

Genre, Narrative, and History in Timothy Findley's *The Wars*

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Abstract

Timothy Findley's *The Wars* (1977) started to investigate the underlying ideological assumptions about the writing of history before the rise of the postmodern epistemological and ontological questioning about history. Its problematization of realist presumptions of historical representation has been analysed by commentators, but the way Findley engages in genre transgression in order to unsettle history's claims to authenticity and objectivity has not received adequate critical attention. This essay is concerned with how he employs the biographic form for his protagonist's story but juxtaposes it with a nameless researcher's collection of information about him and investigation into related historical documents as a metafictional device to problematize the writing of biography and history as mimetic representation. The focus will be on the narrative strategies used to achieve genre transgression and blur the distinction between biography and history.

Keywords: Timothy Findley, *The Wars*, history writing, biography, genre transgression

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Timothy Findley's fascination with the writing of history is exhibited in two of his novels, *The Wars* (1977) and *Famous Last Words* (1981). Integrating elements of factual history with the world of fiction, the two novels approach the issue of historical representation from a metahistorical perspective that allows for alternative visions of historical events and epistemological and ontological questioning of historiography. Linda Hutcheon celebrates *Famous Last Words* as a classic example of historiographic metafiction because it exhibits an intense postmodern self-reflexivity while simultaneously remaining grounded in social, historical, and political realities (13). As for *The Wars*, winner of the 1977 Governor General's Award, she mentions it as an illustration of how postmodern metafiction writers, with their self-conscious recourse to mimetic devices such as photography, cinema and tape-recording, resurrect reading as a dynamic and creative act that is essential in the production of meaning (46-51). But *The Wars* is an example of historiographic metafiction, a genre interested in problematizing historical discourse and practice, and due to its play with the genre conventions of biography, its metafictionality is more complicated and subtle than Hutcheon has acknowledged. This essay aims to explore how Findley employs narrative strategies to subvert biography as a genre and to problematize the writing of biography and history, destabilizing the distinction between and exposing their underlying ideological assumptions.

The Wars consists of two stories: that of Robert Ross as a soldier during the First World War and that of a nameless researcher's efforts to unearth Robert's past from archives sixty years later. Findley's epistemological and ontological questioning of history goes hand in hand with a less overt attempt at genre transgression. Bruce Pirie, one of the few commentators who notices the subversion of genre in *The Wars*, reads the novel as "a parody of romance" and attempts to unearth "the beguiling shape of myth and legend" behind its "elaborate realism," which "seems to seduce the reader into accepting the authenticity of the account" (70).¹ However, his reading of the novel as a parody of romance focuses on Robert's adventure into the battlefield but completely overlooks the second strand of

1 One example of the play with romantic conventions is the theme of metamorphosis — the union of human and animal identities. Robert's identification with the animal is seen in his killing of his superior officer, Captain Leather, in order to set free the horses from the barns under shelling. In romance, joining the world of animals indicates a regression of human identity, which Findley overturns by presenting Robert's fellow-feeling with animals as "part of the human largeness and generosity" and as a recognition of "one's kinship with and duty towards all life, a recognition threatened by the 'ethics' of war" (Pirie 74).

narrative, which disrupts the novel's verisimilitude. The researcher striving to rebuild Robert's life story is not mentioned in his analysis, nor is the way in which Findley interweaves the two narrative strands to reveal the ideological implications of documentary realism.

Evelyn Cobley draws attention to the formal transformation Findley has achieved in the tradition of writing on the First World War, which presupposes that any commentary on war has to be based on firsthand experience (98). The privileging of experience in this war genre serves the claim to authenticity, creating the impression of the text as a direct reflection of reality. However, this immediacy is undermined in *The Wars*. With intertextual references, Findley invokes and breaks with this genre's obsession with conveying facts, foregrounding the mediating process activated by an interpreting consciousness (Cobley 99-100).² Biography is another genre parodied. Simone Vauthier mentions in passing that *The Wars* "pretends to be . . . a biography in the making" (15), while Howells notes that it combines "the forms of fictive biography and historical novel" (130).³ Yet none of them elaborates on the subversive use of this genre in *The Wars*. In fact, it is through the combination of fictive biography and historical novel that Findley subverts the generic conventions of biography and exposes the underlying ideological assumptions about the writing of history in general.

If we take no account of the elaborate narrative structure of *The Wars*, the plot seems quite simple. In 1915, Robert Ross, a Toronto teenager growing up in a rather dysfunctional family, decides to enlist after the death of his hydrocephalic sister Rowena because he feels guilty at neglecting his duty to look after her. In the training camp, Robert comes across Eugene Taffler, a senior soldier who has been wounded at the front. On the voyage to Europe, he is appointed to care for the horses in the hold, replacing the ailing Harris. His legs subsequently are injured in an accident. During recovery, Robert cultivates an intimate relationship with Harry and meets Taffler and his lover Lady Barbara d'Orsey. In January, 1916, Robert finally arrives at the front in France, and by February he has accumulated plenty of near-death experiences.⁴ On leave in England, Robert encounters the newly crippled

2 In contrast to Cobley's stress on formal subversion, Diana Brydon is attracted by Findley's attempt "to circumvent the established rhetoric of the genre, which determines what can and cannot be said," contending that his challenge to the war genre lies in his fascination with articulating the unspeakable horrors of war (62).

3 In a similar vein, Hutcheon describes this text as "a novel very much about the writing of history and biography," placing emphasis on its self-awareness and self-reflexivity (210-11).

4 Robert almost drowns in the dikes, escapes an air attack, suffers a gas attack immediately

Taffler, who has tried to commit suicide, and has an affair with Lady Barbara and meets her twelve-year-old sister, Lady Juliet, who falls in love with him. Back at the front, when the stables are trapped in heavy bombardment, Robert disobeys Captain Leather to save the animals inside. But it is too late. The death of the animals drives him to shoot Leather and desert the army. Robert is badly burned when his captors set fire to the barn in which he and a great number of animals are trapped. He refuses the offer of euthanasia from Marian Turner, the nurse looking after him in the hospital. Eventually, he is returned to England to be court-martialled in absentia. Under the care of Lady Juliet, Robert survives another six years and dies in 1922.

Such a sequential recounting of the life and death of Robert Ross does little justice either to the experience of reading or to the narrative structure Findley designs for the novel. What matters is not the story itself but the way it is told. *The Wars* commences with a prologue and numbered sections and closes its five parts with an epilogue. This impression of neatness is misleading in that the numerical order does not have a chronological narrative as a counterpart. The prologue does not serve the purpose of supplying a framework or providing introductory information to orientate the reader, nor do the first few numbered sections show any narrative progression or establish any cause and effect relationship with the prologue. As Laurie Ricou observes, the novel “begins . . . four times, in four different ways” and the prologue is “no prologue at all” (129, 134).⁵ The multiple beginnings increase readerly disorientation.

The prologue and the first sections build two narrative strands and set the pattern of how they relate to each other within the novel. The two strands are connected through their common focus on Robert but separated from each other in time and space. The prologue introduces Robert in a scene given out of context, but subsequently his story, narrated impersonally after section 4, obeys chronology. This narrative strand is mainly set in 1915-16. The first three sections present the second strand, set about sixty years later, in which an I-narrator addresses a researcher as “you” and describes the difficulties encountered by the latter in the search for Robert’s past. Both remain anonymous throughout the novel. What makes this narrator intriguing is that when narrating what the you-researcher is doing in the archive, the I-narrator repeatedly makes comments on the photographic documents and inserts Marian Turner’s firsthand account of Robert. She and Lady Juliet are the only witnesses willing to talk about him, and the transcripts of their taped interviews become one of the I-narrator’s primary documentary sources. The narrative pattern established here in Part One will be repeated until the end of the novel. Why does

afterwards, and encounters a German sniper whom he kills in a moment of confusion.

5 Vauthier also notices the multiplicity of beginnings (31).

Findley interweave the two strands in such a complicated, non-chronological way? Why does he create this unusual anonymous narrator so eager to report the actions of a you-researcher and to interpret the archives?

According to Vauthier, the two narrative strands are told by different narrators (an I-narrator who is also a historian, and an impersonal third-person narrator), and their coexistence limits the authority of each (16-17, 25-26).⁶ Frank Davey, in contrast, argues that the novel offers the story of an unidentified narrator's search into the history of Robert and the narrator's hypothetical reconstruction of that history and that the impersonal narration in the latter "can be read as a second narrative voice of the I-narrator" (115). Such a reading establishes a clear connection between the two stories, but Davey does not explain why this narrator chooses to speak in two different voices in the same textual space. This nameless I-narrator compounds the difficulty of analysing the narrative voice through his use of the ambiguous "you" in the first person narration.⁷ Who is this "you" he keeps addressing? John F. Hulcoop suggests that the pronoun "you" can be understood as addressing either the reader or another researcher engaged in the same process (33). Vauthier acknowledges the ambiguity as well but insists on differentiating the I-narrator from the anonymous researcher, whom he addresses as "you," so that the former is doubly removed from the object of his investigation (16-17). Brydon, however, identifies the I-narrator as the researcher and the use of "you" as an attempt to bridge the gap between reader and writer and to invite the reader's active participation in making sense of the story's events (68). Davey proposes a similar reading, seeing "you" as "a familiar replacement for 'we'" and its use as the I-narrator's endeavour to invite the reader to share his own research position (115). Whether the I-narrator aims to seek cooperation or win recognition from the reader through the use of "you," or whether the "you" and the I-narrator can be seen as one and the same, this narrative device must be considered in relation to the whole textual structure, especially the shift between two modes of narration.

In regarding the two stories as told by different narrators and the "you" as a

6 Donna Palmateer Pennee holds a similar opinion, calling the two narrators the principal narrator and the research-narrator (*Moral Metafiction* 39-40).

7 I prefer to see the two narrative voices as male, the reason for which will be given later in my discussion. Dagmar Krause notes that the narrator's gender has puzzled critics: Catherine Hunter and Joseph Pesch believe the narrator to be male while Pennee insists on a female voice; others claim the narrator's gender is not revealed (48). A rather extraordinary interpretation about this gender issue is proposed by Shane Rhodes, who takes into consideration the fact of Findley as a gay male writer and comes to the conclusion that the author creates "an almost genderless and unknowable researcher" in order "to erase the gay from his gay historiography" (48).

researcher other than the I-narrator, Vauthier multiplies the narrative layers in *The Wars* but leaves the connection between the three unexplored. Davey identifies the first person and third person narrative voices as spoken by one narrator, who is also the researcher addressed as “you,” but he fails to take account of Findley’s motivation for deliberately splitting the text into two narratives and creating a “you” for the I-narrator to speak to. For him, these narrative layers produce “little effect on the text overall” (116). Although Davey’s reductive reading of the otherwise densely layered texture remains questionable, his suggestion of one narrator with two narrative voices provides clues as to why Findley juxtaposes two narrative strands and has the I-narrator keep addressing the you-researcher. Taking a position between Vauthier and Davey, I would argue that in *The Wars* there is only one narrator recounting two stories from different perspectives.

Davey does not explain what tempts him to regard the impersonal narration as the second voice of the I-narrator, but textual evidence can be found to support this reading. There are several moments when the distinction between the impersonal narration and the first-person narration tends to be uncertain and even blurred. For example, when trying to pick Robert out in one of the photographs, the I-narrator shifts focus from Robert’s posture and appearance to his inner thoughts:

A Band is assembled on the Band Shell. . . . They serenade the crowd with “Soldiers of the Queen.” You turn them over—wondering if they’ll spill—and you read on the back in the faintest ink in a feminine hand: “Robert.” But where? You look again and all you see is the crowd. . . . Then you see him: Robert Ross. Standing on the sidelines with pocketed hands—feet apart and narrowed eyes. His hair falls sideways across his forehead. He wears a checkered cap and dark blue suit. He watches with a dubious expression; half admiring—half reluctant to admire. He’s old enough to go to war. He hasn’t gone. He doubts the validity in all this martialling of men but the doubt is inarticulate. It stammers in his brain. He puts his hand out sideways: turns. He reaches for the wicker back of a wheel chair. “Come on, Rowena. There’s still the rest of the park to sit in.” (6)

How can the I-narrator know Robert’s inarticulate skepticism about the martialling? Moreover, the last two sentences depicting his act of pushing Rowena’s wheelchair cannot be part of the static photograph. Here, despite the consistent use of present tense (tense is another way to distinguish the two modes of narration: the I-narrator uses present tense while the impersonal narration is presented in past tense), the narrative voice slips from the first person narration into an omniscient point of view that can be identified with the voice in the impersonal narration. This description

also indicates the narrator's tendency towards emplotment and hence the practice of imagination in decoding documentary sources. He creates a dynamic narrative for a frozen image, speculating on the actions happening in the photograph rather than providing an inventory of its content. Sometimes, the direction of slipping in the voice is reversed:

All through the prairie autumn Robert's parents showered him—almost perversely—with scarves and socks and mittens. . . . They also sent him food. . . . Robert also wrote to his father, saying he would like an automatic pistol. . . .

Lest Robert's having to ask for his own side arms make no sense to those of you who weren't around or haven't read this part of history, it should be pointed out that this was a "people's army"—not an army of professionals. Officers provided their own uniforms and sometimes even their own horses if they so desired. . . . At any rate—many telegrams and letters were passed back and forth about this pistol. (33)

A change in the narrative voice is discernible between the two paragraphs, especially the first sentence in the second one, which with its present tense sounds more like one of the I-narrator's utterances. Here, there is no doubt about the use of "you." The narrator speaks directly to the reader, not the unnamed researcher, explaining the nature of the army that Robert has joined. It is both an insertion into the flow of the omniscient narrative and a gesture foregrounding the temporal gap between the act of narrating and what is being narrated. Sometimes the direction of the slipping is difficult to determine, prompting more speculation about whose voice is speaking. Rowena's funeral, the third person narrator switches his tone in a parenthetical statement:

Peggy's current beau was in uniform. He stood at attention. Robert envied him because he could go away when this was over and surround himself with space. (It was then, perhaps, the first inkling came that it was time for Robert to join the army. But he didn't think it consciously.) All he knew was that his hands felt empty. In his mind, they kept reaching out for the back of Rowena's chair. (18)

The omniscient point of view showing confidence in Robert's inner feelings gives way to a hesitant voice making a guess at Robert's motivation for enlisting, but then the voice reassumes certainty, assuring the reader that Robert has not come to realize his yearning for escape. It seems that here the I-narrator and the impersonal narrator have merged into one voice. After the parenthetical sentences, the narration becomes impersonal again. Section 12 of Part Five provides another illustration of this ambiguity in the narrative voice:

Here is where the mythology is muddled. There are stories of immediate pursuit. But these are doubtful. Some versions have it that Robert rode through La Chodrelle at a gallop. . . . Far more likely is the version that describes the horses making a detour out around the woods. . . .

At any rate, what happened was that Major Mickle went himself immediately to his signals office at La Chodrelle and sent word back to Bailleul that an officer of the C.F.A. had shot and killed one of his men and had then made off with a great many horses in the direction of Magdalene Wood.

It took some time, due to the confusion at Bailleul, to discover that the horses were indeed missing and that no authority had been given anyone to remove them. . . . Once this was established—Mickle was commissioned to give pursuit to the renegade horse thief and, within about four hours of Robert shooting Private Cassles, Major Mickle and forty men had taken after him on foot. (209-10)

The I-narrator begins by claiming to be evaluating the plausibility of the various versions of what happens after Robert runs away. Then with the tense changing from present to past, the narrator reports with assurance the actions taken by the army to handle Robert's case. The last paragraph quoted above can be read either as the I-narrator's re-establishment of this part of history or as the third person narrator's recounting of one episode in Robert's life.⁸ The blurring between two voices in these moments suggests that the two stories are recounted by one and the same narrator. But why does Findley's narrator speak in two different voices? Does not shifting between modes of narration usually generate disorientation, let alone increasing difficulty of reading and understanding? What does the juxtaposition of two narrative strands aim to convey or achieve?

To answer these questions, it needs to be noted first that considering the episodes respectively recounted, the two narratives exist side by side not to contradict but to complement each other.⁹ A careful comparison between them shows that it is exactly through their juxtaposition that a relatively complete version of Robert's story can be re-established, although the way they interweave chops the

8 Vauthier also analyses the ambiguity in this section, noting that the last two paragraphs shift back to the third person narration while the rest has grammatical marks of the I (18).

9 Vauthier argues that the two narratives "dovetail and overlap without inconsistency" (22). But some trivial inconsistencies do exist. I will return to this point later.

larger text into fragments that require considerable effort from the reader to piece them together. Many parts of the I-narrator's narrative, especially the descriptions of photographs and interview transcripts, help to bridge the gaps left in the impersonal narration, which in turn provides the framework for the fragments of the first person narration to fit in.

In Part Two, Section 10 and Section 12 cooperate to tell what happens between Robert, Harris, Taffler, and Lady Barbara at the Royal Free Hospital. Section 10, narrated mainly by the impersonal narrator, begins by describing the house in Kent where the injured Robert and the critically ill Harris spend their first week in England. This opening is chronologically connected to the end of Section 28 of Part One, where their voyage across the Atlantic stops. The impersonal narrator continues to explain why Robert takes his embarkation leave in London—to keep Harris company in the hospital and to obtain a Webley automatic his father has tried to procure for him. At this moment, the narrative voice modulates into the first person narration, admitting the lack of some information: “The dates are obscure here—but it must have been mid-January, 1916 since Robert's tour of duty began on the 24th of that month” (102). Then the voice changes back to an omniscient perspective, narrating Robert's interaction with Harris and his first encounter with Lady Barbara. The transcript of the first interview with Lady Juliet constitutes Section 12, in which she recalls what Robert has said about Harris. With the episode in the hospital overlapping but not entirely the same, she brings the interview to an end with how Harris's body is cremated by mistake and how the grieved Robert, with Taffler and Barbara, takes his ashes to Greenwich and scatters them on the river.

In the third person narrative, where the events of Robert's life are presented according to a more straightforward chronology, the detached voice pretends to assume an omniscient point of view and have access to all positions of focalization, with that of Robert privileged. This narrative exhibits traditional realist conventions. By contrast, the first person narrative is far more disjointed. Its intimate voice reports the activities of the you-researcher, gives detailed descriptions of photographs, explains the background of the eyewitnesses, inserts sections of interview transcripts, provides information about the Great War, and makes comments on the research process. The intimacy creates a sense of immediacy. In content, the two modes of narration, despite some overlapping, constitute a complementary relationship, each providing pieces of information that can be rearranged to fill in the blanks in the other. They work together to present a relatively comprehensive version of Robert's story. However, a tension arises from their formal juxtaposition, threatening the reliability of Robert's story. The mimetic model and the sense of immediacy fail in the reconfirmation of actuality. How do they develop a relationship that is simultaneously supplementary and undermining?

At first glance, it is the first person narrative that at the outset strives to establish the authenticity of the impersonal narrative. After the prologue, the I-narrator opens his narration with “All of this happened a long time ago. But not so long ago that everyone who played a part in it is dead. Some can still be met in dark old rooms with nurses in attendance” (3). A number of witnesses survive. Despite their refusal to talk about Robert, they confirm that he exists. The unavailability of firsthand accounts forces the anonymous researcher to turn to archives: “In the end, the only facts you have are public” (3).

It comes as no surprise that the researcher begins in the archive with photographs, a documentary form believed to reflect reality and therefore verifying again the existence of Robert. The introduction of Marian Turner, who “remembers Robert vividly” (9), and the insertion of her interview transcript serve the same purpose. Photographs and eyewitness accounts are used as incontrovertible documentary evidence to guarantee authenticity (Cobley 108). The insertion of Marian’s interview at such an early stage performs another specific function — to justify the narrator’s research into the life of an ordinary soldier, whose rebellion is described by Marian as “*un homme unique*” because “he did the thing that no one else would even dare to think of doing” (10). Paradoxically, the strategies used to reinforce a sense of reality betray the problems with the I-narrator’s method of dealing with his material, and undermine the authenticating effect the first person narrative strains to produce for the third person narrative. The refusal of the surviving witnesses to talk about Robert proves the difficulty of collecting firsthand accounts, which suggests the deficiency of primary sources. The narrator even reveals that some of the archives are in danger of disintegration while those not included in them have been forever lost: “As the past moves under your fingertips, part of it crumbles. Other parts, you know you’ll never find. This is what you have” (4). Nevertheless, the shortage and fragmentariness of primary sources cannot thwart his determination to search for Robert, thanks to his faith that “the corner of a picture will reveal the whole” and that “a whole age lies in [these] fragments” (3).

Photographs, whose authority originates from the presumption of veracity and immediacy, are perfect documentary evidence used to support factuality. For the I-narrator, they are miniatures of reality, mirroring an age and its historical transition. When poring over the snapshots of 1915, he comments on the changes in women: in one photograph, they “still maintain a public reticence” (4) but in another they “abandon all their former reticence and rush out into the roadway, throwing flowers and waving flags” (5). He pays close attention to the attire: “Here for the first time, the old Edwardian elegance falters. Style is neither this nor that—unless you could say it was apologetic” (4). His comments suggest that the viewer must own knowledge about one age and its change so as to be able to identify them in pictures.

Therefore, it is not that photography provides knowledge but that it “activates an already existing stock of knowledge” (Cobley 109). In other words, how pictures can make sense depends on the viewer rather than the images presented. What if photographs contain something the viewer has no knowledge of at all? Oddly, the point is exemplified by the I-narrator’s response to a photograph of the Atlantic, in which there is a small white dot on the far horizon and above the dot one of the Rosses writes “WHAT IS THIS?” (8). The narrator reflects: “All too clearly, the small white dot is an iceberg. Why whoever took the picture failed to verify this fact remains a mystery” (8). This “mystery” shows that if the viewer has no existing knowledge to activate, the photographed image fails to make sense. However, what if the knowledge is wrong? How can the I-narrator be so certain that the white dot is an iceberg when he is not a witness?¹⁰ The way the I-narrator interprets the photographic images raises questions about their nature, in particular their authenticating value.

Sometimes background knowledge enables the viewer to see photographed images differently. Speaking of the photograph of Barbara, Lady Juliet reveals to the nameless interviewer something different from public impression: “You can see the sceptical eyes and the strange perpetual smile. I’ll tell you a secret about that smile. It wasn’t a smile at all. It was a nervous dimple on her left side” (111). This example also suggests that photographs are susceptible to multiple readings and misinterpretation. Another instance shows how background knowledge allows the viewer to realize what is hidden from the photograph:

Thomas Ross and Family stand beside a new Ford Truck. . . . This picture will appear in the *Toronto Mail and Empire*. . . . The “family” consists of Mister and Mrs Ross and three of their children: Robert, Peggy and Stuart. Rowena, the eldest, is not shown. She is never in photographs that are apt to be seen by the public. (6)

The word *family* needs to be put in quotation marks because the I-narrator knows what has been excluded from the photograph. The absence of Rowena gestures to the problem of the framing and selectivity of photography, yet it does not shake the narrator’s trust in photography as a perfect medium for capturing reality.

However, the I-narrator’s reliance on photographs for factual accuracy is often disrupted by his tendency to make up stories for them:

He is wearing his uniform. Nothing is yet broken down. Every stitch is stiff as starch. The boots are new—the latest gift from his father. He

¹⁰ As Cobley notes, “what guarantee does the reader of *The Wars* have that the researcher’s identification of this ‘fact’ is accurate?” (113).

carries a riding crop made of Algerian leather. . . . He is posed in mind and body. Only his left hand disobeys his will. Its fingers curl to make a fist.

Dead men are serious—that’s what this photograph is striving to say. Survival is precluded. Death is romantic—got from silent images. I lived—was young—and died. But not real death, of course, because I’m standing here alive with all these lights that shine so brightly in my eyes. Oh—I can tell you, sort of, what it might be like to die. . . . At most, the hero sighs his way to death while linen handkerchiefs are held against his wounds. His wounds are poems. . . . Medals—(there are none just yet, as you can see)—will sit beside this frame in little boxes made of leather lined with satin. I will have the Military Cross. *He died for King and Country*—fighting the war to end all wars. (48-49)

The description shifts from identifying the items in the picture to speculating about Robert’s left fist as a signal of disobedience. The narrator even appropriates Robert’s voice, declaring he dies for patriotism, a declaration denied later in the novel. Again, the I-narrator demonstrates his power to conjure up an active plot for a static photograph. This exemplifies Sontag’s critical concept that photographs “cannot themselves explain anything” but “are inexhaustible invitations to deduction, speculation, and fantasy” (23). Obviously, despite the ability to freeze images, photographs fail to fix their own meaning. Interestingly, the I-narrator’s treatment of photographs also foregrounds the role of interpretation in decoding historical materials.¹¹ His narrative about this photograph of Robert is structured by the tropes of tragedy and romance, two of the modes of emplotment that Hayden White identifies as being used by historians in giving historical accounts.¹² In so doing, he

11 The interpretative aspect of historiography has been reconceptualized as ineluctable. For Hayden White, a historical account is “at once a representation that is an interpretation and an interpretation that passes for an explanation of the whole process mirrored in the narrative” (*Tropics* 51). According to him, interpretation has to be downplayed because it gives rise to a multiplicity of possibilities: “most historical sequences can be emplotted in a number of different ways, so as to provide different interpretations of those events and to endow them with different meanings” (*Tropics* 85). Foucault explicates this act in terms of power—“interpretation is the violent or surreptitious appropriation of a system of rules, which in itself has no essential meaning, in order to impose a direction, to bend it to a new will, to force its participation in a different game, and to subject it to secondary rules” (151-52).

12 White defines emplotment as “the way by which a sequence of events fashioned into a

imposes a direction on the understanding of the photograph.

In Section 3 of Part One, an image of Robert “*riding straight towards the camera*” (5) is inserted into the description of the photographs, and on it the narrator comments, “*You lay the fiery image back in your mind and let it rest. You know it will obtrude again and again until you find its meaning—here*” (6). It is placed at the point when the focus shifts from public snapshots of 1915 to those of the Ross family. Hulcoop suggests the adverb “*here*” may refer specifically to this “*fiery image*,” which he identifies as “*an imaginary photography*” since “no photographer is present to take pictures when Robert breaks out of the fired barn” (33). York considers this image to “provide a living link between the researcher and the distant and mysterious world of the public photographs” and believes “*here*” refers to the next object in the archives the narrator is about to describe: a picture of Robert standing on the sidelines, watching a band play “*Solders of the Queen*” (82). Yet it is more likely that the researcher-narrator takes this fiery image as standing for the essence of Robert’s life which he has striven to capture and that “*here*” refers not just to a single picture as York has suggested but to all those private photographs in the archives, among which the I-narrator believes he can discover the true Robert and unravel the mystery of his mutiny.

Little agreement has been achieved in respect of the use of photography in *The Wars*.¹³ This may stem from the fact that little distinction is made between how the I-narrator treats photographic images and how Findley presents their treatment by the I-narrator. Confusing these two layers allows Findley’s critical reflection to pass

story is gradually revealed to be a story of a particular kind” and identifies at least four modes of plotment: romance, tragedy, comedy and satire (*Metahistory* 7). They provide the formal principles by which historical narratives are structured.

- 13 From a postmodern perspective, Cobley contends that the researcher’s verbal representation of photographed images launches a process of substitutions, not only subverting the authenticity photography is meant to guarantee but also foregrounding “the slippery ground on which all meaning is produced” (112-13). Her reading echoes Sontag’s characterization of the photograph as “a pseudo-presence and a token of absence” (16). This is exactly the paradoxical nature of photography. Nonetheless, David Williams rejects this Derridean notion of slippery signification, arguing instead that in *The Wars* photography disrupts the traditional notions of cyclical or linear temporality by immobilizing or arresting historical moments and in seizing a historical moment, it tears the image from its context, creating a tension between distance and proximity in which the viewer can develop its historical significance (60). For York, photography, due to its ability to fix historical moments, is “a type of surrogate memory,” a requisite for preserving “life-sustaining acts of courage such as Robert Ross’s desertion” in a violent world (85). She affirms the photograph’s capability to capture reality.

unnoticed. The I-narrator trusts photography's capacity to fix the past. This confidence is undermined by the way he deals with them. Findley problematizes the nature of photography through the I-narrator's act of interpreting, in particular his dynamic emplotment or narrativization of static images.

Eyewitness accounts are similarly employed to guarantee authenticity. To reinforce their factuality, the I-narrator depicts in detail how the you-researcher travels to Lady Juliet's home at "number 15, Wilton Place—the St Aubyns' London address since 1743" (108), and into the interview transcripts are inserted descriptions in brackets of what happens during the tape recording, such as "PAUSE," "LAUGHTER," "MISS TURNER TURNED TO LOOK OUT OF THE WINDOW AT THIS POINT. THERE IS QUITE A LONG PAUSE ON THE TAPE" (10). It is an attempt to place the interviews in concrete context and to show they are given in their full forms. The I-narrator presents them as if they were live shows. However, like the photographs, these firsthand accounts betray the faults that call their reliability into question. One problem is the uncertainty of memory, as shown in Marian Turner recalling Robert after sixty years: "my impression was of someone extremely well made who cared about his body. At least that's my memory of it—the way it was. You get them all mixed up, after so long a time" (9). Transcription of these oral accounts does not amount to accurate duplication: "There is an aspect of this interview which, alas, cannot survive transition onto paper—and that is the sound of Lady Juliet's voice" (157).

The problems of selectivity and judgment are highlighted in Lady Juliet's second tape transcript. She emphasizes at the outset her role as an onlooker recording her observations of the events occurring sixty years ago and tells the researcher to treat her diaries as a source of information: "*I never took part, you see. Not ever, I was a born observer. . . . These diaries will tell you what you want to know, I think. But I warn you—I was ears and eyes and that was all*" (162-63). She reiterates her detachment in saying "*The conclusions are for you to make,*" but not everything put down in the diaries can be shared: "*I won't read everything*" (163). When it comes to the physical aspect of Robert's affair with Barbara, Lady Juliet becomes very uneasy, stating that for fear of violating privacy she has determined what will be told: "*I will tell you this and then one other thing and that is all*" (175). Her role as an uninvolved observer is undermined when she admits to falling in love with Robert and feeling hurt at the sight of him with Barbara. Moreover, Lady Juliet in her seventies likes to insert her comments on Robert's behaviour during the interview. The most daring judgment is the twice-repeated claim that Robert's feeling for Harris is love: "I think that Robert was in love with Harris" (113); "Robert, though he never said so, loved Harris" (114). Her conclusion leads the I-narrator to describe Robert as being confused by his feelings for Harris in his

impersonal narrative: "The thing was—no one since Rowena had made Robert feel he wanted to be with them all the time. If what he felt could be reduced to an understanding — that was it" (104). The reduction in intensity—from Lady Juliet's speculation about Robert's love to his desire to be together—suggests the narrator has filtered out what he finds inappropriate in his primary sources.

Marian Turner also attempts to leave out something in her interview:

MISS TURNER IS ASKED IF SHE EVER CONVERSED WITH ROBERT ROSS. THERE IS A PAUSE ON THE TAPE — AND THEN BESSIE TURNER IS HEARD SAYING FROM ACROSS THE ROOM: "*Why don't you tell him, Mernie? Why don't you say it and get it off your chest?*" (215)¹⁴

The secret Marian needs to confess is her offer of euthanasia to Robert, an offer arising from her desperation and guilt: "That night, I thought: *I am ashamed to be alive. I am ashamed of life. And I wanted to offer some way out of life—I wanted grace for Robert Ross*" (215). She is deeply moved by Robert's reply "Not yet," in which she finds "the essence of Robert Ross" and which has become her motto ever since (216). Having looked after Robert, both Marian and Juliet display strong personal involvement, which helps enhance the authority and authenticity of their firsthand experiences, but their attempt to leave out certain information cannot help but cast some doubt on their reliability.

Besides, the sentence "MISS TURNER IS ASKED IF SHE EVER CONVERSED WITH ROBERT ROSS" raises a critical question as to the nature of the interviews. Marian is asked a question but by whom? Given the circumstances, it is the interviewer, the anonymous you-researcher, who puts the question forward, but this too logical answer alerts us to the unusual part of the interview transcripts: they appear more like monologues than interactions between interviewee and interviewer. The interviewer is muted and his presence is reduced to such a degree that in the transcripts he is nowhere to be found except in a few of the bracketed asides, such as "(YOU CHANGE TAPES)" (117). It is as if the interviewer were only an extension of the tape recorder instead of a persistent and curious researcher trying to unearth Robert's past. This seemingly uninvolved role forms a stark contrast with the I-narrator, who creates dynamic narratives for static photographs. In one sense, this can be seen as an effort on the part of the researcher to remain detached from his sources and transfer authority to the witnesses, but this effort to efface interference from the researcher-interviewer is so deliberate as to arouse suspicion about the role he plays in interviews. Why does he leave out the questions

14 In this excerpt lies the only clue to the researcher's gender as male: "*tell him.*"

when trying to solicit information from the witnesses?

The effort to report the interviews as they are in process contrasts with the I-narrator's appropriation of the transcripts. The two transcripts of Lady Juliet's interviews are arranged according to the time of tape recording, but the I-narrator chops that of Marian Turner's into three fragments to achieve his ends. The first fragment, in which Marian recognizes Robert as a hero, is used to authenticate his existence and to justify the research. The second one, placed after Robert's journey from the prairie back to Kingston, is a tiny extract with her comment on the after-effects of the war: "It was the war that changed all that. It was. After the Great War for Civilization—sleep was different everywhere" (46). Her sense of alienation echoes Robert's estrangement from the city of his birth: "Where, in this dark, was the world he'd known?" (45). Inserted between Robert's arrest and his return to England, the third fragment serves to fill in a gap in the impersonal narration, recounting the episode in the *Bois de Madeleine* hospital. The fragmentation of Marian Turner's interview transcript exposes the narrator's manipulative methods.

The resort to documentary sources in the first person narrative generates paradoxical effects that result in a tension with the impersonal narrative. On the one hand, the accumulation of photographic archives and eyewitness accounts, as well as the inclusion of historical figures like Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon, aim to reinforce a sense of factuality and to guarantee the reliability of Robert's story in the impersonal narration. On the other hand, authenticity is simultaneously undermined in that the way they are collected and treated by the I-narrator betrays their shortcomings as documentary evidence. Photographic records, seen as miniatures of reality, are in fact subject to speculation and interpretation, with no single meaning guaranteed. The framing of any photograph suggests it "must always hide more than it discloses" (Sontag 23), exposing the problems of exclusion and manipulation. What eyewitness accounts convey is subjective experience, as a result of judgment, interpretation and filtration, and as shown in Juliet and Marian, informants are likely to leave out certain things because of personal considerations. Moreover, with the I-narrator addressing the you-researcher, presenting archival material and reporting the ongoing research, the first person narrative shatters the immediacy generated in the impersonal narrative, exposing the existence of an interpreting consciousness, which selects and arranges the details to reconstruct the past (Cobley 104).

Speaking in two voices, Findley's narrator is a historian in a dilemma. On the one hand, he has become self-conscious about the constructed nature of history-writing, therefore foregrounding in the first person narrative the interpreting consciousness and mediating process. He is the researcher addressed by himself as "you." In so doing, he doubly removes himself from his subject, highlights temporal

gaps between historical events, the act of constructing them, and their constructions, and historicizes his own position. By showing difficulty in collecting primary sources and uncertainty about certain events, he also admits his limitations. On the other hand, his faith in traditional historiography still lingers, limiting the extent of his self-consciousness. In spite of the awareness of the constructedness of history-writing, he depends on photographs, eyewitness accounts, and other forms of documentation for authority and authentication without recognizing the fact that they are already products of mediation. He believes truth about the past can be “discovered” among primary sources, in particular among photographs with their apparent objectivity and verisimilitude. His impersonal narrative not only illustrates what Roland Barthes calls ‘*the reality effect*’ (139), which means that the historian must “‘absent himself’ from his discourse” (131), so that historical discourse can assume the authority of objectivity and authenticity.¹⁵ It also demonstrates a persistent demand for a coherent vision of historical events as a premise of meaning production in history-writing. Emplotment is still a requisite, and intransigent material must be shaped into a sensible order of narrative. He is a historian caught between modernist and postmodernist impulses, with the latter gaining the upper hand.

Kuester classifies Findley as a modernist “because, even if he cannot help living in a postmodern world, Findley still strives for a coherent universe and a coherent cosmology” (94-95). This evaluation seems more applicable to his anonymous narrator. Even if the two narratives in *The Wars* complement each other to form a rather complete version of a lost past, it does not mean Findley desires a coherent vision of history. They in fact interweave in a way to interrupt and undermine each other. Copley considers Findley to struggle between “a nostalgic yearning for certainty and order,” and “postmodern imperatives to counteract this nostalgia” (121). But the ending of the novel demonstrates its preference for postmodern imperatives. The epilogue does not end with Robert’s death in the impersonal narration but shifts to the first person narration, with the I-narrator contemplating another picture of Robert seated on a keg, holding a skull of some small beast, and describing the you-researcher’s glance at a photograph of “*Robert and Rowena with Meg*” (218). The you-researcher cannot determine the meaning of the first photograph: “You put this picture aside because it seems important” (218).

15 Foucault also examines the naturalizing process through which history seems to tell itself: to “invoke objectivity, the accuracy of facts, and the permanence of the past,” the historian is “forced to silence his preferences and overcome his distaste, to blur his own perspective and replace it with the fiction of a universal geometry. . . , to adopt a faceless anonymity” (158).

With some material still awaiting exploration, the research has not been completed. The ending implies the version of the past just presented is provisional, subject to change. No certainty or ultimate truth of history is guaranteed.

The postmodern impulse to problematize historiography is interwoven with a challenge to the accepted significance of the Great War in Canadian history. This challenge is underestimated by critics.¹⁶ According to Howells, Robert's forms of disobedience are redefined by Findley as "signs of the heroic ability of human beings to resist and to survive" (133). His mutiny, a punishable transgression in official judgment, turns into a story of moral heroism that affirms universal humanist values and "goes beyond nationalism" (134). Dennis Duffy, likewise, remarks that Findley pays scarce attention to the role of the Great War in Canadian nationalism (65). Tom Hastings even contends that, considering the few Canadian references but frequent British references to the war in *The Wars*, "its affinities—both chronological and ideological—lie with the sentiments of the British War Poets of the Great War years" (96-97). However, the Canadian nationalist depiction of the Great War is not simply left out, as these critics suggest. Findley seeks to keep a distance from this myth, if not to dismantle it, through the antiwar propensities and historical setting of Robert's story.

The past the anonymous researcher reconstructs for a court-martialed and officially disgraced soldier like Robert offers a counter discourse to official history, retrieving muted dissenting voices. Robert enlists not out of patriotic sentiments but out of the longing to elude his family. Militarism is called into question and the absurdity of the war is exposed through the questioning of compulsory obedience, which is articulated by Robert's fellow soldier, Bates:

Bates . . . looked at Robert. Here was an unknown quantity—a child in breeches with a blue scarf wound around his neck whose job it was to get them out and back alive. This—to Bates—was the greatest terror of war: what you didn't know of the men who told you what to do—where to go and when. What if they were mad—or stupid? What

16 I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers for reminding me of Pennee's 2006 article on *The Wars*. Pennee may be the only critic that reads Findley's representation of the Great War in relation to Canadian nationalism. From a postcolonial perspective, she argues that Robert Ross's fictive biography "allegorizes" (90) the story of Canada's progression from colony to nation through the participation in the Great War and that Findley's work exposes the ambivalence of second-world postcoloniality. Her reading initiates the inquiry into the postcolonial implications of *The Wars*, but what I am foregrounding here is Findley's postmodern impulse to challenge Canada's postcolonial desire for independence and maturity.

if their fear was greater than yours? (132)

His doubt and fear foreground military leadership as a play determined by chance instead of competence. A gas attack makes his deepest fear come true: "He was quite convinced that Robert had lost his reason—but you have to obey a man with a gun—mad or sane. Here was the terror" (139). This is when Robert orders him and other soldiers in the trench to urinate on pieces of cloth torn from shirts and use them to cover their faces. Robert's eccentric command turns out to be a life-saving decision, but he does go mad sometimes: he fights with a comrade in confusion over who is in command of the guns when there are none.

The battle scenes in Part Three, where the narrative moves at a sluggish pace to show the agonizing slowness of time and psychological stress under siege, also comprise piles of crazed acts.¹⁷ War blurs the distinction between sanity and insanity. Robert's final act to save horses and to shoot his superior, seen as crazy rebellion in official history, is a desperate attempt to avoid senseless sacrifice and represents his personal resistance to the madness entailed by the machinery of war. By depicting the brutalization of men and the massive destruction in war, *The Wars* demonstrates its refusal to romanticize the Great War, allowing Eric Thompson to place it in the antiwar literary tradition inaugurated by Peregrine Acland and Charles Yale Harrison and developed by Philip Child, a tradition different from the "clichéd romances by authors more interested in jingoistic patriotism" (92, 84).

The antiwar tendency is reinforced by Robert's absence from Canada's greatest military moments of the First World War: the successful defence of Ypres in 1915, the Battle of the Somme in 1916, or the capture of Vimy Ridge in 1917. The Great War has become a national myth that marks the evolution of Canada from colony to nation, and the death and deconstruction it caused was accepted as a tragic expense to be paid on the road to sovereignty.¹⁸ As Morton and Granatstein put it,

Even though Canadians fought as allies of the British, for Canada the Great War was a war of independence. By 1918, the self-governing colony that had trusted its fate to British statecraft was not only committed to speaking with its own voice in the world, it had won on the battlefield the right to be heard. (qtd. in Hastings 93)

17 For example, some soldiers burn rats and mice alive; failing to stop them and even forced to watch their killing of a cat, Rodwell, Robert's fellow soldier, kills himself.

18 For the discussion of how memories of the war contribute to the nation-building of Canada, see Jonathan Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning and the First World War*, Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997.

By removing Robert from the historical victories on the European battlefield, Findley refuses to participate in the myth-making of the war as a key moment in the establishment of Canadian nationhood and instead presents a historical moment seen from the bottom up. When Lady Barbara speaks of General Wolfe winning “*your country for us,*” which suggests her imperialist superiority, Robert’s reply is a direct rejection of seeing history from the privileged perspective: “*No, ma’am. I think we got it for him. We?*” Barbara asked. *Soldiers,* said Robert” (120). With a mutinous soldier as the protagonist, Findley provides not only an alternative version marginalized by official history but a point of view that has been entirely excluded from patriotic accounts about the Great War.

Setting *The Wars* in the Great War, Findley acknowledges the significance of this war in Canadian history. Limiting the narrative time to a period outside Canada’s greatest moments on the European battlefield, he enables his novel to avoid flag-waving patriotism. Choosing an ordinary soldier as protagonist, he presents history not from the centre but from the margin. Having this soldier disobey military commands, he challenges antiwar novelists’ perception that “the bravery of the fighting Canadian soldier is founded on stoicism and an almost inarticulate commitment to endure” (Thompson 85). Findley keeps deviating from general expectations of the war genre but he never forgets his political concern — providing alternative voices to counter official history. His refusal to participate in the mythologization of the Great War in nationalist terms echoes his problematization of history by dramatizing the historian-narrator struggling between the modernist vision of coherent and teleological history, and the postmodern impulse to question traditional historiography both epistemologically and ontologically.

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提摩西·芬德利《戰爭》中的文類、 敘事與歷史

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摘 要

在後現代主義對歷史進行知識論與本體論的質疑之前，提摩西·芬德利的《戰爭》已開始檢視歷史書寫隱含的意識型態前提。評論家已經注意到芬德利小說中對歷史再現所依賴的寫實設定提出的質疑，但芬德利如何經由逾越文類規範以擾亂傳統歷史的信條，例如能夠忠實與客觀再現過去的宣告，則尚未被深入探討。這篇論文探討芬德利如何利用傳記這個文類鋪陳主角的故事，卻在同時講述一位無名研究者如何收集與調查關於主角的歷史資料，這兩個故事的交錯並陳，是作者的後設小說手法，用來質疑歷史與傳記擬真的書寫信念。論文的重心將放在分析作者運用何種敘事策略達成顛覆文類傳統以及模糊歷史與傳記文學之間的分界。

關鍵詞：提摩西·芬德利 《戰爭》 歷史書寫 傳記 文類逾越

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