to a mentality that shamelessly encouraged cultural impurity. Meanings were intended both to remain intelligible to and distinct from Western standards. The different colonized communities had to undertake this process separately. Interestingly, the new settler representations needed strong continuities with Europe, so a spiritual place called «home» had to be found in the colonies with the result that many quest narratives appeared in literature. Critics have lately demonstrated that the search was not for physical destinations but for a historical self. Obviously, black representations had to be created by the blacks themselves. Pre-English traditions were revived (The *Mahabharata* in India). Western myths, such as the Promised Land, were reversed. Native films and songs were included in works of art and, most importantly, English was rejected. Kincaid's quotation from *A Small Place* included in *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* p. 208 reads «The language of the criminal can explain and express the deed only from the criminal's point of view»). The urgency with which imperial stereotypes were knocked down is responsible for the omission of entire black communities (such as women) from the new national image. Nevertheless, a second reaction concerned itself with marginalized groups and re-appreciated the advantages of speaking European languages for trade or as a means of communication among different ethnic groups. Boehmer quotes Aijaz Ahmad (p. 209) «To substract English from South Asian cultural life ...would be as absolutely pointless as boycotting the railways».

Chapters five and six turn to the voices that have emerged after self-government. In my view, this is the most valuable part of the book because of the writer's well-aimed remarks about postcolonial women's writing, indigenous writings after 1970, the connections between the postmodern and the postcolonial, and migrant literature. Unfortunately, though, her project only touches on these aspects. Boehmer's opinion about the future developments of postcolonialism and their connection with postmodernism have an enormous potential to be the seed for further work. Notwithstanding, I alert readers of the writer's subtle alliance with «a strange universe». Can she really not see the obvious farce of those authors who criticize the neocolonialist order at the same time that they invest their profits in securing a place in the First World?

Salvador Faura
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

Susana ONEGA (ed.) *Telling Histories: Narrativizing History, Historicizing Literature*. Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1995. 208 pages.

Telling Histories is a collection of essays originally presented in the «Symposium on History and Literature» celebrated in Zaragoza in March 1993. The book is divided into two main sections: the first, «The End of the Classical Period», deals with aspects of nineteenth-century historical fiction and with the legacy left by nineteenth-century new ideas on history, especially by Hegel's view of history as a global master narrative. The second part, «The Postmodernist Era», focuses on examples of postmodernist historiographic metafiction, such as Salman Rushdie's *Midnight Children*, William Golding's *Rites of Passage*, and Julian Barnes' *The History of the World in 10 and 1/2 Chapters*, among others written in the 1980s.

What is meant by historiographic metafiction are British postmodernist historical novels written in the 1970s and the 1980s. They are intended to

question from an ironic, historically self-conscious position, the idea that history and not literature, is the most appropriate discourse to arrive at the 'truth' about the world. Susana Onega cites John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1968) as the earliest pioneer of this genre. Yet, in fact, novels like Fowles's belong to the British tradition of the historical novel initiated by Walter Scott, which they partly subvert. Offering a better understanding of this tradition is the idea that justifies the inclusion of the essays on Victorian historical fiction in the first part of *Telling Histories*.

Onega's own introductory essay reviews the changing relationship between history and literature since the Renaissance. According to her, modern historiography was born when the need to demarcate the fictional from history, reformulated then as one of the sciences, was felt in the 17th and the 18th centuries. In the 19th century the trend was partly reverted, firstly, by Hegel's new view of the world's history as a master narrative pointing towards a utopian 'end of history' and, secondly, by Walter Scott's historical romances, in which the representation of man as a product of historical forces was in fact infused with fictional, romantic motifs. In the 1980s, the New Historicists –the term was coined by Stephen Greenblatt in 1982– and a number of influential philosophers questioned the idea that there is a radical difference between the truth proclaimed by the historian and the one arrived at by the storyteller. Hayden White, Jacques Ehrman and Paul Veyne on one side, and Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man on the other, argued that history and literature are discourses necessarily articulated by language, hence, as fictional or as truthful as one may regard any other linguistic utterance. However, Onega notes that «what provides the impulse for the writing of historiographic metafiction is indeed the discovery of the ability of literature to reveal truths that cannot be grasped from traditional history» (p. 16).

The first part of this collection consists of four articles by Andrew Sanders, Mª Dolores Herrero, Mª Pilar Pulido and Felicity Hand, respectively. In his review of Victorian historical fiction from Dickens to Elliot, Sanders observes that Scott's successors in what he calls an «intensely historical age» (p. 21) found in the historical novel a «new aesthetic respectability» (p. 22). Writers such as Dickens or Elliot were convinced that the historical novel could be used to educate a wide, popular public and, indeed, to explore the relationship between the individual and society, as most Victorian fiction did. On her side, Herrero explores the influence of Hegel's view of history as a divine plot that the philosophers must unravel on the work of Mary A. Ward. She notes the late-Victorian paradox that the more historical studies tried to discover the historical pattern envisaged by Hegel, the more each historical situation came to be seen as a unique grouping of events. This led to a historicist fragmentation of the Hegelian sense of historical cohesion that was expressed by modernist fiction, which centres rather on the inner world of the individual. Pulido's article on the development of the ballad history in Ireland contributes the idea that the historical balladist produced his work, which was meant to be an integral part of the task of rebuilding Ireland's cultural legacy, on the strength of research as accurate and scholarly as that of the historian. Felicity Hand's analysis of two novels about the 1857 Indian mutiny written a century later, describes the danger that the historical novel might be used to create a falsifying mythology which could be passed off as the 'historical truth' in the interests of a biased (in this case imperialist) manipulation of the historical facts.

The second part of *Telling Histories* gathers together essays mainly on postmodernist British historiographic

metafiction. Eight different scholars analyse novels by Salman Rushdie (Luisa Juárez), William Golding (Marita Nadal), Julian Barnes (María Lozano), Jeannette Winterson (Susana Onega), Margaret Drabble (Ángeles de la Concha), Angela Carter (Celestino Deleyto), David Bradley (Jesús Benito), and a play by Caryl Churchill (Chantal Cornut-Gentille). The territories analysed in the essays in which history and fiction interact are as varied as the representation of the recent history of India in Rushdie's work, the discussion of female identity in the texts by Carter, Chuchill and Winterson, the exploration of the difference between the meaningless events of real life and the meaning of the historical 'fact' established by the historian in Golding's novel and the recovery of the silenced hi/story of African slaves in the USA narrated by Bradley.

From these essays it can be inferred, basically, that postmodernist historiographic metafiction usually presents history from the point of view of a a character that is marginal to the main historical events s/he narrates but who is both a witness of history in the making, and the link between the reader –who can be said to be also at the margins– and the centre of past historical events. Juárez notes, regarding Saleem Sinai, the natrator of Rushdie's *Midnight Children*, that he is «a caricature of the historian» (p. 81). Yet, despite insisting on the idea that contemporary historiographic metafiction is different from the traditional historical novel because it questions rather than complements the task of the historian, oddly enough, none of the authors discusses in depth an idea constantly implied in all the essays but that never quite surfaces, namely, whether the writer of postmodernist historical fiction is genuinely concerned with subverting the historiographic discourse –with turning into a caricature– or whether s/he aims, instead, at producing, basically, an alternative model of research to be taken as seriously as that of the academic historian. In fact, the postmodernist writer of historical novels is a researcher who writes his or her conclusions in a way that would be rejected by the academia as history but that makes nonetheless strong claims to being intellectually serious.

Most of the essays suggest that this rejection of academic historiography is subversive, for it parodies the historian's discourse and his or her authority, especially by introducing not only fictional events but also great doses of fantasy and myth in the fabric of the historical novel. In other cases, obviously, historical fiction helps disempowered minority groups to claim an authority that the historian has denied them by neglecting the area of history that concerns them. In any case, since the selection of works of fiction commented on in the second part of the book is mainly canonical –or rather composed of candidates to future canonisation– what is missing is how the playful manipulation of the historical discourse in mainstream postmodernist fiction compares with similar strategies used in popular culture.

Is not this postmodernist attempt to deconstruct the historiographic discourse in fact much less carnivalesque, subversive –somehow less radical, less courageous– than other British postmodernist narratives such as Monty Python's revision of history in *Life of Brian* or the unglamorised retelling of British history in the television series *Blackadder*? Even the American cartoon TV series for children based on the comedy film *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure* seems more disruptive of the seriousness attached to the academic historian. It could even be argued that the enjoyment a child may derive from seeing the naive Californian teenagers Ted and Bill meet the historical characters s/he has heard about in the classroom is, at root, the same felt by an adult, sophisticated

reader of postmodernist historiographic metafiction when coming across historical characters in works of fiction. Arguably, the depth of the reflection on the relationship between history and fiction is greater in the fiction analysed in *Telling Histories*, but this is fiction that still takes itself too seriously to be genuinely subversive, genuinely threatening for the credibility of the historian's work. In fact, it is its best complement.

Sara Martín Alegre
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

Rohinton MISTRY. *A Fine Balance.* London: Faber & Faber, 1995. 614 pages.*

It sometimes seems apt to imagine the history of the Indian subcontinent as a palimpsest of literary forms. First a substantial layer of myth and epic, then a burning layer of tragedy, then melodrama and farce and so forth. Lately, the furious discovery of political scandals witnessed in India might suggest that it is now an action thriller, Hindi-film style,[1] which is currently being written out in subcontinental space. Rohinton Mistry's new novel, *A Fine Balance*, takes us back to the time that many observers of Indian history would unhesitatingly identify as that critical moment when the composition of this villainous tale of corruption in high places began. The declaration of the Emergency[2] exactly twenty years before the publication of Mistry's fictional account was a blunder of such mammoth proportions that there's little doubt that it will continue to stimulate the imagination of writers for a long while to come. Having said that, however, one wonders whether there is any correlation between the fact that the blurb of Mistry's book tells us that he has «lived in Canada since 1975» and the fact that his recall of events stops precisely at that traumatic point in the inception of our symbolic political thriller.

The task of writers, it has often been said, is to keep memory alive. Were not the holocaust, or colonial repression or the slave trade fictionally redescribed in the public mind from time to time, a numbing amnesia would descend. Nations could be condemned in perpetuity to repeat those terrors of history that they had, willy-nilly, forgotten. To this extent, Mistry, like Rushdie before him, performs commendably in reminding the world of the horrors of the *nusbandi*.[3] operations, the mowing down of *jhuggis*.[4] and those repeated fascist lies that were the stamp of the Emergency.

* A longer version of this review was first published as «Bombay's Balzac» in *Biblio*, March 1996. Reprinted with permission.

1. The Hindi film, with its characteristic song and dance routines and stereotypical plots, is now being recognised by critics as a distinct cinematic genre. Spawned by the Bombay film industry, which is the largest in the world and humorously known as 'Bollywood', the Hindi film embodies many aspects of the popular culture of contemporary India.
2. A state of Emergency was declared in 1975 by the then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, after she had been indicted for election malpractices by the Allahabad High Court. Almost all opposition leaders were jailed and nationwide censorship imposed. Despite these draconian measures, however, when a general election was held in 1977, Indira Gandhi was decisively voted out. The Emergency years: 1975-1977.
3. nusbandi (Hindi): vasectomy.
4. jhuggis (Hindi): small hutments in urban slums.