THEORY AND INTERPRETATION OF NARRATIVE
James Phelan, Peter J. Rabinowitz, and Robyn Warhol, Series Editors
FACT, Fiction, and FORM

Selected Essays

Ralph W. Rader

Edited by James Phelan and David H. Richter
For June Warring Rader
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alph Wilson Rader (1930–2007) was born in Muskegon, Michigan and grew up in rural Indiana. He earned his B.A. at Purdue University in 1952 and his Ph.D. at Indiana University in 1958. In 1956 he began teaching as an Instructor in the English Department at the University of California, Berkeley, the institution at which he spent the rest of his career. Rader advanced rapidly through the ranks, becoming assistant professor in 1958, associate professor in 1963, and professor in 1967, and serving as department chair from 1976–80. In 1992, he was given the title Professor in the Graduate School. He retired in 1993, but he was prevailed upon by his colleagues in 1994 to come out of retirement in order to serve once again as chair. He completed that term in 1996, and in 1997 he officially became professor emeritus. An energetic and influential advisor, Rader received UC Berkeley’s Distinguished Teaching Award in 1976, and, upon his retirement, its most prestigious honor, the Berkeley Citation. Although Rader published only one scholarly monograph during his career (Tennyson’s Maud: The Biographical Genesis, 1963), between 1973 and 1999, he wrote a remarkable series of essays that established him as one of literary theory’s most distinctive and powerful thinkers about the nature and value of literary form. Fact, Fiction, and Form collects those essays.

Although Rader’s work has influenced many who followed its unfolding from essay to essay, it has not yet had the wide influence it deserves, and we hope that Fact, Fiction, and Form will change that situation. Indeed, we believe that these essays are especially relevant to current conversations among critics and theorists seeking to reestablish the importance of questions of form and aesthetics alongside questions of politics and ideology.
Rader’s influence has not yet been as large as it deserves to be, because, like Kenneth Burke, he worked outside the dominant paradigms of literary theory and interpretation, and because his book on Tennyson precedes his extended engagement with fundamental questions of form, literary explanation, and literary history. This engagement was spurred by Rader’s encounter with neo-Aristotelian theory and criticism, primarily through Sheldon Sacks, who was his colleague at Berkeley from 1958 to 1966, and who, like Rader, had done his dissertation on Henry Fielding. Rader shared an office with Sacks for one year (1961–62), collaborated with him on a college textbook (Essays: An Analytic Reader, Little, Brown 1964), and, according to a contemporary, spent many late afternoons arguing literature over drinks at Sacks’s house on Buena Vista Way.

As we explain in our Introduction, Rader was never a wholly orthodox neo-Aristotelian or even a strict formalist who excludes authorial agency and readerly activity from what happens in literature. His fundamental problem, as he himself defined it in 1972, in a successful application for a Guggenheim Fellowship, was the relationship between “the artificial world of literature and the world of real experience” and “the validity of the felt values of literature in relation to the cold work of fact,” including at times the cold facts of an author’s life. He strove to understand how the mind of the reader builds and grasps “the different worlds of the literary imagination on the basis of its commerce with the real world.” Rader drew upon—and modified—neo-Aristotelian principles as he conducted his own rigorous inquiries into these fundamental questions.

The result of those inquiries is Rader’s coherent and powerful explanation of literary form and its value rooted in three related principles: (1) literary works comprise that subclass of texts whose chief end is pleasure; (2) literary form is the means by which human beings come to artistic terms with the nature of the world and their place in it; and (3) form is sufficiently powerful to work its effects on readers even if readers are not always able to translate their experience into conventional literary critical explanations. In our Introduction, we explicate these principles and examine their consequences for Rader’s ideas about the different forms of the novel and the lyric, the history of the novel, the nature and appropriate methods of interpretation, and responses to his work.

As Rader applies his key principles to a broad sweep of literary texts—from Paradise Lost to In Cold Blood, from “Elegy in a Country Churchyard” to “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”—he offers contributions to three significant areas of contemporary literary studies, and we have grouped his essays accordingly. Part I, “Principles,” contains essays that articulate and argue for the fundamental elements of Rader’s critical vision. Part II, “Fact, Fiction, and Form,” is devoted to essays that build on Rader’s second principle (form as an artistic response to human experience) and that show how Rader’s approach to form leads him to
think in fresh ways about the interactions among the three entities of the section’s title. Part III, “The History of the Novel,” consists of essays that outline his general account of the rise of the novel in England and its formal development from the mid-eighteenth century to the modernist period, a development influenced both by individual novelists’ formal innovations and by shifting notions about the appropriate functions of the novel. These essays include impressive readings of a wide range of prose fictions from *Moll Flanders* through *Ulysses* and demonstrate Rader’s ability to integrate his concerns with form, history, and interpretation into his larger vision of the novel as an evolving genre.

Working on this volume has been a rewarding experience for many reasons, but especially because we had encouragement and support from so many people. Arend Flick and June Warring Rader deserve credit for proposing the volume, and Arend and Nancy Rader provided us with hard-to-locate manuscripts. Peter J. Rabinowitz and Sandy Crooms were enthusiastic about the project from its inception, and we were gratified to see their enthusiasm reflected in multiple anonymous reports on the prospectus and in the extensive commentary on the whole manuscript by the anonymous reviewer. Dorothy Hale and Harry Shaw offered important encouragement and advice along the way. Sam Otter and George Starr tracked down information about the collaborations of Rader and Sheldon Sacks at Berkeley. Jim Phelan’s graduate assistants Paul McCormick, Lindsay Martin, and Brian McAllister did heroic work in preparing the manuscript for publication. Lindsay also compiled the Works Cited and Brian reviewed the proofs and made valuable contributions to the index.

Finally, we dedicate this book to June Rader because we know that Ralph would have done the same.

With the exception of “Big with Jest—the Bastardy of Tristram Shandy” (written ca. 1970) and “Barchester Towers: A Fourth Baggy Monster” (written ca. 1980), the essays in this book have appeared previously in journals or edited collections. We are grateful to the publishers for permission to reprint them. Here are the full bibliographic details of their first appearances (listed in the order of their arrangement in this volume).


“Notes on Some Structural Varieties and Variations in Dramatic ‘I’ Poems and Their Theoretical Implications.” *Victorian Poetry* (special dramatic monologue issue) 22.2 (Summer 1984): 103–120.


The Literary Theoretical Contribution of Ralph W. Rader

James Phelan and David H. Richter

Ralph W. Rader consistently located his work within the tradition of Chicago School criticism, and he just as consistently characterized that tradition as a minor movement in the history of twentieth-century criticism and theory. But from our perspective at the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century, Rader’s commendable modesty does not do justice either to the Chicago School or to his own work. First, the persistence of Chicago School principles and ideas over four generations of critics and theorists, and especially the presence of those ideas in developments and debates within the still expanding field of narrative theory, suggest that “enduring and influential” would be more apt adjectives than “minor.” The persistence of the Chicago School is especially salient in comparison to the fate of its chief initial rival, the New Criticism, a school that has a recognizable legacy but no contemporary heirs. Second, the Chicago School’s interest in form and genre, and more generally in the affective, ethical, and aesthetic dimensions of literature, has a new appeal in our present moment, when so many critics and theorists, seeking to go beyond the orthodoxies of poststructuralism and New Historicism, are turning (or returning) their attention to these components of literary experience.

In this context Rader’s work is particularly valuable because it develops a coherent and compelling vision of the nature and significance of literature and an impressive way of translating that vision into interpretive practice. That vision, as we will discuss below, is based not on a theory of language, power, history, or culture but rather on an understanding of literary forms as human creations designed to address aspects of our existence in the world. In other
words, for Rader literary forms are not preexisting molds into which artists pour their ideas, but rather the consequence of their efforts to respond to fundamental conditions of human life. Unfortunately, as we noted in the Preface, Rader never fully articulated his vision of literature and its multiple consequences in a single book. Instead, he presented substantial pieces of it in a wide-ranging body of essays, each of which carried out its own distinctive critical inquiry. Consequently, in this introduction, we seek to reconstruct Rader’s vision, to explicate the interrelationships among several of its key components, and to reflect on its consequences. More specifically, we address Rader’s definition of literature, his understanding of the tasks of criticism and theory, his concepts of literary form and literary quality, his work on the history of the English novel, and his methods of interpretive reasoning. We conclude with a brief look at responses to Rader’s work. In a sense, we understand our task as doing for Rader’s critical work what he so often set out to do for another writer’s imaginative work: reconstruct—and appreciate—the core principles of its construction.

Rader’s Definition of Literature and His Concept of Form

In “Fact, Theory, and Literary Explanation” (1974), Rader defines literature as that class of verbal compositions designed to be understood by immediate reference only to themselves through the reader’s grasp of the writer’s communicative act as directed toward the evocation of a certain pleasure in their own understanding. In this sense, “literary works are verbal compositions in which the act of understanding is experienced as its own justification” (36). This definition has both a descriptive and an evaluative dimension. In its descriptive sense, the definition distinguishes literary works from nonliterary works, the class of verbal compositions in which the reader’s act of understanding is directed toward her doing something else, often something practical (making a pie, voting for one candidate rather than another, writing a letter of protest, and so on). In its evaluative sense, the definition allows us to distinguish among degrees of literariness once we acknowledge that different members of the literary class offer their readers different degrees of pleasure and concomitantly different degrees of self-justification. For example, we could readily agree that Paradise Lost is substantially more literary than, say, Ogden Nash’s “Ode to a Baby”: “A bit of talcum / Is always walcum.”

This painfully simple demonstration of the definition’s evaluative dimension also helps illuminate Rader’s understanding of the task of criticism. Why do we readily accept this judgment of Milton’s epic as a greater literary work
than Nash's doggerel? At least in part because the reference to Milton's poem and the quoting of Nash tap into our intuitive understanding of each one's literary merit. This answer doesn't deny other influences such as Milton's long-established place in and Nash's absence from the standard canon, the cultural status of epics versus light verse and so on, but it keeps open the possibility that these other influences are actually connected to what we intuitively know after the experience of reading each poem.

Furthermore, Rader's trust in our intuition would extend to our ability to distinguish between the literary quality of two works within the same general class, for example, Nash's couplet and Alexander Pope's two lines for a dog collar: “I am his Highness's dog at Kew / Pray tell me, Sir, whose dog are you?” Both couplets convey their wit by using the first line to set up the punch delivered in the second. But we can readily discern that Pope's couplet is the superior literary text because it gives more pleasure. In addition, Rader would insist, we can find the source of our comparative judgment in the couplets themselves. Where Nash relies on his weak and strained pun to deliver the wit, Pope relies on the more sophisticated conceit of the dog collar's erasure of difference between its wearer and its reader, a conceit that in turn opens up the rich double-voicing of the couplet, the way it contains both the (imagined) voice of the wearer and the ironic voice of the poet.

Rader believes so strongly in the connection between our intuitive experience of texts and our implicit understanding of them that, for him, the task of criticism is less to construct new knowledge about literature than “to explain, clarify, and regularize the knowledge that we at some level already possess” (34). Consequently, his efforts to develop satisfactory accounts of form, genre, and quality in general and of the form and quality of individual works are efforts to make visible and comprehensible aspects of our reading experience that would otherwise often remain below the level of conscious awareness.

Here we've reached an important crux in Rader's project of explaining the distinctive quality of literary experience: his faith in the ability of literary form to work its effects on audiences, even if those audiences are not always able to articulate very clearly either the nature of those effects or how they come about. In this respect, Rader wants to do for literary understanding something akin to what Chomsky wanted to do for linguistic understanding. Just as Chomsky sought to explain how competent speakers of English intuitively know such things as that “John is eager to please” is not strictly parallel to “John is easy to please,” Rader wants to explain how readers of literature intuitively know such things as that *Paradise Lost* is a greater work than not just all of Nash's poems but also any of Milton's other works. This understanding of Rader's faith helps explain his concept of form.
At the most general level, as noted above, Rader conceives of literary form as the mode by which we humans come to artistic terms with our experiences of the world. Forms are “extensions of our inborn capacities to imagine ourselves, other men, and the world of which we are part” (152). We develop those inborn capacities through direct experiences of the world, and this development is crucial for our ability to make our way through life. But we can also develop those capacities through our encounters—as writers or readers—with literary form. These encounters in turn allow us to broaden and deepen our understanding of ourselves, the world, and our place within it.

 Authors employ, adapt, and invent forms in order to communicate what they imagine to audiences, and audiences intuit those forms as they read. This connection between forms and the human agents who produce and consume them is crucial to Rader’s thought. It is the principle that leads to his locating forms within history—even as he contends that those historically situated authors have considerable flexibility in fashioning forms as they do. One good way to clarify Rader’s concept of form is to compare it to the one developed by the first generation of Chicago school critics, a comparison that prompts a quick review of the Chicagoans’ project.

R. S. Crane, Elder Olson, Norman Maclean, and others at the University of Chicago in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s sought to develop an approach to literature based on Aristotle’s *Poetics* and his *Metaphysics* that would be adequate to literary works written over the more than two millennia since Aristotle lived—works that Aristotle never dreamed of in his philosophy. The Chicagoleans were drawn to the *Poetics* in particular because they were interested in the affective experiences offered by reading literature, and they understood Aristotle’s treatise as explaining the principles underlying the audience’s experience of Greek tragedy. This way of conceiving their project made Aristotle’s a posteriori method of reasoning back from the effects constituting that experience to the causes of those effects in the plays of the Greek tragedians more important than his particular conclusions. But this way of conceiving their project also led them to adopt the concept of form underlying Aristotle’s famous definition of tragedy. If tragedy is an imitation of an action using the devices of language, spectacle, and song to arouse and purge the emotions of pity and fear, then form (what Aristotle in the *Metaphysics* called *eidos*) is the organizing principle that synthesizes the various aspects of imitation—the objects (the constituent parts of the action: plot, character, and thought), manner (the dramatic spectacle), and means (the speeches of the characters, the songs)—into a larger purposive whole designed to affect its audience in a particular way.

This reading of Aristotle led Crane and his colleagues to distinguish between two broad categories of works, the mimetic and the didactic. Mimetic works...
like tragedies are organized as imitations of actions whose purposes are to affect their audiences’ emotions in certain ways. Didactic works, while still containing representations of characters and events, are organized more as arguments than actions and their purposes are to persuade their audiences about the truth of certain propositions (as in the apologue) or about the ridiculousness of certain objects external to the work (as in satire). The mimetic–didactic distinction was important to the first generation because it helped them underline their differences from their major rivals, the New Critics who, by postulating that literature was a special use of language that put meanings in ironic tension, effectively made all works didactic. The Chicagoans’ larger point is that efforts to explain the structure and form of mimetic works by treating them as didactic works (or didactic works as if they were mimetic) was to commit a category error that would doom one’s interpretation to inadequacy because it would disconnect one from the experiential effects of the works.

Thus, Crane, in his manifesto-like essay, “The Concept of Plot and the Plot of Tom Jones,” specifies that he is focusing on plot in mimetic works and that plot is more than just the sequence of events. Instead it is the key to form because, as Crane puts it, plot is a particular temporal synthesis of character, thought, and action endowed with the capacity to affect the audience’s opinions and emotions in a certain way. The plot of Tom Jones, then, is the dynamic system of actions and the affective responses associated with that system. This system governs Tom’s movement from his initial but unstable union with Allworthy and Sophia to the low point of his being on the verge of fulfilling the prophecy that he was born to be hanged and then, in a marvelously swift transition, to the high point of his final stable happiness in Sophia’s arms and Allworthy’s good graces.

Rader, in “Tom Jones: The Form in History,” an essay written in 1981 but not published until David Richter wrested it out of his hands in 1999, finds much to like both in Crane’s concept of plot and in his analysis of Tom Jones because it explains a great deal of his (Rader’s) experience as a reader, and more generally, a great deal of the novel’s ability to move readers who are historically distant from it. Nevertheless, Rader also finds that Crane’s concepts of plot and of form are flawed because they are ahistorical. Rader puts it this way: “Crane, in his rigorous attempt to conceive Tom Jones as an autonomous artistic construct, caused himself to miss the full dimensions of the [novel’s] effect as intended and felt” (245–46). Rader supports this claim by comparing and contrasting his and Crane’s conclusions about the marvelous series of events that brings about Tom’s escape from the gallows and his happy reunion with Sophia. For Crane, with his ahistorical approach, this series is an example of the vagaries of blind Fortune that adds to the moral seriousness of the novel by showing that
Tom’s fundamentally sound moral character is no guarantor of his eventual happiness. For Rader, with his location of form in history, this series of events shows that something more than mere chance is behind Tom’s sudden reversal of fortune. This reversal is an implicit and powerful demonstration of Fielding’s specific mid-eighteenth-century Latitudinarian belief in the hidden providence governing human life, a demonstration that the audience registers in the way that it registers the superiority of Pope’s couplet to Nash’s. Thus, by attending to Fielding’s historically located beliefs, Rader concludes that the predominantly mimetic comic plot carries along with it a significant didactic component. More generally, then, Rader revises Crane’s proposals by relocating form in history, by connecting it even more closely to the historical author, and by significantly reducing the explanatory power of the mimetic–didactic distinction.

Rader’s engagement with Crane both reinforces his commitment to the concept of form as crucial to explaining literary experience and gives him a greater openness to the variety of forms in literary history than any other member of the first two generations of Chicago critics. Rader then uses that openness in combination with his own rich responsiveness as a reader of literature across the span of literary history to develop two important lines of thought, one about form in the novel and the other about form in the lyric. The key principle underlying Rader’s work in both lines of thought is that the purposes of different forms can be analyzed by attending to different configurations of the relationships among (1) the author (and his or her capacity to imagine); (2) the objects represented (self, others, and the world in some combination); and (3) the audience’s positioning toward both author and objects.

Form in the Lyric and Form in the Novel

In approaching the lyric, Rader’s first move is to reject the a priori critical doctrine popularized by Cleanth Brooks and given support by W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley’s essay on “The Intentional Fallacy” that the speaker of a lyric is always distinct from the poet. This rejection allows us to distinguish between lyrics in which the speaker and the poet are identical and those in which they are not. These distinctions in turn also enable us to recognize the difference between lyrics that are essentially nonfictional and those that are essentially fictional and to think about the variety of forms along a spectrum from wholly nonfictional to wholly fictional. Thus, at one end of the spectrum, we have the expressive lyric such as Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey” in which poet and speaker are one and in which the poet works out in the present-tense of the poem his thoughts about some real issue or his responses to some real experience:
Once again
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs
That on a wild secluded scene impress
Thoughts of more deep seclusion. . . .
(4–7)

In the expressive lyric, the audience understands the poet to be presenting rather than representing his thoughts and feelings, and the audience enters into the poet’s effort to work through those materials.

The next point along the spectrum is the dramatic lyric such as Hopkins’s “The Windhover” or Frost’s “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening.” The dramatic lyric is based on the poet’s memory of a real experience, and, thus, in contrast to the expressive lyric, is a re-presentation of an experience even if told in the present tense. Thus, though the poet and the speaker have the same identity, the audience registers a difference between the “I” who is the lyric actor and the “I” who is the poet fashioning the actor’s experience into this artistic construct. The audience in the dramatic lyric has a primary awareness of—and participates in—the lyric actor’s experience and a secondary awareness of the poet’s constructive activity in re-presenting that experience.

Next along the spectrum is the mask lyric, such as Tennyson’s “Ulysses” and Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” in which the poet and the speaker are no longer the same person, but in which the poet uses the speaker as a surrogate to express his genuine thoughts and feelings. The audience once again has a dual awareness, but one that, like the mask lyric itself, straddles the line between fiction and nonfiction: the audience simultaneously takes on the vision of the fictive surrogate but attaches the surrogate’s thoughts and emotions to the poet. The mask lyric also allows (but of course does not require) a poet to explore, under the guise of the mask, thoughts, attitudes, or experiences that he or she is not wholly comfortable with or would not speak of without the mask. Tennyson’s Ulysses, for example, alludes to suicidal impulses before resolving to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

At the far end of the spectrum, we move wholly into the realm of fiction with the dramatic monologue proper, a form for which Browning’s “My Last Duchess” serves as a paradigm case. Here the poet and the speaker are totally distinct, and the poet uses the speaker’s monologue gradually to reveal the speaker’s inner purpose in uttering this speech to this narratee on this occasion—and then through that disclosure to reveal the speaker’s overall character. In the dramatic monologue, the audience’s dual awareness of the speaker’s purpose contained within the poet’s purpose constitutes a major source of the form’s power.
As we turn to Rader’s ideas about form in the novel, we will begin with a brief sketch and then flesh it out in the next section where we discuss his conception of the formal history of the English novel. Again, Rader’s ideas about form are linked to his focus on the relations among the author, the objects represented, and the audience, and he identifies three main configurations of those relationships. The first configuration is what he calls the *pseudo-factual* with Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* as the paradigm case. The second configuration is the *action/fantasy* or the *plot/judgment* model, with Richardson’s *Pamela* as the exemplar. The third is the *simular* with Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* as the prototype. More specifically, the action/fantasy pattern of *Pamela* conforms to our ordinary conception of the standard novel of represented action, which Rader describes this way: “a work which offers the reader a focal illusion of characters acting autonomously as if in a world of real experience within a subsidiary awareness of an underlying constructive authorial purpose which gives the story a significance and affective force that real experience does not have” (99). The *pseudo-factual* form of *Moll Flanders* does not offer its audience this dual awareness. Instead, it takes advantage of its fictiveness to heighten the entertainment pleasures associated with an action-packed true story. The pleasures of *Moll Flanders* reside not in how Defoe shapes Moll’s story into a larger design with greater significance but rather in the very vividness of her experiences. By contrast, the simular form moves away from the “as if” quality of the novel to represent in fictional form real people and events. The young artist in Joyce’s narrative is called Stephen Dedalus, but his experiences are those of Joyce himself. Joyce gives another twist to this simular form in *Ulysses*, where he combines this recreated version of his younger self in Stephen with a recreation of his mature self in the body of another—in, that is, Leopold Bloom.

**Form in History: The English Novel**

Rader’s ideas about the literary history of the English novel, like his ideas about the form of the novel, both draw on and diverge from R. S. Crane’s work. In “Critical and Historical Principles of Literary History,” Crane argues that form should have a central place in any properly *literary* history. Not surprisingly, his preferred concept of form is the neo-Aristotelian one defined above: the organizing principle that synthesizes objects (the constituent parts of the action: plot, character, and thought), manner (the dramatic spectacle, or, in the novel, the narrative technique), and means (the speeches of the characters, the songs, the diction and syntax of the narration) of imitation into a larger purposive whole designed to affect its audience in a particular way.
Crane labeled any analysis of this synthesis and of the relations among objects, manner, and means as one focused on the “constructional” aspect of a text. Crane also identified “preconstructional” and “postconstructional” aspects and their relevance to literary history. The preconstructional aspect consists of the text’s origins, sources, analogues, and other raw materials. For a writer working within a given genre and literary scene, the preexisting tradition offers a storehouse of such materials (familiar plot devices, character types, verbal strategies, narrative conventions) to which the author looks in composing his or her original work. The “postconstructional” aspect consists of the work’s actual influences on its readers, the ways it affects their relations to other aspects of culture and, indeed, to “the common causes of all human discourse: language, the mind, society, history, and so on” (“Principles” 48).

While all three aspects of a text can provide evidence for its role in literary history, Crane argues that the constructional aspect has been relatively ignored, especially in comparison to the preconstructional aspect, with the result that most literary histories leave out essential parts of the story. Literary historians found it easier to trace the historical origin, continuity, and variation of the raw materials of a text or set of texts than to understand how authors shaped those materials for specific purposes and how such shaping influenced subsequent authors as they sought to achieve their own purposes. Despite all that preconstructional histories tell us about the conditions under which writers worked, they remain incapable of addressing the distinctive qualities of individual texts that are both primarily responsible for their place in the canon and for their influence on subsequent texts. Engaging in purely preconstructional explanation is like writing a history of the apple pie through chapters on apple growing, pig farming, flour milling, and the development of the oven. Obviously an apple pie needs apples and flour and lard and an oven, but apple pie is also obviously more than the sum of its necessary ingredients and tools.

Crane’s antidote to the “scissors and paste” preconstructional literary histories was to move the constructional aspect of texts to the center of those histories. A novel (or any other literary work) is the way it is less because of its available raw materials than because the artist’s choice of form demands that the artist choose some of those materials rather than others and that she shape those chosen materials in one way rather than another. As Crane puts it, the “first interpretative task of the historian of forms” is “the various reasons of art which presided in their making.” Crane usually wrote about masterpieces like Macbeth and Tom Jones, but for him, even the apparent “defects” of a form can be dictated by formal considerations. For example, the simplistic characterization in the Gothic novel may “have been dictated, in some sense, by the artistic end their authors had in view, namely, a concentration on the mysteriously terrifying...
quality of the events portrayed.” One needed “enough character to impel readers to take sides . . . and nothing more” (“Principles” 109–110). But Crane assumes that the sequential analysis of masterpieces like Tom Jones, defective canonical works like The Vicar of Wakefield, and texts in minor genres like the Gothic will yield “narrative histories of form.” Crane himself did not attempt such a history, and he does not identify a motor for driving historical change, a force or set of forces that would give us a sense of necessary sequence, of history rather than mere chronology supplemented by a formal literary analysis.

As noted above, Rader’s revision of Crane’s formal analysis argues that form needs to be located more squarely in history. As he puts it in his reflections on the work of Sheldon Sacks, we should “think of literary works not as embodiments of a priori principles of form but as constructions in which the author’s attempt to realize his aesthetic and allied aims may produce conflicts which leave on the works the marks of their solutions” (“Contribution” 189). By expanding his view to include those “allied aims,” Rader can explain, first, that partially incoherent mixed forms, flawed comedies such as Fielding’s Amelia, Smollett’s The Expedition of Humphry Clinker, and Goldsmith’s The Vicar of Wakefield, abound in literary history, and are demonstrably more common than masterpieces like Tom Jones. Second, Rader can explain that these texts need to be understood through the formal conflicts engendered by these aims, aims that may be personal idiosyncrasies of the author, or that may be cultural, that is, set by rules and principles that are widely shared in a particular age. Thus, some works of art may in fact be less than optimally effective either because of a collision of formal requirements or because of conflicts between formal rules and ethical or political principles. It is not only possible but perhaps inevitable that the ideology of an age can be at odds with its aesthetic principles, in ways that generate problematic texts with different solutions to these conflicts, some more and some less successful, with later novels building upon the aggregate failures of earlier ones.

Like Crane, Rader sensed something intrinsically defective about “precon-structional” literary history, as one can see from “The Emergence of the Novel,” his review-essay on Michael McKeon’s neo-Marxist treatise, The Origins of the English Novel. For Rader, McKeon goes wrong from the very first page, where he skips over any constructional view of the novel as a distinct form and claims that “genre theory cannot be divorced from the history of genres, from the understanding of genres in history. Another way of saying this is that the theory of genre must be a dialectical genre theory” (qtd. by Rader 203). As Rader sees the case, any theory of the novel’s origins must be able to distinguish the formal principles of a novel from other fictional narratives in prose. The epistemological and ethical changes that McKeon presents as predisposing causes for
the construction of the novel, ideological components caused by changes in the socioeconomic patterns of English society, are necessary but not sufficient elements of the story of the novel’s emergence. Because McKeon does not capture the novel as a literary form, he does not—indeed, cannot—adequately place it in history. Like Crane’s apple pie, the English novel for Rader is far more than the sum of its elemental materials and techniques, and until we explain its distinctive qualities we cannot do justice to its history.

More particularly, Rader objects to McKeon’s notion that we can adequately understand *Moll Flanders* and *Pamela* as two products of the same ideological processes, without some understanding of the very different formal qualities of the two texts. In “Defoe, Richardson, Joyce, and the Concept of Form in the Novel,” Rader had laid out the main lines of his literary history of the English novel. The central track is the action/fantasy or plot/judgment pattern that we have briefly described above. This pattern begins with Richardson’s *Pamela*, acclaimed in its own day as inaugurating a new kind of writing, and which continues through the late Victorian and early modern novels by Hardy and Conrad—and, indeed, into the present day. *Pamela* is an original form because the events it recounts have to be understood in two different ways at once, on a narrative plane and on an authorial plane. That is, the reader is forced to take the story as autonomously “real,” in the sense that we understand Pamela’s world as operating by the laws that obtain in our own world and that render her fate independent of our desires for her (narrative plane). At the same time, the reader is forced to take the story as “constructed” in the sense that we understand the novel as shaped by Richardson’s creative intention, which in turn guides our developing expectations and desires respecting Pamela and her eventual fate (authorial plane). For Rader the crucial moment in the emergence of the novel is precisely Richardson’s construction of a prose fiction that operates simultaneously as autonomous narrative and as authorial construct. Once Richardson wrote his novel, others could imitate and adapt the achievement, bringing to the form new sorts of meaning and structure.

Before *Pamela*, Rader argues, Daniel Defoe wrote a very different kind of prose fiction. Works such as *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders* are pseudofactual texts, that is, imitations of naïve, incoherent autobiography, or false true stories. These texts, in Rader’s view, have no authorial plane corresponding to the one in *Pamela*, and, thus, create no sense that an authorial designer is weaving Moll’s diverse experiences into any significant larger pattern. What we see—Moll’s collection of tellable adventures—is what we get. *Moll Flanders* does include inadvertent signs, here and there, that someone other than Moll wrote the words that we are reading, but these signs never coalesce into a pattern that signals an encompassing authorial design of the kind we intuit in *Pamela*.
or in *Tom Jones.* Indeed, to the extent that we are distracted by these signs, the intended illusion collapses. (Other fictions written in the period before *Pamela* have the opposite feature: they tell without adequately showing, creating a world in which the presence of the authorial plane is so heavy that the autonomous narrative plane never develops.) After *Pamela,* the genre in which Defoe excelled fell into disuse, as the most talented writers explored the complex possibilities of the action/fantasy or plot/judgment model for most of the next two centuries.

Then around the beginning of the twentieth century, the most important writers of the masterpieces of literary modernism—Proust, Joyce, and Woolf—developed a new form of prose fiction, the “simular” novel. As we noted above, the simular form moves away from the “as if” quality of the novel to represent in fictional form real people and events. The protagonist in Joyce’s *Portrait* is called Stephen Dedalus, but his experiences are those of Joyce himself. In *Ulysses,* Joyce develops another variant of this simular form by combining the recreated version of his young self in Stephen with a recreation of his mature self in the figure of Leopold Bloom.

The simular novel is in one way like the protonovelistic form of Defoe in that “both project images of the actual as opposed to the fictional; the effects . . . depend, in very different ways, upon the reader’s imaginative sense that he is in contact with life as in nature it actually is” (184). Nevertheless, “between Defoe and Joyce there is a very great formal difference that we may begin to specify by saying that Defoe presents false natural facts as truth, whereas Joyce presents something like real natural facts as fiction” (184). Thus in the novel of represented action between Richardson and Conrad, “the world meets the terms of our wishes,” while “in simular novels, as I would call those of Joyce, Woolf, and Proust—novels built as artificial simulations of the actual—our wishes are made to meet the terms of the world” (185).

In an early essay on *Tristram Shandy* (circa 1970), published for the first time here, Rader prepares the ground for a case that he did not develop, namely, that the simular novel descends not only from Defoe but also from Sterne. Rader argues that Sterne is present as Yorick within his novel in a way parallel to Joyce’s presence as Stephen Dedalus: “Even the uninitiated reader surmises that [in the scene of the death of Yorick] he is confronted with a more-than-fictional reality, the presence of which in the book has an extra-fictional justification. The material is given point within the story, but there seems to be a private meaning beyond” (266).

Rader never wrote a protohistory of the novel leading up to Defoe, or a full history of the simular novel of Joyce, Woolf, and Proust, but he did attempt to explain the stages within the history of the novel of represented action over the 160 years between Richardson and Conrad in terms of what we have earlier
called the “collision of formal requirements or . . . conflicts between formal rules and ethical or political principles.” Rader’s first demonstration of the workings of this theory is “From Richardson to Austen,” in which he argues that the morally serious comedy we admire in Fielding’s *Tom Jones* was distorted in the course of its development by what Rader calls “Johnson’s Rule.” Johnson’s Rule is that feature of eighteenth-century ideology explicitly articulated in Samuel Johnson’s *Rambler* essay No. 4 (and visible elsewhere) which demanded fictional narratives with heroes and heroines of perfect moral rectitude and entirely unsympathetic villains. From the perspective of Johnson’s Rule, texts with attractive villains, like *Clarissa*, or with scapegrace heroes, like *Tom Jones* and *Roderick Random*, were ethically ambivalent if not defective.

The key point here is that many other works written to situate themselves in conformity to Johnson’s Rule paid an affective and aesthetic price for moral clarity. *Sir Charles Grandison*, written explicitly in order to demonstrate what male rectitude would look like, is rendered so insipid by its moral paragons that it fell from canonical status soon after the turn of the nineteenth century, while the novels of Burney and even early Austen (*Sense and Sensibility* and *Northanger Abbey*) are weakened by the formal compromises required for conformity with the rule. Rader envisions the sequence of the English novel from *Pamela* through *Grandison*, Fanny Burney’s *Evelina* and on to *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma* as a struggle with “Johnson’s Rule,” as the search for a form of morally serious comedy that will be simultaneously acceptable to the ideology of the age and dramatically effective. Austen resolves the conflict by constructing her heroes and heroines with traits that temporarily keep them from happiness with each other, correctable character flaws that nevertheless do not amount to serious moral faults. But this solution is no sooner reached than, with the change of aesthetic ideology at the start of the nineteenth century, it becomes practically irrelevant to the further formal development of the novel, which after Austen takes quite different directions. (A second ideological feature of the period, the requirement of distributive justice, where characters’ fates are apportioned according to their ethical deserts, explains why after *Clarissa* no successful tragic novel is written in the eighteenth century.)

Rader’s second sequence deals with action/fantasy novels published in the middle of the nineteenth century, from the late 1830s to the early 1870s, where in place of “Johnson’s Rule” novelists face what he calls the “Victorian Rule” requiring the subordination of the individual to the social. In terms of the value systems of the novels Rader considers (including *Vanity Fair*, *Bleak House*, *Barchester Towers*, and *Middlemarch*), this rule defines the highest good as the sacrifice of one’s self for the common good, as we see characters like William Dobbin and Esther Summerson and Dorothea Brooke doing. In terms of
their novelistic structures, the Victorian Rule leads to a “transindividual focus in conflict with the intrinsic demands of the action form”: a multiplication of characters and plot lines needed to provide a sense that the fiction is representing society as a whole, with a formal result that the reader registers the work as what Henry James called a “large, loose, baggy monster.” Rader also shows how, in each of the baggy monsters, a different formal structure is used to unify the social vision. In *Vanity Fair*, for example, Thackeray uses the two intertwined plot lines conveying “a fate felt to be universal,” while in *Bleak House* a single complex and concatenated plot line is artificially split by the dual narratives to convey multiplicity and universality, with the dual system of the interconnected plot collapsing at the end into a single denouement.

Rader’s theoretical analyses of Victorian fiction also make room, in places, for the biographical issues that had interested him from his early work on Fielding and Tennyson, the way authors make room for representations of themselves and their own personal conflicts within otherwise fictional literary creations. Rader’s analysis of *Barchester Towers*, for example, attempts to understand Trollope’s way into the clerical community whose internecine conflicts he chronicles. Rader posits that Trollope was closest to this sort of community when he was a student at the Winchester School, opposite the cathedral, and that Obadiah Slope, the ugly and clumsy bishop’s chaplain, darkly figures Trollope’s own adolescent sense of himself as an ungainly hulking pariah.

At the end of the Victorian period, around the turn of the twentieth century, new literary forms are created that Rader envisions as transitions between the novels of social collectivity and the similar forms of the high modernists. Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* and Conrad’s *Lord Jim* are the masterpieces of this transition, in which “both actions are focused on an inherently universal conflict between the natural and the social, which is the ground of the protagonist’s tragic suffering” (305–6). For Hardy the conflict centers on sexual love; for Conrad it centers on courage and personal honor. In both the narrator’s voice reflects on the destiny of the protagonist from a “cosmological perspective” which displays fate as malignant and nature as devoid of transcendent norms that would allow us to validate and judge human destinies.

The endpoint of Rader’s work on the history of the English novel is *Ulysses*, an advance over the earlier *Portrait* in Joyce’s experiment with turning the actual material of real life into fictional experience. Fiction generally has autobiographical elements, but we can adequately comprehend *Jane Eyre* and *David Copperfield* without any awareness that the fictional worlds project portions of the life of Charlotte Brontë and Charles Dickens. Rader argues that the opposite is true of *Portrait* and *Ulysses*, which we experience precisely as fictionalized versions of the life of James Joyce, where the awkward underdevelopment of minor
characters testifies not to defective artistry in the portrayal but rather to the fact that they derive from an independent reality that Joyce did not invent. Nevertheless, *Portrait* and *Ulysses* are to each other as lyric is to drama. Whereas in *Portrait* we imagine the world from a point inside Stephen Dedalus’s body (the author’s body, that is), in *Ulysses* “we have the uncanny sense that we are looking with the author at himself as if he were outside himself” (“Defoe, Richardson,” 193)—with respect to both Bloom (a dislocated version of the middle-aged man that Joyce had become) and Stephen (the young man whose anxious arrogance he had left behind). What makes *Ulysses* fascinating to Rader—and to the many Joyceomanes among us—is that the novel’s perverse egocentric fascination with versions of the author is precisely what is most universal about it. As Rader puts it in “The Logic of *Ulysses,***” in a statement that recalls his case for the value of literary form, “only by insisting on the importance of his own personal predicament . . . was Joyce able to write a book that could be true to the predicament we all share, of being locked in a body and a world which will inevitably destroy us but which, meanwhile, we can both imaginatively rise above and spiritually assent to . . . . This world is the only world we have or will have, and our own particular bodies in this time and this place the pre-given and only opportunity we have of seizing it” (341).

We find Rader’s principles of literary history highly explanatory, and we recognize a kind of beauty in the symmetric relationship between the pseudo-factual narratives of the novel before Richardson and the similar novel of high modernism. But it is hard not to wish that Rader had been able to extend his history further in several directions. First, even the most fully developed part of that history, the account of the novel of represented action, is longer on constructional aspects of different subtypes than it is on explaining the historical links among the subtypes. Rader is clear that the historical development of the novel depends on the intersection of individual agency, the aesthetic and ideological demands of a given age, and a tradition of formal achievement, but he does not offer a comprehensive account of the causes and accidents in the evolution of those intersections over time. Thus, for example, using Rader’s model, we could hypothesize that the novelists working under the Victorian Rule did learn from Austen’s use of Charlotte Lucas in *Pride and Prejudice* as a negative but sympathetic analogue to Elizabeth Bennet how to make an even more fully elaborated story of a minor character relevant to a larger, transindividual focus, but we cannot explain the intermediate steps by which the novel developed from Austen to Dickens. Second, we wish there were more than the slight hints about how Rader would have written about Woolf’s experiments with the simular novel, her own versions of the self known from the inside out, like Clarissa Dalloway and Lily Briscoe, and the selves known from the outside
in, like Septimus Smith and Mr. Ramsay. Third, we regret that Rader’s history ends with the masterpieces of high modernism. It would have been fascinating to see him extend his study of the development of the novel to the fiction of the last seventy years.

A different question arises from Rader’s history being what Viktor Shklovsky called a “history of kings.” Rader does not restrict himself to masterpieces, but he writes almost exclusively about canonical works, particularly the canon in place during his graduate training and early career, a canon that culminated in those masterpieces of high modernism. Those of us who have worked on texts on the fringes of the canon—like the Gothic novel—are not so sure that literary history has always been moved by its most canonical texts, particularly by our canonical texts. Nevertheless, we are convinced that Rader’s ideas about emergent form can be extended through the analysis of other sequences that demonstrate the same kind of wrestling with the problematics of form that Rader explicated in “From Richardson to Austen.”

Form and Quality

Just as Rader’s definition of literature has both a descriptive and an evaluative dimension, so too does his concept of form. “In the dramatic lyric,” he writes, “the experience is not created but re-created; more accurately, its significance is recreated. In the greatest such poems the experience recreated will be one which is itself so exceptional—so rare a moment of insight or revelation such as sensitive spirits have in their encounters with the world—that it cannot be conceived as invented by the poet but only given to him” (145–46). In other words, the quality of the poem exists not as something added to the form but as something integral to it. As we register the self-justifying cognitive act of the poet in composing the poem we also register its quality. To put the point in more concrete terms, because we feel that both the experience recreated in Hopkins’s “The Windhover” and the manner of recreation are so extraordinary, we know we’re dealing with nonfiction and with a high degree of literariness.

Coming at the question of quality from the other direction, that is, from the direction of authorial craft, we can say that for Rader formal coherence is typically a necessary but not sufficient condition of literary value. To switch from the dramatic lyric to the novel written on the action/fantasy pattern, the “significance and affective force” of the whole depends on more than just the author’s skillful handling of the action structure. It depends as well on the choice of material—how significant are the situations that the author has chosen to work with—the ability to make the different parts of the structure affecting and plea-
urable in themselves, and on the larger vision of human possibility and experience that governs the shaping of the coherent structure. To the extent that the larger vision both shapes the coherence of the work and touches on something that transcends the work’s particular representations, it offers a highly powerful literary experience. At this juncture, we can see the potential for developing a Raderian ethics of reading, one that would be closely tied to aesthetics.

Rader’s comparison between Boswell’s *Life of Johnson* and Capote’s *In Cold Blood* as literary nonfictions sheds further light on the relation between form and quality. Rader notes that both Boswell and Capote are extremely skilled craftsmen who exhibit great “powers of imaginative reconstruction and synthesis” (131). Yet Boswell’s biography achieves literary value because it “lifts an aspect of human reality—namely, Johnson and the events of his life—from the contingency of history and displays it as a concrete universal—self-validating, self-intelligible, inherently moving, permanently valuable” (128). Capote accomplishes the extraordinary feat of simultaneously allowing us to appreciate the full horror of the murder of the Clutter family and to feel a genuine but limited sympathy for the murderers Dick Hickock and Perry Smith. But this achievement is limited by the fact that the deaths of the Clutters ultimately have “no moral relevance whatever to them. There is no ethical consonance in it, so that we do not feel retrospectively that it was worthwhile for them to have lived or that to have lived and died as they did would be worthwhile to us... The defect is not in Capote’s art but in the subject itself, inherently defective because not sufficiently universal” (131).

**Goals, Methods, and Tests of Interpretation**

Rader’s contributions to literary criticism and theory extend beyond his conception of form, his perceptive delineations of varieties of the lyric and of the novel, his evolving account of the development of the English novel, and his many powerful readings of individual works. His contributions also include (a) his proposal for a comprehensive theory of literature and his accompanying criteria for testing such a theory; and (b) his similar account of the goals, methods, and tests of interpretation itself. “Fact, Theory, and Literary Explanation” succinctly addresses the first set of contributions, but it is both Rader’s discussion in that essay and his practice across a wide range of interpretive essays that address the second set.

In “Fact, Theory,” Rader explains his attraction to a hypothetico-deductive theory of literature as well as to a hypothetico-deductive account of the “constructional” aspects of a given work. Such an account acquires its power by both
advancing a strong generalization that coherently explains the details of a work’s construction and recognizing that the generalization is not a truth but a hypothesis that needs to be tested—and that is always capable of being disproved by its inability to explain adequately some details, especially when compared with a competing hypothesis. Furthermore, Rader follows Karl Popper in arguing that the easiest part of hypothesis testing is hypothesis confirmation. As Stanley Fish and others who emphasize the socially constructed nature of knowledge argue, the frameworks that we use to interpret the world and its texts are often sufficiently powerful to give plausible accounts of texts. Consequently, asking whether the framework can explain a given object almost always results in an affirmative answer. From Rader’s perspective, however, this finding does not mean what it does for Fish, namely, that frameworks, in effect, produce texts, and that we should recognize the basic equality of different interpretive communities. Instead, for Rader this finding means we should take another page from Popper’s book and test hypotheses not simply by seeking to confirm them but also by seeking to disconfirm them.

Rader’s response to Crane’s analysis of *Tom Jones* provides a nice example of how to test both a general theory and an interpretive hypothesis. Both Crane and Rader develop strong generalizations about the constructional aspect of *Tom Jones* based upon both their general frameworks for understanding form and their engagements with the details of Fielding’s novel. Rader’s generalization, however, is capable of explaining some elements of the novel that fall outside of Crane’s view and of giving a more precise explanation for Fielding’s arrangement of the marvelous reversal of Tom’s fortunes. This arrangement is not meant, as Crane with his ahistorical view would have it, as an illustration of the whims of Fortune, but rather as a demonstration of a contemporary Latitudinarian principle about the hidden power of Providence in human life. In other words, when we seek to disconfirm each critic’s interpretive hypothesis by putting it in competition with an alternative, we find good grounds for preferring one over the other. In addition, when we link that preference to the underlying causes in the general theory of form, we have further grounds of preference.

This example also indicates that Rader’s concept of interpretation as the development of a hypothetico-deductive account of a work’s construction is, despite initial appearances, compatible with the neo-Aristotelian commitment to an a posteriori method. Both Crane and Rader are wary of a priori reasoning that says because some variable of literary production (e.g., language, human psychology, a given set of sociohistorical conditions) is a certain way, the literary text must also be a certain way. Instead, both are interested in the results of an inductive examination of the details of the work that a commitment to the a posteriori principle encourages. But then both seek a generalization that
can do justice to the results of that examination, and while both develop strong
generalizations, Rader’s is ultimately more comprehensive and more precise.
For that reason, we think that even Crane would have to concede that Rader’s
hypothetico-deductive account of *Tom Jones* is the more adequate one.

Rader’s interest in strong generalizations also leads him to an intriguing pro-
posal about what he calls “negative consequences of positive intentions.” Rader’s
point is that sometimes well-motivated and even well-executed formal choices
will not only achieve their ends but also give rise to undesirable side effects.
The focus on a strong generalization about the overall formal power of a work
will allow interpreters to differentiate between such side effects and more seri-
ous artistic flaws or failures. Why does Milton’s God in *Paradise Lost* sometimes
sound less like a Deity than like a school divine? Because Milton’s decision to
represent God as an agent in the narrative is a crucial part of his positive intent-
tion of justifying the ways of God to man, but any effort by a finite human, even
one as gifted as Milton, to represent a Deity who, according to Milton’s theology
possesses infinite wisdom, grace, and power, is bound to disappoint. When we
juxtapose that problem with Milton’s successful representation of Satan, then
it is not surprising that William Blake and others would suggest that Milton is
of the devil’s party without knowing it—even as we can see that the suggestion
magnifies the side effect of Milton’s choice to have God speak in His own voice
and neglects the underlying reasons for that choice.

Influenced both by Popper’s emphasis on the need to test hypotheses by
doing more than seeking to confirm them and by his belief in the power of
form, Rader proposes another test for the adequacy of an interpretive hypothesis:
whether it can explain why critics have disagreed about a work the way they do.
Such disagreements for Rader point not to the insurmountable incompatibility
of different readings (or different interpretive communities) but to the difference
between direct and indirect facts of literary experience—and to the desirability of
a hypothesis being able to explain both kinds. A direct fact of experience is one
that just about all readers register, such as the difference between the author–
speaker relationship in the expressive lyric (the speaker in “Tintern Abbey” is
Wordsworth himself) and in the dramatic monologue (the speaker in “My Last
Duchess” is a character wholly distinct from Browning). An indirect fact is one
implied by critical disagreement. A given interpreter may want to take a clear
position on one side of a critical controversy, but her case for that side will be
stronger if it can also explain either the textual source or the critical assump-
tions that give rise to the disagreement. Thus, for example, critics disagree about
whether Defoe ironizes Moll Flanders’s narration, especially when she reports
her conversion at the end of the novel. Rather than simply weighing in on one
side of the controversy, Rader poses the challenging question: “what peculiar
structural quality of *Moll Flanders* causes it, alone among eighteenth-century novels, to be the object of such a controversy?" (33). By hypothesizing that *Moll* is a pseudofactual prose fiction rather than an action/fantasy novel, Rader not only advances a strong position in the debate—irony is not possible because the pseudofactual form does not have an authorial level—but also explains why the debate should exist: those who see irony are treating Defoe’s narrative as if it were an action/fantasy novel, yet the narrative itself resists their efforts to establish consensus about the nature and extent of that irony.

More generally, Rader’s theoretical discussions and his interpretive practice make his contributions to hermeneutics cogent and compelling. His approach does not offer a simple, straightforward discovery procedure, and it does not replace the art of interpretation with a science of achieving certitude. Instead, in emphasizing that any interpretation is always a hypothesis and in developing criteria for testing hypotheses, he offers a vision of interpretation that is simultaneously open-minded and rigorous.

**Responses to Rader’s Work: A Brief Sketch**

Rader’s contributions have generated and influenced research projects in the third generation of the Chicago school and even in critics who would not claim to be part of the tradition. Furthermore, Rader’s work has been influential not only among those whom Rader directly taught and mentored, but also among those who read his articles or heard his spotlessly finished lectures at conferences. Books by Rader’s own students directly inflected by his theories include Laura Brown’s *English Dramatic Form, 1660–1760: An Essay in Generic History* (1981), Harry Shaw’s *The Forms of Historical Fiction: Walter Scott and His Successors* (1983) and *Narrating Reality: Austen, Scott, Eliot* (1999), Adena Rosmarin’s *The Power of Genre* (1985), George Haggerty’s *Gothic Fiction/Gothic Form* (1989), and Dorothy J. Hale’s *Social Formalism: The Novel in Theory from Henry James to the Present* (1998). But the list of books by scholar-critics who have been influenced by Rader’s theories without his direct mentorship is even longer. A partial list would include Michael Boardman’s *Defoe and the Uses of Narrative* (1983), Walter Cohen’s *Drama of a Nation: Public Theater in Renaissance England and Spain* (1985), James L. Battersby’s *Paradigms Regained: Pluralism and the Practice of Criticism* (1991), David Richter’s *The Progress of Romance: Literary Historiography and the Gothic Novel* (1996), Michael S. Kearns’s *Rhetorical Narratology* (1999), and all of James Phelan’s books in narrative theory: *Worlds from Words: A Theory of Language in Fiction* (1981), *Reading People, Reading Plots: Character, Progression, and the Interpretation of Narrative* (1989), *Narrative*

Not surprisingly, there are many critics who have taken up Rader’s work in order to disagree with it, and in some cases, we have the advantage of Rader’s replies. In elucidating Rader’s ideas about the history of the English novel, we discussed his dissatisfaction with Michael McKeon’s history because it does not do justice to the generic innovation Richardson produced with *Pamela*. McKeon, for his part, objects that Rader overstates Richardson’s innovation, fails to pay sufficient attention to the prehistory that makes *Pamela* possible, and undervalues the extraformal conditions that make the emergence of the novel possible. Rader replies that his account of *Pamela* is designed to explain what Richardson’s contemporaries themselves identified as a new mode of writing and that the prehistory and the extraformal developments are necessary and influential but neither sufficient nor determinative of Richardson’s achievement.

Rader’s “Fact, Theory, and Literary Explanation” generated debates about the relationship among general literary theories, particular hypotheses about specific works, and the ways in which facts internal and external to the specific texts might be used to validate or invalidate these hypotheses. Jay Schleusener presents two main objections to Rader’s use of the work of Karl Popper. First, Schleusener argues that Rader fails to distinguish between general theories and hypotheses about particular matters of fact and fails to do justice to the asymmetry between falsifiability, which applies only to general theories, and to verification, which applies to both. Consequently, Schleusener contends, Rader also fails to distinguish among critical misapprehensions (more likely to derive from a general theory), unintended negative consequences, and artistic defects (both more likely to be parts of particular hypotheses). Thus, we cannot know whether a particular problematic textual phenomenon is an unintended negative consequence, an artistic defect, or the product of a critical misapprehension. In addition, Rader mistakenly seeks falsification for interpretations. Second, Schleusener asserts that Popper’s ideas about scientific knowledge and proof were designed to be used about natural facts that are the objects of scientific inquiry rather than about human creations such as histories and works of art. Consequently, Rader’s effort to use Popper’s ideas as a guide to hypothesis construction and hypothesis testing is doomed to inadequacy.

Rader responds to these objections by clarifying his use of Popper and by extending the argument of “Fact, Theory.” Rader deals with the issue of applying Popper’s views to literature and criticism by noting that Popper himself was open to extending his views beyond the realm of science. In addition, Rader contends that he has sought to be responsive to the distinctiveness of literary
experience rather than to assume that literature and nature were wholly equivalent. As for Schleusener’s first objection, Rader agrees with Schleusener’s point about the asymmetry between falsifiability and verification but insists on the crucial role of explaining problematic facts in testing both general theories and particular hypotheses: “the most relevant facts are those problematic ones on which earlier theories can be shown to founder, as these are subsumed in more comprehensive theories which lead to the discovery or appreciation of new facts and new problems” (“Explaining” 903). Then in order to demonstrate that his approach is able to distinguish between critical misapprehensions, artistic defects, and unintended negative consequences, Rader turns to concrete cases. We will summarize his treatment of one case in order to clarify his proposal about the controversial concept of unintended negative consequences.

In “Fact, Theory,” Rader had introduced the concept by means of a simple story, told in an office manager’s account book entries for a single month, of that manager’s hiring, seduction, and sudden firing of a stenographer who starts out as the “new stenographer,” becomes “Mary,” and ends as the “stupid stenographer” for whom the manager pays doctor’s expenses.

The audience’s pleasure in the story depends on making rapid inferences about the developing affair from the brief account book entries, culminating in the conclusions that the doctor’s expenses are for an abortion and that the final entry, “Ad for male stenographer,” indicates that the manager is determined not to make the same mistake twice. But the inference about the abortion overlooks the fact that the stenographer could not know within the limited timeframe of the story that she was pregnant by the manager. In order to preserve the pleasure, we overlook that fact and overlook the way in which it makes the story even less realistic than it purports to be. Thus, that fact is an unintended negative consequence of the positive intention of telling this efficient joke at the manager’s expense.

Rader contrasts this hypothesis with one in which the fact of the physiological impossibility is a positive feature, one that combines with the fact of the stenographer’s being named Mary, to produce an analysis of the story as an inversion of the myth of the Virgin Mary. This Mary is far from the pure and innocent mother of the Christian Savior but instead a calculating woman who outwits the manager and who is unable to give birth.

In his reply to Schleusener, Rader argues that this alternative reading is an example of a critical misapprehension based on an overreading of a single fact, the appearance of the name “Mary” and the neglect of other elements of our experience. This hypothesis fails to explain the common response to the story as a witty joke and fails to account for such facts as the story’s being written as an account book. In addition, the key fact undergirding this hypothesis, that
the stenographer’s name is Mary, can also be explained by Rader’s interpretation as being consistent with the story’s interest in efficiency and generality: it needs common names, and the anonymous author chooses Mary not to allegorize the stenographer but because it is so common as a result of its being the name of the Virgin.

Stanley Fish responded to “Fact, Theory” in part by defending himself against Rader’s attack on Fish’s interpretive paradigm of “affective stylistics,” a paradigm that Fish was soon to subsume under his broader theory of interpretive communities, and in part by objecting that Rader’s reasoning is circular: “Rader presents . . . the ‘independently specifiable facts’ whose existence he is supposedly proving; but in fact he is assuming them.” (Fish’s theory of interpretive communities effectively denies the existence of independently specifiable facts, so he would make a similar argument about any critic who does not agree that interpretive strategies determine textual features.) Rader responds by clarifying that he is not the source of the facts and so cannot be accurately described as assuming them. Instead, the facts are either direct or indirect, either in the texts or objectively part of the history of their interpretation. Rader also notes that, ironically, it was Fish’s own celebrated interpretation of God in *Surprised by Sin* that Rader used to explain how “unintended consequences” arise and how they work.

In *Act and Quality*, Charles Altieri raises a very different objection to “Fact, Theory.” He argues that defining artistic wholes in terms of principles of coherence “creates the danger that [Rader] may purchase coherence at the cost of ignoring the complex situating required to account fully for the multiple levels of meaning and the loose edges of authorial involvement in the mimetic world we find in the richest literary texts” (260). Although Rader does not respond directly to Altieri, we think that he would be sympathetic to Altieri’s concerns. Rader in fact often discovers in the genesis of particular texts some obvious or covert autobiographical impulse engaged within the fiction, and he was always aware of the many jobs (of self-justification, confession, revenge) that authors expect their texts to perform. Rader’s essay on *Barchester Towers*, published here for the first time, for example, explains why the comic form Trollope adopted required the antagonist to Archdeacon Grantly to be a contemptible character whose defeat we expect, but also explains, based on a reading of Trollope’s autobiography, the psychological reasons why in constructing Obadiah Slope the author might have given him the particular traits he did. And Rader’s account of “My Last Duchess,” while making sense of the poem as a discourse by the Duke within a fully coherent imagined world conceived as external to both poet and reader, does not reject the possibility that Browning’s personal motivations might have included a desire to expose the sort of brutal domestic tyranny under which his wife had grown up. Rader could have given a similar
account of the discourse in “The Bishop Orders His Tomb,” whose imagined world within Renaissance Rome intentionally comments, as Browning’s correspondence with his publisher reveals, on the religious scene in England at the time of the Oxford Movement. But in all cases, Rader would extend the analysis to consider whether the complex situating is accommodated within an overall positive constructive intention or leads either to unintended negative consequences or actual artistic defects.

James Kincaid, in “Coherent Readers, Incoherent Texts,” offers a stronger version of Altieri’s objection. “But what if [complex texts] are not [coherent]? What if most texts, at least, are, in fact, demonstrably incoherent, presenting us not only with multiple organizing patterns but with organizing patterns that are competing, logically inconsistent . . . a structure of mutually competing coherences? Instead of a single pattern, we are presented with many incompatible competitors, all of which are supported but none of which is, by itself, adequate” (783).

This is a genuinely interesting issue that exposes one of the fault lines in late twentieth-century literary theory, as many critics tended to regard coherence as either a necessary condition for literary achievement or an outdated critical ideal blind to the indeterminacy of language, the inevitable psychic conflicts within authors, and the force of competing cultural ideologies on literary production. Rader, however, while valuing coherence, does not assume it a priori. Indeed, as our earlier discussions indicate, Rader is well aware that many texts do have elements that work against their overall coherence, even as he stops far short of making incoherence the defining feature of most texts. Rader argues, for example, that Sheldon Sacks failed to build into his theory

an expression of the significance of the fact that, though the action structure requires for its efficacy a transfusion of extraformal values, it can be overloaded and unbalanced by an ethical or conceptual input that is not fully absorbed into the functioning organic action structure of the book. [Sacks’s] formulation is designed not to take careful notice, so to speak, when the affective force of an action work—the tension of the caring—suffers for the sake of some other element. . . . The suggestion I would make is that the action form involves indeed a pure principle of construction but one which is explanatorily more useful if we think of it as an abstract and in practice malleable one which can accommodate (at an affective price) many extraformal intentions which the creative freedom of writers may bring to it. (“Literary Theoretical Contribution” 189)

Rader here is explaining the incoherence of Fielding’s last novel, *Amelia.* Amelia is perhaps Fielding’s weakest novel, but it seems clear that some of the greatest novels of the nineteenth century—including *Moby Dick* and *War and Peace*—
have the same sorts of problem with coherence that Rader described in *Amelia*. Rader was careful, in ways that Sacks and other first- and second-generation neo-Aristotelians were not, to register this incoherence, in terms of the ways in which the action form absorbs didactic intent while losing some of its “affective force.” At the same time, he, like Sacks, celebrated unity more enthusiastically than incoherence and chose his texts accordingly. It is not an accident that Rader’s essay on Victorian “baggy monsters” discusses *Bleak House*, whose apparent incoherence is a rhetorical strategy masking a more fundamental unity, rather than, say, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, a text of the same period that never quite achieves a comparable coherence.

If Kincaid argues that formalists invariably find form, that Rader allows too much force to the framing effect of generic forms to resolve the actual incoherence of literary texts, the Marxist critic Michael Sprinker argues, similarly, that Rader’s literary history of the novel accurately describes the changing literary forms but takes too little account of the actual history against whose background the novel developed and flourished. In “Fiction and Ideology” Sprinker admires Rader’s formal analysis of *Lord Jim* as far as it goes. As noted above, Rader views Conrad’s narrative as an exemplar of the novel in the period between the Victorian “baggy monsters” and the “simural novel” of Joyce, Proust, and Woolf, a period, Rader claims, when the conflict of the individual with society “is imaged with reference to the sense of a nature, a cosmic trans-social reality which offers an over-arching perspective to which a sense of individual destiny within society can be referred” (103). Sprinker agrees that Rader has accurately caught Conrad’s formal intention, to create a quasi-tragic action hinging on Jim’s assumption of responsibility for the consequences of his key mistake during his time governing Patusan. But Sprinker then argues that Rader has analyzed only the “manifest content” of *Lord Jim*, its ideology in the sense of “false consciousness,” missing the latent content revealed in Fredric Jameson’s analysis of Conrad’s novel, about the contradictions inherent in European imperialism heading into its final half century.3

Although Rader never responded directly to Sprinker, we can extrapolate from his reply to McKeon that he would resist Sprinker’s tendency to explain Conrad’s achievement as the result of forces wholly independent of Conrad’s agency. For Rader, Sprinker—and Jameson—do a good job of explaining the sociohistorical context in which Conrad wrote, but they are not able to explain adequately the specific formal achievement of his novel because they do not give a sufficient role to Conrad’s individual agency in shaping his particular response to that context.

In a recent reflection on Rader’s work on the history of the English novel, Frances Ferguson returns to his debate with McKeon less in the interest of
taking sides and more in the interest of using it to identify what distinguishes Rader’s position from those of most other historians of the novel. Ferguson emphasizes four interrelated points: (1) Where other historians adopt a gradualist approach to describing the novel’s emergence, tracing lines of resemblance among ever-earlier precursors to *Pamela*, Rader views Richardson’s novel as the inauguration of a radically different form, one dependent on the dual operation of the narrative and authorial planes. (2) Where other historians regard the novel’s emergence as “a precipitate of a larger socio-economic transformation” (91), Rader views that emergence as the result of Richardson’s insight into the formal possibilities of epistolary fiction and of his readers implicitly recognizing that he had created something new. In this way, other historians tell a “history from without” whereas Rader tells a “history from within.” (3) Where other historians link the march of history with the development of the novel, Rader offers a view of the novel as moving both forward (as later novelists expand upon possibilities opened up by earlier ones) and backward (as some developments significantly change our view of earlier forms, e.g., in the way that Joyce’s similar novel sheds new light on Defoe’s false true stories). (4) These emphases in turn point toward Rader’s concern with the novel as a written genre. Rader’s emphases on form and literariness that lead to his “history from within” also entail an effort to tell the history of a genre by “isolating and identifying its technological resources.”

Ferguson’s essay highlights in its own way some of what we have been saying here about the distinctive quality of Rader’s history of the novel. From our perspective, she underrepresents his interest in the interactions between the ideological strictures of a given age and literary form, and we find her claims about Rader’s interest in the novel as a written genre to be a suggestive extrapolation rather than a central feature of his critical project. But all in all Ferguson’s essay testifies to the continuing relevance of Rader’s work, even as it demonstrates one strong critic engaging with another.

Another such demonstration can be found in Steven Knapp’s recent assessment of Rader’s concern with the immanent intention underlying any literary form. In a sense, Knapp offers a fresh and more nuanced version of Kincaid’s case about the inevitability of incoherence. Knapp nicely recapitulates Rader’s position that the intuitive act of responding to a work entails the intuitive apprehension of its underlying purpose. But Knapp focuses on Rader’s admission of flaws in various works—the difficulty of perceiving Defoe’s presence in *Moll Flanders*; the mingling of dramatic monologue and mask lyric elements in “Fra Lippo Lippi”; the unintended negative consequence of Pamela’s writing-to-the-moment making her appear to be a hypocrite—and then flips their significance. Where Rader sees these flaws in relation to a larger immanent
intention, Knapp argues that they are “moments in which the formal principle, the ‘immanent’ intention, points beyond itself to that which exceeds or evades its control” (111). Furthermore for Knapp, it is moments such as these that define the literary. “Although they disrupt the formal perfection defined by what Rader regards as the work’s immanent intention, such moments of confusion are themselves still formalizable as objects of literary interest. Indeed, in the tradition of aesthetics associated with the literature of the sublime, exactly these kinds of moments become the objects of literary interest par excellence” (111).

Knapp’s case reveals as much—or more—about his own theoretical commitments as it does about fundamental problems with Rader’s, as the progress of his argument indicates. After carefully reconstructing Rader’s accounts of immanent intention and flaws in the specific works, Knapp jumps from the three cases to the generalization about all literature. This induction will make sense to anyone who already sides with Knapp’s view about the literary being located in the escape from authorial control, but it will be less persuasive to anyone who does not share that view, particularly anyone who also puts into the balance Rader’s insightful accounts of works that do not exhibit such defects (e.g., “My Last Duchess” rather than “Fra Lippo Lippi,” Pride and Prejudice rather than Pamela). Even as we counter Knapp’s argument in this way, we remain aware that he—and others who begin with different first principles from Rader’s—will have their own rejoinders.

The essays of Ralph W. Rader, then, are a rich resource for anyone who wants to engage with any of the following ambitious issues: the concept of form, the genres of the lyric and the novel, the literary dimensions of literary history, the distinction between fiction and nonfiction, the evaluation of literary quality, and the nature and tests of general theories and of interpretations. Even more significant, when we study Rader’s essays in the aggregate, we can discern a very striking figure in the collective carpet. What we find is a rich and coherent theory of literary form, purpose, and value, one that connects Rader’s interest in form not only to a rigorous—and persuasively demonstrated—method of interpretation but also to our collective efforts as finite human beings to come to terms with our life in this world.

Notes

1. Kincaid’s argument begins by contrasting other groups of critics who find order and chaos in literary texts, e.g., Wayne Booth and M. H. Abrams with Roland Barthes and Stanley Fish, and only later settles down to argue with Ralph Rader’s case in that our perceptions of a literary text’s genre tends to limit and control the way possible ambiguities are perceived.

2. In a similar way, David Richter explicated the incoherence of Goldsmith’s The Vicar
of Wakefield as a comedy that, about halfway through, becomes an apologue as the Vicar becomes a Christian version of the biblical Job. See Fable's End (171–77).

3. In The Political Unconscious, Jameson sees the novel as demonstrating “the demoralizing effect of Jim’s discovery of Sartrean freedom on the ideological myths that allow a governing class to function and to assert its . . . legitimacy” (qtd. in Sprinker 243).
PART I

Principles
The modern critic works inductively, focusing on the local facts of the text and seeking to build up an interpretation which will accommodate their apparent complexities. When he does develop an interpretation which fits all the facts, he considers that the validity of the interpretation has been established. The problem is, however, that the same facts seem strangely able to confirm for different critics very different interpretations. Despite the widely accepted view that a rich multiplicity is characteristic of literary meaning, the wealth of interpretation that critical practice has developed in recent years has come to seem more and more an embarrassment: to have many meanings is too much like having no meaning. It may be, however, that much of this critical inflation is an almost mechanical consequence of a seldom recognized relationship between fact and hypothesis: that hypothesis—interpretive assumption—does not follow from the observation of fact but necessarily precedes and structures it, so that agreement between hypothesis and fact is to some degree foreordained. The implications of this relationship have been powerfully developed in the philosophy of Sir Karl Popper (Conjectures 44ff.), who argues that all our knowledge is inherently and permanently hypothetical, that knowledge can never begin with “the facts” but only with a conjecture about the facts, and that the test of a conjecture (read hypothesis or theory) is not the degree to which it finds confirmation in facts—the significance of which it effectively constructs—but the degree to which it risks refutation by independent facts which it does not have immediately in view. In this conception knowledge is not built up inductively from local fact to gradually justified generalization, but deductively, by extending a strong generalization over the
widest possible range of fact toward potential refutation. The more disparate the independent facts that general premises can be shown logically to entail, the more the premises may be assumed to reflect the actual underlying structure of the facts, and the more worthy they accordingly are to be taken tentatively as an approximation to the truth. Such deductive explanation is rigid—inflexible in a positive sense—because of the requirement that it proceed by strict logical extension of the initial premises; if it were flexible, if its explanations of all particulars did not deductively derive from its most general assumptions but could be developed ad hoc, it would not risk refutation because it could always be confirmed. Flexibility—accommodation to the apparent anomalies of the facts as they appear—is not a virtue in a theory or its applications, much as it might seem to be. A yardstick that stretches will always allow us to measure whatever we apply it to but just for that reason will, like a theory modified ad hoc, never tell us anything useful.

We are free to get our theories where we will. As Einstein said, the emergence of a theory is like an egg laid by a chicken, “auf einmal ist es da” (Clark 173n). In practice theories are usually derived as improvements on earlier theories, as better tools are refinements of earlier, cruder ones; and they are directed explanatorily not at the facts of their own construction but at independently specifiable facts which, left unexplained by earlier theories, have therefore refuted them. A new theory should cogently and directly explain all that its predecessors explain and in addition those particular facts which they conspicuously do not explain. The ideal is to have the simplest possible premises explaining most precisely the widest possible range of problematical facts.

I say problematical facts to reemphasize that the facts which serve as the best tests of a hypothesis must present themselves as requiring explanation independently of the formulation of the hypothesis. But where, for literary criticism, are these independent facts to be found? I answer, in our literary experience as it can be objectively specified, directly and indirectly. It is not usually recognized that there can be directly specifiable facts of literary experience, but there are many such facts, large and small. An example of a directly specifiable local fact of literary response invariant for all readers is the fact that we experience the speaker in Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” (and cognate poems) as if we saw the setting through the speaker’s own eyes, whereas we experience the speaker in Browning’s “My Last Duchess” (and cognate poems) as if he were external to us, himself visually perceivable in the setting. These features seem to correlate with the fact that we read the “Elegy” aloud in our own (idealized) personal voice, “My Last Duchess” in the voice of an “other” person. Indirect facts of experience are those implied by the perplexities of previous interpretation, the problems as just mentioned left to us by the failure of earlier explana-
tions and defined by their conflict. An example is the continuing unresolved controversy as to whether or not Moll Flanders is ironic. The participants in the controversy do not subjectively intend to pose the objective test question which the controversy as a whole does pose: what peculiar structural quality of Moll Flanders causes it, alone among eighteenth-century novels, to be the object of such a controversy? Another example is the fact indicated in the question why, in Paradise Lost, a supreme poem by a great religious artist, God should seem at times so oddly unsympathetic? (This might be said to be a fact of direct experience, but it has been fully objectified as problematical only by controversy.) I see no reason why we should not also make use of other, nonexperiential facts, if they can be adequately specified and significantly related to the lines of an independent deductive explanation. Thus we may ask why Defoe had almost no recognition as a novelist in the eighteenth century, or note not as an explanatory fact but as itself a fact requiring formal explanation Swift’s statement, that he meant Gulliver’s Travels to vex and not divert his reader. (These and related questions will be used as critical tests later in this essay.)

But such individual facts as these can best serve as tests when, as already indicated, they are approached from within a broad and cogent theoretical framework, which in turn should initially be directed toward the broadest possible problem. Now the most general problematic fact of our literary experience is that, collectively and individually, we are able systematically to distinguish literature in general from nonliterature, both in the essential, merely descriptive sense in which a bad joke is understood to be a work of literature while a good recipe is not, and in the evaluative sense in which, over time, writers and works are more and more ruthlessly winnowed by the collective judgment and the survivors arranged in a relatively fixed honorific hierarchy of status and value. Thus Shakespeare, Keats, and Kipling all unequivocally have places within this hierarchy (while Nicholas Rowe and Sir Henry Taylor, who in their own time clearly did, no longer do), but Shakespeare’s work is of greater literary magnitude than Keats’s and Keats’s of greater literary magnitude than Kipling’s. Furthermore, only a relatively few of the works of the selected writers keep a prominent place in the forefront of the collective attention, again with a relatively fixed hierarchy of value (i.e., within the group of Keats’s poems collectively selected for attention, “Ode to a Nightingale” clearly outranks “The Eve of St. Agnes,” while “I stood tiptoe on a little hill” lies outside the group).

We may notice that this collective winnowing process sharply restricts the possibilities of our own individual free choice of literary experience. Logically, we ought to reexamine the rejected writers and works, or sample them at random, in order to determine their merits for ourselves, and of course we do read and implicitly retest the selected writers and perhaps sample those time
has rejected. But as we do this, we discover that time has been right, that the collective judgment accords for the most part with our own—the world does well to neglect Sir Henry Taylor, Keats is not so great as Shakespeare, the “Ode to a Nightingale” is of greater literary magnitude than “The Eve of St. Agnes,” while our reading of “I stood tiptoe on a little hill” does not encourage us to assign it to our students. The integrity of our personal experience, we discover, is not coerced or distorted by the pressure of collective experience, the whims of anthologists, or the quirks of tradition; we find rather that our experience has been anticipated by the collective experience and is surprisingly able to replicate it and, in the face of conflict, even to correct its own defects, as witness the sophomore who comes to love Pope.

These universal facts of literary valuation, as we shall see, have their explanatory uses, but just in themselves they declare the obvious but seldom recognized truth that our perception of literature is not fluid and subjectively indefinite but in some fundamental sense fixed and objective; the problem of literary explanation therefore, as I shall shortly suggest, is not so much to provide knowledge of literature as to explain, clarify, and regularize the knowledge that we at some level already possess. More immediately useful in this regard are the facts connected with our capacity to distinguish literary from nonliterary works and to make further general discriminations within that large discrimination. Thus, on the one hand we intuitively discriminate the class “novel” within the large class of literary works, and on the other we perceive each individual novel as formally unique. But this formal uniqueness is itself general, so that a novel like Richardson’s *Pamela*, for instance, can be understood as different in a global way from its sister novel *Clarissa*, within the common likeness that distinguishes both together from all other novels.² Our perception of every work, then, involves an implicit awareness of an interlocking set of likeness/difference discriminations which define its relation to all other works. These facts of our literary experience, obvious though they are, offer a very strong test of literary explanation. They may be said to refute any explanation of a literary work which does not account for the possibility of such discriminations.

Closely related to the basic literary/nonliterary discrimination is our recognition that works basically nonliterary in the descriptive or essential sense can nevertheless be more or less literary and, in exceptional instances, find a place within the hierarchy of enduring literature. We know what we mean when we say that Hume’s essays are more literary than Locke’s, that Gibbon’s history is a great work of literature but Toynbee’s, great though it be, is not. (I shall consider below the problem posed by the literary status, unique among biographical and perhaps all factual works, of Boswell’s *Life of Johnson.*) The fact that our experience manifests these congruities suggests, as I have already begun to assume, that
there is an objective cognitive basis for the agreement, a basis in principle universally apprehensible and implying the common competence of the author and the collective and individual reader. Let us make the explanatory assumption that this competence is a tacit or intuitive capacity exercised as an extension of the natural cognitive powers through which we conceive the world in common with our fellows. I use “tacit” here in the sense made familiar by Michael Polanyi as referring to all that we know and can do that we are not focally aware of and cannot give an explicit account of. We recognize a face but cannot fully say by what means we do so. I use “intuitive” as an almost synonymous term in the sense developed by Noam Chomsky and other linguists in speaking of a competence that manifests itself in a use of language which can only be explained as determined by ordered rules applied unerringly by the speaker but which he cannot systematically express. Thus no illiterate speaker of English would say “the red big horse,” but if asked cannot say why the phrase is inadmissible except that “you can’t say that.”

The specific aim of a comprehensive theory of literature, then, would be to conceive and render explicit the objective basis of our tacit experience, accepting the task of accounting for all the general discriminations just indicated as well as of specific problematical facts that have come to be associated with particular works. Cases of marked critical disagreement are especially important; for if there is an objective tacit basis for our common understanding of literary works, sharp contrasts in interpretation become a problem of special significance. Continuous variation in interpretations would suggest merely the differences arising from difference in critical languages applied to the tacit base, differences which could be resolved by translation into a comprehensive theoretical metalanguage; but sharp bifurcation of critical opinion suggests that the tacit base is itself problematical and confusing. It is these works where explanation has been most inadequate to our intuitions which offer the most stringent and potentially the most illuminating tests of the explanatory power of a comprehensive theory. The general question we have put to theory—what must literary works be like for us to agree about them as we do?—has most potency in inverse form: what must (particular) literary works be like for us to disagree about them as we have done? Answers to such questions, of course, would not only be decisive tests of theories but would help to clarify our tacit experience.

In the balance of this essay I will sketch out and illustrate a hypothetico-deductive theory designed to be specifically adequate to all these tasks and then to test its explanatory power against that of another theory currently in the forefront of critical attention. My own theory would begin by conceiving the class of verbal compositions designed to be understood by immediate reference only to themselves, through the reader’s tacit grasp of the writer’s immanent communicative
act as directed toward some (presumptively) significant external goal—in short, as self-intelligible but extrinsically significant. (This class would not include, say, a personal letter, because it is not written to be generally intelligible in terms of itself alone, but would include a recipe, an editorial, Toynbee’s history.) Within this vast class of works, literary works would then be those which could be hypothetically conceived as not only self-intelligible but also self-significant. More precisely, they could be conceived as works the act of understanding which is experienced as its own justification. I thus reformulate the familiar idea that literary works are autotelic and join it with the equally familiar but not identical idea that they are those works whose end is pleasure, in order (1) to stipulate that literary pleasure is not to be conceived as free-floating and passively hedonistic but as integral with the act of cognition; (2) to rule out the assignment of meanings to a work of literature which cannot be pleasurably experienced within the tacit comprehension of the work; and (3) to make it possible to bring within the concept “literature” those works mentioned above which achieve literary status despite the fact that they belong to genres—biography, history, philosophy, etc—which cannot properly have pleasure as their primary goal.

This abstract discussion may gain substance and clarity through the analysis of a compact example. Consider the following item:

Oct. 1  Ad for female stenographer  1.00
Oct. 4  Violets for new stenographer  1.50
Oct. 6  Week’s salary for new stenographer  45.00
Oct. 9  Roses for stenographer  5.00
Oct. 10  Candy for wife  .90
Oct. 13  Lunch for stenographer  7.00
Oct. 15  Week’s salary for stenographer  60.00
Oct. 16  Movie tickets for wife and self  1.20
Oct. 18  Theatre tickets for steno and self  16.00
Oct. 19  Ice cream sundae for wife  30.00
Oct. 22  Mary’s salary  75.00
Oct. 23  Champagne & dinner for Mary & self  32.00
Oct. 25  Doctor for stupid stenographer  375.00
Oct. 26  Mink stole for wife  1,700.00
Oct. 28  Ad for male stenographer  1.50

Total expenses for month  $2,321.90

We may note, first of all, that our experience of the story is tacit: we are caught by its illusion and feel its effect without explicit awareness of how they
are obtained. Questioned about these matters, many readers will point to the “real document” form of the expense diary and the sense it gives of the autonomy of the diarist as accounting for the illusion of the story, whereas a little reflection shows that our imaginations, focally aware only of the diarist, are in confident contact with the author behind him and resonate with instantaneous accuracy to his signals. Mixing as it does business and personal expenses, with no completeness on either score, the diary bears only the most minimal likeness to a business account, a likeness sufficient to serve the mind as a premise for the illusion which, as it were, it actively chooses to entertain—willingly suspending disbelief but not at all believing—on a “let’s pretend” basis, for the sake of the delight which the illusion offers. We in fact understand every entry in the diary as a transparent dramatic proposition of the author, and if a genuinely verisimilar expense item were to appear—“typewriter ribbon, $1.25”—our imaginations would not know what to do with it. We can see clearly how the diary is understood if we ask ourselves or another reader who “Mary” is. The answer will always be that she is the stenographer “of course”; but considering the diary as a putatively real document, there is no reason why Mary should not be another girl in the office, or even the maid. She is automatically identified as the stenographer because the first-name reference fits into the pattern of deepening intimacy which the diarist hubristically seeks and which we follow, desiring, expecting—but not clearly foreseeing the source of—the reversal into comic disaster which punishes his vanity and deceit.

Another piece of evidence, still more striking in its implications, is the response obtained when we ask how the stenographer was stupid and what she needed a doctor for. The answer will always be that she was pregnant and required an abortion. It takes only a little calculation, however, to determine that it is a physiological impossibility for her to know she is pregnant by the businessman-diarist at the point indicated. In the face of this fact we ought logically to assume that something else happened to the stenographer—she dropped a typewriter on her foot, perhaps. But of course we do not infer this but continue to assume that she is pregnant by the diarist and underwent an abortion, even though this is an impossibility, because it fits the intuited form of the story as constructed. If we attempt to impose any other meaning, the humorous point disappears and the imaginative reality of the story collapses. The pleasure the story offers is identical with its significance and therefore tacitly determines intelligibility and overrides any other interpretive consideration. We have thus a clear objective example of the kind of inherently pleasurable cognitive structure hypothesized above. (It may be worth noting, however, that the story is of the “bad joke” kind—literary in its constitutive principle but, with its degrading presumption on our response, of the most minimal literary worth. We should
nevertheless recognize that the construction of such a story is an achievement which, if beneath the contempt, is also beyond the means of most of us.)

The story helps us also to get our bearings on another matter crucial to literary theory and interpretation. If a discrepancy similar to the one about the possibility of pregnancy were to appear in a serious literary work, it might well be used by critics to justify extensive reinterpretation of the “surface” story. The minimal suggestion might be that the man is being deceived by the girl, that, hidden irony, the victimizer is really the victim. A grander view, in terms of Christian myth, might discover a pointed analogy with the Virgin Birth (is not the girl’s name Mary?), turned here to sterility by the deadly agency of modern capitalism and science. The most up-to-date and sophisticated interpretation might closely follow out the two lines of implication, one affirming, one negating the fact of conception, and conclude simply by indicating the way in which the contradictions, the deep polarities of meaning and anti-meaning, hold themselves in precarious counterpoint above the semantic abyss, ready to disappear into chaos at the critic’s probing touch.

Parody may obscure my serious point. My intention is not to ridicule errant interpretation so much as to show how it may easily arise from and seemingly be confirmed by what appear to be, but are not, the objective facts of the text. Misinterpretation can develop from the mere pressure of a hypothesis, but it only becomes strongly persuasive through an appeal to what seems indubitable, otherwise inexplicable fact. Consequently, it is of the first importance to realize that such “facts” may appear in the text simply as the unintended and unavoidable negative consequence of the artist’s positive constructive intention. In this story, for instance, in order to avoid the contradiction, the author would have had to stretch the story out over two months, something that would have destroyed his effect, which very much depends on the rapidity and economy with which it is produced. If he did not meet the difficult conditions imposed by his premise and complete the story within the probabilities of the monthly account, the basis of the reader’s pleasure and hence the illusion and effect would fail. Within the pleasurable illusion of the story, the reader does not experience the underlying factual contradiction, so that the author did not need to be concerned about it. Even if the reader does perceive the contradiction, he will make nothing of it, but in a serious work such a puzzling fact, if its genesis as an unintended consequence were not perceived, could be used plausibly to support serious misinterpretation.

Trivial as it is, the stenographer story illustrates three matters of great importance to our theory: the process of tacit cognition, the operation of the principle of pleasurable intelligibility, and the crucial matter of unintended consequences. With these points clear, I now proceed to illustrate, very schematically, how the
theory might be brought to bear in collateral explanation of some especially significant problems which have arisen in critical discussion of three eighteenth-century masterworks—Boswell’s *Life of Johnson*, Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, and Defoe’s *Moll Flanders*. The overall explanatory commitment, again, is that each work be generally differentiated from the others within their common likeness as literature, with the most general unique literary feature serving, in turn, to define the particular form of the work in a way that (in principle) permits the clear deductive explanation of all its specific features, and the resolution of any special problems independently associated with its interpretation.

A prominent criticism of Boswell’s work has been that, because it is formed as a noncausal series of discrete episodes, it lacks development and structural unity; beyond that, since so much less space is accorded the early than the later life, the *Life* has been held to be ill-proportioned to the dimensions of Johnson’s actual existence. This interpretation and criticism are clearly supported by the facts as they present themselves in the work and are suggested by the most obvious and commonsense concept of form available, namely, that a biography is a work whose aim is to tell the truth about a man’s life, not as an assemblage of disconnected facts but by revealing the continuity and significant shape of an entire career. This view, like so many in modern criticism, honors the positivist doctrine that reality involves a single range of truth attached to a single set of material facts. But we may notice that such a conception of form holds, if it does hold, for all of biography as a genre and fails to take account of the most prominent—and problematical—fact about the *Life*, its special, indeed unique status as, of all biographies, the only one which is accorded a place as a literary masterwork of the very first rank.

The theory which I sketched above, on the other hand, requires that every work registered as literature be conceived as literature, in general, that is, as the embodiment of a cognitive act which is or can be experienced as its own intrinsic justification. To do this for the *Life of Johnson* will also be to conceive it in its formal uniqueness since, as just noticed, its literary status is unique for biography. But the theoretical imperative is seemingly difficult to carry out just because a factual work appears necessarily to bear upon the interest of fact in the world outside itself and to be extrinsic therefore both in matter and purpose. Actually, the theoretical restriction forces the solution which I have worked out in another essay and may summarize here (“Literary Form”). The key is supplied by Boswell when he concludes his book with the sentence, “Such was Samuel Johnson, a man whose talents, acquirements, and virtues were so extraordinary, that the more his character is considered, the more he will be regarded by the present age and by posterity, with admiration and reverence” (4: 430). The intrinsic pleasure of the book is the admiration and reverence we feel as a
natural consequence of our imaginative apprehension of the character of a man who so uniquely exceeds the normal intellectual and moral limits of the human nature which we share with him and through which we conceive him. The act of apprehension, which involves the assimilation and comparison of our natures with his, is inherently astonishing and ennobling to ourselves and to our concept of human nature in general. The universal significance of such a character is fully revealed not in the long-term direction and shape of the life as a whole but in the individual acts and achievements which result from and manifest it. Therefore Boswell’s structuring of the Life as a flow of discrete but formally homogeneous episodes offering intrinsically pleasing images of Johnson’s characteristic acts was not a formal mistake but the strongest artistic choice he could have made.

This conception of the form of the book offers an obvious solution to the problem presented by the unavoidable extrinsic reference of the factual work, for the massive admiration and reverence the reader feels for Johnson is, as already said, involuntary testimony to his conviction that the particular powers imaged most strikingly exceed his own and those of other men of whom he has had experience or report. Human imagination is incapable of supposing that the image of a man of such striking powers could itself lie within the invention of another man; it could not have been created but only recreated. The Life, therefore, so far as its essence, Johnson’s character, is concerned may be said to be intrinsically experienced as extrinsically true. There can be no better evidence of the truth of a character than Boswell gives.

The disproportion between the dimensions of the biography and the actual dimensions of Johnson’s life can also be easily and fruitfully explained from this perspective. Boswell’s choices of matter had to be of those facts which, presented at the proper magnitude, could most fully actualize his own vital memorial image of Johnson’s character. Many more such facts were available from the later than the earlier life, of course, but even in the latter life no proportion could be kept between the time occupied by events and the corresponding span in the book. The clearest instance of this is the so-called Wilkes episode, which took up perhaps two or three hours and so deserves no mention in proportional terms or in relation to the overall significance of Johnson’s career (Joseph Wood Krutch, quite properly, does not treat it at all in his biography) but which, as recreated by Boswell, forms, as I have elsewhere tried to show, the most richly pleasing manifestation of Johnson’s complex virtues in action.

The fact that Swift’s Houyhnhnms appear in various ways inadequate—clumsy and ludicrous, cold and detached—has been a major piece of evidence in the revisionist demolition of the long orthodox view that book 4 of Gulliver’s Travels is an unmitigated attack on mankind, with the Houyhnhnms a principal
instrument. Almost any reader, however strong his intuitive persuasion that the
book is indeed an unqualified attack, might waver when confronted with the
clear counterevidence of such negative traits and conclude that, however little
he had noticed it, there must indeed be ironic subversion of the Houyhnhnmns
in the book and of Gulliver’s reverential attitude toward them.

The obvious objection to the revisionist view is the absurdity of supposing
that Swift invented Gulliver’s uniquely devastating views only to undermine
them; it is as if one were to set a building afire in order to put it out. It would
likewise appear absurd for Swift to invent the Houyhnhnmns and then attack
them for purely imaginary traits which he had invented and assigned. Who
needs to be persuaded of the physical inadequacies of creatures who do not
exist? But such considerations no doubt have little force so long as the traits in
question are perceived as deliberately constructed and seemingly incompatible
with the rationale of attack. As several critics have shown, however, these traits
in the Houyhnhnmns as well as other puzzling facts in the book can be effectively
explained as unintended consequences of Swift’s intention to mount an unquali-
fied attack, once that intention and its consequences are clearly understood. 7
This explanation can easily be expressed deductively, in terms of the theory
which we have been considering, as follows:

We may begin with the fact that Gulliver’s Travels is a long, serious, realistic
prose fiction which is nevertheless distinguished from the novel form in general
both by the collective judgment and the intuitive response of the individual, a
difference usually expressed by saying that Gulliver is not a novel but a satire.
The theory requires us to formulate an explicit concept of the differential form
involved, and this may be done by saying that a satire is a fiction whose intel-
ligibility is not internal but depends upon the reader’s recognition that it is
designed to ridicule a human target actually existing in the external world. The
pleasure of such a work would derive from the reader’s willing complicity in the
satirist’s objectified act of ridicule, the pleasure of having his own aggression
focused and pleasurably discharged without cost or effort. The distinctiveness of
book 4, the most general quality which differentiates it from other satires, would
inhere in the fact that, whereas in ordinary satires the attack is on a third person
for the sake of the reader’s pleasure, in this satire the second and third persons of
the usual satiric triangle are merged, since the attack is on that general ‘human’
nature with which the reader is unavoidably identified. This distinctive feature
is directly indicated by Swift’s well-known comment that his aim was “to vex
the world rather than divert it,” as an ordinary satire does. It would follow from
this that the fictive standard in terms of which man was to be measured and
attacked could not itself be a human agent—no Chinese philosopher, man in
the moon, or even Brobdingnag giant—or else the attack would be self-refuting.
Some nonhuman creature noble in body and spirit would be required, with the horse perhaps the most obvious candidate; but this creature would have to be endowed, as the ground of satiric comparison, with human attributes of reason, language, and culture. To the extent, however, that these non-equine qualities were stressed, the reader would gradually tend to lose his sense of species difference and could identify himself with what would increasingly seem merely a superior human point of view, thus evading the force of the attack. The solution for the problem was to remind the reader consistently at strategic points that the model creatures were emphatically nonhuman, but since they could never be allowed to be merely horses, this would have to be done by having them do human-like things in a distinctively equine way—threading needles with hoof and pastern, neighing poetry, etc. This choice ran the danger of making the horses seem clumsy, even ludicrous, but this was an entirely minor risk compared with the need to maintain the imaginative probability of the fictional premise essential to the special satiric attack.

A word more should be said about the imperfections of the Houyhnhnms, again from within the framework of the theory. The standard view that the Houyhnhnms are rational “ideals,” though correct, conceals an ambiguity that usually goes unrecognized. The term may be interpreted to mean either that they are the vehicle of an ideal concept of what rational creatures ought to be or that they are, in much more limited fashion, merely ideal instruments by which man’s pride in his own rational dignity can be measured and ridiculed. Only the second possibility is compatible with our theory, and if we construe the book in terms of it, we see that much that is puzzling about the Houyhnhnms and their views if taken didactically (that the Yahoos should be castrated, for instance, or exterminated from the face of the earth) becomes clear and functional if understood merely as a dramatic means of jolting human pride.

This same line of thought serves also to interpret another feature of the work which is often thought to undercut its apparent tenor, the excesses, as they seem, of Gulliver’s response both to the Houyhnhnms and to Pedro de Mendez, the virtuous Portuguese captain who treats him so well on his voyage home. When Gulliver kisses the hoof of the Houyhnhnm master, for instance, Swift’s intention, as indicated by our formal hypothesis and confirmed by the local rhetoric, would have been to use the reader’s anticipated reaction to the apparent fatuousness of the action as the base for delivering an unexpected shock to his pride in himself as human. Similarly with de Mendez: if Gulliver’s profound disenchantment is not seen to hold for the best as well as the worst of men, the radical insult implied will fail to have general force and can easily be evaded by the reader.

Our hypothesis at the same time that it resolves these difficulties explains also how the erroneous hypotheses it seeks to replace could have been suggested
and apparently confirmed by the “real” facts—the tacit structure of the work as it now appears—and why tacit reaction is not always what Swift must have intended. In the view offered here, a correct interpretive reaction to the work requires in general that the reader make self-damaging inferences, that he feel reflexive vexation rather than the complacent diversion he seeks. That readers can react as intended to the tacit base is indicated by the reactions of critics over nearly two centuries who have protested that Swift was mad. But once it is suggested, as modern critics have done, that Swift’s real point is that the Houyhnhnms are inhuman monsters, Gulliver a fool, and the truth midway between Yahoo and Houyhnhnm, it is easy for the reader to experience the work, somewhat imperfectly, as a pleasurable attack directed away from himself. It is inherently difficult for his imaginative faculties to perform the task required of them and actively register, even as a fictive hypothesis, the possibility that the nature in which they are grounded is inherently deficient. There is a kind of somatic contradiction involved in the attempt to occupy a nonhuman point of view, to interpret an encounter between horse and man in favor of the horse; and once a positive alternative interpretation is confidently offered, it is almost inevitable that many will construe the unintentionally ambiguous facts in accord with it.

As a last example of the capacity of the theory to deal with the problematical facts of our literary experience, I may briefly summarize an argument that I have developed extensively elsewhere concerning the relationship of Defoe’s fiction to Richardson’s and Joyce’s and the history of the novel form (see note 2). Many critics, early and late, have noted that Defoe’s novels are not plotted and have interpreted the lack as an artistic defect, the most evident sign of his failure, despite his striking “realism,” to achieve the full form of the novel as Richardson was to do. Again we have an interpretation based on indubitable facts—Defoe’s novels are manifestly not plotted—and a generalization about historical development based implicitly on the attractive evolutionary idea that the standard novel was achieved only after earlier approximations to its full perfected form. I argue that this is an inadequate view.

The idea that the plotlessness of Defoe’s novels is an artistic deficiency fits the overall impression the novels give of haphazardness and shapelessness, a quality that we easily respond to as a failure to achieve order. But if we follow the full implication of another common view of Defoe’s stories—that they were written in imitation of real documents, that is to say, that they are presented, falsely, as naive true stories, we gain an entirely new view of their formlessness. If Defoe did in fact mean his stories to be registered as naïve true stories, we see that their plotlessness would have been an absolutely necessary artistic choice, since the pattern of plot would reveal the author behind the supposedly real narrator. The
same point applies to the sharp critical quarrel about whether Defoe “judges” or does not judge his characters, ironically or otherwise. Any pattern of signalled judgments would again indicate the author behind the narrator. The formal situation is in direct contrast with that of “realistic” fiction like Richardson’s in which, as with the stenographer story, analysis can demonstrate that the reader is tacitly aware of and cooperative with an immanent authorial presence. Specifically, he is tacitly aware of and responsive to the realistic surface of such fiction as a constructed illusion that forwards the development, looking toward ultimate discharge, of the tension which results from his induced expectation of what will happen in the narrative, as contrasted with his induced hopes about what he wants to happen. The lines of this development are in fact the lines of the plot. In Defoe, contrastively, there is no such tacitly recognizable authorial control. The completely covert author seeks to induce the reader’s imaginative belief in and reaction to the narrator and the events of the story as if they were actual, neither invented nor told by himself. His novels therefore are not in intention fictional at all but, again, false true stories, pseudofactual rather than fictional.

This offers a clear solution to the critical controversy that has developed about Defoe’s work, particularly Moll Flanders. Knowing in fact that Defoe’s works are fabrications and accustomed to the complexly indirect authorial roles of twentieth-century writers, modern critics have approached Defoe’s works as if they were projected as author-based fiction and are then forced into an unsatisfactory choice between two mutually exclusive conclusions–either that Defoe “failed” to judge his fictional characters or that he has judged them in an ironically complex way that the critics are unable to define with any clarity or agreement. But there is no satisfactory way of treating Defoe stories as fictions. The conclusion indicated by the present hypothesis is again that, as a matter of positive formal principle, he actively refrained from judgment or any other sign of his constructive presence in his feigned true stories. This explains why his stories have been called “lies” by Leslie Stephen and others, whereas Richardson’s and later fictions have not. In a real sense Defoe’s stories are lies, but they are imaginative, not practical lies. It explains also why Defoe’s stories have so often been taken to be literally true stories by very sophisticated readers. It further explains his extraordinarily dense “realism,” not to be matched for nearly two centuries. It is so unlike the relatively schematic realism of his immediate successors because it is meant to be taken for a report of actual experience.

Further important conclusions—for Defoe and the whole history of the novel—follow from these considerations taken together with the fact that Defoe was not seen as a high literary artist until the appearance of the fiction of Joyce and Woolf, between whose work and Defoe’s there has always been recognized, by those writers and others, to be a kinship. From the perspective
we have adopted, the nature of the similarity—as well as the radical difference—between the early and later writers is clear. Defoe is like Joyce and Woolf in attempting to give a sense of the world as in actual fact it is given to us, in contrast to the fictional mode of the standard post-Richardson novel, where our sense of the real world is plastically drawn upon to vitalize an illusion which objectively enacts and pleasurably resolves some implicit inner conflict. But whereas Defoe’s formal intention involves the deliberate concealment of his authorial function as a means of securing appropriate response to his pseudo-facts, Joyce and Woolf require our fullest appreciation of their role in creating a reality which can be responded to as if it were in fact autonomous; the effect is not of interest and momentary wonder at the presumed fact but of continuous and growing wonder at a fictional world which so magically and coherently simulates our experience of the real one. The creatively detached yet cognitively immanent relationship of Joyce and Woolf to their autonomous fictional world has suggested to many critics that Defoe is playing a similar role, and his status as an artist has sometimes been exalted accordingly. Allen Tate has written, for instance, of “that great forerunner Moll Flanders, which is so much all of a piece . . . that sometimes I think that Flaubert wrote it; or that nobody wrote either Defoe or Flaubert. For when literature reaches this stage of maturity, it is anonymous” (139). As we have already seen, the book reads indeed as if no one wrote it; Defoe’s apparent detachment is really formal absence. But this fact locates not the artistic merit of the novel but its defect, because it means that we have no way in reading the work of implicitly appreciating the author’s constructive act. We respond to the narrative in reading with interest and curiosity, as if the events reported had in fact occurred; when we consciously perceive and appreciate the means by which this illusion is achieved, like a visual illusion it disappears. The pleasure of the work depends on our imaginative sense that it was not intended, and explicit perception of intention destroys the pleasurable effect. Our general theory pronounces very clearly on the literary status of such a work: it says that since the imagination cannot coherently construe the work as informed by the author’s creative intention but can only respond to the interest of the fabricated story as if it were in effect true, the work will be registered as either nonliterary or ambiguously literary. This deductive consequence of the theoretical conception may be seen to constitute an accurate retrospective prediction of Defoe’s almost nonexistent reputation as a novelist in the eighteenth century, as independently specified in the most recent and authoritative study of his reputation: “It is not that Defoe’s successors wrote badly about his art,” we are told; “they were not really aware that he was an artist.” And again: “Defoe is surely unique in the delays he experienced before being permitted to arrive as a serious artist. . . . [For well over a century] he was not really an obscure
figure, but his fame was scarcely that of a creative writer as such” (Rogers 1). And the theoretical conception, as just seen, also accounts for—and sharply qualifies—the high but implicitly ambiguous place in the literary pantheon accorded him today. I ask those who reject my conception of the form of *Moll Flanders* to test the capacity of their own conceptions to explain the fact that it was not commonly considered to be a novel in the eighteenth century but was seen as a supreme novel in the twentieth, as well as the fact that it is the subject of an unresolved controversy as to whether it is ironic or not. (I hope it will not confuse matters too greatly if after this I add that, all that I have said remaining so, *Moll Flanders* and *Robinson Crusoe* are genuinely though ambiguously and incoherently literary and have a permanent place in the history of the novel because they present an illusion of life which is offered and experienced as an end in itself. If Defoe’s forms contrast sharply with Joyce’s in coherence and ultimate aesthetic value, their own intrinsic value is in polar contrast also with that of stories in the true confessions or true detective mode which seek the pseudo-factual illusion for the sake of sensation or pornography.)

The attempt to solve the particular problems presented by Defoe’s novels within the general theory results, as the reader may already have perceived, in a clear and I believe strongly explanatory subtheory about the history of novel forms in general, which I can describe here further only in outline. Briefly, the subtheory would suggest the view that Defoe’s works are to be seen as the last and most perfect realization of the entertainment potential of the false true story, while Richardson’s are to be seen as the first of the long line of standard novels structured to exploit the possibility of building from the reader’s sense of the actual a story which would objectify and resolve the conflicts of his inner nature. Joyce—and Woolf, Proust, and others—would then appear as writers who, dissatisfied with novels which used the inmost feelings to shape a sense of the world, decided to use their sense of the objective world to shape and realize their inmost feelings. In the standard action-fantasy novel, to sum up the contrast, the world meets the terms of our wishes; in similar novels, as I would call those of Joyce, Woolf, Proust, and some of Faulkner—novels built as artificial simulations of the actual—our wishes are made to meet the terms of the world. I believe that this simple set of concepts—pseudofactual, action-fantasy, similar—makes clear without distortion the basic formal principles which lie beneath the large shifts in the history of the novel as well as the distinctive shape of the most characteristically modern novels (Rader, “Defoe” 50).

So far in this essay I mean to have illustrated, first, that literary interpretation, like all explanation, is hypothetical; that the agreement of a critical hypothesis with the facts is not a sufficient confirmation of its truth; and that literary criticism needs to develop its interpretations within the framework of a theory that
is clear, definite, and strong enough to permit a range of deductive consequences which can constitute really significant tests of the theory. And the important test for a general literary theory or a local hypothesis is not whether it can offer a coherent interpretation of the apparent facts of a text but how far its premises can be extended to solve the problems posed by the failures of previous explanation. I have also indicated what I believe to be the most significant general problem of literary explanation, the problem presented by the striking regularities of our tacit experience of literature, in particular the fact that we perceive literary works in terms of likeness/difference relationships which define at one pole their common quality as literature and at the other their individual formal uniqueness. Beyond this, I have schematically indicated how a theory developed to explain these regularities might be deductively extended to solve some of the more special problems that have developed in our experience and interpretation of particular literary works. I want now in conclusion to compare the explanatory power of my deductive theory with that of the strongly argued, radically inductive theory put forward in recent years by Professor Stanley Fish, a theory like mine of literary experience but in method and result nearly its polar opposite.

The most prominent feature of Fish’s method is his systematic attempt to demonstrate that what might seem to be defects or ambiguities of meaning in both the small and large elements of a work are in fact to be taken as deeply meaningful, deliberate tokens of the inherent complexities of the processes of human perception and understanding. Most strikingly, perhaps, he claims that in Paradis Lost Milton deliberately attempts to subvert or render ambiguous the reader’s responses in order to teach a “distrust of our own abilities or perceptions” appropriate to a poem whose subject is the Fall of Man; “the reader’s difficulty is the result of the act that is the poem’s subject. The reading experience becomes the felt measure of man’s loss” (Surprised 22, 39).

The characteristic quality of Milton’s poem shows itself locally, Fish asserts, in what might be called its subversive syntax, an example of which is to be seen in the following lines describing Satan’s spear:

His spear, to equal which the tallest Pine
Hewn on Norwegian Hills to be the Mast
Of some great Ammiral, were but a wand, . . .

(1.292–94)

“A mind,” Fish says, “asked to order a succession of rapidly given bits of detail (mental or physical) seizes on the simplest scheme of organization which offers itself,” and he assumes that the reader is led by this principle to read the first line as (tentatively) equating spear and pine and the second as forcing the spear
into “a kind of apposition with a conveniently visual pine”—an equivalence suddenly blocked in the last half of the third line by “were but a wand” (*Surprised* 23–24). Fish continues: “In the confusion that follows this rupture of the reading sequence, the reader loses his hold on the visual focal points, and is unable to associate firmly the wand with either of them. The result is the momentary diminution of Satan’s spear as well as the pine, although a second, and more wary reading, will correct this; but corrected, the impression remains (in line 295 a miniature Satan supports himself on a wand-like spear)” (25).

As Michael Polanyi points out, once we concentrate analytically on the proximal components of a tacit cognition, our focal synthetic impression tends to disintegrate; and confronted with Fish’s slow-motion analysis we may find it difficult to say just what it was that we might have been aware of when, free of sinful knowledge, we first read these lines in the normal way, but in my own case I certainly re-read them as, in context, an unconfusing but surprising evocation of a sense of the spear as much but indefinitely larger than the visualized pine. (An unconfused reading is greatly facilitated by the realization that “equal” is being used in the obsolete sense of “to liken, compare” (OED, vb. 2), so that “to equal which” means “compared to which.”) That we should be struck but unconfused by the comparison is understandable in terms of the very principle to which Fish appeals, that the “mind . . . seizes on the simplest scheme of organization which offers itself,” for in truth the simplest and only scheme the mind can make use of in interpreting a syntactical element is the sentence of which it is a part; and any interpretation placed on a sentence must involve grammatical completeness, semantic coherence, and pragmatic significance within the communicative situation. The lines under consideration are a subordinate element in a main clause yet to appear which forms only a part of a twenty-two-line sentence the significance of which is itself immediately conditioned by a narrative sequence of sentences; so that the reader who is disoriented by the clause describing the spear is not likely to grasp the intricate architecture of the whole passage and respond to its harmonies as Milton certainly meant him to. But the descriptive clause, taken by itself, comes into focus only when we understand it in terms of its complete structure as meaning that the great spear is so much larger than the concretely visualized tree mast as to make the mast appear a wand. Until the words yield this meaning they cannot be said to have made sense at all.

And after three pages of analysis devoted to their supposed confusion, it is just this meaning which Fish assigns to the lines: “The logic of the reading experience . . . says to us: If one were to compare Satan’s spear with the tallest pine the comparison would be inadequate” (27). Fish also explains the artistic considerations which in fact must have led Milton to construct the simile:
Had Milton asserted the identity of Satan’s spear and the tallest pine, he would not only have sacrificed the awe that attends incomprehensibility; he would also have lied, since clearly the personae of his extra-terrestrial drama are not confined within the limitations of our time and space. On the other hand, had he said that the spear is larger than one can imagine, he would have sacrificed the concreteness so necessary to the formulation of an effective image. What he does instead is grant the reader the convenience of concreteness (indeed fill his mind with it) and then tell him that what he sees is not what is there (“there” is never located). The result is almost a feat of prestidigitation: for the rhetorical negation of the scene so painstakingly constructed does not erase it; we are relieved of the necessity of believing the image true, but permitted to retain the solidity it offers our straining imaginations. . . . Thus Milton is able to suggest a reality beyond this one by forcing us to feel, dramatically, its unavailability. *(Surprised*, 26–27)

This is a cogent and precise specification not of disorientation and incoherence but of a large effect arising from Milton’s local solution of an artistic problem which his overall formal commitment made omnipresent in the poem: the necessity of representing the transcendent as concrete. What Fish is describing is the source not of confusion but as he says of “awe,” that is, the immediate manifestation of that general grandeur in the poem which Johnson mentioned as its distinctive beauty: “The characteristic quality of [Milton’s] poem is sublimity. . . . [H]is natural port is gigantic loftiness. He can please when pleasure is required; but it is his peculiar power to astonish” (S. Johnson, “Milton” 115).

But if the simile is constructed, as Fish shows, to produce this special effect, then its peculiarities would be explained, if they require explanation, simply as the negative consequence of Milton’s positive intention. We are freed by this explanation of any necessity of supposing that Milton created the alleged difficulties of the syntax in a deliberate attempt to disorient the reader for the sake of homiletic instruction; the “fallen reader” hypothesis is superfluous. The difficulties of the simile (which, again, are not actively registered when the construction is understood) are seen to have arisen in the same way that the difficulties of Shakespeare’s, or Gray’s, or Dylan Thomas’s syntax arise, as a result of their attempt to meet the problems to which their complex artistic aims give rise. Fish’s strong perceptions allow him finally here to rise above the limitations imposed by his hypothesis, but immediately after this his thesis leads him into a clear misreading of Milton’s lines describing Satan’s landing on the sun:

There lands the Fiend, a spot like which perhaps
Astronomer in the Sun’s lucent Orb
Through his glaz’d optic Tube yet never saw.
(3.588–90)

Fish comments:

Again in the first line two focal points (spot and fiend) are offered the reader who
sets them side by side in his mind; again the detail of the next one and one half lines
is attached to the image, and a scene is formed, strengthening the implied equality
of spot and fiend; indeed the physicality of the impression is so persuasive that the
reader is led to join the astronomer and looks with him through a reassuringly spe-
cific telescope ("glaz’d optic Tube") to see nothing at all ("yet never saw"). In both
similes the reader is encouraged to assume that his perceptions extend to the object
the poet would present, only to be informed that he is in error; and both similes are
constructed in such a way that the error must be made before it can be acknowledged
by a surprised reader. . . .

Of course Milton wants the reader to pull himself up and re-read, for this pro-
vides a controlled framework within which he is able to realize the extent and impli-
cation of his difficulty. . . . The implication is personal; the similes and many other
effects say to the reader: "I know that you rely upon your senses for your apprehension
of reality, but they are unreliable and hopelessly limited." (Surprised, 27–28)

Here as elsewhere one may remark the illogicality of Fish’s supposition that the
mind will react to a confusing sentence as evidence of its own congenital limita-
tion. After all, the fact of confusion presupposes the fact and the available means
of normally clear communication. In this situation one might suppose that the
mind encountering confusion or frustration would simply assume that the dif-
ficulty derived either from the inarticulateness or the deliberate deception of the
author or the inherent difficulty of what he was saying, and respond accordingly,
but one could scarcely expect a “mea culpa.” If the experience of stylistic dif-
ficulty were tantamount to a conviction of original sin, the Reverend Billy Gra-
ham might well give his nights and days to the study of the later Henry James.

But surely, in this particular instance, it is a simpler solution to our difficul-
ties than the one proposed to observe that there are not “two focal points (spot
and fiend)” in the first line but only one, the fiend-who-is-the-spot presented as
a single entity actual to our imaginative sight at the narrated time, the likes of
which, we are told, no astronomer has ever seen among the spots he telescop-
ically has seen; the effect is to emphasize the fateful actuality of the once-only
dire event. And we may notice that the reader’s perceptions extend very well to
the object the poet would present. He can both see Satan’s presence on the sun
imaginatively and conceive that he might in principle have seen it through a
telescope had he and the telescope been then available and the fictionally repre-
sented transcendent fact actual.

We may now consider Fish’s treatment of one of those larger aspects of Mil-
ton’s poem which have been troublesome to many readers, the negative feature
located by Pope in his statement that Milton made God the Father speak like
a school divine, so that He seems on the one hand pedantic and on the other
petulantly self-justifying and self-righteous. Fish argues quite convincingly, first,
that God’s speech at the opening of book 3 is to be understood as setting forth
unadorned the timeless truth as it is present to His omniscience, and he goes on
to indicate how the speech is placed and developed to comfort and reassure the
reader, who has just followed Satan’s revengeful purposes as he moves from Hell
to Adam’s earth. The two aspects of the speech do not conflict but complement
each other: “The speech can be said to move on two fronts: as a self-contained
organism [expressing immutable truth], it unfolds according to its own inner
logic; as a performance [a dramatic speech], it inspires confidence and offers con-
solation. The God who tenders reassurance and guidance to a reader in need of
both is still the logician whose existence supports the seventeenth-century ideal;
it is Milton’s triumph to make the two figures one in terms of their effect, while
maintaining the integrity of each. . . . Theology’s demands have become poetry’s”
(80). Quite. But Fish goes on to note that readers, especially modern ones, almost
universally react to God’s speech with “dismay, disappointment, and a reluctant
hostility” (81), for the concise logical force of God’s argument cannot offset our
natural human reaction to God’s summary condemnation of His creature man as
solely responsible for the sin yet uncommitted which God unconditionally asserts
he will commit. Yet “the reader’s response is a judgment on him (a reflection of
his ‘crookednesse’), not on the dispassionate voice of the Logos. What seems ‘dis-
agreeable’ . . . or distressing is the result of the fallen reader’s inability to come to
terms with what he knows to be true” (83). Milton intends the negative effect as
a means of persuading the reader of his own sinfulness.

This argument is in clear conflict with Fish’s earlier demonstration that
Milton had developed God’s speech to be comforting and reassuring to the
reader, and the contradiction is not really diminished by saying that the dem-
onstration applies only to the earlier part of the speech. But a perfectly good
alternate explanation of the unsympathetic aspect of God’s speech is available.
It can be understood as another unintended but unavoidable consequence of
Milton’s most general positive intention. This was defined in passing above as
an intention to represent as fictionally concrete a reality assumed to be tran-
scendently real. More specifically, we may now observe, Milton had chosen to
represent eternal truths abstractly specified in Christian theology through the
(independently given) concretely dramatic frame of the classical epic and by this
means pleasingly justify the ways of God to man. This commitment (the source of the most general formal difference between *Paradise Lost* and other classical epics) is what Johnson points to in his remark that “the moral of other (epic) poems is incidental and consequent; in Milton’s only is it essential and intrinsic” (S. Johnson, “Milton” 111). The unmatched creative and plastic power with which Milton forged his sublime solution to this self-imposed problem (“That with no middle flight intends to soar” [*Paradise Lost* 1.14]) gives the poem its unique grandeur, but no artistic power could avoid the constraints of his special commitment: to present transcendent and eternal agents as finite dramatic personages moving in space and time and to express through these personages the abstract logic of a transcendent perspective the strict terms of which he could in no wise alter. (“The substance of the narrative is truth,” says Johnson, “and . . . truth allows no choice” [“Milton” 113].)

Milton had on the one hand to make unequivocally clear the theological imperative that an all-good God was utterly without blame for man’s fall which, in His omniscience, He must nevertheless foresee; and he had on the other to make this transcendent condition an active element in the reader’s concrete sense of the developing space-time drama. It is difficult to see how he could have done this without making God speak, but presenting God’s infinite perspective through a personal voice at a particular moment necessarily created a sense of Him as a merely finite being operating within the frame of a reality which the reader has to imagine as independent of Him; so that the reality which logically He created and transcends imaginatively seems to transcend and limit Him. When God speaks of man, He may very well then seem one limited personality speaking of another quite independent of Him, and there will almost unavoidably be a sense, when He states His foreknowledge of man’s fall, that He is arbitrarily and a priori imposing for His merely personal justification a fate which He is free not to impose, since it seems to move from His finite temporal will to man’s and not from a Being who is present to the imagination as, in Hopkins’s phrase, “past all grasp God.” Of course Milton expected the reader’s awareness of the fiction and his predetermined sympathies to offset the difficulties, as they do; but the difficulties were inherent. Milton did not god-like choose to weaken or limit the force of his imaginative effect with a view to convicting the reader of his sinfulness; as a merely human genius he could not avoid the negative consequences to which his positive choices committed him. The human limitations, in this case, are on Milton’s side, not the reader’s, but it was just because Milton tried to rise so far above the human that the relative imperfections of *Paradise Lost* are more striking than those of his other works.

This alternate (and by no means new) explanation has many advantages. Since Milton is not asserted to intend his negative effect, we do not have to
understand imperfection as a perfection, a formal limitation as a formal virtue, with all the complicated contradictions to which as a general position that leads. We do not have to assume that so sensitive a reader as Pope (for one) read the poem inaccurately, or wonder how an acute reader like Johnson, deeply persuaded of original sin, could have missed the instructive puzzlements and perplexities that Milton offered him. We are free to understand the poem in much the same way that not only Pope and Johnson understood it but in the same way that Coleridge, Arnold, Eliot, and past readers in general have understood it, though perhaps with fuller insight into its apparent faults.

The alternative hypothesis also provides an explanation for the puzzlement of modern critics whose characteristic attention to isolated features of the text has brought into relief many unexplained anomalies, as they seem, in Milton's great poem. That the greatest poem in English should have so many weaknesses is on the face of it quite puzzling, since it is not at all obvious that, as just suggested, its faults derive from its very greatness; and the strongest appeal of Fish's powerfully integrative argument is that it seems to show that the apparent faults are evidence of the poet's supreme mastery. The alternative explanation does not explain the negative features as actual strengths but suggests that though they are quite definite and real they are in fact the defects of the special qualities of the poem which constitute its greatness. And indeed when we are fully engaged in the active experience of the poem, they do not interfere with or disrupt our experience of the poem so much as they mark for us the limits of its perfection. Pope's sense that Milton's God talked like a school divine did not compromise his explicit and implicit recognition that Milton was a far greater poet than he; and neither does our response to the imperfections within our active tacit experience of the poem prevent our registration of its unmatched sublimity.

Thus the special features of *Paradise Lost* can be explained as the consequences, positive and negative, of what has long been seen to be Milton's unique formal intention without recourse to Fish's special assumptions, which force the negative aspects into undue and misleading prominence. I may notice also that, because my explanation is strictly deduced from a conception of the distinctive literary form of the poem, it implies and is implied by the general conception of literature I have offered as well as by the other particular explanations that I have developed collaterally within it. I want now to show that Fish's method cannot be logically extended to meet general explanatory demands of the same order. First of all, as Fish himself explicitly recognizes, his method "provides no way to distinguish between literary and other effects" and "doesn't permit the evaluation of literature as literature as apart from advertising or preaching or propaganda or 'entertainment.' . . . The fact that the method does not begin with the assumption of literary superiority or end with its affirma-
tion, is, I think, one of its strongest recommendations” (Self-Consuming 408). It is difficult to see why this shortcoming should be called a virtue, especially when we have been told two pages earlier that the properly equipped reader is one who has “literary competence” and has “internalized the properties of literary discourses”; but in any event the method obviously does begin with the assumption of literary superiority. Fish’s selection of Paradise Lost for analysis assumes the high collective estimate of the poem which he shares and clearly expects the reader to share. The prestige of his argument depends on the preexistent prestige of Paradise Lost, so that to admit that the method is in principle incapable of indicating the source of that prestige is obviously to admit that the method has a basic imperfection.

This leads directly to the observation of a collateral deficiency in Fish’s theory. The fact that his method cannot locate either the general quality of literature or the unique literary quality of Paradise Lost means also that it cannot differentiate the characteristic quality of any literary work from another; it cannot locate the source of our sense in reading Gulliver’s Travels and the Life of Johnson and Moll Flanders that these works are different from each other both in the general and particular principle of their literary structure. But not only is Fish’s method unable to differentiate the literary quality of one work from another, its actual collateral application to other works involves Fish in a contradiction. In his Self-Consuming Artifacts Fish consistently discovers—in poem, essay, allegory—that a key source of the peculiar tendency of these works to self-destruct is syntax of the same subversive kind as that he had attributed to Paradise Lost as a distinctive aspect of a poem meant to make the reader feel his radical subversion by original sin. (In Paradise Lost the induced “distrust of our own abilities and perceptions . . . extends to all the conventional ways of knowing that might enable a reader to locate himself in the world of any [other] poem” [Fish, Surprised 22].) But a feature generally present in a whole group of works cannot be held to be uniquely characteristic of a single work. Either the syntax is unique to Paradise Lost as expressive of its unique subject and cannot be present in the other works, or it is present in the other works and cannot be felt by the reader as the distinctive quality of Paradise Lost. One argument or the other (or both) must be falsely predicated.

Actually the method is logically committed to discovering something like subversion in the syntax and larger features of any work that it treats because it assumes to begin with that apparent inconsistencies and incoherencies are to be accepted as positively significant. Since any semantic system becomes incoherent when the rules by which it is constituted are violated, any method of interpretation which assumes that contradiction between elements of meaning is itself meaningful can only end by proving that all discourse is meaningless.
With characteristic rigor and clarity, Fish himself comes to what is in effect this conclusion: “Perhaps, then, the word ‘meaning’ should also be discarded, since it carries with it the notion of message or point. The meaning of an utterance, I repeat, is its experience—all of it—and that experience is immediately compromised the moment you say anything about it. It follows, then, that we shouldn’t try to analyze language at all. The human mind, however, seems unable to resist the impulse to investigate its own processes” (Self‑Consuming 425).

And again, in another essay: “Finally, however, you are left only with yourself and the impossible enterprise of understanding understanding; impossible because it is endless, endless because to have reached an end is to have performed an operation that once again extends it beyond your reach. In short, this way lacks the satisfaction of a closed system of demonstration and is unable ever to prove anything, although paradoxically this makes rigor and precision more, not less, necessary; but these very deficiencies are the reverse side of its greatest virtue (in both the Renaissance and the modern sense): the recognition that meaning is human” (Fish, “What is Stylistics” 152).

Fish’s words really say, not that meaning is human, but that the effort to understand meaning is hopeless, that meaning does not mean. But this evades the given problem, the preexistent fact of meaning. Surely Fish’s conclusion threatens his theory more than it does our inescapable conviction that what we say in general and the literary works we honor in particular have “meaning and point.” The hypothesis that everyone is out of step but Johnny suggests an obvious reinterpretation of the facts; and the obvious interpretation of Fish’s result is not that there is no way of getting at meaning but that Fish’s premises are wrong, unequivocally refuted by the conclusion to which they inevitably lead. Fish may be righter than he means to be when he says that his theory is “full of holes” (Self‑Consuming 426).

But how can an argument that is full of holes be as attractive as Fish’s seems to be? I think Fish answers that question, too, when he tells us that his method is “not a method at all, because neither its results nor its skills are transferable. Its results are not transferable because there is no fixed relationship between formal features and response . . . ; and its skills are not transferable because you can’t hand it over to someone and expect him at once to be able to use it. (It is not portable.)” (425). But if the method is not portable and the meanings it discovers are not transferable, what value do its demonstrations have? The answer is clear: as the manifestations of untransferable skills, as works which have no end beyond themselves, they have, in terms of my own theory, the character of literary performances; the acts of interpretation are acts whose justification lies in the reader’s vicarious experience of them, and what he seems to experience is the intrinsically significant, indeed awesome truth that all literary works are
emblematic of the vast indeterminacy at the heart of things. But if the reader suspects, as well he may, that this truth is not true, then these demonstrations themselves will become for him truly self-consuming artifacts.

I have considered Fish’s position at such length not only because it epitomizes the ad hoc inductivism of established New Critical practice and carries to a logical extreme the New Critical principle that literary form is inherently ambiguous or contradictory, but also because the great clarity and rigor of Fish’s argument (quite uncharacteristic of New Critical practice) makes it relatively easy to locate and test points of disagreement. But just because the interpretive principles involved are so widely accepted (and so much in tune with the temper of the times) it is not likely that I will have persuaded many of the validity of hypothetico-deductive explanation or of the verisimilitude of the particular conception of literature I have offered. But my arguments may at least have suggested to some that the facts of the literary text do not speak for themselves, that theoretical constructions are vital to literary interpretation, and that there are objective problematic facts to which the resolution of theoretical disagreement may be referred. Whatever the effects of my argument, the issues involved are real and their resolution will have real effects on the way the academic critic conceives literature, on his teaching of teachers, and thereby on the fullness and clarity with which the rising generations will understand and experience the meaning and value of literature. The issues are also connected with even larger issues now under wider debate—issues concerning the nature of human cognition and creativity and ultimately human power and freedom.

Notes

1. For a somewhat more extended treatment of these phenomena, see my “The Concept of Genre and Eighteenth-Century Studies” in New Approaches to Eighteenth-Century Literature: Selected Papers from the English Institute. [Editors’ Note: Chapter 2 of this volume.]

2. For a specific difference-in-likeness conception of Pamela and Clarissa as well as of Joyce’s Portrait and Ulysses within a continuous theory of novel forms, see my “Defoe, Richardson, Joyce, and the Concept of Form in the Novel” in Autobiography, Biography, and the Novel. [Editors’ Note: Chapter 8 of this volume.]

3. Michael Polanyi gives a compact account of his views in The Tacit Dimension.

4. See Noam Chomsky’s relatively untechnical account of these matters in Language and Mind (21 ff., 250).

5. I came across the story as a giveaway item on a shop counter: so far as I know it is anonymous.

7. Among the critics referred to I am particularly indebted to Rosenheim (216–18); Sacks, *Fiction and the Shape of Belief* (7–12, 31–44); and to R. S. Crane, “The Houyhnhnms, the Yahoos, and the History of Ideas.”

8. “Scrutinize closely the particulars of a comprehensive entity and their meaning is effaced, our [tacit] conception of the entity destroyed” (Polanyi, *Tact Dimension* 18).

9. See Popper’s *Conjectures and Refutations* (317 ff).

10. When Fish asserts further that “in the end the only unqualified recommendation I can give [the method] is that it works” (426), he seems not to recognize that this means only that his hypothesis, in common with other hypotheses, can find confirmation in the apparent facts.
The subject of this essay is not genre in the prescriptive and conventional sense we associate with the eighteenth century itself, but rather a more fundamental conception of genre that I believe needs to be made the basis of any poetics capable of accounting for the realities of our literary experience. But since our common subject here is the future of eighteenth-century studies, I shall develop my views, with one exception, entirely in terms of eighteenth-century examples and in conclusion will suggest briefly some significant ways in which adequate generic conceptions might improve and clarify not only the formal but also the historical and cultural study of eighteenth-century literature.

By and large modern critical theory and practice have not seen generic distinctions as really significant. The main line of modern criticism has tended to conceive poetry and all literary structures as belonging in effect to a single genre, the genre of statement. In this almost universally accepted view poetry is a special kind of statement the meaning and value of which are to be identified with the peculiar syntactic and lexical structure alleged to be its vehicle.¹ This emphasis on the primacy of the sentence-statement seems to have developed originally as an attempt to defend the significance of literature against the threat posed by the reductive conceptions of meaning put forth with apparent authority by philosophers claiming to speak in the name of science. The arguments of these logical positivists—men like Carnap, Morris, and the early Wittgenstein—seemed to restrict meaning and truth value only to sentence statements meeting special conditions of logical form and empirical verifiability. Literary discourse, in such a view, had no significance at all, or at best
an emotive one. The early theorists of the New Criticism—Ransom, Tate, and Brooks—following at a distance the lead of I. A. Richards, tacitly accepted the charge and attempted to turn the alleged defect of literary meaning into a virtue by asserting that the sentence-statements of literature were by their very nature not subject to the ordinary rules of language or logic or the claims of actuality; the freedom of literature from these bothersome restraints, in fact, somehow made it the “completest mode of utterance” (Richards 163). From such origins derives the pervasive emphasis of modern criticism on the contralogicality of poetic statement, its lack of meaning in the ordinary sense—upon irony, ambiguity, paradox, tension, texture, metaphor, etc.; hence also the emphasis on its autonomy—its formal disjunction from any external agency, reference, or intention—the concomitant doctrines of the intentional, biographical, and affective fallacies, and the development of the concepts of the free-floating dramatic speaker and persona.

The price paid for this array of defensive armament has been high, for these doctrines in effect deny semantic coherence to literary structures and eliminate the principle of excluded contradiction from critical discourse itself. Their use has therefore made it possible to validate any desired interpretation of a literary work, however arbitrary, and brought us increasingly into a situation in which, because literary works can be held to mean nearly anything, they seem in effect to mean nothing at all. Thus in defending literature its friends have inadvertently reduced it to the nonsense the positivists said it was and led some recent critics actively to embrace the meaninglessness of literature as the sign of its profundity. But it seems very likely now that the positivists were wrong—premature and narrow, as Sir Karl Popper has shown, in their notions even of scientific discourse, and that in consequence the literary doctrines developed in reaction to them were also wrong. The positivist doctrine that all significant sentence-statements are to be understood as referring to or describing some empirical fact has been effectively challenged, from an orientation close to its own, by J. L. Austin and his followers, who have demonstrated that sentences in use express many kinds of significant acts beyond stating or describing. They may communicate judgments, threats, promises, commands and, in short, do all the things that men have always supposed they were able to do with language. But speech act philosophy is only one of several disciplines which have indicated in recent years that the great and interesting task in the study of meaning is not to prescribe to man what he can know and how he should know but to try to gain some insight into the astonishing tacit knowledge and means of tacit knowing that he already possesses but does not consciously understand or ordinarily even become aware of.
An important general fact about the cognitive operations of the human mind is illustrated, I believe, by Figure 1, my version of the rabbit-duck which has been put to so many epistemological uses. Notice that it can be perceived either as a rabbit-like creature oriented toward the right or a duck-like creature oriented toward the left; notice also that it is impossible to see it as both at the same time, that our perceptive apparatus will not accept the ambiguity. Why should this be? Most fundamentally and obviously, I think, because our minds have been developed by evolution to enable us to operate in a world external to us which we must scan and interpret accurately and decisively if we are to survive. That we see any form at all in these loose curves enclosing a dot clearly testifies to this meaning-seeking faculty as does the fact that we are able to see the two things we do see only alternately. The mind by its nature actively seeks to impose meaning and to eliminate ambiguity in its encounters with the world, and so it must certainly be also with language.

I mean by this that the mind in responding to a piece of language scans and interprets it so as to discover that meaning which renders the whole coherent and significant, to the exclusion of partial and incomplete meanings. In doing this the mind is pervasively dependent on the sort of interpretive assumptions about agentiality and intention that poetic theory has commonly proscribed as heretical. Take, for instance, the simple imperative sentence, “Close the door!” Considered in syntactical and lexical terms alone, the sentence might be said to have only one unequivocal meaning. Yet considered as a sentence in possible use it has a potentially infinite number of meanings. Consider if you will the different significances that one would assign to the sentence if it were uttered (1) by a man shivering from the effects of a draft; (2) by one man to another
who had come in without closing the door; and (3) by a man who had been told that his long-estranged son was coming down the hall to see him. The effective differences in meaning could best be indicated by the use of three quite different sentences—something like “I’m cold!” in the first instance; “You’re rude!” in the second; and “I don’t want to see him” in the third. One might go on indefinitely making the sentence mean other things, but perhaps the essential point is clear: The interpreter of a sentence in use does not gather its meaning from the words taken in themselves, and he does not entertain all the meanings which the words separately and together might have; rather he assigns a single coherent meaning by inferring intention, asking himself not, “What do these words mean?” but something like “What must the speaker mean to have used these words in this situation?” He asks himself this question and ordinarily gets his answer so rapidly that he is scarcely aware of the process, scarcely aware, without reflection, that the words in fact contain other possibilities of meaning.

Such facts as these, it seems to me, raise the strong presumption that the understanding we have of literature and the pleasure we take in it do not in fact derive from a reaction to specially literary disjunctions in the structure of the sentences themselves but, just the opposite, from a comprehensive inferential grasp of an author’s overall creative intention in a work, which allows us to eliminate in the act of reading any potential incoherencies and ambiguities which cannot be resolved within our appreciation of the coherence of the whole.

The curious idea that literature, the highest use of language, involves ambiguous meanings floating free of intentional coherence to be gathered by the critic as he will is challenged by the most obvious facts of our everyday experience with language. I may illustrate this conveniently by an example which I have often used in teaching. In the motion picture “Up the Down Staircase,” the heroine, a fledgling English teacher, begins her first class in a slum high school by writing on the board the line “There is no frigate like a book,” whereupon the students burst into coarse laughter. The teacher does not intend and is not aware of the bawdy ambiguity which the class perceives in the unfamiliar word “frigate,” and the class’s instant and intuitive recognition of this fact is the basis of the laughter which they direct at her. Let us now imagine the same ambiguity employed in another situation. Let us imagine a man explaining the names of various kinds of ships to some dullard who keeps asking, “What was the name of that one ship again?” whereupon the exasperated explainer replies, “I said frigate.” In this case an audience would automatically laugh with the speaker and at the questioner. The fact illustrated is known indubitably to us all: whether or not an ambiguity is registered as a virtue in expression is directly dependent upon whether or not it is judged to be intended, and this judgment is made by the hearer as an inherent part of his basic act of interpretation. It is indeed
strange that this difference which in ordinary communication constitutes the difference between wit and foolishness should be obliterated by a dogma of criticism, as if ordinary men could make their significant intentions clear to us but poets could not.

Let us now consider how the principle of interpretation according to inferred intention might bear upon a more complex piece of language. In an essay of characteristic force, Stanley Fish examines the sentence by Sir Thomas Browne, “That Judas perished by hanging himself, there is no certainty in Scripture: though in one place it seems to affirm it, and by a doubtful word hath given occasion to translate it; yet in another place, in a more punctual description, it maketh it improbable and seems to overthrow it” (qtd. in “Literature in the Reader” 123–24). Professor Fish’s analysis of this sentence is a notable example of his method, with which we are all familiar and which is a logical extension of the general New Critical position I have described. Professor Fish offers an analysis of the developing responses of the reader to the words as they succeed one another, as if the reader were conscious of and actively entertained all the meanings which the words at each stage of reading might potentially produce; and he emerges with the conclusion that this sentence, with its twists and turns and series of indefinite it’s, does not “yield a declarative statement,” that it offers us “no information,” but simply the experience of attempted but unsuccessful interpretation which is itself to be taken as the significance of the sentence (125).

That this analysis and conclusion are correct I do not believe. I do not believe that we read this or any other sentence in the piece-meal way Professor Fish suggests, taking the opportunity to go up as many semantic sidetracks toward dead ends as each segment of language considered independently might permit. If it were so, language would be of no more use to us than to the builders of Babel. Rather I believe that, even without a context, a reader reads this sentence (fairly easily) as he reads all sentences, by hypothesizing a comprehensive intention in terms of which the words make collective sense, to wit: “There is no certainty in Scripture that Judas perished by hanging himself. Though in one place it [Scripture] seems to affirm it [that he hanged himself], and by a doubtful word hath given occasion to translate it [that is, by a word of doubtful meaning in the original has prompted a translation which asserts that Judas hanged himself]; yet in another place, in a more punctual [that is, explicit] description, it [Scripture] makes it [the fact of hanging] improbable and seems to overthrow [that is, controvert] it [the fact of hanging].” With its meaning-oriented direction-finder, the mind gets through the tangle of references, emerging not with an experience of meaninglessness but with definite significance joined to a sense of inefficiency of expression. (We may notice, by the way, that the mind acutely attributes this
inefficiency not to the ineptness of the writer, as it would with a sentence from a freshman composition, but to the development of English prose at the time the writer wrote.)

I return now to my suggestion above that the principle of inferred intention applies to literary as well as non-literary discourse. With literature too we understand by asking, “What must the author mean to have used these words?” or, more broadly and accurately, “What significant creative intention must I assume to make these words intelligible?” I substitute “creative intention” for “meaning” to avoid the implication that the sentences of literary works can be understood simply as “making statements” and to lay the basis for my full positive thesis. Though some literary works are properly understood as embodying statements—direct assertions of the author about the world in which we live—they use their sentences not to assert but, in different ways, to represent. They can be said to represent the activity of various kinds of real or imagined agents operating in various kinds of determinate relationship to the author for the sake of the various kinds of significance which such represented structures can have. Just as in our real-life examples language is intelligible only by reference to a significant intention inferred within a communicative situation, so in literary works the language is intelligible only in relation to the author’s presumed intention to realize an inherently significant representational structure.

Such representational structures are identical with genre in the sense in which I am using the term, and they accord more or less well with the various generic categories—lyric, satire, essay, novel, history, etc.—commonly in use, except that common use does not involve a really analytic use of genre nor any recognition that generic structure is the primary determinant of intelligibility and value. Readers are always aware to some degree of making generic assumptions, and critics use them sometimes more, sometimes less explicitly in formulating critical interpretations. But just because generic features are structural, it is difficult for us to become fully conscious of their pervasive determination of intelligibility and effect; like all intuitively apprehended structures, they tend to remain covert. What I wish now to demonstrate is that the literary force of literary sentences does indeed arise from their placement within and contribution to the cognitive force field of the generic structure in which they are embedded and not atomistically and additively from any inherent character of their own as sentences. In order to illustrate at the same time some varieties of generic structure and the different kinds of cognitive operations the mind does in fact perform in its intuitive interpretations of them, I shall take as examples several eighteenth-century masterpieces—Gray’s “Elegy,” Goldsmith’s “Deserted Village,” and Johnson’s “Vanity of Human Wishes,” considered as a group together with “My Last Duchess,” borrowed from the nineteenth century for reasons of
explanatory convenience. I shall move then to a discussion of “The Rape of the Lock,” and conclude with a brief comparative treatment of *Tom Jones* and Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall*. I may point out here that all the poems, with the exception of the “Duchess,” are quite similar in the kind of diction and syntax they employ and that all, with a minor rhyme variant in the “Elegy,” are in iambic pentameter couplets—facts of linguistic similarity which point up the striking differences in imaginative experience offered by the poems.

To begin then with Browning’s “Duchess,” we may notice how vain is any effort to discover the source of its poetic effect in words and syntax taken by themselves. “That’s my last duchess painted on the wall, / Looking as if she were alive. I call / That piece a wonder now,” etc. (1–3). We may compare this with my saying here, “That’s my former colleague seated on the aisle, looking as if he were asleep.” The difference in effect lies not in the slight difference of the words but in what Browning’s words encountered on the page force us to postulate imaginatively in order to understand them.

It is a particularly clear illustration of my general point: as a cognitive necessity, *simply to render the words of the poem intelligible*, we must imagine the Duke as their agent, the gallery and the Duke’s presence in it, the unknown auditor, and the Duke’s as yet unrevealed purpose in speaking to him about the duchess and her portrait. The fourteen words of the opening sentence are a miracle of representational power, but so instantaneously is it performed that most readers accept the Duke’s presence as a matter of no particular remark rather than as what it is, the central aesthetic fact of the poem. So vital has Browning made the Duke’s presence, indeed, that critics often think of him as in effect the sole intelligence understood behind the words of the poem, almost as if he were in fact the real natural person he seems to our overt imagination. Such critics think of Browning’s agency in the poem as something known or inferred extra-formally, outside the imagined experience of the poem. But a simple introspective test will show that this is not so. We may ask ourselves whether in reading we imaginatively hear the words of the poem as spoken by the Duke, and of course we reply that we do. We may then ask ourselves if we understand the rhymes that we hear in the poem as part of the Duke’s speech, and we discover that we do not. This shows that prior to any conscious analysis our imaginations register and respond to the presence of two agents in the intuitive act of construing the poem—a created actor, the Duke, and the immanent creator Browning. The same imaginative fact can be shown by another test. If we imagine the scene imaged in the poem as translated into a cinematic medium—a useful imaginative test to which I shall be resorting again—we shall discover that the vividness and pleasure of the illusion would be sharply decreased, despite the great increment of visual particulars. The reason for this is that the mind responds to the
illusion as relative to the means used to produce it: it requires no art to project an image of this drama as a motion picture of an actor duke speaking the words of the poem to an actor emissary within a scene visually actual to the eye; and the mind would not gain enough re-creative pleasure from the mimetic process to entertain the image as vital illusion; but the delight of the lucid imitation through words alone is so great as to produce an illusion of great intensity and beauty. But if this is so, again it must be that the imagination registers and responds to the Duke not as an independent speaker but with a definite tacit awareness and appreciation of the fabricating poet behind him.

These considerations suggest that the concept of the autonomous dramatic speaker, of which the Duke is surely the most unequivocal example, has generated so much critical confusion primarily because it is a highly oversimplified and explanatorily inadequate concept. A concept of greater explanatory accuracy and utility is the idea of a created agent best called an “actor” (since he may or may not be a literal “speaker,” as the Duke is, but some other kind of agent) projected in specific formal relationship to an immanent poet. I shall be able to consider fully only one more example of such a relationship, in Gray’s “Elegy,” but before doing so I will remark in general that in my view a prime source of difficulty with speaker-persona criticism has been a failure to distinguish adequately the many different kinds of specific functional relationships which such projective agents can have with the poet and a failure to see and consider the relationship as immanently defined by the poet. This failure to give adequate consideration to the controlling intention of the indwelling poet, though it reflects in part no doubt the inherent complexity of such imaginative constructions, derives in significant measure from a physicalist theory of language which has conceived sentences as mere sequences of sound symbols which could carry the meaning only of a single agent since only a single agent could utter them.

Turning now to Gray’s “Elegy,” we may notice that for the better part of two centuries it never occurred to anyone to suppose that the agent of the words in the poem was anyone but the poet Gray in his own proper person, but the interpretive possibilities opened up by modern theory have led some in recent years to the view that the speaker is to be entirely dissociated from Gray, is to be understood merely as a generalized dramatic Spokesman by any reader not perversely bent uponCommitting the biographical fallacy or violating the doctrine of the dramatically autonomous speaker. Now there is in fact a clear intuitive basis for differentiating between Gray the poet and a second actor-agent of whom we are conscious in the poem, but this fact does not make the poem the dramatic monologue that the critics just alluded to hold it to be. The poet/actor relationship in the “Elegy” must be construed and responded to very differently from the poet/actor relationship in Browning’s “Duchess”; it must be construed in a
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way which, when fully conceptualized, complicates and enriches but essentially confirms, from a strictly formal point of view, the old notion of the poem as an expression of the biographical Gray. We may say that in “Elegy” as in the “Duchess” our imaginations respond to a fictive actor implicitly understood as created by a real poet: the actor in the “Elegy” is the man in the churchyard at dusk; the poet is the man who made the poem as an image of the man in the churchyard. In the “Duchess,” however, the Duke is imagined as somatically external to the poet and us and is known as another person is known, from the outside in, his inner self inferred solely from external signs. The effect and significance of our experience of him is like the effect and significance of being the uninvolved completely absorbed observer of another natural person whose inner purpose we apprehend through a continuous act of sequential inference which, beginning in focused curiosity, ends in the satisfaction—and surprise—of full knowledge.

In the “Elegy,” by contrast, the churchyard actor is conceived by the poet from within, so that we participate in his mental activity as if his eyes and his experience had become the poet’s and our own; and the effect and significance of his experience is registered in our consciousness as the effect and significance of our own experience of the external world is registered. That this formal contrast between the two poems is accurate as a matter of objective imaginative fact we may demonstrate to ourselves by transposing the experience of the two poems into cinematic terms. We will see the Duke as an outward presence within the frame of the motion picture screen, gesturing and speaking the words of the poem, whereas with the “Elegy” we will see the scene of the churchyard landscape with the camera imaginatively understood to be the actor’s eyes through which we are looking and with the words of the poem registered as the “voice-over” projection of the actor’s inward stream of meditation with which we are identified. A related confirmational test of the objectivity of the imaginative contrast is a simple reading aloud of the two poems: the reader will discover that he projects the Duke’s voice dramatically as characterizing the “otherness” of the Duke, but that the voice of the “Elegy” will be an ideal extension of the reader’s own voice. Such imaginative facts as these, when they can be unequivocally asserted as universal, constitute very powerful tests for any literary theory with claims to empirical validity.

These considerations directly illuminate, I believe, the intuitive basis of the common reader’s automatic reference to the actor in the poem as “Gray,” though it is also clear that the figure in the poem is imaginatively distinct from Gray, as already specified. In fact a great deal of our pleasure in this poem as in the “Duchess” derives from our intuitive appreciation of their conjoint agency. Consider, for instance, our response to the single word “glimmering” from the line “Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight” (5). Our total apprehension of
the “significance” of the word is a combination of seeming to see the landscape as the actor sees it in the visually unsteady light of the dusk and our implicit simultaneous appreciation of the aesthetic loveliness of the poet’s act of mimesis as he stretches the sight-symbolic word “glimmering” over two metrical feet, using the rippling anapest of the second foot as a verbal correlative of the wavering light.

Poet and actor in the “Elegy” are clearly related then not in the mode of the dramatic monologue but of the dramatic lyric, to use the contrastive terms so brilliantly developed by Robert Langbaum, and it is perhaps worthwhile to say a word more about our assumption of the effective consubstantiality of the poet and actor as characteristic of the dramatic lyric. I believe the assumption derives not only from the imaginative features specified above, but also from our intuitive recognition that that actor, dramatically independent though he is, was built out of a memory of the poet’s, that the experience we share with the actor has the character of an artificial re-creation and/or extrapolation of an experience which the poet did not invent.11 This hypothesis would explain the complex sense of artifice and actuality we have in such poems, and it contributes incidentally to a solution of what has been the most puzzling crux in Gray’s poem—the problem of why the “me” of line four addresses himself as “thee” in line ninety-three and then proceeds to supply himself in roundabout fashion with an imagined epitaph which an imagined rustic might in the future invite the reader to read. The greater Romantic lyric as described by M. H. Abrams was not yet coherently in being, its full lyrical form only beginning to take shape in Gray’s and other hands. Gray moved away in the course of the poem from the explicitly dramatic representation of the actor’s lyrical response to the initial setting and situation toward a more generalized meditation appropriate to eighteenth-century conventions and proceeding more and more as if from the “real I” of the dramatic poet. But the meditation was in fact developed to be an organic part of the lyrical action, as is shown by Gray’s abrupt attempt in the abbreviated first version of the Eton manuscript to conclude the poem not with a generalization but with a resolution, derived from the churchyard meditation, of the actor’s personal problems:

And thou, who mindful of the unhonour’d Dead
Dost in these Notes their artless Tale relate
By Night and lonely Contemplation led
To linger in the gloomy Walks of Fate

Hark how the sacred Calm, that broods around
Bids ev’ry fierce tumultuous Passion cease
In still small Accents whisp’ring from the Ground
A greatful Earnest of eternal Peace

No more with Reason & thyself at Strife;
Give anxious Cares & endless Wishes room
But thro’ the cool sequester’d Vale of Life
Pursue the silent Tenour of thy Doom.

Looking back one sees that from the first the experience represented in the poem is implicitly shaped so as to justify the actor’s positive acceptance of a life of obscurity leading through death to eternal peace. But Gray had a problem. Though he had recreated with complete lucidity the impact of the churchyard experience which had ignited in him the train of thought developed in the poem, he had not represented the continuing personal conflict out of which it had arisen, so that the references, in the original Eton manuscript ending, to his ambition, his strife with reason and himself, as well as the admonition to pursue his silent doom, seem quite unprepared for and aesthetically inert. The conflict was the poet’s in his own proper person, and the attempt to assign it to the actor, his lyrical projection, by addressing him as a “thou” who is writing the poem, though it was a way back from the apparent disengagement of the didactic I, was clearly an external assertion not formally organic with the imaginative reality of the actor, which is figured for the reader entirely in terms of his presence in the churchyard. But, it must have seemed to Gray, there was no other way to bring in and resolve the conflict which made sense of it all; especially after the didactic disjunction, there was no way to build the conflict dramatically into the actor’s response to the stimulus of the churchyard. This difficulty seems to account for Gray’s long delay in completing the poem, but at last he must have hit upon the brilliant if slightly confusing device of projecting (through the “hoary-headed Swain” [97]) a merely hypothetical future for the actorial “thou” which could be represented entirely in terms of the graveyard established as the basis of imaginative probability in the poem. In this way, the preexistent conflict, merely asserted in the original ending, could be fully and harmoniously expressed through the figure of the actor and, in the epitaph, beautifully resolved. By the same means he was able to achieve the effect of special decorum, so finely elucidated by Bertrand H. Bronson, of presenting with dignified obliquity the extremely personal sentiments embodied in the imagined epitaph.12 But we could not appreciate the delicacy of this obliquity at all if we did not intuitively apprehend that the poet Gray and the actor of the poem were effectively identical. And so, returning to the main line of my thesis, we see that in reading the “Elegy” at least commission of a sophisticated version of the biographical fallacy is a formal necessity.
In “The Deserted Village” Goldsmith, writing after the example of Gray’s poem, encounters a similar problem in inverted form. Where Gray’s movement toward apparent meditation was really lyric, Goldsmith’s genuinely didactic poem sprang from such deep personal sources that it verged toward lyric, and, like the “Elegy,” demanded a special formal solution. All of Goldsmith’s formal choices develop his poem steadily in the direction of didactic generality. The opening apostrophe, with its poignant evocation of Auburn’s vanished charms, is immediately followed by a prospective statement of the moral (“Ill fares the land,” etc. [51]) and then a generalization of the Auburn situation to all of England (57–74). Only when the overall didactic course of the poem is thus firmly set does Goldsmith develop the sense of lyric presence at the site of the depopulated village (“Here as I take my solitary rounds” [77]) and indicate the background of personal suffering which stands behind and implicitly energizes the whole creative act of the poem: In a world of long vexation where strong temptations fly, “Remembrance wakes . . . and turns the [far-off childhood] past to pain” (81–82).

Despite the fact that the lyric element is itself immediately generalized (97ff.), we respond to the loving reconstruction of lost Auburn which follows as supporting the public thesis primarily through the sense it communicates of private loss. The imaginary vision is nonetheless strongly followed by a translation of the private significance of the memories into a base for a generalized articulation of the theme, concluding with the encapsulating line, “The country blooms—a garden and a grave!” (302). This is followed by a likewise general contemplation of the lot of the expropriated peasantry which is midway neatly transposed into an account of the specific fate of the Auburn folk in the fearful “distant climes” (341) of Georgia. By this means Goldsmith resolves the expectations attached to the development of the general theme and also those independently raised by the representation of Auburn. (The general and specific exodus had been explicitly foreshadowed in lines 50 and 73 respectively.)

Left unresolved at this point is the sense of personal fate attached to the voice of the poem as grounded in the present landscape of the village. On the one hand the voice never achieves the simulated somatic autonomy of the actor in the “Elegy” but is a mere device for the intensified expression of the theme; on the other hand, as already suggested, it is registered as attached to an emotion which is not subordinate to the didactic intention of the poem but which rather exists prior to and generates it. The voice proceeds from a stylized presence behind which the reader senses the poet, as behind the stylized Auburn he senses what is in fact Lissoy. The burden of this presence demanded discharge but could not be resolved within the merely internal terms of the representation, which would themselves be satisfied merely by the renewed conjunction of the
thematic material with the landscape-located voice: “Even now, methinks, as pondering here I stand, / I see the rural virtues leave the land” (397–98).

The one means of complete resolution was for Goldsmith himself to enter the poem in the only role available, as poet; but a stage-center presentation of himself in his substantive identity would have broken the representational façade and dissipated the force of the didactic message. Goldsmith’s solution was the address to a personified Poetry which permitted first the (subordinated) expression of the emotion externally attached to his poetic role and then an easy transition back to an assertion of his internal poetic theme (“Teach erring man,” etc. [424]), in which the full personal voice is climactically conflated with the public message. Even so, Goldsmith was not himself able to carry this design completely through and accepted finally from Johnson the lines which brought the poem to the emphatic, purely didactic conclusion which the overall form required.

Taken together, the formal problems which developed for Gray in the “Elegy” and for Goldsmith in “The Deserted Village” suggest a larger conflict in the eighteenth century between external didactic norms and the internal logic of the emerging dramatic lyric and, I believe, other genres also, as well as a general means by which historical developments within a given genre might be conceived and analyzed.

The overt message of the four strong lines which Johnson provided for Goldsmith’s poem reminds us that his own powers were best suited to the kind of poetry exemplified in “The Vanity of Human Wishes,” a poem quite properly called a poem of statement since it requires us to assume only the “real I” agency of the poet and an intention to establish, by argument and example, a truth bearing on the conduct of life. But even in this poem, as in poems of similar structure by Pope and others, meaning, effect, and value depend not on syntax and diction considered in themselves but as they are made to realize the mental and moral power of the author in his objectified persuasive act. And of course the “statements” embodied in such a poem can be as empirical, as indubitably true as our sense of life itself: “From Marlborough’s eyes the streams of dotage flow, / And Swift expires, a driv’ler and a show” (315–16). Merely in conceiving the examples our imagination assents to the thesis of the poem and finds its beauty in the austere brevity with which they are adduced.

Critical discussions of “The Rape of the Lock” usually place emphasis on local rhetorical effects and/or large perspectives loosely derived from literary or religious tradition as these are held to bear in a general evaluative way on Belinda and the social world of which she is a part. Valuable as much of this criticism has been, it has seldom attempted to explain either the concrete imaginative force of the work or its large structural features as deriving from Pope’s attempt to realize a specific overall satiric intention. I mean by satire a work whose intelligibility
and value is determined by a formally embodied intention to ridicule an object understood to exist outside the work. It is a work designed to make fun of something or someone, and if there is nothing there to be made fun of, there is no meaning and pleasure for the reader. The triangular psychic mechanism embodied in satire is closely analogous to that described by Freud as essential to the tendentious joke: “Generally speaking, a tendentious joke calls for three people: in addition to the one who makes the joke, there must be a second who is taken as the object of the hostile or sexual aggressiveness, and a third in whom the joke’s aim producing pleasure is fulfilled” (100). In satire, in parallel, we have the author who is understood as constructing the satiric fiction as a means of ridiculing a real human target for the pleasure of the spectator reader.

We understand then that when, in teaching “The Rape of the Lock,” we all as an automatic preliminary tell the story of Arabella Fermor, Lord Petre, and the ravished lock, we do so to fill out and clarify the immanent basis of intelligibility everywhere implied in the poem, most obviously in the line, “This, ev’n Belinda may vouchsafe to view” (4), which makes sense only on the assumption that Belinda has an external counterpart conscious of and responsive to the poet’s representation of her in the poem. This assumption on the reader’s part is the basis of significance and effect throughout.

The pervasive external reference of the “Rape” is tacitly recognized by critics who emphasize the primacy of Pope’s “attitude toward Belinda” but who perhaps do not consciously perceive that the reference is necessarily intuited as external because the details of the fiction, except for the cutting off of the lock itself, have no manifest real-world counterparts, a fact which logically might seem to make the story functionally a fiction independent of fact. But the formal situation involved is exactly parallel to that of a journalistic satire in our own day by a Buchwald or a Hoppe, where one real event—a presidential decision, say—is used as the basis of a dramatic sketch manifestly fictional and yet understood as meaningful and emotionally effective only in relation to the initially given real-world fact.

In order to account for the peculiar structural features of “The Rape of the Lock,” we need to define its precise satiric intention. In the special quality of its ridicule the “Rape” stands at the opposite end of the satiric spectrum from Swift’s Book Four. Where Swift seeks to vex and not at all to divert the reader by making him at once the witness and (through his participation in human nature) the object of attack, both the second and third persons of Freud’s triangle, Pope’s purpose is best defined as an intention to ridicule as a fault the excesses of Belinda’s reaction to the loss of her lock but to do so in the most flattering and pleasing way consistent with its still appearing to be a fault. The reader’s pleasure in the poem derives from his knowing complicity in the
benevolent fun being made of Belinda, his appreciation of the easy readiness of invention and bland urbanity of manner with which the poet makes good everywhere his pretence, at once flattering and reductive, to take Belinda’s vanity more seriously than she does herself, to create in his shimmering fiction its objective correlative, transparently false but mimetically indubitable. Where others might see merely a vain girl with her nose in the air, Pope reveals her justification in a dazzling retinue of invisible sylphs. Where others might say that Belinda had unbecomingly lost her temper, Pope describes it all with straight face as resulting entirely from the machinations of Umbriel and his visit to the Cave of Spleen, things for which Belinda obviously cannot be blamed. (Anyway, it is not Belinda but Thalestris who speaks the words of Belinda’s anger.) Even when in 1717 it seems necessary to add a moral to make Belinda’s fault a little more definite, Pope certainly does not place it in the usual place for morals, in unflattering emphasis at the end, nor even offer it in his own voice. Rather, with artful ventriloquism, he gives it obliquely, through Belinda’s enemy, Clarissa, at the beginning rather than the end of the last canto. There, of course, he had already, in 1712, offered his assurance that the lock had risen to the glory of a star, though seen, to be sure, only by his own “quick, poetic eyes” (V 124). What beautiful final fun to make of Belinda’s overevaluation of her lost lock, but there it still is, at the poem’s end, shining in immortal flattery.

Since I have dealt here only with structural features usually neglected in analysis, I shall indicate briefly how, as with the “Elegy,” the generic principle informs not only the large features but the smallest particularities of diction as well. If we consider, for instance, the single word “appears” in the line “A heav’nly Image in the Glass appears” (I 125) we see that its force derives from the lucidity with which it conveys at once the fiction of the mystical apparition of deity and the correlated literal fact of the instantaneous materialization of Belinda’s reflection in the mirror which speciously justifies the poet’s pretense to believe his fiction. The same fact holds for, “To that she bends, to that her Eyes she rears” (I 126)—a simultaneous rendering of the fictive acts of worship and the literal movements of primping—as well as for all the other often-appreciated *double entendres* of this magical passage. (It is worth noticing in passing that the double references of the passage are sometimes referred to as “metaphorical,” whereas they are more properly described as merely the local manifestation of the satiric fictional surface which throughout overlays the representation of the literal satiric target beneath; the passage is metaphorical in the same sense that the sylphs and the Cave of Spleen are metaphorical, not in a general poetic way, but in a way peculiar to satiric structures.)

I have meant in this analysis to show the critical power of considering satire in terms of unifying generic intention rather than through local rhetorical
devices and/or allusive contexts, but one final point may be necessary to make my conception of satire fully clear and protect me from an obvious criticism. Though I hold that a work like “The Rape of the Lock” must be imaginatively construed as attacking an object outside itself and therefore located in time, I do not conceive the value of the greatest of such works to be limited by their time-bound reference. The permanent quality of such poems depends on two factors: (1) the degree of aesthetic perfection with which the satiric act of the poet is embodied in the work; and (2) the degree to which a knowledge of the external object adequate to a full response is internally inferable from the work itself. “The Rape of the Lock” is the greatest and most continuingly vital of our verse satires because it fully meets both of these conditions. “Absalom and Achitophel,” on the other hand, though a construction of great aesthetic power, has not so vital a continuing life because of its weakness in respect to the second condition.

Before concluding I have time to offer two brief final examples of generic analysis, one of a novel, one of a history—*Tom Jones* and Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall*, examples also used in a recent study which badly blurs what I believe is a polar contrast in intelligibility and value between fictive and factual narratives. I have elsewhere taken the position, not obvious even to some quite sophisticated critics, that true stories and fictitious stories differ not only in their extrinsic relationship to the real world but in their intrinsic imaginative structure, which invites and requires the assumption of factuality or fictionality, as the case may be, to be properly understood and responded to. I have argued further that factual works which achieve the status of literary masterpieces raise the essential fact they offer us out of hypothetical existence and display it to our imaginations as inherently true in the act of conception and inherently valuable because of some permanent relevance to human nature and/or some universal aspect of the human situation.

The experienced value of Gibbon’s work depends very much upon our sense that the events it treats were not invented but, in Carlyle’s phrase, “did in very fact occur.” Gibbon has recorded the “strong emotions” which agitated his mind as he first approached and entered Rome and told how, “after a sleepless night,” he “trod with a lofty step” the ruins of the Forum: “each memorable spot where Romulus stood, or Tully spoke, or Caesar fell, was at once present to my eye; and several days of intoxication were lost or enjoyed before I could descend to a cool and minute investigation”). (*Memoirs* 134). It was a few days later, “as I sat musing amidst the ruins of the Capitol, while the bare-footed friars were singing vespers in the Temple of Jupiter, that the idea of writing the decline and fall of the city first started to my mind” (*Memoirs* 136). The giant fragments of magnificence before him must have led his imagination outward
in space and backward in time and forced it to an overwhelming inference of
the past grandeur of the empire at the same moment that they bore most elo-
quent witness to the fact of its ruin. His history may be considered an image
constructed to be objectively adequate to the knowledge and consequent emo-
tion arising from that moment of grand surmise. In reading the book, as we
watch emperor succeed emperor, grand hopes arise, desperate ambitions lapse;
as wave after wave of barbaric incursion is followed by repulse, stabilization,
absorption, and new incursion; as century yields to century and the very sub-
stance of the empire shifts, dissolves, and reconstitutes itself beneath the names
and images of its institutions and traditions, we come to grasp what Gibbon
grasped and what we could never otherwise have imagined—the stupendous
magnitude of the Empire and how infinitely beyond individual understanding
and control the long oscillating process of it was. The effect of Gibbon’s history
depends not as we might casually suppose upon any intricate explanatory truths
he offers, or upon the validity of an overall “theory of history,” but simply upon
the indubitable image he makes of some primal facts: that the Roman Empire
was a grand and awesome human achievement, that it passed out of existence,
and that those living during its decline—“the greatest, perhaps, and most awful
scene in the history of mankind” (History 4: 350)—were neither aware of it,
nor able, if they had been, to prevent it. (“It was scarcely possible that the
eyes of contemporaries should discover in the public felicity the latent causes
doing and corruption” [History 1: 32].) The history offers in sum a deeply
moving factual image of the proud resilience with which a high civilization
maintained its massive life against the blind forces of dissolution: “The decline
doing,” Gibbon says, “was the natural and inevitable effect of immoderate
greatness. Prosperity ripened the principle of decay; the causes of destruction
multiplied with the extent of conquest; and as soon as time or accident had
removed the artificial supports, the stupendous fabric yielded to the pressure
of its own weight. The story of its ruin is simple and obvious; and instead of
inquiring why the Roman empire was destroyed, we should rather be surprised
that is subsisted so long” (History 2: 386).

Concurrently with his perception of the grand spectacle the reader is offered
empathetic participation in the counterpoising act of the lucid intellect which
conceives it all. Gibbon’s measured irony and urbane detachment, reflecting
his commitment to the most characteristic values of the civilization he memo-
ralizes, imply as well his recognition and deep acceptance of his own and the
collective fate. (Gibbon tells his story throughout with the almost melancholy
languor of one who, like Eliot’s Tiresias, has foreseen and foresuffered all—as
indeed he had at the ruins of the capitol—and is therefore beyond enthusiasm
or surprise.)
Whereas in a fictional work the intention to produce an emotional effect precedes and shapes narrative substance, in a factual work emotional effect rises out of and completes the apprehension (as true) of an aspect of objective fact. The factual artist must reveal, not fabricate, the object of emotion, or the effect is lost. In Gibbon’s work the effect is left to emerge unbidden from the overall construction of the facts but at crucial points is brought to explicit expression. In his first paragraph, for instance, Gibbon begins by locating the empire in the past and evoking its grandeur—“In the second century of the Christian era, the empire of Rome comprehended the fairest part of the earth and the most civilized portion of mankind. The frontiers of that extensive monarchy were guarded by ancient renown and disciplined valour. The gentle but powerful influence of laws and manners had gradually cemented the union of the provinces” (History 1: 2)—goes on at once to register with unbroken syntactical calm the seeds, then unperceived, of inevitable decay—“Their peaceful inhabitants enjoyed and *abused* the advantages of wealth and luxury. The image of a free constitution was preserved with *decent* reverence: the Roman senate *appeared* to possess the sovereign authority and devolved on the emperors all the executive powers of government” (History 1: 2)—and returns to the full note of civilized felicity before striking, with restrained but reverberating force, the pendant and climactic chord of incipient tragedy: “During a happy period of more than fourscore years, the public administration was conducted by the virtue and abilities of Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, and the two Antonines. It is the design of this and of the two succeeding chapters to describe the prosperous condition of their empire, and afterwards, from the death of Marcus Antoninus, to deduce the most important circumstances of its decline and fall, a revolution which will ever be remembered and is still felt by the nations of the earth” (History 1: 2).

The formal principle becomes likewise explicit in the opening sentences of the famous chapters on Christianity: “A candid but rational inquiry into the progress and establishment of Christianity may be considered as a very essential part of the history of the Roman empire. While that great body was invaded by open violence, or undermined by slow decay, a pure and humble religion gently insinuated itself into the minds of men, grew up in silence and obscurity, derived new vigor from opposition, and finally erected the triumphant banner of the Cross on the ruins of the Capitol” (History 1: 221). The latter sentence (a close equivalent of Gibbon’s initiating experience) reindicates the pervasive fact of the empire’s magnitude (“that great body”), notes unconcerned the cooperating cancers of external and internal barbarism, and with serene irony creates the subjective victory of rational civilization in the antithesis which marks its objective defeat at the hands of superstition.
The meaning, beauty, and value of Gibbon’s narrative then depend upon its truth as realized to the reader’s imagination. Just as clearly the meaning, beauty, and value of *Tom Jones* depend on its fictionality, on the reader’s appreciation of the fact that the shape of events presented to his imagination has been constructed, not reported, by the author. In another essay I have argued that the general novel form described by R. S. Crane, after Aristotle, in terms of the concept of “action” (of which *Tom Jones* is a comic subtype) is, in effect, an objective fantasy, since its structural rationale is the pleasurable resolution of a dynamically developed tension deriving from the reader’s induced wishes for a character’s fate as compared with his induced expectations. In such novels our sense of reality is (more or less fully and deeply) accommodated to the pressure of our wishes, values, and beliefs. In *Tom Jones* specifically we respond to the author’s direction of our desires and expectations for Tom, so that in the end what we had wished for him against the appearances of a world only seemingly like the random real one we inhabit, comes miraculously to pass, as the world of apparent reality becomes the world of realized desire. The world of *Tom Jones* is, then, fundamentally a world of wish, of hope, of (in its specific case) rehearsal of providential faith. The most fundamental source of this providential sense is the fact that those actions of Tom which establish his desert are also understood as the necessary but not sufficient cause of his coordinate good fate, so that the lines of coincidence which lead to that fate are accordingly registered as finally determined by transcendent agency. “The Lord disposeth all things,” says Allworthy, and in the book we participate in the pleasing illusion that He does, within a more fundamental awareness that it is Fielding who contrives it all. The Fielding-Gibbon contrast illustrates as well as I can in a short space my contention that the more explicitly and precisely our experience of fictive and factual stories is analyzed, the more clearly it appears that they are, as common sense would suppose, polar in structure and significance.

Moving now toward conclusion I may remark that if many of my observations on the works discussed here seem obvious, I make no apology, since they ought to seem so if they are indeed as I have claimed merely an explicit and systematized articulation of an intuitive understanding of literary structures which we all possess as a potential dimension of our natural cognitive capacity. But if my observations and their theoretical basis are even something like the truth, it would seem likely that the main line of contemporary literary study has gone harmfully wrong, not of course in its best practice, but in fostering a theory which permits and even encourages irresponsible critics to distort and override the native limits of significance in literary structures. Such a theory in effect exempts critical assertion from the principles of logic and the standards of meaning which are the necessary conditions of significant argument, so that,
as I initially observed, by permitting literature to mean anything, such a theory leaves it in effect meaning nothing. By contrast the kind of theoretical view for which I have argued does not conceive literature as characterized by a special syntax and a coordinate plurisignation upon which the critic may ring whatever semantic changes he will, but as a system of structures, self-intelligible and self-justifying, which, through their embodiment in language, are developed and comprehended by imaginative extension of the mind’s inherent capacity to grasp and respond to the world of which it is a part.

Such a theoretical point of view suggests also a significant reversal of emphasis in our understanding of the interdependence of the values embodied in literature and those values associated with the religious beliefs and myths of the past. In our nostalgia for the grand faiths of traditional Western culture, for its spiritual splendors and the dignity, reflecting the Great Chain of Being, supposedly attached to its hierarchical social structure, we have been led too easily to conceive the experienced value of the literary work as if it were in fact identical with an external structure of value once vitally located—and now lost—in the past, whereas the view outlined here would emphasize value as inhering in the embodied cognitive act of the work itself and see in it our most vital means of access to whatever in the values of the past was truly valid and universal.

More particularly as concerns the historical study of literature, a generic approach would encourage students to conceive more accurately the specific nature of the literature of a particular historical period, the eighteenth century in our present view. Rather than emphasizing exclusively the homogeneities that have indeed been shown to pervade the century’s literature—its tendency toward generality, clarity, and simplicity, toward overt formality and stylization, toward didacticism; its preoccupation with classical models, conventions, and traditions—a richer kind of historical analysis could be produced through an endeavor to discover precisely how such homogeneities are brought into creative relationship with differing kinds of generic structure, how different forms are differently adjusted to the larger lines of cultural force. Attention could also be paid to the problem of why certain genres flourish at certain times—why for instance the great achievements of the early eighteenth century should be in satire, of the mid-century in the novel, of the late century in factual prose.

Most significantly of all, perhaps generic concepts could be combined with historical studies in an attempt to write a genuine literary history, a history that would attempt to understand the processes involved in the invention and development of generic forms in themselves, the kind of history, envisaged by the late R. S. Crane and exemplified, to select a notable example to which I have already alluded, in M. H. Abrams’s account of the structure and genesis of the greater Romantic lyric. Through such study we could come to a fuller
and more accurate understanding of literature as a primary manifestation of the characteristic freedom of the human spirit, its capacity to invent and develop in time forms of imaginative self-discovery and expression which in their aesthetic autonomy are a chief vehicle of its triumph over time.

Notes

1. I have in mind here specifically Maynard Mack’s statement in an influential article that “all poetry is in some sense poetry of statement” (20), but the idea is pervasive in modern criticism, as for instance in the notion that even novels are to be understood as expressing “themes.”

2. Perhaps the clearest example of this procedure is Allen Tate’s criticism of the positivism of Charles W. Morris and the early Richards while effectively accepting the validity of the positivist analysis in his concept of a complex poetic “tension,” a somewhat obscure notion in which “extension” and “intension” are combined in a specially valid semantic status, the precise nature of which Tate does not manage to make clear. (See “The Present Function of Criticism,” “Literature an Knowledge,” and “Tension in Poetry,” collected with other essays in On the Limits of Poetry [46–47, 82–83].) Tate’s “tension,” like Ransom’s “texture,” Brooks’s “paradox,” and Empson’s even more influential “ambiguity,” all seem concepts deriving in parallel fashion from Richards’s own attempts to convert the terms of his early reductive conception into a view of poetry in its special complexities as the “completest mode of utterance.”

3. On this matter see the 1958 preface to Popper’s The Logic of Scientific Discovery (“Unfortunately, there seems to be no such thing as the ‘language of science’” [20–21]) and the extended discussion of Carnap’s philosophy offered by Popper in Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge, particularly the section titled “Carnap and the Language of Science” (264–73).

4. See J. L. Austin, How to Do Things with Words and John R. Searle, Speech Acts. The basic semantic facts described by these philosophers were independently (and for literary analysis, more usefully) developed (in 1952) by Elder Olson in terms of his distinction between lexis and praxis in language. See his essay “William Empson, Contemporary Criticism and Poetic Diction.” (After this was written I encountered H. P. Grice’s article “Utterer’s Meaning and Intentions,” which offers a view of meaning as determined by inferred intention significantly different from that of Austin and Searle and essentially similar, if I understand Grice’s complex argument, to the one I employ below.)

5. The general processes of our “tacit knowing” have been extensively considered by Michael Polanyi, who seems to have originated the term. See Polanyi’s The Tacit Dimension for a short introduction and, for fuller treatment, his Personal Knowledge and the essays collected in Knowing and Being.

6. On the ambiguity of the rabbit-duck and visual ambiguity in general, see E. H. Gombrich’s Art and Illusion (5–7, 232–41). The views Gombrich develops on the relation of ambiguity to inferred intention and determining context serve to support the similar views advanced below about literature.

7. In The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems, J. J. Gibson shows that this assen-
tion holds even at the level of sensory experience. Basing his argument on a comprehensive synthesis of the available experimental evidence, Gibson demonstrates that the senses cannot be adequately conceived as rigidly separated channels for the passive reception of amorphous data but must be understood rather as coordinated systems which actively seek out definitive information about the structure of the environment in which they have been developed by evolution to operate: "The activity of orienting and that of exploring and selecting—the commonsense faculty of attending—is seen to be one that extracts the external information from the stimulus flux while registering the change as subjective feeling. . . . Perceptual development and perceptual learning are seen as a process of distinguishing the features of a rich input, not of enriching the data of a bare and meaningless input. A perceptual system hunts for a state of what we call 'clarity.' Whatever this state is physiologically, it has probably governed the evolution of perception in the species, the maturation of perception in the young, and the learning of perception in the adult" (320; my emphasis). Gibson's radical but strongly confirmed hypothesis seems to contradict the basic assumptions of logical positivism and to support the view of Sir Karl Popper that human knowledge is not built up inductively from atomistic sense data but is developed rather as a chain of progressively refined hypotheses whose earliest source is the innate evolutionary endowment of the mind (Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations* 47).

8. The views expressed in the last two paragraphs have obviously been influenced by those put forth by Elder Olson in "William Empson, Contemporary Criticism and Poetic Diction," in *Critics and Criticism*, as my analysis of the New Critical position in general has obviously been influenced by essays in the same volume by Crane. But my views about the primacy and complexity of inferred intention are deliberately more radical than those of either Olson or Crane, and I have tried to make my conception of genre more comprehensive and more precise. I plan to discuss the relationship at greater length in a book on generic form now in progress, which will in part be an expansion of the materials of the present essay.

9. Examples of such interpretations are conveniently available, with others, in H. W. Starr's *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Gray's "Elegy": A Collection of Critical Essays*.

10. The definite but quite different ways in which intuition permits the poet's name to be related to his agent in various kinds of dramatic poems does not bear out the doctrine that such agents are uniformly detached and autonomous. In dramatic monologues like "My Last Duchess," as already indicated, the agent is emphatically "other" than the poet and never confused with him, whereas the agents in "Dover Beach" and "The Windhover," like the agent in the "Elegy," can casually be referred to as "Arnold" or "Hopkins" without drawing protest from an undergraduate class (or even more sophisticated critics), though consideration of the dramatic representation will always produce qualification of this response. In sharp contrast, the agents in "Tintern Abbey" and *In Memoriam* must be referred to as "Wordsworth" and "Tennyson." These differences seem to betoken important generic distinctions.

11. If the reader attempts to explain the artistic rationale of the choice of Dover Beach as the setting for Arnold's dramatic lyric, he may be surprised to discover that he has assumed that the experience represented in the poem was not invented and assigned to Dover Beach but in fact took place there. Similarly, though we have no knowledge that Hopkins was ever enraptured by the sight of a windhover at dawn, no reader would be surprised if a letter turned up recording such an experience.

12. See Bronson's "On a Special Decorum in Gray's Elegy," reprinted in his *Facets of the Enlightenment*. The argument of the whole paragraph is essentially a translation of the
substance of Bronson’s analysis into generic terms, so that where he emphasizes the peculiar structure of the “Elegy” as resulting from the poet’s sense of personal decorum, I see it more as the consequence of a potential formal impasse in the poem.

13. The notion of satire as directing ridicule against a target existing outside the work itself is conventional, though its full analytical implications are seldom developed. My own use of the term assumes the rigorous working out of the concept offered by Sheldon Sacks, *Fiction and the Shape of Belief* (5–12, 31–49).

14. Though I do not entirely agree with the concept of satire as a genre put forth by Edward W. Rosenheim in his *Swift and the Satirist’s Art*, I have nevertheless been influenced by his arguments and particularly by the concept of “satiric fiction” as advanced on pages 17–23 and elsewhere.

15. Our pleasure in the epic allusions of the poem and its adherence to epic conventions derives not, as is often implied, from their “meaning” taken in some loosely ideational way but from our perception of the ingenuity and brilliance of the poet’s adaptation of them to his precise satiric needs. The same kind of confusion of agent-of-ridicule with vehicle-of-meaning lies beneath much of the controversy concerning Book Four of *Gulliver’s Travels*. See Sacks, *Fiction and the Shape of Belief* (11).

16. I refer to Leo Braudy’s *Narrative Form in History and Fiction*. Braudy does not totally override the distinction between fiction and history, but he seems at times to come close to it, as when he builds upon Fielding’s reference to his works as “histories” an illegitimate comparison of the problems and methods of the two modes (91 ff.) or makes such a statement as: “He [Fielding] defines in the narrator of *Tom Jones* the model historian who constructs from the materials of observation, learning, and authority an appropriate causal pattern, without necessity but with plausibility, and totally fitted to the varied world in which we must live” (180). Having moved fiction toward fact, Braudy moves fact toward fiction, emphasizing that Gibbon “shapes and gives meaning to history” (257) as opposed to the possibility that Gibbon discovers and represents a particular objective aspect of historical truth. Much of Braudy’s analysis of Gibbon’s shaping presence in his history is accurate and valuable, but it is achieved at the expense of underemphasizing the factual authenticity of its effect, as the whole argument of Braudy’s book is developed at the expense of obscuring a fundamental and analytically essential generic distinction.

17. My argument on this point is developed most fully in my essay “Defoe, Richardson, Joyce, and the Concept of Form in the Novel” in *Autobiography, Biography, and the Novel*. See also “Literary Form in Factual Narrative: The Example of Boswell’s *Johnson*” [Editors’ Note: Chapter 5 in this volume].

18. See my “Literary Form in Factual Narrative: The Example of Boswell’s *Johnson*” [Editors’ Note: Chapter 5 in this volume].

19. See the essay cited in note 17 above (33–34); R. S. Crane, “The Concept of Plot and the Plot of *Tom Jones*”; and Sheldon Sacks, *Fiction and the Shape of Belief* (15–20) and elsewhere.

20. The notion that *Tom Jones* incorporates as a peculiar dimension of the reader’s satisfaction a sense of the operation of supernatural agency within the events of the book has been remarked upon by Dorothy Van Ghent, *The English Novel: Form and Function* (78–79), and by Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (217). Robert Wess offers the most rigorously formal account of the origin of this sense in the novel in his fine article “The Probable and
Marvellous in *Tom Jones*; and in my unpublished dissertation “Idea and Structure in Fielding’s Novels,” I trace out the providential pattern in detail and relate it to its conceptual basis in the doctrines of the Latitudinarian divines.

21. See Crane’s “Critical and Historical Principles of Literary History” in *The Idea of the Humanities and Other Essays Critical and Historical*. 
Poets have always been wonderfully moving in their evocations of the pathos of the human condition, our longing for permanence in the midst of perpetual change. One thinks of Spenser asking his God to grant him the sight of that Sabbath when all shall rest eternally, or of Hopkins looking to be translated from the Heraclitean fire of nature into the immortal diamond of eternity. The more modern Joyce, eschewing religious comfort, sought an analogous literary solution to our always recurrent predicament and, at the end of *Ulysses*, from within the darkness of Molly’s imagined body, yields through her to the deep down tidal torrent of Gibraltar, moving into union with the stream of time which plunges from the future to the past, accepting and affirming, in a never-changing literary now, the ceaseless process of change and renewal which lies beneath all life.

These thoughts can provide a basis for my reflections this evening on the counterpoint of change and stability in the small and protected arena of literary academia where, as we all know, the great force for change in recent years has been the new modes of interpretation—variously and in combination structuralist, deconstructive, Marxist, psychoanalytic, feminist—which many, especially in my generation, have responded to with concern as a threat to literary values which we had thought as stable as the pillars of Hercules which mark the shores of Molly’s flow. But many of the best and brightest, the liveliest and most confident, of this generation have embraced these modes, just because for them
they offer life-giving renewal, escape from the outmoded and outworn into fresh channels of personal and moral self-declaration and actualization.

But the vitality of the new interpretational modalities for their practitioners must be measured against the fact that the freight of accumulating interpretation lies on literature increasingly now with a weight heavy as frost and deep almost as its life. Interpretation need not but often now does alienate us from the literary work and insulate us from its power to move, so that our experience of the work is attenuated and impoverished.

If our literary experience is the result of the author’s act directed toward us, interpretation is our act directed toward the work. Our interpretations are always grounded in the purposes of our minds and rooted in the energies of our bodies, so that it is not easy, many would say impossible, for interpretive acts to be accurately and vitally in touch with the immanent act of the writer in the work. But “in touch with” is just the right phrase. We do say that we are “touched” by a work, though the dimension of the work thereby indicated almost never now comes into critical discussion. But theory to the contrary, the very essence by which we know literature is its capacity to offer us a moving meaning, an understanding that touches the body through the mind, within the range that Kenneth Burke has spoken of as reaching from the catharsis of laughter to the catharsis of tears. Literary works are made of words ordered by a meaning which, when we grasp it, moves us in the physical bodies inseparable from our humanity. So it is the rootedness in the body of human action which underlies both our interpretive alienation from the literary work and our experiential communion with it. Our bodies in literature as in life generally are the source both of our incurable separation from each other— islands in Arnold’s unplumbed salt estranging sea—but also the only basis of such interpersonal understanding as we have. (This is the paradoxical predicament that Donne dramatizes lyrically in “The Ecstasy,” Sterne comically in Tristram Shandy.) Our common psychosomatic equipment derived from the universal DNA gives us the capability of tuning in on each other, and even if it is always ultimately our tune we are playing, our glory is still that we can, in the phrase of the social philosopher Alfred Schutz, “make music together.” But it is just this that the Walter Shandy of contemporary criticism, mounted on its various hobby-horses, is not set up to do.

In current discussion the reader and emphatically the critic have come in for their share of priority and honor—the critic’s chest now is full of self-awarded medals marking the theoretically directed triumphs he has won in his campaigns on the field of the text—but the author gets very little. This is a logical consequence of the doctrine of the autonomous work which has governed almost all modern criticism. Only the text itself to be sure can generate our literary experi-
ence, but it is still the author’s purpose that informs the work and designs it so that it can in itself reach us with its feelingful meaning, and it is that feelingful meaning which criticism and theory—and teaching—needs to return to and start again from. Authors themselves, by the same token, never can ignore the reader, whatever their contempt for the critic. They must perforce construct their works so that they will command and animate the imagination and feeling of their readers else they will not be read and remembered and we will not know them. The author must find the reader, and if she or he is a great, a canonical author, will already before interpretation have found him and included him in the communion of the text, the work which the author has made within his or her embodied mind for the embodied mind of the readerly other. If this is the case, then a criticism which asserts its own self-interested perspective upon the author’s text is likely to miss just those structures of aesthetic concord which constitute its inherent and to some degree already experienced value.

Reading feminist criticism, for instance, a male reader of any sensitivity has to be instructed and chastened by the demonstration of the ways in which male domination, exploitation, and suppression have structured and limited female aspiration; and yet that same reader who may all his life have been reading Emily Dickinson, George Eliot, Jane Austen with love and awe may be made uncomfortable and even resentful to see his long familiars treated not in terms of their indubitable membership in that rarest of human categories, literary genius (which no man in his right mind would dream of patronizing) but simply in terms of their identity as women. Do not such writers write, as many women critics have insisted, from a stable female identity of course, but with a focus and sympathy that transcends and moves across and beyond commitment to sexual role? Consider Dickinson, for instance, in those lines we all know—

I heard a Fly buzz—when I died—
The Stillness in the Room
Was like the Stillness in the Air—
Between the Heaves of Storm—

The Eyes around—had wrung them dry—
And Breaths were gathering firm
For that last Onset—when the King
Be witnessed in the Room—

I willed my Keepsakes—Signed away
What portion of me be
Assignable—and then it was
There interposed a Fly—
With Blue—uncertain stumbling Buzz—
Between the light—and me—
And then the Windows failed—and then
I could not see to see—

Imagining out of her own identity, Dickinson gives us access here to an experience without gender, the experience of what none of us can imagine but all of us will come to, the experience of the non-experience beyond death.

Or consider George Eliot in Middlemarch. One of the more remarkable feats of authorial self-transcendence surely is the sympathetic understanding by which Eliot with her grand nature so capable of depths of love but destined by her plain face to be largely unloved displays Lydgate's torpedoing by Rosamond, the reincarnation of the blonde blue-eyed dolls, the Belindas and Madeleines, of male literary idolatry, marking the stages of Lydgate's increasingly devastated awareness of the incurable fix he has got himself into by his adoration of that sylph-like frame and gracefully obstinate neck. Certainly it was a portrait of much greater service to men and the masculine imagination theretofore the willing prisoner of its fantasies than it was to women, and one for which men should and do continue to be grateful.

Jane Austen gives us in Emma an even more striking and moving example of the capacity of female literary genius to conceive and objectify, understand and respond to the male in reciprocity with the female through her portrait of the unequivocally masculine Knightley with his “downright, decided, commanding sort of manner” (45). Early in the novel Knightley says that it would do Emma good to be “in love, and in some doubt of a return” (50). Of course he does not mean with himself. He does not then think that Emma can love him and, like Robert Martin in his own description, Knightley “has too much real feeling to address any woman on the haphazard of selfish passion” (67).

It is Emma’s pride of independence, of course, which so long keeps her from recognizing the clearly marked, subliminally growing love for Knightley which is present in her from the outset, and it is this same pride which is the fault that generates her misfortune, her blunders and vexation, and makes her look erringly to Harriet Smith for companionship rather than to Jane Fairfax or, farther, to her proper and destined companion Knightley. Beyond the vexation of Mr. Elton’s proposal, however, and Knightley’s reprimand for her insult to Miss Bates, and her temporary but deeply salutary belief that she has lost Knightley to Harriet, lies simultaneous self-knowledge and knowledge of her love leading in beautifully cogent reversal to éclaircissement and stable union with Knightley. But though Knightley may think her cured of error, the “sweetest and best of all
creatures, faultless in spite of all of her faults” (342), we know that many readers have not thought her so after her career of wilfulness and have remained restive and unconvinced despite the long denouement that Austen contrives to persuade them. Certainly one bit of Austen’s demonstration, marking its fullness, I think, is so subtle as nearly to escape attention, for it is not often remarked. We remember that Mr. Knightley has early spoken to Mrs. Weston of her long education on “the very matrimonial point of submitting [her] own will” (48) as a marriage partner, so that this value becomes incorporated in the novel’s implicit definition of what an adequately satisfactory outcome of the book and his own ultimate marriage to Emma must be. For her part, however, Emma has delighted in the independence of her unmarried state because she could never “expect to be so truly beloved and important; so always first and always right in any man’s eyes as I am in my father’s” (84); with her father, her will is entirely unsubordinated, though a central part of Austen’s demonstration of her essential virtue is that she is scrupulously careful of her father’s feelings. Austen’s problem was to realize the value of subordination while preserving a full sense of that spirited self-love in Emma which, as Lionel Trilling noted, makes us care about and love her, knowing like Knightley from the outset that she “will make no lasting blunder” (25). The scene in question is quietly climactic. Knightley has been reading his plain-spoken brother’s letter of congratulation upon his engagement and reports to Emma that any other woman might find him cool in her praise. “But,” he continues, “I am not afraid of your seeing what he writes” (366).

“He writes like a sensible man,” replied Emma, when she had read the letter. “I honor his sincerity. It is very plain that he considers the good fortune as all on my side, but that he is not without hope of my growing, in time, as worthy of your affection, as you think me already. Had he said anything to bear a different construction, I should not have believed him.”

“My Emma, he means no such thing. He only means—”

“He and I should differ very little in our estimate of the two,”—interrupted she, with a sort of serious smile—“much less, perhaps, than he is aware of, if we could enter without ceremony or reserve on the subject.

“Emma, my dear Emma—”

“Oh!” she cried with more thorough gaiety, “if you fancy your brother does not do me justice, only wait till my dear father is in the secret, and hear his opinion. . . . He will think all the happiness, all the advantage, on your side of the question, all the merit on mine.” (366)

Emma’s acknowledgment of Knightley’s moral superiority lasts only a moment but it is enough to embarrass Knightley (as well it might) before she
darts off from her moment of smiling seriousness into a more usually assertive gaiety. But Austen has shown us the basis of Emma’s declaration in her delineation of the tact and tenderness, the restraint and respect Knightley has shown Emma, as well as by the criticism which his devotion to her truest self has prompted him to. By imagining her commerce with such a man, Austen articulates her full sense of Emma as a woman. Knightley, like Darcy, is Prince Charming, but he is a fantasy raised to the highest moral power, a wish given realization through, not despite, those moral elements of consciousness which forbid simple indulgence and make for the fullest personal dignity. “I’d like to be married to such a man,” the wish says, “but only on these terms.” But oddly, in that female fantasy, constructed with such complete aesthetic detachment and delight, Austen, who was never to have a Knightley, also makes a realistically ideal figure for men who want to try out for intersexual decency and are in need of education.

The reader’s registration of Emma’s and Knightley’s quick reciprocal sympathy with, and respect for, each other can be taken as a model for, as it is the interface of, the sympathetic commerce of Austen and the reader—two transient embodied subjectivities making cognitive music together through the moral/aesthetic harmonies of the work composed by the one and tuned into by the other. The inter-assured confidence of mutual understanding offered by the author and accepted by the reader in a full experience of the work compares unfavorably with the exploitative relationship of interpreter to text in so much current criticism where the critic seeks conceptual mastery through whatever tricks and turns of domination are required to tame the writer in his text regardless of the cost to its felt integrity. These critics—often supremely literate and articulate—don’t so much write texts of their own as write over the texts of the dispossessed authors, nesting in them like cuckoos. Well might we say of such critics what Molly Bloom says of atheists: “I wouldn’t give a snap of my fingers for all their learning why don’t they go and create something.”

Of course the disenfranchisement of the author follows automatically from the demolition of the subject which has been a central project of current theory. Some Marxist critics are pleased to dissolve the subjectivity of the author into the determinacies of the objective historical process, appropriating the author’s implicitly conceded preestablished value as a valorization of their own analysis, meanwhile displacing and realizing their own subjectivity in its asserted objectivity. But how is one to see *Wuthering Heights*, say, as having any character of historical necessity? If Emily Brontë had not survived to write the book, as like some of her sisters she easily might not, her uniquely heroic literary gesture simply would not have been made—though having been made, it is an ineradicable part of our inherited historical being, at once a cultural banality and an
imaginative splendor conceivable only as an emanation of Brontë’s particular embodied subjectivity. Cultural life and certainly its articulation in literature is, I want to assert against the critical fashion, ultimately a matter of persons, acting individually and in aggregation, not of a priori impersonal structures which override personality. This is offered not just as humanistic piety, which it no doubt is. More important than piety, such a person-centered view is the basis of what I would claim is the most powerful explanation of cultural and particularly literary structures, which can in my view be most successfully conceived as emergences deriving from human choice, construction, and inheritance. Human persons make life’s meanings large and small, and they mutually as human subjects have, as Sir Karl Popper has so powerfully argued, the responsibility for the interactive construction of our human identity, the aggregating self-creation of humanity, and the shape and meaning of history. The challenge, as already suggested, is to refrain from masking our subjective responsibility in false mastering objectivities which are only a means of escape from the real terms of our predicament.

These are grand words, but they point to a real difference in the way we may teach, explain, and open literature to our students and them to it, not as textual high priests, but as embodied humans looking and feeling to understand what other human beings have made, in token of what we are, or might be. Thus we may know our selves in our full humanity, at once, like Joyce with Molly, celebrating our permanence in acknowledging and accepting our transience, admitting that there is no one here but us humans, no meaning that we do not make.
The overall aim of this essay is to show how a single theoretical perspective can articulate and collaterally explain and illuminate both the micro-facts, the pre-analytical shared invariants of our immediate tacit reading experience of literary works, and the macro-facts of our collective experience. The most crucially significant of these macro-facts are the patterns of agreement—and particularly disagreement—in the interpretations which have grown up around major works and rendered them critically problematical. It is in critical disagreement that the complexities of experience most perplexingly but also (potentially) most fruitfully manifest themselves, since the very limitation of understanding that such interpretive shortfall reflects provides a rich test for further explanatory inquiry if we appreciate the fact that patterns of disagreement are as specific as a spectrograph to individual works and therefore offer for decoding an implicit structural characterization of the works as the objects of our experience. Explanatory accounts of individual forms gain power the more their implications are extended to provide collateral and comparative accounts of other members of the same or related genres and, as possible, their historical development as well. Two large examples sketched here are a differential definition of the dramatic monologue and related lyric forms and a historical account of the emergence and development of the English novel, beginning with the unique problematics of Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* and ending with those of Joyce’s *Ulysses*.

Increasingly today, literary theory seems to insulate us from the supreme value of literature—its concrete power to move and unite cognition with feeling. At the same time theory often offers little help to the practical critic.
attempting to come to terms with the particular problems of individual works as they offer themselves through reading experience to understanding. In my own work I have tried to develop a theoretical perspective that on principle seeks to engage, clarify, validate and deepen the facts of immediate experience while at the same time treating the problems which have developed in practical criticism as an index to the obscurities of experience. My view would be that any meaning claimed for a literary work ought to be a moving meaning, a meaning that alters our subsequent reading experience of the text, of its vital context, and that an alleged meaning that cannot be so felt cannot be said to be part of the work. Such an emphasis on feeling implies an intelligent commerce between two embodied minds, the reader’s and the author’s, and a greater regard for the intention of the latter as immanent in the work.

But if full aesthetic experience is properly the beginning and end of interpretation, it is only available—can only be contemplated, articulated, and improved—through interpretation; and despite the ideal of commerce between author and reader, there is always an irreducible gap between experience and interpretation. Our experience may be thought of as resulting from the author’s act as articulated through the work to bend our imaginations to its own ends, whereas our interpretations are our acts attempting to bring the work within the compass and control of our own purpose. The two need not have much to do with each other, and if we seek to improve the fit between them, we must commit ourselves deliberately to direct our interpretation toward experience. I shall try to demonstrate that interpretation can point to direct facts of experience, items universal to readerly consciousness, but my notion of experience and of experiential facts presenting themselves for collateral explanation extends far beyond what is affectively immediate to the widest range of indirect evidence of the nature of the work as constructed to be the cause of experience, including not only the work itself but as already indicated those patterns of agreement and problematic disagreement that interpretation has built up around the work.

Even more largely, I would claim, local interpretation needs to take into view the work in its comparative generic relation to other works. The overall cognitive registration of a work developed in our reading experience exists in implicit differential comparison with our registration of other works, so that we can think of our experience of all literary works together as involving a hierarchy of likeness/difference discriminations moving from a sense at the one extreme of the general similarity as literary works which sets them together off from all non-literary works, to the sense at the other extreme of their particularity as involving a global difference from works most similar to them (such a global difference as exists, for instance, between two Jane Austen novels or, on another axis, two multi-plotted Victorian novels).
By asking interpretation to give conceptual integration to wide ranges of related facts, we not only extend, systematize, and unify our knowledge of constructive possibilities in literature, we also begin to lay the basis for avoiding automatic congruence between interpretation and critical facts. The plague of our interpretive efforts is that interpretations always fit, largely because, as we have come to appreciate, they generate the facts or the perspective on the facts which confirms them. (There is of course additionally always some reciprocality between looseness or incompleteness or ad hoc adjustments and the responsiveness of the “facts” which interpretive formulations are asserted to cover.) This is why I would propose that we always focus our interpretations not just on pieces of literature taken individually but, at least by implicit extension, on relationships between generically affiliated—and differentiated—works and groups of works, hoping thereby to subject our hypotheses to the most rigorous tests possible, in an explanatory situation where agreement between fact and hypothesis has been rendered less automatic. The aim is one general to explanatory endeavor on the scientific model, to seek at once the greatest generality and the greatest particularly of explanation on the basis of the most cogent set of assumptions for doing so. Cogency here means that our assumptions if true would say something significant about the unifying inner nexus of the subject matter about which we inquire. Hypothesizing such a nexus—for me a nexus of authorial invention and inheritance in various genres—we attempt to account systematically for the whole range of literary facts before us.

I will give sustained examples of this kind of explanatory procedure below, but before that I want to say something more about the objectivity, or inter-subjective stability, of some facts of our immediate experience. Though these facts are tacit in the sense made familiar by Michael Polanyi—what we know but cannot or do not ordinarily give an account of—they can be given explicit formulation, and the great part of the task of literary explanation in my view is to give an explicit account of such tacit facts, moving them from what Polanyi calls subsidiary awareness to focal awareness and using them as a frame for explanation. I referred above, for instance, to the distinction between literature and non-literature. It is a notable fact that most modern theories of discourse do not make this discrimination which I would claim has a strong basis in our tacit awareness. Ask a group of students, for instance, to say which is more literary, a recipe or a joke, and the answer will invariably be that a joke is more literary. Clearly, the basis for the discrimination is that the joke is a work whose aim is pleasure, whose end is within and not beyond itself—familiar enough notions but oddly now often ignored. I would raise this discrimination to the level of hypothetical assertion, slightly complicating it by saying that a work of literature is one the act of understanding of which is experienced as its own justification.
As I have written elsewhere ("Fact, Theory" 36), this reformulates the familiar idea that literary works are autotelic and joins it with the equally familiar but not identical idea that they are those works whose end is pleasure, in order (1) to stipulate that literary pleasure is not to be conceived as free-floating and passively hedonistic but as integral with the act of cognition; (2) to rule out, as mentioned above, the assignment of meanings to a work of literature which cannot be pleasurably experienced within the tacit comprehension of the work; and (3) to make it possible to bring within the concept "literature" those works which achieve literary status despite the fact that they belong to genres—biography, history, philosophy, etc.—which cannot properly be said to have pleasure as their goal, an elaboration of a recipe, say by M. F. K. Fisher, might indeed achieve literary status, as compared with one equally functional by Julia Child; the difference in status would depend on the degree to which the recipes offered satisfaction simply in the act of reading.

No doubt my argument for the existence of the distinction at the level of immediate tacit experience will be rejected by many as pointing to agreements which are simply the result of convention, but I do not think it is; it has to do with the way works work within the native economy of our cognitive apparatus; the discrimination I have pointed to appears for anyone who grasps both kinds of work in their own terms, and it does not disappear upon analysis. (Of course the fact of the felt distinction can be denied, but here as elsewhere I ask the reader only to give the matter a fair test by consulting the phenomenology of his own imagination.)

I have been able to develop much sharper examples of the intersubjective stability of our experience in making distinctions among different kinds of dramatic "I" poems according to the way we imagine the speaker in relation to the poet (Rader, "Dramatic Monologue," "Concept," "Varieties of Structure"). To begin I have tried to clarify the basis of Robert Langbaum's distinction in The Poetry of Experience between the dramatic monologue of Browning and the dramatic lyric form (as instanced in Gray's "Elegy," Arnold's "Dover Beach," Hopkins's "Windhover," Hardy's "Darkling Thrush" and other masterpiece poems) by pointing out that in the former, as an inescapable condition of rendering the text intelligible, the reader must imagine the speaker as an outward presence, as we in our bodies register others in their bodies, from the outside in, whereas in the dramatic lyric we are imaginatively conflated with the speaker, understanding him from the inside out, seeing with his eyes and speaking his words as if on our own behalf. This distinction is reflected in the fact, invariant for all readers, that in a "cinematic" projection of our imaginative visualization of the two kinds of poems, the dramatic monologue speaker will be seen displayed directly on the screen, with the words of the poem issuing from his mouth, while in the
dramatic lyric we see not the speaker but rather an outward scene—graveyard, seascape, skyscape, wintry landscape—that he is understood as seeing, with the camera implicitly taken as his eyes, through which we also look, and the words of the poem registered voice-over as articulating his inner act of perception.

In neither kind of poem is the apparently autonomous speaker actually self-existent but stands in different kinds of fixed relationship to the implicit constructive act of the poet. The most striking instance I have discovered of the poet’s presence behind the speaker in the dramatic monologue is the fact that in “My Last Duchess” all readers both hear the duke speaking and hear the rhymes in the poem, but do not hear the duke as speaking the rhymes (the same phenomenon holds for all dramatic monologues). Thus our imaginations locate pre-analytically—in their complex but not contradictory “let’s pretend” operations—what the analysis of critics and linguists commonly does not recognize, that sentences can be construed by the mind as expressing two agents (here the explicit speaker and the implicit creating author) simultaneously. The distinctness of represented speaker and representing poet in the dramatic monologue seems correlated with the often-noted fact that the speaker is projected as a person “other” than the poet with a mental process cleanly separate from his. In the dramatic lyric, in contrast, the conflation of mental processes often results in structural confusion between poet and speaker, or more accurately, poet and actor, as in Gray’s “Elegy” with its puzzling shifts of reference between the character musing in the twilight and the poet writing the lines of the poem (see Chapter 2, 65–69). This kind of confusion can be explained on the hypothesis that in dramatic lyrics the represented actor is a recreation from memory of the poet’s own experience, which he reenters imaginatively as he constructs in the poem an image aesthetically adequate in the present to his memorial sense of the structure and significance of a past cognitive event. The situation is such that only in the course of his reconstructive act does he perhaps first fully discover and articulate the felt significance of the experience, so that the poet’s remembered act and his reconstruction of it may tend to merge. This is particularly likely to be the case in dramatic lyrics where the representation is in the present tense, as in the “Elegy” or Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale,” in contrast to those where it is consistently in the past tense as in Hardy’s “Darkling Thrush,” or is given as the actual speech act of the actor within the scene, as in Arnold’s “Dover Beach.”

This assumption about the relation between poet and actor in the dramatic lyric cogently accounts for the consistent “behind the eyes” effect in these poems and for the fact that the reader, following the poet, is imaginatively conflated with the speaker’s represented subjective act, as for the moment he dwells in the image of the poet’s spirit. The assumption accounts also for the fact that though
the dramatic lyric speaker has no name or specified identity, unlike dramatic monologue speakers who do have names and specified personal identities, we are hesitantly prompted to call him by the name of the poet, because of our intuitive sense (which can sometimes be corroborated by biography) that the poem reflects the poet’s actual experience at a real point in space/time beyond the poem. Nevertheless, the fact that the poems are manifestly artificial constructions of experience—the man in the churchyard cannot be writing a poem and we cannot be there with him as we seem to be—makes us properly hesitate to make a simple identification of poet and actor. (Wordsworth nicely catches the quality of a dramatic lyric as an artificial reconstruction of a personal visual experience when he says that, in “With Ships the Sea was Sprinkled Far and Nigh,” “I am represented . . . as casting my eyes” on the given scene [148; my emphasis]. Thus though based in a time-bound event, such poems may be said to transcend time’s moment by fully articulating its felt significance in a poetic construct.

In addition to these two classifications of dramatic poems, I locate a third, the mask lyric, instanced in many famous nineteenth- and twentieth-century poems, and also a fourth, the expressive lyric, of which I will speak below. Splitting off the mask lyric from the dramatic monologue (under which rubric the poems it points to are normally included) is intended to permit explicit recognition and provide a guide for analysis of a kind of poem in which an artificial personage—Ulysses, Childe Roland, J. Alfred Prufrock—is made the vehicle of the poet’s indirect lyrical expression. Whereas lyrical elements in a dramatic monologue proper tend to dilute our sense of its formal purity as a rendering of an autonomous other, as in Browning’s “Fra Lippo Lippi,” in the mask lyric we implicitly understand the art of the poem as involving the poet’s sophisticated attempt to express, while at the same time objectifying and limiting, an aspect of his own subjective situation. So it is that we can understand Eliot’s “Prufrock” as a dramatic construct which permits the poet at once to express and escape from his own personality while projecting himself into Prufrock’s as he characterizes and delimits it. The crucial point of contrast with the dramatic monologue is that the reader experiences Prufrock lyrically, feeling his situation as he feels it, including his self-irony, within an appreciation of Eliot’s deliberate deployment of Prufrock as a calculated artificial construct, a mask. (A mask, we remember, is an artificial semblance which a real person can use both to hide behind and speak through.) The reader joins the poet in the mediation of the mask as he projects himself into, and limits his expression to, the objectifying correlative of the character and his situation.

This differentiation of the mask lyric from the dramatic monologue is, I think, justified by the conceptual clarification and additional explanatory power it offers. Like the other two concepts it fits a whole range of poems quite sharply,
revealing closely analogous formal features, including the typically irreal, fluid, and symbolic scene of the mask lyric, so clearly in contrast with the wholly natural though fictive probability of the dramatic monologue scene and the quasi-actual scene of the dramatic lyric.

A fourth category, the expressive lyric, was generated by my need to make clear how Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey,” originally Langbaum’s paradigm instance of the dramatic lyric, could not be accurately described in the same structural terms that applied so well to other poems he had indicated by the same name. The leading fact is that in “Tintern Abbey” there is plainly no built-in artful contrast between the poet as actor and the poet as representer of the actor, but rather the sense that the articulation of the poem was achieved as the poet’s unfolding, emergent response to the stimulus of the scene. Unlike “With Ships the Sea was Sprinkled Nigh and Far,” “Tintern Abbey” is not a recreation in memorial tranquility of a feelingful perception but rather a sublimely successful attempt to articulate toward completed catharsis the urgent burden of overflowing feelings. One imaginative consequence of this implicitly registered constructive situation is that, in contrast with our uncertain identification of actor and poet in the dramatic lyric, our sense of the speaker’s identity is such that we must call him Wordsworth, with no hesitation or ambiguity, and may further, indeed almost must, go beyond the strict limits of the poem to call the speaker’s “dear sister” Dorothy. We may compare this with the situation in “Dover Beach,” where we may not call what is almost certainly the image of Arnold’s wife by any name at all.1 (The different degrees of fictivity manifested by the various types of dramatic “I” poems, and emphatically the implicit referentiality of “Tintern Abbey,” offer a strong challenge to the widely held identification of literary status with fictionality as such.)

This account of the dramatic “I” poem and some of its generic subdivisions is meant to illustrate our capacity to register and discriminate different kinds of creative relations between dramatic figures and the mode in which they are constructed or projected from the always immanent creative poet. Most fundamental and applicable to all literary forms is the idea that an author and his immanent purpose are always the basis of our implicit conjecture about and ultimate understanding of what is going on in a literary work, just as inference of purpose is constantly necessary to our understanding of others in ordinary life in the context of the world we mutually inhabit. I speak here of operations at the level of imaginative experience, not of interpretation, for nothing is more antithetical to the basic current of twentieth-century literary theoretical thought than the notion that authorial intention should play any role at all in interpretation. (I stress that what I refer to as intention is something immanent in the work—its formal principle as a work—and available only by hypothesis, though there is no reason why
we should not take an author’s statements about his intention as relevant to or corroborative of a hypothesis about immanent intention.)

I mentioned above the possibility of using patterns of interpretive agreement and disagreement surrounding a work as evidence for its further interpretation. Such patterns, the result of our collective best efforts to understand a work, are a major resource in our attempt to generate further and fuller understanding than that which is already in place. The pregnant question we can seek to answer through the interpretation of interpretations is, what must the work hidden in the clouds of commentary in itself be like for us to agree and disagree about it as we do? Agreement about works is always more extensive than we commonly recognize, just because it is taken for granted, but it nonetheless reflects the work in ways that conscientious explanation needs to commit itself to articulate; for if we are able to deduce it rigorously into common terms, agreement is the best evidence we have of what the work is like. But the test question has most potency when put in inverse form: what must the work be like for us to disagree about it as we do, for it is in our disagreement that the perplexities of experience most pointedly manifest themselves. But the very limitation of understanding that such interpretive shortfall indicates can be taken as the basis for further explanatory invention, if we appreciate the fact that patterns of disagreement as of agreement are as specific as a spectrograph to individual works and offer an implicit structural characterization of them as the objects of our experience. Paradoxically, the free variations of subjective interpretation can end by implicating an objective work as random lines drawn on paper over a penny collectively reveal the face beneath.

I should now like to indicate how the theoretical outlook I have been defining can be used to sketch a developmental outline for two centuries of the English novel, with the special problematics of *Moll Flanders* at one end and of *Ulysses* at the other. *Moll Flanders* stands near *Pamela* at the point of emergence of the novel form in English, yet its place in the history of the form is much more equivocal. Many critics, early and late, have noted that Defoe’s novels are not plotted and have interpreted the lack as an artistic defect, the most evident sign of his failure, despite his striking “realism,” to achieve the full form of the novel as Richardson was to do. The idea that the plotlessness of Defoe’s novels is an artistic deficiency fits the overall impression the novels give of haphazardness and shapelessness, a quality that we easily respond to as a failure to achieve order. But if we follow out the full implication of another common view of Defoe’s stories—that they were written in imitation of real documents, that is to say, that they are presented, falsely, as naïve true stories, we gain an entirely new view of their formlessness. If Defoe did in fact mean his stories to be registered as naïve true stories, we see that plotlessness would have been an abso-
lute necessary artistic choice, since the pattern of plot would reveal the author behind the supposedly real narrator. The same point applies to the sharp critical quarrel, discussed more fully below, about whether Defoe “judges” or does not judge his characters, ironically or otherwise. Any pattern of signaled judgments would again indicate the author behind the narrator. The formal situation is in direct contrast with that of fiction like Richardson’s in which, as I shall indicate below, analysis can demonstrate that the reader is tacitly aware of and cooperative with an immanent authorial presence. In Defoe, contrastively, there is no such tacitly recognizable authorial control. The completely covert author seeks to induce the reader’s imaginative belief in and reaction to the narrator and the interesting events of the story as if they were actual, neither invented nor told by himself. His novels therefore are not in intention fictional at all but, again, false true stories, pseudofactual rather than fictional.

This offers a clear solution to the critical controversy that has developed about Defoe’s work, particularly *Moll Flanders*. Knowing in fact that Defoe’s works are fabrications and accustomed to the complexly indirect roles of twentieth-century writers, modern critics have approached Defoe’s works as if they were projected as author-based fiction and are then forced into an unsatisfactory choice between two mutually exclusive conclusions—either that Defoe “failed” to judge his fictional characters or that he has judged them in an ironically complex way that critics are unable to define with any clarity or agreement. But there is no satisfactory way of treating Defoe’s stories as fictions. The conclusion indicated by the present hypothesis is again that, as a matter of positive formal principle, he actively refrained from judgment or any other sign of his constructive presence in his feigned true stories. This explains why his stories have been called “lies” by Leslie Stephen and others, whereas Richardson’s and later fictions have not. In a real sense Defoe’s stories are lies, but they are imaginative, not practical lies. It explains also why some of Defoe’s stories have been taken to be literally true stories by very sophisticated readers. It further explains his extraordinarily dense “realism,” not to be matched for nearly two centuries. It is so unlike the relatively schematic realism of his immediate successors because it is meant to be taken for a report of actual experience.

Further important conclusions—for Defoe and the later history of the novel—follow from these considerations taken together with the fact that Defoe was not seen as a high literary artist until the appearance of the fiction of Joyce and Woolf, between whose work and Defoe’s there has always been recognized, by those writers and others, to be a kinship. From the perspective offered here, the nature of the similarity—as well as the radical difference—between the early and later writers is clear. Defoe is like Joyce and Woolf in attempting to give a sense of the world as in actual fact it is given to us, in contrast to
the fictional mode of the standard post-Richardsonian novel, where our sense of the real world is plastically drawn upon to vitalize an illusion which objectively enacts and pleasurably resolves some implicit inner conflict. But whereas Defoe’s formal intention involves the deliberate concealment of his authorial function as a means of securing appropriate response to his pseudofacts, Joyce and Woolf require our fullest appreciation of their role in creating an image of reality which can be responded to as if it were in fact autonomous; the effect is not, as with Defoe, of interest and momentary wonder at the presumed fact but of continuous and growing wonder at a fictional world which so magically and coherently simulates our experience of the real one. The creatively detached yet cognitively immanent relationship of Joyce and Woolf to their autonomous fictional world has suggested to many critics that Defoe is playing a similar role, and his status as an artist sometimes been exalted accordingly. Allen Tate has written, for instance, of “that great forerunner Moll Flanders, which is so much all of a piece . . . that sometimes I think that Flaubert wrote it; or that nobody wrote either Defoe or Flaubert. For when literature reaches this stage of maturity, it is autonomous” (139). As already indicated, the book does indeed read as if no one (but Moll) wrote it; Defoe’s apparent detachment is really formal absence. But this fact locates not the artistic merit of the novel but its defect, because it means that we have no way in reading the work of implicitly appreciating the novelist’s constructive act. We respond to the narrative in reading with interest and curiosity, as if the events reported had in fact occurred; when we consciously perceive and appreciate the means by which the illusion is achieved, like a visual illusion it disappears. The pleasure of the work depends on our imaginative sense that it was not intended, and explicit perception of intention destroys the pleasurable effect. Moll Flanders is a work which truly opens itself to its own deconstruction.²

Defoe’s failure to claim his authorship within the form of his work explains his almost nonexistent reputation as a novelist in the eighteenth century as compared with the celebration of Richardson and Fielding as founders of a “new way of writing.” His work was the culmination of a tradition of the false true story and has no discernible influence at all on later eighteenth-century fiction. The case is quite opposite with Richardson’s Pamela, which holds its handbook place quite well as the first unequivocal novel in English. It is not that there are not many candidates for first novel, in English and other languages, before Pamela, and a case can be and has been made for many. The comparative case for Pamela, however, gains great strength when cast in the following negative form. We can say that no critic holds that Pamela is not a novel, that before Pamela there is no work of which the same can be said, and that after Pamela there are increasingly many. This is an indubitable statement
and argues strongly that *Pamela* is the earliest work unequivocally registered as a novel by all. But what is the content of that pre-analytic registration, the content of the tacit concept novel which is in force here? My own definition of that content is that a novel is a work which offers the reader a focal illusion of characters acting autonomously as if in the world of real experience within a subsidiary awareness of an underlying auteurial purpose which gives their story an implicit significance and affective force which real world experience does not have.

Let us read the first letter of *Pamela* in the light of this definition:

Dear Father and Mother,

I have great trouble, and some comfort, to acquaint you with. The trouble is, that my good lady died of the illness I mentioned to you, and left us all much grieved for the loss of her; for she was a dear good lady, and kind to all us her servants. Much I feared, that as I was taken by her ladyship to wait upon her person, I should be quite destitute again, and forced to return to you and my poor mother, who have enough to do to maintain yourselves; and, as my lady’s goodness had put me to write and cast accounts, and made me a little expert at my needle, and otherwise qualified above my degree, it was not every family that could have found a place that your poor Pamela was fit for: but God, whose graciousness to us we have so often experienced at a pinch, put it into my good lady’s heart, on her death-bed, just an hour before she expired, to recommend to my young master all her servants, one by one; and when it came to my turn to be recommended, (for I was sobbing and crying at her pillow,) she could only say, My dear son!—and so broke off a little; and then recovering—Remember my poor Pamela—And these were some of her last words! O how my eyes run—Don’t wonder to see the paper so blotted.

Well, but God’s will must be done!—And so comes the comfort, that I shall not be obliged to return back to be a clog upon my dear parents! For my master said, I will take care of you all, my good maidens; and for you, Pamela, (and took me by the hand; yes, he took my hand before them all,) for my dear mother’s sake, I will be a friend to you and you shall take care of my linen. God bless him! and pray with me, my dear father and mother, for a blessing upon him, for he has given mourning and a year’s wage to all my lady’s servants; and I having no wages as yet, my lady having said she should do for me as I deserved, ordered the housekeeper to give me mourning with the rest; and gave me with his own hand four golden guineas, and some silver, which were in my old lady’s pocket when she died; and said, if I was a good girl, and faithful and diligent, he would be a friend to me, for his mother’s sake. . . .

I know, dear father and mother, I must give you both grief and pleasure; and so I will only say, Pray for your Pamela; who will ever be

Your most dutiful daughter
I have been scared out of my senses; for just now, as I was folding up this letter in my late lady's dressing-room, in comes my young master! Good sirs! how was I frightened! I went to hide the letter in my bosom; and he, seeing me tremble, said, smiling, To whom have you been writing, Pamela?—I said, in my confusion, Pray your honour forgive me!—Only to my father and mother. He said, Well then, let me see how you are come on in your writing! O how ashamed I was!—He took it, without saying more, and read it quite through, and then gave it me again;—and I said, Pray your honour forgive me! Yet I know not for what; for he was always dutiful to his parents; and why should he be angry that I was so to mine? And indeed he was not angry; for he took me by the hand, and said, You are a good girl, Pamela, to be kind to your aged father and mother. I am not angry with you for writing such innocent matters as these: though you ought to be wary what tales you send out of a family.—Be faithful and diligent; and do as you should do, and I like you the better for this. And then he said, Why, Pamela, you write a very pretty hand, and spell tolerably too. I see my good mother's care in your learning has not been thrown away upon you. She used to say you loved reading; you may look into any of her books, to improve yourself, so you take care of them. To be sure I did nothing but courtesy and cry, and was all in confusion, at his goodness. Indeed he is the best of gentlemen, I think! But I am making another long letter. . . . (3–5)

This letter, in which Pamela tells her news so artlessly to her parents, powerfully opens Richardson's novelistic story, from the beginning of the action in the mother's death, with masterful clarity. So improbably alive with Pamela's speaking voice, it is not like a real letter at all, as our reading of Pamela's narration generates in the imagination a succession of autonomous scenes, giving us first Pamela at her writing task before fading to the deathbed scene in which Mr. B. and the others are present to us seemingly without Pamela's mediation, then returning us briefly to Pamela writing in her closet before springing on us (as well as Pamela) the sudden literally dramatic reappearance of Mr. B. from beyond the bounds of Pamela's narrative expectation. Examining our experience of the passage, we see that as early as Pamela's “God bless him!” response to B.'s promise to be a friend, we pick up the authorial signal of danger of which she is unaware, a probability which sets up his alarming reappearance in the postscript, where we are not at all assured by Pamela's conclusion that he is “the best of gentlemen.” By the end of the letter we are so strongly set in our concern for Pamela in respect of B. (that is to say, in the structure of the author's story) that even without her parents' warning, we would interpret any further portion of the story in the light of that expectation. It is the shaping authorial structure within and behind Pamela's sentences, with which we subconsciously cooperate, that makes the story an unequivocal novel.
But the authorial understructure of the apparently autonomous surface story needs to be more fully defined. Most generally what we have here is an action structure, which I have defined as a structure designed to develop and maximize concern for a character (or characters) along a line of development in which the ground of concern is a dynamically shifting contrast between the reader’s sense of the immediate and ultimate fate of the character as compared with his immediate and ultimate desert and to resolve this concern by a surprising but probable extension of the means used to raise it, so as to give the reader the greatest satisfaction in the ultimate fate of the character (or characters). Put more simply, the author of an action pits our induced sense of what will happen to a character against our induced sense of what we want to happen to him or her, in order to give the greatest pleasure appropriate to their resolution. Within this general action model, which would apply to all novels we react to as standard novels of plotted suspense, a specific model of *Pamela* would specify that the reader is meant to feel for Pamela a serious fear, which can be defined by saying that her merit and fate develop along a line of branching alternatives, where one branch, always closed by circumstance or choice, leads to an ethically acceptable but materially undesirable safety, while the other leads overtly and immediately to greater danger but covertly and ultimately to the most desirable resolution of her difficulties.

If space allowed, one could account for nearly every detail of the opening letter in terms of the specifications of this model. The immediate sense, as we have noticed, is of danger to the servant girl Pamela from the socially remote master Mr. B., as well as the unsuitability of her return to her parents’ home; but at the same time the distant probability of Pamela’s ultimate elevation as B.’s wife is already being prepared by the presentation of her as one singled out and raised above her degree by her mistress and noticed by B. for her ladylike accomplishments as well as her youthful attractiveness and vulnerability. Her essential worth and goodness are meanwhile given witness through her artless and undesigned narration and marked as valid by the tears that fall upon and make us believe in the literal letter and its testimony. There are of course constructional difficulties ahead for Richardson with which we do not have time to deal: the most important of these is that Mr. B. must be at once the source of Pamela’s danger and reward, a formal fact which generates the creation and specific role of nearly all the rest of the characters, as Richardson makes the substance of the story do his telling. The other important difficulty was the fact that, because Pamela is necessarily the vehicle of our knowledge of her ambiguously developing fate, she seems herself morally ambiguous and, against Richardson’s intention, a hypocrite (on this see Chapter 8, 175; Chapter 10, 221–22).
My notation above that after *Pamela* there are increasingly many works that all readers will intuitively recognize as novels is meant to suggest the claim that Richardson’s invention in *Pamela* enabled this posterity as the example of Defoe did not. That Richardson was what might be called a negative inspiration for Fielding does not alter the fact that without Richardson Fielding’s first novel would not have been, and one notes that the first leads fairly clearly to the second and third. Of course, Fielding like Smollett and Sterne claimed influence from Cervantes and to a lesser degree from Rabelais, influences lately so strongly highlighted by the work of Bakhtin. But it is worth noticing that neither of these examples so long present generated any novels in English till *after* the appearance of Richardson. I mean to suggest here the kind of nexus of invention and inheritance spoken of above as the matrix of literary creation in general. The claim in respect of Fielding, and I believe also Smollett and Sterne, can be made a bit stronger by saying that it is the specifically novelistic structure as defined above and not the action understructure which is inherited by all these writers. The hallmark of this structure is a shaping authorial presence felt in the created world of the work behind and beyond any characterological or narratorial agency.

This principle holds true even of a seemingly obstructive presence like the narrator in *Tom Jones*. Despite the fact that this narrator is a so-called omniscient authorial narrator who refers to his departed wife and declares his capacity to alter the story at will, so that we easily call him “Fielding,” the odd experiential fact is that we are unable to think of the characters and their actions as actually under this narrator’s control. The reason for this is that they exist to us beyond the ken of his report. At the same time, because of the coherent shape of the whole, the reader is never in any doubt that the whole as a whole is a creation of Fielding the author. The only solution to contradiction involved is to draw a distinction (following with a difference Booth and Bahtkin) between the authorial narrator who speaks in the sentences looking toward the characters and their world, and the author who imagines and generates for the reader the world of the novel by a pretence mounted through the sentences. That is to say, the authorial narrator’s sentences engender a world imagined by the author as existing beyond the narrator whom he speaks. But this was the Richardsonian contribution.

The more specific posterity of *Pamela*, beyond Fielding, is indubitable in Richardson’s own later work, in Fanny Burney, and in Jane Austen, besides many works lesser known. In another essay (Rader, “Richardson to Austen”) I have attempted to add another dimension to my structural explanations by conceiving the Richardson-Burney-Austen as a subset of the action novel which I denominate the novel of moral action. The idea here is that these eighteenth-century writers of novelistic actions were under cultural pressure to make their
protagonists morally exemplary, an extrinsic pressure toward didacticism deeply characteristic of the age but at odds with the intrinsic need of the form to have protagonists make action-generating moral errors. The history of this novelistic subset then becomes the analysis of these novelists’ attempts to satisfy simultaneously the intrinsic artistic and the extrinsic didactic demand. The same cultural demand left many eighteenth-century novels dead of what may be called didactic poisoning, the dynamics of action stultified, but in these novelists a special structural compromise, most integral in Austen, left their novels with a distinctive time-bound beauty.

The most distinctive novels of the Victorian era, in contrast, are the great “baggy monster.” In an unpublished essay, I have tried to show that the structures of three of the most celebrated masterpieces of this kind—Dickens’s *Bleak House*, Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair*, and George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*—can be understood as resulting from the incorporation of a transindividual significance into an action structure which in terms of intrinsic organic effect requires concentration on an integrating individual fate. The introduction of such a significance—the result of the extrinsic imperative of Victorian culture that literature be socially relevant—in each instance renders the novels “baggy.” In the case of *Bleak House* Dickens breaks apart the individual relationship of Lady Dedlock and Esther in order to associate Lady Dedlock’s guilt with the socially outcast Jo and by this and other means to generalize the sense of parental neglect over the whole of society. *Vanity Fair*, contrastively, displays within a plot system built around the interwoven stories of Becky and Amelia the vanity which is shown to be a universal condition of human fate—“Which of us has his wish, or having it is satisfied?”—while in *Middlemarch* the attempt is to show us the genuine joint activity of several individuals as bearing on a transindividual end, so that we will feel in the whole the contribution of those buried in unvisited tombs to the growing good of the world.

In the late Victorian/early modern novel, distinctively but contrastively instanced in Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* and Conrad’s *Lord Jim*, we move beyond while remaining within view of the Victorian paradigm. The fact that both novels are named for individuals suggests that the transindividual focus of the Victorian novel no longer obtains. We have once more concentration on the individual as in the eighteenth-century line of action novels, but here we can say that the individual is not displayed acting within the norms given by the represented society, but is imaged against and in conflict with society and socially asserted and approved norms of value and action. We can say further that in both *Tess* and *Jim*, but in different ways, this conflict is imaged with reference to the sense of a nature, a cosmic trans-social reality which offers an over-arching perspective to which a sense of individual destiny within society...
can be referred. (In contrast, nature in Victorian novels is either not represented as a distinct agency or is represented as a projection of social meanings.)

In the classic modern novel of Joyce, Woolf, and Lawrence, we have a shift away from the action novel that yields a new kind of structure altogether. The action model describes a form which the reader at some level of consciousness must know from the outset is being shaped beneath its realistic surface to meet the created requirements of desire. It has therefore the character of an objective fantasy, not such a fantasy as makes a reader the passive victim of a process hidden from his consciousness, but a deliberate, determinate, conscious, controlled fantasy identical with the cognitive structure of the book. If this description suggests the possibility of the simple wish-fulfillment of shallow novels, it also suggests the possibility in serious novels of cathetically working out the shape of desire against the resistance of our ideals on the one hand and the objective conditions of experience as rooted in our sense of the world on the other. Nevertheless, the action novel—the standard novel of plotted suspense—is a fantasy, involving at last a pleasurable distortion of the world of real experience, and we can think of Joyce, Woolf, and Lawrence as writers who, wearied with novels which used the inmost feelings to shape a sense of the world, decided to use their sense of life in the world to educe and shape their inmost feelings of understanding. In action-fantasy novels, to sum up the terms of the contrast, the represented world meets the terms of our wishes; in similar novels, as I would call those of the classic modern novelists—novels built as artificial simulations of actual life—our wishes are made to meet the terms of the world. It is thus no accident that Portrait of the Artist, Ulysses (in part), To the Lighthouse, Sons and Lovers are all novels of recreated memory, offering centrally cathartic portraits of the authors’ parents, the beings out of whom sprang the generating conditions of the authors’ own life and consciousness, the only life that they could truly claim to know and could truly re-present as actual. (The formula for this recreation is closely cognate with that given above for the dramatic lyric; these are in effect dramatic lyric novels.)

The greatest and most problematic of this set of novels is of course Ulysses, a work which we recognize as a novel but one different from all preceding novels in a way in which none of them is different from another. Its large formal difference from Portrait, and from To the Lighthouse and Sons and Lovers (which are broadly cognate with Portrait) lies in the fact that the book seems to change its nature as it proceeds from transparent naturalistic representation to become increasingly thickened and self-present as a textual end unto itself. Some have supposed that Joyce changed his interest and purposes over the long course of the book’s composition, so that it has no single rationale, and many have joined in the conclusion that this splendidly elaborated book has no particular inner
significance. My own argument has been ("Exodus and Return"; "Logic of *Ulysses*") that the book is Joyce-as-*Ulysses* own great return to the earlier literal life he reenters at the outset as he, the Holy artistic Ghost, midway between himself and others, moves first with Stephen Dedalus in the grip on his mother’s memory (himself as another), then with Bloom (another as himself) until, after rising high above the finally united pair, he plunges through the black dot at the end of ‘Ithaca’ to immerge and immolate himself in Molly. Joyce’s metempsychotic journey—from (as I have written) May Dedalus to Marion Bloom, from the dream of the time-and-tomb bound body of the real mother from whose womb he came, to incorporation in the word-borne everliving body of Molly, the woman who never was—makes strictly logical the transition in the book from life to text and displays the deep though strangely articulate unity of this greatest work of twentieth-century English literature.

My overall aim in this paper has been to suggest (much too sketchily and compactly) how a single theoretical perspective can hold conceptually in view and collaterally articulate both the micro-facts, the pre-analytic invariants (as I claim they are) of our immediate tacit experience of literature, and the macro-facts of generic relationships and the development of literary works within inherited matrices of creative possibility. This kind of combination of generality and particularity, an explanatory endeavor that attempts to cast wide but closely woven nets, seems to me the best literary study can do as an approach to a quasi-scientific mode of understanding. If literary works are in fact those the act of understanding of which is experienced as its own justification, any explicit objectifying statements about them always have to return to the test of everyone’s experience, which is entirely in order, and are always incorporable into innumerable interpretive hypotheses, the production of which is the celebration of our individual delight in the wonder of literature. But in all the centrifugal tendencies of interpretation, there is room for centripetal efforts that seek, by the kind of strong, bold conjecture recommended by Sir Karl Popper, to develop portable and sharable ideas that attempt to locate what is common to our literary experience and what is systematic in the history of individual creativity.

Notes

1. This summary of Rader ("Dramatic Monologue" and "Fact, Theory") is drawn from Rader ("Varieties of Structure"), which goes on to develop further distinctions. [Editors’Note: See chapters 6, 1, and 7 of this volume respectively.]

2. This reduction of Rader ("Defoe, Richardson, Joyce" 38–50) draws on that in Rader ("Fact, Theory" 285 ff.), which adds new material. [Editors’ Note: See chapters 8 and 1 of this volume respectively.]
PART II

Fast, Fiction, and Form
Although factual narrative, that is to say, history and biography, is certainly an art, only a few biographies and histories are unequivocally literature. This paradox deserves explanation and will in fact provide the whole subject of my remarks in this chapter. While much biography and history has a clear if relatively low place in literature, only Boswell and Gibbon in English have constructed factual narratives which stand unquestioned as literary masterpieces of the very first rank. On the other hand, much excellent biography and history has no place in literature at all. The explanation for these facts lies in the fundamental contrast between the fictional and the factual narrative modes. Literature in general is, in Coleridge’s phrase, that species of composition which proposes pleasure rather than truth as its immediate object. The purely literary artist is free to invent, dispose, weight, and vivify his materials as a means to the greatest intensity of effect, whereas the immediate object of the biographer or historian cannot be effect but fidelity to truth.

Some works of history and biography nevertheless produce a distinct and powerful effect closely akin to those which characterize works of the imagination, and these of course are, as they should be from Coleridge’s definition, the very works which rank as literature. But though we speak of Gibbon’s epical sweep and force and Macaulay’s dramatic powers, we ought not to succumb to the temptations of analogy and talk as if the Decline and Fall were in fact an epic, or the History of England a drama, or even as if the most celebrated contemporary work of factual narrative (Truman Capote’s In Cold Blood) is what its author calls it, a non-fiction novel. To do so would be to evade the terms of the question we want to answer, which is, not how literary works are literary,
but how works whose primary commitment is distinctly nonliterary nevertheless become literature.

The answer which I am going to propose is that such works become literature by transcending while fulfilling the usual purpose of history and biography, to provide true knowledge of the human past. I am going to suggest that factual narratives in order to compass a literary effect must raise their subjects constructively out of the past and represent them to the imagination as concrete, self-intelligible causes of emotion. My claim will be that these works of history thereby become, paradoxically, “a more philosophical and a higher thing than history.” They become universal, in Aristotle’s sense, because they are displayed to the imagination not as contingent but as concretely probable, and valuable in terms of that general human nature which as human beings we all share and intuitively know. I choose as my text Boswell’s Life of Johnson but shall return intermittently and at the close to a view of the overall subject.

It has not been obvious to the authors of the two most extensive and scholarly modern treatments of biography that the greatest work of factual narrative in our language has a structure which is the cause of its greatness, and that effective structure, as all writers should know, is never an accident. Donald Stauffer, though he gives high praise to Boswell’s artistry, says flatly that “the structure of the Life is open to serious question.” It lacks narrative connection and temporal development, it fails to scale itself to the proportions of Johnson’s life, and (astoundingly) it fails to create Johnson, affording rather “materials from which Johnson may be created by an imaginative act” (445–46). John Garraty repeats the charges and adds a few of his own: the book is “all out of proportion”; it is merely “one man’s recollections of another” (26); it lacks “not so much unity as cumulative effect and a comprehensive estimate of its subject and his importance” (95). As we shall see, it would make as much sense to blame Shakespeare for not providing a comprehensive estimate of Hamlet. Most of these criticisms point to real facts about the substance and structure of the Life, but they do not point to faults. Only the inadequate theoretical conception which underlies the criticism could make these facts seem faults, for no reader intuitively reacts to them as such. The problem lies in conceiving Boswell’s work as if it were an ordinary explanatory narrative, like Krutch’s biography of Johnson. If it were such a biography, then it would be a manifestly defective one, and we should have to pronounce it inferior to Krutch’s. This would be absurd, for fine as it is, Krutch’s biography is not great literature and Boswell’s is. That is the whole point. It is literature. It is not an explanatory narrative but an emotive narrative of the type we have indicated, one whose whole principle is not to give instrumental information and explanation but rather to reconstruct and present as concrete and universal an aspect of human fact so as to render it inherently the cause of a distinct effect. What aspect of fact does Boswell
reconstruct, and what is its effect? The answer lies in the last sentence of his book: “Such was Samuel Johnson, a man whose talents, acquirements, and virtues were so extraordinary, that the more his character is considered, the more he will be regarded by the present age and by posterity, with admiration and reverence” (4: 430). The subject of Boswell’s book is not the life of Johnson but the character of Johnson as revealed in the facts of his life; and his purpose is to make us feel that admiration and reverence which is the natural emotive consequence of full empathetic perception of the character.

Unlike Scott’s life, Johnson’s career as a connected sequence of actions could not have been presented as the cause of a powerful effect. It is his character alone—the extraordinary strength, subtlety, and depth of his mental powers, joined with the nobility and magnanimity of his moral nature and his astonishing powers of expression—that contains the potentiality of such an effect. This Boswell knew. That concluding sentence is no accident, nor is the brilliant character sketch which precedes it and pulls together into a single retrospective view the subject which the myriad pieces of his book have together evoked.

Character must be manifested in the concrete, and Johnson’s character is known primarily from its concrete manifestation in the Life. Just because the concrete is or seems to be a given reality, however, Boswell has gained small credit for showing it to us. So discerning a critic as Joseph Wood Krutch can see Boswell’s technique as wholly naturalistic: “What he [needs is] not imagination or insight, or even, primarily, the judgment to select. It is documentation and more documentation” (386). The well-known, often answered, but still recurring charge that Boswell was nothing but a tape recorder is a ghost that ought to be permanently laid, but it will continue to haunt us until we perceive with more clarity and certainty than we yet have that Boswell’s book is, in the part and in the whole, not a recording of fact but always and everywhere an implicitly affecting artistic selection and construction of an aspect of fact. George Mallory pointed out long ago that the effect of the Life does not depend on its factuality but upon Boswell’s power of “picking out [from the facts] all that was characteristic and important, of ruthlessly discarding unnecessary details and presenting only the salient points” (293). “He gives not the whole of Johnson’s words but the essence of them,” preserving only “the spirit [and, we may add, the effect] of Johnson’s talk and the atmosphere of the moment as the listeners felt it” (278). The talk is “too deliberate, too close, too well-winnowed, as it were” to be a transcript of the actual (271). The effect of Boswell’s operation on the facts, Mallory nevertheless concludes, was to make the whole more real, “a better representation of Johnson” (281).

All this implies the creative secret of Boswell’s art: he had within his mind not a series of disjunctive photographic impressions but a single dynamic image
of Johnson which, though it derived from innumerable manifestations of Johnson’s character, was nevertheless quite independent of any particular manifestation and even independent of their sum. He knew Johnson’s image mimetically, and he knew it in its essence. We remember that he could impersonate Johnson more vividly and exactly than Garrick, giving something that approached a full psychosomatic impression. We remember that he could make fresh Johnsoniana, with the ring of the true coin: “Dine with Jack Wilkes, Sir! I’d as soon dine with Jack Ketch!” (3:66). But just because he possessed Johnson’s image so completely within himself, he knew its value immediately and fully through the involuntary psychic comparison with himself which the act of mimetic participation implied. In Johnson’s presence Boswell always felt an intense exhilaration as he imaginatively participated in Johnson’s powers. It is easy to understand how in retrospect that exhilaration became an unshakable reverence and admiration.

In creating the *Life*, then, Boswell was in a real sense creating an objective correlative of a grand emotive idea. His idea was not so much an aid to him in his task as it was the very principle of that astonishing reconstruction. No other assumption can account for the fact, indicated by Mallory and others, that the Johnson of the *Life* is more Johnsonian than Johnson himself could invariably be. To breathe life into the concentrated dust of the notes and to shape from them the form of the living Johnson can in no sense be conceived as a mechanical act directed toward a string of discrete memories but only as a fully organic act of the creative imagination. Boswell had not to record dead memories but to construct a re-enactment of Johnson which would be concretely adequate in itself to reproduce and release in the reader the emotion which the living man had once produced in him. And the fullest proof of the truly imaginative nature of his act is that he found the correlative of his idea not only in the facts which he himself had witnessed but in all the other facts which his industry had brought to light. His book, he says, is made up of “innumerable detached particulars,” but it is not therefore a mélange; the particulars are not a heterogeneous collection of facts but a homogeneous presentation of character. Each of the particulars is displayed by Boswell, to the degree which each inherently permits, as an epiphany of an infinitely varied but always single character. Boswell’s image of Johnson is the selective, constructive, and controlling principle of the *Life*, the omnipresent element which vivifies and is made vivid in the whole. The image is the unity—the real and living unity—of the *Life*.

It is obvious therefore why the book lacks narrative connection and temporal development. The uniqueness of Johnson’s character manifested itself in moments of time and not over a temporal sequence. There is no external connection of parts in the *Life* because the subject can be expressed only as the essence of its individual manifestations; there is no development because
the character in its uniqueness was static. It is obvious also why the book is not scaled to the proportions of the actual life: more facts expressive of character were available from the late than from the early life.

The creative and unifying role which Boswell’s internalized idea of Johnson plays in the Life can be forcefully demonstrated from his treatment of those portions of the life in which he himself had played no part. Critics have not sufficiently noticed the very many occasions when Boswell shows his dramatic talent quite independent of his memory. One recalls, for example, the vivid and pleasing scene where Langton and Beauclerk rouse a comically formidable Johnson in the middle of the night and take him on a midnight frisk. It is alive before us; yet Boswell was a boy in Edinburgh when it occurred. How many such scenes in the Life Boswell never saw but makes the reader see because he saw them not in reality but where the true artist always sees—in the mind’s eye. But of the parts in which Boswell’s memory played no part, the most instructive for our present purpose are those which may be compared with parallel parts from the works of Boswell’s rivals, Hawkins and Mrs. Piozzi. Neither of those writers, of course, was moved by any detached sense of Johnson’s magnificent mystery to discover every possible sign of it; they were content with what lay at hand. The very immensity of Boswell’s Life is itself evidence, in comparison with their works, of the way in which he was possessed by the essence of his subject and motivated to give it body. They were prompted to write about a particular man whom they had known, from private emotion; Boswell was driven to write about a man who was intrinsically of interest to all men, by disinterested universal emotion. Both Hawkins and Mrs. Piozzi held and expressed the same general estimate of Johnson that Boswell does—he was an astonishingly great and good man—but neither is consistently able to show us the materials of their works as the cause of their estimate. Too often, they allow merely personal feeling to interfere with their presentation of the universal Johnson. Consider the following anecdote told by both Boswell and Mrs. Piozzi. Boswell first: “In the playhouse at Lichfield, as Mr. Garrick informed me, Johnson having for a moment quitted a chair which was placed for him between the side-scenes, a gentleman took possession of it, and when Johnson on his return civilly demanded his seat, rudely refused to give it up; upon which Johnson laid hold of it, and tossed him and the chair into the pit” (Life 2:299). Mrs. Piozzi’s version is as follows: Garrick “said that in their young days, when some strolling players came to Lichfield, our friend had fixed his place upon the stage, and got himself a chair accordingly; which leaving a few minutes, he found a man in it at his return, who refused to give it back at the first intreaty: Mr. Johnson, however, who did not think it worth his while to make a second, took chair and man and all together and threw them all at once into the pit” (224). There is a good deal
of difference in precision and elegance of narration here, of course; Boswell’s is much the shorter, with no irrelevant detail, the whole laid out in the clean curve of a single sentence. And Boswell’s works together with a series of short epiphanies he is giving at the moment to illustrate his nicely discriminated immediate thesis that Johnson was afraid of nothing but death, not even what might occasion death. But the most basic difference is that Boswell’s version in itself supports his claim that Johnson was a great and good man. Mrs. Piozzi’s does not support her claim and thereby fails to display that which she has pointed to as the natural interest of her subject. The choice which she made in evaluating Garrick’s story was as a personal moral choice just as justifiable as Boswell’s, but as an artistic choice, it was not defensible at all, since it diminished the inherent potential of the subject. If Johnson had been as she shows him here, we would feel no interest and take no pleasure in reading about him. Mrs. Piozzi’s mistake was repeated, on a much larger scale, by a much greater biographer—Froude, in his Life of Carlyle.

There is an example of parallel tendency in Hawkins, who writes thus of a famous incident at Oxford: Johnson had “scarce any change of raiment, and, in a short time after Corbet left him, but one pair of shoes, and those so old, that his feet were seen through them: a gentleman of his college, the father of an eminent clergyman now living, directed a servitor one morning to place a new pair at the door of Johnson’s chamber, who, seeing them upon his first going out, so far forgot himself and the spirit that must have actuated his unknown benefactor, that, with all the indignation of an insulted man, he threw them away” (Hawkins 11). The essential facts are as Boswell is to present them: the shoes were given and Johnson was indignant. The problem is in evaluation: it was a fault in Johnson to be indignant. It may be true; yet in judging Johnson on a narrow moral base Hawkins diminishes him. Johnson is seen to fall away from a universal standard of virtue and to become by that much less the man because of whose greatness Hawkins is writing. Boswell, without at all changing the facts, reads and relates them in a much different way: “Mr. Bateman’s lectures were so excellent, that Johnson used to come and get them at second-hand from Taylor, till his poverty being so extreme, that his shoes were worn out, and his feet appeared through them, he saw that this humiliating circumstance was perceived by the Christ-Church men, and he came no more. He was too proud to accept of money, and somebody having set a pair of new shoes at his door, he threw them away with indignation. How must we feel when we read such an anecdote of Samuel Johnson” (Life 2:76–77). Hawkins’s inert details and judgments drop out as Boswell makes us feel Johnson’s poverty and the reality of his consequent humiliation. Boswell construed his pride convincingly as a sign of his majestic independence, and, suppressing the irrelevant clergyman, evaluates
the incident not in relation to him but to Johnson’s essential character and the fact of his permanent greatness, something to which Bateman’s excellent lectures and Johnson’s desire for them are not of course irrelevant. Critics often seem to assume that the Boswellian record is superior to the Hawkins and Piozzi record largely in its greater material fullness: there is more documentation. If this were true, then it would have been no literary crime for Croker to have conflated as he did all three works together; facts are facts. But it was a crime because the records are different not in extent but, as Professor Clifford has seen, “in their fundamental nature” (357). Boswell’s facts are created according to the model of a living universal idea of a great man, the minor biographers’ as impressions of the contingent acts of a contingent man who sometimes displayed his greatness.

(The passage quoted from Hawkins, incidentally, witnesses to an interesting point. In attempting to impose universal moral judgment on Johnson’s imperfect action, Hawkins is imitating Johnson’s own biographical practice, just as he attempted to imitate Johnson’s style. Johnson succeeds in his biographies because he genuinely does impose his judgment on the facts. His biographies are literature because they achieve universality of judgment, not because they display the inherent universality of their subject. The pleasure of Johnson’s Life is Johnson, not Pope or Addison. This shows how untrue is the usual statement that Boswell followed Johnson’s biographical example. He followed it in its emphasis on character and on characterizing particularity, but he departed totally from the basic Johnsonian mode of presentation. Johnson’s practice, of course, was ideally suited to his gifts, for the same reasons that made him the ideal subject for Boswell’s kind of biography.)

Once the nature of Boswell’s image of Johnson has been pointed out, its presence and constructive function are everywhere apparent. Many facts in the Life, however, would not in themselves contribute directly to our vivid sense of the character, and it is not immediately clear why they should have been included if the subject of the work is as I describe it. Briefly we may say that Boswell treats the full range of facts in the life on the assumption, amply born out by modern scholars, that anything connected with such a man will contribute a little bit more to our attempt to fill out and confirm the inherently fascinating reality of his image. In factual literature, we do want to know how many children had Lady Macbeth. But Boswell, as may easily be illustrated, always proportions his treatment of a fact to the relevance it has for the image of essential character, so that he dismisses quickly much that has great importance in the progress of Johnson’s life and devotes pages to what does not affect its progress at all. He explains the substantive biographical facts adequately as facts but always in such a way as to shape and control their significance as emblems of the admirable character. Take, for instance, Boswell’s account of Johnson’s pension (1:372–77).
We see at once that it is not an account of a fact in itself but a transformation of a potentially hostile fact into the terms of the image. He begins by placing the grant in the glowing context of George III’s liberal and disinterested patronage and only then contemptuously characterizes the charges of venality which had been made against Johnson. He then refutes the charges by a detailed citation of witnesses, painstakingly and concretely recreating the motivation on both sides, and emerges with the dramatically won conclusion that the pension had been granted on “liberal and honourable terms” (375). The passage closes with Johnson’s nobly dignified letter to Bute, which concretely confirms and amplifies the judgment Boswell has offered, so that the reader is left secure in truth and admiration, the image not only intact but fortified. Examples of such essay-parts, as we may call them, clearly shaped to the large end of the book, could be multiplied.

But the fact that the shaping role of Boswell’s grand image of Johnson is especially obvious in particular passages should not prevent our perceiving its active presence in every part of the Life. We hear it vibrate in the fanfare of the very first sentence: “To write the Life of him who excelled all mankind in writing the lives of others, and who, whether we consider his extraordinary endowments, or his various works, has been equalled by few in any age, is an arduous, and may be reckoned in me a presumptuous task” (1:3). A grand and confident claim has been made upon our attention. We necessarily infer that the claim has a cause in reality external to the narrator, and we respond as to a perceived fact with a corresponding mental and emotional assumption of our own. The narrative posture thereafter continuously asserts the real existence of the image thus evoked and continues to demand its counterpart in us. Thus, even when the facts immediately produced do not actively validate the image, the reader never doubts its reality because the narrator does not evaluate such facts as validation but only as necessarily interesting and relevant, in relation to the curiosity which the continuing image naturally generates.

More than narrative assertion is required, of course, to call Johnson’s spirit from the vasty deep, particularly in the opening pages where so little of the concrete is available; and the discerning critic can only admire the many subtle means Boswell employs to bring the permanent Johnson quickly before us. In the facts of the youth he discovers the greatness of the man; and with the voice of the man he makes the youth vivid. He selects, compresses, dramatizes, vivifies to such a degree that when at last the figure of Johnson walks through Davies’s doorway, he is an old and beloved acquaintance.

More largely, throughout the Life, many subtle features, quite distinct from its factual substance, conspire to renew and intensify our sense of the grandeur of the subject. Recurring epithets like “my illustrious friend” give us a tug of
pleasure and reanimate our established estimate as we think subconsciously, “he was illustrious.” Even such apparently irrelevant aspects of the book as its praise of great men, or its literary allusions, or Boswell’s digression on the qualities of a noble estate contribute in the aggregate to the massive special effect of the whole. (Only consider how much grander and more spacious is the world of the *Life* than the world of Boswell’s *London Journal.*)

In a moment I shall pay detailed attention to the means by which the image is given redundant concrete specification, but I should not leave the subject of the peripheral means Boswell employs in connection with it without noticing two directly related matters, his citation of the testimony of others and his use of Johnson’s letters. Both these dimensions of his work serve as necessary guarantees that we are encountering not a personal but a universal view of the subject. The testimony of others validates and extends the view Boswell himself takes; and the letters, each of which, as Professor Daghlian has recently noted, powerfully images Johnson’s noble character (109, 128), offer the strongest possible objective corroboration of the image: the Johnson we meet in the letters is indubitably the same as the Johnson Boswell elsewhere shows us. From all this we understand how the image becomes a covert but omnipresent reality in the *Life*, even in those facts which in themselves would not evoke it. The explanation offered here as confirmed by the actual experience of a continuous reading of the *Life* allows us to understand how such seemingly inert facts are drawn into relevance by the unseen lines of magnetic force which the large image and emotional flow of the whole exert and how each function as one of the myriad particles which together make the lines real and distinct. The image constructs the facts, and the facts in turn construct the image; the process, circular and progressive, constitutes the linear coherence and material unity of the *Life*.

But unity and coherence do not by themselves make literature. To understand why the *Life* is a supremely literary work, we must explain its power, unmatched among factual narratives, of producing literary pleasure. The explanation lies in the unusual degree to which the *Life* is able, within the limits of truth, to meet Coleridge’s supplementary requirement that literary works ought to be so designed as to give in each of their parts as much pleasure as is consonant with the greatest pleasure in the whole. Lockhart’s *Life of Scott*, for instance, has a plot-like structure, a single line of developing tragic perception, which produces a powerful single effect, but the constituent parts are relatively inert. As a whole, consequently, it is much less a work of literature than Boswell’s. The *Life of Johnson* gives maximum pleasure just because it is so preponderantly made up of images of Johnson’s acts, each of which has its own particular pleasure which, when most fully realized, most contributes to the peculiar pleasure of the whole. To understand this, we must remember what Aristotle teaches: that literary
pleasure results from the vivid representation to our consciousness of striking human acts, morally determinate, which move us through our perception of the internal probability and ethical consonance of their inception, continuance, and completion. Now, as I shall more fully illustrate, all the acts in the Life are represented according to this formula. Boswell renders them vivid and striking, makes us see them as internally probable in terms of motive and circumstance, and adjusts our view so that we always see them as ethically consonant both in themselves and with the morally determinate image of an admirable Johnson. Each of the representational parts, then, has its own local pleasure, but the parts are of such a nature that in sum they also form the basis of the larger literary pleasure of the entire book—the single continuing, growing and self-reinforcing pleasure of encountering in new and striking but always probable manifestations the astonishing character of Samuel Johnson. That we know these new manifestations as probable and encounter them with anticipatory pleasure demonstrates the fact that the image, though it has no single material expression, nonetheless exists as an active essence in the reader’s mind which, as I have already said, effectively renders even the inert parts concrete. (That we possess the liberated image of Johnson even after the fact of reading the Life is demonstrated by the effect upon us of the words “Sir” or “Why, No Sir” spoken out of context but with appropriate inflection. The utterance immediately brings to mind that amusing but admirable conjunction of sincere deference and rational aggression which together reflect the essence of Johnson’s character. A similar phenomenon obtains for no other historical figure.)

It may help to clarify the large structural principle of the Life if we recall that we have already seen it in action in the episodes compared with their counterparts in Hawkins and Mrs. Piozzi. When Boswell’s Johnson throws the interloper off the stage, we are made to see his action as ethically consonant with, though conventionally disproportionate to, the provocation he has received and his own dignity, so that the scene becomes comically pleasing; at the same time, Johnson’s overall moral stature is pleasurably confirmed and reinforced. Mrs. Piozzi’s Johnson, by contrast, is neither amusing nor admirable. When Boswell’s Johnson throws away the shoes at Oxford, we are moved by a momentary pulse of admiring compassion, because we understand the grounds of his act fully and evaluate it as justified; at the same time, we see a permanently grand aspect of his nature. Hawkins’s Johnson is shown to neither purpose.

But Coleridge’s principle about the relation of parts to the whole has in view not only such material parts as episodes in a representation but also purely qualitative parts. The pleasure of any literary work will increase in proportion as all its elements, including those of language itself—syntax, diction, and pure sound—are arranged so as actively to support the effect. For example, other
things being equal, a representation in verse is more intensely pleasing than one in prose. Here, then, is another cause of the supreme literary quality of the Life. Johnson's speech—edited and pointed by Boswell to preserve and heighten its Johnsonian essence—makes him the only character in factual literature whose speech is equal to or superior to that of fictional characters. The graceful elasticity and full vital expressiveness of Boswell's own purposefully unobtrusive style work toward the same end to make the Life unique as a factual work which to the large pleasure of concrete character and the smaller pleasure of concrete act can add the fully perfecting concrete pleasures of language itself. (At least once in the Life we get the pleasure of speech as a pure increment to the already forceful sense: “He seemed to take pleasure in speaking in his own style,” says Boswell; “for when he had carelessly missed it, he would repeat the thought translated into it. Talking of the Comedy of ‘The Rehearsal,’ he said, ‘It has not wit enough to keep it sweet.’ This was easy; he therefore caught himself, and pronounced a more rounded sentence; ‘It has not vitality enough to preserve it from putrefaction’” [4:320]. Pure style, pure pleasure—but as always in Johnson, the style is the man.)

But the vital corpuscles of the Life's body are the acts. Let us take them first at their simplest and then at their most complex. The simplest kind of complete act represented in the Life is an aphorism or generalization by Johnson without context. Now any general truth even independent of a speaker has a representational character and force: the mind perceives it as a self-caused, inherently purposeful, surprising but probable act of cognition, carrying with it therefore its own distinct pleasure. The pleasure of a generalization will be greater in proportion to the degree in which it is both true and unobvious, to the inherent human relevance of its substance, and to the concision and force of its expression. To describe the conditions of pleasure in generalizations is to suggest the qualities of Johnson's. As much as La Rochefoucauld's and Pascal's, Johnson's sayings have literary value in and of themselves, with the additional pleasure of their spontaneity; it is not too much to say that the recorded impromptus of all other men together do not equal the total of his in pleasure and value. Yet all of his remarks in the Life give additional pleasure, on the large grounds sketched out above, in that they satisfy as fresh but unforeseeable signs of the power of the character and at the same time add an increment to the total pleasurable image. Let us take one of the myriad examples, the statement, “All censure of a man's self is oblique praise. It is in order to show how much he can spare. It has all the invidiousness of self-praise, and all the reproach of falsehood” (3:323–24). The initial sentence, paradoxical and surprising, is quickly and pleasingly rendered inherently probable (that is, true) by the explanatory second sentence. The compelling analytic judgment of the third sentence converts what might
have been a cynicism of La Rochefoucauld's into an implicit positive base of moral operations. It is not directed scornfully at other men but put instructively, for the use of all men, including the speaker. The statement surprises, pleases, and teaches; and it leaves the mind with a renewed and augmented sense of the simultaneously good, wise, and articulate man who made it. But even when Johnson’s statements are perfectly particular they are pleasurable merely as fresh revelations of the established admirable character. “Sir, I would walk to the extent of the diameter of the earth to save Beauclerk” (4:10). Or: “Sir, you have not travelled over my mind, I promise you” (4:183). Notice that the hyperbolic first statement would not please if our conviction of Johnson’s majestic rectitude and the depth of his feeling did not give it substance; and that the second, if said by Goldsmith to Johnson, rather than the other way around, would be merely an egotistical impertinence.

But the most massively pleasing parts of the Life are its scenes. The art of the major scenes is so plain that they have often drawn praise upon Boswell for the vividness of their pointing and their parenthetical stage directions [“Johnson (puffing and blowing): . . . ”]. But these praises are often analytically empty because the critics who give them have no conception of the form and effect to which the devices are subordinate. After “vivid” and “dramatic” there is nothing left. Space does not permit me to work in full detail through the most famous scene in the Life, the Wilkes episode (3:64–79), but a partial analysis can sufficiently demonstrate how much its effect depends upon Boswell’s handling. Its essential structure may be described by expanding the basic formula already set down: it is a full Aristotelian action which follows the predicament of a central character from a beginning which defines the terms of that predicament, through a middle which develops and complicates it and our reactions to the full, to an end which resolves the complications and brings our emotional participation to satisfactory discharge and close. More particularly, it is a comic action. Now in a comic action the hero is of mixed character—essentially and predominantly good, so that we wish him finally well; at the same time flawed or restricted in a way that involves him in embarrassments which are the substance of the complications of the plot. We view these embarrassments with delight both because they are of the hero’s own making and because the conduct of the story assures us throughout that he will in some way that our perplexity cannot foresee ultimately achieve the due which his fundamentally good character deserves and that meanwhile nothing really harmful or painful will befall him. Boswell shows us the Wilkes episode according to just this formula.

At the outset, Johnson is already secure in our admiration, but Boswell must make us actively desire to see a kind of trick played on him. He does this initially by making us feel that the meeting will be a delightful experi-
ment in human nature which will end much to the Doctor’s credit and by heightening our sense of that awful personal power in Johnson which by itself guarantees the preservation of his dignity while it enhances our comic sense of Boswell’s resourceful daring. (“How to manage it, was a nice and difficult matter.”) Boswell sets the terms of the story by defining Johnson and Wilkes as “celebrated men” who, though as different as they could possibly be, are yet both friends of Boswell. The meeting is thus neatly characterized as potentially productive either of an explosion or a conciliation. We are made to feel that the last will and ought to be the result but are left to wonder how, considering Johnson’s strong moral and political prejudices, the first will be avoided. The terms are quickly sharpened with the apparently gratuitous paragraph about Sir John Pringle who, like Wilkes, was also linked to Johnson through the middle term of Boswell’s friendship but who, though an excellent man, was “not sufficiently flexible” to meet agreeably with him. The paragraph has a very precise function: it underlines the potential explosiveness of the desired meeting and Boswell’s own underlying assurance that the explosion will somehow not occur, while at the same time it defines any inflexibility which might stand in its way as a regrettable human limitation. From this point on, therefore, the reader must actively hope that Johnson will be able to meet Wilkes on affable terms, while he is all the more aware of the piquant difficulties.

The paragraph on arrangements with Dilly increases with every detail our sense of the necessity that Johnson for his own sake meet the standards of social sophistication, while Dilly’s represented alarm reinforces our sense of the internal barrier to his doing so. The next scene shows Boswell with consummate meekness and guile inducing Johnson to accept the invitation through a subtle challenge to his vanity as a social man. The paragraph could sustain a page of analysis, but I will only say that its brilliance consists in Boswell’s heightening our comic sense of Johnson’s majestically cantankerous nature at the same time that he makes us sympathetic to Johnson’s full if inadvertent commitment of his pride to the fact that he is not ultimately limited by his prickliness. “And if Jack Wilkes should be there, what is that to me, Sir?” Johnson must make good this commitment, but all the more we wonder: how is he to do it?

The obstacle presented by Mrs. Williams is used fully by Boswell to heighten by opposing the wishes we have formed to see the meeting take place, as well as for other purposes; and when the obstacle is overcome we exult with Boswell as his prize is carried off. Snug and silent, we watch with delight the impact upon Johnson of Mr. Arthur Lee and then Mr. Wilkes. Boswell defines Lee’s comic function with brilliant economy by juxtaposing a description of him in the idiom of Johnson’s prejudice—he was both a “patriot” and an “American”—with a comment that underlines his membership in the civilized
world of which we desire Johnson to be fully a member—Lee was, Boswell says, later American ambassador to the Court of Madrid. In other words, we see Lee at once as Johnson in his comic limitation sees him and also as he really is and as Johnson must therefore finally accept him if he is to maintain and increase our regard. But just at this moment we are most aware of the resources it will require in Johnson to overcome the strength of his prejudice as Boswell vividly communicates his comic distress—“too, too, too.” The distress is visible, but if the effect is to be maintained, we need as well some assurance that the hoped for if as yet unspecifiable triumph will eventually come and that it will come not accidentally but as a result of Johnson’s deliberate attempt to master himself and the situation. No sign is available, and so Boswellboldly goes into Johnson’s mind to get it for us: “His feelings, I dare say, were awkward enough. But he no doubt recollected his having rated me for supposing that he could be at all disconcerted by any company, and he, therefore, resolutely set himself to behave quite as an easy man of the world, who could adapt himself at once to the disposition and manners of those whom he might chance to meet” (3:68). The sympathetic vanity and our hopes for its triumph are strong in our minds. Despite his resolution, Johnson’s “surly virtue” is shown to yield only gradually as the conciliatory gestures of the suave but sincere Wilkes make us wish all the more for Johnson’s triumph of sophistication. All the matter now heightens and foreshadows the climax, in ways we cannot pause to notice, until we get the climactic interchange: “JOHNSON. (to Mr. Wilkes) ‘You must know, Sir, I lately took my friend Boswell and shewed him genuine civilised life in an English provincial town. I turned him loose at Lichfield, my native city, that he might see for once real civility: for you know he lives among savages in Scotland, and among rakes in London.’ WILKES. ‘Except when he is with grave, sober, decent people like you and me.’ JOHNSON. (smiling). ‘And we ashamed of him’” (3:77). The speeches please not just in themselves but because they resolve with such unexpected and delightful fullness the underlying tensions which have been so clearly and vividly represented from the outset.

Johnson’s first speech—“and rakes in London”—covertly and politely acknowledges and thus neutralizes the antagonism which he has felt toward Wilkes and which has been the source of our comic concern. Wilkes, just as politely, denies any antagonism by defining himself with Johnson as among the “grave, sober, decent people—the three adjectives are a giveaway—as opposed to the rakes. Johnson’s smiling “And we ashamed of him” accepts the denial, cancels the animosity, joins himself to Wilkes, and, in a complete reversal of the original terms of the incident, leaves the Boswell who had challenged Johnson’s civility comically out in the social cold, a barbarous Scot. The single adjective, “smiling,” applied to Johnson is, of course, not just a piece of random vividness but is
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...crucially important to our full sense of the active benevolence with which Johnson reconciles himself to Wilkes; it is not the limited triumph of self-control over ineradicable and debilitating prejudice, but the full-hearted triumph of a capaciously human soul whose prejudice is only a temporary defect of its large virtues. It should be clear even from this brief analysis that the pleasurable effect not only of the climax but of the whole depends on the facts only as they are selected, revealed and evaluated by Boswell's art.

The interchange does not end the episode, but we cannot pause to follow Boswell's means of bringing it to full aesthetic completeness. Enough has been said to show how the episode, like the other parts we have examined, makes its fullest contribution to the overall purpose of the Life when its own appropriate pleasure is most realized. The inherent particular effect of the Wilkes episode is comic pleasure, and that pleasure has been seen to increase in proportion to Johnson's triumph. The greater, the more surprising, and yet characteristically probable the triumph, the greater the comic pleasure. But obviously then the greater the comic pleasure, the greater our residual admiration for Johnson. We should notice, too, that the episode necessarily depends on the preceding part of the Life, for an active idea of Johnson's character is a requisite of its comic effect. No one who reads the episode without experience of the Life will think it very funny.

A great part of the pleasure of the scene taken as a whole is their wide range of effect from somberness to the gayest lightness, while all express the same Johnson and all are indebted to Boswell's art. Consider, for instance, the grand scene where Boswell introduces "the subject of death, and [endeavors] to maintain that the fear of it might be got over" (2:106–107). The conversation must have lasted some time but Boswell gives only its heart. Johnson's defense of his own fear of death as against the alleged lack of fear in Hume and Foote justifies him immediately in our estimation because he finds evidence for his own feelings that we cannot deny: "Hold a pistol to Foote's breast, or to Hume's breast, and threaten to kill them, and you'll see how they behave." Still, we would not be really prepared to absorb the gigantic outburst which follows Boswell's "But may we not fortify our minds for the approach of death?" (2:106) if Boswell had not been able, without breaking the rhythm of the scene, to specify and ennoble Johnson's inner state:

I am sensible I was in the wrong, to bring before his view what he ever looked upon with horrour; for although when in a celestial frame, in his "Vanity of Human Wishes," he has supposed death to be "kind Nature's signal for retreat," from this state of being to "a happier seat," his thoughts upon this aweful change were in general full of dismal apprehensions. His mind resembled the vast amphitheatre, the Coliseaum...
at Rome. In the centre stood his judgement, which, like a mighty gladiator, combated those apprehensions that, like the wild beasts of the Arena, were all around in cells, ready to be let out upon him. After a conflict, he drove them back into their dens; but not killing them, they were still assailing him. To my question, whether we might not fortify our minds for the approach of death, he answered, in a passion, “No, Sir, let it alone. It matters not how a man dies, but how he lives. The act of dying is not of importance, it lasts so short a time.” He added, (with an earnest look,) “A man knows it must be so, and submits. It will do him no good to whine.” (2:107)

Boswell’s grand simile, though necessary, is dangerous. Were it not for its manifest accuracy and truth and its immediate validation by the grandeur of Johnson’s reply, so artificial a comparison could easily have been a disaster. But it succeeds by forcing us to understand that Johnson’s unusual fear of death does not diminish him, since it makes us feel how constant and tremendous the pressures upon him were, how great was the effort needed to hold them in equilibrium, and how near to breaking without ever really breaking his majestic nature was. The agitated but noble reply confirms all this and releases Johnson from the blame of personal defect because, though it functions fully as the sign to us of his particular emotion, it is perfectly general and fully applicable to all other human beings, so that we see him not as a particular fearful man but as an exemplar of the most basic kind of human heroism. Our sense of the splendid agony of his bravery carries over to his full credit as Boswell goes on to tell of his “Give us no more of this” and of his expressing himself “in a way that alarmed and distressed me.” When the peremptory “Don’t let us meet tomorrow” comes, we feel not that Johnson has been blamably irritable but only that we have seen a nature, like ours but much grander, unintentionally provoked beyond endurance. Boswell, of course, had at the moment been himself made “extremely uneasy.” “All the harsh observations which I had ever heard made upon his character, crowded into my mind” (2:107). But in retrospect the causes of this uneasiness had faded away, irrelevant to the grand epiphany to which he had been witness, and we ourselves actively perceive only the universality and not the contingency of the occasion.

But Boswell can preserve not merely the grand essential moments but also the very small ones. It is sometimes said that he does not show us the light, trifling Johnson we know from Burney and Thrale, but consider the following vignette:

Johnson was prevailed with to come sometimes into [blue-stocking] circles, and did not think himself too grave even for the lively Miss Monckton (now Countess of Corke), who used to have the finest bit of blue at the house of her mother, Lady Gal-
way. Her vivacity enchanted the Sage, and they used to talk together with all imaginable ease. A singular instance happened one evening, when she insisted that some of Sterne’s writings were very pathetick. Johnson bluntly denied it. “I am sure (said she) they have affected me.”—“Why, (said Johnson, smiling, and rolling himself about,) that is, because, dearest, you’re a dunce.” When she some time afterwards mentioned this to him, he said with equal truth and politeness; “Madam, if I had thought so, I certainly should not have said it.” (4:108–109)

Boswell’s quick definition of the established mutual regard of the two, the brief glimpse we get of Johnson’s usually ominous tendency to roughness (“bluntly denied”) joined to the surprising adroitness and sophistication of his immediate and ultimate responses to Miss Monckton’s momentary and fetching vulnerability conspire to make the little scene extremely pleasing. Even so, however, the immediate response would not have given much pleasure if Boswell had not marked Johnson’s inner spirit so accurately by his description of the Doctor’s physical posture. The language (“dearest”) and the movements together wonderfully communicate the delighted premeditation and benign condescension with which the ponderous Johnson makes his affectionate thrust. And so Boswell reveals another aspect, surprising but entirely consonant, of Johnson’s astonishing being.

Despite his intention of evoking consistent admiration and reverence for Johnson, Boswell as we have already seen does not suppress our sense of his faults. Boswell set out to write “not his panegyric, which must be all praise, but his Life; which, great and good as he was, must not be supposed to be entirely perfect” (1:30). Boswell did not suppress faults but deliberately included them and thereby induced Fanny Burney’s fear, that the portrait of Johnson with all his blemishes would lessen him forever in the eyes of posterity. But Boswell knew that without the blemishes the portrait would not be true and concretely convincing. Unless the reader were to see an image which in its basic structure corresponded to his own imperfect nature, he would not recognize either the paradigmatic likeness or the particular otherness that are the essence of biographical portraiture; he would not admire because he would not believe. Besides, to be as Johnson was, with all his defects, constituted, as Boswell says, “panegyric enough to any man in this state of nature” (1:30). But Boswell had an artistic motive even higher than verisimilitude for his honesty. He can make Johnson even more admirable by showing that he was so in spite of his faults and uglinesses. As in all art, the greater the ugliness overcome, the greater the ultimate beauty and pleasure. As Hume showed long ago in “Of Tragedy,” any emotion arising from the contemplation of a painful object is, in the presence of a predominant sentiment of beauty, converted into the higher feeling. Any
emotive reaction to faults or ugliness is overcome consistently in Boswell by the emotion attaching to our immediate or residual impression of Johnson's essential greatness and goodness. When Mrs. Piozzi tells us that Johnson was a “gross feeder,” the brief image is ugly and painful, while a much more particular and materially ugly description of Johnson's eating by Boswell is not (1:468). Mrs. Piozzi's description images her own disgust, Boswell's a more complex but affirmative reaction which assimilates our perception of the intense passion with which Johnson eats to our sense of the gigantic will which drives his being and which does not, except in indifferent matters, break through his moral control. Consistently in the Life, as in most episodes we have examined, faults are pleasurably rendered as temporary foibles or necessary defects of the great virtues, while the fully represented physical grotesqueness, the eccentricity and ugliness, ultimately serve only to make Johnson's achievement the more concretely real, particular and astonishing.

But even when Johnson's defects cannot be converted to immediately sympathetic pleasure, Boswell faces them directly, in order to show, we may say, how much Johnson can spare. He makes little defense, for instance, of Taxation No Tyranny. Johnson should not have written it, and Boswell quotes with approval two animadversions on the pamphlet. Both of these, however, share with Boswell the assumption that the work is an uncharacteristic and unworthy product of the great mind which produced it, and when Boswell goes on to indicate as fully and concretely as he can that Johnson probably shared this view, the effect is complete. Finally, in extreme cases, where Johnson has been excessively rude or violent, Boswell will report an outburst in general terms sufficient to make us understand its character and effect, but not vividly enough to make it actively disagreeable. The most notable example precisely because it is so seldom noted is the occasion when Johnson attacks Boswell himself so fiercely that Boswell is angry for days and almost goes away to Scotland without seeing the Doctor again (3:337). The shock was obviously nearly traumatic to Boswell, and affected him personally more deeply perhaps than all but a few of the scenes in the Life. His handling of it is characteristic: he tells us accurately the substance and effect of Johnson's rudeness, but he does not show it to us; in the sequel, however, he dramatizes the reconciliation with great particularity and happy effect. Despite his personal investment, he proportions the weight he gives the scene strictly to its relative value as a sign of his subject—Johnson’s character as it is of interest to all men, not Johnson’s character as it might appear momentarily to and affect one man. Boswell sees not for himself but for all of us; his book is by no means “one man’s recollections of another.”

This brings us to our final topic in the Life: the general matter of its truth. Most students have emphasized that the strictest truth is essential to biography,
but they have meant by truth, ordinarily, authenticity—fidelity to ascertainable empirical fact. The authenticity of Boswell’s account has often been investigated and checked against his own records and the records of others. The verdict is nearly unanimous: the Life is as authentic as human effort could have made it. Yet we have seen fully characteristic instances when Boswell goes quite beyond the limits of literal truth, as when he dramatizes scenes he has not witnessed, or directly enters Johnson’s mind; even the speeches, we have noticed, must be understood as true more in effect than in substance. If, as Johnson himself and many since have insisted, the inherent value of biography depends directly upon its literal truth, how can we justify Boswell’s editing, shaping, and evaluation? More generally, how can we explain the fact that we experience the full value of Boswell’s book while reading it in complete innocence of all the existing external corroboration of its accuracy? The answer is implicit and to a degree explicit in all that I have been saying. Certified truth in Boswell’s book is a requisite as in all factual narrative, but its truth is ultimately relevant not to the essential facts of Johnson’s life but to the essence of his character; for the book is not about an eighteenth-century man of letters, not about an external life and career, but about a man, significantly independent of history, who manifested himself in the events of a life and career. All of Boswell’s authenticating assiduity, all the innumerable certified details, are valuable finally not as they give us true external facts but as evidence of the conjunction of that magnificent image with reality; like Defoe’s circumstantiality, Boswell’s constantly implies that the fact is not fiction but real; but unlike Defoe’s, Boswell’s circumstantiality is not a lie. An inherent part of the pleasure of the character is that it was real, and without Boswell’s endless certification of what might seem the aesthetically indifferent reality around it, our pleasure in the image could not be as certain and full. Our emotion is toward a timeless image but it is nonetheless an image of fact with location in time and place. Nevertheless the only inherently essential fact of the work is the character; and the truth of the character itself, as we understand by now, is something internal to the Life itself. We know intuitively that the character is what it appears to be because it is so complex, so various and astonishing in its endless manifestations and yet so obviously consistent and coherent as a whole that its image could have proceeded from no cause except itself. It is not, as some have sneeringly said, that we know that Boswell could not have invented Johnson; rather we know with the fullest intuitive certainty that no one—not Defoe, not even Shakespeare—could have invented him. No fictional personality approaches the capacities and complexities of Johnson’s. Insofar as the reality of the character is concerned, the book is more compelling than any other evidence of any kind could possibly be. The truth about Johnson’s life will change and grow, but the essential truth of his character will never be different.
from what we feel it to be in Boswell; our residual impression of Johnson must always be such as to produce admiration and reverence. And so we end where we began. Boswell’s book is literature because it lifts an aspect of human reality from the contingency of history and displays it as a concrete universal—self-validating, self-intelligible, inherently moving, permanently valuable.

For what we experience finally in the book—and this is the most fundamental source of its literary greatness—is not the sum of Johnson’s particular actions but the essence of his character, an essence deeply relevant not to the contingency of history but to the permanence of human nature and therefore immediately to ourselves.

Every man desires to be both bound and free. He desires to be free to express his own deepest passions, and he desires to be bound by the ties of morality and convention that link him to other men in love and respect. It follows from this that he desires at the same time to bind his deepest passions and to break through the internalized restraints of society. His pride requires that he be potent; his dignity requires that he be moral. The powers of most men are unequal to the paradox: dignity suffers when the passionate self breaks down, or corrupts, the moral commitment; or pride is diminished as the self in meeting the commitment succumbs to the seductions of the protean forms of hypocrisy. Literature in general may be understood, at bottom, a series of symbolic solutions to this paradox, with success dependent upon the degree to which both its dimensions are satisfied. And Johnson’s image is the functional core of a great work of literature because his extraordinarily passionate and powerful being, while fully committed to the restraints of convention, morality, and reason, was yet neither corrupted nor rendered impotent. Perpetually he broke powerfully through the ordinary restraints of convention to express his most primal impulses in vindication of his commitment to convention, morality and reason. He thereby created his dignity and justified his pride on the most general human grounds, so that his image could become for all of us a token of the simultaneous freedom and commitment which is possible to human beings. Symbolically in our imaginative sympathy and actually as an example, that image frees us from the burdens of conventional impotence and falsity—from the rehearsed response, the coward’s stance, the liar’s quinsy—and restores our dignity, and our pride in ourselves and in the human nature which we share with him. That is why the pleasure of the book is so real and so deep.

Johnson’s image is therefore one of the most valuable of our cultural possessions, but without Boswell it would never have been freed from the bondage of time. His book is, as Carlyle said, “a revocation of the edict of Destiny; so that Time shall not utterly, not so soon by several centuries, have dominion over us” (Carlyle, “Boswell’s Life of Johnson” 80). Not over Johnson, notice, but
over us—who have our stake in Johnson. Boswell’s construction of his book was a supremely important artistic act. Because it was so fully artistic, however, it is fully real and therefore has seemed to many to manifest no art at all. But it should be clear from what we have said that the *Life of Samuel Johnson* is a great book not because the subject was great or because the biographer was great but because both were great; it was a magnificent literary symbiosis. Johnson was all activity, Boswell all potentiality. He—a truly reverent man, as Carlyle says—filled himself with Johnson’s greatness and displayed it to posterity shorn of accident and unblemished by any stain of his own private feeling or immense personal ego. That ego indeed had been deeply wounded in the midst of his task when he learned what Johnson had said of him in his letters to Mrs. Thrale, but this did not at all deflect him from his high purpose.

Johnson, if he had known, would have been more grateful to Boswell than posterity has often been. “Sir, it was generous and noble beyond expectation.” But even in his life he was not indifferent to Boswell’s devotion. We remember the unusual gesture he made in going with Boswell down to Harwich to see him off to Holland. One of the finest moments in the *Life* is our view of him tarrying on the Harwich pier as the receding Boswell perceives him in the distance, “rolling his majestic frame” (1:472). The moment is strangely moving, because it triggers in proportion to its slightness such a flood of sentiment. Boswell’s two epithets render the for once inarticulate figure a sudden and forceful evocation of all the benevolent affection that our experience as shaped by Boswell has attached to his image. Boswell repaid the Doctor for his kindness. His majestic frame will roll there forever in its particular and universal humanity.

A brief postscript about the relevance of the conception offered here of the form of Boswell’s *Johnson* to the general problem of literary form in all factual narratives. We may say first that to the degree that any factual narrative is responded to as literature, its form may be analyzed as inherently the cause of an effect. And insofar as the form has the capacity to produce an effect, it will have raised human fact out of contingency and made it concretely present as a striking but inherently probable manifestation of complete and morally determinate human thought, character, or action, individual or collective.

It is this noncontingent, universal quality of narratives like Boswell’s and Gibbon’s which accounts for the indubitable fact that they remain of timeless value while works dealing with contingent aspects of the same subjects are perpetually superseded and absorbed in new expressions. Both kinds of history depend upon truth, but in different ways. The effect of Gibbon’s work, for instance, depends on a very simple and unchanging truth which in no way either limits or is limited by more complex explanatory truths about Rome’s fall. The effect depends on the undeniable fact that Rome can be viewed by all human beings
as a true high civilization, that it passed out of existence, and that none of the actors in the fall could fully comprehend or in any way prevent it. The fall was striking and necessary and therefore, when presented as Gibbon concretely presents it, inherently moving.

In the highest factual literature, therefore, the conditions of literary success approach those of fictional literature, but we must not therefore confuse the two modes. In fiction, the form must totally subsume the whole matter of the work. In most factual works, even when there is literary intent, a good deal of material must necessarily remain only passively adjusted to the form. When effect in factual works is produced in spite of, rather than through, the facts, as in Strachey’s sketch of Dr. Colbatch, the result is brilliant but cheap. Factual literature is inescapably connected with external reality, and in the best factual works a necessary part of our pleasure, as we have seen, comes from feeling that, in Carlyle’s phrase, the events related “did in very deed occur” (“Biography” 56). Thus, though the formula is the same, the criterion of imaginative commitment in fiction and fact is different; fact is stranger than fiction, and when fact is rendered universally true, it can and ought to claim a benefit from its strangeness and particularity that fiction cannot. But the realms of fiction and fact, so absolutely distinct at their extremities of pure imagination and pure explanation, nevertheless come very close to one another at the point where Shakespeare’s history plays, say, and *Paradise Lost* on the one hand—fully concrete but dependent on a presumptive relation to fact—look toward works like *The Prelude* and Boswell’s *Johnson* on the other which, though largely concrete, demand acceptance as true fact. And even at the extremes, pure explanation, as in Hume’s “Of Tragedy,” can give concrete pleasure in proportion to its clarity, coherence, concision and native significance, while even the veriest work of the imagination must ultimately be dependent on the facts of human nature and existence. (Johnson himself made the point clearly: “The value of every story depends on its being true. A story is a picture either of an individual or of human nature in general: if it be false, it is a picture of nothing” [Life 2:433].)

But our present concern is with those works which, clearly factual, are nonetheless clearly literature. We can see now why there are so few such works. Fact is seldom such as to be even the potential cause of universal effects. If the decline of the Roman Empire had not been an inherently grand spectacle, Gibbon could never have made it so and given us the gravely sublime pleasure of perceiving the internal human causes of its inevitable fall. If seventeenth-century England had not really produced a nineteenth-century England that was in some perspectives inherently superior to it, while retaining its heritage and essential values, Macaulay could never have shown us the spectacle that causes the grand pride he makes us feel. And even when the facts are potentially
productive of art, the man and the occasion rarely meet. The fully imaginative artist has subjects at any time, but the decline of the Roman Empire was available as literature only to the unique gifts of a man who had inherited the special values and attitudes of a single time and place. So it is also with Macaulay, to say nothing of the miraculous conjunction of Johnson and Boswell, a special providence for which humanity must ever be grateful.

The very great barriers to full literary success in factual narrative are illustrated by Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood*. Here an artist of great capacity seized the accidentally available opportunity and realized it to the full extent of its potentialities. Displaying powers of imaginative reconstruction and synthesis equalled only by Boswell, he yet failed, I believe, to achieve the highest kind of factual literature. Capote does an extraordinary thing. He makes us appreciate the full horror and senseless cruelty of the inexplicable, bloody, night-time murder of a whole family remarkable for its normal decency in a broad social context of normal, uneventful decency, but he makes us feel at the same time a much more unusual thing. He makes us feel for the murderers not anger or a desire for vengeance but rather a peculiar if limited sympathy. The sympathy can be defined by saying that we see Dick’s and Perry’s actions as the result of their whole nature and lives, for which they are not to blame, and that consequently we do not hate them or desire their deaths; but neither, on the other hand, do we feel toward them any real mercy or forgiveness. This effect is the strength but also the limitation of the book. Our failure to feel mercy and forgiveness means that finally we do not recognize Dick and Perry as fully sharing our common nature; we feel that we could not, in any conceivable circumstances, have done what they did. Our intimate knowledge of the murderers widens our view of human existence but it does not make us better able to bear it. The same is true from the point of view of the victims. When Hamlet dies, or when Rome falls, we perceive how human beings are involved in their own necessary destruction, but we feel strongly after the fact that even in the face of destruction it was worthwhile to be Hamlet, worthwhile that Rome was. But the Clutters’ death, we are made to see, is a monstrous accident with no moral relevance whatever to them. There is no ethical consonance in it, so that we do not feel retrospectively that it was worthwhile for them to have lived, or that to have lived and died as they did would be worthwhile to us. The whole story offers only a limited catharsis and no residual grandeur. The defect is not in Capote’s art, except as it selected the subject, but in the subject itself, inherently defective because not sufficiently universal.

History and biography then cannot often aspire to the purity of Boswell or Gibbon. Indeed, to seek after concreteness and effect would often prevent them from fulfilling their usual purpose—true knowledge and understanding of the
contingent past. Modern history, for that matter, is not often guilty of trying to be literature. The high level of general culture among a small elite class which was the great achievement of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century civilization permitted and encouraged the historian or biographer to aim at both historical truth and literary force; the concerns of the scholar were not separate from the concerns of the human being. Now, of course, we have the often-lamented gap between the scholar and the journalist, between inert truth and cheap effect. The journalist, however, now seems pushed by the rising level of general culture towards adequacy to the human truth, and the scholar by the same phenomenon encouraged to discover that, though fact needs to be true to be valuable, it need not be dead in order to be true. Capote’s book, Schlesinger’s Thousand Days, Schorer’s Lewis and Ellmann’s Joyce, together with others that have recently appeared, may thus be harbingers of a renaissance in factual literature. We may hope so, for as Herbert Muller has shown, by precept and example, the past, of which materially we have recovered so much, must sometimes be put to immediately human uses if it is to serve us as fully as it may.

Notes

1. Many of the concepts articulated here were first developed in a graduate seminar which I gave in the spring of 1964 at the University of California, Berkeley. I wish to acknowledge my debt to the students in that seminar, particularly Gerry Brooks, William Chace, Peter Collier, Robert Hirst, John Hunter, and James Johnson. Since the lecture was written, it has benefited from the criticisms of Paul Alkon, Bertrand H. Bronson, James L. Clifford, Philip B. Daghlian, and Frederick A. Pottle, to all of whom I am grateful.

2. Professor Pottle has put the case for Boswell’s imaginative creativity more explicitly (and accurately, I believe) than any other critic. See Frederick A. Pottle, James Boswell: The Earlier Years, 1740–1769 (87–90), and an earlier article, “The Life of Boswell.”

3. “Boswell’s superiority over his rival biographers . . . lies not only in the completeness of his picture of Johnson, but also in the significant definition, the delicate shading, and the general coherence of his portrait. He justifies himself as a creative artist” (Clifford 357).

4. The conception of a comic action offered here is obviously indebted to R. S. Crane’s “The Concept of Plot and the Plot of Tom Jones” (632–33).

5. Hallam Tennyson’s attempt to sustain an attitude of reverence in his Memoir of his father is largely unsuccessful because Tennyson’s character is consistently presented as without defect and because Hallam’s represented reverential attitude has no adequate correlative in the facts as presented.

6. I am well aware that all readers of Boswell do not admire Johnson consistently throughout the book, and that some do not admire him at all. This does not alter the fact that, formally speaking, Johnson is always presented so as to sustain the effect of admiration. That Boswell should fail of his intended effect of some passages or with some readers is no
more evidence of a lack of consistent artistry than that Wordsworth, for example, should often fail of his effect in similar ways. The strong wine that Boswell offers can sometimes be fully savored only if the reader has the capacity to take the same disinterested delight in the powers of human nature that Boswell does. But that Boswell in fact achieves his effect with most readers the unique position of his book in literary history testifies.

7. Like the description of Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall* above, this statement is intended to articulate the large formal principle which governs the work.
The most distinctive and highly valued poems of the modern era offer an image of a dramatized “I” acting in a concrete setting. The variety and importance of the poems which fall under this description are suggested simply by the mention of such names as “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard,” “Tintern Abbey,” “Ode to a Nightingale,” “Ulysses,” “My Last Duchess,” “Dover Beach,” “The Windhover,” “The Darkling Thrush,” “Sailing to Byzantium,” “Leda and the Swan,” “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening.” The power and beauty of such poems seem intimately connected with the fact of their dramatic integrity and autonomy, and we have all been taught, in analyzing them, to refer to a “speaker” existing independent of the poet and to avoid the “intentional” and “biographical” fallacies which spuriously link the poem to the poet and the world outside the poem. Such an approach tends to undercut any notion that a poem has a single definite meaning, the meaning the poet gave it, and to support the idea that the meaning of a poem is indeterminate and/or multiple. All this is quite in accord with the orthodox critical doctrine that poetic language is differentiated from scientific language and preserved from competition with it by the fact that it is (a) nonreferential, making no claim upon the real world; and (b) complex, indefinite, and alogical, where scientific language is simple, definite, and logical.

This roughly is the theory we have been taught to honor. In practice, however, critics commonly make use of the idea that these poems have a quite definite relationship to the poet and the real world. Thus it is common to call the speakers of many of these poems by the name of the poet and to characterize...
the speakers of other poems by saying that they are someone “other” than the poet. The contradiction between such usages and the prevailing critical doctrine is not commonly perceived because, I believe, the relationship to the poet is not understood as intrinsic to the objective semantic structure of the poem but as an extrinsic relationship our knowledge of which derives in part from sources outside the poem.

In this essay I want to argue that these practical usages need no apology and that in fact they point to what the actual structure of meaning in these poems is. I will argue, specifically, that we do not understand such poems as objects standing apart from their creators and the real world in semantic indeterminacy but that we understand them, or can come to understand them most fully and clearly, as objects whose meaning and relation to the real world are fixed by the immanent intention of the indwelling poet. My more particular claim is that we register the figures in these dramatic poems as projected in various kinds of specific significant relationships to the author which we grasp not through some special poetic way of knowing but by extension of the means with which we have been equipped by evolution to understand, through our bodies, ourselves and, by tacit inference, the human others like ourselves, in the context of the world of which we are a part.¹

I may locate my own position initially in relation to that of two eminent critics—Robert Langbaum and Elder Olson—whose views depart in significant ways from the standard critical conception sketched above but yet are almost directly opposed to each other. Langbaum divides the poems we have been discussing into two large groups, the dramatic lyric and the dramatic monologue, and in contrast with the standard view emphasizes the experiential reality of the figures in both types of poem. He sees the speaker of the dramatic lyric as a real person nearly consubstantial with the poet, but he sees the speaker’s experience, which is the experience of the poem, as in essence indeterminate, as in the standard view, because its object is in the world external to the poet. Concurrently, he sees the figure in the dramatic monologue as other than the poet but as if he were in effect a real natural person existing independent of the poet, though Langbaum emphasizes that through some means we typically see the dramatic monologue speaker with a mixture of “sympathy and judgment” (see Langbaum, chapters 1 and 2). Thus Langbaum sees the matter of both kinds of poem as essentially real, free of the constructive control of the poet. Olson, on the other hand, recognizing what are in effect the same subclasses, sees both kinds of figures as artistic constructs, created and controlled by the poet’s art, whose shape and effect are single and determinate.² These views, I will argue, are not so much contradictory as complementary; these poems are most adequately seen as both determinate artistic constructs and as embodiments, in different senses,
of real experience. But to show that this is so will require the development of formal concepts more various, complex, and precise than these critics offer.3

Langbaum, as I have indicated, tends to think of the speaker in the dramatic monologue as if he were in effect a real person, as if he and the reader’s response to him were independent of the poet’s control. In a moment I want to show how completely our response to such a poem as “My Last Duchess” is built into the poem by the poet, but first I shall use the “Duchess” to show that, before any analytic reflection whatever, we are imaginatively aware of the Duke as held within and sustained by the poet’s creative consciousness. If we ask ourselves whether in reading the poem we imaginatively hear the words of the poem as spoken by the Duke, we discover of course that we do. If we then ask if we hear the rhymes in the poem as part of the Duke’s speech, we discover that we do not.4 This small but potent fact suggests even without further analysis that the poet’s presence in the poem is a fundamental aspect of its form, not something we know from outside the poem, but something inseparable from our experience of it. In this respect our experience tends to support Olson’s view of the poem as purely a poet-determined artistic construct as against Langbaum’s concept of it as an indeterminate natural fact.

On the other hand our immediate imaginative experience of “My Last Duchess” does not support Olson’s view that such a dramatic monologue character as the Duke is related to the reader imaginatively—is in the same fictive relationship to him—as the speaker/actor of a dramatic lyric like “Dover Beach.” That Olson’s view is incorrect can be shown if we transpose our imaginative experience of the two poems into cinematic images. If we do so, we shall see the Duke as an outward presence within the frame of the motion picture screen, gesturing and speaking the words of the poem to the envoy, whereas with “Dover Beach” we will see a moonlit seascape with the camera understood to be the actor’s eyes through which we are looking, with the words of the poem registered as proceeding “voice over” from a consciousness understood as attached to the eyes. A parallel test involves a simple reading aloud of the two poems: the reader will discover that he projects the Duke’s voice dramatically as characterizing the “otherness” of the Duke, but that the voice of the “Dover Beach” speaker will be an ideal extension of the reader’s own voice, that he utters the words, as it were, in his own behalf, or rather on the dramatic speaker’s behalf, as if the reader had become the speaker.

These facts suggest why we are automatically ready to think of figures like the Duke as “other” than the poet but are not inclined to insist upon the same distinction with figures like the one in “Dover Beach,” though they do not go very far toward explaining why we may find ourselves calling such dramatic figures “Arnold” or “Hardy” or “Hopkins.” I will have more to say about that later,
but first I want to say more about the “otherness” of the dramatic monologue speaker and more about the dramatic monologue form itself.

In a well-known passage from her diary Fanny Burney offers us a memorable verbal photograph of Boswell listening to Johnson and, incidentally, a most instructive image of the process whereby one man understands another: “the moment that voice burst forth, the attention which it excited in Mr. Boswell amounted almost to pain. His eyes goggled with eagerness; he leant his ear almost on the shoulder of the Doctor; and his mouth dropt open to catch every syllable that might be uttered: Nay, he seemed not only to dread losing a word, but to be anxious not to miss a breathing; as if hoping from it latently, or mystically, some information” (Dr. Johnson 224). Though Burney means by her description to demean and diminish Boswell, she actually shows us the source of his biographical genius. We see him here, utterly lost to himself, in effect become Johnson; at the same time, he remains tacitly very much conscious of himself as his act of imaginative identification with the great man stretches him physically out of shape. Thus did Boswell gain the deep dynamic impression of Johnson which he used in his biography to create that image of the Doctor in characteristic action which has given him eternal life.

But special as Boswell’s concentration may be in this scene, he is understanding Johnson in exactly the way all of us can and do understand the continuous purposive activity of another person when his activity is directed away from us toward an external goal. We fix our attention upon him and, losing all sense of ourselves, fill ourselves with a sense of his activity as, through an act of psychosomatic conflation and comparison, we empathetically register the contrast in identity between ourselves as the “other” and ourselves as ourselves.

Now it seems to me that the dramatic monologue is built not just as a generalized image of an “other” person but specifically as an artificial replication of this structure of interpersonal understanding. The poet of the dramatic monologue gives us his nonexistent character chameleon-fashion as Boswell in his great scenes transparently gives us Johnson, except that we react to the dramatic monologue characters without previous knowledge or expectation. We encounter them as at the turn of a path we might encounter one person speaking to another in some striking way that catches our attention, so that focusing our attention we begin to infer the speaker’s inner purpose from his words and external acts and continue to follow his activity until our rapt curiosity is replaced by the satisfaction of insight. If we are in fact related to dramatic monologue characters in this way, then we have a clear explanation of Langbaum’s persuasive but unclearly based idea that we react to these characters with a mixture of “sympathy and judgment.” The double response is not a matter of ethical or psychological ambiguity but is inherent in the imaginative act of conflation and comparison by which in the observer
situation I have specified we understand other people. We become them (sympa-
thy) while remaining ourselves (judgment).

It would follow from this that a good dramatic monologue would offer us an
arresting image of a literal person acting in literal circumstances whose obscure
but significant inner purpose we would with inferential empathy more and
more perceive until, just at the completion of his purposive act, our insight is
complete. Our pleasure in such a poem would derive from our focal response to
the inherent significance of the revealed act on the one hand and our continuous
subsidiary appreciation of the poet’s artful fabrication on the other. The more
we understood the dramatic actor from signs that seem to proceed from his own
purposes alone, the more we would tacitly appreciate the beauty of the poet’s
transparent simulation—his completely artificial presentation of what seems
completely independent natural activity.

It is possible, however, that the simulation could be so transparent as to be
invisible, not to the imagination so much as to the critical intellect. Thus we
have many critics taking the wonderfully lucid presentation of Browning’s Duke
for granted, as if the Duke were there because he was real on his own account
and not because Browning artfully made him. I have already said that I think
Langbaum misses the poet’s creative and controlling role in the dramatic mono-
logue, and it may be useful now to demonstrate the critical consequences of his
doing so by comparing his analysis of “My Last Duchess” with one developed
from my own conception.

What, we may ask, is the Duke up to in telling his story to the envoy? Lang-
baum is typical of critics when he sees the Duke as not up to much of anything.
He sees the Duke’s self-revelation as gratuitous, but he is different from the run
of critics in seeing that the very gratuitousness of the Duke’s act demands expla-
nation. He suggests on the one hand that there is always a certain element of the
gratuitous in the dramatic monologue, but uncomfortable with that explanation
of what he sees as the Duke’s “outrageous indiscretion,” he concludes that the
Duke’s sanity may well be in question (82–85).

Interpretations like Langbaum’s, which see the Duke’s actions as accidental
or casual, are, as I say, common. A much less common interpretation is that the
Duke, as I shall argue here, reveals himself with deliberate calculation, for a spe-
cific purpose. One may note in the first place how extremely out of character it
is for the proud and imperious Duke to let his mouth run in the presence of an
inferior, and indeed I believe most readers sense something more than aimless-
ness in his speech:

That’s my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolph’s hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will’t please you sit and look at her? I said
“Frà Pandolph” by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. (1–13)

Our impression that the Duke is merely calling his listener’s attention to a wonderfully lifelike work of art (“I call that piece a wonder, now”) is disturbed at several points. First, we are brought up a little short by the Duke’s admission that he had referred to Frà Pandolph “by design” when his reference had seemed so casual. Second, there is the fact that the Duke’s easy politeness (“Will’t please you sit?”) is uncomfortably juxtaposed with a sense of his terrible imperiousness (“And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst”). Finally, there is the fact, perhaps not fully registered by the reader on first reading, that the Duke has deliberately unveiled the painting and further that the Duke is replying not to a question which the listener has actually asked but to one which the Duke has gratuitously imputed to him. (The envoy has only asked “thus,” that is, in the manner of those who “seemed as they would ask me, if they durst.”) There is, or should be, at this point, a distinct sense of aroused puzzlement in the reader, a sense that the Duke has something more in mind than he directly expresses, but there are no solutions immediately in sight since the reader does not yet even know who the auditor is, much less why the Duke is speaking to him, or why he is speaking about the (normally veiled) portrait of his former wife. As the Duke goes on, however, the reader may perceive that he now refers increasingly not to the painting as a work of art but to the woman who is the subject of the painting. Finally come the chilling lines:

Even had you skill
In speech—(which I have not)—to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, “Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark”—and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
—E’en then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene’er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will’t please you rise? (35–47)

The short clipped last sentences do not seem gratuitous or casual, nor does the Duke’s repetition with terrible new force of his earlier observation, “There she stands as if alive.” But though the Duke’s “Will’t please you rise?” in contrast to the earlier “Will’t please you sit?” now comes through as an electric imperative (“Get up!”), the reader cannot fully understand the situation until the revelation that the auditor has come to negotiate a new marriage for the Duke. Even then, as in the common interpretation, the revelation may seem only to involve an irony of which the Duke is not aware; but if the reader has registered the hints of purpose that have come all along the way and bears in mind the Duke’s proud watchword, “I choose never to stoop,” the truth will come to him as it must come to the envoy, with great and sudden impact: the Duke has all this time been warning his new wife through the envoy without seeming to warn her, because to warn her would be to stoop when he chooses never to stoop. As the shaken envoy stands deferentially aside to let the Duke precede him on the stair, the Duke carries his charade out beautifully to the end, with his egalitarian “Nay, we’ll go together down, sir!” and, with his final “Notice Neptune, though, / Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity, / Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!” seems to say, “Of course we’ve been talking really about art all this time, have we not?” (53–56).

It is my experience that most readers will accept this interpretation when it is proposed, but since so many have reacted to the Duke as revealing himself inadvertently rather than by design and since many will no doubt continue to do so, it might be argued that Langbaum is essentially right—that we are free to react and do react to the poem as we will; the poet has left it open. To such an argument I offer the following rebuttal. First, and in general, interpreting the poem as if the Duke speaks by design gives it much more power. The revelation is more massive; probability and surprise are both increased as the Duke’s motives become both completely cogent and more deeply hidden. Second, more indirectly, one may argue that if Browning intended to write the “by design” poem, he would automatically have created the possibility of the second interpretation, because he necessarily had to give the Duke’s speech the appearance of inadvertence which the Duke himself intends; to write this poem, Browning would have had to run the risk that the reader might be deceived. But if
Browning’s intention was to show the Duke as revealing himself by accident, it is difficult to see how he could have created the possibility of our reading the poem the other way; too much is left unexplained in terms of motive, in hints of sinister purpose, and in the Duke’s pretense of kindness. Finally, there is a much narrower explanatory consideration which I think is nevertheless nearly decisive. If we require of a critical account that it strongly explain everything about a poem, then we must certainly ask an account of the “Duchess” to explain why Browning chose to write the poem in iambic pentameter couplets and then concealed the rhymes by running on his lines. It is the very essence of couplets that their chime should be heard, yet here the poet deliberately muffles them. If we assume that Browning’s intention is to show the Duke speaking inadvertently, the choice has no particular point and is perhaps even negative. But if we assume that the Duke speaks purposefully, we see that the couplets have a very definite function—to give a sense of submerged pattern running, like the Duke’s hidden purpose, through the whole. Thus the particular conception of the form of the “Duchess” developed here within the more general conception of the dramatic monologue form generates a precise explanation of the poem’s most peculiar individual feature.

I have so far emphasized that the activity of the dramatic monologue character is literal; that we experience him, through the poet’s simulation, just as we might another natural person, inferring his inner purpose from its outward manifestations; and that he has for us the significance that another natural person might, though we do not usually meet characters as interesting and extraordinary as those the poet gives us. We have never known such a person as we meet in the dramatic monologue, but, finishing the poem, we think that such a person might well have been. I will shortly suggest that, if we hold to this conception of the dramatic monologue, as I think we should, we shall find that it does not accommodate many poems, such as Tennyson’s “Ulysses” and Eliot’s “Prufrock,” which are commonly called dramatic monologues, a fact which will require us to produce a new explanatory paradigm. Before that, however, I may pause to notice a further general property of dramatic monologues proper. Although in all dramatic monologues we are ignorant of the final outcome of the actor’s act as it develops in relation to its dramatized object, our understanding of the actor himself and his motives is always superior or inferior, as it is with real people. We either do not understand the actor’s purposes as well as he does himself, his knowledge or power exceeding ours as Johnson’s does Boswell’s, or we understand him better than he understands himself, as the adult does the naïve child. In the first instance, our posture is of serious apprehension, in the second of comic condescension. Dramatic monologues which meet the first condition are “My Last Duchess” and “Porphyria’s Lover,” where
we do not initially register the depth of the Duke’s and the lover’s purposes but react with astonishment when we do. Monologues which meet the second condition include “Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister” and “The Bishop Orders His Tomb.” In the “Spanish Cloister” we know from the first, as the Monk does not, that for all his rage he is impotent to harm Brother Lawrence, and as the Bishop orders his tomb we know as he does not that the tomb offers no fence against oblivion. We watch with a kind of comic pity as the Bishop’s increasingly desperate requests betray his underlying sense of the annihilation which awaits him and are surprised and pleased at the end when, accepting the loss of the tomb, he holds in compensating memory his one substantial triumph over his rival Gandolf, the possession long ago of his mistress:

. . . leave me in my church, the church for peace,
That I may watch at leisure if he leers—
Old Gandolf, at me, from his onion-stone,
As still he envied me, so fair she was! (122–25)

But the special quality of the poem is held perfectly in this conclusion as we feel the Bishop’s soul-deep satisfaction in his triumph over Gandolf against our own awareness that the Gandolf he looks toward is dust in his tomb.

Turning now to the problem of distinguishing between the dramatic monologue and other poems—“Prufrock,” “Ulysses,” Browning’s “Childe Roland”—often so called, I remark that the most general difference between the two groups is that the actor-speaker in the second group is not a simulated natural person in contrast with the poet but an artificial person projected from the poet, a mask through which he speaks. This familiar concept, developed originally by Pound and Eliot, indicates that the poems described by it are really a kind of indirect lyric, mask lyrics I will call them for convenience. In such poems, we may say, adapting Eliot’s notion of the objective correlative, the poet creates an artificial outward correlative of an emotion inwardly real in him. I mean by this to describe the immediate character of the reader’s imaginative experience of the speaker and poem, for the very names of the characters—“Prufrock” or “Ulysses”—insist upon their fictive or mythical status, and both the figures and the settings of the poem are registered by the reader not as literal but as symbolizing, while standing in disjuncture from, some private felt meaning of the poet. If we summon up our memory of the setting in these poems—of the sea in “Ulysses” fraught with the doomed heroism of the old king’s venture, of the cursed desert through which Childe Roland rides, of the ominously significant slum through which Prufrock passes, or thinks to pass, and compare these with the Duke’s gallery, the Bishop’s church,
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the Monk’s cloister, we can easily see the absolute contrast. Directly connected with this formal property of these poems is the fact that we are not at all clear about just where the speakers are located in the scene and how they move in it. At the outset Ulysses seems to speak to a group of people in Ithaca, while later he seems to be setting out to sea. It is uncertain whether Prufrock ever leaves his fog-sealed room to pass through the half-deserted streets to the room where the women come and go. In the dramatic monologue proper, however, the speaker is always precisely located in the sharply focused concrete setting that can be seen as in a photograph, as in “My Last Duchess” we can locate the Duke and Envoy and follow their movements in the gallery precisely. In terms of the cinematic analogue employed earlier, a motion picture version of a dramatic monologue would be literal, sharp, and clear, while a motion picture version of a mask lyric would present the speaker against a manifestly factitious backdrop, a montage of indistinct and fluidly shifting scenes whose very lack of concreteness would be taken as a sign of their expressive artificiality; the scene would be not so much real as surreal.

A further characteristic property of these poems is the fact that the speaker does not speak to anyone palpable within the poem. The reason for this is that the reader, not a dramatic auditor, is the object of his speech. Thus Eliot says specifically that the poet does not get all dressed up in a mask just to talk to himself but in order to talk to the reader (“Three Voices” 104). This leads to an easy solution of the problem of the identity of the “you” addressed in “Prufrock”; he is the same Baudelairean “hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable,—mon frère!” apostrophized in The Waste Land. Though in the mask lyrics of other poets the reader is perhaps not so specifically in view, the idea that the mask figure mediates between the poet’s private feeling and the reader holds good. Thus Tennyson’s saying that “Ulysses” expressed his need for going on after Hallam’s death more directly than anything in In Memoriam (H. Tennyson 196) accords with our own response; we feel the poet in the poem. But we feel also that the character’s predicament is in essence our own; as the poet expressed himself in the character, so we find ourselves in him also. Thus we feel Prufrock’s predicament not with the superiority or inferiority of the dramatic monologue, in terms of his difference from us, but in terms of similarity, as if his predicament were ours. Similarly, we experience the old Ulysses as we experience the old man in “Sailing to Byzantium,” not in terms of contrast but of identity. We are stirred on our own behalf by Ulysses’ final resolve; we yearn toward incorporation in the golden bird with the old man of Byzantium. This relationship would be cinematically expressed by having the character speak in profile, between poet and reader, as it were, and able to look and speak out of the screen to the reader as Prufrock seems to do.
In his “The Three Voices of Poetry” Eliot sets forth this concept of the mask lyric fairly clearly, but he confuses matters, I think, by asserting that all Browning's poems are in this genre. Browning did indeed write in this form—in “Childe Roland,” in “Caliban upon Setebos,” in “Rabbi Ben Ezra” and elsewhere—but these are not his greatest poems, which are in the mode I have earlier described. Eliot's own most characteristic poems, on the other hand, are all mask lyrics, including, as George Williamson saw long ago and as the manuscript now makes clear, *The Waste Land* (Williamson 124, 139). In that poem, which he had originally thought to title with a tag from Dickens, “He do the police in different voices,” we do indeed hear the poet's voice speaking lyrically to and for us through a mythic Tiresias who unites the many personae disposed throughout the symbolic landscape of the poem (*Waste Land Facsimile* 5).

Eliot's subsumption of the dramatic monologue proper within his concept of the mask or personal lyric is thus quite understandable in terms of his own creative practice, and the concept does fit most of Tennyson's dramatic poems very well, some of Browning's also, and some of Pound's and Yeats's. But it is of the first importance to keep the two genres distinct, for failing to do so can make for harmful critical confusion. Thus critics in recent years, taking seriously the idea that “Ulysses” is a dramatic monologue, have tried to see that lyrically sympathetic old warrior as if he were dramatically disclosed as a villainous other. The same poem is likewise criticized because the presentation of the setting is not definite and Ulysses' relation to it is not consistent and continuous, thus asking the poem to meet conditions not appropriate to its real genre. On the other hand, we have symbolic and figurative readings of Browning's monologues which override and obscure the literal, perfectly concrete beauty of those poems. Such interpretive mistakes can distort our actual imaginative experience, especially for beginning students, and they indicate how practically necessary to interpretation are such distinctions as I have made between the dramatic monologue and the mask lyric and as can be made between both forms and such a live-voice dramatic lyric as “Dover Beach,” which has also been mistaken for a dramatic monologue.

Mention of the dramatic lyric may serve to turn our attention now fully back to that form. If in the dramatic monologue we imagine the figure in the poem as somatically external to the poet and ourselves and understand him as we understand another natural person, from the outside in, in the dramatic lyric the figure in the poem is imagined by the poet from within, so that we participate in his mental activity as if his eyes and experience had become the poet's and our own, and the effect and significance of his experience is registered in our consciousness as the effect and significance of our own experience of the natural world is registered. I would include in this class such poems as Gray's
“Elegy,” Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale,” Arnold’s “Dover Beach,” Hopkins’s “Windhover,” Hardy’s “Darkling Thrush,” and Frost’s “Stopping by Woods.” In these poems, as in the dramatic monologue, we are, or can become, aware of two agents, poet and speaker, or more accurately, poet and actor, since normally in these poems the represented figure does not himself speak but performs a cognitive act. The two agents are so closely conflated in our consciousness that we may have difficulty separating them at times except as a matter of logic; but in “The Darkling Thrush,” for instance, we may say that the actor is the man who leans on the gate, looks at the landscape, and hears the thrush, while the poet is the man whose activity we implicitly appreciate as making for us the image of this experience so that we ourselves seem to participate directly in it. Thus in “Dover Beach” we both feel the actor’s painful predicament and respond with pleasure when the poet makes us see “the moon-blanced land” (8) and hear the “melancholy, long, withdrawing roar” of the sea (25).

The sense we have that the experience in these poems is cognate with our own experience of the natural world is distinctly different from the somewhat parallel sense we have in the dramatic monologue. There we are pleased to feel that the world of the poem is exactly like the real world; in the dramatic lyric we have a clear sense that the experience in effect takes place in the real world, the world we and the poet are in. That the actor in the dramatic lyric is felt to be in the same world we are is easily shown. No one would think a scholarly foolish, for instance, who tried to discover when Hopkins saw the windhover, whereas only a very foolish scholar would try to find the portrait of the Duke’s Duchess. For that matter, we know that Keats heard the nightingale, and Hardy gives us outside the body of the poem the date when he heard the thrush; and no one would be surprised to hear that Arnold wrote his great lyric looking at a moonlit Dover Beach one evening on his honeymoon trip to Europe.

But our sense that the experience in the dramatic lyric is real is directly contradicted by the fact that the poem gives it to us as actual in the present. This logically denies it any connection with reality since a real event of this kind could only be reported to us as a memory of something in the past. But this contradiction leads us in turn to see what the actual status of the experience is. The fact that we feel the experience in these poems as if on the one hand the poet had not invented it and on the other as if it were actually present to our own imaginations can be explained if we think of these poems as if they had been built by the poet to be mimetically adequate in the present to the impression left on his memory by a real past experience. The experience is not created but re-created; more accurately, its significance is re-created. In the greatest such poems the experience re-created will be one which is itself so exceptional—so rare a moment of insight or revelation such as sensitive spirits have in their
encounters with the world—that it cannot be conceived as invented by the poet but only as given to him. If we did intuitively register the “Darkling Thrush,” for instance, as if Hardy had invented the thrush’s song for the sake of the effect, rather than creating anew for us what it was like in the midst of wintry bleakness to hear that unexpected burst of song, we would feel that the effect was spurious, like the streaks of sunlight which break through the dark clouds of a Hollywood ending. The poet of the dramatic lyric must not act for God or nature but only reproduce their gifts. Characteristically, I might add, these poems are named after the object—churchyard, seascape, hawk—which, encountered not created, lies at the core of the experience the poem gives us.

In this manner we may reconcile Langbaum’s view that in the dramatic lyric we are given the real experience of the poet with Olson’s view that such poems are artificial constructs. We may say, a little too simply, that we respond to these poems as artificial re-creations of real experience. I say “too simply” to allow for the fact that when the experience is fully reconstructed in words, it thereby becomes independent of the real world, an autonomous aesthetic image luminously expressive of a real world significance. That is why, though we often do call the figure in these poems by the poet’s name, we feel a little uneasy in doing so. In holding that the dramatic lyric has a significance, that is, one significance, I come into conflict once more with the views of Langbaum, who holds that the very essence of the dramatic lyric experience is that it is outward and unfixed. One reason for this emphasis on his part is the fact that he sees Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey” as the prototypical dramatic lyric. I think it is a mistake to place “Tintern Abbey” with the poems we have been considering, and I believe that to assume that they are structured as “Tintern Abbey” is will cause us to misconceive their meaning. We may certainly accept Langbaum’s idea that “Tintern Abbey,” like the dramatic lyric, involves an actual “occurrence”—“something which happens to someone at a particular time in a particular place” (47). But if we apply fully to “Tintern Abbey” the concept of the dramatic lyric developed above, we run into trouble. There is no sense of representation in this poem but only of expression; there is no poet conflated with an actor but only the poet. The poem does not represent the cognitive act of a dramatic actor but presents the cognitive act of the poet. Langbaum quite accurately says that at the outset of the poem the “poet’s perception of the landscape exceeds his understanding” and that “he will spend the rest of the poem trying to understand his perception” (43). It is indeed as if the poet had begun the poem extempore, as an attempt to express the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings which the landscape evoked in him, moving toward an expressive conclusion the shape of which he intuits but does not clearly foresee at the outset. David Perkins speaks very persuasively of the sense we have in
reading the poem that the poet is just barely but spontaneously and wonderfully finding the words so movingly adequate to his meaning” (210), an effect which we may contrast with the sense we have in Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale” not of expression achieved in the moment but of experience artfully re-created. We think of Keats’s “Ode” as a lovely artifact, but it is difficult to think of “Tintern Abbey” as artful at all.

The situation in “Tintern Abbey” is very different from that in the dramatic lyric, where the poet may be said to know from the outset what the actor fully discovers only at the end of the poem. It is this representational dissociation of the poet from the image of himself which makes us feel uncertain and tentative when we call the actor “Arnold” or “Hopkins” or “Hardy.” But we may notice that in “Tintern Abbey” it is not that we may call the speaker Wordsworth, we must so call him. Likewise we must call the person addressed at the end of the poem Dorothy Wordsworth, in contrast to the situation in “Dover Beach” where we may not call what is in all probability the image of Arnold’s wife by her name. We see by this that the experience presented in “Tintern Abbey” is not real experience re-created but is given as actual in the present; all the matter of the poem is understood as impinging immediately on the poet’s consciousness, so that the poet’s world seems to us very much out there, real but not defined, that is to say, not contained in his consciousness. Thus when Wordsworth speaks of his “sense sublime of something far more deeply interfused” in nature (95–96), we are stirred into conviction by his stronger conviction than ours that out there in the real world utterly beyond himself and the poem is such a presence. When Langbaum says that “Tintern Abbey” advances through mystery to a deeper and wider, more inclusive sense of mystery at the end (46), he is describing, I believe, the sense the poem gives of the outwardness of the real world as the poet inhabits it and the unknown future he welcomes in a present felt as a development out of a past whose roots in us and the universe run deeper than we know.

This structure in “Tintern Abbey” influences the whole way in which Langbaum thinks of the poems more properly called dramatic lyrics. Thus he sees “The Windhover” as involving a “perception beyond the poet’s understanding,” a “mystery which is resolved in profounder mystery.” He thinks the poem may possibly involve an allegory of the relation between Christ and the poet, “yet,” he says, “nothing in the poem itself makes such a reading inevitable, and [this interpretation] certainly cannot be equated with the meaning,” since there are in the poem other kinds and levels of meaning, each of which “points inadequately to the whole poem” (67–68). In saying such things Langbaum is remaining faithful to the orthodox critical doctrine of the multiplicity and indeterminacy of poetic meaning, and in seeing the meaning of “The Windhover” in particular
as multiple and indeterminate, he is scarcely unusual, since more meanings per phrase or word have been found for this lyric perhaps than for any other poem. The great crux of course is the word “buckle,” which a prestigious anthology of Victorian poetry (not unusually) glosses as follows: “‘Buckle’ has many meanings, e.g. fasten, enclose, grapple, submit, bend or crumple. The diverse meanings do not contradict each other: the cluster of ‘join’ meanings involves the heroic power of Christ and join the heart of the humble believer to Him; the ‘bend or crumple’ meanings may suggest the submission of the heart to Christ” (Houghton and Strange 700n). “Buckle” does indeed have many meanings—in the dictionary, but it scarcely seems right to thrust them all on the poem in the hope that one or another will do the job. I want to suggest that “buckle” in the poem has a single definite meaning that functions within a single definite structure of meaning, in the poem as a whole, which is identical with its structure as a dramatic lyric. If the poem is a dramatic lyric, then (again and somewhat more particularly) it simulates a dramatic actor’s perception of an object in the real world, like Arnold’s seascape or Hardy’s thrush, which, literal and without meaning, comes to be luminously seen by the actor in the course of the poem as if it were informed by a meaning which he discovers in it. The meaning of such a poem for the reader would be the cognitive experience, the cognitive act itself, as the reader dynamically participates in it through the poet’s re-creation. This conception would direct us to interpret the words of “The Windhover” as from beginning to end the actor-poet’s experience of seeing and finding significance in his perception of the windhover in the light of the dawn.

I want first to show that the verbal complexities of the poem can all be explained as an attempt to give the actor’s sense of projective identification, of exalted empathy, with the bird’s flight, reserving for a moment the problem of the significance which the actor comes to see in the literal experience. In the opening the poet begins to give as present his memory of how his sight had been arrested by the splendor of the bird soaring majestically in the cloud-mottled dawn sky, together with a sense of the actor’s projective participation in the aerodynamic buoyancy of the bird’s flight (“in his riding / Of the rolling level underneath him steady air” [2–3]). The strong sense that we are, as it were, “feeling” the flight of the bird leads naturally to the interpretation of the following words on the same assumption. “Striding / High there” (3–4) then would be understood as representing a visual perception of the bird’s sudden accelerated movement upward, as in a stride, a pace going beyond the normal expectation of an observer; and “how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing / In his ecstasy!” (4–5), so variously interpreted, can be understood quite simply as rendering the bird’s characteristic gliding turn on a wing inclined against and rippling in the air, the whole movement being likened to a horse
moving circularly in response to the centripetal guidance of a rein. “Then off, off forth on swing” (5) presents the actor’s reaction to the sudden further rapid movement of the bird turning “as a skate’s heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend” (6), that is, as an ice skater turns smoothly in controlled inertial movement on the pivot of his heel. “The hurl and gliding” (6) of the bird’s powerful flight are then understood by this action to have “rebuffed the big wind” (7) as the windhover, in the characteristic action for which he is named, hovers dynamically static in the air. Since what is represented is not the bird’s flight but the actor’s projective perception of it, we may understand “My heart in hiding / Stirred for a bird,—the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!” (7–8) to set forth, not any great mystery, but simply and directly the actor’s sense of enraptured empathy with the bird’s power and freedom, the same empathy with the bird’s “ecstasy” imitated in the rushing succession of epithets in the opening. The critic-tortured sentence means simply that this poet’s heart leaps up when he beholds a windhover in the sky.

That this literal interpretation is entirely adequate to the force of the octet seems indubitable to me; it is in fact so obvious that I would be ashamed to rehearse it if it had not been almost totally obscured, as it has been, by the agglutinations of critical commentary. But it is the sestet that offers the greatest problems:

Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here
Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!
No wonder of it: shéer plód makes plough down sillion
Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,
Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion. (9–14)

Continuing our interpretation of the words as referring to the bird’s literal flight and (again) reserving the problem of the significance which the actor perceives in the experience, we will understand “thee” as directed toward the bird, and the “then” and the comparative “lovelier, more dangerous” as implying some literal and striking change in the bird’s state. What this is, and what “buckle” therefore means, is in these terms obvious and unavoidable. The falcon, “riding high” in the “brute beauty and valour and act” of his flight suddenly “buckles,” that is, folds up his wings and, releasing his aerodynamic hold on the air which collapses beneath him, stoops as falcons do, falling downward like a stone. The actor sees this descent as in appearance a defeat of pride, a fall from high estate, but as actually a victory, a sign of greater power, since the bird does not really fall but is expressing his nature and power now most fully in his imperious descent.
on his prey. Thus the bird is “lovelier, more dangerous” in fall than in flight.

“No wonder of it:” would then mean “it is no wonder that you are more beautiful in the apparent ignominy of falling than in flying aloft,” because, as the two similes following after the indicative colon analogically explain, the apparently homely and graceless plodding of the workhorse can result in the shining beauty of the burnished plowshare, and the dull ashes of a burned-down fire can suddenly collapse in fiery splendor. Thus these final metaphors can also be understood not as general assertions within some loose “statement” of the poem but as completing the representation of the poet-actor’s cognitive response to the hawk.

But so far I have only spoken of the literal dimension of that cognition. Just as Arnold’s actor comes to see in the seascape before him an image of the general precariousness of human happiness from which he turns to his beloved, and just as Hardy’s actor comes to see in a dead winter landscape an image of the dead hopes of the nineteenth century from which emerge the sudden notes of the thrush’s song, so Hopkins’s actor is represented as becoming increasingly conscious of an implicit analogy between the hawk and Christ, the full implications of which burst upon him in the sestet with overwhelming force. The incipient perception of the bird-as-Christ is indicated at the outset by the phrase “kingdom of daylight’s dauphin” and may be thought of as tacitly continuing as a dimension of the observing actor’s appreciation of the bird’s exalted flight. When, however, the falcon, kingdom of daylight’s dauphin, seems to suffer defeat and ignominy in a descent to earth which is actually a triumphant expression of his sovereignty and power over creatures of the earth, the actor is suddenly struck with exaltation as the hawk’s descent seems to body forth an unexpected and dazzling meaning: so also was the descent of Christ, heaven’s king, to earth, not, as it might seem, the defeat and humbling of his deity in lowly manhood and the passivity of death, but an act of absolute power asserting his supremacy and omnipotence. It is this vision of the hawk as an emblem of Christ “royally reclaiming his own,” as Hopkins puts it in “The Wreck of the Deutschland” (34.7), which produces the near ecstasy of the sestet and accounts for the peculiar force of the language. Thus Christ is addressed through the hawk, or in the hawk, as “thee,” and the beauty of the hawk’s descent in the sunlight is suddenly expanded as a sense of the supreme beauty of Christ’s mission (“a billion times told lovelier, more dangerous”) explodes within it, and Hopkins sees and feels himself and all mankind as the object of the imperative and enrapturing love of Christ the champion (“O my chevalier”). This climax is followed—and somewhat endangered—by the two concluding similes which threaten to dissipate the force of the revelation in the process of completing its significance. But the poet overcomes this danger by finding within the second
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Simile a fresh revelation of the analogy it elucidates: the phrase “ah my dear,” interrupting the syntax of the final clause, represents the sudden perception that the image of the fire is itself unexpectedly a direct emblem of Christ’s defeat as victory: in their fall, the ashes, like Christ, gall themselves, but the result is an incandescent shower which is marvelously seen to express the transformation of the sacrificial blood of Christ’s death into the splendor of eternal triumph. It is only with this suggestion of the crucifixion that the meaning is fully complete, for only in specific relation to the crucifixion can the bird’s fall be seen as a passive descent into apparent death which is actually an active, willful entrance into the world, to be followed by ascendant, transcendent victory, as the bird like Christ rises with his prey.

This particular meaning, growing out of and inseparable from the literal experience of the poem, is, I believe, the meaning of “The Windhover.” This meaning gives the poem a concrete impact and dynamic beauty that, in my view, are simply lost in those readings which see in it a welter of figurative meanings which do not enrich but impoverish the poem, and I think that once this interpretation is clearly understood it can be seen to resolve many difficulties which have made for confusion.

The poem nevertheless remains difficult. What Hopkins wished to represent was so concentrated and complex an experience as to make it extremely difficult for the reader to grasp the dramatic coherence which renders the sentences connectedly meaningful. It was no doubt partly to improve the intelligibility of the poem that Hopkins added the subtitle, “To Christ Our Lord.” Beyond this, there are difficulties of tense and difficulties, especially in the last three lines, with the logic of the representation. Both difficulties, it seems to me, stem from the peculiar difficulties of writing a dramatic lyric. In a poem like this the poet has to construct in words an image which can generate an imaginative experience in the present adequate to his memorial impression of a past real experience. In doing this the two poles of his re-creation, the actor who experiences and the poet who re-creates, are likely to come together as the poet reenters his experience in its more complete and artificial form; it is likely, in fact, that he first discovers in the poem the full significance of what had been a partially inchoate intuition. Herein no doubt lies the explanation of the somewhat confusing shift from past to present tense and perspective in Hopkins’s poem, and for the fact that in the last few lines the figure who has been outdoors seeing and reacting to the windhover is suddenly given as reacting to a metaphor within the poem which reconstructs that experience. This kind of technical contradiction is common in the dramatic lyric, as when the figure musing in the dusk of Gray’s country churchyard refers to himself as writing a poem, or when the figure represented as listening raptly in the dark to Keats’s nightingale responds to a
word from the poem ("Forlorn! the very word is like a bell," etc.). Of course the reader does not ordinarily notice these formal wrinkles as he registers the affective continuity of what is in one sense a completely artificial experience, but when these wrinkles come to explicit critical notice they can cause difficulty, as the reference in the Gray poem has; and in “The Windhover” it is likely that the blemish of the tense shift, if it is that, keeps some from seeing that the poem offers a continuous experience in the dramatic present. I may notice in passing that two dramatic lyrics which avoid these representational contradictions are “Dover Beach,” where the representing words are themselves presented as part of the experience, and “The Darkling Thrush,” where the representing words, given in the past tense, are clearly separated from the experience to which they run parallel. But these are technical puzzles for which there is no more space.

Moving now toward conclusion, I may define and differentiate the several forms of first-person poems I have described according to the way in which the poet is related to the figure given in the poem. In an expressive lyric like “Tintern Abbey” the poet speaks in his own person out of the stimulus of a real situation, seeking an expressive catharsis the shape of which he does not foresee but discovers, finding as he goes words adequate to his inner sense of his outward circumstances. (This does not suggest that the poem records a real speech uttered in the indicated circumstances, only that as a poem it was composed sequentially in dynamic response to the circumstances; the poet need not have completed his saying in a single effort, though like a letter written in several sittings, it reads as if he had.) Distinct from this form is the dramatic lyric in which the poet simulates as dramatically present to a lyric actor a significant experience of the real world which is in its origin a memory but which, as reconstructed, stands free of memory. In the dramatic monologue, in contrast, the poet simulates the activity of a person imagined as virtually real whom we understand as we would an “other” natural person, inferring from outward act and expression to inward purpose. In both dramatic lyric and dramatic monologue our pleasure is compounded of our participation in the dramatic actor’s act and our appreciation of the simulative activity of the chameleon poet. Finally, in the mask lyric the poet speaks through an actor who is registered almost overtly as an artificial self. In the actor and his situation the poet finds a correlative of a private emotion which at the same time dissociates him from it and makes it possible for the reader to share it.

If these concepts provide an adequate base for strong explanation of the poems to which they refer, and I have tried to show that they do, then it may seem plausible to consider that such poems, and by implication all literary forms, are built, in various ways, as extensions of our inborn capacity to imagine ourselves, other men, and the world of which we are a part. If this is so, we do
not need to assume that poetic language and meaning have a special syntactic and semantic character. We do not need to think of literary meanings as necessarily indeterminate, multiple, or ambiguous (though by intention they may be all of those things) because we do not need to think of them as different in principle from the meanings of everyday life except that they are artificially created or embodied in language. The same point applies to the symbolism of literary structures. It is common to think of different literary works as in the same way all symbolic of meanings in the world beyond the work, as if they were complex embodied statements, but it is likely that most symbols so called are strictly controlled and limited by the particular representational structure of the works in which they are found. Thus in “Tintern Abbey” nothing is symbolic; the meanings are actual and literal. The meaning of the poem for us lies in our identification with Wordsworth’s sense of the unity of his life and its oneness with the universe beyond; we experience the act of his belief, his conviction about reality. In the dramatic lyric the object of cognition—moonlit seascape, thrush, hawk—is as an entity independent of the poet which he sees as symbolic but which in itself is simply a natural object. In the dramatic monologue the person and objects are not symbolic but literal, natural but not actual. Thus the bronze figure of Neptune pointed to by the Duke at the end of his speech to the envoy, so often made to bear general meanings of all sorts, has, I suggest, only literal dramatic meaning; by pointing to this (perhaps characteristic) item of his collection the Duke is understood by the reader as implicitly denying to the envoy that he has stooped to threaten him. In the mask lyric, in contrast, nothing is literal and everything is symbolic and is so registered by the reader; consider the fog in “Prufrock,” the squat tower in “Childe Roland,” the golden bird in “Sailing to Byzantium.” Whether or not these conceptions are wholly correct, I think that the formal explanations I have developed from them are sufficient to indicate that this whole class of poems is more various in basic structure, and its subclasses more distinct, than accepted doctrine has ordinarily allowed and to suggest that our experience of literary forms in general may be much more fixed and regular than our theoretical assumptions usually permit us to recognize.

Notes

1. This general position is elaborated in my “Defoe, Richardson, Joyce, and the Concept of Form in the Novel,” which appears in Autobiography, Biography, and the Novel, “Fact, Theory, and Literary Explanation,” and “The Concept of Genre and Eighteenth-Century Studies,” in New Approaches to Eighteenth-Century Literature [Editors’ note: Chapters 8, 1,
and 2 respectively in this volume]. On authorial intention, see also E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation*; on the implied relationship of work to author, see Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* and *A Rhetoric of Irony*; on the implicit contexts of intention in discourse, see Barbara Herrnstein Smith, “Poetry as Fiction” and “On the Margins of Discourse.”

2. Olson’s conception of single-actor forms is stated briefly in “An Outline of Poetic Theory” (560), more fully (though still with characteristic density) in *The Poetry of Dylan Thomas* (30–33), and more fully still in “The Lyric.”

3. Having said this, I should directly acknowledge my debt to both Olson and Langbaum and the fact that my own view of these poems has developed out of my long attempt to understand and resolve the conflicts between their persuasive but mutually exclusive conceptions.

4. I have developed the implications of this and related facts about the poem somewhat more extensively in “The Concept of Genre and Eighteenth-Century Studies” (91–96) [Editors’ note: Chapter 2 in this volume].

5. Langbaum’s basic view is quite generally stated: that there is in dramatic monologues a “tension between sympathy and judgment” and that ordinarily we are forced to suspend judgment in order to sympathize (83–93); but at one point, in discussing Hopkins’s “Harry Ploughman,” he defines the effect as correlated with exactly the process of psychosomatic comparison that I have described: the meaning of the poem derives, he says, “from our experience of the poet’s sense of the difference between himself and Harry and at the same time of what it feels like to be Harry,” so that, he says, if this poem were given in Harry’s speech, it would be a dramatic monologue (71).

6. Olson briefly offers this interpretation in *The Poetry of Dylan Thomas* (33).

7. The facts of composition clearly suggest this origin. See the notes to the poem by editor Kenneth Allott in *The Poems of Matthew Arnold* (Arnold 239–40).

8. For an analysis of Gray’s “Elegy” as a dramatic lyric in terms of the conception developed here, see my “The Concept of Genre and Eighteenth-Century Studies” (93–99) [Editors’ note: Chapter 2 in this volume].
This essay is intended as a sequel to, and refinement of, an earlier attempt to question some of the prevailing assumptions about the ways in which readers experience the “I” in monodramatic poems, particularly the notion that this “I” is uniformly given as an autonomous speaker who stands free of any determinate relation either to the creating poet or the world outside the poem (Rader, “Dramatic Monologue” [chapter 6]). Building upon while reformulating Robert Langbaum’s important distinction between the dramatic monologue and the dramatic lyric, I emphasized the very different relations between poet, speaker, and reader which those forms manifest, and went on to argue that still further conceptual categories of “I” poems were required for fullness and accuracy in this and other descriptive respects. For the benefit of readers not familiar with my earlier argument, I will begin by recapitulating some of its main points before embarking on some further observations and conclusions about structural variations and varieties in dramatic “I” poems as they can be illustrated through an exploration of the formal characteristics of three poems that in different significant ways do not fit the specifications of the categories previously developed.

I.

In my earlier effort, I tried to clarify the basis of the distinction between the dramatic monologue and the dramatic lyric by pointing out that in the former, as an inescapable condition of rendering the text intelligible, the reader must
Imagine the speaker as an outward presence, as we in our bodies register others in their bodies, from the outside in, whereas in the dramatic lyric we are imaginatively conflated with the speaker, understanding him from the inside out, seeing with his eyes and speaking with his voice as if on our own behalf. This distinction is reflected in the fact, invariant for all readers, that in a “cinematic” projection of our imaginative visualization of the two kinds of poems, the dramatic monologue speaker will be seen displayed directly on the screen, with the words of the poem issuing from his mouth, while in the dramatic lyric we see not the speaker but rather an outward scene that he is understood as seeing, with the camera implicitly taken as his eyes, through which we also look, and the words of the poem registered voice-over as articulating his inner act of perception.

In neither kind of poem is the apparently autonomous speaker actually self-existent but stands in different kinds of fixed relationship to the implicit constructive act of the poet. The most striking instance I have discovered of the poet’s presence behind the speaker in the dramatic monologue is the fact that in “My Last Duchess” we both hear the duke speaking and hear the rhymes in the poem, but do not hear the duke as speaking the rhymes. Thus our imaginations locate preanalytically—in their complex but not contradictory “let’s pretend” operations—what the analysis of critics and linguists commonly does not recognize, that sentences can be construed by the mind as expressing two agents (here the explicit speaker and the implicit creating author) simultaneously. The distinctness of represented speaker and representing poet in the dramatic monologue seems correlated with the often-noted fact that the speaker is projected as a person “other” than the poet with a mental process cleanly separate from his. In the dramatic lyric, in contrast, the conflation of mental processes often results in structural confusion between poet and speaker, or more accurately, poet and actor, as in Gray’s “Elegy” with its puzzling shifts of reference between the character musing in the twilight and the poet writing the lines of the poem. This kind of confusion can be explained on the hypothesis that in dramatic lyrics the represented actor is a recreation from memory of the poet’s own experience, which he reenters imaginatively as he constructs in the poem an image aesthetically adequate in the present to his memorial sense of the structure and significance of a past cognitive event. The situation is such that only in the course of his reconstructive act does he perhaps first fully discover and articulate the felt significance of the experiences, so that the poet’s remembered act and his reconstruction of it may tend to merge. This is particularly likely to be the case in dramatic lyrics where the representation is in the present tense, as in the “Elegy” or Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale” or Hopkins’s “Windhover,” in contrast to those where it is in the past tense, as in Hardy’s “Darkling Thrush,”
or is given as the actual speech act of the actor within the scene, as in Arnold's “Dover Beach.”

This assumption about the relation between poet and actor in the dramatic lyric cogently accounts for the consistent “behind the eyes” effect in these poems and for the fact that the reader, following the poet, is imaginatively conflated with the speaker’s represented subjective act, as for the moment he dwells in the image of the poet’s spirit. The assumption accounts also for the fact that though the dramatic lyric speaker has no name or specified identity, unlike dramatic monologue speakers who do have names and specified identities, we are hesitantly prompted to call him by the name of the poet, because of our intuitive sense that the poem reflects the poet’s actual experience at a real point in space/time beyond the poem. Nevertheless, the fact that the poems are manifestly artificial constructions—the man in the churchyard cannot be writing a poem and we cannot be there with him as we seem to be—makes us properly hesitate to make a simple identification of poet and actor. (Wordsworth nicely catches the quality of a dramatic lyric as an artificial reconstruction of a personal visual experience when he says that, in “With Ships the Sea Was Sprinkled Far and Nigh,” “I am represented . . . as casting my eyes” on the given scene [148; my emphasis].) Thus though based in a time-bound event, such poems may be said to transcend time by translating a temporal into an eternal moment, escaping the contingency of the experienced real moment by fully articulating its felt significance in a poetic construct.

In addition to these two classifications of dramatic poems, I located a third, the mask lyric, instanced in many famous nineteenth- and twentieth-century poems, and also a fourth, the expressive lyric, of which I will speak below. Splitting off the mask lyric from the dramatic monologue (under which rubric the poems it points to are normally included) is intended to permit explicit recognition and provide a guide for analysis of a kind of poem in which an artificial personage—Ulysses, Childe Roland, J. Alfred Prufrock—is the vehicle of the poet’s lyrical expression. Whereas lyrical elements in a dramatic monologue proper tend to dilute our sense of its formal purity as a rendering of an autonomous other, as in Browning’s “Fra Lippo Lippi,” in the mask lyric we understand the art of the poem as involving the poet’s sophisticated attempt to express, while at the same time objectifying and limiting, an aspect of his own subjective situation. So it is that we can understand Eliot’s “Prufrock” as a dramatic construct which permits the poet at once to express and escape from his own personality while projecting himself into Prufrock’s as he characterizes and delimits it. The crucial point of contrast with the dramatic monologue is that the reader experiences Prufrock lyrically, feeling his situation as he feels it, including self-irony, within an appreciation of Eliot’s deliberate deployment of
Prufrock as a calculated artificial construct, a mask. (A mask, we remember, is an artificial semblance which a real person can use both to hide behind and speak through.) The reader joins the poet in the mediation of the mask as he projects himself into, and limits his expression to, the character and his situation.

This differentiation of the mask lyric from the dramatic monologue, though it complicates the simplicity of Langbaum’s original dual conception of the dramatic monologue and dramatic lyric, is I think justified by the conceptual clarification and additional explanatory power it offers. Like the other two concepts it fits a whole range of poems quite sharply, revealing closely analogous formal features, including the typically irreal, fluid, and symbolic scene of the mask lyric, so clearly in contrast with the wholly natural though fictive probability of the dramatic monologue scene and the quasi-actual scene of the dramatic lyric. Langbaum uses his two concepts so flexibly and applies them to individual poems with such sensitivity, accuracy, and brilliance, that the student, in attempting to extend the application of the concepts himself, may have difficulty seeing that they do not in themselves provide a clear basis for keeping sufficiently constant and unambiguous, across different applications, what are significant differences and contrasts. For instance, Langbaum says in his primary formulation that the dramatic monologue characteristically involves a “tension between judgment,” so that “we understand the speaker of the dramatic monologue by sympathizing with him, and yet by remaining aware of the moral judgment we have suspended for the sake of understanding” him (85, 96). But he can then describe Tennyson’s “Tithonus” as allowing “us no reserve of judgment” (89), an accurate description which departs without acknowledgment from the idea that the dramatic monologue involves a necessary “tension” between sympathy and judgment. The quality pointed to may be located less equivocally by describing “Tithonus” as a mask lyric in which the poet employs an artificial person as a means of expressing and delimiting a personal emotion.

We shall be returning below to the matter of dual awareness in dramatic monologues. For the moment it may be sufficient to say that this departure from the ambiguities of Langbaum’s “sympathy and judgment” terminology is meant to assert clearly that the basis of our imaginative commerce with the poems in this field is our in-built cognitive capacity to read from the mind/body of the “self” into that of the “other,” a capacity which allows us by extension to register and discriminate different kinds of creative relations between dramatic figure and the mode in which they are constructed or projected from the immanent creating poet. This emphasis on the assumptions that we read poems as we read the world, that is, as written by beings like ourselves rooted in the natural and historical conditions ineluctably incident to such beings, stands in contrast also with Langbaum’s view of the modes as essentially autonomous.
artistic “strategies” not internally manifesting a defining connection with the implicit presence of a “real” poet.

Distinctly relevant in this connection is a fourth category, the expressive lyric, which I felt it necessary to develop in my earlier exposition in order to make clear how Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey,” originally Langbaum’s paradigm instance of the dramatic lyric, could not be accurately described in the structural terms that applied so well to other poems he had indicated by the same name. The leading fact is that in “Tintern Abbey” there is plainly no built-in artful contrast between the poet as an actor and the poet as representer of the actor, but rather the sense that the articulation of the poem was achieved as the poet’s unfolding, emergent response to the stimulus of the scene. Unlike “With Ships the Sea was Sprinkled Nigh and Far,” the poem is not a recreation in memorial tranquility of a feelingful perception but rather a sublimely successful attempt to articulate toward completed catharsis the urgent burden of overflowing feelings. One imaginative consequence of this implicitly registered constructive situation is that, in contrast with our uncertain identification of actor and poet in the dramatic lyric, our sense of the speaker’s identity is such that we must call him Wordsworth, with no hesitation or ambiguity, and may further, indeed almost must, go beyond the strict limits of the poem to call the speaker’s “dear sister” “Dorothy.”

II.

The appearance of a fourth distinctive structure in my set of dramatic “I” forms clearly portends the imminent possibility of discriminating still further distinct types of structure, and in illustration of this possibility I will later be pointing to a complex fifth one, without any sense (rather the opposite) that one wouldn’t need to develop many more beyond in order to do precise analytical justice to the structural workings of dramatic poems not here considered, particularly postmodern ones. The indicated situation comports with my assumption that all the forms under consideration are based, as indicated above, directly on our natural capacity as human creatures to image and understand ourselves and others. But it very much needs to be emphasized that to make vital and seemingly autonomous images of ourselves and of others, real and fictional, by means of representation in words, was not itself a capacity given and automatically available in our natural endowment but only a creative potentiality that had to be historically discovered, articulated, and developed. This way of conceiving the origins of the forms in question yields quite a different view of individual poems and the interrelations of the formal sets and subsets involved from that envisaged by structuralist or archetypal theories which would see all literary
works as cleanly assimilable to a finite number of preexisting patterns revealing themselves in individual works. Categories of poems are not like categories of biological species which locate the uniform characteristics of whole ranges of individuals, nor (to employ an analogy closer to structuralist usage) are they like sentences in a language which can all unequivocally manifest a finite number of basic grammatical structures. Resemblances among poems need to be understood, on the one hand, as resulting from the emergent discovery of natural correlative possibilities and on the other in terms of the subsequent historical development, with variation and extension, of such possibilities.

This historical continuity of literary forms is often attributed to convention, when not to structural archetypes, but this point of view usually does not involve a sufficient recognition of the preconventional objectifying base that forms have in our common cognitive endowment, nor does it often involve an appreciation of the nature of generic conventions themselves as specifically invented, inherited, and redeployed with creative variation by the succession of writers working with them.

Further, though deeply conditioned by nature and history, literary forms have to be considered, in their individual manifestation, as ultimately ad hoc, contingent and personal in a sense which, despite our current bias toward the pre- and transpersonal, we all intuitively understand: we do realize, when we think about it, that if Browning had not written "My Last Duchess," that great poem, despite all the conventions and structures and other poets in the world, despite all the rest of history and nature, would just not have been.

But the masterpiece distinctiveness of such a structure as "My Last Duchess" is closely akin to its status as a particularly "pure instance," a paradigm instance, of the dramatic monologue form. This leads to the further observation that, even as there are an indefinite number of potential formal principles derivable from the structure of the natural imagination, there are necessarily (given the notion of a work as a personal and therefore finally contingent construct) different degrees of fullness of constructive realization of a particular formal potentiality, conditional on the author's powers operating within the terms of particular constructive situations. The methodological consequence is that, in the application of formal principles to the interpretations of individual works, the conception of the principle needs to be kept clear and distinct, so that its degree of "fit" to the work can be given perspicuous statement. When concept and work are not congruent, the critic can then conclude either that the principle is not the principle of the work and hypothesize a new, more adequate principle for it (as in my reconception of "Tintern Abbey" as an expressive rather than a dramatic lyric) or take the incongruence as an objective indication of the work's only approximate realization of a formal potentiality and conduct his analysis and evaluation accordingly.
Since such variant possibilities are more easily illustrated than generalized about, the space remaining will be devoted to consideration of three masterpiece poems whose formal characteristics do not in some way fit those of any of my developed categories—Browning’s “Porphyria’s Lover,” Yeats’s “Leda and the Swan,” and Tennyson’s In Memoriam—and indicate how the first can be analyzed as realizing while to some degree departing from the full formality of the dramatic monologue, how the second can be effectively described by an extension of the dramatic lyric conception, while the third has to be seen as displaying a more complex formality than can be described in terms of the other formal notions.

Browning’s three supreme monologues—“My Last Duchess,” “The Bishop Orders His Tomb,” and “Andrea del Sarto”—are all developed as speech acts deeply motivated in the actor’s represented situation, in contrast with the normal mode in dramatic lyrics where the words of the actor do not constitute a speech act but are a “worded” objectification of his inner cognitive process, so that one might be tempted to see the outward speech act/inner cognitive act contrast as locating the essential characteristics of the forms (cf. Banfield 178–79, 306n). But both clearly retain their distinctive imaginative character even when the normally characteristic speech modalities are not present (a fact which supports my fundamental assumption that literary forms, though always realized in language, are never subject to merely linguistic definition). Arnold’s “Dover Beach,” which has all other properties of a dramatic lyric, is articulated as the speaker’s speech in the scene to his lover, whereas Browning’s “Porphyria’s Lover” is not literally voiced speech but must be understood as implicitly giving the speaker’s stream of memory and reflection after the represented action has taken place. Even these anomalies confirm the underlying structuring presence of the respective forms, however, since the “Dover Beach” actor’s speech must be taken as inner-thought-in-consequence-of-perception moving into speech, perhaps not even actually voiced, and if at all, only at “Ah, love, let us be true / To one another” (29–30). We do not see him as an outward presence but look through his eyes at the registered scene, and orient ourselves through him toward the (implicit) presence of the lover; we enter the speaker’s act and engage with him in his heartfelt appeal. (I leave this description in place, as instructively illustrating the fact that it may not be quite accurate. The editor of this volume, Linda Shires, tells me that she has tested the description with a group of student readers who unanimously report that they see the speaker as an outward presence at the same time that they orient themselves through him. My general claim that we “conflate” ourselves with the actor in the dramatic lyric implies the participation of our identity in his, and this notion of a merging duality can accommodate the possibility of a slight disjunction between the reader and the “Dover Beach” actor coordinate with the sense of him as not merely perceiving
but speaking the scene. In a cinematic projection, this may register as an “over the shoulder” view, still allowing us to dwell in the actor and his act; certainly we cannot imagine ourselves as seeing him face-to-face as an other.)

In contrast, though a cinematic projection of “Porphyria’s Lover” also shows us an outward scene by means of the “voice-over” wording of the lover projecting his inner image of the action (as in the dramatic lyric), he is registered by our imaginations from the outset as peculiarly “other.” It is as through we stood outside his body and mind, privy to his stream of thought from an outward perspective (as if he were speaking to or toward us), but not to its sensed inner meaning, hidden within his embodied mind. This correlates with the fact that we “hear” his unvoiced speech as if in the distinctive voice of “another” person.

Beyond this, we can uncover the fact of our awareness of the indwelling quasi-invisible poet, who from the outset generates a subliminal sense of the unbalance of the lover through the ababb rhyme scheme, just as the muted rhymes of the couplets in “My Last Duchess” suggest the Duke’s dissembled purpose (Rader, “Dramatic Monologue” 138–39). But of course the Lover’s whole memorial recapitulation of the early action is developed with the greatest skill by the poet so as to maintain the perspective of the “other.” Browning achieves this perspective not only through the Lover’s dramatically significant pathetic fallacy whereby he projects his paranoid fears onto the setting, but by displaying in Porphyria’s seemingly autonomous action the signs by which we form a judgment of her independent of the speaker’s, register as excessive his motivating fear that she is fickle and faithless, and thereby judge him. From the fact that she enters wordlessly without knocking, the reader infers her status as his intimate. At the same time, her spontaneous act of making a fire in the cheerless grate (before doing anything else) and soiling her gloves in the process suggests her concern for his comfort and her complete lack of pride as the lady the gloves (and the later reference to the “gay feast”) indicate she is. The fact of her “dripping cloak” and “damp hair” (11, 13) confirms the imaginative promise of the rainy night established in the opening and draws upon it further to emphasize the extraordinary devotion required to bring her to him from the feast, as the Lover notes, “through wind and rain” (30); so that, all in all, we have good grounds for seeing his estimate of the quality of her love as having its basis more in his fears than in her character, so “Perfectly pure and good” (37).

The disjunction between the Lover’s and our own estimate of Porphyria’s character needs to be sharp, for the more the reader sees the Lover’s fearful reading of her as objectively justified, the less mad he will seem, and the less accordingly the impact of the poem. We may therefore admire the skill by which Browning allows the Lover to confirm our positive estimate of Porphyria without either disrupting our sense of his consistency or qualifying the basis of
our (retrospective) judgment that his motivation is insane. Thus his strongly positive concessions about her occur, as already in part noticed, in contexts that confirm them and undermine his qualifications, as when he says that it was just a “sudden thought” (28) that prompted her determined foray through the stormy night or that her manifest devotion to him was only to last “That moment” (36).

Yet not all readers, or at least not all interpreters, will agree without equivocation that the Lover’s negative assertions about Porphyria are unjustified, just because the necessary complexity of the representation made it so difficult for Browning to keep the terms of the contrast clear. For that matter, fully establishing Porphyria’s character is not required by the primary objective of the poem, and though she is persuasive enough in our concrete awareness, the further we ponder her character outside our immediate encounter with it in the poem, the more we may be inclined to doubt, not that she could be faithful to the Lover, but that, given her vitality and goodness, she could have been attracted to him at all, since nothing we learn suggests how this moping solitary could have been so overwhelmingly attractive to her. Our sense of the depth and cogency of Porphyria’s motivation in its ultimate relation to our sense of the Lover’s action, as perhaps of that action itself, does not go so implicitly deep as our sense, for instance, of the Duke’s innocent last Duchess, or Andrea’s Lucrezia, or even of the Bishop’s so briefly represented mistress of the glittering eyes; and this may have something to do with our feeling that “Porphyria’s Lover,” for all its brilliant economy of representation and insight, is not so great a poem as the generality of readers surely feel the three others to be.

Browning’s problem in unequivocally establishing the Lover’s unreliability from the outset connects with another problem, his need to prevent the reader from too early inferring the Lover’s murderous insanity while at the same time clearly developing its probability. His achievement, and the impact of his achieved effect, can be cleanly located in terms of the reader’s response to the lines where the Lover’s murderous action and his insanity are jointly revealed:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{I found} \\
&\text{A thing to do, and all her hair} \\
&\text{In one long yellow string I wound} \\
&\text{Three times her little throat around,} \\
&\text{And strangled her (37–41)}
\end{align*}
\]

We can locate the structure of the strong effect by saying that, at the end of the next-to-the-last line, the reader has no anticipation of what the Lover’s intention is, whereas after the following phrase he realizes that this act is completely
consistent with everything that has gone before. The paranoid projection of
the opening, the confession that he listened with “heart fit to break” (5), his
strange passivity sitting alone in the cold, cheerless cottage, his even stranger
self-conscious failure to answer her call (“When no voice replied” [15]), the
ominous oddity of “I found / A thing to do” (37–38), at once portending and
coyly concealing his imminent act, all subliminally fill out our registration, in
the midst of our focus on Porphyria, of the Lover’s derangement. The effect
turns, of course, on the presence of the unconcealed but entirely unsuspected
weapon of her long, yellow hair, the damp hair she let fall on her gliding
entrance which, with her “smooth white shoulder bare” (17), defines her as so
completely not for killing.

Yet it is just because of her overwhelming attractiveness and supportive love,
as a stay against the threatening world beyond the cottage, that the lover does
decide to kill her. After the insanity is established at the point of the strangling,
the focus is simultaneously on the horror of the act and on the reasonableness
of the Lover’s action from his insane point of view (cf. Langbaum 88): he has
killed her in order to fix her in her love for him forever, and as the poem moves
to its end we continuously understand what we see simultaneously in his terms
and ours. So, when he “warily” opens her eyelids to see her laughing “blue eyes
without a stain” (45), we understand, in visual terms, that he can register as
thus alive the eyes that we see as those of a very dead woman. Similarly, we
understand the “bright blush” he takes as a response to his burning kiss to be
the result of the blood rushing back into her face as he releases the strangling
hair, and her head, propped and drooping upon his shoulder, as manifesting a
limp lifelessness which he reads as expressing her willing dependence on him.

This duality of awareness is the sine qua non of the dramatic monologue
structure that Langbaum located in his famous and widely echoed phrase
“sympathy and judgment.” My own view, already in part indicated, is that this
dual effect is based on our in-built capacity to empathize with the innerness of
another person when we stand as the uninvolved external observer of his speech
and bodily action, at the same time that we necessarily retain the anchoring
perspective of our mind in our own body. But if this explanation is clearer and
more explanatory than the “sympathy and judgment” formulation in locating
the common reference of both, I would underline the importance of Lang-
baum’s emphasis on the fact that, in his terms, sympathy predominates over
judgment in our experience of the dramatic monologue, or, to put it in mine,
that we are absorbed in our focal empathy with the dramatic monologue char-
acter, whereas our awareness of the in-built disjunction is subsidiary; we are in
short rapt in our outside act of understanding the “other.” This agrees with and
glosses Langbaum’s statement, quoted above, that “we understand the speaker
of the dramatic monologue by sympathizing with him, and yet by remaining aware of the moral judgment we have suspended for the sake of understanding.” Langbaum speaks as if more deliberate choice were involved than I do in my insistence on the in-built pre-structuring of our cognition of the “other,” but in saying of the Duke that “we prefer to participate in [his] power and freedom” (83) rather than hold ourselves in disjunctive judgment, Langbaum locates rightly the side to which our awareness of these poems must incline if we are to achieve full aesthetic appreciation of them. The point is particularly useful for teachers who might wish to articulate the source of a problem students develop more frequently with the Bishop of St. Praxed’s than with the Duke, as they hold themselves judgmentally aloof from the urgent flow of the Bishop’s errant and sensual spirit and quite miss the enchanting access the poem offers to his strange but nonetheless deeply human point of view (cf. Rader, “Dramatic Monologue” 139–40).

It is in fact the consistent mark of the dramatic monologue character that he should, in his otherly mystery, be distinctly understandable. The characters are normally extreme instances just so understanding will not be easily available through assimilation to our own “perspective of the normal,” but the ultimate beauty of the poems depends on the fact that the poet provides, the more covertly though clearly the better, a representation which fixes the rationale of the character and allows us literal in-sight through his speech and action into the structure of his motive, so that our act of rapt sympathy can begin in aroused curiosity and end in the release of full insight and understanding. (This is equivalent in reference to the familiar but inadequate and incomplete characterization of the dramatic monologue as involving a “study” of “character.”) In presenting the character as if autonomous and actual, the dramatic monologue poet may risk obscuring the reader’s understanding of the motivation which objectively characterizes him, but the need for implicit intelligibility is a necessary corollary of the poet’s creative control of his two-sided enterprise; he could not focus his mysterious other without some key to his mystery. It is accordingly no accident that we can discover that the Duke’s entire action is grounded in his imperious wish that his pride be respected without his seeming to stoop to insist on it; or that the key to the Bishop’s character and action is that, desiring eternal life, he cannot conceive immortality as spiritual but only as material; or that, as noticed above, Porphyria’s Lover’s mad act has its rationale in his thought that he can preserve Porphyria’s love for him only by killing her.

Whereas in the dramatic monologue the fact of “character” and the need for an implicit external notion of its rationale are inseparable from the fact that the represented character is an “other” of whom we seek sympathetic understanding, in the dramatic lyric, in contrast, the registered actor has no “character” as
he has no name: he lacks both because a self in its self-inhabitation and self-understanding does not need to locate itself with a name, just as it acts out of its identity rather than directs its understanding toward it, so that it is an undefined indwelt ground rather than a defined outward object. What is outward for the dramatic lyric actor is the external world as the object of his understanding.

An essential feature of the dramatic lyric is its power to bring before the reader’s imagination a visually objective scene which is yet perceived as instinct with discovered subjective meaning. Gray’s initiating achievement in the “Elegy” is truly remarkable for the sense it gives of seeing and hearing the objects of the churchyard scene in the gathering dusk, and its structural anomalies can in fact be explained as produced by its rigorous commitment to the probability of the actor seeing in the scene. The scenic sense in the poem, however, is nonetheless somewhat diluted by the meditative development, and the natural tendency of later poets was to work in more reduced compass for more continuous and sharply realized visual effect, as does Arnold in the open moonlit seascape of “Dover Beach,” framed by the flickering light on the French coast and the bright belt of the moonlit beach, both so charged with the felt meaning of the poem. But “Dover Beach” in turn is not so fully informed by intricate visual probability as Hardy’s “Darkling Thrush,” where so many details—the tangled bine stems that score the sky, the wintry dregs of the clouds, the sun as the “weakening eye of day” (4), the “sharp features” of the distant landscape (9)—evince and confirm the sense of seeing the scene in the distinct ambient light of the winter day, so that one needs an account of the workings of vision like that developed by J. J. Gibson in his revolutionary but already classic *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems* to articulate fully the registered structure of the visual situation as Hardy makes it manifest through the words of the poem. Hardy follows Gray, Arnold, and also Keats in developing the auditory correlate of the visual dimension of his poem, perhaps with no greater affective power but with more integrating technique than Gray and Arnold, as the significance of the poem bursts with the thrush’s song more probably and surprisingly from the scene. In this progression, if it is that, we see the development of the possibilities of an invented and inherited form realized in permanent aesthetic instances, each based on and appealing to universal cognitive resources but at the same time articulating the unique personal experience of each writer.

Considered off-hand, Yeats’s “Leda and the Swan” would seem quite an unlikely work to think of as a dramatic lyric, for how can a portrayal of a mythological figure be related to reconstructions of actual cognitive experience? But it is just this apparent contradiction which leads to a fruitful use of the concept to locate the source of power in this great poem. The crucial point is that we are
given the scene not, as would have been conventionally quite possible, in a free flight to literary never-never land, but that we see it rather, through our imaginative absorption in the poet-speaker, as if in the twentieth-century present. The rape is shown us not as if told or imagined but in rigorously visual terms as if literally seen—so that we infer Leda’s (and the swan’s) inward state exclusively from external signs, as from the sight of “those terrified vague fingers” (5) attempting to push the “feathered glory from her loosening thighs” (6); we infer from what we see of Leda’s body that her mind is not in command of her body’s compelled acquiescence to the swan’s assault. But yet simultaneously with our restrictedly visual perspective, we know that it is Leda and the swan as Zeus that we see; we know the event perceived in the present as nonetheless fixed in the mythological past, and we know with the speaker what the sequel of the rape will be (“engenders there / The broken wall, the burning roof and tower / And Agamemnon dead” [9–11]), though it has already been. And this knowledge we are also able to read in what we see, as the “great wings” (1) and “feathered glory” (6), mimetically descriptive of the swan, bespeak the presence of the god; indeed, the swan’s represented action is only intelligible as Zeus’s. Yet the poet-speaker’s independent knowledge of the myth does not include knowledge of Leda’s and the swan’s inner consciousness, hidden and only to be guessed at in the objective presence of their bodies (“Did she put on his knowledge with his power / Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?” [14–15]). In sum the reader experiences the poem not as a fictive entry into a fabulous past but as Yeats’s recreation of his vision of the fabulous as impinging objectively on his awareness in the real present, like Keats’s nightingale or Hopkins’s windhover, though Yeats’s is an inwardly present scene without setting or sound. A great deal has been written about the relation of Yeats’s odd beliefs to his poetry, and treating this poem as a dramatic lyric helps us to be clearer about dealing with the problem. “Now as at all times I can see in the mind’s eye / . . . the pale unsatisfied ones,” Yeats says in the opening of “the Magi” (1–2); in that poem and in others, as in “Leda,” he induces us to share the fact and inward act of his visionary belief.

The reader’s tacit experience then turns out to be surprisingly if covertly dependent on his sense of the relation of the matter of the poem to Yeats’s experience in a way quite out of keeping with doctrines of autonomous speakers and the “textuality” of poems, but we are so used to thinking of a poem like In Memoriam as obviously and unproblematically connected with the poet’s experience that we are likely not only to forget how grossly such assumed connection contradicts accepted doctrines of autonomous textuality but also to lose sight of the fact that the biographical elements in the poem are not a matter, first of all, of external knowledge but are inseparable from the intrinsic
intelligibility of the poem as immediately read and experienced, so that, more strongly than the dramatic lyric, and more complicatedly than “Tintern Abbey,” it requires the presumptive identification of the speaker/actor in the poem with the creating poet Tennyson. (External knowledge of course has to fill in the formal implication of the poem. The “A. H. H.” whose initials and date of death are given epigraphically and the person mourned as “Arthur” in the text constitute a conjunction of incomplete terms which we must take as converging on a real and not fictional referent, but this referent has to be externally glossed for us as the historical Arthur Henry Hallam, analogous to the way we might need to be told by a mutual acquaintance that an unknown person who has come under our palpable observation as actually existing is in fact “Frank Smith,” with such and such a personal history.)

Although the individual lyrics of the poem have clear affinities with the dramatic and lyric forms, our experience of the individual structures is developed within the force field of the larger structure of the whole, which is in fact the primary cause of our reading the poem as inherently autobiographical in substance and diaristic in form. The poem displays overall coherence only if we interpret the speaker/actor in the lyrics as effectively identical, though (as we shall see) to some degree in contrast, with the real poet conceived as articulating himself in the poem. This identity is most strikingly implied in such features as the speaker’s later reference (“Let this not vex thee, noble heart!” [LXXIX 2]) to his brother’s reaction to the lines in the poem asserting that Hallam was “More than my brothers are to me” (IX 20), where the mutual internal/external reference of the poem is implicit. A further implication of this and cognate references is that the poem must be understood as diaristic, so that to grasp the movement of the poem and feel its beauty, we must react to the individual lyrics as expressive constructs artistically achieved and in place before the completion of the whole; there is necessarily a sense throughout of the poem as a serially staged existential projection into time, in which the later stages were not for the poet, any more than for the speaker/actor, foreseen at the earlier stages. Consider in this connection the force of the Poem as looking back upon the whole recorded experience, including the recording poems themselves, as “the long result” of time, with itself, the beginning of the poem, as the last (retrospective) temporal point in its series.

The fact that the poem must be registered as created emergently, with the parts complete before the resolution of the whole was achieved or in view, is the assertion that the poem has also to be simultaneously understood as a preenvisioned construct. Though Tennyson no doubt wrote some of the early poems, as he said, with no initial thought of putting them into a larger work, it was then very fortunate that he cast them all in same verse form; and indeed we know that
he did not contribute to Henry Hallam's memorial volume because he already hoped at this early date (February 1834) to construct some larger tribute to his friend; this was surely the In Memoriam project (Tennyson, Works 954).

The homogeneous aesthetic quality of the poem also has to be conceived as fixed from the outset. This quality involves a continuity of effect dependent upon our lyrical participation in the poet’s continuously achieved serenity—shadowed and weighted, momentary and tentative in the earlier part, increasingly stable and enduring in the later and in the whole—as he struggles to assert by fiat of faith, completely against all evidence, the presence of a divine purpose in the universe; so that the “Believing where we cannot prove” in the fourth line of the poem should be seen as defining the basis of the continuous emotional effect of the whole rather than as merely a statement of religious “idea” or belief. This emphasis (which is perhaps what Eliot meant to convey when he spoke of the quality of the doubt in the poem being more important than the quality of its faith) is proper to our understanding of a work not of philosophy but literature, whose raison d’être is its power to move rather than its validity as thought; but at the same time it is the enacted validity of the assertion as rooted in earnest belief which gives it its emotional power. If the belief were felt to be generated by the poet’s search for effect rather than the other way around, the effect would be sentimental, whereas the avoidance of sentimentality is the mark of Tennyson’s signal success in this poem which, so precariously based in personal feeling, is consistently articulated in aesthetic dispassion. The quality of unfounded affirmation, one may note, finds expression even in the metaphorical detail of the poem, as in “God’s finger touched him, and he slept” (LXXXV 20), where the emotional force of the statement depends on the reader’s measuring its calm assertion that Hallam’s death was the result of God’s benevolent act against his well-developed coordinate awareness of the spiritual anguish the loss has earlier wrought in the speaker; the overriding emotional denial of brute fact through faith in what is invisible and doubtful is an emotional effect pervasively characteristic of the poem. A parallel example is “the great world’s altar-stairs / That slope thro’ darkness up to God” (LV 15–16), which so persuasively postulates secure support within the space of complete objective uncertainty. The effect of course culminates in the confident grandeur of the final assertion, understood by poet and reader as assertion but felt as truth, of the “one far-off divine event, / To which the whole creation moves” (Epilogue 143–44).

Our awareness of the poem as based in and reflecting real experience while having a complementary status as an aesthetically homogeneous construct enables us to understand and accept the fact that Tennyson wrote various of the poems at times different from their implied chronology and inserted them into
an earlier or later sequence. This can be theoretically glossed in terms of the fact that the poet’s act of construction is in principle separate from the experience he expresses or reconstructs, so that he can fill out or complete his construct in terms of its unity and effect in ways that prevent it from being anything like a reflexive response to his raw “experience,” while at the same time it is expression as close to his “real” experience as the total creative situation permitted.

There is something of a paradox here. It was the sense of the unavoidable disjunction from his experience that expressing it in a poem involved which caused Tennyson to say that the poem displayed more optimism than he actually felt, or that the voice of the poem was not always his but “the voice of the human race speaking thro’ him”: from one perspective of the analysis offered here, this statement is not so much the self-important pomposity it seems as a consequence of the constructive inevitabilities implicit in the logic of writing such a poem. At the same time, one can see from another perspective of the analysis that the objective act of writing the poem which disjoined him from his experience also implicated him personally because of its inevitable opposite tendency to become intertwined with the experience it recorded. It is no wonder, then, that we find as an integral part of the poem the assertion, in contrast with his later external one that it is not his personal self speaking, that “I sometimes hold it half a sin / To put in words the grief I feel” (V 1–2). The idea of halfness is accurate: the poems only half express his real grief because they do not present immediate real experience but artistic objectifications of memories of real experience, and this double aspect of the poems, as at once objective constructs and serially completed expressions of personal emotion, is just the character so accurately and beautifully attributed to them from within the work as “these brief lays, of Sorrow born,” “Short swallow-flights of song, that dip / Their wings in tears, and skim away” (XLVIII 1, 15–16). (The reflexive consciousness of itself as a poem stands in contrast with the directly “expressive” mode of “Tintern Abbey” and the Immortality Ode and even with the closer integration of artifice and experience in the dramatic lyric, just because the artistic reconstruction is so manifestly long-term, independent, and separate from the experience.)

As a final brief illustration of the comprehensive way in which the overarching structure of the poem as the progressive artistic reenactment of the poet’s moments of personal grief governs the reader’s registration of the component lyrics, thus giving them a phenomenological dimension that by themselves they would not have, notice Section XXXI, “When Lazarus left his charnel-cave” (1). Nowhere in this lyric is there any reference to the poet and his personal situation or any implication about him other than that he is, as in any poem, the author of the lines we are reading. Removed from its context, the poem would be a generalized meditation on resurrection vis-à-vis Lazarus. But of course we
do read it in the very powerful context of the whole, and readers take it and
deeply feel it, universally and unreflectively, not as meditation but as marking
one in the continuing series of stages of the poet’s lament for his friend, though
neither of them is in any explicit way implicated by the language.

I would apologize for belaboring the obvious in this analysis of _In Memori‑am_, as of the other poems earlier, except that it is just the inescapably obvi‑ous, the ground of our ordinary reading experience and our practical critical
operations, which has to be explicitly laid out in its experienced objectivity and
brought into full conceptual focus if effective challenge and counterclaim is to
be offered to the powerful theoretical denials of significant connection between
poetry and experience, text and world which currently hold sway in the literary
critical arena. The kinds of imaginative stabilities and invariants of our literary
experience which I have been pointing to throughout are, I would claim, the
underlying though usually not clearly conscious basis of our sense of generic
distinctions and of the structure of significance and value in individual poems.
A systematic account of such imaginative facts is the most meaningful test that
can be offered of the application and validity of critical theories. Even more
important, explicit theoretical reconstruction of the implicit basis of literary
works in the definite through various constructive intentions of authors—their
intelligible purposes as human beings rooted in their personal grounds of reality—
can invigorate our sense of literature as movingly meaningful to us as
likewise rooted in the preexistent realities of our experience in and of the world.

Notes

1. See “The Dramatic Monologue and Related Lyric Forms” (133–35) and also my
   “Exodus and Return: Joyce’s _Ulysses_ and the Fiction of the Actual” and “The Logic of _Ulysses_,
or Why Molly Had to Live in Gibraltar,” where I extend the application of the concept to
Joyce’s representation and projection of himself in _Ulysses_, climaxing in his abandonment of
the “anchoring perspective” in the creation of Molly. [Editors’ note: Chapters 6, 16, and 17
respectively in this volume.]

2. See my essay, “The Concept of Genre and Eighteenth-Century Studies,” in _New
   Approaches to Eighteenth-Century Literature_, ed. Philip Harth (New York, 1974) 94–99. [Edi-
tors’ note: Chapter 2 in this volume].
We experience literary works as inherently meaningful and beautiful. This not very challenging statement raises a troubling question: if literary works do in fact have an inherent structure of meaning and value which is the ground of our response to them, how is it possible for us to disagree and even flatly contradict one another as we do in our conceptions of what their meaning and value are? Let us put the question more usefully: what must the objective basis of our intuitive experience of literary works be like for us to misunderstand and disagree about them as we do?

A theory developed to answer this question would have to begin with the assumption that it is in fact just the intrinsic meaning and value of literary works which makes us respond to them as literature, and it would accordingly have to describe all such works as possessing forms which could present themselves to intuition as self-intelligible and self-justifying, that is, as forms the act of understanding which could be experienced as its own justification. The theory would have to elaborate a kind of grammar of the natural imagination which could spell out the general and particular ways in which works might differ from each other and distinctly enough so that we could understand how our ideas about our experience of them, singly and together, might have come to be confused and contradictory.

I want to develop an example of the kind of critical procedure such a theory might entail by posing and attempting to resolve some especially confusing problems raised by the contemporary controversy concerning the form of *Moll Flanders* as related to the form of *Pamela* and the standard novel on the one hand, and to *Portrait of the Artist* and *Ulysses* on the other. My attempt will be
to define all the particular forms involved in such a way as to offer a solution
to the specific problems associated with each, but to do this as just indicated
within a single controlling theoretical perspective which can be seen to relate
them coherently to each other and to clarify our overall conception of the nature
and history of the novel form.

I begin by pointing out that there are, generally speaking, two current views
of Moll Flanders. On the one hand, the book is seen as a work which achieves
that realism held to be characteristic of the novel form but which lacks plot and
a coherent dimension of moral judgment; and, on the other, it is seen as an
ironic masterpiece similar in structure and quality to twentieth-century forms.¹
Opposed as these views are, they nevertheless attempt to measure Moll in terms
of the same general formal conception: the first sees it as an example of failure
in a simple version of the realism-plot-judgment form, the second sees it as an
example of success in what is in effect a complex version of the same form.

The ubiquity of something like the realism-plot-judgment concept in novel
criticism suggests to me that there is indeed an intuitively recognized class of
works to which it refers. But the very fact that Moll itself is ambiguously per-
ceived in relation to the class would seem to imply that Moll is not a member
of it. We can of course say that Moll is a deficient member of that class, but
if the basis of classification is an intuitive recognition that its members in fact
share a common principle of self-justifying intelligibility, then this would mean
that Moll is deficient in those very qualities which render the class as a whole
meaningful and valuable to readers, and any such conclusion is adequately
contradicted by the book’s enduring popularity and interest. When we find
two critics as careful but divergent in their theoretical outlook as Ian Watt and
Sheldon Sacks both declaring that, measured against their conceptions, Moll
Flanders is an incomplete or incoherent member, and when we find that both
believe their classification to be based on just those features of the class which
render it inherently coherent and significant,² then I believe that the logic of
the situation instructs us to tighten up our conceptions in a way that will at the
same time more clearly define the common class and exclude Moll Flanders from
membership in it. It would also instruct us then to develop a concept of another
principle of form which would account for the independent intelligibility and
significance of Moll Flanders and which would describe also the ambiguities
which cause it to be confused in the first place with works written on principles
different from its own.

I want now to develop some concepts of form that in my view satisfy these
conditions. I will offer first a highly specific conception of the realism-plot-
judgment form from which I will develop a plot of Pamela. I will call this
conception and others to be developed later models, in order to emphasize their
hypothesized character and their function as artificial similitudes of independently cognitive form. The model is a revision of the R. S. Crane-Sheldon Sacks concept of represented action designed to make it meet clearly the condition just mentioned, namely to define the principle of the realism-plot-judgment class and to exclude *Moll Flanders*. I should say that the models are deductive models; that is, they are meant to define the most general differentiating principle of a work’s form in such a way that its more particular aspects can be rigorously deduced from it.

The general action model, as I shall call it, is meant to indicate the form common to all those works that make up our idea of the standard novel and to permit a unique model to be drawn up within it for every particular standard novel. The cumbersome definition is necessary for explanatory accuracy. I shall simplify it for convenience after I give the full definition. Let us say then that the general action model specifies works of fiction designed to develop and maximize concern for a character (or characters) along a line of development in which the ground of concern is a dynamically shifting contrast between the reader’s sense of the immediate and ultimate fate of the character (or characters) as compared with his (or their) immediate and ultimate desert, and to resolve this concern by a surprising but probable extension of the means used to raise it, so as to give the reader the greatest satisfaction in the ultimate fate of the character (or characters). To put it more simply, the author pits our induced sense of what will happen to a character against our induced sense of what we want to happen to him, our hopes against our fears, in order to give the greatest pleasure appropriate to their resolution.

The action model describes a work which the reader at some level of consciousness must know from the outset is being shaped beneath its realistic surface to meet the created requirements of desire. It has therefore the character of an objective fantasy, not such a fantasy as makes a reader the passive victim of a process hidden from his consciousness, but a deliberate, determinate, conscious, controlled fantasy identical with the cognitive structure of the book. I emphasize that the description is not pejorative. If it suggests the simple wish-fulfillment of shallow novels, it also suggests the possibility in serious novels of cathartically working out the shape of desire against the resistance of our ideals on the one hand and the objective conditions of experience on the other.

A particular model of *Pamela* would specify that the reader is meant to feel for Pamela a serious fear, which can be defined by saying her merit and fate develop along a line of branching alternatives, where one branch, always closed by circumstance or choice, leads to an ethically acceptable but materially undesirable safety, while the other leads overtly and immediately to greater danger but covertly and ultimately to the most desirable resolution of her difficulties (cf.
Sacks, *Fiction and the Shape of Belief* 23). “Overtly” here means that of which Pamela herself is aware; “covertly” means that of which only the reader is aware.

Notice that the model locates at once and insists upon the sources of the most common critical complaints about *Pamela*—the quality that Ian Watt calls its “immitigable vulgarity of . . . moral texture” (*Rise* 171) and the ambiguity of Pamela’s status as heroine-hypocrite. The model also clearly explicates the difficulties. It says that it was no part of Richardson’s intention that *Pamela* should be judged as hypocrite but that it was likely, given the form, that a reader might react to her as one. We can see this more clearly if we consider that the first-person report of the narrative was, on the one hand, necessary to bring the reader close to Pamela’s own fears and uncertainty about the future and to provide that inner account of her motives essential to the reader’s admiration of her, but that, on the other hand, the choice involved the necessity of creating through Pamela as narrator the covert sense of potential prosperity so necessary to the special fantasy pleasure objectified in the form but which, as a condition of that pleasure, must not be attributed to Pamela. She must remain immune to the pressure of those material desires which the reader is nonetheless solicited to indulge actively on her behalf. (The formal situation is neatly epitomized in Pamela’s exclamatory description of one of the early rape attempts: “O dreadful!” she says, “out rushed my master in a rich silk and silver morning gown” [60]. The danger-in-reward notation of the emblems of Mr. B.’s wealth is not to be taken as especially characterizing Pamela’s consciousness but as part of the objective content of the scene. [In a cinematic version the camera would show the richness of the morning gown, with Pamela the image of uncalculating terror; but since Pamela herself is Richardson’s only available camera, the notation must be potentially ambiguous.] We conclude, then, as a solution to our critical difficulties, that Pamela may appear at times to be a hypocrite in accidental consequence of an inner necessity of the form, whereas the tawdry moral effect of the novel, such as it is, is clearly the intended consequence of the form.

I will now very briefly indicate how the matter of an action novel is generated from the necessities imposed by its inner core and at the same time illustrate the specific explanatory capacity of the abstract model by asking it to explain the traits and actions of two characters in the novel—Mrs. Jewkes and Mr. Williams—and in particular to explain why Mrs. Jewkes is sensual and repulsively fat and why Mr. Williams is a clergyman.

The model directs an answer somewhat as follows: Richardson’s chief problem in the novel is the need his form imposes to make Mr. B. both a villain and a hero. B. must threaten Pamela and threaten her increasingly, else our sense of her danger and the merit which develops from her response to danger will not increase, as the form requires, along lines that make her ultimate reward pos-
sible; but the more directly and villainously he does threaten her, the less acceptable he will appear as an ultimate and satisfactory reward for her, something that the form requires also. Richardson’s attempt to face and minimize this paradox is implicit in almost every aspect of the book, but let us consider the problem only as it relates to Jewkes and Williams.

First of all, B.’s abduction of Pamela to Lincolnshire in general allows Pamela’s danger to increase in respect to B. but in such a way that B.’s direct culpability is minimized. Mrs. Jewkes becomes Pamela’s direct oppressor, with ambiguous authority from B., while B. himself remains in the wings temporarily safe from blame but a real and increasing threat as, one by one, the possibilities of Pamela’s escape are cut off. It was an ingenious solution to Richardson’s problem except for one thing: B.’s physical absence removes the basis of the sexual fear which is a chief element in the reader’s continuing concern for Pamela. And here we can see why Mrs. Jewkes is sensual and fat. Her repulsive fleshiness, especially as conjoined with her tendency to fondle Pamela, keeps the idea of B.’s sexual threat constantly before the reader’s imagination, while Jewkes’s often manifested physical strength makes her prospective cooperation with Mr. B. seem certain to result in successful rape. Yet upon reflection we see that Mrs. Jewkes is gross and repulsive very much in excess of B.’s actual threat, and we may be puzzled by this until the complex demands of the model force the recognition that she must not only condition our sense of Pamela’s immediate danger but contribute also to our sense of her ultimate fate. Then we see that she is designed to be so repulsive that B. will seem actually attractive in contrast; in comparison with her he is seen to stand well within the outer limits of sensual sinfulness.

Mr. Williams is the last of a series of secure but unsatisfactory escape routes that are opened and closed for Pamela in her Lincolnshire imprisonment, as she waits trembling for B.’s arrival. Respectable and well-intentioned, Williams in his admiration for Pamela and willingness to help and marry her increases our developing sense of Pamela’s social worth and thus the probability of her eventual marriage to B. At the same time, Williams’s strength and merit must be sharply limited. If he were stronger and more morally forceful than he is, the reader’s sense of Pamela’s isolated danger and resourcefulness would decrease and his feeling that Pamela could and should escape would increase. As it is, Pamela consistently appears to be morally and prudentially the superior of the bumbling, somewhat timorous Williams. Both her danger and her merit are heightened, as just remarked, but more importantly the reader is made to feel an active desire that Pamela not run away with Williams and marry him—the potentially safe out becomes unacceptable. The reader feels the clear superiority of B. as a potential husband for Pamela, and so the as yet remote happy ending is built up as desirable, probable, and deserved.
But why specifically is Williams a clergyman? We see, on the one hand, that he must be a virtuous gentleman genuinely concerned for Pamela or he cannot contribute adequately to our sense of her moral and social merit. However, a gentleman willing to help Pamela would almost by definition be able to thwart Mrs. Jewkes effectively and take Pamela away, something that Richardson cannot allow to happen. Williams must therefore be a dependent gentleman, a contradiction in terms which can only be resolved if he is a clergyman in the service of Mr. B. His clerical capacity also has a further rationale in Richardson's need to use him to give retrospective sanction to B.'s outré behavior.

With a little work we can get the model to answer all sorts of interesting formal questions—Why should the good Mrs. Jervis at times be morally ambiguous? Why does the novel not end with the marriage? etc.—but perhaps enough has been said to establish tentatively the important general conclusion that in works of the action model kind the objective characters and events of the story are all at some level functions of the underlying fantasy structure. (I will only remark further that a slight change in the Pamela model—separating rather than joining merit and reward in the line of alternatives—produces a model that can be used to provide a precise account of Clarissa in its contrasting moral grandeur, one which enables us to see clearly how Richardson constructed Clarissa out of the same psychic materials as Pamela but with an intention now to separate in sharp moral austerity the moral and material goods which he had been accused in Pamela of joining with hypocritical ease.)

Moving now to Moll Flanders, I will say at once that if we test any version of the general action model against Moll, the results are absolutely negative; the model rejects Moll and Moll rejects the model. Either Defoe was not writing a work on the action model as here specified, or else he was doing such an impossibly bad job of it that the result could not be called even a deficient example of the form.

I will not seek to demonstrate the point further, because it should become incontestable later. I proceed then to build a new model for Moll on a different principle of natural intelligibility and inherent significance.

Let us say what has often been said but never fully understood: Moll Flanders is an imitation of a real autobiography. The implications of this fact begin to be clear when we realize that Moll is an imitation of real autobiography in a sense totally different from that in which Pamela is an imitation of real letters, though the difference is not easily perceived by those who think of realism as involving a single kind of imaginative relationship to the natural world. The “real documents” of Pamela cannot, our model tells us, be like natural letters at all in the sense that they must at every point tell us Richardson’s “once upon a time” story clearly and powerfully while they only seem to tell Pamela’s story to her parents. In fact, the dramatic vividness of the letters (and the events they relate) is not
the result of their likeness to real letters (and real events) but of their unlikeness to them, though, of course, the minimal signs of likeness given are a necessary condition of the illusion. Everyone will agree that the letters are the author’s device, but I will say further that every reader of the work intuitively knows they are, in the midst of and as a condition of the illusion. He knows just as he knows in “once upon a time,” as a natural condition of the fantasy.

Now the primary formal fact about *Moll Flanders* is that its form does not within itself convey the information that Moll is not the real agent of the story. To the contrary, it may be said to be an obviously positive feature of the form to make Moll seem the real author of the story but not of the events of the story—to make the work seem, in a word, literally true. This formal argument is entirely confirmed by the external historical fact that many sophisticated readers have mistaken Defoe’s unidentified fictions for fact, as Donald Stauffer in 1941 mistook *Robert Drury’s Journal,* whereas not even an unsophisticated reader could so mistake Richardson’s fictions.

The point can be made more clear if we think of three figures: an angry man, a man acting the part of an angry man, and a man pretending to be angry. The first has the appearance he does because he is really angry: his outside expresses his inside. The second has an appearance quite different from his internal state, and the audience knows this, else it could not take pleasure in his performance, since it would not know that it was a performance. The third man—the pretender—has the appearance of the first—the angry man—and, as long as we do not see behind the appearance, we react to him so. When we do see behind the appearance, we understand that we have been deceived. Notice, for later use, that we cannot actively think of him as angry and know that we are deceived at the same time. Now *Pamela* is clearly analogous to the second instance—the actor—and *Moll* is clearly analogous to the third instance—the pretender.

If we take seriously the idea that an intention to make *Moll* seem like a real story is the whole principle of the book, then it follows directly that, as a matter of artistic principle, it would display neither of those features called plot and judgment, the desert/fate curve of the action model. To do so, we see, would have revealed at once the immanent presence of the real agent behind the apparent agents and destroyed the principle of the form. Simple and inevitable as this conclusion is, Defoe’s critics have time and again noticed that Defoe was writing in imitation of real documents and gone on to say that he did not know how to make plots or that he failed to judge his characters. Part of the reason for this is the difficulty of seeing what the full positive principle of the form of *Moll Flanders* is.

We can begin to understand the principle if we think a bit about the form of true stories. We should note first that we react to true stories as true not
primarily because we know them to be so in an objective, referential sense but because they require us to do so hypothetically in order to understand them. The true story invites us to believe it as an account of fact and makes sense only if we do think of it as referring beyond itself to what its author did not create; it presents itself as true—reality referring—and our assumption that it is true governs our entire imaginative participation in its meaning and value, so that if we do discover, for instance, that a fascinating true story is false, we do not think that we have been entertained with a good fiction, we think we have been told a lie. Both the intelligibility and the effect of the true story, then, depend on its factuality considered merely as form, quite independent of the actual connection with external reality which the form of course implies.

Now Defoe’s aim was to simulate both the intelligibility and effect of a true story. But what kind of true story? A kind of story that I would call a naïve incoherent autobiography, a story really told by a real person like Moll. There are no well-known examples of the genre, because such works are by definition deficient in art. They depend for such interest as they have on the extraordinary, as does all factual literature, but in the special sense of the naturally improbable or bizarre. “Man bites dog” or “truth is stranger than fiction” hits it exactly.

Moll Flanders can be understood very well as an imitation of a work of this kind designed to maximize the effects possible to the form. When we sit down by woeful chance with the talkative lady on the bus, we can ordinarily expect to be bored, but occasionally it may turn out that she has led an interesting life—has been hostess of a speakeasy, say, a carnival shill, and a pickpocket, so that her wandering and formless tale, thanks not to her art but to her material, including her naïve self, turns out to be worthy of our interest.

The maker of the simulated naïve incoherent autobiography, however, would make very sure that his story was not boring, however wandering and apparently artless. How would an author proceed if he were going to write Moll Flanders? He would, first of all, need a good many extraordinary, even sensational incidents: a kidnapping by gypsies, for instance; a strange love triangle; a marriage based on mutual deception; an incident of clairvoyance; a case of accidental incest; a varied career in crime, replete with many small but interesting episodes; a capture and trial; a conversion in the face of execution; a reunion with a long-lost lover; and a happy establishment after all. Described and listed thus, the events clearly manifest Defoe’s intention, as they do not in the story, where they are intermixed with many minor events, pieces of the unsensational ordinary made interesting by means which I shall discuss in a moment. In presenting both kinds of material, the author—Defoe—might well refine the crude procedures of earlier factual stories. In a work like Francis Kirkman’s The Counterfeit Lady, for instance, the writer assumes the reader’s
belief in the actuality of the story and milks it for sensational effect, but Defoe reverses this emphasis, using a constructed sense of unsensational reality to produce imaginative belief, which is itself the effect. He does this by systematically crossing the lines of expected effect. On the one hand, he makes the inherently sensational incidents seem real by submerging sensation in the sense of the normal and probable. When, for instance, Moll discovers that she is married to her brother, she does not tear out her eyes but keeps her uneasy peace for three years. On the other hand, he makes the minor incidents seem oddly real by pointing up the unexpected and improbable, after the “man bites dog” principle. Thus Moll sleeps with her gentleman friend for months, but in complete innocence; a maid is offered a bribe of £100—many times her annual wages—and for no specified reason refuses; Moll standing in the street is given a horse to hold, and, on impulse, just walks away with it. Thus, the usual is moved away from the expected toward the unusual, and the unusual is moved away from the expected toward the usual. Everything is countersensational. What is the reason for telling me these odd things? the reader asks himself. Because they happened, is the only answer; they would not be told thus, otherwise. But since they did happen, then, how curious! How full of the strangeness of life! And Defoe has his effect.

Since the detailed story is to be taken as true, all the events will have to be fitted into the range of one life and narrated autobiographically. This is the first rule of Defoe’s pseudofactual stories, a rule which could have been used long ago to solve the problem of “The Apparition of Mrs. Veal,” thought at first to be fiction and discovered to be fact. Since that story is narrated in the third-person, it was almost certain to be true (that is, genuinely factual) a priori. In Moll, the first-person report will have to be bland, unemotional, and matter of fact so as not to call attention to the unnatural succession of the natural extraordinary. For style, the tone of rambling speech will do—perfectly clear in its apparent naïve lack of clarity, a little repetitious, but, most of all, without apparent design.

So far as overall form goes, in a pseudonatural story a pseudonatural form will do, the apparent form of incoherent natural life. Life, someone has said, is just one damn thing after another, and the tortuous progress of Moll Flanders will violate no reader’s sense of life (unless he were an analytical sort inclined to remember forgotten children and notice how conveniently husbands die when the run of incident needs freshening). Even then we might, as a last touch, give the life a little shape in its shapelessness, a semi-coherent natural shape familiar from the popular literature of spiritual autobiography and therefore presumptively real; but we would have to be careful not to give the shape any determinate homiletic or sentimental force, to avoid any sense of plottedness.8 (The incident of conversion would serve furthermore as an effective bridge from one
improbable incident—the last-minute deliverance from execution—to another, the transportation to New World safety. The last incident would do nicely to end, an undeserved good fate but not wholly good. Moll does not quite live happily ever after.)

I have so far emphasized Moll as almost a device to hold the material events together, and this is quite proper, I think, for Defoe mainly wanted to maximize the episode-by-episode interest and believability of the story. In Defoe’s weaker pseudofactual stories—The King of the Pirates, for instance—we can see clearly how secondary his interest in his protagonists actually is, but it is an obvious virtue in such stories to give the narrator himself or herself as much interest as the matter of the story will allow. Since she is so much engaged in questionable activities, it is easy to give Moll a great deal of psychological and moral interest and even to have her comment on her activities in a morally interesting way. What must be avoided at all costs is a sense of consistency either of psychological portraiture or implicit ethical judgment. Everything about Moll must be left ultimately a little skew and incoherent, as a real person seems when presenting himself naïvely. The image of himself which a natural person projects to others expresses his inner unity only tacitly; the self which expresses the image is not itself expressed. An artist attempting to simulate the image projected by another from within himself will not really be able to do so, since, if he achieves his purpose, the image will be informed by his explicit purposiveness and be, therefore, unlike the actual image; and if he leaves it unachieved, the partial incoherence will only superficially seem to replicate the tacit unity of the actual. The only solution is for the artist to project his own tacitness into the image, in which case the image becomes in its inner essence the image not of another but of himself. (I will return to this problem, with Joyce.) The point here is, though, not that Defoe tried and failed to make Moll coherent; he didn’t really care if she was or not, only that the reader should interpret her incoherence as that puzzling surface complexity of the real which betokens its underlying unity.

And so we return to the paradox at the heart of Moll Flanders. Fictional artists are supposed to show and not tell, but Defoe “shows” most effectively not by showing but by not telling, as when we feel through Moll’s glancing reference the horror of the pickpocket’s lynching at the hands of the street mob. The reason for this is that the form of the book forces our imagination to construe its matter as real. A reader who inspects his reaction to the story closely will discover that he gives Defoe the creative artist very little credit because he has in fact thought of the incidents as if they were not invented but merely reported.

But the hidden substance of the real to which we respond isn’t there. When Moll tells us that she discovered the fact of her incest when her mother-in-law/mother mentions her early name, and when later Moll tells us that she con-
vinced her mother of the relationship “by such other tokens as she could not deny” (77), we accept the complete vagueness as correlated with the truth of the facts alleged. It is told so because it was so, whereas in a fiction the causal line for such a coincidence would have to be fully established (cf. Oedipus Rex and Tom Jones). If our attention is then directed to Moll’s earlier story that her first memory is of being left by gypsies at Colchester, we should infer—from a logical point of view, we cannot help but infer—that she can know nothing of her mother and so cannot recognize her by any tokens at all. But we are not able to infer this within our imaginative participation in the story, because to do so contradicts the assumption we have made in order to understand the story. If we infer the contradiction, the story disappears. My point here is difficult to grasp just because it forces us to turn in so sharply on our mental processes. We are likely to think that just because we know Moll to be made up, we are free to react to it as a fiction, especially since its deceit is not referential, not forgery; but we aren’t. We aren’t free, just as in our original analogy we aren’t free to perceive the pretender as if he were acting. Moll, like the pretender, can be seen from only one perspective at a time. The pseudofactual story does not turn itself into a workable fiction because of our knowledge but remains a story which the imagination must construe as real and cannot therefore fully interpret. When we are most caught up in the intended effect of the work, we cannot be conscious within the illusion that it is a work of art; and when we are most fully aware of it as a work of art, we cannot within that consciousness feel the effect. The wholeness of the work can be understood but not experienced because it affirms an imaginative contradiction.

If this is an accurate description of the form, it is possible to see where the twentieth-century critical differences with the book come from. Knowing it to be a fiction in fact, critics try to understand it as if it were a fiction in form. Since a fiction is always created within the consciousness of an implied author, to use Wayne Booth’s term, and since there are many obscure signs in Moll that someone other than Moll wrote it, critics then assume that Defoe is formally present in his fiction. But the signs are just that—inadvertent traces of his role that Defoe did not or could not avoid; they are not signals. All the signals in the book say that Moll wrote the book, that Defoe isn’t there except as a kind of editor. But when the work is interpreted as fiction, when the signs are taken as signals, they are seen to have no clear or consistent meaning, and the critics are left to say, on the one hand, that Defoe is “failing” to judge his material or, on the other hand, that he is judging it in ironic detachment. As Ian Watt neatly puts it, there seem to be only two possibilities, neither satisfactory: one that Moll Flanders is a work of irony, the other that it is an ironic object (Rise 130; “Recent Critical Fortunes” 124). But we need not choose between these alter-
natives. I am persuaded that anyone who examines his experience of the book closely from the perspective I have offered will come to see that it is neither a work of irony nor an ironic object but an ambiguous object in a sense that no work of any other well-known author is.

Understood in this way, *Moll Flanders* and Defoe’s other stories of the pseudo-factual type fit cleanly into literary history. We see why the standard novel is usually not thought of as springing from Defoe, and why it was Richardson, rather, who was perceived by contemporaries as founding a new way of writing. Defoe, whom studies have shown to have ancestors but no posterity, is the last and most perfect artist in a tradition of works designed to exploit the interest naturally attaching to true stories. Richardson, with an ample posterity but no real ancestors, begins a new line of action-model fictions. The twenty-year gap between their stories is the dead space between two traditions.

It remains to consider more fully the set of formal problems to the fact that *Moll* has been taken to be not only an imperfect *Pamela* but also a fully perfected work akin to those of such sophisticated twentieth-century writers as Joyce or Virginia Woolf. Since both Joyce and Woolf recognized a kinship with Defoe and admired him in preference to grander names in English fiction, one would expect any explicit model of their work to reveal the formal similarity to *Moll* upon which their admiration was intuitively based. But given the fact that Defoe has his historical place at the rude beginnings of the novel, Joyce and Woolf at its sophisticated end—that Defoe comes before Richardson, Joyce and Woolf after Flaubert and James—one would expect that model also to reveal a profound difference within the similarity which sets both off from the intervening action model or realism-plot-judgment novelists.

In order really to test any model of Joyce’s work, however—leaving Virginia Woolf aside—it will be necessary not only to compare the model with *Moll Flanders* but also to apply it to an analysis of Joyce’s forms themselves and the disagreements which have arisen about them. Why should irony be an apparently baffling problem in *Portrait* as in *Moll Flanders*, and how is the problem to be resolved? How are we to evaluate Stephen’s aesthetic in *Portrait* and understand its function in the book? What is the rationale of the symbolism of *Portrait*, and what limits can be placed on arcane symbolical interpretation? How is the form of *Portrait* related to the form of *Ulysses*?

Although I want to confess at the outset that I am a Joycean amateur, ready to defer at all points to veterans of the labyrinth, I think that a consideration from a general formal point of view of the problems which have arisen in the interpretation of Joyce’s work can be of help to insiders. Much of the difficulty, as with *Moll Flanders*, derives, it seems to me, from the critical mixing up of accurate intuitive perception and understanding of the work with confused
general concepts of form, usually implicit and only half-recognized, which distort and confuse both intuition and the expression of intuition.

To begin, let me assert that the feature which Defoe’s and Joyce’s novels have in common, in contrast to the action-fantasy forms of the standard novel, is that both project images of the actual as opposed to the fictional; the effects of both novelists depend, in very different ways, upon the reader’s imaginative sense that he is in contact with life as in nature as it actually is, whereas in action novels the effect depends on the reader’s tacit sense of the ways in which, despite his sense of realistic illusion, the story, shaped for effect, is in contrast with the natural shape of the actual. What Joyce—and Woolf—admired in Defoe was the sense of the actual, re-created undisturbed, for its own sake.

But between Defoe and Joyce there is a very great formal difference that we may begin to specify by saying that Defoe presents false natural facts as truth, whereas Joyce presents something like real natural facts as fiction. When I say that Defoe’s images are false, I mean simply that the sense of inner coherence in *Moll*, of a mental-spiritual unity underlying the surface reality, is an illusion, not imagined by the author at all. But it is the inner mental-spiritual unity that is most real, most fully imagined in Joyce. In *Moll* the coherent substrate seems to be there but isn’t, whereas in *Ulysses* it seems not to be there but is.

This maximum contrast within minimum similarity persists in other aspects of comparison, as with the effects which each author seeks. Defoe, we have seen, makes the extraordinary seem ordinary for the sake of the emotional effect inherent in formal belief in the coincidental and contingent, whereas Joyce in *Ulysses*, as Richard Ellmann has said, shows that “the ordinary is the extraordinary” (James Joyce 3) revealing in an image of one time and place the universal inner beauty that is always and everywhere.

As a natural consequence of their intentions, the authors will be formally detached—“absent”—from both kinds of works, but Defoe will seem really absent, while Joyce’s presence in detachment from the autonomous matter of his books is a constant source of the reader’s aesthetic delight. Our awareness of Defoe’s presence in his works is contradictory and puzzling, and the more we become conscious of his role in them, the more their intended effect diminishes. Our awareness of Joyce within and behind his novels is magically, lucidly pervasive, and the more we become conscious of it, the more the effect proper to the work increases.

It would be a contradiction of both novelists’ purposes to draw upon conventional fictional probability within their novels; both adhere rigorously to the probability of nature. Yet both do borrow literary forms (Joyce’s symbolic frames; Defoe’s patterns from spiritual autobiography). But Joyce uses the forms to emphasize the artificiality, the madeness of the work, while Defoe uses them
to emphasize and make acceptable its apparent truthfulness, its unmadeness.

These reflections define the genuine but superficial similarity between Defoe’s and Joyce’s forms which sets them off together from the standard novel form, as well as the very great difference which, if generally recognized, would prevent the confusion which has arisen about Defoe because of his ex post facto relation to Joyce. These reflections also make it possible to see a clear developmental logic in the overall history of the novel, a glimpse of the kind of critical orientation that a full developmental history of literary forms would give us: Defoe’s works appear clearly, as I said earlier, as the last and most perfect realization of the entertainment potential of the false true story, while Richardson’s are seen as the first to exploit the possibility of building from the reader’s sense of the actual a story which would define and satisfy the wishes of his inner nature. Joyce—and Woolf and Proust and others—would then appear as writers who, wearied with novels which used the inmost feelings to shape a sense of the world, decided to use their sense of the objective world to shape and realize their inmost feelings. In action-fantasy novels, to sum up the contrast, the world meets the terms of our wishes; in simular novels, as I would call those of Joyce, Woolf, and Proust—novels built as artificial simulations of the actual—our wishes are made to meet the terms of the world. This simple set of concepts—pseudofactual, action-fantasy, simular—makes clear without distortion, I believe, the basic formal principles which lie beneath the large shifts in the history of the novel as well as the distinctive shape of the most characteristically modern novels.

I turn now to a more particular definition of Joyce’s forms, in order to render more precisely than I have so far the peculiar way in which Joyce’s fictions are related to the actual. The dependence of Joyce’s novels upon his life has from the first been so unavoidably plain that critics have tended to lose sight of the fact that the obtrusive interconnection is deliberate and formal, an inherent aspect of the intelligibility and effect of the works. Commentators have felt free to use the life to comment on the work and vice versa, they have felt and responded to the force of the integral relationship; but partly because we live in a critical era when to commit the intentional and biographical fallacies is a hanging offense, partly because the fictions are in a very clear sense set apart from life, the commentators have often omitted to follow out the full logic of the relationship, thinking of it as only a specially intense instance of the kind of connection between life and art which obtains in any work rather than as the very principle of the form.

The fact is that Portrait and Ulysses, unlike David Copperfield or Women in Love, cannot be read without at least tacit awareness that they are versions of real life—every reader senses the quality deriving from the fact—and, as I
have said, the full force and significance of the novels can be felt only when the
relation between the author outside the work to the representation of his life
inside the work is actively experienced. On the first point, for instance, Joyce’s
failure in *Portrait* to fill in the reader’s knowledge of Dante or Mr. Casey or any
minor character would be a *prima facie* sin in an action novel, but we believe in
the characters entirely, not because we have been induced to imagine a nonexistent whole where we see a part, as in *Moll Flanders*, but because we feel their
mysterious outwardness, their existence independent of perceiving Stephen
and, I think every reader feels, independent of Joyce also. Whereas in a stand-
dard novel, as we have seen with *Pamela*, the reader understands at some level
that all the characters have been invented for the sake of an effect, in reading
*Portrait* we feel that all the characters derive from, though they are aesthetically
independent of, a reality which the author did not invent. I reserve discussion
of the second point—that awareness of the interdependence is necessary for the
full effect.

The failure to absorb the full implications of the life/art interpretation as
immanent formal principle lies behind the many disagreements concerning
various aspects of *Portrait of the Artist*—its supposed irony, its symbolism, its
aesthetic. In recent years, as more and more has become known about Joyce’s
early life, the more extreme ironic and symbolic interpretations have come to
appear more striking than substantial, but many recent commentators still see
considerable irony in the book, and even the most authoritative seem to insist
that the aesthetic is to be seen as inherently pretentious and/or irrelevant.

Since the aesthetic does seem to be the element of the book least understood
and since in my view it expresses the inner logic of the forms of *Portrait* and
*Ulysses*, I shall begin with it and use it as the basis of my own model.

If we take seriously and literally Stephen’s short statement of artistic ambi-
tion—“to recreate life out of life” (172)—we notice that he is not mouthing
second-hand aesthetic generalities but specifically describing the peculiar kind
of art which I have been emphasizing Joyce’s is—a re-creation of actual life as
actual, or, as Stephen has it elsewhere, “life purified in and reprojected from
the human imagination” (215). Art does not involve the invention of fictional
images which resemble life but the re-creation in perfected aesthetic objectivity
of images taken from life. This doesn’t mean that they are literal, remembered,
always, but that they are built as perfected fictional correlates of the signifi-
cance of remembered experience and have therefore the objective character of
the actual. They are not real experience but the imaginative equivalent of
real experience. Looking, then, at Stephen’s conception of the lyric, epic, and
drama, we see that it is peculiar indeed if taken as descriptive of literary works
in general, since all three forms seem to involve the presence of the poet’s own
defoe, richardson, joyce, and the concept of form

proper self and life. Reserving the epic for later treatment, we need only consider Stephen’s idea of lyric as the form wherein “the artist presents his image in immediate relation to himself” (214), that is to say, where the artist presents himself as an object of aesthetic intuition and as center of emotional gravity in relation to himself as perceiving artist. We can see that this precisely describes the imaginative form of *Portrait*, where, as Stanislaus Joyce says, we are always in the center of Stephen’s brain (*My Brother’s Keeper* 172), conscious of the artist only implicitly as our transparent means of access to Stephen’s consciousness, which we understand in its whatness from within, as he understands himself. The novel is so fixed in this mode that, for example, the long hellfire sermons spoken by the priest in the first person and presented by the author in the third, are automatically interpreted by the reader as representations *from within* of Stephen’s consciousness.

Stephen says that the business of the artist is “to express, to press out again, from the gross earth or what it brings forth, from sound and shape and colour which are the prison gates of our soul, an image of the beauty we have come to understand” (*Portrait* 207). If we look back over the novel, we see that from the beginning it has shown us Stephen in continuous development of his capacity to do this—to press out images of what he comes to understand. It is sometimes said that we see Stephen developing patterns of sensory association or moving through a flux of impression. Such emphasis on Stephen’s mental passivity is understandable enough in an age dominated till recently by a behavioristic as opposed to a cognitive psychology. But if we look closely at the book, particularly the first chapter on which such judgments are usually based, we will see that what is represented is Stephen’s process of cognition. We do not hear his father telling him a story; we understand him understanding that his father told him that story; we do not share Stephen’s passive experience on the first page and thereafter, but we understand Stephen’s moments of actively understanding or seeking to understand his experience, his attempts to grasp and press objectively out its mystery.

We feel him sometimes reconstructing the pat answers given him by the grownups, sometimes merely being puzzled by the queerness of things (“Why did people do that with their two faces?”), but sometimes also coming upon talismanic intuitions of his own: “How could a woman be a tower of ivory or a house of gold?” he asks, and then later: “Eileen had long thin cool white hands too because she was a girl. They were like ivory; only soft. That was the meaning of the *Tower of Ivory* but protestants could not understand it and made fun of it. . . . Her fair hair had streamed out behind her like gold in the sun. *Tower of Ivory. House of Gold.* By thinking of things you could understand them” (35, 42–43).
By thinking of things you could understand them. The whole book is given over to the representation of Stephen's turning passive impression to active aesthetic cognition, pressing out the meaning of things until at the end he is no longer puzzled but sees the world and himself in relation to it with clarity and cold detachment. Suddenly the narrative which has been the cognition of Stephen's developing cognition turns from third person to first, as the author gives us an image of the object of his knowing becoming the potential agent of that knowing and the potential creator of the objectified act of understanding in which we have just participated; and we understand that we have seen not life, not autobiography, but life purified and recreated in its essential significance and liberated beauty. The image of the artist as object becomes the image of the artist as subject; the logic of the book as expressed in its aesthetic is made fully manifest.

It is difficult to see in what sense a work of this kind could be thought ironical, and I venture to assert, not without apprehension, that those who see it as ironical are mistaken. But the problem here, as with Moll Flanders, is not to deny the problem but to see how it arises.

Wayne Booth, noticing that critical opinion is about equally divided on the question of viewing Stephen positively or negatively, concludes that the controversy shows that Joyce in his indirection has not given us adequate means to judge Stephen accurately, and he cites in support of his argument an explicit judgment of Stephen from Stephen Hero which, he points out, could not possibly be inferred from the parallel passage in Portrait. But this analysis tacitly assumes that Portrait is intended to be a form where judgment—specification of ethical sympathy as a measure of dramatic expectation—is formally appropriate, as in all action forms it is. Critics of prose fiction ordinarily mean by irony the implicitly established desert/fate judgment of actions, as in Austen, James, and Flaubert. But in Portrait there is no expectation at all, no desert, no ethical evaluation. We neither actively expect anything particular to happen nor think one outcome preferable to another. Indeed, we have no thought of outcome, of developing possibility. Our experience is simply the experience of knowing Stephen's knowing at particular moments as we move through the novel, and perceiving the inner inherent logic that connects them.

If there were formalized judgment of characters in the book, as, again, there must be in actions, we would be broken away, disjoined from Stephen's consciousness, whereas that we should move in vital empathy with it is the first formal necessity of the book. The artist's image of the artist must fill the reader's mind as it filled the artist's own. If there is room for irony, the effect of the work fails. We see Stephen always, or are meant to see him, without external sympathy or antipathy, as in the action model, but in his whatness, from
within; when he is a child, we understand him in limpid childishness; when he is a callow teenager, we feel what it is to be him in his callowness (see Ellmann, *James Joyce* 150).

If we look back to *Stephen Hero*, we can see that the frequent judgments of Stephen by the author do not contradict this view but, in fact, bear it out. The judgments are in effect apologies for Stephen, assertions which have their origin in the author’s embarrassed awareness that he has not been able to project as objective the inward grounds which memory gives him for feeling with Stephen as he does. The result is the peculiar aesthetic deadness which every reader feels in *Stephen Hero*. In *Portrait*, by contrast, Joyce was finally able to create an image adequate to the inchoate impression of himself with which he had begun his original “Portrait of the Artist” sketch. What Joyce wishes the reader to understand about Stephen is simply there objectified upon the page, ready to draw the reader’s mind into imaginative conflation with it.

All this—the contrast with what I have called the action model form, the absence of judgment—is clearly spelled out by Stuart Gilbert, certainly as prompted by Joyce, in a passage which, though it refers to *Ulysses*, clearly applies to *Portrait* as well: “In most novels the reader’s interest is aroused and his attention held by the presentation of dramatic situations, of problems deriving from conduct or character and the reactions of the fictitious personages among themselves [cf. the action model]. The personages of *Ulysses* [and by implication of *Portrait*] are not fictitious and its true significance does not lie in problems of conduct or character. . . . All these people are as they must be; they act, we see, according to some *lex eterna*, an ineluctable condition of their very existence” (8). There is, in short, no judgment, only whatness. Characters can be perceived with informing clarity in their uniqueness and limitation, if that is irony, but not with the kinetic reflex of ironic disapproval.

But why, then, should the question of irony arise? Primarily, I think, because Stephen has the traits of an actual person and is not shaped, as all action protagonists, even criminals, are (witness Raskolnikov and Macbeth) to be the reader’s alter ego, so that, if one is not drawn fully into the experience of the work, there appear plenty of pegs to hang judgments on. When Wyndham Lewis pointed out long ago that the proud, priggish, selfish Stephen in fact had such negative qualities, critics were soon eager to show that Joyce knew this very well and, in fact, was ironically insisting upon Stephen’s deficiencies, and they quoted in support of this view Joyce’s remark to Frank Budgen, that the portrait was of the artist as a young man. Joyce meant, not that he had presented a negative view of an immature, fictive Stephen, but simply that he had represented his earlier self as he was. He also said to Budgen in a remark less quoted: “Many writers have written about themselves. I wonder if any of them have been as
candid as I have?" (Budgen 51, 60). And now that so many reminiscences by Joyce’s youthful contemporaries have appeared, it is plain that the early Joyce was just what Stephen is—proud, selfish, priggish, and cruel, more so even than Stephen, whom Stanislaus considered an idealized portrait.  

It will become increasingly clear, I think, that the passages in *Portrait* which have been deemed most ironic are those in which Joyce is not most detached from Stephen but where he is least detached. What we have in these passages is not lucid aesthetic knowledge of Stephen’s limitation, as in the passages dealing with his religiosity, but what will seem to some readers, especially older ones, the author’s too fervent participation in Stephen’s self-exaltation. When *Portrait* is working properly, we are moved with the author at the luminous static idea—the intellectual perception—of the nature of Stephen’s emotion, but as Stephen grows closer to the author, Joyce is sometimes stirred into a kinesis in which the reader may or may not be willing to participate. As for myself, I confess that I have little trouble participating. The more I become aware that the portrait is not of a fictive romantic aesthete, as some think, but of a particular artist overcome with his sense of a mission which is to involve the sacrifice of his entire practical life as a means toward the re-creation of life in art, the more I am inclined to forgive him his self-exaltation. I find it hard to be ironically superior to the image of the mind of a genius who changed the course of a century’s literature. From this point of view I find it especially hard to understand those who suspect that Stephen, with his scholastic aesthetic and swooning villanelle, is no artist at all. Surely our knowledge of Stephen involves the knowledge that his mind could only have been re-created reflexively by the mind which created the book. Doubting that Stephen’s is the mind of an artist is like doubting that water is wet.

These considerations lead naturally to the related problem of symbolism in *Portrait*. Here again, I believe, a generalized conception of a literary device as if it were constant in all modes has led to distorted perception and evaluation. If *Portrait* is indeed to be understood as simulating an actual artistic development implicitly the author’s it would follow that any symbolic dimension of the book would be developed as an extension of this formality—that it would not violate the restriction of the book to essential actuality and would merely be a means of rendering explicit and perfecting the inner meaning of the represented experience.

These assumptions explain—and limit—the symbolism of *Portrait* quite well. Although critical discussions usually lump modern symbolism together as one kind of device, we see from the model that neither Stephen nor the other characters of *Portrait* are symbolic as Yeats’s Leda is symbolic, say, or Eliot’s Prufrock. Stephen as Christ, as Satan, as Stephen martyr, as priest, as Daedalus-
artificer, is not a symbol of anything; he does not embody a meaning which refers beyond himself; rather, the symbolic meanings are attributed to him with calculated artificiality to his sense of himself, his artistic mission and its peculiar requirements of rebellion, betrayal, exile, self-immolation, resurrection, and re-creation. The symbolism is one with the aesthetic program as sketched in the book and executed by Joyce—exile is ultimate detachment as preparatory to artistic return—and it insists upon the identity between author and subject. The meaning of the book is the literal reality of the peculiar artistic vocation, which just because it is literal and actual can be expressed under a contradictory and overlapping set of approximating ideas; Stephen can be simultaneously Satan-Christ-Martyr-Priest-Daedalus just because beneath these attributive labels lies his concrete individual natural self. The names serve to define and dignify the role he has discovered. His name, Stephen Dedalus, is an exception to the other symbolic meanings in that it is not invented by Stephen, but it is understood as the author’s way of objectifying the fact that Stephen senses his artistic calling as coming from beyond the point where his conscious self is attached to the mystery of nature. The fact that Stephen inside and the author outside the novel cooperate in the construction of a single artificial symbolic matrix is to be understood as implying, like every other aspect of the book, their ultimate identity and their common sense of his mysterious mission.

This view also clarifies the somewhat puzzling symbolism of the other characters, Cranly as John the Baptist, in particular. Cranly does not seem in any way adapted to express any meaning at all except himself as a real, natural person; how can he be a symbol? That is the point; he isn’t. We understand his symbolic role as attributed to him by Stephen in the process of constructing a sense of himself as artist-Christ; he is symbolic only to Stephen.

All this, you may be thinking, is tediously obvious, and I agree; yet if it is obvious and true, another fact becomes obvious also: the emptiness of the elaborate, allegorizing readings of *Portrait* so sanctified in the casebooks. These readings mistakenly attempt to extend the symbolic patterns invented by Stephen and make them inherent in the matter of the book, so that it becomes the vehicle of meanings of which Stephen is not and could not become aware and which cannot be understood as expressing any aspect of the actual natural reality which the book presents. I venture to guess that these meanings, so obscure in contrast to the others so artificially plain, are in fact not in the book and that they have been found there only through a false analogy with *Dubliners* and *Ulysses*, which require a symbolic backscreen in a way which *Portrait* does not.

I should like to conclude by saying something about the way in which the form of *Ulysses* can be related to *Portrait* and the *Portrait* aesthetic within the general theoretical perspective I have been developing. Since I have taken the
aesthetic seriously in explicating *Portrait* and propose to take it seriously in commenting upon *Ulysses,* I may remark in passing that, despite the extensive disparagement which the aesthetic theory has suffered at the hands of recent critics, there seems every external reason to suppose that Joyce took it with complete seriousness. One notes, first of all, that he allowed, indeed must have prompted, Stuart Gilbert to say that Stephen’s is the functioning aesthetic of *Ulysses* (Gilbert in, 9–10). There is beyond this the well-documented but unappreciated fact that Joyce at the point in his life corresponding to that at which Stephen formulates his aesthetic could have offered nothing at all comparable. It was not until he was several years older than Stephen that Joyce achieved in all seriousness for himself the views set down in *Portrait* and very probably not until 1914 that was able to give complete integrated expression to the theory—at the time, that is, when he was completing the final chapters of *Portrait* and with the conception of *Ulysses* already in his head.¹⁵ It is incredible that Joyce should be supposed to attribute his own mature theory to Stephen as a sign of Stephen’s immaturity, as so many have supposed. The fact is that he was exaggerating Stephen’s maturity—giving him the capacity to express objectively and explicitly what Joyce at the corresponding chronological point had been able to express only as a confused and nearly inchoate intuition in the original “Portrait of the Artist” sketch. (I may remark in passing that I suspect that almost all of the significances represented in *Portrait* as achieved in 1904 were probably not objectified in Joyce’s understanding till as late as 1912 or thereafter).¹⁶ As for the aesthetic, there seems ample support for applying it to *Ulysses.*

Given the aesthetic, we should understand Stephen quite literally when he goes forth at the end of *Portrait* to encounter “the reality of experience,” and we may imagine Joyce, having finished *Portrait,* seeking again to “recreate life out of life,” life as it actually is and is experienced, in space and time; but, this time, seeking not to re-create the inner coherence of his own artistic consciousness in immediate relationship to himself but to present a wider image of life in its surface incoherence in mediate relationship to himself and others, that is, with himself as artist posted imaginatively midway between his represented self as subject and others as subject. The image of Joyce as Stephen would reappear in this new work but would be understood now not from the inside out but from the outside in, not as if he were the artist’s self but as if he were another person; and we notice that we understand Stephen’s mental innerness in *Ulysses* not as we understand it in *Portrait,* as he understands it himself, but as we might understand another person from the outside if we suddenly became connected with his stream of thought, coherent to him but not immediately to us. This is why Stephen and the whole book, unlike the lucid *Portrait,* are nearly opaque at first reading. Another consequence of the outwardness of the representation
is obvious but not often pointed out: the fact that Stephen in *Ulysses*, though we are often inside him, is imagined as a body external to us as he is not in *Portrait*, where we are inside his body. When we think of Stephen in *Ulysses* we have the uncanny sense that we are looking with the author at himself as if he were outside himself.

But what of the “others” in the book? They are of two kinds: the real natural others, Stephen’s father, family, and acquaintances, seen not peripherally, as in *Portrait* from within Stephen, but from the outside, as flashes of fragmentary, fully persuasive outward otherness; and the fabricated natural others, Bloom and Molly, known, from the outside in, in their moment-by-moment inner-ness, the reader equally aware of them in their seeming autonomy and of the fabulous artificer who made them.

The real natural others were no problem; Joyce could make their fragments out of memory, just as he could build out of memory and research the dimensions in real time and space to which they were attached. But to create the continuing coherence of a fictional other person conceived as actual was no easier for him than for Defoe. The coherence of *Portrait* had been possible only because the “fluid succession of presents” (Scholes and Kain 60) that the work images could be built out of the genuine coherence of the remembered past; but the life-long coherence of another person was out of the question. A day’s worth would be enough, and even then there were problems. But building the external Bloom carefully on hints from real models, and Molly largely from his knowledge of Nora Barnacle—working in a microscopic way of which Defoe never dreamed—he achieved characters which have been praised, rightly, for their overwhelming actuality; and yet careful critics have pointed out that Bloom is not ultimately a totally persuasive Jew nor Molly a totally persuasive woman. These facts might seem to suggest that Joyce no more than Defoe was able ultimately to pass through the solipsistic barriers of the human mind into the innerness of another. But whereas Defoe tries to keep us from seeing that the problem is there, Joyce, we finally understand, is insisting upon it as an inherent aspect of his form. He is not presenting Bloom ultimately as really an autonomous other, as Defoe does Moll.

Though Joyce does all he can to objectify Bloom’s otherness, he is, in the last analysis, basing Bloom’s tacit unity on his own. Just as Stephen is implicitly the real young Joyce imagined as another, so the inner Bloom is implicitly (and explicitly, when all the signs are read) an attempt to imagine a fictional other as himself in his maturity; so that we have the author, central in the epical event, first himself as another and then another as himself, just what the extended logic of Stephen’s aesthetic demands. But what of Molly and the reality of her otherness? Joyce could not ultimately really understand Molly, as Nora insisted:
“He knows nothing at all about women.” But Joyce did his objectifying best and earned Jung’s praise (Ellman, *James Joyce* 642). Nevertheless, Nora was right, and we must understand the passionate inner coherence of Molly’s “dark rhapsody,” as Professor Adams wonderfully calls it, to derive not from Joyce’s fabricating detachment but from what Professor Adams again describes as “a head-long plunge into the pit of the [author’s] self” (*Surface and Symbol* 255) into and through the “gaping, irrational void which is the condition of modern life” (*Common Sense* 168; see also 165–66). Thus did Joyce crucify himself upon the paradox of otherness in a world where one knows fully only himself. The author who knows himself first in serene detachment from himself as Stephen, and then in projection from himself as Bloom, cuts loose from his psychic moorings and plunges at last into the utter earthly otherness of Molly, the self turning itself inside out, abandoning itself to and realizing itself within its polar opposite, “the flesh made word” (Ellmann, *James Joyce* 388).

All of this has been beautifully expressed by Professor Adams—not only the crucial matter of Molly, but the inside-outside relation of Stephen, Bloom, and the author who is “terminus ad quem” of the whole (*Surface and Symbol* 251), as explicated in Stephen’s Shakespeare theory which “enables us to see the book before us as a sufficient answer to the questions posed within it” (*Common Sense* 147). So fully and movingly, in fact, has Professor Adams described all this as indicating “the perfect coincidence of autobiographical with artistic unity” that I hesitate, in my indebtedness, to question Professor Adams’s feeling that in some respects *Ulysses* lacks consistent and noncontradictory form, as well as the negative view he takes of the aesthetic of *Portrait* (*Surface and Symbol* 254).17

I hesitate because it is so much more likely that I am belaboring the obvious by following out the merely schematic point that the work which Professor Adams describes is specifically if cryptically envisioned in the *Portrait* aesthetic and the more important point that formally *Ulysses* is precisely as a work must be which is built out of the actual in the way that *Ulysses* is. On the first point, I note that Stuart Gilbert, following out the continuous line of the triadic procession of forms outlined in *Portrait*, describes *Ulysses* as an “aesthetic image of the world” which is ultimately but “a sublimation of the [lyrical] *cri de coeur* in which the art of creation begins” (21) which is to say in Stephen’s terms that the book is just that plunge of the artist’s actual self into fictive otherness that Professor Adams says it is. Further evidence that *Ulysses* is a deliberate carrying-out of the *Portrait* aesthetic is to be seen in the fact that Stephen’s ruminations in “Scylla and Charybdis” deliberately echo the aesthetic. Stephen thinks of a time “in the future, the sister of the past [when], I may see myself as I sit here now but by reflection from that which then I shall be” (Joyce, *Ulysses* 194), thus articulating the Joyce/Stephen/Bloom self-as-other, other-as-self relation
implied by his concept of epic. The rationale of the aesthetic is specifically reca-
pitulated twice again, once in theological transposition when the Holy Ghost is
presented as “middler” posted “between himself and [the] others” of the Trinity
(197), once and climactically in theory when Eglinton sums up the relation
between Shakespeare and Hamlet by saying, “The truth is midway. . . . He is
the ghost and the prince. He is all in all” and Stephen replies “He is” (212).

On the second point, concerning the seeming formal contradictions of
_ulysses_, it is to be remarked that the larger ones, at least, are intended and ines-
capable consequences of its form and inseparable from the sources of its beauty.
One may consider that Joyce’s formal intention required Joyce, on the one
hand, to present a Stephen whose nature was rooted in and inseparable from the
reality of the world, which Joyce had not created but could only re-create, and,
on the other hand, a fictive Bloom and Molly whose essence we have seen is
that they derive their quality as images of the real not from actual counterparts
but from Joyce’s creative projection of himself. The minds and lives of these two
figures, nevertheless, had to be placed within and connected with the frame of
reality provided by the objective world as re-created in the book, so that they
could be perceived and understood as if they were uninvented parts continuous
with its total substance. By its very nature, however, this hybrid procedure
entailed contradiction and incompleteness, as the requirements of the fictive
hemisphere were adjusted to the facts of the actual and both to the symbolic
structure which at once controlled and expressed the nature and significance
of the whole. Inherently and unavoidably, material consistency could not be
achieved, so that the unavoidable incoherencies of the material surface are to
be adjudged not so much aesthetic faults as markers on the outer boundar-
ies of possible success. It is entirely natural of course that looking behind the
organic surface one should perceive the seams of the artifice and the traces of
the artificer; golden birds are made, not born. The wonder of the book lies just
in the fact of its two-sided is-ness/madness, a wonder epitomized for me in
the thought of Simon and Dilly Dedalus in the work, the palpable images of
the author’s loved flesh and blood whom in the flesh he would never see again,
being looked on with utter detachment under the aspect of eternity, and the
thought, on the other hand, of the author’s passionate entry into Molly, the
woman who never was.

In all his complication Joyce, as he liked to say, was ultimately simple, and
so it must be also with the human imagination in literature. The laws underly-
ing the operations by which the mind translates the world of which it is a part
into the many worlds of its own creation must be simple, definite, and regular,
else we could not have common intuitive access to those worlds as, despite
interpretive confusion, we know we do. But these worlds have become so
many and the relationships among them and to the real world so complex that intuition is not able to prevent the confusion of concepts appropriate to one with concepts appropriate to another. The result is to make analysis itself often seem inherently futile and empty and to blur even more the wonderful reality of literary experience. Knowledge of the structure of imaginative experience is itself of intrinsic value, but we need to try to make that knowledge as specific and explicit as we can not only for its own sake but also and more importantly so that we may purify our concrete participation in that experience and render it more full and true.

Notes

1. The controversy over Moll is brilliantly surveyed and summed up by Ian Watt in “The Recent Critical Fortunes of Moll Flanders.”

2. See Ian P. Watt, The Rise of the Novel, and Sheldon Sacks, Fiction and the Shape of Belief. Watt conceives Defoe to have achieved the realism which is the “lowest common denominator of the novel genre as a whole” (34) but not the “intrinsic coherence” of a plot in which character relationships are informed by a “controlling moral intention,” a coherence characteristic of the mature novel as first achieved by Richardson (131). Sacks says that Moll Flanders, though not like Pamela a “represented action” (a concept intuitively but not functionally identical with Watt’s realism-plot-judgment formation), is nevertheless formally incoherent in comparison with it (267–70). I should emphasize that though both critics perceive that Defoe’s intention was not to create a form of the order of Pamela (see Watt [100ff] and my discussion in note 5 below), neither quite frees himself from the notion that Moll is an approximation to the form that Richardson was to achieve.

3. Sacks’s reformulation of the neo-Aristotelian concept of an action as a “work organized so that it introduces characters, about whose fates we are made to care, in unstable relationships which are then further complicated until the complication is finally resolved by the removal of the represented instability” (Fiction and the Shape of Belief 26) is descriptively more flexible than R. S. Crane’s four-cause definition emphasizing the fate/desert relationship which constitutes the “working or power” of an action; see Crane’s “The Concept of Plot and the Plot of Tom Jones.” But though Sacks also employs the fate/desert contrast to make subclassifications, his emphasis in the general concept on “unstable relationships” and indefinite “caring” makes the flexibility a potential liability, since it allows application of the concept to works like Defoe’s and Joyce’s to which, as I argue below, it does not apply. In my own development of the action concept, therefore, I emphasize even more than Crane the primacy of the fate/desert contrast as the formal basis of the whole.

4. A specific Clarissa model would describe Clarissa’s merit and fate as developing along a line of branching alternatives where one branch, always refused by Clarissa or closed by circumstance, is defined as ethically acceptable but not impeccable and apparently promises earthly felicity, while the other, always chosen by Clarissa, is defined as ethically impeccable and increasingly excludes the possibility of her earthly felicity.
5. Almost fifty years ago Arthur Secord strongly emphasized the fact that Defoe attempts to make his stories seem to be authentic history (Narrative Method 232 and elsewhere), as had others still before him. In view of my comments above, I should call particular attention to the fact that Professor Watt presents a concept of Moll Flanders directly equivalent to the one I offer here when he says that Defoe’s “basic literary purpose” in the novel is “to produce a convincing likeness to the autobiographical memoir of a real person” (Rise 11). Yet, despite the excellent analysis which Watt develops from the idea, he seems, in describing the novel finally as an “ironic object” lacking artistic design (130–31), to miss the full logic of this accurate formal concept. Our difficulty with the book is, as Watt says, largely owing to the fact that “our whole critical vocabulary for fiction is still confusing in itself” (“Recent Critical Fortunes” 125), and my own attempt is to make clear that the contradictions and incoherence in Moll, which Watt properly emphasizes in arguing against those who see it as a coherent fiction, are the result not of artistic failure but of the positive artistic requirements of Defoe’s special pseudofactual form and of the impossibility of resolving the imaginative contradictions which it necessarily involved.


7. A striking example is Secord’s following his remarks on Defoe’s intention to imitate true history with the comment that Defoe was “deficient in the construction of plot” (Narrative Method 234).

8. G. A. Starr, in Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography, has clearly demonstrated the influence upon the book of the tradition of spiritual autobiography. My point is that Defoe is borrowing from the conventions of that tradition not, as Starr feels, to give his books a religious significance analogous to that of real spiritual autobiographies (which would make them a kind of didactic fiction) but simply to reinforce the sense that Moll and the other books are true, since they possess a shape which life was known to have in admittedly true stories. This would account for the fact, recognized by Starr, that the pattern of religious significance in the books is not made formally complete and emotionally effective, though from the formal point of view I am offering, it can be seen that the presence of the pattern effectively increases interest as well as verisimilitude. On this matter, see also Watt (“Recent Critical Fortunes” 119).

9. This aspect of Moll Flanders is treated very well by G. A. Starr in his Defoe and Casuistry, though, as with his earlier study (see previous note), I believe his analysis needs to be qualified by the recognition that he imputes to a feature of the book derived from a nonfictional tradition a value which it possessed in that tradition but which in Defoe is subordinate to his intention to produce the illusion and interest of naïve autobiography. The “tension between sympathy and judgment” (165) which Starr finds characteristic of Defoe’s fiction is not the result of Defoe’s attempt to edify the reader and instruct him in the complexities of life but simply the result of his wish, partly with devices and material derived from the tradition of casuistry, to give maximum moral interest to his story while clearly avoiding anything that might look like authorial judgment. Hence the “tension” that Starr finds, the irony, uncertainty, or contradiction that others have found, in what is calculated ambiguity. (I should notice that Professor Starr’s discussions of my views [108–9] refers to an earlier version of the first half of the present paper, read to the All-University Eighteenth-Century
Conference held at UCLA in the fall of 1969.)

10. My views of Joyce’s forms have been much influenced by this book. I did not read Professor Ellmann’s more recent *Ulysses on the Liffey*, however, until after this essay was completed, and it seemed best not to attempt any revision in response to its complex revelations.

11. See Wayne C. Booth’s *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (323–36). In these pages Professor Booth brings the contradictions of critical commentary on *Portrait* most forcefully into view, but I would interpret much of what Booth says about the formal shortcomings of *Portrait*—and *Moll Flanders* (321–22)—as resulting from mistaken assumptions about the generic intentions of the two works.

12. Joyce’s early hostility to the pleasing falsifications of the action form is clearly set forth by Stanislaus in *My Brother’s Keeper* (92).

13. Stanislaus, who described the Joyce of this period as characterized by a “proud, willful, vicious selfishness” (*Dublin Diary* 14), remarked of Joyce’s self-portrait in *Stephen Hero*: “Jim is thought to be very frank about himself but his style is such that it might be contended that he confesses in a foreign language—an easier confession than in the vulgar tongue” (qtd. in Ellman, *James Joyce* 153; quoted from Stanislaus’s ms. diary). Joyce himself, in a letter to Nora dated September 10, 1904, speaks of his delight in proving that “I am really selfish, proud, cunning, and regardless of others” (*Letters* 2:52). As for the views of his contemporaries, the comments on his youthful character as “aloof, icy and imperturbable” (Eugene Sheehy) and the “condensed essence of studied, insolent, conceit” (A. E., via Joseph Holloway) seem typical (qtd. in Scholes and Kain 141, 166).

14. Critics inclined to ironize Stephen might consider the implications of Stanislaus’s description of young Joyce as “temperamentally capable of absolute devotion to a mission to which he felt called by the accident of having been born with talent, even if, as he foresaw from the beginning, that mission would make him an outcast. He understood better than those who were wont to quote the text how inexorably an inner necessity can turn son against father and against mother, too; and yet it was inspiring to live with one so young and purposeful. His faith in life sustained him with the joyous certainty that in spite of the squalor that surrounded him, life had some not ignoble meaning” (*My Brother’s Keeper* 108–9).

15. See *The Critical Writings of James Joyce* (141–48). In *The Workshop of Daedalus* Robert Scholes and Richard Kain, while bringing together materials which clearly show that the aesthetic was a slow and serious creation of the period of Joyce’s life after that which he represents in *Portrait*, curiously deflect the force of this evidence in their comment that the “esthetic theory . . . is apparently a redaction of many episodes in his undergraduate career, deriving from papers delivered before the Literary and Historical Society and from his essay ‘The Day of the Rabblement’” (111), with which works the substance of the aesthetic theory has little to do.

16. In Mary and Padraic Colum’s *Our Friend James Joyce* (101–4), Padraic Colum argues strongly for the effective identification of Joyce’s final departure from Dublin in 1912, after the rejection of *Dubliners*, with the exile objectified in *Portrait*. The association of the end of *Portrait* with this period gains support from some of Joyce’s contemporary letters, particularly from such a sentence as this to Nora: “I am one of the writers of this generation who are perhaps creating at last a conscience in the soul of this wretched race” (*Letters* 2:311; August 22, 1912). Though Joyce had long before decided that he “could not enter the social order except as a vagabond,” that he was a “voluntary exile” (*Letters* 2:48, 84), it seems likely
that the whole period 1904–1914 (or 1915) during which Portrait was achieved involved a gradual movement toward the objectification and expression of ideas and emotions which at the outset had been nearly inchoate; the meaning had been there to begin with but took a long while to press out. Whatever the precise state of chronological affairs, the evidence as a whole strongly emphasizes the closeness, not the distance, between Joyce and Stephen.

17. For Professor Adams’s comment on the aesthetic, see Common Sense and Beyond (106–7). The reservations Adams expresses about the structural consistency of Ulysses, especially in the concluding chapter of Surface and Symbol, puzzle me particularly, as I say, in that they occur in the context of what appears to me a beautiful description of the aesthetic coherence of the novel. I suspect that there may again be conceptual interference from standards derived from action novels, but anything approaching a truly valid response would require a more detailed consideration than I offer briefly below of the ways in which I conceive the symbolism of Ulysses to be related to what I have called its “simular” structure.

18. Professor John Henry Raleigh has worked out in detail the chronology of the Blooms’ fictional history as devised by Joyce and will present the results in a forthcoming book. [Editors’ note: Raleigh’s book, The Chronicle of Leopold and Molly Bloom: Ulysses as Narrative, was published by the University of California Press in 1977.]
PART III

The History of the Novel
At the outset of his monumental and much-praised account of the origins of the English novel, Michael McKeon asserts that “genre theory cannot be divorced from the history of genres, from the understanding of genres in history” (Origins 1). But the understanding of genres in history is a very different thing from the history of genres (as I shall argue), and the connection between them is much more tenuous and problematical than McKeon supposes. Perhaps more urgently than with other genres, we need first to say what the novel is as a form, a thing in itself, before we can speak clearly either of its history or of the possible bearing on its origins of extraformal historical forces. McKeon radically elides these two dimensions of an adequate inquiry, placing primary stress on the understanding of the novel as the outcome of general historical process, rather than (as I shall here) defining its distinctive form, suddenly emergent at a particular historical point—as it has been and can be preanalytically (and transhistorically) registered by the readerly imagination.

McKeon sees the novel as the outcome of a long dialectical prehistory of narrative concern with what he calls questions of truth on the one hand and questions of virtue on the other, with the dialectic culminating in, or as, the novel in a way that he leaves conceptually unarticulated. In an unwarranted reification, he treats these two diffuse, lowest common denominator terms as if they possess, in their application to narratives of the most diverse kind and quality written over several centuries and countries, a persistent identity whose continuity can be unproblematically followed. At the end McKeon concedes that all the terms of his dialectical method are so loose as not to be subject to falsification, but perhaps a more threatening possibility for him is that they...
are not even subject to definition in a way that can guarantee that they have continuous meaning when applied to one work and then another, as they are throughout his book in what seems to me an ad hoc and shifting fashion.

Beyond this, the ultimate focus and relevance of the terms are unclear because the nature of what they are said ultimately to bear on is unclear. Like Ian Watt and most critics, McKeon seems to agree that the English novel fully emerged after Defoe in the work of Richardson and Fielding. He speaks with equivocal approval at the beginning of his book of the “common understanding that the novel ‘rose’ around 1740,” providing “a terminus ad quem which appears to organize all that follows within the ample boundaries of the great modern form, but which also requires that what precedes this founding act will resemble chaos” (25); but at the end he seems unequivocally to affirm the fact of “the formal breakthrough of the 1740s” (419). He has at this point extensively discussed the intersection of Fielding’s work and Richardson’s—quite without reference to anything that might be called “formal” in the sense of distinctive literary structure—in terms of his bifocal sociocultural thematics, as a matter of the “establishment of a form sufficient for the joint inquiry into analogous epistemological and social problems which themselves had a long prehistory of intense and diversified public debate,” a form which could reconcile “naïve empiricism and extreme skepticism, progressive and conservative ideologies” (410). At the same time, he recognizes that “these oppositions,” which have been the focus of his long exposition, are at this very historical point “losing their intellectual and social significance” (418) and notes further that “Fielding meets Richardson at the nexus where moral and social pedagogy hesitate on the edge of their transformation into something else entirely, aesthetic pleasure” (408).

But the notion that the new form is characterized in contrast to its predecessors by its provision of a new basis for aesthetic pleasure stands in clear contrast to McKeon’s long-term primary emphasis on the continuity between the novel and earlier narrative forms. McKeon’s problem here is further reflected in his admission that “To suggest that epistemological and social conflict were ‘institutionalized’ by the encounter between Richardson and Fielding is of course not to say that contemporaries registered that encounter in the explanatory terms that have been most useful and recurrent in this study” (409). He nevertheless asserts the compatibility of his terms with explicit contemporary response to Richardson and Fielding as having developed a new “species” or “kind” of writing, but he does not analytically validate his assertion by showing how the account of the dialectical development which he claims leads to the novel in fact offers a basis for defining the clearly registered original aesthetic power and effect of the new form, or the basis of its differentiation in parallel terms from those works which he has been treating as precursors but not full instances of the novel.
The subliterature and non-novelistic narrative literature which McKeon’s massive research brings into view are selected for treatment almost solely in terms of his arbitrary thematics, but, of course, the overall explanatory situation requires that he also confront what he speaks of as “several narratives that are commonly seen as central, in one way or another, to the origins of the English novel” (22)—to wit, *Don Quixote*, *Pilgrim’s Progress*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and *Gulliver’s Travels*. But in discussing these works, he consistently evades the issue of defining, at the same time that he recognizes in passing, the formal differences among them and their bearing or lack of it on later novelistic developments. Thus, *Don Quixote* is treated in ideological and class terms without explanatory reference to its manifest and undeniable influence on English forms, which is the only real justification for treating this Spanish work in an account of the origins of the English novel; and though the genre of *Pilgrim’s Progress* is relevantly defined as allegory straining toward the form of the novel (297, 301), and *Gulliver* acknowledged as a satire equivocally related to the novel (341), the novelistic aspect of both works is again subsumed under ideological rubrics which are related to the later unequivocal novels of Richardson and Fielding only by the way in which loosely analogous elements in those works can be fitted under the same general rubrics; the specifically novelistic aspect of these protonovelistic narratives, as it might bear on later unequivocally novelistic ones, is left unilluminated.

The elision of the difference between protonovelistic works and the fully achieved novel appears again in McKeon’s extended treatment of Fielding’s *Jonathan Wild* and *Shamela* as illustrations of his sociological thesis rather than as exemplifications of novelistic form. McKeon sees *Jonathan Wild*—probably drafted before *Pamela* but completed and published after—as evidence that Fielding had embarked on his future novelistic course independently of Richardson (394); but, as I shall argue briefly below, it more reasonably has the opposite implication in that *Jonathan Wild* lacks the phenomenological quality specifically characteristic of the novel. Before I can speak of that, however, I will need to offer my own account of the origin of the novel, an account which will focus explicitly on the specific quality manifested in the Richardson/Fielding new way of writing, that vivid aesthetic effect which struck their contemporaries as common between them, for all their manifest differences.

McKeon notes that from 1740 on the novel developed with “feverish intensity” (419), yet, as already noticed, he seems to acknowledge that the dialectic he has seen as leading to its establishment tends to disappear from the genre. This is a problematical outcome for his explanatory endeavors. My own approach would emphasize the fact of the post-1740 burgeoning continuity of the novel, in contrast with the pre-1740 nonexistence of unequivocal examples of the
form, as calling for direct and strong explanation. I would move to provide this explanation by resurrecting and developing the full theoretical and historical implications of the traditional assertion that Richardson’s *Pamela* was the first unequivocal novel.

The idea that there could be any persuasive argument that would in these sophisticated and deeply relativistic times validate this claim for *Pamela* is countered by the welter of other candidates that have been offered as initiating the tradition of the novel, but this disagreement can be understood as generated more by variation in theoretical assumptions than by any instability in underlying experience, for, if no positive conceptual consensus can be discerned in the matter, a very strong implicit one can be located by offering for counterexample the covering generalization that no student of the matter holds that *Pamela* is not a novel, whereas the same cannot be said for any earlier work. The implication would be that *Pamela* has the capacity to fix its character in every reader’s imaginative experience of it so as to fit the intuitive impression we have of what a novel is, an impression which, we may note, operates quite surely and steadily for subsequent works, as not for earlier: who has any sense that *Pride and Prejudice* and *To the Lighthouse* are *not* novels?3

The indicated problem is to define what it is that stands as the basis of our phenomenological impression of *Pamela* as a novel that is extendable to novels in general; for this, rather than a synthesis, unregistered by readers, of questions of truth, questions of virtue would seem to be the ground of readerly response to “a new way of writing” and the novel’s emergent status as what McKeon terms after Marx a “simple abstraction” (20).

Common scholarly opinion seems to agree with Ian Watt that the lowest common denominator hallmark of the novel is its characteristic realism (Watt, *Rise* 9ff.), though McKeon, for one, has very little to say on this crucial topic, which would seem to fall under the category of questions of truth. The problem has been and is, of course, how to conceive the novel’s distinctive realistic illusion so as most sharply to locate this quality as one that all readers can be understood as tacitly registering, however unable they are to define it in a conceptually adequate way.

My own definition of the content of the preanalytic registration underlying our tacit conception of the form has been that a novel is a work which offers the reader a focal illusion of characters acting autonomously as if in the world of real experience within a subsidiary awareness of an underlying constructive authorial purpose which gives their story an implicit significance and affective force which real world experience does not have.

Let us read the first letter of *Pamela* in the light of this definition:
Dear Father and Mother, I have great trouble, and some comfort, to acquaint you with. The trouble is, that my good lady died of the illness I mentioned to you, and left us all much grieved for the loss of her; for she was a dear good lady, and kind to all us her servants. Much I feared, that as I was taken by her ladyship to wait upon her person, I should be quite destitute again, and forced to return to you and my poor mother, who have enough to do to maintain yourselves; and, as my lady's goodness had put me to write and cast accounts, and made me a little expert at my needle, and otherwise qualified above my degree, it was not every family that could have found a place that your poor Pamela was fit for: but God, whose graciousness to us we have so often experienced at a pinch, put it into my good lady's heart, on her death-bed, just an hour before she expired, to recommend to my young master all her servants, one by one; and when it came to my turn to be recommended, (for I was sobbing and crying at her pillow,) she could only say, My dear son!—and so broke off a little; and then recovering—Remember my poor Pamela—And these were some of her last words! O how my eyes run—Don't wonder to see the paper so blotted.

Well, but God's will must be done!—And so comes the comfort, that I shall not be obliged to return back to be a clog upon my dear parents! For my master said, I will take care of you all, my good maidens; and for you, Pamela, (and took me by the hand; yes, he took my hand before them all,) for my dear mother's sake, I will be a friend to you and you shall take care of my linen. God bless him! and pray with me, my dear father and mother, for a blessing upon him, for he has given mourning and a year's wages to all my lady's servants; and I having no wages as yet, my lady having said she should do for me as I deserved, ordered the housekeeper to give me mourning with the rest; and gave me with his own hand four golden guineas, and some silver, which were in my old lady's pocket when she died; and said, if I was a good girl, and faithful and diligent, he would be a friend to me, for his mother's sake. . . .

I know, dear father and mother, I must give you both grief and pleasure; and so I will only say, Pray for your Pamela; who will ever be

Your most dutiful daughter,

I have been scared out of my senses; for just now, as I was folding up this letter in my late lady's dressing-room, in comes my young master! Good sirs! how was I frightened! I went to hide the letter in my bosom; and he, seeing me tremble, said, smiling, To whom have you been writing, Pamela?—I said, in my confusion, Pray your honour forgive me!—Only to my father and mother. He said, Well then, let me see how you are come on in your writing! O how ashamed I was!—He took it, without saying more, and read it quite through, and then gave it me again;—and I said, Pray your honour forgive me! Yet I know not for what; for he was always dutiful to his parents; and why should he be angry that I was so to mine? And indeed he was not angry; for
he took me by the hand, and said, You are a good girl, Pamela, to be kind to your aged father and mother. I am not angry with you for writing such innocent matters as these: though you ought to be wary what tales you send out of a family.—Be faithful and diligent; and do as you should do, and I like you the better for this. And then he said, Why, Pamela, you write a very pretty hand, and spell tolerably too. I see my good mother's care in your learning has not been thrown away upon you. She used to say you loved reading; you may look into any of her books, to improve yourself, so you take care of them. To be sure I did nothing but courtesy and cry, and was all in confusion, at his goodness. Indeed he is the best of gentlemen, I think! But I am making another long letter . . . (3–5)

This letter, in which Pamela tells her news so artlessly to her parents, powerfully opens Richardson's novelistic story—from the beginning of the action in the mother's destabilizing death—with masterful economy and clarity. So lucid to an outside reader, so improbably alive with Pamela's speaking voice, it is not like a genuine letter at all, as our reading of Pamela's narration generates in the imagination a succession of autonomous scenes, giving us first Pamela at her writing task before fading to the deathbed scene in which Mr. B. and the others are present to us seemingly without Pamela's mediation, then returning us briefly to Pamela writing in her closet before springing on us (as well as Pamela) the sudden literally dramatic reappearance of Mr. B. from beyond the bounds of Pamela's narrative expectation. But examining our experience here of the illusion of autonomous life, we see that, as early as Pamela's “God bless him!” response to B.'s promise to be a friend, we pick up the author's covert signal of a danger of which she is unaware, a signal which sets up the possibility of B.'s alarming reappearance in the postscript, where we are not at all assured by Pamela's conclusion that he is "the best of gentlemen." By the end of the letter we are so strongly set in our concern for Pamela in respect to B. (that is to say, in the structure of the author's story) that, even without her parents' warning, we would interpret any further portion of the story in the light of that expectation. It is the covertly shaping authorial structure, operating within the illusion of autonomous life which Pamela's sentences require us to generate in order to understand them, that is the ground of our response to Pamela as an unequivocal novel.4

My aim here is not merely to establish Pamela's chronological priority in the history of the novel, but, much more importantly, to assert its enabling and conditioning influence on the whole subsequent development of the form—an obvious and undeniable fact when systematically pointed out, as I will here, but, curiously, one the theoretical and historical implications of which have never been fully admitted and appreciated. Pamela has its most direct and obvious formal influence as the initial term of what I have elsewhere called the novel
of moral action as written by Richardson himself, Burney, and Austen, and its most individual impact, as a specific story, unmistakable and almost overt, on such masterworks of the main novelistic line as Jane Eyre and Tess of the D’Urbervilles, and through and beyond them perhaps on Turn of the Screw, Lady Chatterley and Maurice.

But Pamela’s most immediate generative impact was on Fielding, a celebrated encounter which is ordinarily noted without acknowledgment of its historical ramifications, partly because Fielding’s positive creative debt to Richardson has not been sufficiently recognized. Taking the situation in its most obvious and indisputable causal terms, it is clearly the case that, without Pamela, Joseph Andrews would not have been and equally clear that Joseph Andrews, with its hero’s benevolent and amorous appetites focused on the bountiful woman under the guidance of a foster father, initiates Fielding’s progressive treatment of the same situation in Tom Jones and Amelia. Since Tom Jones has an important and obvious influence on the main later line of the novel, leaving its unmistakable mark on such masterworks as Dickens’s Oliver Twist on the one hand and Thackeray’s Vanity Fair on the other, there is a prima facie sense in which Pamela can be understood as in general originating and conditioning the development of the novel form in English. When we look for comparable “manifest marks” of descent from works prior to Pamela, however, we look in vain—an overall situation which I summed up some years ago in the simple, but I think irrefutable, descriptive generalization that Pamela had manifest posterity, but no ancestors (“Defoe, Richardson, Joyce”), that it was, in short, a unique creative emergence of marked generativity.

The indubitable causal role which Richardson played in the initiation of Fielding’s career as novelist was a negative if nonetheless crucial inspiration, and the fundamental contrast between the work of the two novelists points to Fielding’s own originating role as co-founder of the form, as well as to the more positive and obvious influence on him of the epic tradition on the one hand and Don Quixote on the other, influences which Fielding specifically invokes and makes manifest in his work.

The influence of Cervantes is also prima facie and authorially acknowledged in the two other master novelists of the early period, Smollett and Sterne; but it is worth noticing that Cervantes’s example, so long available (Knowles), failed to generate any novelistic posterity in English until after the appearance of Pamela. This suggests that Pamela may have enabled even this contrasting line of development in the novel, a suggestion that will appear less improbable if we think of Pamela as providing, as its most general formal contribution, the presentational modality defined above, the hallmark of which is, again, the reader’s vivid experience of an autonomous world which he or she can grasp as projected
from—and as—a life world like his own, but tacitly informed by a shaping authorial presence felt in the created world of the work behind and beyond any characterological and narratorial agency.

McKeon asserts that Ian Watt’s notion of formal realism fails as a comprehensive principle because it does not unequivocally apply to Tom Jones, the stylized presentation of which has often been seen as a departure from realist canons (3). But Tom Jones is unquestionably and pervasively in the mode of the new, novelistic way of writing as I have defined it here. Despite the fact that its so-called omniscient narrator is a seemingly obtrusive presence who refers to his departed wife and declares his capacity to alter the story at will, so that we easily call him “Fielding,” the odd experiential fact is that we are unable to think of the characters and their actions as actually under this narrator’s control. The reason for this is that they exist to us beyond the ken of his report. At the same time, because of the coherent shape of the whole, the reader is never in any doubt that the whole as a whole is the controlled creation of Fielding the author. The only solution to the contradiction involved is to draw a distinction (following, with some analytical refinement, Booth and Bakhtin) between the authorial narrator who speaks in the sentences looking toward the characters and their world and the author who imagines and generates for the reader the world of the novel by a pretense mounted through the sentences. That is to say, the authorial narrator’s sentences engender a world imagined by the author as existing beyond the narrator in whom he speaks. But just this, as we have seen, was the Richardsonian contribution.

The possibility that Richardson’s innovation not only prompted but also enabled Fielding’s own use of what was henceforth to be registered as the novelistic mode of representation is corroborated by the fact that Jonathan Wild, written before the appearance of Pamela, is relentlessly told and not shown, never achieving the imaginative autonomy so strikingly manifest in the great comic scenes of Joseph Andrews or, more crucially perhaps, in the autonomous scenicality which Fielding earlier imitates to make Shamela parodically effective; it is to be noted, moreover, that Fielding did not make his “new kind of writing” claim for Jonathan Wild. Thus, McKeon’s identification of Jonathan Wild as the beginning of Fielding’s novelistic development (383) is, from the formalist perspective developed here, a clearly inaccurate claim that obscures Pamela’s unique generative role in the development even of Fielding’s line of the novel. (This impact of Richardson’s representational modality, conceived in the broadest terms according to the model I have offered, may also have been the condition of Don Quixote’s influence on the modern novel as written not only by Fielding, but Smollett and Sterne as well, with both employing the new vitalizing modality in realizing their own differing substantive ends according to the bent of their own geniuses.7)
It is worth noting in passing that both Watt’s conception of the essentials of novelistic form and McKeon’s point in their different ways to the same phenomenological reality as that which my own concept attempts to locate. Watt’s notion of a form characterized by realism as shaped by plot and authorial judgment corresponds to my own quite differently formulated notion of the novel as involving a focally autonomous illusion of a world like all of our life worlds, but informed by a subsidiary registration of the fact that the substance of the apparently autonomous fictional world is everywhere instinct with the author’s intention to give it affective meaning and point. (Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the more powerful the novel is, the more this marking and shaping seems to be inseparable from the reader’s own perception of what seems the reality of the fictional world, whereas any breaking-through to focal awareness of authorial design is always registered as a [relative] weakness; this is equivalent to the long-accepted principle that a novel should not tell but show, a limited assertion which in itself fails to recognize that the novelist can both show by telling and show without telling.) The same complex affective structure presumably generates the common reader’s response to novels as, on the one hand, “just like life,” but, on the other, as having “something to say,” as this structure can be seen to underlie almost any other explicit definition—for instance, Smollett’s description of the novel as “a large diffused picture, comprehending the characters of life, disposed in different groups, and exhibited in various attitudes, for the purposes of a uniform plan, and general occurrence, to which every individual figure is subservient” (Dedication to Ferdinand Count Fathom, 4). The conjunction of “picture” and “plan” points clearly to what I am claiming is the universally registered biplanar quality of the novel as generating an illusion of an apparently autonomous life world experienced as is our own—so strong that it and its inhabitants can be perceived and discussed as if self-existent—with a clear sense that the whole is the deepest kind of “let’s pretend” construction imposing a coherence and consummation which each of us seeks in our life worlds but never achieves.

McKeon’s notion of the novel as synthesizing questions of truth and questions of virtue might be taken as, like Watt’s, pointing to the same novelistic modality that I have been defining, though falling greatly short of precision and fullness in its account of the distinctiveness of the form as imaginatively experienced. This is owing to his commitment to a method that looks to understand all sociocultural phenomena as the outgrowth of a dialectically continuous development according to which any epiphenomenal cultural trends are determined in the long run by more fundamental economic and social forces. This view stands in contrast to my own approach, which sees history as the emergent result of aggregate human action, with what constructively comes before conditioning and enabling what comes after, and with the individual
embodied human person assigned a more important role in the development at least of cultural phenomena like literature than in McKeon’s Marxist account or in contemporary critical thought generally. The issue becomes decidedly pertinent to the present discussion of the origins of the novel if we consider the biographical context of its formal invention which I, like so many others for so long, have attributed to Richardson. In the only detailed biographical statement Richardson provided to posterity, the famous letter to Johannes Stinstra (Selected Letters 228–35), Richardson records how as a youth he sat among a circle of sewing girls reading to them and offering at their solicitation moralistic comments on what he read, and, further, how he often served as an amanuensis to these same girls in their epistolary pursuit of their amours. This self-described “bashful & not forward Boy,” whose early stories always “carried with them, I am bold to say, a useful Moral,” was clearly gratified by this non-moral employment, with none of the young women aware that he was secretary to the others. In answering their lovers’ letters, he reports,

I have been directed to chide, & even repulse, when an Offense was either taken or given, at the very time that the Heart of the Chider or Repulser was open before me, overflowing with Esteem & Affection; & the fair Repulser dreading to be taken at her Word; directing this Word or that expression to be softened or changed. (231)

Here we see the biographical root of Richardson’s capacity to register, imitate, and represent in letters an autonomous female consciousness within the covert awareness of an actively interested male consciousness. Further, here we can infer that this male consciousness held the potentiality of projection out of its shy and bashful state into a contrasting predatory male personality which (in the fiction) could be allowed a voice only to the degree that Richardson denied his own complicity with it, as he consciously identified with the female other’s virtuous rejection of that predatory maleness. (Earlier in the Stinstra letter Richardson gives an account of the gentleman patron, “a Master of ye Epistolary Style” [229], with whom he corresponded as a youth; this was perhaps the same gentleman who told him the story that was the germ of Pamela and who may also have been a psychological model for Mr. B. and Lovelace.) Richardson’s unique biographical situation can thus be seen to be the ground not only of the specific psychological substance of his novels but, more importantly, of the biplanar modality of representation which was his initiating contribution to the novel form. We can think of this modality as broadly adaptable on the one hand to other narrative orientations, as with Fielding, or different formal goals, as with Sterne; but what was a biographical accident with Richardson, his extraordinary personal commitment to letter and note writing (rather than
Direct speech) as a means of communication, left a lasting imprint on the technical mode of the form. We see this imprint in Burney most prominently, but also in other derivative novelists, who long employed the letter as narrative device—not because of its absolute utility or historical inevitability, but simply because of the accident that Richardson’s example came packaged that way. Of course, Austen, at the end of that subtradition, escaped (while showing vestiges of) the bondage of the letter form—as Fielding had at first in his adaptation of the modality to the traditions of epic narration; but the overall development, from biographical accident to enduring form, together with the lines of influence earlier sketched, seems clearly to indicate that, without Richardson’s specific individual contribution, the novel and its development might have been but would have to have been otherwise, would have had a shape we cannot imagine and that it is useless to try to imagine.

The emergence and evolution of the novel, then, and presumably of other literary forms, is not something that follows from the massive, long-term pressure of social history, as in Professor McKeon’s account, but, like biological evolution in Stephen Jay Gould’s description, centrally involves contingency:

A historical explanation does not rest on direct deductions from laws of nature, but on an unpredictable sequence of antecedent states, where any major change in any step of the sequence would have altered the final result. This final result is therefore dependent, or contingent, upon everything that came before—the unerasable and determining signature of history.

Gould goes on to speak of evolutionary developments as not predictable from any general or abstract property of the larger system. . . . When we realize that the actual outcome did not have to be, that any alteration in any step along the way would have unleashed a cascade down a different channel, we grasp the causal power of individual events. (283–84)

Chaos theory, now emerging into general intellectual awareness, also seems to suggest powerfully that lines of causation in many ontological areas, including the immediately human, are nothing like deterministic in the Laplacean sense in which it has long been assumed that all of nature is determined, and indicates that initial, arbitrary conditions may have a crucial influence on fluid lines of development proceeding from them.14

The specific argument articulated here, however, suggests, contrastively, that in the development of human generic constructions, the crucial initiations, as well as later adaptations and continuations, are not arbitrary but merely con-
tingent, dependent on the preexistent posture of uniquely individual creativities which (as cognate development of these views can more clearly show) are themselves never simply free, but conditioned by extrinsic sociocultural forces on the one hand and the intrinsic demands of the forms—as invented, inherited, reconstructed—on the other. Out of such a dialectic of creativity can sequentially emerge the anti-chaotic developmental order of a form like the novel.

Notes

1. McKeon writes that “The emergence of a distinct new form was affirmed first of all by the authors themselves. Richardson believed he had introduced a new ‘species’ of writing; Fielding claimed a new ‘kind’ or ‘province.’ These affirmations were echoed enthusiastically by their respective admirers. And after 1750 it was increasingly easy to speak of them as exemplary and founding figures in the same breath” (410). (See also the relevant references by contemporaries that McKeon conveniently brings together [506n11]). Richardson speaks of *Pamela* as introducing “a new species of writing” in a 1741 letter to Aaron Hill (*Selected Letters* 41) and makes similar statements elsewhere. In the Preface Fielding refers to *Joseph Andrews* as a “kind of Writing, which I do not remember to have seen hitherto attempted in our Language,” though he goes on, somewhat paradoxically but accurately, to place the book in the epic tradition (3); and in *Tom Jones* he speaks of himself as founding “a new Province of Writing” (76).

2. In his authoritative recent biography, Martin C. Battestin reassesses the scant evidence and concludes that Fielding had probably produced a version of the book by 1740 (*Henry Fielding* 281–85).

3. This is not meant to imply that after *Pamela* there are no marginal or equivocal novels.

4. I have elsewhere defined the shaping authorial understructure beneath the apparently autonomous surface of *Pamela* as a unique realization of the more general action-suspense structure which informs novels “designed to develop and maximize concern for a character . . . along a line of development in which the ground of concern is a dynamically shifting contrast between the reader’s sense of the immediate and ultimate fate of the character . . . as compared with his immediate and ultimate desert, and to resolve this concern by a surprising but probable extension of the means used to raise it, so as to give the reader the greatest satisfaction in the ultimate fate of the character . . . . More simply, the author pits our induced sense of what will happen to a character against our induced sense of what we want to happen to him, our hopes against our fears, in order to give the greatest pleasure appropriate to their resolution.” The concern developed for Pamela is a “serious fear, which can be defined by saying that her merit and fate develop along a line of branching alternatives, where one branch, always closed by circumstance or choice, leads to an ethically acceptable but materially undesirable safety, while the other leads overtly and immediately to greater danger but covertly and ultimately to the most desirable resolution of her difficulties.” See my “Defoe, Richardson, Joyce, and the Concept of Form in the Novel.”
5. See my “From Richardson to Austen: ‘Johnson’s Rule’ and the Eighteenth-Century Novel of Moral Action.” I there conceive the “moral action” set of novels as an historically conditioned, genetically developing sub-line within the larger category of the “action model” novel (see note 4), the standard novel of plotted suspense as it endured in the high canonical line from Richardson and Fielding through Conrad and Hardy, before giving way to the different understructure of the “classic modern” novel as written by Joyce, Lawrence, and Woolf. See “Defoe, Richardson, Joyce, and the Concept of Form in the Novel” (47ff.) and the opening remarks of my “Exodus and Return: Joyce’s Ulysses and the Fiction of the Actual.”

6. Joseph Andrews, of course, has its own special line of descent through The Vicar of Wakefield to Pickwick Papers.

7. On the other hand, Smollett’s earliest novel, Roderick Random (influenced more by Le Sage than Cervantes), displays no more clearly than Don Quixote itself what was, after Pamela, to be the characteristic modality of the novel, in which the shaping presence of the novelist is felt within the material substance of the story; but in his final novel, Humphry Clinker (1771), Smollett shows immediately in the opening scene that he has at last assimilated the method, as Matthew Bramble is scenically displayed in such a way as to convey the author’s implicit characterization of him as developed to meet the novelist’s (only partially coherent) formal goals.

Sterne’s Tristram Shandy masterfully employed the novelistic modality from its first page on, but, like Smollett’s novels, achieved no unitary overall understructure, so that both novelists notably had no structural influence in the foundation of later formal lines, finding their posterity and leaving their “manifest marks” on writers (like Dickens and Thackeray) who participate in the main Richardson/Fielding action novel line.

8. The passage continues with the specification that “the plan cannot be executed with propriety, probability or success, without a principal personage to attract the attention, unite the incidents, unwind the clue of the labyrinth, and at last close the scene by virtue of his own importance.” Of course, Smollett himself notably failed to realize a fully unified plan in any of his novels, which accounts for his relatively low standing among the four preeminent early novelists and for his lack of enduring influence. For a keen-eyed assessment of the principles of form (or lack of them) displayed in Smollett’s novels, see G. S. Rousseau’s Tobias Smollett: Essays of Two Decades (55–73). Unlike Rousseau, Robert Giddings in The Tradition of Smollett sees Smollett as firmly placed in the picaresque tradition, but his arguments for Smollett’s impact on subsequent authors (other than Dickens, where it is manifest) is limited and not strongly persuasive.

9. Novelists, of course, commonly speak of their characters as if they were living beings apart from themselves, so that the formal condition noted above as marking the novelistic quality of Tom Jones would seem to have its counterpart in authorial consciousness.

10. The term “life world” in my usage refers to Alfred Schutz’s integration and development of Husserl’s concept so as to incorporate a Weberian sociology. The term indicates “that fundamental and paramount reality” which human beings necessarily take for granted in the “natural attitude” of common sense that enables them to live in a world given to them as intersubjective from the outset and as including not only the natural world, but also an historically pre-given social and cultural world with spatial and historical extension and continuity which is nevertheless always projectively understood from the restricted “here and now” standpoint of the individual embodied consciousness looking toward a world...
of embodied others to whom it imputes a consciousness cognate with its own. (See Alfred Schutz and Thomas Luckmann, *The Structures of the Life World* [1 ff.] and Schutz’s “Phenomenology and the Social Sciences” in his *Collected Papers*.) This concept provides the basis of a solution to long-standing problems about the nature and validity of novelistic realism, since both the transsubjective concrete extension of the world of the novel and the restricted experiential point of view from which it is imagined—a dual aspect which I mean to locate in the phrase “as if in the world of real experience”—are implicit in and imaginatively validated by the pregiven, ineluctable structure of our experience of the world and do not impinge upon the theoretical realms into which discussion of realistic mimesis and its reference or truth value are commonly brought. Rather, the novelistic illusion is seen to be generated by a pregiven cognitive capacity to construct an operational map of the humanly structured and organized world in which we live. Of course, individual novelists ordinarily draw on their individual life worlds as set in their place and time—a world already real to their imaginations—in order to construct and project as if actual the illusion of their novels, so that readers seem to witness the action as taking place in a putatively real time and place different from that of their own life worlds, within the knowledge that, if they were to have been present at that time and place, they would not have witnessed the scene; this generalization, however, does not hold for what I have called simular novels of Joyce, Woolf, and Lawrence, where the central story material is built around a memorial armature.

11. But who, looking back over a century featuring the crucially determining actions of such figures as Hitler, Stalin, Churchill, and Mao, would deny the individual personality a distinctive and overwhelming shaping role in political history as well? Pavel Campeanu gives a vivid firsthand account of the more recent and well-defined example of Nicolae Ceausescu, whose associate he was in early Communist groups. Campeanu argues that Ceausescu’s entire later regime was an expression of the “despicable nature” of a dictator who not “merely dominated [Romanian] society,” but managed “to graft his own morbid psychology on it” (30).

12. Current literary theory seems nearly united in asserting the nonexistence or at least insignificance of distinctive subjectivity and in dismissing the cultural relevance of individual creativity, but current scientific inquiry seems to be a good deal less skeptical on this issue. In the field of human behavioral genetics, Robert Plomin and Denise Daniels report research converging on the remarkable conclusion that non-shared environmental influences “make two children in the same family as different from one another [. . . in personality, psychopathology, and cognitive abilities] as are pairs of children selected randomly from the population” (1); see, more largely, Plomin, Defries, and Fulker, *Nature and Nurture During Infancy and Childhood*. Gerald M. Edelman, in *The Remembered Present: A Biological Theory of Consciousness*, attempts to “explain consciousness in terms of the material structures and function of the brain” (273) and in the process notes “the usefulness of taking the human subject . . . as the canonical reference for any robust theory of consciousness” (27); he goes on to speak of “the enormous individual variation in structure that brains possess at a variety of organizational levels,” of the fact that “each brain is highly variable,” and that “each organism’s behavior is biologically individual and enormously diverse” (30). Each brain develops its unique structure “on the basis of individual experience in an open-ended world,” “against the background of inherited and evolutionarily determined [ethological] value systems governing adaptive survival” (31). “Consciousness is a process occurring separately in each individual; it is historical, changing, partial, and linked to the perception of objects. It is therefore not
a property of particles of matter or even of most biological arrangements of matter. . . . Although the world is not of our making, and although we must disappear in death, while alive we may alter it and ourselves causally by conscious means. Given the historical nature of creation, it follows that those socially cooperative interactions based on creative skepticism (but not on dogma) that lead to an increasingly rich culture are the most valuable heritage we have. While our consciousness is based on an ethologically determined set of values, the acquisition of higher-order consciousness and the interactions in a culture allow us to achieve new values. In a culture, each person can have the freedoms of grammar, of private imagination, and of subjective individuality—and still enjoy the harmonious constraints of art and communal belief as well as the final satisfaction of a shared scientific world view” (278).


14. I rely on the popular accounts of chaos/catastrophe theory by James Gleick (*Chaos: Making a New Science*) and Ivar Ekeland (*Mathematics and the Unexpected*). I do not pretend to grasp the intricacies even of these simplified presentations but take them as in principle supportive of the rationale of my account of the emergence and development of the novel, as indicated by Ekeland’s summary observation that “determinism leaves plenty of room for individual freedom” and that “a small scale event (a knife in Caesar’s body) may have large scale implications” (111). Gleick, in a review of Gould’s book, makes the point that Gould perhaps insufficiently recognizes that his orientation is widely shared in the present scientific climate: “The last two decades have seen many other sciences, without benefit of Burgess Shales, evolve a stronger appreciation of the roles of contingency and catastrophe,” while “within paleontology, quite apart from the evidence of the Canadian fossils, many voices have been making the case for a more chance-ridden, less progress-oriented view of life—none, in fact, more vigorously than Mr. Gould” (“Survival” 41). The present explanatory effort would seem then to have the virtue of being in harmony with the current direction of scientific explanation, however unmodish it may appear in the literary theoretical community. But the support is only analogical; the argument here must stand or fall on its own terms, which cannot be reduced or translated into those of another conceptual domain.

15. For analyzed examples of such conditioned formal developments, see “From Richardson to Austen,” as well as my “The Comparative Anatomy of Three ‘Baggy Monsters’: *Bleak House, Vanity Fair, Middlemarch,*” and “*Lord Jim* and the Formal Development of the English Novel.” [Editors’ Note: Chapters 10, 13, and 15 of this volume respectively.]
The neo-Aristotelian approach to the novel from which my own approach in part derives—I refer specifically to the work of R. S. Crane and Sheldon Sacks1—has tended to identify the novel with the action structure first described by Aristotle and long employed in the drama before its appearance in *Pamela* and, subsequently, in Richardson's later novels and those of Fielding, Burney, and Austen. Since I shall be referring to the action structure throughout, let me define it here by saying, more simply than would my predecessors, that it is an affective structure designed to induce, develop, and finally cathartically resolve in the reader an active concern for a protagonist which results from the tension between what the reader is led to think will happen to the protagonist (his fate) and what he is led to think ought to happen to him (his desert). Thus stated, the concept corresponds pretty much to what we might call the novel of plotted suspense, and, intelligently applied to such novels, it can yield consistent insight. But it does not provide any really satisfactory basis for analyzing a number of works unequivocally registered as novels—for instance, in the eighteenth century, *Tristram Shandy* and *Humphry Clinker*—and this points to the more general fact that our possession of the intuitive concept “novel” is stronger than our intuitive notion of the action structure. We are more aware of *Tom Jones, Tristram Shandy*, and *Ulysses* as novels than we are of the fact that the first is a novel of plotted suspense while the other two are not. The plain implication of such reflections is that the action structure is not the definitive characteristic of the novel. The most fundamental thing that Richardson in *Pamela* borrowed from the drama was, I think, not the action structure but, as Mark Kinkead-Weekes has suggested,
the dramatic mode itself (395). In watching a play we seem to see the actors as characters acting out of their own purposes, while more fundamentally our imaginations register and respond to the fact that their actions are fictive, designed to realize the playwright’s artistic purpose in the play. Now it is this same kind of illusion that the novel, using mere words and not actors, contrives with largely covert art to present. We may say for the sake of precision and clarity, using Michael Polanyi’s helpful terms, that the novel presents to our imagination a focal illusion of characters acting autonomously as if in the real world, within our subsidiary awareness of an underlying authorial purpose which gives their story, virtually real, implicit significance and affective force (*Personal Knowledge* 55–56). This formulation is meant to locate the basis of the universal impression that the novel is “realistic,” that it is “dramatic,” that it shows rather than tells, or rather tells by showing, in contrast with earlier narratives which may be said to tell in order to show.

Crane’s and Sacks’s formulations do not directly express the realistic mode of the novel as independent of the action structure, in large part I think because of their tendency to think of that structure as an integral and unmalleable formal principle and of the transition from the drama to the novel as a mere change in the manner of representation—in drama, in prose—conceived as a repertory of logical possibilities in principle available to artists at any time. This almost structuralist tendency to think in terms of fixed and timeless forms deflected their attention from the evidence which suggests that the novel needs to be conceived as a unique, historically emergent construction, something entirely new under the literary sun. Nevertheless, I believe that the concept of the action structure is accurately applicable to the novel as historically the most important of the subsidiary organizations used to give the realistic surface of novels their significance and force, and I have already implied my agreement with Crane and Sacks that it characterizes the main line of development in the eighteenth-century novel from Richardson to Austen. But the attempt to explain the structural peculiarities of these novels individually and as a developmental sequence immediately again raises the problem whether the action novel, any more than the novel form as a whole, can be thought of as fixed and timeless rather than as mixed and historically adapted to the purposes and preconceptions of its users, specifically in the present instance to the didactic purposes of the eighteenth-century novelists who employed it. Crane was quite sure that didactic aims had no part in actions, the essence of which for him was just that they were mimetic and not didactic, and in his famous essay on *Tom Jones* he made no mention of Fielding’s explicitly announced didactic intention, just as in his account of neoclassical criticism he tended to think of critics who spoke of incorporating morals into actions as misunderstanding Aristotle rather than as formulating
viable conceptions of mixed forms which fell well within the possibilities of free human creation.

Following Crane and clearly recognizing that Fielding’s and other eighteenth-century action novels do in fact incorporate didactic material, Sacks redefined the action so as to make the expression of an author’s belief not only permissible but necessary. In doing this I think he blurred the distinction between two different claims: (1) that the aesthetic requirements of the action structure put no pressure on an author to falsify his beliefs in building into his work the moral judgments of characters necessary to develop and resolve the tension of suspense; and (2) that the expression of doctrinal or other didactic material was inherently compatible with the action conceived as a strictly integral form. The first claim I take to be indubitable, but the second dubious. Sacks’s own demonstration of the brilliantly inventive ways in which didactic material is built into *Tom Jones* and *Amelia* is more easily interpreted to the opposite conclusion, that such material is not inherently compatible with the action structure but requires special accommodation. Sacks did not draw this conclusion because he was committed, as I say, to an almost structuralist view that principles of literary form must be conceived as fixed, unitary, and finite if they are to be capable of explaining the facts of our literary experience, but it seems to me just the facts of our literary experience—that *Amelia*, for instance, seems manifestly weakened by formal contradictions—that suggest the usefulness of thinking of literary works not as embodiments of a priori principles of literary form but as constructions in which the author’s attempt to realize his aesthetic and allied aims may produce conflicts which leave on the works the marks of their solutions.

My specific thesis in this paper is that we can get maximum insight into what I will call the eighteenth-century novel of moral action if we think of its employment of the action structure, with its inherent need to develop and cathartically resolve concern for a protagonist, as under the constraint of a commitment to moral instruction imposed by the most fundamental critical assumptions of the time, assumptions which the novelists shared and positively accepted as the basis of their work. My aim may be considered an intention to explore, in relation to the novel, the concrete critical implications of Ralph Cohen’s much larger argument that “neo-classical forms were mixed and interrelated, dominated by didactic models” (75).

Fielding’s example shows that ideas and messages as such can be built into action structures, sometimes, as with *Amelia*, at a heavy formal price. But the didactic pressures of the time exerted an even more fundamental influence on the substance of the action structure itself by restricting the novelist’s freedom to develop the character of his protagonist solely on the basis of aesthetic considerations, for cathartic effect alone.
In implicit reproof of current novelistic practice, Dr. Johnson asserted in his famous *Rambler* 4, that “In narratives, where historical veracity has no place, I cannot discover why there should not be exhibited the most perfect idea of virtue; of virtue not angelical, nor above probability, for what we cannot credit we shall never imitate, but the highest and purest that humanity can reach, which, exercised in such trials as the various revolutions of things shall bring upon it, may, by conquering some calamities, and enduring others, teach us what we may hope, and what we can perform” (24). Now we may take this prescription not as laying down a principle (let us call it “Johnson’s Rule”) which the novelists ignored but one which they consciously accepted and attempted to embody in their works, with results, as I shall attempt to show, that have much to do with the problematic qualities of their individual novels and with the progressively different forms which emerged in this series.

I have elsewhere described the specific action structure of *Pamela* by saying that the concern we are made to feel for her is a serious fear which results from the fact that her desert and fate develop along a line of branching alternatives where one branch always leads to an ethically unacceptable or materially undesirable safety (respectively either refused by Pamela or closed by circumstance), while the other, ethically impeccable and always chosen by Pamela, leads overtly and immediately to greater danger but covertly and ultimately to the most desirable resolution of her difficulties.²

It can be predicted from this model that the impeccable moral choices which lead Pamela immediately to her greatest danger but ultimately to her greatest reward will constitute her a moral paragon but will also involve the danger that she will be viewed as a hypocrite, since the dramatic presentation through her consciousness makes the reader’s awareness of the potential positive outcome of her morally defensive action seem, contrary to Richardson’s intention, part of her implicit calculation; and, indeed, whatever her motivation, the dynamic equation of virtue and reward which the novel offers the reader is inherently ambiguous and vulgar. I will not detail here the full structural account of *Pamela* which this model can generate, since I have already done so in another essay [Editors’ note: see Chapter 8] but will turn at once to *Clarissa*, a novel which has as its structural core the same contest between the sexually libertine male and the female paragon, or perfect “exemplar,” as Richardson himself calls Clarissa (I:xiv). We may assume that Richardson, sensitive to criticism of the have-your-cake-and-eat-it-too morality of Pamela, decided to alter its desert-fate structure so as to create a novel of contrasting moral stringency and grandeur. We may precisely locate the great moral difference within close structural similarity of *Pamela* and *Clarissa* by saying that Clarissa’s fate and merit develop along a line of alternatives where one branch, always refused by Clarissa or closed by circumstance, is defined as ethically acceptable but not as impeccable, and apparently
promises earthly felicity, while the other, always chosen by Clarissa, is defined as ethically impeccable and increasingly excludes the possibility of her earthly felicity.

The model appears cold and taciturn, but if we question it in the right spirit it will grow articulate and tell us that *Clarissa* is the story of a woman who is constrained, or constrains herself, to give up all objects of earthly desire in order to remain virtuous, since the only outcome of the sequence envisaged in the model is the heroine’s death. Such a story is inherently painful and is made more so by the basic principle of its structure, which forces us to be aware, as Clarissa makes her impeccably virtuous choices, that to make a self-regarding choice would be very easy, since an alternative temptation is always present and defined as ethically acceptable. Our participation in the book may be described by saying that we fully empathize with Clarissa’s plight and in a way (a crucial way) feel its pain more sharply than she does, since we are more attracted than she is to the earthly goods she gives up with such relatively clear-sighted ease; she suffers, but she does not suffer agonies of indecision. On the other hand, we are reassured about her sacrificial choices and do not judge them as capricious or overly nice, since we are made more aware than she can be that if she did make the self-regarding acceptable choices, she would not by such means actually achieve earthly happiness. She is restrained by principle alone from choices that full knowledge would define as imprudent. The emotion that develops and is discharged as we witness this struggle is an admiring and indignant pity quite in contrast with the hopeful fear gradually turning to fearful hope with which we follow the career of Pamela.

The inherent moral grandeur of *Clarissa*, however, is not quite the tragic grandeur envisaged by Aristotle and achieved by the Greek tragedians and, in a somewhat altered form, by Shakespeare. Superficially considered, *Clarissa* is that kind of tragedy proscribed by Aristotle when he asserted that in effective tragedy “a good man must not be seen passing from happiness to misery” because such a spectacle “is not fear-inspiring or piteous but simply odious to us” (1466). Aristotle has in mind a situation where a good man is externally deprived of the happiness he desires and deserves and that we desire for him, a situation merely frustrating or shocking. But *Clarissa* is not shocking in an aesthetically unpleasant way, because it does not fulfill Aristotle’s implicit conditions. Clarissa is not deprived of but, at the behest of an ethical imperative which forbids self-gratification, voluntarily gives up all objects of earthly desire. But more than that, she gives up desire itself; she wills finally, as her commitment to principle demands, not to will, not to desire anything earthly, even life itself. Rather, she actively desires death as a positive, pleasurable good, and we are made to believe in and at an admiring distance to sympathize with that desire. She is not a good person,
then, whose desires are frustrated, but a good person whose desires, in a strange way, are fully realized. Unlike the usual tragic situation, Clarissa’s involves her conscious, willed choice, at every step along the way, of her own personal moral good, clearly perceived as it is present in the situation in which she finds herself. She chooses her fate as the true tragic protagonist does not, without moral mistake (except in a token sense), and she remains ethically impeccable to the end, blaming herself but free of blame.

Despite Clarissa’s positive choice of her fate and lack of blame in it, her story would still be unsatisfactory if the reader did not also take satisfaction in the outcome, and to secure that satisfaction was Richardson’s primary problem in constructing the ending. His solution was simple: to make it appear that Clarissa would find her full and proper reward in heaven. But this appearance was difficult to achieve within the limits of a form which could display only the phenomena of this world. One dimension of Richardson’s solution was his successful representation of Clarissa’s own serene conviction, expatiated upon and dramatized in her long renunciation of life, that her destiny was indeed her Father’s house in heaven. But the most brilliant part of the solution was the development of a possibility latent in Richardson’s use of the letter form as a story-telling vehicle. By presenting posthumously Clarissa’s long will and a number of her letters to various persons, Richardson achieved the wonderful effect of giving Clarissa’s afterlife a seemingly concrete manifestation, whereas if her voice had ceased at her death, the effect would have been far different. In her letters she seems to speak fully, easily, and serenely after her death from the achieved perspective of immortality. At the same time that Richardson gives this affective proof of her afterlife, he concurrently represents other characters in a way that will enhance that sense. Even the best of those who remain after her death have no positive happiness, while those responsible for her death are punished with condign severity; everyone seems to have no thought but of Clarissa and her merits and her life beyond, so that the whole world of the novel seems to give a kind of negative testimony to her transcendent significance and existence.

The climax of this aspect of the book is Lovelace’s death scene, which is narrated as follows by the valet De La Tour:

Blessed—said he [Lovelace], addressing himself no doubt to Heaven; for his dying eyes were lifted up. A strong convulsion prevented him for a few moments saying more, but recovering, he again, with great fervour (lifting up his eyes and his spread hands), pronounced the word blessed. Then, in a seeming ejaculation, he spoke inwardly, so as not to be understood: at last, he distinctly pronounced these three words, LET THIS EXPIATE! And then, his head sinking on his pillow, he expired, at about half an hour after ten. (IV: 530)
The scene is constructed so as to give the most persuasive testimony possible to Clarissa’s presence in heaven. Here the great prevaricator—speaking in pain, at the point of death, and only for himself, since he is indifferent to De La Tour’s presence—is seen for once to be absolutely sincere. Through Lovelace’s words, much more through his gesture and attitude, which imply his thorough and undoubted conviction of Clarissa’s presence in beatitude above, the imagination of the reader is led to experience the fact of Clarissa’s immortality, all the more since De La Tour does not understand the implications of the scene, which are left to the reader’s own active inference and hence to his implicit belief.

Richardson’s maintenance of that impeccability in Clarissa’s choices which ultimately justifies her apotheosis presented him with some special problems of which I may briefly notice those surrounding first her elopement and then the rape. In order to free Clarissa of fault in the elopement, Richardson first develops a situation where it appears that Clarissa may not be able to resist the nefarious pressures or even forged processes that may be brought upon her to marry Solmes, and thus he makes acceptable but not impeccable the choice Lovelace offers of rescuing her and depositing her in some safe place. But Clarissa decides to withdraw from this choice (more dangerous than she knows, as we know) only to be obliged by Lovelace’s contrivance to meet him in the garden to revoke her tentative consent in person. Once there, Lovelace tricks her into his carriage by making it appear that her brother and father are about to burst out upon them, to their great danger at the hands of Lovelace. Thus, last, Clarissa chooses to run away not for her own salvation but for the sake of the others she is bound to hold dear. But now Richardson has contrived to maintain her impeccability while bringing her by choice into the moral bind he needs to generate her fate. From this point on, her freedom, though actual, is almost an illusion; she cannot thereafter really choose to profit by her choice, marry Lovelace, and live, without appearing retrospectively to have made a self-interested choice and thus being less than impeccable. When she steps into the carriage her doom is, as the melodramatic phrase goes, sealed.

But even as that doom develops against the apparent but always receding possibility that she and Lovelace can accept each other, we become more and more aware of the absolute opposition between their characters that prevents any actual rapprochement. Their characters are designed so as to be mutually exclusive in their potential choices. She will do nothing which, not dictated by principle, has the least hint of self-gratification about it, while he seeks from her, in gratification of his pride, a fearful, self-regarding acknowledgment of his power. (It is important to note that his desire is not basically sensual, as is consistently suggested by the fact that he remains indifferent to the other
women in Mrs. Sinclair’s house.) His primary wish is that she show herself less than an angel, acknowledging her fleshliness toward him. He wants to validate in respect of himself the proposition of Satan in Job 2:4, “Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life.” But she will give nothing, will not violate principle even for her life, and he will not spare her unless she does. For that matter, we understand clearly that he would not spare her even if she did, because she would then be less than perfect, and he would not want her. He can neither accept her perfection without the ultimate test which makes his possession of it impossible, nor would he have been able to accept her had she proved imperfect in the test.

Admiration and pity for Clarissa thus grow as the action leads inevitably toward the rape. But a difficulty for Richardson emerges with and in the rape. It is necessary that the violation which makes it impossible for Clarissa to live be a rape and that she be unconscious while it is perpetrated, or else she might seem in some sense to have assented, which would mar her perfection, as of course would marriage after the fact, an ethically acceptable temptation which all England seems to urge upon her. But in being raped, she emphatically does not choose and maintain her moral responsibility for her fate, and hence the principle of form of the book seems to fail: internal moral development is replaced by melodrama, with Clarissa a passive victim of external force. Richardson’s solution is the famous pen-knife scene, in which, after the pathos of Clarissa’s postrape situation has been fully developed, Clarissa splendidly faces Lovelace down, persuading both him and the reader that she will take her life rather than suffer further indignity. With this scene she has taken her fate once more into her own hands and afterwards is spiritually free of Lovelace, so that when she escapes the house a few hours later she is henceforward free of his physical presence and control.

This following out of the constructive logic implicit in the formal principle I have hypothesized locates something of Clarissa’s moral magnitude and cathartic power. It can also suggest the limits of its effectiveness as they derive from the same source, the need to sustain unto death Clarissa’s program of impeccable obedience to principle by means of which she seeks to contravene her natural desires, selfishness, and pride. Her implicit motto is “I will not do what I will; I will not gratify my selfish pride.” But that she will not gratify her pride is, of course, just her pride; in its own self-immolation her ego (or rather the reader’s) finds the gratification she has pervasively denied herself; her self-denial is the ground of the reader’s moral self-indulgence. Clarissa is cut off from responsibility and causally separated from the devastation wreaked by the rocket blast of her ascent to heaven. She forgives Lovelace and does not desire his punishment; she forgives all her enemies. Yet Lovelace dies miser-
ably and they die, satisfying in the reader the vengeance which he has admired Clarissa for giving up. In this sense, Clarissa is affectively similar to Pamela in that it requires the reader to tolerate in himself a moral ambiguity from which the heroine is presented as being free. But Clarissa, though it falls short of the agapemenous sublimity displayed by Cordelia in King Lear, achieves grandeur just because, unlike Pamela, it does dramatize the full price for moral pride, renouncing the early vanities which in Pamela are cherished. In essence it is an enactment of the you'll-be-sorry-when-I'm-dead-fantasy, but it is the grandest and most scarifying version of it imaginable in the stringency and relentlessness with which it carries the moral will to the extremity of death. It is an epic of righteousness, or rather self-righteousness, with the virtues and defects proper to such a work; but with its defects it is still a novelistic action of nearly incomparable massiveness and power.

Richardson’s last novel, Sir Charles Grandison, presents for explanation, within the terms I have used to consider its predecessors, the fact of its great critical popularity in its own and immediately succeeding times as compared with its marked neglect in our own era and in contrast with Clarissa. Why the great loss in power from the earlier to the later work? Space permits only a brief and schematic answer. Envious as always of Fielding, Richardson had been particularly scornful of Tom Jones and of the low and immoral adventures in which Fielding was willing to display his hero. Yet his own Lovelace, though antagonist and not protagonist, fell as much as Tom Jones under Johnson’s condemnation of mixed characters whose sympathetic attractions masked vice and made it seem attractive. Looking back on Lovelace and Mr. B., Richardson felt the point of his friends who urged him to paint a truly good man to put Fielding’s flawed hero in his proper light. And so, as is well known, it became Richardson’s specific intention in Grandison to present “the Example of a Man acting uniformly well thro’ a Variety of trying Scenes” (Preface to Sir Charles Grandison 1:4).

There was only one difficulty with Richardson’s plan. His decision to make a perfect hero meant that he could not develop an effective action. In his previous novels he could generate powerfully dynamic action structures through his impeccable heroines’ acts of moral resistance to the threatening advances of the male antagonists, thus creating a mounting sense of moral danger registered against a mounting sympathy. But a hero cannot be put in such a posture of passive resistance leading increasingly to danger without making him seem unheroically weak or ludicrous. And to make a successful action out of his positive choices would require either that he make mistakes inconsistent with his moral perfection or that the grounds of his acts be merely external and the action therefore melodramatic and independent of his internal moral state.
An action based on a courtship, as Richardson’s was, was even more limited: a morally perfect hero can only be attracted by and rewarded with a morally perfect heroine, but between two such paragons there cannot be any morally significant differences that can serve as the dynamic basis of a truly fateful separation between them. Richardson’s solution, such as it was, was to separate his hero Grandison from his heroine Harriet Byron by means of a prior semi-commitment Grandison has unblameably made to a third paragon, Lady Clementina della Poretta. The situation is artificial and not productive of morally dynamic action, but it does permit a semblance of action, while the real emotional effect lies in the episodes, Richardson’s “Variety of trying Scenes,” as occasions for displaying at large Grandison’s moral perfection. Richardson does all that he can to offset the inherent and essential dullness of a story in which the principals can make no real mistake and be in no real distress, by using novelistic means to lend interest to his characters and by using the resources of his genius to reconcile, as Jocelyn Harris says, “an inert mass of instruction with the demands of entertainment” (Introduction to *Sir Charles Grandison* xxiii).

But no degree of genius could truly vitalize an action stultified by its initial commitment to display its leading characters as moral paragons. And saying no more than this, we can find the solution to the first half of the problem noted above: the eighteenth century loved *Sir Charles Grandison* because, triply observing Johnson’s Rule, it was so full of beautiful conduct, an orgy of impeccabilities and delicacies, whereas later audiences are wearied by its lack of organic movement. The choices of the characters create and resolve no tension, and there is no catharsis. In short, we may say that its structure is such that eighteenth-century audiences were edified but that we are not delighted.

Richardson’s tripartite engagement with Johnson’s Rule left a distinct problem for his successors: how to construct an effective action in which both male and female protagonists were moral paragons. The solution was begun by Fanny Burney and completed by Jane Austen, with some help from Fielding. Fielding’s own struggle with the demands of moral action and related problems requires the attention of another essay, but for my purposes here I may say briefly that in his most relevant work, *Tom Jones*, he did present a hero who, despite the long history of moral complaints about him, was intended as a moral paragon—a man incapable of acts inconsistent with his perfect natural benevolence. The defects of *Tom Jones’s* virtues are flaws sufficient to generate an exemplary moral action of the comic kind, in which those defects are displayed as the partial cause of an apparently adverse fate before the actually happy fate generated by his virtues themselves finally appears. The hero’s internal activity is thus made causally integral with his external career, but Jones’s defects were too gross to pass muster by most eighteenth-century and even later standards (as already
noticed), and the comic attenuation Fielding employs to reduce our sense of the seriousness both of Jones’s lapses and his potential fate prevents us from having anything like the close view of his internal moral life that Richardson offers in his novels. But with the resource of the comic action provided by Fielding, new solutions were possible to the dilemma which had stultified Grandison. If in a comic novel the fateful issues were made less materially serious than in Tom Jones, and the hero and heroine given correlated imperfections not amounting to moral faults, a relative closeness of psychological transcription would be possible which could maintain moral interest and significance without imperiling the sacrosanct status of the paragons. The closer and more sensitive the transcription, the less materially momentous the separating moral issue would have to be to achieve affective balance, and here we see the basis of two apparently contradictory views of the Jane Austen novel as on the one hand a tempest in a teapot and on the other a wonder of fine psychological and moral analysis.

The halfway house to Austen was, of course, Fanny Burney. We need be concerned here only with her first novel, Evelina, for only in that novel, written in obscure anonymity, was she able to be free from the burdens of propriety which increasingly crushed the life out of her late novels. Borrowing from Grandison her paragon hero and heroine, Lord Orville and Evelina, Burney reduced their dignity and the high seriousness of their moral concerns in a way appropriate to the reduced scope of the comic action in which she placed them. In the early stages of the story she allows Evelina’s choices to create her own fate in somewhat the same manner as Tom Jones’s do. We are in general assured that Evelina, beautiful and impeccable but provincial and naïve, will eventually, though we know not how, be rewarded by marriage to Orville, but in the meantime we are treated to the spectacle of Evelina in her naïvete committing faux pas which would seem to doom her romantic hopes but which are nevertheless overcome with perfect aplomb by the endlessly considerate Orville. By reducing the heroine’s defect to a merely social ineptitude, Burney is able to present her as a moral paragon while still organically creating a suspense in which we closely participate. But this solution was imperfect. The defect attributed to Evelina was lacking in moral significance and, accidental and circumstantial as it was, could not be used to generate the whole action. If Evelina had continued the line of inept social choices with which the action so effectively begins, she would increasingly have seemed a fool, unworthy of Orville’s love and the reader’s sympathy. The result was that Burney was forced to relocate the sources of the separating embarrassments outside the heroine in the Branghtons, a band of low bourgeois relatives to whom Evelina is not affectionally committed but whose association she cannot for various reasons, including those of propriety, escape. The result is a wonderfully excruciating series of embarrassments, but
the point of her predicament is that she is not responsible for her relatives’ vulgarity and other shortcomings, though she seems doomed to suffer from them.

The climax of this development comes when the Branghtons, in Evelina’s name, crudely demand the use of Lord Orville’s carriage from his servants and, after setting her down, become involved in an accident that damages the carriage. The sequel is narrated to Evelina next morning by an egregiously conceited vulgarian cousin, who tells her of his visit to ask Lord Orville’s pardon, gaining entree again by use of Evelina’s name. Lord Orville receives the visit with characteristic politeness, whereupon the cousin offers a further encroachment as follows:

“... so it come into my head, as he was so affable, that I’d ask him for his custom. So I says, says I, my Lord, says I, if your Lordship i’n’t engaged particularly, my father is a silversmith, and he’ll be very proud to serve you, says I; and Miss Anville, as danced with you, is his cousin, and she’s my cousin too, and she’d be very much obligated to you, I’m sure.” “You’ll drive me wild,” cried I, starting from my seat, “you have done me an irreparable injury;—but I will hear no more!”—and then I ran into my own room. I was half frantic, I really raved; the good opinion of Lord Orville seemed now irretrievably lost; . . . for the rest of my life, he would regard me as an object of utter contempt. (Burney, *Evelina* 234)

This is as far as the secondary line of development can be taken, and Burney immediately after develops out of this the first of a number of largely external melodramatic devices to maintain and increase suspense until such time as she can dramatize the closing fullness of mutual understanding which Orville and Evelina achieve as a prelude to their union. Thus Burney was able neither to generate her action from within her characters nor to make morally significant the internal dimension of the action which she did manage to realize. Her location of her heroine’s embarrassments outside of her control but impinging on her sense of responsibility—she suffers from them because she appears responsible for them—is the characteristic feature of her work. Considering the matter a little more closely, we can see that the external embarrassments through which Evelina suffers constitute an appeal to that side of ourselves which locates the source of our social insecurities in persons or situations other than ourselves. It is not I but the others, my relatives, who are so vulgar (our weaker self says), and I am not responsible for them. The nightmare of social embarrassment is exquisitely realized in the book, but it is nightmare and, despite the degree to which it is brought to objective dramatization, requires a kind of indulgence of the insecure, snobbish part of our nature against the other side of mature responsibility. The psyche is flattered
but not forced to self-knowledge and confrontation of the submerged moral issues involved, which is why we find Evelina today still amusing where it does not seem stilted, but not deeply moving.

We can begin to understand Jane Austen’s contribution to the development I have been tracing by setting against the episode of Evelina’s outrageous cousin an episode from Northanger Abbey remarkably similar in structure but significantly different in quality. The Thorpes in concert with Catherine’s brother have renewed plans to visit Blaise Castle but discover that Catherine has engaged herself (for a second time) to walk with Miss Tilney. Her friends urge her to cancel the engagement for the sake of their collective pleasure: “she must and should retract, was instantly the eager cry of both the Thorpes; they must go to Clifton tomorrow, they would not go without her, it would be nothing to put off a mere walk for one day longer, and they would not hear of a refusal” (Northanger Abbey 97). But Catherine will not be moved: “do not urge me, Isabella. I am engaged to Miss Tilney. I cannot go.” Still her friends press her, making every unfair and selfish appeal, and her brother joins his voice strongly to theirs. “I did not think you had been so obstinate, Catherine; . . . you once were the kindest, best-tempered of my sisters” (99–100). “I hope I am not less so now,” she replied, very feelingly; “but indeed I cannot go. If I am wrong, I am doing what I believe is right.” But external circumstance in the person of John Thorpe intervenes to shape her fate (as he had on the previous day deflected her from her first date to walk with Miss Tilney). He has left the discussion for a few minutes and rejoins them with a gay look, saying:

“Well, I have settled the matter, and now we may all go tomorrow with a safe conscience. I have been to Miss Tilney and made your excuses.” “You have not!” cried Catherine. “I have, upon my soul. Left her this moment. Told her you had sent me to say, that having recollected a prior engagement of going to Clifton with us to-morrow, you could not have the pleasure of walking with her till Tuesday. She said very well, Tuesday was just as convenient to her; so there is an end of all our difficulties.—A pretty good thought of mine—hey?” (100)

Isabella and James are pleased but Catherine is not. “This will not do,” she says, and sets off, despite efforts to restrain her, to find Miss Tilney. “I will go after them,” said Catherine; “wherever they are I will go after them. It does not signify talking. If I could not be persuaded into doing what I thought wrong, I never will be tricked into it” (101). The analogy of the scene with that where young Branghton speaks to Lord Orville about the carriage is close, but how different the effect. Austen has built into her scene of social embarrassment a dimension of moral agency and responsibility that serves to integrate a serious
moral intention with her need to develop an organic and affectively potent action, and this serves to raise the pleasure of the scene into a range of moral value that Burney never touches but that is Austen’s characteristic register.

Further consideration of the principle of structural difference in similarity of the scenes from *Evelina* and *Northanger Abbey* allows us to describe a striking relation between *Evelina* and the first drafted of Austen’s novels, *Pride and Prejudice*. The title of Austen’s novel is, of course, taken from Burney’s second novel, *Cecilia*, a fact that helps us to direct our attention to the initial change which Austen made in the paired paragons she drew from *Evelina* as Burney had taken them from *Grandison*. Darcy and Elizabeth are given imperfections not amounting to moral faults—pride and prejudice, a short but adequate description—which serve as the beginning but not the full substance of their separations, a substance which can be seen to derive so remarkably, not from *Cecilia* but from *Evelina*, that one might almost say that *Pride and Prejudice* is *Evelina* transformed according to the principle already specified for the scene in *Northanger Abbey*, namely, that those characters represented as responsible for the paragon’s adverse fate but as having no claim upon her affections and thus her sense of moral responsibility, be represented as having such a claim and requiring such responsibility.

*Evelina* is committed early to the unwanted chaperone Mme. Duval, her grandmother, a volubly vulgar, aggressive, and déclassé woman, through circumstances scarcely known to Evelina and, except for the fact of kinship, alien to her in every respect. Thus developed, Mme. Duval is calculated to be a powerful source of social embarrassment and distress to Evelina without posing any real threat to her intrinsic status or any real problem in moral accommodation to either Evelina or Orville. Austen modulates the almost surrealistic stridency of this figure into Mrs. Bennet, a normally vulgar mother whose propinquity Elizabeth must from the first acknowledge and respect, while within that respect ultimately conceding that her mother’s deficiencies offer Darcy reasonable grounds for his misjudged advice to Bingley. In parallel fashion, the tradesmen cousins of Evelina, the Branghtons, become Elizabeth’s city cousins, the Gardiners, but whereas the Branghtons are occasions of embarrassment whom Evelina can snobbishly scorn and reject, the Gardiners exemplify fully the cultivated values on which the evaluations of the book are based, so that the values are thus emphatically defined as more than class values, as Darcy’s easy acceptance of the Gardiners underlines. Austen makes the same point from another direction with Lady Catherine de Bourgh, a second upper-class relative of Mme. Duval, whose boorishness also bears witness against the identification made in *Evelina* (though to some extent dramatically qualified) of manners with class, and so provides a full expression of the barriers of class pride which
Darcy in moral autonomy must cross to claim Elizabeth. The result of this system of transpositions is, like that in *Northanger Abbey*, to bring within the range of consciousness and dramatized moral responsibility elements of feeling which are repressed in *Evelina* and thus to strengthen probability and morally enrich the suspense structure of the book.

A further borrowing involves the conversion of Sir Clement Willoughby into Wickham. In *Evelina*, Willoughby is used as a melodramatic threat to the heroine, a covert external expression of internal feeling. Wickham's sexual attractiveness to Elizabeth is directly represented in an early episode where her muted physical infatuation is expressed in an implicit but distinct fashion that permits psychological honesty but preserves her status as a paragon. The full reality of Wickham's sexual threat is deflected to expression in his off-stage elopement with Lydia; thus the sexual dimension of courtship is acknowledged without compromising either the moral purity or realistic integrity of the story. And these characters are then nicely reintegrated into the main action as a final barrier to the marriage of Elizabeth and Darcy. By this means Darcy can be presented with an opportunity to display with gratifying probability and intelligence, as Elizabeth had earlier done in revising, against the grain and in response to good evidence, her mistaken estimate of him.

In short, Austen in *Pride and Prejudice* achieves a solution to the problems presented to the action novelist by the didactic elements reflected in what I have called Johnson's Rule. She does this by creating a morally impeccable, yet entirely natural, hero and heroine who are first separated from each other, not by circumstance but by significant misjudgments not amounting to moral error, defects deriving from appropriate strengths of their splendid characters—Darcy's pride in his inherited station, and Elizabeth's prejudice against Darcy which arises from a proper pride in herself. Austen then amplifies and supports this original rift by means of the protagonists’ relationships to characters whose qualities and actions are themselves morally problematical, without damaging the essential impeccability of the protagonists. She thus achieves a novelistic action which is fully and honestly edifying and completely delightful. 3

Austen's other two early novels, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Northanger Abbey*, also repay analysis as structures resulting from conflicts between the action structure and didactic intentions less specific than those expressed in the requirements of Johnson's Rule. Austen's creative intention in *Northanger Abbey* was not to parody the gothic novel but rather to incorporate in a comic action a reference to it that would define a correctible defect in the heroine's understanding of the world so as to measure the realistic or confrontational fantasy of the gothic mode. Though the incorporation of the alien matter is as complete as the nature of the constructional situations allows, the final effect is to render
the action a bit top-heavy and lacking in the full substance of the other books. Sense and Sensibility is a work with which few of Austen’s readers are fully satisfied, yet whose precise formal deficiencies are hard to define. Some see the formal rationale of the work in an intention to contrast the systems of thought and value of the two sisters, as indicated in the title. But this merely didactic or thematic conception does not do justice to the actual dramatic power of the work, which can be analyzed quite effectively as developed in action terms. The precise formal situation can be expressed if we say that, though the work is entirely developed as an action, the first choice of a structural core for the book, the choice of the contrasting sisters, cannot be explained as being inherently appropriate to an action as are the choices of Pamela and Mr. B., for instance, or Elizabeth and Darcy, but only as appropriate to a didactic intention. We have in Sense and Sensibility, then, a different kind of example of the impingement upon the action form of the requirement that novels be morally instructive. The idea that Austen in this instance built an action novel on a didactic base I believe can be used to develop an analysis which will explain quite well its feel to us and its puzzlements.

Austen’s later novels—except perhaps Persuasion, where, eyes to the sea, her art looks toward fresher formal possibilities—are touched in fairly obvious ways by the pressures of eighteenth-century didacticism. After her the action novel was to undergo new lines of development, but the novel of moral action and its concomitant formal problems came to an end with her, partly because the line had reached its perfection, but more largely because later novelists threw Johnson’s Rule and related didactic baggage out the window, as Becky Sharp did his Dictionary, en route from the restraints of the academy to new and less trammeled pleasures.

Notes

1. See Crane’s “The Concept of Plot and the Plot of Tom Jones” and Sacks’s Fiction and the Shape of Belief (cf. 26–27, 268–69).
2. See the author’s “Defoe, Richardson, Joyce and the Concept of Form in the Novel” (34–35). [Editors’ Note: Chapter 8 of this volume.]
3. My view of the structure of Pride and Prejudice has been significantly influenced by that of Sheldon Sacks as briefly sketched in his “Golden Birds and Dying Generations” (285–87). See also Walter Anderson’s cognate but more extended analysis in “Plot, Character, Speech, and Place in Pride and Prejudice.”
4. For a cogent and much fuller account of the interrelation of the action structure and gothic material in Northanger Abbey, see Walter Anderson, “From Northanger Abbey to Woodston: Catherine’s Education in Common Life.”
In his “Reply to David Richter: Ideology and Form in Fielding’s Tom Jones,” John Richetti follows Terry Eagleton (and Clifford Geertz) in offering a “rehabilitated” concept of ideology as “no longer just the pernicious and conspiratorial legitimating strategies of the dominant class but rather . . . ‘a realm of contestation and negotiation’”; “not only as a legitimating opposition from above but also and more usefully as an inevitable and necessarily complex negotiation . . . within a culture for what social life and its organization are to mean for its participants” (206). Richetti goes on to examine Tom Jones as a work “especially relevant to the question of ideology and form in the novel, since it has some salient features that locate it (in mid-eighteenth-century terms, of course) right in the middle of our current struggle to understand how literature is inseparable from a refined or re-complicated notion of ideology” (209). But Richetti begins by reiterating something close to the negative view of ideology in Tom Jones for which he had been criticized by Richter:

To be sure, in the final analysis Fielding’s novel is a pretty good instance of most of the operations that define ideology in the bad old sense as legitimation by a dominant group. Naturalizing, universalizing, denigrating, excluding, and obscuring as Eagleton describes them are clearly at work in Tom Jones. As the majority of its commentators until recently have taught us, in Fielding’s novel a comic artifice featuring a resolving uniformitarianism and universalism takes over to some extent and naturalizes everything and everyone. Tom Jones seems to be ideological in what might be called the classic and negative sense of the term. (209)
But Richetti also sees a “rehabilitated” ideology as present, in *Tom Jones* and other novels, in a more positive (and contradictory?) sense, not as an imposition from above, but as involving “the dynamic interaction between moral values and social experience” of characters (and authors) as individual agents. Indeed, “the best novels of the period are precisely about tracing the possible ways of accommodating ideology to the painful experience of a secular world dominated by economic rapacity and unsentimental material interests.” Here ideology is understood, in the Geertzian sense Richetti also develops, as a validating conception (faith, belief) deployed not only against competing conceptions but in the face of and in response to external socioeconomic circumstances. In one formulation, the comic form of *Tom Jones* is now said to have a positive role: “By virtue precisely of its comic classicizing and satiric disdain for the self-seeking amorality of mid-century life, *Tom Jones* is a novelistic rendition of the inescapable ideological conditions of social life in England in the 1740s” (210), while in another “Fielding’s comic panorama” is still held to be “reductive” (though satisfying) “in its simplicities and symmetries” (211). In keeping with his earlier claim that “literature is inseparable from a refined or re-complicated notion of ideology,” Richetti concludes finally that it is “exactly the persistence of the ideological next to and indeed squarely within the comedy that makes *Tom Jones* the masterpiece it is” (216). “Masterpiece” is a suspect term these days, and Richetti early on disdains the idea that there is any “realm of timeless truth” (205) beyond ideology in which masterpieces are situated, but he nonetheless seems to think of masterpieces as being at least relatively timeless just because their forms display an admixture of the ideological. But how is a time-bound “rendition of the conditions of social life in 1740s England” actually dynamically melded into the unified reading experience of a “structured comic artifact” like *Tom Jones*?

My own answer to this takes off from R. S. Crane’s classic description of the comic form of *Tom Jones*, which I feel neglects the complex historico-ideational dimensions of that form. What follows offers an alternative formulation to Richetti’s of the ways in which the formal and ideological in *Tom Jones* are functionally integrated.

I may begin with some intellectual autobiography, starting with an account of my meeting Crane at Indiana University long ago when he was a visiting professor and I a graduate student. I had then been working on a dissertation study of Fielding’s novels as functions of his Latitudinarian faith (following the lead of my director, James A. Work) and was of course eager and awed to think of meeting Crane, who seemed to know more about the Latitudinarians and eighteenth-century thought in general than anyone. But it was just because of Crane’s mastery of the historical background that I was troubled and puzzled
by the essay on *Tom Jones*. As I told Crane when I bounced into his office for a talk about it all, I could not make out why someone who knew as much about the historical setting of the novel as he did should deliberately choose to write a totally ahistorical analysis of it, and I went on to detail my view of the shape and intelligibility of *Tom Jones* and Fielding’s other novels as constituting an imaginative rehearsal of faith in his Latitudinarian version of the world. Crane listened at first with amusement but finally (I am glad to say) with some respect, without as I recall saying a great deal in explicit answer to my question, so that I did not then gain much further understanding of his views. That came later, at Berkeley, as I argued about Fielding with Sheldon Sacks, whose views had been much shaped by Crane’s. Sacks would point out insistently that the life and reality of a novel, of *Tom Jones*, lay in its power to move a reader in the act of reading, to induce him to accept its illusion and feel its effect, so that a twentieth-century reader, taking *Tom Jones* from a drugstore rack, could find himself in immediate contact with its moving aesthetic force, that is to say, with the essential meaning and value of the novel. Despite my own quite passionate sense of the fact that the value of literature, however described, was indeed inseparable from its immediate power to move (it was this sense, in truth, which had brought me into the profession), I nevertheless saw Crane and Sacks as too narrowly preoccupied with what I thought of as the mere “affective mechanics” of literature as opposed to its significant connection with the world. But my analysis of Fielding’s novels as functions of his ideas was tending to an inevitable conclusion quite at odds with my appreciation of the primacy of the fact of their twentieth-century vitality: the conclusion that the meaning and significance of the novels was limited by their eighteenth-century context. Listen to me, I was ready to say after my studies, and I will take you back from the twentieth century and show you the wonderful meaning the novels could and did have for Fielding and his like-minded contemporaries; but that put their meaning and value back from the twentieth century into the eighteenth, and my statement of the value of the novels in terms of embodied ideas (I had to admit to myself) tended to thin out and dilute my actual sense of their concrete imaginative qualities, particularly their comedy. More and more I had to recognize that the historico-functional explanation was to some degree at odds with the facts of reading experience and with the experienced fact of the transtemporal nature of literary value. In consequence I began to concentrate my critical interests on the problem of understanding the formal power of the concrete work to move the reader in the act of reading and so became a postgraduate pupil of Crane and Sacks and a fellow traveler in the neo-Aristotelian fraternity. From the first, however, and increasingly, I have been something of a dissident and schismatic because of my continued dissatisfaction with the neo-Aristotelian emphasis on the aesthetic autonomy of the literary work, which cuts its lifelines off from
their sources in the writer’s individual purposes and agency, describing it in terms solely of a formal blueprint of an effect which might have been realized by any artist of sufficient capacity at any place, in any time. My own impulse was to preserve something of my original historical emphasis by following out even more radically the revisionist tendencies of Sacks and Wayne Booth and conceiving the literary work and its effect as immanently shaped and conditioned by extra-aesthetic dimensions of the author’s creative intention which in fact are experienced if only tacitly as part of the work’s concrete significance and value.

Now the correctness of something like this view of literary effect is in fact conceded by Crane at the end of his *Tom Jones* essay, where he specifies that his method is one which depends on the analytical isolation of works of art, as finished products, from the circumstances and processes of their origin. It is better fitted to explain those effects which would be specifically the same in any other work, of whatever date, that was constructed in accordance with the same combination of artistic principles, than those effects which must be attributed to the fact that the work was produced by a given artist, in a given period, at a given stage in the evolution of the species or tradition to which it belongs. Just below he reemphasizes the power he claims his method does have to analyze the literary work as “a self-contained whole endowed with a power of affecting us in a particular way by virtue of the manner in which its internal parts are conceived and fitted together” (“Concept of Plot” 646–47). But this assertion is in some tension, not to say contradiction, with the larger passage quoted, where he speaks of “effects” which must be attributed to the influences of external circumstances. But such extrinsically derived effects must be just as much a part of our experience of the work as “a self-contained whole” as those which are intrinsically derived.¹

This conclusion would seem clearly to require that any full analysis of a work’s effect take extrinsic influences into account to the degree that they modify and organically enter into the work as intrinsically experienced, since no account in terms of timeless artistic principles can render the work fully intelligible in its actual concrete construction as created by the time-bound author and registered by the reader. But apparently Crane never completely followed out this line of thought, and certainly never offered an example of practical criticism based upon it, partly I think because the pluralism to which he was so deeply committed encouraged him in actual analysis to separate the intrinsic from the extrinsic, partly because he thought of external influences as sufficiently subsumed, for practical critical purposes, in the purely affective intention of the work. Whatever the reason, I think that his conception of the structure of *Tom Jones* as the cause of its effect, though accurate in its location of the innermost moving principle of the work, is significantly incomplete, in ways that I shall indicate in the balance of this essay.
Crane develops his analysis of *Tom Jones* as an imitation of a comic action. The neo-Aristotelian emphasis on literature as imitation or representation in my view offers, if adequately adapted, a more potent basis for explaining the imaginative properties and effects of literary works than contrasting conceptions of literature as some kind of mediated propositional or ideological discourse. It is important to note that the neo-Aristotelian idea of imitation has no reference, as do other contemporary notions of mimesis, to any notion of literature as reflecting, in the sense of having some truth relation to, the external world or the human beings in it. (This is an important point to which I shall be returning later.) The neo-Aristotelian conception refers rather to the fact that matter that is not a thing can be so disposed that we see that thing in it: in the presence of a piece of stone worked by Michelangelo we see Moses starting in anger; reading what is merely language we seem to be with Tom Jones striding down the highway to London. Imitations offer us an integral *object* of imitation, realized in a specific *medium* (which in literature is always of course language), by an artist working in a certain *manner* of representation, to achieve a distinctive working or *power*, which is the effect realized in and by the whole, and for the sake of which the whole *as* a whole is presumed to exist.

In the *Tom Jones* essay Crane sketches a number of general formal possibilities for extended mimetic forms as realizable in the dramatic or narrative manner. He thought of any extended action as involving the representation of a protagonist undergoing a completed change in fortune (or character or thought) for the sake of a spectrum of effects ranging from the tragic to the comic. *Tom Jones* achieves its affective vitality through those artistic choices of Fielding which give it a pervasively comic working or power. Generally speaking, we can think of any successfully realized action as raising concern for a protagonist by developing a dynamic tension between what we think ought to happen to him—his desert—and what we think will in fact happen to him—his fate—in the short and long run, and then resolving that tension by an extension of the means used to raise it so as to give us the greatest satisfaction in the whole. In a comic action there is developed in us from the first and throughout a sense of reassurance that the adverse long run fate which threatens and causes our concern for the protagonist we are led to favor will somehow not eventuate, though we see not how; and meanwhile our response to the painful short run predicaments in which the protagonist is involved as a condition of his apparently adverse fate is sharply attenuated, so that what would otherwise be painful is experienced by the reader as a kind of pleasure. (One can think here of that movie cartoon rabbit suddenly handed a bomb which, before he can react, blows him in pieces; we laugh at what in actual life would be horrifying because we have no doubt that the pieces will reassemble into our familiar animal friend.
and because we are meanwhile not shown the bodily dismemberment as involving any bloody tearing of fur and flesh.)

In a comic as in all actions, Crane notes, our view of the protagonist's desert and fate is conditioned among other things by “the opinions we are made to entertain concerning the degree and kind of his responsibility for what happens to him, as being either little or great and, if the latter, the result either of his acting in full knowledge of what he is doing or of some sort of mistake” (632). The special quality of *Tom Jones*, Crane goes on to say, derives from our general feeling of comic security about Tom’s ultimate fate together with “our perception of the decisive role which Tom’s own blunders are made to play, consistently, in the genesis of all the major difficulties into which he is successively brought—always of course with the eager assistance of Fortune and of the malice or misunderstanding of others” (635–36). Viewing his final fate against the dark background of the potentially serious developed in the novel, “we are not disposed to feel, when we are done laughing at Tom, that all is right with the world or that we can count on Fortune always intervening, in the same gratifying way, on behalf of the good” (638).2

By this entire formula Crane means to locate in an explicit conception the basis of our dynamic emotional response, our feelingful interest, in reading *Tom Jones*, a response the causes of which normally lie below the threshold of the reader’s awareness, giving life to his experience of the novel; just because it is the form of our immediate experience of the novel, the principle of its intelligibility and force, it can be neglected by critics who nonetheless stand on its solid if unacknowledged ground in erecting their own interpretations. We can understand the analytic bearing of the formula, and eventually something of the incompleteness I have mentioned, if we take an extended look at the episode in which Jones, in prison, has reached the nadir of his fortune. Believing himself given up by Sophia and subject to hanging as the seeming murderer of Fitzpatrick, he hears even worse news from Partridge who comes into his prison room in the wake of Mrs. Waters’s departure: Fielding describes Partridge as “stumbling into the Room with his Face paler than Ashes, his Eyes fixed in his Head, his Hair standing on End, and every Limb trembling,” looking as he would have done had “he seen a Spectre, or had he indeed been a Spectre himself.” Daunted by his appearance, Jones asks him what is the matter.

> “The Matter, Sir? O good Heaven!” answered Partridge, “was that Woman who is just gone out, the Woman who was with you at Upton?”—“She was, Partridge,” cries Jones.—“And did you really, Sir, go to Bed with that Woman?” said he trembling. “I am afraid what past between us is no secret,” said Jones. “Nay, but pray, Sir, for Heaven’s Sake, Sir, answer me,” cries Partridge. “You know I did,” cries Jones. “Why,
then, the Lord have Mercy upon your Soul, and forgive you,” cries Partridge; “but as sure as I stand here alive, you have been a-Bed with your own Mother.”

“Upon these Words,” Fielding continues,

Jones became in a Moment a greater Picture of Horror than Partridge himself. He was, indeed, for some Time struck dumb with Amazement, and both stood staring wildly at each other. At last his Words found Way, and in an interrupted Voice he said, “How! how! What’s this you tell me?” “Nay, sir,” cries Partridge, “I have not Breath enough left to tell you now, but what I have said is most certainly true. That Woman who now went out is your own Mother. How unlucky it was for you, Sir, that I did not happen to see her at that Time, to have prevented it! Sure the Devil himself must have contrived to bring about this Wickedness.”

Jones replies:

“What thou has told me, Partridge, hath almost deprived me of my Senses! And was Mrs. Waters, then—But why do I ask? for thou must certainly know her. . . . O good Heavens! Incest—with a mother! To what am I reserved!” He then fell into the most violent and frantic Agonies of Grief and Despair.

The narrator then comments:

If the Reader will please to refresh his Memory, by turning to the Scene at Upton, in the Ninth Book, he will be apt to admire the many strange Accidents which unfortunately prevented any Interview between Partridge and Mrs. Waters, when she spent a whole Day there with Mr. Jones. Instances of this Kind we may frequently observe in Life, where the greatest Events are produced by a nice Train of little Circumstances; and more than one Example of this may be discovered by the accurate Eye, in this our History. (Tom Jones 18.2.915–16; emphasis original)

After Partridge returns from a fruitless search for Mrs. Waters, Jones, in “a State of Desperation,” becomes “almost raving mad” at Partridge’s report, and in this condition receives and reads the following letter from Mrs. Waters:

Sir—Since I left you I have seen a Gentleman, from whom I have learned something concerning you that greatly surprizes and affects me; but as I have not at present Leisure to communicate a Matter of such high Importance, you must suspend your Curiosity till our next Meeting, which shall be the first Moment I am able to see you. Oh, Mr. Jones, little did I think, when I past that happy Day at Upton, the Reflection
upon which is likely to embitter all my future Life, who it was to whom I owed such perfect Happiness. Believe me to be ever sincerely your unfortunate J. Waters

P. S. I would have you comfort yourself as much as possible, for Mr. Fitzpatrick is in no Manner of Danger; so that whatever other grievous Crimes you may have to repent of, the Guilt of Blood is not among the Number.

Jones

having received the Letter, let it drop (for he was unable to hold it, and indeed had scarce the Use of any one of his Faculties). Partridge took it up, and having received Consent by Silence, read it likewise; nor had it upon him a less sensible Effect. The Pencil, and not the Pen, should describe the Horrors which appeared in both their Countenances. (18.2.916–17; emphasis original)

Our feelingful response to this episode is predicated, as elsewhere in the book, on our sense of Jones's immediate and ultimate fate in relation to his immediate and ultimate desert. At this darkest point in the decline of his fortunes, our view of Tom's fate is not the one taken by him and Partridge. We do not feel the horror they feel because we do not believe in the impending Oedipal doom as they do. Partridge's often demonstrated fallibility and gullibility do not encourage us to place the reliance on his testimony and conviction that Tom does, and we see Tom's belief—“for thou must certainly know her”—as characteristically precipitous, exemplifying the impulsiveness which has brought him into so much needless trouble before. Mrs. Waters's letter seems to confirm Tom's conclusions, but the reader sees that it does not actually do so and, in implication and tone, contains a good deal of evidence to the contrary, so that the reader actually views it as sufficient to sustain Tom's horrified belief while offering further support to the reader's sense that such response is premature, especially in the postscript about Fitzgerald which shows a silver lining at the edge of the dark cloud of Tom's fate. This judgment is strongly reinforced by the narrator's marked unconcern as implied in his digressive dissertation on causality in the story. Thus, despite the illusion of disaster, the reader maintains his long-term reassurance as to Tom's eventual good fate, but since he has no material knowledge to the contrary of what lies beneath the appearances, he has the intensest interest in how—not whether—Tom's happiness is to be brought about.

Meanwhile the reader's sense of Jones's immediate fate—his painful predicament of even believing that he has committed incest—is here as elsewhere sharply attenuated by the emotional distance produced by Fielding's generalized description, rather than close transcription, of Tom's "most violent and frantic
Agonies of Grief and Despair” and his use of conventional phrasing for the extremes of dark emotion—“Picture of Horror,” “struck dumb with Amazement,” etc. Such tired description is a distinct narrative virtue here, softening and comically stylizing Tom’s suffering. Concomitantly, we are not displeased to see Tom punished by his too eager belief because we feel that he has been reckless and deserves such punishment as warning and instruction; attenuated as it is, we in a certain sense enjoy his pain, and are pleased at the amendment in him promised by his recognition of his own responsibility as, in a passage I have not quoted, he cries:

Sure . . . Fortune will never have done with me, till she hath driven me to distraction.
But why do I blame Fortune? I am myself the Cause of all my Misery. All the dreadful Mischiefs which have befallen me, are the Consequences only of my own Folly and Vice. (18.2.915–16)

Jones had earlier told Mrs. Miller that he had already “resolved to quit a Life of which I was become sensible of the Wickedness as well as Folly” (17.5.894) and had told Mrs. Waters of “his Resolution to sin no more, lest a worst Thing should happen to him” (17.9.911), a resolution which has been validated by his refusal to respond to the several renewed advances of Mrs. Fitzpatrick, Lady Bellaston, and Mrs. Waters herself. This amendment, joined to the reader’s larger sense of his merits (considered below), is such as to give him at last a desert to match the great final shift in his fortune, from despair to happiness, which developments reflected in this episode conceal while actually advancing.

If the episode thus manifests the general dynamic character of a comic action as described by Crane, it also displays to our notice those qualities which Crane posits as distinctive to the novel: both in Tom’s reference to Fortune and the narrator’s disquisition on concatenating chains of little circumstances (as well as in Partridge’s references to ill-luck and the devil) we see the presence of that coincidentiality in the book which, in Crane’s view, makes Tom’s final good fate seem, in the face of his many indiscretions, a matter of good luck. Now Crane’s emphasis on the fact that we are made aware, against the background of serious evil in the world of the novel, that things do not always work out as well for others as for Tom is very well taken as a description of a primary quality of the overall effect; but the attribution of Tom’s personal good fate to luck does some injustice to our actual sense of Tom’s special qualities of goodness as portrayed and communicated in the novel. Crane sees our desires for Tom’s good fortune as deriving from the fact that he is better than anyone else in the novel and at least the equal of ourselves in moral quality, but this is not fully adequate to the imaginative sympathy Fielding develops in us for that inborn,
deeply instinctive goodness in Tom which reaches spontaneously out to the help and relief of others without any calculation of his own advantage. This peculiar goodness in Tom is everywhere portrayed and emphatically instanced in the book, standing out with special clarity because it is in such sharp contrast with the conduct of the majority calculatedly and hypocritically devoted to what Fielding calls the “art of thriving.” Tom is, as critics have perceived, Fielding’s version of the Latitudinarian “good-natured man,” one of those characterized by an innate “glorious lust of doing good” (Fielding, “Of Good Nature” 31). But why did not Crane, author of a classic and originating article about the genealogy of the man of feeling in the eighteenth century, fail to note the special historical quality of Tom’s goodness? Because, I think, of his assumption that characters in mimetic literary works are both presented and responded to as if they were real people in the natural world; to draw attention to the fact that the imitation of a character was mediated by an idea would violate the neo-Aristotelian doctrine that there is a great gulf fixed between the mimetic and didactic, the representational and ideational. Crane was right, of course, that Tom Jones is presented by Fielding and registered by readers not as an idea but as an imaginatively believable man, a point that those scholars who see Tom as the embodiment of doctrine go reductively astray in not bearing in mind; but this does not mean that his qualities as presented are in actual fact like those of a real human being or that we judge those qualities in the same terms that we would bring to bear in judging a real human being. (This is actually implicit in the neo-Aristotelian doctrine that imitation is not referentially mimetic.) The natural grounds of our sympathy and judgment are drawn upon and marshaled by Fielding in a very special way as he invests Tom’s character and career with values and circumstances, deeply colored by his own personal ideas and feelings as charged by his own character and experience, which ignite and sustain our caring for Tom and make us wish him well in a feelingful empathy more precious and special than Crane’s analysis allows.

But if Crane’s account of Tom’s moral nature is inadequate to define the full dimensions of his desert, so also is his account of Tom’s good nature as it causally conditions his fate. In assessing “the degree and kind of [Tom’s] responsibility for what happens to him,” Crane, as we have seen, puts great emphasis on the causal role of chance and Fortune and Tom’s impulsive indiscretions, without paying sufficient attention to the reader’s registration of the ways in which Tom’s spontaneously benevolent nature influences his fate. If we recognize that passioned indiscretions which are the defects of his benevolent virtues consistently condition Tom’s short-run bad luck, we need also to recognize that his acts of goodness in conjunction with fortuity create his ultimate good fate. Each of the several agents who in the denouement contribute directly to Tom’s
exculpation and the revelation of his identity—Mrs. Waters, most crucially, but also Mrs. Miller, Nightingale, and Square—is motivated by a signal act of spontaneous generosity on Tom’s part which binds that person to his cause and leaves him disposed to contribute in Jones’s final need. As Fielding implies in his comment quoted above, the causal connections are intricate and striking, and involve the interplay of Jones’s active goodness with the responses of a number of persons casually encountered, including for instance the beggarman who finds Sophia’s pocketbook and the highwayman Enderson who turns out to be Mrs. Miller’s son-in-law. The most central and prominent of these occurrences, however, involve the chain of events which bring Jones in touch with Mrs. Waters. The first of these is Jones’s stalwart rescue of the Man of the Hill, an event which causes him to tarry with the old man long enough to be the agent as well of the rescue of Mrs. Waters, and so leads directly to his involvement with her and finally to her crucial role in the revelations of the denouement. The precise circumstances of the rescue require attention. Hearing the screams of Mrs. Waters, Jones “ran, or rather slid, down the Hill, and, without the least Apprehension or Concern for his own Safety, made directly to the Thicket whence the Sound had issued” (9.2.495). After the rescue, we are shown the Man of the Hill sitting still on the crest of the hill, “where, tho’ he had a gun in hand, he with great Patience and Unconcern, attended the issue” (9.2.497). Thus Fielding indicates that it is Jones’s spontaneous propensity to help others, so emphatically in contrast with the contemplative hermit’s indifference, which is the necessary if not sufficient causal condition of the chain of events which leads him to his destiny.

Now Crane speaks not at all of Jones’s acts as causally conditioning his destiny because, thinking of the action in terms of a universal sense of life appropriate to a timeless work, there was no way to conceive of fortuities as other than a morally indifferent, causally unconnected aspect of universal human experience, an aspect which could be accepted to the degree that it was figured by Fielding as Fortune. If fortuity is so conceived, then Tom’s isolated acts of goodness obviously have no causal moral significance for the overall shape of the action. But this is not the way the action feels to the reader. As Dorothy Van Ghent pointed out long ago, “Fortune, capricious as it is, has some occult, deeply hidden association with Nature (in Fielding); therefore, in the long run, good nature does infallibly lead to good fortune, bad nature to bad fortune” (79). I shall consider more fully later why that “occult relationship” is actually felt by the reader as immanent in the action, but here we may note that its conceptual source, as has been indicated by several scholars, is clearly that Latitudinarian doctrine which held that whenever the operations of what men call accident, luck, chance, or fortune took on retrospective shape and significant
purpose, such operations were to be seen as those of Divine Providence. Consider Fielding’s remark about the nice trains of little circumstance in his novel in the light of this comment by his favorite divine, Isaac Barrow, on similar circumstantial trains in actual life:

If that one thing should hit advantageously to the production of some considerable event, it may with some plausibility be attributed to fortune, or common providence: yet that divers things having no dependence or coherence one with the other, in divers places, through several times, should all join their forces to compass it, cannot well otherwise than be ascribed to God’s special care wisely directing, to his own hand powerfully wielding, those concurrent instruments to one good purpose. For it is beside the nature, it is beyond the reach of fortune, to range various causes in such order. Blind fortune cannot apprehend or catch the seasons and junctures of things, which arise from the motions of causes indifferent and arbitrary: to it therefore no such event can reasonably be imputed. (118)

In *Tom Jones* the narrator himself only indirectly (though clearly) refers to the providential nature of fortuity in the novel, since to do otherwise would violate the notion of providence as hidden beneath the operation of second causes. But Fielding’s labeling is nonetheless unmistakable. Tom tells the Man of the Hill, for instance, that “Providence alone” has sent him to his assistance. “Providence, indeed,’ cries the old Gentleman, ‘if it be so.’—‘So it is, I assure you,’ cries *Jones.* . . . ‘Be thankful then to that Providence to which you owe your Deliverance” (8.10.448). And to Mrs. Waters Jones says that “Heaven seemed to have designed him as the happy Instrument of her Protection” (9.2.496), and the narrator himself, some pages on, speaks of Jones’s “providential Appearance” on that occasion (9.7.521). This kind of underlining appears at other points to reanimate the providential implication, most notably when Jones in prison declares his reliance on “a Throne still greatly superior” (17.9.908) and climactically later when, as the inner secrets of the action miraculously unfold, Allworthy declares that “The Lord disposeth all Things” (18.7.942).

Now why did Crane, who had read as many Latitudinarian sermons as any scholar who has since been concerned with Fielding, choose to term as Fortune and luck what Fielding finally labels providential? Because to recognize the presence of providentiality in the book would have been to admit into his timeless, mimetic conception of form an element that was clearly historical and didactic. But, as I have been and will be suggesting, this element of extrinsic origin can best be thought of as incorporated, not directly as doctrine, but as part of the represented action as incompletely described by Crane. My point, here as elsewhere, is that Crane, in his rigorous attempt to conceive *Tom Jones*
as an autonomous artistic construct directed toward an intrinsic effect caused himself to miss the full dimensions of the effect as actually intended and felt.

The dimensions of the book I have just spoken of fit fairly well as indicated into an enlarged if impure version of Crane’s notion of an organic comic action, but there are manifestly a number of other structural features of *Tom Jones* which can by no means be explained as resulting from the simple intention of constructing a comic action of the kind Crane describes. Why, we may ask, should a comic action centered on a single protagonist have in it such a wealth of characters from all levels of society? Why in purely artistic terms should it include glimpses of and encounters with the Jacobite rebellion of 1745? Why in a novel imitating concrete human action, we may ask further, should some characters—Tom Jones, Allworthy, Sophia, Western, Thwackum, Square—have quasi-universal, allegorical names? Why should a unified action include such digressive stories as those of the Man of the Hill and Mrs. Fitzpatrick? Finally, we may ask why, in a mimetic action of the kind Crane describes, free of didactic intent, Fielding should so emphatically declare that his work has a moral? We may ask these questions of Crane’s model, but we will get no answers, and we will get no answers because (once more) Crane’s model is not a complete model of Fielding’s intention in the work.

But Crane can help us to understand what that complete intention was. In a long note to the *Tom Jones* essay Crane is at pains to show how Aristotle’s conception of mimetic works as realized for the sake of purely affective ends was corrupted by the neoclassical emphasis on the merely rhetorical and didactic ends of literary art (617–19), so that it no longer offers an adequate account of the principles upon which mimetic works like *Tom Jones* (or *Hamlet* or *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*) are actually constructed. But this does not mean that inaccurate neoclassical description could not become a prescriptive influence on writers like Fielding seeking to construct a work in a particular genre, namely for him a comic epic in prose. I do not at all suggest that conscious ideas of what an epic ought to be constituted for Fielding the actual intrinsic working principle of his novel, but that in intuitively constructing an affectively vital work whose inner principle I would hold must be something like that described by Crane, Fielding accepted and attempted to accommodate certain extrinsic formal conceptions which he understood as part of epic decorum, and that this attempt to accommodate the concrete affective work to external doctrine presented him with problems of artistic construction the solutions of which left their distinct marks upon the work.

If we do in fact assume that Fielding’s intention was to construct a comic action as a comic epic, we get quite good explanation of the problematic features listed above and of others also. I do not want to claim that Fielding’s book
answers to the example of any previous work or to any one set of rules for the epic (as if it wholly could), but only to point out that these distinct but puzzling features can be seen to reflect common background doctrine about the epic as synthetically described for instance by H. T. Swedenberg in his well-known book on the theory of the epic in England. If we consult that volume, we can see that even such a seemingly aformal part of Fielding’s work as his suggestion that Allworthy’s character reflects that of Lord Lyttleton and Ralph Allen may not be merely flattery but a response to the notion, articulated by Dryden, that an epic writer might follow the precedent of Virgil and Spenser and represent his friends and patrons in his work (see Swedenberg 53).

Turning from this small but illustrative point to the larger features noticed above, we can see that the wide social scope of *Tom Jones*, embracing many real-life figures and places, including the background of the ’45, reflects the generally held doctrine that national history should be the basis of the epic, though the epic should properly be a mixture of history and fiction, or as Joseph Trapp had it, “partly real, and partly feign’d” (Trapp 330; qtd. in Swedenberg 160). But such a commitment to social inclusiveness and amplitude threatened disintegration to the action as an action; and we can understand Sheldon Sacks’s post-Crancean analysis of *Tom Jones* as a combined episodic and continuous action—in which some characters and lines of causation carry through the story, while some merely cross those lines with a local contribution to the action and disappear into a larger world (*Shape of Belief* 193–229)—as an empirical discovery of a structural feature, not logically envisioned by Crane’s conception, which is responsive to the problem posed by this aspect of Fielding’s intention. The problematic digressions in the novel can be somewhat similarly understood. Crane and Sacks argue (I think successfully) that the digressions are in fact made to function organically in the action as an action, but this does not explain why Fielding chose to introduce such shape-distorting elements in the first place. Acquaintance with neoclassical doctrine suggests, however, that they are deliberately introduced as “episodes”—like those of the *Odyssey* or *Paradise Lost*—suitable to, indeed demanded by, the tradition of the epic.

In analogous fashion, we can understand the universalizing names of the novel to result from the pressure of the specification, as in Fielding’s favorite Le Bossu, that the epic action be allegorical and universal. To make the story generally allegorical would have destroyed its effect as literal comic action, but by assigning some of his characters different kinds of generalizing names, Fielding could honor the doctrinal requirement and give his epic an appropriate breadth of reference and implication. This is a very different thing from making the characters stand for ideas or from attempting to fit the meanings suggested by the names into a pattern or relation of ideational significance. Again, one
can see that Sacks's extension of Crane's analysis to show how such characters as Square and Thwackum function in the action both as concrete characters and as types is in fact a description of Fielding's operational response to the disparate pressures of the intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions of his artistic intention.

Fielding's flat statement that he means his novel to have a specific moral, of which Crane takes no notice, is in direct general conflict with Crane's notion that literary works divide into watertight compartments of mimetic and didactic and is in specific conflict with his idea that any moral elements in a mimetic work are subordinated to its nondidactic effect. But Fielding's statement is of course in complete accord with the fact noted by Swedenberg that almost every critic of the period taught that "the epic is a great organ for the inculcation of virtue" (194) and the specific view of Le Bossu that a moral ought to be the underlying foundation of an epic action (vii, 28ff.). It is interesting then to note once more that Sacks's revision and extension of Crane's account of the action structure of *Tom Jones* should discover the presence of Fielding's moral intention in it. But Sacks's conclusion about the relation of moral belief to the action form and *Tom Jones* in particular seems not quite adequate either, partly because he fails to distinguish sharply enough between his minimum general thesis—that the artistic end of writing an action "exerts no pressure on a writer to make insincere [moral] judgments" of the characters—and his specific conclusion that *Tom Jones* embodies Fielding's particular moral intention, in principle separable from the action, which is "to recommend goodness and innocence" (249–50). Since Sacks, like Crane, thinks of the action form as a fixed, timeless structure, he infers that the moral intentions he finds embodied in Fielding's action novels are a normal feature of the form. But my claim here is that his first, minimum conclusion alone is true of any realization of the general principle of the action form, while the fact that *Tom Jones* and other eighteenth-century novels reflect the embodiment of specific moral intentions is an historically introduced modification of the action form which generates, as I have tried to show in another essay, the distinctive shapes of the Richardson–Fielding–Burney–Austen line of action novels. 4

I would note furthermore that Sacks's assessment of the influence of Fielding's moral intention on his action is incomplete. Examining the possibility that the whole shape of an action (implicitly the action of *Tom Jones*) can express a moral implication by displaying a causal connection and equation between the protagonist's merit and fate, Sacks concludes that it cannot, essentially because the comic action form in itself ensures an equation between fate and desert, which therefore cannot be read as carrying extrinsic implications (252–62). Now this is certainly true, I would say, of such comic actions as Jane Austen's, whose happy endings seem to have no doctrinal overtones, but it is not true
of *Tom Jones*, in which as my account of providentiality has already suggested, there *is* such a causal equation and moral parity, as Le Bossu’s notion of the realization of the moral in the whole structure of the action would require. But this formal situation is in distinct contrast with that envisaged in Crane’s conception, where any moral element is introduced entirely subordinately, in the service of comic catharsis. This is the clearest and most relevant illustration of my central point about the inescapable modification of the intrinsic by the extrinsic, since it involves the articulation of the inner action principle itself. And it illustrates as well a matter of very general literary theoretical interest, of particular relevance in our own time, namely that an incorrect and incomplete critical conception of previously achieved forms—here the idea that epics had been and therefore ought to be didactic—can act as a preconception and prescription leading to the production of works which actually do fit the formula. Writers can be so hampered by such prescriptive burdens that their works are deadened, as many eighteenth-century novels are by didactic intentions that fail of organic aesthetic realization, and as are many works in our own time in seeking semantic complexity or political relevance at the price of incoherence or affective inertness.

But the point here is just that prescriptive influences are successfully embodied in the working form of *Tom Jones*, and this can bring us to a fuller consideration of the providential dimension of the book, which answers not merely to a moral didactic intention but to an aesthetic one also in that it involves the actual concrete achievement of an effect prescribed for epics, namely, the effect of the marvelous. Again, my point can rest on an independent empirical analysis of the quality of the form of *Tom Jones* conceived apart from any specific notion of providentiality, this time not by Sacks but another critic working in the revision and extension of Crane’s conception, Robert Wess, whose powerful essay on the probable and marvelous in *Tom Jones* is insufficiently known and appreciated. In too short summary, Wess’s attempt is to show that Crane’s analysis of the causality of the action of *Tom Jones* as merely probable does not account for the so often praised effect of its “wonderful” plot, the effect of “the marvelous.” Wess locates the basis of the felt effect in the absolute polarity of merit developed between Jones and the thriving characters of the book, in particular Blifil, as contrasted with their apparent fates which, at the low point of Tom’s fortune earlier examined, are so completely opposite to those merits. Without this sharply defined polarity of merit, the reader would not feel the complete reversal produced by the denouement as the startling and wonderfully satisfying transition he does in fact feel it to be. The effect depends further on the reader’s perception of the causation of the reversal, which Wess notes is probable in that no action of any character is inconsistent with his represented
capacity—a principle specifically announced by Fielding—but that the joint result of such actions is surprising and improbable when considered in their interconnections, which depend so heavily, as Fielding emphasizes, on coincidence. Though he stops short of the specific inference, what Wess's analysis does is to extend Crane's conception of the structure of effect in the book to display the formal sources of that sense of “occult connection” mentioned by Van Ghent and to indicate thereby how Fielding's representation of providential agency working not by divine intervention but through second causes actually becomes aesthetically effective as “the marvelous” in the comic action of a modern epic.

I turn now from consideration of the form of *Tom Jones* in terms of Fielding's conception of it as an epic to consideration of it, again in relation to Crane's analysis, in terms of our modern perception of it as a novel. It is a striking fact that, quite apart from any agreement on an explicit definition, our preanalytic application of the intuitive notion “novel” should be as uniform and regular as it is, implying, it would seem, that the notion has a strongly fixed cognitive content. But it is nonetheless clearly a concept of a historically delimited form and agrees quite well with the standard handbook notion that Richardson's *Pamela* is the first novel; for it can be successfully asserted that before *Pamela* there are no prose fictions which all readers and critics respond to as unambiguous novels, whereas after *Pamela* there are many. Now it is remarkable, I think, that Crane in describing the form of *Tom Jones* standing near the origin of the novel form should, though he calls it a novel—notice how awkward it would be to refer to it as anything else, including an epic—attribute to it no affective properties that would account for our registration of it as a novel. Since Crane's conception is of a timeless form, one could expect it *a priori* not to account for a historically delimited form, but the reason for this shortcoming of Crane's conception—which I take to be a signal explanatory deficiency—lies not with his conception of the action form so much as with his more general concept of imitation, as we can see if we try to give our intuitive conception of the novel some explicit content. If that concept is basically invariant from reader to reader, it must have a content compatible with our most common formulations that the novel is “realistic”—by which I think we mean that our experience of it seems to be like our experience of the real world—and that it is “dramatic” and “shows” rather than “tells”—by which we mean that in a novel the presented characters seem to exist and act from within themselves with the hidden shape of the story emerging from their actions as if independent of the author's purpose. Let me put a little more tightly what I am claiming is the content of everybody's intuitive notion of the novel form, by saying that a novel is a story which offers a focal illusion (to use Michael Polanyi's convenient terms)
of characters acting autonomously for their own ends, as if in the world of real experience, within a subsidiary awareness of an authorial purpose which gives their story, virtually real, a shape of implicit significance and affective force. Now Crane’s view of imitation—of literary illusion—as indicated earlier, turns on the fact of its imaginatively autonomy—on the fact that it is constituted by the artist’s disposition of his material, not by any reflective relation to the real world. But this conception, valid enough as an attempt to define the inherent force of a representational text as a text, cannot in itself express the fact, pointed to by my definition, that the specifically novelistic illusion involves a sense of imaginative immersion in the real world. This does not at all mean that Crane’s conception is to be judged in error in contrast with notions of realism as reflective of the actualities of the real world, for such conceptions in their turn have no way to speak of the internal affective structure of the novel, while they miss emphatic expression of the fact that the inner formedness of the novel, which energizes it aesthetically and affectively, is in actual conflict with any claim it might offer to be at bottom really like the unformed world.

A view more nearly adequate to the facts would be to say that the novel imitates in two distinct but intervolved senses, in terms of its intrinsic or inherent power to secure illusion, as its own world, and then, in its characteristic quality, to maintain that illusion as if it were of the uninvented external world known to the reader. But the logic of Crane’s conception of imitation as well as his belief in the aesthetic autonomy of the text prevented him from taking direct conceptual notice of a dimension which in *Tom Jones* and all novels is a chief source of their affective power: the sense given to the reader that his experience of the novel is in significant connection with his experience of his own life-world. But as I have already noticed, the realistic illusion of the novel is an illusion and not a truly verisimilar image because of its formal artistic understructure, and I believe that Crane’s conception of the action form does locate the principle of the understructure of the standard novel of plotted suspense, though as with *Tom Jones* that structure must be conceived as varying in response to extraformal pressures. In fact the conception of the action structure, with its implication that from the outset the reader at some level realizes that both his expectations and desires are being developed to meet one another, offers a clear-cut way to describe the standard novel’s means to both pleasure and significance: the action novel is thus seen as a controlled objective fantasy in which the reader’s satisfaction in the discovered significance and order in the novel’s image of the world is realized through and experienced against his implicit sense of the opacity and incoherence of the real world as it actually is.6

Thinking of *Tom Jones* as a novel, we can see in the terms set forth that Fielding’s decision to place his epical story in a virtual real world—a world
based directly on and imaginatively conflated with his own life-world—is what gives it the status as a novel it would not have had he followed the precedent of other epic writers of the period who centered their works on a Leonidas or Prince Arthur. Epic doctrine indeed gave his innovating genius some impetus in this direction, as we have seen, in suggesting that the action be part real, part fictional; and his need to realize the marvelous in terms of “self-moving agents, working with knowledge and choice” (580), as in Barrow’s account of a nonmiraculous providence of second causes, moved him toward the construction of a world peopled with autonomous characters, with a hidden causal dimension to be informed by the plan of an unseen author-god. It is important to notice in this connection, I think, in view of all the commentary on Fielding’s intrusiveness in the story, that in fact we are not really able to think of the characters as manipulated by Fielding as narrator, despite his assertion of his control, and it is this experienced autonomy of the characters as their joint action eventuates in the shape of the story which gives it in our imaginations its unequivocal identity as a novel.

Nonetheless we can see that Fielding’s inherited notions of epic structure and his neoclassical assumptions in general were to some degree in conflict with his emergent intuition of the demands of the new kind of “history” he was trying to bring into being and that his concrete resolution of the conflict left the book with characteristics that can, as they often have been, interpreted as formal deficiencies when viewed in terms of the long-term logic of the novel form, committed as our definition suggests to the absorption of representation into the substance of the represented, but which are at the same time clearly the marks of its success as the achieved particular form it is. Thus Fielding’s narrative prominence just mentioned obviously results from the fact that he conceives his function as in the choral tradition of the epic narrator, a role explicitly urged by Trapp and other contemporary critics in the requirement that an epic be a “Narration that comes immediately from the Poet” (qtd. in Swedenberg 162). But it is his vital presence in this role which permits him—“he handsomely possessed of a mind,” in James’s famous phrase (Preface to The Princess Casamassima, in Art of the Novel 68; emphasis original)—to surround and infuse with his own vitality characters who as noted needed to be kept comically distanced and rendered in terms of relatively simple and clear moral contrasts. Collaterally, the epical breadth of the story enables Fielding to offset and qualify the potentially anti-novelistic archetypal schematism of the central action by introducing many peripheral characters of mixed morality and uncertain destiny, as in the world, giving the sense as Crane says that things don’t turn out so well for everyone as for Tom and thus pleasingly shading off the clarities of design into the obscurities of the real.
So in general does the pervasive stylization of the book deriving from Fielding’s neoclassical assumption that art should be explicitly artful, manifestly made, work together with the very unstylized life represented to give the novel its distinctive texture. Several recent critics have countered criticism of the novel as insufficiently realistic by properly emphasizing the positive value of its calculated artificiality, yet we probably have some way to go in appreciating how the distinctive polarity of earthiness and artifice functions organically in the action. Thus Allworthy’s articulation of a consistently stiff and programmatic morality makes Fielding’s paragon seem rather a dead stick to many readers, but through Allworthy as thus presented Fielding is able to establish the firm reference point of an apparently objective, explicitly rational, principled, and public scheme of values to which Tom’s more subjective fluid and intuitive morality can be ultimately attached in implicit validation, all in the service of maintaining that firmly structured sense of moral perspective and judgment upon which, as we have seen, the overall effect of the action depends.

Similarly, from the opposite direction, Squire Western is used to introduce elements of feeling which neoclassical decorum could not allow direct expression. In the denouement, for instance, Fielding needs to suggest a sensual fullness in Tom and Sophia’s union appropriate to Tom’s often demonstrated and Sophia’s implicit natural feeling but cannot dramatize this explicitly without rendering sexual Tom even more opprobrious than he has been to many readers and compromising in Sophia that complete freedom from sexual feeling conventionally required in pre-twentieth-century heroines. Fielding’s solution is to have Tom declare his impetuous love in the innocuous terms of high romantic rhetoric (“O! my Sophia . . . do not doubt the Sincerity of the purest Passion that ever inflamed a human Breast. Think, most adorable Creature, of my unhappy Situation, of my Despair,” etc.), while Sophia remains firm in her insistence that Tom redeem his earlier inconstancy by a period of faithful waiting: “Time alone, Mr. Jones, can convince me that you are a true Penitent,” and fixes her term, “a Twelvemonthperhaps” (18.12, 972, 974; emphasis original). This is accepted without protest, by Jones, who is indeed beside himself with joy: “O! transporting Thought! am I not assured the blessed Day will come, when I shall call you mine; when Fears shall be no more, when I shall have that dear, that vast, that exquisite, exstatic Delight of making my Sophia happy?” And he kisses her “with an Ardour he had never ventured before” (18.12.974; emphasis original). Had Fielding left it as this, with decorum and delicacy satisfied, his novel would have lacked a great deal of the satisfaction of its actual ending, as it would have also if he had shown Tom and Sophia eager to satisfy their love without punctilio. His solution is a remarkable piece of art. Before the interview between Tom and Sophia, Allworthy remarks to Western that
Sophia was “the finest Creature in the World.” “So much the better for Tom,” says Western; “for d—n me if he shan’t ha the tousling her,” at which remark Sophia is reported “all over Scarlet” (18.12.970; emphasis original). Then just at the point where Tom ventures on his kiss, Western bursts in and exclaims with the crudity long established as inseparable from his hunting squire’s character, “To her Boy, to her, go to her.—That’s it, little Honeys, O that’s it. Well, what is it all over? Hath she appointed the Day, Boy? What, shall it be to-morrow or next Day?” (18.12.974). Western then breaks out over Jones’s protesting, “Let me beseech you, Sir,”

“Beseech mine A— . . . I thought thou had’st been a Lad of higher Mettle, than to give way to a Parcel of maidenish Tricks.—I tell thee ’tis all Flimflam. Zoodikers! she’d have the Wedding to-Night with all her Heart. Would’st not, Sophy? Come confess, and be an honest Girl for once. What, art dumb? Why do’st not speak?”

“Why should I confess, Sir,” says Sophia, “since it seems you are so well acquainted with my Thoughts.”—“That’s a good Girl,” cries he, “and do’st consent then?” “No, indeed, Sir,” says Sophia, “I have given no such Consent.”—“And wut nut ha un then to-Morrow, nor next Day?” says Western.—“Indeed, Sir,” says she, “I have no such Intention.” “But I can tell thee,” replied he, “why hast nut, only because thou dost love to be disobedient, and to plague and vex thy Father.”—“Pray, Sir,” said Jones, interfering.—“I tell thee thou art a Puppy,” cries he. “When I forbid her, then it was all nothing but sighing and whining, and languishing and writing; now I am vor thee, she is against thee. All the Spirit of contrary, that’s all. She is above being guided and governed by her father, that is the whole Truth on’t. It is only to disoblige and contradict me.” “What would my Papa have me do?” cries Sophia. “What would I ha thee do?” says he, “why, gi un thy Hand this Moment.”—“Well, Sir,” says Sophia, “I will obey you.—There is my Hand, Mr. Jones.” (18.12.974–75; emphasis original)

Every reader must feel Fielding’s effect here but perhaps not always with full awareness of his artistic strategy. By her comically quick but entirely delightful act of obedience, Sophia in effect incorporates in her assent and accepts, without having to take responsibility for, the bawdy view of the union which Western has taken, and the reader (also without responsibility) can feel the pleasure of including Western’s sentiments in his own. The subtle process of expression through displacement is climaxed when, after Allworthy assures Sophia that Tom will “use his best Endeavours to deserve” her merit, Western exclaims: “His best Endeavours! . . . that he will, I warrant un.—Harkee, Allworthy, I’ll bet thee five Pound to a Crown we have a Boy to-morrow nine Months” (18.12.976; emphasis original).
Our understanding and perhaps full appreciation of the art of such an episode, as I believe of the whole of Tom Jones, depends on our sense of the way in which an artist in a particular historical situation has shaped and aesthetically energized his materials as historically given in a structure which, remaining intelligible and moving beyond its time, yet in its timelessness speaks to us of its time and makes it live in us and us in it. This is the power of great literature and the mark of both its success and limitation as a specifically human product. Perhaps more adequately than any other single critical theorist, R. S. Crane offered a coherent and consistent conception, at once comprehensive and detailed, of the complex of internal and external causes which bear on the work of literature as the concrete, product of individual human beings acting in time. My endeavor here has been to suggest (however incompletely) that Crane's pluralistic attempt to define the effect of a work in terms only of a timeless aesthetic structure results in an inadequate analysis because, as at times Crane himself directly recognized, the actual structure of effect in a work inevitably reflects timebound influences. In correction of Crane's view, we must say I think that it is only as the intrinsic artistic structure of a work is seen in relation to extrinsic influences that it can be understood in its full power to move. By the same token, however, the a-formalist historical critic needs to be reminded, from Crane's enduring point of view, that it is only as the extrinsic is absorbed into felt significance in the living shape of the work that it can be said to have any literary meaning at all.

Specifically in relation to Professor Richetti's analysis, the argument here suggests a number of points. First, that the formal, affective dimension of Tom Jones is not at all an instrument of ideological domination, but the necessary condition of its being the specific kind of masterpiece that it indeed is. The book is not merely "reductive and satisfying" (Richetti 211; my emphasis) but satisfying (that is, affectively successful) inherently because it is comically reductive and simplifying. At the same time, it achieves realistic complexity, as Richetti like Crane realizes, because Fielding consistently manages to suggest the fact of a ruder, darker, more threatening world within and beyond the comic world of the novel. Furthermore, the form of the book clearly displays an ideological dimension in its dynamic incorporation of Fielding's conceptions of good nature and Providence, but it is clearly of the Geertzian kind, a personal ideology employed defensively against a threatening world, so that the book stands as an aesthetically dynamic, time-transcendent rehearsal of Fielding's personal faith.
Notes

1. Crane later moves more broadly to this same conclusion in his great monograph “Critical and Historical Principles of Literary History” (in The Idea of the Humanities), where his insistence that an adequate literary history must be predicated on a conception of literary form as intrinsic leads him to see external influences as bearing on this intrinsicality in ways that clearly condition the total quality and effect of the work in our indivisible experience of it.

2. In Fiction and the Shape of Belief, Sheldon Sacks brilliantly elaborates and illustrates Crane’s assertion in his assessment of the contributions of Tom’s episodic encounters with various characters, for instance of the Quaker Broadbrim who disowns his daughter for marrying against his will: “Broadbrim appears, tells his tale of self-induced misery, and departs from the novel: he himself, his shadowy daughter and his son-in-law—the last two shadowy enough to be Tom and Sophia or any other couple—remain in a limbo of permanent unhappiness in no way lightened by the facts that Tom becomes prosperous, marries his Sophia, and lives happily ever after. . . . Not only Tom but the reader sees that ‘there are madmen, and fools, and villains in the world’ and the latter knows precisely what the important relevant forms that comprise madness, villainy, and foolishness in the worlds of the novels: though particular forms of the three are defeated by or for the protagonists at the end, we have clear evidence they need not have been defeated and are threats still” (198).

3. The topic of Providence in Tom Jones has been extensively treated by Martin Battestin in The Providence of Wit: Aspects of Form in Augustan Literature and the Arts; by Aubrey Williams in “Interpositions of Providence and the Design of Fielding’s Novels”; and by Leopold Damrosch, Jr. in God’s Plot & Man’s Stories: Studies in the Fictional Imagination from Milton to Fielding (281ff.); but my own account is based on independent research and follows a different analytic line.


5. The following account of the novel form is absorbed and greatly expanded in my “The Emergence of the Novel in England.” My argument there is made in explicit contrast with that of Michael McKeon in The Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740. Professor Richetti sees McKeon’s and other recent reevaluations of the novel form as exploring “questions that are fundamentally sociocultural and thereby powerfully and essentially ideological” understood in the “bad old sense” of “social and cultural control rather than a means of insight or personal liberation for writers and readers”; “authorial agency,” he notes, “is not often an issue in these new accounts of the novel’s emergence. The question that always remains after reading these critics is how individual novelists fit into this larger picture” (207–8). My attempt in the article cited is to show that individual agency was in fact the crucial element in the contingent emergence and development of the novel form. [Editors’ Note: See Chapter 9 in this volume.]

6. On this point see my “Defoe, Richardson, Joyce and the Concept of Form in the Novel.” [Editors’ Note: Chapter 8 in this volume.] Cf. Richetti’s view that the novel gains its ideological resonance by in various ways implicating and indirectly representing an “anti-world,” the world of real experience, present in the novel only as a “potential actuality known only by its differences from the structured and artificial order” (213).
7. The quoted phrase occurs in a passage from *The Art of Poetry on a New Plan* (2:181) given by Swedenberg (162). The work is apparently hackwork by Goldsmith and John Newbery (see Newbery), and Swedenberg (105) emphasizes the commonplace nature of the views it advances.
“Big with Jest”
The Bastardy of Tristram Shandy (ca. 1970)

I was begot in the night,” says Tristram Shandy, “betwixt the first Sunday and the first Monday in the month of March, in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighteen. I am positive I was” (8). And a page later on: “On the fifth day of November, 1718, which to the æra fixed on, was as near nine kalendar months as any husband could in reason have expected,—was I Tristram Shandy, Gentleman, brought forth into this scurvy and disastrous world of ours” (9–10). Now in the face of such a direct challenge, many a reader must, like myself, have performed the swift digital calculation practiced on those occasions when the marriages of friends are followed too soon by births, and emerged with the clear conclusion that Tristram was born not nine, but eight months after his conception. One’s immediate reaction, perhaps, is to assume that Sterne made a careless mistake, but that possibility is soon disposed of.

Tristram’s emphatic certainty and his gratuitous notice of the possibility of illegitimacy set up the presumption, first of all, that any discrepancy in the dates is significant. And the presumption is supported by the whole passage in which the statements occur. Part of Tristram’s proof that he was conceived when he says he was is that he could not have been conceived earlier: “—But pray, Sir, What was your father doing all December,—January, and February?—Why, Madam,—he was all that time afflicted with a Sciatica” (9). The information is not germane to Tristram’s ostensible purpose. If he was delivered in November, nine months after conception, as he says, and if his conception therefore was in March, there is no need to cite evidence for December, January, and February. It is only when one perceives that November is not nine months after March but after February that the information suddenly
becomes relevant: if Tristram was conceived in February, the incapacitated Walter Shandy could not have been his father. The facts fit together too well, in the light of Tristram’s challenges, to be accidental. Even the totally irrelevant reference to December and January has its purpose in preventing Sterne’s insinuation from being too palpable and bald.

One might nevertheless be reluctant to press the inference if it were not supported by two later passages in the book, one in the middle, one at the very end. Tristram begins his account of the visitation dinner by telling the story of the bend sinister—“the vile mark of Illegitimacy” (314)—which fatality or accident had placed on the Shandy coat-of-arms and which is especially irritating to Walter because it is associated with Tristram’s great Aunt Dinah, who had been “got with child by the coachman” (65).

No, indeed, said my father [to Uncle Toby],—you may go with my aunt Dinah to a visitation with a bend-sinister, if you think fit—My poor uncle Toby blushed. My father was vexed at himself—No—my dear brother Toby, said my father, changing his tone—but the damp of the coach-lining about my loins, may give me the Sciatica again, as it did December, January, and February last winter.” (314–15)

Surely, in such a context, this brought-in-by-the-ears reference to the crucial fact of Walter’s earlier incapacity is not intended to be without its sly point. Indeed, the reference otherwise has no particular point.

At the end of the book the matter of illegitimacy and paternal impotence is brought up obliquely again. The Shandy bull (of whom Walter has a high opinion since, like himself, he goes about his business “with a grave face”) is suspected of being impotent because the cow brought to him to be serviced on the day of Obadiah’s marriage had not calved, as she should have, at the same time that Obadiah’s wife had brought forth her child.

—Most of the townsmen, an’ please your worship, quoth Obadiah, believe that ’tis all the Bull’s fault—

—But may not a cow be barren? replied my father, turning to Dr. Slop.

It never happens: said Dr. Slop, but the man’s wife may have come before her time naturally enough. (646)

By itself the passage would have no large significance, but the called-for emphasis on the uncertainty of the term of pregnancy and the identification with the bull’s plight which Walter’s solicitude implies serves to reanimate, in this last, naturally emphatic passage of the book, the suggestion which had been posed at the outset and reinforced midstream.
The figure of the bull, we may remember, had been associated once before in the book with the idea of illegitimacy. In volume V Walter Shandy speaks at length on the primal importance of the marital relationship: “The original of society, continued my father, I’m satisfied is, what Politian tells us, i.e. merely conjugal; and nothing more than the getting together of one man and one woman;—to which (according to Hesiod) the philosopher adds a servant:—but supposing in the first beginning there were no men servants born—he lays the foundation of it, in a man,—a woman—and a bull” (390). After an exchange among Yorick, Walter, and Toby on the question whether the animal Hesiod refers to was not rather an ox, the discussion continues:

—I enter upon this speculation, said my father carelessly, and half shutting the book, as he went on,—merely to shew the foundation of the natural relation between a father and his child; the right and jurisdiction over whom he acquires these several ways—

1st, by marriage.
2d, by adoption.
3d, by legitimation.
And 4th, by procreation; all which I consider in their order.

I lay a slight stress upon one of them; replied Yorick—the act, especially where it ends there, in my opinion lays as little obligation upon the child, as it conveys power to the father.—You are wrong,—said my father argutely, and for this plain reason ************** (391)

And so on, for three rows of asterisks.

Once more the possibility of illegitimacy has been hinted at, but Yorick’s bland comment serves to raise a related issue: Who, if Walter be eliminated, is Tristram’s natural father? Sterne only hints, but the hints point toward a single conclusion: Yorick himself. The first hint comes a few pages after the visitation dinner, where the discussion of the validity of Tristram’s christening had led to the question whether a mother is kin to her own child. Yorick explains for Toby’s benefit:

And pray, Yorick, said my uncle Toby, which way is this said affair of Tristram at length settled by these learned men? Very satisfactorily, replied Yorick; no mortal, Sir, has any concern with it—for Mrs. Shandy the mother is nothing at all akin to him—and as the mother’s is the surest side—Mr. Shandy, in course, is still less than nothing—In short, he is not as much akin to him, Sir, as I am—

—That may well be, said my father, shaking his head. (331)

We may relate this scene to the one which occurs two volumes on, when Walter and Mrs. Shandy in the midst of their monthly “bed of justice” discuss the
merits of putting Tristram into breeches. It would be a sin, they agree, to take Tristram out of his vests and tunics, except that he is “growing a very tall lad.”

—He is very tall for his age, indeed,—said my mother.—
—I can not (making two syllables of it) imagine, quoth my father, who the duce he takes after.—
I cannot conceive, for my life,—said my mother.—
Humph!—said my father.
(The dialogue ceased for a moment.)
—I am very short myself,—continued my father, gravely.
You are very short, Mr. Shandy,—said my mother. (437)

But Yorick, who may be more kin to Tristram than Walter, is, as the reader knows, not at all short but tall and lank. Taken together with the other evidence, the emphasis given here to Tristram’s unaccountable unlikeness to his father and his (implicit) likeness to Yorick constitutes a broad hint as to Tristram’s paternity. But the hint is veiled, remaining only a sly insinuation whose point lies ultimately, I shall suggest, outside the book.

“Everything in the world,” says Walter, a page on from the passage about a father’s relation to his child, “is big with jest,—and has wit in it, and instruction too,—if we can but find it out” (393). The hint about Tristram’s paternity makes it difficult but not impossible to discover that Mrs. Shandy and his whole book is literally big with jest; but if we are to find out its wit and instruction, we must proceed carefully.

The jest is significant, but nothing would be more alien to the spirit of the book than to take it as anything more than a jest. Sterne has made the whole matter ambiguous—a sly insinuation—deliberately, so as to ensure that it will not interfere with the benevolent comedy of the book. The very thought of the passionless Mrs. Shandy engaged in an adulterous liaison is sufficiently ludicrous to keep us from contemplating it very vividly as a literal and disagreeable possibility. There was in her, Tristram says, not “the least mote or speck of desire.” “[H]ow I happened to be so lewd myself, particularly a little before the vernal and autumnal equinoxes—Heaven above knows—My mother—madam—was so at no time, either by nature, by institution, or example” (600). Nevertheless Sterne is not above suggesting at a discreet comic distance the possibility that Yorick and Mrs. Shandy have their unsuspected little secret:

I wish, Yorick, said my father, you had read Plato; for there you would have learnt that there are two Loves—I know there were two Religions, replied Yorick, amongst the ancients—one—for the vulgar, and another for the learned; but I think one Love
might have served both of them very well—

It could not; replied my father—and for the same reasons: for of these Loves, according to Ficinus’s comments upon Valesius, the one is rational—

—the other is natural— . . .

This latter, continued he, partakes wholly of the nature of Venus.

The first, which is the golden chain let down from heaven, excites to love heroic, which comprehends in it, and excites to the desire of philosophy and truth—the second, excites to desire, simply—

—I think the procreation of children as beneficial to the world, said Yorick, as the finding out the longitude—

—to be sure, said my mother, love keeps peace in the world—

—in the house—my dear, I own—

—it replenishes the earth; said my mother—

But it keeps heaven empty—my dear, replied my father. (587–88)

But the jest is more, I think, than an incidental piece of comic bawdy; it is integrally related to the form of the whole book and, properly understood, extends its effect and significance in two separate but complementary ways. To understand how this is so, we must pause to consider what the form of Tristram Shandy is.

The unity of Sterne’s book lies in the fact that it displays in all the wandering variety of its episodes a single human predicament toward which it evokes a single complex response. Throughout the book man is displayed as a psychosomatic machine, a corporeal automaton whose spirit is at the mercy, first, of the material world to which through the body it is ineluctably bound and, second, of the body itself and its irrational drive toward self-expression and self-fulfillment. Man as machine, Bergson says, is inherently ludicrous, and our pervasive response to the book is the amusement appropriate to the spectacle of mechanical man blindly foregoing his idiosyncratic purposes in the intemperate act of pursuing them. But if in Tristram Shandy we see man constantly from the outside ludicrously imprisoned in the isolation of his unremitting ego, we see him in another, complementary aspect from the inside, as Sterne makes us feel with sympathetic pleasure the inner urgency of the human need which drives him. At the same time Sterne increases both amusement and sympathy by forcing the reader to acknowledge his own involvement in the general human predicament. This is the function of all the bland double entendres in the book. They are not merely bawdy jokes but attempts to force the reader to recognize his inescapable involvement in the mental and physical mechanism which is himself. “—But pray, Sir, What was your father doing all December,—January, and February?—Why, Madam,—he was all that time afflicted with a Sciatica.”
The reader, a moment before secure in his pure-minded dignity, suddenly finds himself the possessor of an undignified dirty mind. Against his will his mind supplies the bawdy inference, and he stands self-convicted, while Sterne looks innocently on. The reader can either be angry at Sterne or, confessing the truth, laugh in comic detachment at himself and his own inescapable nature.

The complex working of the book can be illustrated in the famous episode dealing with the Shandy household’s almost totally selfish reaction to Bobby’s death, from the stuff of which a grim Maupassant story might have been made. The episode is rendered ludicrous, in general comic terms, because we do not ourselves feel Bobby’s death as a real and serious thing and because no painful consequences proceed from the characters’ reactions. But it is specifically ludicrous beyond this because we are made to feel that the harmlessly selfish reactions are totally spontaneous and uncontrollable. Our reaction is nonetheless simultaneously sympathetic, first because despite their selfishness each participant is able to feel Bobby’s situation for an empathetic moment as something which involves himself, and second because we recognize the “delicious mixture” of selfishness and sentiment as inescapably characteristic of human nature, including our own.

So it is, too, in a quite different passage from the opening pages. Tristram asserts that “the Homunculus, Sir, in how-ever low and ludicrous a light he may appear, in this age of levity, to the eye of folly or prejudice,” has nevertheless his own dignity, is “a Being guarded and circumscribed with rights” (5). The argument that the Homunculus is not ludicrous is itself ludicrous, and we respond to it so; but even here there is also sympathy. Sterne with his magical rhetoric makes us feel in the little gentleman’s fight against odds a comic analogue of our own fight against what are, after all, the same odds in the same “scurvy and disastrous world” which will end by destroying us.

The world behind the book is scurvy and disastrous; and though Sterne’s presentation under the aspect of absurdity detaches us from its pain and purges away the spleen which comes from taking life seriously, the reader’s aesthetic victory demands as its momentary precondition the implicit recognition and acceptance of universal human defeat. And that is one dimension of the jest with which the book is big. It is simply the final extrapolation of the logic of the whole. Walter’s long and perpetually thwarted struggle to communicate with and make an impact upon his wife and to rear effectively an heir to his body were doomed, the final ludicrous insinuation is, a priori. Not even that once did he make an impression on his wife; the son upon whom he expended so much passionate effort was not his to begin with. From the first it was all for naught. As the reader grasps the insinuation, he grasps also the final comic message: defeat, and absurdity, are universal.
That few readers have perceived the covert insinuation is quite in order. To have our leg so pulled is completely consonant with the whole subversive mode of Sterne's humor. The joke is not for us but on us—it is not our joke but Sterne's. Only after it has been played can we glimpse, fleetingly and uncertainly, the last unsuspected secret of the cock-and-bull story, the hidden explanation of the mocking smile on the face of Tristram—Sterne.

But there is even more to the secret than that, I think. Mention of the man behind the book, bringing to mind the very special relation which Tristram Shandy has to the life of its author, serves to open for us a second and more important dimension of Sterne's jest. It has always been recognized that there is no neat separation between Sterne's book and his life. Though in one respect the book is quite free of time, in another the reader is forced to be aware that a real figure and a real life lie behind it much more immediately and literally than Fielding's figure and life, say, lie (as they unquestionably do) behind his books. Tristram Shandy has two faces, one toward fiction, one toward fact. Walter, Toby, Trim, Mrs. Shandy, Susannah, the Widow Wadman, Tristram himself (as character) and the major incidents of the book—the geniture, the christening, the accident of the sash, etc.—are purely imaginative and have no literal connection with anything that ever was on land or sea. But Yorick, Dr. Slop, Phutatorius, Tristram as narrator, together with incidents in which these characters are central, are distinctly if obliquely connected with autobiographical reality, a fact that the reader, quite apart from external information, cannot help but sense as he reads the book. The outside of the book, as it were, has partly been brought inside.

If we look back over the course of Sterne's life, we can begin to see how and why this was so and something of its meaning. Sterne was born into an old and fully established family, but his prospects in life must nonetheless have seemed to him blasted from the outset. His father was a good-hearted but improvident and impetuous man who at the beginning of an ill-fated military career contracted, according to Sterne's biographer, “a most unfortunate marriage” with the ill-bred daughter of a sutler (Cross 11). From this inauspicious marriage was born first a daughter, Mary, who, though she grew, in Sterne's words, to be “a most beautiful woman” at last was to die “of a broken heart” (qtd. in Cross 12). Next Sterne himself was born, on a “day ominous to my poor father,” for, soon after, his father was broken from the army and “sent adrift into the wide world with a wife and two children” (12). More children came—Joram, “a pretty boy” (13) who died after four years of the smallpox; Anne, a “pretty blossom [who] fell at the age of three years” (she was “of a fine delicate frame, not made to last long, as were most of my father’s babes” [13]); “little Devijeher” and Susan, both of whom “left us behind in this weary journey” (14); and Catherine, who lived to be “most unhappily estranged from me by my uncle’s wickedness” (15).
the midst of these ills, the father himself, brought again into the army by the chances of war, was run through in a duel over a goose and subsequently died of a fever.

Separated from his mother, Sterne was left to make his own way with the grudging help of relatives. Cursed though he was with the ill-health characteristic of the family, he had, as he tells us, miraculously escaped death when he passed unharmed through the race of a running mill, and Sterne apparently preserved the memory of the incident as a sign that his was to be different from the usual family fate. At any rate it is clear that Sterne, bitterly aware of his over-weighted struggle with life, longed from an early age to achieve the rank and position which he felt were his due. He tells us that he was severely whipped by an usher at school for brushing his name in whitewash on the schoolroom ceiling; but the “master was very much hurt at this, and said, before me, that never should that name be effaced, for I was a boy of genius, and he was sure I should come to preferment—this expression made me forget the stripes I had received” (Cross 18).

But neither preferment nor other permanent solace came for Sterne. After his sizarship at Cambridge, his clerical career, promising at first, was embittered by the long prostitution of his literary talents in the service of his politically ambitious Uncle Jaques and blighted at last by their ensuing quarrel. Meanwhile, a sentimental courtship had led to the perpetual frustration of an incompatible marriage. His life was made additionally miserable by his semi-public quarrels with his mother over her upkeep, quarrels fomented by Uncle Jaques and laid as a blot on his character and station. In reading the bare account of these things one feels at a distance Sterne’s sense of pain and indignity, and in the lines of the letter in which he passionately defends himself to Uncle Jaques, one hears the accents of a man beset by unmerited calamity and driven by his pride to speak with an unconscious but still self-regarding lack of sympathy and charity for the woman who bore him. No comic perspective qualifies the seriousness with which Sterne takes himself, as it had not qualified the famous letter of sentimental courtship written years before to Miss Elizabeth Lumley. There is no humor, either, in Sterne’s attempt to rise to squiredom through his precipitate and ill-advised purchase and cultivation of lands about his rectory. Nevertheless, all these years, his powers of humorous detachment from practical life had grown as he relaxed from time to time in the company of the Demoniacs, that group of originals who gathered at Crazy Castle, the home of his closest friend, John Hall-Stevenson. Those powers found their first full expression in the brilliant Tale of a Tub-like satire, A Political Romance, which he directed in 1759 against the ridiculous diocesan politics of York. The suppression of this piece was a frustration which may in part have generated the conception and
composition of *Tristram Shandy*, but in 1759 there was much else to prompt its genesis. At about this time his Uncle Jaques and his mother, after strutting and fretting their hour upon the stage, both died and, demonstrating their own frailty, released Sterne from the enmity in which he must have held them. There was nothing left to fight, and Sterne was free to contemplate a life—a career and a marriage—pretty well in shambles and, at forty-six and in frail health as he had been from early years, pretty well over. It was all, really, quite absurd, and quite painful.

Clearly Sterne’s statement in his dedication to Prime Minister William Pitt that his book was written out of his “constant endeavour to fence against the infirmities of ill health, and other evils of life, by mirth” (Sterne 3) is nothing else but the simple truth. In one way or another, in *Tristram Shandy* Sterne recapitulates and comically objectifies the train of disasters just recited. The book was his last recourse, the triumph of his comic sense of life over the circumstances which had brought his worldly life to a practical close. Reflecting upon this fact, we grasp the final point of Sterne’s elaborate joke.

The portrait of Yorick early in the book is, as has been recognized from the first, Sterne’s portrait of himself. Yorick as fictional character is brought in naturally enough in relation to the midwife, but, formally speaking, it is not clear why the portrait should have been so elaborate or why it should have been extended at this point to include the scene of his death. We react to this material as a digression outside the digressive structure of the book. Even the uninitiated reader surmises that here he is confronted with a more-than-fictional reality, the presence of which in the book has an extra-fictional justification. The material is given point within the story, but there seems to be a private meaning beyond. Consider the climax of Yorick’s death scene:

—I declare I know not, *Yorick*, how to part with thee,—and would gladly flatter my hopes, added *Eugenius*, chearing up his voice, that there is still enough left of thee to make a bishop,—and that I may live to see it.—I beseech thee, *Eugenius*, quoth *Yorick*, taking off his night-cap as well as he could with his left hand,—his right being still grasped close in that of *Eugenius*,—I beseech thee to take a view of my head.—I see nothing that ails it, replied *Eugenius*. Then, alas! my friend, said *Yorick*, let me tell you, that ’tis so bruised and mis-shapen’d with the blows which **** and *****, and some others have so unhandsomely given me in the dark, that I might say with Sancho Pança, that should I recover, and “Mitres thereupon be suffer’d to rain down from heaven as thick as hail, not one of ’em would fit it.”—*Yorick*’s last breath was hanging upon his trembling lips ready to depart as he uttered this;—yet still it was utter’d with something of a cervantick tone;—and as he spoke it, *Eugenius* could perceive a stream of lambent fire lighted up for a moment in his eyes;—faint picture
of those flashes of his spirit, which (as Shakespear said of his ancestor) were wont to set the table in a roar! (31)

Sterne goes on to tell how Yorick lies buried under a plain marble slab, with “Alas, poor YORICK!” written on it, and how “Ten times in a day has Yorick’s ghost the consolation to hear his monumental inscription read over with such a variety of plaintive tones, as denote a general pity and esteem for him; . . . not a passenger goes by without stopping to cast a look upon it,—and sighing as he walks on, Alas, poor YORICK!” (32).

We do not need the black page which follows to tell us that the delicately pathetic scene is to be taken with a great sprinkling of comic salt, but half the comedy is hidden outside the book: Yorick is not dead but alive and weeping tears over himself. Yet the lament has real edge and meaning: only out of what was in effect Sterne’s practical death could the triumphant imaginative life of Tristram be born. I suggest that this is the meaning of Tristram’s bastardy and Yorick’s paternity: It was not the character Yorick inside the book who was Tristram’s father but the writer outside, and his death is juxtaposed with the presentation of Tristram’s conception and birth in order that Sterne might make the most of his inside-outside joke. The dying Yorick has left an unsuspected sign of life, and Sterne has woven the tragedy of his defeated existence inseparably into the victory of his comic imagination. These inferences are given further warrant by the facts that Sterne published his own sermons under the authorship of “Mr. Yorick” as early as May 22, 1760 (while Tristram Shandy was still unfolding in installments) and that in 1768 he published A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy with Yorick as the first person narrator.

It was a splendid joke bravely conceived in the midst of a scurvy and disastrous world, but the world tried hard to have the last laugh. After Sterne’s death, we read in his biography, his body was dug up by resurrectionists and delivered to Cambridge, where his face was recognized by an acquaintance. That Sterne should have so literally followed out the fate of the fictional jester whose name he had taken as his own is an irony so deeply macabre as scarcely to be endured. But even then the world was not done. Sterne’s only grandson, conceived by his daughter out of wedlock, died when a little boy, leaving the novelist’s physical posterity, like the Shandys’, ignominiously obliterated. It is as if some President of the Immortals had set himself to punish Sterne’s impudence by inexorably carrying out the pattern Sterne had so light-heartedly drawn. Alas, poor Yorick, we may truly say; yet, even as we speak, we see in the book the mocking eyes and stream of lambent comic fire.
In the context where James speaks of the “large loose baggy monsters” of fiction, he is referring specifically to Thackeray’s *The Newcomes*, as well as to *The Three Musketeers* and *War and Peace* (Preface to *The Tragic Muse*, in *Art of the Novel* 84). But as his separate review of *Middlemarch* makes clear, James would have been willing enough to include in the category the three great Victorian novels named in my title, and indeed I believe that we all have no difficulty in fitting the phrase to our intuitive impression of these works, though we may well dissent from the implied deprecation. We immediately understand the suggestion that such works are carrying something inside which seems to distort and hinder the free operation of harmoniously organic form. I think it is fairly easy to recognize that what these works are carrying is a general social message, for they are, as we all know, novels of social panorama, of transindividual significance. But it is less easy to see why the presence of “message” should be at odds, as James’s phrase suggests, with our sense of organic form, or why these novels should apparently have so much in them of what James calls “the element of the accidental and arbitrary” (Preface to *The Tragic Muse*, in *Art of the Novel* 84)—the crisscrossing plot lines, the squads of episodes and characters which seem in their multiplicity to have no perceptible justification in a single artistic purpose and which increase so much the impression of “bagginess.”

From the critical point of view which interprets novels as expressing more or less complex “themes” or “visions,” “message” is the essence of form and should logically produce no impression of formal distortion, imbalance or disproportion, and indeed such criticism is almost always able to discover that what seem to be defects and peculiarities in such works, the apparent element
of the accidental and arbitrary as James has it, fit seamlessly into the interpretive scheme it proposes. But such procedures do not account for our intuitive impression of bagginess or, as I may say, lumpiness in these works, but in effect deny the impression or explain it away.\(^2\) And more recent narrative theory, for all its theoretical sophistication in the description of plots, also does not seem calculated to account for such impressions, being either too strictly typological to allow for discordancy or too accommodating to notice it. Even Peter Garret’s specific account of Victorian multiplot forms does not in its Bakhtinian orientation seem to differentiate in principle the “baggy monster” novels from more regular dialogical forms.\(^3\) On the other hand, I do not think that the critical tradition from which my own work stems, the approach to the novel developed by R. S. Crane, Wayne Booth, and Sheldon Sacks, has been able to explain the basis of our intuitive impressions any more clearly. Crane developed a concept of plot form as centered on a single protagonist, in which the novelist seeks to raise and resolve our concern for the protagonist by controlling our conception of his fate—what we think will happen to him—at every point in the novel (“Concept of Plot” 621–22). But though Crane indicates briefly how this general conception can be used to explain a great range of novels of different effects and emphases, his conception cannot accommodate novels where no single dominant protagonist appears, and it excludes altogether the notion of such action novels as carrying messages.

It was these descriptive limitations in Crane’s concept which led Sheldon Sacks to redefine the action form more loosely as “a work organized so that it introduces characters, about whose fates we are made to care, in unstable relationships which are then further complicated until the complication is finally resolved by the removal of the represented instability” (Fiction and the Shape of Belief 26). This statement has the explanatory virtue of permitting us to see the novel of plotted action as a dynamic system of relationships and so rather easily to accommodate the kind of novel we have immediately in view; but it has the defect of the same virtue. It does not explain why, if all actions are to be homogeneously conceived as a system of relationships among all characters, novels like Bleak House or Middlemarch should strike us as to some degree unintegrated in terms of plot, in comparison with novels, so well described by Crane’s concept, which with many characters also seem to center integrally on a Tom Jones or Strether or Lord Jim. A priori, it would seem that all dynamic systems of relationship ought to strike us as harmonious and fluid and organic, like figures moving in a ballet. Again, it seems to me, that the anomalies are accommodated by an explanatory conception which in effect denies their existence.

In this essay I want to outline some ways in which the Crane–Sacks action concept can be adapted to yield what I think is a relatively powerful explanatory
perspective on the novels I have proposed for consideration. I would undertake to illuminate the formal cause of our impression of all three of these novels as “baggy,” by showing how they seek to develop different kinds of differently significant plot structures. I shall try to define the peculiar plot intention of each novelist as creating plot shapes—and plot anomalies, real and apparent—of the very different kinds that we see in these novels, so as to explain not only why all three novels seem baggy in comparison with more standard novels, but also why each seems baggy in a different way from the others. In the process, I shall try to illuminate such persistent critical problems as those presented by the dual narrative of *Bleak House* and the insipidity of Esther Summerson, the dual heroines of *Vanity Fair*, the not fully integrated plot lines of *Middlemarch*, the weakness of Will Ladislaw as a character. Beyond this, I shall attempt to show that the several distinctive plot intentions arise from an attempt to give each novel a different kind of social significance, but in contrast with the thematic critic, I shall conceive this significance as embodied in and realized through the structure of the plot itself, so that the “meaning” of the book is determined by the plot and not the plot by the meaning. To this end, I shall indicate for each novel how plot intention endows chance events with a different meaning and how the large events or institutions brought into the novels from the real world—Chancery in *Bleak House*, Waterloo in *Vanity Fair*, the Reform Bill in *Middlemarch*—are introduced in the service not of independent ideational intention nor in their objective historical meaning, but as a function of the significance concretely immanent in the plot.

In developing my conception of the plots of these works, I want to use Crane’s (and implicitly James’s) idea that the basis of our impression of aesthetic purity in an action novel is the degree to which everything in it is subordinated to our concern with the fate of a single individual, so that even when there are many characters in a work, as in *Tom Jones* and *The Ambassadors*, we still understand all the minor characters as functions of the protagonist’s fate. I want to suggest that in each of the novels before us the action principle is the basis of the form but is developed, in three distinctively different ways, to accommodate a transindividual significance, and that the bagginess of each novel can be understood as resulting from the author’s attempt to solve the formal problems which arise as a consequence of this mixed intention. Thus each novel will be conceived as having not an inherently integral plot but rather a plot system developed to embody a transindividual social significance and thus to extend, and in a sense, distend, the pure shaping logic of the action-plot principle conceived in terms of itself alone. Any concept we develop to explain our impression of *Bleak House* as set off from other ungainly novels of social significance ought also to illuminate any sense we may have of its difference within likeness to Dickens’s
other novels. Comparison of *Bleak House* with *Oliver Twist* is particularly fruitful, I think, because Oliver is a single protagonist novel with materials in its core conception strikingly similar to those of *Bleak House.*

Since Edmund Wilson’s *The Two Scrooges* all Dickens critics have had to recognize the impact made upon his fiction by that nearly overwhelming episode of his early life when he was sent out by his financially distressed parents to menial work in James Lamert’s blacking factory. Dickens wrote later that

> It was wonderful to me how I could have been so easily cast away at such an age. It is wonderful to me that, even after my descent into the poor little drudge I had been since we came to London, no one had compassion enough on me—a child of singular abilities, quick, eager, delicate, and soon hurt, bodily or mentally—to suggest that something might have been spared, as certainly it might have been, to place me at any common school. (qtd. in Edgar Johnson 1:32)

Rather than being placed at school, he was placed in the factory, among workers from the lower class who must have seemed to his childish eyes and in fact may actually have been semi-criminal and degraded. “No words can express the secret agony of my soul,” he writes,

> as I sunk into this companionship; compared these every day associates with those of my happier childhood; and felt my early hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man, crushed in my breast. The deep remembrance of the sense I had of being utterly neglected and helpless; of the shame I felt in my position; of the misery it was to my young heart to believe that, day by day, what I have learned and thought and delighted in and raised my fancy and my emulation up by, was passing away from me, never to be brought back anymore, cannot be written. My whole nature was so penetrated with the grief and humiliation of such considerations, that even now, famous and caressed and happy, I often forget in my dreams that I have a dear wife and children; even that I am a man; and wander desolately back to that time of my life. (1:34; qtd. in Johnson)

Though he was eventually removed from the blacking factory and returned to the relative comfort of full family life, his memory of this dark period was always exacerbated by the fact that his parents, particularly his mother, were ambivalent about assuming the expense involved in taking him back into the household, so that to the burden of abandonment and neglect was added the greater pain of knowing that his mother in particular was willing to sacrifice him to her own convenience and pleasure. “I do not write resentfully or angrily,” he said of this later, “for I know how all these things worked together to make me what I am;
but I never afterwards forgot, I never shall forget, I never can forget, that my mother was warm for my being sent back” (1:44).

This situation is clearly the root, the untreated psychic core out of which Dickens created *Oliver Twist*, where the terror and want of the quick, eager, delicate and neglected boy are separated from and set against the dark side of those same emotions—the fear of the contamination which threatens the fictionally asserted innocence, objectified in Fagin; the fear of the impulse of angry retribution directed through Sykes toward the disguised figure of the absconding, guilty, and yet longed-for mother. If we look in *Bleak House* now for the figure of the sinful, unfeeling neglecting mother and the neglected boy, we find them easily in Lady Dedlock and in Jo, the hungry, degraded outcast of the London streets. It is the illiterate Jo who says, we remember, that “everybody overlooked me till I became the creature that I am” (Dickens 198). The curious fact, however, is that in this story the culpable, unfeeling mother is not the mother of the neglected boy. Even more curious is the fact that Lady Dedlock’s fate nevertheless is inextricably bound up with Jo, or more accurately with the crazy, dilapidated, neglected slum district where he lives. “What connexion can there be,” the omniscient narrator asks, “between the [Dedlock] place in Lincolnshire, the house, in town, the Mercury in powder, and the whereabouts of Jo, the outlaw with the broom, who had that distant ray of light upon him when he swept the churchyard-step?” (197). The central plot process of the book dynamically brings us to understand what that connection is as Lady Dedlock is brought down from her high social estate to die at the churchyard gate swept by Jo beyond which her lover’s bones and now Jo’s lie in fearful corruption. Curiously, again, however, the lover, Captain Hawdon, her remorse for whom reportedly drives her to death, is never shown to us distinctly either as Captain Hawdon or as Nemo, nor are the facts which led to their separation ever made clear. The abstract fact of her relationship with him is pointed to as the logical source of her downfall, but concretely Hawdon is for us only the shadowy lawyer, the self-destructive outcast Nemo, whose one prominent act is his kindness to Jo—“He was very good to me, he wos!” Hawdon functions affectively not to connect Lady Dedlock and her culpable lack of feeling with himself but only with Jo and with Hawdon’s own feeling as an outcast for him as both exist within the context of the neglected underworld life of London. Though Lady Dedlock is not literally guilty toward Jo in any way, he is the image in terms of which her personal guilt is given emotional focus and social significance.

These reflections lead directly to consideration of the most puzzling formal feature of the book—its bifurcated story and its alternating double narrators. The odd fact about the doubleness of the story, as only H. M. Daleski seems to have remarked, is that it is not inherently double in a way that prevents it being
put together but that it is rather inherently single, one story split arbitrarily in
two (159). Lady Dedlock's story is logically of a piece with the story of Esther
Summerson, her illegitimate daughter, but the double narration seems to divide
the one half of the story from the other, and Dickens's obvious attempt through-
out, we see upon reflection, is to deflect our emotional attention away from the
connection between them. Thus Esther is established very early in secure safety
with Jarndyce, so that we do not look forward to nor desire any change in status
that might result from the discovery of her parentage. Similarly, the secret of her
relationship to Lady Dedlock is early revealed, and revealed oddly in such a way
as to make Lady Dedlock guiltless in respect of any neglect of Esther, as Dick-
ens makes clear in the awkward speech he gives her to utter in response to the
discovery: “O my child, my child! Not dead in the first hours of her life, as my
cruel sister told me; but sternly nurtured by her, after she had renounced me and
my name! O my child, O my child!” (Dickens 364). Thus we see, in paradoxical
summation, that Lady Dedlock does not abandon and is not guilty in respect of
her real child but is made to seem guilty toward and to seem to suffer on behalf
of Jo who is not her child. What are we to make of this paradox? I suggest that
we see in it Dickens's clear intention to generalize the emotional significance of
the individual relationship with which his imagination was obsessed and imbue
with it the whole social fabric. In his personal plight he found the means to dis-
cover and image for his readers the collective guilt of a neglectful and unfeeling
society.

In terms of the dynamics of plot, however, his story remained a single action
and presented him with a number of difficult formal problems. The most urgent
of these was what to do with the literal child necessary to establish the literal fact
of individual guilt the emotional force of which was to be displaced elsewhere.
Critical tradition and our own reaction to Esther tell us that in a fundamental
sense he did not fully solve this problem. Deprived of organic emotional con-
nection with the central action and with no real action of her own, Esther
remains essentially static and vapid. But Dickens did a great deal nevertheless to
turn this negative consequence of his primary intention to positive formal uses.
First of all, by making her co-narrator of the story, he deflected attention from
her as a character in herself and made her a means of access to other characters
who could be used, as I shall suggest in a moment, to further universalize the
significance of the central story. Thus we find ourselves always looking with
Esther away from herself and toward other centers of narrative interest—toward
Jenny and her child, toward the Jellybys and the Turveydrops, toward Richard
and, most of all, toward “my darling” Ada. This self-effacing narrative posture
harmonizes easily with the passive role she plays in her passive, deempha-
sized relationship—sporadically, almost covertly represented—to Jarndyce and
Woodcourt. This relationship is not a separate line of truly dynamic action so much as it is a pseudodramatic definition of values by which the panorama of neglect and irresponsibility imaged in the rest of the novel is judged. Esther, Dame Durden, the sturdy little housekeeper with keys; Jarndyce the guardian; Woodcourt the selfless physician sentimentally epitomize the self-sacrificing devotion to duty and responsibility which, in polar contrast with the general dereliction, gives the novel its peculiar emotional resonance. In a world where every heart is closed to the needs of others, theirs respond only to the needs of others. When at last Esther gains her Woodcourt, we are meant to be moved not so much by the fact of the union itself, to which we have scarcely been made to look forward, as by the orgy of mutual self-sacrifice which precedes it, of Esther giving herself up to Jarndyce and Jarndyce in turn giving Esther up to Woodcourt.

But, as already noted, Esther’s chief use is to bring into the story material that will conceal its essential singularity and help to generalize its significance. Thus, through Esther, we encounter a number of situations in which the figure of the neglected child is repeated with variations. In Esther’s doll buried as she leaves her foster home; in Jenny’s child, dead for lack of nourishment by Mrs. Pardiggle’s tracts; in Peepy Jellyby, whose care falls outside the pious purposes of his missionary mother; in Prince Turveydrop, drained by selfless devotion to his selfish father; in the orphaned servant girl Charley, we have successive replications of the situation which lies at the psychic heart of the novel. These episodes, unattached to any line of action, are, characteristically of Dickens, parts developed for their own sake at the expense of the whole, a fact which makes *Bleak House* seem much the baggiest of the monsters I am anatomizing. But they serve nevertheless to give inductive substance to the generalized indictment brought with dramatic centrality, by means we have yet to consider, against Lady Dedlock and the society of which she is the concrete representative.

All that I have said so far emphasizes how much Dickens was driven to fragment his novel in the service of giving it general significance. His further need was for formal elements that would tie the two main halves of his book back together and with them the other fragments that would tie the two main halves of his book back together and with them the other fragments he had created to fill out the second, derivative half. His use of Chancery as a backdrop for the story enabled him to do this with such effectiveness that many critics have taken it for the main subject of the novel rather than as what I believe it is, a binder for the plot system and a means of manifesting in the social realm the significance springing out of the underlying personal psychic core. Chancery is the legal institution by which the legacy of earlier generations is intended to be transmitted with equity to the later, and its stultification as imaged in the
novel is the large social analogue of the unfeeling neglect of individual parental responsibility ubiquitously displayed in the novel. The objective shortcomings and failures of Chancery as a literal legal institution are specified of course and attached, not so much to the story of Ada and Richard as to the still more minor characters of Gridley and Miss Flite. But that the primary significance of Chancery is not its objective defects is seen in the fact that Richard's destruction is necessitated much less by Chancery than by his own inner attitude, an attitude, most fully expressed in his identification with Skimpole, which places both of them in strange contrast with Jo. If Jo, like Oliver Twist, is the neglected child whom nobody takes care of, Skimpole, like Richard, is the adult child who expects everybody to take care of him with no effort on his part. Thus Richard, supported by Skimpole, seems not so much to illustrate the dangers of Chancery as to mark the dangers and limits of the sentimental attitude upon which the emotion of the story is built.6

It was an effective choice on Dickens's part to connect Richard's story so closely to Esther's. He thus succeeded in compensating further for Esther's inherent lack of dynamic interest and placed in close conjunction the polar adult responses necessary for our accurate assessment of the emotional dynamics underlying the neglected child/guilty mother situation. Dickens's need to attach Richard to Esther partly accounts for her intense and otherwise puzzling attachment to the vacuous Ada. In general her love for Ada may be said to express the love that Dickens cannot permit her in her selflessness to feel for herself; since she cannot be allowed to feel much for her mother, without her love for Ada she would seem affectively dead. On the other hand, Dickens could not have made us believe that Esther could care directly for Richard without either decreasing our sense of her as a moral benchmark or making her in love with him, a love which would necessarily seem to some degree self-interested and which would also have threatened her necessary final happiness. Esther's intensely selfless love for the lovely Ada who in her turn loves Rick was the two-sectioned bridge that Dickens constructed to cross the formal gap.

At the same time that the presentation of Chancery serves to homogenize and integrate our sense of the significance of the novel as a whole, it serves also to bind together the material elements of the plot system and make it seem more integral than it otherwise would have. At the outset of the story the Chancery through which Esther, Jarndyce, Richard, and Ada are connected functions also, through Hawdon and the mock chancellor Krook, to connect Lady Dedlock with the slum world of London. Krook is identified with the Chancellor and Chancery in order to make him a linchpin capable of holding the two complex sides of the story together. Then by association and extension, largely through the figure of Tulkinghorn, the civil legal domain of Chancery is made to pass imperceptibly
into the contiguous domain of the criminal law and finally to Inspector Bucket. Thus Lady Dedlock’s story is concretely connected on the one hand with the law as expressing a social analogue of her dereliction and with it on the other as the social means by which her dereliction is hunted out for retribution.

Though the large spiral of Chancery moving integrally downward in the novel and the spiral of disease moving from Jo and the graveyard and Tom-all-Alone’s upward serve to make Dickens’s great novel of episodic fragments seem at last the embodiment of a single amorphous mystery, it is finally Lady Dedlock’s story which provides the monster with a rudimentary backbone if not a complete skeleton, and I may conclude consideration of the novel with a brief further appreciation of the artistry by which Dickens endows her individual story with full transindividual significance.

I have noticed already how Lady Dedlock’s story is oriented emotionally toward her symbolic social child Jo rather than toward her actual natural child Esther Summerson. Just as she in conjunction with her husband Sir Leicester is made to seem representative of the social establishment, so Jo is made to seem the victim of the establishment collectively. Thus when, denounced and denied by the pious fraud Chadband, Jo sits munching the food supplied by the humble Snagsby, the narrator remarks:

> And there he sits, munching and gnawing, and looking up at the great Cross on the summit of St. Paul’s Cathedral, glittering above a red and violet-tinted cloud of smoke. From the boy’s face one might suppose that sacred emblem to be, in his eyes, the crowning confusion of the great, confused city; so golden, so high up, so far out of his reach. There he sits, the sun going down, the river running fast, the crowd flowing by him in two streams, everything moving on to some purpose and to one end—until he is stirred up and told to “move on” too. (243–44)

Thus Dickens requires the religious pretensions of all society to share the fault concretely dramatized in Chadband, and it is this indictment that he draws upon in his last reflections upon Jo, the famous words:

> Dead, your majesty. Dead, my lords and gentleman. Dead, Right Reverends and Wrong Reverends of every order. Dead, men and women, born with Heavenly compassion in your hearts. And dying thus around us every day. (572)

But if all society is abstractly implicated in the guilt of Jo’s neglect, one person in whom feeling is dead and locked up tight must be brought to feel its terrible accusation and pay its price, and the central catharsis of the story is achieved through the long process by which Lady Dedlock is charged with and made to
suffer the guilt diffusely located around the figure of Jo. From very early in the novel, the sense of something pursuing her, coming ever closer to perception of guilt and indictment, is in evidence; but it is embodied in so many forms and agencies, manifested in so many chance occurrences, that it seems at last the force of a disembodied vengeance, of providential nemesis itself. First it is the “fashionable intelligence” which rapidly pursues her, then the shrewd but foolish young Guppy, then the relentless Tulkinghorn, and finally Inspector Bucket, through whose finger as directed at Sir Leicester the indictment is finally discharged with devastating force. In close examination of both Tulkinghorn’s role and Bucket’s, however, we encounter some surprising apparent anomalies. Tulkinghorn’s motives for pursuing Lady Dedlock are obscure, illogical and contradictory in a way strangely at odds with our purely dramatic sense of the cogency with which he acts. Even more so with Bucket, whose conduct yields upon examination a most striking but to my knowledge never noticed contradiction. When Bucket confronts Sir Leicester Dedlock after Tulkinghorn’s murder and lays bare Lady Dedlock’s hidden past and apparent present culpability with such relentless force that Sir Leicester suffers a stroke, we have no difficulty in accepting the probability of Bucket’s extreme actions because we believe him to be motivated and justified by his knowledge of the fact of Lady Dedlock’s actual guilt. When, after a delay caused by the incursion of the Chadbands and Smallweeds, we learn at last that Bucket has come to arrest for the murder Lady Dedlock’s French maid Hortense, we forget to remember that this leaves Bucket without any grounds for having spoken with such unmeasured harshness in the first place to a person of Sir Leicester’s great dignity. We might count this and the obscurity of motivation in Tulkinghorn to be defects of probability in the novel, but I do not think that in actual effect they are. Rather I think we should see them as wonderfully artful attempts on Dickens’s part to attach to Lady Dedlock and indirectly to Sir Leicester a diffuse, inspecific guilt that shall not seem to result from any individual action of theirs, nor be pursued from any clear private motive in Tulkinghorn and Bucket, but which shall, in its imprecise content and great emotional weight, be the basis for exactly the kind of effect Dickens requires to endow his individual plot with general significance. He does not want the Dedlocks to appear as individual malefactors but to bear and be impersonally indicted for the large and clear social guilt which the structure of the novel has attached to Lady Dedlock’s unspecified personal errors. So strongly do Tulkinghorn and Bucket press their nonexistent legal case indeed, that it is hard for us to register in the normal act of reading the fact that Lady Dedlock is not guilty of anything except bearing twenty years before an illegitimate child. But the self-accusation and the opening up of her heart to feeling and the self-punishment to which
they lead, an emotional necessity of the plot, would not be at all believable without the threat of external indictment which, in its diffuseness, prepares for the diffuse significance which, as I shall now indicate, Dickens attaches to her death.

Dickens's large design does become fully apparent, I think, in his handling of Lady Dedlock's death at the gate of the cemetery where are buried both Hawdon-Nemo and Jo. Esther, the literal ground of Lady Dedlock's guilt, is brought by Bucket rather improbably into the rescue-chase through which is concretized the sense of abstract pursuit which, following her throughout, seems in its final stages to come from within herself and thus to harry her to her solitary end. When at last Esther with Bucket and Alan Woodcourt approaches her figure we are led to suppose that she does not recognize Lady Dedlock but sees in her, because of her earlier change of clothes, only Jenny "the Mother of the dead child" (who is also, we remember, the shelterer of Jo in his last illness). The phrase defines and intensifies the prolonged suspense of Esther's discovery and, in repetition—"I saw before me, lying on the step, the mother of the dead child"—serves as a final evocation of the universal burden that has been attached to Lady Dedlock's fate before she is literally revealed to Esther as "my mother cold and dead" (714).

The climactic scene thus serves to epitomize the fact that in *Bleak House* we have a panoramic story which can be understood as developed from an intention to extend the emotional significance attaching to an individual fate—the fate of a mother guilty in respect to her neglected child—over the whole of a society, as Dickens finds in the sorrow of his personal trauma, for himself and for us, the means of sympathetic access to the analogous sorrow of all neglected children and social outcasts. In *Vanity Fair* we have a work of comparable panoramic view built on quite a different central plot principle. That principle is, I believe, directly indicated by Thackeray himself when he says in the penultimate sentence of his novel, "Ah! Vanitas Vanitatvm! Which of us is happy in this world? Which of us has his desire? or having it, is satisfied?" I do not mean to suggest that his novel is developed to express and enforce this as a moral, as *Rasselas* for instance is designed to express and enforce a somewhat analogous moral. What I do suggest is that Thackeray intended to write a novel of plotted action in which this truth would be experienced in the dramatized fate of the characters rather than as a dramatized proposition per se. But to do this in an action presented obvious problems. On the one hand, the essence of his projected form would have been to display the fact of a universal fate. But this inherently would require the book to be the story of many people, many stories of many people with the same structure of fate, as contrasted with the one fate of one person ideally required for an effectively unified action.
One solution would be to design a story in which the fate of a number of characters would be represented as subordinate to but structurally supportive of the fate of a single dominant character which would be the structural backbone of the whole. This character might well be a disadvantaged social climber, whose powerful drive toward the obvious vanities of life would be a sympathetic as well as an extreme instance of the general condition and at the same time would be the means of bringing her into contact with, and turning to her own purposes, the lives and fates of many other people which would also be displayed to the reader. (My reference to “her” assumes rather than explains the choice of a woman as protagonist. A woman—or rather women, as I shall explain in a moment—was a better choice than a man because the systematic scheming required in a climber would be more sympathetic in a disadvantaged but talented woman.) But if Thackeray had used such a woman’s, that is to say, Becky Sharp’s, as the single dominant fate, the effect would still have been manifestly weakened, since the frustration of Becky’s life purposes would be felt by the reader as resulting from their immorality rather than as manifesting a universal situation. Similarly, to use Amelia Sedley as the single figure would have been even more disadvantageous, since her limited and unworldly virtues in themselves scarcely lead to an engagement with Vanity Fair at all. By uniting their two stories as the dominant plot structure Thackeray achieved an asymmetry of moral conditions which neutralized morality as the causal factor differentiating happiness from unhappiness. We feel in reading the book that there are definite moral differences among people but that these differences do not affect their liability to the common fate. It is this relative formal indifference of the book to morality which made many Victorians think it cynical, just as it is Thackeray’s implicit preference of domesticity to anything in Vanity Fair which makes us think it rather sentimental.

By using his joint heroines, Thackeray could also easily extend the territory surveyed by his novel to include the landed aristocracy on the one hand and the upper middle merchant classes on the other and look beyond them at least to Europe and the West and East Indies, if not to China and Peru. Further, by making his subordinate characters typify various well-known social and economic roles and conditions and naming them so as to reactivate many literary and historical associations, Thackeray was able to make it seem that what was true of his dozen or so primary characters was true of all English society. The problems of bifurcation presented to Thackeray like Dickens by his double focus Thackeray solved brilliantly by synchronizing and counterpointing the respective ups and downs of his heroines’ careers and by tying the two careers and the lives which they connect into an interfunctioning causal unity. His need to do this brought into existence Amelia’s brother Jos, whose prime function is
to serve as a bridge between her and Becky, bringing the two into interaction at
the beginning, middle, and end of their represented careers.

As a single example of the way the protagonists’ lives intersect with and are
conditioned by subordinate lives so as to give a strong sympathetic sense of the
universal fate, I choose the powerful scene where, immediately after his wife’s
death, Sir Pitt Crawley comes to Miss Crawley’s in town in order to propose
to Becky. The news of Lady Crawley’s death has itself arrived not long before,
so that, though we know Sir Pitt’s attitude toward Becky, we do not guess his
immediate urgent purpose. And similarly, though we know that Becky is deeply
involved with Rawdon Crawley, we do not certainly know that they are married:

“I wawnt you back at Queen’s Crawley, Miss,” the baronet said, fixing his eyes upon
her, and taking off his black gloves and his hat with its great crape hat-band. His eyes
had such a strange look, and fixed upon her so steadfastly, that Rebecca Sharp began
almost to tremble. “I hope to come soon,” she said in a low voice “as soon as Miss
Crawley is better—and to return to—to the dear children.”

“You’ve said so these three months, Becky,” replied Sir Pitt, “and still you go
hanging on to my sister, who’ll fling you off like an old shoe, when she’s wore you out.
I tell you I want you. I’m going back to the Vuneral. Will you come back? Yes or no.”

“I daren’t—I don’t think—it would be right—to be alone—with you, Sir,” Becky
said, seemingly in great agitation. “I say agin, I want you,” Sir Pitt said, thumping
the table. “I can’t git on without you. I didn’t see what it was till you went away. The
house all goes wrong. It’s not the same place. All my accounts has got muddled again.
You must come back. Do come back. Dear Becky, do come.”

“Oh, Sir Pitt!” Rebecca said, very much moved.

“Say yes, Becky,” Sir Pitt continued. “I’m an old man, but a good’n. I’m good
for twenty years. I’ll make you happy, zee if I don’t. You shall do what you like, spend
what you like; and ‘av it all your own way. I’ll make you a settlement. I’ll do every-
ting regular. Look year!” and the old man fell down on his knees and leered at her
like a satyr.

Rebecca started back a picture of consternation. In the course of this history we
have never seen her lose her presence of mind; but she did now, and wept some of the
most genuine tears that ever fell from her eyes.

“Oh, Sir Pitt!” she said. “Oh, Sir—I—I’m married already.”

(Thackeray 141–42)
Our complex response to this scene epitomizes our response to the characters throughout the book. Here as elsewhere, Thackeray makes us understand how deeply his characters desire what we would not desire for them because of our awareness that their desires are inherently vain. Even if they were to have their passionate wishes, here foreclosed by the chance which makes them manifest, we know in our detachment that they would not be happy. Sir Pitt’s overpowering desire for Becky’s youth and beauty, Becky’s consuming appetite for rank and wealth which he represents are so urgent as to blind them to the incongruities which we so plainly see in their situation. But despite our superior knowledge that what they wish cannot be and would, if compassed, be empty, we understand also that they are unable to want anything else, that nothing but what they cannot have would make them happy; and in this knowledge of their participation in a condition in which we also share, we find the basis of our informed compassion for them.

But this local manifestation of the universal fate is itself only a stage in the dynamic plot process through which the final fate of both characters is unfolded in the same ultimate terms. Becky goes on now to an immediate hope in the benefactions of Miss Crawley which Sir Pitt has already in this scene suggested is vain, and to further vanities beyond. And Sir Pitt goes on embittered to sate himself with drink and to court Miss Horrocks, a stroke, and death. Space is lacking to explore the ramifications of all the interrelated actions of the book, but I may in connection with Sir Pitt make another general point about a quality they all share.

In the last stage of his life Sir Pitt seems to lose himself in degradation as he pursues the low delights offered by the beribboned Horrocks and seems to fall more and more into sensual bondage to her. Before his final collapse, however, Thackeray gives him a moment of surprising recovery, when he one day suddenly delivers over to his daughter-in-law, Lady Jane, the chest containing the hereditary jewels of the Crawley family. “‘Take that,’ said he, ‘my dear; it belonged to my mother, and afterwards to the first Lady Crawley. Pretty pearls—never gave ’em the ironmonger’s daughter [his second wife]. No, no. Take ’em and put ’em up quick’” (388). This little scene gives an unexpected revelation, in the midst of his degradation, of Pitt’s strong underlying sense of his own dignity as the bearer of a family name and title which existed before and remains after his individual life, and it leaves with us accordingly a residual sense of the worth of those things which, ultimately vain or not, men have sought as a bulwark against oblivion. Pitt’s action makes us feel that to be a baronet and a Crawley is, after all, something.

If we observe closely, we see that Thackeray is careful everywhere in his book to preserve our sense of the worth of those things for which men struggle. He
wishes us not to turn away in piety or disgust from the things which men seek in Vanity Fair but to keep us always in a kind of active sympathy with the vain wishes the workings of which he shows us everywhere. He does this, as with Sir Pitt, partly by giving these wishes a passionate force that tends to redeem them, compelling empathy against our will. Hence we are made to sense the molten depth of resolution which leads old Osborne to disinherit young George. The family and the servants tremble that night in the face of his volcanic resolve, as later Lord Steyne’s grander family tremble in the presence of his dark and imperious will. In somewhat parallel fashion Becky’s ultimate betrayal of Rawdon is raised above the tawdry by the implications of the charade she acts in earlier that same evening. When, as Clytemnestra, she “scornfully snatches the dagger out of Aegisthus’s hand, and advanced to the bed” where lies Rawdon as Agamemnon, we see in her dramatic action the image of her real inner capacity for such ultimate powers of decision; so that Lord Steyne merely speaks our own thought when he says between his teeth, “By God, she’d do it too” (494).

The fact that Becky appears in the guise of a great tragic queen also serves to dignify her and her later action and to indicate another dimension of awareness that Thackeray creates in his book to offset any potential emotional disengagement on our part. This we have also already seen in Sir Pitt—the fact that the things men seek in Vanity Fair are often worth seeking, or at least are understandably sought, and, in their highest manifestations, genuinely grand. Thus for instance we are induced to believe in the splendor of the great world of public affairs to which we have imaginative access through Steyne (see Ray 416), and we are made to feel with Becky the reality of his status and power when in Italy Steyne’s politely ominous emissary warns her away from any attempt to renew acquaintances.

This dimension of the book is most fully realized, of course, in connection with the Battle of Waterloo. In general the setting of the novel backward in time does not imply any specially historical orientation. The full vanity of human hopes—as with Sir Pitt or old Sedley—becomes manifest only over stretches of time, so that to realize its proper force the novel had to be set some time in the past. And, a generation in the past, Waterloo offered itself as if providentially as a center for Thackeray’s book. The surroundings of the great battle gave him a stage on which his principal actors could all be plausibly brought together, and with its glimpses of the historical great (“it’s the Juke himself,” says Mrs. Major O’Dowd), it tied his action closely to the reader’s world of real experience. Most of all, it offers as a backdrop for the action one of the grandest of man’s vain reaches toward glory, the last passionate all-or-nothing cast of Napoleon. Standing unseen beyond the action, Napoleon lends amplitude and altitude
to the world of Thackeray’s fiction, while in the forefront of the drama, at the opposite pole of significance, he is parodied and patronized by “Waterloo” Jos Sedley, the fat fool whose garish clothes amount almost to motley, in whose image the world’s vanity is contracted to absurdity. In the terms of this contrast, as in the cumulative force of his whole plot system, Thackeray makes us feel that in all their infinite variety of worth and dignity human hopes are alike in their urgency and emptiness.

I may conveniently begin discussion of Middlemarch, to which I now turn, by noticing the reaction to it of Henry James, who, despite his admiration for the book, thought it less “an organized, molded, balanced composition, gratifying the reader with a sense of design and construction” than “a mere chain of episodes, broken into accidental lengths and unconscious of the influence of a plan.” “A treasure house of detail,” the book nevertheless seemed to him “an indifferent whole” (Review of Middlemarch 353). But James made little effort to see what in fact Eliot’s overall formal intention was or to gauge properly the artistic problems it presented. He saw only that she meant to paint a “panorama compact” of the “total sum of life in an English village forty years ago” (354). But her purpose was clearly more definite than this, as is evident from the last sentence of her book: “The growing good of the world,” she says there, “is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life and rest in unvisited tombs” (Eliot, Middlemarch 613). Her formal intention, I believe, was to construct a plotted story the felt significance of which this sentence would serve to render explicit and complete. Her intention was not therefore to paint a static “social picture” but, as many have seen, to represent dynamic social process. Gordon Haight has said that her intention could be carried out only “by studying the relations of a whole community” (xvi), but it would be somewhat more accurate to say that she could not really represent a whole community, but had at least to represent several independent lines of action as contributing implicitly to the general social result indicated in the quoted last sentence. Thus, we may locate the general differential principle of structure in Middlemarch by saying that whereas Bleak House extends a sentiment derived from one individual relationship over the whole of society, and Vanity Fair displays within a unified plot system a universal condition of individual human fate, in Middlemarch we have represented actual social interaction, the genuine joint activity of several individuals as bearing on a transindividual end.

But pervasively represented in Eliot’s novel is a condition of the individual spirit which inherently opposes any movement of the individual toward a significant end outside himself. In a famous passage of her novel she speaks of
the fact that “we are all of us born in moral stupidity, taking the world as an udder to feed our supreme selves” (156), and she expands this idea in another well-known passage:

An eminent philosopher among my friends, who can dignify even your ugly furniture by lifting it into the serene light of science, has shown me this pregnant little fact. Your pier-glass or extensive surface of polished steel made to be rubbed by a housemaid, will be minutely and multitudinously scratched in all directions; but place now against it a lighted candle, as a centre of illumination, and lo! the scratches will seem to arrange themselves in a fine series of concentric circles round that little sun. It is demonstrable that the scratches are going everywhere impartially, and it is only your candle which produces the flattering illusion of a concentric arrangement, its light falling with an exclusive optical selection. These things are a parable. The scratches are events, and the candle is the egoism of any person now absent. (194–95)

In the novel as a whole this conception is offered to us not abstractly and for its own sake but as imaged in and conditioning the lives of all the characters. Those who like Lydgate and Dorothea mean to “shape their own deeds and alter the world a little” (107) and thus contribute to the growing good of the world must to some degree break through this egoistic illusion into contact with the reality of other lives in the world beyond self. But the plan of the novel required the breakthrough to be strictly limited. Since Eliot seeks to represent not the extraordinary human agent who makes public history but, in her words, the “gradual action of ordinary causes rather than exceptional” (qtd. in Haight xv; Eliot to Blackwood), that is to say, the private underside of history, the hidden lives of those buried in unvisited tombs, she will have to show us self-limited lives that are, in a public sense, unsuccessful, obscure, defeated, but which in the aggregate can be understood as nevertheless contributing to the forward movement of society.

The universal fact of egotistical insularity clearly determines the distinctive way in which chance and providentiality are presented in the book. Since the real controlling forces of social life are for Eliot the aggregate innovating pressures of the freed human spirit as it casts off the retrograde weight of the outlived past and moves toward a vital future, any sense of external providentiality is not, as in Fielding and Dickens, a reflection of an objective external agency but simply a projection of the individual’s selfish illusion. Thus Casaubon sees Dorothea as “providentially” (32) sent to help him complete the Key to All Mythologies, and Fred Vincy sees his Uncle Featherstone’s provision for his wants as an expected “providential occurrence” (99). Even Ladislaw has an appropriately nonsectarian “reliance on the intentions of the universe
with regard to himself” (61). He is one of those who feel that genius “may confidently await those messages from the universe which summon it to its peculiar work, only placing itself in an attitude of sublime receptivity toward all sublime chances” (61).

Peculiarly enough, Ladislaw is the center of a web of concatenating incidents in the book which seem to reflect that novelistic use of providentiality familiar from Fielding and Dickens; I mean the series of events which brings Raffles into contact with Bulstrode—a coincidence which Raffles directly labels “a Providential thing”—and is the means of revealing the intricate schemes by which Bulstrode had deprived Ladislaw of his inheritance. It is a little difficult to see what Eliot is doing with this kind of plotting in an anti-providential novel, but reflection suggests that she means the development as an implicit refutation of that providential view of things which Bulstrode is explicitly represented (with richly mixed authorial sympathy and judgment) as taking with regard to himself. Introducing Bulstrode into the plot gave her a fictionally probable way of bringing in traditional religious doctrine concerning the structure of historical causality so that it could be criticized within the representation of the quite different humanistic conception which she dramatizes in its place. The significance of the quasi-providential development is completed when it results in the revelation of the secret of Ladislaw’s birth and the potential restoration of his inheritance. In *Tom Jones*, in *Oliver Twist*, in *Bleak House*, such developments serve to culminate and complete the desert/fate structure of the reader’s desire for the central character and to bear witness to the pleasingly mysterious presence of occult agency. But here, as Ladislaw waves aside Bulstrode’s offer to restore his fortune, we are made to feel the irrelevance of such material considerations to personal destiny; whatever the source of these developments, they solve no problems for Ladislaw at all. The result of the whole episode is perhaps to bring the reader himself fully out of the fellowship of providential illusion and to ready him to live in a world where the shape of events is man’s own responsibility.

In developing her novel, Eliot needed to display a number of figures, making, as hidden causes, a small incremental contribution to the common good in a way that would at the same time suggest the larger array of social forces to which their individual contributions relate. But in order to make a plot system out of the actions of these characters, she also had to make them interacting members of a concrete community. Both their systematic interaction and their ordinariness would be easier to show within the confines of a small provincial community; the problem was to suggest the larger forces within the same perspective. We can see, incidentally, that the dual aspect of this problem is directly suggested in the title of the book: “Middlemarch” implies both a community in the provinces
and the large never-ending social process in which, as Eliot says, every ending is a new beginning.

Any representation of growing social good had to implicate the innovative and creative role of science as a central cause of that progress, and in a small community this could be done probably only in the person of a doctor; hence Lydgate. This role has a social dimension which makes it easy to develop the sources of his individual defeat, but at the same time the nicely vague suggestions that Lydgate has experimental ambitions make him potentially the compeer of Jenner, Laennec and Vesalius who are his heroes. In these ambitions he is defeated, but in defeat he makes a small contribution to the growing good and reminds us in his very failure that the parallel efforts of other men in other places have not failed. Similar reflections help us also to see Ladislaw more accurately. James long ago noted that Ladislaw seemed to him “a beautiful attempt” but finally a failure, “the only eminent failure in the book.” The portrait, James said, “lacks sharpness of outline and depth of color” and “remains vague and impalpable to the end” (Review of *Middlemarch* 355–56). These judgments have been so often renewed that they cannot be completely wrong, perhaps. It is easy to think ill of Ladislaw, with his flowing hair and delicate throat, but George Eliot may have known better than James what she was doing with the character, and she may well have developed him as he is with full deliberation to suit her overall formal purposes. So long as we think of Ladislaw as intended to be the concrete manifestation of what Eliot supposed a proper intellectual hero to be, we are bound to find him something of a disappointment. But if we think of him in terms of the formal intentions I have outlined, the result is rather different.

First of all, it should be obvious that Ladislaw cannot any more than the rest of the characters be represented as a success, making manifest contribution to the upward progress of mankind. This would infringe on the area of the extraordinary, of true history, and besides violate the specific formal condition that all causes of the growing good should be hidden. And we see if we look that Eliot intends to present him as a (relative) failure. Eliot follows her earlier quoted remark on Ladislaw’s reliance on Providence by saying that “He held that reliance to be a mark of genius; and certainly it is not a mark to the contrary, genius consisting neither in self-conceit nor in humility, but in a power to make or do not anything in general but something in particular” (61). It is just this power of doing something in particular that finally, we are made to see, Ladislaw lacks, and this accounts for his failure to make an effectual mark in the world of the novel, though he does, early and late, make indefinite contributions that can be thought of as absorbed in the growing good. At the same time, however, he does seem to be able to do almost anything in general: he is by turns an expert on art,
an authority on the Higher Biblical Criticism, a writer, a man of practical political affairs, etc. He has the general air of being what Mr. Brooke thinks him, “a sort of Burke with a leaven of Shelley” (366). He isn’t, we know, a Burke or Shelley, and that again is his personal failure; but his whole being is admirably designed, I believe with deliberate vagueness and intentional lack of sharpness of outline, to suggest the general presence in the world of the forces that make for its overall good. While we feel that Ladislaw is not a Burke or Shelley, as Lydgate is not a Jenner or Vesalius, we feel also that he might have been the one as Lydgate might have been the other; and that in any event there are out there Burkes and Jenners who are making the world grow better. The net result then is that we register Ladislaw as a temporarily defeated manifestation of a larger social struggle. Thus, that vagueness and lack of substance in him which would be a clear defect in a novel of individual action becomes, I believe, manifestly a virtue in a novel which means to go beyond the merely personal to a sense of the transpersonal. If Ladislaw were more definite, more in focus, more effective, the general impact of the novel as a representation of social process would be decreased.

Both Lydgate and Ladislaw come into Middlemarch from the outside and go away from it at the end into the wider world, thus literally suggesting the conjunction of local life with the larger stream of cultural forces, and this is part of that general positive suggestiveness in them of which I have just spoken. Yet it would not have done to leave the reader’s sense of progress entirely with the subliminal countersuggestions which surround their defeat, and here we see the necessity for the third major plot line of the story, the Fred Vincy/Mary and Caleb Garth line, which runs through the whole more in counterpoint than in direct connection with the others. If as concrete dramatic characters Lydgate, Ladislaw, and Dorothea carry ideal overtones of the scientific, the aesthetic, and the moral currents in man’s historical life, it is easy to see that Caleb and Vincy as his anointed successor are meant to suggest the possibility of material betterment and progress. Garth is specifically called by his wife “a father whose good work remains though his name may be forgotten” (295), and since the reader has seen his good gates and cottages abuilding and in place, and since Garth and Fred are represented as doing early work for the railroads which the reader knows to have become in the meantime an improvement in the general condition of life, he, the reader, has indubitable imaginative evidence that ordinary causes, though hidden, do produce real results. Without Garth and young Vincy, whom James so much despises, it would have been impossible, I think, for Eliot to have given us that almost palpable sense of progress that she does give us upon which our apprehension of the significance of all the other main characters depends.
In this connection also we may see clearly why the book is set back from its own time and centered upon the Reform Bill. The Reform Bill, of course, was the public event which most clearly expressed the general potentiality in English affairs for development toward an increasing social good, and setting the story in the time when it was passed was bound to make the reader aware of it in terms of his own later knowledge as something which had on the whole made clearly for the betterment of society. Hearing of the Reform Bill, the reader knows that the efforts to bring it about—even the relatively ineffectual ones of Brooke and Ladislaw—will have positive results; it is the guarantee that the hidden lives in unvisited tombs had a permanent good influence.

A brief final word about the central role of Dorothea. The essence of her character is the essence of the motive spirit of the book and the process it attempts to image—the impulse to live beyond the self, to act upon the world beyond the ego. In her attempt to do this, she, like the other characters, is trapped by her own perceptions, as through her attachment to Casaubon her impulse to contribute toward a vital future becomes mired in the dead past. But Eliot develops this defeat for her very early, almost preclimactically, so that out of it might come the insight which frees her to affect positively, as she later does, the lives of all the others in the book whose achievements fall short of their aspirations. The sympathy which she feels for her fellow characters is closely akin to the sympathy which the author makes us feel for them and for her also; as her self-knowledge makes her free to know and to act upon them, our knowledge of her and of them makes us freer to know ourselves and the others beyond ourselves. Thus Eliot’s novel helps to further something like the process it represents, as in our expanded consciousness we feel heartened in our feeble struggles toward the good and are consoled by the thought that in our obscure struggles we are not alone.

In these too concentrated analyses, I have meant to suggest how, if we conceive the social significances which these novels present not as just manifested “themes” but as in principle in conflict with the plot structures in which they are nevertheless by their authors’ deliberate intention concretely embodied, we can better understand how they came to have the distinctive shapes that they in fact have, and gain some degree of insight into the puzzling structural anomalies which they manifestly display. In doing this, I have meant to contribute something to our understanding of the ways in which the being as it were of literary works can come into conflict with their meaning, not in a way that blocks successful realization of mixed intention, but in a way that can prevent their authors from achieving in them the aesthetic purity of fully integral organic form.
Notes

1. This essay was composed some time ago as a lecture and has since been delivered on a number of occasions, most recently at the 1987 Conference on Narrative Literature at Ann Arbor. Also circulated in manuscript, it has had the good fortune to be referred to in print by other critics, so that its appearance here (stylistically corrected and with added notes but otherwise unrevised) may be useful as a precursory version of a fuller account I plan eventually to offer in a book on the formal development of the English novel that will analyze leading masterpiece novels of successive periods as creative adaptations of the intrinsic possibilities of an historically invented and inherited form in response to the extrinsic norms characteristic of the periods on the one hand and the authors’ pre-given psychological set on the other. An early prospective sketch of the project is to be found in my “Defoe, Richardson, Joyce, and the Concept of Form in the Novel” [chapter 8], while more recent work is represented in “Exodus and Return: Joyce’s Ulysses and the Fiction of the Actual” [chapter 16], “From Richardson to Austen: ‘Johnson’s Rule’ and the Development of the Eighteenth-Century Novel of Moral Action” [chapter 10], and “The Unambiguous Ambiguity of Conrad’s Lord Jim” [chapter 15].

2. Though thematic readings are still no doubt staples in the classroom, they seem now increasingly to be yielding place in published criticism to the dissection of literary works as symptomatic cultural phenomena, as in D. A. Miller’s brilliant The Novel and the Police. Miller’s radically probing analysis of Bleak House, for instance, eschews the kind of traditional critical focus still nevertheless to be found in such a sensitive and insightful recent thematic treatment as Paul Pickrel’s “Bleak House: The Emergence of Theme”; but both these critics, though they deal illuminatingly with the effects of the structural anomalies of Bleak House, fail to see that the anomalies require specific explanation as anomalies. Pickrel, for example, reads Bleak House as characterized by a tension between the narrative and the thematic without specifying what the thematic content is or why, in this novel, it should be at odds with the narrative development.

3. See Peter Garrett, The Victorian Multiplot Novel: Studies in Dialogical Form. Garrett criticizes my “monological” approach as in principle foreclosing descriptive recognition of the contradictions of multiplot form (13–15), but his own approach does not adequately discriminate “baggy” from other period novels—Wuthering Heights or Great Expectations, for instance—which he also conceives in dialogical terms; nor, despite a concluding discussion of the historical dimension of these works (223–225), is he at last able to give a comprehensive explanation for the problem he begins his book by recognizing, that “bagginess” is a distinctive historical characteristic of the greatest novels of (only) this period. For an analysis of the structural anomalies differentially characteristic of the novels of another period, see my “From Richardson to Austen.” [Editors’ Note: Chapter 10 in this volume.]

4. James speaks repeatedly about his own conception of organic form—see for instance the preface to The American in The Art of the Novel (37–38); the preface to The Portrait of a Lady (Art of the Novel 51); and the preface to The Ambassadors (Art of the Novel 317–18).

5. For an exception in a strong reading of the book, see Robert Donovan’s The Shaping Vision (222ff)
6. Edgar Johnson definitively defines the double-sidedness of Dickens’s attitude toward the figure of the helpless child: “Somewhere, deep down inside, perhaps unconsciously [Dickens] made the decision that never again was he going to be so victimized. . . . In one sense, the grieving child in the blacking warehouse might be said to have died, to be succeeded by a man of deadly determination, of insuperable resolve, hard and aggressive almost to fierceness. In another, that child never died, but was continually reborn in a host of children suffering or dying young and other innocent victims undergoing injustice and pain; from Oliver and Smike and poor Jo to all the victims of a stoney-hearted and archaic social system who throng Dickens’ later books” (1:45–46). But the self-defined child, looking to others for his care, like Skimpole and Richard, equally earned the inner scorn of the man whose salvation depended on taking responsibility for himself.
If Barchester Towers is to be understood as a differentiated member of the group defined in my “baggy monster” essay, it must be conceived as an action novel which embodies a transindividual social significance which is in tension with the action structure considered as the strictly integral structure of an effect. The grounds of such a structural conception of the book are implicit in Anthony Trollope’s account of how, during the course of his work as a travelling surveyor for the postal service, he visited Salisbury and, “while wandering there one mid-summer evening round the purlieus of the cathedral . . . conceived the story of The Warden—from whence came that series of novels of which Barchester, with its bishops, deans, and archdeacon, was the central site.”

He continues:

I may as well declare at once that no one at their commencement could have had less reason than myself to presume himself to be able to write about clergymen. I have been often asked in what period of my early life I had lived so long in a cathedral city as to have become intimate with the ways of a Close. I never lived in any cathedral city—except London, never knew anything of any Close, and at that time had enjoyed no peculiar intimacy with any clergyman. My archdeacon, who has been said to be lifelike, and for whom I confess that I have all a parent’s fond affection, was, I think, the simple result of an effort of my moral consciousness. It was such as that, in my opinion, that an archdeacon should be—or, at any rate, would be with such advantages as an archdeacon might have, and lo! an archdeacon was produced, who has been declared by very competent authorities to be a real archdeacon down
to the very ground. And yet, as far as I can remember, I had not then even spoken
to an archdeacon. I have felt the compliment to be very great. The archdeacon came
whole from my brain after this fashion—but in writing about clergymen generally,
I had to pick up as I went whatever I might know or pretend to know about them.
(Autobiography 77–78)

There is much of literary critical interest to be remarked in this passage,
including some hidden significances that I will return to at the end of this analy-
sis, but we may notice in general, to begin, Trollope’s pointing up the fact that
the archdeacon (and by extension all his clerical characters) stand in accurate
correspondence with counterparts in the objectively existent social life-world
outside the novel, in which Trollope has his own existence, at the same time
that they are completely fictional, having no actual existence in that world but
imagined by Trollope in accordance with “whatever I might know or pretend to
know about them.”

Less generally, one notes that Trollope’s inspiration is in response not to an
impression of a person but of a milieu, the milieu of Salisbury Close in its secu-
ritv and serenity. He says, just after the passage quoted, that his first idea had no
reference to clergymen in general but involved centering a novel on the ethical
tensions surrounding the issue of the self-interest of the clergy in disposing and
making use of inherited institutional places and emoluments. He says he could
have attacked the church by showing a “bloated parson, with a big red nose” or
defended it by painting

a man as good, as sweet, and as mild as my warden, who should also have been a
hard-working, ill-paid minister of God’s word, and might have subjected him to the
rancorous venom of some daily Jupiter, who, without a leg to stand on, without any
true case, might have been induced by personal spite, to tear to rags the poor clergy-
man with poisonous, anonymous, and ferocious leading articles. (79–80)

He chose to place his warden rather in a moral bind between the two perspec-
tives and so to produce the novel of delicately transcribed internal moral action
that he in fact gives us in The Warden. One can see that in so doing he did not
need to distort the single-protagonist structure of the ideal-typical action in
order to get his social significance into it but that nevertheless that significance
can be understood as prior to and generating the character of his protagonist
rather than the other way round. Harding’s character needs to be just what it is
for him to suffer and by his moral choice movingly resolve, as he does, the con-
flict implicit in the double-sidedness of the moral issue which initially occurred
to Trollope as the focus of the action when he “stood for an hour on the little
bridge in Salisbury” and “made out to my own satisfaction the spot on which Hiram’s hospital should stand” (Autobiography 80).

It is in Barchester Towers, the second novel of the series, that the full structural pressure of Trollope’s intention to center an action novel not on a particular person-in-a-personal-predicament but, transindividually, on “clergymen in general” makes itself apparent. An intention to write about life within the high and long-established clerical order manifested in the appearance of Salisbury close presented an immediate difficulty to the novelist: just because the clerical life is inherently peaceful and serene—a spiritual life, normally receiving outward expression only in ceremonial event—it would be difficult to use as the ground of a dynamic and interesting action. But one can see that the general intention we have hypothesized—to make a socially significant action—would have prompted him to do what he does by way of meeting this problem. By choosing to display the life of the clergy in its social, that is to say, its worldly aspect—showing churchmen not merely as ministers of God but as men—he could develop an action that could be developed from within the material of its distinctive subject. We find Trollope fixing this perspective specifically in his text, in his observation toward the end of the first chapter that “if we look to our clergymen to be more than men, we shall probably teach ourselves to think they are less, and can hardly hope to raise the character of the pastor by denying to him the right to entertain the aspirations of a man” (Barchester Towers 18).

Given this specific intention, we can see why Archdeacon Grantly was central to Trollope’s idea of what he was doing, as is made plain by Trollope’s immediately following comment (prospective of his ubiquitous dramatic demonstration) that “our archdeacon”—the incumbent of Plumstead Episcopi—“was worldly.”

But the focus on the worldly aspect of the clergy potentially endangers the interest, basic to the story, of the clerical life (remember Trollope in Salisbury Close) as genuinely peaceful and serene and, though human, the social locus of the sacred. This consideration in general can be seen as requiring the action to be comic, with the faults of the characters not allowed to be truly heinous, the security of those we favor never being fundamentally threatened, as the drama of ethical significance develops within a continuing reassurance as to the essential stability of the community’s institutions and values.

The specific focus of the action is on the question Trollope presents at the outset, “Who was to be the new bishop” of Barchester?, which, in its fullest sense, governs the entire action but which, as a practical issue, is settled by the end of the first chapter in a way fully consistent with the formal considerations just sketched. That it should be settled, that the clerical object of worldly desire of our worldly archdeacon is foreclosed at the outset means that there will be
no unseemly struggle for actual worldly gain to demean the clerical character in the reader’s perception. Trollope gives us a close view of Archdeacon Grantly’s spiritual struggle as he waits by the deathbed of his father the bishop—“the good old man” fully ripe in years, moribund and “sleeping like a baby,” ready to die but only slowly dying (13)—while his mind cannot exclude the thought that at any moment the present ministry may go out of office and with it any chance that he, so perfectly suited to and deserving of the post, as his father’s son and administrator long in place of the diocese, will ever in fact be bishop. After the struggle is over and his loss in place, Trollope notes that “many will think that [Grantly] was wicked to grieve for the loss of episcopal power, wicked to have coveted it, nay, wicked even to have thought about it, in the way and at the moments he had done so” (18), but he has already induced an opposite judgment by representing the solitary archdeacon, in the presence only of God and his sleeping father, as asking himself “whether he really longed for his father’s death” and allowing us to watch as “the proud, wishful, worldly man sank on his knees by the bedside and, taking the bishop’s hand within his own, prayed eagerly that his sins might be forgiven him” (18).

With Grantly’s worldliness thus firmly placed within the limits of a properly clerical conscience, simultaneously with the loss of his worldly ambition, Trollope is ready to proceed with the struggle for practical control of the diocese which is the sequel. We need to note that this struggle could not have been represented as taking place directly between Archdeacon Grantly and the new bishop. In order to keep sympathy on Grantly’s side, the struggle needs to be a defensive one, in response to what the reader will be made to feel is unjustified encroachment from the bishop’s side; but whatever the encroachment and whatever the lack of justification, Grantly cannot, while remaining (as he must) a proper clergyman, be sympathetically represented as resisting the desires of his clerical superior, any more than he can in and of himself extend his effective diocesan power. It is this structural impasse which calls into being Trollope’s invention of a “baggy monster” structure different from those noted in *Bleak House, Vanity Fair,* and *Middlemarch.* In those works we noted, respectively, a plot structure built by splitting and then universalizing what is essentially a single action; a plot structure built of two intertwined actions displaying, in concert with a number of subordinated actions, a fate felt to be universal; and a plot system interrelating several main actions in order to give a sense of the meaning of the individual life in its impact on the lives of others in relation to the aggregate social life beyond the individual. With *Barchester Towers* Trollope’s need to give a representation of clerical life within the constraints of the action structure prompted him to create what may be called a composite or joint protagonist, and also a composite antagonist, in order to further develop and
satisfactorily resolve this action as focused on the “who shall be bishop” issue and initiated as already described. (The concept of the action as single, though enacted with a composite protagonist, accords with our intuitive impression of the action as more organically unified than that of the other “baggy monsters.”)

My observation above that the archdeacon cannot be put into open conflict with the bishop leads easily to a fruitful analysis of the action as it develops out of the beginning I have sketched. Rather than placing Grantly in insubordinate opposition to Bishop Proudie, Trollope shows us Grantly’s ally, the saintly Harding, under attack from Mrs. Proudie and Slope, both of whom, we are made to feel, improperly assume the bishop’s prerogative and therefore ought in justice to be opposed. (This separation of the bishop from his proper power, necessary to the action in general, is based on his status as henpecked husband, from which much comedy is drawn; it is the condition also of Slope’s immediate power, as well as of his ultimate dismissal.) The “morning visit” recorded in Chapter V displays Mrs. Proudie comically arrogating to herself the role that prompts and justifies the opposition of our friends (see below for a comment on this phrase):

“But surely, Dr. Grantly,” said the lady, “surely we should look at it differently. You and I, for instance, in our position: surely we should do all that we can to control so grievous a sin [as travelling on Sunday]. Don’t you think so, Mr. Harding?” and she turned to the precentor, who was sitting mute and unhappy. (46)

Harding now becomes the principal object of her attack:

Over and over again had she thrown out her “Surely, surely,” at Mr. Harding’s devoted head, and ill had that gentleman been able to parry the attack. . . . Mrs. Proudie interrogated him and then lectured. “Neither thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant,” said she impressively, and more than once, as though Mr. Harding had forgotten the words. She shook her finger at him as she quoted the favourite law, as though menacing him with punishment, and then called upon him categorically to state whether he did not think that travelling on the Sabbath was an abomination and a desecration. (48)

As the narrator notes for Harding, “there was no standing this,” but Harding only replies, “If you will come to St. Cuthbert’s some Sunday, I will preach you a sermon on that subject.”

By joining Harding to Grantly, and developing much of the subsequent action around Slope’s criticism of Harding and his and Mrs. Proudie’s attempt to prevent Harding’s reinstallation at Hiram’s Hospital, Trollope is able to keep the action in motion while maintaining sympathy for our friends in their
struggle against the bishop’s party. To speak of “our friends” here, as also of “the bishop’s party,” is in accord with our hypothesis that the protagonist as well as the antagonist of this action is composite; but we have not yet fully described the composition of the composite, nor all the problems involved in its construction. We have already in place the perception that joining Harding to Grantly is a means of offsetting the negativity of Grantly’s necessary worldliness and gaining ethical validation for his struggle with the bishop: he can be indignant on Harding’s as well as (to some degree) on his own behalf at the encroachment of Mrs. Proudie and Slope as he could not be wholly in his own simple self-interest; but with the support of Harding’s cause he can declare comic “war” on the interlopers, as we are made to feel the bishop’s party is, with the reader’s full sympathy.

But the further problem is that this war (seemingly) cannot be won: the bishop is bishop for life and can’t be defeated or forced out of office, or both. Trollope has two lines of solution to this problem. In the long run, it is of course Mrs. Proudie, not the bishop, who is ultimately to be de facto Bishop of Barchester. Toward the end, the narrator notes: “It has been explained, in the beginning of these pages, how three or four were contending together as to who, in fact, should be Bishop of Barchester. Each of these had now admitted to himself (or boasted to herself) that Mrs. Proudie was victorious in the struggle” (506), an assertion dramatized with wonderful comic force in the scene of Slope’s dismissal which follows. Consequently, Proudie’s occupation of the post cannot be envied on behalf of our friends, nor, since he wields so little real power, can it be any source to them of legitimate and therefore truly oppressive threat. (Note Slope’s parting shot, “As for the bishop, I pity him.”) To this negative compensation is added the positive dimension of success achieved by bringing in Arabin as a third element in the composite protagonist. Arabin’s ultimate appointment as Dean of the Cathedral puts him in charge at the imposing visible center of those lovely purlieus the sight of which at Salisbury had first charmed Trollope, so that, with Grantly’s position as archdeacon, our friends finally possess an independent and autonomous power in the diocese which, in its extent, security, and comfort, adequately compensates, in their mind and the reader’s, for the bishopric technically lost, thus completing the action as focused on the who-is-to-be-bishop issue.

Meanwhile, the dark side of the comic action (the apparent bad fate) has been developed in terms of Harding’s second loss of Hiram’s Hospital, a loss made up for by the Deanship offered first to him and then to Arabin, and made acceptable to the reader by the incumbency being assigned to Quiverful, who with his overflowing family is so much more in need of it than Harding. (It is, on the other side, Mrs. Proudie’s genuinely virtuous concern for the Quiverfuls
which to some extent redeems her and renders her [barely] acceptable to the reader as a member of the enduring Barchester community in its comic ideality.)

The composite protagonist of the novel as we have so far spoken of it as made up of Grantly, Harding, and Arabin would, if composed only of those individuals, hardly be experienced as even a quasi-unity. What gives them a semblance of concrete integrality as well as functional organicity is their being bound together in a network of close family relationship, with one of Harding’s daughters married at the outset to Grantly, thus linking these two very different characters in agency and interest, and the other at the end to Grantly’s protegé Arabin.

Here we see plainly Eleanor Bold’s function as a binder for this peculiar and distinctive plot, but if she were used only as that she and the story would have a great deal less life. I have asserted axiomatically, within my general theoretical position, that in an effective literary work, every means to an end will to the degree possible be made an end in itself (an adaptation of Coleridge’s well-known generalization about literary pleasure), and this certainly holds for Eleanor, whose spirited individuality prompts her resistance to the intrusive suspicions of her friends and provides the action with a large measure of comic suspense. We know that she will not do what they fear and oppress her with (marry Slope or Bertie Stanhope), but we cannot anticipate what precisely she will do (how her understanding with and marriage to Arabin will be worked out).

This completes my sketch of the composite protagonist but not of the composite antagonist nor of the complete plot structure, and since (at least in principle) a complete account of a work within a single integral conception is accepted a priori as a test of the general approach, this deficiency in the account needs to be made up. Generally speaking, the explanatory tests offered by a work are most stringent when they can be posed in terms of specific and undeniably given but nonetheless striking and curious features of the characters and the story. For instance, with Barchester Towers, a reader might reasonably ask why Trollope decided to make the bishop henpecked, or why Mr. Slope has the post of chaplain (as opposed to some other clerical appointment), or why Signora Neroni is crippled. We have already given a clear answer to the first question by deductive development of the constructive implications of our basic structural conception. An answer to the second will be central to a fuller account of the structure of the composite antagonist, and an answer to the third should logically develop within any attempt to give a full and precise account of the presence of the Stanhopes within the action already described.

We have already said but not much considered the fact that Slope as well as Mrs. Proudie are in the story to arrogate the power to themselves in ways that may legitimately be resisted by our friends. Slope is initially made opprobrious through his public attack (from which the bishop is specifically dissociated) on
Harding’s values, which amounts to an attack on what is long and harmoniously in social place in the name of an assertive and rancorous Evangelicalism, which is presented through Mrs. Proudie as an expression of her self-righteousness and with Slope as an expression of his greasy, pietistic ambitions. Slope’s palms are clammy; his face unpleasantly shiny; he is a man of ill-hidden appetites, as on the occasion when he is noticed eating so much currant pie. “It was not very probable,” says the narrator, “that any Barchester-bred living thing should like Mr. Slope” (50), and as the comic “war” begins, Grantly is reported to feel that either he or Mr. Slope “must be annihilated as far as the city of Barchester is concerned” (54). In short, Slope is a social pariah, a scapegoat shaped so that he can be expelled from Barchester in place of the bishop (and wife) who can’t, his defeat a sufficient victory for our friends, his removal a sufficient restoration of the harmony of the social community. He is indispensable as a disposable part of the composite antagonist, a vulnerable aspect of the invulnerable bishop. It is this potential disposability which accounts for his being a chaplain: unlike most clerical appointees in the diocese, which are for life, a chaplain can be dismissed at the bishop’s pleasure. The same need also accounts for the fact that Slope is not related to the other two members of the composite antagonist, as they are to each other, and as the members of the composite protagonist are: Slope had in fact missed an opportunity to marry Dr. Proudie’s daughter when, in earlier years, he had first proposed and then withdrawn “on finding that the doctor had no immediate worldly funds with which to endow his child” (34), thus giving a moral and characterological expression to the deeper formal necessity that he have no unbreakable bond to the bishop.

But to be disposable is not to be disposed of, and Slope cannot be dismissed without making himself by his own action subject to dismissal by conduct unbecoming a clergyman. Otherwise he would seem to some extent a victim and gain a measure of sympathy dangerous to the effect sought; even as it is, he is allowed to foresee and prepare for the dismissal so that he will not seem wholly the sacrificial victim and allowed also to front Mrs. Proudie with dignified boldness as she passes the bishop’s judgment on him.

But it is the Signora Neroni who is the cause of the disgrace by which Slope earns his expulsion from the Barsetshire garden. Thinking of this, one sees that sex more, say, than peculation is the likeliest source of a clerical misstep, though apparent theft is to be made the ground of a clergyman’s seeming disgrace in _The Last Chronicle of Barset_. Bringing a femme fatale probably and safely into the action was not an easy task, in view of the givens of the story. In general, the Stanhopes bring a splash of intensely worldly color into the book that much enlivens the otherwise dangerously staid clerical scene. The gay atheism of the scapegrace Bertie and the sophisticated Madeline instance the freer life available
beyond the borders of that scene, and it is a real mark of Trollope’s skill that he can allow them their life and yet leave the reader’s sympathies ultimately on the clerical side. It was a notable inspiration on Trollope’s part to bring in this pair, so unlikely to be found in such a setting, on a premise directly derived from the probabilities of the contemporary clerical scene. The problem of absentee clergy (so widely discussed in Victorian debate over social and ecclesiastical issues, including such as were typified in the matter of Hiram’s Hospital) allowed him to bring this cosmopolitan family into the action without straining probabilities, and by the further expedient of Madeline’s marriage to give believability to the presence in a provincial English town of a woman who is in effect an Italian adventuress.

But there was danger to the decorum imposed by the clerical subject in using the fire of feminine attraction to draw Slope to his destruction, and it is to avoid violating this decorum that Trollope brings the Signora on the scene both married and crippled. As Trollope directly says, the signora

could not eat [her victims] matrimonially, as young lady flies do whose webs are most frequently of their mothers’ weaving. Nor could she devour them by any escapade of a less legitimate description. Her unfortunate affliction precluded her from all hope of levanting with a lover. It would be impossible to run away with a lady who required three servants to move her from a sofa. (259)

And so, with no danger of raising the thought of actual elopement or adultery on the part of his devoted chaplain, Trollope can in complete security allow Madeline in the scene following (while reemphasizing that she is “maimed, lame, and already married” [266]) to torment Slope with the illusion of these temptations and leave him in ridiculous misery, exposed to the vengeance of Mrs. Proudie.

Even more than my analysis of *Wuthering Heights* as an action that displays a mysterious love that can be consummated only beyond the world of novelistic action [Editors’ note: Rader never developed this hypothesis in a full reading of Brontë’s novel], this account of the structure of *Barchester Towers* can stand on its own terms without any reference to the life of the author, since the interest of the represented clerical scene is inherently such as to require no explanation of why the author chose to focus on it. Yet if we look to the biographical background for connection, we can find what I think is a very interesting one indeed. If we ask what is Trollope’s point of psychic entrance to the novel, there is no apparent answer, since in a socially oriented novel without an individual protagonist there is no obvious alter ego in which the author is felt to dwell as Fielding may be felt to dwell in the simplified and idealized identity of Tom
Jones, and as likewise, though with a difference, Austen dwells in Elizabeth, Dickens in Oliver, etc. Nevertheless, I believe that there is a character in whom we can find (with a great difference) Trollope’s means of psychic entrée into Barchester Towers—a very surprising one.

Looking back to Trollope’s account of his conception of the Barchester subject during his visit to Salisbury, we can take note of his statement that he had “never lived in any cathedral city, except London, never knew anything of any Close.” Very oddly, we may discover by his own account some pages earlier in the Autobiography that this statement cannot be true, for he tells of having spent three years at Winchester College, which as every visitor to Winchester knows lies adjacent to Winchester cathedral. And Trollope’s account of his life at Winchester is strikingly relevant to our understanding of the psychodynamics underlying the creation of Barchester Towers. At Winchester, primarily but not solely because money was not available to pay his necessary expenses, Trollope tells us, he “became a Pariah”:

It is the nature of boys to be cruel. I have sometimes doubted whether among each other they do usually suffer much, one from the other’s cruelty; but I suffered horribly! I could make no stand against it. I had no friend to whom I could pour out my sorrows. I was big, and awkward, and ugly, and, I have no doubt, skulked about in a most unattractive manner. Of course I was ill-dressed and dirty. But, ah! how well I remember all the agonies of my young heart; how I considered whether I should always be alone; whether I could not find my way up to the top of that college tower, and from thence put an end to everything? (Autobiography 8)

After he was removed from Westminster he again at Harrow, as a day boarder walking in from his father’s farm, felt “the misery of expulsion from all social intercourse”:

What right had a wretched farmer’s boy, reeking from a dunghill, to sit next to the sons of peers,—or much worse still, next to the sons of big tradesmen who had made their ten thousand a-year? The indignities I endured are not to be described. (10)

We can see here the ground of the long manly struggle Trollope describes in the rest of the Autobiography to establish a respectable social identity and live as a gentleman. Yet, he says, “Something of the disgrace of my school-days has clung to me all though life” (14). In light of the fact that it was his work as a novelist that was fully to extend and confirm the status as a gentleman that his industry as a Post Office official had earlier begun slowly to bring him, his account of the origins of his ability to create stories is quite notable:
As a boy, even as a child, I was thrown much upon myself. I have explained, when speaking of my school-days, how it came to pass that other boys would not play with me. I was therefore alone and had to form my plays within myself. . . . I myself was of course my own hero. Such is a necessity of castle-building. . . . I never became a king or a duke. . . . But I was a very clever person, and beautiful young women used to be fond of me. And I strove to be kind of heart, and open of hand, and noble in thought, despising mean things; and altogether I was a very much better fellow than I have ever succeeded in being since. . . . I learned in this way to maintain an interest in a fictitious story, to dwell on a work created by my own imagination, and to live in a world altogether outside the world of my own material life. In after years I have done the same,—with this difference, that I have discarded the hero of my early dreams, and have been able to lay my own identity aside. (37)

He was able in his novels to lay his identity aside while finding heroes in dukes and archdeacons, if not kings, but his identity as described in the passages given above was not so easily suppressed and leaves its trace throughout his work, as in *Barchester Towers*. The reader will already have anticipated my conclusion that Trollope’s covert sense of his identity is given in the book through—Slope, the despised, hulking, ugly and physically repulsive outcast, the Pariah without a friend who “could he ever have learnt the ways of a gentleman . . . might have risen to great things” (*Barchester Towers* 69). (The same figure—the solitary intruding, excluded outsider—may be perceived in a different aspect in the Trollope who conceived his imaginative entry into this gentle world as he wandered in the purlieus of Salisbury, as in his youth he must have wandered alone in or near the Close of Westminster.) The reason the correspondence is not ordinarily seen is that Slope, though offered a degree of sympathetic understanding, is so utterly and unequivocally condemned in the book. But one need not find any deep psychological mystery here, only Trollope’s psychic flight from the outcast identity which his youthful experience had borne in upon him, to adopt those “ways of a gentleman” which he had so struggled to live by and of which, as has been well recognized, his work is pervasively a celebration. The point can also be put more abstractly, in terms of considerations of literary structure conceived in its cultural setting. Given his culturally generated commitment to write a novel dominated in structure and value by social imperatives, his private identity could only be introduced as an abominated outcast other. We see here the deeper meaning and power of those Victorian pressures toward social conformity with which long-accepted truism has made us wearily familiar, and can more fully appreciate from this perspective not only the root complexity of Trollope’s work but also the early Victorian gestures of dissent from conformity of Emily Brontë in Cathy and Dickens in Sikes, as well
as the conscious late Victorian struggle to enact the freedom of the individual hedged by social judgment as in Hardy.

Note

1. One may note in the later text two instances, among others, when the necessary concern of the unworldly with worldly interests is asserted: the first of these is Grantly’s response to Harding that “If honest men did not squabble for money in this wicked world of ours, the dishonest men would get it all” (*Barchester Towers* 131). This is touched with irony, as is no doubt Signora Neroni’s later suggestion in earnest conversation with Arabin that “the greatest mistake any man ever made is to suppose that the good things of the world are not worth the winning. And it is a mistake so opposed to the religion which you preach!” (385). Arabin can hardly be represented as himself emphasizing this point and yet Trollope can say at this point that “it seemed to him as though he were being interrogated by some inner spirit of his own.” The signora’s interview with “this singular man” who, with Harding, anchors our friends securely in the waters of spirituality, establishes his justified rapprochement with the worldly as it does his love of Eleanor Bold.
After so many fresh interpretations in the recent past by major critics, any new interpretation of *Lord Jim* needs justification. The justification of the present account is that it is part of a larger attempt to make sense of the overall development of the English novel as an emergence engendered in its successive stages by the intentional constructive efforts of innovating novelistic artists seeking to extend the intrinsic possibilities of the form on the one hand while meeting on the other the extrinsic pressures and circumstances which operated in their particular historical moments.

Richardson’s original invention was of a form which produced in the reader’s imagination a focal impression of characters acting autonomously, as if in the world of real experience, within a subsidiary awareness that the novelistic world possessed an immanent significance and shape that the real world lacks. This realistic illusion of a shaped and meaningful world is the basic source of the novel’s distinctive literary pleasure. In its main line, the development of the English novel is the development of what may be called the action novel, or the standard novel of plotted suspense. I have argued (in “From Richardson to Austen” [chapter 10 in this volume]) that in its first stage of development, from Richardson through Burney and Fielding to Austen, we have what may be called the novel of moral action, in which the action form operates under the constraint of a commitment to moral instruction displayed in the fact that the choices of the protagonist which crucially condition his, or more often her, fate are also presented as morally exemplary.

The peculiar structural qualities of leading Victorian masterpiece novels can be analyzed as novelistic action structures realized by their authors within the
constraints of what I would call the “Victorian Rule,” a hypothetical cultural demand pervasively requiring the subordination of the individual to the social. Its various effects may be traced 1) in the formal distinctiveness of “baggy monster” novels like *Bleak House*, *Vanity Fair*, *Middlemarch*, and *Barchester Towers*, where the accommodation of social significance generates a transindividual focus in conflict with the intrinsic demands of the action form, so that successful aesthetic resolution results in an organic whole registered by the reader as “baggy”; 2) in the value system of the novels, in which a publicly approvable good is separated from a proscribed bad, as in the sentimental moral polarities of Dickens’s novels, and in the ultimate value ascribed to the sacrifice of the self to others as (variously and contrastively) displayed in Esther Summerson, Dobbin, and Dorothea; and 3) in a related but more submerged matter, the deflection of the author’s sense of his inner identity so that it is expressed through characters with whom connection is dramatically denied, as with Sykes in *Oliver Twist*, or even more strikingly, with Slope in *Barchester Towers*.

Successful analysis of these action suspense novels in terms of the Victorian Rule significantly connects with the fact that they are the greatest novels of the greatest novelists of the high Victorian period: through them, as through the eighteenth-century masterpiece novels, we gain insight into the content of the truism that great art is necessarily conditioned by as it is expressive of its time. By the same token, one would not expect the greatest novels of the greatest novelists of a later portion of this same period to display the same formality, though one would expect—and I, given my commitment to the notion of a continued emergence and development of the action novel, am constrained to predict—that extended analysis in these terms will discover significant difference and development in continuity. If we take *Lord Jim* along with Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* coming, in the last decade of the century, at the end of Victoria’s reign, as, in all their obvious difference from one another, to be typical “late Victorian” or “early modern” masterworks, my approach needs to offer an explicit account of their structures that will articulate the basis of our placement of them as emerging from the Victorian group in contrast but also in a continuity which is soon to be deeply broken by the “classic modern” fiction of Joyce, Woolf, and Lawrence.

(I will assert in passing that the classic modern novels are, at least in their initial instances, novels of reconstructed actuality, of recreated memory, which summon us to aesthetic contemplation of a world given to us as meaningless but all in all, to which our minds are led to accommodate, in contrast to the objective fantasy mode of the action suspense novel, as written even by Conrad and Hardy, where objectively transcendent nature is held in aesthetic challenge by projected/asserted human meaning [Rader, “Defoe, Richardson, Joyce”].)
I can begin my account by noting that the titles of our novels are both names of individuals, which suggests that the transindividual focus of the Victorian novel no longer obtains. Once more we concentrate on the individual as in the eighteenth-century line of action novels; but here we can say that the individual is not displayed acting within the terms given by the represented society but is imaged against, and in conflict with, society and socially asserted and approved norms of value and action. We can say further that in both *Tess* and *Jim*, but in different ways, this conflict is imaged with reference to the sense of a nature, a *cosmic* transsocial reality which offers an overarching perspective to which a sense of individual destiny within society can be referred. (In contrast, nature in Victorian novels is either not represented as a distinct agency or is represented as a projection of social meanings. The exception to this in masterpiece novels of the period is *Wuthering Heights*, where the representation of nature as a transcendent point of reference [in contrast to Lockwood’s “busy world” of society] is its distinctive focus, setting it apart as an anomaly in its time and indeed in the whole line of English novels.)

What is indicated here as an extrinsic pressure toward focus on the individual is obviously in harmony with what I have claimed is the intrinsic ideal requirement for the action form of an individual focus, so that there is in these two novels no problem of distorted structure, as with the Victorian “baggy monsters.” But whereas the structure of *Tess* is clearly of the standard action kind, with an incrementally increasing suspense which is given maximum cathartic resolution in clearly developed probability-and-surprise terms, *Lord Jim* lacks such a continuous curve of suspense, a fact connected with its dual episodic *Patna*/Patusan structure, a feature which criticism has made problematic. But though both novels are developed as individual actions, they are complicated by the need to make vivid the cosmic background against the background of which the protagonist meets her/his fate. In both cases the fate is felt as instancing an essential and typical conflict which the protagonist, though emphatically given as a unique and not a typical person, is specially suited to suffer. The overall structural situation in these novels, in which a protagonist is displayed in conflict with society within a transsocial perspective, is basically similar to the situation in eighteenth-century novels like *Clarissa* and *Tom Jones*; but in those novels the transcendent agency is displayed as meaningfully supporting values that are ultimately made effective in the social world of the novel, whereas in the two early modern novels, the transcendent agency is displayed as meaningless and/or malign.

Within the similarity just articulated, *Tess* and *Jim* are of course in striking differential contrast that explicit analysis is required to recognize. While both actions are focused on an inherently universal conflict between the natural and
the social, which is the ground of the protagonist’s tragic suffering, the conflicts themselves are entirely different in substance, but nevertheless center on a question of individual responsibility with respect to a social code of conduct conceived in a cosmic perspective—a code of conduct respecting sexual love in *Tess* and a code of conduct respecting personal honor in *Lord Jim*. And while both novels incorporate a transsocial, cosmological perspective on their stories, we of course contrast the relatively provincial focus of *Tess* with the programmatically cosmopolitan perspective of *Lord Jim*, which fits with the fact that Hardy’s life world was that of a lower-class member of English provincial society, while Conrad’s was richly international and multicultural, in accordance with his experience as an expatriate member of the Polish nobility who lived as emigré and sailor.

In contrast with the Victorian novel, where the novelist is projected as at once the servant and instructor of society expressing but limiting himself to its own highest values, both *Jim* and *Tess* project an authorial role that, as already suggested, views and implicitly instructs society from the transsocial perspective of a nature viewed as in conflict with social aims; the role is thus to some degree ameliorative and not yet that of artistic priest or prophet that is characteristic of the classic modern novel. But particularly in Conrad, the conviction of the high artistic vocation of the novelist operating in the tradition of Flaubert and James is strong, and the standard of artistic purity in the novel accordingly high.

I would like to move from these observations on the givens surrounding *Lord Jim* to an exploration of the problems of the novel which allows these givens deductive force in explaining Conrad’s artistic construction of his work. The method and scheme of analysis which I am pursuing assumes that the literary work can best be understood as the result not of the artist’s intention in the sense of a meaning abstracted and set apart from the work but of an immanent constructive intention, that is, from a commitment to make the particular concrete work we have before us, with all the complexities and problematic aspects that our collective experience has shown it to have. Such a constructive intention is available only by hypothesis and testable only by its power of explanation compared to other explanations. Such a hypothetical intention must be considered as conditioned but certainly not determined by any features or context it may have in common with closely comparable novels. The critical challenge is to express its similarities to other works as, with *Lord Jim*, distantly to *Tess* and very closely though within a polar contrast, to *Heart of Darkness*, while in the same terms still defining it strongly and precisely in its distinctive individuality.

The problematic aspects which a work displays have a dual face: on the one hand they locate the limits of our understanding of the work, its opacity to understanding and interpretation; and on the other hand they define the work
as present objectively to us, as in its integrity projecting just these aspects that collectively are characteristic of this and no other work. They allow us to ask what the author’s intention must have been, to have produced this work about which we agree and disagree in the way that the problems developed by interpretation suggest that we do, so that we may hypothesize accordingly. The problematic aspects of *Lord Jim* that present themselves for hypothetical explanation are, among others, the two-part story already spoken of; its complexity of narrative presentation through Marlow; and its manifest ambiguity, rendered more ambiguous by interpretation and apparently unresolvable. To these I would add a feature of the book not usually stressed by critics as problematical, but logically so, the fact that as a book dealing with a single hero in the two requisite central episodes, it should have so many other characters and their side episodes as a part of its constructed wholeness.

In attempting to offer a rationale for these problematic aspects of the book by deductive elaboration of a hypothesized authorial constructive intention, I may arrive at conclusions about the book’s structure that are not, taken separately, particularly new and striking. My aim is not, as is characteristic of the most prestigious contemporary criticism, to complicate and further mystify what is already complex in the work under examination but as much as its complexity permits to clarify and simplify it and thus render it more affectively and aesthetically available. But the attempt to display this puzzling book as intelligible in itself is, as already suggested, conditioned by and meant to facilitate understanding of a larger creative development conceived as the joint result of the creative effort of individual artists capitalizing and extending their literary inheritance while operating in significant response to the social, cultural, and natural realities that they took to be given and that we may imaginatively enter into and understand as developmentally preceding our own.

Let me hypothesize then that the distinctive structure of *Lord Jim* results from the fact that Jim’s individual fate, on which we through Marlow focus as the center of the book, is figured as developing within the terms of a universal existential predicament, a predicament most centrally and cogently defined in Marlow’s often noted, but almost equally often misconstrued, statement that “the most obstinate ghost of man’s creation” is “the doubt of the sovereign power enthroned in a fixed standard of conduct” (Conrad 31). Marlow has just mentioned his membership in a body of men (naval officers) held together by “a certain standard of conduct,” but it is less immediately clear that the doubt of the “sovereign power enthroned” in such a standard can only refer to the question of whether human beings in fact have the free will requisite to carry out its imperatives. It is this doubt which is always “the inseparable part of our knowledge” (135) of our human situation, and it is this which makes Jim’s pre-
dicament seem to Marlow to involve an “obscure truth” “momentous enough to affect mankind’s conception of itself” (57) and of the “sheltering conception of light and order which is its refuge” (191).

The fixed standard of conduct is of social origin, the result of mankind’s need to find protective solidarity in an unknowable natural world. But the code implies that men are free to act according to its command, whereas being themselves part of that unknowable nature, they can never know whether they are able to do so or not; one is oneself and to one’s self part of nature’s mystery (cf. Epstein 230–31). Hence the doubt, the obstinate ghost which haunts all who hold themselves responsible to meet society’s demand. Of course here I am synthetically putting together relatively obscure individual comments from various parts of Marlow’s commentary into a clear assertion. I will consider the presentation of the predicament more closely below; but in doing that, it will be necessary to see how the indicated predicament and the reader’s knowledge and response to it are actually built into the structure and effect of this novel which takes its nature as a novel so seriously.

In the formulation about the novelistic structure that I offered at the outset, we have the notion that the novel presents a surface of apparently autonomous human action which is implicitly understood as shaped by an immanent authorial purpose. The cardinal Flaubertian–Jamesian–Conradian rule is that the author should not seem to interfere with the autonomy of the action and should contrive to realize his shaping role as much as possible through the apparent objectivity of the story itself, absorbing the telling into the told, so that the world of the novel shall seem to body forth its own meaningfulness and the reader be made to see and thus to attribute the meaning as if for himself. Thus Marlow says that “I affirm nothing” and that there is in his story “no message unless such as each of us can interpret for himself from the language of facts” (Conrad 206). On the one hand it is true, as Marlow says, that “it is only through [him] that [Jim] exists for” us but Marlow exists for us within and not beyond the world of the book (137), whereas it is Conrad who makes that world exist for us for the moment as the world. It is important then to realize that what appear to be the facts of the overt human surface of the story are given in the language of the covert author. Just because it is meant to be concealed in the story, the author’s shaping will not be apparent unless we set out deliberately to look for it. Critics have been too ready to think of Marlow as the limit of our access to the story, whereas thoughtful inspection reveals the author determinately shaping Marlow’s indeterminate story both from without and within.

Before Marlow’s appearance, the originating omniscient narrator displays the novel’s field of action as a human and social world in which the predicament I have spoken of is objectively, though implicitly, embodied as a frame
from within which and in relation to which Marlow can subsequently present Jim's story. The omniscient narrator tells of Jim's father's Providential faith in the Unknowable apparently supported by his centuries-old church “with the mossy grayness of a rock” (4), a setting of piety and peace seemingly almost a part of nature. But Jim's subsequent encounter with the “earnestness of the anger of the sea” as it moves to “sweep the whole precious world utterly away from his sight by the simple and appalling act of taking his life” (7) bespeaks another aspect entirely of the Unknowable behind the face of nature, as does his earlier experience of the nature within when he had unaccountably stood paralyzed in the face of challenge despite his long-standing convictions as to his potentiality for heroic response.

The same implicit scheme of things is almost immediately replicated and writ large in the omniscient narrator’s account of the setting out of the Patna on its fateful voyage. On the one hand, we have the striking account of the Islamic pilgrims:

They streamed aboard over three gangways, they streamed in urged by faith and the hope of paradise. . . . At the call of an idea they had left their forests, their clearings, the protection of their rulers, their prosperity, their poverty, the surroundings of their youth and the graves of their fathers . . . the unconscious pilgrims of an exacting faith. (9–10)

The response of the German captain—“Look at dese cattle”—is calculated to shock us into awareness of our spiritual solidarity with the pilgrims, and the whole representation implicitly registers the deep likeness in difference of the pilgrims’ faith to that of Jim’s father, which is the faith of the common English reader. (Such implicit intercultural generalization is characteristic of the novel’s pervasive universalization of its values.) But at the same time, however, that the common enduring faiths bespeak mankind’s need for conceptual shelter and fideistic commitment, there is also the continuing implication that such commitment operates in tension with an unknowable and indifferent nature. While the ship passes over a sea that is “viscous, stagnant, dead,” the sun pours the “concentrated fire of its rays on the pious purposes of men” as the ship smoulders “in a luminous immensity, as if scorched by a flame flicked at her from a heaven without pity” (11). (It is to be noted that what is implicit commentary and evaluation on the omniscient narrator’s part is rendered as incidental narrative description so as to mask its presumption as to the given facts of the represented world, which is accordingly accepted as an image of the real one.)

The indicated existential situation is precisely imaged in the contrast, two pages apart so as not to be too obvious, between the line made by the wake of the ship, “a white ribbon of foam that vanished at once, like the phantom of
a track drawn upon a lifeless sea by the phantom of a steamer” (11), and the “straight pencil-line [which] drawn firmly as far as Perim figured the course of the ship—the path of souls toward the holy place, the promise of salvation” (13). Just below this description, the “white streak of the wake” and “the black line drawn by the pencil” are now mentioned together so as to emphasize the conjunction of the pious but purely human purposes of men with the nature upon which they are vanishingly written and which accords them no recognition. At the same time that this disconnection between the natural and the social is made clear, the absolute need for the fixed standards of conduct imposed by society in the face of nature's threat is represented with equal force. In pursuit of their purposes, the narrator tells us, repeating his earlier phrase, the “pilgrims of an exacting faith” are “surrendered to the wisdom of white men and to their courage,” the image of their trust given in a sleeping “head bent back, a naked foot, a throat bared and stretched as if offering itself to the knife” (12).

It is following the establishment of this context that, after the notation of the ship's quivering passage over an unknown object in the sea, we move into the courtroom with Jim to Marlow through whom Jim's struggles within the terms of the outlined predicament will henceforward be displayed. It is clear that Marlow, though a complex and variable means to the author's shaping purposes (often ironic for the sake of forestalling the reader's irony toward Jim) is as a character serving these purposes to be understood as drawn to Jim because he sees in him his own potential case, guarded though he is against Jim's attempts to claim spiritual kinship. The large basis of his identification is implicit in his early statement already quoted that Jim's case is to be seen as bearing on that most obstinate ghost of man's creation and his later one that he is “bound to him [Jim] in the name of that doubt which is the inseparable part of our knowledge” (135). But it is important to see that Marlow is only the most important of the many means Conrad uses to establish just the understanding of Jim's case that the meaningful effect of his novel requires.

First of all, one notes that the initial construction of Jim's actions in itself requires careful art. The fact of his action—abandonment of a ship in the face of his official duty—is as Marlow says about “as naked and ugly as a fact can well be” (22). To produce sympathetic, even identificative understanding of such an act is difficult, and would have suggested to Conrad first of all that Jim not be the officer with chief responsibility in the action and also that the situation—overwhelmingly too many passengers for the life-boats available—is such that any practical action Jim might have taken would be futile. But this was only the setting for further dramatic definition of Jim's action. Jim is set sharply apart morally from the captain, “the incarnation of everything vile and base that lurks in the world we love” (14), as well as later from the captain and
the other two of the three “dirty owls” who sit apart from him in the lifeboat (“he wanted me to know he had kept his distance; that there was nothing in common between him and these men” [63–64]); they are the “them” in contrast to the “us” of which we and Jim are to be one, the “them” whose vile company Conrad’s rhetoric leaves us to join if we choose to waver from the exacting fidelity his book marks out for the faithful. From within this sense of Jim’s essential uprightness, Conrad proceeds to detail the precise nature of Jim’s action as following upon his sense of his helplessness in the situation—“I saw as clearly as I see you now that there was nothing I could do” (53). Jim’s account to Marlow tells of him standing apart in loathing from the others struggling to launch their lifeboat but then, after their success, finding himself without volition standing in position above the boat. “Something had started him off at last, but of the exact moment, of the cause that tore him out of his immobility, he knew no more than the uprooted tree knows of the wind that laid it low” (67). “From his relation,” says Marlow, “I am forced to believe he had preserved through it all a strange illusion of passiveness, as though he had not acted but had suffered himself to be handled by the infernal powers, who had selected him for the victim of their practical joke” (66). Jim’s own quoted report also gives the sense of passive discovery: “I had jumped . . . it seems.” “Looks like it,” Marlow mutters (68), but despite this ironic jab at Jim’s refusal to face the fact of his cowardice, the overall impression is clearly in accord with Jim’s judgment that the pressure of the situation seemed “to knock something over in my head” (65) as the unknown object in the sea had knocked against the _Patna:_ in both cases humans encounter at their hazard the Unknowable in a world of which they are a part but do not control.

But if Conrad was to limit the scope of Jim’s action to an unreflecting moment of seeming passivity, he had a further problem on his hands: once Jim had jumped, he would be free to reflect and return to his duty and the boat, failing which his dishonor would be of a deeper dye which would put him beyond the pale of identification. Conrad therefore sets up a situation in which Jim in the lifeboat sees “just one yellow gleam” before the others in the lifeboat see no lights at all in the blackness and think the ship gone down (69). Jim declares that if there had been lights, “I would have swam back—I would have gone back and shouted alongside—I would have begged them to take me on board. . . . I would have had my chance,” but “there was not a glimmer—not a glimmer” (82). But how, the ship still being there, was there _not_ a glimmer? Conrad brings Brierly, the seasoned captain, to provide on the basis of the ship’s position and the squall provided by the author, the explanation that the latter needs and that Brierly even more believably than Marlow can give, so that Jim’s moral responsibility can be properly delimited.
The presence of Brierly along with so many other secondary characters and their stories in this book of a single protagonist and single action itself presents a problem for the critic. The explanation for their presence is the novelist’s need to provide shaping commentary in the form of apparent action when he has by deliberate high artistic choice restricted his own commentative voice and ceded his rights to Marlow. Brierly, for instance, in addition to the minor function as nautical expert just noted, is brought into the book at length to provide a contrast that further draws Jim’s course of action from its apparent naked ugliness into the universal significance it is meant to have. Before we hear the full details of Jim’s action, we hear Brierly’s story. He is a distinguished captain with a shining record, “one of those lucky fellows who know nothing of indecision, much less of self-mistrust” (35), but as a member of Jim’s board of inquiry Brierly, who is intensely disturbed by the case, speaks to Marlow of offering Jim money to run from his disgrace and then later commits very deliberate suicide from motives mysterious to the first-mate who reports the story. But his motives are not mysterious to Marlow who reports, before we hear the story, that during the inquiry Brierly must have “been holding silent inquiry into his own case” and given a verdict of “unmitigated guilt” (36). We realize that Brierly’s motive was his own fear that he might lose his courage as Jim had and fall into disgrace, so that in Marlow’s words he “committed his reality and his sham together to the keeping of the sea” (42). Notably, Marlow does not give Brierly’s story direct evaluative bearing on Jim’s case beyond the apparent causal relationship; but the author behind Marlow, before allowing Marlow to give Jim’s full story, has endeavored to make us see that an accepted hero like Brierly can feel himself subject to the same chance as the apparently cowardly Jim. Furthermore he establishes the point that Jim may in fact be braver than Brierly in his willingness to face rather than shirk his fate. Brierly’s comment that the evidence Jim faced was “enough to burn a man to ashes with shame” comes just after Marlow’s that Jim shows “a kind of courage in facing it out as he does, knowing very well that if he went away nobody would trouble to run after him” (41).

The elderly lieutenant from the French gunboat who stays calmly on the Patna while it is being towed precariously to port conveniently comes in contact with Marlow and responds to Marlow’s probing interrogation in ways useful to the author. His credentials as a brave man are established by his conduct on the Patna as well as by his composed manner and scarred face, and his role as authorial shaper of readerly response is well dissimulated by Marlow’s supposed translation of his remarks from parenthetically reported French. “I have made my proofs,” he says, but despite that, he reports, the fear that one’s courage will fail is always there: “one’s courage does not come of itself” (89–90). This comes close to exonerating Jim since as the lieutenant says “one is no cleverer
than the next man—and no more brave. Brave! This is always to be seen.” Marlow, represented as feeling the potential pain of the predicament on his own behalf, says that he is glad to see the lieutenant taking a lenient view, but feels the pincers immediately close once more as the lieutenant responds: “But the honour—the honour, monsieur. . . . The honour . . . that is real—that is! And what life may be worth when . . . when the honour is gone . . . I can offer no opinion—because—monsieur—I know nothing of it.” “Hang the fellow!” says Marlow; “he had pricked the bubble” (90).

The lieutenant’s point about the primacy of honor is crucial to the value structure everywhere implicit in the action, and, to keep the reader from moderating the point, the dishonorable (as with the German captain and Chester) are consistently represented as outside the pale of the human community, odious and vile. But honor is nonetheless represented as a most precarious value, so much so that for some commentators it appears thoroughly undercut as a romantic delusion. But Conrad’s implicit account is more complex, following logically from the structure of the universal predicament, the representation of which (as I have claimed) informs the novel. On the one hand, men must find their honor in meeting the demand for fidelity that their social fellows must in a threatening universe make upon them for the common safety of all. On the other hand, in an Unknowable universe, individual men can never know if they in fact have the capacity to meet this demand. Full social existence then involves a commitment to a standard whose validity is always exposed to subversion by an alien nature. It is this situation that Marlow refers to when he reports that Jim’s case involves “a subtle and momentous quarrel as to the true essence of life” by which he was made “to look at the convention that lurks in all truth and on the essential sincerity of falsehood” (57). In their situation human beings must necessarily deceive themselves, but they cannot certainly know that they do and cannot, if life is to be meaningful, act as if they are deceived.

Conrad’s principal instrument for his full dramatic demonstration of his outlook is, of course, Stein. Before considering his evaluative function, I may notice that he serves as actor to initiate the second Patusan stage of Jim’s story. It is unaccountable that some commentators have seen the second part of the story as a nonintegral extension of the novel, for this novel could clearly not have been developed as a single rising curve of then resolved action as are most plotted suspense novels. In Conrad’s intention, the novel was deliberately and necessarily bipartite, as suggested, as has been pointed out, by the name of the second locale of the action, Patusan, which is nearly an anagram of the first, Patna. The structure is closely akin to popular adventure stories in which the hero fails in a first attempt and is redeemed in a second in which, as Jim says, there is a “chance to get it all back again” (109). Lord Jim and The Red Badge of
Courage are the highest and aesthetically most illustrious examples of this kind.

Stein is the linchpin of the evaluative structure implicit in the book’s action. He is established quickly as unequivocally reliable and brave, “one of the most trustworthy men I had ever known” with “an intrepidity of spirit and a physical courage that would have been called reckless had it not been like a natural function in the body” (123). With his broken English, German syntax, and dramatic utterance, Stein seems an autonomous voice utterly separate from Marlow and seemingly from the author who uses him and his story as a context that can give Jim’s story the meaning and shape he wants it to have.

Conrad’s most brilliant choice was to make Stein both a man of action and an amateur entomologist, thus much increasing the range of his implicit evaluative power. We note that first of all he, whose courage does come of itself, immediately and intuitively understands and accepts Jim, whose courage has failed, helping him to the challenge and trust of his Patusan employment, his faith marked by the pledge of Doramin’s silver ring, thus confirming and completing the view of Jim already implicitly established in earlier episodes. But operating from this base of direct evaluation, Stein’s story is then developed to bear on Jim’s in a complex way not easy to synthesize. Stein’s bravery is instanced in his report of how on one occasion he met the challenge of assassins, holding his shots with cool grace till they could be made effective and how he just afterward, “with the clean earth smiling at me” (127), saw first the shadow and then the actuality of his most “rare and extraordinary” specimen of a butterfly sitting before him on a heap of dirt; Stein says that with the capture of this butterfly, the fruit of his spiritual victory, “what I had once dreamed in my sleep had come into my hand” (128), and Marlow asserts that Stein sees in the preserved specimen “an image of something as perishable and defying destruction as these delicate and lifeless tissues displaying a splendour unmarred by death” (126).

The butterfly is immediately linked to Jim when Marlow says that he has come to Stein to “describe a specimen” (129), and Jim’s story prompts Stein to his disquisition on “How to be.” Man, he says, dreams of himself as being “a very fine fellow,” adding that “it is not good for you to find you cannot make your dream come true” (130). In the terms set forth in my earlier discussion, what Stein is saying is that it is not good for men to discover that they lack the power to live up to an ideal of conduct with which their sense of themselves as significant agents is identified. Since men can never know whether they have the power or not, the only thing to do is to risk acting as if they do. “One thing alone can us from being ourselves cure,” and that is to submit oneself to “the destructive element” (129–30). I venture to say that this oft-discussed injunction ought to be taken in the simplest and most obvious way as meaning that
one must, as Stein has, hazard death in order to test the reality of one’s dreams.

Though the discussion is apropos of Jim’s case, Marlow does not note the parallel between Stein’s conduct in the face of danger and Jim’s in his later encounter with assassins on Patusan when, aided by Jewel, he meets the challenge as Stein had his, holding his shots with cool bravery, and finding after his triumph a “great freshness” in the earth around. The reader does not need Marlow to tell him that Jim’s bravery here is to be evaluated in terms prospectively defined by Stein, nor to register the overtones of Jewel who wakes Jim from a dream and, dressed in white and with her torch aloft, seeming to “glide without touching the earth” (184), guides him throughout. In short, but too crudely, Jim is to be registered as carrying out Stein’s admonition to follow the dream.

But the image of Jewel’s torch arcing into the stream as the *Patna*’s fleeting light had seemingly dipped into the sea suggests how precarious is the restoration of Jim’s honor. One sees that Conrad wishes to suggest, here and in the book as a whole, that the honor Jim seeks is, given man’s metaphysical situation, always beyond his certain grasp and therefore always has an aspect of illusion; but (and here is the crucial point) everything in the book suggests that Conrad means to make us feel that the pursuit of the ideal of honor nonetheless remains a supreme good; even though always in ambiguity, it is not for Conrad really undercut by any other irony. This is the point of Stein’s disquisition, and Marlow’s following comment when he links the butterfly’s “splendour unmarred by death” with Jim as he speaks of his sense of the latter’s “imperishable reality” and then continues in an impassioned passage:

I saw it vividly, as though in our progress through the lofty, silent rooms amongst fleeting gleams of light and the sudden revelations of human figures stealing with flickering flames within unfathomable and pellucid depths, we had approached nearer to absolute Truth, which like Beauty itself, floats elusive, obscure, half-submerged, in the silent, still waters of mystery. (132)

This meaning is repeated and written more deeply into the face of the world of the novel when Jim is just afterwards shown with Marlow in Patusan watching the moon floating away like the butterfly above the split summits of the two steep hills separated as if by “the cleavage of some mighty stroke” (135), where the split bespeaks the gap between ideal human code and human capability as fixed in an unknowable nature, the gap across which men must leap, as Jim leaps in all his crises, “with a jump into the unknown” (140), in their pursuit of the honor which floats in indispensable but always impalpable beauty above. (The image of the moon floating “away above the chasm between the hills like an ascending spirit out of a grave” is reanimated in the context of the later
account of Jim’s leap into Patusan [150], and another time as a preparatory image to Marlow’s assertion of his attempt to convey to us a story in which we are to see “the truth disclosed in a moment of illusion” [196].

Conrad’s problem in celebrating the value of action according to an ideal commitment lay precisely in the fact that, unlike Victorian believers prepared to maintain that value through unequivocal sentimental assertion of its reality, his lonely appreciation of the metaphysical gap between human need and the Unknowable meant that he had to display Jim’s final action in terms of a muted crescendo of implication based on the terms earlier established. Thus he dramatically asserts the value of Jim’s ultimate action in the scenes with Stein just glanced at so that it can be drawn upon at the end and figured against the backdrop of ultimate Unknowability, as Jim is in Marlow’s last view of him—“a white speck catching all the dim light left upon a sombre coast and the darkened sea . . . a cruel and insoluble mystery” (239). Yet long before this, too long before for it to appear unsuitably climactic, yet too firmly to be ever lost from the reader’s mind, Marlow has asserted, “I affirm [that Jim] had achieved greatness” (138). Later he says again that Jim had approached “greatness as genuine as man ever achieved” (149), and still later compares him to “mankind itself, pushing on its blind way, driven by a dream of its greatness and its power” (212).

The intended force of the actual enacted ending cannot be accurately gauged apart from the implication of the Gentleman Brown episode, one of the most difficult in the novel to “read.” The central question is what leads Jim to let Brown go as he does and what the significance is of the disaster he thereby looses on his head. It is clear that Brown presents his case to Jim—“I am here because I was afraid once in my life” (233)—so that the parallel between the two of them is obtrusive:

He asked Jim whether he had nothing fishy in his life to remember that he was so damnedly hard upon a man trying to get out of a deadly hole by the first means that came to hand. . . . there ran through the rough talk . . . a sickening suggestion of common guilt, of secret knowledge that was like a bond of their minds and of their hearts. (235)

The need in interpreting this and Jim’s subsequent move to let Brown and his men go is not psychological analysis but simply the perception that Brown is claiming that he is not responsible for his actions because of circumstances and that Jim is accepting the claim from his own sense of having been once the too hardly used victim of circumstances. But Jim’s restored position as again one of us, one of those who accept the code, is just that, as he had earlier recognized after attempting to extenuate himself, that “All the same, one is responsible”
(110). His failure to hold this position, to maintain the claim of the code upon human nature, exposes him to the terrors of chance and the Unknowable once more. “The dark powers should not rob him twice of his peace” (248), Marlow reports of Jim’s innerness without warrant at his author’s need. With Dain Waris dead as the chance consequence of his mistake, he has only one choice if he is to maintain the view of himself that he is committed to, and he marches up to Doramin to accept responsibility with his “Upon my head” and takes Doramin’s shot and dies with that “proud and unflinching glance” (252–53) that betokens the inner serenity of his existential assertion.

At the end Marlow says that Jim has gone “away from a living woman to celebrate his pitiless wedding with a shadowy ideal of conduct” (253), and the fact that Jim does leave Jewel and the Patusan community to shift for themselves can allow undue emphasis to be placed on Marlow’s description of his action as involving an “exalted egoism.” But it is to be noted that if Conrad had not in Jewel given Jim something to lose in making his choice, his gesture might seem a movement of despair instead of the Lovelacean choice it is of honor over a love meaningless without honor. Conrad had previously brought his strongest spokesman to bear on this issue when to Jewel’s charge, after Jim’s death, that “He was like the others,” he has Marlow protest, “Not like the others,” and then to Jewel’s “He was false,” Stein’s passionate “No! no! no! My poor child! . . . No! no! Not false! True! true! true!” (213). This note is picked up at the very end by Marlow’s “He is one of us—and have I not stood up once, like an evoked ghost, to answer for his eternal constancy? Was I so very wrong after all?” (253). And yet the fundamental framing of Jim’s so strongly endorsed action within the context of an indifferent and Unknowable nature requires that the last sentences close the book on a minor note, with Jewel “leading a sort of soundless, inert life in Stein’s house” and Stein himself among his butterflies “preparing to leave all this.” This mixed ending—a vision of a meaningless, neutrally present natural world displayed in tension with the pressure of human social needs—is appropriate to the position of Lord Jim as a late Victorian/early modern novel, as is its complex indirect presentation of its author’s vision through a rigorously “factual” image of an “autonomous” world in a mode which is still profoundly rhetorical. It thus moves to some degree away from the traditional action novel in which what is apparently the real world is more deeply shaped as the ground of an objective fantasy in which outcome meets the needs of formally developed desire. But it stands still in contrast with the classic modern novels of Joyce/Lawrence/Woolf in which we are asked to renounce our desire to reshape reality and allow our feelings to be invested in an image of the world simulated as it really is, on the basis of the author’s autonomous recreation of the actual. But my view here stops short of that.
Exodus and Return

*Joyce’s Ulysses and the Fiction of the Actual* (1978)

Every first-time reader registers the quality which makes *Ulysses* different from earlier novels (except *Portrait*) in a way in which no earlier novel is different from another. The felt quality of difference arises from the fundamentally new formal principle upon which *Ulysses* and its sister novel are constructed. Earlier novels of plotted suspense develop, within an illusion of real life, a dynamic affective pattern which leads the reader out of his own world into another where, moving with an alter ego, he can find a purpose, meaning, and consummation which real life does not have. Joyce’s novels, in contrast, seek, in the phrase of Stephen Dedalus, to “recreate life out of life,” so as to show us this life “purified in and reprojected from the [artist’s] imagination” in a reconstruction which will at once image and transfigure the facts of our real existence (*Portrait* 172, 215).

In traditional novels the author’s purpose is to develop the reader’s emotional investment in a central character whose concatenated choices involve him in a predicament which will draw out, and in its resolution cathartically discharge, that investment. This general intention requires the author to shape his protagonist so as to render him continuously sympathetic to projective identification as real people are not. At the same time, minor characters in standard novels are invented and deployed in action not in genuine autonomy, as people in real life are, but only apparently so, while actually they function, as James has indicated in many a preface, to shape the reader’s response to the central characters and their dynamic situation. Thus Mlle de Vionnet in *The Ambas-
sadors is called into being in the first instance by James’s need to prevent Strether and the reader from inferring too early the true state of affairs between Chad and Mme de Vionnet, and this need arises in turn from James’s still more basic artistic need to give maximum affective force to Strether’s discovery, gradually prepared through his experience of Mme de Vionnet as contrasted with Mrs. Newsome, of what it might mean to “Live all you can!” The characters of traditional novels and the experiences in which they are involved are consequently, by the very principle of their construction, necessarily in contrast with those of real life. Even the greatest such novels, whatever their spiritual depth and cathartic power, are involved in imaginative programs in which finally the reality principle is subordinated to the pleasure principle, and the gratification available through this subordination is a constant potential source not of integration and insight but also of affective deception and distortion.

It was this kind of fiction, its high artistic potential by the beginning of the twentieth century nearly exhausted, that Joyce consciously set himself not to write. His brother Stanislaus notes that the life which Joyce found in novels was not the life that passed before his steel-blue eyes and unblinking gaze at home and in the streets of Dublin, the emotions which he found in poetry were not those he found in his own heart (My Brother’s Keeper 92). Joyce himself wrote at age eighteen: “Life we must accept as we see it before our eyes, men and women as we meet them in the real world, not as we apprehend them in the world of faery” (“Drama and Life,” in Critical Writings 45). His ideal of artistic method was also developed early; it was a method which, he says in his youthful essay on James Clarence Mangan, “bends upon these present things and so works upon them and fashions them that the quick intelligence may go beyond them to their meaning, which is still unuttered” (Critical Writings 74; my emphasis). It was to underline the all-important difference between traditional fiction and his own fiction of recreated reality that Joyce prompted Stuart Gilbert to write thus of Ulysses:

In most novels the reader’s interest is amused and his attention held by the presentation of dramatic situations, of problems deriving from conduct or character and the reactions of the fictitious personages among themselves. The personages of Ulysses are not fictitious and its true significance does not lie in problems of conduct or character. . . . All these people are as they must be; they act, we see, according to some lex eterna, an ineluctable condition of their very existence. (8)

Even those critics who have contributed most to the explication of Joyce’s new fictional purpose seem not to appreciate completely the radical transvaluation of fictional values that purpose implies. Thus S. L. Goldberg, in a book that
does much to show the ways in which *Ulysses* is utterly unlike any novel except *Portrait* that had gone before it, asserts that after all *Ulysses* “is a novel, and what is of interest about it is what always interests us with the novel: its imaginative illumination of the moral—and ultimately spiritual—experience of representative human beings. . . . And though it is an unusual novel, and complicated with extraordinary elements, its importance is founded, in the last analysis, on that fact” (30). In contrast to the assertion that the characters of *Ulysses* are not fictitious, Goldberg holds that they are “representative human beings.” In contrast to the assertion that the true significance of *Ulysses* does not lie in problems of conduct or character, Goldberg asserts that its importance is in its imaginative illumination of the moral. But Stephen and Bloom and the “stately, plump Buck Mulligan” we meet at the opening of *Ulysses*, and Stephen’s mother whom we encounter through Stephen’s memory, are not meant to be understood as representative human beings but as particular real people whose existence derives like our own from a prevenience and in a modality beyond human choice and full understanding. Like the historical characters of whom Stephen thinks in “Nestor,” they are figures whom time and not Joyce has branded and fettered; unlike ordinary fictional characters, they are not to be thought—or analyzed—away. They exist as real people do—as Gilbert has it, ineluctably—according to some *lex eterna*, because Joyce had recreated them as real, and our response to them and the world in which they move is meant to be far deeper than anything we ordinarily call moral.

Despite his assertion that the characters of *Ulysses* are representative human beings, Goldberg stresses and greatly illuminates the fact that both Stephen and Bloom are implicitly connected with Joyce the author, who sees both from the perspective of the maturity of experience which separates him from Stephen, so that Goldberg can say, quite accurately, that “the consummation of the action of *Ulysses* is *Ulysses* itself” (99). Beyond this, Goldberg stresses that throughout the work we are to be aware of a very important “hidden character,” “the author himself” (35). But Goldberg is prevented by his critical assumptions from following out the implications of these facts to the fullest appreciation of Joyce’s formal intention in the work, which requires terms very different from those appropriate to standard novel forms. Since Goldberg cannot cut himself loose from standard novel terms, he finally is forced to see the novel as having “flaws and limitations” that “are both deep and serious” (300). One of those flaws is, emphatically for him, Molly Bloom and the conclusion of the book, which does not respond to Goldberg’s notion of the proper morality of fiction. Response to Molly may be a matter of taste, but I believe that Goldberg’s derives at least in part from an incomplete grasp of Joyce’s purpose in creating her and of Joyce’s own relation to her.
Robert Martin Adams, who is, with Goldberg and Richard Ellmann, among the best general critics of *Ulysses* we have had, has difficulties with the book similar to Goldberg’s. Like Goldberg, Adams recognizes the strongly implicit relation of author to the central characters and, particularly with Molly, responds to it much more deeply than Goldberg does. But Adams too feels, despite his accurate and affectively profound reading, that the book has grave formal imperfections and is in some degree aesthetically impure (*Surface and Symbol* 249).¹

The source of Goldberg’s and Adams’s difficulties with *Ulysses* is the contradiction implicit in their treatment of the book now as “fictitious” fiction, now as the fiction of recreated fact. It is not merely, as Goldberg asserts, that “the implicit connection between creator and creatures is never denied” but rather that the connection is formally affirmed as the basis of the inner significance of the book. It is not merely that in making the book Joyce in some general way “reworked,” as Goldberg says, “situations and themes he found in his own experience,” so that he is related to Stephen and Bloom “variably and ambiguously” (38, 131), but rather that the book is to be understood as deriving its significance from, and as a continuation of, his own experience, a fact which requires the reader to understand the relation between Joyce and Stephen and Bloom as quite definite and unambiguous. In short, Goldberg and Adams do not fully appreciate the fact stressed by Gilbert that *Ulysses* is “not fictional” not only in the sense that it displays undeniable biographical sources and connections but in its very form and intelligibility. This mistake, as I believe it is, has been made in much more extreme forms by other critics and has caused *Ulysses* and also *Portrait of the Artist* to be not only misconceived but basically misperceived and misevaluated. This mistake is understandable, because it is not obvious how a work which exists in autonomous aesthetic independence of reality can yet be meant to implicate that reality nonreferentially within itself, and it will certainly not be obvious that its separation from reality is in fact the clearest manifestation of its connection with it. It is difficult also to understand how a work which directly asserts no autobiographical reference can yet be meant to take its significance for us from the private life of the author. In consequence, despite the ubiquitous plainness of the biographical connection—without an awareness of which, indeed, Joyce’s novels literally cannot be read—critics have construed them as if they were fictional in the sense that standard novels are.

This mistake has generated, among other critical errors, the view that Stephen Dedalus in *Portrait* and *Ulysses* is to be viewed ironically, as a false or deficient artist, and the parallel view that his aesthetic is amateurish, incoherent, or incomplete, a piece of dilettante intellectualism. It will be useful to review briefly here an argument I have developed elsewhere on these points in *Portrait* as an introduction and transition to the problems posed by *Ulysses* (see

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¹ Surface and Symbol, 249.
my “Defoe, Richardson, Joyce” [chapter 8 in this volume]). On the first point, if Portrait is read as fictional in standard novel terms, it is easy to take Stephen as exposed by his author to negative ironic judgment because Stephen is not developed to attract projective emotional sympathy from the reader but rather is offered for understanding as the portrait of a particular [young] man with a unique constellation of qualities. Aloof, proud, conceited, and selfish, he is exactly what we have more and more clearly come to understand the young Joyce was. If we do take Stephen as fictional or even quasi-fictional, it is easy to respond ironically to his discovery of his artistic calling at the point where he sees the girl at the seashore, for the slight villanelle he constructs within the book gives small evidence to support his sense of grand vocation. But if we take the book to be what its title says it is, if we take it to be offered for understanding as Joyce’s imaginative reconstruction of his own unique history and the inner integrity of his artistic mission, the basis for such a negative interpretation disappears. The book itself then becomes the self-evidence of Stephen’s artistic capacity, the objective recreation of the development of a world genius which only such a genius could know and only he could create. Stephen’s self-exaltation at the sight of the muse girl can then be read as an image of the exaltation felt by the author of Portrait—and Dubliners, Ulysses, and Finnegans Wake—when he first understood what his life’s work was to be.

As for Stephen’s flight towards exile at the end of Portrait, those who think Joyce meant us to see it as ironically subverted should consider the implications of the letter Joyce wrote to Lady Gregory at just that point in his life—1902, when he was twenty—corresponding to the end of Portrait, of which it is in fact the biographical analogue. It reads in part:

I intend to study medicine at the University of Paris supporting myself there by teaching English. I am going alone and friendless—I know of a man who used to live somewhere near Montmartre but I have never met him—into another country, and I am writing to you to know can you help me in any way. I do not know what will happen to me in Paris but my case can hardly be worse than it is here. I am leaving Dublin by the night boat on Monday 1st December and my train leaves Victoria Station for Newhaven the same night. I am not despondent however for I know that even if I fail to make my way such failure proves very little. I shall try myself against the powers of the world. All things are inconstant except the faith in the soul, which changes all things and fills their inconstancy with light. And though I seem to have been driven out of my country here as a misbeliever I have found no man yet with a faith like mine.

Faithfully yours,

James Joyce (Selected Letters 8)
It is even more possible to ironize this letter at the end of *Portrait*, where Joyce provides Stephen in his diary with a great deal of that self-ironic protection which is lacking here; and we may remember that in *Ulysses* it is Stephen himself who ironizes the journey of exile that Joyce here announces. But considering the ultimate sequel, the letter would seem impervious to irony, inaugurating as it does an epoch in the history of literature. The simple fact is that no artist of his time did have a faith like Joyce’s, as it is a fact that he more than any other writer did forge the spiritual conscience of the modern world.

The problem presented by Stephen’s artistic mission is closely analogous to that presented by Stephen’s aesthetic. If we think of *Portrait* in standard novel terms, it is logical to take the aesthetic as characterizing Stephen. But if we assume that the artistic intelligibility of the book is meant to depend on its presumptive relation to a reality outside itself which is none the less recreated in detachment within it, we can see that the aesthetic is necessary as an internal expression of the rationale of the circular relationship between the work and the life of the artist who created it. As I have already suggested, the separation of the book from life is the direct manifestation of its connection with it, since the goal of fictional recreation requires, as autobiography does not, that the artist break the explicit premise of connection and with it the emotional bond to his represented experience. He is to recreate his life as if he were not part of it. But this apartness, or detachment, was nevertheless meant to be understood as a fully implicit relation. To make it explicit would threaten the purpose internal autonomy of the book, a threat which in the event Joyce managed serenely to avoid, as he dramatically incorporated in the aesthetic an implied assertion of the relationship without in the least disturbing the book’s artistic vitality and rhythm. What has to be thought of as an extremely clumsy means of characterizing Stephen becomes from this point of view a beautifully oblique expression of the special relationship of artifact to invisible external artificer.

Misunderstanding of Joyce’s artistic purpose in his novels has usually gone hand in hand with a misunderstanding of Stephen’s aesthetic as set forth in *Portrait*. Despite the clear biographical fact that Joyce was developing the aesthetic on his own behalf long after the point in his life corresponding to the end of *Portrait* and the fact that he prompted Stuart Gilbert to say that the aesthetic was the functioning aesthetic of *Ulysses* as well as of the earlier novel, critics have persisted in characterizing the aesthetic as evidence of Stephen’s artistic and intellectual immaturity, part of the pervasive ironical attack which Joyce is supposed to mount on his priggish hero. Surely Stephen’s extended presentation of the aesthetic must be judged a wasteful and extremely obscure and inefficient method of negative characterization, but critics for the most
part have been content to suppose that Joyce attributed his own mature theory to Stephen as a sign of his immaturity.

One of the reasons the aesthetic has not been sufficiently appreciated, I think, is that it has the most striking limitations as a general literary theory. It conceives the lyric, epic, and dramatic forms as characterized by the successively different relationships which they manifest between the poet and his work, and those who try to consider how in *Paradise Lost*, say, the poet can be understood to present his image in mediate relationship to himself and to others (*Portrait* 214) will have a difficult time of it and may well conclude that Stephen's theory is a piece of jugglery. But Stephen and Joyce are not really talking about epics or lyrics in general but about their own unique projected work in particular, in which it is of the essence that we understand them by understanding at every point the way in which the detached artist is related to his materials.

In the lyric form, says Stephen, the artist presents his image in immediate relation to himself, and in *Portrait of the Artist* we understand Stephen from within, as he understands himself, and move with him, as Joyce expressed it, through a “a fluid succession of presents” that in sequence body forth the inner logic of his own artistic development (Original “Portrait” sketch, in *Portrait* 257). The narrative is easily intelligible both because the recreated matter has the natural preexistent coherence of that development and because we are continuously following Stephen's own acts of understanding. In *Ulysses* the situation is quite different. The epical form, Stephen says, emerges out of lyrical literature when the artist prolongs and broods upon himself as the center of an epical event and this form progresses till the center of emotional gravity is equidistant from the artist himself and from others, or “between Himself and others” (*Ulysses* 197; hereafter *U*), as Stephen puts it in the Shakespeare theory, which functions in *Ulysses* as the translation and expansion of the *Portrait* aesthetic. And we may notice that we understand Stephen's mental innerness in *Ulysses* not as we understand it in *Portrait*, lyrically, as he understands it himself, but as we might understand another person from the outside if we suddenly became connected with his stream of thought, coherent to him but not immediately to us. A direct consequence of this shift in representational posture is obvious but not often pointed out: the fact that Stephen in *Ulysses*, though we are often inside him, is imagined as a body—and mind—external to us as he is not in *Portrait*, where we are always inside his mind and body. Looking at himself in Buck Mulligan's mirror, Stephen thinks: “As he and others see me” (*U* 6). And that is how he is seen, for with Stephen in *Ulysses* we have the strange sense that we are looking with the author at himself as if he were outside himself. The differential perspective of the two books is developed out of our natural capacity to understand ourselves from within our own bodies and others from outside theirs and had already been used in more limited ways by poets, the *Portrait* mode in
dramatic lyrics like “Dover Beach” and “The Windhover,” the Ulysses mode in dramatic monologues like Browning’s (see my “Dramatic Monologue” [Editors’ note: Chapter 6 in this volume]).

The artist in Ulysses is often midway between Stephen and others, as in the early episodes, but he cannot be said to be equidistant, since we do not enter Mulligan’s mind or Haines’s or Deasy’s as we do Stephen’s. The other from whom the artist is equidistant is, of course, Bloom, who is, as the Shakespeare theory implies and critics now agree, based on the older Joyce himself. But “based upon” and for that matter “equidistant” won’t do the descriptive job. In order to be fully accurate about the relationship, we have to say that, whereas Stephen in Ulysses is to be understood as the real young Joyce imagined in his own body as if he were another, Bloom is to be understood finally as the mature Joyce imagining another in a different body as himself. The full rationale of this dual relationship, merely hinted at in Portrait and set forth at length but obscurely in Stephen’s Shakespeare theory, ultimately involves the whole rationale of the book and must be gradually unfolded.

Since the remainder of this essay will focus almost exclusively on the relationship between the main characters and the author, I should note in passing that I consider all the characters and matter of Ulysses to be built upon Joyce’s memory or knowledge of existent things and all the various symbolic patterns of the book as derived from Joyce’s need to bring this uncreated contingent matter within the order of his artistic purpose without violating its preexistent integrity. In the words of the Mangan essay Joyce bends upon these present things and so disposes them that, in connection with one order or another, his artistic meaning can be made to shine through them. I may cite as a sole example the way in which Joyce shows us in the memorial statuary of Glasnevin cemetery the ghostly figures of Homer’s Hades—“white shapes thronged among the trees, white forms and fragments streaming by mutely, sustaining vain gestures on the air” (U 100), transfiguring thus the stone reality we know as independent of Joyce into something exquisitely spiritual and more permanent than itself. Similarly, Joyce’s shifts of style from episode to episode are intended as a continuous manifestation of the presence which everywhere translates the random real to the order of art.

But this large aspect of Joyce’s actualistic novel will require another essay to develop, and I turn back now to my more limited and more primary subject by means of a passage which is nevertheless not unconnected with the points just made. In the “Oxen of the Sun” episode there looms up suddenly an obscurely
eloquent passage where Stephen is presented as saying, in the archaic idiom then predominant in the stylistic pastiche: “Know all men, . . . time’s ruins build eternity’s mansions. What means this? Desire’s wind blasts the thorn-tree but after it becomes from a bramblebush to be a rose upon the rood of time. Mark me now. In woman’s womb word is made flesh but in the spirit of the maker all flesh that passes becomes the word that shall not pass away. This is the postcreation” (U 391).

This passage, central to a complete understanding of *Ulysses*, bears directly on Joyce’s relationship to all the main characters of the book, but we may begin by noticing that it is Stephen specifically who is shown to us as lost in the ruins of time. Whereas in *Portrait* Joyce had portrayed his own spiritual development as a fluid succession of presents moving coherently to his discovery and acceptance of his artistic vocation, in *Ulysses* he wished as artist to represent himself in his situation as an ordinary man, and consequently the flow of time in *Ulysses* shows quite a different aspect. “Hold to the now, the here, through which all future plunges to the past,” says Stephen to himself in “Scylla and Charybdis” (186). His problem is that he can’t. He can neither arrest time nor loose time’s ruinous hold on him. From this point of view, we can see why Joyce opened the book with a view of Stephen in contest with Mulligan and oppressed by memories of his mother. Mulligan’s “even white teeth glistening here and there with gold points” (3) form a contrast not created by Joyce with “toothless Kinch.” The dental contrast directly reflects the larger contrast in their inheritance and social circumstances, between the Dedalus “house of decay” and the prosperous situation of the Mulligans of Ireland. The fact that Stephen is fixed in time by limiting circumstances beyond his and his author’s choosing finds renewed expression when Stephen asks himself, “Who chose this face for me?” (6). He gives the answer later on: “From before the ages He [God] willed me and may not will me away” (38). He means that he knows himself as an *is* and not a *might have been*, but he is still a mere piece of flotsam being carried to destruction by the torment which plunges from the future to the past. All this is summed up in Stephen’s famous phrase that “history is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake” (34).

But if history is a nightmare from which he is trying to awake, we see that the dream of his dead mother which haunts him throughout the day is the literal embodiment of that nightmare, since it was from his mother’s body that he emerged in ineluctable being and knowledge of himself as fixed in time. Through her womb he belongs to the order of flesh and the order of history which moves, as he thinks, to one great goal, the all-wombing tomb to which all flesh comes, the tomb which swallowed her and will swallow him.

Stephen reminds Mulligan this day of the offensive words he had spoken on an earlier occasion, “O it’s only Dedalus whose mother is beastly dead,”
and Mulligan apologizes by explaining: “And what is death, . . . your mother’s or yours or my own? You saw only your mother die. I see them pop off every day in the Mater and Richmond and cut up into tripes in the dissecting room. It’s a beastly thing and nothing else. It simply doesn’t matter. You wouldn’t kneel down to pray for your mother on her deathbed when she asked you. Why? Because you have the cursed jesuit strain in you, only it’s injected the wrong way. To me it’s all a mockery and beastly” (8). For Stephen, we recall, Mulligan is of the brood of mockers, that is, of those who see life as empty and meaningless, as opposed to those who like Joyce, as described by his brother, thought life held some “not ignoble meaning” (My Brother’s Keeper 109). But though Stephen would escape to life from the hold his mother’s image exerts—“No mother. Let me be and let me live” (U 10)—he cannot escape either from her or from history. He will not assent to Mulligan’s assertion that “it’s all a mockery and beastly,” and yet, fixed in his body, in the order of time and space, he can only see himself as a beast, as “poor dogsbody” and meat for the corpsechewer God.

We see Stephen all day “battling against hopelessness” (247), tortured by the agenbite of inwit, the bite of conscience that holds him to his living family as well as to his dead mother. “She is drowning,” he thinks when he sees his sister in the street, but immediately thinks again, “She will drown me with her, eyes and hair. Lank coils of seaweed hair around me, my heart, my soul” (243). Finally, in the fantasy of “Circe” his mother’s blackened, withered arm reaches towards his breast as she cries “Beware! God’s hand” and “a green crab with malignant red eyes sticks deep its grinning claws into his heart.” Stephen in a rage cries out “Shite!” and declaring “The intellectual imagination! . . . Non serviam!” he performs his climactic action in the book, described by Joyce as follows: “He lifts his ashplant high with both hands and smashes the chandelier. Time’s livid final flame leaps and, in the following darkness, ruin of all space, shattered glass and toppling masonry” (582). In other words, Stephen is to be here understood as detaching himself from time’s ruins and setting out to build eternity’s mansions. But he is still in time and, so far as anything he knows certainly of his future, lost still. Exhausted and drunken, he drops his ashplant and rushes out from Bella Cohen’s to be knocked flat by Private Carr, that emissary from history. As he lies unconscious he hears a voice call “Stephen” and feels a hand shaking him by the shoulder. Mr. Bloom (for it is he) brushes him off and bucks him up (“in orthodox Samaritan fashion”) and hands him his ashplant and his hat.

Mr. Bloom’s help is material and timely, and we shall return to consider his appearance more closely; but his superintendence of Stephen may serve to remind us that Stephen has not hitherto on this day been completely unattended. As in the opening episodes we watch Stephen and his companions move through their hours of contingency, they come to appear to us strangely
uncontingent. It must gradually be borne in upon us that our perception of them fixed in the ineluctable but purposeless order of time and space, the nebe-neinander and nacheinander, is itself not bound by time and space but belongs to another order, the order of the deep invisible purpose which sustains them to our view. The agent of this purpose and his identity is meant as already suggested to become integral to our final understanding of and response to the text, and the invisible presence finds many means of telling us so. When for instance Stephen is expounding the complexities of the overall relationship in his library conversation with Eglinton, Best, and Russell, he glances “anxiously . . . in the cone of lamplight where three faces, lighted, shone.” “See this,” he says to himself, “Remember” (192). The moment has its proper aesthetic force only when we realize that we are experiencing Stephen’s thought through its own fulfillment, that the scene is not a fiction but the recreation as present of a past that an invisible Joyce–Stephen remembers. Stephen himself states the principle directly two pages later: “In the future, the sister of the past, I may see myself as I sit here but by reflection from that which then I shall be” (194).

The imaginative situation with which we are confronted in the book fulfills the boast Stephen makes in “Oxen of the Sun” regarding what he calls there “the past and its phantoms”: “If I call them into life across the waters of Lethe,” asserts Stephen in the style of Landor, “will not the poor ghosts troop to my call?” (415). But paradoxically this intention leads to the situation in Ulysses where it is the ghosts who have become palpable and Stephen–Joyce who has become a ghost. “What is a ghost?” asks Stephen apropos of Hamlet. “One who has faded into impalpability through death, through absence, through change of manners . . . returning to the world that has forgotten him” (188). The truly ghostly detachment with which Stephen is seen implies the different perspective of the later point in time from which he is seen, and hence the appearance and reappearance in the book of the mysterious word “parallax,” indicating as it does the difference in apparent direction of an object as seen from two different points.

The spiritual position from which Joyce creates the image of his tormented youthful self is manifested in mute epiphany at the end of the Telemachiad when Stephen, lost in the ruins of time, turns to look over his shoulder and sees moving upstream in the Liffey the “high spars of a threemaster, her sails brailed up on the crosstrees, homing, upstream, silently moving, a silent ship” (51). I do not know how often the strange fact has been noticed that this ship, the schooner Rosevean as we later learn, moves with furled sails upstream, but the fact is consonant with suggestions elsewhere in the book that, though loaded with bricks from Bridgewater, it is a ghost ship with a ghostly passenger.

The silent tranquillity of the homing Rosevean is the pivot on which we turn
the page into the relaxed spirit of Leopold Bloom, Stephen’s opposite; but it is important that we realize that the spiritual transcendence it represents is the outcome of Stephen’s ashplant gesture in the brothel and the logical result of all his thought and action in the book. More than this, it is inseparable in a way that has seldom been understood from the apparently most negative aspects of Stephen’s personality. From a normal point of view, from the perspective of ordinary fictional judgment, Stephen’s demand of absolute allegiance from his friends—“as I am. As I am. All or not at all” (49)—and such statements as his assertion that Ireland’s importance consists in its belonging to him seem absurd, as his refusal to be a good fellow and get along with Mulligan can seem merely a point of priggish pride. And such attitudes and posturings in Stephen, as they appear to be, have let many to see him as an unpleasant fellow, a dilettante aesthete and immature poseur, to be scorned and reviled. But so to pelt Stephen with the stones of irony calls attention to the role Joyce deliberately assigned him with the name of Stephen Protomartyr. Negative judgment of Stephen is quite in order as the response of the normal person who sees him from the standpoint of what is necessary to live in this world, but that is just the point: Stephen and Joyce did not mean to live in this world. It was not that the world or friends forced either of them out of it if either had been willing, as most of us who live in the world are, to make the least spiritual compromise, but neither was. Joyce saw clearly what he might become if he stayed in the society into which he was born, and projected the various possibilities in Lenehan, Little Chandler, and Gabriel Conroy. But he meant to fly by the nets in which he showed them caught. Richard Ellmann has recently written that Joyce’s repudiation of “easy solutions to artistic as well as personal problems” made possible “his elaborate and great solutions” (Selected Letters xiii). This needs to be stressed, for that refusal to compromise which, superficially considered, seems so nearly ridiculous in both Stephen and Joyce, as they discover betrayal everywhere and sentence themselves to the path of exile, was the necessary generating condition of their artistic mission. Joyce had to break the link of practical desire which held him to the world of time in order to achieve the aesthetic detachment necessary to recreate it as artistically self-existent and in this new existence redeemed. Joyce literally had to sacrifice his practical life in order to be able in his work to prepare for himself and his readers his mansions in eternity. It is his unique mission as artist-Christ and re-creator God that makes Stephen seem to readers as Joyce wished to seem to his friends, “Selfish, proud, cunning, and regardless of others” (Letters 2:52).

Such reflections give some notion of what that schooner with three cross-trees is doing sailing back into Dublin Bay and up the Liffey. In Stephen’s theology of art the artist is “nailed like bat to barn-door, starved on cross-tree”
so that with the schooner moves the mediator whom the sacrifice had made effective, “middler the Holy Ghost,” in Stephen’s phrase, who stands in parallax above and between himself and Bloom as does the little cloud they both look up to see this day from different points in Dublin. The schooner, of course, is only an outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible presence in the book, an intelligence that knows where Stephen is going as he does not, that has come fully to realize what Stephen is able only to purpose dimly, though often we hear the voice of his recreator’s mature knowledge and purpose speaking through him. As Stephen says in a statement that instances its own assertion, the mature artist is “a ghost, a shadow . . . a voice heard only in the heart of him who is the substance of his shadow, the son consubstantial with the father” (197).

Entering into the construction of Bloomsday were many small fragments of memory and recorded fact, but larger fragments were also pressed into service. There was the morning remembered by Oliver St. John Gogarty when, shaving, he had a conversation with Joyce on the roof of the Martello tower, and another day, also recorded by Gogarty, when Joyce left the tower after a nighttime altercation like that alluded to in *Ulysses* (qtd. in Scholes and Kain 213, 219; Gogarty). W. K. Magee (“John Eglinton”) remembered the library conversation about Shakespeare and found in *Ulysses* what he thought a surprising record of things actually said on that occasion (qtd. in Scholes and Kain 200–202, 206–207; Eglinton). J. F. Byrne remembered the night he brought Joyce home with him to No. 7 Eccles Street, even to the peculiar manner of entrance occasioned by a lost key (157–58). The funeral of Paddy Dignam was adapted from the funeral of Matthew P. Kane, which was attended by Joyce and his father and, among others, one Alfred Hunter (Adams, *Surface and Symbol* 62). There was also the occasion when Joyce was knocked down, not in Nighttown where Joyce had often been, but on St. Stephen’s Green, and left to his fate by Vincent Cosgrave, the Lynch-Judas of *Ulysses* and *Portrait* (Trieste Notebook, in Scholes and Kain 93). This was the same occasion, apparently, when he was picked up and taken home by the same Alfred Hunter already mentioned (Ellmann, *Ulysses on the Liffey* xv).

Hunter was, it would appear, a distant friend of the Joyce family through the same Mrs. (Dante) Conway (renamed Riordan in *Portrait* and *Ulysses*) with whom Bloom is acquainted, but otherwise little is known of him except that he was a Jew and was said to have an unfaithful wife (*Selected Letters* 125n). Joyce’s encounter with Hunter was apparently the root fact from which, over several years, the whole conception of *Ulysses* developed. One can see how from the memory of that encounter grew the dazzling thought of enacting a literal return to, and reunion with, his earlier self, a means of reentry into a
past reality whose ineluctable fixed and finished order was otherwise impervious to access. In the memory of that mysterious, unsought encounter, in the touch of that "strange flesh," he could find a means of literal reembodiment in and contact with his earlier life. He could thus give to his earlier recreated self an understanding Father who would Himself be His own Son. And thus could he by parallactic projection perfect the imperfection of his earlier life, creating its goal in its own image.

III

All this suggests that Bloom is not to be thought of merely as embodying in a general way Joyce's mature thought and perspective but that he is to be seen as a specific function of Joyce's overall program of detachment from himself in pursuit of his art. I spoke earlier of Joyce's imaginative position as outside the bodies of both Stephen and Bloom, himself as another, another as himself, and now I may follow out the logic of that relationship more fully. If in recreating himself as Stephen from the outside, Joyce was in effect withdrawing from his natural body as attached to his earlier self, in creating Bloom he was projecting his present self into the imagined body of another, detaching himself from himself in an opposite sense.

Thus, it is crucial that Bloom is physically different from Joyce, his bodily opposite. The two figures Joyce shows us at the end of "Eumaeus," “one full, one lean” (U 665), have complex points of similarity and difference, as the book makes explicitly clear, yet the fundamental contrast-in-similarity is plain; the two are, as the trite narrative asserts, “poles apart” (634). There is not only the bodily contrast and the racial difference; they also have fundamentally different characters: Bloom is prudent where Joyce was reckless, thrifty where he was spendthrift, sober where he was drunken, ordinary where he was extraordinary. The last point of difference is particularly important, for it is a mistake to say as some have that Bloom is Stephen's intellectual superior. His was emphatically not the mind that wrote Ulysses. That clear, keen mind was his own phrase “another now and yet the same” (11). This is not to say that Joyce's poetry does not come powerfully through Bloom's mind, but the point is that Joyce is finding his own extraordinary thought in the mind of an ordinary man, joining his innerness with that of a common other who was what he told Nora he always felt himself to be, “a stranger in my own country” (Selected Letters 173–74). As through his extraordinary mind, the mind of Stephen, he had become estranged and detached himself from the stream of life into which he was born, so through the solitary Bloom's ordinary mind and body and adaptive character
he has attached himself once more in atonement, that is to say at-onement, with that life and his earlier self.

It was Bloom’s formal otherness that made it possible for Joyce to objectify and anatomize in him the obsessions rooted in his own secret self. In Bloom the author Joyce sought to probe the vicious mole of that identity which nature had planted in him, the hornmad Iago which in his intellect as in Shakespeare’s would not let him rest. So it was, as recent investigation and now Joyce’s finally published letters to Nora make clear, that he gave to Bloom and Bloom’s body the psychosexual burdens which he does not represent in Stephen at all (see Shechner 100ff.). But we are not to suppose that the self-revelation is either unconscious or genuinely confessional. Joyce’s intent was not to seek absolution even from himself. For him, as for Hamlet, this was a matter wherein he was not guilty, since nature cannot choose his origin. His intent was rather to objectify and know himself as he was without thought of purgation or change. He knew he had not achieved either purgation or transformation or even, as he seems to have confided in Gilbert, complete detachment (Gilbert 23). This he tells us in Stephen’s description of Shakespeare: “He goes back, weary of the creation he has piled up to hide him from himself, an old dog licking an old sore. But, because his loss is his gain, he passes on towards eternity in undiminished personality, untaught by the wisdom he has written or by the laws he has revealed” (U 197).

Before we can consider the manner in which that middler Ghost of the artistic Trinity passed on towards eternity in undiminished personality, and with it another aspect of Joyce’s sexual obsession as both are connected with the deepest structure of the book, we must consider the further life in Ulysses of Father and Son in a way that I think much illuminates that ghostly journey. After Bloom picks Stephen up at the end of “Circe” and the two move off together in the “Eumaeus” episode to the cabman’s shelter, the narrative (by deliberate intention) grows trite and tired, the action static. It has reasonably been thought odd that the narrative should lose strength at just the point where Stephen and Bloom have at last achieved at-onement, as they do fully towards the end of the episode when Bloom passes his left arm through Stephen’s right and Stephen reacts uncertainly, feeling “a strange kind of flesh of a different man approach him, sinewless and wobbly and all that” (660). That strangeness in Bloom’s flesh results of course from the inhabitation of his creator. Bloom’s presence to Stephen is strange indeed; he is a visitor from another order, a manifestation in reverse time and space of his future self in the present. But why then again, given this resounding event, should there be such paucity of action, such lack of real connection and communication between the two, who scarcely understand each other? First of all, I think, because of what the actual model
of the encounter must originally have been like. When Hunter picked up Joyce up and took him home, Joyce like Stephen must have been out of it, and there would have been only the rudiments of successful communication. Joyce the actualist was not about to turn suddenly fictionalist and fable a conversation for which memory gave no warrant. The ineluctability of reality was just what gave point to the return as possible through the fact of the encounter with Hunter, and though the life of Bloom beyond the immediate representation could be partially invented and fictionally expanded, the actual space-time experience and connection with Stephen needed to be shaped around the armature of a remembered reality. This is why there is no point in speculations about any future relationship between Bloom and Molly and Stephen. There was no place for such a relationship in the ineluctable shape of Stephen’s life. Bloom and Stephen must pass, as Budgen’s phrase has it, “like two ships bound for different ports that come within hail and disappear into the night” because that is the way that Hunter and Joyce had passed (259).

A deeper reason for the inconsequential quality of the meeting was that the event in fiction as well as in fact was in one aspect a non-event. Joyce had by the psycho-logic of his art got himself out of his present self and back to his earlier self, but at that point nothing, so far as grand consummation, went: logic and reality gave out. We see in the episode what Joyce describes in the idiom of “Ithaca” as “the incongruity and disproportion between the self-prolonging tension of the thing proposed to be done and the self-abbreviating relaxation of the thing done” (U 774). Not only was the at-onement to some degree an anti-climax, it was in a way a lie: Joyce never really got back to himself. He was still in 1922 Paris, his earlier self still lost back in 1904 Dublin. For him, again in the idiom of “Ithaca,” there was “an unsatisfactory equation between an exodus and return in time through reversible space and an exodus and return in space through irreversible time” (728).

This thought leads to interesting reflections on the unusual figure who makes so large an appearance in the “Eumaeus” episode, the wandering sailor W. B. Murphy, drunk and full of tall tales, who had arrived in Dublin that morning on the three-masted schooner Rosevean. He is described as red-bearded, with partially grey and therefore partially red hair also—a striking feature, since we have twice been told that Shakespeare’s hair was greyed-auburn, once by Stephen and once again when, completely without explanation, almost the same words thought by Stephen turn up in Bloom’s thoughts. In “Scylla and Charybdis,” Stephen thinks: “In a rosary of Fetter Lane of Gerard, herbalist, he [Shakespeare] walks, greyed-auburn. . . . One life is all. One body. Do. But do” (202). And Bloom in “Sirens”: “In Gerard’s rosery of Fetter Lane he walks, greyed-auburn. . . . One life is all. One body. Do. But do” (280). Since Stephen
and Bloom have earlier in the “Circe” phantasmagoria looked into a mirror and seen one Shakespeare and since Stephen just after the reference to Murphy’s hair says that “Shakespeares were as common as Murphies” and adds “What’s in a name?” (264), we must take his point: W. B. Murphy is a stand-in for Joyce the artist, appearing here within as well as beyond and above his creation. He is the ghost sailor of the *Rosevean* taking visible form, though as Budgen says with a hint from Joyce “if he stood on the scales the pointing needle would not waver” (252). The identification is emphasized by the fact that during the day Bloom’s throwaway religious circular with “Elijah is coming!” imprinted on it has floated out to sea and met the *Rosevean*, as the artist within the creation reaches out to make contact with himself coming in. Murphy we are told is also Rip Van Winkle and Enoch Arden, that is to say emphatically, in this *nostos*, he who after long absence returns home.\(^3\)

But why then is he a drunk and a weary teller of tales? Because Joyce was a drunk and was at the moment telling a particularly tall tale about a long journey to nowhere at the end of which perhaps he too like the Shakespeare of his description had grown “weary of the creation he has piled up to hide himself from himself.” Through Murphy—Odysseus Pseudangelos, the false Ulysses—Joyce makes a covert confession (really a kind of protective concession) before he permits the final linkage of arms between Bloom and Stephen to take place, followed shortly by neatly managed references to the “arms of Murphy” and once more to Shakespeare as connected with Gerard the herbalist in Fetter Lane.\(^4\) Having fully accomplished the union of the two halves of himself between whom he has been the middler apex in the isosceles triangle of the parallactic relationship out of which the book is generated, the Holy Artistic Ghost now rises in “Ithaca” far above his creation and the bodies of the two men he has earned the right to call his creatures and looks down upon and measures them with disembodied catechizing voice from a point of elevated detachment the sublimity of which has often been appreciated. As Joyce wrote to Budgen, he meant to give the two in “the baldest coldest way” so that they would become heavenly bodies, “wanderers like the stars at which they gaze,” (*Letters* 1:160) and we do imaginatively see them as fixed among “the heaven-tree of stars” “hung with humid nightblue fruit” (*U* 698). They are perceived in the full tranquil stasis of the intellectual imagination to which Stephen had committed himself in “Circe”; they are seen, as they move in the apathy and cold of the universe through everchanging tracks of neverchanging space, as God himself might see them, in Spinoza’s phrase, “under the aspect of eternity.”

Joyce thus manages to see himself as Bloom in this episode universally, as Everyman and Noman, part of the human series originating in and repeated to infinity. This universal aspect of the life he portrays Joyce has been developing
all through the book, in references to the lore of esoteric Buddhism, to Adam and Eve, the omphalos, and the strand-entwining cable of all flesh; but what he means by it all is simply to give us a sense of our literal but mysterious incorporation in the continuous stream of life by which the human spirit passes from body to body, always different, always the same. This is one aspect of the meaning of metempsychosis, the strange word that Molly asks Bloom the meaning of and that, like parallax, turns up so insistently throughout the book. But the term has a complementary, literal meaning that is more central to the inner structure of the book that I have been tracing out.

As Stephen discusses Anne Hathaway’s supposed seduction of Shakespeare, he thinks to himself: “And my turn? When?” (193). The answer in real life was, of course, “Today,” for as we know from Ellmann’s biography, Bloomsday, 16 June 1904, was the day Joyce first walked out and was on terms of physical intimacy with his future wife Nora Barnacle (James Joyce 162, 163). But oddly enough the event memorialized by the book is not represented in it. As we have already seen, Joyce made his 16 June 1904 from the fragments of other days, which was a way of indicating that Bloomsday was his day, not time’s day. None the less the events of the real 16 June 1904 are connected with the book in a most fundamental way. Appreciation of that connection may be sought in that very discussion of Anne Hathaway, which certainly must implicate Nora to the degree that the discussion of Shakespeare implicates Joyce.

Stephen speaks of Shakespeare not as choosing but as being chosen by Anne, and he saw Shakespeare’s memory of this event as implicit in his creation of Venus and Adonis: “She put the comether on him, sweet and twenty-six. The greyeyed goddess who bends over the boy Adonis, stooping to conquer, as prologue to the swelling act, is a boldfaced Stratford wench who tumbles in a cornfield a lover younger than herself” (U 191). This is clearly a case of the recreated character being endowed with knowledge by his creator, for Shakespeare/Adonis’s seduction by Anne/Venus is very close to the one that Stephen/Joyce was to undergo at the hands, literally, of Nora. Years later he recalled in a letter to her the time “in that field near the Dodder” (apparently on 16 June) when “the girl I loved . . . sauntered over to me and took me so easily into her arms and made me a man” (Selected Letters 259). “It was you yourself,” he says in another letter, “who first led the way. It was not I who first touched you long ago at Ringsend [by the Dodder]. It was you who slid your hand down,” he remembered, to perform an act of intimacy, “all the time bending over me and gazing at me out of your quiet saintlike eyes” (182), not grey in Nora’s case but blue.

Stephen feels that Anne’s seduction was an undoing from which Shakespeare never recovered. Stephen senses in Shakespeare’s words “some goad of the flesh driving him into a new passion, a darker shadow of the first, darken-
ing even his own understanding of himself. A life fate awaits him and the two rages commingle in a whirlpool” (U 196). So Joyce wrote Nora in the second letter quoted above that “you seem to turn me into a beast.” The dark side of the sensual immolation which he sought in her he sought to objectify, as already noticed, through Bloom in “Circe,” and in “Circe” also he revealed the deep connections between his bondage to the flesh, his program of artistic detachment, and his fear (and oblique solicitation) of betrayal by the beloved woman. Stephen says of Shakespeare that “his unremitting intellect is the hornmad Iago ceaselessly willing that the moor in him shall suffer” (212). And Joyce’s obsession with cuckoldry was likewise directly linked with his own total commitment to the intellectual imagination. The will to artistic detachment and power found a strange symbiosis with his will to abandon himself passively to the female body and even to see himself replaced by another in possession of it. In passive abandonment to the woman he once fulfilled and discharged the dark impulses that drove his body and thus left himself spiritually free to contemplate and recreate the flesh and the world from which through her he had detached himself. So it was that his love for Nora seemed to him both “ugly, obscene, and bestial” and “pure and holy and spiritual” in a circular process that brought him “one moment high as the stars, the next lower than the lowest wretches” (Selected Letters 9, 167). For him as for Shakespeare there were “two rages,” the one towards sensual abandonment, the other towards intellectual detachment, commingled in the whirlpool of himself. These two rages he had represented side by side in “Circe,” where Stephen, “strangled with rage,” commits himself to the intellectual imagination (U 582), and Bloom after acknowledging his impulse to degradation goes wild in voyeuristic contemplation of Molly and Boylan, while both figures are summed up in their joint mirror image as a Shakespeare paralyzed with rage and crowned with the antlers of the cuckold (567–68). It is, again, important to understand that the two rages, the two impulses, are not finally opposed to one another but that one is the condition of and complement of the other, as the world Joyce lost in sensual abandonment to the woman he recreated in detachment though her image. (Bloom notes as one of Stephen’s predominant quiddities an “equal and opposite power of abandonment and recuperation” [673].) Thus Joyce wrote to Nora that he had “loved in her the image of the beauty of the world, the mystery and beauty of life itself, the beauty and doom of the race of whom I am a child, the images of spiritual purity and pity which I believed in as a boy” (Selected Letters 179). And even the impulse to bodily abandonment finally became a positive aspect of the artistic programme, as is indicated by a strange conceit which Joyce develops in another of his letters to Nora: “O take me into your soul of souls,” he writes, “and then I will become indeed the poet of my race. I feel this, Nora,
as I write it. My body will soon penetrate into yours, O that my soul could too! Oh that I could nestle in your womb like a child born of your flesh and blood, be fed by your blood, sleep in the warm and secret gloom of your body!” (169).

Studying *Ulysses* in the light of this passage illuminates it, I think, in ways which no critic that I have read completely follows out. In the midst of expounding the thoughts about artistic paternity which imply his relation to Joyce and Joyce’s relation to him and Bloom and John Stanislaus Joyce, Stephen Dedalus, his mind in the grip of his mother’s memory, concludes that the father-son relationship, “an apostolic succession from only begetter to only begotten,” is nevertheless founded “upon incertitude, upon unlikelihood” (207). Then rather mysteriously he continues: “Amor matris [mother love], subjective and objective genitive [that is, in the two senses of the mother’s love for the child and the child’s love for the mother], may be the only true thing in life. Paternity may be a legal fiction. Who is the father of any son that any son should love him or he any son?” “What the hell are you driving at?” Stephen silently asks himself, and answers, “I know. Shut up. Blast you! I have reasons.”

What those reasons are, close consideration of the book I think reveals. At the end of “Ithaca,” Bloom, after kissing the “plump mellow yellow smellow melons” of Molly’s bottom, lies in bed against her in the posture of “the childman weary,” “the manchild in the womb” (737). “He rests,” the narrative voice says. “He has traveled.” “With?” the voice then asks, and replies as we all remember, “Sinbad the Sailor and Tinbad the Tailor and Jinbad the Jailer,” and so forth, and then asks again, “When?” and answers: “Going to a dark bed there was a square round Sinbad the Sailor roc’s auk’s egg in the night of the bed of all the auks of the rocs of Darkinbad the Brightdayler.” “Where?” and then the black dot before we turn the page to Molly. Since W. B./Shakespeare/Odysseus/Rip Van Winkle/Murphy was also given to us as Sinbad the Sailor, we know who it is who, high as the stars, comes down now from his disembodiment to pass through the dot into Molly’s body in her dark bed. “Into” is specifically accurate, for if we reflect upon the experience of Molly’s consciousness that we are given, we find that we are not related to her mind and body as we had been to Stephen’s and Bloom’s. As noted earlier, we experience their minds from the outside in, as if retaining the anchoring comparative perspective of ourselves, as we do when empathizing with real people. But Joyce said to Budgen that “Penelope” was written “through [Molly’s] thoughts and body” (*Selected Letters* 152), and we find ourselves understanding her thoughts not from the outside in but from the inside out, giving ourselves up to her body as we do not to Stephen’s or Bloom’s. If we accept the imaginative invitation, we find ourselves lost in her, entirely without external orientation, so that, for example, Molly’s orange-keyed chamberpot which in “Calypso” was placed clearly in the room
for us, external to us, external to Bloom, we can now locate only through Molly’s own groping. It is this formal imperative to give ourselves up to Molly, to lose ourselves in her, that makes her seem to some obscene and terrifying. In a way that shakes our sense of selfhood, she invites us to let our mind’s grip on our body go and let its feelings flow with hers into acceptance and affirmation of the living stream which plunges from the future to the past.

But where we are Joyce has been. Metempsychosis, Bloom tells Molly, means “living in another body after death” \((U\ 65)\), and recalling Shakespeare–Stephen–Bloom’s “One life. One body. Do. But do,” we may understand finally why that ghostly “Mark me now” emphasized through Stephen with such strange force the assertion that “In woman’s womb word is made flesh but in the spirit of the maker all flesh that passes becomes the word that shall not pass away. This is the postcreation.” \(Ulysses\) is Joyce’s postcreation, the eternal mansion of the afterexistence which he constructed by the deed of his long creative passage from May Dedalus to Marion Bloom, from the dream of the time-and-tomb-bound body of the real mother from whose womb he came, to incorporation, through his experience with Nora, with the word-borne everliving body of Molly, the woman who never was.

As the climax of an almost Dantesque reading of \(Ulysses\) that I believe will grow more and more authoritative, Richard Ellmann has shown that the menstrual blood which flows from Molly’s womb into her chamberpot is to be seen as the consecrated blood of a chalice, a token of substantiated, that is to say, actual, life in the body, rather than transubstantiated life beyond the body \((Ulysses\ on\ the\ Liffey\ 171)\). In the floating spot of that blood sacrifice we are to see the “rose upon the rood of time” that Stephen had prophesied. But that phrase draws upon and is vitalized as well by the sacrificial rose of the cross-masted \(Rosevean\) and the rosery of Fetter Lane in which Shakespeare walked and by all the other flowers of “Penelope” and by Molly’s memory of the Gibraltar current—“O that awful deepdown torrent O and the sea the sea crimson sometimes like a fire” \((U\ 783)\), where the rose merges both with time’s tide and its livid final flame. More inclusively, however, the rose upon the rood of time is the life that grew out of the dogsbody of Stephen Dedalus to flower in Bloom and bloom in Molly, the blossom of \(Ulysses\) itself unfolding out of time to timeless life.

By this analysis I have meant to indicate what can be gained by following out the logic of a specific formal conception of \(Ulysses\) as different in a fundamental way from all the novels which had gone before it. This conception, which is simply the result of taking seriously Joyce’s own assertions about his art, locates not only the formal uniqueness of \(Ulysses\) but also the sources of its extraordinary artistic value. By writing a novel not made to shape life to our feelings but to shape our feelings to life as it is, Joyce increased the capacity of
those who came after him to know and accept without illusion the undignified truth about our contingent bodily life, at the same time that his great cognitive and reconstructive act instanced, as only the very greatest poets have been able to do, that power the human mind has to image and understand its own condition which is the basis of our dignity. In a way he could not completely have foreseen when he wrote his 1902 letter to Lady Gregory, he drew upon the faith in his own soul to display to us the inconstancy of all things and fill that inconstancy with light.

Notes

1. For Adams’s moving reading of *Ulysses*, see also his *James Joyce: Common Sense and Beyond* (particularly 165–77). My own interpretation of *Ulysses* builds upon both Adams and Goldberg, and also, as will appear, upon Ellmann. Hélène Cixous in her massive *The Exile of James Joyce* develops from a structuralist perspective a view of *Ulysses* and *Portrait* which has much in common with that developed here more literally and naturalistically.

2. When Frank Budgen pointed out to him that “crosstrees” was an inappropriate term for the spars referred to, Joyce replied that “the word ‘crosstrees’ is essential. It comes in later on and I can’t change it” (Budgen 56).

3. Professor John Henry Raleigh has also made this identification and brings some further points to my attention, among them the fact that by the name “W. B. Murphy” Joyce implicitly challenges comparison with Yeats as the leading Irish poet, and that references to Murphy as “a bit of a literary cove in his own small way” and as “bad in the eyes” involve further implicit self-reference.

4. See Gilbert (361). Gilbert’s discussion hints heavily at the interpretation I am offering of Murphy.
Sixty years after its publication *Ulysses* stands unchallenged as the greatest literary work in English of the twentieth century; yet despite the richly fruitful efforts of many able commentators, the book remains stubbornly enigmatic and deeply resistant to conceptualization as a coherent whole. Critics seriously in search of unifying meaning have often concluded that the naturalistic and symbolic aspects of the book are in irreconcilable conflict, perhaps (as has been authoritatively suggested) because Joyce’s purposes changed in the long course of composition, perhaps inherently and deliberately, leaving the book, appropriately for a modern masterpiece, hollow at its core. Such a conclusion finds obvious support in current structuralist and/or deconstructionist assumptions, and the result has been an even greater emphasis than in the past on treatment of the book as finally just a text, a dazzling aggregation of signs and styles primarily notable as offering a richer than usual field for the play and interplay of the conventions of language and meaning.

Oddly enough, a good deal of our difficulty in interpreting *Ulysses* may derive from the fact that the greatest work of literature of the twentieth century is not constructed according to the principles on which most twentieth-century literary critical programs have been based. The dominant literary critical dogma of our time (which has governed alike both orthodox New Critical and more radical current outlooks)—that literary works stand semantically independent of their authors’ lives and purposes—cannot accommodate the obvious fact that, self-existent and autonomous though it emphatically is, *Ulysses* is pervasively autobiographical and personal in its provenience and formal orientation. In an earlier essay (“Exodus and Return” [Chapter 16 in this volume]),
I attempted to follow fully out the book’s covert but nevertheless clear and insistent implication that the real author outside the book is formally inside it and the alpha and omega of its meaning. In this current effort, I want to extend and amplify the account of the book that such a view can provide.

At the outset of *Ulysses* Joyce shows us, in calm detachment, the image of his earlier self, Stephen Dedalus, at once caught in the nightmare of history and pondering with keenest clarity his situation in the here and now and his capacity to seize intellectually the world of the *nubeneinander* and *nachbeinander*, the world we can knock our heads against and find that we can to some degree understand (seem in a strange way programmed to understand), despite its ultimate mystery. And Stephen is seen to be developing in his Shakespeare theory a notion of how an artist can draw from the materials of his own life the substance and significance of his art. The Shakespeare theory, and the Trinitarian schematism that goes with it, has the function in *Ulysses* that the aesthetic theory does in *Portrait*, namely to provide from within a rationale for the book we are reading. Our difficulty is in taking the rationale as literally and deeply as Joyce intended, resistant as we are to what seem the invitations of mere perversity and egotism. But the fact is that only by insisting on the importance of his own personal predicament in a way that may seem and perhaps is, in a normal perspective, perverse and egotistical, was Joyce able to write a book that could be true to the predicament we all share of being locked in a body and a world which will inevitably destroy us but which, meanwhile, we can both imaginatively rise above and spiritually assent to. Joyce deeply concurred with another egotist, whom he admired, Wordsworth, who wrote of the world “which is the world of all of us, wherein at last we find our happiness, or not at all.” This world is the only world we have or will have, and our own particular bodies in this time and this place the pre-given and only opportunity we have of seizing it. This is an understanding, systematically but abstractly developed by Husserl and his followers in phenomenological method, which many in our age are less systematically attempting to live out of; but Joyce’s fearless and penetrating genius came early to a concretely personal grasp of this perspective (at once the ground of his greatness and the chief barrier to our understanding him) and out of it made his originary contribution to the modern conscience.

But Stephen is suffering in *Ulysses* from his individual version of the universal bodily predicament in his inability to free himself from the memory of his mother, through whose body he came to life and through whom he has come to be attached to his life-world of family, place, race, religion, and history. In his climactic gesture in the book, he tears himself away from that bodily attachment as the image of his grave-bound mother bids him to repent, and, committing himself to the “intellectual imagination,” breaks with his ashplant the chandelier
which represents the ruin of all time and space, as he declares himself and his creative mind free of the order of the body, the here and now, and history, all in the service of his slogan, “Damn death. Long live life” (J. Joyce, *Ulysses* 591; hereafter *U*). But as he staggers into the street to be knocked down by history in the person of Private Carr, he has only too forceful a reminder that he is not free of time, or not free yet. But even as he lapses into unconsciousness, he has a very peculiar aspect, not often remarked, which suggests that his defeat has an opposite implication. Joyce writes oddly that Stephen lies “prone, his face to the sky” (601), and the peculiar usage is repeated shortly when we are told that Stephen “prone, breathes to the stars” (607). Now Joyce certainly knew the difference between the meanings of “prone” and “supine” (which latter word he uses correctly on 683), and his assertion can only mean that Stephen, the one character of Joyce’s trinity taken from the preexistent realm of the real, is not being displayed to us at this point very realistically, as much else in the scenic surround suggests also. It is just at this point, of course, that Bloom steps forward to pick Stephen up and, with Corny Kelleher, to offer him the support he badly needs and cannot supply to himself.

Notably, this conjunction seems to have derived from a factual core around which Joyce’s imagination shaped the whole book, for his original intention, apparently, was to write *Ulysses* as a short story centered on the figure of one Alfred Hunter, who had once picked him up in similar circumstances after an altercation (Ellmann, *New and Revised* 161–62, 230). Why such an incident should have had such importance to Joyce, and why it should lead to a work titled *Ulysses*, are problems which must challenge any interpretation of the book. In terms of the present interpretation, a fairly clear answer emerges, and points to the meaning of the whole. It is now widely accepted that, in Richard Ellmann’s phrasing, Stephen is Joyce’s immature persona in the book, Bloom his mature persona (359). Stephen’s Shakespeare theory carries the same implication more autoritatively if more indirectly when Stephen insists that the author in *Hamlet* speaks not through the image of his younger self, Prince Hamlet, but through the image of his ghostly father (*U* 188). I have developed the implications of this relationship in my earlier essay by following out the terms of Stephen’s *Portrait* aesthetic to say that Stephen in *Ulysses* must be understood as the real young Joyce imagined in his own body, from the outside, as if he were another person, while Bloom has to be understood as the mature Joyce imagining another (also from the outside in) in a different body as himself. From this perspective we are prompted to see that the memory of Hunter’s rescue offered Joyce a means of imaginatively projecting himself so as to reenter without violating the fixed and ineluctable structure of past reality in order to effect imaginative rescue of himself as Stephen lost in the ruins of time. And this points directly to the
fundamental reason the book is called *Ulysses*: its most basic informing and constitutive act is Joyce's imaginative return home to his early life, to the world which had forgotten him. Almost all the rest of what I have to say in this essay involves the elaboration of the significance which the book gives to this return, and which it gives to the book.

It has long been noted that the meeting of Stephen and Bloom toward which the whole book moves is oddly lacking in apparent significance and aesthetic import. Michael Groden, in a recent update of this view, concludes that Joyce's specifically recorded intention to achieve a “fusion of Stephen and Bloom” results in “hopeless ambiguity for the reader desiring a definite conclusion,” despite Groden's agreement with S. L. Goldberg that Joyce at the end fully “establishes our sense of an imperishable dignity and vitality in the two characters” (Groden 35, 62). The paradoxical conclusion that the union is at once artistically nil and artistically successful is not really a paradox but simply an incomplete expression of the fact that the fusion of Stephen and Bloom is not ultimately a matter of realistic story, autonomously actual in their space/time existence though the characters are, but of symbolic and imaginative fusion with their author. In order to understand this, we need to look carefully at a figure who must be seen as the linchpin of the book: W. B. Murphy, the bibulous, garrulous old sailor whom Stephen and Bloom meet in the cabmen’s shelter to which they proceed after the rescue. Frank Budgen says, prompted undoubtedly by Joyce, that if Murphy were placed on a scale, “the pointing needle would not waver” (252). Which is to say that, despite his obvious and all too human devotion to various aspects of the flesh, Murphy is immaterial, a ghost. Joyce's hints as to the identity of the ghost are, when assembled, unmistakably clear, as I have earlier argued. (What immediately follows recapitulates that argument, with some significant new evidence.) Murphy is described as having greying red hair (*U* 622), a striking feature with direct connections to one of the most puzzling cruxes in the book, the thought about Shakespeare which turns up in the minds of both Stephen and Bloom. In “Scylla and Charybdis” Stephen thinks: “In a rosery of Fetter Lane of Gerard, herbalist, he [Shakespeare] walks, greyed-auburn. . . . He walks. One life is all. One body. Do. But do” (202). And Bloom in “Sirens”: “In Gerard’s rosery of Fetter Lane he walks, greyed-auburn. One life is all. One body. Do. But do” (280). Some critics insist, quite understandably, that this double thought is an impossibility and must be the result of an accident or misprint. But the parallel appearance has far too much point to be accidental. After all, Stephen and Bloom have earlier looked together into a mirror and seen one Shakespeare (567), and now in “Eumeus,” just following the reference to Murphy's greyed auburn hair, Stephen notes that in Shakespeare’s time “Shakespeare were as common as Murphies” and repeats the Shakespearean phrase he
had earlier called attention to, “What’s in a name?” (622), which is to say that Murphy is an Irish Shakespeare. This and further evidence, much of it recently gathered by John Henry Raleigh, underlines and elaborates Murphy’s identity (Raleigh 102–110). He has sailed in this morning on the Rosevean, loaded with bricks from Bridgewater, the ship with three crosstrees, whose silent movement upstream in the Liffey Stephen had noted as the book turned from him to Bloom, the ship to which Bloom’s throwaway religious circular, asserting the coming of Elijah, moves downstream to meet. All this points clearly to the fact that Murphy, a.k.a. Rip Van Winkle and Enoch Arden (U 624), is to be taken as he who after long absence returns home, that is to say Ulysses, that is to say Joyce the author returning home as recreating ghost—the Holy Ghost of the book come to fuse with and complete in creative mystery the other two members of its Trinity.

The Trinitarian fusion is clearly though covertly asserted at the end of “Eumeus” where, just after Stephen and Bloom join arms, we get a third reference to Shakespeare in connection with the lutenist Dowland “who lived in Fetter Lane near Gerard the herbalist,” etc. (661). Before this, immediately after Bloom passes “his left arm in Stephen’s right” (Stephen feels in Bloom “a strange kind of flesh of a different man approach him, sinewless, and wobbly, and all that”—an apparent sign of ghostly presence), we get a reference to the “arms of Murphy” before an immediately subsequent reference again to Stephen and Bloom walking “arm-in-arm” (660–61). We can see then what with full understanding of the book we are meant to see: that the linked arms of Stephen and Bloom are, in fact, the “arms of Murphy,” the arms of the two projections of Joyce now joined by his recreative and transfiguring art. This is the definitive conclusion which Groden (and many others) have judged the progress toward fusion to lack. The conclusion is much strengthened, I think, by the recently revealed fact that the “W” in W. B. Murphy is a compositorial error: what Joyce actually wrote was D. B. Murphy. Hearing this news with me, the Joyce scholar Robert Polhemus, who had earlier heard a shorter version of this paper immediately remarked, “Dedalus Bloom,” which is the inference Joyce must have intended. If the union of Joyce with his creatures through the ghostly arms of Murphy is the significance of the meeting of Stephen and Bloom, then we are to understand as already suggested that it is the author above who thereby becomes the active protagonist of the book, as he rises first high above them in “Ithaca” before his descent into Molly.

This is signaled by the fact that when Bloom lies down at last, head to Molly’s bottom, we are told that he “has travelled” not alone but “with” Sinbad the Sailor (737). Robert Martin Adams thinks that the references to Sinbad, followed by those to “Tinbad the Tailor and Jinbad the Jailer” etc. are a piece of
“inspired stupidity” (Surface and Symbol 82). But, as already noticed, Sinbad the Sailor has earlier been identified explicitly with Murphy, so that what the references offer is not stupidity but a covert annunciation of the very real imaginative event in fact beautifully described by Adams (255–56), the author’s imaginative descent into Molly. (I should say further here, on the immediate point, that the list of further companions of Sinbad, which looks like manifest nonsense, may be understood as keeping the reference to Sinbad/Murphy from being too obviously bald, and as also referring, as Stanley Sultan has ingeniously surmised [213], to various of the other characters in the book whom Joyce—always meeting himself—has, by virtue of understanding and creating them, in a way become.)

The fact of the fusion offers a basis for understanding two aspects of the book that critics have seen as puzzling and even contradictory. The first is the seeming realistic novel-symbolic image doubleness of the book which Michael Groden (again) has most carefully considered from the point of view of his comprehensive analysis of the book’s composition, emerging with the conclusion that Joyce actually changed direction in the long course of his writing the book, allowing the realistic story to fade and the representation—the style and language of the book—to become ever more prominent, as obviously they are. This view has the disadvantage that, at the end in Molly’s soliloquy, the prominence of language as language, style as style, sharply recedes, leaving us with an overwhelming sense of the materiality and fleshliness of Molly’s body which, though made of words, is about as realistically substantial as any object in literature. And we know that Molly was where Joyce knew from the beginning he was going in the book, since he sketched the ending at the outset (J. Joyce, Letters 2:387). But once we see that Joyce wishes to image in the fusion his own authorial relation to the book, we can see also what the rising prominence and then deflation of the stylistic efflorescence in the book is: it betokens first the imminent, immanent declaration of the presence of the author, the manifestation of his power in and over his creation, until, after fusion, he separates himself from his characters, rising high above them in Ithacan intellectual autonomy, before his great descent, as, yielding up the intellect’s claim to primacy, he immerses and immolates himself and the reader in the imagined fleshly reality of Molly’s body.

The reader of Ulysses can participate in this action without understanding the complex ways in which his experience is supported by the author’s intention and enriched by his glosses, but the mysteries underlying Joyce’s creation are nonetheless wondrous. On the one hand, the metempsychosis by which the spirit of the author incarnates itself in Molly is the achievement of that Shakespearean “one body” through which the book’s doing is finally done; but in Trinitarian terms this giving up of himself to Molly is a kind of imaginative
sacrifice through which Joyce found his own afterlife—by metempsychosis “living in another body after death” (U 65)—as he redeemed himself and the reader in yielding himself up to the flowering and flow of the body of the menstruating Molly, the “Rose upon the rood of time.” In this connection “one body” takes on the eucharistic overtone of “This is my body, broken for you,” as the Holy Ghost quickens the body of Molly, who is like Mary both “daughter of her own son” (“vergine madre figlia di tuo figlio”) in the Dantean phrase quoted by Joyce in the central “mansions of eternity” passage of “Oxen of the Sun,” and “mother of God” (391).

But this is only one side of the range of meanings attached to Joyce’s entry into Molly, for the spiritual/symbolic aspect just considered is inseparably connected with a parallel carnal dimension deeply appropriate to Joyce’s celebration of life as life in the body, so that if Molly is the flesh made word, she is nevertheless quintessentially fleshly. What we see here are the polarities in himself which Joyce is expressing and bringing together in the book through his representation of Stephen and Bloom as Shakespeare and, less extensively, in Murphy. In his account of Shakespeare, Stephen sees that poet as subject to “two rages” which “commingle in the whirlpool of himself”—one deep impulse toward sensual abandonment, “darkening even his own understanding of himself,” and the other toward intellectual detachment and contemplation (196). We see these rages manifested in the Shakespeare of “Circe,” his face paralyzed with rage (567–68), and in the two halves of the mirrored Shakespeare, as Stephen, “strangled with rage” (582), strikes the chandelier in his commitment to the intellectual imagination, and as Bloom goes wild in his voyeuristic contemplation of Molly and Boylan (567). All this of course is to bring into the book the rages of Shakespeare–Ulysses–Joyce, who continually found himself, as he tells Nora in a letter, “one moment high as the stars,” the next “lower than the lowest wretches” (Selected Letters 167). (We see in the phrase the basis of the transition from Virgin to prostitute to muse girl in Portrait, as well as the transition from “Ithaca” to “Penelope” in Ulysses. I would guess that it also explains the paradox of Stephen in “Circe” prone, eyes to the sky and breathing to the stars.)

If one aspect of the descent into Molly is figured in relation to the intellectual imagination, another reflects the darker impulse toward sensual abandonment to the life of the body which needs to be fully accepted before it can redeem and be redeemed. As Ellmann in particular has eloquently noted, the book is a celebration of bodily life as an ultimate reality, and that celebration is going on everywhere in the book; but as dark obsession leading to immolation in female flesh, the commitment to the body is figured in the book as a deeply rooted fixation on the female bottom. Reference to the “posterior rectal orifice” (U 729), as it is named in “Ithaca,” is ubiquitous in Ulysses, most obviously and
centrally in Bloom's obsession with bottoms and bloomers (He's “mad,” Molly says, “on the subject of drawers” [746]—like Joyce), and in his close investigation of the museum statues and goddesses who lack such an orifice and of Molly who doesn't, so that her bottom becomes literally the end of his existence in the book. But Bloom's movement toward Molly's bottom is echoed and subliminally amplified from first to last by many other incidental and contrasting images of the rectal, as with the white button under the tail of Bloom's cat, Myles Crawford's K. M. R. I. A., the clotted Arius, the spiritualists who creepy crawl after Blake's buttocks into eternity (in a kind of ironic foreshadowing of the climactic gesture of the book), Zoe's beauty spot, or the carrot-stuck buttocks of Malachi Mulligan. (All these are perhaps negatives to Molly's positive.)

It might seem odd that this motif does not in *Ulysses* much involve Stephen who, as the image of Joyce's body, is the proper locus of the obsession. The reason for this is that, as already noted, he is the bearer of the intellectual imagination, while Joyce's other projection, Bloom, is given the sins of the dark side. Yet Stephen too is drawn into the overall structural matrix of the fixation. Stanley Sultan first traced out the references to Stephen's dream of an “Open hallway. Street of harlots. Remember. Haroun al Raschid. I am almosting it. That man led me, spoke. I was not afraid. The melon he had he held against my face. Smiled. Creamfruit smell. That was the rule, said. In. Come. Red carpet spread. You will see who” (Sultan 377–78; *U* 47). The dream is directly prophetic, as Sultan says, of Bloom's rescue of Stephen in Nighttown; after Bloom's identification there as “Haroun al Raschid,” incognito, Stephen thinks, just at the end of “Circe,” “Last night I flew. Easily flew. Men wondered. Street of harlots after. A creamfruit melon he held to me. In. You will see.” This is followed by Mulligan's remark about Bloom's homosexual interest in Stephen. “Did you see his eye? He looked upon you to lust after you. I fear thee, ancient mariner. O, Kinch, thou art in peril. Get thee a breechpad” (*U* 217). But Bloom as we know has his eye on other bottoms, and so, the dream implies, does Stephen, though he knows it not. Sultan supposes that the prophetic dream means that Bloom comes to Stephen as a minister of divine grace, which is somehow to be channeled through Molly, prefigured in the memory later drawn into his dream, of wishing to see under the petticoats of a “fubsy widow” (40), who finally makes her appearance when Bloom in “Eumeus” displays for his appreciation a photo of Molly with her “fleshy charms” (652). Just how Molly functions as a means of God's grace, or how Stephen can be said to receive it, Sultan does not manage to make clear. His orientation is too theologically conventional, so that he does not see who the grace-giving God of this creation is, and to what he is leading Stephen. Molly has a dream of Stephen, too, which she connects with her reading of cards as indicating that she was to look forward to a “union with
a young stranger” (774). The same reading also turned up “2 red eights for new garments.” Delaying comment on the eights for a bit, we may connect the red and the garments with a third dream, Bloom’s in “Nausicaa”—of what? Of Molly: “She had red slippers on. Turkish. Wore the breeches. Suppose she does. Would I like her in pyjamas? Damned hard to answer. . . . Petticoats for Molly. She has something to put in them” (381). (Molly appears in this costume in “Circe.”) All this together suggests that the melon which Haroun-Bloom holds to Stephen’s face in the dream is somehow identical with the “plump mellow yellow smellow melons” of Molly’s bottom to which Bloom himself is drawn, but how this can be requires another look at W. B. (D. B.) Murphy.

As Bloom shows Stephen the picture displaying Molly and her charms, just before their departure from the cabmen’s shelter and their joining arms, Murphy looms vaguely but ominously in the background, “glued to the spot,” we are told, though suspected of wishing to be off to a bawdy-house in order to maul the “large-sized charms” of the whores (658). Apparently in response to Murphy’s libidinous presence, Bloom is twice described as “prudently pocketing her [Molly’s] photo” so as to forestall Murphy’s potential interest. But given what we have already understood about Murphy, we know that he goes with Bloom and Stephen nevertheless, drawn by such charms, and passes through and beyond Bloom, through the black dot at the end of “Ithaca,” and thus into conflation with Molly.

A careful reading of “Ithaca,” which I will not venture to develop fully here, expands and reinforces this notion of Stephen’s destiny, indicating (in short) that he will proceed in Mosaic exodus from the house of bondage, from known to unknown, in cometary orbit, to return, “victim predestined,” to immolation, as Joyce/Bloom, as Murphy/Joyce, in Molly’s melons, as earlier prophesied, a destination beautifully transfigured at the end of “Ithaca” in the description of Bloom’s “satisfaction at the ubiquity in eastern and western terrestrial hemispheres, in all habitable lands and islands explored or unexplored (the land of the midnight sun, the islands of the blessed, the isles of Greece, the land of promise) of adipose posterior female hemispheres, redolent of milk and honey and of excretory sanguine and seminal warmth, reminiscent of secular families of curves of amplitude, insusceptible of moods of impression or of contrarieties of expression, expressive of mute immutable mature animality” (734).

Molly, here identified with the fructified and fruitful earth, is herself later allowed to reprise these sentiments with scorn as she offers to throw her hat at Bloom because of his devotion to a place “where we havent 1 atom of any kind of expression in us all of us the same 2 lumps of lard” (777). But Joyce wanted it both ways, which is why we are to understand those two lumps of lard as constituting also, as has been pointed out, the figure 8, Mary’s number which, laid on
its side, is the sign of infinity (Boyle 413–14). Since Joyce said that Molly was “the indispensable countersign” to Bloom’s “passport to eternity” (Budgen 264) we are led to connect the figure also with the two eggs associated with Sinbad the Sailor at the end of “Ithaca”: “Going to a dark bed there was a square-round Sinbad the Sailor’s roc’s auk’s egg in the night of the bed of all the auks of the rocs of Darkinbad the Brightdayler.” The two eggs with the black dot following raise the two lumps of lard they stand for into quite a high degree of expression. The roc was the means of Sinbad’s escape from a Dedalus-like imprisonment, while the auk is a bird entirely extinct, the contradictory implication of the eggs seeming to suggest the imaginative truth and literal emptiness of the plunge now being taken through them. And in that simultaneous expression of high meaning and low materiality we find once more the mysterious polarity of intellectual imagination and sensual abandonment of the man who most appropriately calls himself here “Darkinbad the Brightdayler.”

But our survey of the marks and meaning of the journey in the book of that strange spirit is not quite over. The roc’s/auk’s eggs are immediately echoed in the opening of “Penelope” in Molly’s famous meditation on the two eggs that Bloom has ordered for his breakfast, and if we look back we can see that same figure, foreshadowing the later appearances, in Murphy’s curious reference to his highly improbable memory of seeing Simon Dedalus “shoot two eggs off two bottles at fifty yards over his shoulder” (623). Apparently the series of references are imaginative channel buoys, so to speak, marking out for the reader the line of Murphy’s metempsychotic voyage, but if so there are more buoys to chart. Or rather rocks, as the roc’s/auk’s egg conjunction I think is intended to allow. “Oh rocks!” Molly exclaims in impatience with Bloom’s first definition of metempsychosis; “tell us in plain words” (64). Looking forward then, we remember that Bloom asks Murphy if he has seen the Rock of Gibraltar and (after receiving an ambiguous reply, which Bloom interprets affirmatively) asks further what year that would have been and if Murphy remembers the boats that plied the strait. “I’m tired of all those rocks in the sea,” replies Murphy (here characterized as “the wily old customer” [630]).

Bloom’s interest derives from Molly’s connection with Gibraltar, and Molly herself in her monologue remembers the boats well and thinks of missing the boat at Algeciras (opposite from Europa Point) just before the book ends with her thoughts of the “awful deepdown torrent,” the tide that moves like a river through the strait. Imaginatively she moves with that torrent, figuratively the torrent of time that plunges from the future to the past, which she accepts, with her yes, going deeply with the flow of life, and with her goes Murphy/Joyce, touching on Gibraltar at last. Molly remembers Ulysses S. Grant getting off a boat in Gibraltar, an occurrence
that Adams sees as unduly stretching probability merely in order to bring Molly in incidental touch with a man named Ulysses. But remembering that Murphy is a wily old customer, we may remember also that the Ulysses of Joyce’s favorite Dante cannot rest with Penelope but, in search of knowledge and excellence, moves on through the two rocks of the straits of Gibraltar, the pillars of Hercules, to further adventure and also to destruction, and we may then think that with the reference Joyce took pains to tell us that the Ulysses of this book here completes in hidden climax the design and purpose of his book, and sails on to oblivion, or rather to dispersion and reconstitution as everyone in the new adventure of *Finnegans Wake*.

**Notes**

1. Robert Martin Adams notes that “perversity and egotism are distressingly available as explanations of Joyce’s procedures [in *Ulysses*], but nevertheless recognizes that they “may ultimately have to be invoked” (*Surface and Symbol* 185). Adams sees the personal elements as having “a partial aesthetic rationale” but, though he offers an eloquent appreciation of the book as “a cataclysmic plunge into the black pit of the self” (147), he does not see that this plunge is in fact the product of the (urgently) “pure’ aesthetic impulse” (249) which he sees the book as lacking. The only relevant test of a book’s aesthetic coherence is whether we can grasp the principle of its form and be moved by it. Joyce’s achievement in *Ulysses* was to transcend rather than “escape all closed but formal patterns” (255) in the process of achieving and interpenetration of life and art which displays a form and closure as moving as anything in the history of literature.

2. The point was reported at the VIII International James Joyce (Centenary) Symposium, Dublin, June 1982, by Hans Walter Gabler, editor of the 1984 edition of *Ulysses* (New York: Garland).

3. This point corrects while confirming Groden’s observation that in writing the later portions of the book Joyce was “no longer writing a novel based primarily on human actions” (21), in that in this self-transfiguring novel, the continuous “human action” that constitutes the unity of the book, going through and beyond that of the characters, is Joyce’s own.

4. Cf. as Joyce’s gloss on his strange purposes in *Ulysses* Stephen’s thought of a “a darkness shining in brightness which brightness could not comprehend” (*U* 281).
Editors’ note: In most cases, we have cited the editions of the works that Rader himself used. In a few cases, however, we have, for ease of reference or purposes of clarity, used more recent editions (e.g., Daniel Defoe’s *Moll Flanders*, Jane Austen’s *Emma*).


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Yeats, William Butler, 144, 167. See also “Leda and the Swan”; “Sailing to Byzantium”
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