

# The Author as Editor

## Jordan Zinovich's *Gabriel Dumont* in the Archives

What difference does it make who is speaking?

—MICHEL FOUCAULT

The historical novel has always been a problematic literary genre. Because of the extreme difficulty, if not impossibility, of separating the factual from the fictive in the same narrative, writers and critics have tended to dismiss it for its ostensible impurity, its mongrelization.<sup>1</sup> Even if one does not share Alessandro Manzoni's conviction that the historical novel is part of the "false genre" that comprises all works that "try to mix history and invention, whatever their form" (81), it is difficult not to notice that it has unique problems of its own. The most significant of these is that, unlike "purer" kinds of fiction, it appears to have a referential component. Jonathan Dee, for example, asserts with some cogency that "there is something fundamentally compromised" about a type of literary work "whose characters—their physical appearances, their fates, the actions by which they will be remembered—are known to us before we even open the book" (81). Another troubling aspect of the historical novel is the proclivity of its practitioners to borrow copiously from found texts, particularly non-literary ones. The dangers inherent in such a procedure are conspicuously evident in Jordan Zinovich's *Gabriel Dumont in Paris*, a "novel history" that relies so extensively on documentary evidence that perhaps it should have been entitled *Gabriel Dumont in the Archives*.

In the last three or four decades, there has been a veritable explosion of historical novels, sometimes dealing with rather recent issues or barely dead historical figures. Surprisingly, the return of this generic "misfit" that refuses to vanish (Rigney 20) has elicited remarkably little critical attention. Part of the reason for this void, of course, has to do with the conceptual verities of

the day. The postmodernist tendency to conflate fiction and nonfiction eliminates the need to investigate the nature of a hybrid beast that purports to combine those two entities. Moreover, the few scholars who have focused on the historical novel have not been as illuminating in their forays into the field as one might have wished. Linda Hutcheon is a case in point.

Hutcheon has written extensively on the reflexive historical novel, which she terms historiographic metafiction. However, there are some major contradictions in her work. For instance, she claims that “*history* does not exist except as a text. . . . We cannot know the past except through its texts: its documents, its evidence, even its eye-witness accounts are *texts*” (*Poetics* 16; Hutcheon’s italics). Yet she then argues that even though “we can ‘know’ that past today only through its texts,” it “really did exist” (128). What she fails to elucidate is how one is supposed to navigate one’s way from a textualized past to the real one, given that these are ontologically distinct realms. Similarly, Hutcheon states that “[h]istory (like realist fiction) is *made* by its writer, even if events are made to seem to speak for themselves” (“Canadian” 231-32; Hutcheon’s italics).<sup>2</sup> Yet, again, she continues to talk about “the truth and lies of the historical record” and how someone like Robert Coover in *The Public Burning* does so much “violence to the known history of the Rosenbergs” (*Poetics* 114, 115). This would seem to be a pseudo-dilemma. Constructivism, such as hers, does not permit one to deal with historical truth (Doležel 248-53), only with aesthetic concerns.<sup>3</sup>

More pertinent to the study of the contemporary historical novel is the work of Dorrit Cohn. As a narratologist, Cohn is primarily interested in liberating fiction from the unwelcome embrace of the postmodernist concept of universal narrativity. As she writes in the preface to *The Distinction of Fiction*, her book “aims to show that fictional narrative is unique in its potential for crafting a self-enclosed universe ruled by formal patterns that are ruled out in all other forms of discourse” (vii). Therefore, while Hutcheon discerns no crucial distinctions between fictional and nonfictional discourse, Cohn stresses the “essential differences” between the two (9). For her, the central and defining characteristic of fiction is that it is a non-referential narrative that “itself creates the world to which it refers by referring to it” (13). Historical narrative, in contrast, must always possess a “referential” element, some relation to the external world in general and the archive in particular (112). It is true that Cohn concludes that the historical novel is not a cross between fiction and historiography but simply fiction. Still, she acknowledges that it remains a “generic borderline case” (116) and warns that one should not

“lose sight of the peculiarity of the genre,” a singularity evident in the “response of a reader who identifies a work as a historical novel” (158). In fact, Cohn sees proof of the hybridity of the historical novel in the ubiquity in the genre of such “referential apparatus[es]” as prefaces and afterwords, paratexts that she notes are becoming increasingly common and merit further study (115).

The matter of referentiality in the historical novel, as in discourse in general, remains “a vexing problem” for Cohn (112) and many other scholars.<sup>4</sup> Yet there is at least one situation in which referentiality appears to be unquestionable: when a literary work reproduces another extant text. Zinovich’s novel is replete with instances of this kind of referentiality. As its title suggests, *Gabriel Dumont in Paris* explores the life of Louis Riel’s second military commander—the first one being the once beloved but now largely forgotten Ambroise Lépine—although rather little of it takes place in the French capital. Like the overwhelming majority of the many novels, poems, and plays that have been written on Dumont since the publication of Joseph Kinsey Howard’s *Strange Empire* in 1952, it is a paean to the “prince of the prairies” (Howard 358). For Zinovich, Dumont is not just a master buffalo hunter and a brilliant military tactician. He is also an intellectual of sorts, who “knows French and many different Indian dialects,” and a most devoted husband, whose world appears to revolve around the formidable and “very beautiful” Madeleine Wilkie Dumont (3, 13).<sup>5</sup> Most significantly, he is a selfless patriot who devotes his life to his nation and who eventually clashes with Canada only because he and the Métis are betrayed by religious leaders and government officials. Zinovich’s Dumont declares, “I didn’t want to go to war. But when my people spoke, we were ignored [. . .]. Other than fighting, our only choice was to watch Canada take our children’s future from them” (92). Furthermore, he elaborates, the word “rebellion did not have the tragic implications then that it has now.” The Saskatchewan Valley Métis were inspired by the “very peaceful rebellion” at Red River in 1869-70, but Ottawa overreacted and they had no other option but to respond in kind (94-95). In short, the Métis did not initiate the hostilities; they merely defended themselves.

One of the more unusual facets of Zinovich’s novel is that, almost solely among recent aesthetic representations of Dumont, it manages to celebrate its protagonist without denigrating his “chiliastic” leader (Vanderhaeghe, “Novel” 47). In their disparate attempts to wrest Dumont from under Riel’s long shadow, writers like George Woodcock and Alfred Silver go as far as to have Dumont surmise that the Métis defeat at Batoche in 1885 was part

of Riel's grand design, his means to "fulfill" his mission (Woodcock, *Six* 107). As Silver has Madeleine Dumont<sup>6</sup> say to her husband in *Lord of the Plains* (after the narrator notes that she was "definitely past caring" about Riel), "You don't get to be a saint without getting martyred" (399). Zinovich's Dumont, in contrast, is extremely deferential toward "the only man who could seize the attention of the [Canadian] Government" (70). He does come to question Riel's military strategy and at one point determines that he can "wait no longer for the will of God to save us" (133). Yet Dumont displays very little rancour toward the so-called Prophet of the New World. By the end of the novel, he affirms that "Riel surrendered to save the rest of us. He offered himself as a sacrifice in our place" (161). Indeed, "Riel died a saint and a martyr. He took nothing for himself and gave his life for his nation" (178).

The most striking aspect of *Gabriel Dumont in Paris*, though, is not the tale it tells but the way it tells it. So widespread is its dependence on other texts that it raises the question as to when a writer ceases to be the author of a work and becomes its editor or compiler. In a comprehensive review of the novel, Guy Vanderhaeghe maintains that Zinovich uses "the conceit that the story is told by others" (47).<sup>7</sup> However, I would argue that this is less a conceit than the reality—a considerable portion of the narrative is produced by individuals other than the titular author. The novel opens with a prologue in which the historian Auguste-Henri de Trémaudan says that he has been trying to answer the question, "Who was Gabriel Dumont?" He then adds that he has not been able to solve the enigma for the reader, and that "[m]uch of the manuscript that follows is Gabriel's story as he himself told it to my friend M. [Georges] Demanche," who is ostensibly the first editor of the work we are reading (xiii).<sup>8</sup> But, echoing the strategy that Zinovich himself enunciates in his afterword of relying on "the documentary record" whenever possible (183), Trémaudan fills the gaps in the Demanche account with numerous other texts by a variety of authors.

*Gabriel Dumont in Paris* is actually a mosaic of published and unpublished texts. It incorporates documents, memoirs, and poems by everyone from Dumont and Riel to the Métis bard Pierre Falcon, the British soldier and adventurer William F. Butler, buffalo hunters, missionaries, government officials, and even Eric Nicol's own Constable Francis Dickens of the North West Mounted Police. There is so much quotation in the novel that space limitations do not allow me to enumerate every single case. Thus, I will focus on only three examples in order to give a sense of Zinovich's

method of composition. In each instance, I will reproduce a passage from Zinovich's novel and then the original, so that we may determine what changes he makes (or does not make) to it.

The first text is by John Kerr; it is the work that opens the novel proper, and Zinovich duly references it, as he does all his source texts. Kerr was one of the rare whites who hunted with Dumont and, in the mid-1930s, published a memoir about his days with "Riel's right-hand-man in the rebellion of '85" (Kerr 53). Even almost fifty years after the Saskatchewan conflict, Kerr remains utterly sympathetic to Dumont, which might explain the prominence Zinovich gives to his account:

Gabriel was about thirty-four years of age when I first met him in 1872, but I initially believed him to be much older because of his appearance. He is of medium height, square of shoulder, with a homely but kind face and his chin adorned with a scraggly beard. He is by no means huge, as many writers have depicted him, and could not at that time have weighed more than 165 or 170 pounds. His father, *Ai-caw-pow*, and his uncle, *Ska-kas-ta-ow* (these are phonetic renderings from the Cree), were, however, over six feet in height and heavily built. (Zinovich 2-3)

This powerful half-breed must have been 34 years of age in 1872, but I judged him to be about forty because of his thickset appearance. He was of medium height, square of shoulder, with a homely but kind face, and his chin was adorned with a scraggly beard. He was by no means huge, as so many writers have depicted him, and would not have weighed at that time more than 165 or 170 pounds. His father, *Ai-caw-pow*, and his uncle, *Ska-kas-ta-ow*, (these are phonetic spellings!) were over six feet in height, however, and heavily built. (Kerr 53)

Another set of passages reveals a similar degree of indebtedness:

He is a man of unquestioned courage whose word is heeded at the council above all others, even those many years his senior. (Zinovich 3)

He was a man of unquestioned courage, whose word was heeded at the council board above that of all others, some of whom were many years his senior. (Kerr 57)

Zinovich is in such agreement with Kerr that, at the very outset, he devotes almost four whole pages to Kerr's recollections of the "remarkable Métis who, with just treatment, might have become one of the most loyal citizens of Canada" (Kerr 59).

Though also a memoir, the second text that I will examine is quite different from Kerr's, as befits the work (oral testimony) of a very different individual. Norbert Welsh was an Anglo-Protestant Métis buffalo hunter and trader. Either because of social-religious divisions or for some personal reason, he elected not to support the predominantly Franco-Catholic Métis cause in 1885. In fact, Dumont and Riel did not consider Welsh "trustworthy"

and had him briefly arrested under the suspicion that he was a spy for the Mounted Police (Zinovich 96; Weekes 151-54). In any case, in the early 1930s, Welsh told his life story to the journalist Mary Weekes, who then turned it into a book entitled *The Last Buffalo Hunter*. The view that Welsh provides of Dumont differs radically not only from Kerr's but also from his general image as the consummate "man of action," a leader famous for his boundless "cunning and courage" (Woodcock, *Gabriel Dumont* 7, 165). In the process of describing an incident at a buffalo hunt in which the chief of Welsh's brigade refuses to let Dumont's group join it, since the latter is believed to be infected with smallpox, Welsh calls into question even Dumont's vaunted leadership:

Dumont was not a good chief, and I don't know how he got his reputation as one. He could not control his Indians. When the whole brigade arrived, we had to use our guns to keep them out of our camp. We kept them a half a mile away from us, but they came at night and washed their sores in our springs. (Zinovich 34)

Then the whole brigade arrived and wanted to come into our camp. Our Chief told us to take our guns and prevent them from doing this. We were ordered to shoot the first man that came to our camp. We kept Dumont's brigade half a mile away from us. But the beggars would come at night and wash their running sores in our spring water. Dumont was no kind of a leader, and I don't know how he got his reputation as one. He could not control his Indians. (Welsh qtd. in Weekes 74)

Perhaps because of Welsh's obvious animosity toward Dumont, Zinovich is far more selective in his use of Welsh's text than of Kerr's. Still, the most significant correction he makes to Welsh's words is that, when the former buffalo hunter states, "Alcohol was the only treatment they knew of for smallpox" (qtd. in Weekes, 75), Zinovich changes "they" to "we" (35).

The final text that I will discuss is a somewhat curious one, not so much because of what it says about Dumont but because of its own textual nature. Except for the occasional poem, all the other archival texts included in Zinovich's novel are first-hand accounts by historical figures who either knew Dumont personally or were in some way involved with the North-West in the late nineteenth century. The exception is the contribution by Francis Dickens. Charles Dickens's third son served with the Mounted Police for over a decade and played an inglorious role in the surrender of Fort Pitt. Not surprisingly, Eric Nicol's *Dickens of the Mounted* depicts him as an English boob-in-the-woods who is terrified of becoming "known as Dickens the Lesser" (53). But Zinovich treats Nicol's farce as if it were a his-

torical document of the same order as the Weekes/Welsh book. The material from Nicol appears in a letter by the younger Dickens in which he describes his unplanned introduction to Dumont:

How the man spotted me I cannot guess, but before I knew it he was standing over me. I scrambled up, brushing off my trousers. He was a noble-looking savage, barrel-chested and wearing a fringed hide jacket decorated with handsome needlework floral designs in the Métis style. Long, dark hair curled down his neck. His face was nut-brown and unwrinkled, and his blazing eyes would have daunted a panther. He seemed both resolute and faintly cavalier, clearly a Métis, but one such as I had never met before. (Zinovich 60-61)

How the man could have spotted me so quickly in the tricky slant of sunset, I cannot guess. But in no time at all he was standing over me, as I scrambled to my feet, brushing straw off my britches. He had a mien that inspired deference in the beholder: of sturdy, even barrel-chested, build, in his fringed hide jacket, handsomely decorated with needlework floral designs in the Métis style; long black dark hair curling down his pillared neck in a natural ruff of courtly vestment; and a face nut-brown yet unwrinkled, in which blazed two eyes that would have daunted the panther, however famished.

. . . He was clearly a Métis, but a Métis such as I had not met on his own turf. (Nicol 70).

Zinovich's treatment of Francis Dickens's letter has led to some speculation as to whether his novel is a "postmodern" work, written in a spirit of self-conscious irreverence and transgression, or whether Zinovich simply fails to recognize that "Nicol's book is an unabashed tongue-in-cheek hoax" (Vanderhaeghe, "Novel" 46). Perhaps this latter surmise gains some credibility from the fact that the back cover of Nicol's work identifies it as "Fiction/History." But surely other clues (apart from Nicol's reputation as a humorist) should alert one to the farcical nature of *Dickens of the Mounted*. After all, it bears the subtitle *The Astounding Long-Lost Letters of Inspector F. Dickens NWMP 1874-1886*, and opens with a jarring yet familiar Dickensian first line: "It was not the best of times, it was not the worst of times, it was Ottawa" (21).

Zinovich's wholesale incorporation of other people's texts into his novel, as even this small sample should illustrate, raises a score of both aesthetic and ethical issues. As stated earlier, he usually identifies his sources. Therefore, he does not violate "the ethics of literary quotation" in the same way that someone like Rudy Wiebe does in the short story "Games for Queen Victoria," in which Wiebe stealthily borrows words from William F. Butler not in order to better understand the British officer "but to distance

himself from his source text” (Braz 103, 91). Yet, given that so much of Zinovich’s novel is written by others, one cannot help but wonder who is really its author. I will return to the question of authorship, but I would like first to address some aesthetic concerns in *Gabriel Dumont in Paris*, concerns that underline not only the differences between fictional and nonfictional discourse but also the inherent hybridity of the historical novel.

In his review of Zinovich’s novel, Guy Vanderhaeghe contends that while the work “achieves a rich evocation of a time and a people,” it fails to give us “the inner Dumont.” There are several reasons why the title character “seems more an archetype of his people than an individual with his own perplexities and certainties” (Vanderhaeghe, “Novel” 47). The most crucial of these is that, despite all the emphasis on his “first-class mind” and his ability to express himself with “extraordinary ease” (Zinovich 71), Dumont does not appear to have much self-knowledge. His lack of introspection is evident in his propensity to become enraptured by Riel’s words. Dumont often recalls nostalgically some speech that he witnessed the politician-mystic deliver and tends to perceive him as “a visionary” who saw “farther into the future than I did” (81, 77). Consequently, when he claims that at Batoche Riel is merely “a political leader, but in other matters I am the chief here” (87), he is not overly persuasive. In fact, judging by his obeisance to Riel, one cannot help but deduce that Dumont too comes to believe that, while the Métis people have become “a cart with only one wheel” (73), the missing wheel is not the buffalo hunter but the formally educated hero of Red River.

If anything, Dumont’s want of self-knowledge becomes even more apparent in his utter obliviousness to the degree to which he and the Métis are driven by their own nationalism. Throughout the novel we are told how the protagonist is famous for enforcing “the ‘Law of the Plains,’ as the rules of the [buffalo] hunt were called” (3). Yet there are several indications in the text that this is not so much a pan-Prairie code as a Métis one. For instance, the Cree Chief Big Bear supposedly chooses not to support the Métis in 1885 because he has not forgiven Dumont for humiliating him publicly. Years earlier when Big Bear refused to stop his band from chasing a buffalo herd without the consent of Dumont’s larger group, as required by tradition, Dumont “grabbed a gun and jabbed him in the stomach with the butt of it” (39–40). However, it is highly unlikely that a seasoned leader like Big Bear would not be conversant with the rules of the buffalo hunt, unless these are really Métis ordinances. Dumont also proclaims that he is fighting on



behalf of a “united front” of First Nations and Métis against “the White invasion” from the East (72). Yet he frequently boasts about his people’s many victories over First Nations, especially the ferocious Sioux, who had vowed to drive all the “[w]agon men” off the plains (7). When a Cree man tries to justify stealing Madeleine Dumont’s horse by saying that Cree “law obliged their allies to supply their best horses to the warrior going to fight,” Dumont replies unequivocally: “I do not follow your laws” (15). Finally, in an official letter to Sir John A. Macdonald, a committee headed by Dumont attempts to persuade the prime minister that the reason the Métis have a legitimate claim to the territory around Batoche is that they have “so long held this country as its masters and so often defended it against the Indians at the price of our blood” (67). In other words, Dumont’s Métis seem to be a rather autonomous group.

Another reason that Zinovich is unable to capture the inner Dumont, though, has less to do with the psychological makeup of his protagonist than with the formal structure of his work. Since so much of *Gabriel Dumont in Paris* is not fiction at all but a motley collection of third-party documentary accounts, Zinovich often does not have access to the mind of his hero. One of the signposts of fictionality, Cohn argues, is that only fiction “allows a narrator to know what cannot be known in the real world and in narratives that target representations of the real world: the inner life of his figures” (16).<sup>9</sup> As she asks, “what ‘serious’ discourse ever quoted the thoughts of a person other than the speaker’s own?” (117). That is, for Cohn, novelists (and other fiction writers) have privileges that historians do not, such as the ability to enter the heads of their characters. But this is the very power that Zinovich relinquishes when he nonchalantly imports other people’s texts into his novel, a decision that perhaps explains why Vanderhaeghe feels that, when it comes to Zinovich’s portrayal of the private Dumont, his “‘novel history’ reads more like history than novel” (47).

Needless to say, Zinovich’s reliance on found texts also has major ramifications regarding the authorship of his novel. A key distinction between fiction and nonfiction, as narratologists are wont to stress, is the author-narrator function. It is a given that a nonfictional narrative has “a stable univocal origin, that its narrator is identical to a real person: the author named on its title page” (Cohn 123-24). The narrator in a work of fiction, in contrast, is not the author but just a character. In the words of Paul Hernadi, “fictional narratives demand, historical narratives preclude, a distinction between the narrator and the implied author” (252; qtd. in Cohn

124). The problem with Zinovich's novel, in terms of its authorship, is precisely that his characters are not characters but real people. More specifically, they are not the creations of the ostensible author but their own creations, who, along with their texts, have been conscripted into someone else's work.

Because of its generic hybridity and the authorial desire for authenticity, the historical novel as such is of course prone to borrowing from the archival record. As Roberto González Echevarría has stated, the historical novel often strives to legitimize itself as the "bearer of authentic stories by its association with those [usually non-literary] texts that tell the first stories." Since it has "no fixed form of its own," it tends to assume "the shape of a given kind of document endowed with truth-bearing power in society at specific moments in time" (184, 185). Different historical novelists, however, have employed rather dissimilar strategies for imbuing their fictions with historicity. For example, in *Beloved*, Toni Morrison consciously avoids historical sources in her reconstruction of Margaret Garner's life. As Morrison describes her attempt to convey the moral dilemma faced by the nineteenth-century woman who killed her daughter to prevent her from being returned to slavery, "I really wanted to invent her life" (qtd. in Rothstein). In *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, Wayne Johnston makes considerably more use of the archive. He gives such a prominent role to D.W. Prowse's *A History of Newfoundland* that the 1895 classic becomes one of his novel's principal characters. Yet Johnston does not merely reproduce Prowse's text; he becomes dialectically engaged with it, as if he were having a dialogue with the earlier work on the past and future of Newfoundland. This latter aspect is never more evident than when Johnston has one of his protagonists, the journalist Sheilagh Fielding, write a parody of Prowse's *History*, one marked not only by wit and satire but also by "brevity and comprehensiveness" (Johnston 18).

My criticism of Zinovich is not that he borrows from other writers; clearly Johnston does this too, particularly from Richard Gwyn's biography of Joey Smallwood, as Stuart Pierson has shown (285-86). Rather, what troubles me is the sheer magnitude of Zinovich's dependence on other people's words. To rephrase a question posed earlier, at what point does a writer cease to be the author of a text and become its editor? Perhaps Roland Barthes's "The Death of the Author" will shed some light on this matter. At first glance, Barthes's essay would appear to be an odd choice. After all, this is the seminal statement on the nature of writing in which the

French semiotician declares that “it is language which speaks, not the author” (50), and that before reading can become a truly emancipatory act, it is necessary to kill “the Author-God” (52-53). By shifting authorship from the individual writer to discourse itself, Barthes would seem to eliminate the very problem of the ethics of quotation. Yet he also states that writing, by definition, implies “the destruction of every voice, every origin” (49) and that the “Author, when we believe in him, is always conceived as the past of his own book” (52). However, this is what does not occur in *Gabriel Dumont in Paris*. One is never convinced that Zinovich is really “the past of his book,” since one is constantly being reminded that much of “his” text was produced by other people.

Whether or not one fully agrees with Barthes that “contemporary culture is tyrannically centred on the author” (50), it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that authorship is not an uncomplicated matter. All the rhetoric to the contrary notwithstanding, there is scant evidence that we have come to accept that the true “source” of a text is not its writing but its reading (Barthes 54). The pervasive sense of outrage that still greets the unmasking of yet another literary hoax certainly suggests that today’s readers continue to find it hard to separate a book from its purported author. Indeed, the case could easily be made that much of the controversy over cultural impersonation and voice appropriation derives from the fact that we often read authors instead of texts. On a very basic level, it clearly does matter “who is speaking” in a text, to answer the Michel Foucault query that serves as epigraph to this essay (61). The extent and nature of one’s contribution to a work usually determine whether one is its author or its editor.<sup>10</sup> Yet, in reality, the situation is never that simple. For instance, who is the real author of *The Last Buffalo Hunter*? Is it Norbert Welsh, the pioneer whose recollections make up the book? Or is it Mary Weekes, the journalist who recorded and assembled them? The publisher leaves no doubt that it is Weekes, but the matter is not quite resolved, for without Welsh’s words there would be no text.

Considering that a substantial portion of *Gabriel Dumont in Paris* was produced by other individuals, it seems legitimate to suggest that Zinovich is not so much its author as its editor. Nevertheless, the novel remains valuable for more than merely underscoring the politics (and legalities) of authorship. It is also important because of the manner in which it dramatizes the fact that the textual borrowing that appears to be endemic to the historical novel has a narratological dimension. Dorrit Cohn, I noted above,

asserts that one of the signposts of fictionality is that a fiction does not refer to a reality outside itself. This is the reason she disagrees with Hayden White (and, through him, Linda Hutcheon) that a “novel can be said to be plotted, but not *emplotted*” (Cohn 114; Cohn’s italics). As Cohn underlines, a novel’s “serial moments do not refer to, and can therefore not be selected from, an ontologically independent and temporally prior data base of disordered, meaningless happenings that it restructures into order and meaning” (White, *Metahistory* 7-11). However, that would appear to be the case with the historical novel. Because of its dependence on the archive, it is often *emplotted*, and frequently to its own detriment, since the desire to be true to some prior text, or texts, precludes it from developing its own structural unity.

In conclusion, one of the main aesthetic flaws in *Gabriel Dumont in Paris* results from its reliance on the archive. In the penultimate communication that he sends to Georges Demanche, Dumont states that “the Government does not want me to lecture and tell the true history of our rebellion” (180). Presumably, this is Zinovich’s rationale for focusing so closely on documentary accounts. Yet, given that most of the people around Dumont did not know how to write, it is not likely that their “true history” will ever be found in the archives. The consequences of this dilemma are vividly illustrated by the episode that gives the novel its title. Dumont is believed to have spent a year in Paris (Zinovich 184). But since there is little textual evidence of this visit—if it ever did take place—Zinovich does not dwell on it. Despite its title, his novel has only two brief scenes set in the French capital. In the first, Dumont comments that the “River Seine reminds me of our Saskatchewan,” since it has “the same soft, fat, slick, brown skin with a greenish tinge” (26). In the second, he deals mostly with the fact that he has been impersonated in Paris by a fellow Métis, Michel Dumas (178-79). That is, because of the lack of an archival record, the buffalo hunter has virtually nothing to say about his experience in the City of Lights. Indeed, as one reflects on *Gabriel Dumont in Paris*, one cannot help but wish that Zinovich had ventured out of the archive and, following Toni Morrison’s lead, dared to invent the life of his protagonist, not the least his real or imagined adventures in Paris.

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#### NOTES

- 1 For a compelling analysis of the hybridity of the historical novel, see Rigney 16-21. For spirited defences of the genre in the light of both New Criticism and poststructuralism, see Shaw and the last section of Bermann's introduction to Manzoni, "On the Historical Novel Today" (48-59).
- 2 Hutcheon's constructivism, as she acknowledges, echoes the ideas of Hayden White, such as White's assertion that most nineteenth-century historians "did not realize that the facts do not speak for themselves, but that the historian speaks for them, speaks on their behalf" (*Tropics* 125).
- 3 Prior to the mid-1980s, as Kuester rightly notes, most studies of the Canadian historical novel were not theoretically informed (Kuester 26). The situation has been rectified since then. One notable contribution is Vautier's *New World Myth: Postmodernism and Postcolonialism in Canadian Fiction*. A comparative study of three English-Canadian and three Franco-Québécois historical novels, Vautier's book shows how the "specificity" of the (inter)American myth that infuses novels like *Les têtes à Papineau* and *Obasan* "lies in its need to assert itself by flaunting its *opposition* to the European-inspired versions of the past(s) of the New World" (x). Even more significantly, Vautier explores the continued centrality of history at a time when novelists (and scholars) candidly acknowledge "the impossibility of fully knowing the past" (204). As she observes, "Whether one protests against events of the past or adopts a cynical attitude because of feelings of dispossession, one is still in reaction to history" (205). However, given that most recent works on the Canadian historical novel are heavily influenced by Hutcheon's writings, they tend to contain similar contradictions. For example, in *Speculative Fictions: Contemporary Canadian Novelists and the Writing of History*, Wyle asserts that historiography is as much a "discursive construct" as fiction (11). If that were truly the case, what would make the historical novel the hybrid genre it supposedly is?
- 4 Shaw states that "the problem of how historical fiction can refer to the past quickly spreads to realist reference in general, then to fictional reference in general, then to reference itself" (541).
- 5 One of the more humorous motifs in the novel is how a "homely" man like Dumont, an "ugly animal," as he describes himself, "captured such a lovely wife" (13, 54).
- 6 Although Silver gives the first name of Dumont's wife as "Madelaine," I use the regular spelling to avoid confusion.
- 7 Vanderhaeghe is himself the author of a short story about Dumont's purported visit to Paris. He focuses primarily on the buffalo hunter's sense of alienation, not only because everything is so different in the "accursed city" but also because of Dumont's physiognomy, the fact he is "arabic-looking" ("Cafe" 40, 38).
- 8 While Zinovich does not provide the first names of either Trémaudan or Demanche, I decided to do so for the sake of clarity. Trémaudan was a French-born historian who

lived in Western Canada for some years and wrote extensively about the Métis.

Demanche was a French journalist and magazine editor, who wrote a book about his tour of Canada in 1885.

- 9 “Signposts of Fictionality” is the title of chapter 7 in Cohn’s book (109-31)  
 10 Adair discusses a case rather unlike Zinovich’s, that of Naomi Campbell, whose novel *Swan* apparently was written by its “editor,” Caroline Upcher (227).

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