

# The (Im)possibility of Objectivity:

## Narrating the Past in Young Adult Historiographic Metafiction

In *Child-Sized History*, Sara Schwebel (2011) suggests that “by supporting an approach to reading novels that attends to historical argument and historiographical influence, teachers will help students develop into readers capable of recognizing referential illusion and approaching narratives of all kinds with attention to the [ . . . ] arguments they support” (p. 161). The genre of historiographic metafiction can provide opportunities for developing such readers. While typical historical fictions are valued for their historical accuracy, historiographic metafiction calls into question the very possibility of accurately representing the past. Historiographic metafiction consists of self-conscious fictions concerned with historiography (the writing of history). It questions how we know about the past, which version we know, and who told us and what they told us; then it invites us to consider the possible motivations of particular versions of the past.

Historiographic metafiction also problematizes the relationship between history and fiction as distinct narrative genres. In the classroom, students have access to historical novels that are interpretations of the past, which often invite reader identification with the characters; they might also use textbooks, which are considered authoritative and objective truths (Schwebel, 2011, pp. 4–6). Historiographic metafiction focuses attention to both forms of representing history, drawing similarities between the two and demonstrating that history is a construction. The past can only be known via its textual remains, and history is a narra-

tive construction using those textual remains. Historiographic metafiction can be used in the classroom to show the impossibility of objectively and transparently representing the past, while also signifying the importance of history.

This article uses two Australian historiographic metafictional texts for adolescent readers, *Into White Silence* (Eaton, 2008) and *The Lace Maker’s Daughter* (Crew, 2005), to demonstrate how particular narrative strategies destabilize the relationship between history and fiction and the past and the present.

### Background

#### History and Narrative

History has traditionally been distinguished from fiction by its content rather than its form, as it is seen as true and factual, while fiction is perceived as the opposite. Hayden White (1984), however, draws similarities between historiography and narrative processes to argue that both history and fiction occupy the sphere of narrativity. He states that while “history is generally taken as truthful, it is more a ‘mimesis’ of the story lived in some region of historical reality, and insofar as it is an accurate imitation it is to be considered a truthful account” (p. 3). In other words, history comprises not only what happened but the narration of what happened (pp. 4–5). Similarly, Perry Nodelman (1990) proposes:

Like writers of fiction, historians find meaning in events. But just as the meanings writers find in events (and for that matter, that readers find in fiction) depend on the knowledge

and values they bring to it, the meanings historians find in history depend on their own values, their own societal and cultural assumptions. (p. 71)

The similarities between history and fiction, and the notion of history as a form of narrative, are foregrounded in what Linda Hutcheon (1988) called “historiographic metafiction”; *historiographic* calls our attention to the writing of history, while *metafiction* emphasizes the constructedness of narrative. Metafictional novels are generally described as self-conscious and self-reflexive because they draw attention to the constructedness and textuality of fiction and incorporate the “construction of a fictional illusion and the laying bare of that illusion” (Waugh, 1984, p. 6). Some examples of YA metafiction include *A Pack of Lies* (McCaughrean, 1988), *Fade* (Cormier, 1988), and *Inkheart* (Funke, 2003).

Metafictional texts include strategies such as unreliable or obtrusive narrators, spatio-temporal disruptions, intertextuality, typographic experimentation, genre mixing, and multiple narrators, all of which can draw attention to narrative processes. Such strategies in historiographic metafiction position readers to be aware of the way that reality is filtered through storytelling, or how the past is constructed through narrative. In adolescent fictions, metafictional strategies allow readers to question the notion of a stable identity and construct positions from which they can critique a text while reading it (Head, 1996, pp. 29–31).

### Historical Fiction and Historiographic Metafiction

Wilson (2011) notes, “discussions about historical fiction and what distinguishes history from fiction are not new” (p. 2); however, it is the *engagement* with the distinctions (or lack thereof) between history and fiction that is prominent in historiographic metafiction. Historical fiction generally strives to offer readers a coherent and consistent narrative set in a time preceding the readers’ lived experience. According to Stephens (1992), traditional “historical novels generally employ realistic modes, and avoid any self-conscious reflections on their own narrative strategies” (p. 236). However, historiographic metafiction, by definition, self-consciously reflect upon their own narrative strategies. Typically, “metafiction is fiction about fiction, stories that reflect on the nature of storymaking itself and that, in doing so, draw attention to their fictionality” (Head, 1996, p. 29).

Historical fictions often suggest that humanist ideals, or individual experiences, are representative and disclose universal truths, lessons, and values. These ideals are reflected in themes of authority, certainty, and authenticity and are also implicated through narrative closure and teleological purpose—“the impulse to present events in terms of structures of cause and effect” (Stephens, 1992, p. 205). Humanist approaches within narratives are “apt to represent historical processes as developmental and teleological and to generate ‘closed’ versions of history” (McCallum, 1999, pp. 168–169). Such narratives often seek to authentically represent time and place, source material, and research processes; they inevitably impose narrative structure on the past in order to relay past events, either in history or fiction. Historical fictions also typically engage with teleological purpose in conjunction with coming-of-age tropes, suggesting correlations between the past and the present.

Narrative structures in traditional adolescent historical fictions usually result in two possibilities: a representation of the past as a step in understanding the present, or an assumption that events are embedded with meaning that can be traced in a linear fashion, that is, through recorded history. Such narratives suggest that humans have always been essentially the same, perhaps offering comfort to young readers who believe their own trials or tribulations to be unique or exceptional. Alternatively, such narratives present a sense of history as coming of age for humanity at large, emphasizing linear growth and advancement that offers a template for the individual’s coming of age.

In young adult historiographic metafiction, characters often mature as they begin to recognize that “history” and other seemingly stable subjects in their lives, such as authoritative figures, are constructions, not actualities. Through investigations into the past, characters (and readers) come to understand that the past does not contain answers, but the processes of investigating the past and creating a history are analogous to constructing a sense of self. As a postmodern<sup>1</sup>

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1. Postmodernism has many definitions. Generally speaking, postmodern novels play with the (im)possibility of inherent meaning. Hutcheon describes postmodernism as a “contradictory phenomenon, one that uses and abuses, installs and then subverts, the very concepts it challenges” (1988, p. 3).

genre, historiographic metafiction challenge the notion that an individual's experience is universally representative, and they interrogate themes of authenticity, authority, and truth. One example of this is found in the novel *Here Lies Arthur* (2008), by Philip Reeve. The narrator Gwyna, along with Myrddin, is tasked with constructing tales about King Arthur that are distinctly different from how they actually happened. Many of her fabrications are those that readers may recognize from typical heroic representations of King Arthur in popular literature and films, such as *The Sword in the Stone* and *The Once and Future King*. Various narrative strategies allow the reader to follow events as they occurred in comparison to how they are later exaggerated, interpreted, and given meaning by witnesses. This historiographic metafictional novel examines eyewitness accounts, reliability of sources, and the role of "truth" in history.

The two focus texts of this article examine other aspects of historiography. *Into White Silence* (Eaton, 2008) embodies concerns about historiography through narrative structure and techniques, including the problems associated with selecting sources, authenticity and authentic representation of those sources, issues of partiality and unreliability, and the similarities between history and fiction. *The Lace Maker's Daughter* (Crew, 2005) overtly discusses issues of objectivity and the reliability of sources, as well as the meaning and purpose of history; it also explicitly asks questions about the possibility of knowing the whole truth about the past.

## Analysis

A key element of historiographic metafiction is that narrators are often aware of their role in constructing a history: they engage with historical research and evidence gathering, as well as the selection of source material and the positioning of that material to produce their desired version of history. Through narrators revealing and reflecting on their research practices and self-consciously (and subconsciously) interpreting what they find, readers are made aware of the complexities of constructing a narrative about the past.

The analysis in this article focuses on these narrators, their role in the production of history, and the research materials they use. In particular, I examine

metafictional strategies, the kinds of history the narrators are attempting to compose, and the authenticity and authority of their research materials. This article also looks at how the narrators undermine their own analyses and trustworthiness and how historiographic metafictional strategies undermine attempts to add closure and meaning to narratives about the past. Such novels invite young readers to consider their own roles as meaning makers—both of history and of their individual selves.

## Public and Private (Hi)stories

*Into White Silence* (Eaton, 2008) is a novel about explorations both external (of the Antarctic) and internal (of the self) as readers travel toward the South Pole with a present-day narrator and an historical subject. *Into White Silence* is narrated in the present day by Anthony Eaton who discovers a journal previously owned by Lieutenant William Downes, who describes his recruitment to undertake an expedition to map the east coast of Antarctica aboard a ship named *Raven* in 1921. Eaton is driven by a need to both uncover the past and tell the stories he unearths. He steals this historical journal from a library at Casey Station, on Antarctica, in the present day. Although he initially considers appropriating the stories within the journal as his own, Eaton becomes haunted by this thievery and decides to tell the truth about the author of the journal: "I have come to realise that the only way I can free myself [. . .] is to allow this story—his story—to be told" (p. iv).

Both Eaton (the narrator) and Edward Rourke (the Antarctica expedition leader) convey history as a means of validating action and securing enduring recognition or attention. In discussing Rourke's choice of exploration, Eaton notes that Rourke chooses a venture that does not follow in others' footsteps but is something new that will result in a comparison to others' explorations in history. In the initial stages of setting up the exploration, Rourke chooses a "site from which he would launch his own bid to become a part of Antarctic history" (p. 93). Later, Rourke instructs his crew, stating, "If we intend, gentlemen, to write our names into the history books alongside [Shackleton and Amundsen], then we too must have the fortitude to set our course forward, ever forward, without looking back" (p. 168). This assertion of pub-

lic, teleological history as an objective for, and validation of, the expedition aligns with traditional views of history as linear and purposeful.

However, this view of history as the pinnacle of success and as something to depend upon is delivered by two *unreliable* sources—Eaton and Rourke. Rourke is characterized as unreasonable, unfeeling, murderous, and insane, while Eaton, after several chapters of meticulously describing his research processes and the resources used, undermines his own authority by suggesting that readers should regard him with suspicion (p. 66). The doubt surrounding Eaton and Rourke calls into question the validity of their values in the texts. Readers may question the authenticity and authority of history, for example, if such unstable subjects value it so highly.

Tabby, the narrator of *The Lace Maker's Daughter* (Crew, 2005), by comparison, is interested in her family's private history. She is specifically interested in her grandmother, with whom she shares a name. She pesters her parents with questions, claiming she wants to write a history of *Camelot*, the name of the mansion her family lives in. However, her true purpose is to discover the truth behind rumours about her grandmother's confinement to a tower in *Camelot*, as well as the suspicious deaths of family members; Tabby herself has been confined to home and is no longer allowed to go to school after being accused of poisoning classroom pets and indirectly poisoning a child. Tabby states: "So began my obsession with my ancestor (my alter ego, my would-be self), Adelaide Bartlett" (p. 24), affirming that her interest in the past is very personally driven; she hopes to understand more about herself via the past. The intertwining of character and narrative (and intertextual<sup>2</sup>) voices demonstrates the construction of characters (and potentially, readers) in

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2. Both novels discussed here draw attention to literary history with intertextual references, such as to the character Ophelia of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Tennyson's poem "The Lady of Shalott," and Keats's poem "La Belle Dame sans Merci" in *The Lace Maker's Daughter*, and allusions to Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven" and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in *Into White Silence*. Both texts are rich with complex intertextual references, and while intertextuality in historiographic metafiction can work to close the gap between the past and the present, it is not within the purview of this article to interrogate this.

particular ways of seeing the world, foregrounding the extent to which characters interpret and are interpreted as the past is interpreted and given meaning in the present.

## Curating the Past

### Source Material and the Authoritative Researcher

The traditional historical novel most often reflects history as a "group of facts, which exists extratextually and which can be represented as it 'really was'" (Nünning, 2004, p. 362), whereas a historiographic metafictional novel foregrounds the construction of those seeming facts and the presentation and selection of resources chosen for the process of investigating and representing the past. Use of extraliterary devices is a key strategy for representing the process of doing research and choosing historical sources in fiction and can include historical documents and informational texts, diaries

and letters, and paratextual strategies such as footnotes, epigraphs, citations, and typographical experimentation (McCallum, 1999, p. 105). In traditional historical texts, these devices usually serve to indicate a reliable source; they assert an evidence-based historical authority and draw attention to the role of historians and researchers. Within historiographic metafiction, however, such elements are often destabilized or undermined by means of self-conscious, contradictory, or unreliable narration.

Referring to source material illustrates the piecing together of the past and the process of constructing a narrative or history of that past. It is this process that occupies the narrator in *Into White Silence*. As noted above, the novel is narrated in the first person by Anthony Eaton. Downes's perspective, as presented within the journal, is framed by Eaton's commentary and his further research into the histories of people discussed by Downes. Eaton's presentation of the journal is further supplemented by conventional historical

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materials that include a list of crewmembers aboard the *Raven*, diagrams of the ship and its compartments, and family trees for two main characters, Downes and O'Rourke. Eaton's text is typographically distinguished by a larger-sized font. The journal and its contents are represented as an authentic and authoritative source of information. The journal is then discussed by the narrator and framed as a narrative.

Eaton shows himself to be an authoritative and objective researcher by making various statements that serve to validate his research, despite a lack of evidence. He uses phrases such as "it would appear" and "it is worth noting" to indicate he is drawing conclusions based on his research, rather than simply filling in the gaps. This lends credibility to the narrator as pseudo-historian and validates a position of authority. Furthermore, the language suggests an objective stance to the journal rather than an attempt to impose meaning on it.

Eaton also directly presents the voices of Downes's family and friends via letters to validate the story within the journal, as well as newspaper clippings hailing Downes as a war hero, which positions readers to idealize Downes. These strategies work to demonstrate the narrator's research and evidence-based approach to establishing a history of the exploration to Antarctica aboard the *Raven*. They appear to present Eaton as objective and humble in choosing to represent rather than appropriate Downes's story, as he openly admits to considering:

My intention was to use it to form a work around the basis of Downes' experience that I could claim as my own fiction. It seemed too good an opportunity to pass up; [. . .] [However,] each time I began to write 'My Antarctic book'—as I came to refer to it—I'd find myself a mere thousand or so words into the first chapter and unable to continue, haunted by the feeling I was doing Downes and those who perished with him a disservice that flew in the face of the Almighty. (p. iii)

By including this description of his intentions, the nar-

rator seems to represent the tale as it happened and to authenticate it with his research and incorporation of materials found during that research. However, while there appears to be a multiplicity of voices in the texts, this multiplicity is governed by an overt narrative voice. That is, Eaton *imposes* his authority on the journal by intruding and disrupting its progression.

The apparent purpose of the novel is to present items from the past, but the intrusive nature of the narrator redirects attention from the historical sources and instead privileges the narrator over the historical source. *Into White Silence's* challenge to textual, authorial, and historical authority resonates with wider concerns about authority and power in young adult literature as a whole, which tends to "interrogate social constructions, foregrounding the relationship between the society and the individual" (Trites, 2000, p. 20). Young adult historiographic metafiction such as *Into White Silence* expand on this by also interrogating history as a construction and examining elements of novels that blur the boundaries between history and fiction, past and present.

### Narrating Eyewitness Accounts: Authenticity and Inconsistency

In *The Lace Maker's Daughter* (Crew, 2005), Tabby aims to access and witness the past through the eyes of those who experienced it in order to discover the history surrounding her great grandparents' and grandmother's mysterious deaths decades ago. Eyewitness accounts are represented through the point of view of nine characters present at the time of the deaths and are framed by Tabby's first-person narration. She is able to access the past through psychometry; finding paraphernalia belonging to her grandmother, Adelaide Bartlett, Tabby touches these objects to psychically access the past. This way, Tabby claims, she may witness events herself and therefore witness, without interference, the past as it was perceived by those who previously handled the objects in question. Describing psychometry, Tabby states:

What I am saying is this: give me an object (a pair of scissors, say, or a knife) that has been used by someone previously unknown to me and I can tell you the age, gender, etc. of its principal owner/user. [. . .] [M]y head positively reels with the stories that object releases. I swear that I can hear the voice of the owner. Enter into his thoughts. Speak and write in his voice. (p. 6)

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The focus in the text is not on the historical authenticity of the objects but rather Tabby's capacity to access history through these objects, in particular whether it is possible to access and understand the past objectively without interpreting the events and their significance.

Tabby uses historical artefacts as authoritative sources of information (though the information is gained supernaturally). The first set of artefacts that Tabby examines are an embroidery needle and three handkerchiefs that have names embroidered on them: "the names of the owners were Whittaker, a doctor; Missingham, a solicitor; and Buckley, a pastor. Like Adelaide, they had lived [. . .] long, long ago" (p. 24). The chapter following Tabby's discovery is from Missingham's point of view, so determined by the opening sentence: "We met, we three—Buckley, a pastor; Whittaker, a doctor; and myself, a man of the law" (p. 27).

There are a number of issues here that cast doubt on the authenticity of Tabby's information, including the unlikelihood that each person's occupation was embroidered along with his/her name. The language implies that Missingham is deliberately conveying information to Tabby rather than Tabby simply witnessing events; for example, Missingham clarifies for an implied audience who the "we" are. It also suggests Tabby had prior knowledge of these people. The proceeding chapter is from Whittaker's point of view, continuing the conversation about Adelaide Bartlett, and the chapter after that, from Buckley's point of view one week later. Conveniently for Tabby, then, the stories accessed through the objects are revealed sequentially about particular events that interest her. Readers may be left wondering how Tabby is able to source such convenient information—from the precise period of time that she is investigating—if she aims to write history objectively and without personal influence.

The eyewitness accounts related by Tabby are narrated accounts of individual experiences. That is, while the different versions of events are apparently directly related eyewitness accounts, each tale contains character self-descriptions and introductions, as though these witnesses are aware of an audience. At the beginning of another account later in the text, a character named Rufus states, "Although my companions, Bruce and Charlie, made me welcome at

*Camelot*—and the young mistress, too, in her peculiar way—I must say that I never felt at home there. And I am not referring to the fact that I slept in a barn" (p. 129). Although Tabby aims to view the event through the eyes of the witness via her gift of psychometry, the past tense narration and self-assessment suggest a constructed narrative rather than a firsthand experiencing of events. The effect of this is twofold: first, it draws attention to Tabby's initial dilemma about the relationship between truth and stories, illustrating the historiographic metafictional concern with the interpretive nature of history and source material; second, it suggests that Rufus is relaying his experiences in hindsight, as opposed to Tabby experiencing them firsthand.

These examples highlight problems faced by historians, in particular how, in interpreting and making sense of artefacts, the historian may ascribe them with meaning. Tabby imposes significance on the witness accounts and unintentionally blurs the past with the present when she realizes that her own experiences in the present seem to be influencing witness accounts in the past. For example, in Part III, Tabby narrates an encounter with her mother over breakfast: unhappy with her breakfast, she says, "braised kidneys and French toast—aaarrrrggghhhh!" (p. 177). Five pages later in "Elisa's" account (derived from an object psychometrically by Tabby), Elisa says to another character: "Do forgive me, Mr Tyle, [. . .] it can only be the braised kidneys that I had for breakfast" (p. 182). This suggests that Tabby's motives and experiences are embedded within the accounts that she is aiming to replicate objectively, which blurs the past with the present. These occurrences signal unreliability in these eyewitness accounts and Tabby as an authoritative source on the past—and her own story.

Tabby, however, is open about her unreliability as narrator. She is aware that her search for the history of her ancestor and the piecing together of her research is personally driven and interpreted. And after

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introducing herself and her family history and outlining the circumstances by which she became interested in her ancestor, she states:

And so began [. . .] my commitment to both discovering and telling her story. Whether in its entirety or otherwise remained to be seen. The truth behind any story is always hard to find. But I had to try. Even if that meant embellishing the truth. I mean, I wouldn't exactly lie. At least, no more so than is expected of a writer. Which comes naturally. To me, anyway. (pp. 24–25)

Tabby immediately blurs fiction and history by aiming to tell stories as well as the truth, yet concedes that together the two objectives provide for an ambivalent,

if not untrustworthy, narrative.

Tabby has an interest in discovering the truth behind historical rumours about murder and poison and the particular history of her grandmother. It is her hope that this investigation into the past will lend itself to her own search for self because she has been accused of using poison. She searches for eyewitness accounts to validate her own theories and to reveal the truths

of the past, further instilling significance in the value of individual experiences both as historical account and important access point to the past. She comments on the processes of writing her family history, posing three questions:

Question Number 1: IS IT POSSIBLE TO THINK ABOUT A *SUBJECTIVE* EXPERIENCE LIKE *PSYCHOMETRY OBJECTIVELY*? (And are *italics* subjective or objective, being leading in their intent?) . . . Question Number 2: CAN *SUBJECTIVITY* BE TRUSTED? (Might I be at cross-purposes with my art? Or misinterpreting it—deliberately, or otherwise—to suit my own ends? Or might my art be bullshitting me?) . . . Question Number 3: IS WHAT I RECORD (THEREFORE) FACT OR FICTION? (And does it matter?) (pp. 240–241)

This self-reflection suggests that her accounts are untrue and distinctly blurs boundaries between history

and fiction. Tabby's questionable influence on the accounts results in a complex narrative that is indicative not only of the ambiguous skill of psychometry, which Tabby openly discusses, but also the contradictions and contentions of history made visible through the narrative devices of historiographic metafiction. As the unstable nature of history as truth or fiction is foregrounded, readers are encouraged to think about the possibility (or impossibility) of a complete and stable sense of the past.

## Closure and Meaning in Historiographic Metafiction

Meaning in and of historical events and persons is not inherent in the past. It is imposed by historians, researchers, and chroniclers through strategies—such as ordering events and identifying cause and effect—that attempt to explain and interpret the past for those who did not experience it. As Perry Nodelman (1990) suggests, history is “an art of constructing plots, the meanings emerging from the causal connections that the plots create between events” (p. 71). Meaning and significance are embedded through teleological processes, generating closure and implying closed accounts of the past. However, historiographic metafiction works to unsettle notions of closed, meaningful, and objective accounts of the past, subsequently undermining values of authenticity, truth, and authority. The past is not “closed,” and truth and meaning are not “discovered.” The possibility of resistance to teleology and closure in young adult texts works against many assumptions and themes prominent in adolescent genres, particularly the teleological function behind maturation themes.

Such metafictional characteristics, according to Koss (2009), “require readers to think critically in order to achieve comprehension” (p. 77). In both texts discussed here, the metafictional strategy of disruptive narrators provides opportunities to reflect on the story- or history-telling process. This method can push readers out of a text, making them aware of the atypical structure of the story. Authors and narrators not only intrude within the text to reflect on narrative processes but also comment on the meaning and purpose of the text. Such commentary on story and historical significance in *The Lace Maker's Daughter* and *Into White Silence* disrupts closure at the end of the text;

the narrators themselves are dissatisfied with the lack of information available to them and reveal “what really happened” in a nonlinear fashion.

In *The Lace Maker's Daughter*, for instance, Tabby directly comments on the level of closure in the text. The final chapter begins with Tabby's frustration at having not recovered all the information necessary for a complete account of her grandmother's death. She states:

I could think of plenty of things that were more important than that. Eg:

1. (a) What happened to Adelaide's baby?  
(b) Why didn't anybody even think to ask?
2. What did she call it?
3. Who was the father?
4. (a) What did Adelaide die of?  
(b) Was she murdered?
5. (a) Did Adelaide murder her parents?  
(b) If so, why?

And so on and so on. (p. 239)

Tabby's questions effectively refuse any closure. This suggests to readers that history is not closed and that it can only be known as far as the past is available via textual remains and interpretations. It also proposes that the past is only significant and meaningful insofar as it is valued by its reader or chronicler.

At the closing of *The Lace Maker's Daughter*, Tabby addresses the reader and suggests that trying to create a history of her family's past was pointless, stating that her ancestor's story “was none of our business” (p. 248). Debra, the housekeeper, asks Tabby, “And are yer goin' to write her story?” Tabby replies, “No, I'm not. There's nothing to tell” (p. 249). This comment is contradictory because much of her ancestor's history is indeed revealed in the text, simply not the particular accounts of the past that Tabby hoped to discover. By stating that there is “nothing to tell,” Tabby suggests that the information she revealed to readers was uninteresting and meaningless because it provided no closure to *her* as an individual.

In her “Summation of Conclusions,” Tabby surmises that altering the truth to improve expression and language in her stories “lead[s] to *faction* (a combination of *fact* and *fiction*).” Tabby's constructed history of her grandmother leaves her to conclude that whether history or story, fact or fiction, it is without purpose. She recognizes and is frustrated that the past

is not comprised of complete stories but that narratives are constructed from the available information. Instead, Tabby chooses to retell this history as a story of herself, the truth of her own circumstances rather than a family history. Readers have seen how investigations into the past have shaped Tabby's sense of self, even if (or perhaps *because*) they did not result in absolute truths.

Likewise, the narrator of *Into White Silence* sees a lack of information about the past as problematic. He claims there were “holes in [Downes's] narrative which needed to be filled” (Eaton, 2008, p. iv). Eaton's statement suggests that the journal has, or should have, a full story, complete with purpose, beginning, middle, and end. The journal dictates the tale of the trip to Antarctica, the mysterious disappearances of the crew, and the appearance of an Ice Man when the *Raven* is lodged in the ice, but the entries do not reveal whether the missing men chose to leave, whether they were taken and rescued or murdered by said Ice Man. In the last entry Eaton makes available to readers, Downes states:

I have put together what supplies I can carry. With some luck, I will find the others at the coast and we might muddle through until summer, and then who knows what? Either way, my journey aboard this ship is finished. Outside on the ice a perfect morning is upon us, and so I too shall step out, into white silence. (Eaton, 2008, p. 385)

Although the entry suggests an ending to Downes's journey aboard the *Raven*, the linear structure of his story is interrupted throughout the text by the narrator, which in turn disrupts a complete sense of closure.

Eaton reveals to readers that Downes's family never discovered how or when he died, which highlights the incompleteness of his history before the reader discovers it in a linear, progressive fashion. In the “Author's Introduction,” Eaton refers to Downes and “those that perished with him” and “his ill-fated crewmates,” discouraging any hopes for a happy ending. Eaton's commentary on the journal disrupts anticipation of closure, as the open-endedness of Downes's journal is revealed before the closing entry is made available in the text.

The lack of closure in both novels is typical in the genre of historiographic metafiction, which aims to disrupt fixed, single, and centralized meaning in narratives about the past. The lack of resolution prompts



a number of questions: Is this really what happened? What happens next? What does it mean? As meaning and closure are disrupted in the novels, significance remains indeterminate.

## Implications for Practice

### Narrative Constructions of the Past

Schwebel (2011) suggests that “a central strength of historical fiction as curriculum is that it allows adolescents to scrutinize historical narrative as a construction” (p. 138). Historiographic metafiction is particularly useful for this purpose, as a central aim of the genre is to draw attention to the narrative construction of history. A common concern about historical fictions in the classroom is that they may contain incorrect information, outdated information, or biases of the author. The combining of self-reflexive strategies with a critique of history in young adult literature can provide readers positions from which to question the authority of history, historians, and historical sources, as well as other power relations experienced by adolescents. The significance, then, of young adult historiographic metafiction is that it can afford readers the place and space to view and potentially critique those social and political relationships that influence their own construction of identity during adolescence.

Traditional historical fictions are imaginative stories that incorporate facts of the past—facts that are subject to interpretation. The subjects of the novels described in this article, however, are aware that they are creating a history and discuss the difficulties in constructing a narrative about the past. As such, historiographic metafiction<sup>3</sup> can be useful examples in the classroom for examining:

- the authority and trustworthiness of historians or narrators as historians;
- the evidence used to construct a history: how it is positioned, interpreted, and amended to achieve a certain outcome;
- any agendas the historians set out to achieve;

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3. Other texts that may be examined in this way include *Backtrack* (1986) and *A Step off the Path* (1985) by Peter Hunt, *Strange Objects* (Crew, 1990), *The Complete Maus: A Survivor's Tale* (Spiegelman, 2003/1996), *Here Lies Arthur* (Reeve, 2008/2007), *Monster* (Myers, 1999), and *Winger* (Smith, 2013).

- how the narrator's analysis and self-reflection impact readers' understandings of the text and/or affect their view of this history;
- what language is used by narrators to make their historical argument 'authoritative';
- how narrators claim to remain objective and transparent when every investigation into the past begins with a purpose.

By drawing attention to the narrative elements of history, readers can be made aware of the narrative processes of plot, point of view, the power of the narrator, and the effects of closure, as well as how these elements of fiction are used within the discipline of history. In turn, young adult readers might be encouraged to take a critical stance toward history, as well as historical narratives. These strategies invite readers to deconstruct the processes used to create histories and narratives about the past by tracing the historical research process while contradictorily setting up the narrators as reliable and untrustworthy.

### A Medley of Meanings

The novels paradoxically suggest that stories need to be told, and truths and knowledge need to be discovered, while also illustrating that the past is not closed. Further, an account of the past does not mean that it is complete and that all information is available or accurate—there are multiple interpretations, perspectives, and values that may be derived from some aspects of the past from which to create a multitude of histories. As characters (and readers) are shown to question or function within this complex space, they engage with meaning construction.

While the narrators in both novels discussed here reflect on their own intentions to write a story, through an understanding of the past and the history of specific individuals, they also experience the processes of constructing a past and concerns with constructing a sense of self in relation to the past. In turn, each of the texts offers positions from which to derive other or multiple meanings, thus engaging readers in the production of meaning and valuing *acts* of narration and interpretation as highly as their products.

## Conclusion

Allan (2012) notes that historiographic metafiction “self-consciously remind readers that, while events

did occur in the [. . .] past, these events are named and constituted as historical facts through processes of selection [. . .] and thus need to be subjected to scrutiny” (p. 97). Historiographic metafiction introduces readers to the selective nature of historiography and highlights the level of control exerted by historians, narrators, and chronicles over the textual remains of the past. In the classroom, they can be used to develop readers’ understanding of the complexities of history as a discipline and the struggles of historians to present an objective and accurate account of the past.

The novels discussed in this article highlight the narrative construction of the past, as well as the effect of narration and the narrator or chronicler in historical accounts. They also imply value in accessing and interrogating the past, despite the impossibility of being able to fully know or objectively view and understand the past. For the young adult reader, these contradictions may reflect his or her own existence between childhood and adulthood. By problematizing the authoritative subject of history, the young adult reader is positioned to be aware that other concepts, such as adulthood for example, are similarly neither stable nor absolute. History in *The Lace Maker’s Daughter* and *Into White Silence* is both valorised and interrogated. Witnessing the production of history and its narrative processes in historiographic metafiction invites readers to be a part of the process. Engaging with such novels can provide opportunities for young adult readers to critically examine their own experiences and understandings of the past.

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