

## Unpacking the Baggage “Camp” Humour in Timothy Findley’s *Not Wanted on the Voyage*

Some lives  
are only seen  
through windows  
beyond which  
the appearance  
of laughter  
and of screaming  
is the same.

...there are no beginnings, not even to stories. There are only places where you make an entrance into someone else’s life and either stay or turn and go away. FINDLEY: 1975, 217

In 1981, John F. Hulcoop commented that Timothy Findley “has rarely (if ever) received the kind of attention he merits, [and] has, rather, been largely ignored by reviewers and critics alike” (Hulcoop 43). Hulcoop called this marginalization of Findley as a writer to be reckoned with a “sad irony,” especially in light of the fact that, by the year in which Hulcoop was writing, Findley had already been publishing his work since the mid-1960s (43). More recently, Findley has achieved the kind of prominence that make him and his works the subjects of entire books of scholarship, by such critics as Lorraine M. York and Donna Pennee, as well as a plethora of published articles by others, not to mention an annotated bibliography. However, the reasons for what appears to be a reluctance on the part of critics in earlier years to deal with Findley’s work at all probably also inform their later focus on the more “serious” aspects of his novels. The critics seem as uncomfortable dealing with the humour in some of Findley’s work, as they are with the sensibility behind it, primarily because much of the humour is “camp” and the sensibility, “gay.”<sup>1</sup> Their rigorous, often exclusive, attention to his “apocalyptic vision” elides the humorous underbelly of the horror many of his works contain (Hutcheon 216). Ironically,

Findley himself has repeatedly drawn attention to the humour in his writing, and just as tenaciously, critics have largely chosen to “turn and go away” from the notion that “the appearance / of laughter / and of screaming / is the same,” perhaps because it would force a re-examination of the cultural and ideological premises from which their own assumptions and practices arise.

Findley addresses the ways in which contemporary society tries desperately to “normalize” people, social practices, gender, religion, dogma, and exegesis through his placement of humorous elements in stark juxtaposition to horror and history in his novel, *Not Wanted on the Voyage*. Through a radical infusion of “Camp” elements, Findley not only ironizes social practices, but also criticizes the kinds of binary ideologies that function as filters for exclusivity and inclusion on various, coded levels of a social text — and readers unwilling or unable to move beyond the parameters of the “norms” that construct their readings are forcibly excluded from having access to the encoded criticisms inherent in Findley’s text.

By engaging “seriously” with Findley’s text, while ignoring its inversions and subversions of heterocentrism and heterosexuality, critics seem to skirt potential blasphemies precisely because they position their readings in terms of “fable” and “fantasy” as “fiction” (“Fable,” “fantasy,” and “fiction,” are fair game because, in Judæo-Christian terms, these are Othered as much as “folklore” and “fairy tales” are.). Thus, to talk of *Not Wanted on the Voyage* as a “cautionary fable,” as Cude does, or to examine its moral dimensions, from the perspective of metafiction which functions as commentary on contemporary social “realities,” which Pennee does, fails to address the social, ideological, and political framework within which many critics seem to function but are hesitant to interrogate.

*Not Wanted on the Voyage* has been described as “fantastic,” “moral,” “apocalyptic” (it would be fairly safe to assert that this adjective is one of the most frequently used by virtually all critics who have engaged with the text), “fabular,” “subversive,” “historical,” and “mythical.” Because of Findley’s overt use — some would say abuse, as seen in the reaction to the novel during his promotion tour — and rewriting of the biblical story of Noah’s ark, most of the critics agree that the novel functions in one way or another as “fabular” or “moral” (meta) fiction.<sup>2</sup> Seldom has any criticism written about *Not Wanted on the Voyage* made *no* reference to parable, morality, or allegory, at the same time as the novel is described as “fantasy”

or “fantastic.” “Fantasy could clearly be used as a vehicle for many kinds of messages,” writes Linda Hutcheon in *The Canadian Postmodern*:

It could allow a novel to escape linear history and plunge into visionary, mythic dimensions. . . . It could also be used to confront moral issues in allegorical form. Perhaps the most daring such use of fantasy in the 1980s was Timothy Findley’s *Not Wanted on the Voyage* (1984). The apocalyptic vision of Findley’s earlier novels here took on *comic* yet moving and *serious* form in the retelling of the story of Noah’s flood. This was a political and moral retelling, though, a story about evil and destruction, both biblical and future. (216, emphases added)

Hutcheon, in passing, acknowledges the novel’s “comic” elements, but moves on to the apparently more important “serious” elements. Similarly, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin characterize the novel as “Findley’s radical interrogation of the story of the flood,” in which “the great myth of salvation becomes a saga of destruction in the name of minority righteousness and the extension of petty power” (98). They appear equally reluctant to engage in any discussion of the humour and sensibility expressed in specific aspects of the text. While the critical impulse is still to analyze, the resistance appears to be to the naming of the humorous elements of the novel.

In her essay, “Notes on ‘Camp,’” Susan Sontag discusses the difficulties of attempting to describe something that has either “not been named” or resists identification on various levels because it is somehow privately coded (275). She sets the “sensibility” of “Camp” apart from “an idea,” claiming that “the essence of Camp is its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration” (275). And, because, at the time of the writing of her essay, in 1964, Sontag asserts that camp had “hardly broken into print,” “to talk about [it] [was] therefore to betray it” (275).<sup>3</sup> In trying to arrive at “self-edification” in her attempts to analyze camp in its varied, fluid constituent parts, Sontag also characterizes it as “esoteric” and an “aesthetic,” always concerned with taste, style, and artifice. She claims that “the bearer of this taste [is] an improvised self-elected class, mainly homosexuals, who constitute themselves as aristocrats of taste” (290). She goes on to explain that,

while it’s not true that Camp taste is homosexual taste, there is no doubt a peculiar affinity and overlap. Not all liberals are Jews, but Jews have shown a remarkable affinity for liberal and reformist causes. So not all homosexuals have Camp taste. But homosexuals, by and large, constitute the vanguard—and the most articulate audience—of Camp. (The analogy is not frivolously chosen. Jews and homosexuals are the outstanding creative minorities in contemporary urban cul-

ture. Creative, that is, in the truest sense: they are the creators of sensibilities. The two pioneering forces of modern sensibility are Jewish moral seriousness and homosexual aestheticism and irony.) . . . Camp taste . . . definitely has something propagandist about it. Needless to say, the propaganda operates in exactly the opposite direction. . . . Camp is a solvent of morality. It neutralizes moral indignation, sponsors playfulness. (290)

Beyond the reservations I harbour about the kinds of essentialist assumptions Sontag makes on the basis of race and sexual orientation, as though the affinities she speaks of are somehow in-born rather than perhaps culturally motivated, her points about the effects of particular movements are well taken. While it is not my intention to make sweeping generalizations about a phenomenon of writing that I approach from outside, as it were, I think it fairly safe to say that, as a gay writer, Timothy Findley would be very familiar with the kinds of coded writings that employ camp, and quite deliberately and consciously deploys similar methods to similar effect. “Camp developed out of the need to hide homosexual implications from hostile heterosexual readers while entertaining one’s fellow homosexuals,” remarks David Bergman (18). But he argues too that “camp is a style. . . that. . . provided a way to talk to heterosexual and homosexual readers simultaneously” (18). I think it entirely plausible that this is one of the reasons many critics have not confronted the camp elements of *Not Wanted on the Voyage*. Bergman avers that the reluctance of readers and critics to engage with camp is the result of a larger gender issue: “Rarely,” he declares, “have straight critics—especially straight male critics—acknowledged that their difficulties with a work are related to gender” (106). And, clearly, the position taken on gender issues is politically and ideologically informed.

Despite his concerns about Sontag’s “Notes,” Andrew Ross acknowledges that Sontag herself has undergone a shift from her original position about the “apolitical” nature of camp. He argues that the politicization of what Sontag earlier referred to as merely “an ‘aesthetic’. . . of ‘failed seriousness’” challenges directly the “relation between ‘artifice’ and ‘nature’ in the construction of sexuality and gender identity” (19). His point that “camp transforms, destabilizes and subverts the existing balance of acceptance of sexual identity and sexual roles” is one that Findley engages throughout *Not Wanted on the Voyage* (18).

“EVERYONE KNOWS it wasn’t like that,” we are bluntly told in the first line of the Prologue (3). Although the statement functions as a rebuttal to the

epigraph taken from Genesis in the Bible, it also signals our complicity with everything that is to follow, just as we are complicit with what “anyone knows” about Yaweh (71). What follows immediately is a description of the chaos and panic that prevail as the Ark is being boarded:

To begin with, they make it sound as if there wasn't any argument; as if there wasn't any panic — no one being pushed aside — no one being trampled — none of the animals howling — none of the people screaming blue murder. They make it sound as if the only people who wanted to get on board were Doctor Noyes and his family. Presumably, everyone else (the rest of the human race, so to speak) stood off waving gaily, behind a distant barricade: SPECTATORS WILL NOT CROSS THE YELLOW LINE and: THANK YOU FOR YOUR CO-OPERATION. With all the baggage neatly labelled: *WANTED* or *NOT WANTED ON THE VOYAGE*. (3)

At the same time as we are drawn into the chaos in a very tactile way, through the pushing, the trampling, the howling, and the screaming, all of which assault our senses, we are also quite clearly being cordoned off with “everyone else (the rest of the human race, so to speak).” We are “spectators” and we are barred from “cross[ing] the yellow line” — but spectators to what? Through his use of language, Findley signals that this is indeed a spectacle, and that we are to be spectators to excess. “Blue murder” is cliché, but also proleptic, since Japeth, one of Noah’s sons who has been marinated to turn blue, later literally enacts “blue murder”; the “yellow line” functions as a cautionary signal to the reader about moving into uncharted territory without careful thought or guidance; whether or not we can unpack the contents of the “baggage” will determine whether we are “*WANTED* or *NOT WANTED ON THE VOYAGE*” — but again, this will depend upon whether we choose the charted or the coded “voyage” through the text. And we, as readers, must determine who “the *gaily* waving spectators” are, and whether we are among that faction.

**T**he description of what *is* (chaos), is in sharp contrast to the spectacle that is *not* (camp), and we, the implicated readers, are reminded again in the paragraph immediately following that “they make it sound as if there wasn't any dread” (3). Dread is now juxtaposed against what seems like a scene from a cruise:

Noah and his sons relaxed on the poop deck, sipping port and smoking cigars beneath a blue and white striped awning — probably wearing yachting caps, white ducks and blazers. Mrs. Noyes and her daughters-in-law fluttering up the gangplank — neat and tidy — dry beneath their umbrellas — turning and calling;

*"goodbye, everybody!"* And all their friends shouting; *"bon voyage!"* while the daughters-in-law hand over their tickets, smiling and laughing — everyone being piped aboard and a band playing *Rule Britannia!* and *Over the Sea to Skye*. Flags and banners and a booming cannon. . . like an excursion. (3)

Through the gaudiness of this spectacle Findley engages that part of the human sensibility that laughs inappropriately at funerals — an example of a demonstration of questionable “taste” — and “taste,” according to Susan Sontag, has a certain “logic” that is a fundamental, if “ineffable,” underpinning of camp (276). “Camp taste,” she declares,

has an affinity for certain arts [more] than others. Clothes, furniture, all the elements of visual décor, for instance, make up a large part of Camp. For Camp art is often decorative art, emphasizing texture, sensuous surface, and style at the expense of content. . . All Camp objects, and persons, contain a large element of artifice. Nothing in Nature can be campy. . . Rural Camp is still man-made, and most campy objects are urban. (Yet, they often have a serenity—or a naïveté—which is the equivalent of pastoral). . . Camp is a vision of the world in terms of style—but a particular kind of style. It is the love of the exaggerated, the “off,” of things-being-what-they-are-not. (278)

Findley is clearly conscious of the constructedness of his narrative in very particular ways, and his “affinity” appears to be for the “decorative” and the “textured,” not to mention the kind of pastoral effect that Sontag describes. The scene is wildly exaggerated, both in terms of the visual picture it presents as well as in the guffaw reaction it provokes in the reader. *We know* this is ludicrous, but the prospect of perhaps being drawn into the alternative story is most enticing! Seeing Noah “relaxed on the poop deck” (*poop deck?*), wearing “white ducks,” “sipping port and smoking [a] cigar,” while Mrs. Noyes “flutter[s] up the gangplank”; visualizing the “striped awning” and the “flags and banners,” and being party to the pomp and pageantry of a departing cruiseship, all comprise the depiction of excess and contribute to the exaggerated style — “things-being-what-they-are-not” — and Findley’s manipulation of a scene in markedly camp fashion. The only hint we have that things are truly “off” is in the umbrellas that keep the women dry. And, of course, the Holocaust dream sequence into which we are plunged with Mrs. Noyes, directly after, serves to remind us that umbrellas are poor protection against Flood, whether it be one of fire or water.

The flood of contradictions and juxtapositions of the Prologue also function to set the reader on either single or multiple tracks of interpretation that are likewise full of seemingly inexplicable contradictions. But by

remaining cognizant of the artifice and “things-being-what-they-are-not,” one can begin to make some sense of the camp and coded aspects of the narrative. “Camp taste turns its back on the good-bad axis of ordinary aesthetic judgment,” Sontag reminds us. “Camp doesn’t reverse things. It doesn’t argue that the good is bad, or the bad is good. What it does is to offer for art (and life) a different—and supplementary—set of standards” (286). This refusal to engage in straight binaries also licences Findley to create a god who is very like the God of the Old Testament — intractable, vengeful — and somewhat less like certain Christian doctrine has attempted to re-create him, to a large degree unsuccessfully, in “man’s image,” and as loving and merciful. Unlike the biblical depictions, however, Findley’s god is neither omnipotent nor omniscient, and, according to Mottyl, is merely human. He certainly seems to be lacking some of his faculties, and this lack is demonstrated in the manipulation of one of the Old Testament names for God. The name *Yahweh* is derived from an Old Testament acronym, YHWH, that meant, roughly, “I am that I am,” and was used in place of a name. Judaic Law prevented adherents to the faith from actually pronouncing any one of His names, an edict of which Findley demonstrates an obvious awareness in his reference to “the ten thousand names of God” symbolized by the “pink and ruby dove” that lies as “plain as an autograph written in the dust,” announcing Yaweh’s imminent arrival (9). Findley’s disobedience lies, not just in the deviation from the spelling of the “name,” Yahweh, that evolved from the acronym, but also in the suggestion that, perhaps this god is either not the one of the Judæo-Christian tradition, or that he is the “real” one, and that the tradition has survived because doctrine has kept him alive, misrepresented him, and never acknowledged his “death.” The irony is that, regardless of how we as readers interpret *this* god, he truly is an artificial construction, Findley’s own mythical creation, and likely in “questionable taste” to a Judæo-Christian sensibility, which has similarly constructed its own version of God.

“Everyone knows it wasn’t like that” comes also to apply to the characters of the text, to the gender roles they occupy as well as the ones that they are *presumed* to occupy by a reading audience unwilling to unpack the baggage of those “*NOT WANTED ON THE VOYAGE*.” For even if the opening statement *is* a response to Genesis, as quasi-dialogue it is disrupted by the infinity sign that we — like Mrs. Noyes, who is later attacked by Yaweh’s cat, Sarah, for making the sign with her fingers — are not supposed to recognize,

because it is esoteric (100). As an interruption, the infinity symbol functions as a resolute linguistic break in co-reference: “Everyone knows it wasn’t like that” suddenly contains two pronominal constituents without any co-referring antecedents in the discourse. Without its *normative* deictic power, the statement can point in almost any direction *not* sanctioned by the reader. And lacking the stability of an antecedent that links it to a specific place and direction in the discourse, the statement becomes potentially transformative in the syntax, as well as self-referring: “Everyone knows *that* wasn’t like *it*.” And, indeed, throughout the text, Findley’s characters repeat the statement by continually being self-referring themselves, a closed set, as it were, and they disrupt all expectations the reader might bring to the novel. “The Camp sensibility is...alive to a double sense in which some things can be taken,” says Sontag. “But...not the...split-level construction of a literal meaning...and a symbolic meaning...It is the difference, rather, between the thing as meaning something, anything, and the thing as pure artifice” (281). Findley uses this difference in meaning to construct differences in gender roles that interrogate the assumed “normative” value of “accepted” roles. He also subverts the Judæo-Christian ideology that prescribes “acceptable” gender roles and sexual expressions and practices in laws that are an affront to the gay sensibility.

**N**umerous other examples of camp can be traced throughout the novel, and, to do so, it remains fruitful to refer to Sontag’s “Notes,” which can function as a guide on the voyage, as it were. One of the most intriguing (and, by now, obvious) manifestations of Camp in *Not Wanted on the Voyage* is the character of Lucy. Sontag claims that “the androgyne is certainly one of the great [Camp] images” and that “the hallmark of camp is the spirit of extravagance. Camp is a woman walking around in a dress made of three million feathers” (279, 283). Of course, both these features of Camp are expressed in the character of Lucy-Lucifer, whom Findley, in *Inside Memory*, calls a “seven-foot gent in drag” (227). When Lucy is first introduced in the novel, s/he appears as “a seven-foot woman with a great, moon-white face and jet-black hair,” “beautiful,” “odd,” “disconcerting,” “wearing a long, rose-coloured gown with butterfly sleeves,” “whose face [is] covered with a strange white powder” (59-60). S/he has “finely drawn eyebrows” and “kohl. . .colour[s] her lids” (283). S/he even wears a “gown of long bronze feathers,” which feathers s/he has



littered liberally through the pages of the text, in a gesture akin to what Bergman calls “dropping his beads” (283).<sup>4</sup> At various points throughout the novel, Findley slyly refers to her “minc[ing] across the deck,” and “gay and disrespectful” (200, 210). Lucy informs Mrs. Noyes that she is “every inch a queen,” and the latter concurs, but clearly not with the sentiment Lucy has expressed, only with the (mis)perceived one (249). Whenever Lucy’s physical appearance is described, the emphasis is on artifice, on excess, on flamboyance, as well as on her makeup, her silks, the trappings of decadence and excess. “Rouge and facial powder,” Bergman reminds us, should we forget, “draw our attention to the beard stubble below” (11).

Mrs. Noyes, thinking about Lucy, reflects:

The trouble was — the Lucy in her mind was a better match than the Lucy she saw. . . in the flesh. Given the romance of daydreams, Lucy’s figure — as it toyed with Mrs. Noyes imagination — was glamorous, soft and feminine. Pliable. . . But once she appeared in all her seven-foot glory, crossing the lawn or sitting with her knees apart on the fence, . . . the image changed so radically — how could a mother not go worrying? (73)

She has good cause for concern: Ham has fallen in love with a “stranger,” while, “in the past, it had always been Japeth and strangers” — and the implication is now clear that these references to “strangers” are specific to men whose sexual and social preferences are *not* heterocentric. And what Mrs. Noyes has merely a dim suspicion of, Michael Archangelis articulates in conversation with Lucy: “The rumour goes you’re getting married. . . . But — he’s — he’s a [man]. . . . But you’re a. . . *you’re a*. . . But you *are* male” (107). Although he is unable to complete his thoughts, Lucy fills in the gender gaps and claims nonchalantly, “I like dressing up. . . . I always have. You know that. . . . Why not? It’s harmless enough” (107). Earlier, she has teased Michael outrageously: “*Wonderful* scene. . . . Very nice try, ducky” (106). Indeed, the whole tone of her conversation with him is rife with artifice, posturing, and italics — the kind of extravagance of expression that signals what Sontag calls “a mode of enjoyment” (291). “[Camp] wants to enjoy,” she claims. “It only seems like malice, cynicism. (Or, if it is cynicism, it’s not a ruthless but a sweet cynicism)” (291). Lucy understands perfectly well that becoming “human” is impossible for her, that regardless of the heavy makeup and the silk kimonos and the whole of her (successful) impersonation, she will always be an “angel.” Once again, “human company” is emphatically “not the same as angel company. *Only an angel knew that?*”

(109, emphasis added). Metaphorically, being human means being “straight,” which, by now, in the text, has become a quite undesirable condition, while being an angel means being “gay,” untainted by the corruption that humanity suffers from.

In *Inside Memory*, Findley talks of other ways in which *Not Wanted on the Voyage* embodies Camp, although he does not use that term explicitly:

Yaweh’s Circus and Travelling Road Show — Noah’s magic that always fails. . . . Noah’s wife drinks a fair amount of gin, likes to thump out Methodist hymns on her piano and teaches her sheep to sing. She is the heroine. A blind cat also plays an important role. (222-23, 227)

Summarized this way, it is much clearer than in the novel why these elements are comic: the humour there forms the hidden underbelly of a more readily recognized horror. Because of the fact, for example, that many mythical creatures are represented in the text, and several of them also speak, the singing sheep in this context barely raise an eyebrow. However, upon scrutinizing the Judæo-Christian notion of a congregation as “a flock,” the humorous effects of literalizing the image immediately surface. Teaching sheep to sing is, outside of this context, no mean feat, but in the context of “organized” religion, this is precisely what they do. With a logical extension of the metaphor, what we suddenly have, to our horror, is not a “ginny” farm wife leading her flock, but a wine-swilling priest or minister of some religious institution doing so in the name of sacramental ritual. And, of course, since what Findley attacks — more openly than was first apparent — is patriarchy, what better way to do that than through a “righting” of harmful and damaging myths and binary constructions that seek to assimilate or eliminate?

**T**o talk about *Not Wanted on the Voyage* at all, then, seems virtually to *require* a critical retreat from humour, primarily because of its “subject” matter. To discuss it as a revisioning of the biblical story of the Great Flood, of Noah’s Ark, appears to force the critic, in a weirdly contortionist fashion, to avoid the “blasphemy” of humour, either in addressing the inherent “blasphemy” of the text itself, or in (perhaps inadvertently) assuming a critical position that might, by other critics, be perceived (or misconstrued) as blasphemous itself. *Not Wanted on the Voyage* could very well be seen as every bit as “blasphemous” as *The Satanic Verses*, for example, particularly in its depiction of God as a doddering, ineffectual, petty old

fool who *dies*. Recall that God is symbolically killed by Lucifer, in a proleptic gesture towards his later *chosen* death, when the dog is killed in the Orchard by Lucy. The crown of flies that settles on the dog is recognized by Mottyl to be the same one that settles on the god upon his departure (57). And we realize later that the dog has died in the effort to kill the cormorant, just as God has died trying to eliminate Lucifer (102). One might say that the inversions of the dog and the god are hardly gratuitous, especially considering that one of Lucifer's many names within tradition is Lord of the Flies.

Another of such potential blasphemies becomes apparent in the fact that the god of Findley's text has "not a single female angel — not a single female presence" in his entourage:

Yaweh, of course — as anyone knew — had never taken wives in the formal sense — and, indeed, it had never been rumoured there was even a single mistress. He seemed content and supremely comfortable with all his male acolytes and angels about him. And why not? They had been so impeccably trained to minister to His every need. . . Mrs. Noyes was in a quandary as to whether they were the gentlest creatures she had ever seen — or the most severe. And still, no women and no female angels. It was troubling to Mrs. Noyes — and she had to admit it. (71-2)

Just as it is troubling to Mrs. Noyes, despite the implied logic of the situation, it is as troubling for the reader, whose eye in the text is Mrs. Noyes. The reader becomes complicit with what "anyone [knows]" about Yaweh — but we are left to conjecture on the notion that there are only "male angels and acolytes" who are so "impeccably trained to minister to his every need," and why the inference of the absence of women as immaterial *should* be so troubling. "Camp often. . . depicts reproduction as one of the aspects of heterosexual society that must be inverted," according to Bergman (112). The suggestion that this god and his angels are a completely self-sufficient, and "unproductive" group, at the very least a homosocial grouping, with no need or desire for women at all — "And why not?" — flies in the face of a heterocentric doctrine which is manifest in an Edict from Yaweh to Noah that the latter must take his sons *and their wives* onto the Ark. It is this inversion that contributes to our general discomfort, as critics, with a sensibility that excludes us, and exacerbates our unwillingness to acknowledge that Findley's indictment is of a particularly restrictive ideology that literally outlaws homosexuality. It seems no accident that the mythology he takes on is specifically the Old Testament, the foundation of Judaism and of Christianity. Recall that it is the Old Testament that proclaims sex between

men as an “abomination” and that Findley subverts the heterocentricity of that text by “normalizing” homosexuality and making heterosexual couplings in his novel fraught with dysfunction. As critics, we seem to have a profound aversion to confronting an ideological position such as Findley’s which challenges “normal” gender identity or expressions of sexuality. His radical interrogation of heterosexuality as exclusively “normal” pervades virtually every heterosexual (or presumably heterosexual) relationship in the novel.

Investigating the nature of these so-called “normal” heterosexual unions reveals that they are not simply troubled, but almost completely unproductive also; where they are reproductive, the reproduction fails or produces “monsters.” Mrs. Noyes, for example, recounting the story of her marriage and children, tells Emma:

“Years ago, the Doctor and I had a whole other family. Lots and lots of children — ten of them, in fact. But *all of them died*. There was a plague. . . and that killed six of them. . . [T]he other four children died for other reasons: accidents, fevers, animals. It took a very long while for [us] to recover from all those deaths. . . [I]n time, we began again. . . A whole new family. Shem was the first of these children — and, for a while, the only one to live. *We had . . . two or three more who died*. Then Ham. And then. . . When Japeth was born, . . . Japeth had a twin. . . His name was Adam. . . *We killed him.*” (162-165 emphases added)

Not only do none of her first ten children survive, Mrs. Noyes loses several later to death as well. The child named Adam was a “Lotte-child” (also characterized as an “ape-child” and an “animal”), and, because not “human,” was not permitted to live. But we as readers already know that even the living children are beset by problems which make their lives as “unproductive” and dysfunctional as their parents’ before them — and these are the unions that have been chosen by Yaweh to be saved to propagate the “human race”! Although Noah himself has taken pains to ensure that, if future such “ape-children” be born, the blame will be placed upon Japeth’s wife and Lotte’s sister, Emma, the text has already suggested that the fatal flaw is Noah’s own — and that it will surface again in the child that Hannah is carrying, since that child has been fathered by Noah, not by her husband, Shem. Shem, the oldest, does nothing, we are told, “but eat and work and sleep” (11). He literally waits “for his wife to service him,” and we are left with the distinct impression that she seldom does, having more interest in her father-in-law (11).

It appears that Japeth’s failure to consummate his marriage with Emma is not merely the result of *her* fear. Japeth is “driven to distraction by Emma’s

refusal to sleep with him and *by his own inability to force the issue*" (23, emphasis added). Indeed, "Japeth's quest [is] to find his manhood once and for all — and returning, to slay the dragon of Emma's virginity and kill the giant of his shame" (23). His quest leads him to the Festivals of Baal and Mammon, which Noah condemns as "monstrous," mostly because of "the men who practice. . . phallus worship, falling on their knees before the priests of Baal" (23, 49). The more "monstrous" phallus worship is later Noah's own (and, by extension, culturally heterosexist and Judæo-Christian homophobic insistence on the "perversion" of homosexuality), made clear in the "ritual sacrifice" of the Unicorn, whose "cloven hoofs forb[id] that it should be placed on the altar" but "its horn, of course — the sacred Phallus — [is] acceptable" (271). It seems that the real source of Japeth's grief is gender confusion, enforced by his own father's insistence on the consummation of his marriage. Learning later that dragons are associated with the devil supports the suggestion that Japeth's "problem" is also his "solution," as it were. His obsession with his manhood and with being a warrior culminates in the representation of these conditions in the person of Michael Archangelis:

Japeth had his mind on Michael Archangelis — a figure of glory unlike any he had ever dreamed could exist. The great angel's height — his strength — his golden hair — and his armour presented the most dazzling images of manhood that Japeth had ever encountered.

Only once had anyone come close to matching them — and on that occasion, the manliness had been dark, not golden; terrifying, not glorious.

That once had been on the road to the Cities. (75)

This worship of Michael Archangelis is couched in erotic terms: "a figure of glory" and a "dazzling image of manhood" — but this yearning is disguised because it is juxtaposed against Japeth's frightening initiation experience with the "Ruffian King," which physically marks him as "different" for life. We know that the angel presides over a collection of other angels who are all male, all warriors, and a completely self-contained group, whose "pallid faces [are] fiercely beautiful beneath their golden hair, . . . and whose hands [are] eternally busy. . . burnishing, dusting and oiling their armour and weapons" (71). Much of the language used to describe the angels is "customarily" used to characterize women, but in this case, engenders men, and nowhere in the text are women described in similar terms. These warrior angels represent the "strangers" whom Japeth feels forced to consult about what he does not comprehend. After all, "human company [is] not the

same as angel company,” suggesting that it is a heterocentric social structure that is fraught with difficulty. (109). “Strangers [are] Japeth’s trade,” Findley explains, and, because Japeth is a “sexual ignoramus and a virgin to boot,” and does “not even know what ‘perverted’ mean[s],” he will “have to go to strangers” for help in sorting out his confusion (76-77).

Ironically, Japeth instinctively recognizes when a relationship is healthy, not beset by sexual problems. When Ham and Lucy marry, “Japeth [is] furiously jealous. He surmise[s], quite correctly, that in his brother’s union, there [will] be no pause between the joy of marriage and the joys of the marriage bed” (119). Of course, of whom he is jealous is not made explicit, and the *reason* for his jealousy is only alluded to. And clearly, the fact that there is no uproar about gender or sexual orientation after their wedding, indicates that Ham must indeed be content in his marriage, and quite happily homosexual, since Lucy is “a gent in drag.” Just as clearly, since this is the only “happy” union of all the marriages in the text, Findley successfully addresses reproduction as “one of the aspects of heterosexual society” that must be inverted, by disrupting the binaries that heterocentrism implicitly and explicitly posits as “normal” (Bergman 112).

In a bizarre sort of twisting of fiction into fact — instead of the other way about — many of the critics reinscribe the “factual” nature of the original myth, and excuse Findley’s “blasphemy” on the grounds that he has effectively “contemporized” an ancient (or perhaps exploded an outdated) myth. Ironically, Findley himself would not have registered surprise at an accusation of blasphemy. “Given the subject of the novel,” he reflects in *Inside Memory*, “if someone had called it blasphemous I might have paled, but I wouldn’t have been surprised” (227). In reading to audiences from the text, he comments that “sometimes, when laughter might have been expected, there wasn’t any at all” (227). Apparently, the elements to which Findley *expected* reaction were either not absorbed, or as emphatically ignored by his audiences as they have been by the critics and reviewers analyzing his work.

Camp is a way of moving in and out of “appropriate” modes of expression at will; of adopting and creating discursive practices that operate on multiple levels, not in binaries; of speaking in two or more languages simultaneously; of being detected and hidden at the same time *by choice*. It is a particular form of cultural disobedience that is conscious of its own comic, yet often uncomfortable, relationship with the world — a form of textual

cross-dressing, if you will, or a “mode of seduction—one which employs flamboyant mannerisms susceptible of a double interpretation; gestures full of duplicity, with a witty meaning for cognoscenti and another, more impersonal, for outsiders. Behind the ‘straight’ public sense in which something can be taken, one has found a private zany experience of the thing” (Sontag 281). By engaging only in “the ‘straight’ public sense” of Findley’s work, critics have missed much of the wit within the text, and failed to acknowledge that the “serious” is simply one facet of his work, not the one to which *exclusive* attention should be directed. The humour requires more than mere mentions in passing. Such gestures both point to and detract from the success of Findley’s textual “passing” undetected in the world of the outsider/critic.

## NOTES

- 1 I am grateful to Eva-Marie Kröller, of the University of British Columbia, for her discussion of the fin de siècle influences upon *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, and of the ways in which Findley’s text pays tribute to the influences of such writers as Oscar Wilde and F. Scott Fitzgerald. She also drew parallels between this novel and such diverse cultural “phenomena” as *Brideshead Revisited* and the Reagan era in the United States, all of which somehow bore or perpetuated the earmarks of a “camp” sensibility. The idea of examining these camp elements of Findley’s novel, as well as the impulse to explore how Susan Sontag “informed” the text, came from Kröller as well, and I am indebted to her for sharing her broad readings of the novel. For the encouragement to persist in reading the humour in a text that critics see as overwhelmingly serious, I must thank Tom Hastings, of York University. He noted that Findley might as well have had Sontag’s “Notes on ‘Camp’” beside him when he wrote the novel. I hope I have maintained the integrity of the ideas and discussions that Tom and I shared that led, in part, to the writing of this paper, in this form, at this time. And for their careful readings and insights, my thanks go to Aruna Srivastava, Sharron Turner, and Helen Buss, all of the University of Calgary.
- 2 In *Inside Memory: Pages from a Writer’s Notebook*, Findley remarks: “One of our first stops included a visit to an Ontario high school, and one of the first words we heard after my reading from the book was: *scandalous!* And I must admit that, as a reaction, it threw me completely. . . Maybe I’m just old fashioned. Scandalous, to me, still means Scarlett O’Hara dancing in her widow’s weeds with Rhett Butler” (227).
- 3 It is probably worth noting that, thirty years later, camp has become a larger print phenomenon; however, because of its codedness, it may not always be a readily apparent element of any text. Sontag’s essay remains quite relevant nonetheless, and whatever problems that can be identified in the way she engages her subject have, arguably, more to do with the passage of three decades than with her theoretical positioning within her

cultural and historical context. Sontag claims that “apart from a lazy two page sketch in Christopher Isherwood’s novel *The World in the Evening* (1954), [Camp] has hardly broken into print” (275). Although she does not make it explicit here, Isherwood is one of many gay writers who consciously adopt the camp aesthetic as a “code” to different levels of reading and interpretation.

- 4 Bergman actually says that “dropping his beads” is “a dated gay expression” and credits Bruce Rodgers with its definition as “leav[ing] broad hints about one’s homosexuality, a singularly important disclosure between gay men” (110). I suggest that the feathers Lucy sheds are a similar gesture from Findley to the reader, who will either understand its importance or overlook it because he (and I use the pronoun here deliberately) lacks the semiotic information to decode the gesture.

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