

Trading Magic for Fact, Fact for Magic

Myth and Mythologizing in Postmodern Canadian Historical Fiction

This study brings together three major areas of interest - history, postmodern fiction, and myth. Whereas neither history and postmodern fiction nor history and myth are strangers to one another, postmodernism and myth are odd bedfellows. For many critics, postmodern thought with its resistance to metanarratives stands in direct and deliberate contrast to myth with its apparent tendency to explain the world by means of neat, complete narratives. There is a strain of postmodern Canadian historical fiction in which myth actually forms a complement not only to postmodernism's suspicion of master-narratives but also to its privileging of those marginal and at times ignored areas of history. The fourteen works of Canadian fiction considered demonstrate a doubled impulse which at first glance seems contradictory. On the one hand, they go about demythologizing - in the Barthesian sense - various elements of historical discourse, exposing its authority as not simply a natural given but as a construct. This includes the fact that the view of history portrayed in the fiction has been either underrepresented or suppressed by official historiography. On the other hand, the history is then re-mythologized, in that it becomes part of a pre-existing myth, its mythic elements are foregrounded, myth and magic are woven into the narrative, or it is portrayed as extraordinary in some way. The result is an empowering of these histories for the future; they are made larger than life and unforgettable.

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