

THEORY AND THE NOVEL



**NARRATIVE
REFLEXIVITY IN THE
BRITISH TRADITION**

JEFFREY J. WILLIAMS

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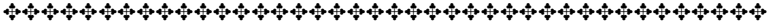
Theory and the Novel

Narrative Reflexivity in the British Tradition

Narrative features such as frames, digressions, or authorial intrusions have traditionally been viewed as distractions from or anomalies in the narrative proper. In *Theory and the Novel: Narrative Reflexivity in the British Tradition*, Jeffrey Williams exposes these elements as more than simple disruptions, analyzing them as registers of narrative reflexivity, that is, moments that represent and advertise the functioning of narrative itself. Williams argues that these moments rhetorically proffer models of literary desire, consumption, and taste. He examines a range of novels from the English canon – *Tristram Shandy*, *Joseph Andrews*, *Wuthering Heights*, *The Turn of the Screw*, *Lord Jim*, and *Heart of Darkness* – and poses a series of theoretical questions bearing on reflexivity, imitation, fictionality, and ideology to offer a striking and original contribution to readings of the English novel, as well as to current discussions of theory and the profession of literature.

Jeffrey Williams teaches the novel and theory at University of Missouri-Columbia. He is editor of *PC Wars: Politics and Theory in the Academy*, and has published work in numerous journals, including *MLN*, *Narrative, Studies in the Novel*, *College English*, *VLS*, and elsewhere. He also is editor of the *minnesota review*, and co-editor of the forthcoming *Norton Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*.

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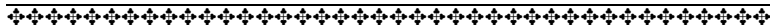
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JEFFREY WILLIAMS



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Preface



When I was in grad school, in the mid- and late 1980s, I hung out with a self-proclaimed Theory Crew. That is, we were taken with theory, signing up for all the theory courses we could and avoiding traditional staples like the “History of the English Language,” buying as many volumes of the Minnesota Theory and History of Literature series as we could afford after paying the rent, writing papers replete with ideologemes, lexic codes, phallogentricity, aporias, *différance*, and the like, probably much to the chagrin of the senior professors in our respective departments, and quoting Derrida, Cixous, de Man, Althusser, Jameson, and the rest when we got together every Thursday night, after seminar, at our favorite local dive Tara’s, with large green shamrocks on the walls and dollar burgers. In a very real sense, theory – whether in seminar or at Tara’s – was what professionalized us.

When we started writing our dissertations, none of us wanted to do the usual thing – say, to write on a relatively unattended literary text by a safe author – but we all wanted to take on big texts and big theoretical topics, so we projected our own nascent series, in the manner of the party game adding “– in bed,” prefixed with “Big” and forbidding subtitles: The Big Allegory, Big/De/construct/ion, GENDER (with the masculinist “Big” under erasure), and, for me, Big Narrative. After having read in deconstruction, my particular twist was reflexivity, how narrative reflexively represents and “thematizes” its linguistic and modal form, and I was struck by the fact that a great many canonical novels – not just anomalous ones, as a kind of sideshow to the Great Tradition, but center stage – foregrounded the act and modal form of narrative itself. Not contemporary “metafiction,” but *Tom Jones*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Vanity Fair*, *Lord Jim*, and so on, in commonplace constructions, such as authorial intrusion, narrative frames, and embedded tales. So, big novels, a big theoretical theme.

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Gradually, the working title of my project – which with wholesale and face-saving transfusions morphed into this book – came to be *Narratives of Narrative*. While I still fancy the elegance of that formulation – the implied reflexivity of the genitive, and the neat doubling of “narrative” – I have since been persuaded that a more apt title, one which would make sense for library-buyers, bookstore-shoppers, and catalog-browsers, ever concerns for publishers, would be the current *Theory and the Novel: Narrative Reflexivity in the British Tradition*. As recompense, this does manage to announce my concern with contemporary theory first, and it succinctly specifies its field as the novel and more generally as literary studies. (The reservation against “Narratives of Narrative” was that it might refer to history, or anthropology, or to autobiography, and so forth, and thus confuse a prospective audience, not to mention bookstore-shelvers.) In typical academic fashion, I have capitulated to the need for an explanatory subtitle, since “Theory and the Novel” alone casts a rather wide net. While this study investigates what I take as the predominant line of theories of the novel – formalist or structural narrative theory, most manifest in narratology – and its somewhat vexed relation to poststructural theory – from which structural narratology has largely insulated itself – I do not catalog and critique the vast array of theory bearing on the novel. That would be an enormous, multi-volumed project, I would think. As a matter of focus, I attend to the problematic of reflexivity – of the narrative of narrative – which I believe opens fairly explicitly questions of theory and the novel, and take as examples a selection of well-known novels in the British tradition that demonstrate different facets of reflexivity, novels that I assume are generally familiar to those of us trained in English departments and who have taken standard survey courses (*Tristram Shandy*, *Joseph Andrews*, *The Turn of the Screw*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Heart of Darkness*, and *Lord Jim*).

Beyond the question of accuracy in labeling, I have come to qualify this project further: at first I saw the problematic of narrative self-reference as solely a linguistic one, that broached a fundamental epistemological dilemma. I have since revised my thinking, more insistently to ask the consequence of this tendency in narrative, to ask the ideological effect of this seemingly natural and playful tendency toward self-reference, its effect not only as paradox but as self-advertisement. In other words, rather than

examining it purely as a poetic phenomenon, to examine it rhetorically, beyond the sense of tropes and figures, in its material effect on purveyors and consumers of literature. Again, in a manner of speaking, as advertising. What action does narrative perform not only in terms of its modal operation, but on *us*, as readers? Not just psychologically or in terms of the immediate act of reading, but pedagogically and socially?

To put it now, I would say that narrative reflexivity is the technological armature of an ideological impulse, to reproduce the model of the desire for and irresistible power of literary narrative and thereby to teach the lesson of the naturalness of its consumption. While narratives have been with us for a long time, this effect is historically specific and takes a particular charge in the age of the novel, or more exactly of the mass production and distribution of novels – even with the advent of television, a productive apparatus that is still going strong, as witness the replicating rows of “literature,” “fiction,” mysteries, science fiction, westerns, romances, and so on, lining the shelves of your local chain bookstore. In other words, maybe Plato and my mother were right, that fiction is not entirely an innocent entertainment. While reflexivity might form part of the aesthetic play of fiction-making, in some sense autonomous from its sociohistorical determinants, the pervasive topoi of the narrative of narrative in otherwise “realistic” novels function ideologically to naturalize and promote the activity of consuming novels.

I am not sure how adequately I have drawn out this question of the ideology of narrative, in palimpsest over my earlier reflections on narrative and theory. The strange thing about *post-partum* prefaces is that they really introduce the book you have come to want to write, more so than the one you have already written.

To offer a few more words of explanation, one question readers of early versions of this book asked was how, amidst its constructing a rhetoric of narrative, it changes readings of the novels I talk about, like *Tristram Shandy* or *The Turn of the Screw*. After all, the presumed job of criticism, in R. P. Blackmur’s phrase, is to provide readings of literary texts. Other than making various observations on these novels’ salient features, my intention has not been to produce a set of new readings of old texts, to paraphrase Richard Levin’s formulation of the Shakespeare critical industry. Rather,

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my intention has been to investigate the theoretical moorings (its lexicon, foci, and presumptions) of narrative criticism and to propose some alternatives to the normative ways we talk about narrative. There is a familiar way in which theory is taken as a template to produce critical readings that lays a theory pattern over the wholecloth of specific literary works, thus yielding a kind of pre-programmed chapter or article on a particular work – the marxist reading of *Wuthering Heights*, the feminist reading of *The Turn of the Screw*, the reader-response reading of *Joseph Andrews*. Without due respect, you put the theoretical quarter in the reading machine, choose a theory, and get the reading out.

To invert this, one might read texts instead as registers through which to read theory and the set of assumptions and expectations that prescribe and govern critical practice, and by extension to examine the critical institution. The colloquial notion of literature defines it as our exquisite disciplinary object, to which criticism takes a service role – to guard and polish the exhibits in the museum. I have no interest in fulfilling that role. I do not mean by this to express the resentment of the critic, performing an overthrow of the monarchical object of our field. Rather, I would say that the horizon of expectation of literature *is* criticism, a point that Stanley Fish has trenchantly argued for a number of years, or, to put this another way, literature is always located in the network of the institution of literature, an institution that usually goes without saying but in a very real sense prescribes and produces the thing called literature. In other words, I would skirt the classic question undergirding literary studies, What is literature?, or its corollary, What is narrative?, that seeks an essential and discernible attribute that demarcates the discursive phenomena we call literature.

The usual feature that defines narrative, from Aristotle on, is plot. As Aristotle has it, plot is the skeletal mimetic ground for a proper narrative; better to have a line drawing of a form than colorful splotches or characters without plot. Rather than supplanting the core of plot with the updated techno-sophisticated attribution of reflexivity as the core operation of narrative, though, I would shift the question to the socio-institutional scene of literature. Instead of asking what is literature, I would ask, what constitutes the field that ascribes and valorizes the object of literature? What draws us to be purveyors of literature, and partici-

pants in that field? What function does criticism have in this institutional economy? How is the institution of literature reproduced? There is an obvious way in which the production of readings and “scholarship” serves – reflexively – to reproduce the institutional configuration of professional literary studies, as measures of accreditation and prestige, incorporating us into the “conversation,” the internal economy of the field. Our critical narratives – what one might summarize under the rubric of theory – record our formation as professional subjects.

The critical postulation of the question, “What is literature?” tacitly iconizes our object of study in order to legitimate the discipline and profession of literature. That is, it assumes the *a priori* and stable existence of the object of literature, grounding and justifying our activity as professors of literature. Amidst the smoke and din of the culture wars, there has been a renewed call to rechristen that object and to reconfirm our faith in the love of literature; while tinged with nostalgia, I see this move not simply as reactionary but as an effort to reconfirm the disciplinary field and thereby to reassure our professional prospect, particularly as that prospect has been jeopardized in the wake of downsizing of university faculty and calls for academic accountability.

To return to the question of ideology, I would argue that in general the narrative reflex toward self-advertisement promotes the consumption of literature and literary narrative. Further, this ideology of desire for literature works socially to inculcate the *taste* for literature, the development of that taste a sign of cultural capital serving to produce social distinction. In short, the ideological inscription of the affective power of literature engenders the cultural affect and distinction of the literate person. In its specific institutional location, the ideological work of “literature” and literary narrative takes a slightly different charge. The critical examination of narrative – in readings, as well as in the attribution of the critical category of “narrative” rather than the novel – records the site-specific (which is to say institutional) ideology of professionalism, the reflexive processes and codes through which we are made into literary professionals and academic specialists. As I mentioned earlier, theory in a very real sense professionalizes us, naturalizing our somewhat unusual activities. As a corollary to the general ideology of literature that makes us literate individuals and cultured subjects, our critical practices make us institu-

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tional subjects. The power of ideology is such that it makes other forms of existence unimaginable, our own inevitable, natural, and desirable. But just as one can imagine other cultures, other times, and other social arrangements in which our narratives are not quite so enthralling or aesthetically pleasing, one can imagine other institutional arrangements for professing literature. The job of criticism, I would like to think, is precisely to read against the grain of our tacit ideological fix, to articulate what goes without saying in texts, in theory, and in the institutions within which we work, and to imagine a new institution of literature.

This book took far too long to finish, much to my editor's chagrin, and encountered far too many obstacles. The one thing I find salutary about this business of literary studies, though, and that keeps me in it, are the many good and generous people I have had the privilege to know and work with along the way. So, a litany of thanks to: David Gorman, whose comments on various chapters not only set straight some problems but prompted me to keep going; Jim Paxson, old friend and Stony Brook veteran, whose frequent phone calls and disquisitions on the state of theory always spur me on; Tom Cohen, fellow exile to unhospitable theory territory, whose surprisingly sage advice helped; Hillis Miller, who showed exemplary professional generosity; Bruce Robbins, fellow Long Island Intellectual, who gave avuncular support; Judy Arias, colleague and friend, making Greenville more livable; ditto for Frank Farmer, carrying our theoretical dialogue to the IHOP; and readers of early, ungainly incarnations, including Sandy Petrey, David Sheehan, and Rose Zimbardo. Thanks, too, to MaryJo Mahoney, who was there when it counted, from Long Island to North Carolina. I am also grateful to Richard Schelp for help preparing the original manuscript on a woefully archaic computer, and to the staff at Cambridge University Press, especially to Chris Lyall Grant.

I would also like to thank especially folks who have stood by me over the long haul: Joyce and Michael Bogin, my sister and brother-in-law; my parents, Sidney and Muriel Williams, who helped me through hard times, financially and otherwise, to whom I owe the deep gratitude of an incorrigible son; and Virginia Williams, my daughter, who asked for several years when this would be done until she tired of asking, who had to await too

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many meals while I finished one last thing, and whose intellectual acuity and integrity I can only admire.

Finally, I owe an insurmountable debt of gratitude to Michael Sprinker, who supported this and other projects not only with long single-spaced comments but with countless burgers at various Long Island restaurants, and who taught me, along with theory and the proper use of prepositions, about intellectual generosity, selflessness, and courage. Despite its glaring ineffectuality in the social struggle, I dedicate this book to him.

An early version of chapter one, "Narratives of Narrative," much revised for this book, appeared in *MLN* 105 (1990), published by Johns Hopkins University Press. Chapter 2 incorporates material on the interpolated tales in *Joseph Andrews* published in substantially different form in *Studies of the Novel*, and chapter 3 incorporates material on *The Turn of the Screw* published in substantially different form in *Journal of Narrative Technique*.

Introduction

i

This book begins with a basic observation: stories frequently depict the act and processes of storytelling. In some ways, this observation is not especially surprising. Novels like *Tristram Shandy* openly exploit this tendency, often to comic effect. Seemingly stepping out of the narrative proper, Tristram tells of the problems he is having progressing in his autobiography, since he has only managed to cover a single day of his life in three volumes. Moments like this one give a kind of wink to their audience, as if to say this is just a story and we are all in on the joke.

However, I take these moments more seriously, as more than a glitch or comic eccentricity in the narrative. In my view, they occur far too often to be accidental – in narratives ranging from Cervantes to *Last Action Hero* – and too prominently to be incidental – in frames, authorial intrusions, digressions, embedded stories, and so forth. In fact, I believe that these moments are not only common but explicitly foregrounded in a number of well-known texts across the tradition of the English novel, several of which I discuss here, including *Tristram Shandy*, *Joseph Andrews*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Heart of Darkness*, and *Lord Jim*. Adapting Hillis Miller's definition of a "linguistic moment," I would call them *narrative moments* – that is, moments in which the act of narrative itself is depicted and thus thematized or called into question.¹ These moments demonstrate a distinctively reflexive turn, in that narrative refers to itself, to its own medium, mode, and process, rather than simply to other (nonlinguistic) "events," the kind of events

1 See "The Critic as Host," in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, ed. Harold Bloom et al. (New York: Seabury, 1979), p. 250. See also "Stevens' Rock and Criticism as Cure, II," reprinted in *Theory Now and Then* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 119; and his book so titled, *The Linguistic Moment: From Wordsworth to Stevens* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

that we normally assume constitute a narrative. Further, beyond indicating solely a linguistic or epistemological problematic, narrative moments broach an ideological lesson, valorizing and in a sense advertising the mode and extant form of narrative – for the most part, the modern novel.

To start, I propose a theoretical description and preliminary taxonomy of these moments of narrative self-figuring. For instance, chapter 3 delineates the various features of framing. Frames are not merely a simple relaying structure but a complicated layering of significance that relies on various codes, among them the figuring of a distinctive situation for narrative (what I will call a *narrative scene*, in which narrative comfortably and it seems inevitably takes place), the introduction of a catalyst that spurs or elicits the telling of a narrative (a *narrative goad*, coding narrative not only as natural but inevitable, casting its telling as a necessary response to this incitement), the description of narrative in hyperbolically attractive terms (*narrative adverts*), and the attribution of an almost preternatural desire for narrative amongst its audience (the *narrative affect* of a *narrative circle*, further coding the narrative as natural and indeed as necessary as hunger or sex, bonding a social group). This kind of poetic description of frames has been largely elided in most theories of narrative as well as in practical criticism, since frames are generally consigned to peripheral status, to being “extra-”diegetical or “meta-”diegetical, by definition outside the primary diegesis or plot. As I note in the case of *The Turn of the Screw*, frames are usually thought to be disposable structures, a kind of packaging that you throw away, like a cracker-jack box, to get to what is inside.

As William Nelles points out in a recent essay, embedding in general has rarely been discussed and its analysis is largely undeveloped in narrative theory.² This study proposes at least provisional suggestions toward such a discussion, or, more grandly, toward an introductory poetics of what I term narrative reflexivity.³ In other words, the line of argument of this book most

2 See Nelles' excellent article, "Stories within Stories: Narrative Levels and Embedded Narrative," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 25.1 (1992), 79–96.

3 I should add that this critique has gotten underway, although in a manner different from mine, with the publication of Gerald Prince's *Narrative as Theme: Studies in French Fiction* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992) and Bernard Duyfhuizen's *Narratives of Transmission* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1992). See also Robert Stam's *Reflexivity in Film and*

immediately occurs within the space of narrative theory and offers revisions to the general distinctions made there, although it also is very much a critique of that field. Further, the impetus for this book is to draw out some of the implications – or really, ensuing complications – of the narrative reflex toward self-representation. For the implications echo through a number of issues haunting narrative theory, suggesting revisions of: the general bias toward defining narratives according to plot or a plot-structure; narratology and its foundational schema of narrative on a stepladder or “levels” model; definitions of literariness; the concept of fictionality; “realistic” representation or mimesis as a determining model for narrative; the prevalent ideology of literary culture and the attendant projection of literary desire and consumption; and, in general, what I see as the current impasse of theory.

To do this, my purpose here is not to produce yet another set of readings of yet another set of standard novels from yet another theoretical perspective unfurling yet another layer of meaning, as has been our wont in this profession, but to suggest the theoretical purview and polemical force of these various reflexive narratives, their complication of meaning and (straight, linear) reading, and their ideological suasion. In short, this is a book about theory, without apology, or rather about the theoretical complications and dissonances inherent in describing and interpreting narrative. To place it in the context of the theoretical movements of the past thirty years, this study is very much a critique of approaches to narrative that are essentially still structural, but it also recognizes the efficacy and usefulness of the structural description of narrative. My intention is not to take potshots at or deride the structural doyens of narrative, for I fully acknowledge the usefulness, both abstractly and more practically, in pedagogy as well as in criticism, of the delineations of narrative set out in a seminal text like Gérard Genette’s *Narrative Discourse*. Genette’s theoretical terms and distinctions help straighten out and make comprehensible narratives like Proust’s *Recherche* or *Tristram Shandy*, as I hope chapter 1 makes clear. But Genette’s system is also built on a theoretical blindspot, in its unreflective assumption of a primary diegetic level. It is that unproblematic positing of an identifiable if

Literature: From Don Quixote to Jean-Luc Godard (New York: New York University Press, 1985).

not definitive narrative ground, a narrative base or degree zero, that I critique.

ii

A common if not prevalent critical tendency is to see self-reflexive narrative moments – “authorial” commentary, frames, or embedded stories – as marginal or aberrant, extraneous to the import of the presumed “real” story. At best they are appetizers, comic interludes, or helpful hints to the main plot, at worst distractions, quirks, or flaws. The usual terms by which they are named – intrusions, digressions, and so on – bespeak their marginal status. In terms of narrative theory, they are devalued as lying outside the narrative proper, by definition ancillary to what the narrative purports to be about. The implication of this bias not only bears on the structural description of narrative but the interpretation of narrative: placed outside the boundary of the cornerstone of narrative meaning, the ordinal category of plot, they are relegated to insignificance, except insofar as they “transmit” that plot.⁴

In broad terms, the intuitive or natural assumption is to see plot as the content of narrative, like the message in the proverbial bottle or, as Conrad’s Marlow puts it, the core of the nut. By and large, narrative theory has retained and elaborated Aristotle’s privileging of plot as the most important feature of narrative, plot being defined as the imitation and construction of the “events” or “incidents.”⁵ Those incidents are usually assumed to be “real,” nonlinguistic or nondiscursive action, in the sense of action in an Arnold Schwarzenegger movie: the running, the fisticuffs, the romantic encounters, but not the narrating. Narrative theorists, from the Russian formalists down to recent figures like Genette,

4 Cf. Duyfhuizen’s model in *Narratives of Transmission*.

5 The relevant passage in Aristotle’s *Poetics* is section six (1449b21–1450b21): “The greatest of these is the construction of the incidents [i.e., the plot], for tragedy is imitation, not of men, but of action or life . . . the incidents and the plot are the end of tragedy, the end being the greatest of all parts . . . Plot, therefore, is the principle and, as it were, the soul of tragedy” (trans. Kenneth Telford [Lanham: University Press of America, 1985], p. 13). Aristotle puts aside the question of the imitation of language (recall that diction is subordinate to plot, character, and thought in Aristotle’s categorization of drama); in “Narrative Diction in Wordsworth’s *Poetics of Speech*” (*Comparative Literature* 34 [1982], 305–29), Don Bialostosky shows how Genette follows an Aristotelian bias in his subscription to an event- or plot-based *mimesis*, at the expense of the Platonic sense of *mimesis*, which places priority on the imitation of language.

Seymour Chatman, Mieke Bal, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, and others, have retained this basic assumption of plot as the central category in narrative analysis. Shklovsky's famous distinction between the story (*fabula*) and plot (*sjuzhet*), whereby the story entails the normal, straightforward temporal-causal sequence of events, and the plot denotes the sequence of events as they occur in the narrative, in literary rather than real time, stacks the deck toward plot. For Shklovsky, plot – the disordering of the normal storyline – is a key locus of defamiliarization and thus of literariness.⁶ Genette's categories of *histoire*, *récit*, and *narration* essentially take up the plot-story distinction. In fact, despite making those three qualifications, Genette proceeds to bracket *narration* and talk almost exclusively about the disparity between *histoire* and *récit* in Proust's *Recherche*, as I discuss in the next chapter.

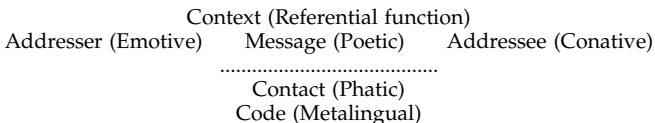
I propose to displace this assumption and to read these self-reflexive narrative moments counter-intuitively, as the provisional content of narrative. The bias toward seeing them as intrusion or distraction is based on the model of colloquial communication: when someone is telling you what you have to do to turn on your new computer, you do not want a lot of digressions, say, about where the computer came from, the person's mother, or that person's self-conscious ruminations on telling you s/he is telling you about computers. With (literary) narrative, though, things are different. What is of interest might be precisely the story about the person's first time using a computer and how s/he is going to tell you that story. In other words, one might say that these reflexive moments – of the narrative of narrative – are a significant *literary* trait, one feature that marks a narrative as literary.⁷ Literary narratives frequently foreground and exploit excessively this reflexive turn, highlighting the modal form of narrative itself, and this very excess becomes a mark of literariness, an excess that is not tolerated in normative forms of colloquial communication.

6 See Victor Shklovsky, "Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*: Stylistic Commentary," in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, trans. and ed. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), pp. 25–57. See also the essays collected in Viktor Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose*, trans. Benjamin Sher (Elmwood Park: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990).

7 Nelles, "Stories within Stories," 79. See also Gérard Genette, *Fiction and Diction*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), esp. chapter three, "Fictional Narrative, Factual Narrative," pp. 54–84.

This is not to specify a hard-and-fast distinction between literary and non-literary discourse, finally providing what Nelles calls the Grail of Poetics by answering what makes an utterance literary. Nor is it merely to elaborate or extend Jakobson's definition of the poetic function, drawn in his classic structuralist statement, "Linguistics and Poetics," as that which focuses on the message itself, rather than on what the addresser is trying to relay (the intention, or, for Jakobson, the emotive function) or any other part of the communication structure.⁸ Instead, it is to underscore the confusion, in the root sense of that word, of those various facets of communication and the interaction of the communicative situation. Reflexive narrative moments blur Jakobson's distinctions among referential, emotive, poetic, conative, phatic, and metalingual functions, among what the message transmits (the addresser's intention – again, the emotive function) and the code of the message (the mode of that expression – the poetic function), the announcement of the message (the phatic function), the meta-narrative or metalingual function, and its referential value. For instance, frames perform a phatic as well as a poetic function, and a(n) (auto)referential as well as intentional function. Narrative moments put all of these functions into play: the intention is precisely an announcement of the mode of narrative, so the message is circularly and paradoxically self-referential and simultaneously metalingual. In other words, the question of literariness turns not on the proffered center of the poetic function, but on the disruption or deconstruction of the categories of the standard, static model of communication.⁹ The *literary*, then, is not a focus on the message itself, but a denial of the separable category of "message" – or, for the purposes of this study, plot.

8 Recall Jakobson's famous scheme:



See Roman Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics," in *The Structuralists: From Marx to Lévi-Strauss*, ed. Richard and Fernande DeGeorge (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1972), esp. pp. 89–97.

9 In some ways, my provisional definition of the literary has more in common with de Man's definition of *text* than with structural schemes of narrative (*Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979], p. 270).

The literary, in its blurring or confusion of normally constituted phases of communication, is thus in some ways similar to *nonsense*, which has relevance to its status as fiction.¹⁰ This is not to reinvoke surreptitiously the axis of nonsense/sense, literary/non-literary, or fiction/nonfiction; rather, my point, counter to that of structural schemes like Jakobson's, is that the literary or the fictional is not an absolute category, but a question of degree and relation, defined provisionally in terms of (the deconstruction of) the usually stable categories of colloquial communication. In other words, it is not an intrinsic or transhistorical property of texts – one can imagine a time when a text like *Finnegans Wake* falls to nonsense, or, for that matter, with the advent of hypertext, when its various puns are more obvious and therefore it becomes more accessible, or when Dickens' novels are taken to be historical records, as they were in the context of Soviet realism – but a register of the continually displaced character of those properties, an ad hoc posterior judgment rather than a prior fact.

This points to the anti-realist character of narrative: stories or narratives do not represent the world, or, more exactly, the world does not provide a ground or literal point of reference. Rather, narratives represent storyworld, the universe or economy of their own functioning and figuring, and they are validated and grounded within that economy.¹¹ This is not to say that stories are divorced from "reality" or history, but to stress that fiction is self-referential, self-validating and legitimating. Stories are true because they tell you they are true: they tell you they are stories and fictional, thereby speaking the truth, broaching the liar's paradox. To give an example, again from *Tristram Shandy*, when Tristram says that he is narrating, when he points to the puppet strings he is holding, it seems as if he takes the

10 There is a large body of work that deals with the question of the status of fictional discourse, from Frege on. One might start with John Searle's "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse," *New Literary History* 5 (1974), 319–32; and Richard Rorty, "Is There a Problem about Fictional Discourse?," *Consequences of Pragmatism (Essays: 1972–1980)* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), pp. 110–38. Chapter two of Genette's *Fiction and Diction* discusses Searle at length.

11 See Roland Barthes, "The Reality Effect," *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), pp. 141–8; and "The Real, The Operable," *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), p. 80. As Barthes succinctly puts it in the latter text, "what we call 'real' (in the theory of the realistic text) is never more than a code of representation (of signification)."

same communicative position as the actual reader, "outside" the fiction. The comic wink is provided by this gesture of identification: let's look at the puppets dancing. But there is a strange contradiction here: while the fictional construct called "Tristram" embeds the putative plot, that construct has no superior ontological status to the fiction "he" exposes. While it is true to point out the fictionality of the previous level, the prior level is not any more ontologically valid or referentially assured than the embedded level. (Thus I would resist the term "metafiction," as defined by Linda Hutcheon and Patricia Waugh, since it implies a superior level from which to judge or expose the fiction.¹²) The situation is akin, in terms of science fiction, to a cyborg pointing out the cybernetic character of another cyborg. That cyborg is not any more human, and, as science fiction films like *Alien* teach us, one should not trust cyborgs.

The analogy of narrative to a cyborg is not entirely gratuitous. A premise of this study is to see narrative as a technology, as a technical operation inscribing its replication. Very literally, a primary "action" that narrative performs is the circulation (telling, receiving, desiring) of narrative, whereas the "actions" of the characters are cybernetic at best, bearing traces of human activities (miming them), but driven by narrative machinations. While this might seem obvious, there is a way in which criticism frames its discussions of novels as if their characters act, think, and live in the ways that actually existing human beings do. In my observation, much criticism talks about characters affectionately, as if they were people (think of commentary on Micawber or Leopold Bloom). Reflexivity, contrary to this prosopopoetic habit, points to the technological economy of narrative (Micawber spurs the plot of *David Copperfield*), that projects its own reproduction – rhetorically hailing us to "imitate" it, rather than the other way around.

In this regard, narrative is a profoundly *ideological* form, because it works to reproduce the model of narrative production and by extension that of literary subjectivity, proffering the model of literary desire, to be engaged in or absorbed by literature and thus to reproduce it and its conditions of existence. Novels specifi-

12 See Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (London and New York: Methuen, 1984), and Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London and New York: Methuen, 1984).

cally tend to promulgate the *ideology of literature*,¹³ of literary life, consumption, and production, through their self-reflexive valorization of storytelling and more generally of the *profession* of literature (say, in Parson Adams' love of literature, as well as in more systematic treatments, such as *New Grub Street* and contemporary academic novels), and also of reading (as in *Madame Bovary* or *Don Quixote*). As a sidebar, the foregrounding of reading and reading scenes in some ways forms a counterpart to this investigation of narrating, likewise coding the implacable power of, if not addiction to, literature within literature.

To return to the question of fictionality, in novels like *Tristram Shandy* the intuitive tendency is to accord the seemingly superior level of a narrator's discourse a greater degree of referential authority, when it logically has none. In other words, fiction depends on a referential house of cards, built upon the various levels of the narrative. In large part, the project of narratology has been to separate and demarcate the levels of narrative, thereby recovering a fundamental level of plot or diegesis that anchors or centers the narrative. Other levels – say, Tristram's narration of his narrating – are consigned to an *ex-centric* status (again, by definition *extra-diegetic*). I argue, in chapter 1, that Tristram is not like an MC, commenting on the game show of the plot, but that "his" plot-level is imbricated in the overall configuration of the text. The explicit figuring of a narrator like Tristram points to the complex of narratorial relations that striate the narrative and complicate the postulation of anything like a univocal plot. The argument of this study is to collapse the hierarchy of narrative levels, or at least to disallow its literal or referential value in grounding the narrative. In other words, the predominant trope motivating or defining narrative is not mimesis or referentiality, but narrativity or reflexivity. More exactly, mimesis is not based on referentiality but on the autological economy of narrative (self-) figuring, on what Roland Barthes calls the signifying codes of narrative or Christine van Boheemen calls the rhetoricity of narrative.¹⁴ This is not an utterly surprising claim in the aftermath of the epoch of

13 See Etienne Balibar and Pierre Macherey, "On Literature as an Ideological Form," in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. Robert Young (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 79–99.

14 See Barthes, *S/Z*, and Christine van Boheemen, "The Semiotics of Plot: Toward a Typology of Fictions," *Poetics Today* 3.4 (1982), 87–96.

poststructuralism, but it is one that I think worth stressing and, again, has been largely elided in the way that we usually see and write about narrative.

iii

A strong qualification is in order here. When I first observed the prevalence of reflexive narratives, I put my thesis in extreme terms: narratives are *really* about narrative. I am still taken with the definitive confidence of that claim, but I have come to realize that it is wrong-headed in two ways. First, I do not want to claim a kind of exclusivity, typical in academic argument, that narratives are only about narrative and their own self-figuring. There's an anecdote about a fan approaching James Joyce to ask, Can I touch the hand that wrote *Ulysses*? As the story goes, Joyce responded, No, it's done a lot of other things too. Narratives are about a lot of other things besides the technology of storytelling, and they differ markedly in how they highlight and foreground those features and aspects. I do not presume to exhaust the significance of a text by resort to one theme, to one mode of reading and attention to one salient stratum. Second, I want to resist the mode of critical phrasing that asserts that I have uncovered a cardinal interpretive secret that of course everyone else has missed, the mode of critical argument that projects a dramatic discovery (or recovery), of a key to what narratives (and literature, life, etc.) are really about.¹⁵ Would that one quite knew.

Two relevant terms I try to stress and use here are *feature* and *salience*. These terms, I think, lend a desirable and conceptually necessary degree of flexibility to my project. In a sense, they answer why I am not a structuralist and why this is at best a modified poetics. In the wake of poststructuralism, it seems impossible to return to a faith in concepts like structure or in the purely poetic categorization of texts. Further, "structure" seems to reify texts into definable and exactly determinable units. It is underwritten by a kind of cognitive faith: one would only have to uncover the framework (axial oppositions, diegetic levels, Greimassian antitheses, and so on), and one would have it, the

¹⁵ See Richard Levin's observations on these tendencies in *New Readings vs. Old Plays: Recent Trends in the Reinterpretation of English Renaissance Drama* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

text would unfold from there. *Feature*, I think, is a more fitting term. Literary texts demonstrate specific, discernible features, features that stand out and define that work, that are more or less prominent in the network of that text. Texts may highlight particular narrative features, or historical features, or stylistic features, or thematic features, to varying degrees. Like a radio band, features indicate the strength of the signal of a specific zone of meaning in a text, in excess of normal and surrounding noise. Overall, *feature* is a specific and local concept, as distinct from the overarching generalization of structure, and thus it more accurately and flexibly describes what goes on in individual texts.

Likewise, *salience* is an apt and useful concept. It allows for the description and analysis of significant issues in texts, issues that the text focuses on and foregrounds, but it also acknowledges the specificity of texts. Texts are not encompassed by one overwhelming theme, whether it be language, class, gender, sexuality, morality, or reflexivity. In the texts I discuss here, the thematization of narrative is a salient feature or activity, one that is not only apparent but conspicuous by its inscription in various narrative gestures or designs, as I have mentioned. Although I would say that there are reflexive moments or hinges in all texts – to start, just by virtue of what Genette calls the paratext¹⁶ – those moments might not necessarily be salient or particularly noteworthy. To sketch a tentative definition, a text is a network of significance that encompasses overlapping and heterogeneous thicknesses of significance. The job of practical criticism is to highlight a salient strand of this network, but with the caveat that it is precisely one among others and intertwined with and dependent on them.

I mention this because I want to resist various strong theoretical claims made in the past twenty years that texts are about History, or Gender, or Epistemology, or Narrative, that a particular feature or line of significance subsumes all other features of a text. However inflated they seem now, this is the import of the notable critical-theoretical projects of the moment of high theory, through the 1980s – for instance, respectively, in marxism (in Fredric Jameson's *Political Unconscious* ["Always historicize!"]), in most

16 See Gérard Genette, *Seuils* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1987). For relevant excerpts, see his "Structure and Functions of the Title in Literature," trans. Bernard Crampé, *Critical Inquiry* 14 (1988), 692–720; and "Introduction to the Paratext," trans. Marie Maclean, *New Literary History* 22 (1991), 261–72.

versions of feminism (as in Elaine Showalter's gynocriticism), or in deconstruction (de Man's *Allegories of Reading* offers an exemplary and constant epistemological lesson, about [the failure of] reading). As Terry Eagleton puts it in a recent interview, "I think that back in the seventies we used to suffer from a certain fetishism of method; we used to think that we have to get a certain kind of systematic method right, and this would be *the* way of proceeding. I think some of my early work, certainly *Criticism and Ideology*, would fall within that general approach."¹⁷

Early on, I might have followed these examples, especially that of Paul de Man, pointing to the allegorization of narrative at some ultimate level and perhaps called this study *Allegories of Narrative*. Indeed, this attention to reflexivity is cast in the shadow of de Man and deconstruction.¹⁸ At heart, my argument bears the mark of obviously identifiable deconstructive moves: a critique of plot as a center of narrative and a narrator's discourse as marginal; displacing this polar opposition and in a sense claiming attention if not priority to narrative signs, to "the linguistic turn"; underscoring the very figurality or rhetoricity of narrative, endlessly displacing its reference; attributing the blindness or gap in structural narrative theory to its schematic contradictions; and finally, the imputation of a kind of cognitive dissonance, of an impossibility in reading and deciphering narrative because of the deconstruction of its categories, such as plot.

However, I now have a great deal of ambivalence toward that theoretical self-definition and the location of this work within the deconstructive camp. What I find compelling in de Man's work is not its famed "rigor," but its unmitigatedly tenacious argumentative drive toward a terse and austere *vision*,¹⁹ of reading, interpreting, and knowing, and the implicit difficulties and ultimately failures in those processes. In this, though, it is a vision of a kind of Fall, of an incomplete knowledge, short of a participation in God's

17 Terry Eagleton, "Criticism, Ideology and Fiction: An Interview with Terry Eagleton," *The Significance of Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990), p. 76.

18 For a consideration of reflexivity in deconstruction, which favors Derrida over de Man, see Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986).

19 Don H. Bialostosky examines the frequently intoned view of de Man's "analytic rigor" and finds it unwarranted; rather, he notes the power of de Man's poetic vision and its sway over the field of Wordsworth criticism (*Wordsworth, Dialogics, and the Practice of Criticism* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992], pp. 152-99).

knowledge, as Aquinas might have it. It is a vision of pathos, of the pathetic failure of interpretive coherence, that had tacitly undergirded earlier, less problematized notions of "close reading." I think that de Man's blindness – to use his own distinction – is precisely in this move, to subsume all other features and significances under the umbrella of the allegory of unreadability, which he posits as always already existing in a text, at some ultimate level. Logically, this pathos rests on a certain reductiveness, whereby meaning is posited as an equation (text = meaning) that always is bound to fail or to lead to an impasse or aporia, since it always yields incommensurable sums, the reading never encompassing the full meaning of a text.

In this way, deconstructive reading is not parasitical on normal reading, as M. H. Abrams argued at the advent of the "epoch" of deconstruction.²⁰ Instead, it is posited on the *pathos* of the loss of normal reading (in Kuhn's sense of "normal science"). Despite its power, my view now, as a third-generation theorist or revisionary poststructural critic, is that setting up meaning on an absolute scale preprograms that loss or failure; the more interesting and striking fact is that we do decipher *some* meaning, however incomplete and limited. A convenient case in point is translation. In one of his last essays, on Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator," de Man spins out an unrelenting, negative vision of the possibility – or, really, the impossibility – of translation.²¹ In that text, he freights Benjamin's key terms along the line of that impossibility: *Aufgabe*, normally translated as "task," he takes up in an alternative sense, as failure; *fortleben*, normally rendered as "to survive," as in an afterlife, he swerves to death (afterlife assumes death); and *Bruchstück*, "fragments," he takes as an indication of a kind of vertiginous and irremediable structure of breaking apart. De Man powerfully strings these senses together to build a compelling narrative of translation's impossibility.

While I acknowledge the power of that argument, for me the

20 See M. H. Abrams, "Rationality and Imagination in Cultural History," *Doing Things with Texts: Essays in Criticism and Critical Theory*, ed. Michael Fischer (New York: Norton, 1991), pp. 113–34, as well as the exchange in *Critical Inquiry*, "The Limits of Pluralism" (3.3 [1977]), which includes early versions of Abrams' "The Deconstructive Angel" (425–38) and J. Hillis Miller's "The Critic as Host" (439–48).

21 Paul de Man, "Conclusions: On Walter Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator,'" *Yale French Studies* 69 (special issue, "The Lesson of Paul de Man") (1985), 25–46.

striking point is that translation works at all, that one gets some approximation of meaning, some correlation, however qualified, between the original text and its translation. Benjamin's essay itself was originally an introduction to his translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux parisiens*. In his translation, Benjamin noticeably twists Baudelaire's lines away from what seems a literal rendering, to fit them into the rhyme scheme of the original. In other words, Benjamin's version is unfaithful syntactically, but that infidelity enables the reconstruction of a salient strand of the auditory pattern of the original. Although Benjamin's translation is imperfect, it seems untenable and perverse to claim that there is *no* translation, that there is no possibility for the transposition of meaning and significance, however partial.

To carry over the implications of this point to the problematics of narrative, here I desist from the all-encompassing epistemological lesson offered by de Man, according to which all texts and indeed all language fall into the abyss of unreadability; rather, I attempt to examine the salient features and significant strands in the following narrative texts by which they generate meaning, however flawed and even if finally inchoate. Part of the theoretical purview of this book is that the meaning of a text is indeterminate, not because of the abyss of language, but because there are a great many forces and vectors comprising the network of meaning in a text that render any text radically overdetermined rather than indeterminate. My point in investigating various reflexive features or strands of novels ranging from *Tristram Shandy* to *Lord Jim* is to demonstrate and account for their salience, but by no means to account completely for the complex of meaning that these texts encompass. I suppose that all of this answers, somewhat apologetically, why I am not a deconstructive critic.

iv

While my purpose here is not to resurrect the mode of deconstructive reading proposed by de Man in *Allegories of Reading* – the kind that he famously and infamously predicted would dominate the field in “the coming years” – I do want to acknowledge the power of its hesitations and cautions for normal narrative theory, where it has been relatively under-utilized, if not occluded. There is a way in which particular zones of theory – narrative theory, as well

as others, such as oral theory or rhetorical theory – function by preserving separate domains of their own, in some ways operating independently of the general theoretical economy or conversation.²² At one time an exemplar of French theory (Roland Barthes' "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives" stands as a characteristic text in the nascent moment of Grand Theory), but now seemingly out of step with or immune to a scene that has since moved on, narrative theory has retained a strong bent toward formal analysis and structural categories, carried over in the recent project of universal grammar.²³ This study, then, stands as a kind of hybrid theoretical project, poaching on normal narrative theory or narratology proper, and articulated within the matrix of poststructuralism (reflexivity as a *mise en abyme* recession of structure), but refracted through a second or third generation view of theory.²⁴

This revisionary tenor or bent is indicative, I suppose, of the current impasse of theory. (I would distinguish it as being an impasse, rather than a crisis, which seems a perpetual and over-inflated claim – like crying the rhetorical wolf.) The current moment in theory registers a diffusion and winnowing of the force of theory as an institutional practice and mode, at least of the force that theory carried with it when it took the field in the 1970s. To rehearse what is by now a generally available narrative (in the storybook of professional lore of the project of "literature," as recounted in any number of anthologies and theory primers), Grand Theory reconfigured literary studies from the late 1960s on, injecting a high philosophical tenor and conceptual concern into criticism. As the story usually goes, that moment of theory was defused by the "antitheory" polemics of the mid-1980s and the undertow of neopragmatism, and superseded first by the decidedly pragmatic new historicism, and more recently by the general turn to cultural studies, as well as what I would summarize under the rubric of identity studies, which includes work such as gay

22 For a relevant discussion of the circulation of theory and how theories seem to go out of fashion, see James Sosnoski, "The Theory Junkyard," *minnesota review* 41–2 (1994), 80–94.

23 For instance, see Marie-Laure Ryan's *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), and David Herman's *Universal Grammar and Narrative Form* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995).

24 See my "Posttheory Generation," *Symploke* 3.1 (1995), 55–76.

and lesbian studies or the new masculine studies (those defined by gender or sexual orientation), African-American studies, Chicano studies, and so on (those defined by ethnic determinations), and Caribbean or Pacific Rim studies (those defined by location or national determination). As this story usually has it, the present turn to history, culture, and identity is an entirely salutary development in the field, representing a turn to more accessibility and political relevance, after the excesses and obscurity of Grand Theory.

The narrative of the fall of Paul de Man – represented for the most part in terms of a *Citizen Kane*-like plot, from promise to significant position to scandal and disrepute – provided a convenient correlative for this institutional-theoretical turn.²⁵ Its sensationalized plot offered a TV movie version of what has been going on in literature departments these past thirty years, underscoring the secret corruption at the heart of theory, and thus mandating the reformism of the new historicism and cultural studies. This is not to say that the fall of deconstruction and the passing of Grand Theory is merely a story, a fiction, projected onto the visage of literary studies, but that what has happened has been mediated by and circulated through these narratives, these narrative forms, tropes, and genres. For the currently extant Fall of Paul de Man has performed a systematic elision or scapegoating of de Man, and by extension deconstruction and theory overall, from the literary scene, thereby clearing space and *de facto* legitimating current “softer” theoretical practices, such as cultural studies, not to mention the current turn toward personal or autobiographical criticism.

Within this economy, my project attempts to register the limitations of a certain phase of deconstruction and “hard” theory, as I have mentioned, but also to circumvent the rote subscription to the scapegoat story, to the dismissal of poststructuralism, as if we have somehow thought beyond it and progressed past it, so that it is no longer worth our time. For questions like those of reflexivity, of the modal form of narrative, are not separable from or surpassable by reading “historically” or “culturally,” but imbricated in

25 My characterization here is not facetious; one only has to look at books like David Lehman’s *Sign of the Times: Deconstruction and the Fall of Paul de Man* (New York: Poseidon, 1991). See my “Death of Deconstruction, the End of Theory, and Other Ominous Rumors,” *Narrative* 4.1 (1996), 17–35.

any reading of these texts. To put it bluntly, one cannot simply skip over the problematics of narrative to decipher the historical significances of a text (as a recent ad for Harvard University Press puts it, literary studies has gone “Back to History”), without accounting for the complications of that recovery. To put it more subtly, at least for my purposes here, reflexivity projects a holographic outline of the technical armature of ideology, of the process by which literary modes and subjectivities are reproduced.

V

A few comments about the question of history. When I first described this project to a friend, he immediately asked how I placed these novels historically and castigated my approach as ahistorical. I take this as a crucial question, most obviously because history is such a freighted and indeed privileged category in current theory and criticism, as I have mentioned. It bears directly on the question of the impasse of theory and the articulation between previously dominant modes of poststructural theory (i.e. deconstruction) and more discursive but historically based critical practices, like the new historicism. Further, and most pressingly for me, it invokes a charge that I would like to heed that what we do in criticism carries a commitment to an oppositional, progressive left politics and has a discernible political relevance and effect.

In some ways, it is embarrassingly true that the kind of study I have undertaken is ahistorical. As should be clear from my discussion so far, this study deals with arguments *in* theory – by which I mean in the present institutional space connoted by “theory,” not just the abstract hyperspace of the realm of ideas. It intervenes in certain academic – in a non-pejorative, locational sense – debates on narrative. As I have already discussed, my points about reflexivity deal with the *technology*, the technical circuitry, of narrative. And for the most part, this view of narrative as technological carries the connotation that it is a transhistorical form. More exactly, the novel is a technology that develops historically (there was a time before novels, and in the course of time the form of novels has evolved), but my focus here for the most part brackets that historical development, instead highlighting the modal features of the technology itself, as well as the present-time ideological lesson that they perform.

In some ways, I think that this kind of intervention has its own merit. On the grounds of traditional scholarship, I think that it serves a useful purpose to be able to describe our objects of study – here the novel – with more precision, in a more exact way, thereby making those objects more comprehensible. Perhaps this rationale retains an element of the impulse to scientificity, to define and delineate texts most manifest in precisely those structural approaches I critique as well as borrow from. As the rationale usually goes, this comprehension of texts enables and prepares for further study of those texts, for historical, political, pedagogical, or any other ends. To put this more concretely, the structural investigation of Greimas prepares the way for Jameson, so that initial study is not without value. This is the tacit rationale for humanistic inquiry, presenting knowledge on a building-block approach, whereby earlier inquiries lay the groundwork for later, presumably contributing to the great chain of Western thought.

I am not entirely satisfied with that explanation, though, which puts me in a strange position regarding this – my own – project. I do not entirely believe in the march of progress of ideas (where does this march actually lead and whom does it serve?); I find myself in a peculiar position, since I have severe doubts that those “building blocks” (of the “advance of knowledge”) do a great deal for our body politic, our general social good, other than propagating and legitimating a code of intra-academic pursuits and interests, akin to a hobby at best, or worse, faithfully replicating the dominant ideology, for instance, of orientalism, as Edward Said so persuasively shows.²⁶ In other words, these building blocks lead to an ideological neutralization of intellectuals, whereby literary intellectuals are subtly funnelled out of the public sphere, or out of the business of commenting on matters that directly bear on a public sphere, by their immersion in arcane, hyper-specialized issues.

Conversely, I suspect rote invocations of “history” as an undeniably superior and politically effective category. What exactly does the apposition of “history” do to texts? How does it make them more politically relevant or effectual? If I were to address, rather than the narrative features of a novel like *Tristram Shandy*, the question of why the novel was written at a particular point in

26 See Edward W. Said's *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

time, I am uncertain what that delivers instead. I might conjecture that it inaugurates the beginning of the novelistic tradition, before generic expectations were fixed and secure, thus explaining the comic and exaggerated mix of discourses and forms. Or, placing it in the context of the formation of the early modern period, it exhibits a concern with epistemological certainty, whereby perspectives are no longer fixed and knowledge no longer easily accounted for. One might compare it to contemporaneous philosophical texts, noting parallels to Locke, Berkeley, and Hume on the theory of knowledge, placing it in the context of the *Ideas of the Time*. Or one might take it to exemplify the epistemological break of the modern epoch, following Foucault and various historicists following him. These conjectures strike me as supportable and illuminating, but they seek to place the novel within the coordinates of other dominant narratives, one called the history of the novel, another the history of ideas, and another the modern era or, in Foucault's term, *episteme*. They offer compelling family narratives that encompass and explain particular elements of novels, but I am sceptical of their actual political import and value. The statement that a particular novel exhibits characteristics of class oppression strikes me as having the same validity and effect as a statement that claims it exhibits a particular poetic structure, in that it occurs within the same socio-cultural discursive space, "the critical conversation," as it is optimistically called, and the extant academic institution of literature. The more urgent question, I think, is one of rhetorical and socio-institutional position: Where are these comments heard? How do they change what is to be done? What actual difference do they make in the critical sphere in which they occur? In the larger intellectual world? In the public sphere?

All too often, the general invocation and discussion of history performs within and is largely confined to the context of academic debate, attempting to provide more compelling plots within the parameters, institutional and otherwise, of those debates. It does not carry automatic value and relevance in a domain called politics, but it is frequently used with a kind of moralistic pretense that one who invokes history has unmediated access to it. In this way, it functions as a placebo, as an ideological front, substituting for engagement and masquerading as a mark of conscience and intellectual responsibility to the larger public sphere.

I say this as a corrective to what seems to me, again, an impasse in the current scene of criticism and theory, as well as a caveat for my own practice. When we think we are telling stories about history, we are frequently and to a significant degree telling stories about how we tell (critical) stories, about our own mode of critical production. What effect does a marxist reading of, say, *Frankenstein*, published in *Novel*, have? This is a question well worth considering. As Evan Watkins puts it in *Work Time*, "For just by virtue of being taught in English, *any* text – 'radical' or 'conservative' or whatever – is already caught up in the social constructions of class, of race, of gender"²⁷ – that is, within the construction of English departments and the university in general, and how people are "circulated" (as Watkins stresses), via grading, to name one measure, sorting them for the professional-managerial class, and interpellated (as Althusser puts it²⁸) and acculturated (as John Guillory shows, following Bourdieu²⁹) there. And I would add that just by being written about, any text is caught up in academic modes of discourse, in the social circulation not only of students, as Watkins makes clear, but of professors and critics of literature. In short – and obviously in keeping with my interest in reflexivity – I would now argue for a turn in attention from the historical plots of how novels were produced, to how they are presently produced and disseminated, and for what purposes and ends they are disseminated. I would call for a *reflexive* criticism, in a broad sense, that examines more explicitly the ways in which critical narratives reflexively thematize their mode and institution of production.

It is precisely the constitutive (theoretical) blindness of plot that we think we are narrating the content of history when we are reflexively inscribing the mode of production of our own (critical) narrating. Yet I do not want to subsume this gesture completely under the rubric of reflexivity; in retrospect, I would now recommend a socio-cultural study of the present production, reproduction, and dissemination of a text like *Tristram Shandy*. If we want

27 Evan Watkins, *Work Time: English Departments and the Circulation of Cultural Value* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), p. 26.

28 See Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), pp. 127–86.

29 See John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

to get historical, we need to look at the ways in which *Shandy* is constituted and used now, how that text is circulated and for what ends. To call *Tristram Shandy* an exemplar of modern epistemology seems to me a relatively inconsequential insight, or rather it only serves to confirm an academic narrative that is already in circulation. At the level of blunt labor and political power, *Shandy* in some ways becomes a vehicle of academic circulation and cultural capital – spurring articles for tenure and job promotion; generating assignments in courses to foster book production and the need for critical analysis, thereby providing a market; acting as a transmitter of a certain “cultural literacy,” thereby passing on cultural capital and taste. In fact, there is a way in which its complications and difficulties make *Shandy* all the more attractive and malleable for academic consumption, presenting a chessboard of critical acumen beyond the checkerboard that a Dickens’ novel might offer. Its productive effects, in the sense I have noted above, strike me as having far more direct political consequence and are a more significant historical intervention than working out the narrative of how an eighteenth-century audience might read the novel, as well as how the verbal play of the novel subverts standard form, thus making us revolutionaries of textual free play.³⁰

This is not to suggest that we abandon history for the more verdant philosophical pastures of reflexivity. As I have suggested, I would now more actively advocate and pursue the socio-institutional study of “literature,” of the present institution of literature and its critical apparatus. But my surmise is that the concept of reflexivity bears directly on the conceptual make-up of ideology and marks the reproductive imaginary of the institution of literature. As Althusser defines it, ideology is an imaginary relation that tacitly fosters and enables the reproduction of the modes of material production.³¹ In this way narrative reflexivity specifies an ideological structure or process; it is a mode that makes itself inconspicuous but that naturalizes and therefore spurs the reproduction of its own modal form. The reflexive self-figuring of

30 For a relevant critique of the “radical panache” and presumed politics of contemporary criticism, see Barbara Foley, “Subversion and Oppositionality in the Academy,” in *Pedagogy Is Politics: Literary Theory and Critical Teaching*, ed. Maria-Regina Kecht (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), pp. 70–89.

31 Althusser, “Ideology,” pp. 162–3.

narrative by narrative functions to disseminate and propagate an *ethos* of literature, of "the literary life," a drive and desire for literature, and finally to reproduce the system of relations of the institution of literature. Novels, still a dominant form of narrative (as a visit to any chain bookstore will demonstrate), constitutively and programmatically glamorize the institution of literature. They make us fall in love with them; they're "addictive," in Avital Ronell's phrase, and constitutively encode a need for themselves.³² Extending this, one might say that reflexivity is the modal form of the libidinal economy of literature, and represents its circular reproduction of need.

It is in part through the encoding of reflexive narrative moments that the novel reproduces (enables, naturalizes, glamorizes) its conditions of production and circulation. Particularly in their valorization of narrative, as well as in their valorization of reading, of the desire for literature, and in general of the literary life, the social effect of novels is affectively to imprint those who consume them with the taste and desire precisely to repeat that consumption, to reduplicate and circulate narratives. Narratives propagate a technology of self-advertisement; they advertise not only how people should behave, how love and marriage and in general social relations between sexes, races, and classes should properly proceed, but also the necessity and utter desirability of narrative itself.

My project, regrettably, stops short of a full examination of the ideology of literature that these narratives promulgate. I suggest ways in which this further study might proceed in the following discussions of *Joseph Andrews*, *The Turn of the Screw*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Heart of Darkness*, and *Lord Jim*. For instance, the frame of *The Turn of the Screw* casts all of the characters, in an almost allegorical primal scene ("round the hearth," socially linked in a narrative circle), as enthralled by and hyperbolically desiring narrative, and poses that desire as normal, natural, and inevitable (as on a winter night "a strange tale should essentially be"). Narratives not only talk about and refer to themselves, broaching an epistemological paradox, but pose the model of "literary" people; they invite and persuade us to take up this strange love and profession of literature, making us into readers, purveyors,

32 See Avital Ronell, *Crack Wars: Literature, Addiction, Mania* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), p. 25.

and fans. And, what is more, they beckon us to conduct our lives in certain ways, ignoring the conditions of existence of those around us; they beckon us to sit by the fire, in an armchair, with a beverage of choice nearby, whiling away an afternoon or evening, and to take that activity as pleasurable, as nothing we should want to do more, and as morally and culturally edifying. Not to put too fine a point on it, they transpose our conspicuous consumption and leisure, in Thorstein Veblen's words, to a natural and socially valuable activity. This is the blatant operation of ideology, hailing us as literary individuals. Or, to put it another way, it poses our professional activity as a function of our individual and natural desires and pleasures, thereby legitimating our "work" as necessary, as going without saying. Part of my point in this book is that it should not go without saying, that we ought to examine how it reflexively makes us do what we do, and pass on what we do, recruiting others to the love and self-acclaimed good of literature.

Narrative of narrative

(*Tristram Shandy*)

Disorderly narrative

Tristram Shandy incites critical confusion. The plot, refusing to yield a simple, readily describable storyline, is troublesome: the presumed events of the narrative – of Tristram’s autobiography and the Shandy family history – are not only told out of order, but are frequently cut off and fragmentary. At times, the suggestion of a word causes the narrative to jump from an event in 1718, say, to Toby’s battle experience at Namur in 1695. And then it might turn to a disquisition on trenches, or on names, or on breeches. Further, Tristram frequently interrupts the narrated events and reflexively calls attention to the question of narration itself, seemingly going beyond the pale of a normal or straight narrative. Overall, on the surface of it, the novel appears to be manifestly nonlinear, knotted, disorderly, convoluted, and fragmented, almost to the point of disintegration, as a number of critics have noted.¹ To spin off a classic metaphor for narrative as a road or journey, *Tristram Shandy* loops around and goes almost nowhere, making short

1 The criticism yields a litany of comments on the disorderliness of the novel: Hillis Miller takes *Shandy* as an exemplar of the deconstruction of linear order (“Narrative Middles: A Preliminary Outline,” *Genre* 11 [1978], 375–87); Ron Jenkins calls the novel “a narrative dramatization of Gordian knots” (“Mathematical Topology and Gordian Narrative Structure: *Tristram Shandy*,” *Mosaic* 25.1 [1992], 27); Robert Alter talks about how the novel “goes skittering off in self-delighting demonstration . . . zigzags and convoluted lines . . .” (*Partial Magic: The Novel as Self-Conscious Genre* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975], p. 31); Elizabeth Harries discusses its fragmentary propensities (“Sterne’s Novels: Gathering Up the Fragments,” *ELH* 49 (1982), 35–49); and Everett Zimmerman notes how it disorders historical narrative and says that “Tristram’s narrative becomes itself a figure of disintegration” (“*Tristram Shandy* and Narrative Representation,” *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 28.2 [1987], 140).

detours and false starts, through thickets, only to return to pretty much the same place.

Despite this manifest confusion, my thesis here is that *Tristram Shandy*, at least on one significant level, comprises a relatively simple historical novel that explicitly features the act of Tristram's writing. This claim alone is not especially surprising; in one sense, it merely carries on the debate over the order or disorder of the novel, a question that has figured centrally in critical commentary on the novel thus far. The complications of the narrative are held together by the linearly ordered but skeletal shadow-structure of Tristram's narrative of his writing. Thus, contrary to appearances, the novel is well ordered. However, rather than merely presenting a "new reading" of or refinement in the conversation on *Shandy*, this plot stratum broaches a kind of problematics of narrative, for the plot of Tristram's writing serves to foreground the *topos* of narrative composition and, as we have been wont to say in the age of poststructuralism, calls into question the mode of narration itself. In terms of speech act theory, the plot of the narrating is performative as well as constative, blending and blurring the two modes, performing the act of narrative as well as describing that act.² For my purposes, I might call it a reflexive plot, in that it inscribes its own mode, its own performative operation, while at the same time constatively depicting that act as a normal novelistic event.

Further, the debate over the order of *Tristram Shandy* has stakes for narrative theory in general, for the ways in which we talk about and describe narrative, or more exactly, for the critical expectations which govern and in a sense mandate how we read and interpret narrative. I am alluding here to Hans Robert Jauss' apt formulation, "horizon of expectation," although Jauss more narrowly refers to the ways in which interpretation is embedded in the specific history of reception of a work and the general coordinates of concrete literary history.³ My use is more general:

2 The ordinal text in speech act theory, distinguishing the performative from the constative, is of course J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd ed., ed. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975). Although largely sympathetic to Austin, Jacques Derrida shows how this distinction finally undermines itself in "Signature Event Context" (*Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982], pp. 307-30).

3 See Hans Robert Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), pp. 3-46.

readings are always *in* theory, embedded in extant theoretical matrices, languages, and conceptual fields, which in a sense generate and define what we consider legitimate statements on and knowledge of literary texts. The confusion *Shandy* induces is symptomatic of and reveals a weak seam in normal narrative theory (in the sense of what Thomas Kuhn calls “normal science”), specifically its reliance, tacit or otherwise, on a certain sense of plot. A standard assumption, from Aristotle on, is that plot forms the necessary and central backbone of narrative, and further, that the plot is an imitation of events rather than language or language acts. Those events are taken to accord with “real,” material acts that one might encounter in the world – Tristram traveling, getting caught in a window sash, and so forth, as well as sitting at his dressing-table, writing. For Aristotle and most subsequent narrative poetics, their linguistic configuration takes a lesser significance, as diction or style. In a colloquial sense, plot is usually thought of as the kind of action one might expect in an Arnold Schwarzenegger movie – running, shooting, duking it out, and spectacular stunts.⁴ In general, traditional narrative theory defines plot as a constative construct, thereby excising its performative function and linguistic complication.

A tendency of much novel criticism – on *Tristram Shandy* but I think one could also extend this more generally, as I hope to show in the following chapters – is to take the narrator-persona at his or her word. I do not mean in terms of reliability and point of view – these are matters of degree and a function of characterization – but in terms of the structural placement of the narrator, as a vehicle relaying a plot, rather than as a performative figure in the configuration of narrative. In *Tristram Shandy*, the narrator’s statements about narrating (as journey, line, digression, etc.), and his recounting what he is doing and when he is doing it, are usually seen as somehow above or beyond the plot, as if they were outside the domain of the narrative proper. Even theoretically sophisticated readings – for instance, Hillis Miller citing *Tristram Shandy* as an exemplar of the deconstruction of linear plot and Dennis

4 Of course, with the exception of *Last Action Hero*. I would speculate that its reflexively calling attention to the question of movieworld versus realworld is the reason for its notable failure (losses estimated at \$150 million), despite its being a Schwarzenegger vehicle. Its droll self-allusions to fictionality and representation disrupted normal audience expectations of action.

Allen attending to the linguistic play of the novel – privilege the comments of the narrator, distancing them from the rest of the narrative.⁵ Miller takes Tristram's use of a wiggly line as direct commentary on the plot, unreflectively as critical paraphrase rather than as an element in the rhetorical construction of the narrative. Allen notes Tristram's plural and punning uses of words, especially regarding sex, taking them as a kind of intentional deconstructive statement from the narrator.⁶ Both of these readings take the narrator's comments as if they were literal, as exogenous critical comments on narrative, rather than as part of the narrative itself, as part of the complex of relations that the narrative forms and performs.

Here, I will take the plot of the writing, as well as the autological comments on narrating and narrative, as *central* to the action, as a salient if not primary event level. The plot of the narrating is not "digressive" from or disruptive to the "plot," but constitutes a salient aspect of the narrative of *Tristram Shandy*. It might seem slightly perverse to take these events as a predominant plot of the novel; however, on a very literal reading, they are temporally more immediate, in exact historical terms the first-order narration, to which all other narrative levels are subordinate.

Overall, I find *Tristram Shandy* – in its foregrounding the problematics of narrative – to be an exemplary case demonstrating the reflexive tendency in and of narrative.⁷ Perhaps this is why Shklovsky cryptically deigned it the "most typical novel in world

5 J. Hillis Miller, "Narrative Middles," 375–87; and Dennis Allen, "Sexuality/Textuality in *Tristram Shandy*," *Studies in English Literature* 25 (1985), 651–70.

6 Allen, "Sexuality/Textuality," notes the intentional use of polysemy (see p. 662); however, from a more strictly deconstructive standpoint, deconstruction occurs unintentionally as a function of language, not simply in the plural meanings of words. For a relevant discrimination between pluralism and deconstruction, see J. Hillis Miller, "The Critic as Host," *Critical Inquiry* 3 (1977), 439–47.

7 On the question of reflexivity, see James E. Swearingen, *Reflexivity in Tristram Shandy: An Essay in Phenomenological Criticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977) and Robert Alter, *Partial Magic*. Swearingen focuses on the phenomenological consciousness of the character, Tristram, whereas I view reflexivity in terms of the mode and operation of narrative. Alter points out the novel's "consciously" calling attention to the illusion of fiction; in this, he is really talking about one facet of defamiliarization. See also Lucien Dällenbach, *The Mirror in the Text*, trans. Jeremy Whiteley with Emma Hughes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), which gives the standard definition of the *mise en abyme* or mirror structure, as "any aspect enclosed within a work that shows a similarity with the work that contains it" (p. 8). This is a very large category, and includes, say, ekphrasis, as well as particular narrative features; I will more narrowly examine specific reflexive features of narrative (e.g., a narrative frame).

literature,"⁸ and it accounts for why it has been adopted as the "major forerunner of modern metafiction" and the "prototype for the contemporary metafictional novel," as Linda Hutcheon and Patricia Waugh announce.⁹ However, I mean this in a fuller sense than simply that *Tristram Shandy* defamiliarizes plot – for Shklovsky, defamiliarization is the cardinal category of literary language, and thus *Shandy* is quintessentially literary in its disturbing normal plot-ordering and wordplay – or that it exposes the illusion of fiction – for Hutcheon and Waugh, its pervasive "intrusive" narratorial comments call attention to its fictional status, and hence are metafictional. Rather, I would argue that *Tristram Shandy* maximally thematizes the complex of relations of narrativity, foregrounding the levels and the hierarchy of levels of narrative representation, and the tension between the locutionary and performative status of literary narrative.¹⁰ In theoretical terms, it overtly signals its status as an allegory of narrative; in the manner of Paul de Man's analysis of the reflexive self-inscription of reading in his essay on Proust called "Reading," I might call this investigation "Narrating."

I Theory

Narrative

Before discussing *Shandy* in detail, though, I will outline several narrative terms that will inform the rest of this study. First, a preliminary definition of narrative. Gérard Genette, in his influential *Narrative Discourse*, distinguishes three different meanings: *Récit*, translated as "narrative," he calls the most central and defines as "the oral or written discourse that undertakes to tell of an event or a series of events."¹¹ This generally accords with the

8 Victor Shklovsky, "Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*: Stylistic Commentary," in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, trans. and ed. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), p. 57.

9 See Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (London and New York: Methuen, 1984), p. 8; and Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London and New York: Methuen, 1984), p. 70.

10 See J. Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 2. Miller cites Marcel Mauss' comment that he chooses to describe those societies that exhibit maximal or excessive qualities in order to see them better.

11 Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane Lewin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980). Hereafter referred to as ND with page references placed parenthetically in the text.

Russian formalists' delineation of plot or *sjuzhet*, and loosely follows Aristotle's definition of plot as an imitation of actions. *Histoire*, or "story," Genette defines as the succession of events, which accords with the formalists' *fabula*. The events themselves, rather than the way they are told, comprise the story and are a kind of "content" or raw material of the narrative. In terms of Saussurean linguistics, Genette slots *récit* as the signifier of the narrative text, and *histoire* then aligns with the signified of the narrative.

Genette introduces a third term, *narration*, translated as "narrating," which he defines as "the act of narrating taken in itself" (ND 26). He elaborates, characterizing it as "the producing narrative action and, by extension, the whole of the real or fictional situation in which that action takes place" (ND 27). Despite this modification of the standard plot/story delineation, Genette proceeds to focus on the temporal disarrangement of the story within the plot of *Remembrance of Things Past*, effectively excluding the category of narration. However illuminating in other ways, theoretically his analysis results in a repetition of the Russian formalist distinction of plot and story.¹²

This elision of the category of narration is set up by Genette's sorting *narrative* and story on the binary axis of signifier and signified. Narrating thus becomes the odd-term-out, the term that does not fit within the temporal parameter of the plot/story opposition, even though one might assume that "narrating" would more viably constitute the signifier of the narrative. This largely derives from Genette's subscription to an Aristotelian definition of mimesis, which privileges the imitation of events in plot, rather than the imitation of language or diction, as would befit the Platonic version of mimesis.¹³ In "Narrative Versions, Narrative Theories," Barbara Herrnstein Smith relevantly critiques Genette's reduction of narrative to this dualistic structure of plot/events, based on "a conception of discourse as consisting of sets of discrete signs which, in some way, *correspond* to . . . sets of discrete and specific ideas, objects, or events . . . discrete signifiers that represent corresponding sets of discrete signi-

12 See Shklovsky, "Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*," p. 57. See also Boris Tomashevsky, "Thematics," in *Russian Formalist Criticism*, pp. 66–78.

13 See Don Bialostosky, "Narrative Diction in Wordsworth's Poetics of Speech," *Comparative Literature* 34 (1982), 308.

fieds.”¹⁴ Smith argues that this view of language occludes the dynamics of narrative, as variable acts performed in response to multiple conditions.

In terms of de Man’s dyad of blindness and insight, Genette’s often brilliant insight into the plot of the *Recherche* – his making sense of its seemingly confusing jumps in time – is enabled by and in turn necessitates his blindness to this third category, narrating.¹⁵ In general, this category of narrating undermines the grounding opposition of story and plot, and the question of the explicit portrait of narrating complicates any notion of “straight” plot, or of the identification of a univocal action-level of the novel. Therefore, I would expressly qualify Genette’s distinctions, especially considering narratives like *Tristram Shandy*: the act of narration is inseparable from the narrative, and, although frequently masked (“shown” as opposed to “told”), it is necessarily inscribed in any narrative, most obviously through authorial “intrusion,” narrative frames, and digressions, but also implicitly in linguistic structure (in control of tense, use of mood, change of voice, in what Genette calls the *paratext*, and so on).

Further, even within the terms of Genette’s scheme, the canonically accepted distinction between *plot* and *story* is not absolute, and is in fact chimerical. While *story* presents a convenient shorthand for a certain comparative value of narrative, the events of the story level do not exist outside their narrative construal and economy. The sequence according to “real time” or “story time” constitutes not a privileged referential level, but a plot formed under the aegis of the trope of historical chronology. The “real time” of a novel has no ontological validity, but we compare, almost automatically, narrative or plot time to the anthropomorphic model of chronological time. In other words, these terms – plot and story – have no absolutely demarcated field of reference, but are radically contingent and generate each other. Since the story is a chronological or historical sequence of events, one might more accurately call it the historical plot, as distinguished from other plots circulated in the narrative. I say this to dispel what seems to me the tacit implication of the projection of a story-level,

14 Barbara Herrnstein Smith, “Narrative Versions, Narrative Theories,” *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1980), 225.

15 See Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

that it provides a referential ground of narrative from which narrative is built and which narrative represents, the raw material of actual, real events from which the narrative derives; rather, the “story” is a retroactive projection of the narrative – what Jonathan Culler calls the “reconstructed plot”¹⁶ – determined by its protocols and within its parameters. Thus, the “reality” or referential value of the story is a function of the configuration of narrative, not the other way around.

Most contemporary narratology follows Genette’s schema and the privileging of the story/plot distinction, albeit with some terminological modifications. For instance, Seymour Chatman, in his early, popularized translation of continental narrative theory to the American scene, *Story and Discourse*, enthusiastically notes that

To me the most exciting approach to these questions is dualist and structuralist, in the Aristotelian tradition. Following such French structuralists as Roland Barthes, Tzvetan Todorov, and Gérard Genette, I posit a *what* and a *way*. The *what* of narrative I call its “story”; the *way* I call its “discourse.”¹⁷

While “discourse” seems to promise a recognition of narrating, it merely amplifies the standard structural dichotomy that Genette poses, the “way” yielding the ordering of story in plot. In his more recent *Coming to Terms*, Chatman expands these categories to “story space” and “discourse space.”¹⁸ However, these spaces are precisely what is confused in the performance of narrative. Relevantly, Chatman goes on to distinguish between mimetic narratives – for him, films – and diegetic narratives – novels. This succinctly illustrates the confusion, since the representation – the mimesis – of the act of narrative – diegesis – constitutes narration. Further, I think it untenable to apply this distinction to a film like, say, *Apocalypse Now*, and a novel like *Heart of Darkness*, since both foreground the representation and complication of narration, and I think it absurd to claim that films are categorically mimetic, rather than a different species of diegesis (think of a film like *Pulp*

16 See Jonathan Culler’s relevant critique of Chatman, “Story and Discourse in the Analysis of Narrative,” *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 179.

17 *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 9.

18 See *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 109–23.

Fiction, which blatantly disorders the times of its story in a synco-pated plot sequence).

To cite two other telling examples, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's introductory survey, *Narrative Poetics*,¹⁹ repeats Genette's tripartite scheme, but substitutes "text" for plot (i.e., story, text, narration), implicitly positing the centrality of plot to the text. Mieke Bal, in *Narratology*, transposes Genette's scheme to fabula, story, and text. While Bal attempts to refine the definitions of each category – she uses fabula, recuperating the Russian formalist term, to indicate the raw material of the narrative, story in its more colloquial sense to denote the rudimentary ordering in plot, and text more expansively to encompass the range of textual actions – her terms have not gained wide acceptance (her alternative use of "story" is confusing given its prevalent usage), and she still separates as extradiegetic the narrator's action, calling such a role an "external narrator."²⁰ The category of narrating is still incongruous, outside the normative boundaries of the "story" or diegesis.

In his *Narratology*, an inaugural work codifying the field of the structural study of narrative, Gerald Prince diverges from the usual alignment of story and plot, splitting narrative on the axes of "signs of the narrating," which "represent the narrating activity, its origin and destination," and "signs of the narrated," which "represent the events and situations recounted."²¹ While this revision calls attention to the category of narrating, it still repeats the false separation of "events" and "narrating activity," one that breaks down when narrating is what is recounted or narrated, when the "signs of the narrated" are the events of narrating. Prince's distinction follows the Saussurean signifier/signified split rather uncritically, particularly in light of Derrida's by now familiar critique in *Of Grammatology*²² and elsewhere. This is not particularly surprising, since the impulse toward the structural delineation of narrative constitutively elides the deconstruction of its categories, its insights into the formal workings of narrative at

19 *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Methuen, 1983).

20 *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, trans. Christine van Boheemen (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), p. 122.

21 Gerald Prince, *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative* (Berlin: Mouton, 1982), p. 7.

22 See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

the expense of this blindness. For narrative, my point is that the putatively separate categories of signifier and signified, or narrating and event, undermine each other and are imbricated in the other, most apparently when the mode of narrative representation is what is represented.

Here, to diverge from Genette's essentially Aristotelian bias, I will extend the definition of narrative to encompass both categories of *récit* and *narration*. For the sake of simplicity, I will retain the standard term *plot*, but with the caveat that there are many and diverse "plots" in a novel, linguistic as well as "action"-oriented, performative as well as constative. For me, plot is a local tactical term that demarcates a strand of related narrative actions. *Narrative*, on the other hand, I will use as a general rubric to encompass the manifold of textual actions, whatever kind or manner of "events." This use of narrative also suggests a more active sense (narration, narrating), to connote its processive and modal operation.

Time

The difference between the historical and other novelistic plots produces a comparative ratio. Genette defines this ratio as anachrony ("all forms of discordance between the two temporal orders of story and narrative" [ND 40]). Again, he is talking about how the plots are positioned in relation to each other: as parallel, as reversed, as dissonant, as intersecting, as diverging. In mathematical terms, this relation would be represented by the curve of the line given by the coordinates of time and distance (i.e., a temporally successive plot yields a fairly straight line, with a zero or positive slope). A distinctive structural feature of *Tristram Shandy* is its apparently extreme anachronic form, with its frequent progressions, digressions, and regressions, its temporally discordant or disorderly plot (its graph would look more like a seismic chart than a straight line). Criticism that points out the nonlinearity of *Tristram Shandy* is simply making this point, underscoring the anachronic character of the novel. By comparison, a novel like *Tom Jones* moves in a fairly stable and constant fashion; the ratio of historical and plot times is not exact or mimetic (it does not take a year to recount a year), but proportionate and consistent, the sequential ordering of the plot paralleling the chronological order

of events. The ratio remains generally constant, and might be represented by a relatively straight line.

To fill in more of Genette's lexicon, he would call a narration like Tristram's "progression" a *prolepsis*, and define it as a narrative maneuver which evokes in advance or calls forward beyond the normal chronologically progressive sequence. He defines an *analepsis* as an evocation of an event that has taken place earlier than the time of narration. This is a typical novelistic move, to hark back to an earlier time, frequently beginning "I remember" (this is the structure of narratives like the classic film, *D.O.A.*, or like Ford Madox Ford's novel *The Good Soldier*, casting back to previous events that lead up to the present).

However, in Genette's system, digressions present an odd category that is not entirely accounted for. In one sense, a digression could merely be seen as an ancillary or supporting event among the other events, a brief analeptic turn to fill in background information, as when Toby tells of his adventures at Namur. Taking the primary plot of the novel to be Tristram's biography, this kind of interruption diverges or, loosely speaking, digresses from the plot proper. Still, its divergence is not particularly decisive, since it works to fill in material that bears, albeit indirectly, on the rest of the plot (although it might have more direct relevance in determining Tristram's paternity, since there is a question of his father's whereabouts when Tristram was conceived). From the standpoint of the overall narrative, this analepsis is subordinate to the plot of Tristram's biography, but Tristram's biography lies within the larger field of Shandy family history. It fills in the larger background of Tristram's genealogy, and thus is consonant and consistent with the plot of Tristram's biography.

I would define *digression* in a stronger and stricter sense than this, to distinguish it from the loose sense of an analeptic or background "digression." Walter Shandy's detour on Slawkenbergius occurs in the sequence of events of Tristram's early biography, but the coordinates of the content of the tale of Slawkenbergius do not fit into the temporal scheme or group of events of the plot proper, and the tale has no bearing on that plot, other than to depict Mr. Shandy's obtuseness. Unlike Toby's pre-history, there is no temporal, topical, or causal plot relation. In Aristotelian terms, it is not a necessary component in the plot. In this way, digressions form (reflexive) pockets within the sequence of the

plot. They are subordinate to the plot within which they occur, yet they are separate from that sequence of events and have no bearing on or connection to those events. Rather than feeding into the chain of actions that comprise the plot proper, their specific action is, very literally, the act of narration. As I will discuss at more length regarding the famously irrelevant interpolated tales in *Joseph Andrews* in chapter 2, they function as blunt inscriptions of narrating, foregrounding the act and dynamic of storytelling, whereby the characters engage explicitly in the exchange of narrative. In this light, they are incoherent in the plot proper, but coherent in the plot of the narrating. *Tristram Shandy*, indicated overtly by narrative intrusions and digressions, and less obviously by digressive tales (Slawkenbergius, LeFever, Andouillet, etc.), signals a deep structure of narrative reflexivity.

Genette distinguishes four types of narration according to temporal position: (1) the *subsequent*, or past-tense narration, where the time of the plot is beyond that of the story, as in most classic narratives ("It *was* the best of times, it *was* the worst of times. . ."); (2) the *prior*, which is rare, and is the predictive, as sometimes in dreams or science fiction (as in *Blade Runner*, projected to take place in Los Angeles in 2021); (3) the *simultaneous*, or "narrative in the present coterminous with the action" (ND 217), a mode common in current fiction (in so-called "New Yorker fiction" – "I am walking through Walmart. I look at the rows of aspirin . . ." – notably in work by Ann Beattie, Frederick Barthelme, and many others); and (4) *interpolated*, which is inserted between the moments of action (say, in Mario Vargas Llosa's *Murder in the Cathedral*, which intersperses times of narration from the narrator's youth to his present state). In terms of these distinctions *Tristram Shandy*, as a narrative of the plot of Tristram's autobiography, most obviously seems a subsequent or past-tense narration. However, insofar as it recounts the act of narrating, it actually forms a simultaneous narrative (cf. ND 222). In a qualified sense, all narratives are simultaneous, or more precisely the allegory of narrative is always simultaneous. While this claim seems to stretch normal expectations of narrative, even ur-narratives such as the *Odyssey* inscribe, however obliquely and inobviously, a present-tense moment of the narrating ("O sing, Muses. . .").

Narrative levels

One of Genette's most crucial and influential distinctions is among the levels of narrative, which he defines this way: "[A]ny event a narrative recounts is at a diegetic level immediately higher than the level at which the narrating act producing this narrative is placed" (ND 228; his emphasis). One might question the implicit valuation of "higher," but this seems fair enough. It accounts for the layering or geo-narratological strata of narratives. Genette goes on to explain the question of levels via this example:

M. de Rencourt's writing of his fictive *Mémoires* is a (literary) act carried out at a first level, which we will call *extradiegetic*; the events told in those *Mémoires* (including Des Grieux's narrating act) are inside this first narrative, so we will describe them as *diegetic*, or *intradiegetic*; the events told in Des Grieux's narrative, a narrative in the second degree, we will call *metadiegetic*. (228)

Innocuously, the events told "in" the *Mémoires* are assumed to be diegetic – the base or primary plot of the narrative. Genette slides their being positioned as intradiegetic to their being the first-order diegesis (with a simple postulation of "or"), and collapses the first level of the narrative – Rencourt's (narration of) writing – into the second, so that what would technically be the third level or degree of the narrative – Des Grieux's narrative – moves up to second place. Very strictly according to his scheme, the events of the writing, the "literary act" as Genette calls it, should be considered diegetic, and those narrative layers that are subordinate metadiegetic. In temporal terms, the level of the recounting of writing is "higher," the first-order diegesis to which all other diegeses are subordinate. Related to his cordoning off the category of narration, Genette tacitly assumes that the "real" events of the narrative are those *in* the *Mémoires*, that they form the diegesis, thus outposting the act of narrating as extradiegetic. Why is the depiction of writing at once separated off and considered external to the diegesis, and given a different status, despite its depiction of a series of events, even if those events are "literary"? Why is that "(literary) act" not considered an act?²³

23 For a slightly different perspective on this passage in Genette, see Bernard Duyfhuizen, *Narratives of Transmission* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1992), p. 31. Duyfhuizen aptly points out the double narrating structure here – Rencourt's and Des Grieux's acts of narrating – stressing what

Genette's terminology claims a certain precision that is not borne out in his casting of these strata of narrative. As should be clear from Genette's definitions, the diegesis is not a stable or definitive category, a clear and absolute structural level in a narrative, but relational and subject to interpretive judgment. From the standpoint of Des Grieux's narrative – the first-order narratorial action – de Rencourt's and Des Grieux's narrating are extradiegetic. On the other hand, from the standpoint of de Rencourt's actions – the authorial narrating – the other levels are intradiegetic or, in a phrase that I think might more accurately describe them, subdiegetic. I use this prefix because the relation is one of subordination, analogous to subordinate clauses in grammatical cases, rather than of containment. Subordination and superordination better describe the relational character of these narrative structures.

This is not to say that Genette's distinctions are meaningless; they work to sort out and make comprehensible the operations of narrative, its order, timing, and layering. However, it shows how his system is predicated on and governed by the traditional bias toward plot as normative rather than linguistic events, and toward separating those events according to a conceptual hierarchy, the "events" constituting the inside and the act of narrating as outside, as *ex-centric*, peripheral to the central action. This hierarchy marks the inside level as figurative and thus the real content or subject-matter of the fiction, and the act of narrating as literal, external to the fiction, whereas in actuality its status – as figure or fiction – can be no different from any other level.

This can also be seen in another pertinent example. Genette calls the intrusion of an extra- or metadiegetic narrator into the diegesis a *metalepsis*, and, specifically citing *Tristram Shandy*, claims that "Sterne pushed the thing so far as to entreat the intervention of the reader, whom he beseeched to close the door or help Mr. Shandy get back to his bed" (ND 234). This is an odd –

he calls the transmission process. His point of contention with Genette, though, centers on the question of who the readers are: as he shows, it is not the "actual public," but narratees in the text. While my argument here is sympathetic in large part to Duyfhuizen's calling attention to "narratives of transmission," I would resist the appellation "transmission" because I believe that it tacitly replicates the bias against seeing those narratives – the reflexive strata – as external, as transmitting media, that carry the internal content. It is precisely this opposition, as I try to show, that breaks down.

but symptomatic – statement, since Genette makes a very basic mistake in identification. It is of course Tristram who is narrating or doing the entreating, and besides that he is entreating what Gerald Prince calls a *narratee*, not an actual reader.²⁴ Even if it were an author “Sterne,” such a characterization would of course only be a persona, a fictional representation. Ditto the “reader,” which shows the magnetic pull toward the intuitive reconstruction of a physically present speaking situation, which is in turn an anthropomorphic displacement of the figural relations of narrative.

This slip on Genette’s part – an astute and indeed elegant critic – succinctly indicates the general turn toward separating off and literalizing the narrator and the act of narrating, as if Tristram were somehow separate from the narrative (consigned to “extra-” status), and as if his comments gloss an authorial intention. This is a predominant tendency in thinking about narrative: that “authors” give “higher” or more privileged commentary, whereas that level can logically be no more literal or less fictional than any other level.²⁵ Tristram does not provide an interpretive key; he merely provides another plot. This becomes even more apparent in Genette’s reply to his critics in *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, where he says: “Gil Blas is an extradiegetic narrator because, albeit fictitious, he is included (*as narrator*) in no diegesis but is on an exactly equal footing with the extradiegetic (real) public.”²⁶ This succinctly demonstrates the problem: I would say that the narrator is never on the same footing as the “real public.” While there is a certain sense in which the narrator is external (superordinate) to the story he tells, as the actual reader is not a part of it either, this grossly elides the signal differences between real

24 For this important distinction, see Gerald Prince, “Introduction to the Study of the Narratee,” in *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, ed. Jane Tompkins (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), pp. 7–25. See also Prince, *Narratology*, pp. 16–25. For more on this issue of the narratee, see chapter 2 below.

25 Thus I would disagree with Marie-Laure Ryan, who argues that “the fictional operator is not an ordinary illocutionary category on a par with such categories as question, command, and assertion, but a meta-speech act, an illocutionary modality ranging over speech acts” (*Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991], p. 67). While there are no doubt distinctions among narrative or illocutionary acts, I would resist the privileging of the fictional operator and its putative control over other acts.

26 *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 84

people and fictive characters. That narrator is only defined in the economy of the figuration of the narrative, whereas people, to my knowledge, are not.

Revising Genette, I find no ontological or definitive difference between narrative levels. The fiction or figural scaffolding of most novels is to posit that the characters have some sort of empirical reality, or that they are directly mimetic. In explicitly reflexive works – *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, although not a novel, is a convenient example, as is *Tristram Shandy* and the narration of writing there – the first level claims a kind of superior empirical reality or warrant that is highlighted by the announcement of contrast with the second level. The six characters in Pirandello's play are admittedly fictional, but they have no more or less substantial empirical validity than other characters. Rhetorically, they seem more realistic since they announce the fiction of the other characters. This is the logic of a con game, the con coming to your aid after the other con tries to make off with your wallet, thereby gaining trust. The relation is similar in *Tristram Shandy*; Tristram, the writer, points to the narrative existence of the Shandy family, of those characters that he depicts. *Tristram Shandy* is unusual in that it so frequently invokes the explicit topic of its fictional nature, although the layer that unmasks the fiction is not more real or less fictional than that which it unmasks, nor more or less a device or figurative move of narrative. As Linda Hutcheon puts it in *Narcissistic Narrative*, "no one fictional event is more or less real than any other," although to carry out the logic of that claim there can be no such category as metafiction, a distinct problem in a book subtitled "The Metafictional Paradox."²⁷

In a sense, then, the import of this is against mimesis, at least as it is usually invoked as a value in narrative. Mimesis is only a tropical level to establish a point of reference. But it is an empty value, a magician's box. It offers an absolute standard ("the world" – here, the events given in the purported diegesis) against which to measure levels of fictionality, but the world only presents a different diegetic level, a different narrative as a point of comparison (the level of the narrating, which is occluded or assumed to be transparent). As Roland Barthes observes, "[W]hat we call the 'real' (in the theory of the realistic text) is never more

27 See Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 91.

than a code of representation (of signification: it is never a code of execution: *the novelistic real is not operable*).²⁸ As the so-called story level is surreptitiously a function of narrative and reconstituted from it, the “real events” are only a reconstitution from the plot, not the other way around. Thus, mimesis is circularly defined and verified within and by the narrative, in its economy of figuration, by the positing of a hierarchy of narrative levels. To put it another way, novels are not about the world *per se*, but about the narrative mediations and relations, which project the world according to the protocols and codes of narrative.

II Reading

General order of the novel

Theodore Baird’s standard essay, “The Time Scheme of *Tristram Shandy* and a Source,” offers a corrective to the tendency of earlier criticism that sees no order in *Shandy*. Notably, it is the first article to establish authoritatively that there is a coherent historical time sequence in the novel: “There is a carefully planned and executed framework of calendar time in what is usually considered a chaos of whimsicalities and indecencies.”²⁹ Baird paraphrases the events of the novel in chronological order, from 1689 to 1750, and concludes that “far from being a wild and whimsical work, *Tristram Shandy* is an exactly executed historical novel.”³⁰ What Baird has reconstructed is the story or historical plot of the novel.

The thrust of Baird’s argument and those that follow his lead³¹ – to re-establish the coherence of *Tristram Shandy* – is well taken,

28 See “The Real, the Operable,” S/Z, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), pp. 81–2. See also “The Reality Effect,” *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), pp. 141–8.

29 “The Time Scheme of *Tristram Shandy* and a Source,” PMLA 51 (1939), 804.

30 *Ibid.*, 819.

31 See Ian Watt, Introduction to *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), pp. vii–xlvii; Samuel L. Macey, “The Linear and Circular Time Schemes in Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*,” *Notes and Queries* 36 (1989), 477–79; Elizabeth Livingston Davidson, “Toward an Integrated Chronology of *Tristram Shandy*,” *English Language Notes* 29.4 (1992), 48–56; and Ron Jenkins, “Mathematical Topology.” Watt builds on Baird’s time-scheme, extending it to 1767, as I do below. Macey offers a further refinement of Baird’s time-scheme, suggesting that the novel ends where it begins – in 1718 – and therefore is circular. Davidson draws an “integrated progressive chronology,” including historical events and dates of authorship. Jenkins elaborates the Baird–Watt chain of chronology (16–18).

certifying it as a fit and even skilled narrative, in part to give it an entry card into the novel canon, to legitimate it as more than a curiosity, as a correct and proper narrative in the official history of the novel.³² However, it is limited in two ways. First, "the framework of calendar time" should not be confused with the plot of the novel as it stands. Baird imposes the order of chronological time to smooth out the narrative, which otherwise demonstrates a disordered chronology, in effect sanitizing *Shandy* for the novelistic tradition by eliding precisely the distinctive defamiliarizing impulse of the novel. Ironically enough, the critical reception seems to have come full circle over this question of order versus disorder. Recent criticism like Hillis Miller's "Narrative Middles" highlights the non-linearity of the novel, and Elizabeth Harries' "Sterne's Novels" outlines four types of fragmentation, taking the disorderly quality of *Shandy* as a virtue, whereas in earlier criticism it was taken as a defect to be corrected by Baird *et al.*³³ Second, Baird entirely ignores the time of narration, dated from 1759 to 1766. Again, this is not a question of Baird's failure, but a function of the normal parameters of novel criticism to take the "events" as separate from the events of narrating and the plot of a narrator's actions as somehow outside or beyond the narrative.

To look more closely and comprehensively at the plot(s) of *Tristram Shandy*, I will trace their respective courses by using the following notational system, in part drawing on the one that Genette uses in *Narrative Discourse*. *Tristram Shandy* can be roughly divided into five narrative blocs, in chronological order: the first (A) from about 1695 to 1697, when Toby was at Namur and was wounded, and came to stay with his brother Walter; the second (B) occurs primarily around 1713, and culminates in Toby's adventures with the widow Wadman; the third (C) centers on 1718, when the autobiographical narrative properly begins, and is marked by Tristram's birth on November 5, 1718, or more

32 Recall that the history of the novel, roughly as it now stands, was critically constituted during this period, most intractably in Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957).

33 See Miller, "Narrative Middles"; Harries, "Sterne's Novels"; and also Dennis L. Seager, *Stories within Stories: An Ecosystemic Theory of Metadiegetic Narrative* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991). Seager argues that *Shandy* does not follow a "lineal" plot and is "non-teleological"; however, despite his claim that it is "a narrative about narrating," he ignores (the very linear narrative of) Tristram's narration of the writing.

exactly by his begetting in March 1718, and extends to the slam of the window sash; the fourth (D) occurs for the most part in 1741, and accounts for Tristram's European tour, which takes up the seventh book; the fifth (E) – this is the one left out by Baird and most other critics – occurs from 1759 to 1766 and incorporates the account of Tristram's narration. The rudimentary sequence – A–B–C–D–E – obviously gives the lineaments of the normal historical-sequential plot, which is usually how we expect a narrative to proceed. Even analeptic narratives, those that move from a present moment backwards, are consecutively ordered after the first analeptic turn (as indicated by the sequence E–A–B–C–D, which more accurately represents the chrono-diegetic structure of narratives from *Tom Jones* to the film *DOA*). However, the sequence in *Tristram Shandy* is not nearly so straightforward.

To sketch a general outline, the plot goes something like this: volume I takes place primarily at the time of Tristram's birth and conception, which could be further specified as C and C₁ (C being November 1718 and C₁ March 1718). The bulk of the first volume is taken up by his father's and uncle Toby's conversation and the events downstairs, and sometimes spans back to Toby's time at Namur and his wound, and also to Mrs. Shandy's marriage settlement. I will mark these as A and A₁. These events occur under the general auspices of Tristram's narration, marked by the first-person pronoun ("I wish . . ."), and by commentary, interjection, and explanation. We find out where he gets the story about his conception ("To my uncle Toby Shandy do I stand indebted for the preceding anecdote . . . " in chapter 3) – Tristram provides a self-validating narrative source³⁴ – and he addresses his readers about his narrating (chapter 4, etc.). He even dates his own narrating (March 9, 1759, March 26, 1759).³⁵ In many ways, the text is striated with these reflexive registers of the *question* of narrative and with the depiction of the events of the narrating.

In terms of narrative layering, the event bloc concerned with the

34 The question of the attribution of narrative sources and origins I discuss more fully in chapter 2.

35 Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, ed. James Aiken Work (New York: Odyssey, 1940), pp. 44, 64. Hereafter cited parenthetically, with page references in the text and abbreviated as TS. For a more exact scholarly reproduction of the text, see Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman: The Text*, vols. I–II, ed. Melvyn New and Joan New (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1978).

depiction of the narrating (temporally, if not topically) circumscribes the other event levels, which are subordinate to that (posterior) level. The text is temporally anchored by it and the other plots return to it. This fifth level, and its relationship to the other levels, I will represent E (C, C₁ (A, A₁)). This is a much-reduced representation – a lot more goes on – but it should prove useful in providing a rudimentary description of the novel.³⁶ For the moment, I will bracket the many references to the plot of Tristram's narration since they are so frequent, first attending to the various subplots in each volume.

The second volume starts with narrative "intrusions" (E), but, again, bracketing that layer, Tristram describes Toby at Namur (about maps, his cure, his charge, etc. [A, B]), although the primary focus is still the bloc of events at the time of Tristram's birth (C) and what the women and Slop are doing. The third volume stays closer to home, and is mostly concerned with Obadiah's knots, the complications of the birth, the use of forceps, and the question of Tristram's nose (C). There are also references to Flanders (A), and Wadman (B), as well as substantial intrusions of the preface and the digression on noses. The fourth volume records more of the digression (Slawkenbergius – C, in that it is told by Tristram's father, so I will mark it C_d to signify the special nature of digressions, mentioned above), and Mr. Shandy's recovery, and it harks back to Bobby's death (B₁). There are memorable narratorial comments about the proposed chapters on sleep, buttonholes, and the question of chapters. Volume v recounts Tristram's mother's overhearing his father, the question of Tristapaedia, and the slammed sash (C, or since it is beyond his birth, C₁ for the time of the slammed sash and Tristram's early life). Volume vi digresses on LeFever (C_d), recounts Slop and Susannah (C), Tristram's breeches (C₂), and refers to Toby's land and campaigns, Utrecht (A) and the widow Wadman (B). The seventh volume primarily tells of the French tour through Paris, Lyons, etc. (D), and digresses on Andouilletts (D_d). Volume viii fills in details about Toby with the widow Wadman (B), and nine, in uncharacteristically continuous fashion, finishes with Toby's siege and Trim's assistance (B). Overall, then, the general shape of the plot might be summarized by the following sequence: E (C (C₁,

³⁶ A more exact if cumbersome representation would look like this: (chap. 1) E-(C₁-E)-E-C- (chap. 2) E_d-homunculus- (chap. 3) E- C- C₁- *ad infinitum*.

A, A₁)–C (A, B)–C (A, B)–C (B, C_d)–C₂–C (C₂, A, B)–D (D_d)–B–B), factoring out the account of narrative composition. To reduce it further, it might be given by the following: E (C–C–C–C₂–C–D–B–B).

As this scheme shows, the overall trajectory of the novel is surprisingly staid and immobile. In very broad terms, the normal plot centers on the time of Tristram's birth, with an extended analeptic turn at the close, filling in Toby's story. This gives the effect of a long and rambling conversation, that meanders through recollections of past events, and then returns to the present situation, but is very much grounded by that present situation. As Ruth Perry points out, "although *Tristram Shandy* is ostensibly about birth and death, sexuality and generation . . . the narrative spotlight comes to rest most often and most continually upon men alone, talking."³⁷ For Perry, this bespeaks the phallocentrism of the novel, and she finally comes to castigate its inherent gender division – the men downstairs talking while the women are doing the real work and not represented. While there is no doubt some truth to this observation, the novel hardly presents such a portrait without irony or satire. To amplify it, I would say that the scene of conversation occurs, in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's phrase, between men, their various disquisitions exchanged within a bonded and separate male world, coding the narrative activity as homosocial. In this sense *Tristram Shandy* is a decidedly homosocial novel.³⁸

Overall, then, the locus of the novel is the drawing-room where Mr. Shandy and uncle Toby's conversation takes place. The events circulate from that location, but do not move very much from it.³⁹ Part of the reason for the discomfort the plot induces is precisely this *static* quality. In this sense, *Tristram Shandy* transgresses novelistic convention and expectation not only because it does not progress or because it proceeds in a disorderly manner, but because it is ateleological.⁴⁰ It does not move to a climax or end, to a

37 Ruth Perry, "Words for Sex: The Verbal-Sexual Continuum in *Tristram Shandy*," *Studies in the Novel* 20 (1988), 39.

38 See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

39 Cf. Macey, "Linear and Circular Time Schemes," on the circular quality of the plot.

40 On the question of closure, see Wayne C. Booth's "Did Sterne Complete *Tristram Shandy*?" *Modern Philology* 48 (1951), 172–83. Patricia Waugh notes *Tristram Shandy*'s "withholding of the final resolution, fundamental to all narrative" (*Metafiction*, p. 70). For Waugh this resistance to closure is a key

final resolution of the action, thereby (dramatically) changing the state of affairs depicted in the novel or the condition of the protagonist. Considered in this way, in classic Aristotelian terms, it is a poor, or at least atypical, novelistic plot.

Narrative instance

This trace-outline of the plot makes some sense of the novel in broad terms, as if in wide focus. However, now I would like to look at it in closer focus. One might call this the micro-plot, as distinct from the macro-plot. To do this, I will schematize a short passage, from volume I, chapter 21 (I, 21), when Tristram's father asks, "I wonder what's all that noise" (TS 63), to II, 6, which returns to his father's, "What can they be doing," and Toby's knocking the ashes off his pipe. This is an especially convenient passage to look at since, chronologically, there is a negligible separation between the times of the events. They are nearly simultaneous, occurring between a smoke of Toby's pipe. The sequence of this action is not only broken, though, but a multitude of things happen in between.

The passage begins within the context of the central scene, of Tristram's birth, in November 1718 (C), but after two paragraphs the narrator interrupts, "for I write in such a hurry," and not only calls attention to his writing but gives the exact date (March 26, 1759), time (between 9.0 and 10.0 a.m.), and weather ("very rainy"). The action clearly and explicitly centers on the time of the writing (E), which in its specificity and elaboration is of course unusual, particularly in light of modernist protocols of narrative, whereby the authorial persona should be invisible,⁴¹ and raises

attribute of metafiction, whereas it seems to me that closure is a relative and variable category, and its seeming lack not necessarily a distinctive attribute of metafiction. For a more recuperative reading of the ending, see Mark Loveridge, "Stories of Cocks and Bulls: The Ending of *Tristram Shandy*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 5.1 (1992), 35–54.

- 41 Recall Stephen Dedalus' famous dictum in *Portrait of the Artist*, "The artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails" (James Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ed. R. B. Kershner [Boston: Bedford Books, 1993], p. 187), and before him, Flaubert's, "An author in his book must be like God in the universe, present everywhere and visible nowhere" (Letter to Louise Colet, Dec. 9, 1852, *The Letters of Gustave Flaubert 1830–1857*, trans. and ed. Francis Steegmuller [Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1980], p. 173). Intrusive narrators signal a different (narrative) cosmology.

questions about and calls attention to the narrational quality of the narrative (a "self-conscious" narrative, in Robert Alter's phrase). This ironic and thematically reflexive move is by no means simple, as I have argued earlier, since the narrator's statements are not necessarily statements of authorial intention or privileged discourse, and are very much a part of the narrative itself and its fictional construction. In other words, it does not break out of the circuit of narrative, of narrative figuration, as a kind of literal overlay or interpretive out-take, but complicates the layering of that narrative text. However, and typically for *Shandy*, it does transgress normal novelistic expectation.

The section continues with a patently metaleptic observation by the narrator: "But I forget my uncle Toby, whom all this while we have left knocking the ashes out of his tobacco pipe" (still E [TS 65]). Further, the narrator digresses about Toby and aunt Dinah, while addressing his "Madam," which raises a complex effect (of digression, d, but also to the past, A and B₂). However, since it is a direct address of the narrator ("My father, as I told you," "You will imagine, Madam"), it occurs in the present of the narration (E). There is also a reference to Namur and Toby's wound (A [TS 67]), to Lillibullero, and to the Shandean system (B₂). The next chapter (22) is a digression about the digressive–progressive nature of his work, leaving the subject of Toby ("I was just going to have given you the great outlines of my uncle Toby's whimsical character" [TS 72]) and speaks directly about the (problem of) narrative ("This is vile work" [TS 73]) (E).

Chapter 23 discusses the question of drawing a man's character (E), again a topically reflexive comment about narrative itself; chapter 24 begins about hobby horses (E_d), and goes on to a fairly straightforward description of Toby's wound and confinement (A, A₁). Volume II starts with narrative action ("I have begun a new book . . ." [TS 81]), but is interspersed with an account of Toby (A₁). Chapter 2 is most concerned with critics' questioning ("So, Sir Critick . . ." [TS 85]) (E). Chapter 3 is mostly about Toby's map and projectiles and Namur (A₁), and chapter 4 returns primarily to the discussion of narration (E) ("I would not give a groat for that man's knowledge in pencraft . . ." "Writers of my stamp . . ." [TS 91]), although it also discusses Toby's cure (A₁). It ends with this proleptic passage: "'Tis the subject of the next chapter to set forth what that cause and crotchet was. I own, when that's

done, 'twill be time to return back to the parlour fire-side, where we left my uncle Toby in the middle of his sentence" (E [TS 92]). In short, it repeatedly refers to the theme or topic of narrative and its linguistic character, almost to an absurd degree, rather than the "actions" of the characters.

Chapter 5 talks more of Toby and Trim and their hobby-horsical adventures (A₁). There, Trim's suggestion to build a bastion is drawn in a fairly descriptive style, although the section begins and ends with the narrator's comments which again transgress the expectation of fiction, or rather the expectation of a firm division between levels of fiction ("At present the scene must drop, and change for the parlour fireside" [TS 99]). And, as promised, chapter 6 returns to the scene in the parlour (" – what can they be doing, brother? said my father . . .") and the snapping of the pipe. After these many forays, it returns to the presumed diegetic level of the novel, the actions of Toby and Walter Shandy and young Tristram (C).

To make sense of these twists, turns, and diversions, here is a shorthand summary: C–E (–E–E_d–A–B₂–E–A–B₂)–E–E_d–E–(A) A₁–E (–A₁)–E–A₁–E (–A₁)–A₁ (–E)–C (–E). As this sequence shows, there is no (chrono-) linear development of the plot of Tristram's autobiography. The narrative of Tristram's birth is broken, but what interrupts is not continuous or sequential. It shuttles back and forth, generally from the narrator's comments and accounts of what he is doing (E) to Toby's and other past events (A), striking certain nodal points – the narrative of narrative, or the men talking downstairs – only to move to other plot nodes. Hillis Miller's argument for the deconstruction of linear plot is borne out here, in the micro-plot, in this constant shuttling action. Not only is it out of sequence, but it rarely repeats or sustains an individual plot-strand. In Genette's terms, the narrative is extraordinarily anachronic and metaleptic. It jumps around, shuttling from time to time, event to event, level to level, and plot to plot.

Typically, most traditional novels (e.g., *Tom Jones*) demonstrate a stable and consistent plot line that is rarely broken, except by an occasional analepsis to give background. Even if there is a multiplicity of plots – related to my argument in chapter 2, *Joseph Andrews* is comprised of the plot of the narrator's activity and of the characters' storytelling, as well as of Joseph's journey – the various plots are predictably concordant and parallel. Even the

authorial comment is fairly regular in a narrative like *Joseph Andrews*, occurring at the start of each book and moving progressively through the novel, parallel to Joseph's story. *Tristram Shandy* is unusual in its radical asymmetry, in its frequent shifts in time and level, moving backwards and forwards, without sustaining a temporal ground or consistent diegetic location.

Contrary to the macro-plot, then, locally *Tristram Shandy* is anything but static. Why it appears static from a distance, in an overall schematization, derives from an effect similar to watching a rapidly vibrating object, that moves to a blur and looks as if it were still. In slow motion and close focus, the case is much different. To expand my former description, *Tristram Shandy* locally demonstrates a *shuttling* plot structure. While the depiction of narrative composition is fairly continuous, the remainder of the plot strands are frayed, looped, and irregularly knotted, stamping the overall product irregular.

Narrative of narrative

Thus far, I have focused primarily on what Baird and other critics usually consider the events of the novel – the events of Tristram's birth and upbringing, the background of the Shandy family (particularly uncle Toby), and so on – bracketing the narrative bloc or plot level that has as its subject Tristram's narrating. To the extent that the narrator so often interrupts and explicitly tells what he is doing, even giving the date he is writing, *Tristram Shandy* recounts very literally a present-tense narrative of narrative. To sketch out the lineaments of this level of the narrative, in I, 18 Tristram testifies, "I am now writing this book for the edification of the world – which is March 9, 1759" (TS 44). In I, 21, mentioned above, he says he is writing between 9.0 and 10.0 in the morning of a rainy day, March 26, 1759 (TS 64). In IV, 13, in a famous passage that calls attention to the difference between narrative and real time, he tells that he is a year older but has only "got . . . almost into the middle of my fourth volume and no farther than to my first day's life . . ." (TS 286). In V, 17, he names the day ("and I am this day [August the 10th, 1761]" [TS 376]). In VII, 1, he speaks of his lodgings and his goal to write two volumes a year. Finally, in the last dated reference, in IX, 1, he tells how he is rather informally dressed: "And here am I sitting, this 12th day of

August 1766, in a purple jerkin and yellow pair of slippers, without either wig or cap on . . ." (TS 600).

These references provide a sparse but explicit timeline for the literal plot level of the writing, reflexively representing the performance of narrating. Despite the disorder – their shuttling, jagged motion, or their nodal stasis – of the subdiegeses, and counter to the expectations that they foster, the narrative of the act of narrating is exactly ordered and proceeds consistently, depicting the simultaneous narrative of the recording of the narrative. As Wayne Booth observes, *Tristram Shandy* effects formal coherence in its "dramatic presentation of the act of writing."⁴² For Booth, the "authorial" commentary is not disruptive but points to the rhetorical and ethical position of the author; in contrast, I would stress that it points to the problematic of narrativity rather than an author or moral concerns. In this light, the novel performs a kind of tautological or self-reflexive teleology: that of completing the autobiography, the end being the depiction of a stop in the the simultaneous narrating record. It is over when it says it is over, or rather when it says no more. Thus, contrary to its apparent open-endedness, *Tristram's* act of narrating provides a closure, projecting a kind of tiredness or narratorial exhaustion – it cannot, or refuses, to go on.

This is not merely a secret or barely perceptible plot. Moreover, there are numerous descriptions of and comments on the nature of narrative, some of which I have noted above, that traverse the narrative. The novel is permeated with commentary on strategies and devices of narrative – about characters or chapters – and it constantly spins out metaphors for narrative – as progressive movement, as a trip or excursion, as a line or thread, as an attack, as machine, as debt, and, significantly for our purposes, as differing from real time (TS 103, 286, 322, 510, etc.). In fact, *Tristram Shandy* demonstrates a kind of narrative metaphorrhea, and part of its humor derives from this frequent intoning of figures for narrative. Indeed, the text is rife with a running monologue of narratorial activity, yielding a constant plot of narrating in the seemingly omnipresent discussion of narrative, as well as in the record of the writing. As evidenced by these references, the events of the most temporally immediate and in many ways most topi-

42 See Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 221–40.

cally dominant plot of *Tristram Shandy* are not those of Tristram's life and adventures, but of narrative figuration.

Aside from this plot stratum – the explicit narrative of narrative – the performative or reflexive function is likewise inscribed in the normal plot of Toby's and Mr. Shandy's ramblings, as they frequently digress to tell a wide variety of stories, of army experiences, past events, Slawkenbergius, sermons, and so forth. I discuss this internal or subdiegetic storytelling function more fully in the next chapter, in particular to explain the function and position of the interpolated tales in *Joseph Andrews*, but suffice it to say for now that they also reflexively signal the complication and problematic of narrative performance, the recession of the *mise en abyme* of narrative self-figuring. In all these various ways, then, *Tristram Shandy* is striated with and thematizes the act of narrative: narrating becomes the emblematic "action" of the novel.

My point here is not to pull the rabbit out of the proverbial hat and claim that *Tristram Shandy* is henceforth easy to read, but to underscore that current critical categories of narrative fail to account for the reflexive complication of narrative, for the replicative structure of a *mise en abyme* rather than the straight sequence of linear plot. To return to Genette's formalization of plot, his structural schema is comprehensive and illuminating when applied to a simple "diegetic" level, but it does not adequately account for this hinge of narrative reflexivity, when narrative represents, figures, exposes, and thematizes itself. As should be clear from the example of *Tristram Shandy*, the "extradiegetic" level – the narrating – is a significant and salient level of action of narrative. In general, reflexive features, such as a narrator's comments, so-called narrative intrusions, frames, embedded stories, etc., foreground the question or issue of narration. By making these features so conspicuous and so prominent, *Tristram Shandy* maximally thematizes the performance of narrative. *Tristram Shandy* gives overt signals of its status as an allegory of narrative, even if those signals are difficult to decipher, and even if they have been definitionally obscured by most conventional theories of narrative.

Narrative improper

(*Joseph Andrews*)

I Narrative proper

Straight plot

Compared to the narrative imbroglio of *Tristram Shandy*, *Joseph Andrews* appears to be a manifestly *straight* narrative. As its full title suggests – *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews . . .* – it depicts the actions, adventures, misadventures, trials, tribulations, and victories of Joseph, as well as of Adams and Fanny, that occur for the most part strung along the arc of his journey. The narrative is straight not only content-wise, in ascribing novelistic events like the dog fight or the various comic scenes of seduction, but in several interrelated ways. Temporally, the plot of Joseph’s adventures is readily decipherable and orderly, generally adhering to a consistent, progressive historical chronology. Spatially or geographically, the plot follows a natural novelistic form, from an initial remove from “home,” through a series of wanderings, finally culminating in the plot correction of a return.

Further, the plot records a social success story, whereby Joseph goes from footboy to propertied gentleman, invoking the standard narrative trajectory of “making it,” of attaining wealth and social position. This is also inscribed as a return of sorts – Joseph claiming his birthright – but the plot line is a straight one, the vertical teleology of a social climb. In other words, the plot is straight both formally and thematically. This social ascent overlaps with a relatively straight plot of discovery of identity; Joseph discovers his true name, thus enabling the plot machinations of his social ascent, his garnering social position and wealth. Calling the novel *Joseph Andrews* is a kind of interpretive trojan horse, to set up the surprise and the reversal of the ending, the discovery of

his name functioning as a naturalized *deus ex machina* to induce closure of the novel. This plot of naming, duplicated peripherally for Fanny and the same device as used in *Tom Jones*, parallels the classic plot crux of *Oedipus Rex*, and emblemizes the development of character – the telos of finding one's correct name and therefore full identity – that presumably provides an accomplished plot, replete with not only a dramatic reversal but anagoresis or recognition. Whether or not Joseph's character actually changes – a question I will address shortly – the changing of his name metonymically stands as a signal of the teleological progress of character.

These trajectories also interweave with the classic novelistic topos of a journey, literally and metaphorically, to marriage. Reductively, *Joseph Andrews* draws out the familiar plot of poor boy makes good and gets the girl, an archetypal species of comedy, in classical terms, whereby everything turns out well in the end – not only for the particular characters, but social order is reaffirmed under the auspices of the normative disciplining of sexuality and desire. This resoundingly straight marriage plot – straight not just in terms of its attribution of heterosexuality, which, as the novel shows us, is anything but regularized or singular, but of the prescription of a legitimate (socially, morally, and legally) heterosexuality in a presumably fertile male–female partnership¹ – taps a common motif from Shakespeare's comedies and before through Jane Austen and the nineteenth-century bourgeois novel, up to Horatio Alger and Hollywood. This narrative topos unapologetically confirms the ideological lesson of the virtue of the intersection of secure wealth and secured sexuality.

Finally, amidst this cluster of standard plot motifs, the narrator's discourse, while "intrusive" upon the erstwhile "events" of the novel, proceeds in a manifestly straight and regular pattern. Each book opens punctually with the narrator's prelude to the

1 I make this qualification since heterosexuality is frequently seen as the polar opposite of homosexuality; it seems to me a significant insight of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, notably in "Tales of the Avunculate: The Importance of Being Earnest" (*Tendencies* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993], pp. 52–72), that heterosexuality is not a stable and definitive category, but variable and floating. In "A Certain Absence: *Joseph Andrews* as Affirmation of Heterosexuality," Carl Kropf argues that the novel celebrates heterosexuality in contrast to homosexuality (*Studies in the Novel* 20.1 [1988], 20). While Kropf is persuasive, his notion of heterosexuality remains a distinctly univocal one.

action, and the narratorial comments seem subservient to the narrative, akin to a reporter's note-taking, prompting the plot and metering its pacing – unlike *Tristram Shandy*, where the narrator's comments and interjections not only obscure the plot but raise explicit questions of the status of narrative and its normative temporal progress. The narrator's comments do not seem to tamper with the narrative, but work as polite and helpful rhetorical comments to usher "our" characters on their paths.

In the most basic of narratological terms, Tzvetan Todorov describes plot on the linguistic model of a proposition. As Todorov puts it in "The Grammar of Narrative," "To study the structure of a narrative's plot, we must first present this plot in the form of a summary, in which each distinct action of the story has a corresponding proposition."² Thus, one can decipher the condensed form of a narrative in terms of the dynamic of subject and predicate or agent and action. Todorov finds that the minimal unit of action "consists in the passage from one equilibrium to another,"³ making more precise the traditional Aristotelian definition of plot as a change in position. The general sequence of most narratives goes like this: a start in equilibrium or a stable state (this he defines as an adjective), a movement to disequilibrium (taking the syntactic function of a verb), and a resolution in a restored equilibrium. (In essence, this presents a technical refinement of the Aristotelian prescription of beginning, middle, and end.) Equilibrium can be re-established in two ways: a return to the initial equilibrium after the testing of the plot, whereby the initial order of things is confirmed; and the establishment of a new equilibrium, whereby the test of the plot causes the order of things to be renegotiated.⁴ To illustrate this distinction Todorov uses the example of Peronella, an unfaithful wife, in the *Decameron*; Peronella evades punishment, which might at first seem to indicate the maintenance of the initial equilibrium. However, Todorov points out that her punish-

2 Tzvetan Todorov, "The Grammar of Narrative," in *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 110. On the centrality of plot, see "Structural Analysis of Narrative," trans. Arnold Weinstein, *Novel* 3.1 (1969), 72. See also *Introduction to Poetics*, trans. Richard Howard (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), pp. 48–53.

3 Todorov, "Grammar of Narrative," p. 111. See also *Introduction*, p. 51.

4 This sequential scheme is not a hard-and-fast law; it can be truncated, for instance in plots that end in disequilibrium, or conversely in plots that begin *in media res*, in the midst of disequilibrium. See Todorov, "Grammar of Narrative," p. 118.

ment would function to return to and repeat the initial order, whereas her evading punishment renegotiates that order such that she can operate according to a new law. Conversion likewise offers a plot form that changes an initial state of affairs.

By these terms, one could define the course – the narrative proposition – of *Joseph Andrews* as one from equilibrium (Joseph – in the syntactical place of predicate of the narrative – begins as a virtuous, promising, and favored young man in the Booby household, intended to Fanny), to disequilibrium (the crisis[es] – the predicate – when Joseph is cast out and makes a difficult and trouble-filled journey through a not always generous countryside, and nearly loses Fanny), finally to the equilibrium of the denouement (when Joseph and Fanny return and discover the facts about their births and are about to be married). While the positions of Joseph and Fanny change precipitously, this new equilibrium reconfirms the social order via the discipline of marriage. Further, since Joseph and Fanny recover their birthrights, the plot performs and is coded as a restoration rather than a conversion. In other words, the plot works to uncover an equilibrium that had been there all along, so in a sense it is an intensely conservative trajectory.

Blocked plot

Locally, the plot seems to proceed according to a steady if not occasionally frantic stream of activity, periodic crises incited by class tension, sex and near-scandal, money troubles, attempted rapes, hunting, fights – all the elements of an action movie or a television show like *Melrose Place*, one would have thought. The plot thus appears to be overwhelmingly active (in Todorov's grammatical taxonomy shunning the static state of an adjective), constantly propelled into disequilibrium (the propositional place of a verb). However, rather than advancing the plot or participating in a dramatic arc, the structure of these actions is iterative and redundant. The narrative is defined and driven by a *deferral* of Joseph's and Fanny's joining and generally by a constant deferral of equilibrium, not a propulsive movement from one state to another. Not to put too fine a point on it, the story would be much shorter and have direct dramatic force if Joseph could have married Fanny immediately, if Adams had been more amenable, if

Booby had behaved more as a benefactor, or if Joseph had been awake during Wilson's story. In Aristotelian terms, the plot is taken up in episodic and unnecessary acts that delay closure. In short, the plot is driven by an iterative series of *obstacles*, not of disequilibrium, but preventing or putting off equilibrium.

There are basically three types of obstacle that occur throughout. First, the majority of the obstacles are predicated on what I could call tests of virtue, for both Joseph and Fanny. These are gender-coded: Joseph generally undergoes tests of seduction, whereas Fanny is subjected to tests of attack. The range of Joseph's actions centers for the most part on these tests and thus exhibits a relatively simple drawing of his character; the case is much different in *Tom Jones*, where Tom is tested not only by women but by money, sibling rivalry, and a generally more complex set of temptations. Book I of *Joseph Andrews* is primarily structured by tests of Joseph. After the summary movement – as Gérard Genette defines them, those intermediary moments in a narrative that are largely expository, mediating the pacing between events, scenes, or dialogue⁵ – of the opening chapters (2–4), which give us background information about Joseph, Adams, their characters (establishing Joseph's virtue) and their world, Joseph goes through a series of tests. Joseph seemingly cannot get away from and inadvertently walks into them. First, Lady Booby tries to seduce him twice (I, 5 and I, 8) (to which he almost succumbs as he writes to his sister Pamela, in I, 10, “for I had once almost forgotten every word Parson Adams had ever said to me”⁶); next, Slipslop corners him (I, 6); and again, Betty is enamored of him (I, 18).

After that, in Book II the plot shifts to a focus on Fanny, although Fanny's position is frequently reduced to that of a plot device to spur Joseph and Adams to action. Joseph and Adams come across her as she has been dragged into the bushes and ravished (II, 9), and Book III pivots on the Squire's plan to kidnap her, the kidnapping (III, 9), and the rescue. Later, Fanny is again detained by a gentleman and then attacked by his servant (IV, 7) and she is fondled by Didapper (IV, 11). She is not an active

5 Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), pp. 94ff.

6 Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews, with Shamela and Related Writings*, ed. Homer Goldberg (New York: Norton, 1987), p. 37. Hereafter all references will be placed parenthetically in the text and identified by the abbreviation JA. General references will be cited by noting book and chapter numbers (e. g., I, 6).

character, but a narrative register of the responses of male characters; in a manner of speaking, she is the token or catalyst of the narratively inscribed economy of men, and part of the action is propelled by their traffic and exchange of her.⁷

The second type of obstacle I would distinguish is that of comic misunderstanding and misintention, which for the most part circulate around Adams. Through their journey in Books II and III, Adams, Joseph, and Fanny end up in difficult situations frequently through Adams' comic misadventures – talking and annoying Trulliber (II, 14), forgetting his horse in distraction (II, 7), not having money (II, 15), and so on. They are usually extricated from these misadventures by accident, by a *deus ex machina* plot device, such as a stranger appearing, finding money, and so forth. These events, interspersed throughout the novel, provide obvious segments of comic relief from its otherwise quasi-moral tenor, as well as elongating the plateau of delay impeding their return.

The third set of obstacles encompasses those of societal norms and expectations, largely dominating Book IV. While the intersecting arcs of Joseph's and Fanny's journeys come together, at least geographically, and thus signal an expectation of resolution, and the obstacles that prevent them from returning to Booby Hall and environs end, this section presents a further plot plateau blocking closure. The obstacles here differ from the previous tests of seduction and earlier machinations of the journey-plot, which seem more individual and circumstantial, and are structured around the social machinations that prevent Fanny and Joseph's marriage (Booby coercing Adams, Adams' wife's antagonism, Pamela's and Sir Booby's reservations, and finally the fortuitous revelation of Fanny's birth). In terms of the consistency of the plot, Book IV seems to diverge from the adventures of a road novel, since the characters stay put in a relatively static tableau; it portrays the force of societal normativity and the articulation of Joseph and Fanny within the social totality. In a certain sense, Book IV draws a fuller characterization of Joseph and Fanny, since we see them tested and respond together, as a united couple, their virtue

7 The standard discussion of the economy in women is Gayle Rubin's "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), pp. 157–210. See also Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

underscored by a willingness to live together platonically after the revelation of Fanny's birth (IV, 12). However, these obstacles affirm not only virtuousness but "acceptable" social relations; this section functions to dispel the threat to social stasis by reining in desire and sexuality – thinking particularly of the scenes of bed-swapping and sexual confusion in chapter 14, which culminates the depiction of the unruliness of sexuality that runs through the novel – by incorporating it in "legitimate" bounds and therefore naturalizing an otherwise artificial and arbitrary law. Further, this book represents a profoundly ideological resolution in its remediation of class relations, and the threat of class transgression, through the conscription and governance of sexuality not only in marriage, but in stipulating a "suitable" marriage.⁸

Passive plot

The plot of *Joseph Andrews* is surprisingly passive, in the sense that Joseph and Fanny are more often acted upon, at the behest of circumstance, than active. Joseph is a remarkably inactive character in that obstacles are encountered by and surround him, impeding his course; the action is not Joseph's imposing his will on the world, but the reverse. One might say that circumstance is the active element in the plot of the novel, not the characters' actions. Rather than taking the form of a movement from equilibrium to disequilibrium and back again, the plot is distributed along an iterative sequence of impediments to equilibrium that essentially repeat one basic structure: an obstacle to overcome. The events constantly vary, but they do not proceed according to a necessary progression toward a telos, as would befit a more correctly formed Aristotelian plot; they are arbitrary, episodic, and in a sense interminable – one could add (or subtract) further scenes and episodes of misadventure without changing the shape of the plot.⁹

8 As Brian McCrea puts it, sexual and class conventions are "rehabilitated" ("Had Joseph Not Withheld Him': The Portrayal of the Social Elite in *Joseph Andrews*," in *Man, God, and Nature in the Enlightenment*, ed. Mell, Braun, and Palmer [East Lansing: Colleagues Press, 1988], pp. 123–8).

9 Robert Alter argues that the novel exhibits a balanced, architectonic pattern, despite some of the actions being episodic (*Fielding and the Nature of the Novel* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968], pp. 133–7). While the return structure suggests a balance, I believe that the iterative obstacle structure governs the plot; if there is a progression, I would argue, it is in the plot of character of the narrator.

This plot structure differs from that of *Tristram Shandy*, where the time of the events is what seems to shift unrelentingly, amidst a fairly steady stock of events. In *Joseph Andrews*, time is relatively stable and constant, but the events oscillate (albeit in a regular pattern).

Although his circumstances change constantly, Joseph's character does not discernibly change through the course of the novel. In fact, the redundant obstacle structure that forms the plot is predicated precisely on Joseph's virtue not giving way, on his steadfastness or, in a less morally charged register, his inflexibility. At the beginning of the novel, it is crucially established that Joseph is virtuous (for example, when he goes to London and is exposed to the vices of the City, Joseph is so pristine that he does not game, swear or drink [II, 4] – a portrait that differs strikingly from that of Tom Jones), to build the expectation that he will resist later temptations. A substantial line of the critical conversation on Fielding – say, Battestin's *The Moral Basis of Fielding's Art* or Sacks' *Fiction and the Shape of Belief* – has stressed the moral theme in the novels,¹⁰ but the morality implied in *Joseph Andrews* is one of negation and thoughtless denial – just saying no – not affirmation. Joseph exhibits little choice, but functions as a passive moral machine, responding by rote to forces around him. In this respect, *Joseph Andrews* differs markedly from *Tom Jones*, since Tom does succumb to temptation (sleeping with Molly and Lady Bellaston), causing him almost to lose Sophia, so that Tom actively prompts his course of action.

In his well-known essay, "The Concept of Plot and the Plot of *Tom Jones*," R. S. Crane revises and expands Aristotle's dicta for plot and distinguishes three basic types that occur in the novel: plots of action (Aristotle's focus, exemplified by *Oedipus* and *The Brothers Karamazov*), plots of character (James' *Portrait of a Lady*), and plots of thought (*Marius the Epicurean*, and one might add

10 Martin C. Battestin, *The Moral Basis of Fielding's Art: A Study of Joseph Andrews* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1959); Sheldon Sacks, *Fiction and the Shape of Belief: A Study of Henry Fielding with Glances at Swift, Johnson, and Richardson* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964). See also Morris Golden, *Fielding's Moral Psychology* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1966). This moral trend continues up to the present, in Laura F. Hodges, "Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics and Tom Jones," *Philological Quarterly* 63 (1984), 223–38, and James J. Lynch, "Moral Sense and the Narrator of Tom Jones," *Studies in English Literature* 25 (1985), 599–614.

Borges' stories).¹¹ In the second section of his essay, Crane carefully and cogently analyzes the plot of *Tom Jones*, finding it to be an exemplary plot of action. For Crane, "It is in nothing short of [its] total system of actions, moving by probable or necessary connections from beginning, through middle, to end, that the unity of the plot of *Tom Jones* is to be found."¹² However, as Michael Sprinker shows in "What Is Living and What Is Dead in Chicago Criticism," Crane's analysis contradicts his conclusion when he reasons that "The most important of these in the long run is the moral change produced by his recent experiences in Tom himself, as manifested by his break with Lady Bellaston and by his rejection of the honorable advances of Mrs. Hunt and the dishonorable advances of Mrs. Fitzpatrick."¹³ That Tom undergoes this moral change fits Crane's definition of a plot of character rather than action.¹⁴

To apply these distinctions to *Joseph Andrews*, Joseph shows no significant change in character; his character is fixed from the beginning and unchanged throughout his adventures. As I have mentioned, the narrative makes a decided effort to establish Joseph's character early on, depicting him not only as moral but as preternaturally graced, as naturally pure, handsome (I, 10),

11 R. S. Crane, "The Concept of Plot and the Plot of *Tom Jones*," in *Critics and Criticism: Essays in Method*, abr. ed., ed. R. S. Crane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 66. 12 *Ibid.*, p. 77.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 75; see Michael Sprinker, "What Is Living and What Is Dead in Chicago Criticism," *boundary 2* 13.2-3 (1985), 185-212. Sprinker goes on to note Crane's divergence from a strictly formal account of plot in his reliance on affectivity ("the form of a plot is an affection experienced by the audience" [198]). For Sprinker, this demonstrates a symptomatic flaw in the Chicago position - of which Crane is a prime expositor - in its avoidance of rhetoric and finally history.

14 To extend this, if catharsis is the formal end of a plot and one subscribes to the common assumption that the audience undergoes a cathartic change, then all plots are plots of character of the audience. However, Kenneth Telford offers a corrective to this common view of catharsis, arguing that "[pity and fear] are not defined by reference to audience reactions . . . they are instead defined as objective qualities of the dramatic incidents" ("Analysis," *Aristotle's Poetics*, trans. Kenneth A. Telford [Lanham: University Press of America, 1985], p. 103). Telford follows Richard McKeon's locating affectivity in the domain of rhetoric, not poetics; see McKeon, "Rhetoric and Poetic in the Philosophy of Aristotle," in *Aristotle's "Poetics" and English Literature: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Elder Olson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), pp. 201-36. For a recent, nuanced account of catharsis, see Alexander Nehamas, "Pity and Fear in the Rhetoric and the Poetics," in *Aristotle's Rhetoric: Philosophical Essays*, ed. David J. Furley and Alexander Nehamas (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 269-75.

pleasant-voiced (I, 2), etc. His actions, then, simply play out the essential property of his nature, which draws on the cultural mythology of the inherent and manifest characteristics of refinement of aristocratic lineage. In contrast, Tom Jones is a more interesting and vital character precisely because he changes and has lessons to learn. Through the middle books of *Joseph Andrews*, Adams seems a more active character, at least as an inadvertent catalyst. In this sense, perhaps he is "the real hero of the novel," as Wolfgang Iser claims.¹⁵ Adams plays out a narratively productive tension between his beliefs and his impulses. His portrait obviously parodies the artificial and abstract imposition of pedantic moral values – an early portrait of the absent-minded professor – whereas Joseph represents a kind of passive register of natural nobility.

On this reading, then, *Joseph Andrews* does not yield a plot of action or a plot of character, as one might ordinarily expect. To take account of its defining action, I would extend Crane's typology to include a fourth type: a *plot of circumstance*. The unity of action is not one of agency of the characters but predicated on the "world" in which Joseph, Fanny, *et al.* travel, the social expectations and forces therein, and the economy of sexuality it governs.

Beyond this discussion of the straight plot, there is a significant – and symptomatic, as I have discussed in previous chapters – elision in Crane's otherwise systematic account. Through his careful explication, Crane barely mentions the narrator of *Tom Jones*. He takes the plot of Tom's story univocally and unquestioningly as the plot of the novel. Seen in an alternative light, in terms of the explicit depiction of narratorial activity, a salient and in fact temporally primary plot of the novel encompasses the development of the narrator's character, his activities, his relation with the other characters whom he interviews, and finally with his "reader." Thus one could say that the novel exhibits a *plot of character of the narrator*. According to Crane's distinctions, there is also a way in which the text ultimately enacts a plot of thought, since the question of narration is reflexively highlighted via the figuration of narrative agency and action, and that question calls attention to the epistemological status of narrative. In this sense,

15 Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 214.

the novel is inherently theoretical – without being heavy-handed, a plot of theory.

II Narrative improper i

Narrative of narrative

Wayne Booth provides a useful counterpoint in the discussion of plot, specifically about the place of the “author,” in “The Self-Conscious Narrator in Comic Fiction before *Tristram Shandy*” and in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, especially in the section, “‘Fielding’ in *Tom Jones*.”¹⁶ Booth’s drawing of the concept of the “the implied author” of *Tom Jones* and his stress on the rhetorical situation of narrative mark a signal shift from Crane’s neo-Aristotelian formalistic delineations.¹⁷ In “The Self-Conscious Narrator,” Booth argues that the commentary and “even the long introductory chapters . . . contribute to the real form” of *Tom Jones*. Their function is not ornamental, but to “contribute to the characterization of the narrator and the intimate comic relationship between him and the reader.”¹⁸ He goes on to make the rather remarkable claim that, “leaving out the story of Tom, we discover a running account of growing intimacy between the narrator and the reader, an account with a kind of plot of its own and a separate denouement,”¹⁹ noting that the last preface in *Tom Jones* gives the narrator’s almost poignant parting from the reader. In short, Booth assigns a plot of character to the narrator, although he equivocates and seems to apologize for the implications of this claim, saying that “It may be extravagant to use the term ‘subplot’ for the story of our relationship with this nar-

16 Wayne C. Booth, “The Self-Conscious Narrator in Comic Fiction before *Tristram Shandy*,” *PMLA* 67 (1952), 163–85; and *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2nd. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 215–18.

17 It would be hard not to see Booth’s shift in focus as a direct response to Crane, since Booth represents the second generation of the “Chicago School,” of which Crane, McKeon, and a host of others were the forebears. For this genealogy, see Wayne C. Booth, “Between Two Generations: The Heritage of the Chicago School,” *Profession* 82 (1982), 19–26.

18 Booth, “The Self-Conscious Narrator,” p. 179.

19 Booth, *Rhetoric*, p. 215; see also “The Self-Conscious Narrator,” p. 180. Howard Anderson, in “Answers to the Author of *Clarissa*: Theme and Narrative Technique in *Tom Jones* and *Tristram Shandy*,” makes a similar point: “in *Tom Jones* and *Tristram Shandy* we develop a thorough familiarity with the narrator; in both novels he is by far the most fully realized character” (*Philological Quarterly* 51 [1972], 860).

rator."²⁰ In this equivocation and labeling the narrator's story a "subplot," Booth still subscribes to the residual bias of most formal analysis of narrative, exemplified by Crane and the predominant line of contemporary narrative theory, that excludes or externalizes a narrator's discourse in accounting for the plot, whether as subplot, meta- or extra-diegesis, "signs of the narrating," or metafiction.

In "From Imitation to Rhetoric," John Ross Baker relevantly compares Crane's and Booth's models of narrative, attributing Crane's failure to account for the narrator of *Tom Jones* to his mimetic bias, whereas Booth focuses on the narrator in keeping with his didactic bias.²¹ Baker notes that Crane takes the novel to mime Tom's actions, although, as I have argued, alternatively one might say that what is "represented," very literally and in terms of the most immediate "predicate," is the plot of narratorial action. To take the Platonic rather than Aristotelian sense of mimesis, it represents discourse rather than action.²² Baker, as well as Crane, misses this sense of mimesis and assumes the "action" of the novel is that of Tom's doings. In my view, Baker more accurately observes that Booth's *telos* is didactic, that is, that authors imply moral aims in novels. For Booth, the narrator's comments are not as ornamental or distracting as the negatively charged appellation, "authorial intrusion," usually implies, but they are crucial to giving an interpretive gloss and carrying proper moral values to the reader. As was the case in *Tristram Shandy* criticism, they become literalized, coded as interpretive keys to the right reading of the novel.

Here, I would assert the full implication of the thesis that Booth tentatively suggests, apropos *Tom Jones*, for *Joseph Andrews*: the novel details the plot of a narrator developing a relationship with a putative "reader," telling how he gets his story, taking his "reader" on a "journey" of narrative, as well as recounting other events of narratorial activity. This plot is the first-order predicate

20 Booth, *Rhetoric*, p. 216.

21 See "From Imitation to Rhetoric: The Chicago Critics, Wayne Booth, and *Tom Jones*," in *Towards a Poetics of Fiction: Essays from Novel: A Forum on Fiction, 1967-1976*, ed. Mark Spilka [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977], pp. 136-56.

22 For a lucid discrimination of the Platonic and Aristotelian uses of mimesis, see Don Bialostosky, "Narrative Diction in Wordsworth's Poetics of Speech," *Comparative Literature* 34 (1982), 305-32.

of the narrative, positing an increasing familiarity and intimacy between the figures of author and reader. In contrast to Booth, I would stress the modal reflexivity of this relation – its textual operation and linguistic relation – rather than the anthropomorphic scene of instruction to which Booth subscribes, of the author directing the actual reader. These are not real people, but operative figures within the economy and relation of the narrative. This is not to deny that there are real readers, but that function stands in metonymical relation to the textual representation of narrators and narratees.

Interwoven with the plot of the narrator's telling Joseph's story to the nominative reader, *Joseph Andrews* also recounts an inconspicuous plot of the narrator's information-gathering, documenting how he obtains his material and verifying the narrative by the explicit attribution of *narrative sources*. This actually forms a temporally distinct and prior plot from the narrator's present-tense telling. To schematize it, with N marking the narrator's action, N_n the narrator's telling the story, N_g the narrator's information gathering and investigating, and J the events of Joseph's story, the temporal relation of the narrative might be drawn thus: N_n (N_g (J)). Typically, in the case of an omniscient narrator or most third person or heterodiegetic narrators,²³ the way in which the narrator comes to take possession of the story – the story of investigation or authentication – is not recounted. Or, rather, the narrator is figured as having occult or magical powers that grant him or her access to the story, which asserts verification in a different way than the attribution of source. Although occasionally obscured, the narrator of *Joseph Andrews* identifies a variety of sources, such as Joseph and Fanny, Wilson, or servants, who might have witnessed the scene and events in question, and in a variety of different forms, such as his own witness, direct account, letters, or hearsay. He makes this explicit by periodically slipping in comments that designate direct testimony, such as: "This was all of Mr. Joseph Andrews' Speech which I could get him to recollect," or "had it not been for the Information which we received from a Servant of the Family," or "Mr. Wilson informs me in his last letter" (JA 183, 192, 269). There are also a number of other innocuous references that signal indirect testimony, for instance

23 Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, pp. 244–5.

when the narrator cites vague, unnamed sources regarding the Constable's integrity after the prisoner escapes (I, 16) – "I am sufficiently convinced of his Innocence; having been assured of it by those who received their Information from his own Mouth" (JA 57) – or when Squire Booby arrives and speaks to the justice in Book IV – "the Conversation between these two Gentleman, which rolled, as I have been informed, entirely on the subject of Horse-racing" (JA 228). An omniscient narrator would of course not need to add "having been assured" or "as I have been informed."

In a certain sense, this layer of the narratorial plot takes the form of reporting testimony to confirm the case of Joseph and Fanny, so, while it does not purport to be definitive, it lends a sense of credibility to and rhetorically legitimates what is told. As John Bender notes, "In many respects the narrator of *Tom Jones* [or, in this case, *Joseph Andrews*] is an idealized version of the kind of trial judge" extant in Fielding's day.²⁴ The function of this attribution of source works to authenticate narrative, as it does juridically with witness testimony. In contrast to juridical testimony, though, narrative sources are frequently predicated on a structure of remove – receiving the story from x, who perhaps heard it from y, who had firsthand experience – which verifies the narrative chimerically, by a chain of recession and metonymical displacement. In other words, narrative posits a verifying source that is by definition inaccessible (in legal terms, hearsay), thus verifying the narrative without being, in the terms of the philosophy of science, subject to falsification.²⁵ This catachrestic structure of narrative

24 John Bender, *Imagining the Penitentiary: Fiction and Architecture of Mind in Eighteenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 178. On the political and ideological context, see John Richetti, "The Old Order and the New Novel of the Mid-Eighteenth Century: Narrative Authority in Fielding and Smollett," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 2.3 (1990), 183–96. For the relation to historical writing, see Leland E. Warren, "History-as-Literature and the Narrative Stance of Henry Fielding," *Clio* 9.1 (1979), 89–109, and Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), pp. 405–9.

25 See Imre Lakatos, "Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes," in *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, ed. Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 91–196. Cf. Paul de Man on the logic of verification of reading: "all readings are in error because they assume their own readability. Everything written has to be read and every reading is susceptible of logical verification, but the logic that establishes the need for verification is itself unverifiable and therefore unfounded in its claim to truth" (*Allegories of Reading: Figurative Language in*

testimony is typical in folklore; as Jan Brunvand remarks, urban legends characteristically are reported as having come from a "friend of a friend," ascribing a tangible source, which at the same time is unavailable, to verify otherwise fantastic or ridiculous events.²⁶

Overall, then, a significant strand of the plot of *Joseph Andrews* is the course of narratorial decipherment. Rather than drawing on an omniscient narrator, this takes the form of first-person homodiegetic narration, the narrative limited by the narrator's purview. The novel also indicates not only the plot of the narrator's knowing, but the more immediate or temporally prior plot of the characters' telling him and of his acting as a reporter or investigator. While he has a great deal of access to what has gone on and sometimes seems to exceed knowledge of normal testimony – for instance, he knows what Lady Booby thinks and feels when rebuffed by Joseph (I, 7) – the narrator also tells of his limited and ultimately uncertain access. There is a gap in how much he knows, despite how complete the story seems. When Joseph is recuperating at Tow-wouse's Inn, the narrator states: "He accordingly eat either a Rabbit or a Fowl, I never could with any tolerable Certainty discover which" (JA 54). Later on, after the banns are published, he says, "Whether this had any Effect on Lady Booby or no . . . I could never discover" (JA 220). And along the way he notes that he cannot prise all he wants to know from Joseph or Fanny, as when he tries to find out the details of the "delightful Conversation" the young lovers have at the Inn: "But as I never could prevail on either to relate it, so I cannot communicate it to the Reader" (JA 132). While this effects a certain indeterminacy, that indeterminacy is largely token and does not impede the unfolding of the plot, but conversely functions as an instrument of credibility in ascribing a kind of humility to the narrator. The rhetorical posture of a humble narrator is more persuasive and plausible than an obnoxiously omniscient one.

In the narrator's narrative of his sources and his inability to ascertain a complete record from them, *Joseph Andrews* is surprisingly similar to a novel like *Lord Jim*, and in a sense "modern." I do

Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979], p. 202).

²⁶ Jan Harold Brunvand, *The Vanishing Hitchhiker: American Urban Legends and Their Meanings* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1981), p. 4.

not mean this gratuitously or to induct *Joseph Andrews* into the modern experimental canon or postmodern canon of metafiction, making it postmodern *avant la lettre*; rather, I mean this in the sense that the modern is not a startlingly new invention of early twentieth-century avant-garde artists – Joyce, Pound, *et al.* – but part of a larger epistemic shift, as Foucault has it, and as recent work in eighteenth-century studies and other fields has argued.²⁷ On the level of the narrative of sources, *Joseph Andrews* thematizes the problematic of narrative validation, the epistemological difficulty of collating various individual perspectives and perceptions, and the inherent impossibility of attaining a totalizing account.

To return to the question of the narrator's position, the narrator cannot be independent of or autonomous from the presumed "story," but figures the displacement among temporal levels of the narrative, among the "action," the account of witness testimony, and the work of magnanimous reporter/judge. Thus the narrator does not offer a privileged authoritative level – as Booth's "implied author" projects and as most narrative criticism tacitly assumes – but the system of narrative is self-circulating and self-validating, the narrator presenting the validation of sources, and the sources in turn grounding the "factuality" of the narrative and the authority of the narrator. In other words, the narrative of narrative does not take the place of a signifier or what Gerald Prince calls "signs of the narrating"²⁸ that stands separate from and delivers a signified or a group of "narrated" events, events which reference an external reality, but indicates the imbrication of narrating – of the mode and rhetoric of narrative representation – with the narrated, in a receding metonymical chain of narratorial relations that feigns but displaces a referential ground, or rather constitutes its own referential ground.

Narrative metaphors

Throughout the course of the novel, the narrator of *Joseph Andrews* takes his "reader" on a "journey" of narrative. Although he spins

27 See, for instance, Timothy Reiss, *The Discourse of Modernism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982).

28 See Gerald Prince, *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative* (Berlin: Mouton, 1982), pp. 7–16, as well as my discussion of Prince in the previous chapter.

off other figures for narrative – notably as a feast – this is the governing figure for the act of the narrative, here as well as in many other novels.²⁹ As the narrator elaborates in his preface to Book II, the chapter breaks

may be looked upon as an Inn or Resting-Place, where he may stop and take a Glass, or any other Refreshment, as it pleases him. Nay, our fine Readers will, perhaps, be scarce able to travel farther than through one of them in a Day. As to those vacant Pages which are placed between our Books, they are to be regarded as those Stages, where, in long Journeys, the Traveller stays some time to repose himself, and consider of what he hath seen in the Parts he hath already past through . . . (JA 70–1)

This figural model also recurs throughout *Tom Jones*, notably articulated in the famous “Farewell to the Reader” opening the last book, Book XVIII (“We are now, reader, arrived at the last stage of our long journey. As we have, therefore, travelled together through so many pages. . .”).³⁰

In addition to the overarching analogy of the conceptual span of narrative to the spatial span of a journey (both over time), *Joseph Andrews* also frequently subscribes to this figural network by invoking otherwise innocuous figures of leaving and returning, as when he says, “As we cannot therefore at present get Mr. Joseph out of the Inn, we shall leave him in it. . .” (JA 75), or “Before we proceed any farther in this Tragedy, we shall leave Mr. Joseph and Mr. Adams to themselves. . .” (JA 203). During the tumult at Tow-ouse’s Inn, the narrator again puns on the reader’s travel, “returning” him to a previous scene: “To return therefore to the kitchen, where a great variety of Company were now assembled . . .” (JA 51). One could cull many other such examples. The humor here plays on crossing literal and figural meaning, since the

29 Walter Benjamin draws a kind of anthropological link between travel and storytelling (“When someone goes on a trip, he has something to tell about,” goes the German saying, and people imagine the storyteller as someone who has come from afar”), speculating that one type of stories originate from journeymen. See “The Storyteller: Reflections of the Works of Nikolai Leskov,” *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1969), pp. 84–5. See also J. Paul Hunter, “The Conquest of Space: Motion and Pause in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*,” chapter 7 of *Occasional Form: Henry Fielding and the Chains of Circumstance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975). On the motif of narrative as food, see Timothy O’Brien, “The Hungry Narrator and Narrative Performance in *Tom Jones*,” *Studies in English Literature* 25.3 (1985), 615–36.

30 Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling*, ed. Fredson Bowers (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press), p. 913.

reader obviously is not physically leaving Joseph at the Inn, whereas the topic of discourse figuratively "leaves" Joseph. A further twist of the pun is that Joseph is literally and inconveniently left behind at the Inn. Similarly with the question of the narrative's "returning": the reader is not physically returning to the kitchen, but the topic of the discourse "returns" to events there.

Similarly, the narrator announces changes in his discourse in seemingly flat comments such as "we return to honest Joseph. . . " (JA 39) or "But to return to our History" (JA 124). The narrative is figured as "carrying" the reader ("carry our reader on after Parson Adams" [JA 75]), the reader proceeds with baggage ("Reader, taking these Hints along with you, proceed. . ." [JA 149]), and the reader is promised surprises at the next station ("waits for the reader in the next chapter" [JA 214]). While these figures are relatively typical and unexceptional in the colloquial lexicon, it is precisely their typicality, as well as their cumulative excess, that makes them significant, and their relevance and applicability seem to go without saying: as ground is covered in time in a journey, narrative events (increments, pages) are covered in time (turning pages, reading). Thus it seems an indubitable and natural metaphor for what is actually the metonymic comparison of their ratio, for there is no necessary connection between the epistemological decipherment of words on a page and traversing ground under foot. In a sense, this lexical code presents a *topography* of narrative, figuring a spatial model for the movement of narrative.

Why travel is such a seemingly natural figure for narrative is that it presents a spatio-temporal correspondence for the act of narrating and thus for the phenomenological experience of the act of reading. This ratio of space over time is what impels Genette's narratological project and in fact what enables him to clarify the narrative pacing and order of *Remembrance of Things Past*. Transposing this ratio to rudimentary terms of physics, I would call it a *narrative velocity*. In *Joseph Andrews*, the order of Joseph's story is not only fairly regular and chronological – differing signally from the plot of Tristram's story in *Tristram Shandy* – but the velocity of the narrative is generally constant. The prospect of a straight narrative is that its velocity is roughly proportionate to chronological time, although not equal to it. An exception would be a novel like *Ulysses*, whereby its recounting twenty or so hours

takes about that long to read. Usually, though, there is no direct correlation between reading time and narrative time; otherwise, a novel spanning twenty years would require a rather extraordinary commitment to get through.

To break down the pacing of *Joseph Andrews*, the earlier chapters truncate Joseph's youth and give summary depictions of Joseph, Adams, *et al.*, while the middle books take a more temporally proportionate velocity analogous to Joseph's travels, and the closing book slows to set the stage for the ensemble discussions and revelations about Joseph and Fanny. *Tom Jones* takes a similar form, since the earlier books cover a large part of Tom's life quickly, whereas the later books cover much less event time – usually not more than a few days. (One has only to look at the chapter headings of *Tom Jones* to see the slope of the plot over time. Book III covers "Tommy Jones Arrived at the Age of Fourteen Till He Attained the Age of Nineteen," IV is down to a year, V "Somewhat Longer Than Half a Year," VI three weeks, VII three days, IX twelve hours, after which the slope levels off, most chapters ranging from twelve hours to a few days.) Thus, in terms of velocity, one might say that both narratives decelerate. This negative curve of the slope of the plot functions to build more immediacy and dramatic impact in its concentration of "action" at the end. In short, there is a certain usefulness in the adequation of spatial distance and narrative distance, albeit with the caveat of their metonymical relation.

Joseph Andrews also spins out other figures for narrative: as a stage, as food, as a dance, as entertainment, as instruction, and so on. This process of metaphoresis, whereby narrative almost compulsively inscribes figures for itself, commonly occurs through the history of fictional narrative. For instance, in the *Decameron*, narrative is figured as an afternoon's entertainment, a kind of pleasant tonic taken in the shade of midday heat, but underneath that it is figured as a way to bide time, as a respite from not only the plague that grips their city but from mourning for all those that they have lost. Narrative, in this sense, is a kind of crucial social bond, a social solace and forgetting if not cure – at its limit, of the brutality of disease and its claims on mortality, as well as of the weight of surviving. In the contemporary movie, *The Princess Bride*, narrative is also figured as a respite from illness, although more humorously as a way for a boy to pass the day in bed with fever,

entertained by his grandfather. To take up a different figural strand, in Henry James, particularly in the prefaces, the overwhelming figure is of economic exchange, of readers getting their money's worth and of narrative being paid to them.³¹ And as I have mentioned in the previous chapter, *Tristram Shandy* exhibits a kind of narrative metaphorrhea, in a Shandyesque way an almost uncontrolled, Tourette's-like spinning of metaphors for narrative – as debt, machine, travel, attack, motion, and probably the major figure, as line or thread, which presents another common and seemingly natural governing metaphor for narrative, correlate to narrative as journey in its representation of movement over distance, space over time.³²

Cumulatively, the pervasiveness and representational excess of these figures encode an allegory of narrative reflexivity, not only on the level of the depiction of the narrator's performance and the complex of narratorial relations entailed thereby, but linguistically, in this tropism toward self-naming or figuring. In the manner of medieval allegories in which characters receive thematic names – Purity, Chastity, Sloth, and so on – these figures serve as allegorical registers signaling the reflexive story of narrative and narrative processes, whereby narrative names and characterizes its operation and modal form. In this sense, they indicate what Paul de Man distinguishes as a tropological narrative – an allegory of metaphor rather than an allegory of reading – which tells the story of denomination and ultimately the failure of denomination, the failure of metaphor to define a necessary connection between tenor and vehicle.³³ These figures cascade out in a metonymical chain for the act of narrative, figuring it by analogy to actions like travel or processes like weaving, building a lexicon

31 See, for instance, the preface to *The Golden Bowl*: "All of which but means of course that the reader is, in common phrase, 'sold' – even when, poor passive spirit, systematically bewildered and bamboozled on the article of his dues, he may be but dimly aware of it" (*The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces* [Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1984], p. 346). See also Roland Barthes, "Contract-Narratives," *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), pp. 88–9; and Marie Maclean, *Narrative as Performance: The Baudelairean Experiment* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 76–86. On the general question of the intersection of economic exchange and discourse, see Marc Shell, *Money, Language, and Thought: Literary and Philosophic Economies from the Medieval to the Modern Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

32 Hillis Miller takes up the question of the "line" of narrative in *Ariadne's Thread: Story Lines* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

33 See *Allegories of Reading*, p. 205.

of narrative rather than representing "real actions." Or rather, they signal an allegorical economy of representation, whereby narrative represents its modal formulation, in a manner of speaking, on its own terms.

Narratorial strata

What I mean by narrative reflexivity here is not then a simple focus on what Genette calls narration or the depiction of a narrative persona, but the figuring of a range of discursive and linguistic strata. The paradigm of the narrative of narrative is not constituted simply by an inobvious level, one level up from the putative events of the normal plot – a surplus zone of events ("signs of the narrating") beyond the action proper. In the previous chapter, I paid particular attention to the explicit depiction of Tristram composing his narrative, since that zone of action has been obscured in the history of reception of *Tristram Shandy*, and obfuscated by the temporal disorder of the plot. That storyline – of a narrator constructing a narrative – suggests a liminal way in which the narrative reflexively signals its allegorical self-inscription and representation. However, my point here – in a narrative where the representation of narratorial activity is not obscured but relatively explicit – is to show how complicated even such a seemingly straight representation turns out to be.

In *Joseph Andrews*, the emplotment of narratorial action occurs in several different nodes of figuration.³⁴ To distinguish among them, first, there is the relatively straightforward plot of the narrator constructing a narrative, the present-tense, first-person plot of what the narrator is doing as he narrates, as a sort of tour guide leading the "reader" through Joseph's story. For instance, the narrator gives specific descriptions of his telling, performative utterances of his enacting a narrative, such as "I will dismiss this

34 I would distinguish these from types of discourse, say, as given by Bakhtin (see Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984], p. 199). Distinctions of the narrator's discourse assume the hierarchy of representational levels I have been critiquing; for instance, the narrator's discourse here demonstrates both direct, unmediated discourse (the narrator telling) and objectified discourse (discourse of the represented figure – the narrator as character). For an alternative typology of the narrator's discourse, see Richard Bevis, "Fielding's Normative Authors: *Tom Jones* and the Rehearsal Play," *Philological Quarterly* 69.1 (1990), 65–7.

chapter" or "I will endeavor to indulge the reader" (72) or the like. Second, in conjunction with these performative directives ushering the narrative, there is also a present-tense plot of characterization of the narrator. These take the form of specific present-tense descriptions of what the narrator is doing, perhaps best exemplified by the offhand comment of the narrator of *Tom Jones*, when he remarks "the little parlour in which I sit at this instant" (XIII, i), as well as Tristram's continual monitoring of his state of mind, dress, and the weather in *Tristram Shandy*. In *Joseph Andrews*, we find out a lot about the narrator, his likes and dislikes, what he has read, the foods he prefers, his views on education and drinking, who he talks to, and so forth. As Booth remarks of the narrator's almost poignant closing of *Tom Jones*, the narrator's frequent interjections similarly constitute a plot of intimacy with the purported reader in *Joseph Andrews*. Third, the narrative also constructs the prior narrative of his interviewing sources, as discussed above.

Fourth, the narrator offers comments of general wisdom ("It is an observation sometimes made . . ."), as well as observations of human nature ("O Love, what monstrous Tricks dost thou play . . . Thou putt'st out our Eyes, stoppest up our Ears . . . Thou can'st make Cowardice brave, Avarice generous, Pride humble and Cruelty tender-hearted . . ." [JA 29–30]). This layer differs from the more singular depiction of the narrator as character, but still invokes a narratorial overlay, constituting a kind of supra-literary, quasi-philosophical frame. In other words, it represents not the "real world" or the world of the characters (Joseph *et al.*), but the literary realm of received wisdom, accepted belief, and tradition, tapping into what Roland Barthes calls in *S/Z* the cultural code.³⁵ Fifth, the narrator comments explicitly on craft, schematically in the introductory chapters as well as sporadically throughout the novel, arguing for the proper mode of imitation, for appropriate literary forms, for the best design of a novel, and so on. The narrator also carries on a running critical commentary about other authors – Homer or Cibber, especially – and about literature in general. This dialogue with the literary tradition also occurs implicitly in the use of mythic apparatus (fighting off the hounds [III, 6] to note one well-known example) and other literary references that striate the book. This zone again invokes the code of litera-

35 See *S/Z*, p. 20.

ture, and discursively situates the action of the narrative in that context. Joseph's adventures occur on this literary topography, by the codes, expectations, and parameters of literary narrative, and the narrator acts within the dimensions of this world, rather than on the topography of a "real" world. In a sense, then, this discursive context constitutes the referential ground of the narrative, the world to which it reflexively refers. Sixth, related to the literary self-encoding of narrative is its pervasive metaphors, as discussed in the previous section, the linguistic action of spinning out figures for its process, which reinforce the representational network of a narrative world.

Seventh, *Joseph Andrews* also depicts a narrative of an imagined reception. This zone occurs as a series of instructional comments in a suggestive if not coercive dialogue with the "reader," providing a guide for, as well as projecting, a future reading. In a sense, this level constitutes a virtual narrative, the proleptic narrative of actualization by a reader. I take this concept of virtuality from Wolfgang Iser, who points out that a reading of a text is not determined solely by the formal criteria of a text, nor entirely by the phenomenological process of reading, but by the interaction of both to create a virtual text.³⁶ However, I would amend Iser's definition of a virtual text regarding *Joseph Andrews*, since Iser conflates the narrator's projection of a reader with the actual reader and reading experience, similar in kind to what Genette does regarding *Tristram Shandy* when he misattributes Tristram's beseeching his "dear reader" as an actual address to us, rather than as a rhetorical construction proffered within the narrative. In *Joseph Andrews*, the "reader" and the reading projected thereby are determined precisely within the representational economy of the narrative, in the narrator's dialogue with and characterization of a reader, not in terms of the phenomenology of an actual, live reader. In other words, *Joseph Andrews* poses a relatively complete and self-enclosed model of the system of narratorial relations, depicting not only the act of storytelling but its rhetorical economy, including its sources and reception, its production and consumption.

36 See Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), p. 42. See also *The Act of Reading*, pp. 20–1.

To get a sense of the multiple layering of the narratorial plot, one could schematize it as follows: $N_{\text{virtual}} (N_{\text{reader's instructions}} (N_{\text{literature}} (N_{\text{character}} (N_{\text{narrating}} (N_{\text{sources}} (\text{Joseph's adventures}))))))$. While this scheme separates the elements of the rhetorical dynamic of narratorial interaction, it shows that Joseph's tale is not only grammatically subordinate and temporally prior, but a heterogeneous range of discursive and represented actions embed it and striate it. The larger implication of this is that the role of the narrator is not as a straight relay transmitting the story, nor a marginal gloss on its themes, nor does it simply provide a lens that filters and inflects the details given in the normal plot. In other words, the construction of the narrator does not simply indicate point of view, focalization, or perspective – the usual prospect of the narrator's discourse in most narrative theory. Rather, the permutations and cumulative effect of the narrator's discourse foreground the action and processes of narrative construction, in a sense upstaging Joseph's story. To reverse the poles of normal expectation, one might even see the events of Joseph's story as the occasion for narrative exchange, as arbitrary attributes to fulfill the terms of the act of narration. More modestly, the dynamic of narratorial relations signals a salient plot, not only of familiarity with the narrator, but encoding the allegorical "world" of narrative representation, its semes, tropes, and trans-actions.

Literalizing the narrator

To call attention to the narrator and narratorial dynamic in Fielding's novels is not entirely surprising, since the narrator's discourse in them has long been accorded a recognized if equivocal status, first remarked in the critical history by Walter Scott as long ago as 1821.³⁷ In general, the prominence of the narrator and his commentary is taken as a central flaw that detracts from Joseph's or Tom's story. For example, in *The Rise of the Novel*, Ian

37 "Those critical introductions, which rather interrupt the course of the story, and the flow of the interest at the first perusal, are found, on a second or third, the most entertaining chapters of the whole work." Sir Walter Scott, "Henry Fielding (1821)," in *The English Novel: Background Readings*, ed. Lynn C. Bartlett and William R. Sherwood (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1967), p. 32.

Watt inducts Fielding into the hall of fame of the early English novel – along with Defoe and Richardson – but only grudgingly so, since the narrator's intrusions "break the spell of the imaginary world represented in the novel" and "interfere with any sense of narrative illusion," detracting from the realism that is Watt's arbiter of value.³⁸ Wayne Booth's *Rhetoric of Fiction* stands as a formidable counter to this negative bias against "authorial intrusion" and indirectly against the modernist bias toward "shown," "realist" narratives, which absent the author or super-narrator, effecting a presumably direct representation of the actions of the characters. That the representation of the narrator's actions could be seen as a similar "showing" rather than a literal telling is a constitutive blindness of realist criticism. Booth works to recuperate the maligned "author" by attributing an ethical overlay to the narrator's discourse, and his fellow Chicagoan, Sheldon Sacks, similarly talks about the way this level "shapes belief" and imparts an ethical cast to the novel.³⁹ Thus, even the criticism that seems more disposed to the role of the narrator takes the narrator's discourse as a vehicle for the voice of the author, separate from the "matter" of Joseph's or Tom's story. The tendency of this vein of thinking is to link the narrator's discourse thematically – separating it as literal commentary rather than as part of the narrative economy, similar to the way in which most critics have read *Tristram Shandy* – which thereby gives a privileged interpretive key to the intended meaning of the novel. Wolfgang Iser goes so far as to call the narrator's comments "essays," thus generically reconstituting them and excising them from the narrative proper.⁴⁰ The narrator's discourse becomes a marginal gloss, taking a structural position similar to that of medieval commentaries.

To review briefly the criticism that attends to the role of and claims a special status for Fielding's narrators – criticism that one might expect to focus on the reflexive problematic of these narratives – Homer Goldberg perceptively distinguishes the narrator from the author in *Joseph Andrews*, noting that the preface presents an image of an author significantly different from the portrait

38 Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), pp. 285, 286.

39 See Sacks, *Fiction and the Shape of Belief*.

40 *The Implied Reader*, pp. 39–40.

of the narrator in the first chapter. However, Goldberg shies from the implication of this observation and makes the narrator a surrogate author, supplying the reader with norms and guides throughout the novel via an "implied authorship."⁴¹ Goldberg speaks of the "author's overt manner" and poses – as naive, a moralist, overprecise, and so on – and in fact draws a convincing portrait of a complex (albeit caricatured) character, not a controlling authorial presence. Fred Kaplan, in "Fielding's Novel about Novels," promisingly claims that "the 'prefaces' are an integral part of the novel" and that their sequence forms a plot, of a developing series of ideas.⁴² However, he goes on to show that they are thematically related to the action and offer Fielding's commentary on it, so he is therefore not talking about another novelistic plot – as his title implies – but, again, an intruding authorial gloss or thematic frame. Thomas Lockwood, in "Matter and Reflection in *Tom Jones*," argues that Fielding's talk in the novel is not intrusive, but instead gives a morally reflective, essayistic filter to the "matter" of Tom's actions.⁴³ In other words, the narrator's discourse merely provides an interpretive lens to the legitimate focus of the narrative, Tom's story.

Generally, the aim of this branch of criticism is recuperative, to justify the value of the narrator's discourse against charges that it is interruptive, and thus indirectly to raise the value of Fielding's novels in the novel canon as formally and artistically accomplished. It performs a kind of critical apologetics, smoothing over what otherwise might be perceived as a flaw. However, despite its preliminary attention to the question of the narratorial plot, it participates in its effacement by expropriating that plot as an authorial guide or thematic reflection on the purported events rather than seeing it as integrated in the overall economy of the narrative, not to mention as indicating an alterior plot of narrative allegoresis.

Booth, on the other hand, although tentatively recognizing the narratorial plot, does not see its relation to the rest of the events of the story. He stresses that the narrator's story in *Tom Jones*

41 Homer Goldberg, *The Art of Joseph Andrews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), pp. 262–86.

42 Fred Kaplan, "Fielding's Novel about Novels: The 'Prefaces' and the 'Plot' of *Tom Jones*," *Studies in English Literature* 13 (1973), 535–6.

43 Thomas Lockwood, "Matter and Reflection in *Tom Jones*," *ELH* 45 (1978), 226–35.

shows “no similarity to the story of Tom” and thus carries only a kind of “autonomous interest.”⁴⁴ In other words, he tries to have it both ways: he marks the recurrence of the narratorial action, but relegates it to a marginal status, as a sideshow to the plot proper, leaving that plot and critical readings based on that plot intact. As I have argued regarding *Joseph Andrews*, while the narrator is not a character *per se* in Joseph’s story, the novel depicts the narrator as the central character in the collection and collation of the accounts of the incipient story and in general fulfilling the network of storytelling – replete in a communicative model with a “reader.” The narrator’s explicit visibility foregrounds that network and the overall emplotment of narratorial production (gathering, telling). Booth, ultimately resorting to an implied author, transposes the narrator’s discourse to an authorial relation, hence autonomous from the complex of narrated actions. This move posits an extra-referential authority that is belied by the economy of narrative representation. The text reflexively draws the terms of its economy – the narrator verifies the narrative (by the attribution of sources, etc.) and is in turn verified by the narrative (the information given – sources, etc. – testifies to the place and authority of the narrator). The category of the author, therefore, only occurs textually, as a rhetorical construction.

In the narrator telling Joseph’s story to a reader – or more exactly what Gerald Prince calls a “narratee” – as well as in the many interpolated and embedded tales, such as the well-bred Lady’s recounting the History of Leonora to Adams and company, *Joseph Andrews* thematizes the system of narratorial relations. These pervasive scenes repeatedly foreground the production and exchange of narrative, ascribing an addresser and also an addressee, establishing a setting or locale for narrative (e.g., a stagecoach ride), projecting a ready narrative channel, and providing a message, saturating the linguistic model of communication that Roman Jakobson defines in “Linguistics and Poetics.”⁴⁵ In other words, the schematic attribution and depiction of these narratorial relations – in a seemingly complete circuit – anthro-

44 *Rhetoric*, p. 216; “The Self-Conscious Narrator,” p. 180.

45 See Roman Jakobson, “Linguistics and Poetics,” in *The Structuralists: From Marx to Lévi-Strauss*, ed. Richard and Ferdnande DeGeorge (Doubleday: Anchor Books, 1972), p. 89.

pomorphizes their textual relation as human communication. In a sense, that figural transposition explains why the attribution of an author or an authorial presence occurs so frequently and so seemingly naturally, since the models of narrative transaction and human communication are metonymically analogous. But the coding of narrative works like a holograph; the system of narratorial relations can only stand in catachrestic relation to the world and to actual authorial relations, and its reference occurs by virtue of its reflexive economy. (The supernarrator "Fielding" cannot be eligible for a royalty check, but Fielding's heirs might.) In short, the narrative is validated within and its terms are drawn by its self-circulating and validating economy, not by reference to a real author, real world events, or a real reader, as is apparent in science fiction or tales with animals as characters.

To make a relevant qualification here, it is crucial to distinguish the textual figure of a narratee – a persona of a reader – from the actual reader of a text, just as one would distinguish a narrator from an actual author. In "Introduction to the Study of the Narratee," Gerald Prince astutely marks this much neglected figure, observing that "[a]ll narration . . . presupposes not only (at least) one narrator but also (at least) one narratee, the narratee being someone whom the narrator addresses."⁴⁶ As I have noted, many otherwise careful critics confuse the "reader" that the narrator addresses in *Joseph Andrews* with an actual reader, taking the narrator's comments as direct (illocutionary) address or instruction from the author. In fact, Fielding has attracted a substantial amount of attention from reader-response critics, I would speculate, largely because of the naming of a "reader." Even as theoretically sophisticated and rhetorically attuned a critic as Wolfgang Iser misses this subtle distinction, taking the general address to a "reader" as literal, noting how the "author" governs and prescribes the act of reading: "The author explicitly instructs his readers . . ." "Fielding actually informs his readers . . ." "The reader, then, must apply the author's remarks to his novel . . ."⁴⁷

46 Gerald Prince, "Introduction to the Study of the Narratee," in *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, ed. Jane P. Tompkins (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 7. See also Prince, *Narratology*, pp. 16–26.

47 Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading*, pp. 142, 218; *The Implied Reader*, p. 35. See also Jeffrey M. Perl, "Anagogic Surfaces: How to Read *Joseph Andrews*," *The Eighteenth Century* 22.3 (1981), 249–70, which elaborates on Iser. Raymond

To see this characterization as the literal "reader" not only ignores the fact that it is a projection of a reader, but that these addresses are so frequently ironic. Not only is a textual figure anthropomorphized and consigned to the position of a reader in an actual communicative act, but this symptomatic slip evades the thoroughgoing rhetorical construction of the narrative.

The problem with authors

In an early work of narrative theory, *Narrative Situations in the Novel*, Franz Stanzel outlines a poetics of the novel based on the role of the narrator.⁴⁸ He finds three primary types: "the authorial novel," which is narrated in the third person, and in which "the author himself seems to enter as narrator," distinct from the fictional world he is narrating; the "first-person novel," in which the narrator plays a role in the fictive action, whether centrally or as an observer; and the "figural novel," in which the narration is mediated or focalized through one of the characters. One could refine these distinctions, and in fact Stanzel notes that there are hybrids between types, as in *Henry Esmond* when the narrative moves from first-person to authorial narration.⁴⁹ There is a certain commonsense utility to these distinctions, and I bring them up because I would surmise that they articulate the common view of the role of the narrator and the apposition of the author.

Stanzel takes *Tom Jones* as the exemplar of the authorial novel, noting that the entrance of the author "forms a bridge from the authorial realm to the fictional world, but as a rule these two realms never come so close together that the action taking place in

Stephanson, in "The Education of the Reader in Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*" (*Philological Quarterly* 61 [1982], 243–58), claims that the narrator deflates the hypocrisy of the "reader," but fails to note that the "reader" is a persona, not an actual person. For a relevant emendation of Iser that distinguishes between an "addressed reader" and the "implied reader," see Nicolas Hudson, "Fielding's Hierarchy of Dialogue: 'Meta-Response' and the Reader of *Tom Jones*," *Philological Quarterly* 68.2 (1989), 177–94.

48 See Franz Stanzel, *Narrative Situations in the Novel: Tom Jones, Moby Dick, The Ambassadors, Ulysses*, trans. James P. Pusack (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971).

49 For a relevant discussion of Stanzel, see Dorrit Cohn, "The Encirclement of Narrative: On Franz Stanzel's *Theorie des Erzählens*," *Poetics Today* 2.2 (1981), 157–82. Cohn complicates Stanzel's scheme, but retains the axis of first-person and third-person narratives. My point is how that axis, however useful, is permeable and finally incoherent.

the fictional world could encroach on the authorial realm."⁵⁰ While Stanzel remarks transgressions of the separation between the two realms, such as Parson Adams informing the "author" in *Joseph Andrews*, this definition of two realms succinctly underscores the problem with the attribution of an author. It is not just that the "author" is covertly implicated in the action – for instance, in the source plot – and thus complicates the relation of the two realms, but the "authorial" level comprises a fictional realm, even if topically different and separate from other levels. While there might be a difference in the linguistic attributes of an "author" and a grammatical subordination of those of the characters, there is no ontological or finally epistemological difference. Without belaboring the conceptual point, the narrator "Fielding" is no closer to material existence than the character "Joseph" and we know him no more assuredly. Further, in *Tom Jones* and *Joseph Andrews*, the narrator takes all of the roles that Stanzel schematizes: "he" narrates the story of Joseph and Fanny as an "author" or authoritative narrator, he carries out a first-person narrative of the collection and dispensing of narrative, and he is the central mediating character of the account of his narrating. In other words, there is a profound confusion among these roles, and among the topological levels of naming fiction and reality, a confusion that the enlisting of an author and of an extra-narratorial reality purports to straighten.

My point in bringing this up is not to show that Stanzel holds to a primitive or outmoded scheme – again, his distinctions pose one useful if preliminary way to sort subgenres of the novel – or to reiterate the complications of narratorial relations, but to look at why the attachment to an author is so entrenched and what this systematic translation of narratorial relations to an authorial relation delivers. The attribution of an author, of direct human presence, enacts an anthropomorphic substitution for what is a textual or figural relation and specifically an effect of the textual operation of characterization. This substitution has its benefits, since it presumably proffers the author's intention and therefore gives a key to interpretation; it would indeed make interpretation fairly easy if one could glean the author's intention directly, and if an author could determinately control language to mean what s/he

intends. As Roland Barthes puts it, "The *explanation* of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the author 'confiding' in us."⁵¹

In general theoretical terms, the appeal to an authorial presence invokes what Derrida, in a by now well-known critique elaborated in *Of Grammatology* and elsewhere, calls the metaphysics of presence, transacting the devaluation of the (written) narrative as incomplete, and projecting the wholeness of the narrative in a chimerical (single-voiced) origin called the author. The spoken presence of the "author" yields the full meaning that the written record of the narrative lacks, metaphysically posing an extra-textual origin and reference. As shown in the foregoing reading of *Joseph Andrews*, though, the authority of the narrator does not derive from an extra-textual ground, from an authorial presence beyond the text, but is generated by the economy of the narrative itself: the "authorial" narrator derives the story from or in relation to the characters therein – and therefore has as much referential value as the characters (one cannot speak to a character unless one is a character) – as well as in relation to various narrative codes (the invocation of narrative wisdom and so on), and takes authority by virtue of the rhetorical construction of that position. This seems counter-intuitive – in part because of the intractable figural model of human communication for the technological operation of narrative – but in the most literal of terms the depiction of the characters' actions and testimony and the other features of narrative representation might be said to constitute the field of reference, if not ground, of narrative.

The tendency toward naming an author underwrites the commonplace critical postulation of "authorial intrusion." Fielding's novels are usually taken as prime examples of authorial intrusion, as implied by Stanzel's category of the "authorial novel" and as defended in Booth's *Rhetoric of Fiction*. But, as should be clear from my argument thus far, the label of "authorial intrusion" is a kind of *non sequitur*, based on projecting the mystified category of the author as the literal, ontological ground of the configuration of narrative, above and beyond the text, and in turn tacitly claiming

⁵¹ Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," *Image-Music-Text*, trans. and ed. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p. 143.

definitive status for a normal plot, for a narrative proper into which the author intrudes and over which he presides. Taking up this second implication of the phrase "authorial intrusion," in addition to the metaphysical grounding of an authorial presence, the benefit of externalizing the narrator is to simplify the plot of a novel and lend it a more readily circumscribable form. One can easily enumerate a coherent chronological plot of Joseph's travels. The aspersions of intrusiveness function to straighten and streamline the narrative, pushing aside any other features or relations that may be difficult to decipher or that do not readily fit, such as the narrator's discourse. It reduces narrative to a single thread generated by a single voice, rather than by the intersection of its typical codes, tropography, and rhetorical economy. In this way, it works as what Paul de Man calls "paraphrase," to "hide discontinuities and disruptions in the homogeneity" of a straight plot, offering "the sequential coherence we associate with a . . . particularly compelling narrative" and the comfort of "the teleology of controlled meaning."⁵² In other words, there is a colloquial interpretive imperative to cull a tangible, readily definable plot from a narrative text that trades its fidelity for an illusory coherence. As should be clear, this prospect of a stable and definitive plot, yielding a stable and readily defined meaning, is illusory in the actual reading of even a relatively uncomplicated text like *Joseph Andrews*.

III Narrative improper ii

Narrative substrata

Thus far, I have focused on the macro-narrative, the so-called authorial plot that is usually projected at a level higher than the normal plot of Joseph's travels, and in a cursory way I have taken this zone of action to exemplify the paradigm of a narrative of narrative. However, I would also stress that the reflexive problematic of narratorial relations striates the text not only in the apposition of the supernarrator but in the pervasive depiction of the characters' narrating, telling and listening to stories, most prominently in the cases of the much-discussed "interpolated

52 Paul de Man, *Critical Writings, 1953-1978*, ed. Lindsay Waters (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), pp. 220, 222, 221.

tales," as well as in a range of other moments. This strata represents a kind of inversion of the externalizing position of the supernarrator, presenting an echoing chain of internalized or embedded narratorial relations, projected at a level lower than the plot proper – a narratorial substrata, one might say. As such, this zone of action is similarly considered, in the critical conversation, as interruptive or diversionary, as a glitch or impediment in the narrative flow. As the narrator's plot is cast as intrusive and ancillary to the normative version of the plot, this substrata is depicted as digressive and extrusive from it.

In particular, "The History of Leonora, or the Unfortunate Jilt" and "The History of Two Friends" have been singled out and function in the critical reception as nodal points of attack and justification. Much of the early criticism spies them as flaws and votes to dismiss them from the flow of the otherwise continuous travel narrative. Sir Walter Scott expresses the tenor of the early reception, commenting in 1821 that the reader normally "glides down the narrative like a boat on the surface of some broad navigable river . . . [but] one exception to this praise . . . [is that] Fielding has thrust into the midst of his narrative . . . the history of Leonora, unnecessarily and inartificially . . ." ⁵³ This view continues in modern-day criticism, articulated by Irving Ehrenpreis, that the tales are "dull and repetitious" and an obvious flaw, and, I would speculate, in ordinary reading and teaching, since they disrupt the plot of Joseph's adventures, therefore extending Ian Watt's complaint about Fielding's interruptions, "break[ing] the spell of the imaginary world represented in the novel." ⁵⁴ In the face of the consensus that they are dull, poorly realized, and irrelevant, and only interfere with or weigh down Joseph's story, a significant strand of more recent criticism works to recuperate them as crafted and integrated components in the narrative. This line poses a variety of rationales: they are thematically unified with the purport of the rest of the plot, underscoring the ethical

⁵³ "Henry Fielding," p. 29.

⁵⁴ See Irving Ehrenpreis, "Fielding's Use of Fiction: The Autonomy of *Joseph Andrews*," in *Twelve Original Essays: On Great English Novels*, ed. Charles Shapiro (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1960), pp. 23–42; and Watt, *Rise of the Novel*, p. 285. F. Homes Dudden, in his standard *Henry Fielding: His Life, Works, and Times* (vol. 1 [Oxford: Clarendon, 1952], pp. 351–2), also attests to this view, seeing the "two independent stories" as a chief weakness of *Joseph Andrews*.

thrust of the novel;⁵⁵ they work as comic and skillful literary parody, pace Cervantes;⁵⁶ they provide analogues to or contrasts with the main characters and their situations;⁵⁷ they contribute to the narrative pacing by effecting a dramatic pause or contrast;⁵⁸ or they highlight the theme of reading and interpretation that recurs throughout the novel.⁵⁹

This recent course of criticism thus performs a kind of revisionary apologetics, making otherwise discordant features cohere according to the critical expectation of a unified plot, justifying them to affirm that the narrative is whole and artfully accomplished. The general suasion of contemporary formalist criticism pre-

- 55 The defense of the tales begins in 1956, with I. B. Cauthen, Jr. ("Fielding's Digressions in *Joseph Andrews*," *College English* 17 [1956], 379-82), who argues that they are instructive, exposing affectation, vanity, and hypocrisy. Sheldon Sacks claims they give relevant "ethical comment on the actions of the important characters" (*Fiction and the Shape of Belief*, p. 213).
- 56 Initiating a different line of justification, Homer Goldberg recoups them as skillful parodies of the literary tradition (after Cervantes), claiming that they "disclose an unsuspected dimension of Fielding's comic invention" ("The Interpolated Stories in *Joseph Andrews* or 'The History of the World in General' Satirically Revised," *Modern Philology* 63 [1966], 295-310).
- 57 Irving Ehrenpreis, "Fielding's Use of Fiction," while observing the inferior quality of the tales, remarks that they provide "negative analogues" to the main characters. Douglas Brooks, in "The Interpolated Tales in *Joseph Andrews* Again" (*Modern Philology* 65 [1968], 208-13), notes the parallels between characters in the novel and within the tales (i.e., Leonora vs. Fanny). Leon V. Driskell ("Interpolated Tales in *Joseph Andrews*," *South Atlantic Bulletin* 33 [1968], 5-8) underscores how the tales apply to their particular auditors. In "Chastity and Interpolation: Two Aspects of *Joseph Andrews*" (*Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 69 [1970], 14-31), Howard D. Weinbrot points out the contrast of the "benevolent God" of "Fielding" to the "foolish" narrators of the tales.
- 58 Robert Alter (*Fielding and the Nature of the Novel*, pp. 108-13) reads the tales as "an integral part of the artistic scheme of the novel," their contrast providing "texture" to the narrative. J. Paul Hunter (*Occasional Form*, pp. 151-61) claims that they contribute to the pacing as "pauses" in the "motion" of the plot. More recently, Hunter notes that such tales are a typical and common feature of eighteenth-century narrative (*Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth Century English Fiction* [New York: Norton, 1990], pp. 47-8).
- 59 In "The Interpolated Narrative in the Fiction of Fielding and Smollett: An Epistemological View" (*Studies in the Novel* 5 [1973], 271-82), John M. Warner argues that the tales foreshadow a Romantic concern with "epistemological uncertainty" by juxtaposing different perspectives. Joseph Bartolomeo ("Interpolated Tales as Allegories of Reading: *Joseph Andrews*," *Studies in the Novel* 23.4 [1991], 401-15) claims that they present allegorical scenarios for reading (drawing on Iser rather than de Man, as his title otherwise suggests). Finally, Raymond Stephanson ("'Silenc'd by Authority' in *Joseph Andrews*: Power, Submission, and Mutuality in 'The History of Two Friends,'" *Studies in the Novel* 24.1 [1992], 1-12) looks at the reader's response to narrative authority in the latter tale.

scribes that unity, projecting skillful attributes on the tales such as irony or parody.⁶⁰ In Paul de Man's formulation, this branch of criticism functions rather patently as paraphrase, smoothing over discontinuities and disruptions. Further, I would add that this move toward paraphrase has larger implication and consequence, beyond the more narrowly defined interpretive problematic de Man identifies, and speaks to the socio-institutional economy of criticism. Under the auspices of the extant critical institution, this mode of apologetics works to revalue *Joseph Andrews* as fit for inclusion in the canon of "classic" novels, which are defined *a priori* as formally accomplished and artfully constructed.

Against this general tendency to integrate the interpolated tales into the formal or thematic texture of Joseph's history and to recuperate them as aesthetically assured, I would remark instead their excess precisely as *inept* narratives. In my view, they are blatantly stilted and laborious – they do not carry the interest or comedic value of Joseph's, Fanny's, and Adams' adventures – and are told badly, haughtily by the well-bred Lady and stutteringly by Dick. Formally, they are incongruous, distending an otherwise relatively coherent plot, depicting incidents that are hardly necessary to its progress. As a point of comparison, Wilson's tale, while a digression from the "road" narrative, bears directly on the plot of Joseph's recovery of his name and birthright, and the incidents Wilson tells carry a decided interest (sex, drinking, gambling, licentiousness) and a relevant but not tedious moral plot (corruption to wisdom). What I find remarkable about them, though, is not the "action" or content of the tales themselves, but their explicit representation of storytelling scenarios, of the characters engaged in and enthralled by storytelling – however ill-executed.⁶¹

By this, I do not mean to claim a refinement in the line of readings that notes the tales offer a contrast, a change of pace in the narrative tempo. There are many such changes in *Joseph Andrews*, from the mock-heroic action of the dog-fight, to the "pauses" when the narrator fills in background information,

60 J. Paul Hunter point out the embarrassment of these features to formalist criticism (*Before Novels*, p. 48).

61 Sacks observes that "the major characters' total participation in many episodes consists of listening to and commenting upon the tale of a newly introduced character," but sees their relevance in terms of ethical value (*Fiction and the Shape of Belief*, pp. 211ff.).

which function effectively to further the progress of the plot and vary its tempo. To claim that the interpolated tales are contrastive is a relatively empty claim, since any inserted segment, no matter how irrelevant or poorly drawn, might be said to offer a contrast or pause. Such a segment might indeed constitute a formal variation, but that hardly qualifies as an aesthetic justification. Rather, I would argue that the interpolated tales disrupt the code of normal novelistic expectation and readability, and their residue, the remainder in excess of that failed representation, is their depiction of scenes of narrative exchange. Their formal dissonance signals the tension between encoding of the major plot of Joseph's history and the otherwise subsumed allegorical plot of narrative performance. This dissonance is not a question of contrast but finally of incoherence.

To recall Todorov's rudimentary definition of a narrative proposition, the primary act that the interpolated tales recount is the act of narrative. As he puts it in "Narrative-Men" – by which he means those characters whose foremost function or predicated action is to tell stories (such as Scheherazade in *One Thousand and One Nights*), and to extend this one might more accurately add Narrative Women (such as the well-bred Lady or Scheherazade) and Narrative Children (Dick) – the primary act of an embedding narrative is by definition the narrative of narrative.⁶² Further, beyond the overt act of the narrator, the vignettes of the interpolated tales foreground the act of receiving narrative, explicitly casting the other characters as narratees, as engaged listeners and participants in the narrative scenario. Significantly, the text depicts a wide range of characters as implicated in the exchange of narrative – across class lines, from the well-bred Lady to Slipslop, across gender lines, from Mrs. Grave-Airs to Adams, and across age lines, from Lady Booby to Dick. These scenarios thus project the act of and urge for narrative as universal, indiscriminate, and natural, as an indubitable "human" attribute that goes without saying and effects a tacit social bond.

The scenario that features the "History of Leonora and the Unfortunate Jilt" aptly illustrates this. After passing the "great House which stood at some distance from the Road," the Lady

62 See Tzvetan Todorov, "Narrative-Men," in *The Poetics of Prose*, pp. 66–79.

remarks that the unfortunate Leonora lives there, which is “sufficient to awaken the Curiosity of Mr. Adams, as indeed it did that of the whole Company, who jointly solicited the Lady to acquaint them with Leonora’s History” (JA 80). The company in the coach includes the “well-bred Lady” who tells the story, Mrs. Grave-airs (who has refused Joseph’s being let into the coach since he is dressed in livery), Adams, and Slipslop, and they each indicate their uniform attention by various interjections regularly through the course of the narrating scene. The story itself consists, for the most part, of the exchange of letters between Horatio and Leonora, in over-inflated Augustan rhetoric,⁶³ and long, overdrawn scenes involving Horatio, Leonora, and Bellarmine, the false seducer, but within the dramatistic scenario the characters are depicted as thoroughly engaged, carrying on a running dialogue about the story, at points about proper conduct, sympathy for Leonora, castigating Leonora, and so forth.

This social bridge or levelling induced by narrative – which encodes the cross-class bond of narrative, or rather effaces the effect of class – is especially striking given the exchange between Slipslop and Mrs. Grave-airs at the Inn when they stop for dinner, at which point Mrs. Grave-airs cattily snipes, putting Slipslop in her place, as that saying goes: “‘Some Folks might sometimes give their Tongues a liberty; to some people that were their Betters, which did not become them: for her part, she was not used to converse with Servants’” (JA 97). In other words, the narrative scene depicts a space that transcends the protocols and expectations of normal and ordinary social relations – a kind of utopic storyworld, the characters joined by a common and seemingly natural and innate interest in storytelling to form a *narrative circle*, or, as the text declares, *company* – despite the fact that it otherwise confirms and asserts the hierarchy of those social relations. This manifest contradiction indicates the way in which the narrative is hyperbolically charged; what appears to be a realistic scene of the telling of a story is overcoded with the self-valorization of narrative – not only in the depiction of the urge for narrative, but in its bonding power – tapping into what Barthes would call the literary code or what I might call the reflexive code

63 See Jeffrey Plank, “The Narrative Forms of *Joseph Andrews*,” *Papers on Language and Literature* 24.2 (1988), 142–58.

of narrative.⁶⁴ The narrative code (equality in the narrative space) here overrides the normative cultural code (class hierarchy).

The stagecoach scene taps into the code of narrative self-representation in several other ways. First, it metonymically measures the story of Leonora against a stagecoach trip, invoking the pervasive narrative *topos* of a journey, presenting in microcosm a version of the general spatial-temporal correlative for the plot proper. Further, the coach ride serves to establish the figure of a propitious *locus* and occasion for the act of narrative, when and where it seems narrative naturally must occur, since characters are gathered at close quarters, biding time, the carriage of a coach presumably prompting intimacy. (One might also think of Twain's humorous twisting of this narrative trope in *Roughing It*, with the portrait of the "non-stop talking lady" on the stagecoach, who talks for twenty-four hours straight until she gets off.) Finally, the story is prompted by passing the "great House which stood at some distance from the Road," which functions as a *narrative prop*, an arbitrary and accidental figure that spurs the narration, which seems inevitably to issue from it. In short, this projection of a narrative scenario – its staging the performance of narrative, as well as its invocation of this set of literary or narrative motifs – demonstrates by its rhetorical excess the reflexive self-inscription and valorization of narrative. It projects an entry into a narrative space, a narrative time, and a narrative society, in which all of the characters are joined by their desire for and absorption in narrative.

Moreover, the story of Leonora in itself projects a complex of narratorial relations, and one might say her situation is governed by discourse-exchange. She writes letters, and in fact her letter to her father impels the denouement, since her father will give her no money, as Bellarmine discovers in his interview. The action is driven not by characters doing things to each other, but by characters telling things to each other; what they "do" is to tell. And, to extend this, a predominant action of the novel is the characters telling and listening to stories – their frequent casting as Narrative People. Wilson tells his story, and Adams listens breathlessly, as do Joseph and Fanny at points. Dick reads the story of Leonard

64 See Roland Barthes' distinction of the real and the operable in *S/Z*, pp. 80–1; and "The Reality Effect," *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), pp. 141–8.

and Paul, and Lady Booby tells Adams not to interrupt. Along the journey Adams periodically tells his story – about his trip to London to sell his sermons, about Joseph and Fanny – and much of the action, or what impels their moving on, is motivated by Adams talking if not arguing with other characters (with Trulliber, Barnabas, the gentleman hunting, Joseph on education, and his wife). At points, Joseph relays his story: in letters to his sister, Pamela, to the Tow-wouses at the Inn, to the justice, to the salesman who generously gives them money. And Adams and Joseph receive stories from many of the other characters they encounter at the various stopping-points along the way.

Bryan Burns, in “The Story-telling in *Joseph Andrews*,” likewise points out this predominance of storytelling, noting that “*Joseph Andrews* is almost entirely composed of stories formally or informally arising as the travellers move on their way.”⁶⁵ For Burns, this tendency works to give a fuller sense of the characters and their motives, to reinforce the moral lessons of the surface story by shifting perspectives, and to intone picaresque elements. In other words, while Burns highlights this strata of the novel, he still sees it as subservient to the normal plot, integrating it as a didactic support, in large part following earlier critics like Sheldon Sacks. Rather than seeing it as a support, I would argue that the invocation of the topoi of narrative performance codes this strata allegorically, in effect superceding the normal plot and its representational code, the characters functioning less as actants in or supports to Joseph’s story than as prosopoetic figures for narrative – as (Narrative) Curiosity, Desire, Attentiveness, Anxiety, etc. Susan McNamara also remarks of the storytelling – in *Tom Jones*, but which might be applied to *Joseph Andrews* – “Storytelling and fiction-making are endemic to the entire world of the novel.”⁶⁶ For McNamara, this vein of fiction-making points to a critique of realism, in that the novel reflexively calls attention to the bound between fiction and a putative reality, so that the fiction is self-referential and validated within a “closed system.”⁶⁷ While I

65 Bryan Burns, “The Story-telling in *Joseph Andrews*,” in *Henry Fielding: Justice Observed*, ed. K. G. Simpson (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1985), p. 126. While perceptive, Burns fails to take account of Sacks’ or McNamara’s earlier and one would assume germane arguments.

66 Susan McNamara, “Mirrors of Fiction within *Tom Jones*: The Paradox of Self-Reference,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 12 (1978–9), 374.

67 *Ibid.*, 388.

would agree with the general import of McNamara's argument, her conclusion is finally tautological; whereas one might differentiate rhetorical positions, all levels of fiction are fictional and determined in relation to that fictive economy (the narrator has a superior rhetorical position, but receives his information from the various characters along the way, and thus his information is not any more ontologically assured – or fictional – than that of the well-bred Lady). Here, I would stress instead the way in which "storytelling" or the subscription to standard figures and motifs of the performance of narrative overcode the representation, signaling the tropological status of the narrative of narrative, beyond the simple exposure of the "illusion" of fiction.

In a sense, the episodic obstacle structure that motivates the normal plot of *Joseph Andrews* functions to facilitate and provide the occasion for these repeated storytelling scenes. The pseudo-realistic travel narrative provides a series of tableaux for the generation and exchange of narrative, in that its reiterative holding pattern sets the stage for what these characters seem naturally to do while waiting, or while coming upon new characters: tell and receive stories. In other words, while travel constitutes a standard motif against which to stage action and adventure, it also forms an allegorical topography for the narrative of narrative, replete with the action of Narrative Figures, of characters personifying the transaction of and desire for narrative.

Insatiable narrative

These iterative and ingrained storytelling scenarios figure not only the act of narrative but the economy of narrative and its valuation by virtue of the characters' functioning not simply as passive receivers but as desiring and avid consumers of narrative. To take the example of the History of Leonora, the various riders in the coach enthusiastically prompt the narrative; the simple mention of her "Calamity" is "*abundantly* sufficient to awaken the Curiosity . . . of the whole Company" (my emphasis; JA 80), and they each interject their comments along the way, at points quieting Adams when he interrupts their attention by his repeated sighs. Even after the break in the story and the "uneasiness" at the Inn – and in part to quell that uneasiness, narrative as a salve to assuage social insult and injustice – the characters immediately

"desired the Lady to conclude the Story" (JA 98), and Slipslop reinforces the request, "'I beg your Ladyship to give us that Story you *commencated* in the Morning'" (emphasis in text; JA 98). These prompts are not simply mechanical set-ups of the story, but excessively encode narrative desire – the audience is "abundantly" curious, and none of the characters abstain but the "whole Company" is implicated in the economy of narrative desire.⁶⁸

In particular, Adams hyperbolically and comically figures the desire for narrative throughout the text. Again, the mere mention of Leonora's unfortunate circumstance goads his curiosity; he signals his interest through the tale by constant interjections – asking how Bellarmine is dressed, correcting a point of fact about the Court, his "deep Groans" (which at first "frighted the Ladies"), and so on – and he is not merely disappointed in the delay in the story when they stop at the Inn, but his desire for narrative is depicted in excessive if not salacious terms: "The Lady was proceeding in her Story, when the Coach drove Mr. Adams, whose Ears were the most hungry Part about him; he being, as the Reader may perhaps guess, of an insatiable Curiosity, and heartily desirous of hearing the End of this Amour. . ." (JA 92).

This excessive characterization of Adams as narratee occurs throughout the text, in the various narrative interludes on the way, such as when he "discourses" with Barnabas, the gentleman who is hunting, Trulliber, the sailor, Joseph, or in reading his Aeschylus, as well as in the scenes of the interpolated tales. It receives the most sustained elaboration in the context of Wilson's History, which is prompted by Adams' dire curiosity:

for his [the host's] extraordinary Goodness, as well as that Fund of Literature he was Master of, which he [Adams] did not expect to find under such a Roof, had raised in him more Curiosity than he had ever known. "Therefore," said he, "if it be not too troublesome, Sir, your History, if you please." (JA 157)

Through the course of the story, Adams indicates his enthrallment by emitting more "deep Groans" and various cries, commenting "with some Vehemence" (160), or "snap[ping] his Fingers at these Words in an Ecstasy of Joy" (171). When Wilson offers to pass over some remarks he had made, Adams beseeches him to re-

68 Cf. Peter Brooks, "Narrative Desire," *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York: Vintage, 1985), pp. 37–61.

count them (167), and later Adams is so immersed that at one point he starts from his chair (171). In a certain sense, these various interjections offer *narrative adverts* or *spurs*, as functional devices to effect the continuation of the narrative, but their cumulative excess builds to valorize the act of and desire for narrative, marking Adams as a prosopoetic figure for a kind of Narrative Lust. Contrary to his being a moral register for the events of the plot, or an example of the disparity between pedantic knowledge and experience, his dominant characterization in this regard is as an *obsessive* – or as the text puts it, *insatiable* – *narratee*. In fact, the text stresses that he is a poor storyteller – as the section preceding Wilson's History puts it, he is a "circumstantial Teller of a Story" (156), and barely stays to the point – thus reinforcing his casting as inveterate narratee.

This depiction comes to a crescendo at the end of the tale when, after telling about his questionable affairs, Wilson apologizes that his account has taken so long: "But I ask pardon. I fear I have detained you too long in relating the Particulars of the former Interview. 'So far otherwise,' said Adams, licking his Lips, 'that I could willingly hear it over again'" (JA 174). This is of course humorous, since Adams' interest seems almost prurient, although he frequently censures any immorality; Adams' interest in hearing stories, in receiving narrative, is figured in terms of innate appetite, fusing the appetites of hunger (his "Ears were the most Hungry part about him," licking his lips) and sex (licking his lips, his insatiability, his desire to hear it over again), and transposing them to a kind of irrepressible and socially countenanced lust for narrative.

In general, this appetite for narrative is summarized under the figure of Curiosity, which constantly impels Adams (and the other characters) to consume stories. As mentioned, the History of Leonora is prompted by the curiosity of Adams and the company in the coach, and Wilson's History incites "more Curiosity than he [Adams] had ever known." Curiosity is defined not as a trivial or inconsequential response, but as a human "Affection" that calls for gratification, and that all the characters and also the projected "Reader" are subject to, as the text repeatedly intones. Before Adams tells his story, when he and Wilson are sitting around the fire-side at night, relaxing with a "replenished Pipe" and a "Bottle of excellent Beer" – obviously encoding a *narrative locus*, an atmosphere of comfort in which narrative might inevitably issue –

Adams' brief account of Joseph "began to work on the Gentleman's Affections, and raised in him a Curiosity to know the Singularity which Adams had mentioned in his History. This Curiosity Adams was no sooner informed of, than with Joseph's Consent, he agreed to gratify it . . ." (156).

This postulation of curiosity as the prime category that motivates narrative is especially distinctive in that it encodes narrative in terms of affect, of a consuming appetite, rather than in terms of (a fulfillment of a desire for) mimetic representation. This bears significantly on the presumed mimetic basis of narrative, from Aristotle down. If one recalls Aristotle's *Poetics*, the primary motivation of art – tragedy, epic, and so on, but that might also be applied to our category of narrative – is mimesis, and Aristotle goes so far as to project an anthropological foundation for this urge:

For imitating is innate in men from childhood. Men differ from other animals in that they are the most imitative, and their first learning is produced through imitation. Again, all men delight in imitations . . . For we delight in contemplating the most exact likenesses of things which are in themselves painful to see, e.g. the shapes of the most dishonored beasts and corpses . . . For men delight in seeing likenesses because in contemplating them it happens that they are learning and reasoning out what each thing is . . .⁶⁹

As a counterpoint to this normative prescription of mimesis as the basis of the poetic impulse, Edmund Burke's *Enquiry*, roughly contemporaneous with *Joseph Andrews*, begins with the highlighting of Curiosity and its ensuing mandate for Novelty:

The first and simplest emotion which we discover in the human mind, is Curiosity. By curiosity, I mean whatever desire we have for, or whatever pleasure we take in novelty. We see children perpetually running from place to place to hunt out something new . . . But as those things which engage us merely by their novelty, cannot attach us for any length of time, curiosity is the most superficial of all the affections . . . it has an appetite which is very sharp, but very easily satisfied . . . Curiosity from its nature is a very active principle . . . Some degree of novelty must be one of the materials in every instrument which works upon the mind; and curiosity blends itself more or less with all our passions.⁷⁰

69 Aristotle's *Poetics*, pp. 6–7.

70 Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. J. T. Boulton (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), p. 31.

While Curiosity has a decidedly transient quality, Burke figures it as central and fundamental to cognitive activity, and he grounds the impulse toward novelty anthropologically, its innateness demonstrated by the presumably primitive state of childhood, which parallels Aristotle's claiming imitation as a primary human impulse. Burke goes on to single out imitation (respectfully citing Aristotle) as a social passion, which forms a social link through the imitation of manners, opinions, and conduct, but the impulse toward novelty still takes priority: "But when the object of the painting or poem is such as we should run to see if real, let it affect us with what odd sort of sense it will, we may rely upon it, that the power of the poem or picture is more owing to the nature of the thing itself than to the mere effect of imitation, or to a consideration of the skill of the imitator however excellent."⁷¹ For Aristotle, artistic pleasure derives from imitation, and the value of a poetic object from its mimetic skill. For Burke, novelty and its affective power – that which makes us run to see it (such as a fatal accident or a public execution, as he notes, rather than a well-done play) – supplant the interest in and take priority over sheer imitation.

Burke's *Enquiry* stands as one of the inaugural texts in the eighteenth-century discourse on aesthetics, of which Hume's "Of the Standard of Taste," Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, and Schiller's *Letters* also stand as prominent examples. In very broad terms, they demonstrate a shift from mimesis as the salient or determining category of considerations of art – essentially a formalist concern with the properties of the art object – to an aesthetic basis – for the most part a concern with the affective power of the object, its spurring interest and impelling judgments of taste.⁷² This discursive field marks a different prospect by which to assess the novel, in contrast to the tacit conventions of Aristotelian poetics, whereby affective categories such as novelty and curiosity supercede the protocols of realistic representation.

To return to the specific case of *Joseph Andrews*, the textual assertion of Curiosity does not necessarily dispense with mimesis, but reorients the categorical priority of narrative to an affective or aesthetic basis. In other words, what is at stake is not only the

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 49–50.

⁷² For a discussion of the history of the aesthetic, see Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

realistic representation *per se* of the characters engaged in actions and activities – as given by the dictates of formal narrative theory – but the encoding of the affective power of curiosity, novelty, and finally, self-reflexively, of narrative itself, as the pervasive storytelling and narratorial scenarios attest. In *Joseph Andrews*, the positing of an “insatiable” *appetite* for narrative exceeds the parameters of poetic description and functions as a blatantly ideological register that testifies to and reinforces the affective power of literary narrative and constitutes the desire for it as the most primary and indubitable of human affections. In other words, the allegory of narrative does not just effect a theoretical valorization of narrative as an abstract mode, but encodes the allegory of desire for and power of an historically specific instantiation of literature – novelistic and other extant forms of literary practice. In this sense, it is thoroughly ideological (rather than, say, metaphysical), asserting not simply its technical mode but its historical production and consumption, as abstract human appetites, beyond history. To put this another way, curiosity, reiteratively fulfilled by an appetite for novelty, presents the recoding of desire from appetites such as sex and hunger to a desire for the new, for new stories, books, sermons, and so forth – engendered by and satisfied under the aegis of capitalist modes of production, particularly the material production of the thing advertised, sold, and consumed as literature. The transposition of desire from presumably natural appetites such as sex and hunger is most familiar in advertising, and one might say that narrative, in these depictions, advertises itself.

The rhetoricity of narrative

By the dictates of the criterion of mimesis, novels give us the world as if in a “mirror,” as it is typically put, albeit as mediated through various novelistic modes or forms (showing vs. telling, the first-person novel vs. the authorial novel), and the goal of such a criterion is verisimilitude. However, as Christine van Boheemen argues, using the example of *Tom Jones* in “The Semiotics of Plot,” despite the “slow mediation between [its] opposed categories [Allworthy and Tom], and an achievement of a state of synthetic equilibrium at the end,” the novel actually “work[s] out irreconcilable contradictions by means of rhetorical strategies which can

only function or exist when embedded in a narrative process, in language."⁷³ In other words, the plot is predicated on its exercise of narrative and linguistic protocols, rather than on its imitation of a plausible series of events. Because of the various rhetorical strategies the novel invokes, van Boheemen concludes that "the still predominant habit of evaluating fictions on the basis of their 'truth,' often understood as the verisimilitude of the narrative, becomes extremely problematic. Verisimilitude is only the indication of a more artificial displacement of the rhetoricity of plot."⁷⁴ This comes very close to Roland Barthes' analysis of "realism" in the novel, whereby those details that seem to invoke the effect of the real are in fact the moments when narrative resorts to the most literary means, to the typical codes and topoi of literature.

This recasting of plot in terms of rhetoricity, in terms of rhetorical strategies and literary codes, presents a significant revision of narrative poetics. While van Boheemen suggests the import of this revision, her analysis still focuses on the essentially structural – following Greimas – oppositions semantically invoked by the characters and maintains the normal scheming of the "action" of the first-order characters in the narrative proper. Drawing on the case presented by *Joseph Andrews*, I would focus instead on the inherently rhetorical situation of narrative throughout the text, as demonstrated by the narratives improper, the many and pervasive appositions of narratorial relations throughout the narrative: in the construction of an "authorial" narrator issuing the adventures; in the less obvious depiction of the collection and collation of narrative sources; in the scenario of intimacy between the (super)narrator and the reader; and in the multiple substrata of narrative scenarios in which most of the characters participate; and in the allegorical encoding of Narrative Characters. Further, the allegorical overwriting of names for narrative – narrative as travel, as hunger, and so forth – and the attribution of narrative appetite contribute to the rhetorical charge of the narrative. To return to my previous discussion of the plot of the novel, the novel does not demonstrate a straight plot line that its title (*History of the Adventures . . .*) and the protocols of novelistic expectation suggest, but striates that straight representation with a network of rhetorical invocations of the performance of narrative, indicating, to

73 Christine van Boheemen, "The Semiotics of Plot: Toward a Typology of Fictions," *Poetics Today* 3.4 (1982), 93–94. 74 *Ibid.*, 94.

appropriate van Boheemen's formulation, the constitutive rhetoricity of narrative.

The various storytelling scenarios discussed in this chapter further play out the paradigmatic action of the narrative of narrative, of the rhetorical apposition of narratorial relations, and the thematizing of the modes of narrative production and circulation. To give some sense of the repetition of the problematic of narratorial relations, one might represent it in the following formula, based on the anachronic recession of the narrative: $N_{\text{virtual}} (N_{\text{reader's instructions}} (N_{\text{literature}} (N_{\text{character}} (N_{\text{narration}} (N_{\text{sources}} (A_{\text{characters}} (N_{\text{interpolated tales}} (N_{\text{within tales}})))))))))$. This schematically illustrates the layers of embedding of the narrative, which, again, yields anything but a simple, one-dimensional narratorial structure, of a narrator delivering Joseph's history. However, the grammar of the plot – the temporal demarcation of narrative levels – collapses rhetorically, in that each level takes the same status, repeating the rhetorical construction of narrative authority. (After all, the supernarrator constitutes the same rhetorical relation as the Lady in the coach.) Rather than deriving from a pseudo-ontological ground of originary authorial presence, deferred but promised by the line of descent of the narration, the narrative thus postulates a tropological fiction, of the iterative rhetorical ascription of narrative authority.

The attribution of levels on the order of sentential syntax, according to tense and person, poses a grammatization of the constitutive rhetorical configuration of narrative. As Paul de Man puts it in "Semiology and Rhetoric:"

But even if we . . . reduce the narrator to the status of a mere grammatical pronoun . . . this subject remains endowed with a function that is not grammatical but rhetorical, in that it gives voice, so to speak, to a grammatical syntagm. The term voice, even when used in a grammatical terminology as when we speak of the passive or interrogative voice, is, of course, a metaphor inferring by analogy the intent of the subject from the structure of the predicate.⁷⁵

Thus the poetic category of voice, which establishes the ordinal authority of a narrator, constitutes an anthropomorphic trope for the rhetoricity of narrative. In this way, standard poetics performs the grammatization of rhetoric, the inverse of what de Man takes

as the paradigm of the deconstructive allegory of reading, the rhetorization of grammar. In a familiar example in *Allegories of Reading*, de Man demonstrates how the reading of the last line of Yeats' "Among Schoolchildren," which is grammatically unambiguous, yields two coherent but incommensurate readings, by virtue of the undecidability of its rhetoric ("How can we tell the dancer from the dance?," usually read as a rhetorical question, might also be read as a serious if not desperate question). For de Man, the incommensurability of these readings indicates not the polysemy of language but its inherent deconstruction.

Here, the paradigm is not one of the allegory of reading, of the rhetorization of grammar; rather, it signals a tropological allegory, perhaps the cardinal move of fiction, which projects the order of grammar – what we commonly call plot – on the rhetorical economy of modes of narrative figuration. The grammatization of rhetoric performed by the formal scheming of narrative attempts to displace the inherently tropological functioning of narrative, in effect to literalize its figural operation by substituting the stable structure of metaphor, of tenor and vehicle, so that the process of narrative becomes the transparent medium that carries – mimes – the tenor, the putative events. Instead, I would say that mimesis is a code engendered by the rhetoricity of narrative, the "real" that narrative presumably represents an effect of its reflexive operation.

Conspicuous narrative

(The Turn of the Screw and Wuthering Heights)

I The rhetoric of frames

Paradoxical narrative

Narrative frames take a paradoxical status: they are a relatively commonplace and conspicuous feature in narrative, while at the same time they are occulted or valuable precisely insofar as they disappear. On the one hand, frames are constituted as invisible or disposable, as peripheral and only significant as a segue to the narrative proper. They function to announce the normative narrative, marking its status and hypostasizing its value, conversely effacing their own. As Jacques Derrida remarks in his meditation on the concept of the *parergon* in *The Truth in Painting*, the frame “is a form which has as its traditional determination not that it stands out but that it disappears, buries itself, effaces itself, melts away at the moment it deploys its greatest energy.”¹ Frames presuppose their own forgetting, as if casting a spell on their audience, thus functioning as a lure or charmed path to the narrative (recall that the derivation of “spell” invokes not only the sense of enchantment, but very literally the telling of a story). As Mieke Bal puts it, in an almost magical way that would seem to exceed her narratological schema, “When the embedded text presents a complete story with an elaborate fabula, we gradually

¹ *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian MacLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 61. See also Derrida’s discussion of the exteriority of Hegel’s prefaces in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 49–50.

forget the fabula of the primary narrative."² From the standpoint of the normal codes of narrative representation, frames are rendered superfluous, somehow beyond the action, fabulated acts that are not acts.

On the other hand, narrative frames conspicuously foreground an act of narrative in an explicit vignette (such as the characters in the coach in *Joseph Andrews*, depicting a scenario of the delivery and reception of narrative) or tableau (such as a narrator alone at night poring over a discovered text, accounting for its discovery and relaying what is in it). They depict a narrative agent – a narrator – in a relatively complete set of circumstances, with an autonomous range of action. In a manner of speaking, they stage and realize the performance of narrative, focusing on a plot of producing a narrative show (as in the film *The Producers*) and thus bracketing the narrative-to-come as a subplot ("Springtime for Hitler" in *The Producers*), dramatizing what one might call the show business – the modal operation and rhetorical dynamic – of narrative. In other words, while frames have a problematic and finally undecidable relation to the narrative proper – as supplementary, as Derrida notes of the parergon in its relation to the ergon,³ and in contrast to his underscoring the parergon's lack of a representational charge⁴ – in this sense they represent the construction of a discrete and whole narrative act, a narrative of narrative performance. Thus, to invert the colloquial expectation of a frame, rather than being superadded to the narrative proper and external or extraneous, one might claim that a frame forms a coherent narrative proposition on its own terms in relation to which the embedded narrative takes the position of an indirect object.

Frames articulate the rhetorical dynamic of narrative delivery and/or reception, not simply invoking the mechanical delivery of the narrative but situating the narrative and filling out a context. As Ross Chambers puts it, "certain types of literary storytelling

2 Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, trans. Christine van Boheemen (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), p. 143. See also John T. Matthews, "Framing in *Wuthering Heights*," *Texas Studies in Language and Literature* 27 (1985), 25–61, which begins by declaring, "Frames are meant to be forgotten" (p. 25).

3 Derrida remarks that it is "half-work and half-outside-the-work, neither work nor outside-the-work and arising in order to supplement it because of the lack within the work" (*Truth*, p. 122).

4 *Ibid.*, p. 59.

consistently produce *by textual means* a narrative situation that gives point to the narration, a narrative situation describable in terms such as 'speaker,' 'hearer,' 'narrator,' 'narratee,' and so forth."⁵ Still, for Chambers, frames function as a thematic key ("give point") or interpretive parameter, whereas I would focus more narrowly on the interpretive displacement of a frame, its constituting its situation as its own complete illocutionary act. In addition to ascribing an audience or communicative scenario, frames offer a rationale for or causal explanation of the narrative, most immediately accounting for why the narrative act will occur at that particular (story)moment and in general attributing its genesis and origin. In other words, they thicken the plot of the narrative production, giving motive and background.

Frames typically cast the narrative scenario or situation independently of the normal plot that the frame presumably leads into (or out of), in time and place, as well as in the topic of action. They always figure the delivery as posterior to the embedded narrative, which is by definition anachronic, and they usually take place at some remove, not only in time (which presumably augurs balance and disinterested reflection), but in space, in a comfortable place that fosters the narrating. Frames frequently feature an alterior audience, as in *The Decameron*, *The Turn of the Screw* or *Heart of Darkness*, who are purveyors of narrative but who are not characters in the normal plot. If the narrator is implicated in the events to be told, the distance in time and space effects a rhetorical cushion, separating the narrative scenario from the normal plot. In short, the border of the frame is the remove of time and/or place, as well as the rhetorical blocking (as the arrangement of stage positions is called in theater) of the narrative scene. Frames present a different operation from the typical invocation of an "authorial" narrator, since they embody and contextualize the narrative performance in a discrete and whole scenario, rather than sporadically issue the narrative from a disembodied, omniscient presence. In fact, part of the occulting validation of an authorial narrator is its lack of a discrete situation.

The frame of *The Turn of the Screw*, for example, sketches an elaborated scenario of the delivery of the governess's story, pro-

5 Emphasis in Chambers; see Ross Chambers, *Story and Situation: Narrative Seduction and the Power of Fiction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 22.

construction of the narrative. At best, a frame becomes a vehicle of the narrative proper, that has no value in and of itself, except insofar as it catalyzes the delivery of that narrative content. In terms of structural linguistics, it serves an enunciatory rather than aesthetic function; it has no substantive content but clears the channel to announce the message of the narrative. A frame takes the role of what Jakobson terms the phatic code, the form of greetings such as "Hello" or "How are you?" which are in a certain sense meaningless (rarely is one literally asking how you are, but establishing what Jakobson calls a "contact"), or more exactly rhetorical. As Jakobson defines them, "There are messages primarily serving to establish, to prolong, or to discontinue communication, to check whether the channel works ('Hello, do you hear me?'), to attract the attention of the interlocutor or to confirm his continued attention ('Are you listening?')." ¹¹ In short, they are dispensable questions of medium, forgotten or irrelevant once it is established that the appropriate channels are working.

Narrative frames no doubt serve on one level as an establishment of contact, or more exactly figure a rhetorical scenario of the contact and transaction of narrative, announcing the literary topoi of narrative exchange. But beyond this simple enunciatory function, narrative frames also work as a kind of advertisement, similar in kind to those that hype television shows ("Tonight, on *NYPD Blue* . . ."). The frame is not considered a part of the "show" – the narrative presentation as such – and is dispensable once the show begins, serving not only to establish contact but to encode the show as desirable, as an estimable consumable object. In other words, frames function not only to open the channel for the sake of the normative message, but to valorize that message, as well as to valorize reflexively their own representation of the process of narrative. In this sense, frames take an ideological function, reflexively encoding the value and desirability of narrative and more generally a desire for literature, in general for the historically specific modal forms of extant literary practice and production (especially prevalent in novels, short stories, and so on, rather than, say, epics or songs). When the audience awaits Douglas's promised tale in *The Turn of the Screw*, the frame is about more than simply making contact; it rather immodestly attributes the

11 Roman Jakobson, *Language in Literature*, eds. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 68.

stein and so on. As an example, Todorov shows that the story of the “bloody chest” in the *One Thousand and One Nights* dizzyingly spins out five levels of framing: “Scheherazade tells that/Jaafer tells that/the tailor tells that/the barber tells that/his brother (and he has six brothers) tells that . . .”¹³ Although each frame can fulfill different functions (Scheherazade’s telling occurs in an articulated if redundant narrative scenario, whereas the chain of derivation accounts for access to otherwise distant material), the very excessiveness of the repetition of the framing relation hyperencodes the paradigm of the narrative of narrative. To make a general surmise, a single frame stresses the representation of the rhetorical dynamic of a narrative scenario – the dramatistic exchange of narrator and narratee(s) – whereas multiple frames stress the projection of a source and its chain of derivation. To put this in legalistic terms, multiple frames work to establish a legitimate chain of possession of the evidence of the narrative.

Overall, the relation and construction of a frame differs from that of a digression, in that the frame occurs prior to the narrative proper or a segment thereof (although temporally posterior – after the fact, as it were), and is normally taken to introduce and situate it. A digression, on the other hand, has an inverse relation: it extrudes from the primary narrative, can occur at any point in it, and seemingly supports that plot, perhaps offering background on the characters or a thematic analogue (say, as the interpolated tales are frequently read in *Joseph Andrews*, as a comment on marriage). According to Todorov, the difference between frame and embedded story can be judged simply by length.¹⁴ If the embedding story is short (say, three pages), and the embedded story significantly longer (say, ten or fifty pages), then the embedding story is a frame. If the ratio is reversed – the embedding story long, and the embedded story notably shorter – then the embedded story is a digression. In other words, what comes to be defined as the primary level of the narrative is determined by word count. This makes intuitive sense, and we usually ascertain the import of narratives and narrative features by such a weighting.

However, I would say more strictly that a frame articulates a discernible narrative scenario, focusing on the rhetorical dynamic

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 71. ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

of narrative exchange. One could imagine a ten-page frame embedding a two-page plot; in an exaggerated sense, this is how a novel like *Portnoy's Complaint* is structured, as prefatory frame leading to the final comment of the psychoanalytic session, "And now we can perhaps to begin." That is usually how long jokes are structured, which invoke humor precisely because of the build-up. Part of the problem in distinguishing frame and digression is that they both represent "passing structures" or a shift in narrative levels and topoi. In a broad sense, they are indistinguishable in that they effect the same relation: the rhetorical scheme of narrating, as the interpolated tales in *Joseph Andrews* demonstrate. Perversely, one might claim that the text of Joseph's adventures frame the interpolated tales, although from a normative standpoint they clearly digress from that major plot. More precisely, that plot represents a broad variety of actions, topoi, and generic conventions, other than the figuring of a frame for the interpolated tales, and thus it would stretch accuracy to reduce it to a frame.

In previous chapters I have argued that *Tristram Shandy* and *Joseph Andrews* constitute narratives of narrative, and in a loose sense one might characterize them as framed narratives in that the action of narrating strates if not dominates their plots. The "author" of *Joseph Andrews* provides a frame, ascribing narrative sources and depicting his situation. However, at best this description is latent, since the narrator's actions are not figured in a fully articulated scenario of narrative composition, but sporadically recur through the text. For my purposes here, I will define a narrative frame in a more limited way, particularly as it fulfills an aggregate of the following topoi: the relatively complete depiction of a discrete *narrative scene*, placing the narrative in time and circumstance separate from the time and/or circumstance of the embedded narrative; the casting of a *narrative circle*, of "narrative men" and women characters, whose primary action is the delivery and/or reception of narrative; the recounting of a *narrative cause*, proffering a causal network for the narrative, both in the sense of its attribution and in the efficient cause of its being told at that point; and finally the ascription of the semic vein of *narrative adverts*, explicit depictions of the narrative-to-be-told and of the narrative desire of the narrative circle.

I would distinguish this poetic sense from the larger senses of

ish Lockwood, or in the film *Princess Bride*, when the grandfather reads the story to the boy home from school. While the stakes of the narrative are not as extreme as in *The Decameron*, narrative occurs under preternaturally opportune conditions.

The frame of *The Turn of the Screw* figures a different scene, the conditions not as fatally serious but nonetheless as urgent, coding the story primarily in terms of entertainment and an overwhelming curiosity. The novel opens with the audience "sufficiently breathless"; the story is deferred, as if baited, which further charges the narrative, since the audience "lost all attention for everything else." However, even after the manuscript arrives from London, no one asks that the story be told. They wait until after dinner, "till such an hour of the evening as might best accord with the kind of emotion on which our hopes were fixed."²² This is implausible, since one would suppose that if the auditors were desperately anxious, they would want to hear the story whenever it arrived, but the explicit reference to "such an hour" obviously invokes the encoding and valorization of a narrative time rather than a presumed real time. In other words, this depiction lays bear the parameters of the literary code that masks itself under the guise of realism,²³ and, like thematic names indicating allegory, signals entry to a narrative world and its protocols.

This narrative scene is further charged, after all the build-up, when Douglas reads to "our hushed little circle on the night of the fourth." The circle is "subject to a common thrill," huddled "round the hearth," noting the scene is "as on Christmas Eve in an old house a strange tale should essentially be." This depiction invokes a number of semes of the comfort of narrative – at night, encircled around a fire in a manor house, wintry, December-cold outside, but warm, intimate, and sheltered around the fire – that harken an almost primal scene, the family or tribe gathered "round the hearth" to hear genealogical or ceremonial narratives, as in the meadhall in *Beowulf*. While Shoshana Felman points out the psychoanalytic resonances of the text – the primal scene that

22 Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw*, ed. Robert Kimbrough (New York: Norton, 1966), p. 4. References will hereafter occur parenthetically in the text.

23 On the "novelistic real," see Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), p. 80.

Jilt" in *Joseph Andrews*), the mention of a name or event, or the discovery of a manuscript. These *topoi* function as *narrative catalysts or goads*, spurring storytelling within the specific dramatic context that the narrative scene sets out. They provide a plausible explanation of why the narrative is given at a particular time, further validating the narrative by drawing on a realistic code of tangible motivation. They differ from sources *per se*, since sources offer a kind of documentary proof of the contents of the narrative; narrative catalysts offer a specific point of origin not of the "content" of the narrative, but of the extant act of narrative in the frame. In a functional sense, catalysts explicitly intone a literary code, as literary props figured in terms of natural and typical events, that prompt or goad the narrative transaction.

Taking up the other pole of exchange, frames frequently focus on the reception rather than source or cause of narrative. For instance, the frame of *The Canterbury Tales* depicts the audience's interaction, with little detail of where each character derives the story from. It is tacitly assumed the characters possess a store of stories – that store an innate human property. The action of the frame then focuses on the interaction of the narratees, of the characters as Narrative Men and Women, inevitably doing what Narrative People do – exchange narrative – and bonded in a social group by their interest in narrative, forming what I would call a *narrative circle*. In fact, their reception in *Canterbury Tales* is crucially figured since they are competing for best story, which subsumes interest in their erstwhile goal, their pilgrimage to holy land. Their pilgrimage provides the tableau for their narrative competition, and their interest in narrative supercedes that of religion, coding narrative as an indeed estimable motivating force. This depiction obviously taps a literary rather than realistic code (as would befit an account of real people on pilgrimage). In addition, they are not simply Narrative People who deliver narrative, but are enjoined by the tacit consensus and community of the narrative circle. Perversely, that is their faith, their bond. Narrative is figured as the predominant form and currency of social exchange and interaction.

The frames of *The Canterbury Tales* and *The Decameron*, as well as those embedding the interpolated tales in *Joseph Andrews* as discussed in the last chapter, depict the narrative circle as an ensemble, perhaps from different social backgrounds, but linked in

that "It's beyond everything. Nothing at all that I know touches it" (p. 1). When his narration is postponed, there is a "unanimous groan, and much reproach," and several "resent postponement." All of this stems, implausibly enough, from the few hints that Douglas has given. The circle, unquestioningly, is fully implicated in the hyper-desire for narrative, "worked . . . up . . . subject to a common thrill," and as one exclaims, "Oh I can't wait for the story!" (p. 4). The lure of narrative is so powerful and all-consuming that the primary narrator, who takes the role of a seemingly impartial witness, says, "We lost all attention for everything else." No ordinary entertainment, this; the promise of narrative not only transfixes the circle but suspends time, since the account elides the three days of waiting to a general state of narrative anxiety. In other words, this scene configures not a realistic scenario in which one might suspect Douglas' self-interest in telling a winning tale and discount his bragging, and which depicts the characters engaged in other events over three days, but invokes an allegorical topography of a narrative world that codes narrative in the extremest of terms, all of the characters registers of that world. They exist for the moment of narrative; in the manner of medieval allegories, one might name them Narrative Hunger, Narrative Impatience, and Narrative Desire.

The frame, then, is not perfunctory or a simple lead-in to the story-to-come, nor does it merely establish an occasion for the governess's story; rather, its concentrated depiction of enthrallment – figuring the compulsion to tell and zeal to hear narrative and its overall power – proscribes not a mimetic language but an allegorical language. To a less concerted extent, typical descriptions of audiences gripped, on the edge of their seats, all ears (recall Adams' burning ears in *Joseph Andrews*), so quiet you could hear a pin drop, and the like function as similar encodings of the power of narrative. I would call these particular semic tags *narrative adverts*, advertising the narrative-to-come in hyperbolic terms, as well as figuring the scene of exchange itself in terms of the allegorical topography of narrative desire and entrancement. An *advert* is an explicit comment on narrative and its virtues and powers, and its compelling force for participants in its narrative circle.

This reflexive process of self-valorization and advertisement works in a manner similar to the process Eugene Vance describes

beginning – prompts the usual view of its inconsequence to the narrative text, except as an entry or signal tone to the majority plot. To spin out a metaphor, frames are taken as appetizers to the main course, as vehicles to wet appetite and thus ancillary to the main course. However, my point is that frames – and particularly introductory frames that otherwise seem contingent to the main plot – are registers of the allegory of narrative appetite. Thus, in an inverted sense, the meal or majority plot serves that appetite, rather than the pique of appetite functioning to aid digestion of the meal.

Introductory frames take several common forms: *an editor's preface*, describing how the narrator received letters, a journal or diary, or other relevant documents that will be presented, tapping the rhetoric of authentication of the embedded narrative. This scenario takes the form of pseudo-scholarly attribution, normalizing content that might otherwise be unbelievable or private.³⁴ Conversely, it valorizes the narrative-to-come precisely as secret and rare, and thus casts the narrative exchange to be of precious value. In some ways, this is the relation of pornography, and offers a kind of voyeuristic access to secret acts, projecting a prurient pleasure in discovering what goes on beyond closed doors, as the cliché goes. Second, an *interview preface*, which casts an oral rather than written source and therefore a dramatic scenario rather than an account of scholarly research. Such a frame draws the narrator as a reporter who records events – events which might otherwise carry high personal or emotional stakes (“We were talking, and I asked him what had happened to his wife, and he told me this story. . .”) – and thereby lends impersonal credence, again authenticating the narrative by effecting a distance, in person as well as time, as well as ascribing access to intimate events. Third, a *confessional preface*, which gives direct testimony of events, but effects the rhetoric of authenticity by its removal in time, presumably lending the perspective and wisdom of age, again normalizing what would otherwise be inaccessible and perhaps painful or embarrassing events.

34 Duyfhuizen, *Narratives of Transmission*, notes that opening frames typically function to assert authenticity and claim interpretive authority (see p. 135); however, I would say more exactly that they invoke the *rhetoric* of authenticity, and further, they function not merely to serve (“transmit,” as Duyfhuizen stresses) the narrative proper, but foreground the drama of narrative exchange.

These scenarios circumscribe the narrative transaction as an individual exchange, focusing their representation on the specific discovery or delivery of the advertised narrative. Differing from these, a fourth type is an *ensemble frame*, dramatizing the interaction of a *narrative circle*, its receptiveness and complicity in the narrative delivery. Such a frame is usually less intimate than individual exchanges, but depicts the public enactment of narrative, most frequently in terms of entertainment or diversion. Obviously, these are not rigid distinctions, and they sometimes overlap. As a case in point, the frame of *The Turn of the Screw* exhibits a composite introductory frame, invoking the code of the discovery of a secret narrative via editorial possession, although it expends most of its attention on the dramatic scenario of exchange and the enthusiastic reception of the circle. The salient distinction is its singulative occurrence at the beginning of the text, and the ensuing interpretive consequences of its asymmetrical formal placement.

The second general type I would note is a *bracketing* or *bookend frame*, that opens or introduces the story and then returns to close or conclude it in a formal if not thematic symmetry.³⁵ A bookend frame spatially and temporally marks the parameters of the narrative, which best fits the visual model of framing. It often occurs in the form of *editorial signals*, announcing the beginning and end perfunctorily. It can also function more significantly, not only marking the narrative temporally but providing the closing events of the embedded story, if not its thematic import, as at the end of a movie when an epilogue somberly states, as in *Boyz 'n the Hood*, that a character has been killed, gone to jail, reformed, or gone on to do great things. In a certain sense, this use of the frame transgresses the boundary of the embedded text, so that it carries on the plot sequence, as a necessary element of its teleology. In *Boyz 'n the Hood*, the epilogue frame extends the narrative to a thematic message, that revenge does not pay; had it ended without the epilogue, the import would be substantially different, proposing a severe family values plot that one must avenge one's family, the Ice Cube character becoming a kind of hero manqué and realizing himself through killing his brother's killer.

The Sorrows of Young Werther likewise demonstrates a bracket-

35 See Dittmar, "Fashioning" (195), for a relevant discussion of bracketing frames.

ing frame. It provides an introductory source attribution, explaining where this narrative comes from ("I have carefully collected and here presented to you whatever facts I have been able to discover concerning the history of poor Werther. . ."³⁶), thereby lending the rhetoric of credibility as well as ascribing the rarity of the narrative. Beyond this valorization of the narrative, the closing frame provides additional information that furthers the plot: "I should very much prefer that document written in his own hand concerning the last remarkable days of our friend were at our disposal, and that it were not necessary for me to interrupt the sequence of his posthumous letters by direct narration."³⁷ In other words, the frame offers not simply a curtain call but provides the telos of Werther's story – Werther's suicide – thus continuing the plot to a different end, lending it a far more melodramatic arc. Further, it implies a cautionary theme of the consequence of a Romantic temperament. Counter to the expectation of an introductory frame, the aim of such a bracketing frame is precisely *not* to disappear, but to give closure and thereby to shape the narrative. In general, then, a bracketing frame integrates more fully with the embedded narrative, imparting the final cause of the narrative and thus determining its teleology. In a rudimentary way, fables operate on this principle. The story of the rabbit and the hare functions as an example of the moral at the end: slow and steady wins the race. In their integration with the plot, bracketing frames usually take a less distinctly separate status than that of an introductory frame.

The third type of frame I would distinguish is a *recurring frame*. The framing move, the invocation of a narrative situation, repeats throughout, sometimes at regular if not mechanical moments, sometimes irregularly traversing the text. In a sense, a recurring frame complicates the very concept of frame since it loses its singular, autonomous position as opening announcement or as closing bracket. This type can take many forms: a tale-telling series or competition, repeating essentially the same narrative scenario periodically by rule (*The Decameron* or *Canterbury Tales*); an interview frame, as in Lockwood's account in *Wuthering Heights* or as one would imagine a novel of psychoanalytic

36 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther and Novella*, trans. Elizabeth Mayer and Louise Bogan (New York: Vintage, 1973), p. 2.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 125.

sessions, usually of a long and involved story told over a period of time, marked by a series of similar narrative scenarios; multiple frames, as in the tale of the "bloody chest" in the *One Thousand and One Nights* (Scheherazade tells that/Jaafer tells that/the tailor tells that . . .), mentioned above; an ingrained and compulsive narrator, like Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* or *Lord Jim*, presenting an enfaming relation that threatens to overtake the embedded plot; or a heterogeneous set of frame scenarios, as in the full text of *Wuthering Heights* or in *Frankenstein*, combining hybrid framing features, such as an initial storytelling scenario, testimony, direct witness, editorial ministration (for instance, letters), confessions, dreams, and so forth.

The frame that recurs in, say, *The Decameron* is regular and predictable, replicating a single structure of a brief introductory frame invoked over and again. While this takes the model of a simple prefatory frame, the excessiveness of its repetition (nine stories times nine days) encodes the act of narrative as a salient and in a sense dominant continuous action of the text. *Wuthering Heights* differs in that the frame recurs at disparate intervals, organized by the overarching frame of Lockwood's interviewing Nelly (in chapter 4, resuming in chapter 10, then giving a consolidated narration from chapters 15–30, filling in final developments when Lockwood returns in chapter 32), but also striated by heterogeneous framing operations, such as Lockwood's witness of *Wuthering Heights*, Heathcliff's testimony, Cathy's journal and haunting, Lockwood's dream, and Isabella's letter. *Frankenstein* exhibits a similarly complicated layering of frames: the preface, Walton's letters, Frankenstein's narration, and the creature's testimony.

The complicated and varied weaving of the frame with the details of the normal plot foregrounds the process of narrative gathering and focalization, discounting the presumption of the frame's contingency or of the straight, autonomous representation of plot. The multiplicity of frames causes a confusion of the layers of focalization, of Lockwood overwriting Nelly (and others) overwriting the events in 1801–2. This confusion and the repeated implication of the framing mechanism in the texture of the plot dissimulates the effect of distance, a distance that the framing relation otherwise seems to promise as an external, transmissive structure. In other words, the repetition or excess of this framing

Readings vs. Old Plays, a crucial protocol of criticism is not to add cumulatively to the conversation, as it is optimistically named, but precisely to discredit previous readings – in one manifestation, as Levin phrases it, showing how “my theme can lick your theme” – thereby generating a new winning reading.⁵⁸ This is not to trivialize the range of critical argument, but to underscore how it is implicated in and repeats the textual emblem, the language game that the text lays out as paradigmatic of narrative and discourse, due not to pique or vanity but to the economy of the critical institution and codified by the parameters of professional legitimation and accomplishment: to generate more and better “scholarship.”

Finally, while the text codes the urge for narrative as pervasive and all-consuming, it locates the exchange socioculturally, as a distinctively classed taste, accoutrement, and desire. It presents what seems a universal valorization of narrative as human desire and drive, but that desire is specified as a class refinement, located in a tableau of high society – it occurs, after all, in an English “country house,” on holiday – and of characters who have had governesses and the education to appreciate and purvey literature and literary refinement (the turns of the screw), and who have the leisure and resources to indulge such consumption. This explicit classing of narrative affect differs substantially from the depiction of the narrative circle in the coach in *Joseph Andrews*, which spans across class and age, in other words not solely representing the upper classes in their aesthetic pursuits but hailing the lower classes into the appreciation and more materially the consumption of literature. The frame of *The Turn of the Screw* poses literature – and specifically the literary taste for refined narratives of entertainment – as a sign of cultural capital and class accomplishment. The framing scenario depicts what Thorstein Veblen identified at the turn of the last century as the conspicuous leisure and conspicuous consumption of the upper classes,⁵⁹ coding literature on the one hand as a property and right of those classes, and on the other as a possible attainment, the ideological lesson being

⁵⁸ Lawrence Lipking, “Competitive Reading,” *The New Republic* (2 Oct. 1989), 28–35; Richard Levin, *New Readings vs. Old Plays: Recent Trends in the Reinterpretation of English Renaissance Drama* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

⁵⁹ See Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973).

that the lower classes might move up the class ladder by possessing it.

The dispossession of narrative (Wuthering Heights)

Wuthering Heights poses a decidedly different critical scenario from that of *The Turn of the Screw*. In the critical conversation, the frame has garnered significant attention, and the framing narrators, Lockwood and Nelly, prominently figure in readings of the novel. The conversation generally sorts along the framing divisions of the text, which broadly fall into three zones: (1) Lockwood's recurring frame (of the story of the Heights, and of Nelly's account of that story); (2) Nelly's recurring frame, telling the story of Heathcliff's rise and fall, as well as her less obvious implication in it; and (3) the enframed plot of Heathcliff and Cathy's vexed love affair, and the Earnshaw and the Linton family fortunes. Those that focus on Lockwood take his account as that of an impartial observer and witness (and therefore as a reliable narrator), or more substantially as an interpretive guide, or more negatively as obtuse if not harmful (and therefore as unreliable). To take one example, Carol Jacobs focuses on Lockwood's narration, separating it from "*Wuthering Heights-as-text*" as a literalized interpretive commentary, which emblemizes the disjunction between nonfiction and fiction.⁶⁰ More severely, several critics judge Lockwood to be incompetent and foppish, or ineffectual and finally complicit in acquiescing to the gendered violence at the Heights.⁶¹ Those that highlight Nelly's role – largely ignoring Lockwood or taking his frame as simply relaying Nelly's account – view her as central, structurally to divide the action (as acts in a drama), or interpretively, as "the author's authority in the novel," as William Buckler puts it.⁶² Less sympathetic readings take Nelly

60 Carol Jacobs, "*Wuthering Heights*: At the Threshold of Interpretation," *boundary 2* 7 (1979), 49–71.

61 See Terence McCarthy, "The Incompetent Narrator of *Wuthering Heights*," *Modern Language Quarterly* 42 (1981), 48–64; and Naomi Jacobs, "Gender and Layered Narrative in *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*," *Journal of Narrative Technique* 16 (1986), 204–19.

62 See Melvin R. Watson, "The Tempest in the Soul: Theme and Structure of *Wuthering Heights*," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 4 (1949), 87–100; and William E. Buckler, "Chapter Seven of *Wuthering Heights*: A Key to Interpretation," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 7 (1952), 51–5. Similarly on Nelly's credibility, see Carl R. Woodring, "The Narrators of *Wuthering Heights*," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 11 (1957), 298–305.

Beyond this general tendency to focus on one zone of the narrative or a particular character, a number of readings underscore the synthetic coherence of the overall framing pattern, bridging if not unifying an otherwise heterogeneous narrative. Dorothy Van Ghent, in an early reading, notes that the novel divides into two distinct parts, the story of the earlier generation and Heathcliff and Cathy's thwarted love, and the story of the later generation and Heathcliff's revenge. Van Ghent finds the overall frame, among other elements, to provide continuity and to bind the two parts together.⁶⁹ John Matthews stresses the importance of Lockwood's and Nelly's roles as imaginative filters governing the story of the Heights.⁷⁰ Other readings variously argue that the frames carry dominant motifs of the novel, such as doubling, overhearing, or gazing. For instance, Michael Macovski shows that the paradigm of listeners and speakers recurs through the text, and that the many "interrogative exchanges between characters" form a salient action.⁷¹ Arguing for the importance of looking rather than listening, Beth Newman claims that "Lockwood's scopic drive is thus what links the frame of *Wuthering Heights* to the narrative it introduces," and, drawing on film theory, finds the gaze to be the overarching motif of the novel.⁷²

In short, contrary to the case of a frame like that of *The Turn of the Screw*, which seems to fulfill the colloquial expectation of a frame as peripheral and forgettable, the frame of *Wuthering Heights* takes a significant status as structural bridge, interpretive overlay, or thematic register. Rather than performing an apologetics to explain and recuperate a discordant feature – the kind of critical move I identified in the last chapter – *Wuthering Heights* criticism conscripts the frame instrumentally, posing its integral bearing on the narrative and its interpretation. By highlighting this move of critical conscription, I do not mean to disparage it or to insinuate its illegitimacy, for one would be hard pressed to

69 Dorothy Van Ghent, *The English Novel: Form and Function* (New York: Holt, 1953), pp. 153–70.

70 Matthews, "Family," 29. While he employs a deconstructive lexicon ("margin," supplement, and so forth) in defending the relevance of the frame, Matthews actually stresses the question of focalization or point of view.

71 Michael S. Macovski, "Wuthering Heights and the Rhetoric of Interpretation," *ELH* 54 (1987), 365. On doubling, see David Galef, "Keeping One's Distance: Irony and Doubling in *Wuthering Heights*," *Studies in the Novel* 24 (1992), 242–50.

72 Beth Newman, "'The Situation of the Looker-On': Gender, Narration, and Gaze in *Wuthering Heights*," *PMLA* 105 (1990), 1033.

describe the novel without attention to the role and function of the frame. Minimally, both Lockwood's and Nelly's frames seem to offer the stability and definition that bracketing frames ordinarily pose, since they mark the dimensions of the embedded narrative, filling in relevant history and progressing to the telos of Heathcliff's death, and identify an explicit if not definitive perspective and chain of possession of the narrative. Exceeding the normal parameters of a frame as marginal and anomalous, the framing apparatus thus becomes a register of narrative – and interpretive – control.

However, while this definition of the role of the frame – shaping and filtering the narrative – belies its marginality, it poses its significance primarily in terms of its instrumentality in yielding the plot of "Wuthering Heights-as-text," as Carol Jacobs puts it. In other words, it supports and assures that plot rather than complicating the foundational concept of plot, for after all one could see it from the obverse, that "Wuthering-Heights-as-text" functions as an instrument of the plot of narration, providing unusual if not sensationalized details that plausibly sustain the interest if not compulsion of Lockwood and Nelly. Still, rather than asserting the primacy of the plot of the narrative of narrative, I would argue that the framing action of *Wuthering Heights* dissimulates its position as a discrete level separate from the other action, since it recurs so frequently and pervasively, and since Lockwood and Nelly are imbricated at the same time in the plots they recount. The frame does not simply pose an external filter or point of entry, identifying a source from which the narrative issues and a discernible perspective, but dispels the supposition of remove and stable transmission.

To examine the framing of *Wuthering Heights* in detail, the first line records Lockwood's impression of the Heights – "I have just returned from a visit to my landlord" – but begins with the citation "1801," marking it as a journal entry, a written account of past events rather than a simultaneous narration of those events. The invocation of this date thus defines the time of the writing, separate from the specific scenes of his receiving the narrative and his experiences at the Heights, effecting the explanatory function and validating distance of an editorial frame. This relation might be abbreviated as: $L_j (L_H + L_d (\text{Cathy}) + L_N (N (\text{Heathcliff } et al.)))$, L_j to indicate Lockwood's journal-writing, recording the narration

(L_H) of what happens to him at the Heights and his dreamwork (L_d), as well as the scene of Nelly's narrating, and Nelly's account (N). Lockwood's frame thus multiplies, the narrative log rhetorically assuring the distance of his otherwise peculiarly invested account.

Nelly's narration is discontinuous within the text of Lockwood's frame, punctuated several times and reframed by Lockwood, in four discrete scenes: first, she tells the ill Lockwood the background of the Heights (chapters 4–9), bracketed by the mimetic correlative of the time of the telling, in other words not simply launching into the narrative world of the embedded plot but establishing the buffer zone of the quasi-realistic plot of narrative delivery and reception. Second, Nelly resumes – on the “second day,” conspicuously drawing the plot of the narrative of narrative – to rehearse the double marriages, closing with Isabella's letter (chapters 10–14). Third, Lockwood's record dispenses with further depictions of elaborated narrative scenarios and presents a condensed version of Nelly's narrative (“I have now heard all my neighbour's history, at different sittings, as the housekeeper could spare time from more important occupations. I'll continue it in her own words, only a little condensed. She is, on the whole, a very fair narrator and I don't think I could improve her style” [WH 120]). Lockwood significantly attributes the focalization to Nelly and minimizes his editorial ministrations (chapters 15–30). This is a move of narrative efficiency, dispensing with the redundant and mechanical re-invocation of a scene for each segment of Nelly's telling after establishing its situation. It reassures narrative control by both positing source and perspective and at the same time eliding the displacement of the receding chain of perspective, funneling all variant perspectives to one homogeneous account.

Fourth, when Lockwood returns “9 months later,” in 1802 (as denoted at the beginning of chapter 32), Nelly updates him on what has happened since he left (chapters 32–4). In addition, Nelly's narrative also incorporates pockets of other narratives – what Duyfhuizen calls “insert narratives”⁷³ – such as Isabella's letter (chapter 13) and Zillah's gossip (chapter 30). These give Nelly access to and account for information she otherwise would

73 See Duyfhuizen, *Narratives of Transmission*, pp. 105–32.

not possess, so her narration, while generally constant and ordered chronologically from Heathcliff's adoption through the contemporaneous scene of Heathcliff's proprietorship of the Heights, is not homogeneous or absolutely privileged, but complicated by these other perspectives as well as by her subjective investment.⁷⁴ To outline this, the multi-varied layers of the frame might be represented thus: $L_j (L_H + L_d + L_N (N_1) + L_N (N_2 + I) + L_N (N_3 + Z) + L_H + L_N (N_4) + L_H)$.

Lockwood's narration thus serially organizes Nelly's account and the story of the Heights, rhetorically stabilizing the narrative by placing it in a coherent scheme and reassuring its credibility by overwriting its complicated layering of perspectives with the apposition of an external, presumably objective, report. As a point of comparison, *The Turn of the Screw* exhibits a similar recessive structure: the unnamed narrator (n), as a detached observer, recounts the scenario he witnesses at the Country House, in which Douglas (d), who has a decided interest in the outcome of his performance among the narrative circle, as well as an ambiguous attachment to the governess, tells her story (G), so in broad outline the frame comprises a relatively simple double embedding, abbreviated as: $N_n (N_d (G))$. (The individual framing levels themselves actually multiply, the narrator giving a past-tense account $N [N_n]$, and the governess's written log recounting her story, $N_g [G]$, so a more precise representation would be $N [N_n [N_d [N_g [G]]]]$). *Wuthering Heights* employs the rhetoric of a similarly doubly recessed frame: Lockwood, as an outside, putatively objective witness, enframes Nelly's narration and first-hand, "inside" account. (Again, the individual framing zones replicate, as I have discussed.) This layering has it both ways, effecting the rhetoric of credibility by posing an internal source, who has privileged access to and possession of private information, but who also has an interest in those events, mediated through the testimony of an external narrator-reporter, who effects an objective cushion of otherwise subjective testimony. This is the structure of hearsay – a detached report of a first-hand account, which works rhetorically to validate strange if not fantastic events. (After all, both *The Turn of the Screw* and *Wuthering Heights* depict ghost stories of a sort, and are overcharged with the somewhat soap-

74 See Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman*, p. 249.

operatic topoi of repressed sex and passion, looming violence, the privileges and abuses of wealth, and transgressive social interaction.) It asserts the legitimate possession of the narrative by displacement, positing but displacing direct witness testimony – which is why hearsay carries no legal or logical weight.

However, while their frames invoke a similar rhetoric of remove, the singulative occurrence of the frame of *The Turn of the Screw* marks it as relatively discrete and separate from “Bly-as-Text,” and the actions of the narrative circle are topically distinct, as agents in the narrating scenario but not in the governess’s story. In contrast, in *Wuthering Heights* Nelly and Lockwood transgress the boundary of distanced observation and disinterest, since they are implicated and invested in the events of the Heights, Lockwood in his various visits to the Heights and interchange with Heathcliff, young Earnshaw, Catherine (in particular, prompting his erotic fantasy), and Joseph there, his dreaming of Cathy, and his inciting Nelly’s presumptive narrative, and Nelly in her undeclared role in Heathcliff’s rise and fall, as well as her various relations with Edgar, Cathy, Isabella, and the other servants, and also in her ushering the narrative to Lockwood. In a sense, Lockwood’s arrival on the scene – an almost Proppian motif of the entrance of a stranger who disturbs the extant social field – goads the question of the rightful proprietorship of the Heights and Heathcliff’s legitimate place there, and thus spurs the telos of the novel and the shift to Earnshaw and Catherine. In this way, the frame becomes confused, in the literal sense of that word, with the topical action, and thus dissimulates the pose of remove and a discrete status.

Further, the repeated invocation of the framing relation diffuses rather than reinforces narratorial location and stability, dissimulating the origin and possession of the narrative.⁷⁵ The critical tendency to focus on one zone of the text, and on one narrator, works to circumvent this diffusion, locating a univocal source and specifying a point of view. The discontinuous and heterogeneous layers of the frame, as well as their confusion with the topical action, radically *unfix* narratorial position and focalization. It is hard, in short, to know where this narrative is coming from. As

75 Cf. Shunami, “Unreliable Narrator,” 461. Shunami argues that rather than supporting each other, “Nelly and Lockwood, in turn, each destroys the credibility of the other narrator’s point of view.”

Beth Newman puts it apropos *Frankenstein*, which demonstrates a similarly complicated over-layering, the frame "blurs the distinction between the voices of its narratees. That is, by transferring a given narrative from teller to teller, it complicates the question that most theories of narrative – particularly those that stress point of view – begin by asking: who is speaking?"⁷⁶ Likewise in the case of *Wuthering Heights*, one cannot identify who is speaking, from whom or where this narrative issues, or who rightfully possesses it. Rather than accounting for a discernible chain of possession, then, the repetition and complication of the frames obscure the question of possession, reiterating the *dispossession* of the narrative. "Wuthering-Heights-as-text" is not simply transferred through the filter of the frame, but striated by the competing interests that Lockwood, Nelly, and informants like Isabella, Zillah, Joseph, Cathy, and Heathcliff himself represent, resulting finally in an incoherence, a cacophony of competing claims to possession – emblematically of the Heights, and narratively of control of *Wuthering Heights*.

The threshold of the text is not then so much a question of interpretation, as Carol Jacobs claims, but of the instability of the source of the narrative and the ensuing discontinuity of narrative sequence, dislocating a stable framing structure and therefore dissimulating a validating ground for its testimony. These no doubt problematize interpretation, and promise but abrogate the stabilizing mediatory role that frames imply, but I would argue that they hyperbolically foreground the complication of narration, of narrative collation and regression, of the indeterminacy of focalization, and of narratorial control and possession. Thus, the first-order allegory that the text signals is the tropological narrative of narrative; the text poses the exigency of naming the proper voice and legitimate possession of narrative, at the same time occulting it, blurring its location in a disjunction of voices, perspectives, and interests.

76 Beth Newman, "Narratives of Seduction and the Seductions of Narrative: The Frame Structure of *Frankenstein*," *ELH* 53 (1986), 141–63. Rather than the scopoc drive that Newman focuses on in her reading of *Wuthering Heights* ("The Situation of the Looker-on"), I find her earlier concern with narrative voice and seduction more persuasive.

Reading/narrating

Under the sign of poststructuralism, perhaps the predominant critical thematic is the question of "reading" or interpretation, its limits, its multiplication, its availability, and finally its indeterminacy. Carol Jacobs' "*Wuthering Heights: At the Threshold of Interpretation*," focusing on the tension and finally undecidability between modes of nonfiction and fiction in Lockwood's recounting "*Wuthering Heights-as-text*," readily exemplifies this tendency. Although not quite as programmatically as was the case in the current reception of *The Turn of the Screw*, two prominent recent accounts of *Wuthering Heights* also find "reading" to be the central theme. Frank Kermode ends *The Classic* with a reflection on the multiplicity of possible readings of *Wuthering Heights*, declaring that "plurality is here not a prescription but a fact."⁷⁷ From this, Kermode generalizes that each reader completes a text and thereby makes his or her adjustments differently, and thus takes *Wuthering Heights* as a site to demonstrate the processes of hermeneutics. However, while the history of reception of *Wuthering Heights* no doubt shows interpretive possibilities to increase over time, in my view this finally seems a trivial observation, since interpretation might always be said to multiply over time, in dealing with texts from the Bible to comic books. The more telling issue, I would think, is how we adjudicate among interpretations, and how particular texts seem to generate certain lines of interpretation.

In *Fiction and Repetition* J. Hillis Miller shifts from his earlier more theological view in *Disappearance of God* – that *Wuthering Heights* is a quasi-religious text about the separateness of man – to a deconstructive thematic.⁷⁸ Miller privileges *Wuthering Heights* as an uncanny text – and therefore as an exemplary deconstructive text – since it promises but does not deliver interpretation, thus signaling its status as an allegory of interpretation or more exactly of unreadability, underscoring the non-ad-equation of competing readings. In other words, Miller carries out the example of de Man's analysis of supportable but contradictory readings of Yeats' "*Among Schoolchildren*" in *Allegories*

77 Frank Kermode, *The Classic: Literary Images of Permanence and Change* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 129.

78 J. Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), pp. 42–72; *The Disappearance of God* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), pp. 157–211.

of *Reading*, extending it to *Wuthering Heights*. For Kermode, plurality signals the generative success of hermeneutics; for Miller, plurality implies a negative knowledge, signaling the constitutive failure and impossibility of interpretation.

I would distinguish this generalized and somewhat vague sense of “reading” as a hermeneutic problematic from the explicit depiction of the act and processes of reading in narrative. What goes on in *Wuthering Heights* differs markedly from the sense of reading foregrounded in a novel like *Madame Bovary* or *Remembrance of Things Past*. Each of the latter texts depicts literalized and explicit scenes of reading, in some sense mirroring the narrative scenarios that frames present, and both code reading as a natural, privileged, and irrepressible activity, valorizing it in a way corollate to the explicit self-advertisement of narrative that I have earmarked throughout this book. In *Madame Bovary*, there are significant if not fatal consequences contingent on the act of reading. Emma’s reading novels, as well as Charles’ literalness and failure to read (in the more general sense, although carrying out this motif of the novel as a counterpart to Emma), define their characters and determine their paths, the terms of their marriage, and the fatal results of the end of the novel. In one way, their reading, and inability to read, constitute their deaths. Further, Emma’s introduction to reading is described in an overdetermined situation: in a convent, by an old maid who had been an aristocrat before the revolution. Emma is formed by the tropo-historical forces implicated in her scene of reading initiation: women’s discourse (the convent, novels, romance), the institutional context of the church (as a site of training, of engendering and class expectation), and the larger historical conjuncture (the decay and destitution of the Napoleonic era, the bourgeoisification of the Second Empire).

Without too much effort, one could imagine a companion study to the one offered here, of narratives of reading, deciphering the explicit depiction of reading scenes and the ensuing desire for and seductive power of literature. Reading scenes are frequently foregrounded and charged in a manner similar to that of narrative scenarios – in a reading locus at a duly comfortable time (the shady corner in Proust), in scenes of initiation, and in their coding reading as extraordinarily desirable if not erotic. Further, the construction of reading has a profound, formative effect on char-

acter, in a sense motivating the action of particular novels, in *Madame Bovary* impelling Emma's end and in *Remembrance of Things Past* Marcel's compulsion, transposed, say, to his jealousy, which figures a crux in reading. (One might also think of the readers in Gissing's *New Grub Street*, who starve for literature, or the elegy to reading in *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, or Stephen Dedalus' formation through reading in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.) Both reading and narrative scenes constitute the drive for and consumption of literature as natural, inevitable, a kind of implacable life-force, while at the same time depicting its consumption as socio-culturally derived (a class privilege, allowing leisure and assuming education, and predicated on the cultural determination of the valorization and indulgence of such pursuits), and historically contingent, on the specific formation of a literary reading public.

This sense of reading – its foregrounding as an explicit motif, inscribing its modal process – differs markedly from the general poststructural attribution of reading, signaling the ideological work of narrative rather than its philosophical dilemma. Reading and narrative scenes reflexively inscribe aspects of literary desire, production, participation, and consumption, in a sense as mirror aspects of the dynamic of narrative exchange. Typically, they are taken as diametric poles in a communicative chain. Seymour Chatman synthesizes their presumably causal relation in the following sequential chain: author → implied author → narrator → text → narratee → implied reader → reader.⁷⁹ In Chatman's model, the insertions of an implied author and an implied reader shrewdly bridge the gap between the author and the narrator and the reader and the narratee, assimilating the formidable contributions of Booth and Iser to encompass the range of interpretive processes from authorial intention to the phenomenology of reading. This model is persuasive because it charts a kind of grammar of interpretation, a step-by-step model of textual understanding, issuing from an identifiable authorial intention, relayed through the filter of various interpretive mediations (implied author and reader), directly linked and delivered to the real reader. It spatializes the temporal dynamic of interpretation, sort-

79 Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 151. See also Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Methuen, 1983), p. 86.

ing its semic aspects into definable units and recuperating intention as linearly transmitted through its sequence.

In contrast to this linearized model of narrative and textual interpretation, and drawing on the lessons of *The Turn of the Screw* and *Wuthering Heights*, I would propose instead the following provisional model: (narrative/reading scenario [narrator → narratee] (narrative scenario (narrative scenario . . .))). *The Turn of the Screw* and *Wuthering Heights* foreground this replication of narratorial relations and the regression of the zones of narrative exchange. To apply Chatman's categories, I would argue instead that a text finally yields echoing strata of non-sequential relations: (author → reader)/ (supernarrator → implied narratee)/ (narrator → narratee)/. . . . The relation among these various analogous dynamics is finally contiguous, not causal, and repeats the same transaction (narrator → narratee), whether author or embedded narrator, and whether actual reader or narratee.

In short, the collapse and inter-imbrication of narratorial relations, in the echoing recession of analogical framing "structures," belies the linear construal of Chatman's model. The collapsed chain (narrator → narratee (. . .)), indicates the reflexive paradigm of narrativity: narrative names and verifies itself, its mode and economy, by its iterative and indeterminate recession. This revises the conceptual definition of narrative as transmission, as a signifier carrying a content other than itself or referring to a nonfictive other. Narrative exists, in a sense, for its own sake and its own reproduction; it works by a self-circulating tropological economy, naming its alterity but displacing reference to another narrative dynamic, another scene of transaction, whether "reading" or "narrating."

Narrative calling

(*Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim*)

Exemplary narrative

Heart of Darkness and *Lord Jim* stand as exemplary texts on the current critical scene, engendering a plethora of commentary and registering the tension between the political reading of narrative and the literary – the formal, generic, and literary historical – reading of narrative. Both novels conspicuously depict the ports and signposts of the British empire, the courses of their plots mapped over its expanse. Thus they present relatively straight imperial representations of the topography, reach, and effect of the empire, at least from the standpoint of the West, and in contemporary criticism become exemplary registers of the imperial moment – which is, as Ernest Mandel and Fredric Jameson following him define it, the second stage of modern capitalism¹ – spurring debates whether they oppose or are complicit in the evils of empire. Much of the reception before the 1970s, while focusing on issues such as how Jim is a flawed hero or the motif of spiritual descent in *Heart of Darkness*, peripherally finds Conrad to be a critic of empire, citing his obvious ambivalence in scenes such as the Africans' dying or the ship firing blindly into the landscape in *Heart of Darkness*, conscripting both texts as liberal cautions to the absurdity of the imperial venture. Chinua Achebe's influential "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*" dispels this recuperative version of Conrad's politics, noting Conrad's unmitigatedly racist depiction of black "savages," finding

¹ See Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, trans. Joris de Bres (London: Verso, 1978), and Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 35.

Political Unconscious stands as a kind of threshold to ensuing commentary. A large part of its power derives from its integration of the formal and historical tensions of the text, as well as its integration of contemporary formal and historical theoretical projects. For Jameson, the generic swerve of the second half of the novel toward romance – Jim's recuperation as a traditional romance hero – enacts its ideological lesson, aesthetically to compensate for the violence of reification and modern rationalization signified by the impressionism of the first half of the novel. While acknowledging the generic tension of the novel and the force of Jameson's reading, here I will focus instead on the way in which the pervasive recurrence of Marlow, the figuring of Marlow's obsessive drive to recover the story of Jim, his compulsion to tell that story repeatedly, and the complicity of the other European characters in that drive (those whose interest in Jim is that he "was one of us"), structures and motivates the plot. Similarly, I will focus on the pervasive narrative drive in *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow's "fascination" with Kurtz's "discoursing," his addictive force in telling it, and the complicity of the other European characters in that addiction (the "followers of the sea" in the introductory frame, as well as the imperial functionaries along the way downriver). The overall topos of *narrative investment* drives the respective plots of each novel.

Although Jameson comments on the almost postmodern narrative production of the multiplication of points of view in the first half of the novel, he takes the dominant plot in traditional terms to be that of Jim and the text to center on Jim's act, and Marlow to frame and provide witness to the Jim-plot.²⁰ In contrast, I will argue that the stories of Jim and of Kurtz function as catalysts that draw Marlow's obsession, and further that link the other characters along the journey in their narrative complicity. That both Jim and Kurtz are enigmatic and for the most part unrealized as characters signals their status, as narrative registers over which the other characters pose their explanations and articulate their interest. Further, that interest, seemingly natural and unquestioned, is peculiar and excessive (Marlow forsaking normal concerns to risk life and health in *Heart of Darkness*, and causing

20 On point of view, see *The Political Unconscious*, pp. 219ff.; on the structural centrality of the hero's act, see his diagrammatic representation of the novel (pp. 254–6).

explicit politics implied by the representation of the expanse of the British empire. In a manner of speaking, the *narrative unconscious* of these novels – the allegorical valorization of narrative, of narrative desire and drive, and of a narrative topography and circle – displaces their literal politics. This foregrounding and privileging of formal, literary concerns is blatantly ideological, overwriting questions of empire and politics – to be somewhat heavy-handed, the “real conditions of existence” – for the sake of narrative enthrallment and literary appreciation, which goes some way to explaining their enduring popularity. However, this reflexive turn in *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim* does not effect simply a modal self-reflection, but a doubled ideological displacement: first, the ideological mystification of the geography of empire for a narrative topography, for a narrative tour, and for the allegory of narrative desire and drive; and second, the re-inscription of the allegory of narrative as bonding Marlow and all of the imperial agents he meets, recoding the imperial investment as one of innate, individual “human” interest in Jim’s and Kurtz’s stories. That interest is cathected through their professional bearing, that crosses the boundaries of and links national interests, from Brierly to the French lieutenant, from the Dutch agent to Marlow, and that marks it as a distinction of educated taste, and as universal among those with that taste and culture. Their professional bond is effected by their common literary education and interest to tell and to hear of Kurtz and Jim – in other words, by their inscription as Narrative Men, as narrative agents and desirous narratees – while at the same time that bond mystifies and in a sense “humanizes” their agency of Empire, tacitly enforcing its otherwise vulgar mission.

In a certain sense, then, I would align with formal readings of *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim*, in arguing that the suasion of these texts is to read them in terms of their focus on if not sacralization of the mode of narrative. However, the consequence of that reading does not simply yield a consideration of the formal attributes of modernist narrative and their place in the development of the novel, but demonstrates the ideological “mission” of modern narrative, in general to normalize and internalize what might be called the culture of the novel,²² hypostasizing a hyperbolic desire

22 See Clifford Siskin, “Epilogue: The Rise of Novelism,” *Cultural Institutions of the Novel*, ed. Deidre Lynch and William B. Warner (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 423–40.

and drive for narrative, and more specifically to establish the discerning taste for sophisticated narratives – narratives of ambiguity reflecting the modern professional ambivalence toward and ironic distance from the imperial venture. That taste carries out the ideological mission by projecting the social bond as one of culture, education, and refinement, while effacing the barbarism of the material bounty of Empire. Beyond the historically specific record of the hailing of imperial European subjects at the turn of the century, the reflexive inscription and valorization of narrative hails us – those residually invested in the modernist project, which is to say those of us invested in the culture of the novel and the profession of literature – as narrative subjects, as “one of us,” as followers of narrative, that is, normalizing and reproducing a refined, sophisticated literary temper and calling.²³ The ideological lesson of Marlow and his confrères as obsessive Narrative Men emblemizes that calling, in its valorizing the taste for narrative, bonding those who profess it.

I Narrative drive (*Heart of Darkness*)

Narrative stations

From the beginning, *Heart of Darkness* invokes a conspicuously allegorical geography, where places as well as characters are for the most part unnamed, signaling the coordinates of an otherworldly map. In the introductory frame, while set on the Thames, the river takes preternatural significance as “the old river” and “the venerable stream,” and it stretches as “the beginning of an interminable waterway,” “leading to the uttermost ends of the earth.”²⁴ To a certain extent, this setting obviously invokes the terms of the national allegory of the British Empire, as is especially clear in the narrator’s paean to its “ages of good service done to the race that peopled its banks . . . It had known and served all the men of whom the nation is proud, from Sir Francis Drake to Sir John Franklin . . . floated on the ebb of that river into the mystery of an unknown earth!” (8). More concertedly, though, this

23 On the question of sophistication, in the novel and in theory, see Joseph Litvak, *Strange Gourmets: Sophistication, Theory, and the Novel* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).

24 Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, pp. 7, 8. Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

heightened quasi-mythical depiction constitutes the setting for the characters on the yacht as if in a world apart, almost a dream-
scape, in “a serenity of still and exquisite brilliance,” where the men lull lazily, in close quarters, waiting the turn of the tide. In other words, as the last chapter defines it, this setting on the ship patently figures a narrative scenario, a preternaturally auspicious time and place for narrative, when and where it seems narrative must inevitably occur. As the narrator remarks, they are “fated” to hear Marlow’s story. In this tableau, the narrative circle to whom Marlow tells his tale are unnamed (other than in their professional functions) and uncharacterized, and as veteran “followers of the sea” are assumed to be a natural and unquestioned audience, which taps into the narrative code, if not literary cliché, that sailors spin and listen to yarns.

Beyond the frame, Marlow’s journey – invoking a standard trope for the movement of narrative, as was the case in *Joseph Andrews* – occurs on a blatantly allegorical landscape. The geography of the world that Marlow passes through is deliberately obscure, without place names, known only by symbolic appellations, such as the Whited Sepulchre or the Dark Continent. As the actual geography of the map of Africa that Marlow memorizes is effaced wholesale by its variegated colors of imperial dominion, the places that Marlow traverses he names only by their company function and position downriver – the Company Office, the Company Station, the Central Station, the Inner Station. In fact, Marlow oddly derides the port towns he passes and their “farcical names” (17). Again, the characters that Marlow happens upon are almost entirely unnamed except by their functional tags – his Aunt, the Doctor, the Starched Accountant, the First Agent, the Manager of the Central Station, the Eldorado Explorers, the harlequin, the Intended. While these names draw on their imperial relation, Marlow shows no interest in his imperial mission, and in fact is contemptuous of it, as when his aunt extols the “glorious idea” of carrying forth civilization, he “ventured to hint that the Company was run for profit” (14, 16), and later when he scorns the folly of “the philanthropic pretense” (27). Marlow’s mission, as becomes clear, is solely if not obsessively to hear Kurtz’s discoursing, and all the points along the way function to fulfill that desire.

The text further charges this allegorical landscape, as Marlow recounts an otherworldly atmosphere, noting that a “general

sense of vague and oppressive wonder grew upon me" (17), and the hyperreal scenes that he comes upon, such as the woman knitting at the whited sepulchre (13), the steamer pointlessly firing into the continent, the "objectless blasting" (19), the chain gang and the Africans he comes upon, ghostlike, under a tree (20), and so on. (This sense of hyperreality is particularly highlighted in the intertext of the film *Apocalypse Now* as when Captain Willard arrives at the Do Lan Bridge looking for the commanding officer, or when he happens upon the USO playboy show in the middle of the river.) Drawn by the looming specter of Kurtz, Marlow defines his journey precisely against a realistic topography, in the form of a dreamscape: "I am trying to tell you a dream – making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream-sensation, that commingling of absurdity, surprise, and bewilderment in a tremor of struggling revolt, that notion of being captured by the incredible which is the very essence of dreams" (30).

In their foregrounding of Marlow's affective state, these depictions suggest a psychological significance – as Marlow remarks, "I felt I was becoming scientifically interesting" (24) – and thus seem to displace their imperial coordinates for a psychological or spiritual allegory, Marlow's journey figuring an archetypal descent into madness or hell (the darkness) and back, set against the cautionary example of Kurtz, who does not return. In an influential reading, Albert Guerard succinctly articulates this view: *Heart of Darkness* "recount[s] a spiritual voyage of self-discovery. . . the night journey into the unconscious, and confrontation of an entity within the self."²⁵ However, while I concur with Guerard that Marlow rather than Kurtz is the central character of the novel and that the novel overtly figures an allegorical terrain, I would argue that the focus of the novel is not Marlow's spiritual discovery. Marlow's tale, as the preface frame attests, is "inconclusive," and Marlow seems still to see his tale in bewilderment, in terms of its affect as a dream, failing to decipher the psychological core – the nut in the shell – that his discovery of Kurtz would presumably offer. Rather, the focus of the novel is Marlow's narrative fascination itself, his only aim to seek narrative such that he cares about nothing else; in this way, Kurtz is precisely an empty name ("he

25 Guerard, *Conrad: The Novelist*, pp. 38, 39. See also Lilian Feder, "Marlow's Descent into Hell," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 9 (1955), 280–92.

was just a word for me" [29]), the pretext that generates Marlow's narrative interest.

As the narrator comments of Marlow's narrative technique: "But Marlow was not typical (if his propensity to spin yarns be excepted) and to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out" (9). This defines a model of the narrative of narrative, by which, contrary to typical expectation, meaning resides not in the presumed diegesis but in the "outside," in the process of narrative itself. Extending this metaphor, the import of the narrative is not Kurtz – who is decidedly off camera – and the kernel of truth or self-discovery that Kurtz promises, but Marlow – who is front stage – and the shell of his narrative journey, motivated by his relentless drive and encompassing his hypnotic retelling. The alterior affective state that Marlow describes, the dream sensation, depicts the dreamscape of a narrative world, naturalizing his drive and establishing a topos similar to that of the frame of *The Turn of the Screw*, that charges his narrative performance. In short, the plot of *Heart of Darkness* is structured by its movement not over a real geography or for that matter a spiritual geography, but over a narrative landscape demarcated by a series of narrative stations, proffering a dramatically intensifying series of narrative props, catalysts, and baits that lead Marlow on.

These narrative baits begin at the Company Station with the immaculately suited Accountant, who offhandedly but pregnantly remarks: "In the interior, you will no doubt meet Mr. Kurtz." This sparse bit of information does not satisfy Marlow, so he presses his source, who adds that Kurtz is "a very remarkable person. . . [who] sends in as much ivory as all the others put together" (22). At the next stop, the Central Station, he hears from the Manager that Kurtz is ill, a rumor that alarms him since Kurtz is the manager's best agent, "of the greatest importance to the company" (26), and "an exceptional man" (28). There Marlow speaks with a First-class Agent who testifies about Kurtz in further hyperbolic terms: Kurtz is a prodigy, an emissary of science and progress, a "special being," and is destined to move to the highest rank in the company. As it turns out, this agent vigorously pumps Marlow for information, because he is jealous of Kurtz's position, further testifying to Kurtz's importance and intensifying Marlow's interest.

Marlow thereafter focuses entirely on Kurtz, or more precisely on the prospect of narrative represented by the name of Kurtz, and the plot is mapped along the narrative geography of baits of his name. Later at the Central Station, Marlow possessively if not jealously strains to overhear the Manager and his uncle in the Eldorado Exploring Expedition talk of Kurtz and his wealth of ivory (they grumble about "unfair competition," adding to the aura of Kurtz and feeding Marlow's desire to hear him [33–5]). Marlow explicitly transfigures the geography downriver, mapping it by its promise of and his drive for narrative: "For me it [the river] crawled towards Kurtz – exclusively. . . . Sometimes I would pick out a tree a little way ahead to measure our progress towards Kurtz by" (37, 40). Marlow continues to be drawn by baits of Kurtz from the landscape along the way, as at the Inner Station where Marlow meets the Russian, who tells of Kurtz's extraordinary power if not god-like position ("They adored him" [56]), and where he accumulates further signs of Kurtz, such as the heads on the stakes.

In the climax of the journey downriver, Marlow finally encounters Kurtz, offering what would appear to be the fulfillment of the plot ("Kurtz discoursed. A voice! A voice!"). However, it is significant – if not the crux of the text – that Marlow does not relay what Kurtz says, but only reports his own enthrallment. For the narrative does not end there, but Marlow continues his seeking and the stations extend through Marlow's return to England, when he visits the Manager in the home office, the journalist, and the Intended. And, ultimately, the narrative folds back circularly, to the Nellie amidst the audience of the frame, taking the place of another station in the narrative geography, one that might be endlessly repeated. Marlow still recounts his tale in a heightened affective state, still uneasy if not haunted. In this way, counter to normal expectation, the telos of the plot is not Kurtz and the meaning he offers but Marlow's narrating his search. Kurtz is the empty space in the narrative, a prop that catalyzes and intensifies Marlow's drive, and the text intentionally dramatizes not the story of Kurtz and what had led him to barbarism, but the story of Marlow's narrative compulsion, the shell that contains the faux-kernel.

In *Reading for the Plot*, Peter Brooks underscores the attempt of recovery of Kurtz's story that motivates the plot of *Heart of Dark-*

ness, likening it to a detective story.²⁶ He finds that, in typically modernist fashion, it frustrates that aim, issuing only Kurtz's unspoken and unreadable report, and thus emblemizes the epistemological difficulties of narrative. Similarly, Hillis Miller argues that *Heart of Darkness* "promises an ultimate revelation without giving it," hence thematizing its indeterminacy.²⁷ Both of these readings see the text in the terms of the promise of meaning – the kernel, represented in Kurtz – and its failing that promise, thereby taking it to exemplify the lesson of deconstruction and the intrinsic uncertainty of language and interpretation. However, in my view they are misdirected in their assumption of the normative teleological structure of the Kurtz-plot, ignoring the shell-plot, of Marlow's compulsive drive. That plot necessitates the displacement of Kurtz and reiteratively produces its theme, the self-fulfilling activity of narrative. (Narrative, as philosophy is for Aristotle, is a self-fulfilling pursuit, for its own sake.) If there is a deconstructive moment in the text, I would locate it in its mobilizing the reflexive rhetoric of narrative – its perpetual self-figuration of Marlow's narrative drive – rather than in the literal content of the presumed diegesis, posed by Kurtz and the problematic meaning of darkness.

As a point of comparison, *Lord Jim* demonstrates a similar plot of the drive for narrative, albeit inverted, since it presents a series of narrative pockets analeptically reconstructing a chain of stories of Jim, as I will discuss in the next section. In this sense, it offers what Brooks calls a narrative of recovery. *Heart of Darkness*, though, presents not a recovery but thematizes the act of *seeking* narrative. It is this vista, of projected rather than retroactive fulfillment, that generates its suspense. The series of hints, baits, clues, fragments, and expostulations builds an aggregate chain of mystery, a drama of narrative baiting and heightened narrative desire, foregrounding the tease of narrative foreplay rather than the moment of fulfillment.

26 See his chapter, "An Unreadable Report: Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*," *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York: Vintage, 1985), pp. 238–63.

27 "Heart of Darkness Revisited," p. 218. For an early deconstructive reading, see also Perry Meisel, "Decentering *Heart of Darkness*," *Modern Language Studies* 8 (1978), 20–8.

Narrative obsession

Before he embarks on his journey, Marlow is in an odd state as he waits in London for a berth. As he recounts it, "I had then, as you remember, just returned to London after a lot of Indian Ocean, Pacific, China Seas . . . six years or so, and I was loafing about, hindering you fellows in your work and invading your homes . . . It was very fine for a time, but after a bit I did get tired of resting. Then I began to look for a ship" (11). This is strange: one would normally expect, after a six year tour of duty, one would enjoy R & R (rest and relaxation, in military lingo). (This quality of restlessness, awaiting a mission, is aptly characterized at the beginning of *Apocalypse Now*, when Captain Willard says: "When I was home, all I could think of was getting back in the jungle.") And it is also strange in formal terms, since one would normally expect the narrative to begin with the journey, with perhaps a bit of a preamble to explain its immediate cause (such as Joseph Andrew's being cast out of the Booby household). But this exceeds that normal explanatory function, charging the narrative in heightened affective terms. Even before the dreamscape of the journey, the text establishes this alterior state, a typical narrative topos of the uneasy lull before the story, of the emptiness and need that only narrative can fulfill. While this might be taken as the drive of a professional of the sea to do his job, Marlow has little interest in the Company's mission and goes on to talk about his childhood urge not to see the world but to fill in the blank spaces of the map, foreshadowing his urge that comes to focus on the empty name of Kurtz and inscribing his drive to seek the signs that constitute narrative.

Marlow elaborates his state, which builds to an overwhelming anxiety and provokes aberrant behavior: "I am sorry to own I began to worry them. This was already a fresh departure for me" (12). He – shockingly, as he puts it – asks a woman, his aunt, to help him. He adds that "I was not used to get things that way, you know . . . I wouldn't have believed it of myself, but then – you see – I felt somehow I must get there by hook or by crook" (12). Despite hearing of the death of the previous captain, the prospect of danger only incites him further: "This was my chance and made me the more anxious to go" (12). In this way, Marlow character-

izes his state almost as a kind of drug need, causing him to do things he "wouldn't have believed," against normal precautions and "by hook or by crook"; he describes the uneasiness before the fix, the implacable restlessness that incites the forgetting or sacrificing of all other concerns. This conspicuously invokes what Avital Ronell calls the "pharmacodependency" of literature and literary affect, "the pharmacodependency with which literature has always been secretly associated – as sedative, as cure, as escape conduit or euphorizing substance," and of the addictive need for itself.²⁸

The text strings together a series of depictions of aberrant affect, as when the doctor measures Marlow's head, predicts changes and warns against madness, when Marlow comments of the French Man of War that "there was a touch of insanity in the proceedings" (17), and when Marlow remarks, echoing the doctor's initial warning, "I felt I was becoming scientifically interesting" (24), after he and the foreman dance on the deck of his ship while awaiting rivets. As Marlow quips, in the thrall of his lull at the Central Station, "I don't know why we behaved like lunatics" (32). The journey records not only Marlow's state of mind but this state is also projected onto the landscape, as mentioned above, in absurd scenes such as the gunship firing and in the characters Marlow comes upon, such as the "harlequin." This trail of disorientation and unreality when going downriver is similar to what is called in Romantic poetry "internal weather," as in Wordsworth's poetry when the external weather provides a correlative for the poet's affective state. Further, the text repeats and cumulatively builds a series of figures of heightened affect: fascination (with the map, with Kurtz), curiosity ("I was curious to see whether this man . . ." [33]; not an innocuous term, as highlighted in a text like *Joseph Andrews*), anxiety (to go on a mission, whether he will hear Kurtz), and madness (his obsession to hear Kurtz, at the exclusion of all normal concerns). By the concerted repetition of this motif of psychological disturbance – and Conrad's style works by a kind of lyrical if not compulsive repetition, especially in *Heart of Darkness* – the text codes Marlow's state as an anxiety that only narrative can salve, a craving or dependency that only it can quell, and an illness that only it can cure.

28 Avital Ronell, *Crack Wars: Literature, Addiction, Mania* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), p. 11.

From childhood, Marlow is goaded – he uses the word “charmed,” advertising the magical properties of narrative, a typical narrative seme – by an idea: “But there was one river especially . . . And as I looked at the map of it in a shop-window it *fascinated* me as a snake would a bird. . . . I went along Fleet Street, but could not shake off the *idea*. The snake had *charmed* me” (my emphases; 12). His compulsion, in other words, does not arise with Kurtz, or again with the meaning that Kurtz promises, but from his nature, as if biologically determined from his childhood on. This drive transposes itself to the idea of Kurtz, drawn by the series of baits through which he becomes progressively enthralled, to the extent that he goes against his own principles: “I went for him near enough to a lie. You know I hate, detest, and can’t bear a lie. . . .” (29). This builds to his singular distraction with the idea of Kurtz, after leaving the Inner Station, saying “I fretted and fumed and took to arguing with myself whether or no I would talk openly with Kurtz” (40). Marlow’s compulsive focus crystallizes when the ship is attacked by natives and the agent, observing the dead helmsman, desultorily murmurs, “And by the way, I suppose Mr. Kurtz is dead as well by this time,” which sends Marlow into a vertiginous meditation:

For the moment, that was the *dominant thought*. There was a sense of disappointment, as though I had found out I had been striving after something altogether without a substance. I couldn’t have been more disgusted if I had travelled all this way for the sole purpose of talking with Mr. Kurtz. Talking with. . . I flung one shoe overboard, and became aware that that was exactly what I had been looking forward to – a talk with Kurtz. I made the strange discovery that I had never imagined him as doing, you know, but as discoursing. I didn’t say to myself, “Now I will never see him,” or “Now I will never shake him by the hand,” but, “Now I will never hear him. . . .” (my emphasis; 47–8)

Marlow concludes, “I was cut to the quick at the *idea* of having lost the inestimable privilege of listening to the gifted Kurtz” (my emphasis; 48).

In this, Marlow’s drive for narrative far exceeds the otherwise transitory affect of curiosity (recall Edmund Burke’s definition of curiosity, as when people run to see a horrific accident – think of rubbernecking in our own time – and the comic incitations to Adams’ curiosity in *Joseph Andrews*) or of common desire (recall the eroticized adverts in *Joseph Andrews* or *The Turn of the Screw*),

but is coded overwhelmingly as an obsession, motivated by what Freud called an "obsessional idea." In schematizing compulsions and in particular obsessional neuroses, Freud distinguishes between obsessional acts and ceremonies – such as compulsively washing one's hands – and obsessional ideas and thinking. In "Obsessive Acts and Religious Practices" Freud compares religious ceremonies and rituals, which are public, communal, and meaningful, and neurotic ritual acts, which are private, individual, and publicly meaningless.²⁹ In contrast, in "A Case of Obsessional Neuroses," he surveys case histories of obsessional thinking, usually rooted in infantile sexuality, such as one patient thinking his parents knew his thoughts (deriving from his guilt at fondling his governess), or one patient fearing rats (through verbal displacement and fear of his father's sexuality).³⁰

As indicated by the explicit attribution of Marlow's motivation to his obsession with "the idea" of Kurtz, his exclusive and dominant thought, *Heart of Darkness* foregrounds the topos of *narrative obsession*. That obsession drives Marlow through the succession of narrative stations and provides the locomotive force of the plot. It is noteworthy that this obsession begins in childhood, rooting it psychologically and also naturalizing it as constituting Marlow's character, and also that Marlow recounts the continual dream-sensation (not only at the beginning, but throughout, as when he says downriver that "the dream-sensation . . . pervaded all my days at that time" [43]). This suggests a certain psychological realism, and it would not be hard to draw out the significance of Marlow seeing the river on the map as a snake when a child, which symbolically displaces his infantile sexuality. However, rather than drawing out a psychological allegory, the point is that the narrative mobilizes the reflexive rhetoric of obsession, a rhetoric that is coherent, consistent, and cumulative. Against the prospect of normal expectation – Marlow is after all an accomplished and experienced sailor – Marlow literally risks health, life, and sanity for the sake of narrative. That Marlow is so absorbed by the otherwise anomalous and incidental mentions of Kurtz is implausible and bizarre, but within the terms of

29 See "Obsessive Acts and Religious Practices," *Collected Papers*, vol. II, trans. Joan Riviere (New York: Basic Books, 1959), pp. 27–8.

30 See "Notes upon a Case of Obsessional Neuroses," *Collected Papers*, vol. III, trans. Alix and James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 1959), pp. 293–383.

the text and its allegorical topography Marlow's enthrallment somehow seems inevitable and natural, fated rather than exaggerated. The text naturalizes and domesticates this obsession, making it not private and meaningless but public and meaningful, accepted and shared by those around him, as well as, presumably, by us. The overwhelming rhetoric of obsession valorizes the in-nateness and indubitable power of narrative, sacralizing its otherwise neurotic repetition as a common human ritual.

The economy of obsession is self-generating and self-sustaining and precisely a reflexive economy, similar to the paradigm of what Avital Ronell defines as "being-on-drugs," which "is only about producing a need for itself." Ronell continues, "If Freud was right about the apparent libidinal economy of the drug addict, then drugs are *libidinally invested*. To get off drugs . . . the addict has to shift dependency to a person, an ideal, or to the procedure itself of the cure."³¹ In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow stakes his libidinal investment on the idea of Kurtz, on which he – and the plot – are entirely dependent. The figuration of the text circulates around these complementary semes of obsession and addiction, transcoded to the idea of narrative – the desire not for a narrative content but for the high of the desire itself – and the text inscribes the libidinal economy and affective power of narrative.

While the dramatic focus is on Marlow's investment, it is also shared by and links many of the other characters at the various stations along the way. The first agent at the Inner Station pumps Marlow, the uncle from the Eldorado Exploring Expedition and the Manager of the Inner Station whisper of and fear Kurtz's success, and the other characters refer to Kurtz mysteriously, attributing an extraordinary aura. Later, even in the denouement of Marlow's journey, the characters at home – the company official seeking Kurtz's papers, the cousin, the journalist, and Kurtz's "Intended" – likewise participate in this web of psychic investment, drawn by the idea of Kurtz. In this light, the somewhat enigmatic scene with Kurtz's Intended repeats the topos of narrative obsession. She too, with Marlow, lives for the idea of Kurtz; the "essence of her being" depends upon it. This web encompasses the characters of the opening frame as well, who are vigilantly awake and growl at interruption. (As noted in the

31 Ronell, *Crack Wars*, p. 25; emphasis in text.

previous chapter, audience reactions – awake, tense, as if on the edge of their seats – function as adverts reflexively to valorize the performance.) The supernarrator testifies to its enthralling power: “I listened, I listened on the watch for the sentence, for the word, that would give me the clue to the faint uneasiness inspired by this narrative . . .” (30). That the supernarrator repeats this narrative further extends the chain of investment, as well as posits a presumably external witness, legitimating and grounding it. This abetting if not duplicating of Marlow’s obsession naturalizes its manifest peculiarity, making it a publicly sanctioned ritual that all participate in.

One way that the structure of *Heart of Darkness* – and of framed narratives in general – has been characterized is as a box within a box, which echoes the spatial model of enclosure implied by the narrative term “embedding.” On this model, L. J. Morrissey describes *Heart of Darkness* as a set of chinese boxes, distinguishing four frames: the unnamed narrator, Marlow, the harlequin, and Kurtz.³² However, while the initial double frame structure of the supernarrator’s report of Marlow’s narrative scenario suggests such a geometrical layering, Marlow’s story records a chain of asymmetrical narrative segments, of narrative props, prompts, and baits, and that the story folds back to the frame contiguously incorporates its audience in the chain. In this respect, the governing figure is that of repetition, the repetition of compulsion, rather than subordination or enclosure. Overall, *Heart of Darkness* is structured as an iterative sequence of narrative exchanges comprised not of self-contained stories but of gestures to a promised exchange, offering the lure not of recovery but of allurements itself.

II The bond of narrative (*Lord Jim*)

Narrative vessel

Lord Jim foregrounds Marlow’s narrative compulsion in a similarly charged and concerted way, whereby Marlow’s enthrallment with Jim’s story drives the plot, but it features different aspects of the economy of exchange. *Heart of Darkness* dramatizes the obsessive

32 L. J. Morrissey, “The Tellers in *Heart of Darkness*: Conrad’s Chinese Boxes,” *Conradiana* 13 (1981), 141–8. On embedding, see also Tzvetan Todorov, “Narrative-Men,” *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 66–79.

hunt for narrative, striving toward the unfulfilled name of Kurtz, whereas *Lord Jim* portrays the compulsively repeated act of Marlow's gathering a series of narrative sources to reconstruct Jim's story, saturating his name. In *Lord Jim*, Marlow becomes, as he calls himself, a "receptacle of confessions."³³ Marlow expresses some chagrin at this, claiming a magical, magnetic power beyond his control: "the kind of thing that by devious, unexpected, truly diabolical ways causes me to run up against men with soft spots, with hard spots, with hidden plague spots, by Jove! and loosens their tongues at the sight of me for their infernal confidences" (21). In this respect, Marlow is a kind of Ancient Mariner in reverse, who compulsively receives rather than delivers narrative, and the plot is formed by the collection of confidences he receives.

Marlow defines this compulsion in extraordinary terms, not merely of empathy or curiosity, but as a curse – "And what have I done to be thus favoured I want to know" (21) – as well as in terms of demonic possession, as "diabolical" and his "familiar devil." This ascribes an occult power, beyond human will or desire, of a narrative cosmology, and peripherally invokes the rhetoric of addiction (as in the cliché, "the devil of drink"). Despite the consternation he expresses at his curse, later Marlow admits "his weakness" for and will to narrative: "One has no business really to get interested. It's a weakness of mine" (58). Although in less magical terms, this conspicuously taps into the code of addiction and extreme affect; Marlow, as an otherwise proper professional man of Empire, eschews the normal weaknesses such as gambling and drink, supplanted by the socially countenanced one of narrative. With some perplexity, he describes his ungovernable drive for narrative arising from seemingly little cause: "Why I longed to go grubbing into the deplorable details of an occurrence which, after all, concerned me no more than as a member of an obscure body of men held together by a community of inglorious toil and by fidelity to a certain standard of conduct, I can't explain. You may call it an unhealthy curiosity if you like" (31). This further elaborates a lexicon of narrative affect, coding his investment not as a transient desire but as a profound longing, and not as a momentary impulse of curiosity but explicitly as an "unhealthy" addiction and obsession.

33 Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*, ed. Thomas Moser (New York: Norton, 1968), p. 21. All further references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

Marlow's grubbing yields prolific results, and from chapter 5 on he compiles a catalog of testimonies about Jim's case. In chapter 5, Marlow reports what he's heard from de Jongh (the shopowner in Samarang), Archie Ruthvel (the principal shipping master), the German captain of the *Patna* (offended at being called a hound), Mariani (the hovel-keeper who fed the engineer liquor), and the engineer (with DTs in the hospital); chapter 6 gives Brierly's report (the clean captain and a judge in the case), and that of Mister Jones (Brierly's first mate); chapters 7–11 primarily focus on Jim's report of what happened; chapter 12 gives the account of the French lieutenant; chapter 14 records the court room scene as well as Chester's offer (of a job on a guano island); chapters 15–17 center on Jim's narration once again; chapter 18 gives an account of Jim's work habits from Denver and then from Egstrom; chapter 20 comes to Stein. Thereafter, the narrative is consolidated into a homogeneous report, similar to the elongated frame of the second half of *Wuthering Heights*, punctuated by periodic visits with Stein and Jim. To summarize the course of these accounts, one might abbreviate it as follows: $N_s (N_m (N_{dj} + N_{ar} + N_c + N_{ma} + N_e + N_b + N_{mj} + N_j + N_{fl} + N_m + N_c + N_j + N_d + N_{eg} + N_{st} + N_j \dots))$. In schematic outline, this illustrates the overwhelming repetitive action of the text, the plot constituted by the series of reports that Marlow receives.

Narratively, then, the novel yields an accretionary series of narrative sources, of witness testimony, that effects the rhetoric of validation but also projects the aura of its ubiquitous reach, enlisting all of the characters in its chain of investment. The multiplication of these sources is truly extraordinary, compared even to other narratives that explicitly attribute an inventory of sources, such as *Joseph Andrews*, where the narrator innocuously cites witness testimony, as discussed in chapter 2, or the recurrently framed *Wuthering Heights*, which foregrounds its overlaying of sources (Nelly, Heathcliff, the servants, Lockwood himself), competing for possession of the narrative, as discussed in chapter 3. In *Lord Jim* the series of narrative sources extends to a potentially infinite degree, bounded only by those whom Marlow contacts during his life and travels, or more exactly by the time of the narrating. The narrative has no necessary end, and in this sense it is ateleological, implying not the failed promise of meaning but its overabundance and continual production. As in *Heart of Darkness*,

the text foregrounds Marlow's perpetual drive, but in this case rather than being predicated on the heightened desire of non-fulfillment, it stresses the repetition of its fulfillment, compulsively refilling the seemingly limitless receptacle.

Predictably, given the normal expectations of narrative theory as outlined in chapter 1, much of the criticism of *Lord Jim* takes the novel as a story of Jim's fall, of Jim's moral test, of Jim's heroic triumph, of Jim's imperial recuperation, etc.³⁴ After all, it is named "Lord Jim." The common sense construal of plot – the diegesis as Genette might construe it – would follow the sequence of Jim's actions, beginning with his going to maritime school, jumping ship, losing his license and pride in court, taking a series of jobs that he continually leaves in humiliation, and finally establishing a successful miniature British colony in Patusan. This accommodates a standard dramatic pattern, representing the hero's fall due to a moral flaw, his testing thereafter, and his ensuing redemption, culminating in the climax of his death. This pattern recurs through what Stephen Land calls Conrad's many "compromised hero" narratives, in which the flaw of the hero – Jim, Kurtz, Nostromo, Heyst, *et al.* – precipitates his end.³⁵

In contrast, I would instead say that the act or "event" that unifies *Lord Jim* is the recurring and overarching "metadiegesis," the plot of which yields a *pageant* or *procession* of narratives and of narrative sources that relentlessly circulate the story of Jim. What makes this story exceptional are not the events of Jim's career; paraphrased, one might say the novel relates the rather inconsequential failing of a young man from the provinces. In fact, the problem with Jim is precisely that he is not particularly exceptional, as the novel tells us over and over again from the beginning. Rather, the exceptional charge that Jim's story takes is a function of the testimonies it draws and the extraordinary interest of Marlow and those he happens upon. Narratively, Jim is the occasion of the narrative pageant, a sign of their common investment, which generates and functions to reproduce the plot of narrative action.

This pageant also extends to the framing scenario of Marlow's

34 As Stephen K. Land claims, heroes such as Jim are, "by definition, always the structural centre of the story" (*Conrad and the Paradox of Plot* [London: Macmillan, 1984], p. 82). It is that normative definition I find troublesome.

35 On the common structure of Conrad's flawed hero tales, see Land, *ibid.*

telling, incorporating its projected narratees and suggesting its potentially endless procession. Rather than gathering narrative, Marlow in this level compulsively delivers the tale: "And later on, many times, in distant parts of the world, Marlow showed himself willing to remember Jim, to remember him at length, in detail and audibly" (21). This ascribes a different but complementary function to Marlow as a narrative vessel, casting him more directly as a latter-day Ancient Mariner,³⁶ in addition to receiving narrative also obsessively disseminating it, as if overbrimming with the narratives he gathers. *Heart of Darkness* likewise characterizes Marlow as a hypnotic narrator (despite initial skepticism, they lose the tide), and it is clear that he is an inveterate "narrative man" (the audience is fully familiar with him and expects without surprise another of his "inconclusive tales," which they recognize they are "fated" to hear), but that depiction is largely limited to the singulative scene of the opening frame, which effects immediacy, as befitting the dramatic concision of a short novel. In *Lord Jim*, as befitting the more circuitous and episodic arc of a longer narrative, the narrative scenarios multiply³⁷ – more extremely than even the recurring scenarios in *Wuthering Heights* or *Frankenstein* – and project the vista of endless repetition, anywhere in the world.

The ideology of narrative

After his chance meeting of the French Lieutenant in a cafe in Australia, Marlow muses:

Indeed this affair, I may notice in passing, had an extraordinary power of defying the shortness of memories and the length of time: it seemed to live, with a sort of uncanny vitality, in the minds of men, on the tips of their tongues. I've had the questionable pleasure of meeting it often, years afterwards, thousands of miles away, emerging from the remotest possible talk, coming to the surface of the most distant allusions. Has it not turned up tonight between us? (84)

36 On the analogy to the Ancient Mariner, see Alan D. Perlis, "Coleridge and Conrad: Spectral Illuminations, Widening Frames," *Journal of Narrative Technique* 12 (1982), 167–76; and Warren Ober, "Heart of Darkness: 'The Ancient Mariner' a Hundred Years Later," *Dalhousie Review* 45 (1965), 333–7.

37 Randall Craig notes that "recreating the circumstances of a performance can be seen throughout the novel" ("Swapping Yarns: The Oral Mode of *Lord Jim*," *Conradiana* 13 [1981], 185).

This is a blatant advert, attributing the extraordinary reach and power of the narrative, figuring it as preternaturally ("uncanny") exceeding the normal dictates of time and memory (its "vitality," as a salve against the fleetingness of time and forgetting), of space ("thousands of miles away"), of relevance ("from the remotest possible talk"), and of human connection (across a disparate range of characters). Its reach extends around the world, west to east, and across nationalities, from Ruthvel (Dutch), Stein (German), to the French lieutenant, transcending what one would otherwise expect to be competing if not rancorous colonial interests. Beyond its indelible effect on Marlow, it enthralles everyone who comes in contact with it. It is not merely an unforgettable story among a store of stories, but preeminent among narratives, "on the tips of their tongues" and obsessively planted in "the minds of men." Its power is such that it can drive men to suicide, as it does Brierly, of which Marlow says: "The matter was no doubt of the gravest import . . . I am in a position to know that it wasn't money, and it wasn't drink, and it wasn't woman" (36). This passage invokes a kind of biodependency of narrative, valorizing it beyond even any of the great vices, or more exactly the normative range of masculinized addictions (money, drink, and women), making it a matter of life and death.

The narrative pageant thus encompasses not only Marlow's gathering, but the full participation of the community of men who share "a certain standard of conduct," implicating them in the same obsession. Their investment is predicated not simply on a common curiosity about or human care for Jim, but on an enigma: that this Western subject, Jim, "one of us," could act against their code and ideology of duty, violating the tenet of keeping one's post. Their perplexity and ill ease stems from this enigma, that "one of us" could transgress and therefore threaten their ideological bond, the bond of those holding "the one great secret" of sailing, which literally and figuratively marks the reach of the British Empire. The pageant of narratives is linked by this redundant stress on Jim's being "one of us" (27, 48, 137, 253), defined as a normal white English male ("I knew his appearance; he came from the right place; he was one of us" [27]), as distinguished from the rest of the Patna crew ("he was not one of them; he was altogether of another sort" [49]). Again, the bond signaled by the incantation of "one of us" transcends what one would otherwise

surmise as competing national interests and conflicting cultural norms, as well as the multiplication of epistemological perspectives. The disparate imperial men are unified by their unexceptioned identification as "one of us," a bond that is asserted through and performed by their unrelenting narrative interest.

The narrative pageant thus suggests not simply the power of the abstract mode of narrative, but inscribes an ideological pageant to reaffirm the threatened bond of this community of men. It depicts a chain of ideological interpellation, recounting a procession of professional, imperial subjects who testify to their proper calling. In Louis Althusser's definition, ideology works to naturalize the vastly inequitable and unjust relations of capital through its interpellating subjects, causing them to internalize the imaginary relations – here, the fantasy of professional men of duty – necessary to sustain the real conditions of existence under capitalist modes of production – here, the profiteering and colonial subjection of the modern imperial mission.³⁸ (Capital does not work by brute force alone, overtly against people's wills, but effects its domination more quietly and indelibly, through ideology, with its subjects' consensual participation.) Jim's transgression – seemingly an isolated act of cowardice or indecision – is so serious because it goes against the force of ideology, of the "obscure body of men held together by a community of inglorious toil and fidelity to a certain standard of conduct," of professional men of empire, and of male heroism, that enables the imperial mission. The scandal is the failure of the ideological bond, and in this sense *Lord Jim* records a lesson of ideological correction. The correction, though, is not of Jim; "the body of men" give testimony to Jim's case not out of empathy for him and his troubles, but to efface those troubles in order to reconfirm their own code and bond. Despite the quasi-heroic ending, in my view the novel does not work to reclaim Jim, for his violation of the foremost law of "the one great secret" is irrecoverable – no one forgets it – necessitating his sacrifice, his eradication healing the ideological fissure.³⁹ The procession of narratives functions to close the fissure and threat to

38 Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review, 1971), esp. pp. 170–83.

39 Cf. Homi Bhabha, who underscores the colonial address of "He was one of us," but argues that Jim is reclaimed (*The Location of Culture* [London: Routledge, 1994], p. 174).

its code; by its hyper-repetition and extraordinary reach, it reassures the implacability of its bond.

In a cursory sense the allegory of narrative effaces the historical surface of the novel.⁴⁰ Despite representations of the extent of empire, of trading stations and merchant ships, the text reconstitutes them as narrative stations and occasions, the story of Jim a vehicle of narrative exchange for this community of men. And the text depicts the drive and desire for narrative in the extremest of terms, of obsession, addiction, and sacrifice of life, this rhetorical excess reflexively valorizing its formal mode and signaling an allegorical status. However, the second-order allegory reinscribes the narrative pageant as a chain of ideological interpellation, figuring an allegory of ideological reassurance, asserting a professional code that obscures but tacitly effects the imperial mission. The allegory of narrative bonding performatively enacts the allegory of ideological bonding.

Thus, in my view, the extreme repetition of these narratives so strongly invested in and circulated around Jim is finally not a matter of rampant perspectivism, hermeneutic indeterminacy, or epistemological uncertainty, as much contemporary criticism claims, but the work of ideological hailing and determination, a hailing that is flexible and incorporates presumably disparate national and other perspectives, that are however linked by a homogeneous code. In an influential reading, Hillis Miller takes *Lord Jim* as an exemplary deconstructive text, suggesting that the modernist tendency toward multiple perspectives thematizes the epistemological lesson of deconstruction: "The indeterminacy lies in the multiplicity of possible incompatible explanations given by the novel and in the lack of evidence justifying a choice of one over the others."⁴¹ Miller echoes Paul de Man's paradigm of deconstructive indeterminacy, in particular de Man's analysis of competing readings of Yeats' "Among Schoolchildren," which he asserts hinge on the "two entirely coherent but entirely incompat-

40 Padmini Mongia also argues that the narrative deflects attention from imperialism, but attributes that deflection to modernist, epistemological themes, whereas I attribute it to the allegory of narrative ("Narrative Strategy and Imperialism in Conrad's *Lord Jim*," *Studies in the Novel* 24 [1992], 173-86).

41 *Fiction and Repetition*, p. 40. Robert Siegle follows Miller in investigating deconstructive metaphor in Conrad; see *The Politics of Reflexivity: Narrative and the Constitutive Poetics of Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp. 100-1. Siegle's book is misleadingly titled, and largely focuses on deconstructive language in novels.

ible readings" of its last line. The two readings do not "exist side by side. . . [but] have to engage each other in direct confrontation, for the one reading is precisely the error denounced by the other and has to be undone by it."⁴² While I agree with Miller in stressing the repetitive structure of narrative sources, in my view they do not offer incompatible readings of Jim's act which confront and undo one another, but they are remarkably coherent and assert their compatibility, testifying to the characters' bond ("one of us").⁴³ The string of sources performatively enacts that bond, not so much by the literal content of what they say – they are sometimes fragmentary and perplexed, although I believe cumulatively concordant – but especially by their perlocutionary social force, testifying to a common cause, the community's almost ritualistically circling the wagons after a threat to or break in their bond. The various "perspectives" – epistemological or national – intersect in their common investment in reassuring the community's ideological bond, their professionalized code as men of empire.

For Miller, the text offers a lesson in interpretation and epistemology rather than politics and imperialism. In contrast to the strand of formal readings focusing on the novel's linguistic and generic attributes that Miller exemplifies, a counterposed strand takes *Lord Jim* directly to represent the politics and historical topos of imperialism, and the novel to demonstrate a more decisive resolution. In *Conrad's Politics*, Avrom Fleishman finds *Lord Jim* to be a "climax of Conrad's . . . political imagination," since it resolves the problem of "the work ethic and colonial adventurism by leading its hero to find his identity in *political* action" in Patusan.⁴⁴ However, although Jim is indeed a humanitarian improvement on Kurtz, the world that Jim manages and marshals is not by any means anti-imperialistic, but imposes an enlightened imperialism (in the terms of the novel, positively compared to the opportunistic imperialism of Brown, or of the Eldorado Exploring

42 *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 12.

43 Cf. Linda Shires, who argues against Miller's view of indeterminacy, claiming the text shows instead "a structure of mutually competing coherencies" ("The Privileged Reader and Narrative Methodology," *Conradiana* 17 [1985], 28).

44 Avrom Fleishman, *Conrad's Politics: Community and Anarchy in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967), p. 106; emphasis in text.

Expedition in *Heart of Darkness*). It is on the order of Scrooge's transformation in *A Christmas Carol*, where he pays his employees fairer wages and provides comprehensive health benefits and more benevolently endows workhouses, but maintains his wealth and privilege. Despite its putative restitution, *A Christmas Carol* hardly portrays a political or economic utopia, but asserts the "natural order" of capitalism. Similarly, *Lord Jim* asserts its imperial mission, albeit in a kinder, gentler fashion, defined by the imposition of an advantage-seeking non-indigenous economic order and the racist subjection of those not "one of us," subject to "Tuan Jim." The political action that Fleishman extols is not represented in terms of the interests of the "natives," on the Patna or in Patusan, as Homi Bhabha underscores, and the novel disregards them, but in terms of the interests of "the obscure body of men," linked precisely by their work ethic in "a community of inglorious toil."⁴⁵ And, again, that link is effected by the narrative pageant. Symptomatically, Fleishman ignores the "metadiegesis" of the narrative pageant, taking the narrating as a literal transmission of Jim's story and Jim – rather than Marlow – as the center of the novel.

In a magisterial synthesis of the formal and historical strands of reading *Lord Jim*, Fredric Jameson construes *Lord Jim* along the axes of a set of structural oppositions – romance/reification, adventure/modernism, premodern/postmodern, etc. – that reveal what he calls the ideology of its form. For Jameson, the text pivots on the hinge of the generic opposition between the modernist first half, impressionistically spinning off its points of view, and the heroic romance of the second half. The structural displacement of modernism for the comfort of romance poses an allegory of restitution for the rationalized fragmentation and reification of modern capitalism.⁴⁶ To put it another way, in the historian Arno Mayer's phrase, "the persistence of the old regime" is effected through the novel's generic shift, the romance of the second half reclaiming the colonial mission of the old regime in the face of the

45 On the elided perspective of those colonized, see Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, p. 174.

46 In Jameson's words, "The burden of our [sic] reading of *Lord Jim* has been to restore the whole socially concrete subtext of late nineteenth-century rationalization and reification of which this novel is so powerfully . . . the expression and the Utopian compensation alike" (*The Political Unconscious*, p. 266).

rise of modern, bourgeois culture.⁴⁷ Still, these readings – the formal and the historical, as well as Jameson's synthesis of the two – take the novel fundamentally as a hero-plot, the diegesis that of Jim's story. While Jameson states that the novel is a reflexive text in the continual meta-analysis of Jim's "event," his reading maintains the novel as one of the romance of the hero, centering on the hero's existential act. As he declares, "the contemplation . . . of *Lord Jim* remains stubbornly deflected onto the problematic of the individual act."⁴⁸ Further, the reflexivity implied by the meta-analysis of the "event" is one of interpretation, and thus Jameson follows the line of criticism that stresses the multiplication of perspectives, which he characterizes as a "damaged kaleidoscope" of "fragmentary data" and suggests are postmodern in their "nonstop textual production."⁴⁹

Part of the persuasiveness of Jameson's reading is his incorporation of this thematic of hermeneutic indeterminacy, grafting the poststructural reading together with the historical. However, as I have argued, the chain of perspectives indicates not a vertiginous fragmentation, but what is remarkable about them is their cumulative concordance, symbolically enacting the ideological cohesion of the community of imperial managers, joined by their narrative investment. That cohesion is never in question, and goes without saying. More so than the restitution suggested by the diegesis of Jim's "individual act," *Lord Jim* foregrounds the continual confirmation of their ideological bond, spurred by and dispelling the negative ideological example of Jim. In this sense, the ideology of the form derives precisely from the narrative of narrative, from Marlow's "metadiegesis" and the procession of narratives. The text thus projects the fantasy fulfillment of the

47 See *The Persistence of the Old Regime: Europe to the Great War* (New York: Pantheon, 1981). For a reading of the turn to modernism in Proust that draws on the more historical work of Mayer, see Michael Sprinker, *History and Ideology in Proust: A la recherche du temps perdu and the Third French Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

48 On its reflexive status, Jameson states that "*Lord Jim* is, however, a privileged text in this respect – a kind of reflexive or meta-text – in that its narrative construes the 'event' as the analysis and dissolution of events in some more common everyday sense. The 'event' is the analysis and dissolution of the event" (*Political Unconscious*, p. 257). On the "individual act," see p. 264. See also his diagrammatic representation of *Lord Jim*, cited in note 20, as well as his diagram of *Nostromo*, centering on "The Act" (p. 277). In finding Conrad's texts to pivot on the hero's "problematic" act, Jameson's view is not all that different from Land's.

49 See *Political Unconscious*, pp. 232–3; 219.

imperial mission not in Jim's questionable reclamation in Patusan, but deflects it as the fantasy of professionals of the sea, cathected as a literary ideology, of those with "a propensity to spin yarns."

The literary calling

To recall his disquieting enthrallment with grubbing stories of Jim, Marlow remarks that it, "after all, concerned me no more than as a member of an obscure body of men held together by a community of inglorious toil and by fidelity to a certain standard of conduct" (31). While this on first sight seems to suggest a slight cause for his motivation, it more exactly specifies his narrative investment as deriving only and exclusively from his membership in that obscure body. In characterizing this community of men, Marlow articulates the paradigm of modern professions, which are based on a code of conduct regulated by a professional community (for instance, the ethics oath in law, and more technically formalized in a body of theory), project a disinterested public rationale, beyond personal glory or profit ("inglorious toil," as, say, demonstrated in the altruism of the Hippocratic oath in medicine), and accredit members of its community, in turn discrediting those who do not adhere to its code (think of doctors as opposed to midwives, and hence the energy circulated around Jim), thereby establishing monopolistic control.⁵⁰ In this, Marlow charges his professional concern as not only not trivial but foremost, such that it governs his otherwise excessive course of action.

Jameson calls this code of conduct the "feudal ideology of honor," tying it to the genre of romance.⁵¹ Although this code has its antecedents in literary models of honor, and particularly in England the professions developed in response to a residual aristocratic model, it is precisely the *modern* ideology of professionalism, contingent on the formation of modern classes and their codes of class distinction, that Marlow evokes.⁵² As shown by his

50 See Larson, *The Rise of Professionalism*. Andrew Abbott revises Larson, arguing that individual professions show "idiosyncratic developments" and are internally differentiated (*The System of the Professions* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988], p. 33). However, while professions have specific systems, with Larson I find the overall rise of professionalism in modern culture constitutive of class formation in modern capitalism, particularly of the middle class. 51 Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, p. 217.

52 Larson notes the historical relation to gentry but stresses the supplanting of the "old professions" with the modern, more meritocratic, middle class system in

locating this code as a “feudal ideology of honor,” Jameson’s reading is decidedly literary, focused on the literary categories of genre (romance) and style (impressionism), and circumscribed within the parameters of literary history (medieval narratives of honor and the turn to modernism), rather than the historically specific formation of modern classes. Jameson’s strong insight in foregrounding the literary and philosophical topoi of romance and reification at the same time precipitates his blindness to reading the actual modern allegory of class, demonstrated by the community of imperial managers bonded by their professional code. What is historically modern about *Lord Jim* – to borrow Jameson’s phrase, the “socially concrete subtext” – is the inscription of the ideological interpellation of professionalism, naturalizing the modes of class distinction and regulating social mobility under modern capitalism. In this regard, *Lord Jim* records the rise of the new “middle,” professionalized classes, which, as Mayer points out, were at the end of the nineteenth century struggling to supplant the old regime.

The obscure body of men with whom Marlow identifies – those who gain entry to the narrative circle – are uniformly managers, agents, men of professional position, not ship hands or wage laborers. (Not only are those colonized unrepresented, but those of lower class position.) They are the ones who manage the imperial mission, rather than the ruling class; those in ruling class positions – “my employers,” as Marlow calls them in *Heart of Darkness* – are invisible and removed from the effectual control and management of the reach of Empire (recall the ineffectual stuffed shirt – the short man in a frock-coat – whom Marlow ridicules upon his interview at the Whited Sepulchre [*Heart* 14]). The mutual recognition of the obscure body of men – despite their social reserve with others, they share “confidences” with little restraint amongst themselves – is one of their professional class position, that automatic recognition signaling the hailing of ideology, that goes without saying. Similarly, those in the narrative circle of the frame of *Heart of Darkness* with whom Marlow implicitly identifies are cryptically unnamed, except by their professional positions: the director, the lawyer, the accountant, the ship

England in the late nineteenth century (*Rise of Professionalism*, pp. 90–9). On the cultural context of professionalism in England, see also Macdonald, *The Sociology of the Professions*, pp. 72–9.

captain. In other words, the text codes them as allegorical professional class figures, denoting their significance only in their class role as managers of empire, and they recognize each other in their mutual vocation, as heeding the professional "calling of the sea." Further, in both *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim* Marlow enforces the boundary of professionalism by expressing contempt for those who do not adhere to appropriate professional standards, such as those in the Eldorado Exploring Expedition or Brown. In this sense, Jim's story is an allegory of professional class entry, Jim's failed professionalism necessitating the correction of the reasserted ideological bond and offering a lesson in the regulation of class mobility, of young men from the provinces who overreach themselves, a lesson common enough in later nineteenth-century novels (think, say, of Pip's correction in *Great Expectations*).

In this context, it is especially telling that Marlow and the imperial managers with whom he identifies disclaim or have contempt for the base motives of imperialism and efface their national interests. In *Lord Jim*, Marlow disparages the absurdity of the drive for pepper and in general for imperial profit, and in *Heart of Darkness* tells with mocking disdain of the sweating, obese Englishman with him on caravan, who responds when asked why he is there, "To make money, of course" (23), and Marlow sneers at the "folly" of the imperial mission. This contempt for the overt material conditions of empire registers the ambivalence that constitutes modern professionalism, that eschews the dirt of actual material concerns and the profit motive on which it is in fact based, for a higher vocational calling ("duty") ruled by an internal code of conduct.⁵³ It casts that calling as disinterested, beyond the realm of self or national interest, sacralizing its distinctiveness. (And it is already distinct from wage labor, in its managerial role.) Conversely, Marlow also contemptuously dismisses his aunt's belief in the humanitarian mission and elsewhere the "philanthropic pretense" (27) of imperialism as "humbug." This dismissal appears to contradict his own belief in duty, which might be taken as an equal pretense, but his contempt works to establish the distinctiveness of his professional calling, marking its separateness from and superior-

53 On the constitutive ambivalence of professionalism, see Robbins, *Secular Vocations*. On the representation of "class ambivalence" in *Heart of Darkness*, see Ian Glenn, "Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*," *Literature and History* 13 (1987), 253.

ity to mystified, common belief. The category of duty sets itself apart from the more malign profit-seeking interests of imperialism, and also from its more benign humanitarian or philanthropic interests, defining the professional interest as autonomous from normal worldly dictates and beliefs, accountable only to its own internal regulation.

Marlow's contempt enacts its class distinction through the attribution of a more sophisticated judgment in dismissing the unknowingness of those not members, a judgment that is cathected through the literary taste and interest that these men exclusively share in sophisticated, problematic narratives of profession.⁵⁴ The drive and desire for narrative – “the propensity to spin yarns” – defines their common culture as a literary culture, which effects their professional bond, “the propensity to spin yarns” a tacit shared attribute of those who follow “the calling of the sea.” While advertising and valorizing the modal power of narrative, *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim* limit the terms of the allegory of narrative, specifying its boundaries as an affect and taste of the professional class. Their narratives are not available for just anyone, but exclusively for those in the professional community. Their narrative investment becomes a possessive sign of cultural capital, distinguishing their class status. Rather than the all-encompassing hailing of narrative interest across class, age, and gender lines in *Joseph Andrews*, the narrative circle is limited to the professional circle. And rather than the more frivolous demonstration of narrative desire for diverting narratives of leisure class entertainment in *The Turn of the Screw*, in *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim* the drive for narrative carries much more serious stakes, asserting the professional bond and in turn the importance of their managerial role, in other words assuring the tenuous position of those rising not on inherited capital but on newly attained cultural capital, via professional accreditation and membership.

In their yoking of professionalism and a literary culture based on narrative investment, *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim* emblemize the masculinized professional warrants of the modern institution of literature. The “obscure body of men [sic] held together

54 On the distinctions effected by class, through taste and the accrual of cultural capital, I draw conspicuously on Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Routledge, 1989).

by a community of inglorious toil and fidelity to a certain standard of conduct" aptly describes, in a more altruistic version, a contemporary model of the profession of literature – those deriving their class position not from inherited capital but from cultural capital, via education and professional accreditation, particularly in the post-World War II American academy (one that was nearly exclusively and is still residually masculine).⁵⁵ This cathexis of the allegories of modern professionalism and narrative I would speculate accounts for the exemplary position of *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim* as privileged texts – recall Jameson's citing *Lord Jim* as a privileged text – in the present institutional field. As Ian Glenn suggests, *Heart of Darkness* (and I would add *Lord Jim* as well) "survives, not so much because of its early treatment of colonialism, nor on account of its dramatization of the clash between nineteenth century virtue [or romance] and twentieth century decadence [or modernism], but because of a presentation of the class ambivalence of many Western intellectuals in the twentieth century that has held an unanalyzed power and fascination."⁵⁶ Glenn speculates that the reason why most previous readings have ignored this portrait of the intellectual class – instead focusing on colonialism, modernism, the spiritual descent, or hermeneutic indeterminacy, as I have surveyed – is because of its discomfiting exposure of their own interests.

For Glenn, *Heart of Darkness* represents directly the situation of the modern artist and intellectual in the depiction of Kurtz, as well as Marlow and implicitly of Conrad himself. In the foregrounding of the community bond, I would stress instead the context of managerial professionalism that mediates and regulates the intellectual classes. Further, Glenn reads the plot of *Heart of Darkness* fairly literally as centering on Kurtz, whereas I would read the ideology of the form, stressing that the code of the professional class is performed through the formal allegory of narrative (in both *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim*), and by extension that the professional class distinction of humanist intellectuals is cathected through the category of narrative, as a *literary calling*. In other words, to amend Glenn, the power of *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord*

55 On the rise of professionalism in America, largely through the educational apparatus, see Burton Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America* (New York: Norton, 1978).

56 Glenn, "Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*," 253.

Jim within the extant institution is due to their presentation of the propensity for narrative, linked with intellectual class ambivalence.

For narrative takes a privileged place in the current profession. Homer Brown suggests that the novel has supplanted poetry as our disciplinary object, and that the purported "rise of the novel" might be more accurately described as the rise of American novel criticism, produced in the 1950s to legitimate the field.⁵⁷ In other words, in a certain sense criticism has become our disciplinary object. More recently, as Bruce Robbins observes, narrative has come to be the central term representing the vocation of literature, as its disciplinary object.⁵⁸ This turn to narrative marks the turn to theory, since narrative is a theoretical category specifying a discursive mode, rather than a literary category specifying a genre, such as the novel or poetry. The novel is an inductive category, drawn from a concrete set of objects. The theoretical coding of the category of narrative defines not only its abstract mode but indicates its reflexive function, as a part of the formative professional discourse, to regulate professional accreditation, legitimation, and reproduction. Bodies of theory are what you have to learn to enter a professional field, and in some sense generate professional distinction and membership. To put this another way, the category of narrative suggests a universal human attribute – Peter Brooks calls it "a form of human desire" and "a primary human drive"⁵⁹ – but this postulation is an ideological one which occludes its function as a specific discursive site of professional reproduction. Narrative, in its current incarnation, is not available to everyone, but to those within the professional field. This is the ambivalence of professionalism, that beckons to a wide public relevance, at the same time marking its territory.

In this light, Jameson's reading – the foremost section of his most well known book – takes its place in current professional discourse not simply because of the force of his interpretation of

57 Homer Brown, "Prologue: Why the Story of the Origin of the (English) Novel Is an American Romance (If Not the Great American Novel)," *Cultural Institutions of the Novel*, ed. Deirdre Lynch and William B. Warner (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 21–2. For a complementary argument on Leavis' legitimation of the novel as disciplinary object, see Francis Mulhern, "English Reading," in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 254–5.

58 See Robbins, "Death and Vocation: Narrativizing Narrative Theory," *PMLA* 107 (1993), 38–50. 59 See Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, p. 61.

Lord Jim and its service to that literary object, but because of its compendium of contemporary theory, ranging across the camps of archetypal criticism, psychoanalysis, deconstruction, Marxism, and so on, and drawing on the avatars of theory, from Frye to Lukács, from Greimas to Lacan, and from Derrida to Althusser. Jameson's synthesis is not just of the dissonant form of *Lord Jim*, but of the predominant literary theories of the 1970s and 1980s, residually with us in the required theory course and a spate of theory primers and anthologies, in other words forming part of the code of contemporary professional accreditation.⁶⁰ This synthesis mirrors the textual action, its presumably dissonant theoretical perspectives underwritten by their professional consonance. "Romance and Reification" itself becomes a privileged text because it reflexively produces the tenets of the late twentieth century literary institution (to wit its privileging the theoretical category of reification rather than the material one of class), and ambivalently inculcates what might be called the *professional unconscious*. This is not to dismiss Jameson's reading, but, while exposing the political unconscious of its literary texts and staunchly advocating a Marxist criticism, his text unintentionally performs a different kind of political intervention than it purports. The question of politics and the novel in this regard reflexively turns back to one of professional reproduction.

Overall, then, both the textual allegories of *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim* – presenting models of the addiction to and obsession with narrative, and of the professional calling – and the critical allegories of their reception and present institutional placement – presenting models of theoretical performance and of professional accomplishment – gesture reflexively to bring us into the literary calling, to adhere to the code of conduct of followers of narrative, the obscure body of people who profess literature, to become "one of us." This self-recognition of the ideology of professionalism is a discomfiting one in revealing the (middle) class position of academic intellectuals, a class position that constitutively eschews its class position through its claims for autonomy and a higher calling, and that generates anxiety due to its tenuous hold of acquired symbolic educational capital rather than the real goods,

60 See my "Packaging Theory," *College English* 56 (1994), pp. 280–99.

capital ownership.⁶¹ Further, it is a discomfiting one for a profession that defines its work as research, as criticism and theory, occulting its more material role in managing the natives – students – funneling them into the proper working order of post-modern capital.⁶² But it is a recognition that becomes harder to ignore, particularly in light of the academic job crisis, since the class distinctions wrought by professional distinctions and the codes that effect them (such as theory, not coincidentally hyper-developed through the history of the job crisis, from 1970 on) have yet more serious and higher stakes, and in light of the more trenchant divisions of class in the epoch of downsizing, speedup, and as it is sometimes now called in economics, casino capitalism.

61 On the anxiety of the contemporary American middle class, see Barbara Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the Middle Class* (New York: Pantheon, 1989).

62 On the managerial function of English, see Evan Watkins, *Work Time: English Departments and the Circulation of Cultural Value* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989).

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