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Postmodernism is often characterized as provoking a sort of "anything goes" aesthetic, a relativistic chaos, an abandonment of shared ideals. However, beyond this frequently derogatory reaction, postmodernism suggests (in a manner consistent with the pluralism generally associated with the term) a multiplicity of more constructive, and often more positive, meanings. For many critics, the term provides a convenient, if problematic, rubric for social, economic, and cultural trends that in many respects represent a resistance to various forms of constraint--social, artistic, and otherwise. In this synoptic essay, we are interested in examining what we take to be promising possibilities offered by postmodern insights, and their thematic convergence in our distinct fields—psychotherapy and literary criticism. More specifically, we will explore the ways in which what might be called the democratization of interpretation in our two disciplines expands the audience for non-expert readings—namely those of readers and therapeutic clients.

As scholars working in very different areas, we are intrigued by the convergence of metaphors in contemporary literature/literary criticism and psychotherapy as the disciplines have, over the past few decades, increasingly attended to the historical and cultural dimensions of meaning-making. It is probably fair to say that psychology has been slower than literary studies to recognize the complexity of textual interpretation. Indeed, positivism still reigns supreme in a discipline that long ago embraced John Stuart Mill's appeals to logic and empiricism over Wilhelm Dilthey's call for an interpretive human science. However, contemporary psychological theory displays a growing interest in what Ian Parker calls the 'turn-to-language', suggesting some striking thematic overlap between postmodern theorizing in psychology and the work of contemporary literary critics such as Linda Hutcheon and Patricia Waugh. These include, among many others, a mutual interest in subjectivity, narrative and textuality, and social construction.

In this essay, we will propose that, contrary to the depiction of postmodernism by its detractors as symptomatic of an era of postindustrial malaise and aimless moral relativism, there is much that is hopeful and even therapeutic in these developments. After laying out some of the developments and controversies associated with postmodern theorizing in these two fields, we will ground them in the discussion of two specific texts: one the 'text' of a therapeutic client's life, and the other Timothy Findley's novel *Headhunter*. Our intent is to argue that postmodernism's embrace of multiplicity and contingency opens texts to alternate interpretations that may be beneficial to clients and readers alike; and, furthermore, that this emancipatory potential may be problematized but certainly not rendered invalid by postmodernism's emphasis on relativism and indeterminacy.

For some time now, psychology and literary studies have been in the throes of a remarkable upheaval, a re-examination of their basic premises. A central feature of this sea change is the critique of positivism and empiricism--a movement away from essentialist and foundationalist premises. In literary studies, under the influence of reader-response criticism, semiotics, deconstruction, and various other strains of literary theory, the emphasis has shifted from literary "works" and their authors to "texts" and their readers. In the process, interpretation has become democratized and relativized, no longer the revelation of a fixed, immutable, transcultural significance.

This trend is also evident in contemporary psychological theory—not merely in the Lacanian post-structural psychoanalysis that may be familiar to literary scholars, but in a range of social constructionist, narrative, and discursive movements that replace scientific metaphors with a literary sensibility, complete with a vocabulary that emphasizes the interpretation of meaning. However, our interest here is not solely the textual dimension that increasingly links these two domains through postmodern theorizing. Both question traditional hierarchies, challenging the authority of their respective expert interpreters, the psychotherapist and the literary critic. It is this dethroning of privileged interpretations—problematic as it may be on closer inspection—that offers possibilities rarely suggested by modernist formulations.

As is the case in literary criticism, many contemporary theorists in psychology reflect a deep skepticism about univocal accounts of human nature and mental health--the notion of a single "correct" interpretation. Social constructionist theory, such as the contributions of Kenneth Gergen, points to the constructed nature of knowledge, and the ways in which dominant psychological constructs have infiltrated popular culture. Discursive psychology, through the work of Jonathon Potter and Margaret Wetherell, examines the way we make meaning through interpretive repertoires which reflect prevalent social discourses. Critical psychologists like Ian Parker point to issues of power and control, and the hegemony of psychology's mainstream structures. Narrative family therapy draws on a Foucauldian analysis to highlight the normalizing impact of institutional practices. Feminist post-structural theory replaces reified conceptions of self--the outgrowth of dominant psychological metaphors--with a focus on multiple subjectivities and positioning amid myriad social discourses.

Our intent here is not to microscopically differentiate these related, but distinct developments. Instead, we are interested in highlighting their shared commitment to subverting dominant psychological readings of human experience, on the premise that univocal, expert-oriented interpretations do not grant storying rights to the persons who consult therapists. This concern leads to a reconfiguration of the therapeutic relationship in a manner parallel to current models of the relationship between literary critics, literary texts, and readers. Put simply, the shift is from "patient" as object of expert interpretation, to client as collaborator in the construction of preferred meanings or, as Michael White would say, author of one's life.

In literary studies, postmodern poetics and poststructuralist theory (for all their variety, notoriety, and controversy) have to a large degree staged a resistance to essentialist and empiricist conceptions of literary discourse and the acts of reading and writing. Lacanian psychoanalysis, Bakhtinian dialogism, Julia Kristeva's conceptualizing of intertextuality, Michel Foucault's theorizing of discourse, and a host of other semiotic, psychoanalytic, and linguistic theories have contributed to a troubling or a decentering of such notions as the coherent, autonomous text, the unified subject, and a stable truth to which the literary text in one way or another corresponds. While the effects of such tendencies are by no means uniform nor consistently positive, it can be argued that such trends in both literature and literary criticism stress the complexity of, and moreover open up, the process of reading and writing, underlining its contingency, its relativity, and its multiplicity.

These literary and theoretical approaches generally underline the role of readers as creators or co-creators of meaning, just as a range of postmodern therapies attempt to

privilege clients' interpretations in the construction of meaning through collaborative conversation. Readers and therapeutic clients are positioned in a new and somewhat similar position of author-ity, though the degree of autonomy that attends that position is certainly a continuing focus of debate.

In effect, postmodern approaches to literary studies and psychotherapy depict readers and therapeutic clients as inhabiting markedly similar interpretive realms--a continuity not readily suggested by modernist formulations. One feature of this mutual participation is the manner in which both domains of discourse stage a resistance to dominant social, cultural, and political narratives and invite subjects to seize the reins of meaning rather than be passive recipients of literary or psychological diagnoses. Our aim in this paper, then, is to explore the intersections between our interests by examining the ideas informing these developments in both our fields, illustrating the practices and concerns these developments have initiated, and pointing to the possibilities they suggest for both readers and therapeutic clients.

While literary studies and psychology have different orientations and methods, they are both informed by philosophical developments which transcend the particulars of any one discipline in the humanities. The philosopher John Dewey captured a central feature of these developments by pointing to the mounting awareness of "the contingency and variability of human societies, cultures, and communities" (qtd. In West 70), which he called "the watershed event" in contemporary thought. This awareness is increasingly evident in our intellectual traditions, where it manifests itself in the contesting of a startling array of premises and practices founded on the supposition of unitary truth—whether empirical or rational—devoid of local variation.

Suspending the task of reaching beyond our senses and our reason, we have become more concerned about how various factors impinge on how we experience the world and about how the practices through which we give shape to the world are subject to regional, cultural, and historical contingencies. This leads to a pluralistic, hermeneutic world-view: experience is textualized and subject to multiple interpretations. In the wake of these philosophical developments, the boundaries between literary studies and psychology have been dissolved in various ways. Both disciplines have been marked by similar epistemological and political shifts, which overlap to a degree and are by no means uncontested in either domain, but which can be highlighted by grouping them at three key sites: the social construction of meaning, the realigning of interpretive hierarchies, and the elevation of local readings.

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The heightened awareness of cultural and historical context leads, irrevocably, to an emphasis on the way in which interpretation is informed by discursive conventions or genres. This is a clear departure from representational epistemologies, with sweeping implications for psychology and literary studies. In effect, social constructionism adopts a hermeneutic perspective to the degree that it locates meaning in language, and construes language as text, conjointly (though by no means democratically) interpreted in community. Bakhtin eloquently captures this view in saying that "language has been completely taken over, shot through with intentions and accents...All words have the 'taste' of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. Each word tastes of the contexts in which it

has lived its socially charged life...The world in language is half someone's else's" (293). Social constructionism takes a constitutive view of meaning-making: words and other semiotic devices are regarded not so much as reflecting some given--what we typically call "reality"--so much as constructing it.

While cultural and historical contingencies provide context for this construction of meaning, narrative structures, as Jerome Bruner, Donald Polkinghorne, and others observe, provide the form. Polkinghorne maintains that we "achieve our personal identities and self concept through the use of the narrative configuration, and make our existence into a whole by understanding it as an expression of a single unfolding and developing story" (150). This highlighting of the narrative, proactive dimension of interpretation reconfigures the view of individual identity. It assumes "a model of the human subject that takes acts of self-narration not only as descriptive of the self, but more importantly, as fundamental to the emergence and reality of that subject" (Kerby 4). In psychology, this description highlights the way people do not merely unfold, but rather construct their personhood in narrative form. As an extension of this idea, psychotherapeutic models (many elements of which have become part of the popular repertoire) can be understood as influencing the stories people construct of themselves through a process of intertextuality.

In an analogous fashion, literary studies have been increasingly marked by a preoccupation with both literature and criticism as constructions shaped by particular and contingent social, cultural, and ideological frameworks. Contemporary literary critics have underlined the way in which literary discourse, rather than providing simply a verbal reflection of an external, preexistent world, constructs that world through its own utterances; furthermore, strains of criticism from reader-response and feminist criticism to deconstruction have emphasized the importance, both in degree and kind, of the participation of readers or critics in that construction.

The destabilizing and "contesting of the unified and coherent subject" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 11-12) and of the unified, representational text in contemporary critical theory has obviously helped to undermine traditional notions of literary representation. The work of Barthes, Derrida, Kristeva, and Foucault has contributed to a fracturing of the stability of the represented world, the literary work as cohesive artistic artifact, and the reader as stable interpreting subject, instead emphasizing to varying degrees the intertextual and intersubjective continuities between them. Derrida's much-debated formulation "Il n'y a pas de hors-texte" (158) certainly has been taken as the rallying cry for a substantial anti-representational strain in poststructuralist thought--the rejection of language and literary discourse as standing in a referential relation with an extratextual reality. Many postmodern texts, emulating this spirit, strive for a self-reflexive, anti-representational aesthetic (the novels of Thomas Pynchon or the stories of Donald Barthelme, for instance).

In both literary studies and psychology, then, there is a growing emphasis on the way our interpretive protocols, as it were, reflect not so much the objects of interpretation as the interpreters themselves. This is not, however, the supplanting of natural science's view of a world "out there" with a cognitive conception of an internal world governed by the mechanisms of a compartmentalized human mind. Instead, social constructionism locates the world of experience in an intersubjective realm. The elaborate discursive constructions of literature, literary criticism, psychology, and psychotherapy are the

products of the cultural contexts we inhabit. These disciplines, in turn, develop highly specialized vocabularies and conceptual frameworks for naming experience. Kenneth Gergen captures this idea in observing that our language-based truth claims are "more reasonably viewed as the constructions of communities with particular interests, values, and ways of life" (134).

All of this has paradigm-shattering implications for the field of psychology, beginning with models of behaviour, development, and the process of therapeutic change which have accumulated on academic shelves through a century of psychological theorizing. Social constructionism suggests these models be regarded as discourses, rather than representations of the processes they address. This discursive turn encourages a reflexive orientation: it prompts us to expand our inquiry from the original objects of our study to the lenses we select to examine them. Likewise, both postmodern literature and contemporary literary criticism have increasingly highlighted the importance of agency, contingency, and ideology in shaping the interrelated activities of textual production, reading, and interpretation. They have been marked in particular by a discursive self-consciousness, a reflection on the role of their own assumptions and practices in the construction and interpretation of literary texts.

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This leads us to the second point of convergence--what we have called the realigning of interpretive hierarchies. The critique of essentialist and foundationalist epistemologies promotes, at least in theory, a predominantly positive democratization of literary studies and psychology. The literary critic and psychotherapist are challenged and relocated, if not deposed, as interpretive authorities—a liberation which has created understandable unease and profound debate in psychology and literary studies.

In the domains of psychology and psychotherapy, postmodern critiques highlight the role of institutional forces (the source of many dominant cultural discourses) in determining which stories are to be foregrounded and which to be marginalized. Psychological theory itself can be understood as being among these dominant narratives—a ubiquitous repertoire of popularized constructs like the "unconscious," "reinforcement," "personal growth", and "catharsis" (to name a very few). Social constructionism encourages us to examine these derivatives of psychoanalytic and humanist psychological discourse in a new light, to see them as discourses that, as Norman Fairclough describes, construct particular realities according to beliefs and values embedded in the cultural and historical contexts from which they originate (39). Rather than gauging the "accuracy" of these ideas in capturing the real--a notion which swims gracefully within positivist waters but which flounders on the shores of poststructuralism--we are inclined to consider how they foreground some meanings and background others according to the power dynamics at play.

These epistemological shifts therefore compel a leveling of the prevailing interpretive hierarchies in literary studies and psychology: a challenging of the legitimacy of truth-claims and a questioning of the authority of experts. In psychology, postmodern theorizing helps us see how the field has traditionally foregrounded people's deficiencies, creating an alienating distance between professionals and those they aspired to serve. In recent years, this critique has prompted a deconstructive re-evaluation of the field's

premier interpretive code book, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM).

The DSM is an ever-expanding taxonomy of human pathology which plays a central role in the delivery of clinical services. While its intent is to categorize people according to the disorders they are deemed to have, it is also possible to understand the DSM's designations as reflecting historically and culturally bound ideas and mores. For example, in the not-too-distant past, the DSM classified homosexuality as a "mental disorder." Homosexuality is no longer so regarded; in a gesture congruent with a widespread rethinking of homosexual experience, the DSM's sprawling board of scientific experts removed homosexuality from the manual. The decision to declassify homosexuality did not come on the heels of new "discoveries" about its "true nature." Rather, it was more like the capitulation of a dominant "storying" institution to concerns about the effects for homosexuals of the DSM's pathologizing narrative. In this sense, social constructionism regards amendments to the DSM not as the polishing of a mirror of nature but as the value-bound revision of an influential textual interpretation.

The literary and literary critical models that have prevailed through most of the twentieth century, it can be argued, have mirrored psychology's privileging of the professional's so-called interpretive expertise. "Drawing on specialized knowledges and employing expert interventions" is indeed what much modernist literature requires and what a variety of critical practices have sought to provide. In critical approaches grounded in expressive or mimetic realism, on the one hand, and emphasizing the literary text as a verbal artifact (as do New Criticism and other formalist approaches), on the other, the text is given as an aesthetic object or as a reflection of an extra-textual reality--a presumption of objectivity against which contemporary perspectives on reading and interpretation have largely rebelled. Frank Lentricchia's description of the circularity of New Criticism, for instance, evokes comparisons to an application of the DSM: "working within a neo-Coleridgean heritage, the New Critic tends, first, to ascribe, a priori, special objective properties to literary discourse (it is inherently ambiguous, or symbolic, or organically whole), and then, with circular logic, to describe the critical act as consisting in the location, that is, the finding of those qualities, wherever they may be" (106). In such critical practices, for the most part, such values as truth and aesthetic merit are not subjective, contingent, and historically relative, but given, objective, and timeless

Furthermore, in conjunction with the general elitism and obscurity rather than populism of high modernist poetics (the work of Pound, Eliot, and Joyce, for instance), criticism developed as a specialized knowledge, with the critic's role in interpreting meaning or assessing value being similar to that of the psychotherapist as expert. Along with the allusiveness and obscurity of a substantial portion of modernist writing, this model of criticism effects a divide between readers and texts, with the literary critic as high priest unlocking the meaning of the occulted canonical texts of modernism for the uninitiated.

In such literary and critical paradigms, the significance of literary texts, whether it resides in the architectonics of New Criticism or the autonomous literary structures of formalist criticism, is an inherent quality which generally requires expert knowledge to divine. Thus both critic and writer participate in what Hutcheon describes as "a modernist search for order in the face of moral and social chaos" (Canadian 2) in a fashion which, it

can be argued, alienates and subordinates readers and renders them reliant on expert critical intervention.

However, both proponents and opponents of postmodernism have persuasively argued that there is a great deal of continuity between postmodernism and poststructuralism and those critical and artistic paradigms against which they are ostensibly "post"-marked. Gerald Graff contends, indeed, that the "very concepts through which modernism is demystified derive from modernism itself" (62). For all the liberatory qualities attributed to postmodern writing and poststructuralist criticism, there is a substantial body of work (that of Graff, Frederick Jameson, and Christopher Norris, for instance) that suggests that postmodernism and poststructuralism ultimately reinscribe the elitism, the obscurity, the critical occultism, and the social conservatism to which they are ostensibly a reaction.

Indeed, a good deal of contemporary literature and literary criticism is certainly susceptible to the charge of being inaccessible and elitist, simply updating modernism's hieratic literary and critical discourse for a self-reflexive age. Given the difficult, highly theorized, and often oracular qualities of postmodern literature and criticism, it seems fair to question whether, with postmodernism, the more things change, the more they stay the same. Nonetheless, despite this continuity and despite contentions such as Norris's that the postmodern emphasis on the discursive construction of reality erodes the ground for "effective counter-argument" (3), what the realigning of interpretive hierarchies in psychology and literary studies suggests is that postmodernism has indeed contributed to a substantial restructuring of power relations.

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Implicit in this postmodern questioning of the authoritative voice is the elevation of local readings. In psychology, these trends are evident in the view of clients as experts in their own experience--the emphasis on competence, personal resources, and "local knowledge" (to use Clifford Geertz's phrase). Traditional conceptions of therapy encourage practitioners to conduct "objective assessments" of people and to eradicate pathology employing expert interventions. The therapist's knowledge is clearly privileged. Postmodern approaches attempt to subvert this hierarchy. The camera is pulled back--way back--and reveals the cultural context surrounding the therapy session. In this wide-angle view, psychotherapy looks something like a cross-cultural encounter, with therapist and client inhabiting different (if overlapping) domains of meaning. Todd and Wade capture this distinction in depicting traditional, expert-driven psychotherapy as prone to "psycholonization"--the psychotherapist penetrating foreign territory, brandishing the bible of psychological knowledge, banishing misguided cultural beliefs and experiences (37).

Given the textual view of meanings as the product of cultural construction, the notion of "local" meanings is admittedly problematic. After all, that which is 'local' must be regarded as reflecting wider social processes, and therapist and client are left with the challenge of teasing out 'truly' local meanings from dominant and constraining social ones. This attention to the role of society in the constitution of discourses also presents questions about the notion of personal agency. If, as Foucault says, discourses constitute the objects of which they speak, is not the client *determined* by wider social processes? These are challenging theoretical dilemmas, but they do not stand in the way of reorienting therapy to clients' preferred directions, rather than indexing it to a taxonomy

of normative prescriptions. The textual view promotes a view of therapy as constitutive, rather than corrective. Postmodern theorists variously describe the therapeutic encounter as collaborative and dialogic social construction (McNamee and Gergen, *Therapy as Social Construction*), "re-authoring" (White, *Re-Authoring Lives*) or "story editing" (Parry and Doan, *Story Re-Visions*).

It goes without saying that postmodern readings of therapy are by no means uncontested. While the influence of postmodernism is increasingly evident in the psychotherapeutic realm, the DSM continues to grow. So does a North American managed care industry which demands the validation of therapeutic approaches according to empirical criteria mostly in line with the assumptions of modernism. And critiques of narrative postmodern practice, such as Barbara Held's *Back to Reality*, dispute a non-realist stance which is seen not to pay sufficient heed to the severity of the 'real' problem that persons experience. Other objections touch on the focus on discourse to the exclusion of embodiment and non-linguistic therapeutic processes; a perceived ethical relativism; the lack of attention to enduring features of personality taken to be expressions of an authentic and enduring self; and the devaluing of hard-won clinical skills that is seen to follow from the emphasis on local (i.e., client) knowledges.

Postmodern views give rise to a range of paradoxes certainly no less challenging than the conundrums presented by modernist formulations; space precludes a detailed examination here of each of these theoretical and practical issues. However, we do not believe the complex ramifications of postmodern insights need lead us, inexorably, to a moral ambiguity, a relativistic ennui. On the contrary, the heightened emphasis on the social construction of meaning promotes a questioning of traditional interpretive hierarchies and inclines therapeutic practitioners to create more space for the client's interpretations and meanings. This, to us, is a good thing.

This sense of epistemological upheaval and theoretical and critical contestation is likewise highly visible in literary studies, where the challenging of interpretive authority has paved the way for a diversification of strategies of reading and writing. Postmodern psychology's foregrounding of the constructed nature of experience, and its emphasis on the construction of counternarratives as a therapeutic response to oppressive, "dominant" stories, it can be argued, parallel postmodern literary techniques--such as intertextuality, self-reflexivity, and indeterminacy--that draw attention to the construction of literary representation and in various ways invite readers into the process of constructing the meaning of the text.

One evident shift in contemporary writing has been the opening up of the text to the reader, and a movement away from conceptions of the text as either a purely aesthetic object inhabiting the autonomous world of literature or as an unproblematic verbal image of the real world (Hutcheon, *Canadian 2*). A lot of postmodern writing (the work of Pynchon, Salman Rushdie, Angela Carter, Alasdair Gray, and Robert Kroetsch, for instance) makes use of devices that draw attention to the text as a discursive and linguistic construct and/or thematize the act of interpretation and invite the reader to participate in the construction or, in some cases, the abolition of meaning--in general rejecting strategies which position readers as passive participants.

Much contemporary literary criticism shares the emphasis on the literary text as a verbal construction. Though generalizations about critical trends are difficult to make because of the diversity of approaches, one can detect an increasing concentration on the

literary work as a textual construct and on the role of social and semiotic codes in the construction of meaning. Interpretation thus becomes not the unveiling of meaning but a code-bound and indeed allegorical construction. Such a model, like various postmodern textual strategies, emphasizes reading as a collaborative process, "the interaction of reader and text as productivity, the production of a multiplicity of signifying effects. In turn this implies the questioning of the model of communication as a closed system" (Young 8).

For many readers and critics, such literary and critical strategies violate the aesthetic or mimetic purity of the "work" and cultivate a troublesome indeterminacy or lack of closure, and the writers who make use of such strategies are often seen as irresponsibly and dilettantishly "playing with words." Furthermore, for many critics the questioning of communication as a closed system paves the way for interpretive anarchy. Nonetheless, the prevailing tendency is to privilege or at least emphasize the interpretive activity of readers, situating reading as a collaborative relationship, one in which readers are invited to do the interpreting or the constructing, rather than having to be "told" what a text means, and/or to reflect on the process of construction itself. For many critics (feminist, postcolonial, and New Historicist critics, for instance), foregrounding the mediating role of language and literary discourse is particularly important because it helps to reveal the ideological assumptions of dominant interpretations and to enable--as in postmodern therapy--more constructive, contingent, and local readings. Recent literary criticism has displayed an undeniable anti-canonical or revisionist bent that has helped widen notions of what constitutes literature, both in terms of literary forms and in terms of constituencies of writers, as well as increasingly emphasizing the role of the reader in the construction of meaning.

The reverberations of these ideas extend far beyond the confines of the academy, and to give a more tangible sense of the potential and implications of postmodern poetics and theorizing, we will provide a pair of specific examples: a clinical vignette from one author's psychotherapeutic practice, and an exploration, by the other author, of postmodern themes and strategies in Canadian novelist Timothy Findley's *Headhunter*.

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The following illustration from my practice (DP) may help to ground many of the theoretical ideas presented here. It should be emphasized that a brief illustration such as this cannot hope to capture the richness, complexity, and contradiction that are features of therapeutic conversations and relationships. In keeping with many of the ideas expressed here, this is but one way of making meaning of my client's experience. Neither does this account capture some real entity called postmodern therapy; rather it provides a glimpse, and certainly not a road map, of psychotherapeutic practice informed by a range of the postmodern ideas discussed above. The same should be said for modernist orientations: I employ a wide brush stroke in the interest of making distinctions, and recognize there are many "modernisms" and many modernist practices.

Bryce was a 33-year-old man who came to see me because his productivity had dropped off at work, and he was experiencing stress in his relationship with his wife Stephanie. As Bryce and I talked further, he described the experience of second-guessing himself at work and at play, to the extent that he rarely felt present for either. When he chose to put in extra hours at work, he was distracted by thoughts of how he should be

relaxing and enjoying down time; when he rode his bicycle along a river valley trail, he was aware of being preoccupied with work and the thought that he should be catching up on overdue projects.

In textual terms, a therapy informed by modernist epistemologies would be inclined to regard Bryce's experience as a text with a single accurate reading, and the clinician's opening task would be to determine the proper reading--the correct name for the problem or problems at hand--a process more commonly known as "diagnosis." As mentioned, the DSM is psychiatry's preeminent book of names: the latest edition provides descriptions of hundreds of "mental disorders". Given that the words Bryce chose to describe his experience corresponded with the DSM's descriptions of generalized anxiety and mild depression, a therapist operating from modernist assumptions might now affix the appropriate labels to Bryce's experience and "treat" Bryce's pathology.

In contrast, a social constructionist orientation to psychotherapy eschews the indexing of experience to taxonomies of dysfunction, preferring to place more emphasis on the client's interpretation in delineating issues to be addressed. Generally speaking, experiences are deemed to be problems when they are problematical for the people experiencing and affected by them--not because they correspond to descriptions in the DSM or other canons of psychopathology. Rather than turning to purportedly objective criteria for determining the correct reading of Bryce's experience, I inquired about Bryce's interpretation. He talked of constantly telling himself what he "should" do and of the experience of these thoughts circulating relentlessly. I asked him if this was problematic for him. After some evaluation of this question, he concluded it was. I then asked him what name he might attach to this experience, and he arrived at a word. He called it "Shouldloop"--an odd, but evocative, term which captured Bryce's description of his experience.

In affixing a name to his experience, Bryce and I were engaged in what White and Epston call an "externalizing conversation" (16). As discussed earlier, the textual emphasis of many postmodern therapies leads to a view of experience—problematic or otherwise—as imbedded in wider social discourses, rather than seeing it as a feature of a fixed "personality," or locked within an intrapsychic realm of synapses and biochemistry. These are only ways of making meaning, as opposed to truth claims, of course, but they provide a context for putting "space" between Bryce and the problem he describes. This distancing from totalizing identity claims facilitates the generation of alternate and more helpful meanings.

We are born, to use Alan Parry's phrase, into a "universe of stories," some which liberate, and some which constrain (51). Shouldloop's story was one of many possible stories about who Bryce is and how he might act in the world. Experience is multi-storied; it is ultimately our clients who, with our help, will sort one from the other. Implicit in this way of conversing is that there is experience both within and outside of the influence of the problem. Shouldloop is not viewed as the tip of some pathological iceberg that must be exposed and dissolved.

Notice the contrast here with what have become popular psychological metaphors of "peeling the onion" or "getting to the core" or "finding out what's really going on." These metaphors borrow heavily from positivist epistemologies: they assume a causal chain and regard diagnosis as the first step in a process of discovery, aimed at determining the root origin of the disorder--the real problem--which is frequently traced

to childhood experience. The textual metaphor leads to a view of "the real problem" as the reification of one particular story or interpretation, which closes down possibilities because it views meaning as rigidly as the geologist regards the ore sample on his laboratory workbench.

Narrative postmodern approaches to therapy stand in contrast to this convergent, reifying orientation. They promote a divergent, pluralistic view, construing the ebb and flow of our lives as the foregrounding of some story threads and the backgrounding of others. White describes how dominant cultural stories are prone to forging what he calls "problem-saturated" descriptions of people. In textual terms, this can be seen as an imposition of discursive constructions of identity by institutional forces in society. These may include organized religions (e.g., guilt), school systems (e.g., attention disorders), the mass media (e.g., anorexia) and institutional psychiatry (see the DSM).

In my interactions with Bryce, I therefore did not view Shouldloop's relentless critique of Bryce as any more real than his counter-arguments--his claim (implicit in his choosing to engage in a therapeutic conversation) that he deserved and hoped for something better. Rather, I joined with Bryce in thickening a counterplot--collaborating with him in authoring an alternative narrative. This narrative, if it is take a firmer hold in Bryce's life, cannot be conjured out of thin air. Instead, it is understood as imbedded in meanings currently obscured by the more dominant problem story, like pale threads lost in a brightly colored weaving. The questions I asked of Bryce shone a light on these threads, inviting them to the foreground of the fabric.

I asked Bryce what it said about his commitment to a revised story for his life that he was meeting with me. How had he managed not to fully submit to Shouldloop's debilitating critique? What did he know about himself that helped him resist Shouldloop's invitation to despair? What sort of activities had he engaged in that effectively turned down the volume on Shouldloop's nagging tone? Who in his life might be the least surprised to hear that he recently enjoyed a bike ride without second-guessing himself, and what is it this person might know about Bryce that would have helped him or her predict he could do this?

Of course, this approach does not show the "whole picture." As Salman Rushdie has observed, all stories are a form of censorship--including the discourses that inform therapeutic conversations. Missing from this partial account, for example, is an exploration of Bryce's genetic inheritance: a tracing of possible family history of depression or anxiety. Neither did Bryce and I discuss the biochemical substratum that could be understood as contributing to Shouldloop's agenda (although Bryce did, for a time, rely on medication to regulate his mood). I will resist the temptation to defend these omissions here. Instead, I cite them to highlight the inevitable contestability of all stories, which is both a hallmark and a perceived limitation of therapies informed by postmodernism.

In effect, contemporary psychotherapy has taken a textual turn. The result is a refiguring of traditional hierarchies which (while presenting a new array of practical and theoretical controversies) places therapeutic clients closer to the centre of the interpretive process. The field's challenge in the years ahead may well be to draw on contemporary textual metaphors and the attention to discourses while revisiting a range of potentially helpful ideas and practices more closely associated with modernist traditions. This development would be manifest in a heightened mindfulness of the multiplicity and

contingency of meaning, so that 'models' and 'interventions' once regarded as direct representations of 'human nature' and the 'human change process' might be retained, but wielded in a more tentative and reflexive manner.

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That recognizing subjectivity, interpretation, and narration as socially constructed and contingent has its risks is likewise evident in the ambivalences of postmodern literature. The anti-representational effects and the intertextual and narrative sophistication of postmodern writing, some argue, amount to no more than an apolitical, narcissistic textual play; as Patricia Waugh notes, critics "have tended to see such literary behaviour as a form of the self-indulgence and decadence characteristic of the exhaustion of any artistic form or genre" (*Metafiction* 9). Others contend that postmodern writing, both at the level of the worlds it ostensibly represents and its anti-mimetic conventions, nonetheless provides a means of constructive social commentary. Waugh herself argues of metafiction, for instance, that "in showing us how literary fiction creates its imaginary worlds, [it] helps us to understand how the reality we live day by day is similarly constructed, similarly 'written'" (*Metafiction* 18), a project which has its counterparts in postmodern psychotherapy.

A novel that illustrates this sense of ambivalence is Timothy Findley's *Headhunter* (1993). Findley's fiction, which consistently pits embattled, disempowered protagonists against the force of dominant stories such as patriarchy, the military establishment, and fascism, certainly brings to mind White and Epston's model of developing counternarratives in response to dominant narratives that negatively shape the lives of individuals seeking therapy or more generally in need of healing. Through its representation of institutional psychiatry and the intertextuality that complicates that representation in a number of ways, *Headhunter* reflects the continuity between postmodern literary strategies and some postmodern forms of psychotherapy, but at the same time it provides interesting insights into the limitations as well as the potential of postmodernism's anti-foundationalist impulses.

Findley's fiction typically concerns itself with relatively powerless individuals threatened or traumatized by oppressive institutional structures and individuals whose primary interest is the accumulation of power and wealth. In *Headhunter*, that pattern is played out in a dystopian Toronto, within the context of the Parkin Institute of Psychiatric Research. Rupert Kurtz, the head of the Institute, though a respected psychiatric authority, is a power-hungry megalomaniac; "We psychiatrists," he writes, "must necessarily appear to the mentally ill as being in the nature of gods . . . with a simple pill, we can exert a power for good that is practically unbounded" (426), though he scratches out "for good."

Kurtz is at the centre of a complicated conspiracy which has at its core a combination of science, mind control, and social control: he has helped to cover up the government's responsibility in illicit genetic engineering resulting in the release of a virus, sturnusemia, which has been conveniently blamed on birds. Kurtz is also overseeing covert experimentation with drugs for controlling human behaviour, supported by pharmaceutical companies eager for profit. In his desire for funds to expand his operations he permits rather than exposes the activities of the sexually voyeuristic

Club of Men, a group of Kurtz's clients who prey on children and ultimately commit murder. Kurtz's foil in the novel is another psychiatrist at the Parkin, Charlie Marlow, a humanist who uses literature as psychotherapy, believing "in its healing powers--not because of its sentiments, but because of its complexities" (131). In the course of the novel, Marlow discovers the extent and effects of Kurtz's activity, and is out to put a stop to him, only to discover, at the end of the book, that Kurtz, in an ironic twist, has contracted sturnusemia and will die before he is brought to justice.

Looking at the plot of the novel, it is tempting to see in the opposition between the two men the contrast between the increasingly narrative-based, hermeneutic approach to psychotherapy and the authoritative, logico-scientific approach against which it is a reaction. However, one cannot say Kurtz and Marlow in the same sentence without recognizing the centrality of the subtext of Joseph Conrad's modernist classic *Heart of Darkness* to *Headhunter*, and the blatant, self-conscious echoes of Conrad's text underline that Kurtz is not to be taken as representative of the scientific psychoanalytic ethos, but like his predecessor in *Heart of Darkness* has taken the principles of that ethos to brutal extremes. Indeed, in his acknowledgements Findley notes his indebtedness to and admiration for the Clarke Institute of Psychology and The Queen Street Mental Health Centre, the Toronto institutions reflected in *Headhunter*, and is careful to underline that "this novel tells the story of what could happen if the wrong people wielded authority in such institutions."

Kurtz and Marlow, however, are just the beginning of the "promiscuously kaleidoscopic" intertextuality of *Headhunter*, as Diana Brydon nicely puts it (58). Kurtz's proteg Dr. Shelley, Marlow's patient Emma Berry, and her lover Gatz echo the protagonists of Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, and Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, and most other characters have recognizable precursors in figures from art and literature. Such intertextuality, however, goes beyond a mere modelling, and accentuates the way in which literary texts, as the work of Julia Kristeva in particular underlines, are not original but are a fabric of other discourses, "a heterogeneous mosaic" or "permutation of texts, an intertextuality" (41, 36). Through the novel's blatant intertextuality, the notion of any kind of original essence to literary character in *Headhunter* is displaced, as it is in much postmodern literature, and the artifice of narrative highlighted.

Headhunter's intertextuality could be taken as exemplary of Jameson's critical presentation of the depthless "logic of postmodernism," in which "metabooks . . . cannibalize other books" and "ceaselessly reshuffle the fragments of preexistent texts" (96). But the novel can be read more constructively as foregrounding the way in which, as postmodern psychology suggests, the very notion of identity is bound up with narrative, the stories we tell of ourselves and the stories others tell of us or tell us into. According to White and Epston, dominant stories produce the internalizing of an objectifying, normalizing ideology that can result in various kinds of "problem-saturated" behaviour. This idea is intertextually dramatized in *Headhunter*, as the stories of characters such as Emma Berry, Dr. Shelley, and Gatz follow the same trajectories, the same social scripts, as their literary predecessors. Such intertextual replays help us to see that power, as in most of Findley's work, is located firmly in the institution--in this case, the social and economic power of the elite and the authoritative and administrative power

of the professional--but its effects, as Foucault's work underlines, are pervasive and naturalized, rather than openly repressive.

While the novel leans predominantly towards this negative, darker view of the storying of lives, it also reflects how the storying of lives, as in White and Epston's therapeutic practice, can be reworked through what Foucault calls an "insurrection of subjugated knowledges" and the writing of alternative stories. Significantly, *Headhunter* stages this resistance in a way that again dramatizes the intertextual basis of literary discourse; for instance, Emma Berry, despite her gravitation towards self-destruction, resists the extreme and fatal despair of Emma Bovary. The focus of this resistance, however, is Lilah Kemp, who at the beginning lets Kurtz out of p. 92 of *Heart of Darkness* and then perseveres throughout *Headhunter* to get him back in. Lilah is a prime example of Findley's belief that "madness and the imagination walk a fine line" ("Whole Lake," 61); a schizophrenic spiritualist and medium, she has the ability to animate texts--that is, various characters from the texts she reads come to life. This ability is, in a way, a pathological response to the force of a dominant narrative, since it is first manifested when Peter Rabbit visits the five-year-old Lilah as she hides from one of her father's displays of brutal, patriarchal tyranny. In clinical terms, this creative capacity is seen as a function of her madness and is suppressed with drugs (that index of modern psychotherapy), which, as Marlow reflects, "could be fashioned to be dictatorial--which is why they had champions such as Kurtz and Shelley" (278).

Toward the end of the novel, as Kurtz's insidious, power-mongering manipulation becomes more apparent to her, Lilah suspends the use of her medicine--which suppresses her symptoms, including these appearances--in order to collaborate with Marlow to conjure Kurtz back into *Heart of Darkness* and put an end to his career as "*Headhunter*." In light of our concern with psychology, and therapy here, it is hard not to see Lilah as allegorical: designated mad according to the technical lexicon of analytic psychiatry, she is also associated with vitalizing stories, literally bringing characters to life. This is not to suggest that *Headhunter* privileges madness as inherently creative; indeed, especially through his portrait of the Club of Men, Findley emphasizes the destructive courses that pathological inclinations can take, particularly under the aegis of corrupt practitioners of therapy. What the intersection of madness and intertextuality does suggest, though, is that, given the principles that these characters represent, *Headhunter's* intertextuality amounts to much more than a "reshuffling" of texts.

Headhunter demonstrates that within the larger arena of postmodernism there are many writers balancing the anti-mimetic conventions characteristic of postmodernism with a renewed social engagement, and its intertextual insistence on the power stories have to shape our lives certainly affiliates it with narrative therapy. Much of the novel, it might be noted, evokes a more traditional critique of the shortcomings of institutional psychiatry reminiscent of the existential and phenomenological approaches to psychotherapy of R.D. Laing; Findley's attitude toward schizophrenia certainly accords with Laing's resistance to the pathologizing of schizophrenia in *The Divided Self* and *The Politics of Experience*.

Yet Findley's concern with underlining the book's function as social commentary and with heading off any dismissal of the book as consumerist fantasy is a characteristic postmodern strategy. This tactic is reflected particularly in the ironic self-consciousness of the ending, as Lilah closes her copy of *Heart of Darkness* and reflects on what people

might think of all that has transpired in *Headhunter*: "It's only a book, they would say. That's all it is. A story. Just a story" (440). *Headhunter*, the message is clear, is more than "just a story." Findley, like Marlow, believes in the value of books as a distillation of lives from which readers can thus vicariously and profitably learn. More importantly, though, in providing this distillation, *Headhunter* underlines that, as Brydon argues, "if the world is also a text, it demands attentive reading" (57).

One of the most interesting intersections between Findley's work and the therapeutic use of narrative by practitioners like White and Epston is that while both recognize the negative power of narrative in the form of dominant stories, and at least implicitly ground their practice in a postmodern consciousness of the constructedness of stories, they both quite clearly subscribe to a belief in the positive and reintegrative power of stories (Findley, it should be noted, has generally resisted being labelled "postmodern"--and in the novel it is Shelley's work, rather than Marlow's, that is derogatorily described as "postmodern"). If dominant narratives can inscribe us pathologically in the familial and social realm--as is obviously the case with someone like Lilah--we can also work our way out of such a position with the help of stories. Just as Charlie Marlow uses literature for psychotherapy because of its complexity, it could be argued, *Headhunter* in a more oblique but perhaps more profound way serves therapeutic purposes in that it foregrounds the importance of stories in the construction of identity and in shaping our participation in the social realm.

While Findley's oft-voiced belief in the integrity (rather than intertextual dissolution) of literary characters and his insistence on aesthetic order certainly modify the anti-foundational energies of *Headhunter*, the novel nonetheless has important affiliations with certain postmodern strategies of resistance. *Headhunter* functions not as the catalytic means to a therapeutic end (as in traditional bibliotherapy), nor as a strictly representational critique of a corporatist institutional psychiatry. Instead, what Findley's novel accomplishes is to illustrate the importance of a consciousness of the power of stories, the value of carefully reading and where necessary rewriting the scripts available to subjects in the social arena, an effect that is analogous to the aims of narrative-based theories of psychotherapy. The critical and deconstructive aspects of postmodern art and literature, *Headhunter* illustrates, constitute, or at least can contribute to, an important intervention in the social and political realm.

The novel thus participates in what Waugh sees as a preponderantly negative postmodern critique of the modernist metanarrative of progress but also sustains the positive side of that modernity, "its release of new and productive energies, its fostering of the belief in the capacity of human beings to improve continuously their conditions of existence" (*Practising* 74). The storying of a life, with its redrawing of the boundaries of subjectivity, social relations, and cultural production, *Headhunter* suggests, has its perils, but *Headhunter* nonetheless invites the reader to identify and contest dominant narratives, and, in the spirit of all of Findley's fiction, to imagine a better world.

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Postmodern psychotherapy, literature, and literary criticism, then, draw their energies from a resistance to established, dominant narratives and emphasize the importance of the social construction of subjectivity not just in traumatizing the individual but also as the basis for a resistance to those metanarratives. In this respect, an

important tendency which postmodern psychology, literature, and literary criticism have in common is the redrawing of the boundaries of the hierarchical hermeneutic relationship which has governed those discourses in the modern era. In a practice like narrative therapy, the therapeutic relationship is reconfigured so that the therapist, instead of positivistically interpreting the patient's condition, participates in a contesting of the problem-saturated narrative and a re-authoring of a life. This reconfiguration is analogous to the way in which poststructuralist theory and postmodern poetics have reworked the relationship in which critics play the role of clergy, interpreting the Word of Literature for the uninitiated. Instead, various postmodern textual strategies foreground rather than submerge the process of textual construction and/or invite readers to participate in the construction of texts, and strains of contemporary theory to varying degrees emphasize the reader's role as one of co-creator rather than passive recipient.

Such a fundamental upheaval of the philosophical, epistemological, and methodological principles of psychology and literary studies is by no means cause for uncritical celebration. The destabilizing of identity, reality, and interpretation raises a number of disconcerting issues, such as the dissipation of political, social, and cultural agency, particularly for constituencies whose subject positions have been limited or denied within the ideologies of modernism; the complicity of such a destabilization with the anti-foundationalist, decontextualizing tendencies of postmodern consumer culture; and the possibility that the ethical relativism it cultivates will create a vacuum in which the power principle will become pre-eminent. Such disconcerting possibilities certainly suggest the need to carefully think through the implications of postmodern theorizing and poetics.

At the same time, sweeping dismissals of postmodernism have been as prevalent as uncritical celebrations. Arguments such as Norris's that "the whole political thrust of postmodernist thinking is to legitimise the kind of inert consensus-ideology that refuses all notions of enlightened critique (or reform of existing social institutions)" (40) elide or misrepresent its potential--a potential which we feel needs to be given its due. As reflected in psychotherapeutic practices like narrative therapy and in much postmodern writing, postmodernism seems to pull the philosophical, epistemological, and cultural mat from under our feet. But it nonetheless deposits us on a different (if no longer solid) ground, a ground which offers new possibilities for staging a resistance to the damaging effects of social, cultural, and political dominant narratives and for inviting subjects to write for themselves more empowering, less subjugated narratives.

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