

# POSTMODERN PARATEXTUALITY AND HISTORY

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## I

*Si nous définissons le post-modernisme selon le modèle de l'architecture de ce terme, la fiction post-moderne serait un phénomène paradoxal : résolument historique bien qu'inéluctablement métaphictive et parodique. Puisque l'historiographie (de même que le statut documentaire des faits et de l'archive) – en tant qu'acte qui ordonne, centralise et narrativise – a fait l'objet ces dernières années d'une analyse des plus rigoureuses, il n'est guère surprenant de constater une problématisation semblable de ce qu'on pourrait appeler la « métaphiction historiographique ». L'une des manières majeures dont se signale le double caractère de cette écriture parodique et ouvertement fictive et en même temps historique, c'est par la paratextualité. En tant que convention majeure de la documentation historiographique (et, par implication, de la vérification et de la certification textuelle), les paratextes sont utilisés pour le meilleur et pour le pire dans la fiction post-moderne afin d'installer et de subvertir, de souligner et de miner l'autorité de l'historiographie comme description objective du passé, qui n'a subi la contamination ni de la textualité, ni de la fictionalisation, ni de la narrativisation, ni de l'interprétation.*

WHEN the term, postmodernism, is used these days to refer to fiction, it generally signifies metafiction, or texts which are in some dominant and constitutive way self-referential and auto-representational. However, I would like to argue the need to define and limit even further the term, postmodernist, in order to avoid the conceptual and terminological confusions that have arisen over the last ten years. Therefore, working from the model of postmodern architecture (the first uncontested and commonly accepted usage of the adjective), I would like to propose that we add to that metafictional impulse of contemporary postmodernist fiction something else : the presence of the past. What I want to call, rather polysyllabically, "historiographic metafiction" goes beyond asserting its autonomy as lan-

guage or as narrative. It also – admittedly, very problematically – incorporates into its metafictional form the discourses of the past : historical, social, and ideological. I am thinking of popular recent novels such as *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, *The White Hotel*, *Midnight's Children*, *Famous Last Words*, and so on.

What all these texts do is to self-consciously focus on the processes of producing and receiving paradoxically *fictive historical* writing. They all raise the question of how the intertexts of history, its documents and traces, get incorporated into an avowedly fictive context, while still somehow retaining their historical documentary status. The modes of this paradoxical incorporation are frequently those of paratextuality : footnotes, subtitles, prefaces, epilogues, epigraphs, illustrations, photographs, and so on. The problematizing of the process and status of documentation is perhaps inherent in the very nature of these paratextual modes, defined by Gérard Genette, as « *types de signaux accessoires [...] qui procurent au texte un entourage (variable) et parfois un commentaire, officiel ou officieux, dont le lecteur le plus puriste et le moins porté à l'érudition externe ne peut pas toujours disposer aussi facilement qu'il le voudrait et le prétend.* »<sup>1</sup>.

## II

This kind of paratextual practice is obviously not unique to contemporary historiographic metafiction. We need only remind ourselves of the documentary function of newspaper accounts in Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*, for instance<sup>2</sup>. Or we might also recall the use of history in the non-fictional novel, such as Norman Mailer's *Of a Fire on the Moon*<sup>3</sup>. I mention this particular work only because, in it, Mailer made a factual error in describing the moon-landing lights on the Eagle. Though immediately corrected by a more knowledgeable reader, he never made the change textually, except to add a footnote in the paperback edition. He seems to have chosen to retain the dichotomy of his imaginative, if erroneous, fictionalizing and the corrective paratext in order to signal to the reader the dual status of his account of the Apollo mission : the events actually happened, but what we read is his narrative (and therefore fictive) account of them.

Similarly, the forewords and afterwords that frame many other non-fictional novels remind us that these works, despite their rooting in documentary reality, are still created forms, with a particular perspective that *transforms*<sup>4</sup>. In these

1. G. GENETTE, *Palimpsestes : la littérature au second degré* (Paris, Seuil, 1982), p. 9.

2. On the thirties' American "documentary expression" see William STOTT, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1973).

3. N. MAILER, *Of a Fire on the Moon* (Boston, Little Brown, 1970).

4. See John HELLMANN, *Fables of Fact : The New Journalism as New Fiction* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1981), p. 15.

inevitably touched by the fictive, the shaped, the invented. In historiographic metafiction, however, this relationship is often more complex. In John Fowles' self-reflexively "eighteenth-century" novel, *A Maggot*, the epilogue functions in two ways. It asserts the fictionalizing of history that has gone on: "*They* [the actual historical personages in the novel] *are here almost all invention beyond their names*"<sup>5</sup>, we are told. And, in addition, the same epilogue also works to root the fiction back into historical – and ideological – actuality, both that of the origins of the historical Shakers and that of the present metaphorical "faith" of the writing narrator himself. In a statement which echoes the tone and sentiments of the fictive voice of Fowles' earlier (self-reflexively "nineteenth-century") novel, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, the contextualizing epilogist asserts: "*In much else we have developed immeasurably from the eighteenth century; with their central plain question – what morality justifies the flagrant injustice and inequality of human society? – we have not progressed one inch.*" (p. 454). Instead of the neat closure of both the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century narratives he inscribes and then subverts, Fowles offers us an ending which is labelled as an "epilogue" (that is, external to the narrative), but which, unlike the pre-textual "prologue", is not signed "John Fowles". Whose voice addresses us then at the very end? Our inability to reply with any certainty helps point, not to any neatly completed plot structure, but to how we, as writers and readers, desire and *make* closure.

Whatever the complexity of the paratextuality, its presence is hard to ignore in this kind of postmodern writing. William Gass has pointed out that, from the first, the novel was a "*fact-infested form*", and, for him, the novelistic battle for "*reality*" is always fought between "*data and design*"<sup>6</sup>. The postmodernist use of paratexts to insert historical data into fictive design might well be regarded as a highly artificial, un-organic mode of doing what novels have always done. And this would certainly be true. But perhaps it is *deliberately* awkward, as a means of directing our attention to the very processes by which we understand and interpret the past through textuality – in both history and fiction.

History's paratextual conventions – especially footnotes and the incorporation of documents – are conventions which historiographic metafiction both uses and abuses<sup>7</sup>, perhaps parodically extracting revenge for the historian's tendency to read literature as only historical document<sup>8</sup>. Recent work

5. J. FOWLES, *A Maggot* (Toronto, Collins, 1985), p. 449. All further references will be to this edition and page numbers will appear in parentheses in the text.

6. W. GASS, *Habitations of the Word: Essays* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1985), pp. 86 and 95 respectively.

7. To use Nietzsche's suggestive terms. See *The Use and Abuse of History* (Indianapolis, Liberal Arts Press/Bobbs-Merrill, 1957).

8. See Robert H. Bremner's introduction to *Essays on History and Literature* ([np], Ohio State University Press, 1966), p. viii; and also in the same volume, Russel B. NYE, "History and Literature: Branches of the Same Tree", p. 140.

in the philosophy of history has called into question the validity of the concept of objective documentation in the writing of history. Yet, even today, paratextuality remains the central material mode of textually certifying fact. As one historian says: "Today the statements of a reputable historian are not believed until they are shown to be believable."<sup>9</sup> And the footnote is the main textual form by which this believability is procured. Although publishers hate footnotes – they are expensive and they disrupt the reader's attention – such paratexts have always been central to historiographic practice, to the writing of the doubled or "braided" narrative of the past in the present.

Historiographic metafiction is, in a number of senses, overtly a form of "braided narrative", and even a brief look at the functions of footnotes in a novel like Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman*<sup>10</sup> shows the rôle paratextuality can play in the insertion of history into metafiction. Here the specificity of Victorian social and literary history is evoked, in tandem with both the fictional narrative and the metafictional commentary, through footnotes which explain details of Victorian sexual habits, vocabulary, politics, or social practices. Sometimes a note is used to offer a translation for modern readers – who just might not be able to translate Latin as easily as their Victorian forebears could. This is in clear (and ironic) contrast to Laurence Sterne's assumption in *Tristram Shandy* that readers and commentators shared a certain educational background<sup>11</sup>. Clearly, part of the function of these notes is extra-textual, referring us to a world outside the novel<sup>12</sup>, but there is something else going on: many of the notes refer us to other texts, first, and the external world only indirectly through those texts.

A second function of paratextuality, then, is primarily a discursive one. The reader's linear reading is disrupted by the presence of a lower text on the same page, and this hermeneutic disruption calls attention to the footnote's very doubled or dialogic form. In historical discourse, we know that footnotes are often the space where opposing views are dealt with (and textually marginalized), but we also know that they can offer a supplement to the upper text or can often provide an authority to support it. In historiographic metafiction, these conventions are both used and parodically abused. The footnotes here do function as what Kermode calls "metatextual announcements"<sup>13</sup> that assure the reader as to the historical credibility of

9. David Hackett FISCHER, "The Braided Narrative: Substance and Form in Social History" in Angus FLETCHER, ed., *The Literature of Fact* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1976), p. 128.

10. J. FOWLES, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (Boston and Toronto, Little, Brown, 1969).

11. Shari BENSTOCK, "At the Margins of Discourse: Footnotes in the Fictional Text", *P.M.L.A.*, vol. 98, no. 2, March 1983, p. 223n.

12. See Theo D'HAEN, *Text to Reader: A Communicative Approach to Fowles, Barth, Cortázar and Boon* (Amsterdam, John Benjamins, 1983), p. 37.

13. F. KERMODE, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge [Mass.] and London, Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 116.

the particular witness or authority cited, while at the same time disrupting our reading – our creating – of a coherent fictive narrative. In other words, these notes operate centrifugally as well as centripetally. The roots of this kind of practice predate postmodernism, of course. Shari Benstock has argued that the notes in Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* "do not keep the text within its boundaries, locked into its narrative form : they insist on taking it always 'out of bounds', taking the reader away with them. They resist the very authority they purportedly represent."<sup>14</sup>

The metafictional self-reflexivity induced by this very postmodernist paradox of asserted and then undercut authority has perhaps been made most evident recently by Alasdair Gray's parodic novel, *Lanark*<sup>15</sup>, where the text incorporates self-commenting footnotes which themselves also refer to a set of marginal notes (an "Index of Plagiarisms"), itself a parodic play on the marginal glosses of past literature, such as *Finnegans Wake* and "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". Chinese-box structured metafiction, like this, frequently abuses and therefore highlights the normal or conventional balance of the primary text and the traditionally secondary paratextual notes or commentary. Sometimes the notes even engulf the text, as in Manuel Puig's *Kiss of the Spider Woman*<sup>16</sup>. The irony of the seemingly authoritative documenting of psychoanalytic authorities in those overpowering notes is that they frequently do *not* explain the characters' behavior – either sexual or political (and the two are connected). The conventionally presumed authority of the footnote form and content is rendered questionable, if not totally undermined. This same paratextual problematizing of the questions of precedence, origin, and authority can be seen, of course, in those much discussed paratextual "classics", Nabokov's *Pale Fire*<sup>17</sup> and Derrida's *Glas*<sup>18</sup>.

The same problematizing accompanies other forms of metafictional paratextuality, such as chapter headings and epigraphs. As with forewords and epilogues, there can be two directions in which these devices in historiographic metafiction can move : to remind us of the fictionality or to assert the factuality and historicity of the primary text. In novels like John Barth's *Letters*<sup>19</sup>, the excessive and almost arbitrary use of descriptive chapter headings points to the fictiveness and the organizational patterning that belie the "realism" suggested by the use of the epistolary form. On the other hand, there are novels, such as Audrey Thomas's *Intertidal Life*<sup>20</sup> and Fowles' *French Lieutenant's Woman*, once again, that use epigraphs to direct the reader to a specific real historical context within, or against

14. *Op. cit.*, p. 212.

15. A. GRAY, *Lanark* (New York, Harper and Row, 1969/81).

16. M. PUIG, *Kiss of the Spiderwoman*, trans. Thomas Colchie (New York, Random House, 1978/79).

17. Vladimir NABOKOV, *Pale Fire* (New York, Berkeley Medallion Editions, 1962).

18. Jacques DERRIDA, *Glas* (Paris, Galilée, 1974).

19. J. BARTH, *Letters* (New York, Putnam's, 1979).

20. A. THOMAS, *Intertidal Life* (Toronto, Stoddart, 1984).

which, the fictive universe operates – however problematically. These paratexts prevent any tendency on the part of the reader to universalize and eternalize (de-historicize) : the historical particularity of both the Victorian and the modern periods is asserted. This is yet another way in which post-modern literature works to contest (from within) the totalizing impulse of what (in the English tradition) has come to be conveniently labelled as liberal humanism. According to Jean-François Lyotard<sup>21</sup>, the postmodern condition is characterized by an active distrust of such *métarécits*, of the “master narratives” that have always made sense of our world. The aggressive assertion of the historical and social particularity of the fictive worlds of these novels ends up calling attention, not to what fits the *métarécit*, but instead to the ex-centric, the marginal, the borders – all the things that threaten the (illusory but comforting) security of the “centred” masterly discourse of liberal humanism.

### III

Whatever the paratextual *form* – footnote, epigraph, title – the *intent* is to make space for the intertexts of history within the texts of fiction. To the historian, what I have called “intertexts” are usually called documents. But, as mentioned earlier, historians have increasingly had to face challenges to their traditional trust in “documentary authenticity” as “*the repository of the whole truth*”<sup>22</sup>, as what allows them to reconstitute facts unproblematically. There has always been an implicit or explicit hierarchy among documentary sources for historians<sup>23</sup>, based on the “*rule of immediacy*” : the farther we get from the actual event, the less trustworthy is the document<sup>24</sup>. But whether historians deal with seemingly direct informational reports and registers or with eye-witness accounts, the fact remains that historians deal with *texts* which they then process. The denial of this processing leads to a fetishizing of the archive into a stand-in for the past<sup>25</sup>. Historiographic metafiction works precisely to foreground this processing, this interpretive inscribing of the past. And it does so by pointing overtly to the discursive nature of that past – as we know it. In novels like Chris Scott’s *Antichthon*<sup>26</sup> or Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*<sup>27</sup> or *Shame*<sup>28</sup>,

21. J.-F. LYOTARD, *The Postmodern Condition : A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

22. Fernand BRAUDEL, *On History*, trans. Sarah Matthews (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 28.

23. Dominick LACAPRA, *History and Criticism* (Ithaca [N.Y.], Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 18.

24. David Hackett FISCHER, *Historians’ Fallacies : Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York, Harper and Row, 1970), p. 62.

25. D. LACAPRA, *op. cit.*, p. 92n.

26. C. SCOTT, *Antichthon* (Montreal, Quadrant, 1982).

27. S. RUSHDIE, *Midnight’s Children* (London, Picador, 1982).

stress is on the act of “denaturing” documents<sup>29</sup> in both historical and fictional writing. The document is no transparent means to a past event; it is only the transformed trace of that past. We must deal with what Nathalie Davis calls “the fiction IN the archive”.

What historiographic metafiction emphasizes is that, while documents are indeed formal or material traces of the past, they are also – as traces – texts, and as such, they are already interpretations – that is, distanced from brute reality or experience unmediated by time or by the act of transcribing. D.M. Thomas uses the text of Dina Pronicheva’s eye-witness account of Babi Yar in *The White Hotel*<sup>30</sup>, but this account is already doubly distanced from the historical event : it is her later recounting of her experience, as told by Anatoli Kuznetsov in his book, *Babi Yar*. As Paul Veyne has argued, historians never seize the event directly and entirely, only incompletely and laterally – through documents<sup>31</sup>, that is, through texts. History does not say what the past was; it says what it is still possible to know about it. Historians are readers of fragmentary documents, and, like the reader of fiction (according to Wolfgang Iser<sup>32</sup>), they fill in the gaps, they create *Gestalten* which are disrupted by textual inconsistencies that force the formation of new ordering patterns. In Lionel Gossman’s terms : “*The historian’s narrative is constructed not upon reality itself or upon transparent images of it, but on signifiers which the historian’s own action transforms into signs. It is not historical reality itself but the present signs of the historian that limit and order the historical narrative.*”<sup>33</sup>. Gossman points to paratextuality as the very sign of this ontological split : “*The division of the historiographical page [by footnotes] is a testimony to the discontinuity between past ‘reality’ and the historical narrative.*”<sup>34</sup>. But even that past “reality” is a textualized one, at least for us today. Historiographic metafiction forces a recognition of a central responsibility of the historian and the novelist: their responsibility as *makers* of meaning.

A few examples will make clearer, perhaps, how these texts use and abuse actual historical documents in such a way as to stress both the discursive nature of those traces of the past and the fictionalized form in which we read them. In *The Public Burning*<sup>35</sup>, Robert Coover at one point alters the context and physical form of the documents of the past – Eisenhower’s speeches – and labels his new poetry-shaped creation : “*The War Between*

28. S. RUSHDIE, *Shame* (London, Picador, 1983).

29. Michel DE CERTEAU, *L’Écriture de l’histoire* (Paris, Gallimard, 1975), p. 84.

30. D.M. THOMAS, *The White Hotel* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981).

31. P. VEYNE, *Comment on écrit l’histoire* (Paris, Seuil, 1971), p. 14.

32. W. ISER, *The Act of Reading : A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

33. L. GOSSMAN, “History and Literature : Reproduction or Signification” in Robert H. CANARY and Henry KOZICKI, eds., *The Writing of History : Literary Forms and Historical Understanding* (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), p. 32.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

35. R. COOVER, *The Public Burning* (New York, Viking, 1977).

*the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness.*" Here, paratext becomes inter-text. In William Kennedy's metafictional biography of "Legs" Diamond, we are given the entire verbatim statement of F.D. Roosevelt vs. Jack Diamond. It is followed by the narrator's rather directive remark: "*Jack thus became the first gangster of the Prohibition Era to have the official weight of an entire state, plus the gobble of its officialese, directed at him. I find this notable.*"<sup>36</sup>. The document is used for both its metafictional and historical suggestibility.

In Julio Cortázar's *Libro de Manuel*, suggestively translated as *A Manual for Manuel*<sup>37</sup>, the same process is seen in a more complex form. Here the intrusion of newspaper clippings constitutes a formal and hermeneutic disruption. Their typographical reproduction (different from the type of the body of the text) asserts their paratextual, authenticating rôle. They act as a kind of collage, but what they incorporate is not any actual fragment of the referent, but, once again, its textualized manifestation. It has been argued that the collage form is one that remains representational while still breaking with realism through its fragmentation and discontinuity<sup>38</sup>. Cortázar's paratextual use of a collage of newsclippings inserted into the text points not only to the actual social and political background of the novel's action, but to the fact that our knowledge of that background is also always a discursive one: we know reality through texts that recount it and we pass on our knowledge through other texts – the book is (as its title suggests) a manual for the revolutionaries' child, Manuel.

Newspapers and magazines are used in postmodern historiographic metafiction to represent the recording texts of contemporary history. Mailer's *The Armies of the Night*, subtitled *History as a Novel, the Novel as History*, opens with a *Time* magazine article about the author, followed by the (orally ambiguous) statement: "*Now we may leave Time in order to find out what happened.*"<sup>39</sup>. In Coover's *The Public Burning*, that same magazine and the *New York Times* are revealed as the texts – in fact, the documentations – of twentieth-century America, and, as such, they become the very creators of ideology.

Clearly, another function of this kind of paratextual insertion of historical documents into historiographic metafiction is related to the Brechtian alienation effect: like the songs in Brecht's plays, the historical documents dropped into the fictions can have the effect of interrupting any illusion, of making the reader into an aware collaborator, not a passive consumer. The potential for ideological challenge is, then, perhaps present in these modes

36. W. KENNEDY, *Legs* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1975/78), p. 214.

37. J. CORTÁZAR, *A Manual for Manuel*, trans. Gregory Rabassa (New York, Pantheon, 1978).

38. Gregory L. ULMER, "The Object of Post-Criticism" in Hal FOSTER, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend [Wash.], Bay Press, 1983), p. 84.

39. N. MAILER, *The Armies of the Night* (New York, New American Library, 1968), p. 14.



of art that incorporate history self-consciously and materially. In the visual arts, we need only think of Joseph Beuys' reliquary box for Auschwitz : in a glass case we see blocks of fat on a hot plate, mouldering sausages, a mummified rat in a pail of straw (parodying Christ in the manger), an engraving of a concentration camp, and a child's drawing. In historiographic metafiction, this same power is achieved in works like Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men* where the documents of American law regarding Chinese citizens as immigrants are juxtaposed with the fictionalized narrative of the actual realities of the American treatment of Chinese immigrant railway builders. One chapter begins with:

The United States of America and the Emperor of China cordially recognize the inherent and inalienable right of man to change his home and allegiance, and also the mutual advantage of the free migration and emigration of their citizens and subjects respectively from the one country to the other for purposes of curiosity, of trade, or as permanent residents. ARTICLE V OF THE BURLINGAME TREATY, SIGNED IN WASHINGTON, D.C., JULY 28, 1868, AND IN PEKING, NOVEMBER 23, 1869.<sup>40</sup>

By 1878, only Chinese fishermen in California were required to pay fishing taxes; by 1882 the first Chinese Exclusion Act had been passed, preventing immigration for ten years; by 1893, the Supreme Court of the U.S. had decreed that Congress had "*the right to expel members of a race who 'continued to be aliens, having taken no steps toward becoming citizens, and INCAPABLE OF BECOMING SUCH under the naturalization laws'*" (p. 153). The Supreme Court seems to have been unaware of the heavy irony of the "catch-22" of Chinese immigrants not becoming citizens when, in fact, prevented from doing so by law. The ideological impact is a strong one, as it is in Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*<sup>41</sup> with its reproduction of the Canadian government document that decreed the evacuation and internment of Japanese-Canadians during the Second World War.

#### IV

It is worth noting, however, that in fiction like this, despite the metafictional self-consciousness, the general apparatus of novelistic realism is retained. For example, the reproduction of pages from *The Gentleman's Magazine* for 1736 in *A Maggot* does offer other – external – but still discursive contexts for the fiction. In a sense, the result is not unlike Truman Capote's use of letters, confessions, psychiatric journal articles, and interviews in *In Cold Blood*<sup>42</sup>. The documents do have a self-verifying place in the

40. M.H. KINGSTON, *China Men* (New York, Ballantine, 1981), p. 150. All further references will be to this edition.

41. J. KOGAWA, *Obasan* (Toronto, Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1981).

narrative, but in historiographic metafiction, it is always a paradoxical place : there is both the assertion of external reference and the contradictory reminder that we only know that external world through other texts.

This postmodern use of paratextuality as a form of intertextuality both works within and subverts that apparatus of realism typical of the novel genre – even in its metafictional forms. Parodic play with what we might call the “trappings” of realism has increased lately, perhaps because of the new trappings which technology has offered us. The popular device of the tape recorder, for instance, has brought us the “talked” book (taped interviews, transcribed and edited) and the non-fictional novel based on tape recorded “documents” which seem to filter out the narrator and allow direct access to actuality<sup>43</sup>. Metafictional parody of this pretence of objectivity may take the form of an intense textual awareness of the process of oral recording, as in Cortázar’s *Hopscotch*. In one sense, however, these are just contemporary up-datings of those earlier trappings of realism, the written, clerical transcriptions of oral statements, as parodied metafictionally in *A Maggot* with the same air of authenticity, but with more avowed room for error or fictionalizing gap-filling. The clerk who takes down in shorthand the testimonies of witnesses being interrogated admits : “[...] where I cannot read when I copy in the long hand, why, I make it up. So I may hang a man, or pardon him, and none the wiser.” (p. 343). Historiographic metafiction uses some of the newer trappings, however, to mimic an electronically reproduced oral culture, while always being aware of the fact that the reader only has access to that orality in written form. As novelist Ronald Sukenick puts it : “*Fiction, finally, involves print on a page, and that is not an incidental convenience of production and distribution, but an essential of the medium.*”<sup>44</sup>.

While the oral tradition has always been connected directly with the cultural handing on of the past and of our knowledge of the past<sup>45</sup>, its rôle in historiographic metafiction is tied up with that of the trappings of realism that paratextuality relies upon. The desire for self-authenticating oral presence is matched by a need for permanence through writing. In *The Temptations of Big Bear*<sup>46</sup>, Rudy Wiebe attempts, in a very self-reflexive manner, to capture in print and in fiction a historical character whose essence was his voice. He also had to convey, in written English, the rhetorical and ritualistic power of oral speech. This attempt to present the historical fact of Big Bear’s oral presence was further complicated by the lack of records (much less recordings) of the great orator’s speeches. But the novel’s textual

42. T. CAPOTE, *In Cold Blood* (New York, Random House, 1966).

43. See Mas’ud ZAVARZADEH, *The Mythopœic Reality : The Postwar American Non-fiction Novel* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1976), p. 177.

44. R. SUKENICK, *Form : Digressions on the Act of Fiction* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press, 1985), p. 46.

45. See Stith THOMPSON, *The Folktale* (New York, Dryden, 1951), p. 4.

46. R. WIEBE, *The Temptations of Big Bear* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1973).

self-consciousness about this oral/written dichotomy points to the text's ironic realization that Big Bear's dynamic oral presence can only be conveyed to us in static print; the oratorical power that goes beyond words can only be expressed in words; and perhaps, the truth of historical fact can only be recounted today in self-consciously novelistic fiction.

Frequently, metafiction turns to paratextual forms to incarnate this same dichotomy. The novel, *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, reads like a transcript of a series of oral dialogues. There are no contextualizing narratorial intrusions; no speakers are identified, except by internal references within the dialogue. But part way into the (obviously written but oral-seeming) text, footnotes begin to appear, footnotes which are, by definition, written and which refer to written texts, usually of psychoanalytic theory. These notes both disrupt and authenticate through their written nature, and do so in a most postmodernist (that is, paradoxical) way.

The paratextual use of illustrations, especially photographs, functions in much the same manner in relation to the apparatus or trappings of novelistic realism. That this is especially true in historiographic metafiction should not surprise us: as Roland Barthes remarked, there is a "*paradox: the same century invented History and Photography*"<sup>47</sup>. The photograph presents the past as presence, and the present as inescapably historical: "*All photographs are of the past. [...] Every photograph presents us with two messages: a message concerning the event photographed and another concerning a shock of discontinuity.*"<sup>48</sup>. In *Coming Through Slaughter*<sup>49</sup>, Michael Ondaatje reproduces paratextually the one surviving photograph of his protagonist, the early jazz musician, Buddy Bolden, a photo actually taken by Bellocq. In this historiographical or biographical metafiction, Bellocq's presence in the narrative and the narrator's own entrance as photographer (as well as writer) are used to juxtapose the fluid, dynamic, but unrecorded, music of the mad, silent Bolden with the static, reductive, but enduring recording on paper – by both photography and biography. But both forms of recording mark only the absence of the recorded<sup>50</sup>. Both forms record and justify, yet also imprison, arrest, and thus falsify the real. They certify and yet refuse experience; they are submissions to reality and yet assaults on it: "*a means of appropriating reality and a means of making it obsolete*"<sup>51</sup>.

Roland Barthes, in *Camera Lucida*, appears to offer another way of looking at photography and history, one that might seem to explain the para-

47. R. BARTHES, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York, Hill and Wang, 1981), p. 93.

48. Jean Mohr in John BERGER and Jean MOHR, *Another Way of Telling* (New York, Pantheon, 1982), p. 86.

49. M. ONDAATJE, *Coming Through Slaughter* (Toronto, House of Anansi, 1976).

50. See Stanley CAVELL, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, enlarged ed. (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1979), p. xvi.

51. Susan SONTAG, *On Photography* (New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), p. 179.

textual attraction to photographs in historiographical metafiction. Photographs carry their referent within themselves : there is a necessarily real thing which was once placed before the lens and which, while only happening once, can be repeated on paper. As Barthes says, “*the thing has been there*”<sup>52</sup> in the past. The photograph ratifies what was there (what it represents) and does so in a way that language can never do. The historiographic metafictionist, grappling with the representation of exactly that kind of past, may well want to turn for assistance to this other medium, this “*certificate of presence*”, this authentication of the real. And yet, Walter Benjamin’s<sup>53</sup> insight – that photography also subverts Romantic uniqueness and authorial authenticity – returns us to that constant contradiction at the heart of the use of photographic paratextual representation in fiction : photographs are still presences of absences; they both verify and void the past of its historicity. Like writing, photography is transformation more than recording (note changes in dimension, colouring, framing, scale); representation is alteration, be it in language or in pictures. Michael Ondaatje’s auto- and biographical *Running in the Family*<sup>54</sup> uses paratextual photographs to underline this contradiction. He makes us wait 130 pages for a promised glimpse of his newly-married parents – and even then, the photograph comes only after a section in the narrative text called “Photograph” which describes (in words) the bizarre picture we then see.

These are all paratextual insertions of historical documents – be they newspaper clippings, legal statements, or photographs – into metafictional texts. They appear in footnotes, epigraphs, prefaces, and epilogues; sometimes they are parachuted directly into the fictive discourse, as if in a collage. What they all do, however, is ask us one important question : how do we come to know the past? And what do we know of the past? In these novels, we literally see the paratextual traces of history – that is, of the discourses or texts of the past : its documents and its representations. To write of the past as either historian or as novelist would seem to be equally a matter of constructing and *reconstructing*. Fittingly, I suppose, what postmodernist literary practice leaves us with are only more questions, more problematizing queries. How do history and fiction deal with what Coover’s Uncle Sam (in *The Public Burning*) calls “*the fatal slantindicular futility of Fact*”? Are we, in fact, all doomed to be Beckettian “*chartered recountants*”<sup>55</sup>?

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52. *Camera Lucida*, p. 76. See too “The Photographic Message” in *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York, Hill and Wang, 1977), pp. 18 and 30.

53. “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hanna ARENDT, trans. Harry Zohn (New York, Schocken, 1969), pp. 217-51.

54. M. ONDAATJE, *Running in the Family* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1982).

55. S. BECKETT, *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, ed. Ruby COHN (London, Calder, 1983), p. 89.