

Section 4). Teenagers and criminals alike use slang as a tribal shibboleth, to distinguish themselves from adult, respectable society. Burgess imagines that in the England of the 1970s, youthful delinquents have adopted a style of speech heavily influenced by Russian (a conceit that would not have seemed so outlandish in the days of the Sputnik as it does now). Alex tells his story to an implied audience of "droogs" (Russian *drugoi*: friends) in this argot, which is known as *naskat* (the Russian suffix for "teen"), though he uses standard English in dialogue with officialdom. There is a bit of Cockney rhyming slang in the dialect ("charlie" = Charlie Chaplin = chaplain) but basically it's derived from Russian. You don't have to know Russian, however, to guess that, in the second sentence of this extract, "sharries" means buttocks, "yahzick" tongue, "grahzny" dirty and "vomny" stinking, especially if you've read the previous 99 pages of the novel. Burgess intended that his readers should gradually learn the language of *naskat* as they went along, inferring the meaning of the loanwords from the context and other clues. The reader thus undergoes a kind of Pavlovian conditioning, though reinforced by reward (being able to follow the story) rather than punishment. A bonus is that the stylized language keeps the appalling acts that are described in it at a certain aesthetic distance, and protects us from being too revolted by them – or too excited. When the novel was made into a film by Stanley Kubrick, the power of conditioning was given a further ironic demonstration: Kubrick's brilliant translation of its violent action into the more illusionistic and accessible visual medium made the movie an increment to the very hoodlumism it was examining, and caused the director to withdraw it.

45 The Non-Fiction Novel

By and by, we note a thickset Individual, in round hat and peruke, arm-and-arm with some servant, seemingly of the Runner or Courier sort; he also issues through Villequier's door; starts a shoebuckle as he passes one of the sentries, stoops down to clasp it again; is however, by the Glass-coachman, still more cheerfully admitted. And now, is his fare complete? Not yet; the Glass-coachman still waits. – Alas! and the false Chambermaid has warned Gouvion that she thinks the Royal Family will fly this very night; and Gouvion, distrusting his own glazed eyes, has sent express for Lafayette; and Lafayette's Carriage, flaring with lights, rolls this moment through the inner Arch of the Carrousel, – where a Lady shaded in broad gypsy-hat, and leaning on the arm of a servant, also of the Runner or Courier sort, stands aside to let it pass, and has even the whim to touch a spoke of it with her *badine*, – light little magic rod which she calls *badine*, such as the Beautiful then wore. The flare of Lafayette's Carriage rolls past: all is found quiet in the Court-of-Princes; sentries at their post; Majesties' Apartments closed in smooth rest. Your false Chambermaid must have been mistaken? Watch thou, Gouvion, with Argus' vigilance; for, of a truth, treachery is within these walls.

But where is the Lady that stood aside in gypsy-hat, and touched the wheel-spoke with her *badine*? O Reader, that Lady that touched the wheel-spoke was the Queen of France! She has issued safe through that inner Arch, into the Carrousel itself; but not into the Rue de l'Echelle. Flurried by the rattle and rencounter, she took the right hand not the left; neither she nor her Courier knows Paris; he indeed is no Courier, but a loyal stupid *ci-devant* Bodyguard disguised as one. They are off, quite wrong, over the Pont Royal and River; roaming disconsolate in the Rue de Bac; far from the Glass-coachman,

who still waits. Waits, with flutter of heart; with thoughts - which he must button close up, under his jarvie-surround!

Midnight clangs from all the City-steeple; one precious hour has been spent so; most mortals are asleep. The Glass-coachman waits; and in what mood! A brother jarvie drives up, enters into conversation; is answered cheerfully in jarvie-dialect: the brothers of the whip exchange a pinch of snuff; decline drinking together, and part with good night. Be the Heavens blest! here at length is the Queen-lady, in gypsy-hat; safe after perils; who has had to inquire her way. She too is admitted; her Courier jumps aloft, as the other, who is also a disguised Bodyguard, has done; and now, O Glass-coachman of a thousand, - Count Fersen, for the Reader sees it is thou, - drive!

THOMAS CARLYLE *The French Revolution* (1837)

THE "NON-FICTION NOVEL" is a term originally coined by Truman Capote to describe his *In Cold Blood: A True Account of a Multiple Murder and Its Consequences* (1966). In 1959 four members of a model midwestern family were brutally and pointlessly murdered by a pair of rootless psychopaths from America's underclass. Capote investigated the family's history and its social milieu, interviewed the criminals on Death Row and witnessed their eventual execution. Then he wrote an account of the crime and its aftermath in which these scrupulously researched facts were integrated into a gripping narrative that in style and structure was indistinguishable from a novel. It started something of a vogue for documentary narrative in recent times, high points of which have been books like Tom Wolfe's *Radical Chic* and *The Right Stuff*, Norman Mailer's *Armies of the Night* and *The Executioner's Songs*, and Thomas Kenally's *Schindler's Ark*. "Non-fiction novel" is a self-evidently paradoxical phrase, and it is not surprising that such books are often the object of some suspicion and controversy as to their generic identity. Are they works of history, reportage, or imagination? *Schindler's Ark*, for instance (based on the true and

extraordinary story of a German businessman who used his position as an employer of forced labour in Nazi-occupied Poland to save the lives of many Jews) was published as non-fiction in America, but won the Booker prize for fiction in Britain.

Tom Wolfe began his literary career as a journalist covering the more bizarre manifestations of American popular culture, and then began to develop his themes in the form of extended narratives like *Radical Chic*, his wickedly funny account of trendy New York intellectuals hosting a fund-raising event for the Black Panthers. Other writers were working in a similar vein in America in the nineteen-sixties and -seventies, and Wolfe saw himself as leading a new literary movement which he called "The New Journalism", the title of an anthology he edited in 1973. In the Introduction to this volume he claimed that the New Journalism had taken over the novel's traditional task of describing contemporary social reality, which had been neglected by literary novelists too obsessed with myth, fabulation and metafictional tricks to notice what was going on around them. (Later Wolfe himself tried, with some success, to revive the panoramic social novel in *Bonfire of the Vanities*.)

In the non-fiction novel, new journalism, "faction", or whatever one calls it, the novelistic techniques generate an excitement, intensity and emotive power that orthodox reporting or historiography do not aspire to, while for the reader the guarantee that the story is "true" gives it a compulsion that no fiction can quite equal. Although it is a popular form of narrative today, it has in fact been around for quite a long time in various guises. The novel itself as a literary form evolved partly out of early journalism - broadsheets, pamphlets, criminals' "confessions", accounts of disasters, battles and extraordinary happenings, which were circulated to an eagerly credulous readership as true stories, though they almost certainly contained an element of invention. Daniel Defoe began his career as a novelist by imitating these allegedly documentary narratives, in works like *True Relation of the Apparition of one Mrs Veal*, and *Journal of the Plague Year*. Before the development of "scientific" historical method in the late nineteenth century there was a good deal of cross-fertilization between the novel and historiography:

Scott regarded himself as being as much a historian as a novelist, and in *The French Revolution* Carlyle wrote more like a novelist than a modern historian.

In the introduction to his anthology of New Journalism, Tom Wolfe distinguished four techniques it had borrowed from the novel: (1) telling the story through scenes rather than summary; (2) preferring dialogue to reported speech; (3) presenting events from the point of view of a participant rather than from some impersonal perspective; (4) incorporating the kind of detail about people's appearance, clothes, possessions, body language, etc. which act as indices of class, character, status and social milieu in the realistic novel. Carlyle used all these devices in *The French Revolution* (1837), and a few others that Wolfe omitted to mention, such as the "present historic" tense, and the involvement of the reader as narratee, to create the illusion that we are witnessing or eavesdropping on historical events.

The passage quoted describes the flight of Louis XVI, Marie-Antoinette and their children in June 1792 from the palace of The Tuileries where they had been confined by the National Assembly, partly as hostages against an invasion of France by neighbouring monarchist states. The Swedish Count Fersen masterminded the night escape, from which Carlyle extracts the maximum amount of narrative interest. First (just before the quoted passage) he describes a common "glass-coach" (privately-hired carriage) waiting in the Rue de l'Échelle near to the Tuileries. At intervals, unidentified and shrouded figures slip through an unguarded door of the palace and are admitted to this vehicle. One of them, who, we might guess, is the King in disguise, "starts a shoebuckle" as he passes a sentry — a suspense-enhancing device of a kind familiar in adventure-stories. Carlyle gives a narrative voice to suspense: "And now, is his fare complete? Not yet . . ." Meanwhile, inside the palace, suspicions have been aroused, jeopardizing the whole enterprise. In a series of rapid statements, telescoping time, Carlyle recapitulates these developments and brings his narrative back to the present, "this moment" when Lafayette, Commander of the National Guard, arrives to investigate. The last of the passengers awaited by the glass-coach, her face screened by a gypsy-hat, is

Marie-Antoinette, who has to stand aside as the coach of Lafayette wheels through the gate. As if to illustrate the narrowness of her escape, she touches the spoke of the wheel with a little ornamental rod called a *badine* "such as the Beautiful then wore". Throughout the passage Carlyle uses clothing in a way that Tom Wolfe would approve of, to indicate both the real status of the personages and the lengths they have to go to to disguise it.

The Queen and her bodyguard are so ignorant of the geography of their own capital that they immediately get lost, a nicely pointed irony which also increases the suspense, registered by the coachman's "flutter of heart . . . under his jarvie-surtout". The reader has probably already guessed that this person is Count Fersen himself, but by delaying the revelation of his identity Carlyle adds more mystery to the narrative brew. Fersen is the main point-of-view character in the second paragraph. "Be the Heavens blest!" is his exclamation or unvoiced thought when Marie-Antoinette finally appears. The effect of this narrative method is of course to make the reader identify with the plight of the fleeing royals, and perhaps the scene does betray Carlyle's fundamental emotional sympathies, although in the book as a whole he presents the Revolution as a Nemesis which the *ancien régime* brought down upon itself.

Carlyle steeped himself in the documents of the French Revolution like a historian, then synthesized and dramatized this mass of data like a moralizing novelist. No wonder Dickens was entranced by the book, and carried it about with him everywhere on its first publication. Not only *A Tale of Two Cities*, but also Dickens's panoramic novels of English society were indebted to its example. Whether every detail in this extract had a documentary source, I do not know. Marie-Antoinette's gesture with her *badine* is so specific that I don't think Carlyle would have risked inventing it, though he cites no authority. The idea of Count Fersen having his impersonation of a cab-driver tested by conversation with the genuine article is more suspicious, because it heightens the suspense so conveniently. Perhaps anticipating this reaction, Carlyle gives two sources for the episode in a footnote. This kind of writing thrives on the old adage that truth is stranger than fiction.