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“This is a true story”: Paratextual Prefaces and their Fictive Truths Across Literature

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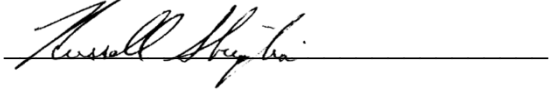

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Abstract

Scholar Gérard Genette defines the term "paratext" as accompanying components of a text like titles, forwards, illustrations, footnotes, etc. Genette claims these "productions" affect the "reception" and function as a liminal space between the "inside and outside" of a written work (1-2). Many texts and other works of fiction, across years and genres, use their paratexts to create fictitious histories that surround their main stories. The success of this rhetorical strategy, a convention that I call "fictive truth," depends heavily on the paratexts' reception from its audience. These genre conventions are traceable through canonical Western literature, from texts like Walter Scott's *Tales of My Landlord* series and Edgar Allan Poe's novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gorgon Pym of Nantucket,* to contemporary popular culture like the FX series *Fargo*. *Tales of My Landlord, Pym,* and *Fargo,* like many pieces of fiction, create a sense of a "true" narrative undermining a fictional narrative. Texts like these highlight a type of aesthetic irony. This project aims to focus on how these exemplary texts from both British and American fiction and popular culture like *Fargo* generate this kind of irony. On the one hand, these types of texts parody the empiricist imperative to be referential – their truth claim is that they reference some actual event, person, place, or thing external to the text. The irony, then, lies in their concomitant assertions that their references are untrustworthy. The examples in this project, I argue, indulge in referentiality with disregard for their actual referents. The effects of these paratexts branch far outside of one's imagination where it is safe to indulge in fiction – these texts ask audiences to question their understanding of "facts" and "truth," and to scrutinize what they find reliable and why. The implications of this line of thinking bleed into contemporary news and politics and draw connections between early modern and contemporary epistemologies as subjective experiences.

"This is a true story": Paratextual Prefaces and their Fictive Truths Across Literature

The opening episode of season three of FX's series *Fargo* (2017) begins in a dimly lit police office in East Berlin in 1988. The camera begins inside a microphone hanging on the ceiling of the room in front of an officer's desk. Moments later, a civilian man is brought into the room and sat down in front of this officer, who turns on a tape recorder and begins his interrogation:

"You are Yuri Gurka."

"No. My name is – thank goodness – Jakob Ungerleider. There is some misunderstanding."

"You live at 349 Hufelandstraße."

"Yes sir."

"Yuri Gurka is the registered occupant of 349 Hufelandstraße. So, if this is your address, then your name is Yuri Gurka, and you are a twenty-year-old émigré from the Ukraine."

"No. I am a German citizen. As you can plainly see, I have not been twenty years old for a long time" (0:2:00).

The conversation continues from here and Jakob explains that he has recently moved into the house, so perhaps the officer has an out-of-date record. The officer, still insisting that the man before him is Yuri Gurka, accuses Jakob of murdering his "girlfriend" Helga. Jakob objects, explaining that, while his "wife," not girlfriend, has the same name, she is very much alive. The German official then asks, "Then there is a problem, you understand? For you to be right, then the state must be wrong. Is that what you're saying? That the state is wrong?" (0:3:25). He shows Jakob a photo of Helga's body and explains that "Her death is a fact" and that he has seen her body with his own eyes. Jakob attempts to protest again, but the officer interjects: "What you are giving me are words. This 'wife,' who is 'alive,' with a 'different last name.' That is called 'a

story.' And we are not here to tell stories. We are here to tell the truth. Understand?" (0:5:30). Within this paratextual frame scene is the constitutive narratological irony between *sjuzet* and *fabula* – between plot and story. *Fargo,* like many narratives, including canonical British and American novels, creates a sense of a "true" narrative undermining a fictional narrative. Texts like these highlight a type of aesthetic irony. This project aims to focus on how examples from both British and American fiction and popular culture like *Fargo* generate this kind of irony. On the one hand, these types of texts parody the empiricist imperative to be referential – their truth claim is that they reference some actual event, person, place, or thing external to the text. The irony, then, lies in their concomitant assertions that their references are untrustworthy. The examples in this project, I argue, indulge in referentiality with disregard for their actual referents.

This scene of mistaken identity from *Fargo* frames the rest of season's main plot, another "story" that begins with mistaken identity. A parole officer in 2010 Minnesota hires one of his parolees to murder his twin brother, but the parolee gets the address wrong and accidentally kills the step-father of the local police chief, and chaos ensues. As a frame then, these opening minutes preface the rest of the season, a mode of what Gérard Genette calls a "paratext." Genette defines the term "paratext" as accompanying components of a text like titles, forwards, illustrations, footnotes, etc. Genette claims these "productions" affect the "reception" of texts and establish a liminal space between the "inside and outside" of a written work (1-2).

Many pieces of fiction spanning different decades, countries, and genres utilize paratexts to lend false credibility to clearly fictional pieces of writing. That is to say, many paratexts feign the material truth or historical actuality of what are otherwise obviously fictional narratives. Through the use of conventions like layered frame narratives with fictionalized authors or editors, texts like Sir Walter Scott's *Tales of My Landlord* series and Edgar Allan Poe's novel

The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket create false histories for the main narratives of their novels. These conventions create the sense that their fictional stories actually gesture at real "referents," as Catherine Gallagher states, which present their texts' fictional tales as credible. In other words, they redouble the fiction by producing fictional realities to which their fictions seem to correspond or refer. Through these rhetorical strategies, these texts assert both their truth and their fictionality, and in turn they suggest that fiction must create an effect of verisimilitude for an audience to properly convey its messages. These notions of parodying truth span from the early origins of the novel in the seventeenth century through today's popular culture, becoming self-referential, or, as Frederic Jameson calls it, self-reflexive; these conventions reference only themselves in a continuous cycle, eliminating their origins. This project aims to call attention to and trace a genealogy of the modern conventions of what I will call "fictive truth." These exemplary texts show that this self-reflexive fictive truth emphasizes a recursive process and competes for authority with the factual knowledge and historical information that it parodies.

1. The Rise of Empirical and Fictive Truth

The rise of the novel coincided with the Enlightenment and the long Scientific Revolution. During this period, epistemology was, in many ways, synonymous with empiricism. Jeremy Black writes in "Renaissance, Reformation, and the Scientific Revolution" that "The belief that man could come to understand much about himself, the world and God through his own reason and empirical investigation played a major role in the Scientific Revolution. Moreover, a form of history of science emerged which identified a mainstream tradition that stressed observation, experiment and careful elucidation of scientific laws" (115). Truth became dependent on experience and corroboration with extra-textual evidence, an idea that was

proliferated in scientific groups like the Royal Society and newly formed state schools detached from religious institutions. Unlike previous thought on knowledge and discovery, empiricism turned its focus away from *textual* sources like the Bible or Aristotle, instead turning to personal experience. Scientific experiments took human observations and repeated them to compare with the "control," suggesting a connection between corroboration and referentiality. Part of learning through experience, as Michael McKeon explains in *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740*, was keeping records of observations: "Empirical attitudes in the study of history and the practice of law helped stimulate an unprecedented dedication to the collection of records, and validated both the first-hand 'evidence of the senses' – eye-and earwitness report – and the 'objective' testimony of documentary objects" (43). This "quest for documentation," a fitting term that David Sedaris uses in his "Santaland Diaries," becomes a literary form in early epistolary novels like Eliza Haywood's *The British Recluse*. In this section of *Holidays on Ice*, Sedaris describes working as an elf in Macy's Santaland and witnessing multiple families, whom he calls "multimedia groups," with heavy photography equipment entering Santa's house and instructing their children to pose on Santa's lap, capturing everything through the camera's lens. The filmed visit records and reproduces the real-life human experience and documents it for future viewing (Sedaris 16-19). His story echoes Walter Benjamin's comments in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in which Benjamin notes the devaluing of artwork's aura of authenticity through its reproduction. These ideas mimic McKeon's point. These specific conventions speak to the austere empiricist tradition that McKeon cites, which informs both his and Benjamin's Marxist approaches, as well as the comic irony of Sedaris. Coincident with this quest for documentation, though, was the beginning of the free press in England.

Lennard Davis begins *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel* with a disclaimer that tracking the history or "rise" of the novel (a term that he is skeptical of at best) is complex, multifaceted, and difficult to follow. He critiques various notions that the novel's history can be neatly traced in a linear fashion, instead overtly favoring new historicist and cultural readings. Along with Edward Said, Davis cites Michel Foucault as an inspiration for his work, explaining,

> The novel, as such, is seen not as a biological entity, nor a convergent phenomenon, but as discourse – that is, in Foucault's usage, the ensemble of written texts that constitute the novel (and in so doing define, limit, and describe it). This ensemble by no means includes only novels and literary criticism, but may include parliamentary statutes, newspapers, advertisements, printer's records, handbills, letters, and so on. (7)

Davis focuses, along with many other scholars, on various types of printed works and their connection to novels. A key component to the early novel was its every growing, newly literate audience. Davis's work shows how intimately connected emerging conventions of the novel were with both the growing literate population and the changing landscape of print news. I argue that the eruption of prose genres and the spread of printed literature led to the spread of certain rhetorical paratextual features that upheld referential truth claims. One of the earliest examples of print "journalism" was the news ballad in the late sixteenth century, which utilized the literary conventions of poetic and prose writing to relate to recent events and information (Davis 47). McKeon explains that, due to their form and subject matter, these printed news ballads began to follow a "paradoxical formula 'strange, therefore true'" (46-7). Though usually comical and meant to be sung, adding an entertaining effect, these ballads often relied on eyewitness accounts

– a further reinforcement of empirical ideals – and lacked any "ironic intent" of other stories (McKeon 46-47).

By the seventeenth century, news became more detached from the ballad and morphed into its own "discursive entity," though, as Davis and McKeon point out, this fact is somewhat of a double-edged sword. Davis remarks that the word "news" was often interchangeable with "novel," which may be a simple linguistic difference, but also suggests an epistemological confusion with genre. McKeon's examination of early publishers' booklists also highlights a general struggle of categorizing texts; while some lists blatantly separated "histories," "romances," and "novels," others mixed these genres, often using terms interchangeably. Furthermore, McKeon explains the dual results of frequent and easily accessible print news stories:

> On the one hand, [print news] helped to validate the new as worthy of attention and to associate news with the historical authenticity of printed documents. On the other hand, the experience of comparing highly partisan and divergent "true accounts" of the same events induced a considerable skepticism regarding the ostentatious claims to historicity which had already become quite conventional. (47)

These partisan issues were ingrained deeply in class. Most criticism came from "those members of the upper class or of the writers who were dependent on that class … the upper classes and wealthier merchants had available to them an alternate and preexisting news information system based on exclusive oral channels, letter-writing, and private communication" (77). The main consumers of "news/novels," according to Davis, were "Merchants, artisans, journeymen, and others," and "as such the discourse was seen as constitutively vulgar, untrue, and potentially dangerous to the interests of the aristocracy" (77). The epistemological queries of print news,

then, were tied deeply to the socio-cultural landscape of Early Modern England. This divide seeps into paratexts of different novels – the fictional authors of Scott's and Poe's prefaces are relatively common men with few ties to the upper echelons of society; their rhetorical strategies appeal less to the elite and more to the common folk of their eras, which I will elucidate in further sections.

J. Paul Hunter, like Davis, emphasizes the cultural context surrounding the novel's origins. Particularly, Hunter focuses on the popular, or "low culture," contributions to the novel. In *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, he, like Davis, illustrates a divide in the changes in printed prose: traditionalists who believed "the new, modern way of writing meant slipped standards and debased values" versus innovators who "rejoiced in changing social values and who sought new varieties of expression and communication because they distrusted what they saw as the exhaustion or corruption of the tradition" (10-11). These innovators were looking for new forms of writing that represented modernity for them. Hunter references a journalistic publication called *The Athenian Mercury*, a bi-weekly participatory publication from bookseller John Dunton. Beginning on March 17, 1691, this circulation published anonymous readers' questions of any kind with answers from various experts or other figures. Hunter claims the *Mercury* directly proves that the average, working or lower-class person was not only capable of thought, but would pay to engage with his peers on various queries in print: "[*The Athenian Mercury*] manages, in print, to assert an authority over individual cases and circumstances that did not precisely conform to set rules and principles, a subtle challenge to traditional literature but (as it turned out) a prophetic one" (13).

Catherine Gallaher affirms Hunter's claim; she writes in "The Rise of Fictionality," "England, the story goes, developed a middle-class readership earlier than other countries, and

the middle class wanted to read about itself, to have the world described in elaborate circumstantial detail; as well as to imagine the simultaneous existence of others in far-flung parts of the nation" (345). These ideas would become the basis for realism in the novel, which Ian Watt describes in *The Rise of the Novel*; through his discussions of Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding, Watt highlights the individual experience as crucial to realism narratives, particularly the focus on common, universal experiences of ordinary people, though his argumentation is flawed. Watt's text assumes a certain ideal form of the novel – meaning he ignores many earlier texts like Aphra Behn's *History of the Nun* from 1689 – that historicists like Davis, McKeon, and Hunter all reject. These features described by Gallagher and others, however, evolve into fictional paratexts by playing on this desire to hear from one's peers, which I will elaborate on in later sections. The first-person frame narrators of texts like *Tales of My Landlord* and *Arthur Gordon Pym* speak directly to their readership on personal levels, mimicking the conventions of prose news and feeding the desire to hear from someone in one's own community.

This divide between the news-consuming working class and the disapproving wealthier classes produced what Davis calls "ideological" journalism: "False news is the news printed by the opposite party. In this sense, news may be factually true, yet for political purposes the opposition must see it as false" (79). Much like contemporary politicians' use of the term "fake news," this point suggests that what audiences find convincing has less to do with "facts" and more with opinions and experience, which are based on eye-witness accounts and trial and error. "Feelings" have more inherent value than "facts." Printed records and news reports, then, are only valid with a personal touch or connection. Accordingly, as I will explain, to foster fictive truth, paratexts need not speak to real facts in the world or history so much as they must reproduce the experience of correspondence or referentiality. If readers experience

correspondence first-hand, the success of these generic conventions seem to suggest, then, the veracity or existence of their referents does not matter. At stake in these paratextual features is not a simple invocation of factuality, but more importantly an appeal to personal perspective and an ironic conviction that suggests perspective matters more than facts alone.

The coordination of these empirical features thus became a crucial method for early novels to sell themselves to suspicious audiences. Genette explains that prefaces that stress their "fictional regime" are meant to be playful, and their fictionality should be obvious to an audience (278). Carolyn Williams implies the same in *Gilbert and Sullivan: Gender, Genre, Parody*: "Parody produces the sense of temporal difference that it then proceeds to turn on and play with" (9). Davis also ponders, "Why not just consider these prefaces as playful conventions which do little more than express the author's whimsy?" (15). Genette writes that "fictional" and "playful," to him, are synonymous. History, though, asserts the opposite. For example, just like Poe's *Arthur Gordon Pym*, Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* was originally published without an author listed and was sold to the public as a factual account of Crusoe's experiences. However, Defoe eventually was forced to reveal his authorship of the text. Gallagher claims Defoe "certainly intended to deceive the public," and that, "A year later, in the preface to a sequel, Defoe, under pressure to admit that he had lied, still insisted on the historical accuracy of his tale but then, inconsistently alleged that each incident in the 'imaginary' story alluded to an episode in a 'real Story'" (339). Defoe's audience did not recognize the playfulness of his falsehoods; they instead viewed his deception for what it was (at the time) – a lie. Genette's point is more applicable to contemporary audiences who, having experience with these genre conventions, may more readily find the humor in parodic prefaces. Despite this attitude, though, Genette still contends that most fictional prefaces must, in some way, assert the credibility of narratives. He states that, for

example, when a real author distances himself from his own authorship through the invention of another author, editor, or founder of his text, he must

> do a bit more than make a performative statement: one must *constitute* this fiction by dint of fictionally convincing details; one must, therefore, *flesh it out* – and the most effective way of doing so seems to be to *simulate a serious preface* … Thus the primary function of the fictional preface, which is to effect a fictional attribution, is supplemented with and reinforced by secondary functions arising from simulation of the serious preface – or more precisely, as we will see, from simulation of one or another type of serious preface. (Genette 279)

Gallagher says as much, explaining that the novel had "to hide its fictionality behind verisimilitude or realism, insisting on certain kinds of referentiality and even making extensive truth claims. If a genre can be thought of as having an attitude, the novel has seemed ambivalent toward its fictionality – at once inventing it as an ontological ground and placing severe constraints upon it" (337). The main constraint that the novel functions under, then, is simultaneously forcing its fictionality into verisimilitude, and vice versa.

But here my argument is that novels are not restrained but animated by performing this forced verisimilitude, often comically, in a way that emphasizes that the play, the performance, the gesture of correspondence or referentiality matters more than the validity of any referents, historical or factual or otherwise. As I will explain, Walter Scott's and Edgar Allan Poe's referential paratexts act as a placebo drug rather than a real medication with verifiable data. It is more significant for Scott's and Poe's audiences to *believe* in the supposed effects of the placebo paratext than to gain actual results from verifiable referents. It is the gesture to a referent, whether real or fake, that matters more than the actual "reality" of said referent or its actual

correspondence or meaningful relationship to the text. Audiences, I argue, enjoy the recreation or pretending of "truth" in these texts, and therefore choose to believe in referents that they cannot corroborate. In her discussion of David Hume and belief, Mary Poovey argues in *A History of the Modern Fact* that the formation of the novel was connected to the genre of scientific essays and Hume's *Treatise on Human Nature*. Hume's skepticism examines the difference between relations of ideas (like mathematics, inherently true) and matters of fact (which must be observed to be verified), and how belief plays into verifying the latter. Though he acknowledged the inherent flaws in induction, Hume argued that belief was a special kind of knowledge based on past empirical observations; he "asserted that this special kind of knowledge assures us that our idea corresponds to something that is real," and, "explain[ed] how we move from the experience of one object to a belief that objects we have not experienced will be of the same kind" (Poovey 199). Readers of novels do the same thing – they buy into the fictive narrator's observations, which sound credible to them through the text's rhetorical strategies, and believe, in some sense, the narrative's fictive truths without having actually experienced the "objects," or referents. These novels' narratives, then, hide behind the subjectivity of belief, and play into its empirical necessity to gain an audience's trust.

Some earlier novels, though, openly acknowledged their fictionality without attempts to hide behind truth claims or belief. Davis, for example, compares another Defoe novel, *Roxana*, with Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. He writes,

> Cervantes freely admits that his work is an act of his own imagination. In fact, this point is not an issue for him. Defoe, however, insists that the foundation of his work is "laid in truth of fact: and so the work is not a story, but a history." It is this claim to verify that allows Defoe's readers to feel as though they are not engaging in mere divertissements but are

> analyzing and learning from the mistakes of others … By claiming that his work is founded on truth, Defoe, the *journalist* par excellence of the early eighteenth century, was treating his novel as if it were virtually indistinguishable in genre from his *news writings*. Cervantes' work, on the other hand, has no relationship to journalism, being much more connected with the chivalric romances of which it was a parody and a negation. (Davis 15, *emphasis added*)

Cervantes was of course well aware of the fictionality of his novel and embraced it fully. In his preface, he addresses his audience as the "idle reader" who "[languishes]" in his text "full of varied fancies," which he referred to as "the child of [his] brain" (Davis 14). This example exemplifies Poovey's "distancing conventions": in, *Genres of the Credit Economy,* Poovey explains that many novelists, "experimented with various distancing devices—ranging from obtrusive narrators, to animated objects, to dehumanized characters—to reinforce the boundary that identified the textual world as *not* real, *non*referential, that is, as art" (374). While Cervantes' overt, intrusive voice in his preface directs his audience's attention to the very artistic, or fictional, nature of his text, Defoe rejects this convention, instead insisting on the specific referentiality of his work. In a sense, he uses the conventions of journalism and news to distance himself from the fictionality of his narrative. I agree with Poovey's claim to a certain extent. While Poovey focuses on how fiction distances itself from the real world, I argue that these conventions both critique the epistemological model of correspondence and fetishize the idea of "fact"; through both these modes, authors like Scott and Poe use distance in their experiments of fictive truth to bring their audiences closer to the false referents of their narratives, in essence making their texts more credible. These authors, like Defoe, utilize

paratexts to distance the real author from his invented history to the novel through ironic referents.

2. Scott's Historical Empiricism

Walter Scott's *Tales of My Landlord* series was published between 1816 and 1832. Like his other novels, this series focuses on Scottish history of the previous century and relies heavily on both real and imagined referents to important events in Scotland. Scott's texts include a general introduction to the whole series, narrated by the supposed "compiler" of the stories, Jedidiah Cleishbotham, followed by individual introductions to each of the seven novels told by another figure, Patrick Pattieson, in whose papers Cleishbotham finds the stories. Neither narrator claims authorship of the tales – they are merely the messengers, delivering the texts to the general public for its anonymous writer. Each introduction focuses on the corroboration of eye-witness accounts, the print records of such accounts, and the narrator's own credibility in verifying such information. Though these paratexts deal in some way with the main plot of each novel, my interest in these inquiries lies more within the prefaces themselves. The paratexts in this series are the main pieces that display performative gestures towards facticity. While these novels are about old and new cultures across the Scottish landscape colliding during the rise of modernity, their paratexts are the primary components that gesture to the cultural and aesthetic roots of the stories through anachronism and false referents.

Genette cites Scott as one of his main examples of fictional preface writers, stating that Scott's work is a crucial example of "the paratextual game of imagining the author [which] gets complicated in a way that makes them, for us, the most novelistic and fascinating part of an oeuvre that has otherwise been somewhat affected by the age limit" (284). Scott's use of the anonymous "Author" throughout his introductions, combined with the layering of Cleishbotham

and Pattieson, distances himself from his narrative, a strategy that Maeve Adams views as a purposeful rhetorical exploration of persuasion. Adams argues in "'The Force of My Narrative': Persuasion, Nation, and Paratext in Walter Scott's Early *Waverley* Novels" that "Scott's writing demonstrate[s] a lasting interest in the concept of persuasion: how to persuade, why humans might seek to persuade another, and what ideally results from acts of persuasion" (940). Scott's paratexts, according to Adams, blur the lines between history and narrative, inviting his audience to consider both as vital to his messages about Scottish history and nationalism. Scott's efforts, though, run counter to traditional, rhetorical notions of persuasion; his efforts to persuade exceed their limit, becoming parodically unpersuasive in their excessive, over-the-top means of attempting to convince his audience of his created referents.

The introduction to the full *Tales of My Landlord* series is "written" by Jedidiah Cleishbotham, a local schoolmaster and parish clerk. Immediately, these titles provide Cleishbotham with some credibility; as a learned and religious man, both positions deeply ingrained in the community, he has more sway with his claims. Cleishbotham acknowledges his social position when explaining why the reader should take his words as fact, claiming "[his] learning and good principles cannot (lauded be the heavens) be denied by any one. …" (Scott 5-6). Cleishbotham asserts, though, that he has further credibility beyond these titles. He first highlights his eye-witness experiences in the landlord's lodging:

> And it must be acknowledged by the most sceptical, that I, who have sat in the leathern armchair, on the left-hand side of the fire, in the common room of the Wallace Inn, winter and summer, for every evening in my life, during forty years bypast (the Christian Sabbaths only excepted), must have seen more of the manners and customs of various tribes and

> people, than if I had sought them out by my own painful travel and bodily labour. (Scott 5-6)

Cleishbotham is painstaking in his attention to detail; not only is he at the inn, but specifically on the left side of the fireplace, and for every single day, not just one. This accentuated repeated act of seeing what goes on at the inn provides him with credibility in the same fashion that the scientific method might – repeated acts and experiences reinforce his observations more convincingly than if he had only passed through once. Cleishbotham's details become gratuitous, and an example of Roland Barthes' "reality effect"; there is no actual, *real* "referent" for these things that the Scott is actually attempting to capture or depict. Rather, such details merely *signify* a sense of the real. Scott himself commented on this type of detailed writing in his praise of Austen's *Emma*: "Scott hailed *Emma* (1816) as the model of 'a style of novel [that] has arisen, within the last fifteen or twenty years,' distinguished by 'the art of copying from nature as she really exists in the common walks of life, and presenting to the reader, instead of the splendid scenes of an imaginary world, a correct and striking representation of that which is daily taking place around him'" (qtd. in Duncan 116). *Emma*'s common descriptions of the regular "nothings" of life are mimicked in Cleishbotham's detailed descriptions. He later cites his extensive travels from Glasgow to Edinburgh, insinuating that he is also a learned man of the Scottish landscape – he has encountered many people of all kinds and been given great opportunities (Scott 6). In these opening paragraphs, before the second frame or main story begins, Scott clearly presents his character's ethos. Cleishbotham portrays himself as a well-traveled and experienced gentleman with great personal knowledge of many people and facets of society, making him an apt candidate to present these tales.

Yet Cleishbotham's self-characterization is paradoxical. In the next breath, he states firmly, "I am NOT the writer, redacter, or compiler, of the Tales of my Landlord; nor am I, in one single iota, answerable for their contents, more or less" (Scott 6). Genette, incorrectly, ignores this distinction, calling Cleishbotham the "author" of the tales. I, however, argue that the distance Scott places between himself and his narrator is crucial to his persuasive exercise in fictive truths. By writing that Cleishbotham is *not* the author, Scott underhandedly claims ownership of his text, subtly acknowledging its fictionality, while also ironically reaffirming the lavish referents he has painstakingly set up. Cleishbotham claims that, although he would be more than capable of writing the following stories, he has not done so, and considers anyone who distrusts his statement "ignorant." Here, Scott sets an expectation for his audience, and then promptly retracts it.

Ironically, though, this action seems to make Cleishbotham more credible – despite not authoring the texts, he proves himself able to corroborate the stories' authenticity with detailed knowledge of the landlord in question. After making this statement, he provides a long and detailed account of his landlord's personal character, including complaints from "the Laird, the Exciseman, and those for whom he refused to draw liquor upon trust" along with Cleishbotham's own counterarguments to them (Scott 7). For example, Cleishbotham explains away his landlord's supposed illegal hunting as follows: "I reply to this charge, that howsoever the form of such animals might appear to be similar to those so protected by the law, yet it was a mere *deceptio visus*; for what resembled hares were, in fact, *hill-kids*, and those partaking of the appearance of moor-fowl, were truly *wood pigeons* and consumed and eaten *eo nomine*, and not otherwise" (Scott 7). His knowledge of these misunderstandings about animal species suggests a close relationship with the landlord who had done the actual hunting, making his statements

about the situation more believable since it is supposedly coming from someone close to the source. Though Cleishbotham again acknowledges his bias towards his landlord, explaining, "It is true, I taught his five sons English and Latin, writing, book-keeping, with a tincture of mathematics, and that I instructed his daughter in psalmody," for which he was paid in libations, his honesty in this case seems to work in his favor (Scott 8). Cleishbotham's tone when making his case presents as overtly forthcoming, as if sharing as much personal information as possible will keep questions at bay about his credibility – openly acknowledging his relationship to his landlord eliminates space for refutation. Cleishbotham plays with digression as a kind of entertainment, distracting his audience from the potentially suspect nature of his referents.

Cleishbotham's characterization of his landlord and his own relationship with him, however, is safe from refutation – Cleishbotham notes at multiple points that his landlord is "deceased," so he can neither confirm nor deny any part of the schoolmaster's account. This "fact" works in Cleishbotham's favor for both his landlord *and* the other important figure in this introduction, Patrick Pattieson, who also "was removed from [Cleishbotham] by death" (Scott 9). Cleishbotham does not harp on these deaths as much as he praises his own character, instead slipping this information into a few sentences as he bolsters his own credibility. He effectively works to persuade his audience by presenting himself favorably first, then letting his readers know after the fact that he has essentially no one to corroborate his explanations for things – he is the sole person able to verify information presented by the dead. Furthermore, Cleishbotham does not portray Pattieson with the most forgiving tone; on the contrary, he seems rather critical of Pattieson's arrangements of the tales, stating,

> I have only further to intimate, that Mr. Peter Pattieson, in arranging these Tales for the press, hath more consulted his own fancy than the accuracy of the narrative; nay, that he

> hath sometimes blended two or three stories together for the mere grace of his plots. Of which infidelity, although I disapprove and enter my testimony against it, yet I have not taken upon me to correct the same, in respect it was the will of the deceased, that his manuscript should be submitted to the press without diminution or alteration. A fanciful nicety it was on the part of my deceased friend, who, if thinking wisely, ought rather to have conjured me, by all the tender ties of our friendship and common pursuits, to have carefully revised, altered, and augmented, at my judgment and discretion. But the will of the dead must be scrupulously obeyed, even when we weep over their pertinacity and self-delusion. (Scott 10)

Again, Cleishbotham reaffirms his character by claiming that, although he disagrees with Pattieson's arrangements and alterations, he will not change the work out of respect for the deceased. He supports his own credibility off the back of Pattieson's "self-delusion," and his explanation of where the tales come from and how they were arranged also reaffirms his denial of authorship. More importantly, though is Cleishbotham's, and by extension Scott's, acknowledgement of the texts' fictionality through Pattieson's less than faithful arrangement. Pattieson's "blending of stories" for a better "plot" sets a precedent of inaccuracy and falsehood for the narratives to follow, and yet the fact that they are based in some sort of truth that is being retold inaccurately still matters.

Despite storylines changing and arrangements being made for convenience rather than accuracy, there is still "truth" in some aspects of the novels. Tamara Gosta cites Katie Trumpener, explaining, "Scott's use of accentuating the Scottish identity only to dismiss it as anachronistic and safely fictitious is a nostalgic tribute to a loss that can be remembered in the space of a fictional narrative but that can no longer be sustained by the progressive overarching

national identity of Britishness" (708). Ian Duncan makes a similar point in *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh*, writing, "romantic national tales and historical novels reflect on the assimilation of Scotland and Ireland into the Union as at once condition and consequence of British imperial ventures overseas" (97). These lines at the end of Cleishbotham's introduction about unreliable retellings define Scott's historical fiction – despite inaccuracies and anachronisms, Scott's novels hold an identifiable truth about Scotland's troubled colonial past. Scott begins his historical novels with Cleishbotham, the reliable educator and record keeper, a man deeply familiar with his and other locales, to frame his retelling of Scottish history with a semblance of reliability and trust for his readers to latch onto. Trumpener and other scholars' political readings of Scott assert that his fiction furthers the image of a Scotland divided between the interestingly authentic but comically quaint, backwards, and dying Highlands, and the modern, commercial, and articulate Lowlands in an era when Edinburgh rivaled London as the intellectual center of the United Kingdom. Scott capitalizes on caricatures of the Highlands and its culture; his subordination of Highlanders creates an aesthetic culture of their dialects and anecdotes that is portrayed as beneath the modernity of the Lowlands. Scott, I would suggest, uses this divide in Scotland's geography to perpetuate an ironic longing for the culture that his fiction portrays, as ambivalent as these connections may be. Cleishbotham's air of superiority as a learned man with experience in Lowland cities colors his critique of his landlord's more rural, Highland community.

The second novel in the *Tales of My Landlord* series, *Old Mortality*, provides further key examples of Scott's "exercise in persuasion": memory and records. The novel's main plot takes place in 1679 during a time of political turmoil. The protagonist, Henry Morton, a moderate Convenanter, finds himself in the middle of violent upheaval between the Scottish rebels and the

pro-Union Royalists. Though on the side of the rebels, Morton's moderate beliefs and actions gain him favor and leniency with the Royalists, and the novel concludes with his marriage to Royalist Edith Bellenden, symbolizing a peacemaking union between Scotland and England. The preface to this tale focuses on historical sites from the conflict and a mason who works to restore the headstones of fallen fighters. Memory and its origins in this preface are unstable but crucial for fact-checking information and highlighting the nostalgia and remorse for a Scotland lost through conflict. In this novel's preface, Scott, as Pattieson, compiled by Cleishbotham, explains that the Author of the story originally met the mason Old Mortality, whose real name is Robert Paterson, thirty years previously in a churchyard in Dunnottar. Cleishbotham questions Pattieson's accuracy in retelling the narratives, and his skepticism is amplified by the added thirty-year gap between when this encounter occurred and when it was written down. Thirty years leaves room for error by memory: as time passes, details change, and people forget.

Furthermore, this introduction, like Cleishbotham's, has multiple narrative layers, all based on memory, which is fallible. These fictional claims to referentiality and real sources therefore might attenuate the credibility of the narrator more than they affirm it. If anything, it seems these rambling apologetic explanations expand the gap between the story—real or imagined—and the novel or "plot," in narratological terms. The prefaces intensify the ironic distance between plot and story even as they seem to struggle to demonstrate their correspondence, and Scott seems to relish in or at least capitalize on the aesthetic pleasures of this irony.

Pattieson, who is now narrating, describes the case of Old Mortality from the writings of the Author, as well as through a conversation with the clergyman of Dunnottar, Mr. Walker, whom the Author also knew. Like Cleishbotham, Mr. Walker holds some credibility because of

his religious position – in a recounting of a previous conversation with Old Mortality, which he is relaying to Pattieson, he states that he "ought to know something about [the parish] … since [he has] been several years the minister" (Scott 15). The lines of recollection become blurred even more in this preface when Pattieson says he is reminded of Old Mortality again while arranging the Author's story: "The remarkable figure and occupation of this ancient pilgrim was recalled to my memory by an account transmitted by my friend Mr. Joseph Train" (Scott 16). Train is actually a true referent; he was a real friend of Scott's and probable inspiration for the novel itself. Here, Pattieson explicitly uses the word "memory," insinuating that he has forgotten about all or some of Old Mortality until another person reminds him. All these people's recollections of Old Mortality become the center of the preface, despite Pattieson claiming to have met Old Mortality himself one day while talking to Mr. Walker. When Pattieson meets Old Mortality, however, "He was in bad humour, and had, according to his phrase, no freedom for conversation with us" (Scott 15). Therefore, having no detailed conversation with the subject in question, Pattieson instead compiles information from others about Old Mortality to introduce the novel. Tamara Gosta writes in "Sir Walter's Palimpsests: Material Imprints and the Trace of the Past," that "*Old Mortality* is notorious for factual errors and excessive anachronism. No doubt Scott purposely manipulates historical facts to bring attention to the work's fictionality as well as to the weakness of memory, the unavoidable errors that happen when collecting recollections or translating memory into a linguistic plane" (714). The multitude of people recalling Old Mortality suggests a dual effect: they both reaffirm the text's inherent fictionality, as Gosta claims, while also distancing the audience from it. Pattieson speaks of each person's account with complete confidence, corroborating them all based on merit, which asserts a claim to truth about Old Mortality's history, even if it does not come from himself.

Ian Duncan focuses on memory and history as well. In *Scott's Shadow*, he writes that, "Scott's fiction is an 'invention of tradition' or 'invention of Scotland' that folds the modern nation into the defeated Jacobite Highlands; tourism and historical romance compose the symbolic arm of Anglo-British 'internal colonialism'" (Duncan 96). Duncan argues that Scott's novels nostalgically conjure a Scotland that is lost, and whose value, as a fiction, is defined by its loss. He argues,

> Cultural differences fall into a receding, insatiable past. In *Waverly*, the hero's (and the reader's) enchanted discovery of Highland clan society signals its translation from a remote place to the remote time of a vanishing premodernity. The contemplation of this lost world converts our disaffection from the imperial violence of modern state formation into a luxurious, aestheticized melancholy … Such devices encode the formation of a distinctively modern kind of national subjectivity, in which the knowledge of our alienation from authentic cultural identities accompanies our privileged repossession of them as aesthetic effects. (Duncan 98)

In psychoanalytic terms, these lost cultural details in the texts are created as lacks, things one desires because they are defined by their absence. Pattieson comically calls attention to his and others' fading memories here because that performatively intensifies the feeling of having lost a real story – something is missing. His narration has a melancholy tone because it is infatuated with that loss and aestheticizes it as desirable. These notions stem from neo-medieval texts like *Don Quixote;* audiences more so enjoy the *feeling* of "being," or wanting to be in, the past than actually desiring to return to it. Readers languish in feelings of regret and loss over their separation from the past.

Where Pattieson is able to fill in the gaps about Old Mortality, though, is through paper records. He seems to indulge in the archive of Old Mortality's life and death. Pattieson provides paper documents from Mr. Train, the man who jogged his memory of Old Mortality, regarding the man's life and death. Mr. Train explains that, over many years, he became "intimately acquainted" with Old Mortality's son, also named Robert Paterson (Scott 16). All the details of Old Mortality's life that Train's papers relay, including marriage, children, and land purchases, are "authenticated" by Robert Paterson Jr. (Scott 20). These documents include detailed expenses listed on paper found "in [Old Mortality's] pocket-book after death," as well as an itemized list of his personal effects at his burial (Scott 18-20). Having paper records of specific details of a man's life, which are then corroborated by his own son, makes the information seem credible. However, memory again calls details into question: Train, relayed by Pattieson, writes, "My informant [Robert Jr.] cannot say, with certainty, the year in which his father took up his residence at Gatelowbrigg, but he is sure it must have been only a short time prior to the year 1746, as, during the memorable frost in 1740, he says his mother still resided in the service of Sir Thomas Kirkpatrick" (Scott 17). Robert Jr., in this account, acknowledges his memory's shortcomings, but still does his best to give an accurate account based on other information he is certain of. Like Cleishbotham, Robert Jr. acknowledges his flaws, making himself, ironically, more credible to an audience. Rather than feigning unaltered, perfect memory of his father's life, he admits his mind's shortcomings. This moment further proves the fallibility of memory, while also humanizing the people involved in telling Old Mortality's story. In addition, it reasserts the fact that memory is more valued than a more reliable source of information like Old Mortality's papers – they must still be verified by his son, whose human recollection is fallible. Really, the dates do not matter as much as the character and other details that readers want to know. Yet

Pattieson relies most on Robert Jr. and the other people he has spoken with to frame the Author's story. Gosta states,

> Pattieson wants to make the fragments whole and, moreover, wants the various fragments to "correct and verify" each other … Pattieson takes on the role of the master tailor, tailoring Old Mortality's stories, correcting and verifying the seams in the cloth of the past. Pattieson's sources are people and their stories … As someone who stands outside the historical moment he narrates, Pattieson cannot escape the problem of perspective as much as he wants us to believe that he will offer an objective account. (713)

Pattieson's efforts of presenting an accurate account of Old Mortality, then, are flawed, but clearly represent a value judgement over memory. History is written not just from records or other such documents, but from personal accounts, which will always be subjective. Even record keeping is done by a person who has a biased perspective. Therefore, Pattieson takes as many different accounts as he can and puts them together to derive truth from commonalities and verifiable statements made by those who knew Old Mortality the best.

Yet Old Mortality himself, whose very existence in the text is compiled from others' recollections of him, works to keep a physical record of history. As a mason, or at the very least "educated to the use of the chisel," he crosses the Scottish countryside re-inscribing tombstones. Old Mortality's work keeps the memories of fallen fighters alive. He, like Pattieson, acts like a kind of historian by preserving key artefacts of troubling times in Scotland when the Jacobite rebels fought to restore power to the House of Stuart. Gosta writes, "Old Mortality revitalizes the memory of the deceased, the memory that the inscriptions materialize through language," which she argues is "a type of performative memory" (712). Whereas the novel's introduction is Pattieson's record of the past, patch worked together from memories of others, Old Mortality's

repeated re-inscriptions keep memory alive. It is as if both characters are doing the inversion of the other – while one is taking memory to create documentation, the other is restoring documentation to preserve memory. One type of truth verifies the other here; memory is verified by tombstone records, and paper records of one man are verified by the memory of others.

Both Pattieson and Old Mortality function under a nostalgia for a lost Scotland; however, where Pattieson and his counterparts long for a lost Highlands aesthetic and a glorified version of quaint, antiquarian Scottish culture, Old Mortality's performative nostalgia suggests a longing for the real people lost during this era of conflict. His re-inscription of the Whig's Vault and other headstones across Scotland from the rebellions suggests a different kind of longing for the past, one of remembering the sad "truths" of conflict and its consequences. Gosta writes, "The past that these tombs encrypt is uncomfortable and resists idealization and totalization," and yet, despite this discomfort, Old Mortality repeatedly performs his re-inscriptions to maintain the lost souls that these tombstones signify (711). She also claims, "Old Mortality's monuments function as a type of palimpsest, although the overwriting seeks to match the *scriptio inferior* – the original inscriptions are reinscribed. In such reinscription lies a fundamental belief in origin. These tombs call to mind Platonic *anamnesis*, the entombed arch-memory" (712). Here, the origins of memory are lost, or at least fading, so that only the memories remain. The same notion holds true for Pattieson's treatment of Old Mortality himself – the man is dead, but he lives on in the memory of others. These examples, though, affirm Gosta's point – there is belief in the "origin," or referent, in these paratexts. Scott's historical fiction, though at times anachronistic in its referents, parodying persuasion through comedic portrayals of Scottish culture, upholds a firm belief in its referentiality. Or, as Duncan puts it, "The ideological force of Scott's novels lies in their explicit representation of modernization as an overdetermined historical process … The

historical novel consummates the novel's historical agenda by making it its theme" (Duncan 97). Scott's paratexts directly connect referentiality to nostalgia for a lost Scotland, romanticizing real and imaged details of Scotland's past to persuade his audience. By extension, Scott's fictions themselves act as a real referent for his fictionalized Scottish past, as well as a fictional referent for the real lost Scotland. These paratextual features conjure a nostalgic "real fiction," a fantasy referent for novels defined by their difference from these referents.

These prefaces set a crucial precedent for Scott's fictive truths – his persuasion in the novel depends on his audience suspending its disbelief from the first line of Cleishbotham's preface, buying into his nostalgic paratexts as a thematic setup for the main narrative of the novel. Not all Scott scholars agree, however. Editors Jane Stevenson and Peter Davidson, in their introductory material to the Oxford World Classics edition of *Old Mortality*, repeatedly claim that readers can simply skip the framing narratives and jump straight to the main text. While they present their introduction as a means "to examine the strategies by which Scott persuades his gentle readers to absorb this intractable, even repellent, mass of data" (xxxv), they also suggest that the potential "bewilderment" (ix) of some audiences may be too great to overcome when reading the paratexts in this novel: "For the contemporary reader, unfamiliar with Scott's work, the advice given by Calder in his 1975 edition still holds good: skip the 1830 Introduction, skip the framing narratives of Cleishbotham and Pattieson, and begin with the wappenshaw which opens the action proper" (xxxix). This suggestion is counterintuitive if, as Stevenson and Davidson state, the goal of this reading strategy is to "read with an awareness of a double historical perspective, of the ways in which the presentation of the seventeenth century is filtered through the preoccupations and anxieties of the early nineteenth century" (xxxix). These nineteenth-century concerns, in part, are ingrained deeply in Scott's prefaces, namely his focus

on the nostalgic view of a lost, romanticized Scotland. To make his fictive truths more credible, he *must* create a frame that distances himself from his narrative in order to affect an emotive feeling from his readers that connects them to the aesthetic *essence* of Scottish history. His reproduction of referentiality through these layered frames of memory and eye-witness experiences of the Scottish landscape is what makes his readership *trust* his narrative, regardless of whether it is actually true. Doing as Stevenson and Davidson suggest disavows Scott's rhetorical efforts towards both fictionality and verisimilitude. *Old Mortality* hinges upon its frames of memory to present its referential truths to its audience.

3. Poe and *Pym*: Ironic Credibility

Memory, as in Scott's texts, features heavily in the paratexts that bookend Edgar Allan Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*. These memories come in the form of a first-person narrator, Mr. Pym, relating his experiences from a voyage through the South Seas. First published in New York in 1838, Poe's only novel includes a preface written by the fictitious protagonist and supposed author Pym himself, and an anonymous editor's "Note" after the final chapter, creating a layered narrative that muddles the origin of the story, distancing Poe from his true authorship. The novel works to establish other forms of verisimilitude as well, including numerous references to – and at times blatant plagiarism of – different fictional and real travel narratives, in particular Morrell's *A Narrative of Four Voyages to the South Sea* (Thompson 430; Kennedy x). J. Gerald Kennedy explains in his introduction to the Oxford World Classics edition that Poe was "Under pressure to complete the book and capitalize on the excitement," surrounding polar expeditions, and that "Reports about the South Seas furnished Poe with details that lent verisimilitude to his depiction of remote islands, while imagination and fantasy supplied images of that mysterious terra incognita, the Antarctic region" (ix). Poe's use

of referents from travel accounts, or at least referents to other fictional travel narratives, add to the frames of the novel. These features, like those in Scott's texts, create a fictive aura that audiences can get lost in.

Some components of the text, particularly some details in Pym's preface, have been explained away by scholars as part of its publication history. G. R. Thompson, in his editorial introduction to the novel in the Norton Critical Edition of *The Selected Writing of Edgar Allan Poe*, explains (as Pym himself describes in the preface) that the novel's first two installments were published in the *Southern Literary Messenger,* the literary magazine that Poe was editor of at the time, but with "a fictionalized twist" (429). However, Poe was in the process of moving to another city between 1837-38, thus leaving this job behind, and "no further portions of the *Pym* narrative appeared in its pages" (Thompson 429). Thompson explains further that Poe's move "and other stressful aspects of his life in 1837-38 have suggested to some critics that he hurried his story rather than giving it the careful, detailed attention that was his trademark; and a favorite critical pastime is to point out errors or inconsistencies in the text" (429). During this time, Poe's relationship with the owner of the *Messenger,* Thomas W. White, was wearing thin due to creative differences, along with Poe owing White money and often drinking on the job. Furthermore, Kennedy attributes some of the text's paratextual features to Poe's inability to get anything else published: "Poe had started to write *Pym* not through any urge to prove himself in the longer form of the novel but because he had been unsuccessful in interesting publishers in a volume of tales … Harpers [Publishing] advised Poe … that American readers preferred a 'single and connected story' of one or two volumes in length" (vii). He continues, "Behind the Defoesque posturing of the preface to *Pym*, we find wry evidence of Poe's lingering contempt for the 'shrewdness and common sense' of those native readers whose predilection for

'uncouthness' had partly occasioned the rejection of his tales by Harper and Brothers" (Kennedy viii). This fact also gestures at another potential joke from Poe – Pym, narrating his preface, comments that the first two installments published in the *Messenger* were heavily edited by Mr. Poe, and that their writing styles should be clearly distinct once the rest of the novel picks up, though of course it is not. Kennedy explains that, given his discontent for the entire project, Poe's use of the paratextual preface and endnote were meant to, ironically, sabotage his novel:

> Compelled by dire necessity to produce a novel for which he had neither aptitude nor inclination, Poe seems to have decided—shortly after his break with White—to turn the project into a hoax, an act of literary deception couched as an authentic travel narrative by a young man just back from the South Seas 'and elsewhere'. To carry off the scheme, he concocted a preface signed by 'A. G. Pym' to explain why his own name was attached to the story in the *Messenger*. 'Mr. Poe' figures in the preface as a mentor, promoter, and temporary ghostwriter; he has expressed the 'greatest interest', Pym reports, in that part of the narrative pertaining to the Antarctic Ocean. (Kennedy ix)

Kennedy asserts here that Poe's use of false referents in his paratexts were a sign of his resentment towards the novel, as Poe famously stated later in "The Philosophy of Composition" that any good piece of fiction or poetry should be read within one sitting and focus solely on what he called the "poetic effect." A novel, then, was never Poe's initial goal, but became a necessity for publication.

Yet Thompson's introduction cautions against dismissing the "epistemological questions raised by the narrative" to mere accident or, in Kennedy's case, frustration. I agree – despite a potential logistical reason to explain away the publication history of his text, the preface and endnote to *Pym* clearly display purposeful exercises in persuasion, like Scott's texts do. Umberto

Eco points out in *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* that Poe, like Daniel Defoe did with the first publication of *Crusoe,* Poe published his novel without his own name appearing as the author. Richard Kopley also comments in "Readers Write: Nineteenth Century Annotations in Copies of the First American Edition of Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*" that Poe was clearly inspired by Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and wanted to present his own novel in the same "authoritative manner": "Indeed, in reviewing *Robinson Crusoe* in January 1836, shortly before he began to plan *Pym,* Poe referred to Defoe's 'potent magic of verisimilitude,' and in September 1836 he referred to 'the infinity of arts which give verisimilitude to a narration'" (401). There is, then, a case to make for the purposeful credibility of Poe's verisimilitude. *Pym's* paratexts use their narrators and eye-witness accounts to assert fictive truths to the novel's readership; however, rather than suggesting feelings of nostalgia for a lost sect of cultural history like Scott, Poe's novel instead invites readers' intrigue through false memories and gives the novel a referential life long after it concludes.

The fictional preface is narrated by the novel's protagonist, Mr. Pym. Poe's rhetorical strategy differs from Scott's – while Scott piles layers of narrative onto one another, Poe places his novel's narrator and the original source of the plot front and center. Mr. Pym explains that he has recently returned to the United States following a voyage to the South Pole. He writes that, upon his return, "accident threw [him] into the society of several gentlemen from Richmond, Va., who felt deep interest in all matters relating to the regions I had visited" (Poe 432). These gentlemen tell Pym that it is his "duty" to share his experiences with the public, though he feels he cannot. He first says, "I had several reasons … for declining to do so, some of which were of a nature altogether private, and concern no person but myself" (Poe 432). Again, Poe's narrator differs here from Scott's – Cleishbotham and Pattieson are both more than happy to over-explain

the reasoning behind certain details, their personal morals and character, etc., while Pym is very reluctant to disclose any such information. As Pym soon explains, though, his story is much less believable than Scott's historical fiction. He writes that another reason for his reluctance to go public with his experiences was that

> the incidents to be narrated were of a nature so positively marvellous, that, unsupported as my assertions must necessarily be (except by the evidence of a single individual, and he a half-breed Indian), I could only hope for belief among my family, and those of my friends who have had reason, through life, to put faith in my veracity – the probability being that the public at large would regard what I should put forth as merely an impudent and ingenious fiction. (Poe 432)

Pym has three issues here: first, he feels his story is too fantastic for anybody to take seriously; second, even if he wanted to convince someone that his tale is true, he has nobody credible to corroborate him (in line with the novel's problematic racial politics, Pym here suggests that his companion Dirk Peters' status as a "half-breed Indian" necessarily renders him a non-credible source); and third, it seems that his story is very personal and private, which of course makes it even more appealing to his audience. Unlike Scott, whose writing is concerned with public knowledge of Scottish history, even if fading from memory, Pym's *private* information is the alluring object of desire that is foreclosed. Unlike Cleishbotham and Pattieson, Pym can only hope that his close relations will believe him, since the only other person who could verify his story is questionable because of his race, making him less credible in the eyes of a nineteenth-century public. Anybody else who would have been able to support Pym's tale has died, as the novel later reveals; the text's main voyage results in Pym and his fellow shipmates entering a supposed "inner Earth" through an opening at the South Pole – a common scientific theory of the

era that appears in different texts Poe borrowed from – to a land called Tsalal. The Tsalalians are a tribe of people who have never been exposed to the color white, and who are themselves entirely black, including their eyes and teeth. They prove hostile in the long run, killing the rest of the ship's crew except for Pym and Peters. Pym's story, before even being told, lacks multiple eyewitnesses to support his claims of what has happened to him.

In addition to Pym's lack of corroboration, he also expresses concern over his memory of the long voyage, as he "kept no journal during a greater portion of the time in which [he] was absent" (Poe 432). Pym worries, "I feared I should not be able to write, from mere memory, a statement so minute and connected as to have the *appearance* of that truth it would really possess, barring only the natural and unavoidable exaggerations to which all of us are prone when detailing events which have had powerful influence in exciting the imaginative faculties" (Poe 432). Here, Pym worries that, due to the lack of a contemporaneous record of what he experienced on his adventures, he will not be able to accurately remember what happened in a way that would be believable to the public. Already having no one to properly vouch for his story, he fears that his memory's natural fallibility will cause further detriment to his true story. Like Cleishbotham remarks of Pattieson's arrangements, Pym acknowledges the novel's overall fictionality in this moment, making a plea to his audience to understand that, in a re-telling, sometimes details are "exaggerated" by the storyteller, but beyond those changes, his narrative still holds some level of truth. Pym's sentiment echoes the opening of Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions*. Rousseau claims that his accounts are a real and honest depiction of himself ("such was I"), though parts of his narrative may be different than actual events due to his lapse in memory or misremembrances: "With equal freedom and veracity have I related what was laudable or wicked, I have concealed no crimes, added no virtues; and if I have sometimes

introduced superfluous ornament, it was merely to occupy a void occasioned by defect of memory: I may have supposed that certain, which I only knew to be probable, but have never asserted as truth, a conscious falsehood" (Rousseau). Rousseau states that his human memory and imagination may have colored his experiences, causing him to exaggerate at times. Just like Rousseau, Pym's frankness, whether real or fake, gives him credibility with his audience because it mimics honesty, an attitude that overcomes potential inaccuracy; in fact, it bolsters the truth of the fiction rather than undermining it.

Despite these potential obstacles, though, Pym still publishes his narrative. In fact, he uses these potential questions regarding his text's authenticity to his advantage through very circular logic. Pym explains that many people, among them an editor named "Mr. Poe" of the *Southern Literary Messenger* in Virginia, advised him to "prepare at once a full account" of his adventure, and to publish it "*under the garb of fiction*" (Poe 432). Eco cites Poe's rhetorical strategy, noting that the first two installments of the novel published in the *Messenger* in 1837 "began with 'My name is Arthur Gordon Pym' and thus presented a first-person narrator, but that text appeared with the name of Poe as the empirical author." However, once the text was published a year later in its complete novelized form, "there was a preface signed 'A. G. Pym' presenting the adventures as facts, and telling readers that in the *Southern Literary Messenger* 'the name of Mr. Poe was affixed to the articles' because nobody would have believed the story, so it was just as well to present it 'under the garb of fiction'" (Eco 17-19). Here, Poe again does the opposite of Scott – rather than repeatedly distancing himself from the text, he directly inserts himself into the middle of his paratext. This fictionalized version of Poe himself, the actual author of Pym's preface and the whole narrative, insists that the very "uncouthness" of Pym's story would, in fact, reinforce its truthful nature, which proves accurate. According to Pym, once

Mr. Poe published two installments of the story under the "fiction" section of the *Southern Literary Messenger*, the actual magazine where approximately the first third of *Pym* was first published, many readers wrote in to the journal claiming the opposite, that Pym's narrative was clearly factual and should be published as such. Poe explicitly blends reality and fiction in this moment. Just as Scott writes historical fiction, using real details and events from Scottish history in his novels, Poe takes real details of his novel's publication history and explains them by making his fictional protagonist real, thus asserting both the true and fictional nature of his text. By mixing referents – pointing to aspects of reality and fiction – Poe provides a level of verisimilitude for his audience to latch on to, disguising his text's fictionality in referentiality.

Yet the preface's claim that audiences were convinced of the narrative's reality is itself a fiction. Kopley cites multiple examples of notes in early copies of *Pym* from readers angry at being apparently tricked, or angry at the author's (Poe or Pym, in different cases) attempt to trick them. Kopley references early reviews of the novel like that in *Burton's Gentlemen's Magazine's*, which "describes *Pym* as an 'impudent attempt at humbugging the public'; a second, in the *Metropolitan Magazine*, similarly characterizes the book as 'an impudent attempt at imposing on the credulity of the ignorant'; and a third, in the *New-York Mirror*, terms the author a 'liar of the first magnitude'" (399). Kopley claims that these and other reviews, as well as handwritten notes from privately owned copies of the novel, "reinforce the impatient annoyance expressed by those early reviewers who had felt duped by the book," and that Poe created a "dissonant community … through his fiction" with his attempts at verisimilitude. Interestingly, though, Kopley seems to conclude that these reviews put neither Poe's text nor its audience at any kind of disadvantage. He then quotes Poe regarding these reviews:

> Poe himself, advocating a seemingly naive presentation of the verisimilar and the fantastic, states: "The reader . . . readily perceives and falls in with the writer's humor, and suffers himself to be borne on thereby" (Poe, rev. of Sheppard Lee, p. 667). Certainly Poe's reader may both "fall in with" and "be borne on" – and thus more fully enjoy – Poe's extraordinary imagination. (Kopley 408)

Kopley's point here is that, though frustrated, Poe's readers have to give up some level of control in order to become attuned to the "writer's humor," meaning that they must suspend their disbelief to some extent in order to enjoy fully Poe's "extraordinary imagination." I agree – I think that these reviews and Kopley highlight the audience's desire to get lost in the narrative and their disappointment at not being able to do so. For whatever reason, some people were not fooled, finding the novel a total "humbug" (a popular word among reviewers). Kopley mentions that in one reader's copy he found the markings "you are a Liar" under Pym's name at the beginning of the text, which insinuates that this reader believed Pym himself to be real, but his story false. On some level, Poe's framing and fictive truths have worked: though not fully convinced, readers have bought into the presented author of the tale, accusing him of lying despite his pleas of faulty memory, rather than looking right through Pym to Poe.

To return to the text itself, as Pym explains, despite his and Mr. Poe's efforts to publish the narrative as a "fable," the *Messenger's* readerships supposedly found Pym's story too spectacular not to be believed. As a result of this trial and error, he and Mr. Poe decided to move forward with the narrative's publication, acknowledging its factual nature instead. Pym writes, "I thence concluded that the facts of my narrative would prove of such a nature that as to carry with them sufficient evidence of their own authenticity" (Poe 433). This statement sets a precedent for the novel's audience – Pym's (or Poe's) preface is, overall, not so necessary, as the "facts" of the

story will speak for themselves. If readers of the *Messenger* found the text credible, then surely everybody else will, despite its incredible nature. A footnote from Thompson in the Norton edition of this text comments on Pym's logic, explaining that it "seems to have a dual purpose of perpetrating a tongue-in-cheek hoax while giving a greater verisimilitude to the narrative" (Poe 433). This footnote lays out Pym's explanation, stating, "we now have the 'real' account by Mr. Pym, not a mere 'fiction' [published] by Mr. Poe," making, as some critics suggest, one of many ironic observations about the nature of writing in this text. The footnote also calls the argument "absolutely absurd," a claim I agree with (Poe 433). Similar to Melville's comment about his own novel *Mardi*, Pym's essential claim is that, initially, the story is too fantastic for anybody to believe, when in fact it is that very fantastic nature that makes it more credible. Melville wrote,

> Not long ago, having published two narratives of voyages in the Pacific [*Typee* and *Omoo*], which, in many quarters, were received with incredulity, the thought occurred to me, of indeed writing a romance of Polynesian adventure, and publishing it as such; to see whether, the fiction might not, possibly, be received for a verity: in some degree the reverse of my previous experience. (Melville)

Like McKeon's description of odd news ballads, this logic from Melville and Poe echoes one of Francis Bacon's points in *Novum Organum*, in which he discusses outliers in scientific discovery that amount to "miracles" or "irregularities": "Man's meditation proceeds no further at present, than just to consider things of this kind as the secrets and vast efforts of nature, without an assignable cause, and, as it were, exceptions to general rules" (Bacon). Man must accept strange anomalies as true, even if they are unexplainable or difficult to believe, which is what Pym hopes his audience will do with his narrative.

Pym's story commences, filled with fantastic tales of strange worlds and occurrences, again borrowing from different travel narratives of the era and earlier (including, more notably, details resembling *Gulliver's Travels*). Pym's story is cut short, though; the final chapter of his narrative leaves his audience on a cliffhanger where, after he and Peters have escaped Tsalal in a small boat, they encounter "a shrouded human figure, very far larger in its proportions than any dweller among men" and whose skin is "of the perfect whiteness of the snow" (Poe 560). The next sentence in the text begins the editor's "Note," which states, "The circumstances connected with the late sudden and distressing death of Mr. Pym are already well known to the public through the medium of the daily press" (Poe 561). This sentence works in two ways: first, again, like Scott's paratexts, it kills off the one person whom the public could go to for further verification of his story, if needed. Now, all that is written down must be taken as fact from Pym, since it is written in first person and Pym can no longer be questioned. Second, it places the audience in a position where it cannot ask what happened to Pym – the editor claims that the general public must already know. Therefore, all that remains is the narrative Poe's readers have just completed before the Note. The editor explains that there were a few final chapters of Pym's narrative left to include and publish, but they have sadly been lost. He also mentions that Pym's companion Peters, whom Pym has already prejudiced readers against, is still alive, but "cannot be met with at present" to either corroborate Pym's accounts or tell the rest of the story. Poe thus provides no closure for his readers, instead forcing them to, in a way, embrace the fictionality of the narrative by imagining what may have happened to Pym. Eco writes that, in this note, "the author wants us to spend the rest of our lives wondering what happened; and fearing that we are not yet consumed by the desire to know what will never be revealed to us, the author, not the voice of the narrator, adds a note at the end telling us that, after the disappearance of Mr. Pym,

‘the few remaining chapters which were to complete his narration ... have been irrecoverably lost’” (7). This cliffhanger creates an afterlife for the novel; like serial fiction, these features suggest that Pym’s story exceeds the plot of the novel and, for all their self-reflexivity, rely on this subordination of the text to present their fictive truth claims to the audience. This ending note directs readers not to an antecedent or historical referent, but to a possible future “conversation” with or about Pym.

All these different layers and pieces of information about Pym and his tale are affirmed further by a brief sentence from the editor, who expresses frustration with “[the] gentleman whose name is mentioned in the preface,” that is, Mr. Poe. The note explains that Mr. Poe has “declined the task” of filling in any blanks he could with his knowledge and publication of Pym’s text. The editor seems fine with Mr. Poe’s decline, writing, “this for satisfactory reasons connected with the general inaccuracy of the details afforded him, and his disbelief in the entire truth of the latter portions of the narrative” (Poe 561). Here, like Cleishbotham to Pattieson, this anonymous editor passes judgement on the fictional Poe’s work on Pym’s narrative, specifically that Mr. Poe might have found Pym’s stories wholly unbelievable, which both the editor and the public, according to these paratexts, have found perfectly credible in their own merit. This editor coming in to correct the record, so to speak, leaves Poe’s audience with one final affirmation of truth in the novel by passing a positive judgement on its overall merit. What he does not say, though, leaves gaps that the audience can fill in. These gaps performatively create meaning by suggesting that there is a story *beyond* the text. As per deconstructionist views, much like Locke’s distinction between *res* and *verba,* the degeneration of language as inadequate in fact creates a sense of something real and important enough that it cannot be reduced to words. Pym

makes his text important through what is missing, which is what his audience enjoys most at the end of the novel.

4. *Fargo's* Postmodern Pastiche

These literary examples of genre convention are only two exemplary cases of many. Fictional prefaces crop up throughout literature across time and genre; they include the prologues to Shakespeare's comedies, like *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* in which Bottom and company claim to deliberately act poorly in case their aristocratic audience believes that they are really murdering or are really lions and are thereby too frightened; they include Horace Walpole's 1764 novel *The Castle of Otranto,* in which Walpole admits in the preface to the second edition that the false medieval origins of his text were due to his attempt to blend the genres of romance and realism; they include other American texts like Washington Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw,* which present narratives found among someone else's papers and are re-told to their contemporary audiences at get-togethers; they include different modern pieces of children's fiction that replicate medieval or supernatural origins, like Tony DiTerlizzi and Holly Black's *The Spiderwick Chronicles* or J. K. Rowling's *Hogwarts Library* set, which utilize typological conventions like characters' handwritten notes in the printed text. These conventions have bled into popular culture as well, particularly onto screen, transcending their printed origins. Quentin Tarantino's recent film *Once Upon a Time … in Hollywood*, for example, separates its second and third acts with "behind the scenes" footage of the movie star characters. "Mockumentary" style films and television shows, too, like *The Office* and *Parks and Recreation*, use documentary conventions like personal interviews and hand-held style filming to portray their characters as real people. Even fiction podcasts mimic the styles of both old radio dramas from the first half of the twentieth century and contemporary

radio reporting; shows like *Limetown* and *The Message* reference contemporary NPR hosts like Ira Glass to give credibility to their science fiction narratives.

A prime example of these conventions on screen, though, is FX's series *Fargo*, based on the 1996 film by the Coen Brothers. Both the film and each episode of the television series begin with the phrase "This is a true story." Of course, as this paper has already pointed out, the stories themselves are not real, despite being presented as such. *Fargo's* use of these conventions, however, lacks what the aforementioned texts have – purpose. In many ways, the series presents its truth claims as less than entertainment, imitating its conventional origins without trying to persuade its audience in the same meaningful way. It plays on Williams' notions of parody, though it might be better described, in Frederic Jameson's terms, as pastiche.

Jameson's book *Postmodernism: or, the Culture of Late Capitalism* outlines his theory of the state of contemporary capitalistic culture. He argues,

> It is safest to grasp the concept of the postmodern as an attempt to think the present historically in an age that has forgotten how to think historically in the first place. In that case, it either "expresses" some deeper irrepressible historical impulse (in however distorted a fashion) or effectively "represses" and diverts it, depending on the side of the ambiguity you happen to favor. Postmodernism, postmodern consciousness, may then amount to not much more than theorizing its own condition of possibility, which consists primarily in the sheer enumeration of changes and modifications. (Jameson ix)

Jameson claims that the referentiality of postmodern literature, in other words the "cultural logic of late capitalism," results from reproductions or simulations of reality replacing the real itself. He explains that a key feature of postmodernism is "the way in which virtually any observation about the present can be mobilized in the very search for the present itself and pressed into

service as a symptom and an index of the deeper logic of the postmodern, which imperceptibly turns into its own theory and the theory of itself" (Jameson xii). Like Derrida's writings on deconstruction, Jameson argues that postmodernist work is self-reflexive – it continuously references itself, to the point where there is no origin, or center, left to find.

One form of the postmodern that Jameson outlines is pastiche, a style of work that imitates that of another era. Jameson views pastiche as a form of parody that takes its self-reflexivity one step further. He writes, "Pastiche is … the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists" (Jameson 17). Jameson refers to pastiche as "blank parody," explaining that, in the end, its only referent is itself as it loses touch with any historical origins of what it is imitating. As I have already elucidated with Scott and Poe, much of realism is more pastiche than verisimilitude – their novels' use of fictive truth claims stems from imitations of news ballads and other early publications, thus making the craft of rhetorical persuasion a main referent.

Fargo's use of epistemological conventions and assertion of truth claims to its narratives lack any connection to its origins in the early novel, however. The series seems to poke fun at itself through some of its paratexts, though any deeper meaning is lost in its self-reflexive nature. For example, the penultimate episode of season two opens with the classic *Fargo* phrase "This is a true story"; however, as the words fade away, the word "true" lingers on screen longer than the rest. The assertion here is that the audience should take this story seriously to some degree, which is further supported by the opening shot of a bookshelf. The camera zooms in on a history

book called *True Crime in the Midwest*, which opens onto illustrated pages detailing the main characters and events in this season. The opening pages also have written on them a play on the classic Fargo intro, stating that these events took place in various states across the Midwest from 1825 to the present, and that names have been changed out of respect, but the events are the same. The show here plays on the idea of documentation I have touched on previously – a history textbook appears on screen, bringing a level of trustworthiness or reality to the season's main plot beyond just the opening statement that accompanies each episode. The issue, though, is that this book opens in the next to last episode, when viewers have already heard most of the season's story told. The paratext is neither introducing nor framing the main narrative, instead referencing what has already happened. It does not use this feature as a rhetorical strategy to entice its audience in the opening of the season, instead acknowledging its historicity near the very end. A narration begins as the pages flip through illustrations and text, providing a familiar voice to *Fargo* viewers. The narrator is actor Martin Freeman, who played season one's Lester Nygaard. Again, the show is referencing itself, but without purpose – Lester dies in the final moments of season one, and, although season two takes place long before the timeline of season one, he would have been a child or young adult during season two, and in a different town. His narration is anachronistic and is merely the show referencing itself for fan service rather than any actual purpose. As a pastiche, these features perhaps betray an effort from the show to accrue the cultural capital of the "literary" via its self-reflexivity rather than trying to present its own authentic epistemological position.

As the pages continue to turn, Freeman narrates,

> And so, we come to perhaps the bloodiest chapter in the long and violent history of the Midwest region. And here, I'm speaking of Luverne, Minnesota, 1979, commonly referred

> to by laypeople as the Massacre at Sioux Falls. Readers will know that I've chosen to file this case as a Minnesota crime, even though most of the murders took place in North and then South Dakota. But I believe the key to understanding this complex and nuanced crime is to look at the butcher and small-town beautician at its center … (0:0:36)

In this narration, like the first-person narrators of the canonical literature discussed above, the author of this history book presents himself with a level of autonomy over his story and expresses narrative choices he has made that may warp or misrepresent fact. He has decided to "file" this crime in Minnesota because the main characters Ed and Peggy Blumsquist live there, despite much of the criminal activity taking place in surrounding states. He makes a value judgement, then, on the crimes he is relating to his audience – the origin matters most. He also speaks to his audience with a tone similar to that of Poe's anonymous editor in the endnote of *Pym* – this narrator trusts that his audience is on the same page as him, understanding why certain things are relevant and why he has made some decisions. Again, though, these conventions lack the same impact since they are coming at the end of the season. The episode's opener references itself, previous episodes, and previous seasons without rhetorical logic, presenting this paratext as a joke void of deeper meaning.

The series somewhat rectifies this creative choice from season two with the opening episode of season three, which I have already detailed. As the scene moves from the German office into the main narrative of the season, the classic *Fargo* phrase appears again, only this time the word that lingers on screen is "story," rather than "true." Despite the German officer insisting that they are there to tell the truth, *not* stories, the textual opening asserts the opposite, as well as the opposite of the previous season's assertion. Again, the show is referencing itself, poking fun at its fictionality unnecessarily – its postmodern audience is already in on the joke.

Despite its dulled self-reflexivity, though, this opening seems to utilize some generic conventions to its advantage. Using this opening scene of mistaken identity to frame a season based mostly on mistaken identity echoes Scott's openings of the *Tales of My Landlord* novels like *Old Mortality*; the preface serves as a thematic and historical introduction to the main narrative. Furthermore, the lingering word "story" on screen as the scene changes reflects the roundabout logic of Poe's preface, doubling back on the reception of his "too strange not to believe" type of tale. The show does its best to make something of its thematic opening.

In fact, the season connects back to its opener in episode eight, "Who Rules the Land of Denial?" In this episode, criminals Nikki Swango and Mr. Wrench are on the run from the main villain V. M. Varga's henchmen, one of whom is named *Yuri Gurka*, a proud Ukrainian Cossack. Yuri is in the background of the majority of the season – he appears to do Varga's dirty work when necessary, but does not feature heavily in every episode. After nearly escaping with their lives in a bloody fight with the henchmen, Nikki and Mr. Wrench, a reprised character from season one, escape through the woods to a remote bowling alley on the side of the road. Wrench's reappearance towards the end of the season is, again, another self-reflexive move by the series, recycling a character from the past. The characters enter limping and battered; as Mr. Wrench sits in a seat at one of the bowling lanes, Nikki approaches the bar and asks for a whiskey. As the camera zooms out slowly, a man appears next to Nikki – his name is Paul Marrane (a reference to the mythological Wandering Jew figure), and he appears in an earlier episode at a bar with Gloria, the police officer trying to solve the mystery of her step-father's death in the case of mistaken identity. After ordering a glass of sherry, Paul turns to Nikki and asks something in Hebrew. When she looks confused, he says, "Job sat on his dung heap, covered in boils" (0:18:42). Nikki sighs, "Mister, it's been a long day," to which Paul agrees,

replying that they are all long. He states, “That’s the nature of existence. Life is suffering. I think you’re beginning to understand that” (0:18:50). His point is well taken – not only does Nikki agree, but so too would many *Fargo* viewers. The show rarely produces happy outcomes, often focusing on stories rife with suffering. Paul reminds Nikki of her own suffering by pulling a small orange kitten from a box next to him. “Ray is the cat,” Paul explains. “His name … I call him Ray. I know, I know, that’s not really a cat’s name, but when I looked at him, that was the name that stuck” (0:19:30). Ray is also the name of Nikki’s deceased boyfriend (and parole officer) who put out the hit on his twin brother. Nikki holds the kitten, looking at him for a sign that he is her lost love. Paul asks if Nikki is familiar with “Ghuigul,” a Hebrew word that describes old souls attaching themselves to new bodies. The assumption, then, for both Nikki and the audience, is that the kitten she is holding is in fact Ray.

This scene thus far exemplifies ideals from both Scott and Poe – Nikki's encounter with the kitten Ray symbolizes both a nostalgic longing for their relationship when he was living and a possible future for him in some type of afterlife. Paul’s use of the Ghuigul also applies to the paratexts of these works in general – like Jameson’s self-reflexivity, these genre conventions, or “old souls,” attach themselves to new narratives, recycling the same strategies to convey their fictive truths, just as *Fargo* does with the persuasive conventions of Scott and Poe, which were not themselves the origins of this writing style anyway. *Fargo* continues to reference itself in this scene – Paul explains that the bowling alley (itself a reference to another Coen Brothers’ film, *The Big Lebowski*) is where people are judged, and that Mr. Wrench was not initially supposed to go on. However, he is eventually allowed to leave with Nikki and continue through the rest of the season. These lines reference Mr. Wrench’s reappearance after season one – the show is acknowledging its reuse of a character from an earlier, seemingly disconnected storyline, and

allows him to continue just the same but in a new plot. Paul tells Nikki that she and Mr. Wrench can use a car out front that has been "swept clean" of its sin to continue their journey together. He tells her a story of Jewish people massacred by the Cossacks in Ukraine, and of a Rabbi Nachman who spoke of their "lost souls" and how their mass grave looked like a garden to him. Paul asks Nikki to send a message to the wicked people she encounters. She gives Ray back to Paul – he explains that the cat must stay behind – and leaves with Mr. Wrench in the car. In this scene, Nikki and Mr. Wrench have encountered the outermost layer of their narrative frame, coming into direct contact with the gateway to the afterlife of both their living souls and the story. This moment shows Paul and Ray, characters seen in the story proper in earlier episodes, existing in the liminal space Genette uses to illustrate the function of paratexts. In other words, in this moment, these characters exist within the paratext rather than the text itself.

Yuri Gurka, the main focus of this season's frame, also enters the bowling alley, right after Nikki and Mr. Wrench escape. Bleeding heavily from a head wound from his fight with Nikki and Wrench, he sits at the bar and asks for napkins and vodka. Paul turns to him and says, "You are Yuri Gurka, Cossack of the plains. Grandchild of the Wolves' Hundred. I have a message for you from Helga Albrecht and the Rabbi Nachman" (0:25:45). Yuri and Paul both turn to face the camera, as if looking off into the distance on the other side of the bar. The camera then cuts to a black and white shot of a field full of the Jewish people massacred by the Cossacks that Rabbi Nachman mourns in Paul's tale to Nikki, and in the front of the crowd is Yuri's murdered girlfriend Helga, from the beginning of the season. Here, text collides with paratext; Yuri, who has been working for the villain Varga the whole season, hiding in plain sight, is revealed overtly as the suspected murderer from the opening scene. Again, in this liminal space of the paratextual bowling alley, *Fargo* becomes self-referential, pointing to its

frame from the beginning. This act is more than the show normally does – many episodes and seasons finish with numerous loose ends, like mysterious sightings of flying saucers in season two that are never explained. In this narrative moment, though, the show deliberately refers to its thematic frame, gesturing at larger conclusions about the nature of "stories."

Even though Yuri exists in the main narrative, he paratextually frames it as well. These moments in the bowling alley affirm for these characters the possibility of an afterlife, and for the audience a belief in some moral truth despite the show's repeated focus on crime and violence. It also breaks down any fourth wall barrier between the audience and the show. As Yuri stares directly into the camera before the shot cuts to the field of Jewish victims, he stares into the eyes of the viewers, acknowledging them in his last moments. In "The Art of Fiction," Henry James vehemently rejects this rhetorical strategy in novels. While discussing Trollope, he writes,

> In a digression, a parenthesis or an aside, [Trollope] concedes to the reader that he and this trusting friend are only "making believe." He admits that the events he narrates have not really happened, and that he can give his narrative any turn the reader may like best. Such a betrayal of a sacred office seems to me, I confess, a terrible crime. (James 2)

James disavows Trollope's and other authors' use of asides because it breaks the illusion of fiction. *Fargo* takes this transgression and ups the ante. The show suggests that frame-breaking is a constitutive feature of its fictionality. Yuri's direct eye contact with the camera breaks the overall narrative, including the main plot *and* the paratextual frame. This season's deliberate collision of text and paratext becomes the ultimate self-reflexive move – the referent must now refer to its own referent, rather than the story proper or other conventions, which is what inevitably disintegrates in this scene. This loop blends the story proper and the frame into one

scene that references the season's narrative *and* the audience experiencing it. In this act, the season creates its narrative afterlife through its audience, pushing beyond the conventions it has been referencing, and forcing viewers to examine *Fargo*'s parody of history and verisimilitude.

5. Conclusion

The examples I have analyzed throughout this project highlight a few key conclusions about epistemology and the novel. The first, I think, is that we should be cognizant of the way we read novels and consume popular media. The relationship between epistemology and fictional narratives, as the numerous scholars I have cited state, is rooted deeply in empiricism; what these fictional texts underscore, though, is the audience's *reaction* to empirical observation, which is key to understanding both how readers consume fiction and their relationships to that fiction and its truth claims, as well as "truth" in general in society. Scott, Poe, and *Fargo*, in their own unique ways, invite their audiences to not only suspend their disbelief in order to consume their narratives, but to also react, enjoy, and savor the *act* of suspending that disbelief. Doing so for each example results in different outcomes, but the desired process is much the same. Readers and viewers are given the opportunity to luxuriate in the simulation of facticity, able to wonder freely about fake referents, without the pressure of fact-checking these fictions because the narratives, in one way or another, are rooted in some aspect of history or generic writing. Their referents are at least plausible, and "supported" with *both* texts *and* personal accounts.

Yet these findings have further implications outside of traditional fiction as well. As Davis, McKeon, and others point out, novel conventions lead directly back to early print news. This logic works in the reverse as well, with "fake news" moving forward in time to today's contemporary political sphere. Politicians and journalists both, in one form or another, focus on their audience's reactions to their messages. Belief in information becomes more important than

the information's accuracy itself – just as readers of Scott and Poe must choose to buy into their narratives, viewers or readers of contemporary news must choose which agenda to believe and support. Through this choice, people may ignore other "facts" or information that do not fit the *narrative* they have put their faith in. For example, during the 2016 American Presidential election, former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich was on CNN discussing crime rates across the nation. When anchor Alisyn Camerota tried asking Speaker Gingrich his opinion on the lower national crime rate, he blatantly disagreed with the factual basis of her inquiry, instead siding with then-candidate Trump's comments on "soaring" crime rates. Gingrich stated, "The average American — I'll bet you this morning — does not think crime is down, does not think they are safer." When Camerota cited an FBI statistic about how crime was down, the Speaker responded, "No, that's your view" (Sam & Me Z). Gingrich's support for his opinion was the average citizen's personal experiences and beliefs, particularly those who already favored his political leanings – if people in certain communities *feel* or *believe* that crime is up, then that is what they will accept as *truth*.

Does this line of thinking apply to other aspects of everyday life? Journalism seems to think so. Turn on any local news channel, and at some point you will see a reporter putting a microphone in some local citizen's face so that he can explain what he saw during a potentially important event. Many viewers of that channel may take his account as fact, even if other eye-witnesses have a different though subjective experience, but who were not interviewed for whatever reason. Where does one draw the line, then, with this mode of epistemological inquiry? Certain parts of our world, particularly those that reference fiction, are either blatantly fake or surprisingly good at hiding their fictionality. For instance, counter to what many die-hard *Harry Potter* fans may say, it is fair to assume that most rational attendees of the *Wizarding World* in

Orlando, Florida will understand that, though the mechanical dragon is breathing fire atop Gringott's Bank, they are standing in a created simulation of a fictional text. The park is a reproduction of an imagined world, which makes the tangible referents in front of people "real" in an entertainment sense, but nothing more. On the other hand, the first time I listened to the science fiction podcast *The Message*, I had to pause the first episode and Google whether it was a true story – the plot was so fantastical that I did not think it could be true, but the simulation of real investigative journalism was so convincing that I doubted my own intuition. I, involuntarily, suspended my disbelief to the point where I accepted the show as fact, if only for a moment.

What about a show like *Fargo*, then, that, regardless of its different prefaces and other odd scenes throughout the series thus far, begins with "This is a true story"? Would some first-time viewers, perhaps unfamiliar with the Coen Brothers' film, see this opening sentence and assume that the plot is based in fact? Or would they be wise enough to know that this maneuver is a post-modern ploy to reference a generic convention steeped in the history of writing in the Western world? I do not know. I think the answer is, of course, subjective. Perhaps the best thing to do is to go down the middle. Each example I have explicated in this project, in some fashion, holds truth behind its fiction in the sense that it brings some facet of the human condition to light: nostalgia and history, mystery and travel, the need for corroboration, the punishments for crime. In order to change our reading, in order to understand these and other texts, I think audiences can simultaneously experience fiction more proactively while still enjoying its fictionality. It is possible to read a novel and understand that it is fiction, but still find pleasure, even for a moment, in imagining that a wonderful and engrossing story is true.

All of this is to say that "facts," in whatever form we understand them, are useless without *context*. Factuality goes hand in hand with motivation, which becomes overgeneralized

in many cases in order to make sense of them. Poovey's many point in her work is that facts are fetishized even though the real epistemological issue of modernity is how to generalize reliability, which is the only real actionable knowledge. As Hume points out, facts are always historical, and history is, inevitably, subjective itself. We are perhaps only interested in the conjecture of it all, but conjecture that works from a factual basis. I think (or at least hope) that these features teach us in some way to be wiser in the face of conjecture and generalization. Attending to these examples, I would argue, will help us come to terms with our subjectivity, which is crucial when consuming media. Acknowledging one's biases and perspective is not a bad thing – in fact, it is probably the most enjoyable part of reading. There is nothing wrong with reading through a particular lens, as long as we do not accept that understanding as "fact," thereby eliminating other experiences with the same text. This closed-off subjectivity is the reason that fake news in the contemporary world is so dangerous, but also why it is a telling marker of human understanding. After all, don't the examples I have elucidated throughout prove that, in some way, we have always lived in and promoted a post-fact society? These texts mirror our understanding of the world around us, suggesting, again, that knowledge is only understood through our own experience, which is what Yuri's fate in *Fargo* represents. Looking into our eyes, his gaze asks the audience, "Do you believe this? *Is* this a true story?" The answer, of course, must come from us.

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