Historicizing Fiction/
Fictionalizing History

Historicizing Fiction/ Fictionalizing History: Representation in Select Novels of Umberto Eco and Orhan Pamuk

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For my parents

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PREFACE

The historical novel remains an enduringly popular genre of writing, never ceasing to tease readers with its literary appeal that combines imagination and factualism. Since its development in the eighteenth century, the historical novel has seen several transformations and has assimilated new techniques to raise crucial questions on literary theory and criticism, fact and fiction, identity, time, history, the reading and writing of 'grand' narratives and their relationship to subcultures.

A glance at Jerome de Groot's *Historical Novel: The New Critical Idiom* (2009) indicates the breadth and variety associated with the genre. Deriving from the eighteenth-century Gothic novel, and later engaging with European history, the historical novel expanded in scope to encompass descriptions of the past, war narratives, counterfactuals and microhistories, romance and children's fiction, metafictional narratives and pastiche, detective novels and novels of intrigue, magical realism, and historical fantasy. Literary conventions like realism, modernism, and then postmodernism, have left their indelible marks on the genre, introducing innovative techniques that influence thematic approaches to the past.

This incessant reinvention renders the genre trans-disciplinary, and makes the study of representation integral to its engagement with, and interventions into, the past. In this respect, the historical novel provides an insight into the way creativity, as praxis, is used to illustrate and comment critically on the theoretical debates on methodology.

This book draws upon my doctoral dissertation on the study of select historical novels of Umberto Eco and Orhan Pamuk, whose representations of history are significant in two respects. The two novelists creatively reinvent history to comment on the ways in which fictional representation engages with historical reality. Further, their innovative means of recreating reality directly address debates over the nature of representation.

Perhaps the most vexed problem confronting theoreticians and litterateurs within literary studies is that of representation which, despite two millennia of theorization, continues to elude clear-cut definitions. This book attempts to approach the study of representation through a textual analysis of four contemporary historical novels that use novelistic techniques to comment on their themes. These novels stand testimony to

the fact that their fictional representations promote investigation into the art of the novel and the writing process by becoming self-reflexive sites that examine paradigms of novelistic creativity. Therefore, by locating itself at the intersection of debates on representation in history and fiction, this book combines a conceptual approach to representation with a study of representation as method, and explores the hypothesis that representation is a simultaneously creative and political enterprise.

In keeping with this aim, this work draws its theoretical argument from three broad fields. Historiography, as an area that studies the methods of capturing reality, provides the first conceptual framework for this study. This book examines the way techniques of representation become integral to the historiographical debate. The second context is the various approaches to fictional representation. This study considers the realist, modernist, and postmodernist conventions of representation within fiction in general, and the historical novel, in particular. Finally, this work examines the concept of representation itself as, alternatively, a reflective or a constructivist enterprise, and its corresponding relationship to reality.

The novels selected for study–*The Name of the Rose* (1980) and *Baudolino* (2000) by Eco, and *My Name is Red* (1998) and *Snow* (2002) by Pamuk–are each located in a historical past and capture moments of crisis in history. *Baudolino*, set against the backdrop of the Holy Crusades and the sacking of Constantinople in 1204 AD, provides a fictional explanation for the mysterious, and unexplained (in history), death of King Frederick I of Germany, as well as the birth of the historical legend of Prester John, which has anonymous beginnings in official history. *Snow* explores the representation of a real conflict within a fictional context, through the headscarf debate in Turkey in the 1990s. Set in Kars, a small border town in north-east Turkey, the novel examines the political repercussions of women fighting to wear the veil in a secular state that bans its public use. *The Name of the Rose* is a murder mystery set during the times of heresy hunting in Europe and the debates among different factions within the Church in the 14th century that condemn, or condone, poverty in religious practices. *My Name is Red*, also a historical whodunit like *The Name of the Rose*, is set in the 1590s in Istanbul during the reign of Sultan Murat III. It captures a moment of conflict among miniaturists who resist the influence of western techniques of realism in an art form that is primarily symbolic.

Though varied in their plot and thematic concerns, the novels display similarities in several respects that support the hypothesis upon which this study is based. Each novel is shaped by a historical moment that is integral to the plot. As sites of speculation on historiography, the novels project

their acts of reconstruction of reality as a self-conscious fictional enterprise, which makes them self-reflexive. Their use of literary techniques demonstrates the way form influences content. Further, the four novels maintain historical realism, even though they use postmodern narrative techniques. Representation thus emerges as a simultaneously reflective and constructivist act. Consequently, the novels speculate on the extent to which creative representation within fiction, by experimenting with techniques, becomes a political enterprise. As a result, the novels encourage questions on the nature of the relationship between fiction and history: does fictional representation simply represent history within an imaginative framework, or does it have the power to interrogate, critique and change (our knowledge of) reality?

Since three of the novels are set in a historically remote past, and the fourth–*Snow*–in the recent past, the study of representation becomes significant on two main counts: the historiographical and the literary. Within the discipline of history, the influence of postmodernism has challenged the objectivist tendencies of old historiography, making the process of documenting reality increasingly fluid and undefined, and making selective narrativizing of events inevitable to such reconstruction. From the literary perspective, similarly, the historical novel's focus has shifted from realism to a postmodernist flouting of realist norms, which has led to the questioning of absolute narratives, urging plurality of perspectives in fiction. These two approaches, in fiction and history, converge at the level of representation as the means of comprehending reality.

The argument in this book is, therefore, structured around a series of questions that the novels investigate. At the level of a conceptual analysis of representation, the novels enable the questions: to what extent do forms of representation affect content? What is the nature of such representation, and how does it determine the perception of reality? Extending these questions to the fictional representation of history, this study asks: how do the stylistic techniques of fictional representation within the historical novel influence the depiction of history? What dimensions do they add to the debates on historiography? These questions frame the close textual analysis of representation in these four novels to examine the different ways in which formal representation–where the terms 'formal' and 'formalization' refer to acts that indicate, and arise from forms/techniques of representation–becomes political.

The postmodernist historical novel, as I term the four novels chosen for discussion, is an interesting site for this study, bringing factual details from a text-external reality to bear on fictional plots. Since the novel is, by

definition, not circumscribed by facts, the extent to which historical events influence plot becomes one means to study the politics of creativity. Novelistic representation, in the four novels selected for study, combines the principles of realism and postmodernism in its reconstruction of the past. The realist novel acknowledges the influence of a prior world on fictional representation, and believes that fiction must maintain fidelity to this external reality. The postmodernist novel, on the other hand, asserts that reality is its representation, and foregrounds its own act of constructivism within representation. It may appear, at first glance, that these two positions are contradictory and mutually exclusive. However, in the postmodernist historical novel, the realist and postmodernist elements appear to mutually support each other. Consequently, a consideration of the manner of representation becomes a common concern in these novels.

The coexisting impulses of realism and postmodernism in the novels find a correspondence in the reflective and constructivist theories of representation, respectively. Studies in representation and its relationship to reality find their origins within a larger theoretical tradition in literature, dating back to Plato and Aristotle, and extending into postmodernist and post-structuralist arguments on the most appropriate way to capture reality.

These debates raise several issues that concern novelistic representation in the postmodernist historical novel: how does the acknowledgment of a text-external reality in novelistic representation confront arguments that declare the autonomy of the fictional world? What is the extent of mediation of creative representation in the postmodernist historical novel and how does this relate to truth/s? In what ways does politicization occur in the postmodernist historical novel?

A few explanatory remarks on the use of terms in this book are in order, at this point. I use the term ‘creative’ to indicate, primarily, the various techniques and thematic innovations in the four novels selected for study. The politics of fictional representation can be located in the subversive nature of representation, which arises through the liberties taken by these novels in depicting history. A related concern arising from this position is the implication of the term ‘political’.

I consider as political any act that is not innocent. A non-innocent action would necessarily be motivated and intentional, and therefore partial to some politics. In the wake of postmodernism, which opens up all domains of knowledge to scrutiny and critique, every action becomes motivated. A statement declaring, for instance, that a work is solely creative and non-aligned to any radical politics can also be interpreted as a motivated act, rejecting existing domains of knowledge. Within this ‘post-lapsarian’ intellectual framework, all literature is political, and subversion,

as a sometimes spontaneous, and at times intentional, denial of existing discourses, becomes an inevitable *consequence* of a work of art. It is here that I locate and align the power of creativity with political discourse.

My emphasis on the textual study of forms of representation arises from these assumptions. Through their creative use of literary techniques, these novels succeed in highlighting the way reality can be glimpsed through, and as, representational perspectives. A study of the choice of techniques, and the implications of the resulting representation, present one means to reconsider existing debates on novelistic representation in general, and representation in the postmodernist historical novel, in particular.

There are six chapters in this book. The introductory chapter, a survey of critical approaches to fiction, historiography and representation, establishes the theoretical context for the arguments in this book. Chapters Two-Five comprise a study of the novels, *Baudolino*, *Snow*, *The Name of the Rose* and *My Name is Red*, respectively. The rationale behind the arrangement of the chapters is argument-based, structured with the intent of tracing the different ways in which the novels approach the relationship between representation and reality, and the subsequent implications for the fictional representation of history. The concluding chapter summarizes the inferences of this study and considers the limits to which these inferences can be extended.

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List of Abbreviations

Metahistory	*Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe*
Serendipities	*Serendipities: Language and Lunacy*
NR	*The Name of the Rose*
SPL	*Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*
Reflections	*Reflections on the Name of the Rose*
Coena	*Coena Cypriani*
MNR	*My Name is Red*
Book	*The Book of the Millennium*
Six Walks	*Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*

CHAPTER ONE

FICTION, HISTORY, REPRESENTATION: A SURVEY OF LITERARY CRITICISM

The problem of representation, Timothy Bewes declares, is based on the differentiation between subject and object, world and the work. Examining and critiquing (the assumptions behind) these dichotomies has remained the primary concern of theoretical enquiries in literary studies. The historical novel that, by definition, incorporates 'facts' of the world within the work intensifies enquiries into the nature and role of representation. The argument in this book arises, therefore, from the point of intersection of the three theoretical frameworks of fiction, historiography, and representation; and explores the ways in which creative collaborations of the text and the world intervene in the problematic of representation, as articulated by Bewes.

Representation in Fiction

Within fiction, the three identifiable conventions of representation–realism, modernism and postmodernism–are each backed by a distinctive philosophy of reality that is expressed, among other means, through methods and techniques of representation. Novelistic theories and methods, it can be argued, correspond to, and support, each other. What follows is a consideration of realist, modernist and postmodernist theories, and their respective novelistic techniques of representation.

Realism and the Novel

Chronologically, realism is the first of the three phases of novelistic representation and marks the rise of the genre in the 18th century. Considered an "exceptionally elastic critical term, often ambivalent and equivocal", realism is defined in literature as "the portrayal of life with fidelity. It is thus not concerned with idealization, with rendering things as

beautiful when they are not, or in any way presenting them in any guise as they are not" (Cuddon 1999, 729).

The realist novel, according to this definition, concerns itself with life as experienced objectively, encompassing the everyday and the 'normal'. J. A. Cuddon states that the term is used to indicate a state of verisimilitude, which is believed to be essential to such literature. The realist, according to Cuddon, depicted the here and now, everyday events, his environment, and the political, social and cultural movements of his time. In the process, positivism and sociological approaches became integral to the realist tradition, where scientific precision in getting the facts right determined the use of novelistic techniques. Cuddon, however, acknowledges the difficulty in providing precise definitions for realism, observing for instance that psychological realism, which focused on the inner workings of the human mind, led to the rise of the stream-of-consciousness novel that characterizes the fiction of modernist authors like Virginia Woolf and James Joyce.

Henry C. Hatfield's definition of realism, similarly, highlights the fluidity of meaning associated with the term. Hatfield, like Cuddon, defines realism as a literary attitude that attaches importance to representing persons, events and ideas with fidelity. He states that the realist belongs to the mimetic tradition and, though he may regard his characters with some irony, he nevertheless takes them seriously. Hatfield proceeds to list a series of questions that may aid the realist in his enterprise:

> What is the attitude of a given writer towards the factors of wealth and poverty; of relations between social classes; towards love and sex; towards the fear and impact of death? How convincingly does he deal with the motivation of human action, in terms of the general psychological beliefs of his time and of the attention accorded to psychological matters by the literary conventions of the novel of his age? (Hatfield 1951, 234)

These questions, according to Hatfield, condition realism within fictional representation. He adds that since the realist author treats his subject with some breadth and detail, the novel–which is "notoriously the loosest and most flexible of genres" (Hatfield 1951, 235)–is best suited for the purpose. In the process, Hatfield highlights the manner in which social and political concerns, which co-exist in realism alongside the psychological, find an appropriate space of expression within the novelistic form. Georg Lukács, similarly, in his consideration of the novel, in general, and the historical novel in particular, states that realism in the novel must recreate the mood of an age.

In *The Rise of the Novel* (1957), Ian Watt establishes a relationship between the novel and an external reality by associating the term 'realism' with the French school of critics who defined themselves in opposition to '"idéalité poétique"' (Watt [1957] 2001, 10). Watt argues that, as an antonym to idealism, realism came to mean the representation of low life and human fallacies, and is reflected in the roguish protagonists of Defoe, Fielding and Richardson.

At the same time, he claims that depicting the seamy side of reality is not the sole function of fictional realism. The realist novel attempts to portray "all the varieties of human experience, and not merely those suited to one particular literary perspective: the novel's realism does not reside in the kind of life it presents, but in the *way* it presents it" (Watt [1957] 2001, 11, emphasis mine). Similarly, for Ortega y Gasset, form and content are inseparable in the literary genre. It is through form that content manifests, and expands the inherent theme of the work: "the stone which is thrown carries within it already the curve of its flight" (y Gasset 1957, 11). Watt and Ortega y Gasset affirm that within fictional realism, the technique and the subject of representation mutually support each other.

Since realism is based on the assumption that the material world of facts comprise the object of art, and that creative works must pay close attention to physical detail in capturing reality, representation in the realist novel focuses on cause and effect, and a careful and unbiased observation of human behaviour. Emphasising positivism and scientific methods in literary convention results in the representation and study of social, political, economic and cultural forces, and underscores the critical role of the genre. Georg Lukács's Marxist agenda underlying the study of realism and the novel is a case in point.

Lukács infuses a Marxist dimension to realism when he declares that the novel performs a critical function by imitating reality. As a socialist tool, the novel captures an objective, material reality that it evaluates through its form of representation. In this respect, Lukács finds the expressionist and impressionist schools ineffective as reflections of a real world. Lukács's critical perspective of the novel appears in his discussion of the historical novel, which I consider later in this section. The Lukácian paradigm of realism calls for an obligation to capture the socio-economic conditions of society in its natural state. Realism, in this case, assumes scientific precision in its attention to the details of social forces[1].

[1] Lukács's "Critical Realism and Socialist Realism" (1962), for instance, discusses the way socialist realism in fiction captures reality from within social and cultural forces. Similarly, *A Theory of the Novel* (1914-1915) examines the philosophical underpinnings of realism that define the novel, and articulates Lukács's abiding

That realism is mimetic and reflects an external world is reinforced by structuralist arguments as well. Rosalind Coward and John Ellis argue that "realism has as its basic philosophy of language not a production (signification being the production of the signified through the action of the signifying chain), but an identity: the signifier is treated as identical to a (pre-existing) signified". They argue, further, that "[r]ealism naturalizes the arbitrary nature of the sign; its philosophy is that of an identity between signifier and signified on the level of an entire text as much as that of a single word" (Coward and Ellis 2000, 595).

Further, the role of language, through which realism manifests, is not to construct concepts but merely to communicate them[2]. Language, in this case, functions as a substitute for the real world that it imitates. "This 'imitation' is the basis of realist literature, and its technical name is *mimesis*, mimicry. The whole basis of mimesis is that writing is a mere transcription of the real" (Coward and Ellis 2000, 595). For Coward and Ellis, the role of realist narratives is to capture a homogenous truth, and fictional realism depends upon closure for narrative pleasure; beliefs that are challenged by the modernist and postmodernist movements in literature.

Modernism

> Any ascription of dates to cultural movements is bound to be arbitrary, but there can be little doubt that the two decades 1910-30 constitute an intelligible unity from the point of view of [Modernism]. Obviously historians of politics, war or economics will see the century in a different shape–but that kind of plural vision is one of the central recognitions of Modernism itself. (Faulkner 1977, 13)

So declares Peter Faulkner in his survey of modernism as a critical movement in literature that follows upon the realist tradition of the novel. Virginia Woolf makes a comparable observation in her half-mocking statement that "in or about December, 1910, human character changed" (Woolf [1924] 2001, 251).

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concern with the notion of totality. For Lukács, depicting the whole must take precedence over depicting parts. His discussions on realism are, therefore, shaped by his belief in the role of literature as a tool for capturing society and historical periods in its totality; a concern that intervenes in, and is intricately tied to, his emphasis on form as a vehicle for theme.

[2] In this point, realism is distinct from postmodernism, where the latter emphasizes that language is constructivist, and that reality exists in language as discourse.

Associated with the turn of the twentieth century, the modernist movement was characterized by its emphasis on experimentation in fields as varied as painting, theatre, literature, music, psychology, philosophy, architecture, sociology etc. Faulkner states that socially, the period 1910-30 was one of widespread turmoil, discord and suffering, which included the First World War (1914-1918) and the economic depression. Also of significance was the rise of the labour class and the feminist movement that depicted the voices of the dominated, rising against continued oppression. Modernism as a cultural movement thereby expressed disillusionment with, and caused the disruption of, the grand narratives and the cultural hegemony of the 19th century. Within the arts, modernism depicted a world falling apart, and the impulse to propose alternative frameworks of existence. Escalating the growing disillusionment with the world was a rise in interest in Charles Darwin's earlier publication *The Origin of Species* (1859) that proposed that existence is a constant struggle for survival where the species that is the fittest alone subsists in the world, and works by Karl Marx whose study of society seemed to affirm Darwin's theory[3]. Other intellectual influences included the works of psychologists William James and Bergson, and their focus on the 'stream of consciousness', as well as writings by Freud, cyclic historiographers like Vico and Spengler, the French formalist realists like Flaubert, the Russian novelists of consciousness like Dostoevsky, post-Impressionistic painters etc. In the process, evolving new techniques to represent a changing (understanding of the) world became a concern integral to the artist's enterprise.

For Malcolm Bradbury, these historical and intellectual milieus supported not simply new intensities of experiences but also new techniques in art forms. It was not merely plot, characterization, technique or point of view, thought or symbolic meanings that changed to depict irreconcilable meanings, conflicting themes, or difficult problems. Instead, the very structure and organizing principles of the novel transformed to acquire what Bradbury calls an "open poetics"[4]:

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[3] For an overview of the historical movements and writings that initiated and propelled the modernist movement, see Tim Middleton, ed. *Modernism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*, Volumes 1-5 (2003).

[4] Bradbury indicates the concern that the modernist novel displays with form in yet another way. The modernist writers and poets were also critics who used their art to define and illustrate a new philosophy of representation. In the process, the novel as an "open poetics" became self-reflexive, anticipating the postmodernist claim that metafictionality is a feature of novelistic representation. Malcolm Bradbury's *Possibilities* (1973), and the Routledge critical editions on Modernism

> [The twenties] gave a stylistic milieu in which some practices which had been very close to the centre of fiction as a story-telling art were brought into question; it seems that certain well established types of narrative presentation, certain kinds and modes of realism, certain poised relationships between the story and its teller, certain forms of chronological ordering and particular views of character, even the belief that a form does not need to exceed the working needs immediately occasioning it, were being reconstructed to fit the form of a new world. (Bradbury 1973, 82)

Modernism is an example of art that arises from a crisis, sharing a tangential relationship with the world–it deals, not with the enactment of events or a specific structure, but with the problematics of depicting a contingent world of disorder, chaos, circularity and pointless time. A consequence of this kind of structure is the increasing risk to form resulting from experimentation in techniques and theme, where novelists were confronted with the question: "How can a novel simultaneously reflect and express the complexity of life, and achieve the coherence of [novelistic] unity" (Faulkner 1977, 10)? This dilemma replaced the erstwhile emphasis of surface realism on thematic and external detail with internal stylization, where the artist's challenge lay in combining the heterogeneity of human experience with formal coherence. A result was the exposition of artistic content "according to the logic of metaphor, form, or symbol, rather than to the linear logic of story, psychological progress, or history" (Bradbury 1973, 84).

It is necessary, at this point, to trace the intellectual assumptions underlying literary modernism. Evolving, chronologically, from the realist tradition, modernism questioned the nature of reality as understood by the realists. Unlike the positivism of the realists, modernists emphasised representations of interiority and subjectivity as central to their enterprise. For the modernists, literary representation must capture the meaning of reality, rather than external details alone. Meaning, in turn, emerges through perception and an individual's engagement with the external world. The modernists did not discount the importance or presence of physical reality. Instead, they shifted the emphasis onto what comprises this reality–not materialistic details, but what these details mean to the human subject. As a result, Henry James (1843-1916), Ford Madox Ford (1873-1939), James Joyce (1882-1941) and Virginia Woolf (1882-1941),

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(Volumes 1-5), edited by Tim Middleton, engage with this aspect of the modernist novel in detail.

proponents of modernism in fiction, depict another kind of reality in their novels: psychological realism.

In Woolf and Joyce, this unfolds within the stream-of-consciousness novel. Characterized by its stress on the interiority of human existence, the modernist novel attempts to capture the flow of thoughts of characters. Woolf, in this regard, distances herself from her contemporaries like H. G. Wells, Galsworthy and Arnold Bennett, whom she calls "materialists" with "simplistic" fictional concerns. Instead, she posits an alternative conception of reality based upon the time of the mind, as opposed to clock time. For Woolf, the time of the mind allows the individual to relive decades of 'real' experiences in a few minutes. She stresses, in the process, the increasing need for psychological realism in depicting the intricacies of human existence. Agreeing, provisionally, with Arnold Bennett that the concern of modernist fiction is development of character, Woolf redefines character as an individual's response to reality, as opposed to the external details that Wells, Bennett and Galsworthy catalogue in their novels. Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) illustrate these principles by capturing their protagonists' thoughts, which are non-teleological, and sometimes incoherent. In the process, the modernist novel demonstrates a correspondence of form and content when Woolf declares that the agenda of the modernist writers is to develop a method to capture this transformed understanding of reality.

According to Woolf, reality resembles an "innumerable shower of incessant atoms" and "myriad impressions that shape life", thereby establishing the evanescence of experiences, and shifting representation beyond reflection of physical detail.

> Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; but a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and the external as possible? . . . we are suggesting that the proper stuff of fiction is a little other than custom would have us believe it. (Woolf [1925] 2000, 741)

Woolf's plea for an alternative form of fictional representation is significant for its emphasis on a different kind of realism. Like the realists who urged minimal intervention while representing an objective reality, Woolf calls for a similar dedication in representing the interiority of human life and the human mind. She redefines the nature of reality by turning the gaze inwards, and urges that fiction must capture the

complexity and transience of life with as little external influence as possible, despite the aberrations in the resulting narrative.

Woolf's arguments illustrate the way modernism's emphasis on individual consciousness displaces omniscience within narrative, and establishes a correspondence between novelistic technique and theme. The omniscient narrator of the realist novel, who speaks with authority on the physical world as well as the emotional universe of the protagonist, depicts the certitude of knowledge and the irrevocability of facts associated with the realist tradition. For the modernists, however, this certitude is deeply problematic. In a world lacking coherence and structure, only human memory appears reliable in capturing reality, since an individual's recollection of an event is certain evidence of its occurence[5], indicating the engagement of the subject with the object. The stream-of-consciousness novel serves the cause of subjectivity by defining reality as the remembrance and reliving of moments in physical reality. Therefore, perspective, as first-person point-of-view, becomes an important narrative technique in the modernist novel.

For Michael H. Levenson, the modernist experience of reality as expressed in Joseph Conrad's novel *The Nigger of "Narcissus"* (1897) illustrates the emergence of individuality through the subjectivity of experience. Levenson, through his reading of Conrad, isolates two factors that influence conventions of representation in modernism: *physis*, or the detailed elaboration of physical space and *psyche*, or the elaboration of psychological space. In the realist novel, the *physis* comprises reality and is thrust into the foreground. The emphasis in the modernist novel shifts, however, to *psyche*, rejecting the omniscient narrative voice that passes seamlessly from descriptions of the external world to the private realm of the emotions of characters, and stressing the individuality of experience over the knowledge of an all-controlling narrator.

Levenson argues that the emphasis on the subjectivity of reality leads to a pluralism that depicts several, sometimes conflicting, accounts of a single reality. For the modernists, writing against the conventions of certitude and tradition, this comprises a conflict of authority and puts them in a problematic bind. How would the individual voice locate itself against

[5] The discussions on the role of memory in establishing the legitimacy of a narrative recur in oral history, which shall be considered later in this book, in the chapter on *Snow*. Suffice it for now to note that in oral history, while memory of events and the recollections of a subject comprise one perspective on historical representation, this feature is considered unreliable within the postmodernist paradigm since memory is fallible and inaccurate. For more on memory, representation and oral history, see Chapter Three.

the voice of tradition? How can the modernist movement reconcile its move towards the articulation of individual consciousness with the principle of structure, which the correspondence of novelistic form and theme implies[6]? For Levenson, the modernists' recognition of the need for newer structures of meaning to comprehend reality is accompanied by the apprehension that these may lead to chaos and anarchy, since pluralism, as a departure from positivist singularity, and with its stress on subjectivity, would lead to a conflict of opinions.

An answer to this dilemma can be found in postmodernism that follows the modernist movement and gained momentum in the 1950s and 1960s, celebrating the principles that troubled the modernists.

The Postmodernist Novel

Like modernism, postmodernism is characterized by a disruption of grand narratives and an emphasis on *petit recits*. As Lyotard elaborates in his essay "Defining the Postmodern" (1986), the postmodern condition challenges certainties in social and political structures. However, unlike modernist frameworks that posit alternatives to existing structures but present the danger of becoming grand narratives themselves, Lyotard suggests that postmodernism positions itself within existing structures and explodes these myths from within. This explanation is affirmed by Linda Hutcheon as well, when she observes that postmodernism displays an awareness of a loss of originality within representation. Further, postmodernism's scepticism and distrust of grand narratives and absolute values finds reflection in fiction through themes that challenge a coherent understanding of reality, and techniques that support such critique. Like the modernist and realist conventions of representation, therefore, postmodernist fiction establishes a link between theme and technique.

Brian McHale's survey of fictional representation in *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987) indicates the breadth of techniques used in these novels.

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[6] T. S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919) and Mathew Arnold's definition and explorations of Hellenism and Hebraism in *Culture and Anarchy* (1867-1869) are two examples of modernism's engagement with the problem of reconciling individual subjectivity with the need for an organizing principle in reality. In the aftermath of the war, the modernists developed a deep distrust for grand narratives; at the same time, they recognized the difficulties of dispensing with larger structures that offer comprehensible frameworks of meaning to reality. For a discussion on the modernists' definition of authority and the role of individual consciousness in ascertaining reality, see Michael Levenson's *A Genealogy of Modernism: A Study of English Literary Doctrine 1908-1922* (1984).

Describing his work as a "descriptive poetics" that "construct[s] the repertory of motifs and devices, and the system of relations and differences, shared by a particular class of text" (McHale [1987] 1996, xi), McHale lists the principles that define postmodern reality: deconstruction of 'Truth', plural worlds, heteroglossia, textuality of life and the emphasis on the word, all of which arise from the recognition that all knowledge is subjective and constructed. The range of techniques and topics that McHale covers in his book indicates, further, that postmodernist fiction resists categorization of any sort.

For McHale, "There is no postmodernism 'out there' in the world . . . These are all literary-historical fictions, discursive artifacts constructed either by contemporary readers and writers or retrospectively by literary historians" (McHale [1987] 1996, 4). He argues that since reality is essentially discursive, it can be constructed in a variety of ways within fiction, where no one construct is less true than another, all of them being equally fictitious. In the process, McHale collapses the categories of fiction and reality. At this point, McHale distinguishes the modernist and the postmodernist dominants as epistemological and ontological, respectively, and lists questions that each dominant raises as its central concern.

> [M]odernist fiction deploys strategies which engage and foreground the questions . . . "How can I interpret this world of which I am a part? And what am I in it?" Other typical modernist questions might be added: What is there to be known?; Who knows it?; How do they know it and with what degree of certainty?; How is knowledge transmitted from one knower to another, and with what degree of reliability?; How does the object of knowledge change as it passes from knower to knower?; What are the limits of the knowable? (McHale [1987] 1996, 9)

By contrast, postmodernist fiction projects ontologically dominant questions that include: "Which world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of my selves is to do it?" as well as

> What is a world?; What kinds of worlds are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?; What happens when different kinds of worlds are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated?; What is the mode of existence of a text, and what is the mode of existence of the world (or worlds) it projects?; How is a projected world structured? (McHale [1987] 1996, 10)

Though the modernist and postmodernist motives differ in their fundamental concerns, there is nevertheless an intricate relationship between

them. An ontological dominant cannot emerge without an epistemic doubt. Similarly, exploring the nature of worlds requires consideration of its origins of construct. In this respect, the epistemic and the ontological depend mutually on each other, where "intractable epistemological uncertainty becomes, at a certain point, ontological plurality or instability . . . by the same token, push ontological questions far enough and they tip over into epistemological questions" (McHale [1987] 1996, 11). The relationship between the two dominants is, therefore, bidirectional and reversible.

Understanding the relationship between postmodernist and modernist fiction, which occupy the ontological and epistemic domains, respectively, is crucial for historical novels that deal, in particular, with an overlap of two different worlds, the fictional and the 'real'. This gives rise to an "ontological scandal" (McHale [1987] 1996, 85). Representation in the postmodernist historical novel is influenced, equally, by the 'real' world that inspires the fictional one, the internal coherence of the fictional world and one's own position with respect to this world. This kind of representation does not deny the existence of reality. Instead, it emphasizes the mediated nature of reaching this reality, since textual representation provides a path to history.

The Historical Novel: From Realism to Postmodernism

The correspondence and dialogic relationship between form and content in the novel becomes apparent in the works of George Lukács and Linda Hutcheon, whose respective explorations of the classic historical novel and "historiographic metafiction" underscore the way technique supports and advances theme.

McHale lists three features that define the classic realist historical novel of the 19th century. The first of these is an adherence to official historical records that should not be contradicted in fiction. Apart from verisimilar representation, this can be achieved either by positioning the tale in inadequately archived domains of history, or by opting for psychological realism and interiorized narratives, which cannot be contradicted or challenged. His second criterion is a commitment to cultural realism, where the novel captures the ideology, cultural dynamics and thought processes of an age. Citing Scott's Middle Ages as an example of a disruption of this paradigm, McHale argues that though Scott's novels reflected official historical records, there was, in his depiction of the Middle Ages, a reflection of Romantic ideology, which is an incongruity within a realist fiction set in the Middle Ages. Finally, the

classic realist historical novel, for McHale, should abide by the natural physical laws of the universe since "historical fictions must be *realistic* fictions; a fantastic historical fiction is an anomaly" (McHale [1987] 1996, 88). Lukács makes a similar case for historical realism in *The Historical Novel* (1937). Curiously, though, Lukács's position contradicts McHale's assessment of Scott when he evaluates the latter as the quintessential historical novelist, par excellence.

These features contrast with those of the postmodern historical novel that highlights instances where fiction and history intersect and diverge. McHale states that the postmodern historical novel is structured, intentionally, as either a supplement to history, or as a conscious divergence from it, with the result that such narratives subvert official historical records by flaunting plurality and non-absolutism. Elaborating on the nature of such a history, McHale states that it is revisionist in two respects. It reinterprets historical records and changes the content of history by challenging orthodox narratives of reality. It also revises and transforms the methods, conventions and norms of historical fiction. This is achieved, according to McHale, through ontological disruptions where the boundaries of fiction and history, internal and external fields of reference of representation, are transgressed:

> Postmodernist fiction . . . mak[es] the transition from one realm to the other as jarring as possible. This it does by violating the constraints on "classic" historical fiction: by visibly contradicting the public record of "official" history; by flaunting anachronisms; and by integrating history and the fantastic. (McHale [1987] 1996, 90)

Pursuing this discussion further, McHale states that, while official history is the tale of winners, the postmodern historical novel attempts to restore the lives of the "'lost groups' (the peasantry and working-class, women, minorities) to the historical record that animates historical research" (McHale [1987] 1996, 91).

In *The Historical Novel* (1937), interestingly, Lukács's outline of the nature and function of the classic historical novel resembles McHale's description of the postmodern historical novel. For Lukács, who approaches novelistic representation with a Marxist agenda, the novel must capture, in totality, the lives of the people who are not represented in the grand historical narratives. These overlaps between different theories of the historical novel substantiate the ambiguity surrounding the genre. Part of the difficulty in achieving clear-cut, compartmentalized definitions arises from the juxtaposition of the real and the fictional in the realist and the postmodern historical novels, alike.