



بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

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تم عمل المسح الضوئي لهذه الرسالة بواسطة / مني مغربي أحمد

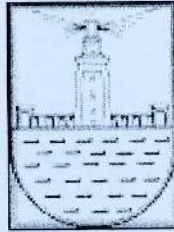
بقسم التوثيق الإلكتروني بمركز الشبكات وتكنولوجيا المعلومات دون أدنى

مسئولية عن محتوى هذه الرسالة.

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BINICK



Alexandria University

Faculty of Arts

Department of English Language & Literature

Narrative Indeterminacy in E. Annie Proulx's Postcards and

Kurt Vonnegut's Breakfast of Champions

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of MA in English Literature by

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Supervised

By

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Narrative Indeterminacy in E. Annie Proulx's Postcards and
Kurt Vonnegut's Breakfast of Champions

To my loving parents

Nadder Hamdy & Nagat Khourshid

*Si la littérature est le silence des significations, c'est en vérité la
prison dont tous les occupants veulent s'évader.*

[Georges Bataille]

Acknowledgments

Innomrables sont les récits du monde. . .

[Roland Barthes]

Even this acknowledgment is bound to fall into the category of a récit: the story of a thesis I wish to relate here, however fragmentary and incomplete. Though complying with academic convention, I tend to think of it as one of a million similar stories being written and read (out) in academia today. If, for one, I may step into the foreground within the space allotted to 'Acknowledgments' and express my gratitude to everyone who has helped bring this thesis to the light, I will have to make a flashback to the last few years of the previous millennium.

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And yet there remains much that is not said, territories uncharted, boundaries still closed in what has been a little learning endeavour.

Noha Nadder Hamdi
July 10th 2006

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Introduction

The Problematics of Meaning and Representation in Post/Modern Theory

In the last few decades emphasis has shifted from structuralist discourse analysis to problems of interpretation and meaning. A growing concern with textuality as a locus of indeterminate signifiers, a condition of fluidity and slippage and a system of excessive signification had certainly cast doubt on the possibility of recovering meaning from discourse. The 1968 insurgencies in Europe had fostered a new 'political' perspective tending towards ultra-leftism. Literary critics were gradually converted from the established traditions of Anglo-American criticism and its 'right-wing' claims about the autonomy and organic unity of texts to 'left-wing' continental theory which dispelled the myth of authorial control by announcing the death of the author and the demise of the Grand Narratives of human progress and knowledge. This, in turn, translated into an assault on traditional definitions of narrative.

This shift in literary/narrative sensibility is viewed as part of a broader movement involving aesthetic reconsiderations and a questioning of traditional systems of representation. Whatever challenges to Victorian artistic conventions had ensued, they were to a great extent the product of a perceived crisis in representation, which had its origins in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Linda Hutcheon ascribes this rejection of traditional modes of textual representation to "[a] discontent with the systematization and ahistoricism of various critical formalisms [out of which] has arisen a new interest in discourse that has begun to see how we see meaning as made" (A Poetics of Postmodernism 54).

Many scientific findings had worked to shatter an entire groundwork of epistemological and biblical certainties. Scientific determinacy was obliterated by a paradigm shift by

Einstein's relativity, Darwin's evolution theories, and Freud's psychoanalytic discovery of the subconscious. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, people were growing increasingly skeptical of science and its accomplishments. Scientific positivism was slowly being replaced with a groundbreaking relativism.

After having proclaimed the omnipotence of scientific observation and deduction . . . and after asserting that for its lenses and scalpels there did not exist a single mystery . . . man is still waking in the midst of the same enigmas, in the same formidable unknown . . . A great many scientists and scholars have come to a halt discouraged. They realized that this experimental science, of which they were so proud, is a thousand time less certain than the most bizarre theogeny, the maddest physical reverie, the least accepted poet's dream, and they have a presentiment that this haughty science which they proudly call positive may perhaps only be a science of what is relative, of appearances, of shadows. (Aurier 93-94)

As evident in the quotation above, late 19th-century scientific philosophy was rather voicing a preoccupation with the certitudes of the past and grappling with the assertiveness of many scientific claims. In spite of an apparently explicit reference to indeterminacy and relativity, Aurier's quotation was written in support, not of a new scientific stance upholding relativism, rather of the Symbolist movement in painting. This last was a manifestation of how art on the whole was veering away from the realist trajectory and adopting a new representational modality.

In fact, temptingly simple though it might be to believe otherwise (it would be a quixotically heroicist and unhistorical belief), the surge of relativistic feeling in the 20th century was never a product or a reflection of even a misrepresentation of Einstein's General Theory of Relativity (1916), it was an expression of the