period” (160). The Victorian manner of the passage above derives from several attributes. One is the gentle

## CHAPTER VIII

OF THE PSYCHICAL RESEARCH INTO THE LADY WITH THE SPOTS. OF A CERTAIN TABLE. AND OF HOW ALICE CRIED IN THE DARK. HOW MR. HEATH CALLED HIS SISTER TO SEE MR. JOHNSON. HOW ALICE WAS TOLD THAT THAT WAS MOTHER. HOW MR. HEATH'S SISTER KISSED MOTHER, AND WHY. OF A PAWN-TICKET, AND HOW DR. JOHNSON WROTE A PRESCRIPTION WRONG

A NEW caretaker had been discovered to live in the basement of No. 40 and show the extensive premises. She was Mrs. Twills, and gave the spectator an impression that she was all on one side. A very long tooth seemed to start somehow from the root of her nose and support her upper lip. It made attempts at speech ineffectual, and appeared in fact to transfer the seat of articulation to the right-hand upper molar, if any. She was also so deaf as to be unable to receive communications except by conjecture; and so ill-informed or reticent as to be unable to impart them under any circumstances. Her redeeming features were her temporariness, and an alacrity in the distribution of cataracts, while insulated on pattens, that was inconsiderate to bystanders perhaps, but serviceable to cleanliness. It would have been beneficial in every way if it had not envenomed the nature of its promoter, and made her look upon her fellow-creatures as incarnate fiends for dirtying her steps.

Mrs. Twills, having been installed as a substitute for Goody Peppermint, had instinctively proceeded to do out the first floor, unopposed. Whether any intelligible instruction had reached her mind, Charles certainly did not know; but he had accepted Mrs. Twills as his lot, considered as a first-floor. It was part of her nature to pay no attention to humanity as such, and to ignore its wants. But considered as first-floors, second-floors, or offices, she did it out. And this official position of Mrs. Twills made it easy and natural for Peggy and Alice, accompanied by Charles, to penetrate the subterranean regions, without explaining to her that the nicely dressed little girl that came with the first-floor's sister in a carriage was the child of the previous caretaker, now in the Hospital, and a father who had poisoned himself on the premises. In fact nothing that occurred during the visit threw any light on

Figure 6. A neo-Victorian chapter beginning from William De Morgan's *Alice-for-Short*.

Note the floridly descriptive chapter heading and Dickensian style.



sentimentality that suffuses the narrator's depiction of the six-year-old Alice as a "pretty and attractive little girl," a small waif with "clear blue eyes and pale brown hair." Additionally, the passage above features numerous examples of De Morgan's practice of direct address, most often delivered in an informal tone achieved partly through a proliferation of decorative adverbs such "quite," "certainly," "very." *Alice-for-Short* is typical of the Early Victorian voice that De Morgan employed in most of his novels, a narrating consciousness that establishes what the Folletts characterize as "an amiable and chatty relation between author and reader" (160-61). While they note that De Morgan "does resemble Dickens in many respects, including his passion for purely verbal pleasantries," the Folletts also contend that Thackeray provides an equally important influence (159). Readers of *Vanity Fair* will recognize in *Alice*, if not the satiric irony that suffuses Thackeray's novel, a conversational voice that allows the sharing of value judgments between narrator and reader: "If Miss Rebecca Sharp had determined in her heart upon making the conquest of this big beau, I don't think, ladies, we have any right to blame her" (27). Ultimately, the Folletts recognize De Morgan's voice as an imitation of the general novelistic idiom of the middle-nineteenth-century, describing it as "a leisurely Victorian affair of quips and pleasantries" (161).

Setting his story mostly in the 1860s, De Morgan emphasizes his archaism's historical context. This allows him to posit archaic voice as a strategy for representing the habits of thought of the middle part of the preceding century, thus enacting a sort of aesthetic antiquarianism similar to that practiced in the novel by the gentlemen artists who are Alice's

neighbors and benefactors.<sup>52</sup> Ultimately, De Morgan's archaic voice inscribes what he deems to be an authentic representation of the sentimentalist humanism of the great Victorian novelists—especially with regard to domestic life, from table manners and family vacations to obsessions with sibling relationships, childhood, parental roles, and matrimony that also characterizes Dickens's and Thackeray's novels. *Alice-for-Short* demonstrates that third-person narration can prove just as effective as Esmond's first-person point-of-view in developing a representative historical consciousness.

### **Stylistic Archaism: Graphics, Orthography, Diction and Syntax**

To fashion its early eighteenth-century voice, *Henry Esmond* employs a full range of typographic and stylistic archaisms. Henry, an amateur, though gifted, literary scribbler, occupies much of his non-military time with writing plays, poetry, and letters, most of them bitterly directed towards his beautiful but capricious love, Beatrix. Henry's most memorable literary endeavor is a sham copy of *The Spectator*, in which he mimics his close friend Dick Steele's language and authors a letter aimed at pointing out Beatrix's faults. He hires a printer to reproduce this letter as closely to the form of *The Spectator* as possible and has a servant lay the copy at Beatrix's breakfast table for her moral edification. Complete with number, date, and introductory quotations from Horace and Creech, Henry's letter commences with a satirical portrait of Beatrix: "Jocasta is known as a woman of learning and fafhion, and as one of the moft amiable persons of this Court and country. She is at home two mornings of the week, and all the wits and a few of the beauties of London flock to her affemblies" (III.69-70). Henry's

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<sup>52</sup>These young men's expertise in ceramics—clearly a reference to De Morgan's own career as a potter—allows them to identify Alice's antique beer jug early in the novel, and their familiarity with eighteenth-century portraiture proves critical in solving the novel's central mystery later in the novel.

production of a forged copy of *The Spectator* offers a wink to Thackeray's conception of his novel as a forgery, one carried out in the same spirit.

Even the novel's graphic design evokes eighteenth-century conventions. Unlike Thackeray's earlier novels, *Esmond* was first published in three volumes and featured a number of print practices associated with the preceding century, including an antique typeface, which helped establish the illusion that the reader held in his or her hands an actual eighteenth-century memoir. Daniel Hack summarizes the first edition's bibliographic principles: "This three volume edition featured a number of striking departures from the bibliographic norms of the day, including unusually wide margins, heavy leading, and an old-fashioned typeface with, for example, a long s and a ligature connecting c and t" (12). Though most modern editions of *Esmond* have not employed eighteenth-century print conventions, these were central to the novel's representation of the previous century, performing a role noted by one of *Esmond*'s first readers, Charlotte Brontë, who, having received an early copy, responded to its publisher, "Colonel Henry Esmond is just arrived. He looks very antique and distinguished in his Queen Anne's garb—the periwig, sword, lace and ruffles are very well represented by the old *Spectator* type" (Charlotte Brontë to George Smith 3 November 1852 *Selected Letters* 209). Though he disagrees, Hack formulates the consensus regarding the bibliographic principles of the first edition: "As reviewers, bibliographers, and the odd critic of the format agree, the primary, if not the sole, purpose of this simulation is to enhance or extend—enhance by extending—the novel's verisimilitude and aura of authenticity" (13).

In keeping with the antiquarianism of the text's graphic design, Thackeray deviates from the style of his earlier fiction to create a language which imparts the flavor of his setting. While critics have occasionally focused on his inability to develop a convincing period style, K.C.

mortification, and the stranger's disappearance. If balked in anything, she is sure to lose her health and temper; and we, her servants, suffer, as usual, during the angry fits of our Queen. Can you help us, Mr. Spectator, who know everything, to read this riddle for her, and set at rest all our minds? We find in her list, Mr. Berty, Mr. Smith, Mr. Pike, Mr. Tyler—who may be Mr. Bertie, Mr. Smyth, Mr. Pyke, Mr. Tiler, for what we know. She hath turned away the clerk of her visiting-book, a poor fellow, with a great family of children. Read me this riddle, good Mr. Shortface, and oblige your admirer,

“*ŒDIPUS.*”

“*The Trumpet Coffee-house, Whitehall.*”

“MR. SPECTATOR,—

“I am a gentleman but little acquainted with the town, though I have had an university education, and passed some years serving my country abroad, where my name is better known than in the coffee-houses in St. James's.

“Two years since my uncle died, leaving me a pretty estate in the county of Kent; and being at Tunbridge Wells last summer, after my

Figure 7. A page from Henry Esmond's counterfeited issue of *The Spectator* (III.75).

Phillips offers an extended analysis of the novel's linguistic strategy, arguing, "What the novelist may have tried for, it seems to me, was a turn of phrase sufficiently different from normal Victorian idiom to be assumed [ . . . ] to be authentically of Queen Anne's time" (152).

Analyzing a number of grammatical categories, including punctuation, lexicon, idiom, and syntax, Phillips provides a thorough account of the novel's imitative eighteenth-century language, giving particular emphasis to Thackeray's syntax: "A prominent feature of both the syntax and the style of *Esmond* is the use of long sentences with such Latinate devices as continuative relatives to join what the novels set in Thackeray's own period would have been written as separate sentences" (156). One example of the discursive syntax that Thackeray intended his readers to associate with his setting occurs as Henry describes the appearance of his mentor, Father Holt, and a young man he later learns is the Pretender:

But in the year 1695, when that confpiracy of Sir John Fenwick, Colonel Lowick, and others, was fet on foot, for waylaying King William as he came from Hampton Court to London, and a fecret plot was formed, in which a vaft number of the nobility and people of honor were engaged, Father Holt appeared at Castlewood, and brought a young friend with him, a gentleman whom 'twas eafy to fee that both my Lord and the Father treated with uncommon deference. (I.253-54)

As Phillips demonstrates, these sentences are integral to Thackeray's effort to convey the spirit of the age through grammar; their lengthiness "lends a certain dignified formality" to the subject matter while simultaneously undercutting this with a syntactic structure which is "often loose, florid, and tending to asymmetries, and this was true, also, of much of the prose of Queen Anne's day. It was left to the grammarians of the later half of the eighteenth century to do the pruning

and tidying up” (157-58). In his attempt to capture the sense of difference between his own society and that of his novel, Thackeray avoids contemporary prose style, seeking instead the flavor of the eighteenth-century style he studied for the *English Humourists*.

It is tempting to see Thackeray’s adoption of eighteenth-century prose style in *Esmond* as chiefly naturalistic; his narrator is, after all, a gentleman born in the 1670s, and any memoir might be expected to include some “realistic” flourishes of language. In his introduction to a 1970 edition of the novel, John Sutherland notes the complicated linguistic status of historical fiction:

This ‘then’ rather than ‘now’ produces technical disruptions. Alienation by at least one generation tends to violate tacit contracts and relationships between what, for the sake of the reading illusion, are usually considered time-space cohabitants, the narrator, the reader, and the fictional personage. The connecting medium, language, feels the strain the most. The historical novel’s idiom, especially in dialogue, becomes notoriously false, fabricating ‘tushery’ or ‘gadzookery’ in its attempt to find the equivalence between the modern and the past modes of language. (13-14)

For Sutherland, Thackeray’s use of an eighteenth-century idiom in *Esmond* is part of the novel’s realist strategy, an effort to present a naturalistic or “appropriate” mode of language—similar to the use of dialect in Eliot or Hardy’s fiction. Archaic style in *Esmond* and similar historical novels, however, extends this limited representational function to join other archaisms (including bibliographic forms, voice, character, and plot structure) in creating a textual trope—rather than a naturalistic reflection—for the *milieux* that provides the novel’s subject matter.

In some ways, Thackeray's concept of archaism as a figure for the historical referent seems to recall the strategy of historiographic metafiction, which subverts the representational assumptions of the nineteenth-century realist historical novel but nevertheless, according to Hutcheon, "posits a relation of reference (however problematic) to the historical world" (*Poetics* 141). For Hutcheon, historiographic metafiction functions as socio-political critique insofar as it suspends the competing claims of art and actuality in paradoxical stasis: "The autonomy of art is carefully maintained: metafictional self-reflexivity even underlines it. But through seemingly introverted intertextuality, another dimension is added by the use of the ironic inversions of parody: art's critical relation to the 'world' of discourse—and through that to society and politics" (*Poetics* 140). The ironic quotation marks around "world," of course, signal the limitations of the form's referential capabilities. As Hutcheon envisions it, the postmodern historical imagination is characterized by an acknowledgment that the past can only be approached through text, and as such is both unknowable and unrepresentable as Scott or Tolstoy would have understood those terms: "there is [in the postmodern historical moment] a loss of faith in our ability to (unproblematically) *know* [external] reality, and therefore to be able to represent it in language" (*Poetics* 119).

Thus while Hutcheon writes of historiographic metafiction's capacity for representing the historical past, the genre seems defined more by its epistemological concerns and its critique of historical discourses than by its mimetic power. Conversely, Thackeray (along with some other historical novelists) seems to assert archaism's potential in fulfilling the conventional historical novel's representational imperatives. Unlike historiographic metafiction, *Esmond* uses archaism not merely to problematize historical mimesis or foreground the discursive nature of the

historical record, but to establish the characteristics of historical “reality” in a manner similar to other nineteenth-century historical novels.

However, one of the chief shortcomings of Lukács’s *The Historical Novel* and other classic studies of historical fiction has been a general lack of attention to its textual self-awareness. Most theorists focus on historical fiction’s structural features, especially characters and plot structure, such as when Lukács praises those novels which give dialectical form to historical crises and whose characters embody social types (19-88). Yet, as *Esmond* makes clear, linguistic and bibliographic experimentation has long formed an essential element in the fictive construction of social-historical *milieux*. As in romance, what Frye calls “synthetic languages” help historical novelists establish the vital sense of difference between the reader’s time and that of the novel; archaic style has cognates not only in E.R. Eddison’s *The Worm Ouroborous* (1922), but in Orwell’s *newspeak* and the futuristic slang of Anthony Burgess’s *A Clockwork Orange* (1962). But no matter what impulse drives the stylistic endeavors of an author of historical fiction, the result is that the tactile medium of printed language becomes another area that can further the reader or novelist’s conception of the past. Examples abound of stylistic experiments developed to characterize historical settings, from Scott’s pseudo-medieval diction in *Ivanhoe*,<sup>53</sup> to the neo-Gothic impressionism of Ford Madox Ford’s Tudor-era *The Fifth Queen* trilogy and the mythic structures of Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!*<sup>54</sup> As a form of textual literalism, archaism captures the alterity of historical experience while implying a social-historical reality that is largely lived through and mediated by texts. In this way, the nineteenth-

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<sup>53</sup> Mentioned in the context of romance by Northrop Frye in *The Secular Scripture* (110).

<sup>54</sup> Yet another cognate occurs when poets of secondary epics adopt a “primitive” style, such as Longfellow’s use of Finnish folk poetry in *Song of Hiawatha* or Wagner’s efforts to maintain a “pure” Germanic vocabulary in the *libretti* for his *Ring* cycle.



century historical novels discussed here prefigure the hyper-reality of twentieth-century novels by Barth, Pynchon, and Vollmann.

### Archaic Characters and Plots

*Esmond*'s use of an eighteenth-century idiom is most apparent in the novel's bibliographic elements and its *Spectator*-influenced prose style, strategies that exemplify Thackeray's attempt to represent Queen Anne's England by mimicking its literary forms. However, like other historical novels *Esmond* also imitates structural elements associated with a historical literary idiom, though these are more alloyed with the aesthetic norms of Thackeray's own time. Two structural elements in particular prove adaptable to archaism: character and plot structure. Though the psychological depths of character and the complex interweaving of plot found in *Esmond* seem more like features of nineteenth-century realism than of real eighteenth-century novels, Thackeray does use some eighteenth-century models for character and plot, an approach which Barth and Golding in the twentieth century apply much more comprehensively.

The archaic characters of novels such as *Esmond* or *Alice-for-Short* derive from their literary models, a strategy that modifies the classical historical novel's use of characters as social types. For most critics, the best characters in historical novels are social-historical "types" whose traits fuse what James Phelan calls the mimetic and thematic dimensions of character (*Reading People, Reading Plots* (1-13)).<sup>55</sup> This is a feature not only of historical novels, but of most classic realist fiction as well. Chichikov, the protagonist of Nikolai Gogol's *Dead Souls*, is not simply a scheming, acquisitive bachelor, but a representative of the nineteenth-century Russian petite-bourgeoisie. Referring to *Waverley*, *Ivanhoe*, and other protagonists in Scott's

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<sup>55</sup> According to Phelan, "the distinction between the mimetic and thematic components of character is a distinction between characters as individuals and characters as representative entities" (*Reading People* 13).

*oeuvre*, Lukács argues that characters in the classical historical novel embody the opposing sides of a social or national crisis: “as central figures of the novel . . . [it] is their task to bring the extremes whose struggle fills the novel, whose clash expresses artistically a great crisis in society, into contact with one another” (36). Beyond their mimetic function as believable individuals, characters in historical fiction carry the weight of ethnographic representation. Lukács envisioned Scott’s fictitious characters both allegorically, to the extent that they exemplify the conflict and eventual synthesis between conflicting ideas and classes, and realistically, insofar as they illustrate the materialist principle that individuals’ personalities and values derive from their socio-economic circumstances. Shaw agrees that characters in historical fiction usually are valued in proportion to their success in typifying sociological norms, noting, “because historical novelists depict ages significantly different from their own and may aspire to represent the workings of historical process itself, they are faced with the task of creating characters who represent social groups and historical trends,” and adding, “historical fiction often employs characters to represent salient aspects of a historical milieu. In the greatest historical fiction, characters and narrative sequences elucidate historical process” (30; 49). My own claim is that the representative quality of archaic characters derives from literary conventions rather than historiography or social science. Thus many of the characters in Scott’s *Ivanhoe* derive from period literature rather than from historiography; they are imitations of imitations that Scott nevertheless believes to be historically “true.”

*Esmond*’s gallery of eighteenth-century types originated in Thackeray’s researches into eighteenth-century culture. Many of Thackeray’s fictional characters (as opposed to the novel’s numerous historical characters) draw upon the conventions of period drama and upon the social clichés of Hogarth’s art. Harden notes that Thackeray’s historicist interpretation of the latter’s

paintings was present in his lectures before the novel's composition: "In the *English Humourists* Thackeray also, of course, passionately and elaborately responds to the visual world of Hogarth, whose painting evoke from him the remarkable comment that 'these admirable works [ . . . ] give us the most complete and truthful picture of the manners, and even the thoughts, of the past century'" (38). Taken from Hogarth's depictions of drawing-room decadence, lace-bedecked gentlemen and ladies whose values end at vanity and pleasure populate the world of *Esmond*. Beatrix, for instance, is characterized by her lack of moral substance and ambitious pursuit of the material trappings of a fading Stuart England, a shortcoming that leads her to continental exile as (one of) the Pretender's mistress(es). An even more extreme embodiment of Stuart-era decadence is the novel's villain, a rakish nobleman named Lord Mohun,<sup>56</sup> a shockingly immoral seducer of ladies and murderer-by-duel whom Henry introduces as "a perfon of a handfome prence, with the *bel air*, and a bright, daring, warlike aspect, which according to the chronicle of thofe days, had already achieved for him the conquest of feveral beauties and toaft's" (I.265). Thus Beatrix, Mohun, Father Holt, and even Henry<sup>57</sup> himself derive from popular character types in the literature and art of the preceding century. Thackeray seems to believe that because such character types populate the historical literature, they reflect current social roles. As such, imitating character conventions allows Thackeray to benefit from period efforts to represent the manners and customs of eighteenth-century England. He imitates an imitation of eighteenth-century life. In *Esmond* and other "archaicist" historical novels, conventional characters reflect not only the requisite typicality of classical historical fiction, but evoke a sense of the

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<sup>56</sup> Thackeray bases this character upon an historical personage, Charles, Fourth Lord Mohun, but he embellishes the historical man with the trappings of the conventional, debauched nobleman. For a comprehensive comparison of the fictitious and real Mohuns, see Robert Stanley Forsythe's *A Noble Rake* (1928).

<sup>57</sup> In her dissertation, "Thackeray's Eighteenth Century Heritage: A Study of *Henry Esmond*," Marilyn Naufftus Karlson argues that Henry Esmond is modeled upon the historical Addison, however.

“constructed-ness” of fictional characters, a metafictional quality which suggests by analogy the artificiality of social-historical roles.

Another type of structural archaism in historical fiction entails simulating the plot conventions of period literature. Like other forms of archaism, plot structure can convey a sense of “oldness” and mark the fiction-making ideologies of the historical world it attempts to represent. This sense of emplotment is very different from that Lukács attributes to the classical form of the genre. According to him, the plots of classical historical novels are shaped by two sources: first, the historical record, and secondly, a dialectical teleology according to which a central character synthesizes the contradictions of his or her society as that individual’s adventures coincide with recorded public events.<sup>58</sup> Due to its frequent disregard of the first of these sources and its reliance upon plot structures self-consciously derived from literary convention, archaic plots seem antithetical to both the historical record and realist standards of composition. However, they are not always antithetical to the historical novel’s representation of the past.

Employing antiquated plot structures in historical fiction typically points to one of two diametrically-opposed modes of thought, the first of which is a universalizing impulse, and the second a historicizing impulse. The first uses self-consciously literary plots to make history seem universal, as with *Absalom, Absalom!*, in which Faulkner’s use of biblical matter to structure his story makes his account of the rise and fall of Thomas Sutpen a story of mythic rather than historical proportions. Another example is Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, in which Okonkwo and his village fall under the jurisdiction of the British Empire according to

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<sup>58</sup> “This close interaction, this deep unity between the historical representatives of a popular movement and the movement itself is heightened compositionally in Scott by the intensification and dramatic compression of events. Here again the classical form of narrative must be shielded from modern prejudices” (*The Historical Novel* 40).

Sophoclean plot-lines.<sup>59</sup> By using tragic conventions, Achebe universalizes the fate of the Ibo tribes rather than dwelling on the particulars of their conquest, making his appeal to the sympathies of a primarily Western audience by building to the familiar tragic outcome of *catharsis*.

In a much different manner, archaic plots use imitation to reveal their origin within the culture of a particular historical milieu. Instead of making universal claims for tragedy or myth by applying related structures to novel historical situations, authors novels such as *A Maggot* or *The Sot-Weed Factor* respectively match Defoe's confessional narrative or Fielding's comic romance form to their historical origins to make them less natural or universal, and more historically specific. In *Henry Esmond*, Thackeray readily adopts eighteenth-century voice, style, and bibliographic elements, but the plot, notable for its complicated interweaving of subplots, is largely a modified typical Victorian narrative structure. Thackeray's adoption of eighteenth-century structural conventions is visible primarily in his use of the *bildungsroman* form to shape the novel's outlook and outcome. While the *bildungsroman* was for Victorian readers hardly an antiquated genre, Henry's story of his progress from orphan of uncertain parentage to first discovery, then rejection of his patrimony and ultimately his emigration to Virginia evokes the narrative patterns of novels including *Tom Jones* and *Moll Flanders*. For Thackeray, the *bildungsroman*, though it remained vital in nineteenth-century fiction, reflected the spirit of the eighteenth century in much the same way as the novel's antique typeface and syntax do. While Lukács, following the formula he uses to analyze Scott's fiction, might interpret Henry's personal development as dramatizing the coalescence of Whig ideology in

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<sup>59</sup> For more on Achebe's use of Sophoclean tragedy in this novel, see Alastair Niven's "Chinua Achebe and the Possibility of Modern Tragedy" (1990), Neil ten Kortenaar's "Beyond Authenticity and Civilization" (1995), and Richard Begam's "Achebe's Sense of an Ending: History and Tragedy in *Things Fall Apart*" (1997).

reaction to Jacobitism and High Church ideals, I would argue that, for Thackeray, Henry's growth embodies a particularly eighteenth-century narrative, one that shaped much of the fiction of that century. Thus the *bildungsroman* structure appears in *Esmond* a tool for representing the development of a Whig ideology during the early eighteenth century.

### Conclusion

Thackeray's *Henry Esmond*, De Morgan's *Alice-for-Short*, and—to a lesser extent—Scott's *Ivanhoe* mimic the *literary conventions* of a specific historical period as a mimetic strategy for representing the nature of social experience in that period. As a result, archaism signifies an alternative to that model of historical fiction Lukács calls the classical historical novel. The archaist historical novel differs from the classical one due to its linguistic self-consciousness and meta-textuality, resulting in at least two distinct qualities. First, historical novels using archaism narrate from within the *milieux* that form their subjects. Most classical historical novels narrate from the perspective of modernity (the author's own time), employing the objective point-of-view common to both historians and realist novelists to depict historical populations, institutions, and events. Novelists such as de Morgan, on the other hand, depict a historical society by using its own aesthetic forms. In *Alice-for-Short*, for example, De Morgan foregoes the technical innovations of modernist contemporaries such as Conrad to portray mid-Victorian England in a strongly Dickensian manner, through which he hopes to capture the spirit of that age, accurately presenting its aesthetic flair and cultural logic while suggesting the material and ideological structures which underlay it.

Secondly, archaism uses the materiality of textual conventions to represent the materiality of the past, distancing or estranging the basic structures of fiction, such as style, characterization, narrative point of view, and plot structure and in turn estranging historical

individuals, institutions, and ideologies. While many authors avail themselves of the historical associations attached to certain textual and linguistic conventions to add period flavor to their fiction, the historical novel using archaism achieves a desirable alienation of its historical subject matter, in keeping with Herbert Butterfield's minimal injunction that historical fiction focus on those elements of human life specific to particular historical *milieus*, treating "the past as past." In this way, the historical novelist's re-creation of an historical literary idiom goes beyond realism to offer metafiction as a kind of mimesis for a historicity largely lived through and mediated by texts.

### Chapter Three

#### Historicism in Hyper-Reality, or Archaism in the post-1960s Historical Novel

While archaism has been used in English literature at least since Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, and in historical fiction since the eighteenth century, it should be stressed that the practice always responds to a particular set of aesthetic assumptions obtaining at the time and place of its creation. Chatterton's Bristol poems, for instance, were fashioned in reference to the then-current rage for antiquarian manuscripts, while Morris's later romances and the Kelmscott books in which he presented them formed a cogent aesthetic reaction against both the prevailing naturalist novel and the increasingly mechanical methods and utilitarian formats of the late nineteenth-century print industry. This chapter expands on the previous discussions of archaism's formal properties in an effort to address its function in a particular historical situation, investigating how and why archaism came to proliferate in late twentieth-century historical fiction. I have noted before that historical fiction enjoyed an international resurgence throughout the second half of the twentieth century, a phenomenon seen in the critical and commercial success of John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1970), Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (1983), Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), and A.S. Byatt's *Possession* (1990), among others. By most accounts, this renewed popularity has been attributed to two factors: the preoccupation with textual representation that forms a central tenet of postmodernism, and the historical novel's potential for addressing the origins of contemporary social and political predicaments. While the canon of nineteenth-century realist historical fiction features localized archaism in only a few novels (most notably *Ivanhoe*) and global archaism in just one (*Henry Esmond*), even the short list above is scattered with examples of works that offer an extended imitation of the literary



idioms of a historical period. Often, late twentieth-century archaism has been viewed only under the rubric of pastiche in the historical novel. However, the specific character of its potential for writing about the past—observed in the previous chapters—requires a more careful look at archaism’s function in late twentieth-century fiction.

Because authors typically iterate antiquated textual conventions to convey “pastness,” archaism lies at the center of the debate over history and historical fiction in postmodern culture. Linda Hutcheon, for instance, argues that parody, her term for a variety of “seemingly introverted formalism[s],” typifies a broader postmodern cultural impulse to re-negotiate the “relation of the aesthetic to a world of significance external to itself” and to re-imagine historicity by liberating reading subjects from the totalizing constraints of an “official” or even a “real” History (*A Poetics of Postmodernism* 22). Fredric Jameson, meanwhile, sees the proliferation of pastiche and other forms of aesthetic imitation in postmodern culture as symptomatic of the dissociation from social-historical experience that occurs under late capitalism (*Postmodernism* 16-25). While Hutcheon applauds and Jameson generally laments aesthetic postmodernism, they agree that textual imitation in the historical novel undermines the historicist principles obtaining in the genre as practiced by Scott, Manzoni, and Tolstoy.

Nevertheless, the widespread use of archaism or other self-reflexive modes in late twentieth-century historical fiction should not be characterized monolithically as an alienation of historical fiction from historicist values. Few novels reject outright the genre’s conventional social-political concerns, and even fewer could be accused of naively reverting to the vision of reality presumed to underlie the genre’s classical form. More often, the novels occupy a conflicted middle ground between nostalgia for this historicism and a postmodernist sensibility that contests the idea of a definable, knowable historical past. Over the past dozen years, critical

studies including Amy J. Elias's *Sublime Desire* and David W. Price's *History Made, History Imagined* have begun to map this middle ground—which corresponds roughly to the expanse between Hutcheon and Jameson's positions—by investigating the relationship between postmodern historical novels and a historical imaginary that insists on the social-political relevance of confronting, remembering, or understanding the past. To demonstrate the contradictory impulses of this new historical imagination, Elias analyzes the reemergence of romance in post-1960s historical fiction, while Price describes a mode of representation he terms “poietic history.” My significantly less extensive argument in this chapter and the next contributes to this discussion insofar as I also examine the social-ethical concerns of postmodern historical fiction. This chapter, however, approaches this broader conversation by suggesting that rather than merely serving as metafictional technique, archaic literalism often appears to reinscribe the historicist values of classical historical fiction.

The late twentieth-century re-invention of archaism as a potentially historicist literary form has an analogy in contemporaneous attempts to address the troubled relation between postmodern representational strategies and referential “reality.” To this end, philosopher Paul Ricoeur theorizes the text as a model for historical experience, while historian Hayden White contends that tropology provides the best method for revealing history's innate literary character.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, literalist textual strategies, including archaism, often appear to sustain, rather than subvert, the inherent historicism of conventional historical fiction. Because the framework of the historical novel makes the relationship between text and context clear, novels such as John Fowles's *A Maggot* (1985) not only de-naturalize (to use Hutcheon's term) the

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<sup>60</sup> See especially Ricoeur's *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981, and White's *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1978.

classical forms of historical writing; they also discipline the language play common in postmodernist fiction, using the constraints of the historical novel to tie language to its historical origins. I contend that for some of these historical novelists, archaism brought self-reflexive postmodern literary practice into some measure of accord (however qualified or provisional) with historicism, a synthesis that emphasizes the textual nature of historical space and re-imagines the historical novel genre through what Jameson calls the “new spatial logic of the simulacrum.”

This chapter examines archaism’s potential for recuperating the socio-ethical project of historicism while retaining its fidelity to a cultural horizon dominated by proliferating, devalued aesthetic simulations of the past. I will first examine the historicist function of the genre’s classical form and the response this has occasioned in postmodern critical and literary practice. Then, I elaborate upon the postmodern conviction of the death of classical historical fiction by discussing what amounts to its post-mortem: Winterson’s *The Passion* (1987), a romance that subverts the forms of the classical historical novel in order to applaud the demise of the socio-political project it embodies. The last major section of the chapter analyzes a massively literalist, archaic text that follows the logic of simulacra toward what one might describe as its neo-materialist, neo-historicist potential: the most recent installment of William T. Vollmann’s *Seven Dreams* sequence, *Argall* (2001). My analysis of *Argall* sets the stage for the dissertation’s next and final chapter, which charts the breadth of responses to history that archaism in postmodern historical fiction makes possible.

### **Historicism and the Classical Historical Novel**

The historical novel genre has proven to be an important site in the debate over postmodern culture and ideology, particularly insofar as newer forms of the genre define

themselves with respect to the classic historical fiction of Scott, Manzoni, and Tolstoy. Often, the fractious debate over postmodern historical fiction and the various perspectives upon historical experience envisioned by its authors took the form of discussions about the continued relevance of Scott's tradition. With so many postmodern historical novels engaged in either reviving or burying the forms and the social-political insights of the classical historical novel and the realist historicism<sup>61</sup> it articulates, a discussion of these seems a pre-requisite to any extended commentary on postmodern historical fiction. For many late twentieth-century critics and novelists, texts such as *Waverley* or *I Promessi Sposi* became emblematic of an earlier century's analogous effort to render the social-historical past intelligible, a generic precedent that alternately provides a foil and an ideal for newer forms of historical fiction.

As happens rarely in literary criticism, the major theorists of what Lukács calls the classical historical novel are in general agreement about the genre's functional value, considering such fiction worthwhile only to the extent that it embodies historicist principles. For most of

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<sup>61</sup> The "old" historicism, often referenced in discussions of the intellectual history of the nineteenth century, is both a belief in historical experience as the key dimension of human life and an inquiry into how historical circumstances—material *and* ideal—shape the fates of individuals and societies. According to Hayden White, the nineteenth century represented a "golden age" of historicist inquiry, when the human sciences, from art to philosophy, combined to seek an understanding of the ways that societies and the individuals within them change over time.

Harry Shaw contends that what he calls "the historicist view of the past" depends upon two interrelated modes of thought: "the past as past" and "the present as history." The former can be thought of an essentially realist, sociological conception of historicity, an idea that originated in the "recognition that societies are interrelated systems which change through time and that individuals are profoundly affected by their places within those systems" (25). According to Shaw, the idea of "the past as past" allowed for a "grasp of social-historical milieu" that distinguishes nineteenth-century fiction and historiography (25).

"The present as history," meanwhile, involves extending the insights garnered from studying the past towards consideration of the social-historical present. White argues that through such inquiry, nineteenth-century historicists—including representative philosophers, historians, and novelists from Hegel and de Tocqueville to Balzac—sought to propagate a historical consciousness that would ultimately lead to social progress:

They did not see the historian as prescribing a specific ethical system valid for all times and places, but they did see him as charged with the special task of inducing in men an awareness that their present condition was always in part a product of specifically human choices, which could therefore be changed or altered by further human action in precisely that degree. History thus sensitized men to the *dynamic* elements in every achieved present, taught the inevitability of change, and thereby contributed to the release of that present to the past without ire or resentment. (*Tropics of Discourse* 49)

them, the genre's high-water mark occurred in the nineteenth-century, developing as an important aesthetic counterpart to what Hayden White refers to in *Metahistory* as "history's golden age," a century in which Europe's greatest historians and philosophers of history—from Hegel to Croce—developed a new conception of the past as a field of knowledge relevant to contemporary social experience, a project White calls historicism (*ix*). As a result, most judgments about the value of historical fiction derive from the precepts of historicism, a perspective shared to varying degrees by such otherwise dissimilar theorists as Georg Lukács, Herbert Butterfield, and Avrom Fleishman, all of them, as Harry Shaw argues, "united in believing historical fiction to be fundamentally a mode of knowledge" (*Forms of Historical Fiction* 28). For them, "valid" historical fiction advances a consciousness of how historical patterns influence the fate of societies and individuals, a quality best exemplified by the realist historical novel of Scott and his successors.

As a result of Lukács's landmark study, the identification between nineteenth-century realist historical fiction and nineteenth-century realist novels in general continues to dominate most theories of historical fiction written before the latter half of the twentieth century. For Lukács, Scott's fiction embodies a nascent materialist realism, an ideological innovation that supersedes arbitrary generic boundaries and results in a closer kinship between Balzac and Scott (two realists) than between *The Pioneers* and *Salammbô* (two historical novels).<sup>62</sup> Even Shaw, though he vehemently denies historicism a role in determining the formal makeup of historical fiction, admits the desirability of interpreting novels by its light.<sup>63</sup> Tellingly, his own study

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<sup>62</sup> Similarly, White identifies Balzac, though a novelist, as one of three representative "exponents of realistic historicism," along with philosopher Hegel and historiographer Tocqueville (*Tropics of Discourse* 49).

<sup>63</sup> On the historicist view of historical fiction: "Such a view has its attractions. Who would want to deny that the best historical fiction can add to the richness of our sense of history, or that the structuring of history in great historical fiction may have cognitive value?" (*Forms* 28).

becomes in its later chapters an analysis of history's role within the novels of Scott and his successors, an effort laden with an implicit endorsement of historicist values.<sup>64</sup> For most critics, formal analysis ultimately gives way to ideological valuation, which most often means holding historical novels to the standards of realist historicism. Even in a literary culture which has long since rejected the constraints of realism, this critical tradition continues to shape conceptions of historical fiction.

Because historicism provides the basis for most critical value judgments about the historical novel and is therefore central to the discussion of value later in this chapter, understanding the full range of its implications regarding the meaning and utility of the genre requires a more focused investigation of historicism's most familiar voices, beginning with Fleishman, whose *The English Historical Novel* represents, in Shaw's words, "historicism at its most powerful and most dignified" (25). Fleishman's study begins with an effort to define historical fiction, and his first gesture in that direction is grounded in formalist thought and limited to describing the basic formal criteria for such novels. For Fleishman, the first aim of historical fiction is to convey a sense of the "past as past," a sense that all past *milieux* are different from the those of the novelist or reader, a difference upon which historical novels are obliged to insist. For this reason, Fleishman argues for a distinction between "novels of the recent past" and true historical fiction, the events of which must have occurred at least two generations before the time of the novelist, so that he or she cannot approach them through an

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<sup>64</sup> Shaw's scheme for history's role in the standard historical novel allows three basic, overlapping functions: (1) History as Pastoral, in which a discussion of the past provides a sort of alias for contemporary preoccupations; (2) History as Drama, in which the events and figures of the past provide the necessary ingredients for an interesting plot; and (3) History as Subject, in which the past is treated on its own terms and from a critical distance as "the past."

appeal to personal experience (in this, he chooses the time frame indicated by the subtitle to *Waverley*: “’tis sixty years hence”). Furthermore, Fleishman insists that this ontologically-distinct past be formally grounded in the “real,” a condition he assures by requiring the presence of at least one actual historical figure as a character (such as Richard Couer de Lion in *Ivanhoe*). While these strictures appear elementary at first glance, the logic behind them is crucial: the historical novelist’s first obligation is to foreground the distinct difference between a social-historical world and the experience of the contemporary reader. As Fleishman argues, the “historical novelist provokes or conveys, by imaginative sympathy, the sentiment *de l’existence*, the feeling of how it was to be alive in another age” (4).

Fleishman’s efforts to define the historical novel extend well past the discovery of such fiction’s common attributes; he in fact defines the “authentic” historical novel as one crafted to illustrate the universal aspects of historicism. In so doing, he arrives at a romantic conception of the historical novelist who transcends the limitations of a subjective historical consciousness, grasping “the constraints of human experience in history” in their totality. In turn, the novelist relays this social-historical totality via a literary work that functions to “lift the contemplation of the past above both the present and the past, to see it in its universal character, freed of the urgency of historical engagement” (14). This vision of the historical novel effects a questionable alliance of “great tradition” ideology and classical poetics; borrowing Aristotle’s vocabulary, Fleishman places the historical novel among the highest forms of imaginative literature: “The historical novel may be considered a kind of poetry—as permitted by Aristotle [ . . . ]. It engages the universal and may therefore make the philosophic claims of poetry—if not the claim of higher dignity than history, in our unclassical times” (8).

Rescuing Fleishman from the dustbin of mid-century theory that addresses the relationship between literature and “the human condition” is his paradoxical conception of how novels such as Scott’s stimulate a sophisticated historical consciousness. If the historical novel aims for universal applicability, it does so by addressing a “specific past situation in all its concreteness, and often with more domestic detail than a tragic or epic poet would employ” (8). To Fleishman, the historical novel’s success depends upon a balance between its contemplation of the “universal” and its focus on social-historical particularity, or “the rich factuality of history” (8). While Fleishman’s dated terminology—especially his insistence upon “universalism” as the central criterion of value—has undercut the lasting influence of the book’s arguments, *The English Historical Novel* remains an important document of the historicist response to the historical novel. Though most readers would only too readily agree with Shaw’s objections to the study,<sup>65</sup> one finds it difficult to argue with Fleishman’s belief that “The ultimate subject of the historical novel is, then, man in history, or human life conceived as historical life” (11).

The other monument of the historicist theory of historical fiction, and one that lies surprisingly close to Fleishman’s in many of its particulars and broader claims, is Lukács’s *The Historical Novel*. The chief differences are worth outlining. Whereas Fleishman begins from the formalist perspective, laying out a number of criteria for a novel to be considered historical, Lukács approaches historical fiction from a quite different direction; for him, the genre is fundamentally connected to class conflict and dialectical teleology. If Scott’s *Waverley*

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<sup>65</sup> According to Shaw, “Fleishman’s discussion quickly slides from defining historical fiction to finding a criterion for ‘authentic’ historical fiction, a separate issue for which his maximal kind of definition is entirely inappropriate” (26).



represents the stirring of a new genre, its technical innovations are important only insofar as they reflect a development in nineteenth-century Europe's ideological reimagining of the past. For Lukács, the events of the French Revolution and the sweeping, real-life pageantry and violence of the Napoleonic Wars which followed provide a necessary historical foundation for Scott's fiction: "Hence the concrete possibilities for men to comprehend their own existence as something historically conditioned, for them to see in history something which deeply affects their daily lives and immediately concerns them" (24). Interestingly, Lukács's own Marxist materialism derives a great deal of its vigor from the reinforcement of it he finds in his analysis of the Waverley novels.

In Lukács's reading, Scott's novels articulate an early version of the historicist imagination which flowered in the achievements of later nineteenth-century novelists, historiographers, and philosophers of history, of whom Marx was central. Scott's classical historical novel becomes a model by which a reader can achieve the proper materialist conception of history; as a result, Lukács's study demonstrates how literature always reflects its ideological origins while simultaneously validating Scott's aesthetic practice.<sup>66</sup> For Lukács, Scott's greatness derives from his ability to give literary shape (in the form of plot, character, and picturesque detail) to historicist principles. Thus the central achievement of the classical historical novel lies in its interweaving of the fates of societies and individuals, and it is through a portrayal of the relationship between literary character and historical circumstance that "Scott makes history live" by representing historical progress, "the driving force and material basis of

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<sup>66</sup> As Fredric Jameson observes in the first paragraph of his introduction to the text's 1983 translation, "*The Historical Novel* is perhaps the single most monumental realization of the varied program and promises of a Marxist and a dialectical literary criticism [ . . . ] Lukács's book may stand as a calm refutation of the often repeated misconception that a Marxist historicism [ . . . ] can ultimately have no theory of value in the area of culture" (1).

which is the living contradiction between conflicting historical forces, the antagonisms of classes and nations” (53).

From this perspective, the classical historical novel illustrates the historicist foundations of Marxist dialectic, offering a poetic counterpart to materialist historiography and class analysis. Thus the classical historical novel is defined by the vision of reality that underlies its forms. This accounts for Lukács’s strengths and for his weaknesses as a critic of historical fiction. In his argument, the classical historical novel contested the reactionary romanticism of the day, signaling the emergence of realist fiction in the later nineteenth century. Hence the best realist fiction after Scott—in his most frequent example, that of Balzac—elaborates on the vision of reality pioneered in the classical historical novel. For both aesthetic and historical reasons, then, Scott represents the most significant literary practitioner of realist historicism.<sup>67</sup> Lukács’s argument has shaped the common belief among historicist theorists that historical novels should be evaluated on the basis of their implicit philosophies of history. While their perspectives begin from very different directions, Lukács and Fleishman are sometimes difficult to tell apart,<sup>68</sup> especially when discussing the poetic success of the “greatest” historical novels, which each of them compares to classical epic (*Historical Novel* 35).

Ultimately, Lukács and Fleishman agree that the best historical fiction emphasizes what Shaw terms the “present as history.” This means that a reader leaves “authentic” historical novels with a conviction that he or she also lives within a “historical period,” one as subject to historical constraints as the milieu portrayed within the book. This too comes from the

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<sup>67</sup> It should be noted that Lukács’s monolithic idea of the realism of Scott’s oeuvre is much qualified by studies of the Romance elements of his novels by critics such as Northrop Frye (*The Secular Scripture* 110), Amy J. Elias (*Sublime Desire* 10-16) and Kenneth Sroka (“The Function of Romance in *Ivanhoe*”), a topic I discuss in Chapter Two.

<sup>68</sup> This is perhaps due to Lukács’s influence on Fleishman’s book, one which Fleishman readily admits (11).

nineteenth-century tradition of realist historicism, which also aimed, as White observes in “The Burden of History,” to “force upon [men] an awareness of how the past could be used to effect an ethically responsible transition from present to future” (49). Lukács implies that historical novels comprise a socially progressive art-form insofar as they project historical crises by the light of materialist dialectic, but he explicitly rejects overt political partisanship, arguing that the Waverley novels’ success depends upon Scott’s objective, scientific portrayal of historical societies (33). Fleishman similarly stresses the historical novel’s imperative of bringing its readers to a heightened awareness of historical experience. Though curiously attributing a “sensitized” consciousness primarily to the *author* of historical fiction, he contends that the novelist, “In ranging back into history [ . . . ] discovers not merely his own origins but his historicity, his existence as an historical being” (15). Perhaps Fleishman’s most important contribution to historical novel criticism is his description of a particular effect upon its readers, one which underlies his observation that “What makes a historical novel historical is the active presence of a concept of history as a shaping force—acting not only upon the characters in the novel but on the author and readers outside it” (15).

For both theorists, the historical novel represents the characteristic aesthetic form of the historicist imagination. Fleishman sees the English historical novel as forming a continuing tradition that began with the Waverley novels and evolved throughout the next century and a half by incorporating later realist and modernist technical innovations in service to a “great tradition” of historicist values, concluding, “This, then, is the form of historical fiction: to interpret the experience of individual men—both actual or imaginary—in such a way as to make their lives not only felt by the reader as he would feel his own existence were he to have lived in the past, but understood as only someone who had seen that life as a completed whole could understand it”

(12-13). Lukács, on the other hand, envisioned the classic form of the historical novel as developing out of the ideological matrix of the early nineteenth century, providing a sort of cultural technology that flowered briefly with the works of Scott and his immediate successors before decaying along with other forms of bourgeois culture after the failed revolutions of 1848 (171-250). While his materialist dialectic proves far more successful than Fleishman's formalism, Lukács similarly asserts the potential of historical fiction to re-awaken the "social and human motives which led men to think, feel and act just as they did in historical reality" (42).

For Lukács, the classical historical novel signaled an ideological development that came out of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars; their propaganda and continental campaigns brought "an extraordinary broadening of horizons" to what was in effect a newly-minted citizenry (24). Contrasting the experience of the modern mass army with that of the "absolutist" armies of the eighteenth century, he writes,

What previously was experienced only by isolated and mostly by adventurous-minded individuals, namely an acquaintance with Europe or at least certain parts of it, becomes in this period the mass experience of hundreds of thousands, of millions.

Hence the concrete possibilities for men to comprehend their own existence as something historically conditioned, for them to see in history something which deeply affects their daily lives and immediately concerns them. (24)

This newfound sense of historical destiny, of the fates of individuals and nations across time, resulted in a "new concept of progress," stimulating what Lukács calls the "last great intellectual and artistic period of bourgeois humanism" (29). This ideological development found

expression in new cultural works: namely, Hegel's philosophy and Scott's classical historical novel.

Assuming that Lukács's analysis of the relation between the classical historical novel and its ideological underpinning remains valid, one might trace changing conceptions of the historical past by charting innovations in historical fiction (providing one subscribes, in however limited a fashion, to the idea of a basic generic continuity). Consequently, the broad critical and popular revitalization of historical fiction in the late twentieth century seems to indicate an ideological shift in attitudes toward the past roughly analogous to that which occurred in Europe between the French Revolution and the end of the Napoleonic Wars. The historical novel *then* represented an attempt to cognitively map the foundations of the nineteenth-century socio-political present. According to this dialectical logic—which remains forceful, a fact illustrated by the popularity of Fredric Jameson's cultural analysis—the postmodern fascination with the historical past, and its expression in various forms of historical fiction, represents a similar attempt to cognitively map the social-historical foundations of present. Developments in the historical novel reflect new conceptions of historicity. While the broad trends of the postmodern historical imagination have begun to be charted, the nature of its connection to the older historicism and to the older historical novel has been too often simplified. Offering an analysis of late twentieth-century forms of historical fiction requires more attention to the continuing legacy of the classical historical novel than has been suggested by many theorists. How, then, does the changing constitution of the historical novel mirror the changing ideological conception of historicist understanding of the past?

Presumably, the genre's vestigial adherence to Lukács's classical formula disappeared altogether by the late twentieth century, while non-realist historical fiction achieved a

considerable degree of popular and literary success.<sup>69</sup> The fate of classical realism in response to twentieth-century aesthetic movements, first of modernism and then of postmodernism, indicates that realist historical fiction should have withered from most conceptions of canonical twentieth-century fiction. Examples of realist historical novels are generally few in that canon, though one finds a number of non-realist historical novels, including Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* But in this novel, and in modernist fiction in general, the faith in historical knowledge and its potential to reflect upon contemporary socio-political realities that characterized the earlier historicism has been replaced by Quentin's impassioned "I don't hate the South!"—a correlative to Stephen Dedalus's epigram, "History is a nightmare from which I am trying to wake." Hayden White finds this antipathy to historicism common in twentieth-century literature, and for historicist critics such an attitude reveals the ideological basis for the death of the realist novel in general and the historical novel in particular after 1900, not to mention the waning of mimesis from Hayden White's particular focus: academic history as a branch of human science (*Tropics* 27-50).

But the preoccupation with history as a subject—often conceived in modernist fiction either as mythology or as an obstacle to the achievement of existential freedom—changed course again after the waning of the so-called High Modernism. Addressing the uncanny recurrence of history in post-1960s fiction, Elias argues that postmodern culture experienced a return of the repressed faith in historicism, demonstrated by a type of fiction she labels metahistorical romance. This sub-genre is characterized by a post-traumatic imaginary she terms "sublime desire": sublime in the sense that the historical past—a record of inscrutable chaos and blank

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<sup>69</sup> Lukács observed what he considered the historical novel's trend toward what he calls decadence and spectacle after 1848, and held up only the barest hope that the historical novel in its historicist form would survive aesthetic Modernism. See his reading of Flaubert's *Salammbô* for the former point (183-206) and his comments on Soviet neo-realism for the latter (332-50).

violence—lies nearly beyond contemplation, looming in the postmodern First World’s collective unconscious as simultaneously terrifying and seductive, its appeal stemming from the desire to search out that past in an effort to find footing among the contemporary philosophical, political, and cultural morasses often thought to form collectively the postmodern condition. Believing that history could offer such knowledge, nineteenth-century historicists were less troubled by this effort; many theorists of postmodernity, however, stress the difficulty (Elias, White, Jameson) of renewing a productive faith in history. Still others question the desirability (Hutcheon) of doing so, dismissing historicism as a relic of what Lyotard calls the Marxist meta-narrative.

For many, the fundamental shift away from realism in historical fiction represents a consequence of the twentieth-century failure of historicism, with its belief that historical knowledge could provide the basis for ethical social action. According to this perspective, postmodern culture reflects the loss of an earlier conviction in the inherently progressive, humanist nature of historicism. White, whose *Metahistory* analyzes the precepts of nineteenth-century historicism, acknowledges the difficulty of recouping these ideals in the twentieth century when he observes that his book is separated from the tradition of Hegel, Marx, and other classical historicists by the gulf of contemporary irony, the spanning of which he leaves to future academic historians. If *Metahistory* is successful, White hopes, “the way will have been partially cleared for the reconstitution of history as a form of intellectual activity which is at once poetic, scientific, and philosophical in its concerns—as it was during history’s golden age in the nineteenth century” (xii). Another theorist who shares to some degree White’s efforts to restore a more sophisticated and nuanced relationship between history and social critique is Marxist cultural critic Fredric Jameson. In explaining both the material factors which underlie this loss of historicism in the late twentieth century and analyzing its manifestation in the new “cultural

logic” of postmodernism, Jameson sees the replacement of Lukács’s ideal historical novel with a new kind of historical fiction as representative of the supplanting of historicism by aesthetic nostalgia. In his landmark *Postmodernism: or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Jameson argues that postmodernism is by its very nature incompatible with the historicist vision of reality. Speaking of nostalgia films including *American Graffiti* (1973), Jameson notes the incongruity between a postmodernist and a historicist vision of the past:

Faced with these ultimate objects—our social, historical, and existential present, and the past as “referent”—the incompatibility of a postmodernist “nostalgia” art language with genuine historicity becomes dramatically apparent. The contradiction propels this mode, however, into complex and interesting new formal inventiveness; it being understood that the nostalgia film was never a matter of some old-fashioned “representation” of the historical content, but instead approached 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 [ . . . ]. (19)

In addition to its presence in postmodern architecture, painting, and film, Jameson regards the ubiquity of aesthetic nostalgia in postmodern historical fiction as a particularly unsettling symptom of the late capitalist erosion of historicity, an erosion of the genre which had—as Lukács argued—previously offered an important locus for representing historical experience.

The massive numbers of “literary” historical fictions—most of them comprising mixed forms of the conventional historical novel—generally can be attributed to the synergy of two fundamental impulses in post-1960s fiction. The first of these impulses originates in the much-theorized notion that postmodern culture is characterized by a proliferation of depthless images;



the market-driven late capitalist culture industry thrives upon replicating the imagery of the past, and the costume pageantry of historical fiction, as of the nostalgia film, provides an easily projected simulacrum, a quickly-constructed and swiftly consumable virtual world. In much the same way as the corporate spectacle film<sup>70</sup> supplanted the auteur-driven cinema of both the international film movement of the 1950s and '60s and the American film renaissance of the 1960s and '70s, historical fiction came to popular and critical prominence by catering to a hyper-literate, spectacle-starved postmodern readership. The other impulse is chiefly political in nature; the fascination with history in post-1960s novels often has implications for current discussions about race, class, and gender. The desire to use historical settings in the investigation of contemporary political questions (without the sense of “the past as past” that characterizes historicism) beckons equally to postmodernists, including John Barth (*The Sot-Weed Factor*), and post-colonial authors, such as Maryse Condé (*I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*).<sup>71</sup> Another aspect of this political impulse can be seen in the widespread a-historical, anti-materialist form of contemporary historical fiction as a reaction against the supposedly patriarchal, bourgeois construction of “received historical accounts.” To Linda Hutcheon, for example, the pastiche and anti-realist mechanics of what she calls historiographic metafiction serve a political end by circumventing accepted notions of the past—or “Total History”—in favor of an ironic, “de-totalized” history (*The Politics of Postmodernism* 62-92). The twin impulses of “history as spectacle” and “history as politics” reflect an erosion of the historicism that provided the realist historical novel with its basis for cultural relevance.

### ***The Passion***

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<sup>70</sup> From *Star Wars* (1977) to *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001-2003)

<sup>71</sup> This particular impulse is not unique to the late twentieth century; Harry Shaw terms it “history as pastoral.”

The changing forms of late twentieth-century historical fiction, then, demonstrate a contemporaneous re-imagining of historical space.<sup>72</sup> Just as the historical space of novels such as *The Heart of Midlothian* or *The Pioneers* is shaped by a nascent realism—their canvasses populated by competing political ideologies, vast citizen armies, and burgeoning nationalism—novels such as Eco’s *The Name of the Rose* (1983) or Pynchon’s *Mason & Dixon* (1997) model a historical past that reflects the influence of their postmodern horizon. The new space mapped by historical novelists from Peter Ackroyd to William T. Vollmann provides the occasion for a number of strong analyses of the postmodern phenomenon.<sup>73</sup> Somewhat lacking in the broader discussions of postmodern space in historical fiction is a sense of the novels’ variety; there appear to be nearly as many maps of this new social-historical space—and as many attitudes about its relevance—as there are historical novels. This chapter will ultimately arrive at an analysis of the manner in which one such novel, Vollmann’s *Argall*, uses archaism to epitomize postmodern cultural space while simultaneously re-inscribing a materialist sense of historical experience. Before coming to *Argall*, however, I wish to establish the breadth of the postmodernist historical imagination by discussing *The Passion*, which parodies the form of the historical novel for opposite reasons; namely, to advance a belief that postmodernism has reduced materialist history to irrelevance.

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<sup>72</sup> For discussion of postmodernist space, see Jameson (38-45); David Harvey’s *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. New York: Blackwell, 1990; Brian Jarvis’s *Postmodern Cartographies: The Geographical Imagination in Contemporary American Culture*. New York: St. Martin’s P, 1998; Peter J. Kalliney’s *Cities of Affluence and Anger: A Literary Geography of Modern Englishness*. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2007; Henri Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1991; and Gaston Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space*. New York: Orion, 1962.

<sup>73</sup> The study which focuses most directly on the spatial—or in his vocabulary, ontological—paradigms of late twentieth-century historical fiction remains Brian McHale’s chapter “Real, Compared to What?” (*Postmodernist Fiction* 84-96).

*The Passion* exemplifies many of the characteristics of what Elias calls metahistorical romance, sharing with similar post-1960s fiction an underlying conviction that historical novels, while (or perhaps because) they offer spectacular simulacra of past epochs, cannot sustain the historicist values formerly attributed to them. *The Passion* is set in early nineteenth-century Europe and narrated by two lovers, the French peasant-turned-soldier Henri and the Venetian prostitute and professional gambler Villanelle. The sensitive Henri joins Napoleon's army as a cook because he recognizes his own passion reflected in the Emperor's desire to conquer Europe. Villanelle, meanwhile, joins the army incognito in order to escape a violent lover in her native Venice. Together, they participate in Bonaparte's ill-fated invasion of Russia, barely escaping with their lives. Returning as refugees to Venice, the pair suffers ill-chance in love, and Henri—guilty of murdering Villanelle's persecutor—at novel's end finds himself hopelessly confined to an asylum for the criminally insane. The contrast between *The Passion* and *War and Peace* may well be deliberate; like Tolstoy, Winterson chooses Bonaparte's Russian campaign as her historical setting,<sup>74</sup> though her novel defiantly flouts the historicist foundations of earlier historical fiction, replacing it with postmodern spectacle and what Lisa Moore calls a "Romantic investment in the transhistorical qualities of human nature" (113). For Winterson, these "transhistorical qualities" consist of sensual experience and romantic love, beside which the social dimension of historical experience prove ephemeral. Like other metahistorical romances, *The Passion* inverts the ratio of fabulation to historical narrative that Elias sees as characteristic of Scott's fiction, a shift in textual dominant that "[privileges] romance over historical telling"

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<sup>74</sup> For Jago Morrison, the Napoleonic wars provide the subject *par excellence* for historical fiction: "On one level, *The Passion* represents itself very much as a historical novel. Indeed, the name of Napoleon is introduced in its first sentence. Set amongst the French Grande Armée on the Boulogne coast as they prepare to invade Britain, and on the freezing Russian plains which witnessed Bonaparte's humiliation (and most of his soldiers' deaths) in 1812, Winterson paints a vast backdrop for the stories of its protagonists" (*Contemporary Fiction* 101).

(*Sublime Desire* 15; 95). But Winterson carries this further, utterly rejecting the classical historical novel's realist ontology and advancing in its place a belief that the historical record offers nothing more than a testament to the human capacity for passion. In contrast to the concern with shifting political, economic, and cultural constraints that permeates classical historical fiction, *The Passion*, as Lynne Pearce contends, "would seem to say is that love is love is love: that gender, age, class, ethnicity, nationality and sexual orientation are all accommodated within the great universals; that desire is an emotion which transcends all specificities, and which we all recognize and experience as 'the same thing'" (*Reading Dialogics* 174). History no longer resembles Fleishman's universally deterministic "shaping force"; historicity, having dissolved into a universal and timeless humanism, no longer offers a valid ethical measure of human experience. *The Passion* articulates a vision of history that contradicts the realist materialism of Scott's model, its formal elements freely subverting those that provide the classical historical novel with much of its historicist imagination.

Winterson's subversion of the classical historical novel features a transformation of nineteenth-century Europe into postmodern space, with the novel's French, Venetian, and Russian settings reduced to aesthetic shorthand, postcards or souvenirs of the real thing, tourist simulacra. Instead of cities detailed by their material, sociological particularities, Winterson offers imagist snapshots,<sup>75</sup> such as the Moscow Henri remembers as, "a city of domes, built to be beautiful, a city of squares and worship. I did see it, briefly. The gold domes lit yellow and orange and the people gone" (83).<sup>76</sup> Of course, the setting that matters most in *The Passion* is

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<sup>75</sup> Paulina Palmer argues that both Moscow and the novel's primary setting of Venice show the influence of Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* (113).

<sup>76</sup> It is worth mentioning that Winterson's snow-globe presentation of the Russian zero winter is accompanied by an impressively long catalogue of its concomitant human suffering, from starving peasants to the macabre details of

Winterson's living museum of decadence: Venice. Again, she generally conceives Venice using the tropes of romance, rather than history:

There is a city surrounded by water with watery alleys that do for streets and roads and silted up back ways that only the rats can cross. Miss your way, which is easy to do, and you may find yourself staring at a hundred eyes guarding a filthy palace of sacks and bones. Find your way, which is easy to do, and you may meet an old woman in a doorway. She will tell your fortune, depending on your face. (49)

Venice embodies and celebrates sensuality and decadence: a fantastical city where the boatmen have webbed feet, a watery maze of passion, a brochure fabrication of reality, an “enchanted island for the mad, the rich, the bored, the perverted” (52). According to Manfred Pfister, Winterson's portrayal follows the precedent of English fantasies that “construct Venice as a place of ardent and illicit, or transgressive, passions, or *eros* and *thanatos*, of love and madness, of sensuality, licentiousness, prostitution and sexual subversion,” a locale where “Everything—from politics to religion, from the topography of Venice to its history, from gambling to storytelling, from collecting to masquerading—is presented *sub specie eroticorum*, is presented as spilt sexuality” (16-17). While her symbolism is not new,<sup>77</sup> the manner in which Winterson portrays Venice as an un-mappable “space of indeterminacy” (Morrison 102) recalls the disorienting effects of Jameson's Westin Bonaventura Hotel or Baudrillard's Disneyland, cloaking the social and economic structures of the “real” Venice with a thickly-aesthetic

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death by exposure. This tempts one to suggest that the mechanical chronicling of misery hopes to represent the “unimaginable zero winter” in a way that the photo post-card images of Russia cannot. Or perhaps the catalogue itself is another type of photographic image, designed to replace a more properly historiographic account.

<sup>77</sup> Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* and Henry James's *The Wings of the Dove* are among the more obvious influences.

symbolic representation, a strategy which challenges the materialist precepts of the classic historical novel.<sup>78</sup>

The novel's characters likewise exemplify Winterson's ahistorical aestheticism. This reverses Scott's practice, in which characters, whether fictional or world-historical, illustrate the influence of economics and ideology on the human personality. Blending individual personalities into the qualities *typical* of their class, race, and gender, characters in historical fiction unite what James Phelan calls the mimetic (character as person) and the thematic (character as idea) dimensions of fictional characters, a dual-function characterization that has proven central to the genre's historicist imagination (*Narrative as Rhetoric* 29). From this perspective, Lukács argues, "Scott's greatness lies in his capacity to give living human embodiment to historical-social types. The typically human terms in which great historical trends become tangible had never before been so superbly, straightforwardly, and pregnantly portrayed" (35).<sup>79</sup>

In contrast to Scott's typical characters, *The Passion's* characters are extravagantly, almost absurdly, exceptional. Winterson's Villanelle exemplifies this quality. Born (like a Venetian boy) with webbed feet, she works in the casino, wears men's clothing, and seduces or is seduced by everyone from a flabby war profiteer to a drunken soldier to her true love, a mask-wearing society lady. She is privy to the secrets of the canals and the hidden parts of the city,

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<sup>78</sup> Most analyses of *The Passion* include extensive commentary on Winterson's Venice. In addition to Manfred Pfister's "*The Passion* from Winterson to Coryate," Judith Seaboyer's "Second Death in Venice" traces the genealogy of Winterson's symbolic cityscape: "As we approach the millennium, Venice is more than ever a theater for narratives of death, fragmentation, and decay, but at the same time, as concepts of reality, truth, and meaning are thrown into question by the idea of difference, the idea of Venice has come to serve a wider purpose than it did for the Romantics" (484).

<sup>79</sup> For more discussion of the necessary "typicality" of characters in classical historical fiction, see Lukács (33-36), and Shaw, who argues that the dual-nature of characters in historical fiction is central to historical fiction and at the same time symptomatic of the genre's aesthetic limitations (30-46).

and, armed with a knife, a false moustache, and a deck of cards, is more the product of postmodern erotic fantasy than of nineteenth-century Europe. Similarly, Winterson draws the novel's world-historical figures, of whom Napoleon is central, with reference to their pop iconography, in much the same way as Warhol portrayed Marilyn Monroe. From Henri, who works in the Emperor's personal kitchen, the reader learns little more than that the Corsican is diminutive, ill-tempered, and sensual, attributes emphasized on the novel's first page: "It was Napoleon who had such a passion for chicken that he kept his chefs working round the clock. [ . . . ] He liked me because I am short. I flatter myself. He did not dislike me. He liked no one except Josephine and he liked her the way he liked chicken" (3). In a manner superficially similar to the relationships between typical protagonists and world-historical figures in the classical historical novel—for instance, the attraction Edmund Waverley feels for the dashing cavalier Charles Stuart or the unquestioning homage Wilfred of Ivanhoe offers Richard Plantagenet—Henri works in Napoleon's camp kitchen, accompanying the emperor on his doomed quest to subjugate Europe, drawn by the Corsican's magnetic megalomania. Unlike Waverley, however, who sees in the Young Pretender the perfect image of his father's Tory ideals, and Ivanhoe, who envisions Richard as the masthead of a chivalric statement, Henri describes his obsession with Bonaparte in neither ideological nor political terms; it is simply an irrational urge to follow the "great man." Henri worships the Emperor for the grandeur of his passions, which is, of course, another way of worshiping his own. As Henri muses during his flight from Russia: "Why would a people who love the grape and the sun die in the zero winter for one man? Why did I? Because I loved him. He was my passion and when we go to war we feel we are not a lukewarm people any more" (108).<sup>80</sup> In Winterson's novel, social-historical

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<sup>80</sup> Similarly, "Conflict in this world is always romantic conflict; even war is primarily an opportunity for Henri to

motivation pales beside what she considers a universal; as Pearce observes, “the primary experience, for all characters, in all ages, is romantic love” (184).

Because her sense of the past is essentially ahistorical, Winterson supplements the “real” settings and events of early nineteenth-century Europe with a liberal use of romance fabulation, a strategy which reduces Bonaparte’s campaigns, and their concomitant human suffering, to the level of fairy tale.<sup>81</sup> Whereas classical historical novels such as George Eliot’s *Romola* often supplement the central plot with numerous didactic disquisitions (which in Eliot’s novel range from the erudite to the pedantic) on the art, customs, politics, and law of the novel’s milieu, *The Passion* instead supplements with supernatural occurrences, a strategy of metahistorical romance that, according to Grice and Woods, undercuts with the novel’s presumably historical setting as “a way of decentring the realism, or suggesting an alternative way of life” (32). For instance, Henri’s fellow soldier and closest friend, the de-frocked Irish priest Patrick, is the Grand Army’s lookout, a post he has attained by virtue of his “eagle eye.” During Napoleon’s encampment at Boulogne, Patrick lives, “like Simon Stylites, on the top of a purpose-built tower,” from where he claims to see the deck-top bustle of every English vessel in the channel, down to the weevils in the sailors’ bread (22-23). Patrick carries in his pocket a pair of miniature boots, which according to his account were magically shrunken when he tried to find the hidden treasure of

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express his excessive love for Napoleon by following him to Moscow. Thus, Winterson’s novels may be read politically, but they themselves make no explicit political argument. For all the richness of resonance with lesbian theory and fiction in her novels, then, Winterson violates their one crucial convention by refusing to engage in debates around the social and political meaning of lesbianism” (Moore 113). Along these lines, Judith Seaboyer writes of the novel’s historical setting, “The choice of this historiographic ground of empire and expansionist warfare over that of revolution is not arbitrary; rather, it is constitutive of a text whose political focus, while manifestly gender and sexuality rather than politics in the national sense, addresses contemporary as well as historical sources of war and violence by informing a historical narrative with the psychoanalytic one of the death drive” (Seaboyer 486).

<sup>81</sup> Merja Makinen discusses Winterson’s use of fairy tales in *Sexing the Cherry* and *Oranges are not the Only Fruit* in an essay for Stephen Best’s *Contemporary Fiction and the Fairy Tale* (2008).



three goblins who had been dancing in a ring of fire (39). *The Passion* shares the logic of fairy tales; like children enmeshed in a plot beyond their comprehension, its characters take to stories for comfort.

By the novel's end, the plot has even more explicitly begun to be modeled on *hausmarchen* motifs. Looking for Villanelle's elsewhere-bestowed heart, Henri steals into the enchanted, forbidden lair of his rival, the Venetian lady who had been Villanelle's lover. Like the protagonist of numerous children's stories, Henri passes chamber after chamber in his search, seeing strange and symbolic items—maps, half-finished tapestries, stained-glass windows—before coming to the eighth room, where he finds the object of his search: “On my hands and knees I crawled under one of the clothes rails and found a silk shift wrapped round an indigo jar. The jar was throbbing” (120). In Winterson's novel, the historical reality that provided the locus of social meaning in Scott's fiction has been replaced by the magic of romance, a re-envisioning of human experience that, as Lyn Pykett explains, is “less a way of trying to explain or understand the universe than of (re)experiencing it, or alternatively, of shoring oneself against its confusions and complexities; less a way of understanding material history or ‘the historical process’ than of transcending it or escaping from its confines” (56). Furthermore, this fabulation underscores the fictitious nature of all attempts to describe history, a proposition illustrated by Henri's repetitive injunction, “I'm telling you stories. Trust me” (5).<sup>82</sup> This insistence that all fiction-making, no matter how fantastical, exists on more or less the same level, offers a strikingly banal instance—

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<sup>82</sup> Scott Wilson offers one of the more novel responses to *The Passion*, suggesting that the stories themselves might be read as the ravings of a man broken by History: “Who says *The Passion* is a magic realist novel? If I may be permitted to give a soldier's view, it can be read perfectly coherently as a realist, historical account of one of the earliest recorded examples of post-traumatic stress disorder. Realistically, historically, humanly, Henri is perfectly plausible while Villanelle plainly is not. Unless, that is, the fact that the whole text is written by a madman incarcerated in a Venetian asylum is taken *seriously*, just as history should be taken seriously. ‘Villanelle’ is purely a figment of Henri's psychosis, and his narrative overflows and divides because he is a classic schizophrenic” (70).

particularly when compared to similar propositions in novels such as Carlos Fuentes's *Terra Nostra* (1976) or Morrison's *Beloved* (1987)—of what Elias considers the metahistorical romance's "simultaneous distrust and assertion of *fabula* as a humanist value" (69).

Deflating the authoritative claims of realist historicism, Winterson foregoes the historical novel's insistence upon every society's distinctiveness in order to emphasize the universals of human experience—which for her are sensual and philosophic—that exist *in spite of* historical difference. This recalls the novel's characters, whose social-historical identities pale beside the universal nature of their experiences.<sup>83</sup> The thoughts and feelings of Bonaparte's new recruits, for instance, are those of all young soldiers at all times, from the walls of Troy to the trenches of Verdun:

New recruits cry when they come here and they think about their mothers and their sweethearts and they think about going home. They remember what it is about home that holds their hearts; not sentiment or show but faces they love. Most of these recruits aren't seventeen and they're asked to do in a few weeks what vexes the best philosophers for a lifetime; that is, to gather up their passion for life and make sense of it in the face of death. (28)

Henri's love of life, his passion, finds expression through his efforts to render his experiences philosophically. Gentle—he never kills an enemy while in the Emperor's army—and full of love for friends and strangers alike, he nevertheless uses violence to defend the weak; early in the story he strikes a brutish cook to defend a prostitute, and later he kills the "meat man" to protect Villanelle. Caught between passion and conscience, Henri ends up like Napoleon, a mad convict

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<sup>83</sup> This "universalism," of course, is of Winterson's own late-twentieth-century making.

on a prison island. Henri's existential consciousness is born out of twentieth-century ideals, rather than his eighteenth-century, rural French upbringing.

While Henri embodies the philosophic response to what Winterson portrays as a universal, existential ordeal, his erstwhile lover represents the essential capacity for sensuality. Through Villanelle Winterson envisions a carnival of passionate sexuality, one transcending historical and social boundaries. In Villanelle's games of chance, both heart and body may be won and lost. When she makes love to the Venetian lady, Villanelle's path to pleasure, love for another woman, is entirely untroubled by nineteenth-century sexual mores. Instead, her passion is timeless:

Hopeless heart that thrives on paradox; that longs for the beloved and is secretly relieved when the beloved is not there. That gnaws away at the night-time hours desperate for a sign and appears at breakfast so self-composed. That longs for certainty, fidelity, compassion, and plays roulette with anything precious.

Gambling is not a vice, it is an expression of our humanness. We gamble. Some do it at the gaming table, some do not. You play, you win, you play, you lose.

You play. (73)

Universal significations of humanness, as opposed to the particular nature of social-historical experience in Napoleonic Europe, provide Winterson's central concern in *The Passion*. At an anagogical level, the novel asks its readers to see across the temporal and spatial distance between the novel's *milieu* and their own, to develop an existential empathy for the novel's characters. This "communion" between "now" and "then" resembles Henri's quasi-mystical experience on a bitterly cold New Year's Eve in Boulogne. After partaking in mass, Henri embraces a young mother and her child, watching the flares over the English Channel, and joins

the celebration of fellow men and women, “The Lord sewn in their hearts for another year,” strangers who throw their arms around his neck and bless him, before dancing, “going round and round faster and fast until my eyes are dizzy with keeping up with them” (44). Faced with the submersion of the individual into the common joy at being alive, Henri vows, “Wherever love is, I want to be, I will follow it as surely as the land-locked salmon finds the sea.” Later that night, huddled with his nearly frozen comrades in the kitchen tent, Henri lays awake until the sun dawns on 1805. In this and similar scenes, the historical distance between the reader and the novel’s characters proves illusory; their consciousnesses, their desires, their pleasures seem virtually identical to our own. History, having created a gulf of nearly two hundred years, nevertheless appears incidental to the human spirit.

From the perspective of a materialist historicism, *The Passion* typifies the inability of postmodern culture to interpret the human experience in history with any authority, much less with the historicist goal of cultivating the study of the past in service to an ethically-informed engagement in the perpetual social crisis of the present. History in Winterson’s novel appears to have been supplanted by pop images of Napoleonic Europe, its processes robbed of meaning, reduced to an incomprehensible nexus of human suffering. The historical subjects who provided the heroes of Scott’s novels now resemble the child protagonists of fairy tales, caught in the violent, fantastical machinations of their elders. *The Passion* shares this fairy tale sense of history with Michel Tournier’s *The Ogre*, in which the Holocaust is envisioned as the Elf-King’s eating of lost children, and the recent film *Pan’s Labyrinth*, which doubles a Spanish Civil War plot with a fairy tale one. Contesting the idea that history offers a source of social understanding, an analogue for the “real,” or a path toward understanding the present, *The Passion* views nineteenth-century Europe through the lens of aesthetic postmodernism. As such,

the novel both reflects and intensifies much that inheres in the cultural logic of post-national capitalism. While Winterson's approach may well offer its own kind of social or political truth, the novel's antipathy to historicist thought must not be taken as the sole postmodern attitude toward the past. Nevertheless, the novel's romantic humanism appears to validate claims that the "new spatial logic of the simulacrum" has entirely effaced earlier concepts of history (Jameson 18). The rest of this chapter considers the extent to which this is true, analyzing Vollmann's use of archaism in *Argall* as part of his effort to articulate the kind of materialist historical imagination that contemporaries such as Winterson vehemently reject.

### **Literalism in the Postmodern Historical Novel: William T. Vollmann's *Argall***

Like *The Passion*'s romance motifs, archaism proliferated in the late twentieth-century as an aesthetic form that reflected newer conceptions of social-historical space. While texts as old as *The Faerie Queen* called attention to their material antiquarianism, John Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor* (1960) and John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) were nonetheless greeted as novelties, experimental in representing the past by aping the conventions of its texts. Such historical pastiche in the postmodern form of the historical novel often appears to elaborate upon a common theme in postmodernist fiction, a use of what Robert Scholes calls "fabulation" to erode the foundations of the historical "real," which novels including *The Passion* accomplish by an ironic conflation of the two. A number of notable "archaicist" historical novels—including Golding's *Rites of Passage* (1980), Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor* (1985), Byatt's *Possession* (1990), Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*, and Vollmann's *Argall* (2001)—followed in the wake of Barth's and Fowles's novels, both of which proved foundational to new phases in their national literatures, and to the emerging international postmodernism. Regardless of whether a novel's

archaism fulfills the technique's potential as a historicist representational strategy, its self-consciously antiquated textuality emphasizes the relationship between history and fabulation that leads to Winterson's rejection of the classical historical novel.

For the most part, archaism in novels such as *Possession*, *Hawksmoor*, and *A Maggot* is assumed to reflect the de-historicization of the historical novel, or to comprise a variety of historiographic metafiction. In particular, their archaism seems to represent a "pure" example of what Jameson envisions as the most characteristic feature of postmodernism: the reduction of the "real" past to aesthetic artifact. That archaism became a key strategy for late twentieth-century novelists to impart period "flavor" illustrates what is in Jameson's view the superficial linguistic mimicry at the center of postmodern cultural practice, one he describes as pastiche:

Pastiche is [ . . . ] the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists. (17)

Archaism, then, is ostensibly part of a widespread tendency toward the "random cannibalization" of all the styles of the past (18). For Jameson, the elevation of pastiche to a central position in both elite and popular culture (Linda Hutcheon, with a different set of principles, likewise recognizes the primacy of textual imitation in twentieth-century culture, though she calls it "parody") reflects the single most significant fact about postmodernity: its "omnipresent, omnivorous, and well-nigh libidinal" appetite for the past. To feed this "addiction," Jameson argues, the postmodern culture industry relies on the numerous strategies of diachronic

intertextuality to provide “a new connotation of ‘pastness’ and pseudohistorical depth, in which the history of aesthetic styles displaces ‘real’ history” (20). The prominence of such pastiche in late twentieth-century historical fiction underscores the de-historicization of social experience under late capitalism precisely because it occurs at the very site of what Jameson considers one of the greatest achievements of realist historicism: the classical historical novel. Of Scott’s legacy, he writes, “what was once, in the historical novel as Lukács defines it, the organic genealogy of the bourgeois collective project [ . . . ] has meanwhile itself become a vast collection of images, a multitudinous simulacrum” (18).<sup>84</sup>

Even though archaism predates late capitalism by centuries, Jameson’s argument seems essentially correct; the practice was common the late twentieth century because it modeled an emerging postmodern imaginary, one Baudrillard characterizes as a “desert of the real.” The newly-popular archaism depended in large part upon innovations in print technology. Novels like Vollmann’s might have been possible in the small printing presses of the early twentieth century, like those Jerome McCann describes in *Black Riders*, but the print industry’s ability to offer such typographically complex novels to a mass audience comprises a relatively recent development which—judging by the fact that the first edition of *Argall* retailed at \$40—remains somewhat difficult. By comparison, distributing editions such as Morris’s Kelmscott books or the avant-garde printings of Robert Carlton Brown’s “optical poems” or Ezra Pound’s “lavish and expensive” early volumes of the *Cantos* beyond the scope of the small press proved impossible and sometimes undesirable.<sup>85</sup> Interestingly, print industry constraints have prevented any subsequent edition of *Henry Esmond* from replicating the eighteenth-century typeface

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<sup>84</sup> He goes on to discuss the “postmodern fate” of the genre in E.L. Doctorow’s *Ragtime* (21).

<sup>85</sup> For an essential account of both the aesthetics and historical context of material textuality, see McCann’s aforementioned *Black Riders: The Visible Language of Modernism*, as well as his *The Textual Condition*, especially pages 101-52.

Thackeray chose for the novel's first printing, and only such twentieth-century book-making innovations as the illustrated cover Daniel Hack analyzes in *The Material Interests of the Victorian Novel* hint at the author's intention to add bibliographic elements to his novel's linguistic archaism (11). Mirroring the increasing prevalence of virtual worlds and simulated space in postmodern architecture, television, film, video-games, and (more recently) the internet, twentieth-century historical novels began to abandon the supposedly transparent linguistic and bibliographic codes of realist historical fiction in favor of hyper-aestheticized representations of the historical past: vivid illustrations, period typeface, and, less-commonly, exaggerated imitations of historical literary idioms. While literary fashion obliged many historical novelists to at least nod in the direction of a self-conscious textual practice, eminent authors including Golding, Barth, Fowles, Ackroyd, Byatt, Pynchon, and Vollmann carried the realist historical novel of the late twentieth century to its extremes, constructing extended simulacra of historical textual idioms which simultaneously satisfied the formal imperatives of the historical novel.<sup>86</sup>

Judging from the polemical description of nostalgia that opens Jameson's *Postmodernism*, and—conversely—from Hutcheon's celebration of historiographic metafiction as an antidote to the totalizing epistemologies of previous forms of History,<sup>87</sup> novels such as Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon* appear to add weight to the case against historicism's continued relevance in the late twentieth century. Yet I would argue to the contrary that these novels feature a more complex relationship to the older historicism than typically has been imagined, and that their paradigmatic amalgamations of historicist principles and postmodernist representational strategies deserve further analysis. Often lost in the heated rejoinders to

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<sup>86</sup> Discussed in Chapter Two.

<sup>87</sup> "What postmodernism does, as its very name suggests, is confront and contest any modernist discarding *or* recuperating of the past in the name of the future" (*A Poetics of Postmodernism* 19).



Jameson's perceived assault upon aesthetic postmodernism<sup>88</sup> is the observation that his (consistent and powerful) dialectical methodology precludes him from offering the kind of moral condemnation with which he is often associated (*Postmodernism* 46-47). For him, postmodernism—from its economic basis in late capitalism to its most abstract cultural practices—represents a historical fact; one can no more reject the postmodern historical moment than reject the laws of physics.

In response to the historical fact of postmodernism, Jameson advocates efforts to negotiate the present in terms of “collective social values and practices,” posing the challenge to identify “some ‘moment of truth’ within the more evident ‘moments of falsehood’ of postmodern culture” (47). Meaningful aesthetic production and cultural critique, then, must adhere both to the constraints of the social-historical present and to the continuing social-political relevance of materialist historicism, a cultural imperative that demands “some effort to think the cultural evolution of late capitalism dialectically, as catastrophe and progress all together” (47). Jameson follows the Marxist tradition of posing the present—in his case postmodernism—as a “problem,” with its “baleful effects” observable everywhere. As partial solution to this problem, Jameson advocates the discovery of a new political art (one at once didactic and grounded in materialist historicism) based on what he calls the “aesthetics of cognitive mapping.” Ideally, this new political art would constitute a technology for demystifying the spatial postmodernity created by multinational capital, endowing the individual subject with a heightened awareness of the relationship between its existential experience and the abstract totality of the world system (53-54). For Jameson, this new art would necessarily be based in the response to postmodern space,

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<sup>88</sup> Hutcheon sees Jameson as the chief of those who abhor the superficiality of aesthetic postmodernism, a monument (along with Terry Eagleton) of what she calls the “naïve” and “reductive” Marxist objection to postmodern cultural practice (19). She advances her own theories in opposition to his both explicitly and implicitly in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* and *The Politics of Postmodernism*.

with the ultimate goal of “disalienation,” or the “practical reconquest of a sense of place” (51).<sup>89</sup> Because they combine a postmodern-inflected archaism with a reprised fidelity to many of the forms and values of classic historical fiction, works such as *Argall* or *A Maggot* seemingly lie at the intersection of Jameson’s two requirements for a new political art; they maintain an allegiance to a historicist conception of the continuing relevance of the past while demonstrating the pervasive influence of postmodern spatial logic.

While one can hardly claim that *Mason & Dixon* or *To the Ends of the Earth* have or will exercise the long-term influence that Scott’s novels enjoyed in the nineteenth century, they can nevertheless be seen as analogous attempts at cognitive mapping, specimens of a cultural technology that addresses the social-historical present by re-constructing the past. Just as the classical historical novel mapped a social-historical space characterized by revolution, conflicting ideologies, continental war, and the experience of political action on a massive scale, Fowles, Pynchon, and Vollmann foreground the *virtual* nature of their novels’ social-historical referent (Lukács 19-30). For them, the key figure for this simultaneously virtual and material space is the literalist text. By no means do I suggest that all or even a majority of these novels are invested in Marxist historicism; collectively, they evince only a partial or potential response to Jameson’s challenge to develop an “aesthetics of cognitive mapping.” A number of them, however, offer what can be described as the provisional—and paradoxical—foundation of a new, hyper-realist historicism.

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<sup>89</sup> This seems an appropriate place to voice my own chief objection to Jameson’s arguments. Possibly because he sees culture as Utopia and thus never realized (48), or—more likely—because his comments in *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* are carefully constructed from an antithetical position, he believes that a political art based upon an “aesthetics of cognitive mapping” to be imminent, coming (if at all) in the form of a Benjamin-ian “breakthrough to some as yet unimaginable new mode” (54). I argue, on the other hand, for the immanence of such an art, or at least some forms of it; its traces are evident in many late twentieth-century cultural productions, including Jameson’s own theoretical works.

Combining archaism with historical settings, these novels contextualize what in other postmodern cultural forms is recognizable as anti-historicizing pastiche. By its nature, the historical novel frame disciplines what in other genres might be devoid of reference to the “real.” For instance, in *Mason & Dixon* (1997) the novel’s eighteenth-century setting serves to historicize Pynchon’s imitation of the bibliographic elements, style, and mode of Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* (1770), an inherent disciplinary mechanism that recalls Hayden White’s idea of “tact.” After detailing the benefits offered by a tropological approach to writing history, White nevertheless cautions his audience that tropes must never violate the nature of the subject matter, a shortcoming dealt with in his request “that the historian show some tact in the use of his governing metaphors” (*Tropics* 47). The formal properties of historical fiction exert “tactful” pressure upon textual imitation, while the thickly-materialized artifice characteristic of archaism paradoxically contests any naïve pretension to historical “reality.” Thus the newly-proliferating subgenre of archaicist historical fiction reflects not a simply a waning of the genre’s inherent historicism, but also the reverse: the constraints of historical fiction provided a means for disciplining the viral aestheticism of postmodernist culture practice.<sup>90</sup> These novels, then, bring

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<sup>90</sup> The role of a historical frame in determining archaism’s meaning can be illustrated by the differences between two Hollywood pastiche films: Steven Soderbergh’s *The Good German* (2007) and Joel and Ethan Coen’s *The Hudsucker Proxy* (1994).

In his adaptation of Joseph Kanon’s novel about US and Soviet intrigue in post-WWII Berlin, Soderbergh re-creates the filmic conventions of 1940s Hollywood pictures. As a result, *The Good German* utilizes a number of the elements of Hollywood dramas and *films noir* including Michael Curtiz’s *Casablanca* (1942), Carol Reed’s *The Third Man* (1949). In keeping with his historical setting, Soderbergh replicates the look of these films, using grainy black and white cinematography, ghastly *noir* lighting, and low-angle, canted camera shots (inspired by *The Third Man*). Soderbergh insisted that all the film’s elements—from its script, film format, cinematographic practices, musical score, and acting—imitate those of the 1940s.

What sets *The Good German* apart from other examples of generic homage is its sense of the history which shaped the films it imitates. The film tells the story of postwar Berlin, narrating a “real” historical scenario in which Allied occupation forces search for war criminals while simultaneously racing to uncover and claim secret Nazi military technology for themselves. The film’s “language” interrogates the relationship between 1940s films and their historical context.

In a superficially similar fashion, the Coen brothers’ *The Hudsucker Proxy* (1994) replicates antiquated film forms, adopting the conventions of the classical Hollywood films of Frank Capra and Preston Sturges. With

together in a variety of combinations two conflicting pressures upon the postmodern historical imagination: on one hand, the recognition that all attempts to represent the past are co-opted by the logic of simulacra, and on the other a desire to recuperate a valid, materialist historicism, a paradox expressed through the trope of archaic textuality.

### *Argall*

One novel that maps postmodern constructions of social-historical space in the effort to recuperate a materialist historicism is William T. Vollmann's *Argall*, which comprises the third volume of its author's so-far incomplete cycle "Seven Dreams: A Book of North American Landscapes."<sup>91</sup> These books narrate highly-symbolic episodes in the millennium-long record of conflict between Europeans and the indigenous peoples of North America. *The Ice-Shirt*, for instance, recounts the unsuccessful attempts of the Norse to settle Newfoundland, Labrador, and Greenland between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries. *Fathers and Crows* testifies to the horrific human cost of the Jesuits' efforts to proselytize the Huron nation in seventeenth-century New France, and *The Rifles* doubles a narrative of contemporary life among the Inuit with an account of Lord Franklin's doomed nineteenth-century attempt to discover a passage through the Arctic Ocean.

*Argall*, meanwhile, purports to be "the true story of Pocahontas and Captain John Smith."

The novel relates John Smith's adventures in England, the Low Countries, and Ottoman Europe

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Tim Robbins in the Gary Cooper/James Stewart role as the naive protagonist and Jennifer Jason Leigh playing the Jean Arthur part as the "tough-girl" love interest, the film narrates its hero's wildly successful invention and marketing of the hula-hoop against the sinister forces of big business. Unlike Soderbergh's film, *The Hudsucker Proxy* offers only pastiche. The film leaves the historical context of its precursor films uncontested, referencing the *filmic* past alone.

For more analysis of *The Good German*, see Christine Sprengler's *Screening Nostalgia* (2009). For discussion of *The Hudsucker Proxy*'s relationship to Hutcheon's arguments about postmodernism, see Paul Coughlin's essay "The Past is Now: History and *The Hudsucker Proxy*."

<sup>91</sup> In order of publication, *Argall* is the fourth and most recent installment in the cycle. To date, Viking has issued Dreams I-III: *The Ice-Shirt* (1990), *Fathers and Crows* (1992) and *Argall* (2001); and Dream VI, *The Rifles* (1994).

before detailing the aspiring gentleman's Machiavellian machinations on behalf of the colony at Jamestown. Embroiled in these latter exploits is Powhatan's daughter, from whose biography Vollmann provides a record of her translation into a submissive, anglicized icon of Native complicity in the conquest of North America. Her change is effected by the plots of the English adventurer who supplants Smith: Captain Samuel Argall, who in contrast to Smith champions power as an end unto itself and violence for its own sake, enjoying (perhaps as a result) the lasting political fortune that eluded Smith in his lifetime. The novel rehearses in detail the history of the early years of the Virginia colony, beginning with Smith's continental adventures and ending with Pocahontas's marriage to John Rolfe and her death in London. Like all the Seven Dreams novels, *Argall* fleshes out the basic outline of a familiar historical episode, using a number of experimental elements, most notably an obsession with its own linguistic and bibliographic codes and a preoccupation with the connection between past and present, most often accomplished through the commentary and direct address of Vollmann's New Journalistic narrative persona, "William the Blind."

In their relentless pursuit of formal innovation and new ethical insights, and their simultaneous re-inscribing of the forms and values of the historical novel genre, Vollmann's Seven Dreams novels collectively represent a major achievement in postmodern historical fiction. Among them, *Argall* most directly confronts the representational hegemony that Jameson terms "the new spatial logic of the simulacrum," modeling the historical past through its own linguistic and bibliographic conventions. This approach comprises the novel's central strategy for contesting the anti-historical postmodernism that Winterson celebrates in *The Passion*. Textual literalism—which in *Argall* incorporates linguistic archaism—allows Vollmann, like Winterson, to model the past while holding to the truth of postmodernism; unlike

those in *The Passion*, however, *Argall*'s historical simulations are materialized—as far as Vollmann's tropological understanding of historical societies will allow—by their symbolic function of representing the culturally-specific semiotic fields of the novel's setting. Because of this, *Argall* reaches toward the “aesthetics of cognitive mapping” Jameson advocates in *Postmodernism*, envisioning a postmodernist, virtual space that is nevertheless rooted in realist historicism, one modeled by the paradoxically materialist simulacra of its textual practice. In this, *Argall* epitomizes the potential of archaism—and its consequent widespread use in late twentieth-century historical fiction—to balance the realist conception of historical experience that characterizes historicism against the body of postmodern cultural practices that Baudrillard describes as “the desert of the real.” Of course, by itself archaism makes such historicism no more than *potentially* possible.

Like all the Seven Dreams novels, *Argall* insists upon its textual materiality, the presence of its linguistic and bibliographic codes. Few of the novel's elements are free from what appears to be Vollmann's self-conscious and obsessive need to foreground textuality as such. For example, his choice of cover illustration (see figure 8) includes a detail from one of Theodore de Bry's sixteenth-century engravings of New World “savages”—one of whom sports a goatee, horn-like feathered headdress, and leopard-skin loincloth (complete with tufted tail), and a clearly fiendish intent—in various attitudes toward the ships and forts of newly-arrived Europeans. He also includes more than seventy pages of scholarly apparatus (six glossaries, a detailed chronology, and an extended compilation of the novel's historical sources). Throughout the novel, Vollmann brings together antiquated typography, idiosyncratic page design, what appear to be re-prints of historical documents, eight hand-drawn maps, and dozens of his own sketches illustrating a variety of artifacts, buildings, landscapes and flora, providing a



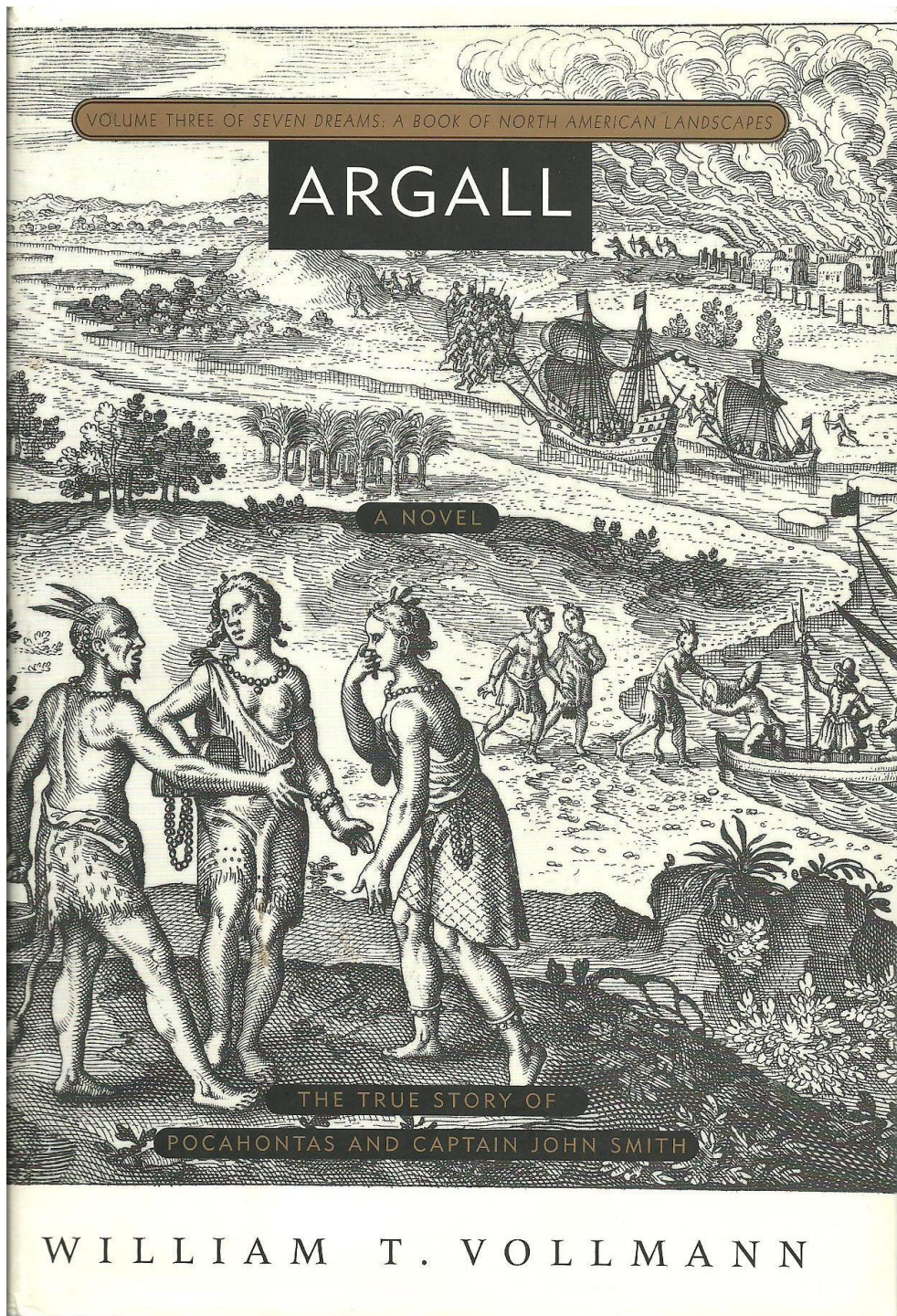


Figure 8. *Argall*'s cover, from a sixteenth-century engraving by Theodore de Bry.

Surprisingly, the 2001 first edition of *Argall* leaves this illustration's origins unclear.

compendium of representational strategies as well as an encyclopedic representation of seventeenth-century Virginia.

Perhaps to a greater extent than any other specimen of historical fiction, *Argall* employs the textual literalism associated with Blake's illuminated manuscripts or Morris's Kelmscott editions. In *Black Riders*, Jerome McGann offers two accounts of this literalism: one historical, focusing on Morris's literalist legacy among the avant-garde moderns, and one philosophical, in which he compares poetic literalism to philosophical nominalism, adding his own to the numerous structuralist and post-structuralist theoretical explorations of the relation between language and "the real."<sup>92</sup> For McGann, literalist texts insist upon their own materiality, the opacity of "words-as-such" as opposed to the word considered as a transitive vehicle; for him, "the phenomenology of images [i.e., the language of art] insists on their obduracy—on an immediate and face value that forbids us to look through them toward something beyond, whether it be conceptual or referential" (*xiii-xiv*). Literalism, then, forbids looking *through* texts, and the practice embodies an essentially materialist perspective upon all texts. By insisting upon their own tangibility, literalist texts emphasize their material, social-historical origins. McGann's Joanne McGrem persona in the philosophical dialogue that concludes *Black Riders* summarizes:

[ A]ll imaginative work appears to us in specific material forms. Many people—even many textual scholars—don't realize the *imaginative* importance of those material forms. Blake's work forcibly reminds us that the way poems are printed and distributed is part of their meaning. That process of printing and distribution

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<sup>92</sup> From a historical perspective, McGann's theories about poetic literalism and his argument for the equivalence of language and thought reflect the broader trends of postmodernism as articulated by Jameson.



# SEVEN DREAMS

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*ABOUT OUR CONTINENT*  
 IN THE DAYS OF  
**OKEUS**

From Whom  
 (as Discover'd in Heroicall or Heretickall Epistles)

We Stole *Puccoons*;  
 and Whose Snake-Earring'd Nation  
 the \*\*\* POWHATANS \*\*\*

*Lost*  
 By the Scheming of our Counsell-Men  
*Princesse Poka-huntas*  
 (A Country Lass)

to  
**TOBACCO**  
 (But *gained* DISCOUNT CIGARETTES);  
*Lost*

**KINGDOMS**  
 to  
**\*Argall\***  
 (Counter-treacherously);

AND THEN  
 in due procedure  
 \*\*\* Bought \*\*\*  
**GOSPEL RADIOS.**

*AS Extracted and Seasoned From*  
**DIVERSE RELATIONS**

duly Engross'd in Parchment  
 by

**WILLIAM T. VOLLMANN**

(Known in This World as  
 "WILLIAM THE BLIND")

Figure 9. Title page from Vollmann's *Argall: The True Story of Pocahontas and Captain John Smith*.

is essential to ‘the record that fiction makes of itself.’ It locates the imagination socially and historically. (168)

With its extreme effort to bring its linguistic and bibliographic codes into a concrete text-as-such, *Argall* shares Blake and Morris’s sense that “texts are thoughts made flesh and blood” (172). Like Morris, Vollmann uses textual archaisms to emphasize the social-historical context of his historical narrative.

*Argall*’s introductory section, titled “*Argall-Text: The Generall Historie of Virginia (1624): A Note to Life’s Voyages,*” offers an *apologia* for the novel’s attempts to find within the postmodern logic of the textual simulacrum an ethically-informed perspective upon social-historical necessity. For this reason, the experimental, journalistic narrative with which Vollmann’s William the Blind persona opens each of the Seven Dreams installments focuses in *Argall* almost entirely upon his textual sources, in particular a rare edition of Captain John Smith’s *Complete Works*. Whereas *The Ice-Shirt*, *Fathers and Crows*, and *The Rifles* place William the Blind in modern locations haunted by their historical past—Greenland, Quebec, and the Canadian Arctic, respectively—his “rhetoric of presence” at the outset of *Argall*, with the brief exception of a visit to Pocahontas’s grave in London, primarily provides an account of his acquisition of Smith’s book, along with a description of its contents and its bearing on Vollmann’s own “True Story” of “The Third Age of Wineland.”

Smith’s totalizing, encyclopedic depiction of Virginia and his adventures there provide both a historical source and a textual analogue for Vollmann’s novel. In “Argall-Text” William the Blind recounts his effort to resurrect the bygone, historical figures of American national mythology by seeking out one of its foundational texts, an early twentieth-century edition printed

by the Institute of Early American History and Culture. After expending a modicum of his own adventurous industry, William finally locates the antique edition at a New York City book-shop:

After donning my accustomed funereal spirit, I shouldered a pickaxe, in case any of the cobwebs I was likely to meet had fossilized; then I recited the Anglican burial service and descended into that subterranean bed of typeset virtue off Eighty-first Street, where the Bookseller [ . . . ] stood ready with the spoils: --my *Complete Works of Captain John Smith*, duly shrouded in brown paper in a cardboard sarcophagus. (15)

After the purchase, William places Smith's volumes among a number of other historical sources, unique representations of the Jamestown story, all of them characterized, even in passing, as ideological *mythopoeisis*.<sup>93</sup> Among the plenitude of Jamestown books, however, Smith's volumes, printed on acid-free paper and "nicely busked up in their box," reign supreme, standing "gloomily elegant amidst many other tomes about Salvages" (12). Smith, whose character embodies the Machiavellian, self-fashioning energy of Renaissance England in all of its morally ambiguous extremes, has done in text what he could not do in life, willing himself into lasting fame and political influence through his descriptions of the Virginia enterprise, or as William phrases it, "wheedlingly complain[ed]" his way into "eternal life" (13). In his thoroughly romanticized and self-promoting account of his adventures, Smith writes a book that

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<sup>93</sup> Including Robert S. Tilton's *Pocahontas, Her Life & Legend*, of which William the Blind writes:

I can scarce unchain my gaze from this last, for the cover's a pageant of Englishmen round a campfire while, in unlikely relief against the darkness, like the subject of a Weegee photograph caught in the glare of powerful flashbulbs, *POCAHONTAS* herself stands half-draped in a tawny blanket out of some Plains Indian fantasy, showing off .1. perfect, hard-nippled breast as she gestures up into the night. No matter that she could have looked nothing like this. I suppose she reminds me of a Thai prostitute with whom I once had sexual relations. (12)

This comprises just one instance of Vollmann's fascination in *Argall* with book illustrations. The cover of *Argall* itself makes for an interesting comparison.

nevertheless manifests the (or a) “truth” about Jamestown; Smith’s words both reflect the “material reality” of his milieu and *materialize* its imaginative or ideological reality. The book itself—rather than historical people, places, and events, all of them long dead—embodies the reality of William’s Dream about Virginia, providing a fitting subject for the narrator’s ironic encomium: “So here’s to his [Smith’s] mortal remains! Most skeletons rule but a single backbone, while his owns .3. spines of burgundy. On each gleams the gilded emblem of the Institute of Early American History and Culture, guaranteeing the *ancientness* of the dead words inside” (13).<sup>94</sup>

For Vollmann, the material presence of Smith’s *Complete Works* stands in for the lost reference of the historical real, a characteristic he foregrounds within his own text. The novel thus participates in the same mimicry of texts that characterized earlier uses of archaism. William the Blind reminds the reader that the actual details of Virginia’s settlement exist only in vestigial form, distanced from the world of experiential reality by the authorship of a long-dead actor: “Squat, rectangular sailor that [Smith] is, he speaks in a rustle & flutter of paper wings which cannot fly” (11). Therefore, referring specifically to Smith’s text but reflexively to *Argall*, the narrator adjoins the reader to “skim bravely o’er his pages now, like a petrel speeding o’er pale-foamed seas, avoiding sharks and Spaniards, ’till looms *Virginia*—she likewise but a paper continent now, inhabited by mere paper tigers [ . . . ]” (12). William reminds us that the

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<sup>94</sup> Though William the Blind does not insistence upon its importance nearly so much, a physical and historical description of the Icelandic *Flateyjarbók* performs a similarly generative function at the beginning of *The Ice-Shirt*:  
 What is there to say about this talisman? Well, it is happily not so decomposed as the original *Njal’s Saga*, whose greasy tissue of black leaves most resembles a squashed cow’s carcass. We read that one hundred and thirteen calfskins were required to make it—a fact singular in its uselessness, but certainly believable, for the page-height of this book is from my wrist to my elbow, and the margins are sumptuous. Each vellum sheet is brown with age, and upon this brownness is a sea of brown ink, stained with islands of darker decay, like Flatey itself [ . . . ]. (9)

horrific dangers of Smith's adventures have been recast into a form in which, because they do not physically threaten the reader, they can be negotiated from a critical distance. The process by which the "real" has been abstracted into text underlies the novel's imaginative project, though Vollmann repeatedly notes the implicit ideological dangers of thus "textualizing" history. Of monstrous King Powhatan, for instance, William the Blind writes:

But be comforted; of him likewise naught remains but old paper and nightmare honor. He'd rise up from John Smith's pages to slay us all if he could, but from all designs hath GOD excused him forever, his paper flesh tamed, time-tanned, tattooed and o'er-written by letters of the English alphabet, alien epitaphs which he cannot read. He's a ghost cobwebbed with John Smith's words. (12)

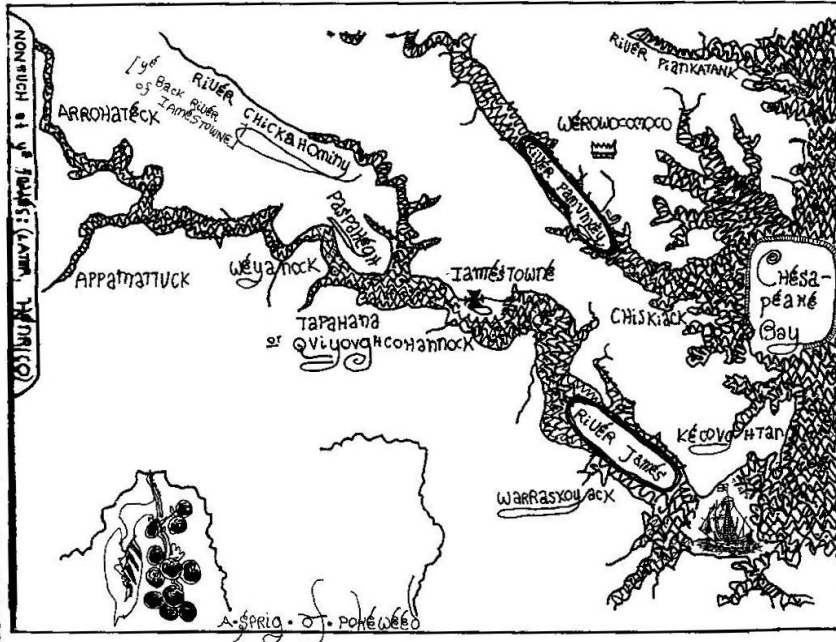
The equivocal potential for truth and falsehood that characterizes iconic representations of social-historical reality—from the description of Powhatan in *The Generall Historie* to the Virginia maps in Blaeu's seventeenth-century *Grand Atlas*, Pocahontas's funerary statue in London, the stained-glass windows of Willoughby Cathedral that celebrate native son John Smith, and, ultimately, Vollmann's own textual inventions—stands at the core of Vollmann's imaginative project, influencing both the form and ethical function of his novel. *Argall* thus attempts, in what one might cautiously label a Jamesonian effort, to enact simultaneously the positive and negative aspects of the late twentieth-century obsession with simulacra.

Pervaded by historically-suggestive linguistic and bibliographical elements, *Argall* resembles an encyclopedia of representational techniques. With its carefully chosen cover, numerous and generally "historical" epigraphs, original sketches, hand-drawn maps, documents, and idiosyncratic, antiquated typeface, orthography, grammatical forms, and prose style, *Argall* reads like a historical novel scripted under the collateral influences of Joyce and Tolkien. This is

to say that *Argall* shares with *Ulysses* and *The Lord of the Rings* the goal of creating a fictive, “secondary world” that models in various ways the ontological concreteness of the “first world of creation.” While Joyce explores the hermeneutic complexity of contemporary experience and Tolkien constructs an imaginary antiquity through philological invention, historical novels from Scott to Vollmann model social-historical space. Scott portrays historical societies with respect to the precepts of realist historicism; Vollmann, on the other hand, uses textual literalism to re-imagine historical experience as constructed largely out of texts and mediated through discourse. *Argall*’s insistently historicized textuality, while resembling the earlier efforts of Spenser, Chatterton, and Morris, nevertheless reflects its author’s late twentieth-century orientation. In his chapter “Worlds on Paper,” Brian McHale explains the relatively widespread use of such literalist techniques as concrete prose and embedded illustrations as part of the ontological dominant of postmodernist fiction, collectively “foregrounding the presence and materiality of the book” and “disrupting the reality of the projected world” (*Postmodernist Fiction* 181):

An iconic shaped text in effect illustrates itself: its shape illustrates its content. Since postmodernist writing exploits, as I have shown, the printed text’s potential for self-illustration, as a means of foregrounding the materiality of the book, it would be surprising if it did not also exploit in the same way the book’s potential for incorporating drawings and photographs. And of course postmodernist writing *does* exploit the possibilities of illustration. A number of postmodernist books are illustrated, either with photographs, or with drawings lifted or collaged from other sources, or, more rarely, with drawings by the authors themselves.

(187)



At Cape Henrico they did fashion a great CHRIST cross out of unpeeled Virginian timber, & the Laborers rais'd it up at at the Counsell's commaund. The Counsell-men knelt (hemmed in most safely by their armor-beetled Soldiers). Reverend Hunt did pray a goodly prayer, into which he incorporated the following homily from their *Instructions by Way of Advice*, to wit: *Every Plantation which our HEAVENLY FATHER hath not planted shall be rooted out.*

Figure 10. Vollmann's hand-drawn map of Jamestown and its environs, with text (*Argall* 155).

THE CHARTER OF VIRGINIA (1606)

James, by the Grace of God, King of England, Scotland, France, & Ireland, Defender of the Faith, etc.: Whereas **Our** loving & well-disposed subjects, SIR THOMAS GATES, & SIR GEORGE SOMERS, Knights, RICHARD HACKLUIT, Clerk, Prebendary of Westminster, & EDWARD-MARIA WINGFIELD [whom I, William the Blind, must warn you, Reader, will prove to be John Smith's flim-flam Nemesis], THOMAS HANHAM, and RALEIGH GILBERT, Esquires, WILLIAM PARKER and GEORGE POPHAM, Gentlemen, & diverse others of **Our** loving subjects, have been humble suitors unto **Us**, that **We** would vouchsafe unto them **Our** license, to make Habitation, Plantation, and to deduce a Colonie of sundry of **Our** people into that part of AMERICA commonly called **Virginia**, & other parts and territories in AMERICA, either appertaining unto **Us**, or which are not now possessed by any Christian Prince or people, situate, lying, and being all along the sea-coasts, *between 34.° of northerly latitude from the Equinoctiall Line, and .45.° of the same latitude, and in the Mainland between the same 34.° and .45.°, and the Islandes thereof adjacent or within .100. miles of the coast thereof.*

... **We**, greatly commending and graciously accepting of, their desires for the furtherance of so noble a work, which may, by the Providence of the ALMIGHTIE GOD, hereafter tend to the glory of *His Divine Majesty*, in propagating of Christian religion to such people as yet live in **darkness** & MISERABLE IGNORANCE of the true knowledge and worship of GOD, and may in time bring the infidels and savages living in those parts to **human civility** and to a **settled and quiet government**, do, by these **Our** letters patent, graciously accept of, and agree to, their humble and well-intended desires.

Reader, if you do wonder what lurk'd behind it all, well, the answer's within reach. The afore-mentioned RICHARD HACKLUIT, Clerk, Prebendary of Westminster, had already written a tract proposing that

Figure 11. The Virginia Charter of 1606, with text (*Argall 117*).



While Vollmann does not use photographs—perhaps, like Fowles, he objects to their chimerical, too-often unqualified realism—he employs nearly every other bibliographic technique available to the contemporary print-and-ink novel. Repeating a common thread of his argument, McHale seems to be most interested in postmodern literalism’s antithetical relation to realism. Yet while Vollmann contests the pretensions of post-classical realism, this does not appear to be his only, or even his chief, object.

Rather, Vollmann is equally interested in the text/illustration/icon’s potential for embodying the political, for both good and ill. His historically-inflected literalism represents a new kind of realism, or hyper-realism, which suggests both the inherent dangers and the continued validity of the textual model in relation to the social-historical real. As Scott brought the ideological and aesthetic innovations of an emerging classical realism to bear on historical subject matter, Vollmann employs the insights and techniques of hyper-realism, while retaining little of the existential or political anti-historicism that permeates the so-called historiographic metafiction of earlier postmodernists.<sup>95</sup> In the Seven Dreams novels, Vollmann’s encyclopedic, postmodernist iteration of historical iconography recalls the massive literalist projects of such predecessors as Morris, and while *Argall* “insists upon the obduracy” of its texts and images, the novel insists just as much upon its referentiality. Paradoxically, the novel’s success in this regard derives from the complexity of its literalist practice, which possesses, as McGann’s “Anne Mack” persona argues, substantial representational promise:

What the imagination seizes as beauty is not, cannot, and must not be “truth.”

Rather, it is seizes appearances, phenomena, *facticities*. The physique of the

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<sup>95</sup> This is not to say that Vollmann’s works are devoid of irony, a quality which might distract some readers from what appears to be a sincerely historicist attitude toward the past.

poetical event: from the elementary phonic values of the letters and syllables, through the entire array of verbal imagery, to the shape of the scripts and all the physical media—material as well as social—through which poetry is realized. What the imagination seizes as beauty is not truth, it is the image of a world.  
(*Black Riders* 155)

This bibliographical materialism serves to foreground what one reviewer regards as the novel's most salient feature—its “linguistic juggernaut” of “pseudo-Elizabethan prose” (Parini). Vollmann's linguistic archaism, a stylistic mask derived from Shakespeare, Nash, Smith, and others, commences with a dedicatory epistle addressed to “The Right Honourable Reader”:

I fear to compound my first offense, in penning such slender and tuneless lines as these, by presuming to direct them to yourself, particularly when their subject matter is a mere Wilderness of insignificant Salvages. For what could bulk more worthy of our puzzlings (save THE ALMIGHTIE Himself), than the hives of GODliness we call *Cities*? And what less so, than Fens & frog-pools? [ . . . ] I incline toward the best, Right Honourable; I'd fain kiss your hand –yet this book of mine doth drag me down toward the worst. (3)<sup>96</sup>

The novel's beginning thus directly imitates the practice of the Elizabethan authors of prose fiction, who, as Paul Salzman explains, wrote during a transition between works addressed to a “real or feigned” audience of gentlemen or ladies and works addressed to specific patrons among the nobility (*An Anthology of Elizabethan Prose Fiction* x). For instance, in a similar attitude of self-deprecation and justification, Thomas Nashe dedicates his *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594)

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<sup>96</sup> This should be seen as the author's pre-emptive defense against the charges of escapism often directed at postmodern historical romance.

to “the Right Honourable Lord Henry Wriothesley,” beginning, “INGENEOUS, honourable lord, I know not what blind custom methodical antiquity hath thrust upon us, to dedicate such books as we publish to one great man or another” (*Anthology of Elizabethan Prose Fiction* 207).

Vollmann maintains a similar style for most of the novel’s 700 pages, a weirdly ironic imitation of Renaissance English that includes frequent direct address to the reader, consistently inconsistent orthography, frequent capitalization of words for emphasis, sprawling syntax, archaic word-choice, and vaguely-antiquated usage, an approach which can be collectively characterized as rhetorical excess, a feature of much Elizabethan prose fiction and one still remembered in the example of John Lyly’s *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* (1578), from which *Argall* borrows the spirit rather than the form of its celebrated stylistic excess. While describing Smith’s post-Jamestown failures, William the Blind characteristically utters the following:

In the year 1623, altho’ exports of *Tobacco* from Virginia now reach’d **.500,000.** Pounds, there were bad times in Lincolnshire, and ’tis written that for many Fensmen, *Dogg’s flesh is a dainty dish, and found upon search in many houses; and also such horse flesh as has lain long in a dike for hounds.* A sad sort of winter food, like unto the cheese parings and offal upon which poor men subsist at Jamestowne [ . . . ]! (619)

Vollmann’s sustained use of linguistic archaism perhaps does more than any of the novel’s other textual experiments to model its reference to historical reality in the form of other precursor texts. If reviewers such as Parini find its “vaguely parodic” irony unsettling, they would perhaps also find unsettling the mixture of satire, sentiment, and extreme violence in its sources in Elizabethan prose fiction. For this reason, the novel takes pains to establish its linguistic sources; the chapter epigraphs, which number in the dozens, typically reinforce the literary

milieu of John Smith's England, offering quotations from Shakespeare, Donne, Symonds, Nashe, Greville, Chapman, Tourneur, Jonson, Raleigh, and many others.<sup>97</sup> Similarly, Vollmann insists at the beginning of his appended glossaries that he has made no effort to standardize (or "totalize") the novel's mind-boggling volume of cultural terms and variant spellings, preferring instead to demonstrate the capriciousness (and "charm") of his sources by leaving them inconsistent (686). The massive source annotations at the novel's end likewise insist upon the historical basis for the novel's stylistic archaism.

Though Vollmann's mixture of pseudo-Elizabethan prose and postmodern stylistic excess dominates the novel's texture, *Argall* borrows from other elements of the Renaissance literary idiom. The frequent allusions to theater remind us the extent to which Marlowe, Tourneur, Shakespeare, and Jonson's stage shaped the imagination of the novel's European characters, a fact that justifies Vollmann's widespread use of theatrical metaphors. Occasionally, William the Blind imposes a dramatic form upon the action, including the scene in which John Smith obtains his copy of Machiavelli's *The Prince*. Having travelled to the estate of his patron (whose youngest son Bartty has been the chief companion of his youth), Smith secures instead an interview with Lord Willoughby's sneering elder son Robert, future Earl of Linsey. Though the character's speeches are in prose, their meeting captures the dramatic energy of the Elizabethan stage. After Smith requests—with limited success—Robert's assistance in attaining a gentleman's career in politics or arms, or at least education toward such, the future Earl provides more than he realizes:

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<sup>97</sup> The epigraphs somewhat less often derive from "approximate" historical sources such as Machiavelli or Hobbes, and from twentieth-century histories, such as Grace Steele Woodward's *Pocahontas* (1969).

*Rob.* Now the ass would sing, & the serpent go erect! Ha, ha—your humor slays me, John! 'Tis true you drive me to a smile! GOD be with you, for you'll go a-*Politician*-ing. What medicine would best cure your simplicity? Let me dream on't—but no! I'll filch him my brother's *Machiavell*! 'Tis a downright volume, and meet to teach you to be right mischeivous. O precious! What *will* Father say? [*Exeunt.* (81).

The upshot of this linguistic archaism is that its opaque *strangeness* prevents readers (as much as possible while reading an account in English) from identifying with the European colonists, an identification that Vollmann considers ideological complicity.<sup>98</sup> While the novel exoticizes Virginia's native cultures and peoples, its stylistic archaism likewise insists upon the foreignness (for contemporary readers) of Smith and his fellow-adventurers. English confusion at a New World occupied by strange animals, alien landscapes, “naturals” covered by nothing more than bear grease, puccoon paint, or wampum, vengeful native deities, and savage Werowances is thus doubled by the twenty-first-century reader's imprecise grasp of the military technology, class structure, natural philosophy, and moral values of the novel's English characters, an estrangement from the familiar Jamestown myth in which linguistic exoticism holds a central place. For instance, one of William the Blind's numerous descriptions of Pocahontas focuses on her “barbaric” appearance, doing so in a reflexively decorative, antique idiom: “Her face was well-pounc'd with the likeness of a phantastickall fish upon each cheek. She wore a necklace of shell-beads. He disremember'd whether he'd seen her back in 1607, when the Salvages had serv'd 'em up with venison, cornbread & puccoon-painted wenchen”

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<sup>98</sup> See his comments on Woodward's biography *Pocahontas* (1969), in which “the tale of Pocahontas becomes more passionate, more romantic, and above all less disturbing to the descendants of the English conquerors. There are dozens of books in the same vein, especially those written for children (*Argall* 696).

(422). Stylistic archaism thus effects the reader's ironic detachment not only from the native characters, but also from the Europeans, a critical distance that results in the sociological objectification of the seventeenth-century English imagination and allows the reader to recognize the historicized, yet typically inappropriate, nature of their attitudes toward native Virginians:

As they draw nigh unto Appamatuck-Towne, .2. Salvages in a Canoa come bearing an invitation from *Queen Opposunoquononuske* for a feast & a dance. This royal damsel's the very same who wash'd Sweet John's hands in an ewer of bark when he was prisoner at Werowocomoco. In short, she's courteously disposed. Let's have a twitch at her! 'Tis rumor'd that her Hand-maidens be passing fair. (436)

Archaism, then, is a key part of Vollmann's effort to present the cultural horizon of seventeenth-century Virginia—including both native and European cultures—as Other. *Argall* brings textual literalism to the historical novel for precisely this purpose, an adaptation of the literalist emphasis McGann ascribes to Laura Riding's poem "The Life of Death": "Insofar as a gap is opened in this text, then, it is opened between text and reader, with the latter encouraged to confront the text as utterly Other. In this way the reader is brought face to face with the word-as-such—with language as the entirety of the scene where truth as an exchange is represented" (*Black Riders* 134).

Vollmann's materialist literalism in the Seven Dreams cycle, specifically in its conflated obsessions with textual artifice and socio-political didacticism, recalls the methods and aims of Bertolt Brecht's epic theater. The novel's textual literalism functions, like the epic theater's projected images, on-stage narrators, and *gestic* acting style, as a classic example of what Brecht calls the "alienation effect," which "consists in turning the object of which one is to be made

aware [ . . . ] from something ordinary, familiar, immediately accessible, into something peculiar, striking and unexpected” (*Brecht on Theatre* 143). *Argall* alienates contemporary readers from a hackneyed Jamestown narrative, just as all of his Seven Dreams novels de-familiarize the often-rehearsed American mythology of successive waves of European conquest, from Erik the Red’s discovery of Greenland forward. William the Blind’s iteration of an archaic Elizabethan literary idiom, then, resembles the “*gestic*” performance of epic theater, allowing him to present historical characters in a way that foregrounds the socially-constructed nature of their actions and beliefs. What Brecht calls the *gestic* principle of performance supplants the naturalism of the dramatic theater with a symbolic presentation of human behaviors, “wherever they are socio-historically significant” (*Brecht on Theatre* 86).

The goals of Brecht’s theater and Vollmann’s Seven Dreams are extremely similar; Brecht calls attention to the epic theater’s politically didactic function, which, Marxist that he is, he ascribes to the materialist, sociological foundation of historical experience. In the epic theatre, “human behavior is shown as alterable; man himself dependant on certain political and economic factors and at the same time as capable of altering them. [ . . . ] In short, the spectator is given the chance to criticize human behavior from a social point of view, and the scene is played as a piece of history” (86). As a result, Brecht argues, “the stage began to be instructive” (71). Similarly, Vollmann envisions *Argall* as a primer of the relationship between ethical action and historical circumstance. Nearly all of the novel’s chapters bear titles which begin “The Grammar of” (for example, “The Grammar of Princes (1595-1603),” “The Grammar of Gentlemen (1607),” and “The Grammar of Kidnappers (1613)”), and Vollmann often employs a Dick and Jane syntactical structure when describing his characters’ actions, such as “See John Smith, a-trying to warn our President of his fears” (162), or “See a shipload of English

adventurers a-searching for iron-mines” (435). According to Vollmann, the first-grade primer he remembers in such specific detail provides an analogy for what he calls Smith’s Bible:

Machiavelli’s *The Prince*. In much the same fashion, he presents Smith, Pocahontas, and Samuel Argall as “grammar-straitened” “exemplars” of individuals in history, abstracting an ethical position that underlies the whole of the Seven Dreams cycle. For the purposes of this chapter, which focuses on the implicit materialism of archaism, the cycle’s *potential* for such an ethical position is more important than its specific claims for such; elaborating upon the responses to history that archaism makes possible is more properly the subject of Chapter Four, with its comparative analysis of John Barth’s *The Sot-Weed Factor* and William Golding’s *To the Ends of the Earth: A Sea Trilogy*.

Archaism in late twentieth-century historical novels, then, proliferated as a technology to embody two powerful and often conflicting impulses in postmodern culture. First, the literalism of archaic bibliographical and linguistic codes rehearses other postmodern spatial paradigms. More than ever, archaism—though still formally similar to that of Spenser, Chatterton, and Morris—lies close to the cultural dominant obtaining at the time of its creation. The decades in which *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* and *Possession* simultaneously achieved popular and critical acclaim was also the era of television, film, and the first stages of a transition to digitized media with virtually limitless world-modeling capability. Byatt’s impulse to portray nineteenth-century England through the skillful pastiche of major Victorian poets, then, demonstrates the extent to which the world of social-historical experience has come to be equated with the world constructed by discourse. Second, archaism speaks to postmodernism’s obsession with the past. For many postmodern writers, iterating a historical textual idiom potentially allows them to capture the material and ideological “realities” that existed at the historical moment of the text’s



origins. If texts *are* thoughts made flesh and blood, then John Fowles, for instance, hopes to arrive at some material or ideological verities about eighteenth-century England by imitating Defoe's novels in *A Maggot*. Representing the past by mimicking its literary forms, archaism seems a technique for balancing (as far as is possible) postmodern pastiche against the weightier (to Jameson and many of the novelists I discuss here) program of materialist historicism.

Thus, writers of historical fiction who use archaism find themselves in the paradoxical position of asserting both the simulacrum and the real, a position of considerable complexity and often questionable consistency. Vollmann's *Argall*, perhaps because it arrives nearly four decades after *The Sot-Weed Factor*, or because it represents Vollmann's fourth historical novel, again most directly addresses the treacherous middle ground it occupies with respect to simulacra. Very often in the text, William the Blind excoriates ideological or fantastical attempts to portray the chief episodes and principle actors of the Jamestown colony: Grace Steele Woodward's *Pocahontas*,<sup>99</sup> for instance, or the maps found in Joan Blaeu's seventeenth-century *The Grand Atlas of the Seventeenth-Century World*,<sup>100</sup> or—most troubling—a funerary statue of Pocahontas in London:

We saw her greeny-white arms outthrust a little from her sides, her gentle hands peaceably empty, the bare tree behind her with its chirping birds. She was another Caucasian angel, like the “little princess” in Virginia Watson's *Legend of*

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<sup>99</sup> “This pleasantly written, painstakingly researched monograph, which was published by a reputable academic press, is as fascinating as any official product of Stalinist hagiography” (696).

<sup>100</sup> “turn o’er the leaf of Blaeu to the subsequent double-page spread, to wit, *Virginiae paris australias, et Florida, partis orientalis*, where bat-winged cherubs rise from a turquoise wave-wash to offer us the scales of German miles. [ . . . ] And within this unknown blankness of America (which hath the almost infernal brightness of rapeseed fields beneath a rainy Lincolnshire sky) we find flourishes, coats of arms to take up space, orange-tinted mountains here and there, .2. lakes as sullen as malachite” (656).

*Pocahontas* who had never danced naked cartwheels at Jamestowne because that might have offended *you*, Reader [ . . . ]. (28)

Even as he laments the distortion of “reality” effected by these and other attempts to make history palatable, Vollmann nevertheless believes that texts offer the only hope for preserving the human experience of history and for rendering it meaningful—as critical response to historicity—for historical subjects *in the present*. To this end, he offers an allegory supposedly drawn from a miraculous occurrence at twentieth-century North Carolina’s Outer Banks. After his wife’s untimely death from a fever, devoted husband John Harris labored to build her—according to her last wishes—a vault that is impenetrable by water. Some time thereafter, a massive hurricane—quite natural for the Carolina coast—pummels the shore, destroying Harris’s house and threatening to sweep his lifeless corpse out to sea. As the waves crash against the ruins of his home, they bring with them Amy Harris’s burial vault. Clutching the vault like Melville’s Ishmael, Harris rides the “well-wrought” funereal monument until rescued by the Coast Guard (16-18). With its concrete similarities to Pocahontas’s funerary statue, Harris’s burial vault provides an analogy for all texts. If they seem a foolhardy and shallow response against the incontrovertible triumph of what William the Blind calls “King Oozymandias,” texts nevertheless represent the only hope for a lasting intelligibility of historical experience. This, then, is the riddle of textuality, the foundational logic of Argall, and the complex paradox elaborated upon—with varying degrees of success—by the twentieth-century historical novelists discussed in this dissertation. For Vollmann and others, text is the only recourse for one who hopes to understand the past; as William the Blind vows, “I’ll keep a-voyaging in the paper boats of these .7. Dreams, standing off paper coasts until I ken the topography of their wheretofores” (19).

Lastly, I wish to stress once more the relation of these novels to the classical historical novel genre as envisioned by Lukács and Fleishman. As the former says about the Scott's classical form, clearly the late twentieth-century historical novels addressed in this study arose as part of a coeval development in the historical imagination of postmodernity. And while their forms are consequently different from Scott's, many of them likewise declare a fidelity to the principles of materialist historicism. As long as they adhere to the framing structures of the historical novel—the genre's foundational modeling of bygone social-historical worlds—they cannot be judged solely according to the ironic, anti-historicist values of Hutcheon's historiographic metafiction. Paradoxically, through their intertextual referencing of older texts, they continue to hold out hope for a recuperated sense of the historical *real*, a goal articulated with sincerity in *Argall*: “And I, William the Blind, do likewise love to grabble in the hold of *Historie*, seeking in bygone darkness certain pale glimmers which are o'er insubstantial to be spied in today's sunlight” (463). Along similar lines, those novels I consider among the better postmodern historical novels abide Fleishman and Lukács's functional imperatives, a double injunction to present with specificity the alterity of historical experience, while inculcating in the reader a concomitant sense of the constraining circumstances of all social-historical experience, including his or her own.

## Chapter Four

### Metafiction and Metahistory in Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor* and Golding's *To the Ends of the Earth: A Sea Trilogy*

One critical commonplace holds that postmodern historical fiction definitively breaks from both the forms and functions of the classical historical novel. Fredric Jameson, for example, opposes the impoverished historicity of postmodern fiction to the rich historicist project represented by the nineteenth-century realist historical novel (*Postmodernism* 18), while Diana Wallace in *The Woman's Historical Novel* sets up the classic form of the genre as a repressive, masculine discourse against which women writers shape a tradition of their own (8-15). Brian McHale also argues that the "older" kind of historical novel has been displaced by a new type of fiction that is essentially fantastic and works out its opposition to realism by undercutting the conventions of historical fiction (*Postmodernist Fiction* 90). David W. Price stresses that the postmodern fictions he calls "novels of poietic history" bear no significant resemblance either to Walter Scott's novels or to Georg Lukács's description of them (*History Made, History Imagined* 9), and Linda Hutcheon similarly argues that historiographic metafiction violates the principles of the classical historical novel by stressing the margins of history and focusing on its least typical individuals (*Poetics* 113-15).<sup>101</sup> For many of these critics, the postmodern tendency toward metafiction marks the central point of difference between the classical form of historical fiction and the nearly unrelated postmodern variants of the genre. This claim rests upon the idea that metafiction by its nature contests the mimetic

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<sup>101</sup> Two exceptions to this notion of the rupture between "old" and "new" historical fiction are noteworthy. Elias sees some continuity between Scott's mixture of romance and realism in post-1960s meta-historical romance (*Sublime Desire* 12-23), while in what amounts to a prehistory of late twentieth-century historical fiction Elisabeth Wesseling describes the historical novel as it moves through first the realist and then the modernist literary models in her significantly subtitled *Writing History as a Prophet: Postmodernist Innovations of the Historical Novel*.

strategies of Scott and his successors, reflecting instead a newfound uncertainty about historical reality itself. Thus the archaism of such historical novels as Fowles's *A Maggot*, Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*, and Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor* appears to signal an irreversible break with both the mimetic strategies and the historicist aims of earlier historical fiction.

The most influential formulation of this idea that metafiction invariably contests the principles of the "proper" historical novel can be found in Linda Hutcheon's theoretical companion-pieces *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988) and *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1989). Hutcheon describes an evolutionary subgenre of the novel she terms historiographic metafiction, which brings together contradictory impulses: first, a desire to undermine the reliability of all historical mimesis; and secondly, an effort to subvert the political authority residing in official "History" (*Politics* 49-51). Hutcheon addresses the first of these in the chapter of *Politics* designated "Re-presenting the Past." The chapter begins by posing historiographic metafiction as a response to the "totalizing" impulses of representational history, epitomized in the twentieth century by the French Annales School of historians. Rather than attempting to depict a coherent historical reality, characteristically postmodern fiction works instead "to contest representation and the traditional notion of the transparent referentiality of language" (64).

For Hutcheon, it is the "deliberate contamination of the historical" with metafiction that determines the postmodern reformulation of the historical as politically relevant (*Poetics* 92). Historiographic metafiction positions itself against both aesthetic modernism *and* the older historicism, generating a vision of the past that "reinstalls historical contexts as significant and even determining, but in so doing [ . . . ] problematizes the entire notion of historical knowledge" (*Poetics* 89). In postmodernism, then, a ubiquitously foregrounded preoccupation with the

discursive nature of all historical writing, including both historiography and fiction, challenges “the implied assumptions of historical statements: objectivity, neutrality, impersonality and transparency of representation,” validating in its place the ironic pursuit of a limited, pluralistic critique (*Poetics* 92). Hutcheon maintains that the tensions between historiography and metafiction must remain unresolved, suspended in a paradoxical stasis: “the formalist and the historical live side by side, but there is no dialectic” (*Poetics* 100). From this perspective, historiographic metafiction seems to be inherently opposed to the principles of nineteenth-century historical fiction. Metafiction simultaneously contests the older genre’s untroubled assumptions about the transparency of power and of language while also contesting Lukács’s claim that historical novels model the coherent (if dynamic) constraints of historical circumstance on individuals and societies. According to Hutcheon, archaism, as a variety of metafiction, undermines not only the specific forms of Lukács’s classical historical novel, but also the historicist imagination that shapes it.

But while metafiction has come to be associated with formalism as anti-historicist critique, I argue that the very metafictionality of archaism can be mobilized in the interest of a re-constituted historical novel along basically classical lines.<sup>102</sup> The metafictional possibilities of archaism in fact include rather than exclude the historicist imperatives of classical historical fiction. Archaism as metafictional strategy is compatible with historicism. Even understood as metafiction, archaism challenges Hutcheon’s claim that self-reflexive elements within historical fiction necessarily denote a challenge to historical mimesis. From Chatterton’s eighteenth-century forgeries to Vollmann’s extended imitation of Elizabethan prose, archaism often depicts

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<sup>102</sup> Writing about E.L. Doctorow’s *Ragtime* and *The Book of Daniel*, Jameson argues that postmodern historical fiction has lost the connection to “the historical real” that resonates in Scott’s novels (*Postmodernism* 21-25)

a phenomenal reality that, as Paul Ricoeur observes, is constructed in ways that resemble texts (*Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*). The pastiche of Elizabethan literature in Vollmann's *Argall* specifically posits a historical past shaped by the forms of its fiction. While the novel aims at hyper-realism rather than classical realism, the technique is nevertheless as much representational in the classical sense as "re-presentational" in Hutcheon's terminology. *Argall* attempts to show us the realities of Pocahontas and John Smith's Virginia by showing the imaginative principles that ultimately structured the actions of its colonists and "salvages," a strategy that recalls Price's belief that "to comprehend fully the reality of the past, we must participate in the processes whereby individuals, peoples, and entire cultures and societies *figured* their futures through imaginative projections of their wills" (*History Made, History Imagined* 3). By thus inscribing historical actors' figurations of their realities as a kind of representational strategy, archaism breaks down the binary opposition between metafiction and mimesis, calling into question Hutcheon's overarching concept of the paradoxical stasis of historiographic metafiction as the only possible attitude towards history in postmodern literature.

Archaism makes possible a reconciliation of metafiction and mimesis, and in some cases it reformulates a historicist—and in some cases even a Lukácsian—vision of the historical novel. Archaism not only represents the material and ideological constraints functioning at a particular point in the historical past, but also "demonstrate[s] by artistic means" the dynamics of historical change to evoke an understanding of human life as shaped by historical forces: an insight that in Lukács's formulation leads to political enlightenment (*The Historical Novel* 43). It should be stressed, however, that the archaism of novels such as *A Maggot* or *Argall* revises Lukács's prescription for classical historical fiction as much as it does Hutcheon's formula for historiographic metafiction. Lukács's sense of the "artistic means" available to practitioners of

the historical novel is limited by his endorsement of a narrowly defined classical realism.

Against what Lukács envisions as the transparent technology of this realism, archaism posits an opaque, literalist aesthetic that, like all metafiction, complicates if it does not contest mimesis.

Thus while in some postmodern novels, as Hutcheon claims, archaism modifies the practice of older historical fiction to foreground the fictional strategies by which historical fiction has always “filtered” reality,<sup>103</sup> it also does the opposite, drawing contemporary fictional practice towards the form and assumptions of the classical historical novel. Ultimately, archaism challenges Hutcheon, Jameson, and Price’s contentions that “old” and “new” kinds of historical fiction represent mutually exclusive generic forms.

Archaism (and its relationship to questions about the nature of historical reality and the relevance of the past) is not consistent from novel to novel, yet in their zeal to make claims for the politics of postmodern fiction, critics tend to over-generalize the unique possibilities of critique that archaism affords in different historical novels. In this chapter, therefore, I offer readings of two late twentieth-century historical novels, John Barth’s *The Sot-Weed Factor* and William Golding’s *To the Ends of the Earth: A Sea Trilogy*, both of which employ archaism at least in part to appraise the classical form of the historical novel. Against Hutcheon’s attempt to hold metafiction and historical fiction in a state of unresolved tension or even opposition, I argue that neither novel is particularly paradoxical or radically metafictional in this sense and that in fact each advances a fairly straightforward claim about the relationship between metafiction and history.

For all their seeming differences, *The Sot-Weed Factor* and *To the Ends of the Earth: A Sea Trilogy* have much in common, including their mutual reliance upon and sustained recreation

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<sup>103</sup> See Wolfgang Iser’s reading of *Waverley* (*The Implied Reader* 81-100).



of historical literary idioms. Neither is as massively literalist as *Argall*—their archaism is chiefly linguistic rather than bibliographic—yet both use archaism to mark their self-reflexiveness and, more importantly, to investigate the relationship between text and “historical reality.” For each, the genre of historical fiction proves well-suited to this task, insofar as it already dramatizes the problematics of this relationship. Both the novel and the trilogy follow the structure of *bildungsroman*, charting the interwoven personal and social maturations of young, privileged Englishmen whose adventures lead them from an old to a New World: colonial Maryland in *The Sot-Weed Factor* and Australia in *To the Ends of the Earth*. In both, the protagonist’s interwoven private and public maturation is doubled by his struggle to produce poems, journals, and other texts—complicated efforts to bring art into accord with actuality (or vice versa), harmonize literary text and experiential reality, offer an index for each young man’s personal and social growth, and even exemplify broader historical shifts.

Yet these parallels between Barth’s novel and Golding’s trilogy only further emphasize the significantly more important differences between them. *The Sot-Weed Factor* uses archaism to create burlesque that repudiates both the historicist values and the literary idioms of classic historical fiction, while *To the Ends of the Earth* reworks the forms classic historical novel to accommodate in a positive way late twentieth-century ideas about the relationship between language, or linguistic reality, and the historical.

### **John Barth’s *The Sot-Weed Factor***

*The Sot-Weed Factor*, a fictitious account of historical but obscure poet Ebenezer Cooke and his misadventures in colonial Maryland, remains notable for its ingenious imitation of the eighteenth-century novelistic idiom, an invocation of textual conventions that begins in the novel’s opening paragraph:

In the last years of the Seventeenth Century there was to be found among the fops and fools of the London coffee-houses one rangy, gangling fritch called Ebenezer Cooke, more ambitious than talented, more talented than prudent, who, like his friends-in-folly, all of whom were supposed to be educating at Oxford or Cambridge, had found the sound of Mother English more fun to game with than her sense to labor over, and so rather than applying himself to the pains of scholarship, had learned the knack of versifying, and ground out quires of couplets, after the fashion of the day, afroth with Joves and Jupiters, aclang with jarring rhymes, and string-taut with similes stretched to the snapping-point. (3)

With this euphuistic style commences a pastiche of Fielding, Sterne, and other eighteenth-century comic novelists that persists throughout the novel's roughly 800 pages, a practice Barth self-reflexively introduces here as his own "gaming with Mother English." In addition to the novel's neo-eighteenth-century style, Barth imitates Fielding's comic romance mode, the structures of Voltaire's *conte philosophique*, and the satiric impulses of numerous seventeenth and eighteenth-century texts, from Samuel Butler's *Hudibras* to Swift's *Tale of a Tub*. The resulting narrative comically suggests that *The Sot-Weed Factor*, like the missing pages of the novel's two secret histories (the search for which forms one of the novel's major plot lines), is a recovered or re-woven piece of an earlier age's textual fabric. This celebratory appropriation of historical textual idioms has been seen as representative both of pastiche in the late twentieth-century novel and of the intertextual relations obtaining in postmodern cultural practice considered more generally.<sup>104</sup> What has gone less thoroughly examined, however, is how

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<sup>104</sup> Discussions of the novel's overt formal intertextuality can be found in Patricia Tobin's *John Barth and the Anxiety of Continuance*, David Morrell's *John Barth: An Introduction*, and Charles B. Harris's *Passionate*

Barth's archaism relates to the representational strategies and historicist foundations of the classical historical novel.

*The Sot-Weed Factor* employs archaism to parody historicist convictions about the value of textual artifacts, contesting the associations between text and historicity that underlie such neo-historicist novels as Vollmann's *Argall* or John Fowles's *A Maggot*.<sup>105</sup> Barth's engagement with what he seems to envision as the universals of human experience ultimately minimizes the particularities of social-historical being. Furthermore, Barth appears to suggest that history reflects little more than the metaphysical flux that complicates all efforts at existential awareness and ethical action. Thus *The Sot-Weed Factor* evinces the antipathy to historical thought that Hayden White finds characteristic of modern novelists such as Gide, Sartre, and Camus (*Tropics* 31). That such an attitude suffuses a novel set in the historical past distinguishes Barth from the earlier moderns, yet for all this irony, the novel affirms the modernist, anti-historical belief in "the essential contemporaneity of all significant human experience," from which follows "the conviction voiced by Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, that history is the 'nightmare' from which Western man must awaken if humanity is to be saved and served" (*Tropics* 31). To this end, *The Sot-Weed Factor* burlesques both historical fiction and history. In his effort to establish the link between textuality and historicity, Barth uses archaism to *reduce* the latter, elevating metaphysical inquiry above the genre's conventional depiction of how historical circumstances define all human experience.

### ***The Sot-Weed Factor as a Neo-Eighteenth-Century Novel***

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*Virtuosity: The Fiction of John Barth.* Barth argues for the centrality of pastiche to late twentieth-century fiction in his own classic essay "The Literature of Exhaustion." Other studies which present *The Sot-Weed Factor* as a paradigmatic of postmodern pastiche include Brian McHale's *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987) and Charles Newman's *Post-Modern Aura* (1985).

<sup>105</sup> While Fowles's attitude toward the past in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* can hardly be called historicist, *A Maggot* (1985) represents a remarkable effort to recuperate historicist thought.

In many respects *The Sot-Weed Factor* epitomizes the twentieth-century literalist historical novel. In fact, the sheer virtuosity of the novel's neo-eighteenth century idiolect, more than its somewhat dated historical imagination, accounts for its iconic status as one of the two foundational models for the subsequent popularity of "archaicist" historical novels (the other being Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*). The novel originated from Barth's desire to recuperate the forms of a historical literary idiom. As he explains in his foreword to a new edition of the novel (1986), *The Sot-Weed Factor* takes its subject-matter from the seldom-remembered poem of the same title, published by obscure poet Ebenezer Cooke in 1708. The poem satirizes the near-savagery of the "planting Rabble" of colonial Maryland, using the then-fashionable, farcically-ugly "jangle" of Hudibrastic couplets to achieve what William L. Andrews deems "the South's first note-worthy literary satire" (*The Literature of the American South* 20). As a historical document and as an unexpected colonial example of Hudibrastic satire, the poem by Cooke unites several of Barth's own interests, including local history, eighteenth-century literature, and philosophical pessimism.

Initially, what became *The Sot-Weed Factor* was to constitute part of a projected "decameron" of tales about Tidewater Maryland, but the project evolved into one of epic proportions as Barth began to imagine the poem's historical origins in terms of period literature: "I drafted [ . . . ] a few tales based on the premise that its [the original poem's] misfortunate narrator was the poet himself, whom I imagined arriving in the colony with the innocence, though perhaps not the programmatic optimism, of Voltaire's *Candide*" ("Foreword" v). The expanded role of Voltaire—and eventually Fielding—in Barth's novel resulted in a massive fiction that joins *conte philosophique* to comic romance while narrating the quixotic travails of a thoroughly fictionalized Ebenezer Cooke. With the sort of farcical ambitions that characterize

Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, Barth sought to out-Fielding Fielding, using a form that differed considerably from the terse, ironic realism of the late-modernist novels then popular:

The style would echo that of the big eighteenth-century comic novelists, especially Henry Fielding—a style and attack very different from those of my first two books. The objective was to conclude my 'trilogy' with something like a narrative explosion, if I could manage one: a story at least as complicated, and if possible as energetically entertaining, as Fielding's *Tom Jones*; a novel fat enough so that its publishers could print its title comfortably *across* the book's spine rather than down it! (vi).

In a manner that should be familiar by this point, Barth, without apparent knowledge of Chatterton, Thackeray, or De Morgan, hoped to reconstruct the milieu obtaining in Cook's historical poem by appropriating "period" textual idioms, representing the past through a skillful re-articulation of its literary language that announces, in Edward P. Walkiewicz's phrase, not an imitation of historical actuality, but "an imitation of other imitations" (45). As we have seen, this representational strategy did not originate with Barth, though neither previous nor subsequent examples of such literalist historical fiction have figured prominently in Barth criticism. This likely results from the second of Barth's stated goals, namely, that the novel "would reorchestrate a number of twentieth-century melodies in eighteenth-century style" ("Foreword" vi).

The extent to which this double-coding affirms or violates the novel's function as historical fiction occupies the central place in this discussion, yet it seems preferable to begin by examining with some detail the novel's re-construction of Cooke's historical-textual milieu, a plan executed with far greater consistency than is usually considered relevant. Many studies of

Barth's fiction provide a short catalog of Barth's presumed eighteenth-century sources for *The Sot-Weed Factor*, typically recited as part of an introduction to the novel's themes before being abandoned in favor of the novel's philosophical concerns or its role with respect to contemporary poetics.<sup>106</sup> Nevertheless, the novel's archaism is deeply interwoven with the mimetic realism required by historical fiction. As David Morrell argues, Barth chooses a narrative voice patterned upon that of period novelists to narrate from *within* the eighteenth century, employing "fictional techniques appropriate to the world view he was presenting" (32). For this reason, *The Sot-Weed Factor* appears at first to validate the historical potential of its archaic technique.

In a manner consonant both with Barth's conscious efforts at post-Joycean linguistic experimentation<sup>107</sup> and the textual "other-worldliness" that Northrop Frye associates with romance, *The Sot-Weed Factor*'s immediate texture depends upon long-abandoned bibliographic features and a prose style that sharply contrasts with the conventions of post-war American fiction, including even Barth's earlier novels. Of these, Walkiewicz writes, "Unlike the prose of *The End of the Road* which imitates in its apparent transparency the language of realism, this is prose that makes a show of its opacity and exhibits a degree of structured complexity commensurate with that of the book's plot" (46). Like all stylistic archaism, from the synthetic neo-medievalism of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* to the numerous historical pastiches of Joyce's "Oxen of the Sun," the syntax and lexicon of Barth's novel construct a linguistic system

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<sup>106</sup> Tobin's *The Anxiety of Continuance* offers a representative catalog (56-57). Additionally, a number of shorter analyses explore the relationship between Barth's novel and a specific source, including Jeanne M. Malloy's "William Byrd's Histories and John Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor*," Thomas S. Gladsky's "Good Neighbors: History and Fiction in John Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor*," Joseph Weixlmann's "The Use and Abuse of Smith's *Generall Historie* in John Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor*," and Robert P. Winston's "Chaucer's Influence on Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor*."

<sup>107</sup> It should be noted in passing that Barth's literalism apparently derives from *Ulysses* and the fiction of Borges and Nabokov rather than the tradition of Blake, The Pre-Raphaelites, or Morris. This is clear from the familiarity with the former that Barth displays in "The Literature of Exhaustion" and other essays collected in *The Friday Book*.

envisioned as departure from and reaction against contemporary literary norms. The stylistic self-constraint of Barth's novel obtains from the first paragraph cited above, which introduces the text's equal investment in ludic self-reflexiveness and a mimetic figuration of an earlier century's delight in rhetorical extravagance. While Walkiewicz offers a brief catalog of Barth's ornamentation,<sup>108</sup> Earl Rovit—in an early, often-cited critique—remarks upon the convincing historicity of the novel's style: “[Barth] elects to write his novel in the eighteenth-century manner, using no words, images, illusions, metaphors, or other figures of speech not current and available to the English novelist writing in Fielding's time. It is possible that here again there may be minor transgressions, but I did not find any” (“The Novel as Parody” 120). In the precision and consistency of its archaic usage, the novel's language represents one of the more memorable and virtuosic instances in English of what Frye terms the “synthetic language” of romance (*The Secular Scripture* 110).

The surface opacity of Barth's archaism, the conspicuous alterity of its textural commonplaces, derives from a handful of closely-observed stylistic features. These include the dialogue rehearsed by the novel's characters, which is all the more impressive—and, as Rovit would have it, perverse (120)—for never obviously deviating from the rules that govern its imitation of period dialogue. This exaggerated fidelity paradoxically results not in realism but consciously comedic language, as in Ebenezer's gloomy explanation, “’Twill avail thee naught. ’Tis not five guineas McEvoy wants, but five guineas from my hand as whore-money” (67), or Bertrand's disconcerted response, “When Master Andrew learns how ill ye've minded his direction he'll sack me for certain, to punish ye” (67). Additionally, the volume and frequency

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<sup>108</sup> According to Walkiewicz, the novel's opening paragraph alone makes use of alliteration, assonance, rhyme, personification, epithet, anastrophe, and anadiplosis (46).

of the characters' interjections—including “‘Sblood!”, “‘Sheart!”, “Marry!”, “Nay!”, “By Heav’n!”, and “In sooth”—fulfill a similarly comedic function.

Comparable are the syntactic contortions of Barth's narrator, who, while seldom stooping to the antique usage of the novel's characters, delights in lengthy sentences that exhaust themselves with ornate successions of carefully poised subordinate clauses, especially when introducing characters. Even in the novel's shorter sentences, the narrator avoids syntactic commonplaces such as the naturalistic, transitive structure of subject-verb-object that has increasingly come to represent transparency and “good style” in written English, as in the sentence: “No one-crown frisker Joan, but a two-guinea hen well worth the gold to bed her, as knew every man among them but Ebenezer” (44). Along with these stylistic quirks, the novel redounds with lexical vigor, in which archaic words and word-forms proliferate. These include decorative participial forms of “plain” words, such as “beshit” and “befreckled” from the passage above, and a treasury of words that live only in old texts, from “swive” to “shive.” Neither is there a shortage of what are presumably pseudo-archaic neologisms, such as the figurative compound “bum-bolts” for flatulence.

Yet there exists no marked disparity between the novel's “textural” literalism and its thematic and structural components: characters, plot, narration, etc. To the contrary, Barth's imitations of Butler, Rochester, Swift, Fielding, Voltaire, and Sterne (to name only the most obvious influences) are, if anything, even more meticulously observed and artfully executed than the novel's blatant stylistic antiquarianism. But neither should this imply that the novel's immediate effects are somehow less important; rather, their seeming superficiality comprises an important strategy within the novel's re-working of eighteenth-century fiction, a means of representing the obsession with surface appearances that characterizes Fielding's comic



romances and relatively similar novels by his contemporaries, including Tobias Smollett, whose *Roderick Random*, Barth writes, “is a novel of insignificant surfaces—which is not to say it’s a superficial, insignificant novel, any more than the age that produced it, the age that invented the English novel, was superficial or insignificant” (32).<sup>109</sup> On the whole, the novel’s texture embodies a sustained re-creation of the mannerisms of eighteenth-century fiction; as in similar works that rely on archaism, the novel employs these antiquated conventions as a means of alienating the reader, in the Brechtian sense, from the illusions of naïve realism.

The accumulation of stylistic detail in *The Sot-Weed Factor* is matched by the discursiveness of its structural design, which includes a panoramic representation of the cultural and physical geography of the eighteenth-century British Empire, a multiplication of the incidents and coincidences of its “tangled skein” of a plot, and a host of caricatures who serve for the novel’s characters. Barth’s catalog of Smollett’s “width of vision” comes close to a characterization of his own novel:

Sailors, soldiers, fine gentlemen and ladies, whores, homosexuals, cardsharppers, fortune hunters, tradesmen of all description, clerics, fops, scholars, lunatics, highwaymen, peasants, and poets both male and female—they crowd a stage that extends from Glasgow to Guinea, from Paris to Paraguay, and among themselves perpetrate battles, debaucheries, swindles, shanghais, duels, seductions, rescues, pranks, poems, shipwrecks, heroisms, murders, and marriages. They wail and guffaw, curse and sing, make love and foul their breeches: In short, they *live*, at a

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<sup>109</sup> Despite the common critical mistake of specifying Smollett’s novel as a source for *The Sot-Weed Factor*, Barth did not read *Roderick Random* until several years after his novel’s publication, as he notes in *The Friday Book* (30). His 1965 afterword to a new edition of that novel, then, should be read (with caution) as comparative poetics, but not as evidence for direct influence.

clip and with a brute *joie de vivre* that our modern spirits can scarcely comprehend. (39)

Barth's imitation resides in a comically far-flung plot and similarly dizzying array of characters. While Smollett's novel arguably provides the best example of Barth's understanding of the comic romance plot, characterized by its series of picaresque episodes raised to epic scale, *The Sot-Weed Factor's* intricate structure appears to derive primarily from two books Barth cites in the novel's foreword: Voltaire's *Candide* (1759) and Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749).

The first of these offers a large number of structural parallels. Like *Candide*, Ebenezer makes an ill-fated effort to reconcile his philosophical preconceptions with experiences that render them at best limited and at worst actively detrimental to his fortunes, a series of fool's errands that ends with both protagonists embracing a skeptical pragmatism and rejecting all intellectual systems in favor of social, philosophical, and literal retirement. Barth borrows *Candide's* profound attachment to his two tutors, Pangloss and Martin, as a model for the relationship between Ebenezer and Henry Burlingame, and he reinvents *Candide's* inter-continental search for his charming cousin Cunégonde as Ebenezer's naïve attachment to Joan Toast. *Candide's* ending, with its rejection of *all* philosophical systems, inspires the resolution of Barth's novel, which features Ebenezer's relative seclusion at Malden and his increasing disengagement from the world beyond the plantation's borders, including a general apathy toward both the muse and the business of poetry.

Despite its preeminence among the precursors to Barth's work, *Candide* is not, after all, a novel, so *The Sot-Weed Factor* employs the techniques of eighteenth-century comic romance as means of amplifying Voltaire's sparse manner. As Barth makes clear, Fielding's *Tom Jones* supplies the primary model for the discursive excess that constitutes, in Barth's phrase, the

novel's "narrative explosion" ("Foreword" vi). *The Sot-Weed Factor*'s debt to *Tom Jones* extends so far that Walkiewicz contends the novel's "Fieldingesque" plot "undoubtedly strikes the reader as the most obvious example of Barth's rescoring of literary conventions" (50). Barth's adopts his predecessor's often jocose discursiveness, a strategy made clear by *The Sot-Weed Factor*'s surfeit of embedded narratives<sup>110</sup> that seem to digress from the novel's principal plot while more often than not actually hastening its resolution.<sup>111</sup> The digressive nature of these generally memorable tales—which include Joan Toast's "Tale of the Great Tom Leech" (51-60) and Mary Mungummory's account of the "The Unhappy End of Mynheer Wilhelm Tick" (405-24)—emphasizes Barth's use of discursiveness to contest naïve realism, a strategy that derives not only from Fielding, but as Walkiewicz observes, the "juxtaposition of levels and species of discourse" in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, a model that "permits him to blend genres in the manner of the Menippean satirist, to interrupt the linear flow of the narrative with learned digressions, philosophical dialogues, verse, and excerpts from spurious historical documents" (55). The novel's chaotic fictional world directly imitates the world of comic romance described by Fielding in his well-known preface to *Joseph Andrews*. That novel, as the title page of its first printing makes obvious, "imitate[s] the manner of Cervantes," specifically in the comedic unworldliness of its (arguable) protagonist Parson Adams, whose simple honesty emphasizes by relief the artful dissimulations of others, a function shared by Quixote, and—of course—Ebenezer (2). According to Homer Goldberg, *Joseph Andrews* aims for a much more comprehensive form of satire than *Don Quixote* by "convert[ing] Cervantes' benign and relatively self-contained comedy into a more abrasively ironic mode, redirecting its satiric

<sup>110</sup> Morrell counts twenty-five separate stories in *The Sot-Weed Factor* (56).

<sup>111</sup> Barth winks at this characteristic in the title of Part II, Chapter 24: "The Travelers Hear About the Singular Martyrdom of Father Joseph FitzMaurice, S.J.: a Tale Less Relevant in Appearance Than It Will Prove in Fact" (347).

impact from the isolated target of the accursed romances to the more immediate foibles of his own society and mankind at large” (“The Reasoning Behind the Form of *Joseph Andrews*” 478).

Ebenezer’s unwitting, recurring discovery of the differences between seeming and being in this comic romance world underlies both the novel’s comedy and its ethical content. Barth, of course, is much less interested in *condemning* worldliness than is Fielding, but he similarly chooses the masquerade as his key figure for society. In much the same way as Sancho Panza’s understated pragmatism counterbalances Quixote’s feverish dementia, or Martin’s Manichean philosophy acts as a foil to Pangloss’s optimism, Ebenezer’s naïveté has its antithesis in the worldliness of Henry Burlingame III, the laureate’s erstwhile tutor and apparent possessor of all human accomplishments. Burlingame’s comically Faustian pursuit of intellectual and sensual experience is motivated by a passion for all aspects of human existence that he explains as “cosmophilia,” and his ability to impersonate others at will—a vast array of noblemen, pirates, secretaries, planters, revolutionaries, and native werowances—represents the key figure for this mastery of the comic romance world.

As his re-inscription of the comic romance makes clear, Barth reinvents the novel as practiced by Fielding and Sterne in their respective manners, while at the same time critiquing, as Charles B. Harris maintains, “both the assumptions of realism and the novelistic conventions based on those assumptions” (*Passionate Virtuosity* 57-58). Yet there seems also to be a mimetic impulse underlying this archaism, a sense that the textual idioms which Barth practices largely correspond to the historical subject matter of his novel. The “Afterword to *Roderick Random*” referenced above, for instance, reveals a tendency to see literary form as closely related to the social-historical “real”; describing that novel’s obsession with the appearances of rank, creed, and morality, Barth remarks, “a bawdy, glistening surface it is, eighteenth-century

England,” to which he enthusiastically appends, “hurrah for the literal skin of things!”(31-32). Even if *The Sot-Weed Factor* fails to extend this relatively limited insight toward any serious reflection on historical experience, the novel nevertheless contains the seeds of the historicist literalism that flowered in later historical novels such as *A Maggot* and *Argall*.

### **Subverting Historicism: *The Sot-Weed Factor* as Burlesque**

Barth’s alienation or distancing of historical experience into conspicuously discursive forms has analogs within the book’s diegetic matter, specifically in the variety of texts created or encountered by its characters. Of particular interest are the apocryphal historical documents that figure into Burlingame’s quest to discover his origins: John Smith’s *Secret Historie of the Voiage Up the Bay of Chesapeake* and Burlingame I’s *The Privie Journall of Sir Henry Burlingame*, both set down in a style that was already archaic by the novel’s 1694 setting, and both reinscribing well-known episodes of Smith’s historical *Generall Historie*, including the Powhatans’ reaction to Smith’s compass and the captain’s later deliverance by the intercession of the chief’s daughter Pocahontas. The textual idiom and thematic concern of these narratives must have been nearly as foreign to Cooke and Burlingame III (both of whom appear well-acquainted with Smith’s “official” version) as the novel’s inscription of their adventures should be to contemporary readers, an alterity demonstrated by a passage from Burlingame’s *Privie Journall*:

The C<sup>apt</sup> made the usuall rejoynders, that he ever maketh on being shown his ignorance and follie, to witt: that I was a coward, a parasite, a Lillie-liver’d infant, and belike an Eunuch into the bargain. This last, he regardeth as the supremest insult he can hurl, for that he him selfe taketh inordinate pride in his virilitie.

(148)

The considerable distance between the pseudo-Elizabethan manner of Burlingame's journal language and the novel's habitual eighteenth-century texture underscores the by-now familiar identification between textual dialect and social-historical milieu while emphasizing the artificiality of historical accounts.

Henry Burlingame III's quest to gather the textual fragments relating to his family history extends the novel's denunciation of realism to include the concept of "truthfulness" in historical representation. As is typical in the novel, this denunciation takes the form of burlesque, defined by Gérard Genette as the imitation of a classical text that trivializes by reducing it to a low form of humor (*Palimpsests* 56-66). Similarly, Fielding in his "Preface to *Joseph Andrews*" describes burlesque as the parody of heightened or heroic styles or themes, its purpose being to exhibit "what is monstrous and unnatural, and where our Delight, if we examine it, arises from the surprising Absurdity, as in appropriating the Manners of the highest to the lowest" (4). The subplot concerning the discovery of Smith's and Burlingame's secret histories functions to burlesque historicist values, in particular its fetish for the revelatory "truth" of historical narratives. This parodic posture inheres in Henry's efforts to track down the complete text of the two documents, which ultimately comprises a quest to unravel the mysteries of his own origins. Not only does Henry hope to unravel the mystery of his parentage, and learn how he came to be found afloat in the Chesapeake Bay, but he further hopes that the texts will contain some remedy for his—presumably congenital—genital deficiency. Henry's "member" is so miniscule that he cannot "properly" make love, nor engender his own progeny. If his ancestors suffered from the same defect, then Henry's own existence proves the existence of some means of overcoming it. In this burlesque, Henry serves as a parodic figure for the historian, who pieces together accounts of the historical past in a heroic effort to arrive at a productive "truth." Yet Henry does not seek

historical knowledge simply for the sake of truth. Instead, recuperating the past (literally) ennobles the present *and* provides the means for contributing to posterity; the errantry that ends with Henry's discovery of the "rite of the sacred eggplant" and subsequent fathering of an heir reduces *ad absurdum* the historicist imperative that Hayden White describes as propagating "an awareness of how the past could be used to effect an ethically-responsible transition from present to future" (*Tropics* 49). Henry's search for origins thus brings the historicist project down to the level of abbreviated members and priapic eggplant rituals.

Similarly, what in the historical Smith's text began as a propagandist description of the early days of the Virginia colony and developed into one of America's foundational myths is altered in *The Sot-Weed Factor* into a low variety of scatological and pornographic humor. The documents embody the "alternative history" of postmodernist fiction, several instances of which, including those found in Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* and Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*, share *The Sot-Weed Factor*'s derisive lampooning of the explanatory impulses of "official" historical accounts, as Brian McHale observes (*Postmodernist Fiction* 91). But whereas these other secret histories derive mostly from comedic paranoia, Smith's *Secret Historie* and Burlingame's *Privie Journall* burlesque a familiar, cherished American myth. The famous episode in Smith's *Generall Historie*, for instance, in which the author's seemingly miraculous compass pacifies the hostile natives who have captured him, is re-told in scandalous detail by Burlingame I, who reports the compass to be part of Smith's not inconsiderable collection of pornography, a device that boasts cunningly-contrived peepholes allowing "degenerates" to "witness gentlemen comporting themselves like stallions, and ladies like mares in rutt" (150). In contrast to the yeoman whose industry and single-minded efforts toward survival ensure the eventual success of the Virginia colony, the Smith of Barth's apocryphal

texts is a sexual shaman. Not only does he save himself and his companions with a timely display of his collection of pornography, but he confirms treaties with native werowances by passing along sexual techniques learnt among the “scurvie Arabs” (260). Similarly, the mythic scene in which Powhatan’s daughter spares Smith from the executioner is turned into a test of Smith’s sexual prowess, in which the Captain must deflower a meretricious but as yet unpenetrated Pocahontas who waits tethered and trussed upon a great stone (732-33). Burlingame even relates the manner in which the “truth” about Smith’s encounter with the princess has been suppressed in the Captain’s “lying Historie,” a “farce and travestie” (a hilarious, reflexive transvaluation) which moved Burlingame, “in hopes of pacifying [his] anguish’d conscience, to commit this true accounting to [his] Journall-booke” (734). Full of such comic sexual escapades and Rabelaisian corporeality, Barth’s version of Smith’s Chesapeake voyage reduces historical narrative to a farce, using burlesque as part of what Hutcheon understands as the impulse to subvert “totalizing” history (*Politics of Postmodernism* 62).

From these burlesque documents extends a strong antipathy to the historicist conviction that history can be harnessed and used to orient oneself amid the social-historical chaos of the present. Instead, Barth’s novel contends that political history offers no more than a garbled report of the causes of violence and intrigue, the subtleties of which cannot be grasped in their entirety, let alone turned to any good use. Again, the novel employs burlesque to advance its claim, notably in the chapter that has “Lord Baltimore” (really Henry Burlingame in disguise) relate the history of the Calvert family in Maryland. This history takes the form of a lengthy, repetitive account of the vicissitudes of the Calverts’ fortunes in the New World, as Maryland changes hands many times, mostly owing to monarchical changes and to the machinations of William Claiborne, the Calverts’ arch-enemy. The details of this history proliferate beyond



intelligibility, exacerbated by “Lord Baltimore’s” overly personal perspective upon the injustices done to such previous Lord Proprietors as “Uncle Leonard.” Ebenezer reacts with increasingly weary befuddlement, interjecting his misery disguised as impassioned empathy: “’Tis too much!”, “Dare I hope your trials ended there?” “I can bear no more!” (77-94).

The laureate hears another major historical account from Jesuit conspirator Father Thomas Smith, who tells him, “I dabble in ecclesiastical history, and just now am writing a relation of the Jesuit mission in Maryland, from 1634 to the present day. ’Tis a sixty-year *Iliad* in itself, I swear, and the fortress hath yet to fall!” (349). The specific story that Smith recites is an account of the martyrdom of the unfortunate Father Joseph Fitzmaurice, a Jesuit whose name appears nowhere else in histories of Maryland. After presenting evidence of the priest’s existence, Smith reverts to the martyr’s point of view to describe his last days among the natives, at which point Henry protests the teller’s fictionalizing while Ebenezer insists, “Let him flesh his bony facts into a tale” (358). The resulting history is largely fabricated, and the moral Smith takes from it are humorously shaped to his ideological predispositions: “he was a fool of God, as hath been many a holy man before him, and the most that can be said is that his way was not the way of the Society. A dead missionary makes no converts, nor doth a live martyr” (362).

This privileging of romance over realism bears an obvious resemblance to what Elias terms metahistorical romance. In *The Sot-Weed Factor*, however, romance tropes function primarily to subvert the basis for truth-telling in historical writing, a fact noted by many of Barth’s critics, including Tobin, who argues that the novelist’s “fictive undoings of history” stem from a conviction that “history has always been fictionalized through and through” (*Anxiety of Continuance* 60). Walkiewicz goes further, citing the author’s implicit endorsement of Henry Burlingame and Father Smith’s seemingly shared belief that “the only patterns which

characterize history are rhetorical patterns employed for rhetorical purposes” (59). If this romanticizing of historical event attempts nothing further than reducing history to entertaining story, then—despite its virtuosic appropriation of historical materials, including archaism—Barth’s novel has little more to say from a historical perspective than does *The Passion*, which overtly challenges the notion that history embodies meaning. In her extended comparison of *The Sot-Weed Factor* and Pynchon’s *Mason & Dixon*, Elias implies as much, arguing that the latter metahistorical romance’s more sophisticated handling of the past “illustrates how this [ . . . ] new approach to Western history grows in force as the millennium approaches” (22). Clearly, Barth’s burlesque of historical fiction results chiefly in the devaluation of history’s relevance to the present.

This flippant handling of history extends ultimately toward a relativistic attitude toward the social-political crises that partly shape the novel’s plot. According to Lukács, such socio-political crises form the chief subject of classical historical fiction, and the heroes of such novels embody the historical dialectic by which the conflicts are resolved (*Historical Novel* 36). Henry Esmond, for instance, struggles to reconcile his inherited Tory sympathies with a progressivism born out of experience, and Thackeray’s novel ends with Henry supporting the new Hanoverian King against Jacobite conspirators. *The Sot-Weed Factor*, however, reverses this dialectical process, and the contending political forces in Maryland—rebels like William Claiborne and John Coode on one hand, and the autocratic Calverts/Lords Baltimore on the other—are static, oppositional entities whose decades-long conflict serves only to perpetuate itself. Throughout the novel, Ebenezer and Henry (like Esmond or Waverley) are deeply implicated in this conflict: Henry serves as Baltimore’s principal secret agent, while Ebenezer has been appointed as poetic propagandist for Calvert. Even Malden, the Cooke plantation, is drawn in—as the staging

ground for a particularly wicked conspiracy to reduce Maryland's population to opium addicts and whores. In the face of this epic conflict, however, Ebenezer learns only to reject any naïve choice between the two sides. If history has been bereft of meaning, then no basis for such a choice exists; the entire crisis may even be an elaborate fabrication. Henry, despite his years of intrigue in support of Baltimore, admits as much:

[A]lbeit 'tis hard for me to think such famous wights are pure and total fictions, to this hour I've not laid eyes on either Baltimore or Coode. It may be they are all that rumor swears: devils and demigods, whichever's which; or it may be they're simple clotpolls like ourselves, that they've been legend'd out of reasonable dimension; or it may be they're naught but the rumors and tales themselves. (705-06)

For this reason, Henry's hypothetical transvaluation of Coode and Calvert has major consequences upon Ebenezer's ethical deliberations as the novel winds to its close (486). Political concerns, while they indeed partly determine the outcome of Ebenezer's adventures (545), pale beside the laureate's maturation as son, brother, and friend.

While the historical accounts and documents clearly subvert the social-ethical claims of historicism, the specific nature of *The Sot-Weed Factor's bildungsroman* plot precludes any paradoxical affirmation of them. The rejection is mirrored in the arc of Ebenezer's poetic endeavors, embodying the laureate's progress from quixotic self-absorption to a fatalistic recognition of poetry's futility. At the beginning of his literary career, Ebenezer's poetry resembles *Candide's* persistent philosophical optimism, and his challenge similarly consists of reconciling his poetical hobby horse with his misadventures. For much of the novel, the utter detachment of Ebenezer's verses from this experience provides the source of the novel's

“Cervantick” humor—the ironic dedication of inept love lyrics to an especially sportive prostitute, for instance. Even more foolhardy is Ebenezer’s projected epic *Marylandiad*,<sup>112</sup> which proposes to distill the virtues of the New World and reflect honorably upon Charles Calvert, Lord Baltimore, the colony’s former Lord Proprietor. While requesting a commission as poet laureate from the man he believes to be Calvert, Ebenezer insists upon the poet’s role in memorializing human achievement, rhetorically inquiring, “How many battles of greater import [than Troy] are lost in the dust of history, d’you think, for want of a poet to sing ’em to the ages?” (74). Ebenezer’s defense continues with an impassioned claim for poetry’s superiority to other discourses, namely the historian’s: “Heroes die, statues break, empires crumble; but your *Iliad* laughs at time, and a verse from Virgil still rings true as the day ’twas struck. [ . . . ] What sings like lyric, praises like panegyric, mourns like elegiac, wounds like Hudibrastic verse?” (74). The people, places, and ways of life that Ebenezer encounters over the course of his travels throw this conception of poetry into sharp relief, revealing it as misguided at best, fraudulent at worst, but always as a source of comedy.

Throughout the novel’s first half, Ebenezer proves an unwilling apprentice—despite his repeated setbacks—to Henry, who is more skilled at appraising of experiential reality. Burlingame holds the doctrine that literature, in a manner that far exceeds a portrayal of princely virtues and vices, is always enmeshed in economic and political actualities. The novel suggests as much—while offering evidence that such a connection has escaped the laureate’s understanding—when Ebenezer’s *Marylandiad* notebook, taken from Benjamin Bragg at sword-point, turns out to be the printer’s account ledger (114). Similarly, agents for both Coode and

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<sup>112</sup> Perhaps an ironic allusion to Joel Barlow’s *Columbiad* (1807), which is generally seen as pompous and unsuccessful in its epic intentions.

Calvert seek the text of Smith's *Secret Historie* not for its historical import, but because its reverse pages contain the seditious Assembly Journal, recording the participants in and actions of the recent rebellion against colonial authority.

No matter how long Ebenezer clings to his innocence, he eventually learns to bring his craft into better accord with experiential reality, creating a more true-to-life *Marylandiad* in *The Sot-Weed Factor*, his bitter satire upon the people and customs of the colony. Written in the aftermath of his loss of Malden—and immediately after a three-week opium fever—the poem responds directly to Ebenezer's new-hatched disgust with his *Marylandiad*, the completed lines of which now seem “as foreign to him as if they were another man's work” (457). Disenchanted with this earlier affectation, Ebenezer exclaims, “What price this laureateship! Here's naught but scoundrels and perverts, hovels and brothels, corruption and poltroonery! What glory, to be singer of such as sewer!” (457). In response, Ebenezer intends to revenge himself upon Maryland through satire, subjecting “the Province with the lash of Hudibrastic as a harlot is scourged at the public post” (458). Here, then, would appear to be the summation of the laureate's literary career; he has sloughed off the naïve pretensions of his juvenile poetry and crafted in its place a sophisticated, caustic poem that succeeds aesthetically and historically.

Had Ebenezer's poetic maturation ended with this success, then the narrative of his career would have been one of refinement, and the novel would have developed a coherent claim about the relationship between reality and literary form. But Ebenezer's adventures, of course, are not ended, and his satirical triumph proves fleeting. Shortly after finishing the poem, Ebenezer deserts Malden, breaking his faith with Joan Toast. His hard-won poetic detachment now offers him a vocabulary for rejecting social responsibility: “What business hath a poet with the business of this world? [ . . . ] He may play at love, or learning, or money-getting, or government—aye,

even at morals or metaphysic—so long as he recalls 'tis but a game play'd for the sport of t'" (474). Clearly, this new conception begs to be proven false, and thereafter the novel systematically diminishes the laureate's poetic pretensions in direct proportion to Eben's increasing willingness to accept the responsibilities of friend, son, and brother. *The Sot-Weed Factor* ends with Ebenezer's retirement to private life as a Maryland planter and a tendency to disparage his small measure of poetic fame (753).

Throughout the last decades of life, poetry is at best a private hobby, and Eben's limited efforts result in nothing more of consequence: "Truth to tell, he had little to say any more in verse. From time to time a couplet would occur to him as he worked about his estate, but the tumultuous days and tranquil years behind him had either blunted his poetic gift or sharpened his critical faculties" (754). Thus what had been a narrative of refinement becomes after the writing of the novel's eponymous satire a narrative of rejection, of getting on with the "real business" of life. Eben's last, and probably "truest," poem can be found in his self-authored epitaph, which begins, "Here moulds a posing, foppish Actor / Author of THE SOT-WEED FACTOR" and continues in brilliantly ugly hudibrastic lines that exhort readers to "Labour not for Earthly Glory: / Fame's a fickle Slut, and Whory" (755-56). Thus the novel's archaism, insofar as it represents the more artificial aspects of literary production, those most directly rooted in social-historical circumstances, embodies a denial of its own potential for meaning. At the novel's end, Eben's poetry has come to resemble the entertaining irrelevance of Pangloss's philosophical propositions at the conclusion of *Candide*. If *The Sot-Weed Factor* makes any claims for literature's relevance to the public sphere, which would include any of its own pretensions as a historical novel, this ending nullifies them.

That Barth's novel expends so much energy on refining the relationship between poetic endeavor and experiential reality, only to reject the former as diverting but ultimately hollow, reveals what may be an irresolvable conflict between the novel's archaism and its ethical premises. Rovit noted such a contradiction as early as 1963, when he opined that *The Sot-Weed Factor* is not "the novel that John Barth intended to write" (122). For Rovit, Barth's choice "to organize his talents within the circumscribing frame" of eighteenth-century fictional conventions renders him incapable of making "a more positive statement of the possibility of value" (122). Though archaism does not of itself preclude Barth from offering "any positive statement of the possibility of value," the novel nevertheless fails to turn its eighteenth-century manner to any real effect; any potential for the relevance of Barth's stylistic imitation has been negated by an ending that characterizes aesthetic artifice as *nothing more* than aesthetic artifice (122). Ebenezer's maturation leads to the insight that the artificial forms of his poetry, and those of Barth's eighteenth-century sources, cannot be brought into any meaningful relation with social-historical experience.

In *The Sot-Weed Factor*, Barth presents Ebenezer's withdrawal from social-political life as the only ethically sound response to this realization and one that derives from a mature, practical paranoia.<sup>113</sup> Toward the novel's denouement, the laureate asks of Coode and Calvert's war, "How do we know who's right and who's wrong, or whether 'tis a war at all? What's to keep me from declaring they're in collusion, and all this show of insurrection's but a cloak to hide some dreadful partnership?" (513). This rejection of the possibilities for knowing right from wrong within the inter-related spheres of politics and history reflects what Walkiewicz calls the novel's "most subversive" aspect: the reduction of "all experience of and in the world to

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<sup>113</sup> See Morrell's *John Barth: An Introduction* for a further account of the novelist's paranoia (41).

anarchic, inconsistent relativism” (57). While Elias accurately notes the political conservatism inherent in the novel’s outcomes (226-27), it should be stressed that this conservatism stems from a radical disavowal of any possibilities for “truth”—or even knowledge of “reality”—obtaining in social-historical experience. Ebenezer, who fails to “acknowledge in his heart that there ever *had* been a Roman Empire” (271), similarly persists in his suspicion that ideological conflict itself is engineered to conceal the interests of the powerful, wondering whether “the ‘real’ John Coode exist[ed] at all independently of his several impersonators, or was he merely a fiction created by his supposed collaborators for the purpose of shedding their responsibilities, just as businessmen incorporate limited-liability companies to answer for their adventures?” (751). Ebenezer’s suspicion articulates Barth’s rejection not only of the claims of empiricist and narrative history that the essential truth of the past can be known, but also of the belief that history offers a source for social meaning.

### **History as Pastoral in *The Sot-Weed Factor***

Ultimately, *The Sot-Weed Factor* comprises a satire of historicism, specifically of its faith that history can be comprehended and employed as the ethical foundation for understanding the social-political concerns of the present. While Barth’s novel resounds with comedic references to and invocations of the muse of history, Clio proves useless in the context of the story; imploring her aid recalls Candide’s frequent appeals to Pangloss’s philosophical optimism. In *The Sot-Weed Factor*, Clio is indeed a “scarred and crafty trollop” (743), and her province, as Henry argues with a rhetorical flourish, “is like those waterholes I have heard of in the wilds of Africa: the most various beasts may drink there side by side with equal nourishment” (486). In particularly unpleasant circumstances, Ebenezer reaches much the same conclusion, observing, “the eyes of Clio are like the eyes of snakes, that can see naught but motion,” history itself



nothing more than a corrupted testament to Heraclitean flux, unequal to the challenges of existential disorientation, social confusion, or even fouled breeches (172). The notion that history conforms to any comprehensible patterning or shape is reduced to an absurd speculation that Ebenezer—by now established as his companions’ ethical leader—uses to divert his fellow-travelers from their anxieties about the threat of piracy in a chapter partly titled “*The Poet Wonders Whether the Course of Human History is a Progress, a Drama, a Retrogression, a Cycle, an Undulation, a Vortex, a Right- or Left-Handed Spiral, a Mere Continuum, or What Have You*” (679). In a manner that again recalls Voltaire’s skepticism toward philosophical systems, the novel’s repeated demonstration of the limits of historicist thought embodies Barth’s belief in the inscrutability of existence, his conviction that what Morrell calls “categorization[s] of the world” have no more than an untenable, illusory correspondence to experiential reality (55).

This wholesale rejection of historical consciousness begs a final, obvious question concerning archaism: if the imitation of historical literary conventions in *The Sot-Weed Factor* does not seem to affirm—as it does in *Argall*—a historicist insistence on the “knowability” of the past, then how *does* it function within the novel? First, Barth’s interest in eighteenth-century textual conventions is primarily aesthetic, not historical. Barth generally conceives the past as *story*. As a wizened trapper explains to Ebenezer, any narrative’s merit lies in the virtuosity of its telling: “No pleasure pleasures me as doth a well-spun tale, be’t sad or merry, shallow or deep! If the subject’s privy business, or unpleasant, who cares a fig? [ . . . ] [A] tale well-wrought is the gossip o’ the gods, that see the heart and point o’ life on earth” (588-89). Barth expresses his idea of the close kinship between history and yarn-spinning even more explicitly in his essay “Muse, Spare Me”: “For me, also, the past is a dream—but I laugh in my sleep. The use of

historical or legendary material, especially in a farcical, even a comic, spirit, has a number of virtues, among which are esthetic distance and counterrealism” (59). Surprisingly, Barth does not seem especially interested in turning this fabulist ethos toward a serious contemplation of the historical past. Even if *The Sot-Weed Factor* provided an important touchstone for the postmodern historical fiction that followed in its wake, the novel hardly confronts what Elias terms the “historical sublime” with the sense of urgency that suffuses such metahistorical romances as Carlos Fuentes’s *Terra Nostra* or Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*. As part of this fabulist strategy, the novel’s archaism represents Barth’s retrogressive attitude toward the history of the novel, his desire to reclaim fictional strategies that pre-date the classical realism of the nineteenth-century and twentieth-century refinements upon it. Despite the mimesis that glimmers from time to time in the novel’s archaism, its *primary* function consists of “counterrealism.” In *The Sot-Weed Factor* the only history that *really* matters is aesthetic history.<sup>114</sup>

Secondly, Barth’s colonial Maryland Barth shares the characteristics of what Harry E. Shaw terms “History as Pastoral,” in which the historical past provides “an ideological screen onto which the preoccupations of the present can be projected for clarification and solution, or for disguised expression” (*Forms of Historical Fiction* 52). Or, as Shaw continues, “history as pastoral is [ . . . ] a mode in which the past is used to serve the present” (53). In some respects,

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<sup>114</sup> Critics of Barth’s fiction agree that the novel’s recoveries of the comic romance and *conte philosophique* comprise part of a broader aesthetic program, as opposed to a serious concern with the historical past, though they characteristically avoid the implications of this attitude toward history. Tobin, for instance, extends to the whole of Barth’s oeuvre her reading of *The Sot-Weed Factor* as an attempt to expand the possibilities of the novel by plumbing its past. Similarly, Harris claims that the novel’s neo-eighteenth-century idiom allows Barth to reject “the conventions of realism in general and the assumptions that give those conventions validity. In this respect, at least, *The Sot-Weed Factor* may be seen as a metanovel; it comments on the origins and, by implication, the history of the novel” (*Passionate Virtuosity* 56). Of course, these and other critics take their cues from the novelist himself, who contends in “The Literature of Exhaustion” (1967) and “The Literature of Replenishment” (1980) that recursive strategies such as his own re-assert the possibilities for fiction in an age of “felt ultimacies,” after modernists such as Beckett appeared to have scripted its epitaph.

Barth delights in drawing superficial parallels between the late 1950s and the 1690s, as Elias notes (225). But the novel's central pastoral impulse concerns broader metaphysical commonalities between the two ages, a fact insisted upon by Tobin, who argues, "Barth locates in the metaphysics of the eighteenth century novel a certain contemporaneity with postmodern science, which confirms the randomized and mutable chaos of that century" (58). Harris likewise perceives in the novel a sense of continuity between Then and Now, specifically in "the novel's submerged analogy between two ages suffering the throes of paradigmatic conversion and the forms of fiction those throes produced" (57).<sup>115</sup>

But Barth's topic is not, after all, the historical particularity of either seventeenth- or twentieth-century metaphysics. Rather, he appears to be more interested in the similar ways in which the two centuries articulate what he perceives to be universal philosophical verities (or anti-verities), such as the novel's oft-repeated allusions to Heraclitean flux or universal chaos. In its insistence of metaphysical continuity across two historical periods, its extravagant efforts to "reorchestrate a number of twentieth-century melodies in eighteenth-century style" ("Foreword" vi), *The Sot-Weed Factor* amounts to a temporal inversion of Joyce's *Ulysses*, which in T.S. Eliot's formulation manipulates "a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity" ("*Ulysses*, Order and Myth" 177). Considered from this perspective, the novel's archaism does not contribute in any meaningful way to history; instead, it fulfills two interrelated purposes by working as "pastoral" decoration for the novel's broader concerns, and by providing an analogue

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<sup>115</sup> Harris's argument unfolds in response to Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962):  
 In doing research for that novel [Barth] must have been struck by the congenial spirit linking that age to his own. Caught between the ebb of an old *Weltanschauung* and the incipient flood of the new, we also occupy a time of paradigmatic shift [ . . . ]. Our celebrated sense of *Angst*, a seemingly endless succession of wars and crises, religious and political upheavals, an intense intellectual fermentation in which truths previously held self-evident are radically called into question—each of these, if not the effect of a paradigmatic shift, may be among its more prominent manifestations. ( *Passionate Virtuosity* 54)

for Barth's conception of "historical reality" as a morass of the superficial, the ephemeral. Barth, then, is inclined neither toward materialism nor historicism, a position he acknowledges in his essay "Historical Fiction, Fictitious History, and Chesapeake Bay Blue Crabs, or, About Aboutness," in which he states that *The Sot-Weed Factor* "is not finally about tidewater Maryland and its history" (181). Rather, the novel is more concerned with the reality it constructs than the one it represents, a characteristic that in Barth's estimation distinguishes all attempts at serious art from the more obviously mimetic approach of the historian (187-88). Considered from the historicist perspective, then, *The Sot-Weed Factor* must be accounted a beautiful failure, insofar as it embodies Shaw's belief that "novels that use history as pastoral [ . . . ] lack the potentiality to be as richly and integrally historical as novels that find their subject in history" (53).

### **William Golding's *To the Ends of the Earth: A Sea Trilogy***

William Golding's *To the Ends of the Earth* trilogy comprises three novels set during the last months of the Napoleonic Wars and published separately—the Booker Prize-winning *Rites of Passage* (1980), *Close Quarters* (1987), and *Fire Down Below* (1989)—which collectively recount the journey from Plymouth to Australia of a small, antiquated warship, *Britannia*.<sup>116</sup> Its protagonist and principal narrator is Edmund Talbot, a youthful representative of the English upper classes who boasts the patronage of an aristocrat, the likelihood of a future seat in Parliament, and a waiting appointment in Australia's colonial government. In *Rites of Passage*, Edmund recounts the numerous social prejudices and naval tyrannies that lead a fellow passenger, clergyman Robert James Colley, to humiliate himself through public drunkenness and

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<sup>116</sup> To stress the trilogy's coherence, I will be using an edition which brings revised (by Golding) versions of the three novels together as *To the Ends of the Earth: A Sea Trilogy* (1991).

sexual impropriety. Waking from this episode, Colley hopes to expiate his shame by willing himself to a slow, solitary death. The trilogy's second installment, meanwhile, charts the sentimental education Edmund receives through his close friendship with First Lieutenant Charles Summers and through his unexpected passion for a young lady met during a brief encounter with another British warship. *Fire Down Below* completes Golding's trilogy by narrating the *Britannia*'s race to safe harborage at Sydney, a stage of the voyage made desperate by the captain's use of smoldering iron to support the decrepit vessel's broken mainmast.

In ways that range from the superficial to the significant, *To the Ends of the Earth* resembles *The Sot-Weed Factor*. Like Barth's novel, Golding's trilogy narrates the adventures of a young Englishman who leaves the insulated purview of the landed gentry for a life-altering passage to the colonies. Similarly, *To the Ends of the Earth* is a *bildungsroman*, focusing on its protagonist's alteration in response to experience. For Talbot, this transformation comprises his maturation from a supercilious reactionary, derided as "Lord Talbot" by the ship's other inhabitants, into an empathetic man of feeling who enters Parliament as a champion of progressive ideals. Like Ebenezer, Edmund is a "scribbler"; his lengthy journal serves to filter his experiences. For Golding, as for Barth, archaism foregrounds the historical differences between the novel's historical setting and the present, while reflecting the terms in which the central characters understand their circumstances. In the trilogy—in particular the first volume, *Rites of Passage*—Edmund narrates his maritime adventures through a variety of conventions adapted from the half-century lying between Neoclassicism and Romanticism in English literature. The novels' archaisms include idiomatic borrowings from and allusions to novelists such as Goldsmith, Smollett, and Austen; a strain of affected Neoclassicism (much of it calculated to impress his classically-educated patron); a considerable use of the journalistic and

epistolary forms of the preceding century; and fragments of original poetry which echoes that of such poets as Pope and Byron. Like other novels using archaism, *To the Ends of the Earth* imitates antiquated literary idioms to examine the relationship between language and historicity. As Stephen J. Boyd claims of *Rites of Passage*, “in reading the novel we partake of the highly civilised pleasure of watching a skilful artist creating the illusion that his work is a product of a past age in art. It is a splendid piece of forgery, a marvelous pastiche of early novelistic techniques and styles” (*The Novels of William Golding* 157-58). While Barth’s archaism in *The Sot-Weed Factor* ultimately demonstrates the ineffectuality of language in grappling with social-historical realities, Golding’s trilogy uses archaism as part of a broader strategy in which language becomes the chief means for reclaiming what Lukács envisioned as the historical novel’s social-historical relevance.

### **Metafiction in *To the Ends of the Earth***

*To the Ends of the Earth* recounts the adventures of Edmund Talbot, and his journal provides the occasion for Golding to extend his concern with the relationship between textual production and historicity towards a hyper-realist history. While the trilogy’s appropriation of period literary idioms never approaches the radical literalism of Vollmann’s *Argall*, Golding similarly employs archaism to emphasize the fictional nature of all perspectives on reality. In *To the Ends of the Earth*, the filtering of historical experience through conscious textual artifice inheres in Golding’s use of the journal form, which, as Lawrence Friedman observes, relies heavily upon the epistolary techniques of such novels as Smollett’s *Humphrey Clinker* (146). Not surprisingly, the journal has its own history within the trilogy, one that stretches from the blank, highly-ornamented quarto given as a parting gift by the young man’s godfather to the two volumes the aging Edmund prepares for publication. The trilogy’s text, then, is neither the

objective account of Edmund's adventures nor the transparent vehicle of his impressions of the voyage, but a metafiction based upon literalist poetics. Like *The Sot-Weed Factor*, *To the Ends of the Earth* foregrounds historical experience as literary experience through pervasive allusions to eighteenth and nineteenth-century literary language, not merely as an instance of metafictionality, but as a representation of the novel's historical setting in the nineteenth century.

These strategies coalesce in Edmund's preoccupation with his journal's appearance and safe-keeping. Thus in the last paragraph of *Rites of Passage*, he seals the quarto with the following pronouncement: "The book is filled all but a finger's breadth. I shall lock it, wrap it and sew it unhandily in sailcloth and thrust it away in the locked drawer" (244). After purchasing a new folio from the ship's purser, he begins by describing his anxiety at recommencing the account of his adventures:

I sat down in my canvas chair before my "writing-flap", my only desk, and cracked the folio open on it. The area was immense. If I bowed my head and peered at the blank surface—as I must, since so little light filters into my cabin—it seemed to spread in every direction until it was the whole of my world. I watched it, therefore, in the expectation that some material fit for permanence would appear—but nothing! (248)

Edmund's recognition of his endeavor's fragility underscores the inherent difficulties of translating experiential reality into a textual record.

Yet throughout the trilogy, Edmund's fascination with the journal's physical and fictive properties also reflects his inherited eighteenth-century sensibility. Edmund's attempt to square his journal with his experiences is often carried out through a comparison of his own writing with that of Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, Goldsmith, and Austen. In one cleverly self-

reflexive passage, he informs his godfather that he must necessarily restrict himself to meaningful detail as he writes:

But come! I cannot give, nor would you wish or expect, a moment by moment description of my journey! I begin to understand the limitations of such a journal as I have time to keep. I no longer credit Mistress *Pamela*'s pietistic accounts of every shift in her calculated resistance to the advances of her master! I will get myself up, relieved, shaved, breakfasted in a single sentence. Another shall see me on deck in my oilskin suit. (25)

Nevertheless, the first-person, journalistic account shares *Pamela*'s sense of immediacy, and Edmund's allusion emphasizes that, ironically, the journal—not to mention Colley's letter to his sister, which Edmund pastes into his own book—borrows extensively from the conventions of epistolary fiction. If Richardson's influence is only ironically observed, Edmund explicitly acknowledges a debt to Sterne that reveals itself in the textual witticisms of the trilogy's first installment. For instance, Edmund frequently violates his rule of numbering entries from the day of the voyage's beginning by giving them whimsical titles such as "X," "?," "Zeta," "Z," Omega, and "Alpha," a practice that usually motivates an explanation such as, "Omega, omega, omega! The last scene, surely! Nothing more can happen—unless it be fire, shipwreck, the violence of the enemy or a miracle!" (91).<sup>117</sup> Edmund himself observes, "My entries are becoming short as some of Mr. Sterne's chapters!" (64). Through his narrator's reflexive recourse to the conventions of eighteenth-century fiction, Golding—like Barth—suggests historical precedent for an attitude towards the text that is often thought of as a postmodernist phenomenon.

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<sup>117</sup> Note that this occurs on page 91 of a 761 page text.



Edmund's narrative draws as much from "literariness" as it does from "reality," evincing a continual awareness of the voyage's fictive qualities. Throughout *Rites of Passage*, Edmund molds his fellow-travelers into literary characters, an effort that persists into *Close Quarters*, which he begins by lamenting, "I need a hero whose career I may follow in volume two. [ . . . ] I cudgel my brains, call Smollett and Fielding into the ring, ask their advice and find they have none for me" (250). By this point, the journal-keeper has made a practice of describing people and events as though they indeed had sprung full-formed from the pages of books. For instance, as his passion for Zenobia Brocklebank cools, Edmund dismisses her propensity for ill-considered love-affairs by observing, "She is having an attack of the *Emmas* and has infected this Unknown Sailor Hero with her own style of it!" (89).<sup>118</sup> Edmund's penchant for seeing his experiences through a fictive lens also shapes his own actions and subsequent narration of them. His seduction of the decidedly non-virtuous Zenobia, of course, provides the most celebrated instance of this tendency. While the rest of the ship's officers and passengers are witnessing Colley's humiliation in the "badger bag," Edmund seizes the opportunity to force the presumably willing young woman into his cabin, an episode narrated in a pastiche of racy eighteenth-century prose:

We wrestled for a moment beside the bunk, she with a nicely calculated exertion of strength that only just failed to resist me, I with mounting passion. My sword was in my hand and I boarded her! She retired in disorder to the end of the hutch where the canvas basin awaited her in its iron hoop. I attacked once more and the

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<sup>118</sup> Astute readers might note that the plural "*Emmas*" appears to be a double allusion. Ostensibly, Edmund refers to Emma Woodhouse, the eponymous heroine of Austin's novel, an author with whom the young man is familiar; however, Zenobia's character makes Flaubert's Emma Bovary a more suitable comparison. Although the trilogy's ludic ironies are usually in keeping with its historical setting, Golding clearly delights in metafictional anachronisms.

hoop collapsed. The bookshelf tilted. *Moll Flanders* lay open upon the deck, *Gil Blas* fell on her and my aunt's parting gift to me, Hervey's *Meditations among the Tombs* [ . . . ]. I brush'd them all aside and Zenobia's tops'ls too. I called on her to yield, yet she maintained a brave if useless resistance that fired me even more [ . . . ]. Ah—she did yield at last to my conquering arms, was overcome, rendered up all the tender spoils of war! (77)

This passage—which is again reminiscent of *The Sot-Weed Factor*—evokes the erotic metaphors typical of eighteenth-century fiction, such as Dr. Pangloss's "repeated experiments" in "applied physiology" to a "very receptive brunette," a lesson notable for "the doctor's sufficient reason, the effects and the causes" (*Candide* 3). Additionally, the lovemaking itself—which plays upon the power struggle between Talbot and his socially-inferior victim, as well as the stereotype of the "willing rape"—echoes similar threatened or fulfilled sexual encounters in *Moll Flanders* and *Pamela*. Edmund unwittingly reveals that his amatory adventures are the actions of a naïve though well-read cad rather than a practiced rake, a fact emphasized by the premature ejaculation that coincides with the discharge of Mr. Brocklebank's blunderbuss (78). The lens through which Edmund envisions his exploit is further accentuated by the overturned bookshelf.

Such pervasive metafictionality and intertextuality seems to violate the realistic principles of both historical fiction and travel narratives, a transgression that Golding emphasizes in *Fire Down Below*, the trilogy's last volume. After a chapter that offers a particularly colorful account of the ship's narrow escape from certain destruction upon an Antarctic ice cliff, Edmund (at work upon a publishable revision of the journal decades after the fact) inserts into the narrative a letter from an academic geographer who vehemently protests that the preceding description owes more to Gothic romance than to reality:

Your description would be well enough for a fiction in the wild, modern manner! Was there not a demented woman screaming curses from the top of your 'ice cliff'? Or was there perhaps an impassioned Druid imprecating your vessel before he threw himself down? I much fear it is all too highly coloured for a respectable geographer and if you *do* find someone rash enough to publish your descriptions I must insist on remaining unnamed! (700).

The “respectable geographer’s” heated response anticipates the objections of those critics who argue that the trilogy falls short of Golding’s earlier standards—as he clearly foresaw. For them, Golding’s adoption of the techniques of a younger generation of novelists represents a digression into insignificant language games that avoid the moral themes of his earlier novels while undermining the seriousness of the trilogy’s historical setting. For instance, Paul Crawford—after describing the trilogy as historiographic metafiction—adopts Jamesonian polemic to dismiss it:

Whereas this pastiche serves to illustrate topsy-turvy oppositions, it hardly amounts to productive parody. It provides a weakened or dead form of writing that Fredric Jameson likens to ‘speech in a dead language’ that is ‘amputated of the satiric impulse.’ As such, it is part of the postmodern displacement of parody in preference for [ . . . ] a ‘depthless,’ ‘dehistoricized,’ ‘motiveless’ form. (190)

For Crawford, the trilogy’s archaism “betrays” Golding’s “desire to languish in more pleasurable yet infinitely less significant subject matter,” to escape from the “horrific” violence of such novels as *The Lord of the Flies*, *The Inheritors*, and *Pincher Martin* by “a more urbane and historically distanced focus on the status of language” (220). Similarly, Boyd laments what he considers Golding’s turn toward romance and comedy, characterizing the trilogy’s second and

third installments as floating soap operas that reflect both a diminution of the author's formerly powerful moral vision and an acquiescence to the conservative, pragmatic ideology of the "Thatcher '80s" (179-90). Meanwhile, Kevin McCarron concurs that *To the Ends of the Earth* must be read in terms of postmodernist metafiction, but for him, the trilogy paradoxically establishes *and* subverts (like other historiographic metafiction) a binary opposition between art and actuality to represent "the potency as well as the inadequacy of language" (*The Coincidence of Opposites* 80).<sup>119</sup> All three critics, however, suggest that the trilogy's metafictionality precludes it from constructing a historicity resembling that of the classical historical novel. This claim, of course, should sound familiar: in a manner not too dissimilar from that of Crawford and Boyd, I argue that *The Sot-Weed Factor's* archaism represents a burlesque satire both of historicism and the Lukácsian ideal of historical fiction. But the question remains whether the same can be said of *To the Ends of the Earth*.

### **Discursive Historicity in Golding's Trilogy**

Despite its often obsessive self-reflexiveness, *To the Ends of the Earth* is not a radical metafiction that subverts any sense of a referential reality transcending its borders. The trilogy is not merely a hermetic meditation upon, or a reduction to, Roland Barthes's "problematics of language" (*Writing Degree Zero* 82). Rather, Golding's archaism, like Vollmann's, seeks to re-establish the link between language and social-historical reality. Arguing this point, Virginia Tiger cautions against too readily seeing the trilogy as prototypically postmodernist, arguing, "Golding's kinship lies far away from metafiction and far closer to another tradition where a fictive writer comments [ . . . ] upon his or her artistic competence, a tradition that includes

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<sup>119</sup> In detailing the trilogy's preoccupation with the problematics of language, McCarron stresses the similarities between Golding and other representative postmodernists such as Beckett, Fowles, Coover, Barth, and Calvino (103).

James, Huxley, Faulkner, Proust, Gide, and even Sterne” (*The Unmoved Target* 258). While the pastiche of historical textual idioms in *To the Ends of the Earth* obviously represents some form of metafiction, this archaism also serves the “sociological” and ethical imperatives of realist historical fiction, manifesting a partial allegiance to the mimetic tradition. To this end, the trilogy’s archaisms comprise a literary trope for the unique social formulations of the Regency-era Empire. For example, Edmund’s initially strict observation of eighteenth-century literary conventions explicitly reflects the artificial constraints of the British class system of the time. The trilogy’s multiple archaic literary idioms represent a range of period conceptions of the social-historical constraints then obtaining.

Furthermore, Golding’s trilogy illustrates not only individual, but also collective, ways of perceiving the world. J. H. Stape argues that Golding’s apparent “recourse to postmodern techniques” reflects an “awareness that significance is inevitably embodied in historically determined and societally validated forms” (227-28). The trilogy’s obsession with textuality and language, therefore, serves the ends of realist historicism. The trilogy’s numerous embedded texts—from Colley’s letter and Captain Anderson’s log to Edmund’s and Summers’s conversational allusions to the classics and the Bible, respectively—embody a variety of individual perspectives that collectively constitute the ideological matrix of the trilogy’s historical setting.<sup>120</sup> The fluctuating affiliation of the trilogy’s character-speakers to various archaic dialects models the relationship between individual subjects and their social-historical *milieu*, an impulse in keeping with Golding’s move toward realism in his later novels (Gregor

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<sup>120</sup> The idiomatic diversity of Golding’s historical pastiche recalls Bakhtin’s description of polyphony in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*. The trilogy does not go so far as what Bakhtin considers Dostoevsky’s radical polyphony, evoking rather the characteristic dialogism of classical realist fiction: Gogol’s *Dead Souls*, for instance, or the novels comprising Balzac’s *Human Comedy*. With this qualification, Golding’s proliferating discourses perform a generally mimetic function of demonstrating the social views of a substantial range of characters.

and Kinkead-Weekes 110). Additionally, the extent to which Golding's characters are shaped by their literary dialects illustrates another precept of realist historical fiction, what Avrom Fleishman calls the idea of "history as a shaping force" on the individual (*The English Historical Novel* 15). For reasons such as these, *To the Ends of the Earth* often appears to resemble the classical historical novel—and the nineteenth-century realist novel—more than it does postmodern sub-genres such as metahistorical romance, historiographic metafiction, or historical poesis. Generally, then, the trilogy relies upon mimetic representation, particularly in what Stape calls the "insistent and accumulated detail," that "affirms the traditional aim of realism in convincing the reader of the 'reality' of a created world" (226). While Stape emphasizes the ironies that accompany this design, ironic self-awareness need not invalidate the trilogy's nuanced, textually-aware affirmation of realist principles.<sup>121</sup>

The maritime pageant at the center of the trilogy's second installment, *Close Quarters*, illustrates Golding's mimetic purpose in the form of a *tableau vivant*, representing the ship's social hierarchy in terms of a polyphonic aesthetic production. In a manner consonant with the strategies of classical realism, the maritime entertainment represents British society in miniature, offering a basically static representation of social class that recalls the mimetic strategy of portraying social structures as they exist at a single point in time. As Bakhtin observes in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, crowd scenes and other societal tableaux allowed the novelist

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<sup>121</sup> It seems appropriate to note that Golding came to his sea trilogy as an experienced historical novelist, having written several novels with settings in an unfamiliar past, including *The Inheritors* (1955), which is more properly a pre-historical novel, and *The Spire* (1964), set in medieval England. From a linguistic perspective, *The Inheritors* is particularly interesting, as Golding makes use of radical stylistic innovation to represent the alterity of Neanderthal cognition. M.A.K. Halliday's analysis (1971) of this novel's unusual syntax has proven foundational to the critical approach dubbed stylistics. Golding's stylistic experiment in *The Inheritors*, despite its formal dissimilarity to the archaism of *To the Ends of the Earth*, prefigures the preoccupation with "language as consciousness" that animates the sea trilogy.

“to perceive these very stages [of social conflict] in their simultaneity, to juxtapose and counterpose them, and not to stretch them out into a developing series” (23). While Golding’s approach adheres to some narrative pattern (fashioned according to naval custom and revealing the hierarchies of class power), the sequence nevertheless redacts the whole of British society into one evening’s entertainment.

Golding’s representation of this social reality is distinguished from the strategies of nineteenth-century realism by his foregrounding of social speech. Even the sailors’ “address” to the officers and “better” class of passengers is consciously constructed according to script. Through this strategy, Golding suggests the constructedness of all speech; speech is never *really* natural, but shaped instead by rhetorical purpose, always affected by social-historical constraints. Even while his interests appear to concur with those of classical realism, Golding’s portrayal of a series of “artful” vernaculars consciously revises what Bakhtin sees as the realistic novel’s focus on the “extraliterary genres of everyday life” (*The Dialogic Imagination* 33). To the contrary, Golding combines an interest in the “sociological” dimensions of realism with a tendency to imagine language as a limited, fallible approximation of the absent “real.” *To the Ends of the Earth* features no sense of a boundary between the private/public or natural/artificial dimensions of speech—every utterance has already been turned into rhetorical artifice by the active, shaping pressure of social-historical necessity, a characteristic that allies the trilogy with neo-historicist novels such as *Argall* or *A Maggot*. In the trilogy, Golding’s polyphonic pastiche reflects the divisions of Regency society.

The textual idiom unique to each of the trilogy’s major characters helps form the mimetic “typicality” required by realist historical fiction. Redacting a position associated with Lukács, Harry Shaw describes character type as a distinctive yet problematic quality of the genre:

“Because historical novelists depict ages significantly different from their own and may aspire to represent the workings of historical process itself, they are faced with the task of creating characters who represent social groups and historical trends” (30). To this end, Golding’s Reverend Robert James Colley combines two distinct historical types—the aspiring bourgeois and the man of feeling—in one person.

Imagining himself elevated from his humble origins by the dignity of his calling and his sincere—if exaggerated—piety, Colley hopes to set a moral example among his fellow passengers, in spite of the naval prejudice against parsons (a custom fiercely observed by Captain Anderson). For this reason, Colley seeks out Edmund’s friendship and patronage, and Talbot responds with a patronizing civility that he deems appropriate to the difference in their ranks, a condescension that the unfortunate parson mistakes for sociability. Because of Colley’s sycophantic behavior and seemingly-affected religious devotion, Boyd considers him a reinvention of the ludicrous Mr. Collins from *Pride and Prejudice*, arguing that Golding uses Edmund’s initial disdain for the man (of which he later repents) to parody Austen’s snobbish, class-inflected depiction of Mr. Collins (*Novels* 155-57). By this logic, the parson represents not only a late eighteenth-century literary stereotype, but also the fluctuating social status of clergymen that provoked the stereotype in the first place. As is typical in the trilogy, Golding portrays Colley as a simultaneously literary *and* historical type.

The trilogy’s other characters—many of whom similarly express themselves in period language—collectively incarnate a considerable range of social-historical perspectives. When Lieutenant Summers apprises Edmund that “Class is the British language,” this relatively straightforward assertion of the foundational structure of British society invites the idea that discourse corresponds almost directly to social position—considered more broadly than the



nineteenth-century idea of “rank”—and that as a result all linguistic/textual idioms in the trilogy embody not only class distinctions, but a full range of social and historical perspectives.

The proliferation of these social-historical perspectives in the novel recalls Wolfgang Iser’s well-known analysis of *Waverley*, in which Iser argues that Scott’s sense of “authentic historical reality” ironically derives from “the inevitable individualization of reality” through a number of fictionalized accounts, “whose subjective transformation of historical situations gives rise to the reality of the novel” (*Implied Reader* 92). Of course, Scott always demonstrates that these subjective versions of historical events originate in broader ideological perspectives, and this technique recurs—with particular attention to its linguistic and textual dimensions—in *To the Ends of the Earth*. Using metafiction explicitly to textualize what Iser understands as Scott’s reliance upon multiple, idiosyncratic “eye-witnesses,” Golding, in McCarron’s words, “repeatedly draw[s] attention to the essential artifice of literary language,” allowing him “to comment obliquely upon conventional perceptions of reality” (*Coincidence of Opposites* 86). Thus the trilogy conflates class and the *language* of class. Golding’s portrayal of Regency society, for all of its postmodernist preoccupation with discourse, is in many respects consistent with the realist underpinnings of classical historical fiction.

*To the Ends of the Earth* nevertheless deviates in significant ways from Lukács’s description of the classical form of historical fiction, being set wholly within the confines of a ship, entirely peopled by fictitious characters, and containing none of the “great events” of the age. Yet perhaps the trilogy’s most important revision of the classical form of the historical novel lies in its preoccupation with historical literary discourse, through which Golding portrays the familiar historical crises and contending social perspectives of the *Waverley* novels. The archaic idioms associated with each of the trilogy’s characters—from the period “literariness” of

Edmund's journal to the rustic emotional intensity of Colley's embedded letter, the Byronic romanticism of Lieutenant Benét's poetry, and the authoritarian utility of Captain Anderson's log—taken together produce a textual map of the ideological matrix of early nineteenth-century British culture. If *Britannia* represents British society, then it is a society “ballasted with paper” (147). Golding constructs his Napoleonic world by showing his characters' bookshelves, figuratively *and* literally. In the trilogy, these discourses represent not only literary but social trends, incorporating what Crawford calls “a discursive battle between versions of reality” (199). Golding's archaism, then, neither embodies ludic postmodernism nor reflects the absence of the historical referent, but instead offers a literalist refinement of Scott's aesthetic project, a formula that Lukács describes as consisting of using literary means to portray “the radical sharpening of social trends in an historical crisis.” The same can be said of *To the Ends of the Earth* (46).

### ***To the Ends of the Earth* and the Classical Historical Novel**

*To the Ends of the Earth* signals its connection to other postmodern fiction by its thorough-going preoccupation with the various ways in which reality is fictionalized, an obsession shared even by novels which reject historicist values, such as *The Sot-Weed Factor*. While Barth's novel is essentially a *conte philosophique*, *To the Ends of the Earth* develops in Lukácsian fashion, dramatizing a historical crisis in which one epoch gives way to another. Its narrative embodies the dialectical paradigm for historical change. As both the trilogy's narrating consciousness and—ultimately—its hero, Edmund evokes Lukács's description of Scott's “mediocre heroes,” who “as central figures of the novel,” must “bring the extremes whose struggle fills the novel [ . . . ] into contact with one another. Through the plot, at whose center stands this hero, a neutral ground is sought and found upon which the extreme, opposing social forces can be brought into a human relationship with one another” (*Historical Novel* 36). Unlike

his namesake Edmund Waverley, who actively takes part in the second Jacobite rising by donning a kilt, joining the march on Edinburgh, and invading England at the behest of Fergus MacIvor and Charles Edward Stuart, Talbot—trapped aboard the *Britannia*—participates in a *discursive* crisis, a textual refinement on the Hegelian historical moment in which “the eighteenth century dissolves into the nineteenth, neoclassicism into romanticism” (Friedman 141). As Edmund begins to understand the multiple discourses practiced aboard the *Britannia*, he integrates them into his own journal, a literary development representing his development into what Lukács envisions as an “index of historical progress” (Shaw 42). Like Waverley, Talbot ends his journey as a much wiser, experienced citizen whose mature world-view synthesizes the ideologies to which he has been exposed. Thus Edmund’s developing social-historical consciousness is mirrored by his increasing sophistication as a journalist/novelist.

The first book in the sea trilogy, *Rites of Passage*, is dominated by the tragic circumstances of Rev. Colley’s humiliation in the “badger bag” ceremony that marks the *Britannia*’s equatorial crossing and his death by shame as a result of his intoxication and sexual impropriety among the common sailors. For much of the novel, Colley’s tragedy is filtered through the story of Edmund’s complicity in the parson’s disgrace and through his response to the man’s enigmatic death; the clergyman’s letter to his sister makes up the rest. If *Rites of Passage* traces the deficiencies of character that bring about Colley’s ruin, the novel focuses to an even greater extent upon Edmund’s shortcomings, using the dramatic irony inherent in the journal form to do so. From the novel’s beginning, Edmund is the picture of youthful, aristocratic arrogance, a snob seemingly of the worst sort who insists upon the privileges of his birth and connections, considering himself—despite being little more than an adolescent—the ranking gentleman aboard the ship. His patronizing way with his fellow passengers and even the

ship's officers extends to his socio-political views and is reflected in the literary idiom he adopts for his journal, which mixes neoclassical erudition and a familiarity with sentimental novelists such as Goldsmith, Richardson, Fielding, and Austen. Throughout *Rites of Passage*, "Lord Talbot's" textual self-awareness and his tendency to see people and incidents aboard *Britannia* according to literary conventions appears to be a failure of imagination similar in kind to the ridiculous affectations of Ebenezer Cooke's *Marylandiad*, resulting in a misapprehension of the actualities of Colley's tragic demise.

Edmund begins his journal by appealing to an audience of one: the highly-placed godfather who has enjoined him to "Tell all, my boy! Hold nothing back! Let me live again through you!" (10). Therefore, displaying his education, wit, and concomitant political promise to this patron provides Edmund's initial primary reason for keeping the journal, the first installment of which addresses his patron in worshipful tones. This eagerness to please a man who not only exercises considerable political power but boasts some literary achievement—in the form of a celebrated translation of Racine—encourages Edmund's cynicism and ostentatious rhetorical flourish, as in one of his many attempts to describe Colley:

Nature has pitched—no, the verb is too active. Well then, on some corner of Time's beach, or on the muddy rim of one of her more insignificant rivulets, there have been washed together casually and indifferently a number of features that Nature had tossed away as of no use to any of her creations. Some vital spark that might have gone to the animation of a sheep assumed the collection. The result is this fledgling of the church. (59)

This simultaneously excessive and insubstantial prose style and observational faculty characterizes Edmund's literary efforts throughout *Rites of Passage*, a fact with which the

journal-writer nevertheless appears to be well-satisfied, insofar as he seems chiefly interested in demonstrating his literary faculties for their own sake. As he subsequently notes, “Your Lordship may detect in the foregoing, a tendency to *fine writing*: a not unsuccessful attempt I flatter myself” (59). This “fine writing” is at once a personal and political performance, yet one that proves unsuitable to the task of representing the “facts” about *Britannia*’s nautical microcosm of British society.

The “fine writing” of *Rites of Passage* is chiefly in the vein of neoclassical satire; and Edmund’s voice from the beginning of the trilogy offers particularly arch observations on the superficiality and affectation of his fellow passengers. In some ways, Edmund’s journal is a less charitable version of Fielding’s comic romance, which targets the ridiculousness of social pretension; similarly, the young man recognizes affectation as evidence of corruption of a well-ordered society. For instance, before he reads Colley’s journal, Edmund draws upon his learning in a struggle to describe the parson’s singular appearance and habits, focusing on the ironic distance between the superficial dignity bestowed by the clergyman’s profession and the peasant’s status for which nature has clearly marked him (59). The affectation that Edmund finds in Colley’s pretensions toward dignity and respectability also factor into the journal’s obsession with theatrical metaphors. While Edmund variously styles the parson as a representative of corrupt religious authority, and a graceless rustic similar to Fielding’s Parson Adams, he particularly delights in seeing him as a Shakespearean clown. According to L. L. Dickson, Edmund’s sensitivity to this theatricality hints “at the superficiality of creatures playing at real-life roles” (*Modern Allegories* 126). Just as importantly, Edmund’s conceit of what he calls the *Britannia*’s “floating theater” fortifies a reactionary social-political perspective that venerates stasis and civic order above all else (*To the Ends of the Earth* 127).

Edmund's literary, ethical, and political errors begin to come into focus once he learns more about the tragic circumstances of Colley's humiliation and death. In the parson's vacated hutch, he discovers the manuscript of a letter Colley had been composing to his sister, a careful reading of which arouses Edmund's intense sympathy as well as shame for his own part in the affair. Not even his uncovering of the sexual details of Colley's shame can reverse the journalist's awakened remorse. Colley's letter throws Talbot's journal into relief, and the young man begins to perceive that his desire to shape life aboard *Britannia* to literary effect stems from a superficial literary priggishness. First of all, Edmund realizes that his prejudice against Colley was based on a shallow knowledge of the man's character. While Colley may have seemed a clownish and corrupt clergyman, he possessed a certain kind of imaginative genius and inner, if not outer, dignity. Were the latter not so, he would not have been capable of dying from shame. Secondly, Edmund recognizes several of his own faults in Colley, notably a misguided tendency to impose aesthetic taste upon reality; as McCarron argues, "By mistaking life for art, Talbot denies Colley's humanity" (91). In reading the parson's letter, Edmund recognizes that he had committed the same infractions that earned Colley the scorn of Captain Anderson, and that the differences in their ranks alone accounted for the difference in their treatment aboard the ship.

In the aftermath of Colley's death, Edmund forswears the satirical idiom that resulted in his complete misjudgment of the parson, losing confidence in the journal because of its complicity in the tragedy. Language itself appears unequal to the monumental task of representing complex reality. "Lord Talbot" is dismayed to find that his own writing is guilty of the superficial, theatrical falsehood he had intended to satire; as he confides, "My imagination is false" (162). Chastened by his error, he tells the First Lieutenant, "Life is a formless business,

Summers. Literature is much amiss in forcing a form on it!” (233). As a result, Edmund becomes (without total success, of course) self-conscious about linguistic affectation, particularly with regard to his earlier fixation with the navalese jargon he has termed “Tarpaulin”: “I saw my efforts to talk as the seamen did as a crass affectation. I might as well have talked of hems and gores and gussets! Let the rest of the passengers make free with Tarpaulin” (304). In *The Sot-Weed Factor*, Ebenezer Cooke reaches much the same conclusion about the relation between art and actuality, a discovery that ultimately leads him to reject his poetic pretensions. Yet Edmund’s enlightenment happens fairly early in *To the Ends of the Earth*, and the bulk of the trilogy features the young man’s search for forms of textual expression that synthesize his experiences and his literary bent.

But this effort is not merely aesthetic affirmation, as it is in Barth’s novel. Rather, Golding presents the import of language in deadly earnestness rather than comedy. Captain Anderson, for instance, perceives the journal as a threat which—if it convinces Edmund’s patron of any wrongdoing in the Colley affair—could easily ruin his reputation and career. Because “Lord Talbot” keeps his account of the *Britannia*’s voyage under the auspices of an important member of the imperial government (and with implicit direction to report on the opinions and actions of the republican Mr. Prettiman), Anderson can neither forbid nor ask to see it; he is all the more anxious that Edmund does not contradict his own account in the ship’s log. Consequently, Edmund hopes that the thought of his journal, by forcing self-awareness on those who appear in its pages, might influence their conduct for the better. Yet he balks at the power the journal—and his possession of Colley’s letter—affords him. Vowing to keep his discoveries about the *Britannia*’s tragedy to himself for the present, Edmund confides, “I must keep all locked away. This journal has become deadly as a loaded gun” (162).

The second and third volumes of *To the Ends of the Earth* face the challenges of continuing Edmund's private and public maturation, seeing him safely harbored in Sydney Cove, and advancing his journal beyond the textual impasse with which *Rites of Passage* concludes. To this end, McCarron argues that the second book of the trilogy, *Close Quarters*, opens with a suggestion that Edmund "has undergone a profound 'sea change' in his understanding of language from that which characterises his smugly superior attitude to it in *Rites of Passage*" (103). The rest of the book, asserts McCarron, features Edmund's search for a more viable language than that of the first novel. Generally speaking, this takes the form of a short but intense detour into romantic poetry, largely inspired by what he calls Colley's "touch of genius" (483), a talent that derived from the parson's "innocence, his suffering and his need for a friend if only a piece of paper" (302). Under this influence, Edmund finds himself similarly dominated by his passions, a state of emotional excess that is exacerbated by the effects of multiple severe concussions. Disoriented in his wits, Edmund first sees Miss Marion Chumley—the future Mrs. Talbot—in a metaphorical blast of lightning that surrounds her in a "white line of light" (317). The new "Lord Talbot" has difficulty comporting himself with the slightest coolness, unleashing tears at Mrs. East's performance of a sentimental folk song and climbing into the rigging in his nightshirt to call after the receding *Alcyone*—and Miss Chumley—"Come back! Come back!" (358).

Having abandoned the supercilious neoclassicism of the first novel, Edmund seeks a suitable idiom to express his altered emotional and mental state. After his concussive confusion slowly clears, Edmund resolves to become a lyric poet, one who might discover in his celebration of Miss Chumley the ineffable grandeur of the kind of imagination that inspired Colley's pen. By the end of *Close Quarters*, the journal-writer has moved beyond lyric to a form



infinitely more appropriate to his intellect and temperament: the then-modern novel, in which Edmund, according to McCarron, “achieves a synthesis of the Romantic and the Classical that will ultimately become his own voice” (116).

As the trilogy’s second installment comes to its abrupt close, Edmund, writing from an unspecified future, admits his developing inclination to turn his journal into a published literary work. In what he calls the volume’s *postscriptum*, Edmund explains to a newly-imagined reading public his desire to see the journal into print: “What began at my godfather’s behest proceeded by my own growing inclination and I now find myself no more or less than a common writer with all the ambitions if not all the failings of that breed [ . . . ] I admit to ambitions. To be printed is the smallest of them!” (484). Furthermore, Talbot now conceives the journal as a triple-decker, and finds himself “envisioning with gusto the three splendid volumes of *Talbot’s Voyage or The Ends of The Earth!*” (485). Edmund has left his inherited (and somewhat anachronistic) literary conservatism far behind, passing first through visionary romanticism, then toward the literary genre that dominated the succeeding century. At this point, Stape contends, “Golding again shifts generic gears as the ‘high’ forms of tragedy and poetry give way to the newly-emergent, democratic, middle-class and socially-centered ones of biography and the novel” (Stape 234).

In *Fire Down Below*, the trilogy’s last volume, Edmund refines this novelistic impulse, drawing in the remainder of the ship’s major occupants as *Britannia* slowly approaches her destination. The last challenge to Talbot’s newfound novelistic idiom comes from his short but intense friendship with Mrs. Prettiman (earlier in the trilogy Miss Grantham) and, especially, her new husband, Aloysius Prettiman, a republican pamphleteer and visionary modeled upon Thomas Paine. Together, the Prettimans plan to establish a utopia in the Australian outback, one

inspired by Voltaire's fictional Eldorado. As the novel draws to its close, Prettiman—an object of ridicule in *Rites of Passage*—is revealed as the noblest figure in the trilogy, powerfully invoking a mystical march toward a perfectible society: “Imagine our caravan, we, a fire down below here—sparks of the absolute—matching the fire up there—out there! Moving by cool night through the deserts of this new land towards Eldorado with nothing between our eyes and the Absolute, our ears and that music!” (676). Mrs. Prettiman, on the other hand, while she shares her husband's desire for Eldorado, is decidedly less poetic. When she parts with Edmund for the last time, for instance, she warns him against mythologizing the *Britannia*'s voyage: “Do not refine upon its nature. As I told you, it was not an Odyssey. It is no type, emblem, or metaphor of the human condition. It is, or rather it was, what it was. A series of events” (728). Both husband and wife have transcended pamphleteering, putting their ideals into concrete action, not speech; according to Stape, they “hope to construct a world on the premise that experience possesses a significance that defies the traditional political, social, or linguistic demarcations confining it” (237). Their influence over Edmund—like that of his godfather, Lieutenant Deverel, Colley, and even Summers—passes, of course. He recognizes that Prettiman's journey, regardless of his wife's cold rationality, is the stuff of books—specifically those of Pindar and Voltaire. Thus, he cannot bring himself to share their journey, which would mean a renunciation of both his journal and his increasingly sincere (if prosaic) commitment “to exercise power for the betterment of [ . . . ] the world in general” (678). Nevertheless, his momentary glimpse of Prettiman's Absolute seemingly haunts Talbot for the remainder of his life, accompanied by a lasting uneasiness about his failure to join the couple's utopian endeavor.

Edmund's rejection of the Prettiman's actuated radicalism represents a simultaneous acquiescence to the constraints of historicity and an affirmation of his journal's worth. Stape

argues persuasively that this latter entails the wiser young man's reconciliation of art and experiential reality, a mature "awareness that literary modes are means that, though they inevitably fail to capture the contours and complexity of existence, nonetheless depict and mediate essences that otherwise lie beyond expression" (235). For this reason, Golding's trilogy concludes with what Tiger calls "the tried and true formulaic conventions for narrative closure": marriage and inheritance (315). While the trilogy's "happy ending" seems as universal as a literary convention can be, its specific nature is "period correct." Beginning his account of the successful wooing of Miss Chumley in Australia, Edmund writes:

I have always been embarrassed for such authors as Fielding and Smollett, to say nothing of the moderns, Miss Austen, for example, who feel that despite all the evidence from the daily life around them, a story to be veridical should have a happy ending—or rather I was so embarrassed before my life took a turn into regions of phantasy, of 'faerie', of ridiculous happiness! (734)

In an ironic transposition to colonial Australia of *Emma*, *Persuasion*, and *Mansfield Park*'s countryside excursions—the two young people and their chaperone drive past exotic trees, unrestrained convicts, and a naked aboriginal on their way to a romantic view of Sydney Cove. As soon as the business of his marriage is settled, Edmund finds his political fortunes—derailed by the death of his godfather—restored by his despaired-of election to that patron's pocket borough—a miraculous turn of events to which he exultingly exclaims, "Beat that, Goldsmith! Emulate me, Miss Austen, if you are able!" (756). Thus the trilogy, which began by observing the constraints of neoclassical satire, ends with an imitation of Jane Austen. Between these two points, Edmund's story has followed typical *bildungsroman* development, and his gradual personal and social maturation follows the course of his development as a writer, a kind of

education noted by Friedman, who writes, “Like the many fictional eighteenth- and nineteenth-century rites of passage it recalls, Talbot’s is ultimately a sentimental journey whose mandatory happy ending is validated by the triumphant, if fortuitous, completion of a mostly sentimental education” (158).

### **Conclusion**

Unlike *The Sot-Weed Factor* and many other examples of metahistorical romance, *To the Ends of Earth* is an unequivocally *historical* fiction imbued with an almost classically historicist sense of a social reality generated by the flux of institutions and customs, the dynamic ebb and flow of social history. That Golding sets his trilogy at the very historical moment that gave birth to *Waverley* and the classical form of historical fiction further underscores this historicism, and indeed, as it appropriates Scott’s form, may be seen as part of the novel’s appropriation of period literary idioms. The trilogy’s turn toward realist historicism may be seen in the transition between *Rites of Passage* and *Close Quarters*, a broadening of Edmund’s historical consciousness reflected in his intellectual confusion upon learning of the war’s apparent end:

[ . . . ] I did not know if my strength was sufficient for the ordeal of our rejoicing! I tried once more to realize the fact—a turning point in history, one of the world’s great occasions, we stood on a watershed and so on—but it was no use. My head became the arena of confused images and thoughts. [ . . . ] I must own to a most eccentric feeling in the circumstances. It was one of fear. [290]

Talbot’s situation is like that of Scott’s heroes: caught in the tide of social-historical conflict, forced to negotiate between antagonistic forces that compete for his loyalty. The trilogy resounds with what Tiger terms “alternative ways of envisaging and inhabiting the world”; caught between them, Edmund’s position is emblematic, “situated, like his epoch, halfway

between the Augustan and the Romantic, the conventional and the innovative, the religious and the scientific” (301). Like other “mediocre heroes” of historical fiction, Edmund struggles to synthesize these forces as far as possible, embodying the processes of historical change. Talbot, at trilogy’s end, is “chastened by experience and committed, for better or worse, to accepting and attempting to understand the compromises imposed by a socially constructed world” (Stape 227). Ultimately, *To the Ends of the Earth* represents not a re-positioning of historical themes into the ironic paradoxes of historiographic metafiction, but a linguistic turn in the forms, though not the aims, of the classical historical novel.

## Conclusion

The foregoing examination of archaism in the historical novel demonstrates the fallacy of supposing either the mimetic transparency of the classical historical novel or the metafictional opacity of its predecessors and descendents, from Chatterton's Rowley poems to postmodern novels such as John Fowles's *A Maggot* or William T. Vollmann's *Argall*. Since the eighteenth century, archaism—an imitative, materialized, and inherently historicized metafictionality—has reflected each of classical historicism's complementary approaches to imagining the historical past. First, archaism posits the heterogeneity of social-historical milieux in terms of aesthetic difference, deploying historical literary conventions in order to reveal the structural dissimilarity between “then” and “now.” Secondly, archaism can be framed to suggest that this very social-historical particularity gestures toward a universalist vision of historical experience as the totality of these constraints. No matter how it is framed, however, archaism suggests that historicity is always *constructed* in a manner analogous to the construction of literary texts. I argue that archaism, a species of metafictional literalism, establishes this “constructedness” as a means of estranging or distancing—in the sense of Brecht's *Verfremdung*—social-historical experience.

Yet the subject of this dissertation is not merely archaism, but archaism as it has been used within historical novels—as a technology within a technology. Considered thus, the technology might be said to cut two ways. In one instance, the narrative elements of individual novels from *Ivanhoe* to *The Sot-Weed Factor* to *A Maggot* disciplines archaism by historicizing it, a quality that differentiates the technique from related intertextual strategies such as allusion, pastiche, or parody. In the other, archaism contests the idea that historical fiction functions *only* through narrative, *only* as a means for representing the progressive unfolding or development of history by using an opaque textual literalism to portray the historical past. Considering the

complicated archaic texture of a novel such as Vollmann's *Argall*, one can hardly argue, as Lukács does of Scott's "picturesque, descriptive elements," that the linguistic or bibliographic texture of historical fiction proves insubstantial in comparison to its deep structure (*The Historical Novel* 41).<sup>122</sup>

In many instances, historical novels that use archaism strongly resemble romances, particularly when they register a particular historical setting as a heterocosm—a world that contradicts that of the reader's presumed reality. Thus the various "oldspeak" practices of De Morgan, Ackroyd, and Byatt are analogous to what Northrop Frye termed the "synthetic languages" of romance: exotic linguistic codes that reflect the alterity of the romantic other-world.<sup>123</sup> In the historical poetry and fiction discussed above, archaism evokes not romantic but historical alterity. This was the central achievement of Chatterton, whose Rowley world represented fifteenth-century Bristol through a matrix of faux-relics, and who relied upon the illusion of materiality as both a forger and as a historical poet. As forger, Chatterton created texts imbued with what he took to be the nature of the medieval past; what can be called the poet's "historical fiction" obtains in his original conception of the fictional characters, biographical incidents, cultural practices, and political events that historicized the Rowley poems.

That Scott acknowledged Chatterton's influence demonstrates the extent to which archaism influenced both the theory and practice of historical fiction during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Introducing *Ivanhoe*, Scott maintained the validity of imitating period romances in order to capture the essence of medieval thought—drawing upon both Chatterton

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<sup>122</sup> For Lukács, Scott's deep structure consists of the Waverley novels' dialectical patterning of characters and events.

<sup>123</sup> Frye's examples include not only Spenser, Morris, and Tolkien, but also Joyce.

and Walpole—yet he nevertheless considered the former to have gone too far in his pseudo-medieval textual obscurity, alienating the historical past from the modern reader. Thus Scott precluded stylistic archaism from his narration of historical events even while he borrowed extensively from old romances in developing many of *Ivanhoe*'s episodes and characters. While many of Scott's successors followed his lead in narrating from a seemingly naturalistic, modern perspective, the continued appeal of Chatterton's archaism occasionally surfaced in the decades that followed—most notably in the decorative language and bibliographic elements of Thackeray's *Henry Esmond*, but also among writers who encountered the Rowley poetry as part of the Romantic tradition: Ruskin, the Pre-Raphaelites, and William Morris. Published as Scott's influence waned in the face of aesthetic Modernism, William De Morgan's *Alice-for-Short* (inspired as much by Morris's Kelmscott romances as by Scott's novels) employs a Dickensian idiom with such thoroughness as to re-imagine the Victorian past through the lens of its aesthetic practices, which is to say he wrote historical fiction in a basically Chattertonian sense.

As practiced in the Rowley poems, *Henry Esmond*, and *Alice-for-Short*, archaism signified a dynamic technique for representing the past before, during, and after the zenith of the classical historical novel. As a strategy within the historical novel, however, archaism achieved its most influential form during the late twentieth century. Between 1960 and 2001, such major authors as Barth, Fowles, Golding, Pynchon, Byatt, Ackroyd, and Vollmann authored historical novels that featured an extensive imitation of historical literary idioms. According to Fredric Jameson, the aestheticized historical settings of fiction like *The French Lieutenant's Woman* or *Possession* exhibit "the new spatial logic of the simulacrum," a uniquely postmodern historicity that is replicated, reinforced, and intensified under late capitalism (*Postmodernism* 1-54). Within this context, archaism in the historical novel can be seen as a strategy for cognitively mapping



historical experience while holding to the truth of postmodernism. To this end, the “materialized ideologies” of the early seventeenth-century textual forms that proliferate in Vollmann’s *Argall* are mirrored in the novel’s coda by an index of the various road signs lining Interstate 95 in late twentieth-century Virginia. Mixing archaism and historical narrative, Vollmann’s novel adopts the logic of the simulacrum as a form of historicist critique.

Each of the novels discussed above, however, offers a unique account (and interpretation) of the aestheticized historicity that archaism always entails.<sup>124</sup> Unexpectedly, perhaps, the possibilities for late twentieth-century archaism include a hyper-realist form of historical fiction that synthesizes two antithetical strategies for representing the past in fiction: metafiction on one hand and the representational formulas of Lukács’s classical historical novel on the other. The synthesis of these two strategies in William Golding’s *To the Ends of the Earth: A Sea Trilogy* flies in the face of Linda Hutcheon’s influential paradigm for postmodern historiographic metafiction, in which metafictional elements and historical themes are suspended in a paradox that by its nature engenders anti-historicist social and political critique. I argue that archaism, which often complicated the transparent mimesis of nineteenth-century historical fiction, ironically performed nearly the opposite task in the late twentieth century. By historicizing textual conventions, archaism in novels by Fowles, Golding, and Vollmann often contested the anti-historical metafiction of a work like Barth’s *The Sot-Weed Factor*.

Integral to my argument is a belief that the historical novel—the genre advocated so powerfully by twentieth-century critics as diverse as Lukács, Avrom Fleishman and Harry Shaw—remains a vital technology for envisioning both the specific and universal nature of

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<sup>124</sup> Jameson makes a similar point in *Postmodernism* when he compares *Something Wild* and *Blue Velvet*, two films that recreate 1950s cultural iconography for different kinds of critique (287-96).

historical experience. For the genre to remain vital, historical novels must maintain a significantly mimetic quality, representing the “realities” of social experience at particular historical moments, rather than formulating the past solely in terms of present concerns. Thus problematizing or confronting the past no longer seems sufficient. Historical novels must continue to reference historical reality, no matter how problematic or provisional that reality might prove.

In my discussion of postmodern historical fiction, this adherence to a classicist sense of what historical fiction is and what it does represents a departure from many previous theories of late twentieth-century historical fiction. For Hutcheon, historiographic metafiction does not concern itself with the past as such, but with how postmodern authors conceptualize historical knowledge and representation, engaging thereby in anti-historicist critique of the sociopolitical present. Refining many of Hutcheon’s claims, Elias analyzes post-1960s literary practice in terms that correspond more precisely to those of postmodern philosophers of history such as Hayden White. She envisions postmodern authors as confronting the historical sublime through metahistorical romance, an engagement with the past that complicates materialist mimesis. Price, meanwhile, argues from a Nietzschean position that novelists of poietic history (Fuentes, Daitch, Rushdie, et al.) annihilate all objective, positivistic versions of the past in order to (re)construct historical narratives as metaphorical or even mythical. I differ from all three theorists by insisting upon the continued necessity for mimesis in recent historical fiction, and by positing that both materialist and historicist principles—often qualified but seldom annulled by metafictional practices—persist in novels by major late twentieth-century authors.

Moreover, unlike Hutcheon, Elias, or Price, I make no attempt to define either a generic or sub-generic category of either postmodern fiction or the historical novel. Nor does my

analysis of late twentieth-century historical fiction extend toward a general discussion of aesthetic postmodernism. My frequent references to Jameson, Hutcheon, and Elias should not imply that I define postmodernism in a substantially new or modified fashion. While Fowles, Pynchon, and others obviously use archaism within the context of international postmodernism, I make no claims that archaism in the historical novel is of crucial relevance to postmodern cultural praxis considered more broadly. Instead, my discussion of *The Sot-Weed Factor*, *Argall* and *To the Ends of the Earth* demonstrates only some of the formal and functional possibilities within the less-extensive topic of postmodern historical fiction. Archaism within these novels epitomizes one tendency within the late twentieth-century historical imagination, not a defining attribute either of postmodern historical fiction or postmodernism.

Unlike most other analyses of historical novels over the past several decades, this dissertation draws upon the work of critics writing prior to the debates over postmodernism that dominated most theoretical responses to historical fiction in the 1980s and 1990s. In writing about historical fiction written both before and during the late twentieth-century, I insist upon some measure of formal and ideological continuity throughout the genre's historical trajectory while asserting the continuing relevance of the small but cogent body of genre criticism by Lukács, Fleishman, and Shaw. However, I hope to refine upon this criticism by departing from some of its oversimplifications of the historical novel's representational strategies—in particular Lukács's description of the genre's classical form as a variety of quasi-sociological realism. Instead, I focus on the overtly fictional forms present from the genre's origins.

Ultimately, I assert a more prominent place for historical novel theory and practice in late twentieth-century fiction than is usually granted by critics writing about historiographic metafiction or postmodern nostalgia. In so asserting, I agree with Elias that the novels of Scott

and Manzoni remain instructive and useful to discussions of fiction by such postmodernists as Barth, Pynchon, Fowles, and Vollmann (*Sublime Desire* 3-45). Whereas for Elias this connection consists almost entirely of the romance elements of historical fiction, I argue that the possibilities of postmodern historical fiction include a materialist sense of the historical past. By positing the *historical* context for all fictions—even metafiction—archaicist historical novels employ the logic of the artifact or relic to gesture towards an “authentic” historical reality.

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