INFORMATION TO USERS

This material was produced from a microfilm copy of the original document. While the most advanced technological means to photograph and reproduce this document have been used, the quality is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original submitted.

The following explanation of techniques is provided to help you understand markings or patterns which may appear on this reproduction.

1. The sign or “target” for pages apparently lacking from the document photographed is “Missing Page(s)”. If it was possible to obtain the missing page(s) or section, they are spliced into the film along with adjacent pages. This may have necessitated cutting thru an image and duplicating adjacent pages to insure you complete continuity.

2. When an image on the film is obliterated with a large round black mark, it is an indication that the photographer suspected that the copy may have moved during exposure and thus cause a blurred image. You will find a good image of the page in the adjacent frame.

3. When a map, drawing or chart, etc., was part of the material being photographed the photographer followed a definite method in “sectioning” the material. It is customary to begin photoing at the upper left hand corner of a large sheet and to continue photoing from left to right in equal sections with a small overlap. If necessary, sectioning is continued again — beginning below the first row and continuing on until complete.

4. The majority of users indicate that the textual content is of greatest value, however, a somewhat higher quality reproduction could be made from “photographs” if essential to the understanding of the dissertation. Silver prints of “photographs” may be ordered at additional charge by writing the Order Department, giving the catalog number, title, author and specific pages you wish reproduced.

5. PLEASE NOTE: Some pages may have indistinct print. Filmed as received.

University Microfilms International
300 North Zeeb Road
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106 USA
St. John's Road, Tyler's Green
High Wycombe, Bucks, England HP10 8HR
NOVEL BEGINNINGS:
A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF OVERTURES
IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY FICTION

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By
Mary Isobel Rosner, B. A., M. A.

* * * * *

The Ohio State University
1978

Reading Committee:
Richard D. Altick
Arnold Shapiro
Christian K. Zacher

Approved By

Richard D. Altick
Adviser
Department of English
VITA


1969. . . . . . . . . B. A., SUNY at New Paltz, New Paltz, New York

1969-1978. . . . . . . Teaching Associate, Department of English, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

1971. . . . . . . . . M. A., The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

1972-73. . . . . . . Leave of Absence from The Ohio State University

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Nineteenth-Century English Literature.
Professor Richard D. Altick

Rhetoric and Composition. Professor Edward Corbett

Nineteenth-Century American Literature. Professor Thomas Cooley

Eighteenth-Century English Literature. Professor A. E. Wallace Maurer
"Begin at the beginning,"
the King said, very gravely,
"and go on till you come to
the end; then stop."

Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*

What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from.

T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*
TABLE CONTENTS

VITA ................................................................. ii
LIST OF FIGURES ........................................ v

Chapter

I. INTRODUCTION ........................................ 1

II. "IN CHANCERY": Lighting the Way into
    Bleak House ........................................ 19

III. THE TWO OPENINGS OF HENRY ESMOND:
     "What I dislike is beginning a new novel." 52

IV. "INTRODUCTORY": Martin Chuzzlewit ......... 79

V. TESTING THE READER OF THE EGOIST:
   "Us, too, he drags into the deeps...." .... 108

VI. THE INTRODUCTION TO MOBY-DICK:
    "I think I can see a little into the springs and
    motives...cunningly presented to me under
    various disguises...." .......................... 132

VII. THE SCARLET LETTER AND ITS "ENTRANCE-HALL":
    "The Custom-House" ............................. 157

VIII. FINALE .................................................. 177

BIBLIOGRAPHY ............................................... 182
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Serial Cover (*Bleak House*) . . . . . . . 21
Figure 2: Serial Cover (*Martin Chuzzlewit*) . . . . 82
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION:

"Man can do nothing without the make-believe of a beginning."--George Eliot

Aristotle defines rhetoric as the study of the available means of persuasion, and a rhetorician as one who uses those means to urge his audience to accept particular attitudes or ideas. Students of argumentative prose have handily adopted (and adapted) Aristotle's analysis of the ethical, emotional, and logical appeals to reveal strategies by which the written word can shape its perceiver, the reader. Fiction, of course, uses strategies too; and the more and more frequent questions about the relationships between the text and the reader justify a rhetorical analysis of fiction.

In oral and written argument, the rhetorician can use the various appeals to make his thesis attractive to an audience he has analyzed. But he can never be aware of the significance of all the choices he makes in the presentation of that material. As Stephen Ullmann explains, "there will always remain a vast number of cases...where we just do not know whether the [author's] choice was fully conscious, semi-conscious, unconscious, or even sub-conscious."1 Intentions, when known, can reveal something of the author's rhetorical strategies; but, since what someone intends and
what he actually conveys may not be equivalent, the critic must look to the product to see what has come through the text.

The novelist has even less knowledge of his audience than the traditional rhetorician has; but his text can also be analyzed to determine how it reveals its "messages" so they can be understood:

1. through a narrator or narrative voice that speaks to the reader by the way he/it structures the material;
2. through connotative language, allusions, and metaphors that may carry more than one level of meaning;
3. through descriptive details that direct responses to characters, settings, themes, ideas.

The rhetorical critic's analysis of fiction has to reveal where and how these techniques are used, and this demands a study that is denotative (what is being said?), stylistic (how?), and rhetorical (with what effect?). Since the novel must introduce a fictional world and create a reader who will comprehend it, the critic should be able to describe that world and the details in the presentation that can shape an audience's response. When dealing with works of former ages, to understand the full content of those texts, it is especially important that he be able to "put [himself] into the minds of the first readers, by steeping [himself] in their immediate, everyday knowledge and language...."2 For the appeals that formed the works' contemporary audiences may be silent to us today; only by
studying a work in its context can we recover its dated,
often implicit, messages.

Contrary to Wayne Booth's simple observation that
"most readers most of the time read most parts of most works
in identical ways,"\(^3\) not every reader responds the same way
to a narrator, a metaphor, an idea, or anything. What each
of us brings to a book obviously affects our reading of it.
A rhetorical critic, like almost any other, tries to free
himself of his idiosyncratic responses. For he is interested
not in what Walker Gibson calls the "real" individual who
holds the book but in the "fictitious reader--I shall call
him the 'mock reader' whose mask and costume the individual
takes on in order to experience the language."\(^4\) To determine
the "mock reader's" role, the critic must discover how that
mask and costume are made.

Unlike Stanley Fish, he does not examine bit by bit
"the temporal flow of the reading experience, analyze "the
developing responses of the reader in relation to the words
as they succeed one another in time"\(^5\)--though this process
very possibly does affect a reader's attitude to the material
he reads. As Fish explains it, however, the exercise seems
both artificial and fruitless. Artificial, for I know of
no reader, even the most severely analytical, who isolates
words and phrases from a context; and fruitless because, by
ignoring the context, Fish (or any reader) must distort.
Rather than emphasizing the activity, the rhetorical critic
demonstrates how the signals in the text help define the "mock reader's" relationship to it.

Roland Barthes has convincingly (but rather incoherently) analyzed how a work conveys information (and thus shapes a reader's response) by identifying the text not as simply a horizontal series of words but as that series complicated by codes which add layers of meanings: "the convergence of the voices (of the codes) becomes *writing*, a stereo-graphic space where the five codes, the five voices, intersect..." In *S/Z*, probably the most thorough rhetorical analysis of a text, he attempts to duplicate the activity of the ideal reader (one who recognizes and responds fully to the codes) in order to uncover this range of meanings. Though his attention to details leaves us with a carefully dissected "Sarrasine," because he fails to explain his techniques--we never know how Barthes knows that a particular segment is an example of a particular code in the particular way he says it is--the process cannot easily be repeated.

Where Barthes neglects to describe his theory fully, Wolfgang Iser fails to apply his convincingly. Like Barthes, he sees reading as an interaction of the reader and the text in which details in the work invite various interpretations which can expand its meanings. For him, too, the "unformulated" text is just as important as the words on the page: "the formulated text must shade off, through allusions and
suggestions, into a text that is unformulated though none-theless intended...the written text furnishes [the reader's imagination] with indications which enable it to conjure up what the text does not reveal." But rather than reproduce the reading activity, to "deconstruct" the text as Barthes does, Iser simply describes reading as "a dynamic process of self-correction" in which the reader organizes and re-organizes various data as he is directed by the text, by his experiences with other texts, and by his experiences with the world he knows. Thus, as he reads, he forms initial hypotheses which are adjusted as more material becomes available to him (as he continues to read): "Every sentence contains a preview of the text and forms a kind of viewfinder of what is to come; and this in turn changes the 'preview' and so becomes a 'viewfinder' for what has been read." Unfortunately, Iser does not demonstrate this process in his discussion of specific works.

Like Barthes and Iser, I will try to describe the denotative and connotative levels of a work to determine what appeals it uses to inform, attract, and direct the ideal reader. Since a rhetorical analysis of fiction must examine material intensively, a study of a lengthy work, though perhaps ideal, is impractical. The opening of a novel especially deserves a rhetorical study because it can demonstrate the ways a fiction defines and attracts its audience. Most novel beginnings additionally reflect the qualities of the
fictions they introduce: their styles, targets, ambiguities. An examination of openings, thus, should reveal how one begins to be refined into an intelligent reader of the text and how the material in these openings anticipates their fictions.

Though the relationships between beginnings and novels vary among the works I examine—in order, Bleak House, Henry Esmond, Martin Chuzzlewit, The Egoist, Moby-Dick, and The Scarlet Letter—for each, I will summarize the argument of the opening, study the narrative techniques, and determine the relationships between the opening and the body of the text. There are two general classes of beginnings, as the following section explains, but the dissertation will study the shaping techniques of the overture only, an opening that is, in one sense, self-contained.

BEGINNINGS

The reader does not approach a novel in complete ignorance. He has read other books and, consequently, has certain expectations of the form; his familiarity with the author's canon, with reviews and advertisements, may make those expectations more specific. The most pertinent reader-shaping comes, however, from the fiction itself: "As the reader uses the various perspectives offered by the text..., he sets the work in motion, and this very process results ultimately in the awakening of literary responses within himself."9 The beginning of a novel is important because here the per-
spectives--the social, cultural, and historical norms and literary conventions--help define not only the text immediately experienced but also the one anticipated, contained in all the chapters to be read. Ishmael, for instance, plays with meanings and with a literary tradition by the amount and kind of material he includes in the "Etymology" and "Extracts" sections of Moby-Dick. The self-consciousness of his story-telling role and his wariness about oversimplifying the whale, the quest, the meaning, and the tale continue throughout the novel. Of course, the promise implied in an opening may not be entirely fulfilled by a work, but it is never forgotten. Barthes' comparison of the narrative structure to a fugue is helpful here: "the narrative 'pulls in' new material even as it 'holds on' to previous material." How much and what kind of "new material" is pulled in for the reader depends, from the first, on the work's beginning.

Most novels open directly with a first chapter that describes an action or a character; these descriptions are continued, expanded, in the chapters that follow. Whether they are embellished, extended, or explained, the specifics in these first chapters directly determine the content of the second, the second chapter determines the third, and so on. In fact, so many novels begin in the middle of things that the reader does not find it remarkable to discover himself suddenly, at the work's opening, in the midst of
some action involving some characters, the importance of both only gradually revealed. Recall the first sentence of Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* which parodies this convention: "They order, said I, this matter better in France--." More typical is the helmet-crushing scene in Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, the "scientific" meeting that starts Dickens' *The Pickwick Papers*, or the train ride Carrie takes to Chicago in Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*.

Novels that start with the history of a character may offer a less traumatic entry into a work, since this material is closer to the kind found in non-fictional writing. David Copperfield, for one, begins his story at "the beginning of [his] life...." But this convention is also burlesqued in ways that multiply the levels of the fiction and complicate the reader's role. Fielding writes in *Jonathan Wild* (Chapter 2): "It is the custom of all biographies, at their entrance into their work, to step a little backwards. (as far, indeed, as generally they are able) and to trace up their hero, as the ancients did the river Nile, till an incapacity of proceeding higher puts an end to their search." The Chuzzlewits are traced to Cain at the start of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, and a history of man's descriptions of whales serves as part of the opening of *Moby-Dick*.

Whatever their subject, these expansive openings provide an open-ended entrance into a reading process that makes each fictional world gradually available to the reader.
by making more and more information available to him as he reads. But the world itself is defined only in pieces. This large class of beginnings is not, however, the subject of this dissertation. Instead, I am interested in openings which seem to be exceptions to this dominant type and which fall into a group I call the overture. The overture is typically, of course, a musical composition whose purpose is to prepare the listener for the major work that follows it. It can be an independent performance; one that is merely tonally connected to the main piece; or one more intimately tied, often previewing striking thematic passages or actually merging into the first movement. Like any musical composition, the overture entices the listener by "playing with his expectations. As Levi-Strauss explains it, the music "withholds or adds more or less than the listener anticipates on the basis of a pattern that he thinks he can guess." The result: the listener of an overture is a "silent performer,"

challenged not only by the gaps within this introduction but also by the much larger gap between the introduction and the main musical text itself. In literature, as in music, there are several kinds of overtures: the more usual directs the reader's expectations about settings, themes, and techniques to be found in the novels and often establishes the narrative tone; the other is radically separate from its novel, only indirectly educating the reader in what is to come. Like the listener, he too is an active producer of the text.
Overtures can occur as prologues or as first chapters. Halfway between the non-fictional "Preface" (with all the narrative authority it conventionally evokes) and the fictional novel, prologues bridge the world of the real and the fictive. Combining authoritative tone and fictional subject, these preliminary remarks help define the text the reader has still to meet. The 1710 edition of Swift's A Tale of a Tub, to take an extreme case, introduces the Tale with a list of works by its anonymous author, an Apology that answers critics, a Dedication that attacks traditional dedications, a Notice from the bookseller to the Reader that refuses to explain the acquisition of the manuscript, and (finally) a Preface. All these introductory remarks, individually and together, affect the reader's expectations of the work that follows. And, while he is anxious for the Tale to begin, in a way it has begun already, for it would not be the same without these preliminaries—material that is not merely decorative but functional because it accustoms the reader to the techniques and tone of the satire to come.

Witness, too, the "Author's Introduction" to Felix Holt, which places the action in the rural past, in the world of glorious coach-roads where "the happy outside passenger seated on the box from the dawn to the gloaming gathered enough stories of English life, enough of English labours fit for a modern Odyssey." The introduction further suggests the mystery and suffering surrounding the main characters,
with a reference to Ovid that broadens the subject of the tragedy to include anyone who suffers, even, perhaps, the reader:

The poets have told us of a dolorous enchanted forest in the under world. The thorn-bushes there, and the thick-barked stems, have human histories hidden in them; the power of unuttered cries dwells in the passionless-seeming branches, and the red warm blood is darkly feeding the quivering nerves of a sleepless memory that watches through all dreams.

Eliot's evocation of this setting and these themes at the beginning of her novel invites the reader to expect their fuller treatment in the pages that follow.

While these prologue-overtures establish an implicit contract between the reader and the work, to recognize the nature of the contract, often he must assume a complex role. "The Custom-House" forces him to ask many questions (not all resolved) about its connection to its text. Overtures can, however, complicate the fiction without necessarily frustrating the reader. The "Prelude" to Middlemarch, for example, demands a divided reaction to Theresa and her nineteenth-century counterpart; the dual beginning of Thackeray's Henry Esmond offers contradictory views of the hero; "Before the Curtain" of Vanity Fair uses an involved manager-performance-fair analogy that forces the reader to become an inhabitant of a world peopled by fools.  

The overtures that come as first chapters seem to differ from the prologues only in the reader's initial
certainty that the speaker and content are undeniably part of the fiction, with the privileges attached to all fictional creations. Occasionally, as with the opening to The Return of the Native ("A Face on Which Time Makes But Little Impression"), these beginnings develop major symbols. Some evoke a mood; "Outside Dorlcote Mill" of The Mill on the Floss, for instance, prepares the reader for the "tone of brooding memory that haunts the whole book" by appealing to his own childhood "as a means of understanding and pity." Others play upon conventions, like Scott's "Introductory" of Waverley, or the beginning of "Levitical" of Charlotte Bronte's Shirley: "If you think from this prelude, that anything like a romance is preparing for you, reader, you were never more mistaken....Something real, cool, and solid, lies before you; something unromantic as Monday morning...." And some, like the "fabulous" beginning of "The Overture" of The Newcomes, anticipate objections: "But who ever heard of giving the Moral before the Fable? Children are only led to accept the one after their delectation with the other; let us take care lest our readers skip both; and so let us bring them on quickly...."

More important than the specific content or the placement of the overtures is their relationship to the reading process. Unlike the dominant class of first chapters, these are concentrated and self-contained. If the conventional first chapter begins a process of gradually unfolding a
fictional world, these immediately preview that world, removed from, yet essential to, the narrative. Thus, we have the darkness, uncertainties, and traps of "In Chancery" of Bleak House. If the conventional, expanded opening begins to present the specific details the reader will need in a process that is essentially inductive, these present generalizations in a reading process that begins deductively. They ask the reader to accept certain attitudes and values and "truths" which anticipate details to be developed by the fiction. In "The Period" of A Tale of Two Cities, for example, the particulars of the novel will demonstrate that "it was the best of times, it was the worst of times...." When he opens the book, the reader does not have that data available to him; rather, the general descriptions of the first chapter outline expectations that the novel as a whole will fulfill. The overture, then, establishes a contract between the reader and the work that instructs him in its themes and very often in its style before he gets to the specifics of the plot. Like Fielding's bill of fare in Tom Jones, these openings allow "all persons [to] peruse their first entrance into the house; and having thence acquainted themselves with the entertainment which they might expect, may either stay and regale with what is provided for them, or may depart to some other ordinary better accommodated to their taste." As a result, these deductive beginnings, whether called Chapter 1 or Proem or Prelude, function as overtures
to the works, brief concentrated arguments that anticipate, in varying degrees, details, characters, incidents, to come.

Six quite different openings will be examined in this dissertation, in an order which shows a loosening of the fiction's strict control of the reader and a corresponding increase in the reader's responsibility for making sense of the fictional world he enters. "In Chancery" of Bleak House is probably most typical of the resounding overture that confidently announces the work's themes and so prepares the reader for their later treatment. Drawing on social and folk material familiar to the nineteenth-century popular audience, the emotional argument presented here disorients, frightens, and finally challenges the reader.

Typical of another kind of opening, one characteristic of eighteenth-century personal history which it imitates, is the beginning of Henry Esmond with its informal introductory letter and formal critical essay. The implied reader of this work is someone more literate than Dickens' audience, familiar not only with nineteenth-century fictional histories (the popular work of Ainsworth, Bulwer, and Scott, for instance) but with earlier literature, art, and history. If in Bleak House's overture, the reader is asked to correct an evil that affects all of England, in Esmond's he is directed to a literary (rather than social) problem, one that announces the major irony of the novel.

Though these two examples raise expectations that the
works clearly fulfill, not all overtures are so successful. *Martin Chuzzlewit*'s "Introductory" is presented by a clearly defined, ironic historian who, especially through his tone, popular material, and style, identifies some of the specific targets of the book: deception in the form of snobbery and language manipulation. Here the narrator and reader are clearly aligned against false social and moral standards; but, except for the American scenes, this alliance is hardly as strong, or hardly as secure, throughout the novel.

The "Prelude" to *The Egoist*, another false preview, challenges and ultimately frustrates the reader by its extremely difficult style, an exaggeration of the novel's own. Allusive, metaphoric, and, in parts, incoherent, in exchange for the reader's perserverence and flexibility, it offers unequal parts of insecurity and humor.

Though I do not propose to offer a genre study, my examination of the two American overtures tests generalizations about the distinctions between novel and romance. Certainly, the openings of *Moby-Dick* and *The Scarlet Letter* are qualitatively different from the other four beginnings: the narrators of the American overtures explore the nature of reality, meaning, and fiction by drawing attention to their own artifice and to their own limitations as storytellers. These fictions announce and demonstrate the value of an individual's perceptions; consequently, the reader is forced to confront various
ways of seeing and knowing, none of which is wholly superior. 
*Moby-Dick* begins with a complementary three-part opening 
that mocks and raises serious questions about various 
literary conventions. "The Custom-House" of *The Scarlet 
Letter*, which most uneasily fits my definition of the 
special opening, blends fiction and fact in an introduction 
that differs markedly from the tone and content of the 
main work to create a gap which is never completely 
filled. The worlds that these two openings preview, 
because they celebrate plurality, are not so easily defined 
as those more confident and stable narratives of nineteenth-
century England. In both Melville's and Hawthorne's works, 
the reader is taught to question accepted traditions, 
interpretations, significances, and to accept a 
perpetual indeterminacy as a condition of reading.

Beginnings are always, Eliot reminds us, a necessary 
make-believe; man can do nothing without them. With them, 
he can be informed, challenged, entertained, confused; 
shaped into what he needs to be to realize the text.
NOTES


3Wayne Booth, "Preserving the Exemplar: or, How Not to Dig Our Own Graves," *CI* 3 (Spring, 1977), 412.


As Cary Nelson has observed (see "Reading Criticism," PMLA 91 (October, 1976), 801), "theoretical or polemical prefaces to creative literature often color or even transform the way we read...." Sometimes they indicate the genre of a work, as Hawthorne's typically do; more often, they respond to the various comments and questions raised by the initial appearances of publications. But these additions to a work are not true beginnings and are not, therefore, my concern here.


CHAPTER II

"IN CHANCERY";
Lighting the Way into Bleak House

"In Chancery" presents a strange world of mud and dinosaurs and falling pedestrians, of an anachronistic legal system and its innocent victims, to dramatize most forcefully the dangerous yet ridiculous forces that are accused of imprisoning and impeding England. The very exaggeration of this opening must initially confuse the reader, but it is because they are grotesque that these images can recur with such force later in the novel and resurrect the future prophesied here. As an overture to Bleak House, "In Chancery" stridently announces its themes.

When the first number of Bleak House came out in March, 1852, readers were greeted by Dickens' usual green illustrated cover. More than decorative, like other covers to serialized novels, it indicated something of the tone and content of the anticipated work. The reader of the serialized Bleak House begins the novel by "reading" the cover and interpreting, as well as he can, the scenes he finds there. Since the cover design remained constant throughout the serialization, with each number he is able to reinterpret those scenes and "read" them more fully--i.e., more aware of the significance of the figures and actions presented.
The reader sees the title, *Bleak House*, surrounded by eleven sketches (see figure 1). The relationship between the title and these sketches is implicit: the eleven scenes must surely describe the world of the novel reflected in its title. Seven of the pictures appear to be primarily descriptive: with documents in the background, a lawyer digs into a mound (1); a woman is threatened by a fox (traditional symbol of treachery), while a Will o' the Wisp\(^2\) dances towards her (2); a smiling woman, enclosed in a garret whose latticed window repeats the criss-crossing of the abandoned bird cage, releases birds to freedom (3); a man writes on a wall, a hunched cat at his feet (4); a muffed and bonneted woman stands by carriage horses, behind her a uniformed man, possibly a soldier (5); a couple stand back to back, before a puzzled Cupid (6); a grim-faced scrivener is bent over his work, a bottle and glass in an open cupboard nearby (7). Familiar with the convention of serial covers, the reader trusts that the novel will develop these curious vignettes.

But the dominant cluster of images on the cover, the most energetic and developed, demands a more emotional response from the reader who sees a legal system with aggressive law officials and victimized man. Blindman's Bluff at the top (8) is one of the metaphors used to establish this relationship. In this children's game, one or more players are blindfolded, turned and confused,
NOTICE is hereby given that the Author of "BLEAK HOUSE" reserves to himself the right of publishing a Translation in France.

1852

Figure 1: Serial Cover
and told to catch whoever can be caught; sometimes the blind men catch each other. As presented on the cover, giant, bewigged lawyers are partially or wholly blindfolded; most of the other, smaller figures run away, though a few grin and taunt them. The world is in chaos: books fall off their shelves, people trip, some cringe; lawyers and suitors stumble over each other and over a woolsack, an attribute of the Lord Chancellor. This "game," then, appears to describe the activities of the Lord Chancellor's court, one that does not honor the traditional figure of blind, impartial Justice but encourages blind, grasping lawyers who seem to have regressed into their childhood and who chase after other adults who may be just as childish.

In another kind of game (9), three wigged figures ponder chessmen (mennikins) on a table with a snake (symbolizing treachery and deceit, like the Will o' the Wisp and the fox) curled at its base. To the left of this, robed and wigged officials play a game of shuttlecock, where men- and women-dolls serve as cocks (10). Together, scenes 8, 9, and 10 present lawyers as powerful hypocrites who attack or control others; and by this presentation, the reader is warned against them even before he meets them in "In Chancery."

The second large tableau on the cover (11) presents a stationary crowd, in contrast to the chaotic one at the top which it balances. The dominant figure here, a dark
and muffled man, draws within himself, unlike the outstretched player in 8 above. And he, in turn, draws the crowd to him, not from him as the lawyers do on top. Near him is a toy wagon with a scribbled "Bubble and Squeak" on its side, possibly warning about "cheats" (Partridge, "bubble"), possibly alluding to magistrates (though Partridge only locates the rhyming slang connection [squeak, beak] in the late nineteenth century). Sitting in the wagon is a man "blowing his own horn," a childish braggart, one who can, in a limited way, be controlled by the dark central figure who steps on the wagon's handle.

But the control the dark man can exercise offers only limited security, for the direction of the smoke and the weather vane of the many-eaved house behind him show that an east wind is blowing; and, as the proverb states, "when the wind is in the east, it is neither good for man nor beast." \(^4\) Two jesters in the crowd give some indication of what is not good: the one with the Humbug sign may be commenting on the lawyer he appears to watch; the other holds an Exeter Hall placard and stands before a woman bent over two black children, implying criticism of popular religious schemes to "redeem the savages." Both fools seem to point to different types of false salvation.

Thus, the cover initially arouses and directs the reader's curiosity, warns him against the lawyers, and reminds him of the Exeter Hall failures. As characters
and situations develop in the novel, he may recognize them on the cover where their depictions, in turn, can augment the prose.

Not all nineteenth-century readers used the serialized version of *Bleak House*, and certainly almost no readers do today. Consequently, a study of the opening's reader-shaping must extend to the actual words of the overture, Chapter 1. "In Chancery" identifies, of course, that long-recognized villain of the nineteenth-century English legal system, the Court of Chancery, and evokes the legal "games" depicted on the serial cover. Founded to promote Equity, in fact, it did little more than promulgate ill-will and suffering among executors and inheritors. Trevor Blount's article, "The Documentary Symbolism of Chancery in *Bleak House*," allows the modern reader to share, at a distance, some of the knowledge Dickens' contemporaries had of the failures of the Court. His impressive survey includes nineteenth-century satirical poems, journal articles, nonfictional books and letters, and even fiction; but it does overlook some important material. In *Past and Present* (1843), Carlyle criticizes the lawyer who brought his client into Chancery "where, after 'half-centuries of hubbub' he got nothing but 'disappointment, almost desperation.'" In 1851 and 1852, Chancery reform was a recurrent topic in the *Times* where it was described in various articles as a "plague-spot," "a mere bloodless arena for mutual
destruction," "a charnel-house of fortunes...golgotha of estates...an organized iniquity, an incurable evil, an inveterate wrong," "an abyss, swallowing up everything that once touches its brink," and a cancer. Even earlier, in 1832 according to the OED, "in Chancery" had become a slang boxing term for the "position of the head when held under the opponent's left arm to be pommelled severely, the victim meanwhile being unable to retaliate effectively...." The term comes from the "tenacity and absolute control which the Court of Chancery holds anything, and the certainty of cost and loss of property...."

The chapter does not, however, begin by confirming immediately what its title evokes. It is not Chancery the reader meets first but a strangely abrupt weather report that becomes more and more emotional, more and more frightening. Not until paragraph 4 does the Court come in as the source of that mud and fog; in 6 and 7, the Lord Chancellor and his assembly are introduced; in 8 and 9, Jarndyce and Jarndyce, the case under consideration, is described; and in 10 are traced its far-reaching effects on English life. Finally, in a return to the Court that repeats the same phrasing of paragraph 4, sentence 2, a session is enacted; and the chapter ends with a magically emptied court-room and the narrator's prayer that Chancery and the suffering it has caused be destroyed. The reader must fit the weather and the legal sections
together to make sense of the chapter; the imagery repetition
enables him to do this.

The first paragraph begins by presenting a series of
facts: "LONDON. Michaelmas Term lately over, and the Lord
Chancellor sitting in Lincoln's Inn Hall." The narrator
then turns to the definitive characteristic of LONDON and
the focus of the paragraph: "Implacable November weather."
From here, the neutrality of the opening vanishes, and the
reader is overwhelmed by the first of several detailed
catalogs: mud, smoke, drizzle, filthy dogs and horses and
air, jostling and falling foot passengers characterize all
places in London, on any and all days in November, any
and every year since the Chancellor has held court at
Lincoln's Inn. These details transform London, the heavily
populated commercial and governmental center of Victorian
England, into a land of fog and mists, hostile to life.
Mud changes the streets into avenues for primordial animals,
makes the world congenial to the dinosaur but strange and
threatening to man, and, by disguising and burying all, even
trivializes his imprint on the environment. Except for
the smoke lowering from the chimney pots, man's mark is
initially absent from the cityscape; so too have his
domestic animals, the horse and dog, become lost to him,
made "undistinguishable by the mire." Their indistinctness
makes them potential threats to be tripped over or run into
rather than servants, allies. The absence of the sun and
the descent of the smothering, soft, black drizzle complete
the presentation of the LONDON of Bleak House.

In the midst of this city remarkable for its omi-
nously exaggerated inclemencies steps man. Like the players
of Blindman's Bluff on the cover, he jostles, falls, slides,
finding other pedestrians and the elements equally opposed
to him. In this strange and hostile world, surrounded by
battling umbrellas and lumbering dinosaurs, he seems doomed
not merely to slip, as tens of thousands have already done,
but to contribute (however innocently) to the strength of
the mud that pulls him down, "adding new deposits to the
crust upon crust of mud...." Not fortunate in any sense,
man learns nothing from his fall: "foot passengers have
been slipping and sliding since the day broke...." And
other inhabitants will follow their lead, the mud will
accumulate, the Megalosaurus will waddle, London will con-
tinue to backslide into the swamp. The paragraph that
opens "In Chancery" places the reader immediately in an
unknown and apparently causeless environment from which
man is unable to escape ("in Chancery"?). Here is a
nightmarish world where, in the midst of dark streets and
ghostly lamps, thousands of figures continually slide
and fall, slide and fall.

But there are comic images in the midst of this
meaningless activity; and the dinosaur that shares the
world with man--the understated introduction to the image,
"it would not be wonderful to meet...," establishes its appropriateness to the hostile setting—does not stalk but waddles, like a huge baby or giant duck or "elephantine lizard." The reader is left with these two unresolved and competing images: the dinosaur as "fearful, terrible... lizard" (OED: the etymology of the word Owen chose in 1841 to describe his discovery) and as funny cartoon. And though the environment is potentially harmful in this opening scene, the manner in which man experiences its hostility lessens its threat. The mud defeats him, but the reader does not see him injured or even dirtied. Instead, man is a slap-stick slider caught in a process that is comical because it is harmless and predictable, and frightening because it is endless. Even the description of the crusts of mud, their "accumulating at compound interest," is reassuring because familiar, with its echoes of civilized banking life, yet oppressive because it is used merely metaphorically: there is no compound interest, bank, or business in this world.

The threat of the opening results, in part, from information being withheld from the reader. Instead of having the causes of transformed LONDON identified, he is directed to other changes in the environment with a paragraph (2) that starts with an apparently detached, impersonal statement ("Fog everywhere.") which is developed, like the first paragraph, by a series that could continue
indefinitely. A giant fog penetrates everything, from the ships and barges to the eyes and throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners. What the fog attacks, by implication, is the present power of the nation (the skipper), the future power (the 'prentice), and the past (the pensioner). It rolls, creeps, hovers; and joins the mud in making England "undistinguishable." Even the earth seems somehow mysteriously changed, insubstantial: pedestrians on a bridge feel "as if they were up in a balloon and hanging in the misty clouds." Together, both mud and fog work to overwhelm and transform a city. And this transformation is disorienting, presenting not an imitation of life but something apparently out of an ominous fantasy in which civilization, the gas lights of paragraph 3, is haggard and reluctant, an only occasional marker in an oppressive gloom.

The style helps establish this opening eeriness. Four of the eight sentences of paragraph 1, five of the six of paragraph 2, and one of the two in paragraph 3 begin with nouns unqualified by articles or adjectives. These nouns (Dogs, not The dogs or Black dogs) offer only the barest identification of large classes of things, not specific members, and help contribute to the abstractness of the foggy environment. And foregoing all transitions at the beginnings of sentences emphasizes the separation of the general nouns from each other: the landscape is
peopled by undescribed horses, dogs, and pedestrians, none having anything to do with anything else. J. Hillis Miller has said that "the discrete elements of Dickens' scene are held together only by their common submission to the atmospheric qualities of fog and mud...[which] cause the distinct elements to blur and to interpenetrate and merge into one another." 9 While I think this impressionistic "interpenetration" is overstated, it is true that the scene is fragmented, as are many impressionistic paintings: 10 and that, while the abstract fog-dwellers are isolated figures, by classing them all together as nameless victims, the paragraph allows no distinctions between a man and a horse.

The sentence openers draw the reader's attention to the inhabitants of London; the sentence units themselves emphasize the activities affecting these inhabitants. Fragments compose the entire first three paragraphs. Lacking full verbs, words that locate a subject in time, they reflect the endlessness of the actions they describe. The twenty-one participles present each activity—sitting, waddling, lowering, jostling, etc.—as a process that has no beginning and no conclusion and that has no connection with other activities in progress (just as the inhabitants of those streets have no apparent connection with each other). As Miller has said, these participles "form a continuous, non-progressive present time. When we first
see \{the actor\} they are already energetically being themselves, or, rather, 'doing' themselves, and as long as we watch them they continue this action without cessation or change.\textsuperscript{11}

This opening of the first chapter, then, vividly presents an alien world in which man has somehow become less than man. Nature here conspires against civilization; the country is "in a fog" and Englishmen become trapped in layers of ancient mud. Somehow man survives in this world, but he has lost his place as its center and has become merely a visual joke. The only progress here is confined to the mud that amasses and the fog that flows and rolls and creeps. Man is their victim. Why? William Axton has argued that the opening paragraphs offer evidence that man has failed God and Nature. The mud and the mire, he convincingly argues, recall the Biblical account of the Deluge and, without a Noah, suggest a world of sinners completely doomed. The layering of mud, he further insists, evokes Lyell's uniformitarian theory which states that species survive only if they adapt themselves to changes in their environment. Man's continued falling indicates an inability to adapt.\textsuperscript{12}

Certainly, both religious and scientific appeals underlie the threat of the opening and point to humanity's end, but the chapter itself indicates a more immediate cause of man's imbalance. For the hostile natural world
has its origin in Chancery, were "the raw afternoon is rawest, the dense fog is densest, and the muddy streets are muddiest." This statement in paragraph 4 puts all that precedes in a context, as it establishes the far-reaching and dire consequences of England's corrupt legal system in panoramic terms. All that follows identifies that corruption in detail. Although the reader is told that any comparisons between the world of mists and bleakness and Chancery, cannot do justice to its "groping and floundering condition," comparisons are continually evoked. Making connections, in fact, is typical of the reader's activity throughout the novel, where he is asked to juggle two narratives, to recognize repeated motifs, and to see that the various levels of society are equally victims of various archaic systems.

Repetition helps the reader make connections and recognize significances. In Chapter 1, he is directly reminded in paragraph 6 that "on such an afternoon" as that described, he is certain to find the Court sitting, a causal relationship earlier implied in paragraph 1, sentences 2 and 3. Specific imagery reinforces this connection. If there is general infection in England encouraged by the darkness and damp, in Chancery there is a veritable pestilence. If the fog affects all, so does Chancery's handling of Jarndyce and Jarndyce. If the mud drags down the man who walks in it, the High Court
destroys the individual who dares go to it for Equity. If the physical world is dark and obscure, so too is the Court, lorded over by a "foggy glory," surrounded by a bar "mistily engaged" and attendants "stuck in [not mud but] a fog bank" which, like the misty cloud of paragraph 2, makes progress impossible. Similarities between the strange natural world and the strange man-made world of Chancery transform that High Court from a specific and limited example of injustice to a presence that infects much of England, more threatening than the waddling dinosaur and the engulfing mud of the streets because, as Dickens' original audience knew first-hand, it is real; and because, as any reader can see, it causes that unnatural regression of the first few paragraphs. Under Chancery, the future becomes the past. Through the indifference of its Chancellor, the clumsy massiveness of its machinery, and the greed of its lawyers, Chancery drains the fortunes, hopes, and lives of all who dare enter it.

Although these similarities are overwhelming, the differences between the physical and legal environments help the reader see the real villainy of Chancery. The physical atmosphere strangely attacks man and any other living thing; it is unmotivated, impersonal, and relatively harmless. Traced to Chancery, however, the fog and mud and bleakness become agents of an institution made by and composed of men, and affecting the health
and happiness of countless lives. The number of its victims, their obvious suffering, and the unconcern of the man-made Court make Chancery a sinner, negligent of the responsibilities it has been established to protect; worse, the source of inequities and pain and death.

A deity in a curtained sanctuary, the Chancellor is cut off and isolated from the chaos he alone can stop. Sanctified, wearing his "foggy glory," he contemplates, in his dim court with its wasting candles (fit emblems for the lives wasted there), the fog that epitomizes his kingdom. Surrounding him are his vaguely described (and vaguely seen) followers: a large advocate with a little voice, a little advocate with a loud voice, some score of members of the bar, various solicitors, the registrar, and two or three miscellaneous figures. But the Chancellor does not listen to them, does not see them, cannot judge them. He "drawls languidly to the roof..."; he is "legally ignorant of the man from Shropshire who has been desolate in the court for a quarter of a century; he has not enabled the sallow executor to "purge himself of his contempt..."; he has given no judgment, incomprehensible or otherwise, to the little mad old woman; he is uninformed of the facts of the Jarndyce suit. Isolated and fog-bound, the Lord Chancellor seems to be aware of very little. As a result, cases are unresolved--people are born into and die out of them--and Chancery can
provide no Equity.

The legal procedures that govern Chancery's operation seem to guarantee its failures and its continuation. "Nothing can possibly come out of the prisoner's conglomeration, but his being sent to prison..." followed by his return to Chancery and his return to prison. "Conglomeration"--a geological term that treats the prisoner like an object to reflect the Court's dehumanizing attitude--suggests too that the sallow prisoner's "appeal" is a mixture of all former, futile appeals, the confused cries of a victim unable to act, "fallen into a state of conglomeration about accounts of which it is not pretended that he had even any knowledge...." The Chancellor, too, is trapped, bogged down by the accumulation of decades of legal rulings, of masses of legal documents, of generations of legal self-interest; and "no man alive knows what [Jarndyce and Jarndyce] means." This layering of the legal material repeats the layering of the mud of the first paragraph to join the prehistoric and natural threat that opens Bleak House with this archaic, man-made threat of Chancery. "Mud" become "Mlud" but both collect bulk and victims at compound interest. In turn, these two interchangeable systems come to stand for any organization that sacrifices the individual for meaningless and destructive activity.
In Chancery, lawyers act, but with little effect. They engage in utterly formulaic verbal combat and never resolve anything. They grope blindly through precedents that are slippery, technicalities that obscure and delay procedures, words that become walls to isolate one speaker from another and all from the truth. For there is no truth in Chancery ("You may look in vain...."), just as there is no sun in the natural world; there is no progress in Chancery, just as there is none in the slippery streets of London. All the reader finds in both settings is constantly repeated and purposeless motion, like the actions of Mr. Tangle's eighteen learned friends, and deadly bulk. Scores of lawyers are lined up in the well--where, contrary to the proverb, Truth does not lie\(^1\)--buried behind piles of "costly nonsense," hundreds of thousands of meaningless words, layers of dead legal "precedents," and records of former hearings that reach back in time to forestall present action. By digging through these documents, laywers cover up truth; "'Mlud'...slides out of Mr. Tangle" to delay justice. And "Jarndyce and Jarndyce still drags its dreary length before the Court..." in a telling variation on Pope's "An Essay on Criticism" (356-7):

A needless Alexandrine ends the song.
That like a wounded snake, drags its slow length along.

In this opening chapter, Jarndyce and Jarndyce has no end; and just as it has trapped victims in the past, as
it drags on "perennially hopeless" more will be trapped. This, in fact, is what Bleak House proves: the Dedlocks, the recluse Jarndyce, Richard and Ada, George, Nemo, poor Jo, good Esther, even the innocent baby of Caddy Jellyby Turveydrop—all these and all others are implicated in the Jarndyce case; in one way or another, all are victims of its infection. And like the Alexandrine it imitates, the case may be perennially needless as well (a suggestion verified by the novel which, as it nears its end, discloses that all inheritance is eaten up in costs); its legacy is no more than suffering and death.

Through the analogy on which the chapter is based, the reader can see the strange and hostile inversions of a legal system where only lawyers benefit. Additional accusations made against Chancery force the reader to condemn the power behind those inversions. It is attacked directly as a long-lived sinner that has caused misery and injustice. Like Satan, it is both the center and the source of suffering. Surrounded by death, its ornament is Temple Bar, a boundary of London where heads where displayed in earlier times. Its circles of evil and the warning all honorable people give to anyone interested in Chancery proceedings echo Dante to make the Court a nineteenth-century Inferno:
"Through me you pass into a city of woe:
Through me you pass into eternal pain:
Through me among the people lost for aye.
Justice the founder of my fabric moved:
To rear me was the task of Power divine,
Supremest Wisdom, and primeval Love.
Before me things create were none, save things
Eternal, and eternal I endure.
All hope abandon, ye who enter here." 16

Chancery's victims are described with understated
details that evoke pathos:

Some say [the mad old woman] really is, or was,
a party to a suit; but no one knows for certain,
because no one cares.... [One man's] prospects
in life are ended.... Another ruined suitor....
can by no means be made to understand that the
Chancellor is legally ignorant of his existence
after making it desolate for a quarter of a
century....

All are hopelessly trapped, foolishing thinking their cases
will be resolved. These pathetic figures are juxtaposed
against the callous law officials who look for "fun" in
their struggles and who find Jarndyce and Jarndyce simply
a "joke." Lists, which seem able to continue indefinitely,
show Chancery itself to be a "joke" to anyone truly inter-
ested in justice. It is chaotic (filled with "bills,
cross-bills, answers, rejoinders, injunctions, affadavits,
issues, references to masters, masters' reports...."); it
is unending ('The little plaintiff or defendant...has
grown up...and trotted away into the other world. Fair
wards of court have faded into mothers and grandmothers;
a long procession of Chancellors has come in and gone out..."); it
is immoral (teaching "trickery, evasion, procrastination,
spoliation, botheration, false pretences."). And a most
dreadful and dramatic series of grim pictures describes its
effects on all levels of English life:

This is the Court of Chancery; which has its
decaying houses and its blighted lands in every
shire; which has its worn-out lunatic in every
madhouse, and its dead in every churchyard; which
has its ruined suitor with his slipshod heels and
threadbare dress, borrowing and begging through
the round of every man's acquaintance; which gives
to monied might the means abundantly of wearying
out the right; which so exhausts finances, patience,
courage, hope; so overthrows the brain and breaks
the heart....

Even the inanimate objects associated with the Court are
implicated in the suffering it causes throughout England:
"upon whose impaling files...dusty warrants...have grimly
writhed into many shapes...." These lists overwhelm the
reader with emotional evidence to argue that when the
legal system can deny responsibility for the suffering
it causes, mankind follows its example. When Chancery can
take its own evil way unhampered, so can all things;
"and even those who have contemplated its history from the
outermost circle of such evil, have been insensibly
tempted into a loose way of letting bad things alone to
take their own bad course, and a loose belief that if the
world go wrong it was in some off-hand manner, never meant
to go right." Implicitly, the narrator asks the reader to
accept responsibility and to stop the machine.

For Chancery represents more than suffering and
delay. The mixture of the frightening and the laughable
recurs in the second half of the chapter, but the obvious suffering of the victims of the Court makes the ludicrousness terrifying. If the Lord High Chancellor is a god in the world of Chancery, he is a befuddled one; if his Court continues to victimize the innocent and the helpless who are dependent on it, it does so in a way that is not without humor: the large advocate with the small voice speaks in a vacuum; the small advocate disappears in the fog; the members of the bar, like the slap-stick sliders, run "their goat-hair and horse-hair warded heads [stubbornly] against a wall of words"; "attendant wigs are all stuck in a cloud bank." On one level, these descriptions are funny, as is the choice of names—Chizzle (OED: chisel, to cheat, defraud), Tangle, and the weather names: Drizzle Mizzle, Blowers—and the use of synecdoche. But silk gowns, maces, petty bags, privy purses, as well as those fog-banked wigs, control the chaotic world of Chancery. And the reader's laughter must be checked by a recognition of their power: the Court in not harmlessly comical but filled with spectres it has created. It is "owlish" not only because it hoots meaningless phrases in a dark world but because it aggressively feeds off the weaker creatures of that world. Indeed, the owl is a fit symbol of the Court and an ironic comment on it; associated with wisdom, it is blind and helpless in the daylight just as Chancery would be powerless in the light of truth and justice.
But Chancery is dim, peopled by buffoons, clowns who are frightening because they can transform a country of Crystal Palaces into a land of decaying houses. In Chancery, these real dangers are part of the system; and Chizzle, Mizzle, Drizzle, and Tangle (like Noodle, Doodle, Poodle, and Quoddle of the government) are more than funny names, being part of the corruption that is Chancery, the frauds, muddles, and jumbles. Maces are rogues as well as badges of office (Partridge), and heads protected by horse-hair are not only wigged but filled with legal verbiage (OED: horse-hair, "[quoting Carlyle Latter-Day Pamphlets (1850)]": "In spite of all this... blotting out of Heaven's sunlight by mountains of horsehair and officiality."). Even the "pleasantry" of the Last Lord Chancellor who equates "when the sky rained potatoes" with "when we get through with Jarndyce and Jarndyce" is ominous. First, it shows the callousness of the Chancellor who makes the case into a joke and removes it from a context of human suffering. Meanwhile, it also demonstrates the deadly atmosphere of Chancery. In The Merry Wives of Windsor, "let the sky rain potatoes," is an invocation of fertility. In Bleak House, Chapter 1, the reader sees not the rain of potatoes but of mourning snowflakes, an invitation to death.

Barbara Hardy has said that these "jokes" are Dickens' attempt to attack the "well-known legal habit
of misplaced humour...," but this fails to account for their total effect. The humor throughout the chapter is used, as Hardy also says, "to punctuate very seriousunjoking remarks... with a verve and vigour which adds up to anger and contempt, and to which the jokes seem to contribute." 16 The jokes have vitality and contempt because what they describe are the few actions and active individuals in the whole chapter: like the dinosaur, Chancery moves slowly, meaninglessly condemning innocent men and women because of the activities of talking purses and petty bags. Since the reader has been made to see the dangers in this legal system, when he comes upon the "jokes" at the chapter's end--Mr. Tangle's tangled language, the eighteen hammer-headed lawyers, the Chancellor's confusion, the foggy-headed lawyer's ignorance--unable to laugh, he must agree with the narrator who bitterly condemns Chancery to the death it deserves.

This condemnation seems to be a hopeless prayer, however, because nothing in the description of Chancery suggests its end. Ann Wilkinson finds that various activities in the book can be described in terms of thermodynamics in that "energy seems increasingly unavailable for useful work...":

we are shown Parliament "throwing itself" furiously upon the country, and producing no meaningful work at all; the Dedlocks, who employ innumerable retainers and suppliers, to work for no purpose; Chancery, which swarms with
busy maggot-like creatures whose activity bears no fruit except the "ashey fruit" of the dead sea it creates at its shores...; religion, whose workers are "toilers and moilers," "harvest-labourers,"...but who are constantly converting nutriment into a kind of train oil, which clogging substance they spread round in large amounts...; all the probers into other peoples' mysteries, digging day and night only to cause confusion and disaster; and the Smallweed type of "worker," always early to the task, and never relaxes vigilance, producing nothing but inert capital.18

The two options available to this world according to science are, she says, alternatives suggested by the novel: perpetual stoppage or explosion. But I must disagree. Though it is true that useless activity characterizes the bleak landscape of this opening and of the England presented in the novel, the reader is not consoled with indications of exhaustion or explosion either here, in the first chapter, or elsewhere in the work. The final irony of the opening is that it promises an end only if someone outside Chancery acts: "If all the injustice it has committed, and all the misery it has caused, could only be locked up with it, and the whole burnt away in a great funeral pyre,--why so much the better for other parties than the parties in Jarndyce and Jarndyce!"

No one, however, is completely free of the system.

The heavily descriptive emphasis of "In Chancery," with its strangely fragmented opening, its grotesques, its catalogs of victims, its direct and indirect accusations, draws the reader into the world of London and of Chancery.
Here he is not asked to be distanced and analytical as he is, in different degrees, in the opening of *Henry Esmond*, *The Egoist*, or *The Scarlet Letter*, but to participate actively in the fictional world created. The narrator drags him into the cityscape, forcing him to imagine that flakes of soot are in mourning for the death of the sun, to "see" the various inhabitants of Chancery ("as here he is...as here they are...as are they not?"), to pray for their freedom. Even the court session with which the chapter ends is dramatized: the reader observes "(Mr. Tangle crushed)" as if he were actually in the courtroom or in a theater. He is unable to forget the vividly presented details of Chapter 1; they follow him throughout the novel, making it more than a fiction, a frightening reflection of what life can be.

These introductory motifs of the fog, mud, infection, law, Chancery, Jarndyce and Jarndyce, these two interchangeable "atmospheres" of the opening are interwoven throughout *Bleak House*. Thus, "On this same...afternoon," a key phrase which associates Chancery with weather in Chapter 1, informs the reader of Chapter 2 (the title of this chapter, "In Fashion," echoes the title of the first) that the world of fashion—"not so unlike the Court of Chancery"—is also somehow connected with the hostile physical world. Like it and like Chancery, "society' is a thing "of precedent and usage," unchanged from the
past, a sleeping institution that manages to persist oblivious to the world around it.

The repeated imagery invites the reader to compare the first two chapters of Bleak House, to discover that the world of fashion is another symptom and cause of England's disease. Like London, Chesney Wold is plagued by wetness and mud. The result is that physical objects become "undistinguishable" and the land becomes something strange: "The weather...has been so wet that the trees seem wet through, and the soft loppings and prunings of the woodman's axe can make no crash or crackle as they fall." Both legal and social worlds are dark and indistinct; both are preserves of dead wood; both bleak, damp environments encourage the growth of the infection that attacks England.

Like the Chancellor, the Dedlocks are "wrapped up in too much jeweller's cotton and fine wool, and cannot hear the rushing of the larger worlds, and cannot see them as they circle round the sun." They have cut themselves off in a lifeless setting; even the "mouldy church" with its "damp pulpit" has a smell and taste of death. And Dedlock's opinion of Chancery shows the dangerous ignorance that results from that isolation: "he regards the Court of Chancery, even if it should involve an occasional delay of justice and a trifling amount of confusion, as a
something, devised in conjunction with a variety of other somethings, by the perfection of human wisdom, for the eternal settlement (humanly speaking) of everything."

Like the universe of Chancery, with the Lord Chancellor as Dead Sun-Center and the solicitors, masters, and suitors as various planets that encircle him (held to him by the strong pull of selfishness), the fashionable world is another planetary system. As the earlier reference (p. 45) suggests, the Dedlocks are both one of the subordinate planets in a universe and a center themselves of a smaller system based on the "fashionableness" of Lady Dedlock. The mechanics of this system help the reader understand the comparable legal world. Lady Dedlock "supposes herself to be an inscrutable Being, quite out of the reach and ken of ordinary mortals....Yet, every dim little star revolving around her...knows her weaknesses, prejudices, follies, haughtinesses, and caprices...." As they manipulate her, is not the also "blind" Chancellor manipulated by his satellites?

And what about the other universes of the novel? Several characters assert themselves as centers of their various selfish systems: Mrs. Jellyby who shares several traits with the Chancellor, particularly his far-off look and his piles and piles of wasted paper; Mr. Skimpole who, even in the Chancellor's own legal vocabulary, evades
responsibility and action by substituting "the will for the deed"; Mr. Turveydrop who, like the system of law designed to act in loco parentis, sacrifices his son to his own comfort; Mr. Chadband who condemns the ignorant poor for their ignorance and poverty. "Wrapped up in too much jeweller's cotton and fine wool," these individuals can see neither the larger worlds nor the smaller. Variations of the Megalosaurus that opens the book, slow-witted and slow-moving, they represent fossils--of a legal system that may have once brought equity but which produces nothing but misery, of a social system petrified in strata, of a political system based on self-serving patronage, of a charitable system that ignores or condemns the helpless. And the power of all these fossils transforms them from simple anachronisms into different kinds of hells peopled by "glittering devils." Just as Dante's sinners suffer forever in various circles of punishment, so too must those in Chancery, or in any of the other meaningless systems, where "every difficulty, every contingency, every masterly fiction, every form of procedure known..., is represented over and over again, and nothing ever ends." So too must Tom and Caddy and Jenny suffer.

Comparisons of the first chapter of Bleak House with the second or third or sixtieth would demonstrate that the imagery and argument of "In Chancery" structure the whole novel. The careful reader will discover analogies,
repetitions, echoes, through every chapter; his experience in the first chapter—finding connections between Nature and Chancery—has taught him to look for other connections. And his initial responses to those motifs will, of course, affect his later ones. Layers are added on layers as he sees the fog and the wasted paper and the useless activity and the infection occur again and again in various forms throughout the novel. The reader's education in the first chapter, for instance, not only invites him to connect the wasting candles of Richard's apartment with the wasting candles of the Chancellor's court, the "sallowness" of the executor, the haggard gas of the streets, and Krook's greasy remains, but forces him to see that Richard's death signifies that London is sinking into the dark, muddy world of paragraph 1; that the fog-bound street of the Jellybys identifies them as both victims of and forces behind the decay of London; that Skimpole's irresponsibility, like the Chancellor's, like Mr. Jellyby's, like Mr. Jarndyce's, makes him a very dangerous fool.

In his Preface to the first edition of Bleak House, Dickens tried to assure his readers that what he presented was essentially true, though he "purposely dwelt on the romantic side of familiar things." It is the exaggeration of the portrayal, of course, that is "romantic" but such exaggeration is essential for the imagery and arguments to speak to each other, through the reader, as he reads the
long book. The first chapter, briefly and powerfully, provides both the basis and the technique of that conversation.

Fictionalized but not essentially transformed, Chancery stands at the portals of Bleak House, previewed in its green illustrated cover and elaborated as a dangerous joke in "In Chancery." This court, for Dickens' original readers and for us still, is a symbol of all vestigial systems. If these are not destroyed, perhaps the familiar world will be transformed, through them, into that hostile land of darkness and disguised threats that opens the novel. This is a danger the reader is taught to see and fear and remember--is forced to remember--as he reads.

2 The Will o’ the Wisp is described by Gillian Edwards in *Hobgoblin and Sweet Puck: Fairy Names and Natures* (London: Bles, 1974), as “the flickering light which once danced so frequently over our England’s marshy ground...seldom referred to in English except by one of these traditional personifications”: Will o’ the Wisp of Jack o’ Lantern (198). He is synonymous, of course, with a delusive guiding principle.

3 Kentley Bromhill, "Phiz’s Illustrations to Bleak House,” *The Di* 40 (June, 1944), 146. Bromhill identifies the pillow as a woolsack; the OED connects the sack to the Chancellor.


7 *The Times*: Jan. 31, 1851, p. 5, c. 5; March 28, 1851, p. 4, c. 5; Jan. 14, 1852, p. 4, c. 2; Feb. 9, 1852, p. 4, c. 4.

8 The “accumulating interest” is a revision made by Dickens, according to Trevor Blount’s "A Revised Image of the Opening Chapter of Dickens’s *Bleak House*,” *N & Q* 207 (August, 1962), 303-4. The original ends with “sticking at these points to the pavements as layers upon layers of barnacles stick to the keel of a ship.” Dickens’ revision is a less visual image, appropriate to a world where images are not clearly seen.

10 See Devra Braun Rosenberg, "Contrasting Pictorial Representations of Time: The Dual Narration of Bleak House," The Vi N 51 (Spring, 1977), 10-16.

11 Miller, p. 165.


15 The Court of Chancery is "high" (OED: tainted, as well as important, ancient, and costly); the case that it has been hearing for many years is "Jarndyce," an old-fashioned pronunciation of "jaundice," as several critics have noted. The Court, then, is an "infectious" sinner.

16 See Martin Chuzzlewit (XLV): "though Temple Bar has been, as in the golden days gone by, embellished with a row of rotting human heads."


CHAPTER III

THE TWO OPENINGS OF HENRY ESMOND:

"What I dislike is beginning a new novel."

The dual beginnings of *Henry Esmond* help establish this personal history, reputedly by Colonel Esmond, actually by Thackeray, as a work of the eighteenth century. Here is presented the traditional letter by the family member who gives a brief and glorified account of the biographer; following this is Esmond's own emotional preface which attacks that kind of prettified history. Like Carlyle, the Colonel wants to see "not Redbook Lists and Court Calendars, and Parliamentary Registers, but the LIFE OF MAN in England; what men did, thought, suffered, enjoyed...." These two very different viewpoints of what a personal history should be prepare the reader for the work which presents, at various times, a hero who is flawless and flawed, a contradiction which is never resolved.

Thackeray, like Esmond, is dissatisfied with the quality of historical writing produced in his age; the novelist's target, of course, is historical fiction. After the widespread appeal of Walter Scott's novels in the first third of the nineteenth century, more and more writers turned to this literary type, most of them unsuccessfully. Both the popularity and poor quality of these writings were acknowledged
in an 1846 *Westminster Review* article by G. H. Lewes, who sarcastically explains that, beyond studying Scott, all the writer has to do is "to cram for the necessary information about costumes, antiquated forms of speech, and the leading political events of the epoch chosen; and to add thereto the art...of complicating a plot with adventures, imprisonments, escapes."³ In his *Novels by Eminent Hands*, Thackeray parodies those most flagrantly guilty of the kind of oversimplification Lewes describes. And though he admired Scott, Thackeray's attitude toward even him is mixed: he mocks the sentimentality of *Ivanhoe* in his own *Rebecca and Rowena or Romance upon Romance* (1850).

The *History of Henry Esmond, Esq., A Colonel in the Service of Her Majesty Queen Anne Written by Himself* (1852) is Thackeray's answer to the historical novels of his era. Here dated costumes and language, political events, adventures, imprisonments, all "appurtenances" become subservient to the development of the protagonist, the work's putative author who aspires, above all, to historical accuracy. From the beginning, Thackeray shows the reader how to test the hero's autobiography and the novelist's fiction.

The quotation of the title-page--

Servetur ad imum
Qualis ab incepto processerit, et sibi costet--

seems to offer a critical precept that is true of both Esmond's personal history and Thackeray's novel. John
Loofbourow argues that these lines from *Ars Poetica*, by presenting Horace's advice to writers to follow conventional depictions of heroes, lend an epic quality to Esmond's story: he sees his life unfolding on an epic scale and himself as a great hero like Achilles or Odysseus. As Loofbourow has also noted, the motto may refer as well to the "only novel Thackeray conceived and composed as a whole." The Ovidian context suggests that Thackeray's work and Esmond's History will present a boldly created, original character that should survive the test of consistency:

If you try something not yet attempted in the theatre, and boldly create a new character, have him remain to the close the sort of person he was when he first appeared, and keep him consistent (my italics indicate the two lines of Latin).

The question of Henry's consistency is immediately raised by the two beginnings of the work.

The history opens not, as one might expect, with the Colonel introducing himself but with two prefatory sections: a letter by his daughter that presents *The History of Henry Esmond* to her sons, followed by a critical essay on the inaccuracies of recorded history, presumably by Esmond himself. Both help establish the book in its role as an eighteenth-century work: they introduce the Queen Anne type and obsolete spellings used throughout the first edition, and the large number of hyphenated and capitalized words, the frequent use of the colon, and the century-old
allusions which are an essential part of the style. More
than decorative, these openings function thematically. The
letter describes the Colonel reverentially; the essay
displays his ironic wit; their juxtaposition emphasizes
the differences in these two presentations of Esmond and
invites the reader to discover how "familiarly heroic" a
subject he is.

Rachel Esmond Warrington's letter (dated November 3,
1778) was, apart from the dedication, the last part of the
novel Thackeray wrote; in fact, John Sutherland argues
that since it was written immediately after the last page
of the novel, it should have been an appendix. But
Thackeray had other ideas, and it became a preface to a
preface, primarily shaping the reader's attitude to Henry
rather than, as an appendix, making an ironic target of
the letter-writer. Rachel's details suggest that the
action of the autobiography will take place against a
background of "heroes," that Henry will be involved in
some political intrigues concerning the Pretender, and
that he will have to leave England as a consequence of
those intrigues. Besides giving the reader general im-
pressions of Esmond, the letter also presents some infor-
mation about the other family members who are to function
in the autobiography: the jealous but devoted wife, the
improper Mrs. Tusher, the royal relatives. The reader
expects the relationships between Henry and these others
to be explained and developed in the personal history that follows, though he is not prepared at all for Henry's final choice of a wife, a significant (and startling) act in the autobiography.

A gossipy and digressive storyteller, Rachel reveals as much about herself as about her father: her education in England, her obedience to her mother, her husband's death, her sons' birth, and her relationship to her step-brother and sister. While defending Henry to her children, then, Rachel both attacks "the junior branch of the family" and praises her own sufferings and sacrifices.

Of Esmond, however, she actually gives the reader little factual information. "Full of abstractions and superlatives, her introduction describes him as a man of peace and honor, beloved and respected by all his fellow citizens, inexpressibly dear to his family; a man who "gave the best example, the best advice, the most bounteous hospitality to his friends; the tenderest care to his dependants; and bestowed on those of his immediate family such a blessing of fatherly love and protection as can never be thought of, by us, at least, without veneration and thankfulness." Her father, thus, is a saint upon earth, his superiority established by her testimony and the opinion of Lord Bolingbroke, the former the understandably biased remarks of a daughter, the latter easily an example of social flattery.
Some of the details of Rachel's letter, in spite of her intentions, raise questions about the perfection of Esmond. Though he may have been in all ways "truly noble," that nobility seems to include aristocratic egoism ("he liked to be first in his company") that respects "the practice and knowledge of Truth, and Love, and Honour," but not Forgiveness (as that unabsolved tipsy gentleman from York can testify). And Esmond's attitude to women seems equally unfair: "'All women were alike,'" he said, "'...there was never one so beautiful as that one; and...we [women] could forgive her everything but her beauty.'" Of course, only the garrulous Rachel's eulogy of her father makes these few examples seem noteworthy, but the reader who has been expecting an ideal man has been introduced to someone who may be flawed. Judgment of Henry must be withheld, of course, until the reader receives more details from the autobiography. There he will find that Marlborough assaults Esmond's dignity by calling him a bastard and turning his back; and that this has made the Duke, Henry's permanent enemy ("No man ever deserved better the very greatest praise and strongest censure. If the present writer joins with the latter faction, very likely a private pique of his own may be the cause of his ill-feeling."). He will further discover that Esmond blames "all [his] troubles and joy too" on a woman and causes even his wife to remark of his unjust
and contemptuous treatment of her sex.

The real importance of Rachel's letter only becomes apparent when it is compared to Henry's own essay at the beginning of Book I. Her description of the Colonel has been called "a highly circumspect, 'official,' 'public' version of things, designed...to create and perpetuate a myth."? Rachel, of course, does want her children to remember the best of her father, but nothing leads the reader to suspect her of deliberately fabricating. Her presentation of a saintly Esmond has also been described as a satire of the novel; it offers a style of chronicle which completely opposes the Colonel's own view of history. His essay, in fact, argues for an accurate historical record that speaks to the common people because it writes down the activities of individuals who are fallible. He begins his argument with an analogy. Productions of ancient tragedy are like formal histories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theatre</th>
<th>History</th>
<th>Lewis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>masks, stilts, head-dress</td>
<td>masks, cothurnus heels, wig</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pipes iambics to a tune</td>
<td>speaks to measure enacts role</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>concerned with fates of kings</td>
<td>...with affairs of kings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chorus in set attitude, rhythmically and</td>
<td>historian in set attitude, obs-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>decorously bewailing</td>
<td>quiously glorifying</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The tone of the analogy suggests Esmond's irreverence and impatience: "The actors in old tragedies, we read, piped their iambics to a tune, speaking from under a mask, and wearing stilts and a great head-dress." The word choice--
"old tragedies" (rather than "ancient") and "wearing stilts" especially--conjure up an image of comic absurdity rather than tragic grandeur. Like Addison's famous treatment of the tragic hero, Esmond's characterization of the production ridicules it.

The criticism implied by sentence 1 is made more explicit by sentence 2: "'Twas thought the dignity of the Tragic Muse required these appurtenances..." (my italics). Under this mistaken assumption, Tragedy came to be defined as much by the inessential "measure and cadence" as by the tragic situation: "So Queen Medea slew her children to a slow music; and King Agamemnon perished in a dying fall...the Chorus standing by in a set attitude, and rhythmically and decorously bewailing the fates of those great crowned persons" (my italics). Everything is rhythmic and decorous, but apparently catharsis is absent. The tragedy has been denied by the artifice.

Like drama, history has come to be defined more by decoration than by an accurate representation of man's struggles. It is a servant to the royalty, presenting the public images of noblemen rather than their true faces, so that costumes (like the ludicrous portrait of the Dowager dressed as an "airy nymph") receive more attention than personalities. Thackeray had earlier
attacked the lack of "dignity" in official history:

In our orthodox history-books the characters move on as a gaudy play-house procession, and glittering pageant of kings and warriors, and stately ladies, majestically appearing and passing away. Only he who sits very near to the stage can discover of what stuff the spectacle is made. The Kings are poor creatures, taken from the dregs of the company; the noble knights are dirty dwarfs in tin foil; the fair ladies are painted hags with cracked feathers and soiled trains. One wonders how gas and distance could ever have rendered them so bewitching.10

Esmond repeats this argument here, and uses the examples of Lewis, Anne, and Charles to typify the "dregs." Although in public, Lewis XIV is "the type and model of Kingship" who "moved but to measure" and who lived and died "according to the laws of his Court-marshals...," this is a wholly fictionalized version of the King. He is playing a role, enacting "the part of the Hero," refusing to see himself "divested of poetry" as "a little wrinkled old man, pock-marked," who needed a great wig and heels to make himself "heroic" (i.e., larger than life). He is, moreover, a victim of his role, unable to accept his human limitations: "what more than a man for Madame Maintenon, or the barber who shaved him, or Monsieur Fagon, his surgeon?" This discrepancy between the historical (official) presentation of the monarch and an accurate one is further exemplified by Anne. Henry has seen her active and inelegant: "a hot, red-faced woman, not in the least resembling that statue of her which turns its stone back upon St. Paul's."11
Dignified and stately in marble, she is "tearing down the Park slopes" in life: her actual behavior, a direct contrast to her glorified public image.

Esmond rejects idealized versions of royalty, popularized through the Court Gazette, a record of court activities which became a vehicle for propaganda and falsification, and through histories, the official records of the proper activities of kings. An accurate history, he argues, should remove the costume from the man. As Fielding and Hogarth do, true historians should recognize man's flaws, instead of transforming and disguising them.\(^\text{12}\)

Esmond's disrespect for the pomp and artifice of official histories is continued in paragraph 2 where those who feel privileged by royal favor are shown to be fools. The German is mocked for his pretensions as well as for the absurd form those pretensions take: he is said to be the "eldest son of the hereditary Grand Bootjack of the Empire, and the heir to that honor of which his ancestors had been very proud, having been kicked for twenty generations by one imperial foot, as they drew the boot from the other." And Lord Castlewood is little more than a glorified barkeep; his "appurtenances" (Warden of the Butteries and Groom of the King's Posset) make him as ridiculous as the German officer or the wigged Lewis. Unlike them, however, Castlewood is not merely deceived by the public role of the monarch but is cheerfully
ruined when the real Charles "sold his country and...took bribes of the French King." He is a victim of the heroic myth, like the other fools who offer thanks for Charles' return.

Paragraph 3 continues to develop the final image of the second: Charles as traitor-king, the actor unmasked. Since History glorifies the nobility, it always presents a king in exile as a brave, unfortunate man. Esmond admits that the king may deserve respect, as does the ruler in Addison's *Cato*, but he criticizes the formal histories for implying that all monarchs are respectable. In the official records, Charles, for example, is not portrayed as he is (drunken and disorderly) but as he should be, according to the role he is playing (glorified and stately). He is "god-like," painted in the manner of a Kneller or a Le Brun, rather than after Ostade, whose works captured "lively, even agitated scenes in which small and clumsy, caricatured figures drink and dance in country taverns," or Mieris, who in 1670 created an allegory "illustrating the kindred vices of drinking, smoking, and dicing...."  

The final paragraph describes the fate of Charles' loyal servant, and Henry's own ancestor, Castlewood: "About the King's follower...his kinsman I suppose should be silent, nor if this patriarch fell down in his cups, call fie upon him, and fetch passers-by to laugh at his red face and white hairs." Of course, Esmond is not silent,
and the worn-out pastoral metaphor--"What! does a stream rush out of a mountain free and pure, to roll through fair pastures, to feed and throw out bright tributaries, and to end in the village gutter?"--introduces a sentimentality into his essay which is distinct from the dominant note of skepticism that returns at its end. The Colonel's knowledge of the world, human nature, and himself leads him to point out again the myth of royal superiority: Anne and Lewis are "neither better bred nor wiser than you or I." And the reference to Hogarth's *Industry and Idle-ness* (evoked by Tyburn Jack and the Mayor) returns the essay to a reaffirmation of Esmond's belief that historical writing should present characters and events in the spirit of actual life.

As an historian and as a character in his personal history, Esmond sees himself as an Everyman: "I look into my heart and think I am as good as my Lord Mayor and know I am as bad as Tyburn Jack." (A running head at the essay's end in the first edition, "de te fabula," evokes a passage from Horace to suggest that Esmond's History is the history of all people: "change the name and the story applies to you" [mutato nomine de te Fabula narrator], a quotation that recurs in the false *Spectator* letter addressed to Beatrix.) The Colonel implies that his hero (i.e., himself) will not be a special individual whose faults are glossed but a recognizably fallible character,
like the reader. Unlike the Muse of History who closes her eyes to what may be indecorous, this historian, Esmond, "can't but accept the world as [he finds] it...."

The Colonel's preamble superficially complements his daughter's preface. He affirms the sacrifices Castlewood made for Charles I; he reveals, by repetition, his own interest in "dignity," an interest which may account for his condemnation of the tipsy Yorkshire gentleman who somehow affronted Henry's own (the Tragic Muse, Lord Castlewood, the exiled King, all are criticized for a lack of dignity); finally, in his descriptions of tragedy, the German officer, Castlewood, Lewis, and Charles, he displays the satiric bent his daughter describes as his weapon against the arrogant, though it is not as grave as Rachel has led the reader to expect (recall the "court-ridden" periwig of History and the door the Historical Muse closes, "on which the exile's unpaid drink is scored...."). Esmond may have been, as Rachel implies, dutiful and tranquil; but he reveals himself to be critical and dissatisfied.

The Colonel's essay suggests an important opposition of the novel, the familiar vs. the heroic, and introduces a subject that is developed throughout the book proper: the nature of heroism and of history. Just as important as these topics in anticipating the contents of the autobiography is the essay's characterization of Henry, both subject and narrator. How well does it prepare the reader
for the techniques and the speaker of the long narrative?

Like Rachel's letter, the Colonel's essay helps place Henry Esmond in the eighteenth century. He alludes to artists of that age (Addison, Fielding, Hogarth) and earlier (Dryden, Ostade, Mieris, Kneller, Le Brun), and to historical figures (Charles, Webb, Lewis, Anne). Moreover, Esmond's introduction helps establish both him and his kinsmen as "real" figures by placing them in the midst of and with personal knowledge of these undoubted historical personalities. Thus, the ruse of the eighteenth-century autobiography, introduced on the title-page, is reinforced.

More important, the essay gives the reader an introduction to the mind of Esmond, a man learned in classical and modern literature, knowledgeable of the aristocrats in their most unaristocratic moments, of the army, the theatre, the judge and the criminal. This mind is discontented. The style of the opening suggests not an "autobiography, written in the autumn light of a calm and noble life..." but an attack on prettified history written by an impassioned and impatient victim. Part of the spirit of the piece comes from the satire: the ridiculous description of the drama, of Lewis in costume, of Castlewood's pride in his title, of the countrymen who give thanks for Charles' return, of the "wine-dribbled divinity" himself. Part of the liveliness comes from the dynamic structure of the sentences. The parenthetical expressions
and the qualifiers signalled by dashes show Henry in the process of creating and shaping his material. Some of these additions draw attention to the satirical remarks noted above. Others allow Esmond to boast indirectly of his knowledge--"(to use Mr. Dryden's words)"--or his wit--"(whereof I myself was the author)...." Some simply string details to the end of a sentence to develop the "familiar" image: "her one-horse chaise--a hot, red-faced woman not in the least resembling the statue of her which turns its stone back upon Saint Paul's, and faces the coaches struggling up Ludgate Hill." The repeated use of coordination ("and," for instance, occurs sixty-eight times) may be characteristic of the balanced sentences of the eighteenth-century literature, but it also helps establish the loose structure of the informal essay. And the nine rhetorical questions (out of thirty-nine sentences) suggest that the looseness is due to the speaker's irritation while they argue against the causes of that irritation.

Finally, just as Rachel's letter tells us about her, the repetition of "I" and "me" throughout Esmond's preface forces the reader to direct his attention to this storyteller. Although the Colonel occasionally appeals to the knowledge of his fictive audience ("as we read," "in our age"), primarily he asserts himself as the voice of truth ("I have seen...," "I have heard...," "I could name...."), of critical authority ("I would have History familiar...."),
and of reason ("it hath always seemed to me...," "I look into my heart, and think I am...know I am...."). Just as Henry's essay forces us to question Rachel's reliability, her letter must make us wary of the speaker who reveals himself here. Which portrait is Esmond?

In the novel itself, Henry drops the lively tone of the theoretical essay but retains its tenets and his pose as critic. In the history Esmond writes, traditional heroes are flawed. Marlborough, we learn, "used all men, great and small, that came near him, as his instruments alike, and took something of theirs...." Addison is inaccurate, Steele drunk, Swift rude. The Pretender prefers a pretty face to a crown; Anne's a "boozy" woman whose advisers act solely from selfishness. The English soldier is no more than a common looter whose warrior activities concern "burning farms, wasted fields, shrieking women, slaughtered sons and fathers, and [other] drunken soldiers...." The Dowager, who "was for dying like Mary, Queen of Scots (to whom she fancied she bore a resemblance in beauty...)," chooses to hide in bed instead. And Lord Francis Castlewood prefers to "be no more than a man...":

Many a home-god grows heartily sick of the reverence with which his family-devotees pursue him, and sighs for freedom and for his old life, and to be off the pedestal on which his dependants would have him sit for ever whilst they adore him, and ply him with flowers, and hymns, and incense, and flattery;--so, after a few years of his marriage, my honest Lord Castlewood began to tire....
These "exposés" demonstrate Esmond's refusal to allow the Muse to retain her obsequious posture. His Muse attacks, and in such a way that the reader is reminded again and again of the discrepancy between the noble public figure and the private scoundrel, not only through Esmond's direct criticisms of well-known heroes but also through his repetition of material from the familiar/heroic viewpoints. In the essay, for instance, he describes Sir George Castlewood's sacrifice familiarly: "He pawned his plate for King Charles the First...." In Book I, Chapter 2, the same act is presented in the "heroic" mode: "the King being at Oxford in 1642, Sir George, with the consent of his father, then very aged and infirm, and residing at his house of Castlewood, melted the whole of the family plate for his Majesty's service." Of Lord Thomas Castlewood's death, Esmond first familiarly relates: "he lay for a while concealed in the marshy country near to the town of Trim, and more from catarrh and fever caught in the bogs than from the steel of the enemy in the battle, sank and died" (I, 6). Immediately thereafter comes the heroic description: "'He is dead of a wound received at the Boyne, fighting for King James.'" With Frank Esmond's mourners, Henry joins the two viewpoints: "the one told stories of former adventures of love, or war, or pleasure, in which poor Frank Esmond has been engaged; t'other recollected how
a constable had been bilked, or a tavern-bully beaten;
whilst my lord's poor widow was sitting at his tomb
worshipping him as an actual saint and spotless hero...."

This attention to the unromantic elements, to the
familiar, is characteristic of Esmond's History. His
counter with Addison, with its echoes of the opening
essay, especially reminds the reader that this work is not
inspired by a Muse who refuses to "begrime her hands with
the horrors of war...." Nor does she romanticize those
gory activities. An accurate historian, Esmond wants
to educate his readers as he himself has been educated
(and disillusioned):

And the only blood which Mr. Esmond drew in
this [Port Saint Mary's] shameful campaign was
the knocking down an English sentinel with a
half-pike, who was offering insult to a poor
trembling nun. Is she going to turn out a
beauty? or a princess? or perhaps Esmond's
mother that he has lost or never seen? Alas no,
it was but a poor wheezy old dropsical woman, with
a wart on her nose.

Instead of a goddess, Henry's Muse is one of "our laqueys
[who] sit in judgment on us" and to whom no one is a hero.

Henry's History is not, however, as accurate as he
claims; it is obviously colored by his prejudices. As
Iser remarks, "as well as shedding this individual light
on history, Esmond is illuminating himself...." And the
man he reveals is inconsistent. Although most of the
characters in this history resemble the Dowager figur-
atively--"her face was illuminated with vermilion, which
appeared the brighter from the white paint employed to set it off....queer structure of paints, dyes, and pomatums"--Esmond does not find that all the characters disguise an inner selfishness. In spite of her jealousy, Rachel, for instance, is repeatedly described as a Dea certé. Even her fallible husband recognizes her superiority:

"'I am not good like her, I know it. Who is--by Heaven, who is?'' And, according to Esmond, "There seemed... in every look or gesture of this fair creature, an angelical softness...."

Yet, while Henry singles her out as someone exceptionally good, Rachel does not show herself to be such a goddess. Juliet McMaster, in fact, has convincingly argued that her treatment of Lord Castlewood forces the reader to recognize an ironic tension between the Colonel's admiration of Rachel's moral rectitude and the reader's knowledge of the damage that rectitude has done. In view of Henry's theoretical introduction that rejects the kind of history that magnifies characters, the reader has to question an historian who seems unaware that his own presentation of Rachel seems to depict an angel, one only occasionally bothered by jealousy.

Though Rachel has this small fault, Henry seems to see none at all in himself. Of course, at the beginning of the autobiography, he describes his earlier naiveté:
"'Tis not to be imagined that Henry Esmond had all his experience at this early stage of his life, whereof he is now writing the history--many things here noted were but known to him in later days." With concepts of idealized love and heroism, he misjudges Beatrix, Holt, and the good English soldier. But beyond this youthful innocence, Henry never finds any fault in himself to criticize. And, in fact, his references to his sacrifice of name and title continually remind the reader (not too subtly) of his virtue: "On one side were ambition, temptation, justice even; but love, gratitude, and fidelity pleaded on the other. And when the struggle was over in Henry's mind, a glow of righteous happiness filled it...." Again, since Henry has prepared the reader for a history in which no one is faultless, the accuracy of the Colonel's self-portrait must be questioned. In a fine analysis of the novel, Elaine Scarry examines three verbal patterns to reveal just how inconsistent Esmond is: his language uses the formal truths that he himself rejects; his details incessantly contradict each other; his images are given multiple meanings, many of them irreconcilable. Although not all of these discrepancies may be consciously noted by the reader, enough are obvious to make him suspect that the Colonel is Thackeray's tool, not his spokesman after all.
McMaster, in fact, makes an interesting case for the novel as a sustained piece of dramatic irony. She argues that Henry's own presentation suggests that he wishes to appear god-like, to have the Castlewoods feel indebted to him for his sacrifice, to have his wife and child and grandchildren make a hero out of him: "His humility is inverted pride, and his self-abnegation an elaborate glorification of self. He renounces a title because he finds more satisfaction in debt than in ownership." Though he never appears to be as consciously manipulative as she suggests, the Colonel is not Everyman, as his own introduction has led us to suspect, but a very special man who perhaps "took a greater pride out of his sacrifice than he would have had in those honors which he was resolved to forgo."

The lively and irreverent writer of the introductory essay becomes hidden as the work develops, replaced by a mask of goodness and honesty. He is, as William Marshall argues, "preaching a sermon, one filled with exempla, from the opening of the story and the possibility of a concept of heroism, to the close with the description of idyllic life in Virginia...." And this moral tone predominates the book. Esmond preaches on two main topics: the loss of love and the value of adversity. Both show him as a publicly silent, privately brave individual. Love, says the "experienced" voice of the
Colonel, runs its course; "it buds and blooms out into sunshine, and it withers and ends." Regarding the value of suffering, he advises, it is "the father of most of what is good in us"; it is "a great reconciler."

Even though he occasionally refers to himself as an older, wiser man as he muses in these clichés, it is easy to forget that Henry himself is the narrator of this history. But the reader who is bombarded by two distinctly subjective viewpoints at the story's beginning, should be prepared to test any others for distortions. As Esmond himself recalls to us: "We have but to change the point of view, and the greatest action looks mean: as we turn the perspective glass, and a giant becomes a pigmy. You may describe, but who can tell whether your sight is clear or not, or your means of information accurate." It is only the plurality of views, as Iser points out, that gives rise to an "adequate picture" of Esmond. 23

The dual opening of the novel reminds us to make these tests; so do the various notations appended to the autobiography that qualify or elaborate on the material presented there. Esmond's History, then, is not reliable as it stands. See Volume II, Chapter 15, where an unsigned note suggests that the various criticisms Henry makes against Marlborough are not wholly the objections of a fair British soldier to incompetent leadership; and Rachel Esmond's footnote in III, 1 which disagrees with Henry's
description of soldiers' wives as "poor tender creatures... sickening and trembling...." Rachel Warrington's notes augment her letter-preface to complicate the portrait of Esmond revealed in the History proper. In one, for instance, the Colonel is described as an example of "perfect calmness and politeness" in his attitude to women (a comment in direct opposition to his wife's annotation in III, 10), and Rachel's minister testifies that Esmond was "the humblest man..., the least exacting, the most easily contented...," a contrast to the proud figure we meet in the novel.

These footnotes force us to test the accuracy of the narrative as they distance us from it: in a work that has several contradictory pictures of Esmond, these various presentations demand that the reader try to make coherence. He finds, ultimately, that though Henry may not be fully successful in writing a history focusing on the familiar and "registering the affairs of the common people," Thackeray is. For his creation, Henry Esmond, is an ironic one, a flawed historian who, while arguing against idealized presentations, describes himself (unconsciously) as an ideal, a critic whose own work may be just as limited as those formal histories he deplores. It is in spite of Esmond, the narrator, that this book has no hero and no demonstration of his theory.
In "The Second Funeral of Napoleon," Thackeray wrote that

it is no easy task in this world to distinguish between what is great in it, and what is mean; and many and many is the puzzle that I have had in reading History (or the works of fiction that go by that name), to know whether I should laud up to the skies and endeavour, to the best of my small capabilities, to imitate the remarkable character about whom I was reading, or whether I should fling aside the book and the hero of it, as things altogether base.... 24

Esmond enables the fiction-reader to share those difficulties. Rachel's letter represents one Henry, his introductory essay another; details of the autobiography and the footnotes confirm both.

"Servetur ad imum/Qualis ab incepto processerit, et sibi constet," advises Horace. But the reader is foiled in his test for consistency from the start. Secure evaluations of Henry's character are impossible; and his History seems to continue the contradictions of the two beginnings to show, at the least, that he is not the critic he pretends to be, that he is his own victim, and, most important, that he is, and is not, Thackeray's spokesman.
NOTES


5 Loofbourow, p. 111.


7 John Hagan, "'Bankruptcy of His Heart': The Unfulfilled Life of Henry Esmond," NCF 27 (December, 1972), 300.


9 Addison attacked the presentation of the tragic hero in the eighteenth century by using hyperbole: "The ordinary method of making a hero is to clasp a huge plume of feathers upon his head which rises so very high that there is often a greater length from his chin to the top of the head than to the sole of his foot. One would believe that we all thought a great man and a tall man the same thing."


That fallible heroes are what Thackeray himself would approve is demonstrated by his own "historical" presentation of Fielding in *The English Humourists* (in *The Works of William Makepeace Thackeray*, XXIII, London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1901): "Why not show him, like him as he is, not robed in a marble toga, and draped and polished in an heroic attitude, but with inked ruffles, and claret stains on his tarnished lace coat...? (p. 300).

*Encyclopaedia Britannica* (New York: Scribners, 1878).


Loofbourow, p. 115.

Sutherland and Greenfield identify two sources of "Mr Dryden's words" (neither of them Dryden): Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and Pope's *Ode on Saint Cecilia's Day* (p. 515, n. 12). This error suggests Henry's pretensions and his fallibility.


McMaster, p. 124.

Iser, p. 133.

CHAPTER IV

"INTRODUCTORY":

Martin Chuzzlewit

"What do you call it, when Lords break off door-knockers and beat policemen, and play at coaches with other people's money, and all that sort of thing?"
"Aristocratic?" suggested the collector.
(Miss Petowker to Mr. Lillyvick, Nicholas Nickleby, 15)

Dickens' novels, which weave topical details into their fictions, especially challenge the twentieth-century audience: and Martin Chuzzlewit's "Introductory," so heavily allusive, contains more of what Iser calls the "unformulated text" than most. Though the reader's initial difficulty arises from the content of the chapter and is increased by the style, it is the tone of the narrative that misleads him about the work that follows. For the sarcastic narrator who maps out targets so clearly here, never reappears so forcefully in the book.

Critics, in fact, have found this opening a serious fault of the novel. Barbara Hardy has commented on its absence of tension, briefly describing this "prelude to Martin Chuzzlewit," as a "tiresome exercise in sarcasm" whose focus seems blurred to us readers. Others, contemporary and modern, have made stronger protests. In 1861, an anonymous writer in the National Review rather inarticulately described the opening as "one of the worst
things that Mr. Dickens has written," worst because "it is entirely away from the story and all about nothing."³ And Gissing agreed. To him, this chapter is "an utterly mistaken bit of sub-acid jocosity, which might well have been omitted from later editions, and which certainly would never have been missed."⁴ More recently, it has been attacked as "puerile irony," "absurd rigmarole after the manner of Henry Fielding in Jonathan Wild...mixed with some forgotten topical satire which missed its aim," and, simply, "a ghastly failure."⁵

But the chapter has not always been condemned; and critics who commend it do so because, unlike Gissing, they discover some connections between it and the novel it opens. A. E. Dyson finds that it introduces the notion of man's inherent evil: "that delightful exercise in pseudo-scholarship in the tradition of Swift, Sterne, and Peacock...starts playfully and progresses to outrageously funny punning, but the underlying ideas are grim....At no state in the unfolding saga does evil originate: for the origin, we are returned to the prime, general taint."⁶ For Edgar Johnson, the beginning establishes a "jeering" atmosphere which is retained throughout the first half of the book.⁷ James Kincaid, who also notes the tone, finds that the reader is "viciously attacked" in order to be educated to his own defects: the first chapter prepares
him "for the development of true selfhood by knocking out some ludicrously invalid props for self, specifically family pride and snobbery." Both Steven Marcus and Garrett Stewart argue that the chapter is about the deceitful nature of language, about "rhetoric." Deceitful, jeering, punning—all describe a narrator who, by this very aggressive opening, quickly and concisely directs the reader to his camp.

Like *Bleak House*, a reading of *Martin Chuzzlewit* can begin with its serialized cover, which suggests something of the tone and contents of the novel, identifies its title, and indicates its scope (see figure 2):

*The Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit His Relations, Friends and Enemies, Comprising All His Wills and Ways: With an Historical Record of What He Did and What He Didn't: Showing Moreover Who Inherited the Family Plate, Who Came in for the Silver Spoons, and also for the Wooden Ladles: The Whole Forming a Complete Key to the House of Chuzzlewit."

Notice how two lives are contrasted on the cover: on the left is the baby born into good fortune; on the right the baby born into ill. The former lies content in a lace-covered cradle, which has a coach (equipped with spoon-carrying livery) at its head, a coat of arms and smiling spoons (presumably silver as the title says) at its foot, and a toasting and attentive group of admirers in the chandeliered background. Contrast this with the child crying in his ragged cradle, a wooden ladle struck through
THE
LIFE AND ADVENTURES
of
MARTIN
CHUZZLEWIT
His Relatives, Friends, and Enemies
COMPRISING
ALL HIS WILLS AND HIS WAYS,
WITH AN HISTORICAL RECORD OF WHAT HE DID,
AND WHAT HE DIDN'T;
SHOWING, MOREOVER,
WHO INHERITED THE FAMILY PLATE, WHO CAME IN FOR THE SILVER SPOONS,
AND WHO FOR THE WOODEN LADLES.
The whole forming a complete key to the
house of Chuzzlewit.

Edited by "BOZ"
WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY PHIZ

LONDON: CHAPMAN & HALL, 184, STRAND
January, 1843.
the opening of a wallet (OED: a beggar's bag) ominously balanced above him, slums in the background.

Along the margins are hands playing a variation of the game cup-and-ball. The jewelled and fleshy hand on the left catches a smiling ball on a flowered string; looking on is a bird of paradise. On the right, the bony hand with its horny fingernails is ready to impale the woeful ball that dangles from a thorny string. In keeping with this image of pain and destruction, the bird of paradise has become an owl on a gibbet. Both variations of the game point to the futures promised in the upper pictures: the rich child will be comfortable, the poor will be doomed.

The bottom corner images complete these predictions. On the one side is a successful man standing reflected (though distorted) before three mirrors and on top of his autobiography; on the other, a worried man with pennies over his eyes (death-in-life?) stands before what appears to be a larger version of the same coin. In the bottom center, a top-shaped man is tied and surrounded by three menacing Fates who seem to enjoy whipping him. These are the three traditional figures: Atropos carries shears with smiling handles (which connect her with the smiling spoons of the rich), Clotho a big staff, and Lachesis
a spindle. But rather than being stately and impersonal, these are huge hags senselessly beating a small, defenseless man.

These various scenes of the cover suggest that birth and fortune shape a person's future and imply that the individual has really little control over his fate, a misleading clue to Martin Chuzzlewit readers but one appropriate to the ironies of the first chapter. Here, rather than the traditional history of the protagonist, the reader finds a far-reaching history of the Chuzzlewit Family. Paragraph 1 traces the Chuzzlewit line directly to Adam and Eve; 2 describes two general characteristics of old families: violence and vagabondism; 3 states that the Chuzzlewits share those traits. What follows is proof of that assertion: paragraph 4 associates the Family with William; after a general attack on English nobility in 5, paragraphs 6-9 link the Chuzzlewits with Guy Fawkes. Then the chapter describes the present status of the Family: 10 presents Diggory in the company of Duke Henry; 11 traces Toby Chuzzlewit's noble ancestry to his father, "The Lord No Zoo"; 12 associates the previously mentioned Diggory with a wealthy and influential "uncle"; 13 adds the final piece of information establishing the "high and lofty stations, and the vast importance of the Chuzzlewits" by reports of their own mothers. The chapter concludes by
connecting the particular Chuzzlewit Family with mankind. As Tigg is later to say, "We're all alike--or nearly so."

Chapter 1 develops from an ironic attack on the Chuzzlewits to a harsh, though not total condemnation of "the Great World about us." Its conclusion continues to ridicule family pretensions as it suggests a wider target, human social behavior. The community of man gives evidence not of his superiority but reinforces instead his affinity with monkeys and pigs, and reminds the reader that those who desire the silver plate may "gain the whole world, and lose [their] soul...."

Although the tone may shift, a consistently ironic attitude to the Chuzzlewits, their "counterparts and prototypes," and the fictive readers of line 1 holds the chapter together. From the first sentence, the narrator implicitly criticizes these readers and the subject of their attention:

As no lady or gentleman, with any claims to polite breeding, can possibly sympathize with the Chuzzlewit Family without being first assured of the extreme antiquity of the race, it is a great satisfaction to know that it undoubtedly descended in a direct line from Adam and Eve; and was, in the very earliest times, closely connected with agricultural interests.

The lack of a clear connection between the subordinate introductory material and the main clause creates an ambiguous gap for the reader, since who gets the satisfaction is not defined. Who may be the "politely bred" lady and
gentleman who desire to know something of the origins of the protagonist of the novel they have begun and who, consequently, are "assured" by the "extreme antiquity" (read, status) of his Family. But the satisfaction may also be the narrator's, who is able to mock their "claims to polite breeding" by the example of the Chuzzlewits who, like all mankind, descend from Adam and Eve.

The first sentence of the first paragraph is not the only instance of multiple levels of meaning that can instruct the reader. The whole first half of the chapter presents two value systems--that of the Chuzzlewit detractors (i.e., the narrator) and that of the Chuzzlewit admirers (i.e., the lady or gentleman of line 1)--which compete to make it impossible for the ideal reader to reject the narrator's viewpoint. "Violent vagabondism" to the Chuzzlewit critic is a "wholesome excitement" and a "promising means of repairing shattered fortunes" to the admirer. What provides comfort and happiness to a Chuzzlewit sympathizer is seen as "slaughterous conspiracies and bloody frays" to those who fail to share the Chuzzlewit standards. Pro-Chuzzlewitians are satisfied to know that Chuzzlewits in "steel of proof" returned gracefully homeward from battle, while critics deplore the deaths of the leather-jerkined soldier-vassals away from home, deaths caused by those graceful, armored survivors.
The competition between the two value systems disappears by paragraph 6 when the Chuzzlewits are directly connected to a "villain," Guy Fawkes, the Catholic conspirator who plotted to blow up Parliament. This association doesn't make the Chuzzlewits more obviously "violent vagabonds," as one might expect, but buffoons; they are no longer placed in remote history, and in modern times their selfish opportunities have been severely restricted. Instead of being responsible for the death of men, they are, at worst, guilty of the theft of silver spoons. At the same time that the Family becomes less destructive singly, the chapter's end suggests that it becomes more widespread and, in a way, even more dangerous. Ironical attacks on the Chuzzlewits lead to a warning about the disguised Chuzzlewits in the Family of Man.

Chapter 1 pretends to be a defense of the Family based on its heritage; it is actually a criticism of its members. Throughout history, the Chuzzlewits have been murderers and thieves and rascals, and their "overweening amount of family Pride" is based on their violent past and hypocritical present. "Introductory" further attacks false standards of superiority through the fictive audience; though that lady and gentleman make claims to breeding, fluctuations in the diction level invite us to question their politeness. In paragraph 4 the narrator needs to
apologize for employing a "vulgar phrase" ("came over") in this formal "history" addressed to a refined readership. But this specific case is not the only instance of informal diction in the chapter: a Chuzzlewit has regularly dined with Duke Humphrey (according to Partridge, a common euphemism meaning to go dinnerless), and a Diggory Chuzzlewit just as regularly visited and left items with a wealthy uncle, or pawnbroker, whose costly entertainments were called "Golden Balls" (sign of the broker). Why aren't these vulgar phrases defined as well? It may be that the speaker is using these vulgarities for a final thrust at the pretensions of the fictive readers: perhaps they are not as polite as they claim if they are familiar with these euphemisms.

The snobbish fictive readers epitomize faults that the ironic narrator can easily attack and the real audience can recognize. But all narrative techniques used in "Introductory" are not as simple or familiar as this Fieldingesque ploy. An author may shape his readers, but the 1863 and the 1978 varieties are not shaped the same way. The twentieth-century reader may not be acquainted with terms like "uncle" and figures like Monboddo, familiar to Dickens' contemporaries, and consequently may miss clues that should direct his response to the work. Because Dickens' text of "Introductory" is largely
"unwritten," appealing indirectly to the attitudes of his audience, defining those attitudes by defining the allusions can help the modern reader understand more of the chapter's meaning.

DEFINING THE ALLUSIONS

On Adam and Eve, the landed gentry, and the Chuzzlewits: "The Chuzzlewit Family...was, in the very earliest times, closely connected with the agricultural interest" (1. 1).

The Chuzzlewits are said to be directly descended from Adam and Eve, making absurd any claim they have to social pedigree, trivializing all claims to distinction on the basis of ancestry, and mocking both the fictive readers and the actual Englishmen who revelled in the kind of self-congratulations perpetuated by the various genealogical works edited by John Burke: A Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Extinct and Dormant Baronetcies of England (1838), A Genealogical and Heraldic Dictionary of the Peerages of England, Ireland, and Scotland, Extinct, Dormant, and in Abeyance (1840), A General Armory of England, Scotland and Ireland (1342). Dickens criticizes this attitude not only in the opening but also in the novel proper through its spokesman, the fraud, Montague Tigg:

"'Still the same name,' said Mr. Tigg; 'my claims to the dormant peerage not being yet established by the House of Lords.'"
In being directly descended from Adam and Eve and connected with agriculture, the Chuzzlewits are tied, of course, to Cain, the farmer-son of those first parents, as the reader is reminded in paragraph 2, sentence 1. This association links the Family to man's violence and fall, prepares for the remarks about the human family at the chapter's end, and previews a certain kind of hero, one in the tradition of Cain. Not all Chuzzlewits are Cains, of course; but as we learn, modern-day Cains are among its members, and at least one Chuzzlewit masquerades as Adam: "I do a little bit of Adam still," says Pecksniff of his pretended application to gardening.

The phrase "agricultural interest," however, does more than connect the Family with the soil. It is a direct allusion to the interests of the wealthy landowners who, in the 1840's, pressed for the passage of the corn laws, protecting their own selfish interests while raising prices and, consequently, starving the poor. The Chuzzlewits, so closely connected with these interests (which are, in turn, condemned by their association with the Family), represent a selfish anachronism in the eyes of radicals like Dickens, a threat not only to individuals but to England itself, one that led Dickens' "thinking eye," like Carlyle's, to discern "images of ruin...."
On William as Chuzzlewit Associate: "at least one Chuzzlewit came over with William the Conqueror" (4. 1).

The Chuzzlewits are traced from the Wanderer Cain to the Norman invaders who brought to England "bravery, wisdom, eloquence, virtue, gentle birth, and true nobility" (5. 1). Goldsmith, Hume, and Charles Knight (as Dickens himself was later to do in his A Child's History of England), all condemn the destructiveness of William, especially in his laying waste of Northumbria. As Knight describes the avarice of William's followers, "They should have land; they should have money; they should wed Saxon heiresses; the humblest foot-soldier should be a gentleman."

And many of these foot-soldiers did become gentlemen. While old Saxon families were reduced to ignominy, estates were seized and given to Normans. Witness Thackeray's C. Jeames de la Pluche, Esq., the footman-turned-gentleman: "We hear it stated that Mr. Pluche is of a very ancient family (Hugo de la Pluche came over with the Conqueror); and the new brougham which he has started bears the ancient coat of his race." By associating the Chuzzlewits with William, the narrator makes the Family ancient participants in the destruction of English countryside, English families, and English tradition. By associating William with the Chuzzlewits, the speaker reminds us that it should be no proud boast to connect one's ancestry with William,
though, of course, this is what the Peerages do. Since no one can be responsible for the character of his ancestors, neither should he claim distinction based on that ancestry.

On Guy Fawkes as a Chuzzlewit: "There was unquestionably a Chuzzlewit in the Gunpowder Plot, if indeed the arch-traitor, Fawkes himself, were not a scion of this remarkable stock..." (6. 1).

Guy Fawkes is included in this survey of the Family because, like the Conqueror, he is part of the "violence and vagabondism" of the Chuzzlewits. Certainly, Fawkes' association with violent English history is common knowledge. Not only is he still burned in effigy on November 5, but, at least in 1835 with David Jardine wrote his account of "The Gunpowder Plot," he was regularly castigated in Church. The Liturgy included a prayer for the "happy deliverance of King James I and the estates of England from the most traitorous and bloody-intended massacre by gun-powder." The Plot was a popular topic earlier in the century, before passage of the Catholic Emancipation Bill (1829), "as a practical proof that the doctrines of the Roman Catholic religion were inconsistent with the safety of a Protestant Government." Certainly, Fawkes was the arch-villain of England, his name synonymous with treachery.

Linking the Chuzzlewits to England's greatest traitor lets the narrator establish their character and introduce
several allusions which identify passing subjects ridiculed in the chapter: "Match-Maker" Chuzzlewit and the modern coal merchant. Like the Guy Fawkes reference, the former evokes the hated spectre of a Catholic monarch on an English throne, referring to James I's unsuccessful project to marry Prince Charles to the Infanta. The coal reference is much more timely, alluding to accusations against London coal merchants in the 1830's for inflating the price of coal: "The city charges before the coals leave the ship are extravagant, but those of the coal-merchant or retailer are most exorbitant." 14

Beyond the villainy of Fawkes, maybe the fabulous nature of his scheme justifies his inclusion in this history. In an 1823 article for the London Magazine, Charles Lamb had commented on the strangeness of Fawkes' adventure: "But, for us, to whom the tradition has come slowly down, and has had time to cool, the story of Guido Faux sounds rather like a tale, a fable, and an invention, than true history." 15 As will be shown, the chapter seems to be attacking historical invention as part of its larger attack on human snobbery, and the Guy Fawkes example may unite both.

On the Monboddo Doctrine: "touching the probability of the human race having once been monkeys" (14, 3).

In Of the Origin and Progress of Language, where he also tries
to establish the existence of mermaids, Monboddo (1714-70) argues a connection between man and the orang-outan, the latter considered very like primitive man but mute. Samuel Johnson ridiculed Monboddo's theories: "It is a pity to see Lord Monboddo publish such notions as he has....Other people have strange notions; but they conceal them." Dickens' contemporaries remarked on his "eccentricities" as well. An 1838 article in The Penny Magazine, while not mentioning the philosopher, disparages earlier theories connected with his name:

It is not many years since that the character, habits and form of the Orang were among the desiderata of science. Ignorance and credulity had invested it with faculties and intellects bordering upon those peculiar to the human race; it was accounted but little lower than man....men of learning had indulged in the wildest speculations respecting its capabilities of progressive refinement, and its affinity to our race. These puerile fancies have all dissipated before true science....

And the 1839 edition of The Penny Cyclopaedia describes Monboddo's theories as "some singular notions about men being only a civilized species of monkey...."

In his own time and since, Monboddo has been ridiculed for his presentation of the orang-outan. The pervasiveness of this ridicule is supported by his satiric presentation in fiction long before Dickens: in Isaac Disraeli's Flim-Flam (1806) and Peacock's Melincourt (1817).
On the Blumenbach Theory: "the descendents of Adam having a vast number of qualities which belong more particularly to swine than to any other class of animals in the creation..."(14. 4).

Unlike Monboddo who was considered an eccentric in Pre-Darwinian England, the physiologist J. F. Blumenbach (1752-1840) was respected. When he visited England towards the end of the eighteenth century, scientists there gave him a distinguished reception; for, according to the Encyclopaedia Britannica (1853), he had "obtained a well-merited reputation by the publication of his excellent Institutiones Physiologicae," and his reputation increased with his hand-book of comparative anatomy (translated into English in 1819, and again in 1827). Not only a writer but a lecturer (Professor Primarius) at the University of Göttingen, he was noted for his theory that all human races were derived from a single source, an argument upheld by strict interpretations of the Old Testament and implicit in the first chapter of Martin Chuzzlewit.

And how do swine function in the scientist's theory? The narrator may be referring to Blumenbach's work in comparative anatomy which argues that man, like the pig, is a kind of domesticated animal. Less likely (but certainly attractive) is the explanation that the reference is to Human and Porcine Races, an article in German that Blumenbach wrote as a joke.
This reference to Blumenbach establishes a scientifically authorized connection between "the descendants of Adam" and swine, most remarkable in the natural histories for devouring their young. Although the swine comparison is exaggerated Blumenbach, just as the monkey reference is distorted Monboddo, its connotations help establish the reader's attitude to the Chuzzlewits he has yet to see and connect the Family to the "vast pigsty" called America the reader is to discover. In Martin Chuzzlewit, where most of the world is peopled by one Chuzzlewit or another, the first character we meet is a Chuzzlewit in disguise (we don't learn of his connection with the Family until later); this particular son of Adam does take especially good care of himself, Pecksniff allowing, for his own good, Jonas to devour his daughter.

* * *

Not everyone is a Chuzzlewit, of course; and though the Chuzzlewit Family reunion, which comes very close upon Chapter 1, may suggest a world completely populated by human vultures (as Pecksniff reminds us in Chapter 2, "When I say, we...I mean mankind in general; the human race...."), Dickens does give us Wark, and Pinch, and Mrs. Lupin, and even Mrs. Todgers to offset that impression. Nevertheless, the introduction ends most soberly, inviting the reader to turn his eyes from the fictional Chuzzlewits to his own world, not quite fearfully perhaps (the Monboddo and
Blumenbach analogies discourage this, but with an un-Pecksniffian hesitation.

The ending of the chapter, with its citing and distorting of authorities, its cautious limitations ("At present it [carefully] contents itself with remarking, in a general way, on this head...."), its general pompousness, may do more than establish a final image of grasping, selfish Chuzzlewits who people both the land of fiction and the land of fiction-readers. For the final paragraph suggests an additional target by parodying the language and techniques of "official" (legal, historical, impersonal, and formal) communication.

Throughout the chapter, the reader's attention is drawn, time and again, to the quality of the arguments used, with repeated references to evidence and distortions of evidence: records, history, documentary evidence, Family legend, Family oral tradition, correspondence, testimony of mothers, authority of all books, eyewitness accounts (the six verified witnesses of Toby's death), presumptive proof, oath, solemn asseveration, and fact. These assertions argue for an investigative accuracy which the simplified viewpoint of the ex cathedra presentations refutes. Nothing is so convincing as the repetition of confident assertions--the narrator ironically implies--and he demonstrates this by battering the reader with a lengthy list of
empty yet "persuasive" tag words: undoubtedly, surely, can be no doubt, beyond all question, unquestionably, cannot fail, too obvious and too full of interest to stand in need of comment, also clearly proved, manifest, plainly susceptible of this meaning, fact is clearly established, needless to multiply instances, a scope of reasonable probability, settled and clenched the business, safely asserted, and wholly unsupported. The quantity and quality of this material force us to reject the surface argument it conveys: that this is, indeed, an accurate history.

Other elements of style further suggest that the argument is parody. The prose consists of long sentences, many of them complex. But the stylistic density is even greater than these characteristics indicate. Twice, internal dashes interrupt and emphasize a statement as, for instance, in paragraph 11, sentence 5:

It may be said--it has been said, for human wickedness knows no limits--that there is no lord of that name.

And parenthetical material occurs nine times (all examples from the eighth paragraph on), primarily to emphasize the narrator's attitude to certain social values ("credible and unimpeachable" is defined in an aside to mean wealthy 9.1) and to "historical accuracy":
(which is wholly unsupportable, for there is no pretense of his grandmother ever having been out of this country, or of any Mandarin having been in it within some years of his father's birth, except these in the teashops, which cannot for a moment be regarded as having any bearing on this question, one way or another.)

Both parentheses and dashes slow the reader's comprehension of the sentences; even more difficulties are put on him when these are coupled with interrupters which discourage him from making logical connections, especially between subjects and objects and their verbs. Some examples will make this clearer:

9. 1 There was, within a few years, in the possession of a highly respectable and in every way credible and unimpeachable member of the Chuzzlewit family (for his bitterest enemy never dared to hint at his being otherwise than a wealthy man,) a dark lantern....

14. 1 This history, having to its own perfect satisfaction (and, consequently, to the full contentment of all its readers,) proved the Chuzzlewits to have had an origin, and to have been at one time or other of an importance which cannot fail to render them highly improving and acceptable acquaintance to all right-minded individuals, may now proceed in earnest with its task.

In the first sentence above, thirty-nine words obscure the completion of "There was"; and in example two, fifty-one words divide "history" from "may now proceed."

If these structures make it difficult for the reader to understand their contents, the expletives and passive voice also hinder clear communication. Expletives, literally fillers-up or redundancies, emphasize a main point
they anticipate. In Chapter 1, they may also obscure or complicate meaning through indirection. As already mentioned, from the first sentence we know "it is a great satisfaction" but we don't know who receives that satisfaction; the expletive does not need to present this kind of information. A similar structure occurs in the first sentence of paragraph 2:

It is remarkable that as there was, in the oldest family of which we have any record, a murderer and a vagabond, so we never fail to meet, in the records of all old families, with innumerable repetitions of the same phase of character.

The neutrality of the double expletive ("it is...there was....") enriches the connotations of the nouns, "murderer and vagabond." The introductory "It is remarkable that" seems impartially to direct the reader to the historical fact it presents, though the sentence ends with a very slanted statement and no "fact" at all. At the same time, the stop-and-go development of the sentence (note the interrupters) camouflages the unsupported cause-effect relationship it implies: since the earliest known family contained a scoundrel, so do all old families. Through his casual "remarkable" and his obscure logic, the narrator attacks the pedigree hunters who search for irrelevant significances in the past, those curious to discover "the progress of hereditary tastes" in the lives of the inheritors.
The expletives are usually joined in their work by the passive voice: "it may be laid down as a general principle...," "It is also clearly proved by...," "It has been said that...." The formality of the passive helps establish the sense of impersonal historical "accuracy." At the same time, as Stewart has noted, "through the uncompromising use of the passive voice, action is cast out by an indirection which finds nothing out in return, and which keeps us from finding out." Not only does the passive give more attention to the deed than the doer, to the fact than the person, in a chapter which obscures and distorts both facts and deeds, it sometimes gives most attention to the telling:  

7. 1 It is also clearly proved by the oral traditions of the Family, that there existed, at some one period of its history which is not distinctly stated, a matron of such destructive principles, and so familiarized to the use and composition of the inflammatory and combustible engines, that she was called 'The Match Maker'; by which nickname and byword she is recognized by the family legends to this day.

Certainly this use of the passive voice helps achieve ironic distancing; it may also suggest a parody of historical presentation, a suggestion reinforced by the chapter's preoccupation with history, records, legends, affidavits, correspondence, testimony, witnesses, et al. If history is an account of an event, this chapter presents the different ways in which accounts are passed on,
interpreted, transformed—above all, falsified. As Balzac wrote, "historians are privileged liars." William, thus, becomes famous as the Conqueror, not as the Bastard; his thievery becomes liberality and generosity; his Invasion, not a sign of death and destruction but a symbol of bravery, wisdom, and the other sterling virtues that the members of the English nobility worship in their ancestors. Guy Fawkes is both an arch-traitor and a Great Ancestor. A nickname becomes "clear proof" that "Match-Maker" Chuzzlewit was Fawkes' mother. And memories of a grandmother's stories can be "justly interpreted" and distorted to prove just about anything "by the exercise of a little ingenious labour on the part of a commentator."

Chapter 1 deals with history, and with perceptions and recordings and transformations of history, and presents these perceptions through passive voice construction to suggest, almost, that no one remakes history, that it remakes itself; that, like Mrs. Gamp's umbrella, it has a life of its own. But the irony reminds the reader that someone in this chapter is making history; and it is the history-making narrator who undermines all the outrageous claims he makes for the Chuzzlewits. Those characters in the novel who also create do not share his ironic pose; Mrs. Gamp, in fact, is almost destroyed when her creation, Mrs. Harris, is challenged. To deal
with the world, they must manufacture, and there is something grand in this, even when what they make deceives.

Mr. Pecksniff, the reader soon discovers, "was in the frequent habit of using any word that occurred to him as having a good sound, and rounding a sentence well, without much care for its meaning. And he did this so boldly, and in such an imposing manner, that he would sometimes stagger the wisest people with his eloquence, and make them gasp again." Thus, a one-eyed almanac and a one-eyed calendar ("dervish") are the same to him, who would just as well "nourish in his breast an ostrich" as a serpent and would find goose, oyster, and siren to be pretty much alike. Montague Tigg, the "inventive and poetical department" of Anglo-Bengalee, is a "rhetorician" too, whose words and structures, like those of Chapter 1, inflate and disguise what he states:

There is at this present moment in this very place, a perfect constellation of talent and genius, who is involved, through what I cannot but designate at the culpable negligence of my friend Pecksniff, in a situation as tremendous, perhaps, as the social intercourse of the nineteenth century will readily admit of. There is actually at this island, at the Blue Dragon in this village, an ale-house observe; a common, paltry, low-minded, clodhopping, pipe-smoking alehouse; an individual, of whom it may be said, in the language of the Poet, that nobody but himself can in any way come up to him; who is detained there for his bill.

Mr. Elijah Pogram, like most of his compatriots, is also
a "transformer." He "favoured the free and independent
custom...of procuring information of any sort in any kind
of confidence, and afterwards perverting it publicly in
any manner that happened to suit him." In different ways,
these three use words to change the world around them to
fit their needs. Though the "wisest people" may be
staggered by those words, the reader should not be. For
the introduction has taught him to glory in the wit of
these creations while he remains skeptical of their
content.

"Introductory" is a criticism of the notions of pedi­
gree and of evidence, an attack on British aristocracy,
an assault on false gentility, a parody of any impersonal
style that invites unclarity and indefiniteness while
claiming authority. Look again at the title of the
chapter: "Introductory, concerning the pedigree of the
Chuzzlewit Family." It is the Family (metaphorically and
literally), the pedigree, and the "concerning" (the
manner in which the material is presented) which are the
subjects of the passage. And what relates all three is
pretentiousness. From Diggory on down, from the claims
of the lady or gentleman, of the aristocracy, of the
Chuzzlewits, of the narrator, and from the style itself--
all are united by not being what they claim to be.
Chapter 1 is educating the reader in how the novel should be read. Its style demands that he pay careful attention to details; otherwise, the interrupters, the dashes, the parentheses will lure him away from the sense of the sentence; expletive and passive voice constructions may tempt him from discovering meaning. More important, though the fictive reader disappears and the levels of the narrative simplify in the novel, the ironic games of the introduction let the reader see some of the fun that awaits him. *Martin Chuzzlewit* is no ordeal, but a delightful history of a character who finally must make his own future. If the opening is faulty, it is not because it is "entirely away from the story and all about nothing." But perhaps it is misleading; it lets the reader expect that the ironic narrator will be close to him throughout, allowing him to feel superior (as he does here), presenting villains who are clearly and irredeemably villainous. All the Chuzzlewits, however, are not complete vagabonds; nor are the judgments the reader is asked to make throughout the book as easy as the ones demanded in "Introductory." The beginning, in fact, oversimplifies his role in the novel.
NOTES


17 "The Orang-outan," *The Penny Magazine*, 7 (Feb. 3, 1838), 44.


CHAPTER V

TESTING THE READER OF THE EGOIST:
"Us, too, he drags into the deeps...."

That dissatisfaction the reader may have with Meredith's introduction to The Egoist stems, as with Martin Chuzzlewit's opening, with the false clues it gives. Although the "Prelude's" multi-voiced narrator accurately reflects, unlike Dickens' historian, the various roles he plays throughout the novel, his style in the essay exaggerates the book's own. In this beginning, Meredith defines the comedy of The Egoist and promises a broad survey directed by the Comic Spirit, aimed at "civilizing" the reader so that he can recognize and correct the disharmonies he finds within and around him, and ultimately improve the quality of his life and his world. His persevering through the opening of Meredith's novel may be the first step of this civilizing process; even the most experienced reader must call his skills into question as he puzzles through the text. And his own deflation, as Willoughby especially comes to know, can represent the beginning of growth. The problem, of course, is that many do not persevere.

The Egoist was the first novel Meredith published after delivering his lecture, "The Idea of Comedy and the
Uses of the Comic Spirit" in 1877 (also published in the *New Quarterly Magazine*, 4/1877); and not unnaturally, most critics have discussed the novel, and the introductory chapter especially, as a fictional development of that lecture. J. Hillis Miller, for instance, quickly glosses it as a demonstration ("concrete," no less) of "the validity of Meredith's theory of comedy"; Gillian Beer calls it an "epitome of the main ideas of the Essay." But the "Prelude" is more. As its title suggests, it is an introduction to the book that identifies its subject and purpose while it prepares the reader for his role in the novel: if the Book of Egoism is the book of common wisdom, each of us can expect to see his reflection there. The reader who can make sense of this essay can certainly meet the demands of the work that follows. The "Prelude" comes before the real performance, a game, with a content that seems to parody the conventional author's preface, and a style that mocks Meredith's own.

Lane Cooper, in fact, accused Meredith of carrying "the use of compression, and of hints, oblique indications, symbolical gesture and indirection, to an excess, desiring the reader to find too much between the words and lines in proportion to what the words and sentences directly offer." Perhaps the style is unreasonably demanding. Though it discourages many, this showpiece does give Meredith's ideal reader a chance to become more intellectually
polished as he participates in the often humorous reading puzzle. The metaphorical language, probably the prime instrument of Meredith's compression, especially enables that reader to excell, forcing him to provide his own imaginative connections between the points of a description or argument. Similes and metaphors, Meredith writes in One of Our Conquerors, help the reader "to vault...gaps and thickets and dreary places." Though he may not be easily able to vault the gaps at the start, he should be more agile at the finish of the introductory essay.

The poetical language, however, is not the only test of the reader. It is joined by the theoretical content and occasionally incoherent structure of the essay. Close scanning is essential for comprehension, and reading almost epitomizes Barthes' slow motion process. With occasional difficulties in sentence structure and competing or inconsistent figures, these first eighteen hundred words of the novel present a virtual nightmare of imps, leaves, dogs, drawing-rooms, solitary majestic outsiders, and volcanoes.

The novel's subtitle, A Comedy in Narrative, connects it to the tradition of Fielding by evoking, among other things, the famous earlier example of a work that cuts across several genres: the "comic epic in prose." And the full title of the "Prelude," "A Chapter of Which
the Last Page Only Is of Any Importance," (important for any number of reasons, none of which are specified, none of which are excluded) continues this connection by suggesting one of Fielding's many self-mocking chapter titles. Just as the eighteenth-century writer played with his readers, so does Meredith, daring them to interpret the difficult and witty prose of the introduction. Comedy is, after all, a game, one in which the reader must participate.

The subtitle also ties The Egoist to drama. In this dramatic fiction the characters reveal themselves through exterior and interior dialogue; very little direct narrative commentary is given. As James Kincaid once remarked, this drama more closely follows Brecht's principles than Aristotle's; the style continually reminds the reader of the artifice and forces him to question his assumptions about the nature of fiction and of Meredith's text. These reminders continue throughout the novel, but they are previewed and intensified in the opening. Here the reader is "alienated" from an essay which does not fulfill conventional expectations of the writer's address to his audience but presents a direct challenge to that convention and to the reader's passivity. Meaning is obscure in the "Prelude"; the reader discovers clues to meanings as he unravels the text.
The "Prelude" can be divided into four parts: paragraph 1 is an overview; paragraphs 2-4 identify the problem of communicating man's wisdom; paragraphs 5 and 6 point to a particular kind of literature as an answer to this problem; paragraphs 7, 8, and 9 describe the hero of the specific example of that literature, The Egoist. In the overview, the audience for the "Prelude" and for comedy in general is said to consist of civilized men and women who are willing and able to play the game that can "throw reflections upon social life." The game itself is neither a sensational nor a minute examination of human nature; but very little else of it--neither its rules nor its procedures--is explained here: simply that Comedy presents a number of characters who reveal themselves through their speech; and that by participating under the leadership of the Comic Spirit, the reader may find something of value he can take from the fiction and bring to his own drawing-room.

Paragraphs 2-4 describe man's inability to learn from human experience the kind of knowledge that can help improve human nature. The Book of Earth, known also as the Book of Egoism and our common wisdom, needs to be condensed; it contains so much irrelevant matter that even those who are able to read it entirely, lack the knowledge they need. Consequently, when the solitary
majestic outsider—whoever this grand figure is—gets into the Book, what he has to teach will still be unavailable; and neither the reader nor the writer will have progressed since the time of "our great lord and master," Shakespeare. For to be profitable, all new wisdom must be carefully edited and focused.

Literary realism cannot achieve this focus, for a transcription of all details of human nature (as realism is exaggeratedly defined in the "Prelude") has led to man's present problem of intellectual coarseness from which no true progress can evolve. As a reader, he has been stuffed full of refuse (bran); as a writer, he has provided undigestible detail upon detail. This propagation of sheer mass, of "the vasty and the noisy," has made it almost impossible for man to see and judge himself; it has merely revealed more of himself to know. Science, too, has offered no solutions; instead, it has aggravated the malady: "before daylight our disease was hanging on to us again, with the extension of a tail. We had it fore and aft." Tracing man back to a common ancestor has not brought him distinction or verified his progress. It has simply reinforced his similarity to the ape. He has not found comforting truths but unsettling humbug, much as the transformed men of the Dead Sea in Past and Present had found.
"sitting on the trees there, grinning now in the most un-
affected manner; gibbering and chattering complete non-
sense; finding the whole Universe now a most indisputable
Humbug! The Universe had become Humbug to these Apes...." 5

As an alternative to realism and to science, para-
graphs 5-6 offer a broad survey of Art. The Comic Spirit
is the condensing and selecting force behind that survey.
It is the "inward mirror" that enables him to perceive and
comprehend at least that page of the Book that shows him
himself and that, consequently, allows him to cure his
grossness and pretentiousness and to become civilized.
How it speaks to the spirit in man, however, is not
explained.

Paragraphs 7-9 describe the Egoist, a character in
this comedy by Meredith. Later revealed to be a pattern
of us all, here the Egoist is introduced as an aristocrat,
a representative of the House (Society). Majestic only
by virtue of social status, he inspires a controlled
pity in the reader who—aided by the "very penetrative,
very wicked imps" (whoever they may be) and the "mild
literary angels" (like Meredith?)—will be able to observe
the Egoist reveal his own flaws: "he who would desire
to clothe himself at everybody's expense, and is of that
desire condemned to strip himself stark naked...." We
see such self-revealing behavior almost immediately; in
Chapter 1 when he "cuts" Lieutenant Patterne, and in Chapter 3 when he mocks the dancing Vernon by comparing him "to Theseus in the maze, entirely dependent upon his Ariadne; to a fly released from a jam-pot; to a 'salvage,' or green, man caught in a web of nymphs and made to go the paces."

Before the reader sees the Egoist in action, though, the "Prelude" has encouraged him to see his ludicrousness. In criticizing him, the reader is learning to criticize his own inflation, dullness, and pretentiousness, and—according to the narrator—acquiring a clearer mind and livelier manners (i.e., manners more responsive to others), a mark of his own progress and an indication of society's possible future. The "Prelude" ends with the promise that the threat of Egoism will be averted, that this "comic drama of the suicide" will mark a painless yet necessary destruction and an ultimate rebirth, hardly an accurate description of Willoughby's deflation but perhaps appropriate to the reader. Through Willoughby, he discovers "that in the gratification of the egoistic instinct we may so besit ourselves as to deal a slaughtering wound upon Self to whatsoever quarter we turn" (Chapter 47). The Egoist's suicide is the reader's comedy and salvation.
This summary is much more coherent than the chapter itself. There, no explicit transitions occur between paragraphs 1 and 2, and 6 and 7, but missing connectives are only one small contribution to its incoherence. Determining the meanings of numerous unidentified allusions and undefined abstractions is another test for the reader. If he recognizes the classical (Bacchus, Hymen, Hades, Amphitrite) and Shakespearean (Ariel, Prospero, Sycorax) references, and if he knows his geography (the Lizard is the southernmost tip of England), his folklore and literature ("the cliff you ken of" is a Dover cliff associated with King Lear), he is still apt to be stymied. The "solitary majestic outsider" of paragraph 2 cannot be identified with certainty; and in context, the phrase can seem to refer to "the notable humourist," "our great lord and master," and the reader who studiously travels. The passage itself never directly identifies who that outsider or who that humorist or who that lord and master is. Rather, it seems deliberately to foil identification, puzzling the reader but hardly giving him enough material to solve the puzzle.

This challenge to identify the various references (not all equally obscure) certainly slows down the reading process and can easily lead to frustration. Attempts to make sense of the essay are repulsed by other elements of
the style. Some of the sentences, it is true, are very short and direct:

Art is the specific.
Wise men say the latter.
There is the innovation.
Do not offend reason.
They wait.

But among these are some intricately constructed sentences, several exceptionally long, which seem to discourage communication rather than convey it. Let us look at two to see some typical structural complexities:

3. 1 Who, says the notable humourist, in allusion to this Book, who can studiously travel through sheets of leaves now capable of a stretch from the Lizard to the last few poor pulmonary snips and shreds of leagues dancing on their toes for cold, explorers tell us, and catching breath by good luck, like dogs at bones about a table, on the edge of the Pole?

Except for the interrupters--"says the notable humourist" and "explorers tell us"--the development of the sentence is forward-moving until the very end, when a simile divides a prepositional modifier from its noun and seems to establish a table on the edge of the Pole?--a veritable balancing trick! But grammatically, this sixty-five word unit is a simple sentence--"Who can studiously travel"--extended by thirteen prepositional phrases which metaphorically qualify the travel:

*through* sheets of leaves
*capable of a stretch*
*from the Lizard*
*to the last snips and shreds of leagues*
*dancing for cold*
catching breath by good luck
on the edge of the Pole
like dogs at bones about a table.

It is the jam-up of prepositional phrases, the continual qualifications--snips and shreds of what? of leagues. doing what? dancing. how? on their toes. why? for cold.--which accounts for some of the difficulties of this sentence and of the "Prelude," and which anticipate a stylistic characteristic of the novel, where such layered prepositional modification is frequently, though not so extremely, used.

This next sentence exemplifies a variation of the structure just examined, for here Meredith piles up dependent clauses:

8, 1 You may as well know him out of hand, as a gentleman of our time and country, of wealth and station; a not flexible figure, do what we may with him; the humour of whom scarcely dimples the surface and is distinguishable but by very penetrative, very wicked imps, whose fits of roaring below at some generally imperceptible stroke of his quality have first made the mild literary angels aware of something comic in him, when they were one and all about to describe the gentleman on the heading of the records baldly (where brevity is most complimentary) as a gentleman of family and property, an idol of a decorous island that admires the concrete (115 words).

This is, of course, heavily subordinate; each detail in the series continues to restrict the information immediately preceding it. Moreover, in this particular example at least, the subordination appears to sabotage the meaning of the sentence: "You may as well know him...as a
gentleman...of wealth and station." But you would be wrong to do so, for this advice invites the reader to share the originally incorrect description the "mild literary angels" were to give of the Egoist, a "gentleman of family [station] and property [wealth]." Both the sheer length and the many levels of the sentence make its content far from apparent and allow the reader to be an easy victim of its poor advice.

Not only the structure of these two sentences but their metaphorical contents are characteristic of the style of the essay and the novel it opens. The indeterminacy of various metaphorical terms adds to the reader's frustration. What are the "mild literary angels" or the "wicked imps"? To discover some measure of meaning and coherence, the reader is forced to play with these figures, trying, with varying degrees of success, to find sense in the "last few poor pulmonary snips and shreds of leagues" and "shifty Spring."

Instead of making ideas clearer, these metaphors frequently raise questions about their own meanings. We know, for instance, that all descriptions of the Book emphasize its size; and we learn in the novel that a study "of the gross of volumes of the first and second sections of THE BOOK will take you up to senility." But the metaphors that describe its size in the "Prelude" are so remote from their subject and so intricately presented
that the reader must puzzle to interpret them, paying
more attention to them than to the book. The fictional
styles that are contrasted in the "Prelude," "the parti-
cular practice of Art in letters," for instance, are
described as appeals to the impressionable senses, the
watchmaker's eye, and the broad Alpine survey. There
three styles are never clearly defined or carefully dis-
tinguished. And Comedy is called 'the singular scene of
charity issuing of disdain under the stroke of honourable
laughter...," a birth in which the Comic Spirit's part is
never made clear.

Occasionally, metaphors are extended to unify sections
of the chapter. Consider the hunt, sometimes described as
a sport, sometimes a battle, sometimes a game:

the victim  the Egoist (a person of particular
          social status; like Meredith's reader
          of comedy, a frequenter of drawing-
          rooms).

the goal  to uncover the ridiculousness lying
          beneath his imposing figure; to warn
          and educate the reader about his own
          egoism; to fortify the House.

the means  the Egoist first reveals himself; then
          malicious imps enlighten literary re-
          cording angels and settle down to wait;
          the reader is invited to join them.

the field  the drawing-room of civilized men and
          women.

Literature enables the reader to join the hunt; the chron-
icle and field of this particular hunt for the Egoist is
Meredith's novel.
A second metaphor, intimated in paragraph 3 ("crow-scalp" for "crow's nest") and dominating paragraph 7, helps to shape the reader's appropriate response to the Egoist. The novel is compared to a ship, and the pathos of its hero to ballast: "Concerning pathos, no ship can now set sail without pathos; and we are not totally deficient of pathos; which is, I do not accurately know what, if not ballast...." Pathos here is not used in the Aristotelian sense but refers simply to the sentimentality of many nineteenth-century novels; too much, the narrator warns, can wreck the vessel. Like the ballast on a ship, the pathos must be carefully distributed. In "our modern vessel," The Egoist, the correct balance is achieved by the writer's control of the reader's response to the pathetic character: "he is not allowed to rush at you, roll you over and squeeze your body for the briny drops." Certainly, the "Prelude" initially enforces a distance between the reader and the fallible hero.

These two motifs—the hunt and the ship—are actually atypical of the figures of the chapter. More usually, metaphors are introduced and quickly dropped; the reader is left to intuit relationships. Roger Wilkenfeld has described most of the novel's emblems as "localized, particularized, and self-contained," and in the "Prelude" their distinctness seems to increase the difficulty in
cracking the written code. "Pulses lump along like the old lob-legs of Dobbin the horse, or do their business like cudgels of carpet-thwackers expelling dust, or the cottage-clock pendulum teaching the infant hour over midnight simple arithmetic." The coarseness that Comedy will help refine is described by a series, no member of which can be clearly equated with any other: "branfulness," the "prolongation of the vastly and the noisy," "malady of sameness," "land of foghorns," "monstrous monotonousness," "vestiges of rawness and grossness," and pretentiousness, inflation, and dullness. Not only does that problem seem to be several ("monstrous monotonousness" can be the same as dullness but not easily the same as pretentiousness), but a few of the metaphors describing the difficulty invite multiple interpretations: "branfulness," for instance, is both coarseness and replteness.

Clearly, the repetition of labels for man's problem or for anything else in the "Prelude" obscures communication, for as these metaphors replace each other, more and more images are raised, none adequately defining the others; singly or together, all failing to limit their subject. Comedy is a civilizer, a polisher, a cook. How or why she is a cook is not explained or even indicated: somehow, the reader is expected to see connections between refining and cooking, perhaps recalling the analogy
that opens Tom Jones; or recognizing that in the 1870's to cook colloquially meant "to present in a surreptitiously altered form, for some purpose..." (OED), presumably to teach; or discovering any number of explanations. At best, the reader has an insecure sense of multiple meanings, but no confident knowledge.

Still other metaphors that have a single appearance may have their significances expanded by word plays and allusions so that the apparently simple comparison is seen to have more and more complexity. The reader is told, for instance, that man's disease comes out of the vasty and noisy, "as from an undrained fen." "Vasty" most obviously refers to the vast, large, empty spaces of the swamp. But its similarity to vasy (OED: slimy) may offer the possibly desperate reader a connection between "vasty" and "fen," a connection made more plausible by Meredith's frequent word plays throughout the book. Both vasy and fen share implications of size, turbulence, odor, water, and potential noxiousness. In addition to anticipating the meaningless chatter of the apes, noisy may similarly evoke noisome: harmful, injurious, noxious, ill-smelling, offensive (OED). These dangerous fumes that steam from the vasty and noisy result from a failure to control: "milepost piles" of undifferentiated matter make the progressive state of man
a barren waste.

But the vastly and the noisy may be fen-like in another way. Chambers's *Encyclopaedia* explains that a fen is a particular kind of swamp, one that is extremely fertile when drained and reclaimed, and that since the 1820's and 30's, such reclamation had been going on in East Anglia. Is the vastly and noisy, then, potentially fertile and productive? Can our branfulness be refined? Obviously, Meredith's answer is yes, and the reader who participates in the game of Comedy gains some of that refinement.

"The art of the pen," Meredith was to write in *Diana of the Crossways*, "is to rouse the inward vision, instead of laboring with a drop-scene brush, as it were, to the eye, because our flying minds cannot sustain a protracted description." Though a clear inward vision may not be aroused in the "Prelude," Meredith's pen does make minds fly, through the figurative language and sentence structures previously discussed and through a multi-voiced narrator. Jacob Korg has already described the various styles of Richard Feverel which "obscure the story and confuse the reader's opinion about it." He goes on to say that "there is no single narrative voice, no single impression to be conveyed by it, no sense of a consistent world view or authorial personality...." The *Egoist* has an identifiable narrator, but meaning is still obscured, especially for the reader who has little
practice in recognizing and weighing various narrative roles.

If, as Donald Stone says, "the novel is built on a series of stylistic levels, each appropriate to the particular character's point of view,"\textsuperscript{10} the "Prelude" is itself built around various persona the narrator will assume in the novel. For most of the essay, the reader finds the familiar unidentified narrative voice, but in paragraph 3 is a voice described as the "notable humourist's" and in paragraph 6 come the somewhat hysterical arguments of the wise man-enthusiast.

The narrator functions as the usual reader's guide through the dense essay and as a reliable perspective in the novel proper. In paragraph 8, he gives directions for finding the Egoist, including information on setting, class, character, and flaw. He invites the reader to join the imps and await the Egoist's fall. But he is probably most helpful in the "Prelude" as a translator ("as I venture to translate him....'"), a role he creates for himself. Like Carlyle who typically fabricates personalities he can then refute, throughout the book this narrator creates other "speakers" whom he then comments on, building up his own ethos and continuing the argument while paraphrasing and mocking them. Both the humorist with his sheets of leaves and dancing dogs,
and the enthusiast who deserves a hearing (why?) are almost intelligible, though the passages of both are occasionally clarified by their wit. The Pole and the crow-scalp of the humorist have already been mentioned; the enthusiast plays with allusions and words: 6. 16, "one foot's length" for arm's length; and 6. 20-21, "Listen, for comparison, to an unleavened society... .O for a titled ecclesiastic to curse to excommunication the unholy thing!" (my italics).

The unidentified narrator-editor juggles these two authorities, teases the reader with their different kinds of hyperbolic language, and tries to develop a theory of comedy. Like the Essay on Comedy, the "Prelude" may encourage a refining, civilized attitude in the audience as the narrator claims, but it joins comic suicides and crumbling Houses in a confusing and not apparently coherent whole. Why? Comedy is a game, and, among other things, the "Prelude" is a preview of that game, setting up the territory and briefly indicating some rules for the writer and the reader. But these rules are couched in difficult language; interpreting them demands a syntactically and metaphorically sophisticated reader who, to play the game well, must intuit those abstractions, identify those allusions, and unravel those sentences. And though in the first half of
the novel especially, the narrator continually directs him to hold certain attitudes, in matters of style the reader is generally on his own. He must persevere to identify the references and to interpret the word plays if he is to recognize the meanings and share in the humor: the pugilist who is needed for "blowy days," the Joe Millerisms that become O'Millerisms, and the potential callousness of Willoughby that is described as a "story of corns."

The narrator frequently participates in the game (possibly as a mischievous imp) to complicate and enrich the reader's role. To ridicule Willoughby, he quotes the Book of Egoism whose language and tone echo the "Articles of Faith" of Carlyle's Sartor Resartus. He carries on mock debates, not only by presenting the points of view of characters *(see, for example, Chapter 23) but also by arguing various viewpoints himself:

The Egoist is our fountainhead, primeval man; the primitive is born again, the elemental reconstituted. Born again, into new conditions, the primitive may be highly polished of men, and forfeit nothing save the roughness of his original nature. He is not only his own father, he is ours; and he is also our son. As we have produced him, he us. Such were we, to such are we returning....

Poets on the other side may be cited for an assurance that the primitive is not the degenerate: rather he is a sign of the indestructibility of the race... (Chapter 39).

Like Fielding's narrator, he plays with the reader and
with his own narrative role. In Chapter 11, he condemns him "to reperuse the foregoing paragraph." In Chapter 28, our omniscient narrator refuses to share his knowledge:

But all the doors are not open in a young lady's consciousness, quick of nature though she may be; some are locked and keyless, some will not open to the key, some are defended by ghosts inside. She could not have said what the something witnessed to. If we by chance know more, we have still no right to make it more prominent than it was with her.

In Chapter 32, he mocks the musings of Laetitia and his own recording of them: "In the secret musings of moralists this dramatic rhetoric survives."

The "Prelude" has prepared us for these comic elements as well as for the challenging sentence structures and varied metaphors which characterize the style of Meredith's book. As a participant in this game of Comedy, the reader is part of the audience, distanced from the drama and warned that details can confuse the aim of the exercise: "Disinterestedly or interestedly, they [readers] wax over-eager for little trifles, and make too much of them. Observers should begin upon the precept, that not all we see is worth hoarding...." Or, as the "Prelude" puts it, the watchmaker's eye misses the broad Alpine view. But, as previewed in the opening, the stage on which those actors play is an intricate and carefully detailed, literary one that demands the
reader's close inspection, even of the trifles. At times in the novel, he participates vicariously in the drama, by sharing the psychological states of the characters presented in more sustained and sober forms than the humorist and wise man caricatures of the "Prelude." He becomes Willoughby, Laetitia, Clara, et al. At other times, he remains critical, especially of Willoughby through his clichés and stereotyped behavior. Occasionally, his attention is turned from the actors to the vehicle, the plays of language that add to and frustrate a reader's response. Thus, The Egoist needs an especially flexible audience who can be separate from and identical with the characters whose minds it shares, both objective and subjective, and, as regards the style, both microscope and telescope.

Like a critical preface, the "Prelude" presents information that should help the reader understand the purpose and the hero of the work he is to read. The speaker here is not Meredith, however, but a fictional construct who seems to parody that helpful opening convention by the manner in which he presents information. The reader who succeeds in understanding the essay has more than enough intellectual refinement needed for The Egoist; he has learned to become an active participant in the text. But the "Prelude" is an overture that may draw an
unwarranted amount of attention to itself, providing the successful reader with the joy of a challenge well met but also giving an exaggerated impression of the main attraction and, more likely, puzzling him long after he has ceased reading.
NOTES


6. Michael Slater has informed me that the Shakespere Cliff is a name commonly given to one of the cliffs of Dover identified with the cliff referred to in *King Lear*. This was a readily identifiable locale in the nineteenth century. Whishaw's *Railways of Great Britain and Ireland* (1842), for instance, describes the tunnels which were begun through Shakespere Cliff in 1837.

7. Juggling balls and plates on sticks (poles) was a popular entertainment at nineteenth-century (and earlier) fairs. The image would not be unfamiliar to Meredith's contemporaries.


11. In a letter to the French translator of *The Egoist*, Meredith acknowledged that the testimony to the merits of Comedy was given in the vein of Carlyle. See C. L. Cline (ed.), *The Letters of George Meredith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), III, 1295. One wonders whom the notable humorist is intended to parody.
CHAPTER VI

THE INTRODUCTION TO MOBY-DICK:

"I think I can see a little into the springs and motives...cunningly presented to me under various disguises...."

All of the openings examined so far have introduced novels of nineteenth-century England; and all of these openings have, characteristically, directed the reader to certain, clearly defined elements of their novels: the plot, the ironies, the genre, the tone, whatever. Though ambiguities may arise as the works develop, very few are present in these beginnings. Even Meredith’s "Prelude," in spite of confusing specifics in parts of the essay, presents a meaning which the reader is challenged to discover. The two American examples that follow represent a different kind of fiction, one that is not so easily defined and, consequently, one that is not so confidently introduced. In fact, very few nineteenth-century American novels have the overture opening.

Richard Chase has described the brilliant chaos and disorder of the American romance.¹ And certainly, if Moby-Dick and The Scarlet Letter are typical, the overtures that are used do seem more fragmented and more self-consciously fictive than those in the other works examined,
to set up a very uneasy relationship with their audiences. The three parts of *Moby-Dick*'s opening indicate that Melville's 1851 work is more than an adventure story or fictionalized biography. The literary experiment they introduce challenges the reader's expectations about the whale, the speaker, the argument, and the themes of the whole. Meredith's opening which, by making fun of the reader-writer relationship, is perhaps closest to the American overtures, does not so thoroughly question the reader's traditional dependence on the story-teller.

Evert Duyckinck in his 1851 review remarked that *Moby-Dick* begins "with a preliminary flourish in the style of Carlyle and the 'Doctor' of etymology, followed by a hundred or so of extracts of 'Old Burton,' passages of a quaint and pithy character from Job and King Alfred to Miriam Coffin; in lieu of the old style of Scott, Cooper, and others, of distributing such flourishes about the heads of chapters." "Extracts" certainly does contribute to the novelty of the overture and, with "Etymology" and "Loomings," reflects Melville's indebtedness to Sterne, Rabelais, and Carlyle as critics have noted, to demonstrate the deadliness of pedantry and the self-conscious playfulness of *Moby-Dick*'s narrator. But other characteristics of the opening are not so simply explained: it contains elements of the epic and mock epic, a narrator who
is not only ironic gamester but morbid philosopher as well, and catalogs whose length and content discourage careful reading. This material gives clues about the nature of the fiction it introduces. The contradictions if offers invite the reader to question both the narrator's and his own role, ask him to reshape his expectations, and enable him to complete the work, fast and loose like Ishmael himself, tied to conventions but aware of their shortcomings.

In "Etymology" and "Extracts," bracketed comments by "I" (presumably the person we come to know as Ishmael) express pity of the symbols of literary authority. The dead teacher of "Etymology" is "threadbare in coat, heart, body, and brain...." A detached and isolated figure, his only society is a community of books; apparently the only reminder of his humanity, his dusting them. The Sub-Sub Librarian of "Extracts" is a "poor devil," a member of the "hopeless, sallow tribe," weak, unrewarded, and (like the Usher) unworldly. A tireless and unappreciated worker, he has "gone through the long Vaticans and street-stalls of the earth, picking up whatever random allusions to the whale he could anyways find in any book whatsoever, sacred or profane." But these "random allusions" and "higgledy-piggledy whale statements" inaccurately represent the whale. The bibulous
imagery that surrounds the librarian--"for whom even Pale Sherry would be too rosy-strong," "with full eyes and empty glasses," "gulp down your tears," "strike unsplinterable glasses"--draws attention to the emptiness of his life.

The sober pictures of both scholars, however, are quickly undercut. The dead Usher is a stereotypical dry-as-dust researcher who works himself to death. Just as his own handkerchief, "mockingly embellished with all the gay flags of all the known nations of the world," ridicules the assistant schoolmaster's drab life, so too do his inclusions of the exotic-sounding but wholly fabricated languages in his apparently scholarly list trivialize his activities. More seriously challenged are the principles behind the Usher's collection: that objects can be defined by words, that meanings can be easily traced and shared. As he continues the novel, the reader discovers that such an approach is inadequate, falsely simplifying both meaning and communication.

And the librarian who may "strike but splintered hearts together" in this world, a phrase with Shakespearian echoes that uplifts both the subject and his historian, is promised a "hext world" filled with barroom toasts, making the "poor devil" mock heroic, and Ishmael his mocker. Even as the Sub-Sub is glorified in Biblical
language--"For by how much the more pains ye take to please the world, by so much the more shall ye for ever go thankless!"--the context of this glorification makes the praise absurd. "Give it up, Sub-Sub!" ridicules the "saintly" scholar. Filled with exclamations and with direct address to "you," "thou," and "thee," the second paragraph of the "Extracts" appears to console an unappreciated and self-sacrificing scholar by offering him heavenly rewards. Instead, even while applauding his hard work, it makes fun of his activities, efforts and future hopes to demand no simple response from the reader.

The extracts show that the criticisms make in paragraph 1 of the commentary are, in fact, accurate. The passages are not organized in any apparent system: history, poetry, geography, science, all are mixed together. And the bibliographical references and quotations testify to the inaccuracy of the printed word: the "Extracts" consist of "vulgar errors (Holland's Pliny) and tall tales (Other or Oother's verbal narratives) as well as poetic insight (Fuller's Profane and Holy State). Natural Theology competes with natural history (Paley's theology and Baron Cuvier) and the natural history extract is calculatingly selected to induce laughter...." These excerpts continue the attack on inadequate definition and unsatisfying scholarship begun in "Etymology" to show the limitations of
a single description, the contradictions of multiple descriptions, and the possibilities of distortion within print: the signifier can be corrupted through time, through printers, through perceivers. Thus, the various perspectives of the "Extracts" preview the complexity and inadequacy of the viewpoints of the novel: only through a juggling of multiple perspectives can the reader hope to "know"--if anything can be known--the world presented there.

The excerpts also introduce the whale as a powerful and ambiguous symbol. From the ancient Hebrew to the fictitious Erromangoan, it is a presence that cuts across history into myth, somehow transformed through imagination so that it is made to inhabit all kinds of worlds--the visible and invisible, the physical and spiritual--and to represent almost anything: evil, good, life, death, even God. Lawrance Thompson, in fact, suggests that the "Etymology" section resembles the pages in Bibles and Biblical commentaries which summarize the history of the word "God" and give its form in different languages.7 By suggesting that the whale is just as deserving as God of a history, "Etymology" offers an example of the irreverence Ishmael is to reveal in "Loomings."

Ishmael's divided responses toward the Usher and the Sub-Sub, members of the lowest echelons of the pedagogical and scholarly worlds, anticipate his own mixed portrait.
Some critics say that the two preliminary figures in *Moby-Dick* are aspects of Ishmael and that in the opening sections he pokes fun at himself, at literary pretensions in general, and at his own literary pretensions in writing the book. This is a most attractive argument, since it anticipates the self-mockery of the first paragraph of "Loomings." Like the teacher and the librarian, Ishmael is another expert commentator on the whale, but his expertise stems from his own first-hand adventures and his habit of inductive reasoning and symbol-reading—not from the inadequate information supplied by books. Of course, Ishmael's expertise is also limited, and he knows it. Instead of the voice of wisdom, he offers a parody of the authoritative narrative role, filled with random puns and scattered philosophizings. His ability to laugh at himself and his narrative responsibilities suggests that, unlike the two authorities that precede him, this lowly collector has no blind faith in the Word or in the Fact or in the Telling.

In addition to introducing themes, symbol, and storyteller, "Etymology" and "Extracts" also anticipate a major narrative technique of the novel. Just as the Usher lists words and the librarian lists quotations, Ishmael characteristically presents testimonies without making his opinion about them clear. James Guetti argues that Ishmael refuses to commit himself wholly to or against any attitude he alludes to; he "almost never makes an unqualified remark."
Consequently, the reader can never be sure what Ishmael feels about the various authorities and arguments he cites nor how he resolves apparently conflicting data. Like the Usher and the Sub-Sub, Ishmael lets the reader draw whatever conclusions he can (if he can). Bombarded by testimonies and viewpoints, often the reader is able merely to recognize complexities, not to sort, evaluate, and judge. The simple and secure response is discouraged; the reader's uneasy freedom is courted. Though the "initial prototypes of learning" may be a "pathetic pair," unaware of the inadequacies of the printed word, dealing in parts or pieces, in phrases or words isolated from contexts, Ishmael is not. He uses them and he uses his own role to warn us about perceptions--theirs, his, other characters', the reader's.

The first chapter's title is one of these warnings. In nautical jargon, "to loom" is to move slowly up and down, to rock gently. The chapter, of course, does not "rock" but it does move in several directions, shifting its focus between specific examples and generalizations, between Ishmael and mankind, and between phases of Ishmael's personality, gradually drawing us into the narrator's story. "Loom" has two other meanings, more ominous than the first: "to make to appear unnaturally large" and "to appear indistinctly." Because he is both narrator and subject of the chapter, Ishmael demands the reader's
attention from the first: "Call me Ishmael." But the amount of attention given him here exaggerates his contributions to the plot. As the novel develops, the reader does not find that Ishmael's "shabby part of a whaling voyage" is unfolded, for he is a very insignificant actor in the story he shapes. And even though Ishmael is the subject of the chapter, the reader sees him only indistinctly. In fact, the second sentence, with its echoes of "Once upon a time," is vague enough to begin a fairy tale. Other facts about his life are hardly more specific: "never mind how long precisely," "little or no money," "nothing particular," "sail about a little." At best the reader sees a mind at work, but even the working of the ironic mind doesn't allow him to know the narrator. Ishmael is an indistinct figure who offers the reader very little narrative security at the beginning of Moby-Dick. He prefers to play games, as the multi-levelled title of this chapter indicates; its meaning depends on how (and how well) the reader interprets it.

Who is this narrator who seems to reject the conventional role of guide and friend to the ignorant reader? If his name is accurate, he is an outcast, "a wild man; and every man's hand against him." Some critics have seen Ishmael as "not a very stable person... [who] seems at times to be joking in order to keep from weeping."
Some have commented on his alienation and desperation, seeing him as a Wakefield or a William Wilson or an Ancient Mariner. Each approach by itself is oversimplified. In "Loomings," to "justify" his voyage, Ishmael gathers all kinds of material and bundles them together. The chapter, like the book, includes his sober and humorous sides. The reader can neither ignore nor reconcile them.

Ishmael portrays himself on one level as a superficial analyst; on another, a self-mocker. Why he went to sea, and why he went as a whaler is part of the subject of "Loomings." In the first paragraph, he explains his self-chosen exile is necessary for psychic survival, that fears of death drive him from the land, that the sea substitutes for a "pistol and ball" escape. Metaphorically, he chooses one type of death over another ("Yes, there is death in this business of whaling--a speechlessly quick chaotic bundling of man into Eternity" [Chapter 7]); heroic assertion triumphs over impersonal fate. Literally, of course, he does not die but merely takes to the sea.

How seriously is the reader to take Ishmael's expressed need to escape the coffins and funerals? Just as the mock epic imagery of the Sub-Sub makes this lackey appear even more insignificant, the comparison between Ishmael and Cato here magnifies the triviality of our
narrator's ostensibly heroic act. Consider this excerpt from Montaigne, a standard depiction of Cato:

Witness the younger Cato. When I see him dying and plucking out his bowels...I believe that without doubt he felt a sensual pleasure in an action so noble, and that he felt a greater satisfaction in it than in any other action of his life. He departed his life, said Cicero, rejoicing in having found a motive for leaving it....Cicero said, "Cato, whom nature had endowed with incredible strength of soul, and who, ever following the path he had traced for himself, had by habit strengthened the firmness of his character, was bound to die rather than look upon the face of a tyrant."14

Ishmael's flippant attitude makes him less than admirable, and later details contradict his early stance to make him appear foolish. When he blames "those stage managers, the Fates" for his part in the whaling voyage, "cajoling me into the delusion that it was a choice resulting from my own unbiased free will and discriminating judgment," he apparently has forgotten his earlier declaration that it was he that accounted it "high time" to sail. This contradiction continues to evoke from the reader mixed responses to figures of authority.

Ishmael's narrative irresponsibility is not confined to the inconsistency described above. In his ironic role, he continually makes outrageously illogical statements using what Chase calls the "Barnum method": "the deadpan presentation of facts, the air of authenticity, the apparent unawareness of anything fantastic or strange or fabulous in what one was saying."15 Not all his remarks
are absurd, however. He attacks the notion of free will, he sees the sea as a reflection of "the image of the ungraspable [and self-destructive] phantom of life...," he has a vision of universal slavery, he recognizes and accommodates himself to the "horror" of the world. All these seem to be weighty questions of a speculative mind; but this is not the only mind revealed in the chapter, and Ishmael's other dominant tone qualifies our reading of his philosophical one.

Allusions are plentiful throughout the chapter; and Ishmael's references to the Bible, Greek and Roman philosophy, and Greek myths, his knowledge of old Perians, Egyptians, Danes, and New Yorkers can appear either silly or wise depending on the mask he wears. Even the apparently objective technical language is used in self-dramatizing and self-mocking contexts: "they...make me jump from spar to spar, like a grasshopper in a May meadow"; "head winds are far more prevalent than winds from astern (that is, if you never violate the Pythagorean maxim)." Jargon can easily impress the uninformed and gullible, but here Ishmael forces the reader to be conscious of its use and wary of its manipulations. Mere information-collecting and pleasure-creating humbug is not the purpose of this introductory chapter.

Neither is "Loomings" the dreary picture of a "shelterless person in the face of almost absolute nothingness,"
as one critic describes it. It is true that there are no surprising gaps in the narrative structure that are often cause for humor. In fact, the chapter is rigidly organized: paragraphs carefully interlock with each other to form a very tight whole: paragraph 1 ends with a general observation about the attractiveness of the ocean; 2 begins with a specific example of an attractive ocean site; 3 gives a survey of the waterfront of that site; 4 describes the crowds there, etc. But the argument of these paragraphs is almost devoid of credible evidence; the material is a parody of logical argument. The discrepancy between expectations raised by the structure yet unfulfilled by the content indicates that the arguer is poking fun at both conventions and his reader's dependency, not seriously bemoaning his fate, shelterless or otherwise.

At times, Ishmael inspires confidence. Like a good story-teller, he appeals to the audience's interests and makes connections between his own experiences and observations and theirs. Some of the narrative details speak to a specific part of his readership: "your insular city," "Corlears Hook and Coenties Slip," "Manhattoes." For the larger class of readers unfamiliar with New York, Ishmael refers to experiences which he defines as universals, as, for example, his desire to escape quietly from reminders of his mortality: "almost all men in their degree, some
time or other, cherish very nearly the same feelings towards the ocean with me." Through his exclamations, he both evokes and participates in the wonder of his reader: "Ah!", "perdition!", "not a drop of water there!", and "But look! here come more crowds, pacing straight for the water and seemingly bound for a dive. Strange!" And he uses the detailed description of the prairie to involve the reader imaginatively in his argument. Yet these emotional appeals, by their content or their presentation, continually call attention to themselves and so discourage the "willing suspension of disbelief" with which the reader usually begins a fictional work.

True, Ishmael establishes narrative authority through the use of commands, usually at the beginnings of sentences: call, never mind, look, circumambulate, go, but look, tell, say, take, try, go, stand. Through these and other pointer words--"there now," "here they stood," "here is an artist" (my italics)--he carefully directs the reader's attention to the imaginative world he creates. And that world becomes the source of the "evidence" of his argument, "evidence" that gets its validity not from universal experiences (as we shall see) but from Ishmael's assertions alone. Those Manhattoes and those absent-minded professors and those artists seem to be characters out of a dream that behave without appropriate cause and mock the function they
apparently serve. Through this choice of evidence, Ishmael forces the reader to recognize the ironical mask he wears.

He uses rhetorical questions frequently throughout the chapter to imply that their unstated answers are shared by all:

- does the magnetic virtue of the needles of the compasses of those ships attract them thither?
- what is the chief element he employs?
- what is the charm wanting?

And, of course, the reader recognizes that the implied answer is not so obviously and undeniably true as the tone insists. Strung together, these questions may mock incredulity (the narrator's own), as they do in paragraph 3: "How then is this? Are the green fields gone? What do they here?" But more usually, as in paragraph 6, the series implies an answer that is irrefutable on one level, silly on another:

"Were Niagara but a cataract of sand, would you travel your thousand miles to see it? Why did the poor poet of Tennessee, upon suddenly receiving two handfuls of silver, deliberate whether to buy him a coat, which he sadly needed, or invest his money in a pedestrian trip to Rockaway Beach? Why is almost every robust healthy boy with a robust healthy soul in him, at some time or other, crazy to go to sea? Why upon your first voyage as a passenger, did you yourself feel such a mystical vibration, when first told that you and your ship were now out of sight of land? Why did the old Persians hold the sea holy? Why did the Greeks give it a separate deity, and own brother of Jove? Surely all this is not without meaning (my italics).

These questions make us see that other responses are reasonable, more reasonable than this single-minded
fascination with water.

That Niagara is a tourist spot because of its magnificent falls is easy to agree to, but a giant cataract of sand on the edge of Lake Erie might be just as attractive to tourists, for it is not necessarily water itself that is attractive about Niagara. The still unidentified and probably unreal poor poet (a character right out of a tall tale) offers evidence that viewing the sea may be more important than having personal comfort. But his "pedestrian trip" is a testimony as much to the other-worldliness of the artist-stereotype as to the lure of water. Healthy boys are "crazy to go to sea" only by Ishmael's assertion, not by any generally agreed upon definition of healthiness. And certainly not all ship-passengers share his "mystical vibration" on their first voyage. The movement of the paragraph--Ishmael seems to be grabbing "evidence" wherever he can find it--and even the final questions imply an over-simplifying mentality, interpreting everything, as it does, in terms of water-power. Because his questions so blatantly include all kinds of silent and unsatisfactory assumptions, he forces the reader to reject his argument and doubt his authority.

Like Ishmael's questions, his diction choices seem to reflect a disorganized mind. On the one hand, he uses the elaborately and abstractly, almost pretentiously formal "philosophical flourish," "circumambulate," and "consign
ourselves to perdition"; the highly connotative "growing grim about the mouth" and "damp, drizzly November in my soul"; and the more clichéd images of a pine tree that "shakes down its sighs like leaves" (pine/sigh, possibly a pun) and the sea-gazing men "posted like silent sentinels." Yet, on occasions, Ishmael leaves this formal diction (he similarly departs from formality in his earlier remarks on the librarian) and uses such phrases as "feet a going," "buy him a coat," "order me about some," and "who aint a slave?" as well as the irreverent identification of Adam and Eve as the "two orchard thieves." These shifts most obviously poke fun at the pretensions (rather, assumed pretensions) of the speaker; the folksy element bursts through the "literary" mask. But they also imply something of his mind: like the "Extracts," these details suggest both intellectual chaos and intellectual breadth and help establish Ishmael in his dual role as foolish narrator and clever manipulator of the narrative.

This ironic story-teller transcends expected classifications in other areas as well. He uses series to invite expectations which he may deny for humor: an old salt is "a Commodore, or a Captain, or a Cook"; and old families include the "Van Rensselaers, or Randolphs, or Hardicanutes." But just as likely--and this is what
makes his presentation seem uncontrolled, unpredictable—the series will be used in non-humorous contexts to impose order on the masses of details that crowd the chapter: "tied ..., nailed..., clinched"; "some leaning..., some looking...' some high aloft"; "has constant surveillance of me, secretly dogs me, and influences me."

Ishmael's inclusion of the literary and the colloquial, the respectful and the irreverent, makes the reader more and more uncertain about the narrator's role. He asks us not to join hands in brotherhood but to rub shoulder blades. He mythifies and ridicules the New Yorkers by an Irving allusion. With tongue-in-cheek, he compares his sufferings to Christ's. Ishmael blatantly displays pretensions throughout the chapter--as sufferer, as logician, as pedant--and deliberately (and successfully) courts his own rejection. Thus, by the time the reader comes to "doubtless, my going on this whaling voyage formed part of the grand program of Providence," in paragraph 11, he is ready to doubt not only Ishmael's interpretations but, since he states it, the notion of a grand program itself. Yet, at the same time, the occasionally sober notes in "Loomings" do not allow him to reject completely the authority of Ishmael's voice.

If through most of the chapter is heard the playful voice of a narrator who makes fun of his role and of the
reader's dependence on him, at the end especially the
tone changes radically. Reminding us of the chapter's
death- and ego-centered beginning, the end concentrates
again on Ishmael's own experiences. He drops his ironic
mask and appears to be, as Glauco Gambo has said, both
"telling us, and struggling the understand, his crucial experience": 18

But wherefore it was after having repeatedly
smelt the sea as a merchant sailor, I should
how take it into my head to go on a whaling
voyage... (p. 11);

Though I cannot tell why it was exactly..., yet, now that I recall all the circumstances,
I think I can see a little into the springs and motives... (P. 12).

Only by reading further in the novel can the reader
know how seriously to take these musings. Our acknow-
ledgment of them here (we do not--as we do with some
earlier details--disregard them immediately as claptrap)
is tentative, based finally on the last paragraph of the
chapter, where Ishmael presents himself as an inspired
man with a purpose (whatever it may be) and with a
vision out of Noah and Pym:

the great flood-gates of the wonder-world
swung open, and in the wild conceits that
swayed me to my purpose, two and two there
floated into my inmost soul, endless pro-
cessions of the whale, and mid most of them
all, one grand hooded phantom, like a snow
hill in the air.

The contradictory impulses of the whole chapter--the
narrator who continually discourages the reader from accepting his narrative authority; the argument that is undermined by its own evidence; the rigid structure that attempts to impose order on such far-flung details as mummies, buttered fowl, and forbidden seas--are replaced by a vision of freedom and mystery which makes those contradictions trivial.

Warwick Wadlington, in describing a predominant technique of the novel as an alternation between audience attraction and disengagement, argues that the opening epitomizes this strategy, that "we are made to value the absorbed passion that not only admits us, but draws us into Ishmael's obsessions and to relish also the ironic, elusive reserve that releases us from them. But I contend that the reader is much less secure than Wadlington suggests; Ishmael's irony forces him to remain suspect of even those statements which seem to reflect absorbed and sincere passions. Wadlington goes on to say that the narrator's playfulness "coaches the reader to secure his own liberty."\(^{19}\) while it somehow allows him to share a balance of wonder and skepticism. That liberty is certainly encouraged in "Loomings": the skepticism is invited. But, because of Ishmael's generally exaggerated presentation, the wonder is harder to come by, evoked, if at all, only in the final words on the hooded phantom, a powerful unknown that combines, in its abstractness, all that Ishmael knows of the whale
and all that we come to know.

As the reader continues the novel and sees Ishmael and Ahab and the Pharisee and all the sailors, he finds again the breadth of evidence that discourages final interpretations. The "Doubloon" chapter clearly shows that each individual subjectively transforms the external object, each object comes to mean many things, each meaning dependent upon the expectations of the individual perceiver and all meanings essential to the reader. And if "Loomings" establishes the inaccuracies of at least one perceiver, Ishmael, it also suggests another way of seeing: he may fail to analyze logically but he offers his imaginative vision as an alternative (also inadequate) mode of perception.

_Moby-Dick_’s opening, therefore, educates the reader quickly and easily in the transforming recorder and the inability of any conventional recorder, or recording system, to do justice to the complexity of even something so solid as a whale, let alone the values and forces it may represent. Instead of sharply delineating the surface subject of the novel, the whale, or establishing convincingly the narrator’s relationship to it, the first three sections of the novel parody conventions by their content and by their scope. The reader is forced to share the narrator’s skepticism about his role and his material; but, since Ishmael is the informing presence
of the whole book, a presence that is often difficult to characterize and impossible to judge as the novel progresses, he cannot be independent of this ironic story-teller. Instead, he must question everything Ishmael says against everything the reader knows. It is true that early in *Moby-Dick*, the experienced Ishmael laughs at his naive younger self; but the discrepancies between the two disappear once the *Pequod* sails and the actor-Ishmael becomes insignificant to the tale. (Unlike Henry Esmond, the older Ishmael does not repeatedly make condescending remarks about himself.) Although the teller-Ishmael continues to draw attention to his artifice--

Other poets have warbled the praises of the soft eye of the antelope, and the lovely plumage of the bird that never alights; less celestial, I celebrate a tail (Chapter 86); now it remains to conclude the last chapter of this part of the description by rehearsing--singing, if I may--the romantic proceeding of decanting off his oil... (Chapter 93).--

these reminders are infrequent. And the diction shifts, the rhetorical questions, the contradictions, the authorities cited, while they all contribute to our uneasiness about Ishmael, appear to become less effective warnings, less persuasive, spread as they are throughout one hundred and thirty-five chapters, lost or forgotten amidst the drama, the mystery, the philosophizings. We come to accept Ishmael’s version as a true one--we have no
other choice—even when we see his obvious distortions, his mock arguments, his superstitions, even while we recognize his unreliability and his subjectivity, even after we have read "Etymology," "Extracts," and "Loomings." But we know too that Ishmael's version is merely one in a series as long as the number of characters in the book; another teller would tell another tale.

Ishmael himself survived his trip by "floating on the margin of the ensuing scene." Perhaps we readers would be wise to remain on the margin as well, loose- and fast-fish, overpowered by neither Ishmael's nor Ahab's rhetoric, aware of the limitations of each and all. If Moby-Dick is a novel about perceptions and communicating perceptions, from the first we are made to see the complexities and distortions of both. What Ishmael teaches is that "there is no steady unretracing progress in this life; we do not advance through fixed gradations, and at the last one pause...." There is no steady progress or pause for us readers of Moby-Dick. Even the final image of the survivor Ishmael must be affected by what we know of him as narrator, a knowledge that begins with "Etymology." Fast and loose, we must rely on him as we suspect him, everyone else, and ourselves of oversimplification.


5 This phrase echoes Buckingham's consoling speech on the death of the King in *Richard III* (Variorum Edition, 1908), II, 3:
   
   The broken rancour of your high-swolne hates/hearts* 124
   But lately splinter'd, knit, and ioyn'd together,
   Must gently be preserv'd, cherish'd, and kept....

*alternate readings.


10 Flibbert, p. 109.


14. Thompson, p. 437n.


16. Berthoff, p. 128

17. Hayford and Parker note (p. 12) that Irving, in his *Knickertocker's History,* refers to New Yorkers as Manhattoes; "the province of the Manhattoes," he writes, "though of prodigious importance in the eyes of the inhabitants and its historian, was really of no very great consequence in the eyes of the world."


CHAPTER VII

THE SCARLET LETTER AND ITS "ENTRANCE-HALL":

"The Custom-House"

Just as musical overtures fall into several groups--those which anticipate tones and announce themes as well as those which seem to remain independent of the major work--so do their literary equivalents. At least one example, "The Custom-House" introduction to The Scarlet Letter, seems only peripheral to its novel. Rather than previewing the Puritan Boston of the seventeenth century, it describes a decaying Salem in which the narrator is, for a time, trapped and where he resurrections the material that becomes the Letter. Like the opening of Moby-Dick, "The Custom-House" raises questions about literary conventions, interpretation, and meaning. But Hawthorne's beginning seems to lack the focus of Melville's; and this rambling introduction to the historical tale fluctuates between a self-conscious variation on the author's preface, a critical essay on the romance, a history of the narrator, and a description of a nineteenth-century Customs-House. With all these roles, "The Custom-House" is not always directed toward announcing the strains of the Letter. As an overture, it is not simply independent of Hawthorne's novel but, occasionally at least, apparently
irrelevant to it.

Nathaniel Hawthorne regularly opens his works with prefaces which address general questions of genre and reader response as well as more specific issues. For, although the romance was gradually accepted by American readers "as a serious mode with its own body of aims and rules" during the decade before 1850, he continually attempted to justify it as a literary form. The statement that begins The House of Seven Gables (1851), for instance, argues for the writer's freedom to "present truth under circumstances of his own choosing or creation" as long as he remains faithful to "the truth of the human heart."

Hawthorne reiterates this declaration of authorial freedom repeatedly, to remind his audience of his broadened definition of fiction. As Iser would say, these introductory comments tell the reader to adjust the focus of his reading viewpoint to look for abstract truths rather than for detailed present realities. Like most of Hawthorne's fiction then, the introduction to The Scarlet Letter, "The Custom-House," contains a similarly descriptive section: it explains the function of the imagination in transforming and abstracting reality. But most of this essay is not so obviously directed to educating the reader in the genre as to presenting the narrator's view of a corrupted and corrupting Salem, heir of that stern yet vigorous Boston of the
romance.

As the only introductory essay not directly a part of the world it opens, "The Custom-House" may be unique in Hawthorne's works (and, perhaps, in all of fiction), but he had planned other "entrance-hall" beginnings to mediate, as this one does, between the world of fact and the world of the imagination. Septimus Felton (1872) was to open with a description of Hawthorne's residence at Wayside before going on to introduce the legend of the man who would not die. The Dolliver Romance (1876) was to contain both a preliminary sketch of Thoreau and information on the legend that was its subject. And The Ancestral Romance (1883) was to be prefaced by a description of consular experiences which would introduce its topic. 

By mixing the non-fictional and the fictional and blurring distinctions between the two, these openings could "pave the reader's way into the interior edifice of a book" which is a romance; where history is mythified, myth is historicized, and the Actual and Imaginary meet.

Because it is not actually incorporated into the Letter and because its setting and tone are so different from that of Hawthorne's romance, "The Custom-House" has frequently been attacked as unnecessary decoration. Hawthorne himself, in a defensive response to the public disapproval of his descriptions of the Custom-House
officials, wrote that "the sketch might, perhaps, have been wholly omitted, without loss to the public or detriment to the book...."\(^5\) Other critics have called the essay inappropriate, an inadequate preparation for the romance.\(^6\) Several have questioned Hawthorne's motives for including some of the material; he may, indeed, have been seeking political revenge.

There is no doubt that the opening of the essay wrongly directs the reader about the amount of Custom-House information; more than a "few extra touches" are needed to represent that mode of life. Because of the extraordinary length and breadth of this opening, its relationship with the main text must be called into question. Certainly, the introduction does not inform like the beginnings of *Bleak House* or *Henry Esmond*; nor does it seem even as relevant as the misdirected beginnings of *Martin Chuzzlewit* and *The Egoist*. Adding more than the "sunshine" and the bulk that Hawthorne attributes to it, "The Custom-House," perhaps because it is so disconnected to the *Letter*, forces the reader to question the narrator as editor/guide, shows him imaginative ways of seeing, and provides an ironic frame to the world of seventeenth-century Salem by describing a present with neither guilt nor shame nor force nor future.
The essay can be divided according to its four subjects: its two paragraph introduction, along with paragraphs 33-41, 55 and 57 deal with traditional prefatory material (a definition of the reader, an introduction to the narrator, an explanation of the source of The Scarlet Letter, a comment of the Letter); paragraphs 42-47 explain the operation of the imagination in a romance; paragraphs 7-11, 28-32, 48-54, and 56 present a brief history of the narrator; and, closely related (and occasionally interrelated) to this, paragraphs 3-6, 12-27 describe the Custom-House environment. Notice how these subjects are, by and large, treated distinctly. Although all can be related, the essay does not draw strong connections among the sections; nor is each similarly tied to the Letter.

Beyond its content, what separates "The Custom-House" most noticeably from the main body of the Letter is its tone. Though it certainly is inappropriate to the dark world of Boston, the humor in the introduction lets the narrator mock (and the reader easily recognize) the stupidity of certain literary conventions, to prepare the reader for the replacement the romance will offer. The speaker makes fun of a particular kind of narrator by the model he invokes: "The example of the famous 'P. P., Clerk of this Parish' was never more faithfully followed."
This reference to *The Memoirs of P. P., Clerk of this Parish* implies that "The Custom-House" will be characterized by a self-important narrator as the eighteenth-century parody it. But Hawthorne's story-teller has previously declared his modesty--he is "disinclined to talk overmuch of myself and my affairs..."--so that the allusion, an ironic contrast to his proclamation and an accurate representation of his role in essay where his opinions and perceptions are its substance, shows a contradiction in our story-teller.

This begins an attack on the "reliable narrator" tradition, but the speaker also assaults the convention of the narrative's explanation of the manuscript, a characteristic of Gothic literature which had become an instrument of parody by the mid-nineteenth century (see Poe's burlesques). The testimony he offers to establish the authenticity of the *Letter* also lets him undermine his role as editor. The reference to Pue in Felt's *Annals*, his exhumation, the explanation of the discovery of his private documents in his public office, the reference to the Essex Historical Society, the description of the manuscript, the narrator's offer to exhibit the letter and papers—all are called into question both by the abundance of "documentation" and by contextual details: Pue's wig that makes him part of a comic motif of heads;
the false clues about the letter's use; the nature of Fue's evidence (made up of the oral testimony of people who remember, from their youths, Hester Prynne as an old woman); and the declaration of narrative embellishment of authentic details. "With superb irony," John Stubbs writes, "Hawthorne asks his readers to consider The Scarlet Letter as a fictionalization of brief documents gathered by an obscure surveyor from the memoirs of old people about an epoch which is only sparsely recorded in the Custom House."8

And the extraordinary precise description of the letter—"By an accurate measurement, each limb is proved to be precisely three inches and a quarter in length"—mocks, like Melville's citing of authorities at the opening of Moby-Dick, the editor's role, attacks the inadequacy and irrelevancy of the kind of information he records (just the facts), and raises all kinds of questions about the nature of fiction, history, and knowledge. Objective data offer no revelations either in the sketch our narrator writes or in the historical romance he prepares for his reader.

This storyteller, like Ishmael, has very little respect for the role of narrator as helpful simplifier. Instead, often using Biblical language to suggest a narrative authority which he may humorously undercut (he casts the
leaves of his book forth upon the wind), he reveals the complicated personality of a exclaimer who can take personal and playful revenge on the political system in general and the Whigs in particular; who feels superior to the other inhabitants of the Custom-House, most of whom are "languid" and "unenlivening" like Salem itself; who is both attracted and repelled by the past, shameful and proud of his relatives, a disappointment to and an apologizer for them (though even his apologies become a joke in the "exorcism" section, P. 10).

Like Ishmael too, this narrator is not always ironic. The questions he raises about his role and about the literature he is to present are unsettling; and he is most sober when he describes his failures to his ancestors (as "a mere storybook writer"), records an intolerable present which he transcends only by transforming it by his imagination, and explains how any romance-writer's imagination can similarly "spiritualize" the commonplace. This customs officer/editor/storyteller/writer uses his art to escape to the greater past of the Letter. He invites the reader to accompany him in discovering the meanings of the mysterious embroidered symbol.

Through the metaphorical language, the reader is able to share his imaginative escape. Comparisons are not made between the unfamiliar and the abstract (as they
often are in Meredith) but primarily between one physical object and another, so that the reader can easily recognize how solid items are transformed. Salem is "a disarranged checkerboard" where "human nature will not flourish anymore than a potato." The old men under the Surveyor are rusty swords and fallen blades of grass, mindless and inanimate. Votes lead to the guillotine, the latter cliché refreshed by the repeated references to heads (Pue's and his wig, the threatened white heads of the speaker's co-workers, the narrator's own head being the first to fall, Irving's Headless Horseman, The Posthumous Papers of a Decapitated Surveyor). The Inspector is some kind of inhuman animal: a "kind of new contrivance of Mother Nature in the shape of man," a beast of the field (with as much moral sense as the earth he was created from), a type of gormandising Macbeth who finds "the ghosts of bygone meals ... continually rising up before him; not in anger or retribution, but as if grateful of his former appreciation. . . ." And the Old General is ennobled not by a list of deeds, characteristic of traditional histories and fictions too, but by an extended comparison to an indestructible old fort. Even the red letter is presented not as a simply verifiable historical object ("an ornamental article of dress") but as a symbol that needs to be interpreted: "Certainly, there was some
deep meaning in it, most worthy of interpretation, and which, as it were, streamed forth from the mystic symbol, subtly communicating itself to my sensibilities, but evading the analysis of my mind."

It is this intensely imaginative reaction that our narrator relies on throughout the essay and that leads him to the past. He imagines that his ancestors condemn his writing; he feels the Old General has a mental life; he fancies that Surveyor Pue, "in his garb of a hundred years gone by, and wearing his immortal wig...had met him in the deserted chamber..." and given him a challenge; he senses the relationship of Hester and her contemporaries: "she gained from many people the reverence due to an angel, but, I should imagine, was looked upon by others as an intruder and a nuisance...." Consider, finally, the speaker's description of the General:

It might be, that he lived a more real life within his thoughts, than amid the inappropriate environment of the collector's office. The evolution of the parade of the tumult of the battle, the flourish of old, heroic music, heard thirty years before;--such scenes and sounds, perhaps, were all alive before his intellectual sense (my italics).

This habit of imaginatively evoking the past and ignoring or altering the present provides the speaker material for his history. Not simply a recorder, he is a transformer whose subjective responses to physical and "spiritual" characters and settings color his reports.
As a result, he offers very few of the specific details that often define a fiction. True, the chapter early presents concrete "realities": a brick building, a vertical flag, a grassy pavement, an enormous eagle, and Salem, formerly a bustling wharf, "now burdened with decayed wooden warehouses...few or no symptoms of commercial life..." But these objective details seem out of place in this history, realistic data imposed on a world that is not defined realistically. Thus, even before he comes to the explanation of the romance, the reader is lured from expectations of realism; he is shown that precise physical details are incongruous and inappropriate to this "house"; and he is educated into the fictionalized and abstract world of the romance where objects are only meaningful once they have been subjectively interpreted.

The narrator's description of his literary genre comes near the end of "The Custom-House" and disrupts the tone and movement of the preceding fiction to demand a different "intellectual machinery" of the reader. He is made to withdraw from his participation in the humorous sketches and to join the narrator in a self-conscious examination of the creative forces behind the essay, forces that transform both Salem and Boston. A new movement is announced here, one more sober and more ambitious, where the imagination resurrects the past, not through caricature
but through some kind of magic that can unite the historic
with the fantastic: "it would be too much in keeping with
the scene to excite surprise, were we to look about us and
discover a form beloved, but gone hence, now sitting quietly
in a streak of this magic moonshine, with an aspect that would
make us doubt whether it had returned from afar, or had
never once stirred from our fireside."

This imaginative evocation has, in a sense, been in
force throughout the essay, written, the reader learns,
after the Surveyor has left the deadening influence of the
government post. The familiar world is recalled and made
to seem less familiar in "The Custom-House." In the romance
the unfamiliar is made to seem familiar; the Actual and
the Imaginary meet to create a strange and remote world
that looks true. And like the "intellectual forge" and
the "moonlight" of the narrator's explanation, it is the
abstract symbol which gives meaning; in the essay, the
narrator interprets his personal symbols; in the romance,
he points the reader to various interpretations. Charles
Feidelson argues that the romance is "a kind of exposition
on the nature of symbolic perception. Hawthorne's subject
is not only the meaning of adultery but also meaning in
general; not only what the focal system is but how it gains
significance."9 As "The Custom-House" demonstrates,
objects and acts acquire meanings both through tradition
(the mirror represents the imagination, the eagle the American government) and through personal interpretation that can transform tradition: the Adulterer can become an Angel; the eagle can be a vulture.

In the opening, then, the narrator shows how characters and events can be subjectively interpreted to indicate how meanings expand depending on how data are interpreted. In The Scarlet Letter, though there is no doubt that he reinvigorates the past, the speaker does not so blatantly transform his material. And while he directs the reader to see Chillingworth's villainy, Dimmesdale's weaknesses, and Hester's strengths, at the same time he reminds that reader of the multiplicity of possibilities in interpreting the "facts" of the history, of any history; the rosebush may be a survivor of the wilderness or a relic of the sainted Anne Hutchinson; Hester may or may not have been invited by Mistress Hibbins (who may or may not be a witch) to join the Devil; witnesses can offer various accounts of Dimmesdale's experience on the scaffold; multiple theories can explain the Salemites' attitude to Hester's art:

Whether from commiseration for a woman of so miserable a destiny; or from the morbid curiosity that gives a fictitious value even to common or worthless things; or by whatever other intangible circumstance was then, as now, sufficient to bestow on some persons, what others might seek in vain; or because Hester really filled a gap which must otherwise have remained vacant....
Because nothing is simple, the reader is directed to complexities that are never resolved. Even the past which can be a great preserver—

Yet there were intervals when the whole scene... seemed to vanish from [Hester's] eyes, or, at least, glimmered indistinctly before them, like a mass of imperfectly shaped and spectral images. Her mind, and especially her memory, was preternaturally active, and kept bringing up other scenes than this roughly hewn street of a little town...—can also be a burden and a destroyer, as Dimmesdale attests. Characters might believe, events might be explained, interpretation might be drawn; the narrator, however, does not draw conclusions, nor does he fully allow the reader to do so. He contradicts himself about the heavenly A. He forgets the physician's other name. He is unable to say anything unequivocally. Regarding the minister's temptation, for instance, he promises to "hold nothing back from the reader" when, in fact, he has been withholding authoritative information consistently; and he proclaims "we blush to tell it," a cliché which makes his subject, himself, and his telling ludicrous. In his mocking his relationship with the reader, he is rather like Meredith's narrator; but the actions of characters in The Egoist finally enable the reader to judge them. The Scarlet Letter discourses any final judgments.

From the possibilities he raises, from the revelations of the various characters, from the evaluations he makes
and fails to make, like Ishmael, the speaker forces us to recognize historical, moral, and literary complexities—Chillingworth's behavior is not unprovoked; the minister is not completely selfish—and helps us create coherence, not resolving all questions, of course, but pointing out what is important for understanding the work: the complex motivations of the three main characters, the complex meanings of truth and justice. Those unresolved details by and large concern questions of precise interpretation, about what was exactly seen or heard or thought in contexts that allow for several explanations. These questions, more typical of a realistic novel, reinforce the major thrust of the romance: they ask the reader to be skeptical of his own interpretive skills; they warn him against judging too hastily. For in its exploration of the nature and discovery of meaning, The Scarlet Letter, like its opening and like Moby-Dick, shows truth to be complicated and transformable. The reader, thus, should not expect comfortable answers and pat moralities but a tentativenss, an unresolvedness, that allows for other evidence, other interpretations. Where Melville's novel mixes the various roles of Ishmael to construct a mighty work which blends tragedy, romance, epic, and scientific treatise, Hawthorne creates a much simpler edifice. In both cases, however, the reader is faced with a surplus of
information to comprehend, sort, make sense of, but never to resolve finally. Both encourage multiple ways of seeing.

The Scarlet Letter is a magnificent edifice, provided with an entrance that foreshadows themes, raises critical questions, and identifies the reader's role. As the narrator again and again "interprets," "recreates," and "embellishes" in "The Custom House," with the audience participating imaginatively in the world the speaker half remembers and half makes, the reader sees that history and truth and meaning are created by the individual, that they are not objective or factual or universal, and that, consequently, any judgments must be merely provisional. That hesitancy must be carried over to The Scarlet Letter where a transgressor easily condemned by most of the community is shown to be more than a simple sinner. But the romance's opening is not as pointed as it could be. The material that prepares the reader for the Letter loses some of its effectiveness (just as the chapter itself loses focus) amidst the very much developed Customs' information. Certainly, less time could have been spent to show the narrator's sense of humor, his guilts, his environment, and his saving imagination. Why is it so fully developed?

Sam Baskett has called "The Custom-House" both prologue and epilogue to The Scarlet Letter. Although
this is more comprehensive than most, it too is an inadequate description, for, like all overtures, the sketch accompanies the reader throughout his reading of the book, continually inviting him to make comparisons between the two worlds. The few contrasts by the narrator help the reader recognize likenesses: Hester is questioned by an elder who "looked like the darkly engraved portraits we see prefixed to old volumes of sermons...." Occasionally, these comparisons reflect on the heirs of the Puritans, the Custom-House officials. We are told, for instance, that Hester's society is characterized as "being then in the first stages of joyless deportment" that has, presumably, settled in by the nineteenth century. And the vulgar supersition of those earlier days may offer more truth "than our modern incredulity may be inclined to admit."

The reader who compares the societies of the Letter and "The Custom-House" finds that the present with which the volume opens, decaying Salem, a city of former vitality peopled by strong and powerful (and cruel) Puritans like the narrator's own ancestors, has inherited neither the strength nor creativity of Hester, nor the stern and unforgiving justice of her society. The hopeful future that Hester imagines--"the whole system of society is to be torn down, and built up anew. Then the very nature of [women], or its long hereditary habit, which has become
like nature, is to be essentially modified, before woman can be allowed to assume what seems a fair and suitable position."--is unavailable to women (there are none at the Custom-House; those that visit bring "tools of magic, the broom and mop"), and the society which has been torn down lies in a rubble. It has no creativity; for the narrator as surveyor, writing was hopeless toil. It has no energy and no profit, unable even to copy the Puritan world in "accomplishing so much, precisely because it imagined and hoped so little." It can make no judgments because its members can not think. Memory for them does not offer a temporary release from an unbearable present (as it does for Hester and the Surveyor) but replaces the present with "frozen witticism of past generations thawed" and dreams of old battles and tough geese. This new world that Hester has so much hope for offers a bare survival that suffocates the imagination. The content of "The Custom-House" does not preview the world of The Scarlet Letter; rather, it overshadows it, making the romance's simplicity, starkness, and strength even more attractive in view of what replaces them.

Like Moby-Dick, The Scarlet Letter and its opening reject the security of certain literary conventions to investigate a new fictional form, one which elevates the individual and which, consequently, reports actions from
various viewpoints, all of which are valid, all of which are incomplete. Their beginnings start an uneasy relationship between reader and storyteller; in each, the reader must assume more responsibility for interpretation because the narrator has refused to present clear answers or simple plot. "The Custom-House" is not an easy entrance to the Letter but, ultimately, a puzzling confrontation for the reader who knows what it means, but is unsure why. And even this essay, which tries to account for its content and style, is still unable to justify its length. An ironic comment it is, but perhaps a comment that is too long-winded to be fully effective.
NOTES


3Harry West, "Hawthorne's Editorial Pose," AL 44 (May, 1972), 211.


7Kent Bales, "Hawthorne's Prefaces and Romantic Perspectivism," ESQ 23 (1977), 81. Mr. Bales credits Pope and Gay with the original P. P., and finds references to the work in Francis Osbaldistone and in Carlyle's Sartor Resartus (near the end of Book 1): "Interspersed also are long purely autobiographical delineations; yet without connexion, without recognizable coherence; so unimportant, so superfluously minute, they almost remind us of 'P. P. Clerk of this Parish.'"


CHAPTER VIII

FINALE

The King's grave advice to the White Rabbit--"Begin at the beginning and go on till you come to the end; then stop."--ignores the difficulties that greet a storyteller at the beginning of his work. Foremost among these are the very challenging responsibilities of defining his relationship to his audience and of indicating something of the nature of the work its members are to read. Novelists, like public speakers and essayists, start to influence their readers with their first word--or, as Dickens' serialized novels demonstrate, their first cover. Though they will never be as close to their audience as the speaker or essayist may be to his, novelists try to shape their public into ideal readers of their works, those who will recognize norms and themes and generic constraints. This shaping takes place through the directions implicit in the text; as he progresses through a book, the reader changes, becoming, for instance, more sensitive to the word plays in The Egoist or to the prejudices of the narrator in Henry Esmond.

A rhetorical analysis, because it describes the relationship between reader and text, can be a valuable tool for investigating that shaping. It may help us understand
why Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* is so problematic by exam-
ining how well she has prepared the reader for the Crawford's
rejection; or it may let us describe in detail the effect
that beginning John Fowles' *The Collector* from Clegg's view-
point has on the reading experience and our judgment of the
protagonist; or it may demonstrate how Saul Bellow's opening
of *Henderson the Rain King*, with its chaotic narrative style,
may make the reader qualify the rebirth suggested in Hender-
son's final jubilant dance. Such lengthy texts as these,
however, make impossible demands on the rhetorical critic.

Some novels do more than provide a cumulative educa-
tion for their readers: they include overtures which pre-
view the fictional worlds their audiences soon know in
detail. This seems to be true especially of nineteenth-
century fiction: in England, perhaps due to its popular
audience and the frequency of its serializations and oral
readings; in American, where the form is far less common,
the overture becomes another borrowed convention that
is transformed. A rhetorical analysis of these special
beginnings is practical and helpful, enabling us--in a
clearly limited text--to see how the reader is taught to
sharpen the skills he will need to participate more fully
in those fictions, skills which invite him, from the first,
to criticize Sir Leicester Dedlock for his ignorance of
Chancery, to refuse pity to Willoughby Patterne, to dis-
trust any of the authorities in *Moby-Dick*. 
Because it demands such a close study, a rhetorical examination of these nineteenth-century overtures can allow us to hypothesize intelligently about how topical details are used to appeal to a work's original audience, but only when we willingly immerse ourselves (as well as we are able) in the social, cultural, and historical milieu of the text. "Words," writes T. S. Eliot, "Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place, / Will not stay still." Recapturing the dated meanings of some of those words, names, images, implicitly invites us to see distinctions between our twentieth-century responses to a text and earlier ones, differences which, though they may not change our interpretation of a novel, can indicate how much more material there is to interpret, how many more layers there are to the lines of prose. And even when very few of the details of the fiction consist of topical allusions and dated vocabulary, a rhetorical analysis forces us to pay more attention to the strategies of paragraph organization, sentence structure, and word choice, the textual material that shapes the reader.

More interesting than what it can tell us about the literary object is, I think, what a study of reader-shaping can tell us about the reading process. It must be true that the text becomes literature as it is read; that something happens in the reader's mind to transform those
letters on the page into some vital and ongoing and influential process; that the transformations can vary, depending on the restrictions inherent in the clues of the text. And this dissertation has indicated, I hope, some of the different kinds of readers the different texts can make: from the reader of Bleak House who is invited to share the omniscient narrator's emotional vision, established primarily through repetition and topical appeals; to the reader of "The Custom-House" opening to The Scarlet Letter who is forced to question the narrator's control, motive, and meaning in order to achieve the intellectual curiosity and independence demanded by the romance.

Georges Poulet says, "The work lives its own life within me; in a certain sense, it thinks itself, and it even gives itself meaning within me."¹ If this is so, just as we should give fiction more of the attention we give to poetry, surely the reading process deserves some of the attention we give to the literary product. These overtures allow us to study both.
NOTES

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Altick, Richard D. "Victorian Readers and the Sense of the Present." Midway 10 (Spring, 1970), 95-120.


Bromhill, Kentley. "Phiz's Illustrations to Bleak House." The Di 40 (June, 1944), 146-50.


"Chancery Reform." The Times, 31 January 1851, p. 5, col. 5.


Hagan, John. "'Bankruptcy of His Heart': The Unfulfilled Life of Henry Esmond." NCF 27 (December, 1972), 293-316.


Hoffman, Michael J. "The Anti-Transcendentalism of Moby-Dick." Georgia Review 23 (Spring, 1969), 3-16.


"Letter to the Editor." The Times, 20 February 1834, p. 1, col. 4.


"London, Friday, March 28, 1851." The Times, 28 March, 1851, p. 4, col. 5.


"The Orang-outang." *The Penny Magazine,* 7 (February 3, 1838), 41-44.


Wilkenfeld, Roger. "'Before the Curtain' and *Vanity Fair.*" *NCF* 26 (December, 1971), 307-318.
