

Postmodernist War Fiction Findley's *The Wars*

Since the most celebrated accounts of the First World War were produced by combatants,¹ it has generally been assumed that only those who had actually been at the front were authorized to reproduce the experience imaginatively. It is not surprising, then, that Henry de Montherlant's *Le Songe* (1954), set at the front in 1918, was discredited as soon as it was discovered that the author himself had never been near the front. To this day, we find a lingering conviction, exemplified in Paul Fussell's writing on the two World Wars and Vietnam, that any commentary on war has to be grounded in firsthand experience.² Written sixty years after the First World War, by an author who had no war experience of any kind, *The Wars* obviously contravenes this precondition of personal suffering. Fussell might well ask what right Findley has to write about a war which was incomprehensible even to combatants. The assumption behind this privileging of experience is that an event loses some kind of spontaneously given "truth" in the process of reinscription. *The Wars* has been critically acclaimed not only because of its literary merits but also because poststructuralist thought has deconstructed such unproblematical reliance on historical origin. However, most criticism has situated the novel in the context of Canadian literature or postmodern metafiction.³ Although I agree that the plural in the title invites an analysis of the novel beyond the narrow historical confines of the First World War, I would, nevertheless, suggest that the specific war context has been too easily ignored. In this paper, I wish to analyze *The Wars* in relation to narrative reconstructions of

the First World War experience by combatants; the emphasis will be on *formal* rather than *thematic* connections. In view of Findley's postmodern tendencies, a comparison of his narrative devices with those favoured by First World War writers may help to clarify both Findley's indebtedness to and transformation of the war genre. Where earlier war accounts sought to conceal their "constructedness," *The Wars* foregrounds its mediated status as a retrospective reconstruction. Instead of claiming authenticity for being grounded in firsthand experience, *The Wars* relies on intertextual references to speculate self-consciously on the story it narrates. As Diana Brydon puts it, "the narrator is obsessed as much by the paradoxes of how we know as by the horror of what we know" (76).

By analyzing such narrative devices as description, documentary evidence, narrative perspective, and symbolic patterns, I hope to generate a greater appreciation of *The Wars* as a highly skillful continuation and simultaneous subversion of the war genre. Findley's postmodern strategies acknowledge that all narrative practice involves mediating processes; this foregrounding of mediation demystifies the illusion of the text as a direct reflection of reality which is still operative in traditional First World War literature. In the end, I want to suggest that Findley's formal choices constitute a postmodernist disruption of the ideological assumptions of modernity which the First World War writers, adopting the strategies of nineteenth-century realism and high modernism, continued to uphold in spite of the fact that the war itself was in the process of showing that modernity failed to deliver the promise of universal human emancipation.⁴

Description

Faced with an unprecedented historical event, those seeking to convey the horrors of trench warfare relied heavily on description. For them, the unknown could only be rendered by integrating it into familiar cognitive patterns. The conventions of nineteenth-century realism seemed best suited to name the unnameable in the most immediate and authentic fashion. Relying on long descriptive passages, the First World War writers invoked a stock of familiar knowledge so as to make the unfamiliar less strange. Since most war accounts devote relatively little time to dramatic battle scenes, the accumulation of descriptive details was a particularly attractive means for conveying the often monotonous routines of everyday life at the front. What is depicted, often at exhaustive length, are such mundane activities as

eating, drinking, sleeping, marching, moving through trenches, enduring fatigue duties, going on patrol, dealing with lice and rats, receiving letters, going on sick or home leave. Because Findley is able to rely “on the reader’s knowledge of World War I” (Vautier 23), *The Wars* both invokes and breaks with this obsession with “telling it as it really was.” At first sight, *The Wars* appears to situate itself squarely in the tradition of documentary realism. Critics do, of course, recognize the novel’s symbolic dimension, stressing that the “narrator’s imagination tends to insinuate mythical and poetical images into what would otherwise be a matter-of-fact history” (Klovan 63) so that the novel’s “imaginative impact goes beyond the effects of verisimilitude” (Pirie 79). But they never seriously question the critical assumption that an “almost documentary realism seems to seduce the reader into accepting the authenticity of the account” (Pirie 70). *The Wars* is said to achieve “the immediacy of personal experience” (McKenzie 395) and to demonstrate that Findley’s “extraordinary intuitiveness allows him to approximate the ‘reality’ of war as effectively as has been done by many of those whose memories are based on actual experience” (Drolet 149). However, such praise for the novel’s “verisimilitude” and its “almost documentary realism” (Pirie 70) signally fails to account for the ways in which Findley also subverts nineteenth-century descriptive conventions.

Description has traditionally been considered the inferior “other” of narration. Where narration is dynamic in its temporal forward movement, description is static in its spatial contemplation of objects. It is the non-dramatic backdrop to the “action,” it conveys information incidental to the plot, it moves in random patterns, it reactivates an already available stock of knowledge. In short, description is often seen as a necessary evil, impeding narrative progress and delaying dramatic moments. Description is tolerated primarily because it helps to authenticate the narrative world of imagined figures and events. Pointing to the world as we know it, descriptive details reassuringly ground the text in “reality.” Ideally, descriptive passages would act as an *objective* window on the world; they therefore constitute the text’s locus of referentiality. Since the aim of realistic narratives is to convey the “facts” with the least possible interference by an interpreting consciousness, they tend to eschew a language which draws attention to itself. At the same time, though, language cannot reproduce objects without being selective. When Findley tells us that “[Poole] was covered with freckles and his hair was the color of sand” (74), we may well ask ourselves why these physical

details are privileged rather than some others. Not only are “freckles” and “hair” arbitrarily singled out, but the list of Poole’s attributes could be infinitely extended. The arbitrary selection process of description undermines the claim of description to be reflecting things simply “as they are.” Faced with the virtually unlimited potential for discursive expansion, the describer of a war scene is invited to demonstrate both his knowledge of the world and his knowledge of words. In description, then, the utilitarian and the playful meet in uneasy antagonism, paradoxically making it the locus of both referentiality and lexical (or aesthetic) ostentation. For the realist tradition, the fear has always been that colorful or metaphorical language destroys or lessens the impression of objectivity the narrative aims for.

Autobiographical and documentary in orientation, First World War narratives tend to avoid lexical ostentation, accumulating descriptive details in the apparently random order in which objects and people supposedly appeared in the narrator’s field of vision. Objects are listed simply because “they were there,” people appear never to be mentioned again, villages are named without playing any role in the action. It is not that individual objects or people are described at great length; on the contrary, they are usually sketched with a few selective details. The impression of descriptive density is created through the sheer volume of randomly accumulated details. In an effort to familiarize the reader with the front, narrators inform us about “reserves of rations, rifle ammunition, grenades, reels of barbed wire, planks, screw pickets, wire netting sandbags” (Blunden 92), “150 mm. howitzers” (Barbusse 209), “Cuinchy brick-stacks” and “Sausages” (Graves 1960, 96). We are introduced to an inventory of items soldiers carry in their pockets and on their backs (Barbusse 1917, 143-56). And we are familiarized with the landscape of Mailly-Mallet where there “was a branch road to Auchonvilliers; the main road, running straight through the town, was in the direction of Serre, which the Hun held; and a third road on the left went off to Clinamps” (Manning 175). First World War narratives rely heavily on a technical knowledge of equipment, a military knowledge of strategy, a geographic knowledge of locations, a social knowledge of class structures, a psychological knowledge of men under stress. The overriding desire is to inform the reader, to add to his or her existing stock of encyclopedic knowledge. However, as David Jones’s *In Parenthesis* demonstrates, this referential orientation is easily transformed into a demonstration of playful lexical ostentation. *In Parenthesis* delights in choosing terms not so much for what

they designate as for how they sound. We encounter such relatively unfamiliar and mysterious terms as “butt-heel-irons” (16), “private ditty-bag” (17), “gooseberries” (35), “picket-irons” (935), “starving as brass monkeys” (52), “toffee-apples” (90), “Woolly-Bears” (148). Lexical ostentation is reinforced through distorted syntax and refined expressions: “Where the road switch-backed the nearer slope, tilted, piled-to-overloading limbers, their checking brakes jammed down, and pack-beasts splayed their nervous fore-legs—stiffened to the incline” (140). Referential utility is clearly no longer the dominant motivation when Jones speaks of “chill oozing slime high over ankle” (41), of someone vanishing, “mandrill fashion, into his enclosure” (91), or of “the inward abysm” (109). The high modernism of Jones uncovers the pull toward lexical luxury which already inhabits the referential insistence of documentary realism.

Findley’s *The Wars* exploits the paradoxical possibilities of description in a direction which was not available to First World War narratives. On the surface, Findley seems to endorse the kind of economical (pseudo-)objectivity advocated by the realist tradition:

Also at Bailleul there was a large, now emptied school for girls where the troops were often billeted. (72)

There was a horse-railway, too, leading back to Wytsbrouk and flat-car-loads of wounded were being drawn away by huge black horses or pushed along the track by walking wounded. (115)

Bricks and sandbags and hay and straw had to be moved about on wheels and parts taken up to the guns. Every morning they cleaned the stable. (83-84)

Findley’s style is remarkably prosaic, avoiding lexical ostentation in much the same way as documentary narratives of the First World War. Although he may allow himself the occasional simile—“The Signal Office, in a farmhouse, was as busy as a stock exchange in a falling market” (115)—Findley rarely expands descriptions beyond the most economical limits. However, the effects of this strategy are quite different from those of his precursors. Because of the openly retrospective position of the research-narrator, Findley acknowledges that referential gestures are always disguised intertextual allusions. The stock of knowledge Findley invokes is not that of the real world but of our familiarity with First World War literature, photographs, and film. The following description, for instance, immediately conjures up an image we are already familiar with: “Several men were asleep on the fire

steps—leaning back with their mouths open and their rifles stuck up between their legs” (85). If we have not actually seen pictures of men asleep on fire steps, we probably think that we have. Findley is able to allude to codes of knowledge as they have already been mediated by prior textual inscriptions. Descriptions in *The Wars* are economical because they allude to what is already known. The first view of the front, usually a signal for an elaborate descriptive expansion in First World War narratives, is in *The Wars* reduced to just a few lines: “The front, after all, was rather commonplace. Two long parallel lines of trenches, each with its separate network of communications ‘ditches’—a great many ruined farmhouses and some villages” (83). Although most commentators on the front tend to come to the same conclusion (the front is commonplace), they do so only after lengthy descriptions. Depending on the reader’s prior knowledge, Findley can begin with the conclusion and virtually dispense with supporting evidence. It could be said that Findley *designates* rather than *renders* what life at the front had been like. Whether he gleaned his knowledge of conditions from his uncle’s letters⁵ or from research into the First World War, he appeals to the reader’s *intertextual* rather than *referential* knowledge. The reader could say that much of what he or she reads is already familiar, thereby occupying a position not unlike that of the researcher in relationship to the photographs: “Part of what you see you recognize” (11). Where descriptive details in realistic narratives function as connotators of reality, Findley’s designations could be defined as connotators of his desire to connote reality. Instead of pretending to be reflecting, like a transparent window, “things as they really were,” *The Wars* signals an awareness that “reality” is always deferred through layers of (inter)textual mediation.

Structural narratologists (Roland Barthes, Gérard Genette, Philippe Hamon) help us better understand Findley’s transformation of descriptive strategies. According to Barthes, descriptive elements like a barometer in Flaubert or a door in Michelet, apparently unnecessary to the narrative, “say nothing more than this: we are reality” (1968, 88; my trans.). If Findley mentions men “asleep on the fire steps,” destroyed “dugouts,” or “a German who had lain out in No Man’s Land for four days” (85), the referent is not so much the landscape or the soldier but the “real” because, as Genette contends, the unnecessary detail is “the medium par excellence of the referential illusion and therefore of the mimetic effect: it is a *connotator of mimesis*” (1980, 186). If description is to connote reality directly and spontaneously, it

must do so without acknowledging that the details are selected and arranged by and interpreting consciousness; we are thus treated to *someone's* reality. Seemingly objective descriptions do, in effect, indicate how they are meant to be read: “[Devlin] was a tall, frail man with a drooping moustache and a slightly receding hairline, despite the fact he was only twenty-seven. He tended to carry his head thrown back, which gave him at first glance a superior look that might have indicated snobbishness or grandeur” (86). Although an interpreting presence can already be detected in evaluative terms like “tall” or “frail,” by the end of the passage we are told what Devlin’s appearance *means*. We are not just “given” the facts but manipulated into accepting a specific view of them. There is thus a tension between description’s ability to act as a connotator of reality (authenticating the narrative as a spontaneously given reflection of the world) and its tendency to subvert this aim by veering either into commentary (identifying the narrative as a subjective construct) or into lexical ostentation (foregrounding the narrative as a self-reflexive textual web).

Findley’s tendency to use the realist conventions of First World War narratives in a “playful” postmodern fashion is particularly obvious in his appropriation of what Hamon calls an “empty thematic.” Analyzing how narratives motivate descriptive elements, Hamon demonstrates that descriptions tend to be “framed” by demarcators introducing and ending them. If a garden is to be described, the description starts when a character pauses at a window to contemplate the flowers and trees outside, and it ends when he steps back into the room. The pause at the window, says Hamon, justifies the description and gives it a pseudo-order because the position at the window organizes the items in the list according to a fixed, and in this case elevated, perspective. The movement to the window and the contemplative “action” of the perceiver’s gaze integrate the description into the narrative. Hamon identifies three descriptive topoi: seeing, speaking, and doing (180-223). I will discuss only the “seeing” topos, since it is most frequently used to create an illusion of reality. In the example of the garden, the character steps up to the window in order to *see* what has to be described and then to *speak* (or *think*) about it. In First World War narratives, descriptions of the devastated landscape are always motivated through the seeing topos. Although no narrative adopts all the ramifications of this topos, theoretically a description of no-man’s land is motivated by the introduction of a newly arrived soldier who has no war experience. He is

naive and ignorant and, best of all, he is curious to know what no-man's land looks like. The new arrival demonstrates a desire to know. He then needs to be put in a position where he can actually see the devastation of the landscape. A gap in the parapet or, more commonly, a fire-step and a pair of binoculars prepare the description. At this point, it is quite customary to allude to some source of light (sun, moon, dawn, dusk, flares) that makes the scene visible. So far the new man has a desire to see and has the ability to see. For the description to be fully motivated, he now needs to speak about no-man's land and is therefore given an audience of veterans. The veterans, who already know what the new man describes, may embellish, modify, or contradict the new man's appraisal. In either case, the veterans constitute only a pseudo-audience since the description is really provided for the reader's benefit. Once the man steps down from the fire-step, the description has ended. A description therefore engenders what Hamon calls an "empty thematic" whose sole function is to motivate and narrativize descriptions. A new arrival appears because a description of the devastated landscape requires his presence.

Findley quite frequently resorts to markers of this "empty thematic"; in the following examples, for instance, he alludes to light sources in a conventional manner:

All he could see was the shape of Poole... (76)

This scene was lit by the moon. (61)

The fog began to lift in places. The shape of the dike was perceptible... (79)

Through the fog he saw a man... (81)

Then, because the tarp had fallen at an angle, light began to filter through from the fires outside and Robert could see... (110)

All of this could be seen and not seen. (114)

He shone his torch at the mud...and he saw there was a body... (176)

Although the markers of the "seeing" topos often function conventionally, at other times they introduce not a descriptive elaboration but draw attention to its *absence*. We are told that there is something to be seen, but Findley provides us with few or no details. The following sentence, for instance, appears at first glance to be a particularly striking example of Hamon's "seeing" topos: "The light was so good they were able to see some very interesting sights behind the German lines from the Observation Post" (84). We have here a light source and a perspective from an elevated position. But, instead of proceeding with a description of these "interesting sights," we are treated to Robert's meditation on *hypothetical* Germans for

the benefit of the newly arrived Levitt: "It made being up there important, somehow, if you could look out and say: 'Do you see that man right there with the blue scarf round his neck...?'" (84-85). The elaborate set-up for a description leads to a hypothetical German who, to make matters even more "unreal," wears the kind of "blue scarf" Harris is known for. Another marker of Hamon's "empty thematic" occurs when Robert and Poole walk away from the devastated front line: "It was a clear, blue day and the air was cold as ice. You could see for miles" (134). Once again, this motivation for a description creates an expectation which the text has no intention of satisfying. Findley does not elaborate on what exactly could be seen on this day when one "could see for miles." He seemingly relies on the reader's knowledge of the First World War to fill in the details which the text promises but refuses to deliver. Though still relying on descriptive techniques to create an illusion of reality, Findley draws attention to the artificiality involved in this process. Produced and consumed in a postmodern age, *The Wars* is indelibly marked by a narrative self-consciousness which restructures the role of description.

Findley's descriptive technique undermines the assumption that reality is open to observation and classification which the First World War writers still subscribe to. Their reliance on an Enlightenment self-understanding of the human subject as a rational agent capable of making sense of an essentially transparent objective world suggests that modern civilization can accommodate even the madness of war. Moreover, Findley's restructuring of description has repercussions for the larger structural articulations of the novel. Ideologically, the "seeing" topos is the metaphor *par excellence* of an Enlightenment tradition which postulates a universal reason allowing the human subject to achieve moral self-realization as well as social and political emancipation. First World War writers sought to make sense of the inexplicable horrors they had witnessed by imposing on them the comforting *Bildungsroman* paradigm, thereby suggesting that the war could be interpreted as a deplorable but necessary stage on the road to a better future. Carossa's epigraph (recurring throughout the text) typically enjoins us to "steal the light out of the throat of the snake." *The Wars* challenges this Enlightenment paradigm. The "seeing" topos not only withholds what is promised but problematizes the economy of observation either by defamiliarizing the object of observation or by preventing the subject from seeing. In the famous scenes of Robert watching Taffler and the Swede through the peep hole in the whorehouse and of Juliet seeing through an open door

Robert and Barbara making love, the observer apparently (mis)interprets what is presented as a *fragmented* vision. In both instances, the “seeing” topos introduces a partial picture, and sex is mistaken for violence. According to the Russian formalists, defamiliarization forces readers to *see* in a new light what they had habitually simply recognized in an automatic fashion. Although perception is made difficult, the object is eventually seen clearly. *The Wars* offers this kind of defamiliarization in the dike scene when Robert gradually works out that the sounds he could not identify were those of crows feeding on dead bodies. The process of perception is prolonged so that the final shock of recognition is all the more powerful. However, in the two scenes where sex is perceived as violence, defamiliarization does not involve the simple correction of a mistaken identification. Working out that the two scenes connote sex rather than violence only foregrounds a profound connection between two acts we conventionally consider to be fundamentally different. Contrary to the assumptions of modernity, “seeing clearly” means staring into the abyss of radical ambiguity.

A more obvious, but perhaps more powerful, example of Findley’s tendency to disrupt the ideological assumptions of modernity is the denial of sight as such. During the rape scene in the bath-house, Robert is in complete darkness, unable to identify his attackers. What is surely one of the novel’s most disturbing scenes can be interpreted as an extension of the “empty thematic” which characterizes Findley’s descriptive style. Straining to “see,” Robert is met with impenetrable darkness; violence is symbolically situated beyond the comforting paradigm of Enlightenment. This point is reinforced by Robert’s blindness at the end of the novel. The war having robbed him of the ability to see is analogous to the war demonstrating the failure of the Enlightenment metanarrative of human emancipation.

Documentary Sources

In addition to descriptive strategies, realistic war narratives conventionally resort to documentary sources in order to reinforce their sense of reality. References to letters, diaries, official reports, copies of orders, press cuttings, and labels signal a desire to reassure readers that the narrative can be trusted. In a rather cynical comment on his methodology in *Goodbye to All That*, Graves confirms that he included “plenty of letters because they make the story read true” (1930, 16). Such sources constitute, of course, the basic tools of historians who create their tableaux precisely through the accumulation

of documents and eyewitness accounts. Ironically, the personal and usually autobiographical stories written as alternatives to official histories nevertheless reproduced the legitimating strategies of just such histories. Anxiety about the documentary accuracy of the war accounts usually surfaces in the need for distinguishing, within the text, between hysterical anecdotes and historical facts. Anonymous “rumors” or “the usual loose talk that one heard at the Base” (Graves 1960, 155) are typically contrasted with believable second-hand stories which are attributed to named sources. “True” stories are presumably legitimized by the assurance that their mediator can be trusted. Documentary evidence is obviously meant to guarantee the narrative’s authenticity. Paradoxically, of course, documents and eyewitness accounts cannot help but reveal, precisely through this pointed reassurance, that the narrative cannot, in fact, be trusted. The inclusion of documents and eyewitness accounts accentuates a constant struggle between asserting the possibility of factual accuracy and the impossibility of escaping fiction.

Unearthed photographs (as well as taped conversations with eyewitnesses) in *The Wars* can be seen as an updated duplication of the documentary impulse manifesting itself in First World War narratives. These “documents” are mediated by a researcher-narrator who interposes himself between the reader and the already technically reproduced reality they denote. This double mediation signals an acknowledgment of fiction-making which the earlier war narratives sought to ward off through documentary guarantees. Since the researcher-narrator does not tell his own personal story, he is in the position of the historian who retrospectively puts together a picture based on traces of the past. Much has been written about photography in *The Wars*. For York, photography “becomes a type of surrogate memory” (1988:85), “fixing the past in order to celebrate it” (1988:84). In her view, photographs are necessary to preserve “memories of life-sustaining acts of courage such as Robert Ross’s desertion” (1988:85). In a less positive vein, Kröller asserts that not all photographs have a “consoling quality”; the crucial image of Robert Ross riding toward the camera after the burning of the barn could be seen as “traumatic” (68). She then focuses on the *camera obscura* as a metaphor for enclosed spaces like the whorehouse, the hold of the ship, the shell crater, the bath house. Depending on the critic’s view of events, photography can be interpreted in either positive or negative terms. More often, though, critics point out that the researcher’s struggle to assemble the pieces of Robert Ross’s story becomes a question-

ing of the readers' "assumptions about authority and the nature of knowledge" (Brydon 77).⁶ For Brydon, "facts prove less reliable than fictions" (77) and for Palmateer Pennee the "layers of intertextuality" demonstrate "the greater truth value of the fictive" (54). Such affirmations of fiction implicitly assume that there is a factual ground against which the fictive receives its value. A closer analysis of Findley's use of photography reveals a more complex interpenetration of fact and fiction than is acknowledged by those asserting either historical verisimilitude or the primacy of fiction.

Unlike the autobiographical commemorators, Findley stresses from the beginning that he is representing a *representation* and not a reality. "You begin at the archives with photographs" (11), says the researcher. But that is not where the reader begins: we read descriptions of photographs or "image[s] of an image" (Sontag 5). In spite of the high visibility of this mediating process, photography is "a pure deictic language," expressing what Barthes calls "the absolute Particular, the sovereign Contingency," or, in more concrete terms, "the Occasion, the Encounter, the Real" (1981, 4). In short, "the referent adheres" (Barthes 1981, 6). Among the many effects of photographs in *The Wars* remains the conventional one of reassuring the reader of the narrative's authenticity. On the simplest level, the researcher's descriptions of photographs ring true because, as York points out, "Findley's analysis of the role of photography during those years is historically accurate" (1988, 56). York only confirms what Findley himself has already drawn attention to: "There were lots of photographs in our house, in boxes and albums. That was the period between 1895 and 1925, I would say, when the still camera was the number, and everybody had one, and people took pictures of virtually everything" (Aitken, 82). The reader is encouraged to accept the actual existence of "snapshots" showing Edwardian fashions, the "Boys' Brigade with band," families "sitting overdressed in Packards" (11-12). Then the war intrudes with women "throwing flowers and waving flags" and with trains "pulling out of stations" and ships "sailing out of ports" (12). The photographic record can further be trusted to document how Ypres changed the way people felt about the war (12). Like description, photography activates an already existing stock of knowledge. According to Sontag, the photographic document is necessarily retrospective: "There can be no evidence, photographic or otherwise, of an event until the event itself has been named and characterized" (19). And like the descriptive detail or "fact," photographs "cannot themselves explain any-

thing,” but are “inexhaustible invitations to deduction, speculation, and fantasy” (23). Although photographs can create an *inventory* of the world, they cannot produce an *understanding* of the slice of reality which they so arbitrarily and discontinuously present.

The researcher appropriates the photographs not only by selecting them but also by highlighting their significance. They make his “point” about the social atmosphere into which Findley then introduces photographs of the fictional Robert Ross. As the researcher moves from “public to private fact” (York 1988, 81), the author asks us to accept an imagined character as a historically real person.⁷ The first photograph of Robert Ross⁸ depicts him “*riding straight towards the camera*” (12). But the scene of Robert in burning uniform leaning along the black “horse’s neck” is almost certainly *imaginary*.⁹ Not only would I agree with Hulcoop that it is unlikely that a photographer was present to take pictures but shutter speeds were too slow to allow such a “*fiery image*” to be captured without significant blurring. Inserted between the public photographic record of the period and the private one of Robert’s life, an imaginary photograph warns us against trusting documentary evidence unquestioningly. That the “real” and the “imaginary” contaminate each other is reinforced in the next photograph of Robert. This time, the researcher’s gaze zooms in on him “standing on the sidelines” of a crowd listening to the Band playing “Soldiers of the Queen” (13). A fictional character is almost imperceptibly slipped into the margin of what is presented as a “real” photograph. Although marginalized, the fictional character offers the possibility of understanding; animating the photographic inventory of public fact, Robert Ross supplies the speculative dimension which alone leads to deeper meaning. At the same time, the intrusion of the imaginary into the real undermines the ontological stability of the text’s documentary legitimation. Although we tend to assume that the “real” photographs are meant to guarantee the authenticity of a fictional character, it could also be argued that the fictional character imbues the documentary inventory with a reality it could not otherwise hope to achieve. The fictional character’s entry into the historical record reinforces the postmodern point that the center (the historically real) is not only threatened by the margin (fiction) but also dependent on it for its truth claims.¹⁰

What makes matters even more complicated is Findley’s tendency to surround Robert Ross with historical figures of sometimes mythical dimen-

sions. Such references to historical reality are neither frequent enough nor sufficiently sustained to characterize *The Wars* as an illustration of Hutcheon's "historiographic metafiction." Her Findley example in *The Canadian Postmodern* is indeed *Famous Last Words* rather than *The Wars*. Nevertheless, through the protagonist's proper name, *The Wars* establishes a symbolic connection with Oscar Wilde's lover of the same name¹¹ and thereby with a discourse of the socio-sexually improper. Moreover, as York has documented in some detail, Siegfried Sassoon takes his place "as a mythical figure in the world of *The Wars*" (1991, 47). Other historical figures alluded to are Wilfred Owen, Robert Graves, Tom Longboat, Virginia Woolf. For Linda Hutcheon, the inclusion of such historical personages in the fictional text constitutes a generic marker for what her postmodern poetics identifies as "historiographic metafiction." She raises the issue "of how the intertexts of history, its documents or its traces, get incorporated into such an avowedly fictional context, while somehow also retaining their historical documentary value" (1989, 82). At the very least, *The Wars* breaks down the opposition between history and fiction, foregrounding that the real is accessible only through (inter)textual traces. Paradoxically, in the very act of reinforcing the fictional text's grounding in the historically real, the document or the historical figure cannot but acknowledge the process of supplementarity which this grounding is meant to contain.

The interplay of verbal and visual representations in *The Wars* dramatizes this postmodern acknowledgment of supplementarity. Going back to the early pages of the novel, we recall that Robert Ross reaches us through the verbal representation (the researcher's text) of an exemplary visual representation (a particular photograph of Ross) of a prior visual representation (the photographs of the period). This chain of substitutions indicates that the meaning of a scene cannot be located in any particular moment so that there is no origin to authorize the discourse. The meaning of the First World War resides neither in the historical record consulted by the researcher (and the author) nor in the speculations provided by the researcher (and the reader). Standing in for an event which no longer exists, the photograph subverts presence in two contradictory ways: it fixes the image of an absence at the same time as making it infinitely reproducible. Paradoxically, of course, an image becomes recognizable (or fixed) only because it can be repeated. Identification or naming depends on the recurrence of an event or object. Duplication (and hence duplicity) is therefore at work in the very process of

naming which is meant to ensure singularity and stability. In *The Wars*, the use of photographs alerts us to the slippery ground on which all meaning is produced. This is graphically demonstrated in the researcher's attempt to describe a photograph of Robert in his new uniform:

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. *The Death of General Wolfe*. Someone will hold my hand and I won't really suffer pain because I've suffered that already and survived. (49).

The researcher's verbal representation of a visual representation (the photograph of Robert in his new uniform) is followed by the researcher's verbal speculation that Robert believed death to be romantic. This speculation is reinforced by an allusion to a painting of General Wolfe dying. The representation of Robert in the photograph is thus explained by another representation (General Wolfe) so that the reader deciphers the representation (the text) of a representation (the photograph) of a representation (the painting). It is most fitting that Findley should have chosen the theme of death to illustrate this process of sense-making as a process of substitutions. "Photography is an elegiac art," contends Sontag, for by "slicing out [a] moment by freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt" (15). The photograph confers immortality (the picture continues to exist) at the same time as it acts as a reminder of mortality (the event has ended). As a "memento mori" (Sontag 15), the photograph always alludes to "the return of the dead" (Barthes 1981, 9). That Findley is well aware of such connections is borne out in comments he made in an interview. Speaking of how "mysterious" photographs are to him, he emphasizes that in photographs "one never, never, never dies." There is in photography "a will to project, to bring life back that's gone, and dissect and keep the dead alive" (Aitken 83). But neither verbal nor visual images can recuperate what is lost; they can only interminably speak their nostalgia for the traces of the past.

If the photograph is "both a pseudo-presence and a token of absence" (Sontag 16), then it speaks to the supplementarity that prevents the thing-in-itself from being fully present to itself. According to Derrida, "*mimesis*, mimicry, imitation" are all other "titles" for what he calls the "aporetic paradox" (1992, 31), the non-coincidence of the thing and its representation. To re-present is thus the attempt to fill in the gaps or aporias which separate

the perceiver from the thing perceived. Where the First World War writers sought to conceal or deny the “aporetic abyss,” Findley celebrates its impact on his narrative practice. I have already commented on his tendency to hollow out the conventions of description, thereby undermining the authenticating function they still enjoyed in First World War narratives. Along similar lines, he uses the photographic document not to guarantee factual accuracy but to foreground the process of supplementarity inherent in all movements of signification. *The Wars* seems characterized by the contradictory desire both to assert and to contest the power of conventional literary devices. First World War narrators represented the experience of war without seriously doubting the ability of a self-present subject to reflect reality directly and honestly. But, as Brydon points out, Findley’s researcher “questions his readers’ assumptions about authority and the nature of knowledge” (77). The reader is empowered to suspect the narrator’s capacity to trace and interpret the past. Instead of focusing events through a central consciousness, Findley offers conflicting views through a variety of witnesses and readers. We are not treated to “facts” (or “experiences”) but to interpretations. The researcher often delegates narrative authority to witnesses like Marian Turner and Juliet d’Orsey. He or she is in turn spoken by an extradiegetic narrator or structuring principle. In addition, Robert Ross reaches us through a host of further mediating secondary characters who either “read” Robert Ross himself or the conditions he endured. There are direct interpretations of Robert Ross’s actions by Stuart Ross who rejects his brother or by Mickle who “decided that, plainly, he was dealing with a man gone mad” (185). There are also less direct “readings” of Robert Ross. Taffler’s reading of the war as a manly contest contrasts with Rodwell’s reading of it as the brutal slaughter of innocent creatures. Then there is Levitt, the literal reader of *On War* by Clausewitz, whose interpretation of war as an ordered minuet is so at odds with reality that he goes mad. That interpretation is a tricky business is borne out when the researcher, looking at a “photograph of the ocean,” discovers an arrow “pointing to a small white dot on the far horizon.” Above the arrow, “written in bold black ink is the question: ‘WHAT IS THIS?’” The researcher immediately identifies the white dot as an iceberg¹² and comments: “Why whoever took the picture failed to verify this fact remains a mystery” (15). But what guarantee does the reader of *The Wars* have that the researcher’s identification of this “fact” is accurate? Contrary to the assumptions of modernity, every interpretive act necessarily risks missing its target.

Symbolic Patterns

Findley's postmodern anxiety about narrative authority is perhaps most pointedly illustrated in his use of images and echo scenes. Critical opinion is perhaps most split on the question of how effective the abundance of symbolic patterns in *The Wars* really is. Reacting against a reviewer's contention that "the excessive accumulation of images" constitutes a "flaw," Laurie Ricou, for instance, defends Findley's ability to "manipulate" images and build "symbolic patterns" (134-35). From a postmodern perspective, Findley's excessive reliance on symbolic patterns appears once again both as an endorsement and as a critique of an earlier narrative tradition. In addition to undermining the documentary truth claims of realism, *The Wars* also problematizes the modernist assumption that symbolic patterns offer access to a higher form of truth. Traditionally an image has been defined as an object, person, or incident which takes on a meaning beyond its objective or literal substance. A text's symbolic dimension superimposes what structuralists identify as the paradigmatic axis of meaning onto the syntagmatic chain of signification. Instead of taking its significance from the linear forward movement of the narrative (its metonymic axis), the text establishes a network of associative links (its metaphoric axis). Most documentary First World War narratives are predominantly metonymic, eschewing metaphorical ostentation for fear that poetic license would distort their supposedly objective accounts.¹³ However, those First World War narratives with specifically *literary* aspirations—Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, Dos Passos's *Three Soldiers*, Mottram's *Farm Trilogy*, Aldington's *Death of a Hero*—tend to communicate a deeper meaning of the war through symbolic structures. Since the most celebrated modernist war novel is undoubtedly Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, it will serve as a test case against which Findley's postmodern practice can be measured.

Through symbols and echo scenes, Hemingway creates powerful emotional effects, making "people feel something more than they understood" (quoted in Miller, 5). The most frequently debated "symbolic effects" in *A Farewell to Arms* are "the weather, the emblematic people, and the landscapes" (Baker 34). Among the "natural symbolism" (Baker 33), we find rain which is associated with disaster and, more specifically, with Catherine's death. Not only is it raining when she watches Frederic return to the front and when she rows with him up the lake, but we are told that, in a dream, she sees herself dead in the rain. However, as Reynolds emphasizes, the

logic of the symbolism is at bottom at odds with the logic of events. "It comes as no surprise," he argues, "when Catherine tells Frederic that she is pregnant. Once the predictions of her pregnancy are fulfilled, there can be little doubt that Catherine's prophecy that she sees herself dead in the rain will also be fulfilled. There is nothing logical in these predictions of death; there is no apparent cause and effect at work. However, both the pregnancy and her death seem inevitable by the time they are achieved" (239-40). The doom associated with rain makes us react to Catherine's death as a sign of the times (war) and as an indicator of existential anguish (fate). This symbolic reading is contradicted by the logic of the story since Catherine dies not because of the war but because of Frederic's sexual self-indulgence. But this logical reading of Frederic as a self-centered male is only available once we resist the novel's overt symbolic understanding of him as a romantic anti-hero who, at the end of the story, stands in glorious isolation facing an existentially doomed world. Similar aporetic effects occur in Hemingway's skillful use of echo scenes.¹⁴ *A Farewell to Arms* is particularly impressive in its "tight synchronization" of the "cycles of nature, love, and war" (Reynolds 267). Through "the seasonal cycle of the land and the seasonal cycle of the war" Hemingway is able to show that the destructiveness of the war cycle is dependent upon the same seasonal weather changes that regenerate the land" (Reynolds 263). Since destruction is an integral part of the fertility cycle, the war is shown to renew its destructive energy in the spring when nature also renews itself. Similarly, since sex as the life force has for its consequence the pregnancy that kills Catherine, love and war are "two sides of the same coin and the coin has a death's-head on either side" (Reynolds 265). Echo scenes throughout the five parts of the novel produce a network of balances and ironic reversals, a symbolic pattern which imbues events with a necessity they do not logically possess. In a totalizing gesture typical of high modernism, *A Farewell to Arms* both opens and then limits the play of signification. Until recently, readers have quite unquestioningly accepted the symbolic (romantic) understanding the novel promulgates. At a time when New Criticism flourished, readers were generally prepared to accept Romantic notions of the symbol as a unifying synthesis of disparate moments or phenomena. Poststructuralist reaction against our Romantic heritage now allows us to read symbolic structures more skeptically, deconstructing their unifying gestures by focusing on the narrative's aporias.

Findley, too, uses nature symbolism to create an "imaginative impact"

which “goes beyond the effects of verisimilitude” (Pirie 79). Unlike Hemingway, though, he seems acutely aware of the problematic status of symbolic structures. Although *The Wars* evidently invites us to construct a symbolic reading of events, it simultaneously seems to question the legitimacy of this invitation. Critics have been quick to pick up on the self-interpreting inscription “earth and air and fire and water” (190) on Robert’s gravestone and on the many echo scenes connecting disparate moments in Robert’s life. Indeed, *The Wars* relies more readily on symbolic structures than any other narrative about the First World War. Virtually everything in the novel seems to link up with everything else. In Hemingway’s novel, symbolic structures were supposed to help readers arrive at a higher truth about the war. It is only now, in a poststructuralist climate, that we are increasingly suspicious of Hemingway’s attempts at narrative closure. Whether intentionally or not, Findley foregrounds the fundamental instability of paradigmatic associations. Using symbolic structures with a vengeance, he draws attention both to their power and to their limitations. He not only appropriates this modernist device but also stresses its duplicity.

Alerted by the gravestone inscription to the recurrence of images associated with earth, air, fire, and water, readers have tended to interpret *The Wars* according to the “traditional symbolism of the elements” (Klovan 66). Klovan shows, for instance, that the fire which eventually destroys Robert is foreshadowed by allusion to Villiers dying of burn wounds, the chimney fires of the Ross factories, the burning Parliament Buildings, the train the Indians call “fire horse,” St. Eloi (the saint of smiths and metal workers), and living “under fire” at the front. Aside from his final trial by fire, Robert endured trials by earth and water (drowning in mud) and by air (gas attacks). Klovan stresses that these images work ambiguously; water, for instance, carries positive connotations when the coyote leads Robert to the well and negative ones when Robert crosses the ocean or the broken dike. Klovan’s interpretation of the gravestone inscription as an indication of the “elemental nature of Robert’s journey through the war” (65) overlooks the complex ways in which images criss-cross throughout the novel. According to the romantic aesthetic tradition, images transcend the ordinary meaning of words, achieving a higher sense of harmony by reconciling contraries and resolving incoherences. No matter how ambiguous images may be, the reader is able to take away from the text an impression of unified meaning. The critical consensus about the images in *The Wars* seems to be that war

inverts and perverts life-giving elements into death-dealing traps. The new critic, this inheritor of the romantic tradition, is able to achieve the illusion of narrative closure (determinate meaning) while also affirming textual ambiguity and complexity (unity of opposites).

Findley's novel obviously authorizes this kind of "closed" reading, but its network of associations also far exceeds such a reductive interpretive frame. A close analysis of *The Wars* reveals that various chains of images overlap, crisscross, loop back on themselves, and undermine each other. Starting anywhere in the text, readers can enjoy unraveling image associations and echo scenes, only to discover that one loses one's way in the textual web instead of reaching a satisfying destination. Entering the text quite randomly where Robert recalls that the Indian name for a train is "fire horse," I am in a position to trace paradigmatic associations in a dizzying slide toward epistemological instability. On the most obvious level, the train links up with the often documented chain of fire images and with that of horses (and animals in general). "Indian" suggests Robert's fascination with Longboat and hence with (marathon) running. We may also recall that Teddy Budge hits Robert with one of "Robert's Indian clubs" (25) and that the Swede is said to have had his tongue cut out by Indians (42). During her ruminations about Robert having bruised himself skating, Mrs Ross further compares him to "a savage painted for the wars" (27). But Longboat also invokes a series of running images. We need only think of Robert's marathon attempt around his city block and his jog in Lethbridge with a coyote. Aside from such literal running, the image suggests Robert's desire to escape from the war; he wishes he could "run away" (93) while lying awake in the dugout, and he eventually deserts. Since running foregrounds breathing, the reader is invited to pursue the many references to breath and breathlessness. In the whorehouse scene, for instance, Robert is described as "breathless" as he stares through the peep hole. Then he is shown to hear Taffler and the Swede "breathing." Robert then comments that the two men "breathing in tandem" are "just like two people running side by side" (44). The train itself was in fact "breathing" in that "Great clouds of steam billowed out around its wheels" (18). Among other things, breathing is prominently associated with Harris who cannot breathe because he caught pneumonia by inhaling the cold air on the ocean voyage. In hospital, Harris claims that he can breathe only under water but chokes in the air (95-96). Now the air images join the chain of water images. Robert is constantly

afraid of both drowning in either water or mud and of choking either in mud, in airless enclosures, or during gas attacks. Meaning is disseminated along intersecting chains of associations so that the textual web can be thickened at any point in the novel. Going arbitrarily back to the bathroom scene where Mrs Ross calls Robert a “painted savage,” I could mention that it anticipates the rape scene in the bath house in Bailleul. Moreover, using the “sink as an ashtray,” Mrs Ross watches her cigarette ashes “fall down the porcelain slopes like mountain climbers tumbling to their death” (26). Robert later watches his men slide down the crater of the gun emplacement where they almost find their death. The bruises Robert soothes in the bathtub in turn connect with his fall on the boat and his subsequent involvement with Harris. The textual web I have constructed testifies not only to Findley’s consummate artistry but also to the instability of language as such. It is unlikely that Findley “intended” all the connections I have posited; it is even unlikely that any other reader would duplicate my particular meandering path. My point is that the novel authorizes links through images and echo scenes which defer rather than capture meaning. *The Wars* creates a “pleasure of the text” which joyfully exceeds the limits of the reader’s referential and conventional symbolic expectations.

The network of associations in *The Wars* draws attention to the production of meaning as an arbitrary process; in Derrida’s terms, “the letter” (language) need not necessarily arrive at its destination (determinate meaning).¹⁵ Hemingway’s relatively sparing use of symbolic structures lures readers into interpreting them as fairly stable metaphorical bridges. It is only by demystifying the romantic aesthetic underpinning his practice that the symbolic method yields up its contradictory significance. Although Findley is clearly nostalgic for this romantic aesthetic, he is too self-conscious a writer to leave symbolic structures unquestioned. By overdetermining *The Wars* with metaphoric signification, Findley in effect conforms to the postmodern insight that metaphoricity is inhabited by allegorical implications which it seeks to deny. Clarifying the difference between symbol and allegory, Todorov stresses that the symbol attracts “the full panoply of characteristics accredited by the romantics: it is productive, intransitive, motivated; it achieves the fusion of contraries; it is and it signifies at the same time; its content eludes reason: it expresses the inexpressible. In contrast, allegory, obviously, is already made, transitive, arbitrary, pure signification, an expression of reason” (206). Postmodernist theorists consider

allegory to be a less duplicitous trope than metaphor. De Man, for instance, condemns the (romantic) “attraction of reconciliation” as “the elective breeding-ground of false models and metaphors” (5), positing instead an (allegorical) rhetoric which “radically suspends logic and opens up vertiginous possibilities of referential aberration” (10). In other words, the romantic view of metaphoricity is deceptive in that it obliterates difference and hence mediation. Allegory openly acknowledges its arbitrary process, admits that it works by analogy, and foregrounds difference and mediation. Although Findley seems haunted by the fear of not having made himself clear (Gibson 146), his narrative practice is nevertheless marked by a (perhaps unconscious) understanding of allegory as the privileged postmodern trope. An observation by Brydon points in this direction: “The dikes on the front only appear to repeat Robert’s memories of the raft at Jackson’s Point; the horse and dog on the railway track only appear to repeat the horse and dog outside Wetgoods; Lady Juliet’s love for Robert only appears to repeat her ancestor’s love for her doomed soldier. All these things are fundamentally unlike; it is only human desire that sees them as repetitions” (77). This “human desire” to connect the unlike implies a romantic desire for the work of art as a harmonious whole. However, using symbolic structures with a vengeance, Findley’s narrative practice slides into allegory. A nostalgic yearning for unified meaning and narrative closure is undermined by a Derridean metaphoricity whose exuberance constantly threatens the “proper” meaning to which the metaphoric detour is meant to return. A close look at images and echo scenes in *The Wars* reveals a vertiginous rhetorical play which questions the possibility of clear and proper meaning.

Conclusion

The Wars is marked by a self-conscious reworking of the war genre which situates it clearly in a postmodern and post-Vietnam world. The commemorations of combatants reinscribe within their form an investment in modernity which the technoscientific slaughter of the First World War was in the process of undermining. Publishing *The Wars* in 1977, Findley could no longer ignore this ideologically suspect investment in modernity. However, postmodernism does not offer itself as an unproblematical solution to the difficulties of reproducing the war experience. One of the most significant areas of the postmodern debate centers precisely on the relationship between the aesthetic and the political. Postmodernism has typically

been accused of being ahistorical and hence apolitical; according to this view, it signals a playfully irresponsible emphasis on (inter)textuality, refusing to engage seriously with social issues. Indeed, it seems that the postmodern invites a passive resignation to or, worse, a cynical reinforcement of the way things are. This negative interpretation of the socio-political consequences of postmodernism is contested by a more favorable view. Instead of understanding postmodernism as conservative and regressive, it can also be seen as a disruptive force intent on subverting the *status quo*. From this perspective, the postmodern opens up avenues for political change. Although I would acknowledge that *The Wars* does not have the kind of political impact to end all wars, I would nevertheless contend that its postmodern strategies are capable of demystifying the ideological investments in modernity which manifest themselves in earlier First World War narratives. Findley thereby disrupts the accommodations and complicities his precursors unwittingly produced by resorting to narrative strategies which remained indebted to an Enlightenment self-understanding. Through their descriptive technique, the First World War writers privileged the scientific method of first observing and then reproducing phenomena objectively so as to allow the “facts” to speak for themselves. By naming and classifying the chaos of the front, the First World War writers in effect domesticated the war, thereby integrating it into the continuist image of civilization’s progress. Reliance on documentary sources similarly reproduced the pseudo-scientific methodology of history, thereby propagating the assumption that the world is accessible through experience and amenable to rational understanding. Reacting against the “scientism” of nineteenth-century realism, Hemingway resorted to a modernist approach, holding that symbolic patterns communicate a higher truth than the mere accumulation of facts. But Hemingway’s modernism manifests a need for narrative closure which is driven by a desperate desire to control contingency and thereby impose order on the chaos of war. No matter what *A Farewell to Arms* says, formally it communicates a totalizing attitude.

Findley’s reinscription of the First World War problematizes the ideological implications the earlier war literature necessarily carries. Although presumably driven by formal rather than ideological motivations, Findley’s formal strategies disrupt the assumptions on which First World War writers based their texts. Being a highly self-conscious writer, Findley could no longer use the earlier narrative strategies without also questioning them. He

does so primarily by foregrounding the *mediated* status of literary texts which his precursors tried hard to conceal or naturalize. Instead of insisting on the referential axis of description, he draws attention to the mediating presence of an interpreter and to (inter)textual interference in the process of representation. This self-conscious contestation of literature as a transparent window onto the world is reinforced by the treatment of the photograph as a documentary source. Here the mediating process is unmistakably foregrounded as a chain of supplementary meaning which is anchored neither in some “originary” reality nor in some teleological moment of closure. The symbolic patterning of *The Wars* confirms the instability of language which disrupts the totalizing gesture of both the documentary writers (a transparently self-present reality) and of modernist writers like Hemingway (a transcendently unified higher order). Although Findley’s anxiety about making himself clear illustrates a nostalgic yearning for certainty and order, his actual narrative practice is sufficiently driven by postmodern imperatives to counteract this nostalgia. *The Wars* constitutes a significant transformation of the war genre if only because formally it demystifies the ideological investments in modernity so characteristic of other First World War narratives.

NOTES

- 1 Edmund Blunden, *Undertones of War* (1928), Siegfried Sassoon, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (1930), Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That* (1929), Frederic Manning, *Her Privates We* (1930), R.H. Mottram, *The Spanish Farm Trilogy* (1927), Richard Aldington, *Death of a Hero* (1929), David Jones, *In Parenthesis* (1937), Charles Yale Harrison, *Generals Die in Bed* (1928), Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), John Dos Passos, *Three Soldiers* (1929), Hans Carossa, *Rumänisches Tagebuch* (1924), Ernst Jünger, *In Stahlgewittern* (1920), Ludwig Renn, *Krieg* (1928), Erich Maria Remarque, *Im Westen Nichts Neues* (1928), Henri Barbusse, *Le Feu* (1916), Roland Dorgèlès, *Les croix de bois* (1919).
- 2 Fussell maintains, for instance, that “the meaning of the [Second World] war seemed inaccessible” to an “unbombed America” (1989:268). Similarly, in response to John Kenneth Galbraith’s criticism of the American decision to drop the atom bomb over Japan, Fussell asks: “What did he do in the war? He worked in the Office of Price Administration in Washington. I don’t demand that he experience having his ass shot off. I merely note that he didn’t” (1988:18).
- 3 To my knowledge, the only lengthy discussions of *The Wars* as an actual war novel have been M.L. McKenzie’s “Memoirs of the Great War: Graves, Sassoon, and Findley,” Eric Thompson’s “Canadian Fiction and the Great War,” Laurie Ricou’s “Obscured by Violence: Timothy Findley’s *The Wars*,” and Lorraine M. York’s chapter on *The Wars in Front Lines: The Fiction of Timothy Findley*. These studies have been primarily thematic, suggesting that *The Wars* deserves inclusion in both English and Canadian traditions of

- war stories. In "'Tis Sixty Years Since': Timothy Findley's *The Wars* and Roger McDonald's *1915*," Coral Ann Howells compares two novels by colonial authors written roughly sixty years after the conflict. Her main emphasis is on national identification marks and differences.
- 4 For a more detailed discussion of these strategies and their ideological implications in First World War narratives, see my *Representing War: Form and Ideology in First World War Narratives*.
 - 5 In an interview, Findley informs us that the letters from his uncle Thomas Irving (Tif) Findley, who served with the artillery during the First World War, constitute an "extraordinary chronicle" (Aitken 83) of the period covered by *The Wars*.
 - 6 Kröller makes the same point when she argues that "*The Wars* is informed by the chronicler's increasing doubtfulness about the ability of fiction (and, for that matter, of writing in general) to recreate reality from the traces it has left behind in the form of maps, letters, cablegrams, newspaper clippings, and masses of 'snapshots and portraits'" (68).
 - 7 That Findley is successful in presenting a character as a "real" person is constantly borne out in classrooms where students assume that Robert Ross actually existed.
 - 8 Because Robert Ross is not described at all, I am here discounting the brief mention of a photograph of "Robert and Rowena—rabbits and wheelchairs—children, dogs and horses" (11).
 - 9 John Hulcoop raises the possibility of an imaginary photograph by pointing out that "so far as we know, no photographer is present to take pictures when Robert breaks out of the fired barn" (33).
 - 10 In order to assert its privileged status, the historically real has to exclude the fictional "other." The historically real thus depends for its identity on an exclusionary move which, precisely because it is needed, indicates that it is inhabited by the fictional other which it denies by expelling it.
 - 11 I am not suggesting that Findley necessarily intended that "Robert Ross" coincide with the name of Wilde's friend. The anonymous reader of this paper assures me that Findley once said in his "*presence and hearing* that it had never occurred to him ("I never thought of that!"). However, no matter how accidental this coincidence may be, the reader cannot help but make it part of his or her interpretation.
 - 12 This reference to the iceberg is, of course, proleptically borrowed from *The Telling of Lies*.
 - 13 Occasionally they may evoke everyday life in the trenches in terms of the familiar world at home; the labyrinth of trenches, for instance, is often likened to city streets. More extravagantly, perhaps, the nightmare world of the trenches is associated with natural catastrophes like volcanoes, earthquakes, or thunderstorms. Such images suggest reassuringly that the horrors of war are temporary eruptions in a natural cycle.
 - 14 Frederic's daydream of spending a night with Catherine in a Milan hotel room finds its ironic echo when the night in Milan marks Frederic's departure and makes Catherine feel like a whore. In a similar ironic twist, Frederic does not spend his planned leave with Catherine on the Lago Maggiore but ends up rowing along its shore during his escape with the now pregnant Catherine.
 - 14 See Jacques Derrida, "The Purveyor of Truth."

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