Chapter 3

FARRELL AND THE FICTIONAL IMAGINATION

History loves only those who dominate her: it is a relationship of mutual enslavement.

Salman Rushdie, Shame

Many texts have undoubtedly many possible senses, but it is still possible to decide which one has to be selected if one approaches the text in the light of a given topic ...

Umberto Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language.*
From Historical Fiction to Historiographic Metafiction

... to see fiction as a move away from reality ... is to overlook its prime and greatest reality as art.

A. E. Dyson, Between Two Worlds

After a detailed analysis of the theme of imperial decay in Farrell’s works in the foregoing chapter, a discussion of the various techniques employed by Farrell in his fictionalisation of imperial history and of their implications for a fundamentally postmodernist concept of historical fiction will be appropriate. But before such a discussion is undertaken, it will be worthwhile to try and briefly explore the current theories of historical fiction and to highlight Farrell’s conformity to and departures from these theories, with a view to pinpointing the nature of Farrell’s relationship to the postmodernist genre of historiographic metafiction.

The historical novel has been unanimously considered by theorists from Herbert Butterfield to Umberto Eco as an extremely complex genre which puts up strong resistance against any attempts at accurate definition. Joseph W. Turner (1979) and Harry E. Shaw (1983) have dwelt at length on the problems of defining the genre of historical novel. Butterfield, in his The Historical Novel: An Essay is the first to make the categorical assertion that the historical novel is a
"form of 'history,' a way of treating the past" (p. 113). He contrasted the aims of the historian with those of the novelist:

...the historian will seek a different sort of synthesis and will try to reconstruct a world, to particularise, to catch a glimpse of human nature. Each will notice different things and follow different clues; for to the historian the past is the whole process of development that leads up to the present; to the novelist it is a strange world to tell tales about (1924:113).

Though Butterfield's The Historical Novel represents the first attempt at a serious discourse on historical fiction, Lukács's The Historical Novel (1937) is the most influential work on the subject to date and therefore, most critics are tempted to use this book as a starting point for their discussion of the historical novel. Moreover, considering the fact that The Historical Novel was a book Farrell greatly admired (Binns 1986:27), an inquiry into the Lukacsian model of a good historical novel, with illustrations of how Farrell uses it in his works, is strikingly relevant.

According to Lukacs, a vital ingredient of historical fiction is the element of 'necessary anachronism' or the necessity of remoulding the historical basis while "preserving historical truth in its essentials" (1962:67). In other words, the historical novelist should establish by artistic means the relation of the past to the present in order to bring the past close to us in a way that allows us to experience its real and true being because as Lukacs aptly puts it: "without a felt relationship to the present, a portrayal of history is impossible" (57). But this relationship consists in "bringing the past to life as the prehistory of the present, in giving poetic life to those historical, social and human forces which, in the course of a long evolution, have made our present-day life what it is and as we experience it" (Ibid). Therefore, a real historical novel is "one which would rouse the present, which contemporaries would experience as their prehistory" (78).

Farrell fully subscribes to this Lukacsian formulation about the historical novel and his Empire fiction is firmly grounded on a clear understanding that "it
[history] is an uninterrupted process of changes” (20). Of the variety of elements which constitutes Farrell’s concept of historical fiction, this Lukacsian principle of the novelist’s use of history as a metaphor for the present is of great consequence—a fact which is illustrated in the following pages through an analysis of one of Farrell’s Empire novels.

Farrell’s highly imaginative use of history as a metaphor for the present or in Lukacsian terms, of ”history as a concrete precondition for the present” is best illustrated in Troubles, the first volume in the Empire fiction. In Troubles, Farrell attempts to foreground the striking similarities between a past phase of history and the living present, with a view to emphasising the essential sameness of the human situation. Farrell himself has stated his intentions in no uncertain terms in one of his interviews:

One of the things I have tried to do in Troubles is to show people ‘undergoing history,’ to use an expression of Sartre’s. The Irish troubles of 1919-1921 were chosen partly because they appeared to be safely lodged in the past; most of the book was written before the current Irish troubles broke out, giving it an unintended topicality. What I wanted to do was to use this period of the past as a metaphor for today, because I believe that however much the superficial details and customs of life may change over the years, basically life itself does not change very much. Indeed all literature that survives must depend on this assumption (1977:219; Italics mine).

Thus, Farrell is, to borrow Dwight Eddins’s phrase on Fowles ”embarked on nothing more threatening than a field trip into the safely frozen past” (1976:219) in order to come up with the striking similarities between past and present. Moreover, a serious concern with history always implies an equally serious concern with the life of ‘today’ because ”[A] reliving of past experience invariably evokes the life of the present, for historical life is understood only in its connections with present life, as a tradition of thinkers from Dilthey down has reasserted” (Fleishman 1971:xii).
Historically, there is an undeniable similarity between the years 1919-1921 during which Ireland was a seething cauldron of militant discontent and the year 1968 when Farrell was working on Troubles. Both the periods of history were characterised by an unprecedented outbreak of violence on a global level. Those times were fraught with a wide variety of problems on a massive international scale. During 1919-1921, Ireland was not the only trouble-spot on the world map. Russia was painfully witnessing the ominous dissemination of militant Bolshevism; race riots were threatening to tear Chicago apart and the heartless massacre of innocent Indians at Amritsar had sent shockwaves across the world about the Englishman’s brutal potentials. There was rebellion in Mesopotamia and D’Annunzio had made a military advance against Fieumne.

The year 1968 was no less cataclysmic—Civil War was raging in Nigeria, the May events had rudely shaken France, the Tet offensive had disrupted peace in Vietnam and Chicago was under * siege.* In such a grim scenario, the disturbingly sinister prophecy of a Third World War was in the air. De Valera had given a profound warning that the Versailles Peace Treaty which nominally ended one war had created the possibility of twenty new ones. And quite ironically, fresh ‘troubles’ had broken out in Northern Ireland when Troubles was in the pipeline. As Farrell said in an interview:

I would go up to the British Museum newspaper library to read the *Irish Times* for 1920 and came back, buying an evening paper on the Tube. It was uncanny: *exactly the same things were happening again,* sometimes in the same Streets in Belfast (Brock 1978:75).

This ‘uncanny* similarity between the past and the present serves to underscore the historicity of Farrell’s fiction in a unique manner. As Lukács puts it:

if experiences ... are linked with the knowledge that similar upheavals are taking place all over the world, this must enormously strengthen the feeling first that there is such a thing as history, second that it is an uninterrupted process of changes (1962:20).
In Troubles, the history of Irish troubles is significant both in itself and in so far as it becomes an appropriate metaphor for the life of the present. Troubles, as Elizabeth Bowen [who herself has authored a novel entitled, The Last September (1926) based on Irish troubles] has remarked «...is not a “period piece”; it is yesterday reflected in today's consciousness. The ironies, the disparities, the dismay and the sense of unavailingness are contemporary” (1970:59). Thus, in Farrell's historical fiction, “the past portrayed is clearly recognised and experienced as the necessary prehistory of the present” (Lukács 1962:78). Quite significantly, this Lukácsian principle is echoed by Umberto Eco when he says that historical novels should “identify in the past the causes of what came later” (1985:66).

A second defining characteristic of the historical novel, according to Lukacs, is that it demonstrates how “it [history] has a direct effect upon the life of every individual” (1962:20). The novelist portrays ‘the broad living basis of historical events' in such a way that even minor characters “experience the smallest oscillations in this basis as immediate disturbances of their individual lives” (45).

In this respect too, Farrell conforms to the Lukacsian model and portrays the impact of history on the lives of individuals in society. Most characters of Empire fiction change with the changing history of their environment. The escalating violence of the so-called 'Shinners' disturbs the peace at the Majestic while the reality of the steadily weakening British resistance almost throws Edward Spencer off his mental balance. The strong Edward, the one-time boxer, is reduced under the stress and strain of history to a “slightly mad old English gentleman who drank too much whiskey and raved about the loss of Ireland” (p. 17). In The Siege of Krishnapur, characters allow themselves to be subordinated to meet the atrocious demands of Sepoy insubordination. As food at the Residency critically runs out under the stress of the Mutiny, the luxury-loving representatives of the coloniser are reduced to the point of eating anything at all. In The Singapore Grip, the unexpected Japanese attack disturbs every individual
life in Singapore. Thus, Farrell's Empire fiction relates how the history of the time affects the individual lives of his characters.

A third significant function of a historical novel, in Lukacs's view, is "to demonstrate by artistic means that historical circumstances and characters existed in precisely such and such a way" (p.45). Closely related to this notion of 'the artistic demonstration of historical reality' is the relative unimportance of the use individual detail in the making of a historical novel. In other words, truth or accuracy of detail has no relation whatsoever to the question of "historical faithfulness" because in the "authentic reproduction of the real components of historical necessity, it matters little whether individual details, individual facts are historically correct or not" (p.65).

Though historical novelists like John Williams have vehemently objected to this aspect of Lukacsian theory (1973:12), Farrell accepts this formulation, though with a slight modification. Farrell's Empire fiction abounds in instances of inaccurate details—Binns' complaint against the historical lapses in The Siege of Krishnapur (1986:80) is a case in point. But Farrell never attempts to show that "historical circumstances and characters existed in precisely such and such a way". On the contrary, Farrell subordinates history to fit in with the requirements of his fiction—an aspect of Farrell's fictional technique which is related to the postmodernist streak in his treatment of the theme of imperial decay. Though Farrell's imaginative representation of historical actuality is based on a sound knowledge of the facts of history and also of the way in which these facts could be effectively appropriated into fiction, his concept of history and the in which history is to be made the subject-matter for a novelistic work of art are, in more ways than one, strikingly postmodernist Farrell is not interested in history for its own sake; nor does he try to rewrite history with the incorporation of any historical lapses. Farrell resorts to the use of various techniques in order to awaken the history of a vanished age. As in Fowles's masterpiece of historiographic metafiction, The French Lieutenant's Woman, the readers in Farrell's historical novels are constantly made to feel the presence of history throughout the novel by
means of the interpolation newspaper excerpts and introducing stray debates on
the burning issues of the time; but still history stays basically behind the scenes.
This is not to suggest that history is totally emasculated. On the contrary, history
even rules the roost at times not directly but by its ominous presence in the
background. The daily ‘catalogue of crime* in the newspapers in Troubles,
references to the sufferings and misery of the teeming millions of India in The
Siege of Krishnapur and the occasional Japanese air-raids on the city of
Singapore in The Singapore Grip serve to emphasise the novel's historicity in
ways that are anything but conventional or Lukácsian.

In Troubles, for example, history is kept at a safe remove from the inert
life at the Majestic, but still it is history which sets the tone of the novel and
effects its denouement. As Binns has aptly put it:

> History is presented as a dimly understood force which
> moves sluggishly towards the incomprehending and
> indifferent inhabitants of the Majestic, only at the end
> engulfing their world, dispossessing them and driving them
> out (1986:52).

Finally, Lukacs felt that the historical novelist should fight "a specially strong
temptation to try and produce an extensively complete totality" of history' (1962:43)
and, instead should aim at a "concentration of characterisation" and "intensification
of events." Such concentration and intensification can be achieved by the creation of
an "important leading figure who embodies a historical movement" (Ibid). This
leading figure should be a type who has to 'generalise and concentrate* the being of
the age in an historical deed. Lukacs draws on Hegel's philosophy of history to
clarify this important feature of a historical novel. According to Hegel, 'the world-
historical individual' [the hero of history or the conscious bearer of the spirit of the
time] and 'the maintaining individuals' [ordinary men in civil society] are equally
important in the context of history because the broad basis upon which 'the world-
historical individual' emerges is formed by the “personal, private, egoistic activity
of individual human beings” (p.40). Lukács, while emphasising the need for 'a close
interaction' and 'deep unity' between these two layers of the society of any
particular period, feels that it should lead the historical novelist not to present a "chronicle-like succession and juxtaposition of all the events of a period" but to effect an "intensification and dramatic compression of events" (p.41).

Farrell never attempts a 'chronicle-like succession and juxtaposition of all the events of a period,' but at the same time, his protagonist is never a type who synthesises in him all the "essential human and social determinants" (p.43); nor does he make any conscious attempts at "compression of events" while it should be noted that even without this "dramatic concentration of events," Farrell's novels are distinguished by a high level of dramatic intensity. The so-called 'world-historical individual' does not figure in any of his novels, and the fictional emphasis falls almost exclusively on 'the maintaining individuals.' Most of his characters are not types but credible individuals in themselves who could have lived in any age. As Charles Palliser has pointed out, "Farrell's characters illuminate the particular historical context in which they are caught without ever being reduced to mere representative figures" (1979a: 14)—an aspect of historical fiction which Umberto Eco considers essential: "what the characters do serves to make history, what happened more comprehensible. Events and characters are made up, yet they tell us things ... that history books have never told us so clearly" (1985a:67). This is not to suggest that Farrell's novels are characterised by an absolute lack of 'types.' Farrell does create types in his fiction, but with an entirely different orientation. By creating types who have only a peripheral significance and are never raised to the stature of protagonists, Farrell seems to be subverting the very concept of fictional types. For example, Lucy in The Siege of Krishnapur represents the Victorian type of 'the fallen woman' while Edward Spencer in Troubles is a typical jingo-imperialist. Examples of several other stereotypes may be cited from Farrell's fiction but they are never protagonists who concentrate 'the being of the age' in any historical deed. In fact, no character is directly involved in such a historical deed. Farrell creates types only as something to be ironically undercut which is an important feature of postmodernist fiction. Instead of attempting a 'close interaction' between the leading historical personage and ordinary human beings, Farrell creates no historical figure, yet
successfully captures ‘the true being of the age’ by a powerful portrayal of the complex and involved character of popular life.

History of any period, Farrell persuades us, can be encapsulated with justice in a couple of sentences while an artistic treatment of real life in the troubled moments of history calls for the powers of a febrile imagination, coupled with a sound sense of history:

A raid on a barracks, the murder of a policeman on a lonely road, an airship crossing the Atlantic, a speech by a man on a platform, or any of the other random acts, mostly violent that one reads about everyday: this was the history of the time. The rest was merely the ‘being alive’ that every age has to do (T, p.93).

Farrell’s main interest, ironically lies not in the dry recording of the factual statistics of the untoward incidents of a turbulent period in history but in the mere "'being alive' that every age has to do” or differently put, in the impact of history on the lives and characters of 'the maintaining individuals.' Fleishman, too, believes that "The ultimate subject of the historical novel is...man in history or human life conceived as historical life' (1971:11). With the help of a vigorous historical imagination, Farrell enters the psychic atmosphere of a distant period and portrays the pains and pressures of individual lives. Fleishman writes:

As art is of the imagination, the historical novel will be an exercise of the imagination on a particular kind of object. It is an imaginative portrayal of history, that is, of past states of affairs affecting human experience. The historical novelist provokes or conveys, by imaginative sympathy, the sentiment de l’existence, the feeling of how it was to be alive in another age (1971:4; Italics mine).
A consideration of this formulation in the context of Farrell’s fictional techniques brings to light an important dimension of his works. For, as Lukacs points out, "the being of the age can only appear as a broad and many-sided picture if the everyday life of the people, the joys and sorrows, crises and confusions of average human beings are portrayed" (p.40). Farrell's lack of interest in the creation of 'type-heroes' in his fiction is crucially related to a distinctly postmodernist technique of critiquing imperial decay in that “protagonists of historiographic metafiction are anything but proper types” (Hutcheon 1988:114).

A fifth significant feature of the historical novel is the conscious marginalization of important personages of history. This relegation of historical figures to secondary roles constitutes, for Lukacs, the basic difference between the epic and the historical novel: "the most important figure should occupy the central position" in an epic while “in the historical novel he is necessarily a minor character" (p.48). This ”great historical figure as a minor character” should be portrayed as a human being "with virtues and weaknesses, good and bad qualities” (p.47).

Farrell’s technique of characterisation contests this Lukacsian principle in two different yet significant ways. First, not a single historical personage appears in the whole of his Empire fiction and characters in Farrell’s historical novels are not modelled on any real-life figure in history as in the Waverley novels of Walter Scott [Mary Stuart in The Abbot (1820) or the Prince of Wales in The Fair Maid of Perth (1828), for example]. Second but more significant from a postmodernist perspective is the fact that Farrell's characters resist any concrete division or classification into the primary and the secondary.

Farrell's characterisation seems to be consciously aimed at demystifying the myth of the Empire-builders’ racial and cultural superiority. The upholders of the Darwinian notion of the survival of the fittest tend to be male chauvinists in their personal life and the dominant male in a male-dominated
society is a recurring image in Anglo-Indian and imperial literature. But Farrell subverts this concept of male chauvinism in his Empire fiction in order to explode the myth of the superior civilisation. The world of his Empire fiction is peopled, not by noble characters with noble passions, but by anti-heroes and anti-heroines, bigots, eccentrics, weaklings and invalids. Farrell’s fiction conjures up a strange world where almost every human being is the very picture of ambivalence itself. This is true of almost all the minor and major characters in Farrell’s fiction—Edward Spencer and Major Brendan Archer in Troubles, Fleury and the Collector in The Siege of Krishnapur, Matthew Webb and Walter Blackett in The Singapore Grip. Each character is a mixture of opposites in his/her own way. Each has the defects of his/her qualities and, therefore, none manages to live up consistently to the conventional, realistic expectations of a hero or heroine. None is devoid of faults; yet none is a thoroughgoing villain. The protagonists of Farrell lack certain basic qualities. The Major and Edward are as heroic as they are anti-heroic. The Major is a diffident dreamer and lacks the tenacity and fixity of purpose Edward ‘suffers’ from while Edward lacks the basic honesty and integrity from which the Major ‘suffers.’ Edward is a jingo imperialist who, as insurgency gains momentum, turns paranoid and shoots an unarmed, innocent Sinn Feinner to boost his imperial ego. Edward ridiculously lies to the Major about the purpose of his visit to Dublin with Sarah and the Major, too ‘weak-willed’ to face out the pressures brought on by “Shinners” yields to unhealthy fits of depression [“Death is the only peace on earth” (p.340)]. The ongoing decay at the Majestic costs him his peace of mind while the other occupants are blissfully oblivious of their bleak future under the dangerous roof. The Major takes on the quality of a hero when he bluntly tells the Unionist Boy O’Neil [who says that the Auxiliary terror squad will teach the ‘Shinners’ a hard lesson] that “the cure may be as bad as the disease” (p.158). But a number of other incidents which reveal his ‘officiousness’ [‘always trying to agree with people’ as Sarah tells him in his face] neutralise his virtues. The Collector in The Siege of Krishnapur is an impractical character, always theorising on the greatness of the Great Exhibition. Fleury and the Collector are characters [whom the readers are at times tempted to accord a heroic status] who can be referred to as protagonists, not on the basis of their nobility of
character but only if frequency of appearance is an important criterion. The same problem besets The Singapore Grip too. Matthew goes weak and sweats profusely whenever he becomes alone in the company of Joan. Walter looks upon even his daughter's marriage as a good business proposition and is not bothered in the least about sexual norms as long as she marries into a family which promotes his commercial interests. And he makes no bones about speaking his mind openly to his daughter "Joan dear, I 've no objection to you flirting with young men provided you are sensible about it .... In future, please be more discreet and hide your love-letters in some safe place" (p. 15).

Farrell's heroines are equally anti-heroic; they are not the embodiments of the Victorian ideals of chastity and faithfulness. As Margaret Drabble has pointed out, [of course, without relating it to Farrell's critique of imperial civilisation], "Through most of the novels runs the sense that women are not at all the quiet womanly pure creatures of Victorian mythology and romantic love; they are dangerous trouble-makers, capricious and destructive" (1981:162). All female characters are 'dangerous objects' in Farrell and all male characters are either weak, bigoted or effeminate. Sarah, in Troubles, is a scandal-mongering, fickle-minded semi-cripple who makes a mockery of the conventional attributes of a woman of beauty, nobility and moral uprightness. She keeps up a mock love affair with the Major while secretly carrying on a liaison with Edward and finally runs away with an elderly man named Captain Bolton, leaving her dismayed suitors in the lurch. Joan, in The Singapore Grip, is another 'predatory' female whose main hobby is to trap men in love and make them suffer.

Farrell introduces heroism and other romantic elements in his novels chiefly to stress the necessity of their exclusion from fiction by foregrounding the relatively stronger presence of anti-heroic elements in real life, effecting in the process a 'sub-version' of the very concept of fictional realism and Realistic fiction. The technique of denying a heroic status to any particular character or marginalizing protagonists is an important defining characteristic of postmodern fiction, in general and historiographic metafiction, in particular. "the protagonists
of historiographic metafiction ... are the ex-centric, the marginalized, the peripheral figures of fictional history" (Hutcheon 1988:14). Thus, unlike any historical novelist before him, Farrell, through his characters who are loners and losers in a world of make-believe, subverts not only the entire body of myths about the culturally perfect coloniser but also the traditional notions of fictional characters... The heroes of Farrell’s Empire fiction miserably fail to live up to the picture of a dominant-personality and Farrell's heroines are equally anti-heroic.

Even present-day theorists of historical fiction like Avrom Fleishman and Barbara Foley have largely stuck to the Lukacsian principles. Fleishman believes that the forms of nineteenth century historical fiction persist even today and speaks about the unique nature of the truth attained by the historical novelist Fleishman calls it 'the symbolic truth': “the symbolic truth of a historical novel may be an insight into the universal processes of history, a hypothetical explanation of an interstice in historical knowledge [usually a personal motivation], or a vivification of a shadowy period or lost past” (1971 xi). Farrell’s historical novels certainly present ‘insight[s] into the universal processes of history’ but, as discussed in an earlier part of this thesis (p.69), they do not seek to explain any ‘interstice in historical knowledge’ while, at the same time, they do attempt ‘a vivification of a shadowy period.’ Farrell's novels provide invaluable insights into the secret recesses of human nature or, to borrow Howell's words on Findley's historiographic metafictions, “they are fictions that rewrite history in order to give significance to past events by creating patterns which reveal essential truths about human nature that can only be distilled through time and presented through art” (1984:49). These 'symbolic truths' of Farrell's historical novels were elucidated in the second chapter.

Foley's concise description of the traditional history historical novel throws into bold relief the fact that Farrell's concept of historical fiction is anything but traditional:

Characters constitute a microscopic portrayal of representative social types; they experience complications
and conflicts that embody important tendencies in historical development; one or more world-historical figure enters the fictive world, lending an aura of extra-textual validation to the text's generalisations and judgements; the conclusion reaffirms the legitimacy of a norm that transforms social and political conflict into moral debate (1986:60).

As discussed earlier on, Farrell's characters are not 'representative social types.' Though some characters in Farrell like Edward in Troubles, Dr. Dunstable and Dr. McNab in The Siege of Krishnapur, Mr. Walter Blackett in The Singapore Grip and Mrs Forrester in The Hill Station 'embody important tendencies in historical development,' no 'world-historical figure enters the fictive world' of Empire fiction.

Farrell is more in agreement with the postmodern theories of historical fiction. Raymond. A. Mazurek speaks about "a new kind of historical novel that has emerged in recent years" (1982:29). Though Mazurek has in mind certain overtly metafictional historical novels like Robert Coover's The Public Burning, Farrell shares certain important characteristics with this kind of novel:

The new historical novel differs from the traditional historical novel defined by Lukács, which aims to present a 'total' model of a society undergoing historical change, and which avoids reminding the reader of its limitations as a textual version of history (Ibid:29).

Again, in her penetrating study of postmodernism, Linda Hutcheon gives a definition of historical fiction which closely corresponds to Fan-ell's concept of the same. Hutcheon defines historical fiction "as that which is modelled on historiography to the extent that it is motivated and made operative by a notion of history as a shaping force [in the narrative and in the human destiny]" (1988:113). That Farrell's fiction is *motivated* and made operative by a notion of history as a shaping force* is quite evident from one of his own notes:

It is a common misconception that when the historians have finished with a historical incident there remains nothing but a patch of feathers and a pair of feet; in fact the most important things, for the very reason that they are trivial are
unsuitable for digestion by historians, who are only able to nourish themselves on the signing of treaties, battle strategies, the formation of shadow cabinets and so forth. These matters are quite alien to the life most people lead which consists of catching colds, falling in love, or falling off bicycles. It is this real life which is the novelist’s concern [though, needless to say, realism is not the only way to represent it] (In Vinson 1978:399).

In this statement of the author’s intentions, Farrell is attempting to explore the possibilities of a new brand of historical fiction which does not ‘avoid reminding the reader of its limitations as a textual version of history.’ The passage is illuminating in many ways; it implies that Farrell has something new to say and a new way of saying it—a view expressed by a critic of Farrell. In his review of The Lung, Bernard Share boldly announced that the novel “confirms Mr. Farrell as a man with something to say and a highly skilful way of saying it” (In Binns 1986:25). The notion of history implicit in Farrell’s criticism of the historian’s selection and ‘narrativization’ of only the dominant trends in historical development and the parenthetical assertion of the need for formal experimentation in historical fiction are distinctly postmodernist in that “historiographic metafiction destabilises received notions of both history and fiction” (Hutcheon 1988:120). When Farrell says that ‘trivial’ things which are in fact ‘the most important’ are ‘unsuitable for digestion by historians,’ he is challenging a notion of history which is well articulated by the narrator of Rushdie’s Shame: "History loves only those who dominate hen it is a relationship of mutual enslavement" (1983:124). This notion of history is beautifully summed up in a scene in The Singapore Grip where the tragic death of a poor wharf-coolie in Japanese bombing is graphically described. At the end of the scene, Farrell makes a significant comment:

Later, when official estimates are made of this first raid on Singapore [sixty-one killed and thirty-three injured], there will be no mention of this old man for the simple reason that he, in common with so many others, has left no trace of ever having existed either in this part of the world or in any other (p.218).
Farrcll seems to be saying that considering the degree of subjectivity involved in the historians’ selection and omission of historical events, every writing of the history of a period engenders the possibility of writing another history of the period which inevitably lead to the extreme postmodernist conclusion that history is as much fictional as it is factual: "The history, then is more in the fiction than in the fact, more in the literary products of the age than in the factual documents of historians" (Kaplan 1973:111). Farrell is seen to be in perfect agreement with the New Historicist idea that there is no single history of a period; there are only ‘histories.’ As he himself has stated: “Another reason why I preferred to use the past is that, as a rule people have already made up their mind what they think about the present. About the past they are more susceptible to clarity of vision” (In Vinson 1972:399). In referring to the textual nature of history, Farrell is again seen to adhere to the postmodern ideology of plurality and recognition of difference. Farrell stated this idea in an interview:

My idea of the way things happen contains an awful lot of things historians never consider, because I can introduce things that are too trivial. The real experience is not composed of treaties being signed and pincer movements. It’s smoke in your eyes or having a blister in your foot (Brock 1978:75).

By attempting to illumine certain dark corridors of history through his fiction, Farrell persuades us that, to borrow Hutcheon’s words on certain metafictional historical novels like Fowles’s The Magus and Timothy Findley’s Famous Last Words, “there are only truths in the plural and never one Truth; just as there is rarely falseness per se, just others’ truths” (1988:109). Thus, history, in Farrell's view, is never perfect and always remains potentially capable of being perfected. Significantly, this view is echoed by one of the characters in Ian Watson’s Chekhov’s Journey, a widely acclaimed work of historiographic metafiction: “Past events can be altered. History gets rewritten—Because history
is a fiction. It's a dream in the mind of humanity, forever striving ... Towards perfection” (1983:174).

In fine, while Farrell's conformity to the classical form of the historical novel reveals his ironic commitment to the Victorian values of fictional realism, his departures speak volumes for his conscious use of innovative postmodern techniques. Though Farrell's novel's may not be taken as purest examples of historiographic metafiction, the fact that they bear an uncanny similarity to the so-called 'metafictional historical novels* is indisputable. Farrell's Empire fiction is not strictly metafictional if one is to go by McCaffery's extreme formulation that the "defining characteristics of metafiction is its direct and immediate concern with fiction-making itself" (In Currie 1994:182). But at the same time, Farrel indirectly draws the readers' attention to the fictionality of his fiction through the use of a variety of metafictional techniques like parody, pastiche and intertextuality. As Malcolm Bradbury has aptly put it: “the conspicuous consumption within the text of its own means is not the only evidence of technical awareness" (1973:174). What such parallels between Farrell's fiction and historiographic metafiction suggest is that Farrell's historical fiction deserves a more serious treatment than it has hitherto received, a treatment which takes into account the traditional as well as the innovative dimensions of his works.

(b) Beyond Realism and Anti-Realism
Great art is not... 'between two worlds'... When the soul of man quickens to creation, it produces symbols: authentic and durable intimations of truth.

A. E. Dyson, Between Two Worlds

When Farrell started writing in the 1960s, fiction-writing was in the stranglehold of a crisis: while some critics talked about the 'crisis of the novel'; others floated the news of the 'death of the novel' (Waugh 1984:7-8). This widespread 'paranoia' on the part of both novelists and critics was primarily due to the rejection of realism as the most acceptable mode of representing reality in fiction, because, for the writers of the sixties, "the exhaustion and rejection of realism [was] synonymous with the rejection of realism itself (Ibid:45). As the readers' expectations that were based on the realistic novel began to be continuously frustrated by the highly experimental novels of writers like B.S. Johnson and Richard Brautigan, it generated the feeling the novel as a popular genre was certainly in extremis.* In 1966, John Barth published his influential essay on 'the literature of exhausted possibility' and significantly pointed out that the exhaustion was 'no cause for despair' (p.70). Consequent on this growing dissatisfaction with the prevailing methods of novel-making, certain writers attempted to choose a median centre between die-hard conventionalism and experimentalism. As Shirley Toulson has pointed out, these novelists possessed an awareness of the difficulties of realism combined with a strong moral attachment to its values, a formal need to comment on their fictiveness combined with a strong sense of the value of a habitable, imagined world, a sense that models, literature and the 'tradition' are ambiguous and problematic goods combined with a nostalgia for, rather than rejection of, the great works of the past (1979:29). This divided loyalty was chiefly a reflection of the experimental anxieties of the sixties when the opposing forces of a marked disposition towards
realism and an obsessive pre-occupation with formal experimentation were pulling novelists into two totally divergent directions.

Farrell, too, was not completely free from the anxieties of his age in which he lived, though the compulsive pull of its literary background was only one of the factors which led him to use experimental techniques in his fiction. Perhaps, the most important reason behind Farrell's appropriation of certain insights of problematical fiction was the fact that he wanted to be stunningly original in recording the colonial experience. Farrell obviously did not want to fictionalise history in a conventional manner; nor did he want to do a Forster, Kipling or Paul Scott, because in the light of the fact that his empire fiction is the product of years of painstaking research, it will be foolish to assume that Farrell was unaware of the stupendous fictional output on the theme of imperial doom. Whereas in his early fiction, Farrell sticks almost exclusively to the realist conventions of fiction-making, Farrell's Empire fiction represents a clear break with his early fiction in terms of theme and technique. Farrell's early work is largely about the living present while the Empire fiction is an evocation or fictional reconstruction of some crucial moments in imperial history. As discussed in the first chapter, Empire fiction is not just a happy fruition of the hopes and expectations stirred up by his early fiction; it is also a testimony to the fact that Farrell has gained tremendous footing in an alien ground—a powerful and unique way of fictionalising the imperial debacle. While the early novels depict the unreflecting realism of a conventional order, the Empire fiction, in several ways, can be seen as a reaction against the so called 'proper stuff of fiction' itself. In the Empire fiction, Farrell is equally alive to the demands of history and a shared reality. The Empire fiction does not merely represent a series of brief creative encounters with history; it is a judicious combination of fact and fancy, of history and historical imagination and above all, of realism and rich symbolism. Though apparently traditional in form and content, the Empire fiction is far from being so; it is realism all the same, but of an untraditional, self-conscious type. At a superficial level, the Empire fiction retains the realistic mode, yet at the same time draws abundantly on the insights of problematical fiction. As Farrell himself has
put it "...needless to say, realism is not the only way to represent it [real life]" (1978:399). Almost fully exploitative of the trappings of the nineteenth century historical novel, Farrell avoids the dry and direct recording of important moments in imperial history and is unusually rich in the use of experimental techniques of fiction-making. In other words, the Empire fiction flaunts the myriad possibilities of a self-conscious, reflective realism and vibrant symbolism as suggestively and powerfully as it flouts the cramping conventions of simplistic mimesis—a fundamental aspect of Farrell’s technique which has been consistently ignored by all his critics.

Thus, Farrell may be situated somewhere between the extremes of tradition and innovation, of pre-modernist continuity and post-modernist discontinuity. In his book The Novelist at the Crossroads, David Lodge discusses the two important tendencies among novelists of the sixties:

Realist novels continue to be written ...but the pressure of skepticism on the aesthetic and epistemological premises of literary realism is now so intense that novelists, instead of marching confidently ahead [on the realistic road], are at least considering the two routes that branch off in opposite directions from the crossroads. One of the routes leads to the non-fiction novel and the other to what Scholes calls fabulation (1971:29).

Farrell's novels are purely fictional and the non-fictional novels of, say, Truman Capote and Tom Wolfe share nothing in common with Farrell’s Empire fiction. Farrell’s fiction partakes of the elements of both realist fiction and Robert Scholes’s fabulation [an extreme form of metafiction with which Farrell’s works retains some affinity] and strongly resists all attempts at a clear-cut classification in terms of technique. But, in the process of this creative oscillation between the two extremes, Farrell gravitates more towards metafictional pole and goes beyond what Lodge calls “an aesthetics of compromise”. By avoiding either the realist or the postmodernist tag, Farrell transcends the limitations of both 'isms* and aspires
to a unique position among the writers of historical fiction. Though Farrell is not avowedly metafictional like Fowles, as Bernard Bergonzi has argued, Farrell's "capacity to give life and conviction to unfamiliar modes of thought is extraordinary and in no way inferior to Fowles's" (1678:63).

Fanell's historical fiction is not based on the extreme postmodernist view that "there is no presence, no external truth which verifies or unifies, that there is only self-reference" (Hutcheon 1988:114). the world of Farrell's fiction is resolutely fictive and yet unquestionably historical. In other words, Farrell employs the techniques of postmodern fiction on the one hand and communicates to the readers powerfully about political and historical realities, on the other. The immediate concern of Farrell's novels is not the problematization of the entire idea of reference, but at the same time, Farrell's fictional realism bears within itself a subtle critique of its own inadequacy as the only acceptable mode of fictional representation of real life. Farrell's belief that the representation of the real cannot be a substitute for the real itself leads to a strong sense of the relativism of historical interpretation—an important feature of Farrell's historical imagination which is summed up in the widely varying interpretations given to the word 'sun' in The Singapore Grip. The word 'sun' repeated several times by the dying Mr. Webb along with a number of other words, 'too garbled to be understood,' receives a variety of humorous interpretations. When Vera Chiang says that Webb was trying to speak about 'Sun-Yat-Sen,' Walter retorts that the old man just wanted to go sunning in the nude while the author reminds that Mr. Webb could just be referring to his 'son,' Matthew Webb. Immediately after this event, "a grim thought came stealing after him[the Major] through the hushed garden and pounced on him before he had reached the safety of his own walls: 'This is how we all end up, mumbling rubbish to people who interpret it as they want !'" (p.95). The titles of the Empire novels ['troubles,' "siege" and "grip"] and the variety of interpretations that they invite readers to make is a measure of Farrell's acute awareness of the fluidity of linguistic reference. Thus, delicately poised on flic shifting sands of differing interpretations about the meaning of words and of
categorical assertion by Farrell of the fact that realism is only one of the ways of representing reality in fiction is quite significant because it points to a fundamental assumption behind Farrell’s idea of the craft of fiction—that there is a multiplicity of fictional techniques available to the writer of historical fiction. As Farrell himself has clearly stated: "There are, it is agreed, a hundred thousand ways of writing a novel and an equal variety of intentions that can be given substance in a novel. A writer may pick and choose as great a number as he wants (In Binns 1986:3). Farrell, in dealing with the history of imperial decline-on a rather massive scale draws on the variety of realist and experimental techniques available to the novelist and uses them in a strikingly Farrell-esque manner.

Towards the end of his influential book The Metafictional Muse, Larry McCaffery speaks about a new kind of fictional model for the contemporary writer, a fiction which is "self-conscious about its literary heritage and about the limits of mimesis but yet managing to reconnect its readers to the world outside the page" (1982:264). Farrell’s Empire fiction is a perfect example of this type. Thus, Farrell goes beyond what Umberto Eco calls a “quarrel between realism and irrealism” (1985:68) in that Farrell writes with a sound knowledge of not only the conventions of the realistic canon in fiction, but also the limitations of those conventions. Unlike the realists, Farrell does not subscribe to the view that realism is an eternally inexhaustible storehouse of fictional techniques and unlike the masters of postmodern fiction, this view does not lead Farrell to lament the exhaustion of meaning or to arrive at any aporetic insights. For example, Farrell is in perfect agreement with the postmodernist idea “history as narrative account is unavoidably figurative, allegorical, fictive; it is always already textualized, always already interpreted” (Hutcheon 1988:143). Farrell’s belief that history is, to borrow Frederick Jameson’s phrase, “inaccessible to us except in textual form** (1981:82) is testified to by the detailed bibliography of historical sources given at the end of his Empire novels and also by his conscious use of the intertext within
the texts of his novels, while Fan-ell’s acute awareness of the relativity of the historical interpretation [which is discussed at length in the fourth chapter] points clearly to the idea that the past is available to us only through interpreted reports of it. But still, this idea of the intertextual nature of historical discourse does not lead Farrell to embrace the extreme postmodernist stance that "books always speak of other books and every story tells a story that has already been told” (Eco 1984:20). Again, though history may be discursively structured, it does not necessarily lead to the extreme idea that history is fiction. It is true that history and fiction resemble each other in that both modes of writing are subjective linguistic constructs which are largely dependent on certain narrative conventions (Hutcheon 1988:107). But still Farrell believes that in David Lodge's words, "history may be in a philosophical sense, a fiction, but it does not feel like that when we miss a train or somebody starts a war" (In Bradbury 1977:109). Thus, viewed from a broader perspective, realism need not be completely dismissed because it can recreate before us a world in which each one of us lives out our daily lives.

Farrell seems to be firm in his belief that the forms of nineteenth century realist fiction, despite their various limitations, continue to be unquestionably valid, because in most narratives realism is a fundamental mode. As one of Farrell’s contemporaries has aptly put it: "Realism is necessary all the way, because it is only out of realism that myths grow—to be broken down again in time by more realism, thus keeping up the simulating flow of artistic progression** (Sillitoe 1961:211). Though Farrell conforms to this positive aspect of realism as a fictional mode, equating the logical flow of the progression of events in a realist novel with the ‘flow of artistic progression’ itself, Farrell was equally aware of the repressive element in the novelistic discourse of realism, of the tendency of realist writers to restrict the play of language. “Of the fact that reality changes, realism is more fully, more intelligently aware than any other literary mode: what it implicitly denies is that in this world there is more than one reality and that this denial is in need of proof (Stern 1973:54). Farrell’s endorsement of the first part of Stern’s proposition leads him to appropriate certain insights of realist fiction
while his complete agreement with its second part leads him to the premises and methods of historiographic metafiction and to recognise plurality and difference which is central to anti-realist fiction. As Hutcheon puts it: “What historiographic metafiction challenges is both any naive realist concept of representation but also any equally naive textualist or formalist assertions of the total separation of art from the world” (1988:125; Italics mine).

As discussed earlier on, two of Farrell’s significant departures from the Realist mode of historical fiction are his total disregard for the introduction of ‘type-protagonists’ and actual historical personages and the use of innovative techniques like parody and pastiche. Now, it will be worthwhile attempting to inquire into the Realist dimensions of Farrell’s fictional technique, with a view to bringing out the possible reasons for toeing the Realist line in certain respects.

Once its various limitations are recognised, realism can become a very useful device in the hands of the novelist. Stern defines realism as “a way of depicting, describing a situation in a faithful, accurate, ‘life-like’ manner; or richly, abundantly, colourfully; again mechanically, photographically, imitatively” (1873:43). The realist mode has far-reaching positive implications for the historical novelist chiefly because s/he is dealing with a period which existed in ‘reality.’ As Stern points out realism may be *epistemologically naive* but still it "conquers oblivion by its unashamed assumption that yesterday’s ephemera are more alive than today’s generalities” (Ibid). One of the important conventions of realist fiction which Farrell consistently draws on is the elaborate description of locale. As D. A. Williams points out, "the Realist pays close attention to the physical and historical setting ... There are detailed descriptions of the faces of several cities" (1978:275). And significantly, Williams refers to ‘a widespread tendency’ among certain novelists ‘to exploit the symbolic potential of the physical setting’ (Ibid). Farrell’s Empire novels start with detailed descriptions of locales which clearly points ahead to the loci of the novels’ action and to the heart of their symbolic structure. The similarity between the opening of Farrell’s Troubles and Forster’s A Passage to India has been hinted at by Bernard
Bergonzi who expresses the view that both the novels are 'masterpieces of realism and symbolism' (1978:58). In fact, all Empire novels, including the unfinished The Hill Station, have similar openings. A comparative study of Farrell's opening descriptions of the physical locations of the novels' action will help to throw some light on the descriptive techniques used by Farrell to recreate the authentic feel of a bygone era. Troubles begins thus:

In those days, the Majestic was still standing in Kilnalough at the very end of a slim peninsula covered with dead pines leaning here and there at odd angles. At that time, there were probably yachts there too during the summer since the hotel held a regatta every July. These yachts would have been beached on one or other of the sandy crescents that curved out towards the hotel on each side of the peninsula. But now both pines and yachts have floated away and one day the high tide may very well meet over the narrowest part of the peninsula, made narrower by erosion. As for the regatta, for some reason it was discontinued years ago, before the Spencers took over the management of the place. And a few years later, still the Majestic itself followed the boats and preceded the pines into oblivion by burning to the ground—but by that time, of course, the place was in such a state of disrepair that it hardly mattered (p.7).

The opening is, of course, quite Forsterian in that it has the same knowledgeable, descriptive register, the calmly assured tone of A Passage to India: "Except for the Marabar Caves—and they are twenty miles off—the city of Chandrapore presents nothing extraordinary". The metaphorical centres in both novels [the Marabar Caves in the city of Chandrapore and the Majestic in Kilnalough] are introduced in the opening sentence itself. A sense of timelessness is established in both Farrell and Forster, though the use of the Biblical “In those days” adds a further dimension of permanence to Kilnalough. Moreover, it can be argued that Farrell goes a step further in his creative use of history by assuming a purely impartial and ironic narrative stance in the true-to-life depiction of the forces of history at work behind the gradual but steady disintegration of British imperialism. Forster’s sympathies have been made clear in the course of his novel
while Farrell’s narrative neutrality remains unpunctured throughout Troubles. Again, Forster’s protagonist is a type who is “constituted by the concrete manifestation ... of the ‘totality of socially decisive forces’” (Williams 1978:273). Forster maintains a certain sense of timelessness through his novel, while Farrell’s opening creates not only a sense of timelessness throughout his novel, but also of a particular time. As Crane points out, Forster "is deliberately invoking cosmic time rather than historical time" (1992:77). 

Like most postmodern novels, Troubles begins by revealing its end. The opening paragraph offers a concise history of the Majestic from its grandeur ‘in those days’ to its final passage into oblivion ‘years later.’ This is a powerful technique which Farrell uses in his Empire fiction to distance the reader by pointing out at the very outset that he is attempting to evoke a vanished phase of history. The language has a touch of irony about it—an aspect which made Derek Mahon exclaim in superlative terms of eulogy. Mahon wrote:

On the first page occurs the sentence, ‘A few years later still the Majestic itself followed the boats and preceded the pines into oblivion by burning to the ground.’ It was that ‘preceded the pines’ that hooked me. Here was a novelist who stood back, who took the long view. There is nothing meretricious or merely topical about Farrell’s work; it has the detachment and repose of great art (1979:313).

Farrell does exploit the symbolic potentials of the physical setting because in the overall structure of the novel, the decaying Majestic becomes a powerful image of the decaying British Empire—a point which, exhaustively discussed in the previous chapter, is hinted at in the last sentence of the opening paragraph itself: “the place was in such a state of disrepair that it hardly mattered,” implying that the British Empire left her colonies only after irreparable damage has been done to the native population. The Majestic and Kilnalough are pure figments of Farrell’s imagination. As Binnns reminds us: "The Majestic hotel never existed and Kilnalough cannot be found on any map of Ireland for the simple reason that

The opening of The Siege of Krishnapur bears a closer resemblance to that of Forster's A Passage to India:

Anyone who has never before visited Krishnapur, and who approaches from the east, is likely to think that he has reached the end of his journey a few miles sooner than he expected. While still some distance from Krishnapur he begins to ascend a shallow ridge. From here he will see what appears to be town in the heat-distorted distance. He will see the white glitter of walls and roofs and a handsome grove of trees, perhaps even the dome of what might be a temple. Round about there will be the unending plain still, exactly as it had been for many miles back, a dreary ocean of earth, in the immensity of which an occasional field of sugar cane or mustard is utterly lost .... Sometimes the village crouches in a grove of bamboo and possesses a frightful pond with a water-buffalo or two; more often there is just a well to be worked from dawn till dusk by the same two men and two bullocks every single day in their lives (pp.9-10).

A sense of timelessness is more powerfully communicated by referring to the immensity of the Indian landscape. At the very outset, almost every ingredient of Indian life is touched upon with extraordinary artistic skill—the in-built capacity of the land to bluff the stranger, the ‘unending plain,’ ‘shallow ridges,’ fields, the ubiquitous heat, bamboo groves, frightful ponds and poor labourers. This vivid description allows the reader to enter the psychic atmosphere of the place and the age. Like Kilnalough, Krishnapur, too is a place which does not exist outside the writer's imagination, yet once the reader is introduced to the city of Krishnapur, s/he gets the feeling that Krishnapur is a concretely real and historical place which is anything but fictional.

The Singapore Grip, too, opens in a calm and detached tone:
Imagine a clock in a glass case; the hands move unruffled about their business, but at the same time we can see the working of springs and wheels and cogs. That ordered life in Tanglin depended on the same way on the city below, and the mainland beyond the Causeway, whose trading, mining and plantation concerns might represent wheels and cogs while their mute gigantic labour force are the springs, steadily causing pressures to be transmitted from one part of the organism to another ... and not just as that time or just to Tanglin, but further in time and space: to you thousands of years ago you should not imagine an uncivilised frontier-town of the jungle. You had only to stroll around wide avenues and lawns and look at the monolithic government buildings, at the luxurious department stores and at the marmoreal dignity of the banks, to realise that Singapore was the work of a civilised nation — But there is no denying it, certain parts of the city were tawdry and others were wretched, and becoming more so as the age advanced.

The 'prodigious quantity of rats and centipedes' reminds the reader of the 'prodigious number of basins and lavatory bowls in Troubles. As Binns has pointed out, "some of the central themes of the novel are subliminally present in the two opening paragraphs" (1986:88). Here too, Farrell is seen, by his own admission, concentrating on 'an awful lot of things historians never consider*— the rats and centipedes, skulls and bones, droppings of local pirates and so on. The concluding paragraph of the opening description is worth quoting in full for a variety of reasons. First, it proves Derek Mahon's thesis that Farrell "had an X-ray vision of society" (1979:313), secondly, it presents Farrell at his metaphoric best and thirdly, it introduces an overtly metafictional technique of addressing the reader directly:

Imagine a clock in a glass case; the hands move unruffled about their business, but at the same time we can see the working of springs and wheels and cogs. That ordered life in Tanglin depended on the same way on the city below, and the mainland beyond the Causeway, whose trading, mining and plantation concerns might represent wheels and cogs while their mute gigantic labour force are the springs, steadily causing pressures to be transmitted from one part of the organism to another ... and not just as that time or just to Tanglin, but further in time and space: to you thousands of years ago...
of miles away, reading in bed or in a deck-chair on the lawn, or to me as I sit writing at a table (Italics mine).

Like the postmodern novelists, Farrell, by engaging the reader in a dialogue about the book s/he is reading, forces us to consider the book we are reading as an artefact, undercuts the realistic impulses of the work and turns it into a self-reflexive creation. But still, as Farrell has stated in the 'Author's Note' to The Singapore Grip, “this novel depends very heavily on primary research conducted by others .... Nevertheless, the Singapore of these pages does not pretend to be anything but fictional” (p.7).

The Hill Station begins with a similarly detached opening: “Nowadays the railway goes all the way upto Simla, but before the turn of the century it stopped at Kalka.” These opening words which immediately take us from the present to a nineteenth century past introduce us to an important technique employed by Farrell to underscore the historicity of his fiction, namely that of instituting direct comparisons between past and present. By taking us back with an awareness of the present in our minds, Farrell makes us see the connections and disruptions between the past and present. In another scene in the same novel, Farrell uses this technique with powerful comic effect: “It is not at all easy to create the right impression if you are not quite an even keel; she felt as someone would with a flat tyre in a motor parade today” (p.83; Italics mine).

Thus, even when Farrell draws on the realist conventions, his interest in formal experimentation is invariably obvious. Though his fiction may not serve as a virtual casebook of fictional experimentation, it partakes even of the elements of the fabulatory novel. According to Patricia Waugh, a ‘fabulation’ is defined by its conscious use of “bizarre metaphors” and “highly obtrusive similes* (1984:17). Waugh cites an example of such a metaphor from Muriel Spark's fabulatory novel Not to Disturb (1971) where the lightning which instantly kills two people is compared to a ‘self-stricken flash photographer’ and to a ‘zip-fastener ripped from its garment by a sexual maniac.’ Farrell’s fiction abounds in instances of such ‘bizarre metaphors.* In A Girl in the Head, the protagonist's mind is compared to
a 'vacuum-cleaner,' 'collecting random and meaningless objects' (p.29). In Troubles, 'creepers' are compared to 'emerald intestines' (p.15). "the restrained laughter bulged like a giant abscess in the room' (p.80) 'eyes were racing to and fro across the carpet like terrified mice,' 'elated thoughts' sped through the mind 'like scared antelope' (p.226) and a mortally wounded soldier is described as sitting 'with his intestines in his lap like a mess of snakes' (p.317). In The Siege of Krishnapur, a good poem is called a 'hedgehog' (p.34). In The Singapore Grip, a phrase had whirled round Dr. Brownley's mind 'like a rat in a refrigerator' (p.127). A splendid example of this 'metaphoric overkill' [to use David Lodge's phrase] appears in The Singapore Grip in a scene in which Farrell compares the cross-section of a moment in history to a severed leg of lamb, "where you see the end of the muscles, nerves, sinews and bone of one piece matching a similar arrangement in the other" (p.345). In examples of this kind, "the extreme polarity of vehicle and tenor implicitly reminds the reader of the way in which metaphor constructs an image of reality by connecting apparently disparate objects" (Waugh 1984:17). Moreover, these obtrusive metaphors not only foreground the fabulatory dimensions of Farrell's fiction but also testify to "the power of the imagination, which, combining the memory of gold with that of the mountain, can compose the idea of a golden mountain" (Eco 1983:220).

To conclude, Farrell goes beyond realism and anti-realism in that the self-conscious realism of his fiction indirectly leads to the creation of a seemingly unconscious level of metafictionality in his novels. Farrell uses several avant-garde techniques in his fiction; yet at the same time, he has vehemently attacked experimental excesses. Farrell criticised the non-fictional novels of writers like B.S. Johnson and thought that they were "uninteresting mechanical feats, like writing a novel all in one sentence or making it out of loose-leafed pages which can be read in any order" (Dean 1973:28). In his early novel A Girl in the Head, Farrell indulges in certain experimental excesses like typographical trickery and flippancy of tone a la B.S Johnson's Traveling People (1963) and the particularly hostile reviews the novel received partly forced Farrell to strike a balance between tradition and innovation with a view to transcending the limitations of both.
Mark Curry has aptly put it, "whereas postmodern fiction can generally be regarded as conscious metafiction, postmodern readings can identify metafiction as an aspect of the unconscious level of the text, against the gram of realist intention, and therefore, beyond any temporal boundaries which might apply to the term 'postmodern'" (1995:17; ItaUcs mine). In the following chapter, an attempt will be made to articulate the seemingly 'unconscious self-consciousness' of Farrell's apparently non-metafictional fiction.
Notes

1. Fleishman has remarked: "Though I have written this book "to fill a gap" in scholarship, I still cannot quite convince myself that there has never been a full-length critical study of the English historical novel" (1971:xxiv). But the books on the historical novel published before 1924 were, as their titles attest, basically in the form of study-aids—Jonathan Nield's A Guide to the Best Historical Novels and Tales (1902) and Ernest A. Baker's A Guide to Historical Fiction (1908).

2. The Historical Novel, by Lukacs's own admission, makes no claim to being an all-inclusive history of the genre of historical fiction because the principles he followed in the selection of historical novels and his interpretations of them are conditioned by a dialectical notion of historical process. But still, it is significant that Lukacs continues to be a constant point of reference for critics as well as novelists [of Marxist, non-Marxist and even anti-Marxist hues] of historical fiction primarily because he has been able to identify most of the essential features of the genre with unprecedented precision and clarity of perception.

3. The only real-life figures in Farrell are the two army commanders, General Percival and Brooke-Popham in The Singapore Grip. But they cannot be called "world-historical individuals" because they are very much marginalised and even comically portrayed.

4. However, Fleishman is very emphatic and totally uncompromising on this point: "There is an obvious theoretical difficulty in the status of "real" personages in "invented" fictions, but their presence is not a mere matter of taste. It is necessary to include at least one such figure in a novel if it is to qualify as historical... The historical novel is distinguished among novels by the presence of a specific link to history: not merely a real building or a real event but a real person among the
fictitious ones. When life is seen in the context of history, we have a novel; when the novel's characters live in the same world with historical persons, we have a historical novel" (1971:3; Italics mine). Farrell's novels do retain "a specific link to history" by centring novels on a significant 'real event.'

5. It may be noted that writers of historiographic metafiction like Timothy Findley and Robert Coover introduce a number of historical figures in their novels. Findley's protagonists are historical figures—Robert Ross in The Wars and Hugh Selwyn Mauberley in Famous Last Words.

6. Fleishman, too, recognises the vital significance of an active notion of history on the part of the historical novelist: "What makes a historical novel historical is the active presence of a concept of history as a shaping force—acting not only upon the characters in the novel but on the author and the reader outside it" (1971:15).

7. Conrad echoes the same sentiment: "Fiction is history, human history or it is nothing. But it is also more than that; it stands on firmer ground, being based on the reality of forms and the observation of social phenomena, whereas history is based on documents, and the reading of print and handwriting—on second-hand impression. Thus fiction is nearer truth. But let that pass. A historian may be an artist too, and a novelist is a historian, the preserver, the keeper, the expounder, of human experience" (In Fleishman 1971:16). The Goncourt brothers put the same idea with a more envious turn of expression: "history is a novel which happened; the novel is history as it might have happened" (In Lodge 1977:25). Perhaps, no other philosopher of history was as conscious as R. G. Collingwood about the striking similarity between the novelist and the historian: "Each of them makes it his business to construct a picture which is partly a narrative of events, partly a description of situations, exhibition of motives, analysis of characters. Each aims at making his picture a coherent whole, where every character and every situation is so bound up with the rest that this character in this situation cannot but act in this way, and we cannot imagine him as acting otherwise. The novel and the history must both of them make sense; nothing is admissible in either except what
is necessary, and the judge of this necessity is in both cases the imagination (1966:245-246). But there have always been strong detractors of this formulation. In his essay *The Views of the Great Critics on the Historical Novel*, Ernest Bernbaum discusses the particularly hostile Victorian attitudes towards the fictionalisation of history. Carlyle always preferred fact to history ["History, after all, is the true poetry; ...Reality, if rightly interpreted, is grander than Fiction"]). Leslie Stephen was another Victorian critic who disapproved of the genre for its inaccurate portrayals of history (1926:342).

8. A similar atmosphere of anxiety prevailed in the 1940s too. Ortega remarked: "It is erroneous to think of the novel—and I refer to the modern novel in particular— as of an endless field capable of rendering ever new forms. Rather, it may be compared to a vast but finite quarry. There exists a number of possible themes for the novel. The workman of the primal hour had no trouble finding new blocks— new characters, new themes. But present day writers face the fact that only narrow and concealed veins are left there" (In Bergonzi 1970:14). In her perceptive essay *Modern Fiction*, Virginia Woolf uses a similar metaphor to highlight the superiority of the established masters of fiction: "With their simple tools and primitive materials, it might be said, Fielding did well and Jane Austen even better, but compare their opportunities with ours? (1972:83). Significantly, at about the same time, Anthony Burgess lamented the dearth of talented historical novelists: "... one knows that there are many great historical novels that ought to be written; the difficulty is finding someone to write them? (1967:140).

9. Roger Sale makes a similar comparison: "The Siege of Krishnapur is, ... like Fowles's The French Lieutenant's Woman, a self-conscious effort to construct a full Victorian scene and tale with a modern idiom and tone, so that a reader is asked to be both inside a good old-fashioned tale and outside it, being ironic, taking its measure" (1974:18).

10. In his book *The Modes of Modern Writing*, Lodge, too, cites a few instances of such metaphorical flights from Brautigan's novel Trout Fishing in America as a significant feature of postmodern fiction (1977:236).