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Readers, writers, and the grounds for a textual divorce

Zinman, Jane Ann, Ph.D.
The Ohio State University, 1988

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U·M·I
READERS, WRITERS, AND THE GROUNDS FOR A TEXTUAL DIVORCE

DISSERTATION

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

By

Jane A. Zinman, B.A., M.A.

* * * * *

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Much of the work in rhetorical theory has been primarily concerned with the identification of the values and beliefs of the implied reader and author. The congruence between these belief systems becomes a standard by which to measure the realization of an author's intentions in the text. This dissertation examines the consequences of a reader's inability to accept the rhetorical invitations extended by an author. The kinds of problematic transactions examined are those generated by historical texts, by ambiguous texts, by works with plural intentions, and by works that employ a kind of combative or assaultive rhetoric. Chapters examine the following works to reflect the above kinds of problems: Pamela and An American Dream are examined together to reveal the difference(s) between a historical problem and an ideological problem; The Turn of the Screw examined the effect on the reader of the shifting
from one narrative (and hence interpretive) possibility to the other that the text demands; The French Lieutenant's Woman was examined in terms of the kind of tension that resulted from Fowles use of mimetic means to create his thematic history; finally, Naked Lunch was examined to determine the limits of the assaultive rhetoric Burroughs used to further his thematic ends.

This investigation into some of the problematic aspects of intentionality led to a more focused understanding of the multi-faceted and complex nature of the reading process. For the activity of reading is at heart experiential--intellectual and emotional and ethical and ideological. Hence, the approach views texts as opportunities for dialogues and interactions; it is not only a question of the active construction of meaning or reconstruction of an author's intent, but one of making explicit the way(s) our intellectual, emotional, and ethical responses to authorial invitations to do various things affect the nature of the texts we study and what we teach others to do with those transactions.
INTRODUCTION

In his preface to The Picture of Dorian Gray, Oscar Wilde captured the critical climate of his age and summed up the principal tenets of literary criticism that would pervade for the next fifty-odd years: "No artist has ethical sympathies" and "all art is quite useless."\(^1\) Dissatisfaction with these views and prevailing New Critical assumptions about the nature of literary art as a special kind of language has led critics to develop new frameworks and strategies both for elucidating the meaning of texts themselves and for asserting the value of interpretive activity. Much of the work in this area developed by challenging the notion of the objective and autonomous nature of the text itself; one important result of this challenge is that the location of literary meaning shifted to the reader or to the reading process.\(^2\)

The concept of the reader as a textual construct is characteristic of much of the initial work in this area; both Gibson's "mock reader" and Prince's "narratee" are defined by the kinds of roles a reader is asked to adopt by
the text: "We assume, for the sake of experience, that set of attitudes and qualities which the language asks us to assume." Gibson's definition is clearly within a New Critical framework, with its emphasis on language as determining the text. Others shifted their attention to the reading process itself, to the way(s) in which and by which actual readers "make sense" of a literary work. The approaches of Fish, Barthes, and psychological theories of reading, exemplified in the work of Holland and Bleich, disparate as they are, share the assumption that the reader determines the meaning of a text. Within this framework, theorists have attempted to elucidate the cultural codes and prevalent aesthetic conventions that define not only the reader's activity, but ultimately the reader herself. Within this new context, much of the work of feminist and Marxist critics gained impetus. Feminist criticism is largely devoted to elucidating the ways in which literary works depict, define, and promulgate the prevailing patriarchal power structure. Fetterley, for example, sees numerous literary works as presenting "a version and an enactment of the drama of men's power over women." Such endeavors, however, often result in various forms of thematic criticism, a type of interpretive activity which again limits the nature of the literary text. In addition, while this kind of critical endeavor challenges the view of the
text as an autonomous artifact, it nonetheless often neglects the affective quality of texts.

Rhetorical theory provides a fruitful way to bridge the concerns of political, ethical, and formalist criticism both in terms of interpretive activity and as a classroom heuristic. Rhetorical theory shares with formalism the view of a literary work as an object intentionally created and designed by an author to produce/induce certain intellectual and emotional effects in readers and shares with political criticism the assumption that those effects have an active influence on readers and are hence capable of changing the world. Currently, however, rhetorical criticism is in and of itself insufficient. As Suleiman astutely points out:

If a successful reading experience requires (1) a correct identification of the implied reader's values and beliefs—which are by definition also those of the implied author—and (2) an identification with the implied reader to the extent of "completely agreeing" with his values, then the critic's task must be not only to show how such identifications are invited by the rhetoric of a given work, but also to explore, in some problematic works, why such identifications may be difficult or even impossible to achieve by an actual reader.5

Despite the problematic nature of many of Suleiman's key terms, particularly "successful reading experience" and "completely agreeing," her call for an examination of problematic textual interactions is an apt one. Most rhe-
torical critics, primarily Booth and Rabinowitz, do seem content to stop their activity with the identification of the implied author's values and beliefs. Booth's groundbreaking work in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, for example, provides an attractive model of interpretation in part because it offers an important role to both the author and reader as well as to the text. Yet Booth's work is primarily a text-centered, intrinsic approach with a firm commitment to intentionality, thus seeming to slight the problem of the potential variety of readers' responses to the rhetorical elements of the text and hence the consequences of that variety for interpretation. While Booth acknowledges the necessity for becoming dissenting or "resisting" readers, his own practical criticism demonstrates his primary commitment to understanding as fully as possible the author's communicative strategies and hence intention. Rabinowitz attempted to complicate Booth's notion of the reader by positing four types of audiences simultaneously engaged in the reading process--an actual "flesh and blood" reader, a narrative audience, an ideal audience, and an authorial audience--while remaining essentially within Booth's framework and assumptions. Rabinowitz's commitment to Booth's major assumption is nowhere more evident than in the following statement:
But even if an author makes a serious attempt to write for the "real people out there," the gap between the actual and authorial audience will always exist. And since all artistic choices and hence effects, are calculated in terms of the hypothetical knowledge and beliefs of the authorial audience, this gap must be bridged by readers who wish to appreciate the book.

Rabinowitz's formulation indeed complicates the relationship between author and reader and offers a concrete direction for interpretation and critical activity. Rabinowitz makes the following primary distinctions in audiences in which a reader is asked to participate in the activity of reading: there is the actual reader, the person actually purchasing and reading the work; while engaged in reading, this reader is addressed by a narrator, generally an imitation of the author, who can be identified as holding certain specifiable characteristics, knowledge, and beliefs; and finally, there is the authorial audience, the hypothetical audience for which the author rhetorically structures her work. For Rabinowitz, this model reflects the possible interactions among three kinds of "readers." Thus, it provides a framework within which one can investigate some of the tensions that may arise between the actual knowledge and beliefs of real readers and the kinds of beliefs they are asked to adopt as members of a narrative audience. One can further examine the problems that may arise between the beliefs of the narrative audience and the
authorial audience or between the actual audience and the authorial audience. Yet while Rabinowitz pays some attention to the tensions between narrative and authorial audiences, he pays none to those that can arise between the actual and authorial audiences or the actual and narrative audiences. In a later investigation of narrative conventions, Rabinowitz addresses this lack, and allows for a greater degree of resistance by actual readers, but he does so from the perspective of the various interpretive conventions readers apply (or misapply) to texts, rather than from the perspective of the conflict of values and beliefs between readers and authors.8

The following pages will explore the implications of this problem in an attempt not only to elucidate the various points at which rhetorical transactions can break down but also to explore some of the consequences of such breakdowns for interpretation and evaluation. In other words, I will address such questions as what kinds of gaps produce tensions in artistic works; how significant, i.e., how bridgeable or unbridgeable those gaps may be; how the tensions created by different gaps lead to different emotional effects; and how those resulting tensions influence the way one reacts to (appreciates) a literary text.

The mere passage of time itself, history in the broadest sense, is perhaps the most obvious kind of gap
that can separate authors and readers. The greater the span of time, the greater the potential difficulties a reader can encounter in her attempt to understand a text. Even assuming one undertook the necessary historical research in an attempt to understand the values and beliefs of an earlier age, problems nonetheless remain, as we see in our classrooms almost every day. Such problems are by and large culturally determined, but not always. Many works depend on precise historical knowledge for their rhetorical effects, whether that "history" is as far away from us in time as in a work by Shakespeare or as close to us as one dealing with the Vietnam War. Most often, however, the greater the distance from our own time, the greater the difficulty in sharing those presupposed values and beliefs an author may reasonably rely upon in making his artistic choices. In the case of Richardson's *Pamela*, for example, the criticism of the work reflects both the kinds of problems that arose for Richardson's contemporary audience and also those that arose for a twentieth-century audience, problems that differ from each other not only in kind but also in degree and effect. The major objections to *Pamela* seem to derive from Pamela's potential hypocrisy, her vanity and her ability to plot and connive, and from the kind of moral/religious views that underlie her ethics, i.e., the "dollars-and-cents" approach to sin, the
emphasis on chastity as a valuable end in itself, the na­
ture of her marriage to Mr. B., and the view of women's
role and status in society that the novel asks us to en­
dorse. As I discuss the novel, I will examine the kind of
tension generated when one can understand the formal artis­
tic necessity for certain actions and episodes but cannot
intellectually or emotionally accept such actions as satis­
fying. In addition, the clear need to accept chastity as a
virtuous and ethical end in itself in order to participate
emotionally in Pamela's plight and ultimate fate generates
an almost unbridgeable problem for many modern readers.

Yet to say this leads to another problem: in what way does
a historical problem differ from an ideological problem?
That is, precisely how does our inability to participate
emotionally in Pamela's plight differ from our inability to
respond appropriately to a literary work that embodies,
say, sexist values? To elucidate this difference, I will
briefly look at Mailer's *An American Dream*, a work in which
the negative portrayal of women generates the risk for
Mailer that we will fail to respond appropriately to Ro-
jack's experience.

Ambiguity is another problem for those interested in
exploring rhetorical transactions. To the extent that a
work is truly ambiguous, the reader is placed in the highly
uncomfortable position of using at least two conflicting
reading strategies and of attempting to participate in at least two narrative audiences. The most celebrated example of such a text is James's The Turn of the Screw. The two readings of the novel, based on whether one takes the ghosts to be real or not, illustrate the tensions that can occur between the knowledge and beliefs of the two narrative audiences and those of the authorial audience. On one narrative level, we are asked to adopt the conventions and beliefs of fantastic fiction—we are reading a "ghost story." On the other narrative level, we are asked to adopt the conventions and expectations of realistic psychological fiction and see the events as illustrating the breakdown of a personality in the face of some circumstances beyond our rational control. James gives the reader no clear evidence as to which narrative audience he would prefer his readers to join, and the tension thus produced has profound consequences for interpretation and evaluation. One solution to the tension generated by determinately ambiguous works is to decide that such works seem to posit ambiguity as a valuable end in itself, hence a positive value in the world. Although this may be true of some works, I want to argue that James's overall intention is not adequately reflected in such a conclusion, and that, therefore, The Turn produces an unbridgeable gap between James and his readers.
Works that embody dual intentions present a whole different set of problems for readers, particularly in their consequences for interpretation and evaluation. Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is an interesting case from this perspective. In his work, he attempts to create a thematic recreation of the transition in values and beliefs from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, a recreation that depends largely on engaging us in the narrative by employing the realistic conventions of the Victorian novel. His secondary, and subsidiary, intention is to write a *nouveau roman* that privileges both literary and ethical twentieth-century values. These two aims conflict with one another at various points in the work, and the conflict gives rise to some interesting questions about such rhetorical transactions and our interpretive and evaluative conventions. Many readers come away from the book either feeling rather cheated of the emotional satisfaction of a closed ending or else are unable to accept that frustration as an integral part of the work's intention. Most of the criticism of the work focuses on the thematic issues concerning existentialism raised by the narrative, and rightly so. Fowles does indeed employ devices that ask us to "read" in this manner. Nonetheless, we are also asked to engage emotionally in the fates of the characters, and that engagement is what Fowles ultimately
undercuts and denies us. This breakdown in the rhetorical transaction may be used as a basis for evaluation in that one can finally say that the work is flawed as a result of this tension. But to do so, however, is to denigrate Fowles' right and freedom—issues very much central to the narrative—to create such a work, and raises questions about the limitations of our criteria for judging narratives such as his.

Rhetorical choices themselves may often present problems for the success of a communicative transaction. Most often, authors aim for a complicitous relationship with their readers, even in the most ironic of works, as Booth has pointed out in his *A Rhetoric of Irony*. There exists, however, a small body of works in which the kind of rhetoric employed is designed to assault the reader, and the consequent relationship between author and reader is uneasy at best and combative at the worst. Kosinski and Burroughs are paradigmatic cases, both attempting to expose the darker side of human interaction in several of their works. Such intentions run the risk of alienating the readers they wish to educate, and I will examine the limits of such assaultive rhetoric in communicative transactions.

The methodology used reveals a way in which one may bridge the critical gap between formal analysis and the more "extrinsic" criticism of some of the Marxist, Freud-
ian, or feminist scholars by more fully elucidating the kinds of problematic interactions among authors, readers, and texts that can generate interpretive difficulties. Moreover, this investigation into problematic transactions may potentially form a bridge between the aims of political and ethical criticism and formal criticism as well. Since the aims of the former involve the study of literature as social structures, a fuller elaboration of the ways in which those social structures are embodied in texts along with a greater understanding of how those ethical concerns influence readers and the way we read should prove valuable to our profession, both in program development and in the classroom.

In addition, the methodology provides a useful heuristic for classroom activity. Rather than present students with an unquestioned canon and our interpretations of those texts, we would do better to make known to our students the principles that underlie our selection criteria. Further, rather than only supplying them with the interpretive conventions and strategies that will improve their reading skills, we should also provide them with a deeper capability to understand the bases of their oft-stated discontent. The methodology used here provides a way of accomplishing these goals by teaching students to respect both texts and their disagreements with texts. Rather than presupposing
that texts are "sacred objects" always to be honored and obeyed, this method instead presupposes that texts are occasions for understanding and/or argument, are interactions that permit and foster dialogue. The findings of this investigation will help further these ends in that the investigation elucidates how texts themselves are dynamic structures rather than static constructs.
ENDNOTES


3Tompkins, xi.


5Suleiman, 9.


8Peter J. Rabinowitz, Before Reading: Narrative Conventions and the Politics of Interpretation (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1987).
CHAPTER I
HISTORY, IDEOLOGY, AND PROBLEMATIC TRANSACTIONS

The most obvious kind of barrier for entering auth­
orial audiences is history, the passage of time. As
Rabinowitz states, all artistic choices are based on the
assumed knowledge and beliefs of a hypothetical audience:

A writer cannot make any rhetorical gestures, cannot even begin to write, without making as­
sumptions about the circumstances of his or her
audience—its beliefs, knowledge, and familiar­
ity with conventions. But this audience and
its circumstances are always hypothetical, be­
cause an author has neither knowledge of nor
control over the actual people who will pick up
his or her book....

...And since the structure of a written work
is designed on the premise that actual readers
will share these authorial circumstances, we
can read the text as the author wished only to
the extent that we do share them.¹

This chapter will investigate what happens to our interac­
tions with texts as time passes and the world changes. How
do we respond to texts that reflect and embody knowledge
and beliefs we no longer have access to or share? Rich­
ardson's Pamela provides a good example of a text that
embodies values about women, marriage, and women's relation
to society quite different from those held currently by
many readers. An examination of our developing responses to the work should help elucidate the kinds of problems that can arise in our interactions with such texts.

Upon its publication, *Pamela* enjoyed an enormous popularity. Anna Seward's statement, which she attributes to Horace Walpole, nicely captures the contemporary response to the work: "I can send you no news; the late singular novel is the universal, and only theme—Pamela is like snow, she covers everything with her whiteness." Moreover, whether one accepts at face value the famous apocryphal anecdote concerning the celebration of the Slough villagers at Pamela's wedding, its existence both attests to the immense popularity of the novel and indicates that Richardson had struck a deeply responsive chord in contemporary readers as well. This kind of emotional response to *Pamela* simply does not occur today, obviously for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is that readers tend not to respond to literary works as groups—reading has become a far more private experience. Far fewer readers today respond to *Pamela* positively, as classroom experience attests. The reasons for this failure stem primarily from several of Pamela's character traits, the nature of her marriage to Mr. B., and the values embodied in the work concerning chastity and women's status and role in society.
At the beginning of the novel, Richardson endows Pamela with the following mimetic traits, all of which combine to present a picture of a complex human being: she is an intelligent and beautiful fifteen-year-old girl; a chambermaid in an aristocratic household, placed there as a consequence of her parents' having fallen into straitened circumstances; is dutiful and loving to her parents; kind to others; responsive to and pleased by the admiration and praises of those around her; is fond of clothes and material goods; is fairly self-reliant, indeed, rather "spunky;" possesses a degree of wisdom beyond her years; and is highly sensitive to circumstances dangerous to her "virtue." These traits combine to create a highly particularized individual, not a representative one; Pamela is not your garden variety chambermaid. In addition, Richardson endows Pamela with the less endearing traits, at least to the modern sensibility, of being overly modest, of whining a great deal, and of being subject to fits and fainting spells at the least provocation. For modern readers, these last traits may present some obstacles to our fully participating in the sympathetic reaction Richardson intends us to have toward Pamela. For example, Pamela's reaction to Mr. B's giving her clothes and stockings taxes the reader's credibility and potentially diminishes Pamela in our eyes: "I was quite astonished, and unable to speak for a while;
but yet I was inwardly ashamed to take the stockings; for Mrs. Jervis was not there: If she had, it would have been nothing." Her extreme prurience and blushing modesty in this instance makes us stop and question the kind of values underlying a woman's shame at taking stockings that belonged to her mistress. Granted, one can see Pamela's reaction as being natural and appropriate insofar as stockings are a rather intimate gift to receive from a man. But clothes that belonged to her former mistress are a natural perquisite for someone in Pamela's position. Thus, while there is some basis for Pamela's uneasiness, complete "astonishment" and "shame" seem rather out of proportion. Our sympathy for Pamela is thereby threatened: she appears to be priggish and prudish rather than merely young and naive.

Many of these mimetic traits coalesce to generate the novel's thematic concerns. Pamela's conception of proper duty to both Mr. B. and her parents, her kindness to others, and her desire to retain her chastity, begin to sketch in the outlines of the kind of "virtue" that is to be rewarded, and reinforce the readers' sense of her worth. Moreover, the concern for her chastity, which many critics persist in seeing as the sole basis of the morality Richardson espouses, is presented in a highly contextualized manner; her parents' concern is not with virginity in and
of itself, but with Pamela's thanking Mr. B. for his gifts with sex:

Indeed, indeed, my dearest child, our hearts ache for you; and then you seem so full of joy at his goodness, so taken with his kind expressions, (which, truly, are very great favours, if he means well,) that we fear--yes, my dear child, we fear--you should be too grateful,--and reward him with that jewel, your virtue, which no riches, nor favour, nor anything in this life, can make up to you.

... If, then, you love us, if you wish for God's blessing, and your own future happiness, we both charge you to stand upon your guard: and, if you find the least attempt made upon your virtue, be sure you leave every thing behind you, and come away to us; for we had rather see you all covered with rags, and even follow you to the churchyard, than have it said, a child of ours preferred any worldly conveniences to her virtue (pp. 6-7, italics mine).

The primary emphasis of these two passages is not on that "jewel" itself, but rather on the giving of that "jewel" for material benefit or reward. And while some modern readers may fail to see virginity as a "jewel," most continue to see prostitution negatively. And it is prostitution that her parents are warning her against, not sex itself. Yet many readers and critics have missed this point and persist in seeing the threat to her virginity as paramount. Part of the reason for this lies in Pamela's repeated question, "for what good could it do him to harm such a simple maiden as me?" (p. 12). This narrowing definition of the danger she runs has two consequences:
first, it shifts our perception of the threat onto Mr. B., that is, his actions and his threats are presented as being of primary importance; second, it furthers the mimetic aspects of her character. Pamela may see the danger as the loss of her virginity, but her parents and we do not. Richardson clearly wants us to bear in mind her youth and naivete. Part of what Pamela must learn, in fact, is to come to terms with her own developing sexuality, and much of the conflict in the novel revolves around her growing awareness of her love for Mr. B and her social role and duties. Were she only to learn that prostitution is not virtuous behavior, the conflict would lose much of its force. Moreover, by defining the threat in terms of Mr. B.'s lust for Pamela, Richardson demonstrates the way in which Mr. B. must change and generates a thematic issue concerning the extent of power the aristocracy ethically may wield.

Pamela's kindness to others and her conception of what constitutes "proper duty" to one's family and social superiors also contribute to the kind of virtue Richardson embodies in the novel. She is uniformly good-natured toward her fellow servants, and is much concerned that none of her actions with regard to Mr. B. warrant censure. Pamela uniformly behaves respectfully to Mr. B. and obeys all his wishes so long as he is not directly threatening
her chastity. As Brissenden points out, the situations in the opening section of the novel raise, among others, the following thematic concerns:

What are the obligations which we owe to those who are socially either our superiors or our inferiors? What are the obligations which, in common humanity, we owe to others irrespective of class, sex, creed, or nationality? And what are we to do when these two sets of duties come into conflict?

These questions are central throughout the novel and their answers become increasingly more complex toward the end. Richardson repeatedly shows Pamela acting "charitably" to those who are less fortunate than she, and concerning the proper attitude of all those who are favorably situated, Pamela states:

And oh! what returns ought I not to make to the divine goodness! and how ought I not strive to diffuse the blessings I experience, to all in my knowledge...But then, indeed, do God Almighty's creatures act worthy of the blessings they receive, when they make, or endeavour to make, the whole creation, so far as is in the circle of their power, happy! (p. 383)

In this beginning section, few problems arise for readers. In addition to the prurience and modesty Pamela exhibits, the only other character trait that potentially mitigates our sympathetic response is Pamela's fainting spells and "fits." The scene in the summerhouse is the first direct representation of Mr. B.'s lustful desires. Richardson places the scene early in the novel to convince
us of the actuality of the threat; prior to this point, we have witnessed only potentially threatening situations and veiled comments. In addition, Richardson only has Mr. B. try to kiss her in this scene. Had Mr. B. done more, our negative reactions to Mr. B. would be far too strong at such an early point in the action. Richardson must convince us of the reality of the threat to Pamela but at the same time cannot afford to have us utterly condemn Mr. B. During the scene, when Mr. B. puts his arm around Pamela and kisses her, she "struggled and trembled, and was so benumbed with terror, that [she sank] down, not in a fit, and yet not [herself]" (p. 17). Significantly, in this first episode Pamela does not quite fall into a "fit." The threat appears to us as not overly horrifying--Mr. B. has merely kissed her--and had she fainted, we might well have reacted to Pamela as a complete ninny. Nonetheless, it is difficult for many readers to understand why Pamela should be quite so "benumbed with terror."

The next assault on Pamela's virtue, is far more serious--Mr. B. not only kisses Pamela, but "put his hand in [her] bosom" (p. 26). Pamela again faints from terror, but this time far more justifiably. Mr. B. is indeed forcing his attentions upon the unwilling Pamela. Nonetheless, the rhetoric of the passage works against Richardson's intended effect. Pamela describes the scene as follows:
At last he came in again, but alas! with mischief in his heart! and raising me up, he said, Rise, Pamela, rise; you are your own enemy.... And saying so, he offered to take me on his knee, with some force. O how I was terrified! I said, like as I had read in a book a night or two before, Angels and saints, and all the host of heaven, defend me! And may I never survive one moment that fatal one in which I shall forfeit my innocence! (p. 25)

The heightened rhetoric of this passage threatens to undermine our sympathetic reaction. Pamela's reaction takes on a faintly ridiculous cast. Granted, Pamela states that her words derive from a book she had been reading, and this fact underscores her youth, naivete, and romanticism. Still, the melodramatic nature of her reaction undermines the real fear Richardson intends us to have for Pamela's safety. Since this kind of wailing and bemoaning of her fate continues up until her marriage to Mr. B., we might well be fed up with Pamela by the time that takes place.

Nonetheless, these negative reactions are few enough and in many respects understandable enough that Richardson is able to maintain his intended effects: we retain a great deal of sympathy for Pamela and her plight and our fears and desire for her safety are greatly enhanced. In fact, it is not until near the end of the second section of the novel—her imprisonment at Bedfordshire—that any real impediments to our entering Richardson's authorial audience arise. In the Bedfordshire section, Richardson must con-
continue to arouse our fears for Pamela's safety and also maintain the comic expectations of the general form. As we shall see, the only satisfactory fate for Pamela is marriage with Mr. B. and the nature of this marriage is precisely what generates problems for many readers.

Many readers condemn the work on the grounds that Pamela's return and marriage to Mr. B. are either improbable or that these actions demonstrate the monetary basis of her morality. The most vociferous voice of these anti-Pamelist is Bernard Kreissman. The following interpretation of Pamela's actions illustrates the flagrant disregard for textual concern characteristic of much of this kind of interpretive practice:

The proof of Pamela's businesslike attitude is too clear-cut to be open to doubt. When B. intimates that he is willing to meet Pamela's terms and marry her, she not only agrees to return, but is in such a hurry to do so that her impatience taxes the endurance of the coachman and even the horses. This unseemly haste stems from more than her eagerness to "close the deal." Her presence in the flesh is part and parcel of her strategy: it is "good for business" to keep B. constantly aware of the prize within his reach. (Viewed in this light, it is not hard to understand why Pamela stayed to embroider the waistcoat, stayed to accompany Jervis, and failed to take advantage of her numerous opportunities to escape.)

Such views, however, ignore Richardson's thematic aims in the work and fail to acknowledge that there is no other possible direction for the action to take. Prior to this
point in the action, Richardson has depicted Pamela as an exemplum of the dutiful daughter and servant who is unjustly imprisoned in a situation that is beyond her control. In so doing, he has generated our admiration for her, our fears for her safety, and has precluded our desires either for her return to her parents or her marriage to Williams. The situation at Bedfordshire cannot continue indefinitely—indeed, Richardson has extended it for as long as possible with the sham marriage device—and the only possible artistic resolution involves Pamela's marriage and Mr. B.'s ultimate moral growth. In addition, Richardson's thematic aims require his demonstration of the force of virtue as an instrument of change and his depiction of Pamela as the figure of the virtuous wife. Yet the acknowledgment of these artistic and aesthetic considerations is not sufficient to absolve Pamela from Kreissman's interpretive charges. We must see Pamela's return to Mr. B. as both mimetically plausible and ethically justifiable, both of which are problematic.

As for mimetic plausibility, there is little problem upon a close examination of Pamela's character. We have consistently been given indications of Pamela's growing love for Mr. B., although she is unaware of the nature of her feelings. Despite Mr. B's abduction and imprisonment
of her in Bedfordshire, upon hearing of his hunting accident, Pamela states:

What is the matter, that with all his ill usage of me, I cannot hate him? To be sure, I am not like other people! He has certainly done enough to make me hate him; but yet, when I heard his danger, which was very great, I could not in my heart forbear rejoicing for his safety; though his death would have ended my afflictions (p. 187).

In addition, when Pamela receives the summons to return, she first engages in a rather lengthy debate with herself over whether to return or not. She accurately assesses Mr. B.'s behavior in the present circumstance and decides to act generously and trust him. Such behavior increases our admiration for Pamela—we see her acting consistently with her principles of virtuous and charitable behavior.

Yet the problem of whether her behavior is ethically justified is more complex. Despite our recognition that Pamela's return is meant to illustrate her genuine charity and good will towards others, it nonetheless jars our sensibilities and strains our credulity to the limit. It just doesn't seem understandable that she would actually return to him and place herself in even greater jeopardy. Her "virtue" at this point seems equal only to that of a saint or angel, if "virtue" it is indeed, and certainly it seems hardly an attainable, human ideal. Our disbelief at her return works against our admiration at this crucial
point of the progression, and the degree to which we object to her action largely determines the extent to which we may see Pamela's morality as having the monetary basis Kreissman and others have claimed. Richardson was obviously aware of the difficulties Pamela's return might pose for his readers for Pamela states:

Upon the whole, I resolved to obey him; and if he uses me ill afterwards, double will be his ungenerous guilt!—Though hard will be my lot, to have my credulity so justly blamable, as it will then seem. For, to be sure, the world, the wise world, that never is wrong itself, judges always by events. And if he should use me ill, then I shall be blamed for trusting him: If well, 0 then I did right, to be sure!—But how would my censurers act in my case, before the event justifies or condemns the action, is the question? (p. 265)

But withholding moral judgment is not the entire issue here. Certainly we may understand Richardson's criticism of a world that determines ethical worth by the events that occur after the fact and may agree that such criticism is unjustifiable on those grounds alone. The issue here is not the final "rightness" or "wrongness" of Pamela's actions, but rather the way her decision to return interferes with our immediate response to Pamela and the kind of virtue she represents.

The concluding portion of the novel is Richardson's attempt to fulfill the thematic requirements noted above and is the source of some of the greatest problems for many
modern readers. The many scenes at the end, the endless rounds of social visits in which the story is repeated over and over, serve both to reinforce our belief in Pamela's virtue (her generosity, her submissiveness, her knowledge of what is due her as Mr. B.'s wife, her lack of arrogance despite the overwhelming praise) and to demonstrate as well that virtue can indeed change the world. Mr. B.'s social position alone is depicted as insufficient to gain Pamela acceptance into his social world, but Pamela's virtue is capable of accomplishing that transition. After all, Lady Davers and society do eventually come to accept and adore Pamela too. Kinkead-Weekes sees the concluding portion as functioning in the following way:

...the scenes in which Pamela is deluged with choric praises attempt to condition the reader to acceptance. Pamela and her husband win over rakes and cynics, servants and proud ladies, all in fact who hear their story. The imagined triumph within the fiction prefigures Richardson's hopes for the coming assault, on the real world, of his novel's intransigent morality.8

While I would take issue with his statement that the fiction "prefigures Richardson's hopes for the coming assault, on the real world" and that the novel's morality is "intransigent," Weekes's statements nicely capture the rhetorical gesture of the concluding portion of the novel. Just as Mr. B. grows morally and is changed by his close
association with a morally upright individual, so too, will all who associate with Pamela.

If Pamela is the exemplary figure of the virtuous daughter and dutiful servant, she is also the figure of the virtuous wife. In this regard, Richardson, while fairly innovative for his times, may seem fairly rigid and old-fashioned to many modern readers. After acknowledging that "the position of women was a subject of debate in the eighteenth century," (and the issues of the debate do not seem far removed from today's), Doody goes on to cite Richard Allestree's work, *The Ladies Calling* (1673), which represents some of the prevailing notions of women's duties:

Woman is man's spiritual equal....Her exercise of virtue is, however, different from men's.... Her calling removes her from contact with influence upon the wider social sphere; her conduct is a household affair....Since God created woman in subjection to man, her chief virtue (and duty) is obedience, at first to her father, and, after marriage, to her husband.... Female virtue is more passive than active, and consists more largely in an attitude of soul than in action. Modesty, humility, resignation, a disposition to reject worldly pleasures --these are her glories. Moral choices are un-aggressive, unremarkable. The inner life blossoms in silence.9

Much of this definition does apply to Pamela--she is dutiful and submissive after her marriage, modest, humble, etc. Yet Richardson also portrays Pamela in ways at variance with Allestree's pronouncements: she never hesitates to
make moral pronouncements about the "wider social sphere," as her behavior to Lady Davers indicates, and her desire to take Mr. B.'s natural child home and great sympathy for Sally Godfrey certainly demonstrate an active and discriminating moral sense.

Richardson was, of course, no feminist, and he is quite careful to delimit the boundaries of the equality between the sexes. The nature of Pamela's and Mr. B.'s relationship understandably may not appeal to many modern readers. After Mr. B.'s proposal—and certainly after the marriage—Pamela behaves with uniform submissiveness, and Richardson never fails to present her as zealous of pleasing Mr. B. by her obedience. Indeed, when Lady Davers first arrives at Lincolnshire, Pamela's chief fear is that she will thus be unable to comply with her husband's wishes to meet him at Sir Simon's house. Such a representation reinforces our conception of the limits of wives' rights and duties in relation to their spouses. So long as Mr. B. is not threatening her virtue, misusing his power derived from social status, Pamela must behave submissively and bow to her husband's desires.

The virtuous behavior of wives is further illustrated in the marriage articles at the end: of the forty-eight articles listed, only four show instances that illustrate the situations in which a woman's integrity and desires are
taken into account—numbers 26, 27, 29, and 33. The majority of the articles stress obedience and submission to the husband's will and desires. Article 2, for example, states that Pamela "must think his displeasure the heaviest thing that can befall me" (p. 475); Article 30, "that if the husband be set upon a wrong thing, she must not dispute with him, but do it and, expostulate afterwards" (p. 477). Such arbitrary obedience in all matters is softened only by the inclusion of permission to "expostulate afterwards," and one can only wonder to what degree that expostulation will be tolerated, at what point the husband's "displeasure" will arise and supersede the wife's right to argue. Article 28, that "she must not shew reluctance, uneasiness, or doubt, to oblige him; and that too at half a word; and must not be bid twice to do one thing," again stresses the inordinate degree of obedience expected of wives, although Article 29 does in some measure ameliorate the heaviness of this stricture: "That this must be only while he took care to make her compliance reasonable, and consistent with her free agency, in points that ought to be allowed her." However, the words "reasonable" and "ought" signal that again it is the man's conceptions that predominate. The phrase, "consistent with her free agency," seems to acknowledge that women have certain rights as individuals that can override a husband's total control, but note that such
"free agency" is only in "points that ought to be allowed her."

The articles that do acknowledge women's rights and desires are themselves severely qualified. Article 26, "that the words command and obey shall be blotted out of the vocabulary," sounds good until juxtaposed to the two articles cited above; Article 27, "that a man should desire nothing of his wife, but what is significant, reasonable, just," again sounds admirable until one realizes that it is his opinion of reasonableness and justness that is the determining factor. Article 33, "that a wife should not desire to convince her husband for contradiction sake, but for his own" (p. 478), expands the earlier notions of Article 29 and illustrates Richardson's contention that virtue can and should exert an active force in changing the world.

A modern reader may well have problems not only with the terms and conditions of Pamela's marriage but also with the fact of the marriage itself. It is no mere exaggeration to say that for many women, Pamela's ultimate position is in some ways a fate only barely better than death. Moreover, Pamela is marrying the very person who has threatened her with rape, who has failed to respect her as a woman and as a person. Certainly this reaction is an imposition on the novel and inappropriate to the text; as
we have seen, Richardson clearly intended his audience to react favorably to Pamela's fate and also constructed his novel to dramatize the full nature of the "Virtue Rewarded" he promised as well. Part of the problem inheres in the form; since we are relegated almost totally to Pamela's consciousness, and since Richardson must generate a sufficient amount of fear in us for Pamela's safety, we see Mr. B. in a negative light. Moreover, as part of his aim to demonstrate the active force of virtue, Richardson must show Mr. B. undergoing a positive moral growth from the interaction with Pamela's virtue. Consequently, Richardson indeed runs the risk of some readers failing to see and appreciate Mr. B.'s internal conflict. Kinkead-Weekes summarizes the problem as follows:

Once one has learned to read with the sensitivity to implications that Richardson demands, it becomes clear that after markedly crude beginnings B. does become a complex character in the grips of acute conflict. But if Pamela and B. are both on the stage, and we are required to understand and judge them both in their opposition, the fact remains that we live always in her mind and never in his because the novel is told from a single point of view. Not only is it fatally easy to miss the exact fluctuations of B.'s conflict through superficial reading, but we inhabit so continuously a mind in which he appears simply as a "black-hearted wretch" that we tend to oversimplify him too....At important points we need the same direct experience of B.'s heart and mind that we have of Pamela's; but the single focus cannot provide this. The result is disastrous when we come to B.'s reformation. Carelessly anyway, our response is likely to register itself in
doubts of the quality of Pamela's forgiveness, her return, her gratitude and meekness, which ought never to have arisen. Critics who believe that it is not the man she objected to all along, but his terms, ought to be discussing not Pamela but B., and not B. as Richardson intended him, but his realization.

True as Kinkead-Weekes's comments are, the fact that this failure arises from technical problems with B.'s realization doesn't alter the problem of a reader's response. Understanding Richardson's intentions for B. and labeling B.'s realization a novelistic flaw, doesn't alter the fact that for some readers Pamela's marriage to him is unacceptable for extratextual reasons. Even granting that within the textual world, Pamela's union with B. is highly desirable—no reader could seriously prefer that Pamela return to her parents or that she marry Williams—we nonetheless cannot completely disregard more modern assumptions concerning "good marriages" and the role and status of women both in relation to their spouses and society as a whole.

These extratextual assumptions and considerations cannot help but affect our experience of the text. While we may acknowledge the artistic appropriateness of Pamela's ultimate fate, we may still feel dissatisfied. Thus it would seem that the passage of time with its attendant change in values and beliefs can indeed affect our interaction with texts. Older texts may still be accessible to us
intellectually, we may still perceive and understand their intended effects, but we may not always be able to experience those effects emotionally. In the case of Pamela, this is certainly true. We can admire Pamela for the virtues she exhibits and can appreciate that her marriage to B. is a fate congruent with Richardson's intentions to demonstrate "Virtue Rewarded." However, as readers who possess a somewhat different set of values and beliefs from those Richardson embodies in the novel, we might come away feeling that perhaps Mr. B.'s "virtue" is rewarded rather more than Pamela's. After all, he gets the wife of his dreams, his position in the marriage is clearly dominant, but she gets B. The sexism inherent in Richardson's view of a proper fate for his heroine interferes with our ability to respond emotionally in an appropriate manner to Pamela's fate. Yet this statement raises the question of how such a reaction differs from that generated by more modern works that embody values and beliefs at odds with our own. To answer this question, it will be useful to examine Norman Mailer's An American Dream, a contemporary work that contains highly sexist values.

Most critics agree that the book is to varying degrees "about" the decayed fate of America and, as the title suggests, the contemporary version of the American dream. Moreover, most see the book (and its protagonist) positive-
ly, as demonstrating Rojack's achievement in reincorporating his subconscious dreams, motivations, and perceptions into his overall conception of reality, thereby attaining a balance between the conscious and unconscious, the principle of order and that of chaos, and good and evil.\textsuperscript{12} This balance is represented in the work in the symbol of the parapet, and Rojack's attempt to walk the parapet high above the city streets symbolizes the precariousness of such an endeavor.\textsuperscript{13} In Mailer's vision, Rojack represents the modern existential hero who must create a new version of the self and America to replace the social world and structure (Las Vegas and Barney Kelly) that has led to sterility and death.

At the beginning of \textit{An American Dream}, Mailer introduces Rojack as a seemingly successful, modern American male who had for his dream the attainment of wealth, power, and women. The invocation of Kennedy in the very first sentence captures the essence of the American experience—the attainment of power through courage in war and hard work, and wealth through marriage. Yet Rojack is clearly no Kennedy, and his dissatisfaction with his life reflects the price one pays for the attainment of the American dream—the loss of an integrated self, among other things:

\begin{quote}
I could have had a career in politics if only I had been able to think that death was zero, death was everyone's emptiness. But I knew it
was not. I remained an actor. My personality was built upon a void. Thus I quit my place in politics....I had reasons for the choice, some honorable, some spurious, but one motive now seems clear—I wanted to depart from politics before I was separated from myself forever by the distance between my public appearance which had become vital on television, indeed nearly robust, and my secret frightened romance with the moon.

As the first step in Rojack's growth, he must destroy the old self, an act metaphorically depicted by the murder of his wife. With this act, he forever separates himself from his society and its rules and values. After this, Rojack must define and create a new self from the chaos he has wrought. His first act is to engage sexually with his wife's maid. In this act, Rojack chooses "evil," the Devil, rather than "good," symbolized in his choice of Ruta's anus. In so doing, Rojack gains the Devil's strength and power to combat the police interrogation and to survive his murderous act. His next step forward is his interaction with Cherry, a relationship with the potential for love, creativity, and growth. Having chosen good over evil, creation over destruction, and having defeated Shago and gained some of his power (he acquires Shago's umbrella), Rojack is armed for his confrontation with Kelly, the Devil incarnate and repository of American values. In this climax, Rojack finally rejects all that Kelly stands for, walks the parapet, and gains the final stage of his growth.
toward positive values. The price, however, is high: Cherry must die to atone for his original murder. Yet Cherry leaves him her power as he sets out for Las Vegas, and from there Rojack turns his back on modern America to create a heavenly city in the heart of the South American jungles.

As we shall see, the sexism and some of the underlying values inherent in the work can create major problems for many readers in seeing Rojack and his growth in the positive manner Mailer desires. At the outset, Mailer introduces Rojack as the typical American male in his desires for wealth, power, and women. His attainment of these elevates his stature in our eyes and prevents our seeing his dissatisfaction with them as so many "sour grapes." Rojack, however, does not come across as an admirable character. The initial description of his attainment of the DSC indicates his unwillingness to accept responsibility for his actions ("it threw them, and it did a near perfect job"), and sets up a thematic equation in which war equals a football game equals sex. Few readers find such an equation easy to swallow, and our notions about Rojack's unsavory character are confirmed in his description of his wife Deborah. To Rojack, Deborah is a "lioness," a "devouring bitch." The interactions Rojack cites to illustrate the nature of their relationship reinforces our nega-
tive assessment of her personality. Rojack's tone throughout this first section, moreover, is honest and confessional; indeed, he recognizes that his negative description of Deborah casts an ugly light over his own character: "The difficulty is that I have given an undue portrait of Deborah, and so reduce myself" (p. 18). As a result, unsavory as his character is in many respects, we do trust his judgment about Deborah's inherent evilness.

On the authorial level, we recognize Mailer's need to present Deborah negatively, insofar as Rojack must be justified to some degree for his murderous act, or we would lose all sympathy and respect for him. Again, since Deborah is Barney Kelly's daughter, she must partake of the evil that characterizes him as well, or the thematic import of the later confrontation with Kelly will be obscured. Thus, sexist as the portrayal of Deborah is, we nonetheless can understand the thematic necessity for such a negative portrayal. Nonetheless, problems exist on the authorial level with respect to Mailer's portrayal of Deborah's murder. While we may understand the thematic necessity for Rojack's act of murder, we nonetheless expect that Mailer himself is against murder in general, that is, we do not normally expect authors to espouse values that are universally abhorrent. In other words, we expect that the distance between Mailer and Rojack would be very great in this
early part of the novel. We do not easily assume that Mailer is advocating murder. Yet the rhetoric of Mailer's description of the murder renders this assessment problematic:

One of her hands fluttered up to my shoulder and tapped it gently. Like a gladiator admitting defeat. I released the pressure on her throat, and the door I had been opening began to close. But I had had a view of what was on the other side of the door, and heaven was there, some quiver of jeweled cities shining in the glow of a tropical dusk, and I thrust against the door once more and hardly felt her hand leave my shoulder, I was driving now with force against that door: spasms began to open in me, and my mind cried out then, "Hold back! you're going too far, hold back!" I could feel a series of orders whip like tracers of light from my head to my arm, I was ready to obey, I was trying to stop, but pulse packed behind pulse in a pressure up to thunderhead; some black-biled lust, some desire to go ahead not unlike the instant one comes in a woman against her cry that she is without protection came bursting with rage from out of me and my mind exploded in a fireworks of rockets, stars, and hurtling embers, the arm about her neck leaped against the whisper I could still feel murmuring in her throat, and crack I choked her harder, and crack I choked her again, and crack I gave her payment—never halt now—and crack the door flew open and the wire tore in her throat, and I was through the door, hatred passing from me in wave after wave, illness as well, rot and pestilence, nausea, a bleak string of salts. I was floating. I was as far into myself as I had ever been and universes wheeled in a dream. To my closed eyes Deborah's face seemed to float off her body and stare at me in darkness. She gave one malevolent look which said: "There are dimensions to evil which reach beyond the light," and then she smiled like a milkmaid and floated away and was gone. And in the midst of that Oriental splendor of landscape, I felt the lost touch of
her finger on my shoulder, radiating some faint but ineradicable pulse of detestation into the new grace. I opened my eyes. I was weary with a most honorable fatigue, and my flesh seemed new. I had not felt so nice since I was twelve. It seemed inconceivable at this instant that anything in life could fail to please. But there was Deborah, dead beside me on the flowered carpet of the floor, and there was no question of that. She was dead, indeed she was dead. (pp. 31-32)

The blatant sexual imagery of this passage needs little comment. Rojack's murderous act is a sexual act, and if the earlier thematic equation, "war equals football game equals sex" characterizes Rojack, so now does murder equal them as well. One could argue that for Rojack murder is a sexual, life-giving and regenerative act, and that this passage works to cement our growing dislike for Rojack. But were this Mailer's intention, it seems he is going a bit too far--he can't afford to alienate us so completely from Rojack. Moreover, we don't put down the book at this point; total rejection of Rojack is not the way we experience the murder. Moreover, if we compare the language with that of the later sexual episode with Cherry, the problem becomes all the more complicated: during that act, too, Rojack has "a glimpse of that quiver of jeweled arrows, that heavenly city which had appeared as Deborah was expiring in the lock of my arm" (p. 128). This deliberate equation of the two encounters renders our understanding of Mailer's stance toward Rojack difficult. We
know we are meant to view Rojack's interaction with Cherry in a positive light. By extension, then, are we also meant to view Rojack's murder of Deborah positively? It is as if Mailer is saying that murder is not only justified, but admirable in certain circumstances. In addition, the passage is extremely powerful and lyrical. We get caught up in the beauty of the description and the intensity of feeling. The rhetoric of the passage creates an ambiguity about where Mailer stands: it can be seen as either a device to distance us from the horror of Rojack's action to allow us to continue reading or it can be seen as a device calculated to make us experience the action in a positive manner more forcefully. But Mailer's thematic intentions do not involve making the reader aware that murder is not only an inherent part of human nature, but an acceptable part as well. Thus we are left questioning why the rhetoric of the passage needs to be so compelling. Many readers consequently may put the book down and refuse to enter into a dialogue with Mailer or end up questioning "why be Rojack?", two alternatives equally devastating to this textual transaction.

Juxtaposed to Deborah is Cherry. While equally sexist in its representation of the Woman-Goddess and her life-generating redemptive function, we can again recognize and appreciate the thematic functions of the representation.
"Cherry" carries with it all the connotations of a wholesome, apple-pie America, innocent despite worldliness, unblemished virginity, etc. With Cherry, Rojack finally has the potential to conquer the evil of the modern world. Rojack is well on his way in his fight to recover the innocence and positive force of the lost America and, having chosen the Devil so to speak in his encounter with Ruta, we now must see him choosing God, consciously opting for love and creativity. To represent this growth, Mailer depicts a creative sexual union with a woman:

I was passing through a grotto of curious lights, dark lights, like colored lanterns beneath the sea, a glimpse of that quiver of jeweled arrows, that heavenly city which had appeared as Deborah was expiring in the lock of my arm, and a voice like a child's whisper on the breeze came up so faint I could barely hear, "Do you want her?" it asked. "Do you really want her, do you want to know something about love at last?" and I desired something I had never known before, and answered; it was as if my voice had reached to its roots; and, "Yes," I said, "of course I do, I want love," but like an urbane old gentleman, a dry tart portion of my mind added, "Indeed, and what has one to lose?" and then the voice in a small terror, "Oh, you have more to lose than you have lost already, fail at love and you lose more than you can know." "And if I do not fail?" I asked back. "Do not ask," said the voice, "choose now!" and some continent of dread spearred wide in me, rising like a dragon, as if I knew the choice were real, and in a lift of terror I opened my eyes and her face was beautiful beneath me in that rainy morning, her eyes were golden with light, and she said, "Ah, honey, sure," and I said sure to the voice in me, and felt love fly in like some great winged bird, some beating of wings at my back,
and felt her will dissolve into tears, and some
great deep sorrow like roses drowned in the
salt of the sea came flooding from her womb and
washed into me like a sweet honey of balm for
all the bitter sores of my soul and for the
first time in my life without passing through
fire or straining the stones of my will, I came
up from my body rather than down from my mind,
I could not stop, some shield broke in me,
bliss, and the honey she had given me I could
only give back, all sweets to her womb, all
come in her cunt.  (p. 128)

The language of this passage demonstrates the very dif­
fferent nature of the sexual union with Cherry and that with
Ruta and, more particularly, than the feelings generated
during Rojack's murder of Deborah. This union culminates
in mutual satisfaction, a reciprocal sharing of "bliss," "honey," and "sweets." The redemptive power of this love
culminates in the only sleep Rojack has during the entire
novel. Still, problems exist because of Rojack's sexism.
Cherry, and the union itself, exist only to serve Rojack's
needs, only to provide him with the opportunity to choose
love over hate, life over death.

In addition, the sexist character of Cherry's portray­
al and thematic function threatens to mar Mailer's overall
intentions. Once again we see Rojack describing a woman
negatively and then seeing her only in terms of his own
needs and desires. The pattern that emerges in the initial
description of Cherry when Rojack goes to hear her sing is
one that constantly shifts from a focus on her positive
qualities to his imposition of negative ones. Typical is the following statement: "She had an unusually large laugh. It would have been perfect and merry and a gain to anticipate if it had not been for a suspicion of something mulish and bragging, a bit of small-town Southern jackass in the sound. I realized what a tension had begun in me that she be perfect" (p. 105). In the encounter with Romeo, again typical of Rojack's denigration of Cherry, Rojack states: "For she had been using me--so I understood it now" (p. 106), using him for attention, admiration, to goad the other men around her, etc. Moreover, since Mailer intends us to view Cherry positively and their interaction as an indication of Rojack's growth, the progression of their relationship presents problems. Rojack undergoes a series of confrontations to "get" Cherry, first with Romeo and company, then with Tony, and finally with Shago. All these encounters are potentially violent; in the last two, a knife and an umbrella, obvious phallic symbols, are either mentioned or used. These representations of the stereotypical confrontations between men over a woman are intended by Mailer to depict Rojack's growing power and ability to act bravely, courageously, and powerfully. Leeds provides the fullest analysis of the confrontation scenes in the work and states:
The men whom Rojack confronts and overcomes are tough, but their toughness is based on total commitment to a corrupt system....His intuitions tell him that the only course which will lead to survival is that of daring to challenge, rather than evade, the corrupt external forces which seek to destroy him. In doing so, he purges his own corruption and gains increasing personal strength.

Yet because these confrontations are over a woman, particularly a woman who has been presented so negatively by Rojack, we may feel that the encounters diminish Rojack further in our eyes. He continues to see women as "prizes" to be gained or lost in battle, not as individuals.

As a result, our notions regarding Rojack's growth toward the good are complicated by our inability to perceive his interactions as in and of themselves contributing to anything "good." That is, the narrative correlative of that growth demonstrate on the contrary values and ideas that are not "good" in our eyes. Whether Cherry is an object worthy of Rojack's love is irrelevant; the fact is that an object she remains, both for him, for Mailer, and ultimately for us as well. The thematic and synthetic aspects of her character don't mesh well with the mimetic traits with which Mailer endows her, albeit they are given through Rojack's eyes. Cherry is made to bear too much weight thematically given her relatively sketchy characterization. Thus, part of the problem is clearly technical; that is, the book is flawed.
The last of the problems also exists on the authorial level. All of the depicted violence in the book is perpetrated against women. Even Shago's violent death, which is the sole exception, is not portrayed, but rather happens somewhere "offstage." One is left questioning why Mailer needs to have it this way. Why is it that only women must bear the brunt of the violence of American society? Are not men equally subject to the brutality and rape of a system gone awry? Since there is clearly no answer to these questions in terms of the structure and themes of the work, answers, if any, must lie in the extratextual realm. Mailer is thus open to and guilty of the charge of sexism.

Thus, we can begin to see wherein the connection between historical and ideological gaps may lie: historical gaps seem to be special cases of ideological gaps in general. In the case of Pamela, we can intellectually understand and accept that Pamela's fate is a good one, that the values and beliefs embodied in the work are sufficiently admirable and ones to which we can give our assent. We can appreciate that Pamela's marriage to Mr. B., while not the particular kind of marriage many of us would find satisfying ourselves, is an appropriate and desirable fate for someone in Pamela's position. Moreover, marriage continues to be an institution many readers see as worthy. The moral and ethical values Richardson espouses are also
generally admirable and worthy. While the world may have changed a great deal since the novel was written, certain underlying values remain the same. Charity, respect for other individuals regardless of their social position, and humility remain as ideals for human behavior. In the case of Pamela, however, our emotional involvement is severely diminished—perhaps never again will readers rejoice over Pamela's fate, never again will this work powerfully engage a reader's emotions in quite the same way. Our differing notions of what constitutes a "good marriage" and the nature of relationships between men and women cannot help but affect our emotional reaction to Pamela's marriage and relationship.

In An American Dream, we may perceive Mailer's intentions, both local and overall, but those intentions fail to materialize in a concrete fashion. We may understand that Mailer intends us to respond positively to Rojack's union with Cherry and to desire his reunion with her after his encounter with Kelly, but that reaction fails to occur in any real way, either intellectually or emotionally. As a result, we may fail to respond appropriately at various points of the narrative. We may feel that Rojack doesn't deserve Cherry, for example, or that her death is preferable to a life with him. Most important, however, is that the kind of engagement Mailer offers us is one which we may
well decide to decline. He has asked us not only to set aside certain values and beliefs we perceive as admirable, but has further asked us to participate intellectually and emotionally in an experience that provides very little in the way of a positive pay-off.

Ideological gaps in general threaten all engagement with a work, both intellectual and emotional. Moreover, the more serious the ideological gap, the farther apart the reader from the authorial values and beliefs, the more difficult it becomes to engage with the text at all.Positing historical gaps is one way to characterize a particular kind of ideological problem—that arising from the breakdown of shared presuppositions about certain aspects of the world. To a large extent, such gaps can be bridged by our gaining some knowledge about the time period and the context. The important point, however, is that we can not only reconstruct the necessary shared assumptions but that we can also recognize their ethically sound basis, that is, we are not being asked to agree to pernicious values. Our assumptions about the nature of world we live in and the moral and ethical dimensions of human experience are always context-dependent and affect our interactions with texts, regardless of the time they are created. Extra-textual concerns play a vital role in the way we respond to literary works, and more normatively, should play such a
role. To deny the force of our moral and ethical values in our interactions with texts would be to relegate aesthetic experience to mere passive observation and would strip texts of their power to change us. Texts are dynamic structures that allow for and require an active dialogue between authors and readers. As we shall see, as readers we tend to desire such dialogues, and for that to take place, we want to know what an author is saying to us, no matter what our final value judgment about that communication may be. In the next chapter we shall explore what can happen in transactions with ambiguous texts, what constitutes our experience when an author provides conflicting "messages" about the textual and extra-textual worlds we cohabit.
ENDNOTES


3Cited in Mckillop, 45.

4As Sacks has pointed out, "it is no exaggeration to say that, after the fourth page of Pamela, Richardson could not have written an apologue," and certainly not one that demonstrates the tawdry proposition that chastity equals virtue. The mimetic traits with which Richardson endows Pamela, the kinds of instabilities generated by her situation and character, and the nature of the virtue that is generated from her character and actions all work to mitigate against such a didactic reading. For a fuller discussion, see Sheldon Sacks, Fiction and the Shape of Belief: A Study of Henry Fielding with Glances at Swift, Johnson, and Richardson (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1964) 234-52.


8Mark Kinkead-Weekes, Samuel Richardson: Dramatic Novelist (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1973) 64. Kearney, too, has argued that it was central to Richardson's intentions to portray the active force of virtue in the world: "Richardson's chief claim in Pamela is that not only can virtue be transferred to good effect from one social context to another, but that without civilized recognition virtue is powerless in terms of influence....Hence the public and ceremonious nature of much of the second part...." Anthony


10Rader has addressed the problems peculiar to the form of *Pamela* at some length in two essays. In his work to develop a notion of the action form of novels, Rader states:

A particular model of *Pamela* would specify that the reader is meant to feel for Pamela a serious fear which can be defined by saying that her merit and fate develop along a line of branching alternatives, where one branch, always closed by circumstance or choice, leads to an ethically acceptable but materially undesirable safety, while the other leads overtly and immediately to greater danger but covertly and ultimately to the most desirable resolution of her difficulties....

The model also clearly explicates the difficulties. It says that it was no part of Richardson's intention that Pamela should be judged as a hypocrite but that it was likely, given the form, that a reader might react to her as one. We can see this more clearly if we consider that the first-person report of the narrative was, on the one hand, necessary to bring the reader close to Pamela's own fears and uncertainty about the future and to provide that inner account of her motives essential to the reader's admiration her, but that, on the other hand, the choice involved the necessity of creating through Pamela as narrator the covert sense of potential prosperity so necessary to the special fantasy pleasure objectified in the form but which, as a condition of that pleasure, must not be attributed to Pamela.

Both Leeds and Adams see the work as an allegory representing the failure of the American Dream and Mailer's prescriptive ideas concerning the direction the new Adam must take to recuperate the lost vision; Bailey sees the novel as primarily demonstrating the heroic qualities of the individual against the social, conventional world; and Tanner sees the novel as illustrating the "Mailer hero, caught in the paradox that while the summons from the moon seems more authentic and important than the voices from the party, to obey the moon would be to abandon form for formlessness, consciousness for unconsciousness, life for death." Tony Tanner, City of Words: American Fiction 1950-1970 (New York: Harper & Row, 1971) 357. See also Jennifer Bailey, Norman Mailer: Quick-Change Artist (London: The Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1979); Barry H. Leeds, The Structured Vision of Norman Mailer (New York: New York UP, 1969); and Laura Adams, Existential Battles: The Growth of Norman Mailer (Athens: Ohio UP, 1976).

For an extended description and analysis of the metaphorical dimensions of this scene see Tanner, 344-71.


Leeds, 158.
CHAPTER II
DETERMINATE AMBIGUITY OR MULTIPLE TURNS OF THE SCREW

If various kinds of tensions can exist in works with a single, identifiable narrative audience, certainly the interaction and potential tensions between readers, both real and implied, and authors are more complicated in works that offer two possible narrative audiences, each reading with different conventions, strategies, and expectations—indeed, in a sense, reading two completely different works. As Rabinowitz points out:

Since we cannot read a novel properly until we have joined the narrative audience, reading problems can occur when we have difficulties in discovering precisely what are the characteristics of the narrative audience.¹

Not only reading problems but interpretive problems as well will inevitably arise in this situation. Moreover, Rabinowitz goes on to discuss the kind of ambiguity that inheres in works such as Dostoyevsky's The Double and Nabokov's Pale Fire, stating that the problem arises "...when we are faced with an ambiguity about which of several narrative audiences we are to accept—although each potential narra-
tive audience may itself face no ambiguity." In this chapter, I would like to explore this problem further using Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* because, as its critical history suggests, it offers two valid and competing interpretations—as a ghost story and as a realistic story of an insane governess—interpretations which have at their base the existence of two potentially valid narrative audiences to join. Thus *The Turn of the Screw* raises the questions of whether there can be two competing narrative audiences for a single text without the creation of a serious gap between the authorial audience and the author as well as whether there can be two distinct authorial audiences, each determined by the respective narrative audiences, for a given text.

As a number of people have pointed out, including Booth, Rimmon-Kenan, and Todorov, ambiguous texts employ various rhetorical devices to maintain their ambiguous status through to the end and in so doing present special problems of aesthetic perception and interpretation. In particular, they see Gombrich's duck/rabbit paradigm concerning pictorial representation as applying with much the same force to literary texts:

Clearly we do not have the illusion that we are confronted with a "real" duck or rabbit. The shape on the paper resembles neither animal very closely. And yet there is no doubt that the shape transforms itself in some subtle way
when the duck's beak becomes the rabbit's ears and brings an otherwise neglected spot into prominence as the rabbit's mouth. I say "neglected", but does it enter our experience at all when we switch back to reading "duck"? To answer this question, we are compelled to look for what is "really there", to see the shape apart from its interpretation, and this, we soon discover, is not really possible. True, we can switch from one reading to another with increasing rapidity; we will also "remember" the rabbit while we see the duck, but the more closely we watch ourselves, the more certainly will we discover that we cannot experience alternative readings at the same time.

Rimmon makes several pertinent statements about this passage that not only apply to *The Turn of the Screw* but also contextualize the nature of the narrative problem of the tale. She points out that the two interpretations of what we "see" are genuinely mutually exclusive and that there are enough "clues" present supporting each to render arbitration between them impossible. Her most important point, however, is that a "stalemate" is the result of the two readings:

We cannot hold them both [at the same time], yet we realize that they fit the image equally well [at different times] and that there are no clues for choosing one rather than the other. All we can do is oscillate between the two conflicting readings as long as we join in the game.

Booth, too, has addressed this phenomenon in his larger study of irony. In his view, the nature of the double view works to diminish one's perception of and pleasure in either the duck or the rabbit:
Once our perception has played the double click with the figure, our minds no longer think of it as either a duck or a rabbit but as an optical illusion. Our chief pleasure now becomes our awareness of the duplicity. We can no longer concentrate entirely on the naive pleasure of seeing only one animal--our energies are concentrated on the trickiness of the process. All such illusions are likely to be deficient as art in either single perspective, because the artist has had to make a highly generalized, uninteresting rabbit in order to make a possible duck, but that duck will be equally generalized. Even an artist who works hard to improve the quality of each half-perception is inevitably constrained from anything like the perfection of ducks or rabbits that he could achieve if his intention were not to be an illusionist.

Several issues arise from the foregoing descriptions that have consequences for our understanding of the kind of ambiguity characteristic of *The Turn of the Screw*. First and foremost is Booth's assumption that the intention to create an illusion precludes anything resembling perfection in the rendering of the duck or rabbit. In James's work, the "perfection" of both possible narratives is precisely what generates the ambiguity peculiar to the work. The long history of critical debate about *The Turn of the Screw* attests to the validity and strength of both interpretations of the text—that of the ghost story *per se* and that of the realistic psychological study of a neurotic woman—and illustrates the potential interpretive results of this kind of perceptual phenomenon. Moreover, both Rimmon-Kenan and Booth maintain that our pleasure in such works derives
primarily from our perception of the duplicity, our recognition of the optical illusion and our oscillation between the two configurations. And I would maintain that such is not the case with The Turn—we take a great deal of pleasure in the narrative, whether we are seeing a duck or a rabbit. Thus, depending on which narrative audience one is a member of at a given point of the tale, the entire configuration of the work will appear consistent, whole, and completely satisfying. Cook states the problem this way: Since its first publication in 1898, the novella has been read alternatively as a simple ghost story; a gothic horror tale of demonic possession; a Freudian case history of sexual neurosis, hysteria, sadomasochism, paranoia, and/or schizoid dysfunction; a poetic allegory of good and evil; a metaphoric evocation of the Victorian cultural impasse; a psychoanalytic biography of Henry James; a study of infantile sexuality; and a novel of detection after the manner of Poe, Collins and Conan Doyle. This imposing group of interpretations seems impossible to assimilate in any coherent fashion. Yet all of these readings are merely elaborately refined variants of two more basic ones—one which holds that the meaning of the novel is the succession of real events objectively reported, which may or may not have resonance beyond the events themselves; and another which believes that the meaning of the novel is the diseased consciousness of the narrator, whose well-concealed unreliability is the work's greatest technical achievement. As Cook makes explicit, the actual events of the story, the instabilities introduced in the action, and the ultimate emotional effects of the resolution of those instabilities are radically different for each narrative audience. More-
over, while reading the one story one adopts a context, conventional framework, and ultimately a world-view quite different from that when reading the other. The "ghost-story" readers see a realistic "duck," and the "hallucinationists" see a cubist "rabbit," and never do the twain meet. The oscillation between the two interpretations can be described as a kind of tension: on the narrative level, one is in the uncomfortable position of shifting between two opposed narrative audiences that presuppose and engender different beliefs and emotional effects; on the authorial level, one is again in the highly uncomfortable position of determining which narrative audience is more compelling at various points and how that ambiguity affects our understanding and experience of what constitutes James's communication to us.

As both Rimmon and Cook have pointed out, part of the ambiguity of The Turn of the Screw can be described generically. The text belongs to a generic category Todorov calls the "fantastic," a kind of middle ground between the "marvelous" and the "strange." Citing Todorov, Rimmon explains the category of the "strange" as that which "leaves the laws of the universe unchanged and explains the "strange" phenomenon 'realistically,' by asserting that dream, madness, the influence of drugs, hallucinations, can account for them." The "marvelous," then is that category
which "admits of new laws of nature by which the unexpected can be explained, new laws which provide for the existence of supernatural beings...." 8 Rimmon goes on to state:

The endless debates as to whether the ghosts are objective supernatural evil beings which appear to the governess and children alike or whether they are hallucinations of the governess's deranged mind can now be said to hinge on whether we classify the story as merveilleux or as etrange. Or, in fact, the other way round: the genre to which the story belongs is determined by the degree and kind of substantiality attached to the ghosts. The debates are bound to be endless because it is impossible to choose between the two opposed alternatives, representing the two contrary genres. 9

After making these distinctions, both Cook and Rimmon assert that the means by which the text maintains its undecidability hinges on the reliability of the governess. Cook states the problem in much the same terms as Rimmon:

In order to sustain the narrative at all, then, the governess must be granted authority and credibility. And it is only through the most skillful of structural manipulations that James creates large cracks in the facade of her account, without ever destroying its credibility entirely. In short, James undermines the discours at strategic, often unobtrusive points and so leaves the legitimacy of the histoire well shaken but demonstrably intact. What results is a tension between the governess's narrative voice and the world outside that voice, a tension, to use the terms of Tzvetan Todorov, between a "marvelous" world of ghosts and an "uncanny" world of neurotic governesses. 10

That the question of her reliability is central is inarguable—reliability looms large in all first-person narra-
tives. But the tension surrounding the governess's reliability is itself based on the underlying and more important questions surrounding the very different belief systems Todorov's two categories entail. It is not, as Rimmon would have it, merely an issue of whether one believes in the substantiality of supernatural beings, or, for that matter, a question of generic conventions; the two narrative audiences can also be classified according to the varying belief systems about the extra-textual world they respectively adopt as members of each particular audience. As Todorov's classifications make explicit, the two narrative audiences can be classified according to the varying values and belief systems they respectively adopt as members of each audience. While both audiences are being asked to adopt certain attitudes about "good" and "evil," they differ with respect to the nature and location of that evil. As we investigate these issues through the remainder of the text, we shall see that their implications have profound consequences for the kind of experience we have at various points of the text and for The Turn's overall effect.

While reading as members of the ghost-story audiences, both narrative and authorial, we perforce adopt certain attitudes about good and evil. First, we assume that there exists such a distinction in the first place, regardless of
how one characterizes the nature of each; second, that ghosts exist and are necessarily evil in nature—there exist no "good ghosts," no Caspers or Toppers in this supernatural realm; and third, that human beings are capable of combatting "evil," that the forces of "good" are potentially capable of triumphing over even the supra-human. Moreover, the narrative audience must adopt the belief that the ghosts are incapable of consorting with one another without the intervening means of the children and that the evil lies in their continued desire to corrupt the innocence of the children. But again, the nature of that corruption is unspecified in the text except indirectly. Since James admittedly decided not to specify the nature of the evil as a means of intensifying the horror of the tale, and deliberately has the ghosts do nothing, the only information in the text we have about the nature of "evil" derives from Flora's use of bad language, Miles's expulsion from school for saying unspecified "bad things," and his theft of the governess's letter to his uncle. Thus, it would seem that in the textual world, evil is manifested in the use and abuse of language. Again, one need only recall the governess's opening remarks about Miles before their introduction when she uses the word "contaminate" to describe his behavior for expulsion. "Contamination," it becomes clear in her explanation to
Mrs. Grose is "corruption," and again the nature of that corruption is entirely unspecified. Given these indications, the authorial audience will infer that James is asking them to view the ghosts as symbolic of the nebulous and ambiguous quality of evil. Hence the text becomes the representation of the fight between the forces of good in the world against the unknowable forces of evil.

Those reading the story of a psychotic young woman, however, are asked to adopt values and beliefs quite different from the above. First and foremost, of course, is their implicit disbelief in the existence of the supernatural. All such phenomena are projections and hallucinations of a sick mind. Moreover, the good and evil posited here is quite different from that of the former audience. No longer does it lie in the nature of language abuse or some substantial quality of "evilness," but rather in the effect of the governess on the children. Indeed, in some respects, the tale is far more horrible for members of this audience than for the other. For if there are no "ghosts," no supernatural agents that embody evil, then evil is seen as a human attribute. In this story, we have the usual beneficent, nurturing view of woman inverted, and instead we have a portrait of the corrupting influence of a woman. The governess herself acknowledges this possibility when she states: "I seemed to float not into clearness, but
into a darker obscure, and within a minute there had come
to me out of my very pity the appalling alarm of his being
perhaps innocent. It was for the instant confounding and
bottomless, for if he were innocent what then on earth was
I".\(^\text{13}\) In this context, the authorial audience of course
recognizes that the governess's "evil" is more a consequence
of social forces than an individual attribute. We do not,
and clearly are not meant to, view the governess herself as
diabolical or malicious. She is herself the victim of her
background--her upbringing, her social class, a romanticism
engendered by gothic tales and social views of women's
roles, etc. The authorial audience of this tale is likely
to view the ghosts as representations of the governess's
psychological make-up and/or as the "ghostly" presence of
social forces forever lurking behind and constituting the
self. Thus, it may view the text primarily as the fight
between innocence and experience, and primarily sexual
innocence at that, or perhaps as a representation of
societal evil.

This conflict in belief systems raises another inter-
esting question for narrative theory: we need to elucidate
more fully the kinds of mental gymnastics we need to per-
form when reading these kinds of texts. Can we, for exam-
ple, account for the two configurations of the tale's
events simultaneously? What happens to the story's emo-
tional effects, both overall and local, when we are asked as readers to hold two contradictory experiences of those events side-by-side? On what basis do we validate one experience over the other, that is, make interpretive and evaluative judgments about James's intention or the "meaning" of the story?

As we begin our journey through the world of the text, it seems clear we are being invited to read a bona fide ghost story, pure and simple, for entertainment purposes. The setting, the discussion, and reactions of the characters, the frame itself and Douglas's prologue, all work to invite an authorial reader to suspend her disbelief in the reality of ghosts and prepare for a chilling excursion into the realm of the fantastic. ¹⁴

The opening section of The Turn of the Screw sets up these generic expectations in several ways. First and foremost, the circle of listeners round the Christmas hearth, spending their evenings by entertaining one another with scary stories, the scarier the better, generates the expectation that the ensuing tale is to be the quintessential ghost story. Moreover, as Felman and others have pointed out, there is a strong tendency on the reader's part, induced by the rhetorical devices employed in the frame, to feel included in that circle around the hearth. ¹⁵ As in all narratives, however, these interpretive conclu-
sions are provisional: beginnings have the heavy burden of establishing our expectations about the direction and genre of the text as a whole both to guide our subsequent reading activities as well as to provide a firm base for a potential departure from those expectations.

The frame and prologue further work to establish first Douglas's, then the governess's, reliability and authority. Douglas's credibility is established both through the juxtaposition with the more credulous and irritating members of the audience, as well as through his increasing association and rapport with the unspecified "I" narrator of the frame. More and more as the prologue progresses, the reader is led to identify with the two clearly more perspicacious characters. James's use of the unfinished sentences of the one being completed by the other, with the implication of the correctness of the other's interpretation, strongly leads us to respond positively to these two figures. In fact, Douglas at one point comments: "You'll easily judge,...you will," and again says to the "I" narrator, "You are acute" (p. 3) The reader is thus put in much the same position as the "I" narrator, and naturally wishes to be as "acute" and perceptive. As Armstrong puts it:

We see that the audience of Douglas's tale is divided on a more fundamental basis than that determined by the principles underlying one's selection of character types or by the kind of value judgment that such a reading activity im-
plies. The frame posits two kinds of readers. There are the literal-minded who assume a right reading of cultural information and apply it to social relationships ("We know whom he was in love with."). But this kind of reader is distinguished from Douglas and his sympathetic listener who refuse to eliminate any possible interpretations of the narrative....

Moreover, this impulse to identify with the initial two speakers is so strong that a number of critics have posited the "I" narrator to be James himself, a leap explicable only by virtue of the strength of the frame in establishing that rapport, credibility, and reliability of Douglas and hence in the tale to come. (I shall only mention in passing that the fact that the irritating members of the audience are female may pose a problem for some readers and hence interfere with the text's obvious invitation to identify with Douglas and the initial narrator; interestingly enough, the gender of the I-narrator is left unspecified, and hence could be female.)

The tale also derives its credibility from the parallels that exist between it and the frame. The interaction between Douglas and the narrator parallels in many ways that between the governess and Mrs. Grose. Most obvious, of course, is that the blanks provided by Mrs. Grose are filled in with the governess's own completing statements; for example, in their conversation about Miles' dismissal from school and the governess's indication that she will
say and do nothing about it, Mrs. Grose states: "Would you mind, Miss, if I used the freedom--", to which the governess responds, "To kiss me?" (p.14). The correctness of her interpretation is evident from the repeated description of Mrs. Grose wiping her mouth with her apron prior to this remark as well as by her statement that "We'll see it out."

Thus, like the I-narrator, we are asked to see the governess's interpretations of half-finished sentences as accurate. A further parallel between the frame and the tale is the fact that both Douglas's manuscript and the letter from the headmaster, are kept by them both in locked drawers upstairs. To ice the cake, so to speak, James acknowledges in his Preface to *The Aspern Papers* that it was enough for his purposes to grant the governess authority.18

Nonetheless, some indications exist that the generic conventions and expectations associated with ghost stories will be, if not thwarted, then considerably altered. Douglas states that the previous tale, Griffin's, departed from the established ghost-story tradition and that the ensuing tale will be a further development of that departure:

I quite agree—in regard to Griffin's ghost, or whatever it was—that its appearing first to the little boy, at so tender an age, adds a particular touch. But it's not the first occurrence of its charming kind that I know to have been concerned with a child. If the child gives the effect another turn of the screw, what do you say to two children—? (p. 1)
Since the departure is explicitly in the same terms as Griffin's—that is, it will be altered merely by the addition of the visitation to one more child—the statement is not strong enough to invite the narrative or authorial audience's real consideration that what follows is to be anything other than it purports to be. Nonetheless, there exists one disturbing indication—Douglas's statement that the tale will not tell in any literal way. Yet even this statement lacks sufficient force to undermine the expectations that have been established, since it works primarily as an invitation to the authorial audience to "read" the ghosts in a nonliteral fashion, perhaps as representative of some abstract concept. Thus, the frame, while departing somewhat from the generic aspects of the ghost story in its conventional structure and realistic style, nonetheless constitutes an exceedingly strong invitation to read the ensuing tale as a ghost story.

These expectations are complicated but not really undermined as we begin to read the governess's account of the happenings at Bly. The opening sentences reinforce our sense that all is not right at Bly and at the same time begin to establish the character of the governess. Despite her sensitivity, doubts, and tendency to rely upon appearances, she nonetheless comes across as a reliable reporter of her surroundings. For example, generically, we expect
Bly to appear as an old, truly gothic mansion, as the governess says "I had expected, or had dreaded, something so dreary..." (p. 7). But she acknowledges that in fact she was mistaken, that the grounds and structure of Bly created a "thoroughly pleasant impression." Moreover, later in the chapter, we get an indication of her tendency to romanticize, but again the passage works to indicate her ability to recognize the reality beneath her imaginative perception:

I had the view of a castle of romance inhabited by a rosy sprite, such a place as would somehow, for diversion of the young idea, take all colour out of story-books and fairy tales. Was n't [sic] it just a story-book over which I had fallen a-doze and a-dream? No; it was a big ugly antique but convenient house.... (10)

The kind of tension that is produced in these opening pages is one that surrounds the nature of the conventional structures of these kinds of narratives, rather than one produced by suspicion of the governess's reliability and sanity. In fact, the only indication that the governess may be unreliable stems from her tendency to jump to conclusions based solely upon appearances, rather than waiting for more concrete "facts" to support her interpretations. Nonetheless, these interpretive statements, that only later and in retrospect will be seen as equally supportive of the hallucination theory, help create and continue the expectations that are inherent in ghost stories. For example,
upon her arrival and introduction to Flora and Mrs. Grose, the governess states:

The one appearance indeed that in this early outlook might have made me shrink again was that of her being so inordinately glad to see me. I felt within half an hour that she was so glad—stout simple plain clean wholesome woman—as to be positively on her guard against showing it too much. I wondered even then a little why she should wish not to show it, and that, with reflexion, with suspicion, might of course have made me uneasy. (7-8)

But the governess was not here made uneasy, and the passage reflects the retrospective nature of the narrative itself as well as introduces a note of anticipatory anxiety about the forthcoming events.

The "identification scene" of Quint by Mrs. Grose works in much the same way as did the governess's description of her reaction to the appearance of Bly did earlier. Moreover, the scene works to reinforce our hypothesis that the tale is meant to be read as a ghost story. Even the sighting itself, which so many critics cite as evidence of the governess's imagination let loose, works more to confirm our hypotheses about the character of the governess and the nature of the tale than to introduce any strong doubt; I suggest that the "hallucinationists" only question the sighting retrospectively, but that the initial force of the scene generates no such questioning. In other words, our prior experience of the governess's disposition towards
a self-aware romanticization which is still capable of piercing through to a "reality," carries through to the initial sighting itself; as a result, we are predisposed to believe in the reality of the sighting, despite her ruminations about the man in Harley Street. The identification of Quint by Mrs. Grose also works to reinforce our developing notion that we are indeed engaged on the narrative level in a ghost story. The governess is able to give Mrs. Grose quite a detailed description of the figure on the tower:

He has red hair, very red, close-curling, and a pale face, long in shape, with straight good features and little rather queer whiskers that are as red as his hair. His eyebrows are somehow darker; they look particularly arched and as if they might move a good deal. His eyes are sharp, strange--awfully; but I only know clearly that they're rather small and very fixed. His mouth's wide, and his lips are thin, except for his little whiskers he's quite clean-shaven. He gives me a sort of sense of looking like an actor. (pp. 23-24)

As a result, we accept Mrs. Grose's identification as accurate. She had known Quint for some time, is aware of the nebulous character of his death, and, most important, we have become accustomed in this narrative to accurate interpretations that are based on little evidence--half-finished phrases, knowing or telling glances, etc.

Until the appearance of Miss Jessel, our reading of the tale is univocal and tension-free. We are firmly
entrenched in the "duck" narrative audience, and our expectations and concerns about the action all center on the fate of the inhabitants at Bly in their confrontation with the ghosts. Initially, the appearance of Miss Jessel works to intensify the horror of the tale. Not only is there one ghost at Bly attempting to gain control of a child but two ghosts, each focusing upon a particular child. Immediately prior to the sighting, the governess reiterates her position:

I scarce know how to put my story into words that shall be a credible picture of my state of mind; but I was in these days literally able to find a joy in the extraordinary flight of heroism the occasion demanded of me. I now saw that I had been asked for a service admirable and difficult; and there would be a greatness in letting it be seen—oh in the right quarter—! that I could succeed where many another girl might have failed. . . . I was there to protect and defend the little creatures in the world the most bereaved and the most loveable. . . . I was a screen— I was to stand before them. The more I saw the less they would. I began to watch them in a stifled suspense, a disguised tension, that might well, had it continued too long, have turned to something like madness. What saved me, as I now see, was that it turned to another matter altogether. It didn't last as suspense—it was superseded by horrible proofs. Proofs, I say, yes— from the moment I really took hold. (p. 28)

The passage generates an enormous suspense about what will happen; we are caught up in the narrative present and wonder what "proofs" will occur and what will be the nature of their horror. The governess immediately continues her
tale with the Sea of Azof scene. While Flora plays, the governess sits with a piece of work in hand; without her looking up, she becomes aware of the presence of a third party. In fact, she never does look up to ascertain whether in fact someone is there until after looking at Flora who sits with her back to the water and hence is unable to see across the lake.

This scene is the first of the "horrible proofs" the governess mentioned before. Flora's failure to react to the ghost's presence constitutes "proof" that the children know about them and that they are already under their infernal influence. The fact that the apparition is female leads the governess to identify her as Miss Jessel. Since at this point, the exact connection between Quint and Miss Jessel has not been mentioned, we are, as is Mrs. Grose, quite skeptical about the identification. Repeatedly Mrs. Grose questions the governess and demands that she tell her how she knows. The governess responds by repeating that she knows because she saw. What she saw was a "woman in black, pale and dreadful" (p. 31) who she claims was staring at Flora. At this point our suspicions are strongly aroused. The governess's interpretation of the events at the lake strains our credibility sufficiently to lead us to wonder about the governess's veracity and to question our hypothesis about the nature of the action. As a re-
suit, complications arise for the authorial audience; we are led to reexamine the previous action and "evidence" in light of our doubt.

Doing so, raises the following issues for the authorial audience: we are led to question both the sighting itself and the frame once again. Upon a closer examination, we recognize that the ghostly apparition differs from that of the traditional ghost story, that is, our conventional expectations are upset. Moreover, we realize that in this story, the visitation happens to the governess first, not the children. In the frame, the point of Griffin's story and the source of its horror stemmed from the ghost's appearance to a child; Douglas's story was to complicate and complement that horror through the addition of a second child. But what we discover at this point, is that the appearance occurs to the adult first—or at least that is all the information we have at this point. Later, of course, the governess will claim that the children have been consorting with the evil beings for some time, but once our doubt has been aroused in this manner, once we are aware of the possibility of an alternative hypothesis, even that claim is suspect. The result of this departure from the expectations generated by the frame is to undermine Douglas's authority and credibility about the nature of the governess and the tale. As many have pointed out,
Douglas's credibility is diminished by his youth and obvious infatuation with the governess at the time he first heard the story.\footnote{Having induced our doubt so strongly in this manner, James forces the reader back to the beginning of the text in an attempt to determine the exact nature of the tale in which we are engaged. Despite the fact that we recognize the retrospective character of the narrative, we have been caught up in the unfolding of the events in a narrative present that strongly affects us. Thus, there is an enormous tension generated by this scene: we doubt the governess's reliability in the recounting of her experience, wonder about the various ways she has distorted and shaped the nature of the events at Bly; we question the nature of the "ghost" story itself and focus instead on the ways in which it departs from those generic conventions; and most importantly, we recognize the existence of and invitation to join an alternative audience of the story, one that is reading a tale of a sensitive, young woman's emotional and psychological breakdown and its consequences for two young children left solely in her control.}

When we go back at this point, we recognize the truly ambiguous aspects of the evidence presented thus far—that, as Rimmon points out, the data we have perceived and that has motivated our hypotheses about the nature of the tale are mutually exclusive and apply with equal force and are
are equally tenable in support of both interpretations. What we had previously thought of, for example, as primarily a realistic portrayal of the character of a young, inexperienced governess, we now can see as a portrayal of a mind losing control over reality. The governess's tendency to insomnia, her hypersensitivity, her admitted tendency to "be carried away," all become indications of her suspect mental condition, rather than indications of her youth, inexperience, and romantic imagination. Allen's statements about the character of the governess nicely captures the kind of interpretive problem we are faced with:

If we look briefly at the apparent anomalies in her character and situation that the hallucination theorists have seized upon to discredit her testimony, they will all be seen to contribute to the credibility of her behavior. Her infatuation with the man in Harley Street makes her determination to stay and fight in the face of danger credible. Her religious background makes her acceptance of a role in the struggle between good and supernatural evil more plausible. The reference to 'disturbing letters from home, where things were not going well' (p. 41), together with her employer's injunction against ever bothering him, of course puts her entirely on her own and is necessary to forestall the objection that she should have sought outside help in her troubles at Bly. 20

Allen's statements demonstrate the double-edged character of The Turn: all textual data can be evidence for one or the other interpretation of the book, depending upon which narrative audience the individual critic participates in. Moreover, the tension produced by the introduction of
a conflicting and competing interpretation of the governess's character, experience, and rendition of the events at Bly remains throughout the narrative and colors one's perceptions of the previous events. Once the text has split, then, after the Sea of Azof scene, one's view of Quint's identification scene and the second sighting, for example, changes dramatically.

My sense of the effect of the dual possibilities is that for many readers the enormous tension gets resolved by their opting for one or the other audience more fully. Many critics have pointed to the ambiguity that arises in the governess's second sighting of Quint. Those readers whose doubt forces them into the "hallucinationist" narrative audience interpret this scene quite differently from the original ghost-story audience, primarily as a reflection of the governess's psychotic fears. McMaster, for example, in an article devoted to the images of repetition that dominate the story, states:

The occasion on which the governess runs round to look in through the window and terrify Mrs. Grose as the ghost had just looked in and terrified her—this is only the most obvious instance of a consistently maintained pattern in the action, in which the governess takes the place of the ghost. Part of James's purpose in this systematic exchange of locations is no doubt to give us another facet of the governess's complex psychology. She herself is conscious of some appropriateness in her taking the ghosts' places, and it is evidently part of her longing to be "justified" in her
perceptions that moves her to endow her mental images with some measure of spatial reality: she becomes the embodiment of her own mental projections.  

McMaster's statements and analysis of the structure of the tale, while perceptive in many respects, fail to be convincing, primarily because the governess's replacement of the ghost is not in fact a "consistently maintained pattern." Often, I grant, there is a suggestion of replacement in their close proximity or in the lack of corroborating outside evidence. For example, when the governess discovers Miles out on the lawn, we are told that he looked at someone/something directly above her, and there is no way of determining the accuracy of that statement once we recognize the presence of the hallucinationist theory. Again, there is no evidence to corroborate or contradict McMaster's statements concerning the confrontation between the governess and Miss Jessel in the schoolroom or, for that matter, at the lake when she tries to wring a confession from Flora. Neither Mrs. Grose nor Flora see Miss Jessel, so the governess's statement that "Miss Jessel stood before us on the opposite bank exactly as she had stood the other time" (p. 71) is, I suppose, suspect. Yet McMaster never addresses such contradictory evidence in her argument, and its lack is eloquent testimony to the effects of the text's duality: readers tend both to opt for one or
the other narrative audience and fail to acknowledge the presence and force of the alternative reading.

The awareness of this duality, of two possible audiences and hence interpretations of the text, changes our experience of the rest of the action. As we continue to read, we can no longer be members of one audience or the other simultaneously and our emotional participation in the tale is consequently altered. In other words, as we read the ensuing events, we cannot read both as "ducks" and as "rabbits;" we do, in fact, choose which configuration we see—depending upon how strongly our doubt has been aroused and which evidence we deem more compelling upon reexamination. Yet throughout the remainder of the text we remain aware of the alternate configuration; while seeing the "duck," we "remember" that it is also a "rabbit." Consequently, our emotional involvement in either narrative audience is strangely diminished, and some of our attention as authorial readers is diverted to the seemingly more central questions of either which evidence is more compelling at various points of the tale or to the ways in which James maintains the perceptual duality.

What, then, does all this mean, both in terms of our overall experience of the tale and of our evaluation of James's accomplishment. The question of success depends, of course, upon our ability to recuperate his intention
and, given the vastly different emotional effects of the story for each audience, that recuperation is rendered much more difficult. In other words, for the ghost-story audience, the end of the tale is a representation of the triumph of "good" over "evil," although the cost (Miles's death) is great. For the other narrative audience, the ending is in a sense far more horrorful—we see the representation of the consequences of leaving children alone in the hands of an insane person, the triumph of madness over innocence, if you will. This negative depiction is only slightly alleviated by Flora's near escape; her escape is not felt as profoundly as Miles's death. Thus, we have two complete and satisfying reading experiences in the work, but the profound difference between the world-views each presents causes a gap between James and us.

While we may appreciate the creation of optical illusions for their own sake in pictorial art, as readers we tend to prefer the unambiguous communication. This preference is evident not only from the number of unilateral readings of The Turn but also from those readings that seek to reconcile the tension that results from the dual audiences on the authorial level. But we have seen that the tale's ultimate emotional effect and possible thematic understandings differ profoundly for each of the audiences. Thus, there can be no "reconciliation" of the two audi-
ences' understandings of James's intent. Nonetheless, attempts have been made to reconcile the two authorial audiences of the work. Murphy states the problem in the following way: 

In this sense, the double being focused upon in this tale of replication is most obvious and constant: author and reading doubling experience through the duplicitous agency of words. But, given the ambiguity informing the tale, James forces us to reconsider our assumptions about the coherency and consistency of a text. More fundamentally, James puts the question: what is the "office" of a reader? Is he one who deciphers an objectively coherent text, or is he one who shapes anew and uniquely the inherently ambiguous world of words? If we look more closely at the collaboration in the prologue, we can see that James undermines the possibility of "objective" reading.

Murphy's statement of the problem the text poses is fairly accurate—the text indeed raises the issues he cites. But to make the leap from the questions the text seems to raise to authorial intent is unwarranted. Moreover, Murphy differentiates ambiguity from coherency and consistency, a distinction again unwarranted. Certainly ambiguous texts may be coherent and consistent in their ambiguity, and The Turn of the Screw is an excellent example of how this may be achieved. One can only state with any certitude that James has created a "plural" text, one in which two "objective" readings are maintained.

Other critics have attempted to resolve the problem by stating that the "meaning" of the novella is reflexivity
itself or about the hermeneutic problems of interpretation and its formation. Such readings are certainly possible, but they don't get one out of James's trap, they merely abstract the problem one step further and are equally as partial and reductive as the earlier Freudian/non-Freudian dichotomy in the final analysis. After all, given the current critical climate, it seems that the meaning of all texts now inheres in their self-reflexivity and bring into question the nature of fictionality and its relation to an extra-textual world. Moreover, such readings ultimately devalue or ignore completely the tensions resulting from an author's thwarting our ability to enter fully into any narrative audience for the work. Much of the pleasure of reading inheres in precisely this activity. As we will see in the case of Fowles's work, his ultimate intentions also conflict with the pleasure we could derive from the narrative level per se, resulting in misinterpretation and posing problems for the reader's engagement with the text.

I would suggest that in The Turn of the Screw James's construction of an ambiguous text based on the simultaneous existence of two potential narrative audiences, each reading with different strategies and conventions, along with his consistent and coherent maintenance of both narratives and interpretations, indeed results in a gap between the
reader and author. One may appreciate the artistry and effectiveness of the textual devices James employs to maintain the text's ultimate undecidability, but beyond that, few, if any, claims may be made concerning the values and beliefs embodied in the text as belonging to "James." Such a situation does indeed, as Murphy would have it, cause us to reconsider our evaluative assumptions about the nature of literary art, but not in terms of coherency and consistency. Rather, such texts force us to confront our own criteria for judging narratives and the stories they tell us about the world we live in; we want to know the precise nature of the communication between James and us, that is, the kind of truth claims about the world being made, and this tension never gets resolved.

In addition, the experience of reading The Turn is a highly uncomfortable one. We saw earlier how the existence of two possible narrative audiences diminished our emotional experience of each. In other words, our recognition of the presence of an alternate audience constrained our full participation in either one. A reader is left in the position of choosing either to switch back and forth between the two possibilities or to close her eyes to one or the other, both of which choices make for an unsatisfactory reading transaction. In the latter case, closing our eyes is a kind of willful suppression of the full experience of
the text and leads to the kind of interpretive phenomenon characteristic of The Turn's critical history. Such evasion may allow one to experience more fully the emotional effects of one of the possible narratives, but suppresses the kind of intellectual engagement the work offers. The former option, that of continual shifting, is even more problematic. Certainly the cognitive aspects of our experience are enhanced, we get caught up in observing the way in which the textual data will fit both possibilities, but the cost is great: we never engage fully on an emotional level. This distinction between "seeing" and "feeling," makes for an unsatisfactory reading experience. Granted, the distinction is not quite so clear-cut as it appears; there is some degree of overlap in both cases. But the text precludes any satisfactory "both/and" resolution in terms of our reading experience. For The Turn, then, it seems as if the aesthetic experience lies in our cognitive contemplation of the text's ambiguity rather than in the emotional or ethical dimensions of literary transactions. Such a conclusion raises the issue of to what extent our evaluation of literary works inheres in our emotional participation, and it is to this question we will now turn.
ENDNOTES


2 Ibid.


4 Ibid, x.


7 Rimmon, 117-118.

8 Rimmon, 118.

9 Rimmon, 119.

10 Cook, 57.


12 Felman makes the claim that the meaning of the story concerns the transgressive nature of reading or telling. While ultimately reductive, her analysis of the function of letters in the tale is worth noting. As she puts it: "If the story is a letter and if a letter is the materialization of the absence of the beginning of a story, then the very act of telling, of narrating, must begin as the transgressive breaking of a seal—the seal of the silence from which the story springs. The story then is nothing but the circulation of a violated letter which materially travels
from place to place through the successive changes of its addressees...." Shoshana Felman, "Turning the Screw of Interpretation," Literature and Psychoanalysis: The Question of Reading: Otherwise, Ed. Shoshana Felman (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1982) 140-141.

13 Henry James, The Turn of the Screw, Ed. Robert Kimbrough (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1966) 87. All subsequent page citations will be to this edition.

14 Rimmon also sees the prologue as functioning in this way: "A first reading arouses suspense, an anticipation of a grim ghost story, and a predisposition in favor of the governess. The framework is a Christmas eve fireside social gathering in which people appropriately tell gruesome ghost stories. Rimmon, 123.

15 See also Alexander Jones's essay in Gerald Willen, A Casebook on Henry James's The Turn of the Screw.


17 Most critics adopt the same view as McMaster who states: "On the other hand Douglas is more particularly addressing the original narrator of the story, whom for convenience we may call [James]. Juliet McMaster, "The Full Image of Repetition' in The Turn of the Screw," Studies in Short Fiction 6 (1968): 381.

18 Willen, 99.

19 Most of those who view Douglas's introductory comments as suspect obviously belong to the hallucinationist camp. Even those who generally acknowledge Douglas's authority, however, see his comments as possibly suspect. Bell states: "The confidence she [the governess] has inspired in her fictional editor, Douglas, does not really help, either, for he, too, is a possibly compromised and implicated speaker over whose shoulder the first-person narrator of the frame-story looks at us without either reassurance or skepticism." Millicent Bell, "The Turn of the Screw and the Recherche de L'Absolu," Henry James: Fiction as History, Ed. Ian F. A. Bell, (London: Vision Press Limited, 1984) 65-66.

21 McMaster, 379.


CHAPTER III

THE FRENCH LIEUTENANT'S WOMAN: OUR FORMAL GROUNDS OF DISCONTENT

Postmodern fiction, particularly the *nouveau roman*, can pose another source of tension between readers and authors. Many of these works not only set out to flout our conventional means for dealing with fiction but also typically foreground their nature as artificial constructs to generate their artistic effects. Moreover, since many of these works are "experimental," that is, depart from conventional structure, character development, and uses of language, our experience of these works on the narrative level is often fraught with frustration. In this chapter I shall investigate the kind of tension that can result between narrative and authorial audiences, specifically in Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, a work that not only exemplifies the effects of such tensions but also raises questions about the nature and limits of our interpretive conventions for dealing with narratives that incorporate dual intentions. More specifically, the mimetic
aspect of the narrative proper and the metafictional char-
acter of the discourse often conflict with one another and
offer us two kinds of reading engagements.

In *The French Lieutenant's Woman* Fowles has set him-
self an interesting and difficult project. A large part of
his endeavor is to provide a narrative account of the
transition, especially in ethical and moral, but also in
artistic values from the nineteenth century to the twen-
tieth. Moreover, since he is writing not a historical novel
*per se* but a modern one that incorporates some twentieth-
century aesthetic values, his problem is that much more
complicated: how to incorporate two different and some-
times even opposing world-views, as well as aesthetic
forms, into one coherent whole. In other words, a primary
source of the tension in the work stems from a conflict
between two distinct, albeit related, intentions Fowles has
set himself: 1) his dominant intention to provide a fic-
tional history of the transition in ethical and moral
values through a mimetic representation of the lives of
Charles and Sarah and Ernestina; and 2) his subsidiary
intention to write a postmodern novel that will illustrate
the changes in aesthetic values. Part of Fowles's solution
is to adopt the conventions of the earlier age, particular-
ly a kind of mimesis and type of omniscient narrator asso-
ciated with Victorian novels, and then to complicate our
response to those conventions by juxtaposing them with more "modern" aesthetic values and practices about the nature of narrative art.

The result is significant for his readers. To accomplish his primary intention, Fowles employs a kind of mimesis that, like any other artistic choice, involves a whole set of contractual obligations between author and reader. Specifically his use of a third-person omniscient narrator, characteristic of many Victorian novels, invites us to trust that narrative voice in accordance with our generic expectations, and his focus on the characters and their problems asks us to become concerned both intellectually and emotionally with the events of their lives. And his recreation of the Victorian age and its problems is indeed compelling; he has written a "history" and a "love story" that powerfully engage our emotions. To accomplish his secondary intention, Fowles, initially in chapter 13 and subsequently in chapter 55, deliberately distances us from the narrative voice and foregrounds the novel as artificial construct. Consequently, he distances us from the narrative account, and, in the process, violates the apparent mimetic contract he has asked us to sign while reading the first twelve chapters and the lengthy middle section. These two "solutions" to his thematic and aesthetic aims render our response to the novel problematic
indeed, and Fowles runs a serious risk of being misunderstood at best and of alienating his audience at worst, as some of the critical reaction to the book makes clear.

An immense popular success, the book obviously presented no insurmountable obstacles for the general reading public, yet the initial reviews and criticism were markedly more cautious and ambivalent. Such a reversal of typical critical reaction to a postmodern work of literature is an interesting phenomenon; one cannot help but question why the general public were so much less troubled by the theoretical elements and concerns than the reviewers. One explanation lies in the powerful mimetic emphasis of the text; the metafictional elements surface obtrusively only a few times in the course of the work. For the general reader, then, it appears that the pleasure of the narrative level is sufficiently strong to overcome any tensions that may arise from the metafictional intrusions that work to diminish the mimetic illusion of the text. Reviewers, on the other hand, have found the narrator's self-conscious commentary far more troublesome and fraught with tensions, often to the point of condemning Fowles for undue "coyness," "cleverness," and "didacticism."^2

Most of the criticism on the novel, while insightful about many of Fowles's thematic elements, has not recognized the problem created by these conflicting intentions.
The reasons for this neglect are, I think, multiple and complex, but a brief look at the assumptions underlying that criticism will help elucidate what I see as distinctive in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and in my own approach to it.

By and large the criticism deals exclusively with justifications, predominantly thematic and partly aesthetic, for privileging the second ending of the story. In this way critics have justified the mimetic-destroying elements of the text as necessary to demonstrate more forcefully Fowles's statements concerning individual freedom, existentialism, the transition from the Victorian to the modern age, and the development of the *nouveau roman*. Part of the explanation for this phenomenon lies precisely in the fact that Fowles's project is one in which the mimetic representation becomes important for its thematic significance: Charles is not just any Victorian but a representative one. In addition, this phenomenon in the criticism reflects the nature of our current critical practices—thematizing is itself our standard critical *modus operandi*. As Scholes has recently put it, "interpretation proper...is the thematizing of a text." Yet such approaches are highly reductive: they either ignore—or at best slight—one or another of the various above-mentioned thematic issues that get raised in this narrative, and,
most particularly, presuppose that the ideational content is meant to be privileged over the emotional effects of the story itself. Consequently, such readings fail to recognize the enormous emotional power of the Victorian "love story" that forms the large part of the book.

Moreover, most of the critical discourse on Fowles's novel takes as given that the narrator and Fowles are either identical or, if the distinction is made, that they share the same values and beliefs about the nature of art and life. These assumptions are untenable upon a closer examination of the text, and, more important, fail to recognize, much less account for, the tensions that exist among the reader, the narrator, and the author as a consequence of Fowles's solutions to his dual intention. In the following pages, I will examine the narrative strategies that reveal Fowles's intention to have us respond antagonistically toward his narrator as a means of underscoring his thematic aims. I will argue further that one consequence of this artistic decision is the development of a "gap" between the reader and Fowles himself—especially with respect to the unavoidable thwarting of our enjoyment of the mimetic narrative after we have been asked us to respond so forcefully on that level. I will also speculate about why critics have consistently ignored these narrator-ial and authorial tensions that indeed form so important a
part of our experience of the work and about the consequences of these tensions for our relationship with the author and our assessment of his work.

For the first twelve chapters, Fowles is clearly asking us to engage in a fairly straightforward mimetic representation of the trials and tribulations of Charles Smithson, a man typical in many ways of the dying breed of the Victorian "gentleman," caught in a dilemma between his duty to Ernestina and his personal desire for Sarah. Beyond those usual functions initial chapters serve in novels, two functions are foremost in this novel: to intertwine carefully the mimetic and thematic components of the narrative itself and to establish a firm relationship between the narrator and the narrative audience. In the opening pages, Fowles establishes a pattern of narration that both engages our interest in the characters themselves and their fates and simultaneously emphasizes their thematic function in his exposition of the movement from one age to another. For example, Fowles's initial extended description of Charles's personality emphasizes his mimetic characteristics, indicates the ways and directions he needs to change, and contextualizes his qualities as a representative Victorian man:

Laziness was, I am afraid, Charles's distinguishing trait. Like many of his contemporaries he sensed that the earlier self-responsibility
of the century was turning into self-importance: that what drove the new Britain was increasingly a desire to seem respectable, in place of the desire to do good for good's sake. He knew he was overfastidious. But how could one write history with Macaulay so close behind? Fiction or poetry, in the midst of the greatest galaxy of talent in the history of English literature? How could one be a creative scientist, with Lyell and Darwin still alive?  

The first sentence of the passage clearly works mimetically; we are given a baldly stated description of Charles, the individual. The second sentence moves directly to a comparison with others of his time and age, a comparison based not on the attribute of laziness but on a thematic issue of a characteristic of the age--its hypocrisy, which works both to cast aspersion on both the age and Charles himself, who may be presumed to share that characteristic. The third sentence again returns to a mimetic depiction of one of Charles's traits, and the fourth again moves back to a statement about the times rather than the man himself. Fowles employs this pattern often enough to indicate that we are meant to view the characters not merely as "personalities" but also as representatives who reflect certain elements of the Victorian age and through whom he will tell a story about that Age.

The second major function of the opening twelve chapters is to establish the character of and our relationship with the narrator. In the very first chapter, indeed, in
the opening sentence, Fowles foregrounds the narrator's temporal distance from the characters; he belongs to a present at some indistinguishable future point from the present of the characters—"An easterly is the most disagreeable wind in Lyme Bay" (italics mine). The verb forms then move progressively to the past ("a person of curiosity could at once have deduced...") and ends with the past tense, characteristic of much fiction. This foregrounding is further manifested in the repeated juxtapositions by the narrator of the descriptions of 1867 and "today," which work to deflect our attention to and heighten our interest in the characters as bearers of thematic concerns:

The young lady was dressed in the height of fashion, for another wind was blowing in 1867: the beginning of a revolt against the crinoline and the large bonnet....while the taller man, impeccably in a light gray,...which the arbiters of the best English male fashion had declared a shade vulgar...a year or two previously. The colors of the young lady's clothes would strike us today as distinctly strident; but the world was then in the first fine throes of the discovery of aniline dyes (p.10-11).

In chapter 3 our notions that the "today" referred to above is indeed the present of 1968 are confirmed. By making explicit the association of the narrator with our contemporary world and ourselves, Fowles invites us to then make comparisons between the ages, comparisons that form part of the basis of the thematic issue of the transition between the two ages. Moreover, Fowles's use of a twentieth-
century omniscient narrator, rather than distancing us from the action, instead heightens our enjoyment of his recreation of a typical Victorian novel by foregrounding his use of a nineteenth century literary convention, and more forcefully demonstrates the similarities and differences between that age and our own, both in the kinds of problems Charles faces and his possible reactions to those problems.

In addition, Fowles works to establish a firm relationship between the narrator and the narrative audience. From the very first, the narrator directly invites the reader to dispute his statements about the Cobb (e.g., "I exaggerate? Perhaps, but I can be put to the test" [p. 10]), and both times, the narrator indicates that his veracity will be borne out. The effect of such challenges is, as usual, complicated. On the one hand, they serve to reinforce the reader's trust in all the narratorial judgments that will follow and perform the function of narrowing the distance between the implied reader and the narrator (if only due to contemporaneity), increasing what Lanser calls an aspect of narratorial status—the narrator's mimetic authority. In addition, the narrator's numerous allusions to the characters' descendants in the twentieth century, for example, Mary's granddaughter, the actress, also add to the creation of this mimetic authority and effect.
For the authorial audience, however, the reaction is far more ambivalent. On the one hand, by indirectly raising the issue of the "correctness" of a narrator's pronouncements, Fowles has raised the opposite possibility— that we cannot take the narrator's judgments at face value. Complicating the issue even further is the fact that Fowles goes to some lengths to suggest that the narrative voice is indeed his own, both by carefully setting the action in Lyme, his own residence, and by subsequent references to ideas and attitudes he can be presumed to share. Many critics, have, in fact, assiduously cited the congruence between Fowles's statements in interviews and The Aristos on the one hand and statements by the narrator in the novel on the other. At this point, however, these two issues are not unduly troublesome, but function rather to prepare us for the kind of tension engendered by the narrator's patently wrong judgments in chapter 13, when Fowles chooses to foreground the indeed formidable discrepancy between the two voices and their judgments.

With the advent of chapter 13, all aesthetic hell breaks loose. Not only does Fowles undercut the mimetic and conventional expectations he has carefully inculcated, (especially by admitting the fictional status of the text), but he also foregrounds the twentieth-century character of the novel by forcefully creating a tension between our
activities and reactions as members of the authorial audience and activities and reactions we have as members of the narrative audience. Chapter 13 opens with the narrator's express disavowal both of the mimetic thrust of the novel and of his heretofore seeming omniscience, claiming that "this story I am telling is all imagination....If I have pretended until now to know my characters' minds and innermost thoughts, it is because I am writing...in a convention universally accepted at the time of my story: that the novelist stands next to God" (p. 80). Moreover, Fowles makes explicit some aesthetic values of this novelist-narrator, particularly those that characterize the narrator (and, by extension, the book) as belonging to the twentieth century:

Oh, but you say, come on--what I really mean is that the idea crossed my mind as I wrote that it might be more clever to have him stop and drink milk...and meet Sarah again. That is certainly one explanation of what happened; but I can only report--and I am the most reliable witness--that the idea seemed to me to come clearly from Charles, not myself. It is not only that he has begun to gain an autonomy; I must respect it, and disrespect all my quasi-divine plans for him, if I wish him to be real.

In other words, to be free myself, I must give him, and Tina, and Sarah, even the abominable Mrs. Poulteney, their freedom as well. There is only one good definition of God: the freedom that allows other freedoms to exist. And I must conform to that definition.

The novelist is still a god, since he creates (and not even the most aleatory avant-garde modern novel has managed to extirpate its author completely); what has changed is that we
are no longer the gods of the Victorian image, omniscient and decreeing; but in the new theological image, with freedom our first principle and authority (pp. 81-82).

For the narrative audience, the "digression" in this chapter serves to heighten the already established mimetic impulse of the novel. If not really controlled by a novelist-God, then the characters' "reality" is thus made more forceful—their thoughts, decisions, and actions are thereby all the more real since we see them as responding to their particular situations in their own "characteristic" ways. As the narrator goes on to point out:

My characters still exist, and in a reality no less, or no more, real than the one I have just broken. Fiction is woven into all, as a Greek observed some two and a half thousand years ago. I find this new reality (or unreality) more valid; and I would have you share my own sense that I do not fully control these creatures of my mind, any more than you control...your children, colleagues, friends, or even yourself (p.82).

Moreover, the narrative audience's relationship with the narrator is deepened in a positive direction. Not only is this narrator "pretending" omniscience, thus reinforcing what we already know, but he is willing to admit it, to let us share in the play on the diegetic level as well. Up to this point, we have been asked to believe the narrator's judgments both about the action in the nineteenth century and about the twentieth as well. He has been our wise and friendly guide and, if a bit intrusive and overbearing in
his comments, we have enjoyed and noted the "truth" of those comments. Moreover, the values the narrator espouses are attractive and ones which we wish to have as well. His catalog of "reasons for writing" ends with the universal desire to "create worlds as real as, but other than the world that is," a desire characteristic of all humankind in our activities as fiction-makers. The life-giving, freedom-granting nature of that desire is manifested in his granting the characters their autonomy and his overt juxtaposition with the kind of control Mrs. Poulteney seeks to exert. While acknowledging that the novelist is perforce a god, "since he creates," the narrator nonetheless is a god of free-will who respects the freedom and individuality of his creations and, one suspects, of the reader as well. Narrator and reader are united in these desires and beliefs, and the action of the story can continue. As the final act of faith, the narrator refuses to enter Sarah's mind, to impinge upon her right to her own private thoughts and griefs.

For the authorial audience, however, the chapter initiates several tensions that are bridgeable only partially and in particular ways. As members of authorial audiences, our interest in characters' fates exists primarily when authorial intent asks us to focus on this aspect of the narrative—and certainly Fowles, up to this point, has
asked us to do so. When an authorial reader encounters chapter 13, her focus shifts from the characters and their situations to the aesthetic questions foregrounded by the intrusion.

First and foremost, the mimetic illusion is seriously threatened, if not altogether shattered, for this audience. Our interest is immediately directed to the more pertinent questions about the work as construct, its status as fiction, the role and character of the narrator, and the thematic issues being raised. Because most of the narrator's statements in the chapter about the nature of art and its relationship to life, about the autonomy of his characters, and about the kind of freedom entailed in this postmodern conception of art are dubious, an immediate tension is generated between the authorial audience and the narrator. For example, not all novelists desire to create worlds as real as the world that is, only those writing certain kinds of works for certain kinds of effects do.

Moreover, most of the narrator's claims in this section are specious: by definition, authors cannot allow characters and events the kind of freedom the narrator claims; at most, an author can create the illusion of such freedom and autonomy, but in actuality that artistic choice is still a "god-given" authorial act. Again, the narrator's disclaimer that he has not "disgracefully broken the
illusion" since his characters are as real as all of us who are engaged in fictionalizing our own lives, is also specious—fictionalizing one's own life is not the same thing as creating works of art. In other words, the narrator's assertions of the similarities between fiction and reality and our reactions and ways of dealing with our own lives and fictions work to foreground the difference between the two. Certainly we all tend to make up "stories" about our lives, our futures, our dreams and fears, but such "fictionalizing" is qualitatively different from that of authors. We may indeed be, and most often inescapably are, the "protagonists of our dramas," but our stories, are not constructed in specific and deliberate ways to communicate truth claims about the world in general to other readers. Often, such stories are either private or are orally communicated. When written, such stories more often fall into the realm of the autobiographical than the narrator would have us believe. In addition, the narrator's statements fail to account for the rhetorical nature of fiction—texts always need and imply readers, readers that both recreate and are recreated by the texts they encounter. Most important, however, is that the narrator's very statements about the relationship between fiction and reality are part of his fiction-making. In other words, his denial of his god-given control is itself a rhetorical choice like any other
and is hence an exercise of that very control he denies. As Rankin points out concerning the narrator's specious statements in chapter 55: "Behind the facade of the freedom-giving narrator-novelist, there still lurks a clever puppet master and an adept manipulator of audiences."7

By the end of chapter 13, the authorial audience can no longer accept wholesale the narrator's statements about his aesthetic aims in the work. Consequently, the authorial audience is left questioning Fowles's intentions here: why, we ask, does he need to undercut or at the least render dubious the narrator's statements about his endeavor. One answer is that he needs to ensure our awareness that his voice and the narrator's are not the same, that we are meant to perceive that the author and narrator are not as close in values and beliefs as we had previously thought. Fowles is thus demanding that the authorial audience weigh more carefully the precise nature of the distance between the two voices; to see that the author/narrator distance is relatively small in matters relating to the thematic and mimetic issues raised in the narrative, but great with regard to the aesthetic judgments.

Along with the tension created between the authorial audience and the narrator, a secondary, though far less severe, tension has been initiated between Fowles and his authorial audience, first and foremost for breaking the
mimetic illusion, and second for not revealing anything about Sarah's state of mind. Although we have consistently for the first twelve chapters been asked to read both mimetically and thematically, one of the major components of our enjoyment has been precisely the mimetic representation and our emotional response to the characters. Fowles has consistently generated our desire that Charles not become more involved with Ernestina and has whetted our interest in finding out more about the enigmatic Sarah, whom we already perceive to be a more appropriate and desirable mate for Charles. By forcing us out of roles as narrative readers and by denying us our gratification for more information, Fowles is again clearly asking us to focus more on the thematic components of the narrative, and as responsive and willing readers, we do so, albeit, I suggest, with some small regret for the emotional satisfactions that the narrative has previously engendered. For members of the authorial audience, then, the primary aims and effects of this chapter are to widen the gap between the reader and narrator, by making us aware of the split between the narratorial and authorial voices, and, by breaking the mimetic illusion, to direct our attention to "Time, Progress, Society, Evolution and all those other capitalized ghosts in the night that are rattling their chains behind the scenes of this book" (p. 82). In addition, the
chapter initiates an additional thematic issue beyond those the narrator mentions explicitly: how does one incorporate into the narrative itself the very kind of transition in literary techniques and values Fowles wants to portray? Thus Fowles needs to portray two thematic "histories": that of all the "capitalized ghosts" and that of the development of metafiction.

As we return to the world of the novel, we find that our interest has somewhat shifted. The synthetic quality of the characters and thematic issues have become foregrounded, and our interest in the narrative per se shifts to a concern with the way(s) in which the narrator's notions of freedom and hazard will or will not get embodied in the novel on both the aesthetic and thematic levels. Appropriately, Fowles opens this next section with scenes dealing with the already established thematic issues of social convention and duty vs. individual desire—the depiction and discussion of the endless rounds of "necessary" visits and their social implications, and the introduction of the Sam and Mary subplot which seems to reinforce the thematic expectations generated by Chapter 13 for the authorial audience. Much of the criticism of the novel is directed almost exclusively to Charles's growth and development, and I would suggest that this phenomenon stems directly from the effects of Chapter 13. Having been asked
to focus on thematic concerns, readers have naturally followed through, and certainly that issue is a prominent one in the novel. Given the lengthy foregrounding of the mimetic level of the text (it is not until some 30 chapters later that the narrator literally obtrudes in the text), it is again natural that the thematic issues focused on by the reader be those most prominent in the mimetic narrative.

In addition, the length and power of the long mimetic middle section has mitigated the effects of chapter 13—by chapter 45, we have once again become seriously involved with the individual characters and their fates. While reading thematically, we are nonetheless also engaged emotionally: our interest in Charles's developing romance with Sarah rather than Ernestina is powerful; our response to Charles's potential loss of his inheritance forms a large part both of our fear for his fate and of our sense of the developing thematic issue of the transition between the two centuries, particularly with regard to the fate of the dying breed of the gentleman of leisure and the rising power of mercantilism. But the power of the mimetic pleasure Fowles grants us in this middle section is sufficiently strong that in spite of the narrator's increased digressions and intrusions into the mimetic world our pleasure in the developing Victorian story is but scarcely affected.

Indeed, the intrusions add to the narrative power precisely
because they underscore our response to the instabilities in the characters' fates, both emotionally and thematically. For example, on the narrative level, such intrusions as those concerning La Ronciere and Hardy serve to heighten the mimetic illusion by juxtaposing "fact" with "fiction": that is, by including the long section dealing with the current court cases and psychiatric case studies that relate to melancholia and psychosis, Fowles is able to deepen our understanding both of the age itself and its beliefs as well as offer potential explanations of Sarah's behavior. That these explanations are suspect and eventually proved downright erroneous, only adds to the developing pattern of the inexplicableness of Sarah and adds spice to our desire to come to understand her better.

Nonetheless, for the authorial audience, disturbing reminders of our tension with the narrator remain. Upon Sarah's arrival in Exeter, and immediately after the narrator's ploy to heighten the mimetic illusion by the inclusion of the "Toby jug" anecdote, the narrator states: "...and then in the first truly feminine gesture I have permitted her, moved a tress of her brown-auburn hair forward to lie on the green cloth..." (p. 221), a statement that directly contradicts his earlier statements about his characters' autonomy in chapter 13. To ensure that no one will fail to mark the contradiction, Fowles has the narrat-
tor again remark, "And I no more intend to find out what was going on in her mind as she firegazed than I did on that other occasion when her eyes welled tears in the silent night of Marlborough House" (p. 221). The potential tension with Fowles generated by these statements is, however, minimal since the effect reinforces what we have been asked to do from chapter 13 onwards—to recognize the distance between the narratorial and authorial voices. Yet the resulting increase of the tension between ourselves and the narrative voice creates a problem. Since our engagement on the mimetic level involves a relationship with the narrator based to some extent at least on trust and collaboration, Fowles's need to undermine this relationship again mitigates our involvement on the mimetic level, an engagement that he has indeed asked us to enter into powerfully. At this point, one is left questioning Fowles's intentions, and the spectre of the possibility that he may be jerking our responses around arises.

Much the same phenomenon occurs in chapter 45 where the narrator comments upon the false ending he has just provided on Charles's train ride to Exeter. Functionally, the intrusion raises many of the same issues as did chapter 13, although in a slightly different key (e.g., the fictional pasts we write are here augmented to fictional futures), and the notions of freedom and existentialism get
explicitly referred to. Again, as in chapter 13 the intrusion serves to reinforce our developing distance from the narrator, particularly in the following statements:

And the "I," that entity who found such slickly specious reasons for consigning Sarah to the shadows of oblivion, was not myself; it was merely the personification of a certain massive indifference in things—too hostile for Charles to think of as "God"—that had set its malevolent inertia on the Ernestina side of the scales; that seemed an inexorable onward direction as fixed as that of the train which drew Charles along.

I was not cheating when I said that Charles had decided, in London that day after his escapade, to go through with his marriage; that was his official decision, just as it had once been his official decision (reaction might be a more accurate word) to go into Holy Orders. Where I have cheated was in analyzing the effect that three-word letter continued to have on him. It tormented him, it obsessed him, it confused him.

But above all it seemed to set Charles a choice; and while one part of him hated having to choose, we come near the secret of his state on that journey west when we know that another part of him felt intolerably excited by the proximity of the moment of choice. He had not the benefit of existentialist terminology; but what he felt was really a very clear case of the anxiety of freedom—that is, the realization that one is free and the realization that being free is a situation of terror (p. 267). To the extent that the kind of effect sought and achieved is merely a recapitulation of the thematic concerns highlighted by chapter 13, the digression is unnecessary and redundant. In terms of our developing response to the personality of the narrator, however, the intrusion is crucial: we need not only to be reminded of the specious
nature of many of the narrator's statements, but also to have our "metafictional memories" jogged, so to speak, given Fowles's need to prepare us for the double ending. For the narrative audience, the digression serves to increase one's trust in the narratorial voice. Of course, the narrative audience is in some sense being asked to address the question then of just who that "I" was, and one would then expect that some tension be generated between the reader and the narrator. But what is particularly striking about this intrusion is that such a tension does not arise, mostly because the narrator moves so quickly to the explanation of the statements as being based on existentialist principles, partly because these statements deal with Charles's and Sarah's states of mind rather than with the narrator's endeavor, and partially because we have come to accept such moves and ploys through sheer repetition. Yet the unsettling effects of the intrusion cannot be altogether mitigated, as Fowles is certainly aware, and his placement of the intrusion before the climactic action of the story is telling in this regard. Leaving aside the complicated issue of how we react to what the Saturday Review called "a sexual encounter so explosive that it nearly blows the top of your head off," Fowles is again clearly asking the narrative audience to participate in the mimetic illusion and power of the novel—and we do. We
care about Charles, we delight in the insights he has gained from his dark night of the soul, we participate in his frustration at being unable to locate Sarah, and, like Charles, we are engaged in trying to figure Sarah out.

As members of the authorial audience, we once more see the split between the narratorial and authorial voices of the text and our sense that Fowles's thematic and aesthetic aims in the work are meant to be as important as our interest in the "love story" is reinforced. Indeed, the tension with Fowles has all but dissipated with regard to Sarah—we have recognized that his need to conceal her thoughts and desires is integral to our perception of Charles's growth and development, and that she is the unknown and unknowable pushing him on his new path.

In chapter 55, Fowles prepares the reader for the dual endings of the novel and foregrounds the synthetic nature of the narrator and novel. As in chapter 13, the intrusion has profound consequences for our understanding of and satisfaction with Fowles's achievement. While not quite so devastating an interruption as chapter 13 in some ways—after all, we've been through this before, right?—our reactions are again fraught with frustrations and tensions. Even more than in chapter 13, the narrator's statements about the nature and purpose of art are specious, and the nature of these statements serves to initiate an antagonism
toward Fowles himself that cannot be completely bridged. In addition, a tension is generated by Fowles's undercutting of some of the bases of the pleasure we have derived from the novel thus far in his need to prepare the reader for the dual ending.

Part of the pleasure of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is constituted by our enjoyment of Fowles's skillful recreation of a "Victorian" novel and his interesting ways of flouting those conventions. Nonetheless, Fowles's play with these conventions seems to have caused some critical misunderstandings. For example, part of our responses to the prostitute scene derives from our prior knowledge of and familiarity with similar sentimental scenes, particularly those found in Dickens novels. This is not to say that we enjoy the sloppy sentimentality of such scenes in and of themselves, but we enjoy Fowles's play with the convention. Given Fowles's privileging of the twentieth century over the nineteenth, it is not surprising that the "Victorian" scenes in the novel become increasingly more simpy and sloppy. Thus we have the first "ending" to the novel where, despite our being told it's Charles's dream and therefore not "real," the overdone romantic sentimentality of Charles's reunion with Ernestine renders it unacceptable. Fowles's inclusion of the Rosettis as characters in the novel and his taunting us to guess their identities
generates a small degree of tension as well. Granted, the inclusion works to heighten the mimetic illusion for the narrative audience—a kind of reverse technique from that which Fowles has previously used; heretofore the narrator has made reference to the descendants of the fictional characters, now he has included "actual" people as characters in the novel's world. As members of the authorial audience we understand that their inclusion is one more way of stressing the developing change in the values of the age and providing thematic completeness. The inclusion also works to provide a sense of development to Sarah's character and growth towards "the new woman," and hence indicates a positive position for Sarah's ultimate fate, a function which surely mitigates the possible tensions for the authorial audience.

To prepare the reader for the dual fates represented in the ending, Fowles foregrounds the synthetic nature of the narrator not only by having him appear as a character in the mimetic world, but also by presenting him in as negative light as possible, in precisely the same bullying, controlling god-figure terms he earlier had the narrator claim to reject. At this point, the relationship between the authorial audience and the narrator becomes strained almost to the breaking point. Fowles needs to divorce us thoroughly from the narratorial voice so that he can esta-
lish a different kind of communication with his readers, but the ploys he uses to accomplish this end make difficult our understanding of Fowles's use of mimesis in the novel and engenders interpretive difficulties.

After a rather extended and unpleasant description of novelists in general, the narrator states:

Now the question I am asking, as I stare at Charles, is not quite the same as the two above. But rather, what the devil am I going to do with you? I have already thought of ending Charles's career here and now; of leaving him for eternity on his way to London. But the conventions of Victorian fiction allow, allowed no place for the open, the inconclusive ending; and I preached earlier of the freedom characters must be given. My problem is simple—what Charles wants is clear? It is indeed. But what the protagonist wants is not so clear; and I am not at all sure where she is at the moment. Of course if these two were two fragments of real life instead of two figments of my imagination, the issue of the dilemma is obvious: the one want combats the other want, and fails or succeeds, as the actuality may be. Fiction usually pretends to conform to the reality: the writer puts the conflicting wants in the ring and then describes the fight—but in fact fixes the fight, letting that want he himself favors win. And we judge writers of fiction both by the skill they show in fixing the fights (in other words, in persuading us that they were not fixed) and by the kind of fighter they fix in favor of: the good one, the tragic one, the evil one, the funny one, and so on.

But the chief argument for fight-fixing is to show one's readers what one thinks of the world around one—whether one is a pessimist, an optimist, what you will. I have pretended to slip back into 1867; but of course that year is in reality a century past. It is futile to show optimism or pessimism, or anything else
about it, because we know what has happened since.

So I continue to stare at Charles and see no reason this time for fixing the fight upon which he is about to engage. That leaves me with two alternatives. I let the fight proceed and take no more than a recording part in it; or I take both sides in it....The only way I can take no part in the fight is to show two versions of it. That leaves me with only one problem: I cannot give both versions at once, yet whichever is the second will seem, so strong is the tyranny of the last chapter, the final, the "real" version.

I take my purse from the pocket of my frock coat, I extract a florin, I rest it on my right thumbnail, I flick it, spinning, two feet into the air and catch it in my left hand.

So be it. (pp. 317-18)

The primary effects of this section of chapter 55 are profound and have several consequences for both the narrative and authorial audiences. The first ploy, that of the impossibility of the "open, inconclusive ending," works especially well to prepare both audiences for the dual ending. Moreover, it reinforces our enjoyment of Fowles's play with the literary conventions of the Victorian age, while at the same time ensuring that we understand that the values of the twentieth century are to be privileged. Again, the narrative audience is united with the value and belief in the necessity for freedom and even admire the fact that it's Sarah's, a woman's, freedom and autonomy the narrator espouses. Indeed, having been forewarned that two fates will be presented, our interest becomes diverted from Charles's problems (since indubitably what he wants is
clear) to the question of what kind of "Sarah" we will ultimately meet.

For the authorial audience, however, the chapter is fraught with conflicting reactions. The synthetic foregrounding further increases our distance from the narrator, a condition that Fowles, as we have seen, has been exploiting with increasing consistency and force. The coin-tossing ploy to escape the tyranny of the last chapter, aside from being silly, makes the reader feel cheated and hence generates even more tension with the narrator. The narrator's statement that he has only pretended to step back into 1867 and that therefore it is futile to show any kind of attitude toward it is highly specious as Rankin has aptly pointed out:

It doesn't require superior insight to see through the superficiality of this argument. Certainly novels may do more than "show optimism or pessimism" about the state of the world. The narrator, all too easily dismissing other possible attitudes toward the world as "what you will" and "anything else," hardly convinces us that, among the variety of worldviews included in such catch-all phrases, not one is worth fixing a fight for....Just as fight fixing is illegal in the sporting world, so "arranging" a novel's ending is out of vogue in literary circles. A world must not reveal its planning."

Yet, as members of the authorial audience, we understand that again Fowles is underscoring the distance between himself and the narrator, in precisely the same way as in
chapter 13. While it may be futile to show "optimism" or "pessimism" about the past, Fowles certainly shows "one's readers what one thinks of the world around one," and in this world, the Victorian Age gets short shrift. Moreover, the way in which Fowles sets up the scenario for the dual ending creates some problems. In contextualizing the problem in terms of "fight-fixing" and by explicitly referring to Sarah as the "protagonist," the narrator engenders our expectations that each of the two fates will reflect the desires of Sarah vs. Charles. (At least, the extent to which this expectation is present in the criticism on the novel is fascinating.) But in fact, the two endings portray two versions of what Sarah may possibly want. The reader in one sense is free to choose whichever ending (or Sarah) s/he pleases because we have been consistently denied sufficient access to her thoughts and feelings to make any accurate judgment about what she wants. Moreover, readers have taken the narrator's statement that Sarah is the protagonist at face value and have used that as a large part of the basis upon which to justify a greater appropriateness of the final version. In fact, however, this statement underscores more forcefully the distance between Fowles and the narrator since we know that Sarah is not the protagonist, at least in any sense that we have come to conventionally recognize that role. This split between the
narrator's view of fictional art and Fowles's reconfirms our developing knowledge that we are not meant to equate the author and narrator.

Further problems arise in this chapter for the relationship between Fowles and authorial audience on the basis of "fight-fixing" and his use of mimesis in the novel. We know that Fowles doesn't share the same values as the narrator about "fight-fixing" and that he is using this ploy to enable him as a "novelist-god" to provide the two endings in the first place. His claim about avoiding fight-fixing is a necessary rhetorical ploy to enable him to fix the fight in favor of the double ending. The crucial problem stems from the assumption that novels are designed in certain ways to make truth claims and value judgments about the extra-textual world and leads to a basic contradiction in Fowles's use (or abuse, if you will) of the mimetic aspects of the novel. As the narrator points out:

Fiction usually pretends to conform to the reality: the writer puts the conflicting wants in the ring and then describes the fight—but in fact fixes the fight, letting that want he himself favors win. And we judge writers of fiction both by the skill they show in fixing the fights (in other words, in persuading us that they were not fixed) and by the kind of fighter they fix in favor of....(317)

Thus, we judge fiction on the basis of plausibility, probability, referential coherence, and thematic and ethical values—and some of these are mimetic grounds. Certainly,
Fowles shares some of the values expressed by the narrator in this passage; he has, after all, "fixed the fight" in this novel to allow for one ending representing two different fates, the second of which is clearly preferred.

Functionally, as members of this audience, we recognize Fowles's need to prepare both audiences for the double fates and admire the kind of aesthetic move involved in his effort to pull it off. But to the extent that we have seen Fowles divorce himself from some of the values espoused by the narrator, to that extent we question Fowles's use of mimesis in this novel. We question whether he wants to critique a certain kind of realism characteristic of nineteenth-century novels, a mimesis that believes itself capable of reflecting determinate "truths," if we are to continue our belief that Fowles wishes us to privilege the values of the twentieth century over those of the nineteenth. Yet Fowles has consistently, and brilliantly, asked us to respond to precisely that kind of realism in this novel. In other words, the kind of mimesis Fowles employs in the novel, despite his disclaimer that he is merely "adopting" an outmoded and suspect convention, is in large measure what engages our emotions and drives our reading experience. While recognizing both that the presentation of two fates may be thematically and aesthetically necessary and that the ploys Fowles engages to accom-
plish this end may work well for the narrative audience, Fowles has severely diminished the pleasure the authorial audience might derive from the possible endings. In other words, the tensions generated through Fowles's manipulation of the synthetic and mimetic impulses of the novel right before the endings have sufficiently distanced us from the mimetic level so that we no longer care overly much whether Charles and Sarah are reunited or not; our interest lies primarily in both appreciating the artistic appropriateness of two endings and in discerning which of the two possible endings is thematically and aesthetically more justified. Or so even a cursory glance through the criticism suggests.

The tension that results from Fowles's deliberate use and subsequent thwarting of the emotional pleasure engendered by the mimetic elements of the narrative renders our response to the whole novel problematic indeed. One can postulate either that this state of affairs was intentional, i.e., that Fowles is deliberately playing with our conventional means of describing the various levels of our engagement with literary texts, or that the novel is in some sense flawed due to his dual intention of representing both the historical and aesthetic transition from the Victorian to the modern age.

As a result of this rhetorical strategy, several consequences arise, both for our reading experience and for
our critical activities. We have in a real sense become divided readers, or readers engaged in two activities seemingly at odds with one another at various points of the narrative. Our activities as members of the narrative audience, our enjoyment of the book on the mimetic level, are powerfully motivated, and Fowles's primary intention relies heavily on this engagement. Since as members of this audience we accept virtually all the narrator's statements about what he is doing, about the nature and meaning of the action, about the nature of art and its relation to life, our engagement on this level often conflicts with the engagement we enter into when we are reading authorially. Granted, some antagonism toward the narrator exists in our mimetic experience in so far as he never does tell us what Sarah in fact wants. But such antagonism is extremely minimal to the extent that part of our enjoyment consists in trying to figure Sarah out. In other words, Sarah's lack of mimetic force, while a source of some frustration, nonetheless works as a motivating force to drive our reading forward and to keep us involved on the mimetic level. When the narrator deprives us of the satisfaction of that mystery, the resultant tension is compensated for by his allowing us the freedom to choose which version, which Sarah, we want. That such a choice in fact does not exist is a question that does not arise for the narrative audi-
ence. In this aspect of the narrative, I think Fowles has succeeded and that success accounts for much of the popularity of the book for the general reading public.

On the authorial level, however, our relationship with Fowles works against our activities on the narrative level. In effect, Fowles has intertwined his thematic and aesthetic interests in a highly mimetic narrative, and has thus tried to incorporate two reading activities—critical and narrative—without privileging one over the other. My claim is that the activity of reading the book, of being mimetically engaged and then yanked out of that engagement, is fraught with tensions that potentially threaten Fowles' intentions in the work. To restate the problem, Fowles has constructed a literary work that deals primarily with the thematic representation of the development of existentialist values and beliefs on the narrative level and only secondarily with the aesthetic issue of the development of the *nouveau roman* and the nature of the relationship between art and life. He has used a highly mimetic and powerful mode of discourse and plot to present his ideas and engage our interest in the fates of the characters to foreground his dominant aim. He subsequently foregrounds the artificial nature of his narrator and the work as a whole to accomplish his secondary aim of illustrating the change in aesthetic values and ensuring our privileging of
twentieth-century literary forms. Cohen's statements about the double endings are apt in this regard:

Both endings are plausible, and yet both endings grow out of a linear Victorian plot. True, Chapter 61, being the last ending in the book, has more weight behind it, but the reader is left to choose whether or not Charles will develop an existential awareness. By evolving both a Victorian closed ending and a modernist open ending out of the same linear plot, Fowles undercuts the notions of inevitability and rational order in art as well as in life. Perhaps Fowles is having it both ways by weighting the second ending and letting the reader take his pick. His fusion of Victorian and modernist techniques, however, creates a fiction which mirrors the world as it is, to the existentialist, not as it ought to be.

Although I disagree with Cohen's final statement, I too would argue that Fowles could have accomplished his dominant thematic aim in the work without creating the tension between the authorial audience and his narrator. We are given sufficient information about Charles, his character and personality traits that determine his subsequent actions, and a realistic depiction of the possibilities open to him in his nineteenth-century world. Conversely, we are not given enough information about Sarah to conflict with any particular developing line of probability in the action. Thus, we are left questioning why Fowles needs to divorce us so thoroughly from the narrative voice through which the action is filtered as well as from the mimetic narrative means he employs. Part of the answer
lies precisely in the fact that he could not have accomplished his secondary aesthetic aims in the work without having done so. It appears as if Fowles feels the need to undercut severely, if not invalidate, nineteenth-century mimetic narrative conventions in order to write a postmodern novel. The conflict that arises from Fowles's achievement of both intentions forms the large part of the tension that characterizes the work as a whole and has profound implications for our practical and theoretical understanding of the book.

The gap thus engendered between the reader/critic and Fowles indicates that our conventional means for coming to terms with literary art are insufficient, that they provide no clear-cut methodology for dealing with or ways of describing works that incorporate and exploit different kinds of reading activities dependent upon different intentions. A brief look at the underlying bases of the critical discourse about the novel should help to elucidate this problem more clearly.

For the most part, previous critics, while acknowledging some distance between the author's and narrator's voices, minimize its importance by equating the narrator and Fowles, maintaining that they share the same values and assumptions about the nature of fiction. With this move, critics are able to make the work "cohere" thematically and
aesthetically. Hutcheon, for example, in a generally well-argued discussion, argues that the three creative figures in the novel—Sarah, on the story level, the narrator, on the diegetic level, and Fowles, on the authorial level—are meant to be seen as parallel, as functioning analogously and simultaneously. In her view, Fowles is in this manner redefining the relationship between art and life, fiction and reality, along existentialist lines. Cohen, too, as we have just seen, adopts much the same view. Rankin, in an article which perceptively discusses some of the unreliable statements of the narrator and questions the distance between what she calls the "novelist-figure" and the narrator "personae," nevertheless claims that the split between the implied author and the narrator is intended to illustrate Fowles's Darwinian principles of "cryptic coloration" and evolution more forcefully.

In addition to closing the distance between Fowles and the narrator, these readings assume that the narrative is either an allegorization, an exemplification, or a realistic representation of existentialist principles or of the relation between art and life. That these readings are so pervasive illustrates one of the most primary effects of the authorial tensions in this work: they tend to direct the reader's attention more firmly to the thematic issues
raised on the narrative level. Moreover, even those readings which acknowledge the split between Fowles and the narrator go no further than merely to note that fact and either attribute such "selective omniscience" to the narrator himself or thematize it as an inescapable evil in the writing of postmodern novels. Thus such readings are further alike in either ignoring the diegetic tensions completely or merely excusing those tensions.

If we want, rather, to develop a reading of The French Lieutenant's Woman that accounts for the kinds of tensions we have earlier identified and incorporates our experience as authorial readers, we must determine whether or not the tension engendered by Fowles's having first generated and subsequently thwarted our mimetic enjoyment was intentional or not.

If we were to suppose that the resultant disgruntlement were intentional, we might justify the supposition by arguing that part of Fowles's intention in this novel is to illustrate in the narrative manner itself the transition in aesthetic values from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries. Phelan argues rather convincingly for this view, asserting that the authorial audience needs

...to recognize the narrative statements of 13 and 55 as part of a challenge that Fowles sets himself, a challenge to create and sustain for the narrative audience the illusion that his narrative is in fact following the principles
of freedom that it recommends and that by crea-
ting that illusion he is transforming his
apparent nineteenth-century narrative method
into a decidedly modern one. 13

To substantiate his claim, Phelan maintains that Fowles
avoids antagonizing the authorial audience by the early
inclusion of chapter 13 and his consistent emphasis on the
representative nature of the characters from the very begin­
ning of the narrative. Phelan then goes on to justify the
intrusion of chapter 55 on the grounds that Fowles must
redirect the authorial audience's attention away from the
mimetic level:

Fowles's challenge, in part, is to re-engage
the authorial audience on the mimetic level
sufficiently to make them care about Charles's
choice not only for what it means thematically
but also what it means for Charles himself. The
novel's popular success is indirect but elo­
quent testimony to his ability to meet that
challenge. From this perspective, we can also
see Chapter 55 as a necessary intrusion after
the point of greatest mimetic intensity—the
events at Exeter and their consequences in
Charles's last trip to Lyme to break his
engagement—to move the authorial audience back
to the importance of the thematic issues of the
novel—and the way they are reflected in the
synthetic. 14

As powerful as Phelan's argument is as an explanation of
the progression of the book and the way(s) that progression
influences our developing responses to the narrative, it
suffers from two deficiencies: first, the explanation
fails to account for the power of the mimetic engagement we
are asked to enter from chapter 55 to the end; and second,
it raises a question that never gets answered concerning the kind of mimetic engagement the authorial audience has for the large part of the book. If Phelan is correct that one of the primary effects of chapter 13 is to prevent the authorial audience's full mimetic involvement in the narrative, why would Fowles feel it necessary to move/redirect the authorial audience "back to the importance of the thematic issues" in chapter 55? Moreover, why should Fowles feel it necessary to make the authorial audience "care about Charles's choice" for "what it means for Charles himself"? As Phelan argues, the authorial audience is aware that Fowles wants both audiences' participation and active concern for Charles on the narrative level and further that Fowles must distance the authorial audience from that involvement if his thematic aims are to be achieved. Still, if Phelan is correct about the way the narrative works as a whole, the problem has not been resolved, only more fully explained.

In addition, the precise kind of mimetic engagement Fowles asks of the authorial audience in the last section of the novel needs to be more fully elaborated. Certainly our concern about Charles's fate with regard to Sarah is diminished; the lengthy depiction of Charles's travels and sojourn in America reinforces our expectations that they will not be reunited and generates more of a concern with
Charles' growth toward twentieth-century values. And here again the problem arises. The authorial audience may recognize that the inclusion of the two fates for Charles and Sarah are aesthetically and thematically necessary, but not two fates for Charles himself. We need to see a more positive outcome of his recognition that "escape is not one act." During his travels, we see that Charles has not grown much, as Phelan admits. Even his decision to return to England immediately upon receipt of information about Sarah is testimony to his lack of growth—he, not we, still envisions a future with Sarah. But we have been invited to care a great deal about Charles himself, despite his flaws, and desire more of a resolution than his choice not to commit suicide as a result of Sarah's rejection, and this mimetic resolution Fowles denies us.

But to say this leads to another and larger problem—one of evaluation. It is not enough to state that the work is flawed because of this possible antagonistic response; we would have to have some firmly defined grounds for measuring the degree and kind of antagonism as well as define what we mean by "flawed" in this context. One criterion for assessing the flaw is whether Fowles might have avoided it. He could have, but only by giving up his secondary intention. We are given sufficient information about Charles, his character and personality traits that
determine his subsequent actions, and a realistic depiction of the possibilities open to him in his nineteenth-century world. Conversely, we are not given enough information about Sarah to conflict with any particular developing line of probability in the action. But do we want to deny Fowles the validity of that secondary intention? I for one don't, in part because to do so would in effect be to violate his freedom, and his narrative, despite its problems, has taught me to respect that value above all others.

Thus, we seem to be left somewhat in a quandary: in the highly uncomfortable and ambivalent position of saying "Yes, but..." to The French Lieutenant's Woman. Yes, I enjoyed Fowles's creation of the thematic history of the transition between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and primarily because of his compelling and realistic portrayal of the ages and their characteristics. Again, I would say that on another level I enjoyed Fowles's play with our notions of literary form and conventions, as well as the way he used the expectations derived from those notions to drive my reading experience. Nonetheless, my pleasure in the work as a whole was diminished as a result of the sometimes conflicting engagements Fowles has offered. On the other hand, the kind of real pleasure Fowles created by his play with critical activities as a reader of texts, his continual teasing and thwarting of my mimetic
involvement rendered the text problematic in terms of my evaluation. In other words, Fowles's achievement of both his thematic and aesthetic intentions in the work generated an unavoidable tension between the reader and Fowles.

Thus, works with dual intentions seem to present evaluative problems that narrative theory has not yet been able to come to terms with adequately. One question that must be addressed is the degree to which we will tolerate as aesthetic wholes works that incorporate two intentions—do we label them "successful" if and only if the intentions are mutually supportive? Or do we condemn such works to the extent that the aims conflict with one another. In the case of The French Lieutenant's Woman, I think we must take the latter course. The work is indeed formally flawed because of Fowles's conflicting purposes. But formal grounds—or thematic and aesthetic unity—need not necessarily be our only criterion for success. What of those other extrinsic or experiential value judgments individual readers bring to bear in their own reading engagements. For example, just how much of our appreciation for and evaluation of literary works depends on emotional engagement, particularly in works that employ narrative means that emphasize that aspect of the reading experience? Or conversely, how much of our appreciation of works derives from the artistic skill and conventional manipulation au-
authors demonstrate in their construction of the myriad worlds of words?

Such questions are by no means easily answered. Certainly, different texts demand different responses, privilege different aspects of our cognitive and emotional experience. And as responsive and responsible readers, we allow texts that power and authors that right. In addition, just as each text is a highly complex conglomerate of intellectual, emotional, and ethical assertions, so too, is every reader's response. Hence, in order to begin to answer these kinds of questions, we need a theory that acknowledges the diversity of reasons for writing and ways of reading. We need a theory that starts with the assumption that texts are occasions for a special kind of human interaction. Further, we need a methodology that is capable of elucidating the nature of that interaction, that can account for the dynamic nature of the experience. As we saw in The French Lieutenant's Woman, our understanding and acknowledgement of Fowles's unique achievement was not sufficient to fully describe our response. Our appreciation of his artistic skill in realizing his thematic and aesthetic intentions did not account for the disgruntlement that resulted from that very realization. As we shall see, the means by which an author achieves her intention can often itself be a source of problem in a textual transac-
tion, particularly when the intention itself is essentially combative.
ENDNOTES

1My use of the "mimetic," "thematic," and "synthetic" distinctions throughout the paper relies on notions about character devised by Phelan. The "mimetic" refers to those individual traits assigned to a character that distinguishes him/her from other possible individuals; these traits may or may not coalesce in a manner that produces a thematic dimension or function in a given work. The term "synthetic" refers to a character's artistic role or function in a work, as the protagonist, say, or a ficelle. More generally, reading with a mimetic interest means reading under the assumption that characters are possible people; reading with a thematic interest means reading for the ideational content of the work; and reading for the synthetic means reading with a conscious awareness of the work's constructedness. Usually all three kinds of reading go on to some degree simultaneously. My concern here is with a situation where reading for the mimetic and reading for the synthetic appear to be incompatible activities. For an extended discussion of these terms, see James Phelan, "Character, Progression, and the Mimetic-Didactic Distinction," Modern Philology 84.3 (February 1987): 282-299, and Reading People, Reading Plots (Chicago: U of Chicago P, forthcoming).

2The most vociferous of the initial negative reviewers is Pearl Bell, who states: "Like some of the new-wave movie directors who cannot resist carrying their ingenuity just a little further than it can credibly go, and thereby ruin the whole film, Fowles has more gamesmanship at this stage of his development than profundity...; more extraordinarily clever red herrings than illuminations; more words than insights; more arcana than feeling." Pearl Bell, "The Double World of John Fowles," The New Leader, January 5, 1970, 20.


9Rankin, 203.


12Rankin attempts to justify chapter 13 on the grounds that it is in fact a "subtle reinforcement of the concepts of freedom, evolution, survival and obsolescence which form the thematic basis of the novel." In terms of the chapter itself, she states: "There is a Darwinian term for this kind of tactic, and it is a term which the narrator makes use of quite often in the course of his novel: cryptic coloration. Our narrator defines cryptic coloration as 'survival by learning to blend with one's surroundings--with the unquestioned assumptions of one's age or social caste.' Since the conventions of the novel have 'evolved' in order to imitate more closely the 'real world' of twentieth century existentialism, this particular novel must blend with its literary environment in order to survive. At this point in the history of the novel, a thoroughly Victorian novel, written in the Victorian conventions, would be a mere fossil. Thus we see that the thematic reinforcement which structures Chapter Thirteen is far more subtle than it first appears. Not only does the narrator give verbal support to the principle of freedom which
informs his novel; he also introduces the themes of survival and evolution out of which that principle emerges." Rankin, 193, 196.

13 James Phelan, manuscript of Chapter 3, Reading People, Reading Plots, 30.

14 Ibid.
CHAPTER IV

ASSAULTIVE RHETORIC; OR, WHEN IS ENOUGH "ENOUGH, ALREADY"?

Naked Lunch demands Silence from The Reader. Otherwise he is taking his own pulse...

So far, we have looked at various kinds of tensions that can arise between readers and authors in their trans-action through the text: tensions that stem from "histori-cal" distance, from an author's competing intentions, and from determinately ambiguous texts. Another potential source of tension is more formal in nature: there exists a body of works in which the rhetorical strategies employed by an author are assaultive or combative rather than complicitous or cooperative. David Richter has already done some work in this area: starting where Booth leaves off in A Rhetoric of Irony, he demonstrates how an author may intentionally make the reader an ironic victim in order to enact in the reader's experience some thematic or moral point of the text. He concludes:

With the ironic victimizations perpetrated upon us by West and Kosinski we find ourselves far from our starting point in the temporary confu-
sions of a graduate student; here our confusions are permanent and intentional, they partake of the nature of a political act. These ironic works, and others like them...are genuinely subversive, though contrary to that arch-rationalist Settembrini's fears, they are far from constituting an "unclean traffic with the forces of reaction, vice, and materialism." They are subversive rather because they seek to undermine our naive confidence that we can remain guiltless in our fallen world, that we can display our clean hands and ignore the misery, the crime, the brutality our society produces.2

In this chapter, I shall examine the problems posed by assaultive rhetoric, particularly 1) the way such rhetoric makes it difficult, if not impossible, for real readers to enter the narrative audience, to participate in the rhetorical transaction on the most basic level of reading; and 2) the difficulties of evaluating such combative intentions. For example, what do we make of and what should we do with such rhetoric as the following from Naked Lunch?

Mark reaches up with one lithe movement and snaps Johnny's neck...sound like a stick broken in wet towels. A shudder runs down Johnny's body...one foot flutters like a trapped bird....Mark has draped himself over a swing and mimics Johnny's twitches, closes his eyes and sticks his tongue out....Johnny's cock springs up and Mary guides it up her cunt, writhing against him in a fluid belly dance, groaning and shrieking with delight...sweat pours down her body, hair hangs over her face in wet strands. "Cut him down, Mark," she screams. Mark reaches over with a snap knife and cuts the rope, catching Johnny as he falls, easing him onto his back with Mary still impaled and writhing...She bites away Johnny's lips and nose and sucks out his eyes with a pop....She tears off great hunks of cheek....Now she lunches on his prick....(p. 97)
In order to understand Burroughs' more fully, it will be useful to see some other, less extreme examples of assaultive rhetoric. Before taking up Burroughs, though, I will examine the rhetorical strategies employed by Swift in *Gulliver's Travels* and Kosinski in *Steps*, which also reflect and enact philosophies of combative interaction, but with different effects from each other and from *Naked Lunch*.

Like Burroughs, Swift deliberately sets out to "vex the world rather than divert it," but the means he employs are less offensive. Many critics have noted the effects of Swift's strategy in terms of the consequences for his relationship with the reader. Rawson and Dyson both examine the discomfort inherent in reading *Gulliver*, and Rawson notes that "there is something in Swift's relations with his reader that can be described approximately in terms of the edgy intimacy of a personal quarrel that does not quite come out into the open." In Burroughs, of course, this "quarrel" is very much in the open. Dyson goes even further: "The technique is, of course, one of betrayal. A state of tension, not to say war, exists between Swift and his readers. The very tone in which he writes is turned into a weapon." While I would not go quite so far as Dyson in my assessment of that relationship, which I feel is more apt of Burroughs, I certainly
agree that the tension is present and, as we shall see, the creation of this tension is one of Swift's major rhetorical strategies.

Both the combative nature of Swift's rhetorical strategies and the satiric attacks he makes have led to a long history of critical debate about the fourth book of Gulliver in particular and about Swift's overall intentions more generally. The depiction of Gulliver's developing misanthropy in Houyhnhnms-land has long confused critics as to precisely what the external objects of satire consist of, how we are to react to this aspect of Gulliver's character, and hence, exactly where Swift stands in relation to Gulliver's expressed values. One of the most striking features of the debate is that critics offer diametrically opposed interpretations of Swift's attitudes in the fourth book, and hence of Swift's overall intentions in the work. The debate, as Clifford characterizes it, falls roughly into two camps—the "soft" school and the "hard":

If the "soft" school is right about Captain Mendez, then the ending must be comic or satiric, with Gulliver and the reader raked over the coals for their credulity in having been taken in, even for a moment, by the so-called "perfections of nature," the Houyhnhnms. But for the "hard" school adherents, who see Don Pedro as merely a minor character in the narrative, being Swift's ironic admission that even such an admirable person is basically a Yahoo, the description of Gulliver's return home is meant to shock and not to amuse the reader. There is no such viable solution. Thus Swift savagely
twists the knife. To see it any other way, they say, is to misinterpret his basic satirical approach.\textsuperscript{5}

Part of the problem clearly inheres in the nature of the satiric form itself. Sacks has demonstrated the difficulties of determining an author's positive beliefs in a form whose main principle is ridicule; about Gulliver's Travels in particular, he writes:

\begin{quote}
...the difficulties implicit in the ending of Gulliver's Travels are not merely the result of a critical chimera. They are the result, instead, of Swift's having shown us the object of ridicule, but then having left us alternatives among the relationships either of which would ridicule that object. For the first time in the pages of Gulliver's Travels we are forced to select not the one possible relationship relevant to satire, but the better of two. The ambiguity is a predictable consequence of a conjunction of satiric, in which either, though not both, may be identified with the clear object of satire in such a way as to ridicule it.\textsuperscript{6}
\end{quote}

Rader, too, sees the problem as being germane to the kind of satire Swift has created:

\begin{quote}
The distinctiveness of book 4, the most general quality which differentiates it from other satires, would inhere in the fact that, whereas in ordinary satires the attack is on a third person for the sake of the reader's pleasure, in this satire the second and third persons of the usual satiric triangle are merged, since the attack is on that general human nature with which the reader is unavoidably identified.\textsuperscript{7}
\end{quote}

Both Sacks's and Rader's statements account for the basic interpretive problem the work poses, that is, go far toward explaining the underlying problem that has led to the
debate noted above. Furthermore, Rader's statement that "the attack is on that general human nature with which the reader is unavoidably identified" sheds some light on the kind of combative rhetoric peculiar to Gulliver's Travels and, as we shall see, indicates a reason why Swift might have chosen to merge the components of the satiric triangle.

In Gulliver's Travels, Swift, as will Burroughs, initially tries to align the reader with the narrative voice. He grants Gulliver just enough mimetic force as a typical Englishman to allow us to identify with him and make us willing to trust his judgments. Moreover, much of his rhetorical strategy is calculated to ensure not only that the reader accept and experience all that Gulliver tells her, but also that she is sufficiently engaged on the narrative level to be likely to make the same kinds of judgments. Thus Swift casts the narrative into a "fantastic" mode, thereby lessening the mimetic force of the work and decreasing our resistance to the authorial assaults about the nature and limits of human intelligence and rationality. In addition, this rhetorical strategy, while not combative in and of itself, sets the stage for the kind of attack Swift will mount upon the reader, since one of his major thematic aims is to subvert our pride in our own perceptiveness and intelligence. For example, the perceptive reader of the opening pages understands that Swift is
parodying the travel books prevalent during his age and that the nature of his social satire demands a nonmimetic mode of presentation. What we fail to perceive this early in the narrative is that it is precisely this "perceptive understanding" that Swift will also satirize.

Few critics are troubled about the themes or objects of satire in the first three voyages. Engaged as we are on the narrative level and distanced as we are from any direct mimetic representation, the force of Swift's attacks on human pride often go unnoticed in light of the more topical attacks specifically directed toward various political, social, and cultural norms. As early as the opening chapters, however, Swift includes satiric attacks on the reader's view of the physical side of human nature. Among the many objects of satire contained in the work, certainly two of the most prevalent are the view that humans are as essentially different from (and better than) other animals and that they should take a corresponding pride in human rationality, achievements, and civilization. Significantly, Swift opens his attack on these views both with the depiction of Gulliver's need to urinate while constrained by the Lilliputians and with his lengthy apology and description of his need to defecate. The rhetoric of both these passages is certainly not directly combative;
at this point, Swift merely wants to "jolt" his readers mildly and stress that, contrary to what polite society pretends, the "animal" functions are natural and central to human existence. Fittingly, these scenes take place in the two books where the physical size differential between humans and others structures the satire, so the scenes take on an even more grotesque character. Moreover, the nervous laughter the scenes evoke, much in line with modern British humor, signals that we do indeed feel uncomfortable. Swift's attack then continues in Brobdingnag with Gulliver's description of his reaction to the smell of the ladies of the court and their nakedness:

For, they would strip themselves to the Skin, and put on their Smocks in my Presence, while I was placed on their Toylet directly before their naked Bodies; which, I am sure, to me was very far from being a tempting Sight, or from giving me any other Motions than those of Horror and Disgust. Their Skins appeared so coarse and uneven, so variously coloured when I saw them near, with a Mole here and there as broad a Trencher, and Hairs hanging from it thicker than Pack-threads; to say nothing further concerning the rest of their Persons.

Swift's description and use of these two episodes differ markedly from Burroughs'. Whereas Burroughs will graphically describe sexual acts and bodily activities, Swift's descriptions are far more abstract, despite the concrete analogies, and Burroughs certainly would not have said "nothing further concerning the rest of their Per-
sons." Most importantly, however, all these early examples stress Gulliver's reactions and attitudes towards these bodily attributes—the objects of satire are not the acts and bodily functions in and of themselves, but rather people's attitudes towards them. We are clearly meant to laugh at Gulliver's discomfort in these passages and not to see urinating, defecating, and bodies in a gross, disgusting manner, as we will in Burroughs. Again, Swift does not include these descriptions to offend our sensibilities, but is instead attacking the views of those who see bodily functions as shameful or base rather than as the natural part of human existence they are.

Clearly, though, Swift mounts his strongest attack on human pride in the fourth book. The book opens with an account of the treachery of the crew towards Gulliver on his sea voyage; thus the context of the voyage is one that generates the expectation that human behavior will be presented negatively. This expectation is borne out immediately upon Gulliver's arrival and his meeting with the Yahooos. At this point, however, there is no definitive linking between Yahooos and human beings. Gulliver, certainly, perceives no connection, despite the Houyhnhnm master's immediate identification of Gulliver as a Yahoo, and we, at this point, have no compelling reason to doubt Gulliver's point of view. Moreover, as in the other
voyages, we expect to find creatures that resemble human beings in some respects (or the satiric thrusts will be impossible) but who nonetheless retain their qualities as distinct nonhuman species. Nonetheless, very early on, disturbing indications of the veracity of Gulliver's perceptions occur:

And indeed, I now apprehended, that I must absolutely starve, if I did not get to some of my own Species: For as to those filthy Yahoos, although there were few greater Lovers of Mankind, at that time, than myself; yet I confess I never saw any sensitive Being so detestable on all Accounts.... (233)

How, one is left wondering, can Gulliver attest to being one of the greatest lovers of humanity after his experiences on this voyage out? Indeed, Swift includes numerous comments throughout the book to demonstrate Gulliver's increasing misanthropy as he comes to see more clearly his basic Yahoo-nature. That he is nonetheless not a Yahoo is a fact the reader is meant to perceive. For example, at the beginning of chapter 7, Gulliver states:

The reader may be disposed to wonder how I could prevail on my self to give so free a Representation of my own Species, among a Race of Mortals who were already too apt to conceive the vilest Opinion of Human Kind, from that entire Congruity betwixt me and their Yahoos. But I must freely confess, that the many Virtues of those excellent Quadrupeds placed in opposite View to human Corruptions, had so far opened mine Eyes, and enlarged my Understanding, that I began to view the Actions and Passions of Man in a very different Light; and to
think the Honour of my own Kind not worth man­aging.... (262)

At this point in the narrative, however, the "entire Con­gruity" between Gulliver and the Yahoos lies solely on the physical level. Moreover, the passage initiates a tension between the reader and Gulliver. As "our" representative in the debate with the Houyhnhnms, we expect some active defense on our behalf, a role Gulliver explicitly repu­diates. Swift mounts some of his strongest attacks against human nature in the rest of this chapter. Only a few pages later, more cultural and social connections are made by Gulliver in his conversation with his Houyhnhnm master.

The following excerpt is typical of the entire interchange:

Another thing he wondered at in the Yahoos, was their strange Disposition to Nastiness and Dirt; whereas there appears to be a natural Love of Cleanliness in all other Animals. As to the two former Accusations [regarding sexual practices], I was glad to let them pass without any Reply, because I had not a Word to offer upon them in Defence of my Species, which otherwise I would certainly had done from my own Inclinations. But I could have easily vindicated human Kind from the imputation of Singularity upon the last Article, if there had been any Swine in that Country, (as unluckily for me there were not) which although it may be a sweeter Quadruped than a Yahoo, cannot I humbly conceive in Justice pretend to more Cleanliness; and so his Honour himself must have owned, if had seen their filthy Way of feeding, and their Custom of wallowing and sleeping in the Mud. (268)

Two things are significant about Gulliver's actions and responses here and throughout the entire interchange:
first, that as he does here, Gulliver fails to offer any "defence" to a single one of the Houyhnhnm master's attacks; and second, the nature of the "defence" he may have offered here is logically absurd. The previous attacks throughout the interchange have centered on propensities to violence, both military and sexual, and the nature of government. To the worst of the attacks, concerning a government that allows only the most deformed to attain to the role of leader, Gulliver allows his master to go completely unanswered, although he thinks: "I durst make no Return to this malicious Insinuation, which debased human Understanding below the Sagacity of a common Hound, who hath Judgment enough to distinguish and follow the Cry of the ablest Dog in the Pack, without ever being mistaken" (267). In the passage quoted above, Gulliver fails twice to rise to the occasion and defend humanity; first, he acknowledges that he has no defence against the Houyhnhym's attack on human sexual practices, and second, makes no response to the charge of humanity's propensity for "Nastiness and Dirt," not because humans are in fact like other species in a disposition to cleanliness, but because there are no pigs in his master's land. Significantly, then, Gulliver allows all the challenges to human nature to go unanswered and undefended. This technique reinforces Gulliver's opening statement that he indeed thought "the Hon-
our of [his] own kind not worth managing," and further
signals that Gulliver, as representative human, is both the
object of satiric attack in the fourth book, both in terms
of his intellectual competence and for some attitude that
he professes, and that he is the means by which Swift will
ridicule the external objects of the satire—his readers.

Rhetorically, the interchange functions to antagonize
the reader, both against Gulliver and Swift. We are dis­tanced from Gulliver in so far as it is natural to expect
him to give some answer to the charges leveled against
humanity, and feel attacked by Swift not only for the kinds
of comparisons he has the Houyhnhnms make, for they are by
and large sufficiently apt to sting our pride, but also
because Gulliver's alleged defense is itself another form
of attack. We have either to accept the attack or to work
at coming up with a defense of our own. We are caught by
Gulliver's subjection to the Houyhnhnms and keep reading to
watch it develop. As we do, we become more and more vexed
as we realize that we're the objects of attack.

Swift continues his attack with the depiction of Gulli-
ver's run-in with the female Yahoo, when he is forced to
acknowledge totally his affiliation with the species.
Aside from the sheer humor of the description, Gulliver's
reaction is perfectly in keeping with what one would sup-
pose a typical human reaction would be: "For now I could
no longer deny, that I was a real Yahoo, in every Limb and Feature, since the Females had a natural Propensity to me as one of their own Species..." (272). Here, a strong invitation has been issued to align ourselves with Gulliver, to acknowledge our Yahoooness as does he. The force of our alignment with Gulliver carries through to the end of the book, when he takes leave of the Houyhnhnms. In this scene, Swift offers his final insult to humanity, the depiction of Gulliver's kissing the horse's hoof and Gulliver's grateful reaction:

...I took a second Leave of my Master. But as I was going to prostrate myself to kiss his Hoof, he did me the Honour to raise it gently to my Mouth. I am not ignorant how much I have been censured for mentioning this last Particular. Detractors are pleased to think it improbable, that so illustrious a Person should descend to give so great a Mark of Distinction to a Creature so inferior as I. Neither have I forgot, how apt some Travellers are to boast of extraordinary Favors they have received. (p. 290)

At this point, the reader becomes quite distanced from Gulliver and antagonistic towards Swift—the vexation has become extreme. Gulliver's extreme humility is far closer to groveling. The whole scene is, in fact, debasing, particularly when he calls the Houyhnhnm a "Person" and himself a "Creature." Moreover, his acknowledgement of the censure he has received continues Swift's attack, since it is based on the assertion that the object of attack is
really on the travel books current at the time. Boasting of "extraordinary Favors" is hardly an apt description of the scene just witnessed, and Gulliver's "defense" of presenting the scene as such is ludicrous in the extreme. As McKee has pointed out:

...but it should be mentioned that for most of Book IV it is Swift's strategy not to reveal the absurdity of Gulliver's attitude. The Yahoos are, indeed, repulsive creatures, and the mutual disgust toward the Yahoos shared by Gulliver and the reader serves as a strong force for the reader's confederacy with Gulliver. Gulliver's rejection of the female Yahoo, for example, cannot be seen as incipiently pathological until the reader also sees Gulliver rejecting his wife at the end of the book. In the absence of a larger context in terms of which to judge Gulliver's attitudes and actions, the reader cannot but assume that his own responses would be like Gulliver's under similar circumstances.  

The distance from Gulliver is not overly problematic; as I have suggested, we have had clues throughout the fourth book that Gulliver's attitudes may not be completely reliable. In this passage, as we have seen, unreliability is certainly not the main issue. Nonetheless, McKee's comments are not without merit. By placing us in an analogous situation as Gulliver and having presented Gulliver's previous instances of logical inconsistencies in a manner which fails to draw attention to them, Swift has set the stage to play a trick on the reader.
As we have seen our antagonism towards Gulliver derives primarily from his failure to defend the human species against the charges of the Houyhnhnms. This antagonism is reinforced at the beginning of the next chapter when Gulliver states:

As I ought to have understood human Nature much better than I supposed it possible for my Master to do, so it was easy to apply the Character he gave of the Yahoos to myself and my countrymen; and I believed I could yet make farther Discoveries from my own Observation. (270)

As we expect, these further "discoveries" are all negative. Yet, the creation of our alignment with Gulliver is one of the means by which Swift traps the reader. McKee makes the following case:

...Swift must arrange matters so that Gulliver undercuts himself by demonstrating several forms of intellectual incompetence. When this incompetence is perceived, the reader becomes reluctant to align himself with Gulliver. In spite of this reluctance, Swift manages to suggest that Gulliver and the reader are alike. The reader sees that Gulliver's limited vision causes him to make errors in judgment, to misconstrue his surroundings, and to fall into various kinds of traps. Later, the reader is made aware that he has committed remarkably similar errors.

In addition, the rhetorical juxtaposition of the Yahoos with the more "rational" behavior of the Houyhnhnms again invites us to agree with Gulliver in his interpretations. That the Houyhnhnms are a nonhuman species, representing an ideal that is perhaps unattainable for humans,
is a fact that many, as does Gulliver, fail to perceive. In this way, Swift has contrived his satire in such a way as to assault the reader by trapping her into conclusions and interpretations that do not, in fact, coincide with his own position. The numerous critics who persist in taking Gulliver's reaction as reflecting Swift's attest to the force of Swift's strategies in the chapter.

Swift has, throughout the chapter, strongly misled the reader in order to make his thematic points more forcefully. We have seen the lengths to which he goes to undercut our views about our civilization and accomplishments. Given the aptness of much of his comments about the nature of human interaction, we, like Gulliver, tend to go along with the negative judgments—many similarities between Yahoos and mankind do in fact exist. But Swift is also satirizing Gulliver's reaction to the imperfection of man as well, and to the extent that we identify with Gulliver and agree to his interpretations, to that extent are we being satirized as well. Swift is not offering misanthropy as a viable alternative; misanthropy is, after all, a form of pride or elitism.

Consequently, the reader is being satirized almost as much as Gulliver, and our pride in standing beside the author in a position superior to Gulliver's is thereby attacked. Nonetheless, humbled though we may feel by such
a realization, we do not feel assaulted in the way that we shall see Burroughs make us feel. In understanding his intention to "vex the world" (which is a far cry from attacking it outright), our pride in ourselves may be injured, but we still come away feeling we have learned a valuable lesson. Moreover, Swift has made our learning experience a pleasant one on the narrative level; we enter the narrative audience quite readily, caught up as we are in following Gulliver through his adventures.

Steps is another work that employs a rhetoric aimed at unsettling the reader. The book is comprised of a series of vignettes with interspersed "conversations" between the I-narrator and an unidentified woman, all seemingly unrelated to one another except insofar as a single consciousness is recounting them. Both structurally and emotionally the book occupies a kind of middle ground between Naked Lunch and Gulliver. With Burroughs' work, however, the thematic issues and rhetorical strategies have so much force that little problem is encountered by the reader for understanding Burroughs' intention. In Kosinski's work, however, it is much more difficult to discern his overall intention. We have no conventional plot, no progressive revelation of a unified character in the series of vignettes. Moreover, the nature and content of the vignettes raise thematic issues that seem to be as much, if
not more, a part of his purpose than the revelation of the narrator's character. Since it is clear that we are not meant to relate to this narrator positively, that is, there is little ground for empathy, sympathy, or respect, one must suspect that the purpose lies in the nature of the experiences and the thematic issues they raise rather than the effects of those experiences on the narrator per se.

Many of the scenes in Steps depict either the narrator and another engaged in sexual activity or his account of watching others engaged in such activity. For example, we stand with the narrator in a group of spectators who are paying money and betting on a woman's ability to have intercourse with an animal. In another instance, the narrator recounts his relationship with a woman after she's been raped and how he subsequently "abruptly and forcefully... subjected her to various experiments, stimulating her responses, exploring and violating her in spite of her pleas and protests." Even those scenes that are non-sexual in the novel are reminiscent of the kind that characterize Naked Lunch. Violence and entrapment are common threads running through them all, whether that violence is enacted in military or in social encounters.

Alongside these scenes are those that highlight a motif of mirrors and mirror-images. In one scene, the narrator makes love with a dying, tubercular woman in a
mirror, each caressing the reflection of the other but never touching. In still another, the narrator recounts his encounter with a woman who turns into a man, and states: "All we could do was to exist for each other solely as a reminder of the self." This same philosophy of interaction is picked up in the narrator's italicized conversations with the woman. When asked why he goes to see a prostitute, he responds: "I do with her what you would find unacceptable....Because you know me only in a certain way. And because our relationship is based on your acceptance of what I have been with you" (60). For Kosinski, then, human interaction is by and large solipsistic and existential in the sense that human interactions lead not to contact with another but only to different experiences of the self. The world exists only as a mirror held up to reflect one's consciousness. So Kosinski attempts to structure his novel as mimetic of the structure of life itself; we are forced to see ourselves in our own way through the text. We can never know or understand the narrator—we are not meant to, or even care to—we can only come to recognize ourselves in our reactions to his depictions. Moreover, to force us into this awareness, Kosinski employs primarily violent and perverted scenes; had he been less "shocking," we might have become involved either with the narrator himself or with the kinds of experiences he under-
goes, thus reducing our tendency to focus only on our own reactions. Kosinski must prevent this kind of engagement if he wants to make his thematic points about the nature of human consciousness and the range of emotions we are capable of feeling. Lavers has noted this effect, albeit in a slightly different context:

If Kosinski's intentions for his novel are that they present moral dilemmas without comment, putting the burden of moral decision on the reader, and that they push the incident forward in our consciousness by rejecting plot, then we are entitled to call *Steps* Kosinski's purest novel, or at any rate the purest working out of his aesthetic intention. His moral commentary is so muffled or absent that it is difficult to know in what way he intends us to respond to the incidents in *Steps*, and so, as in actual life situations, in reading the book we are thrown on our own resources.  

Hence, we can understand why readers find the book so unsettling. Without a strong authorial voice to guide our responses to the chaotic and destructive world of *Steps*, we are left by ourselves to make sense and meaning out of the seemingly random and meaningless events of the novel.

The following excerpt is typical of many incidents in the book and of Kosinski's stylistic technique:

Work was scarce during the war; I was too thin to work in the fields, and the peasants preferred to use their own children or relatives. As a vagrant, I was everybody's victim. To amuse himself the farmer with whom I was finally boarded would take hold of me by my collar, drag me up close and then strike me.... Upon my return from the fields, the farmer was waiting for me. He pushed me into the barn
and whipped me until the blood oozed from my legs. Bellowing with rage he finally hurled the leather thong into my face.

I began to collect discarded fishhooks and bury them behind the barn. After the farmer and his wife left for church I slipped into my hiding place and kneaded a couple of fishhooks and crushed glass into balls of fresh bread which I had torn out of the day's newly baked loaves.

I liked to play with the youngest of the farmer's three children....

One evening the little girl hugged me. I dampened a ball of bread with my saliva and asked her to swallow it in one piece. When she hesitated, I took a piece of apple, put it into the back of my mouth, and pushing it with my forefinger, instantly swallowed it. The girl imitated me, swallowing the balls, one after another. I looked away from her face, forcing myself to think only of the burning of her father's whip. (34-36)

The passage is interesting in that the violence of the farmer and peasants seems mild compared with the violence of the narrator's revenge. We are left questioning whether whippings justify the kind of death to which he condemns the child. Moreover, the narrator takes a perverse kind of pleasure and triumph from his acts:

From then on I gazed boldly into my persecutor's eyes, provoking their assault and maltreatment. I felt no pain. For each lash I received my tormentors were condemned to pain a hundred times greater than mine. Now I was no longer their victim; I had become their judge and executioner. (37)

Clearly we are meant to despise the narrator's acts; nonetheless, we retain some sympathy for his position—he has, after all, been brutally assaulted and battered by the
farmers. Moreover, we are even being asked to see his reaction in a rather heroic light—he has triumphed, is no longer their "victim," but instead is a person capable of no small degree of power over their lives. This kind of ambivalence to the nature of the events depicted in the novel is typical of Kosinski's technique. He consistently presents us with scenes of violence and sexual perversion whose moral dimensions are complicated and made ambiguous by our conflicting reactions of dismay or disgust and intellectual understanding. Furthermore, the experience of entering the narrative audience, of being addressed by the narrator as if we will of course understand his position makes the act of reading even more unsettling. This technique corroborates Lavers assertion above about Kosinski's intentions in the work.

To this extent, there exist some similarities between Steps and Naked Lunch. Both have their structural basis in an extremely loose and episodic progression, one based on theme rather than linear action. As we have seen, this kind of thwarting of the reader's usual expectations of story and plot often has the consequence of forcing the reader away from the narrative level to focus more strongly on the thematic and aesthetic issues present in the work, although each vignette in Steps offers another invitation to enter a narrative audience. Again, similarities with Burroughs
exist on the narrative level, in so far as we are presented with highly repugnant subject matter in both cases, and, in both cases, we are forced into a voyeuristic position. Again, Cahill has noted the similarities and states:

"What takes place before the reader's sight is not gratuitous or hallucinatory as the nightmarish events of *The Naked Lunch* or *The Soft Machine*. In both of the Burroughs novels, the reader is not threatened by a sense of complicity because the fictive events are filtered through a nightmare reality. In Kosinski's novel, the aesthetic distance is closed and the reader does not have the safety and comfort of a mere spectator at unspeakable events. The horror in *Steps* is committed in places without names by persons unspecified. The personalities involved are faceless actors in a social order of destructive force."

While I disagree with Cahill's assessment that being a "mere spectator" represents any kind of safety and comfort, I do concur that the aesthetic distance in Kosinski's work is lesser than in Burroughs to the extent that Kosinski is not interested in attacking his reader either morally or verbally. Cahill fails to note that while Burroughs is intent upon keeping his reader out of the narrative audience, Kosinski, by refusing to attack the reader, repeatedly extends the invitation to enter the narrative audience. If we do enter that audience, we must acknowledge that we are no longer a "mere spectator," but rather an active participant. The opportunities in *Steps* for coming to know
ourselves through the reflection of our reactions to the events is therefore much greater than in *Naked Lunch*.

One of the chief means by which Kosinski manages not to alienate the reader is through his style. He chooses to have his narrator report the events in as "objective" a manner as possible, merely recounting the events with little or no moralizing commentary. The narrative plays over the surface like the dead leaf in the water at the end of the novel, ever elusive and mysterious, revealing in its lack of concreteness no one way of catching hold of it. Thus, while we are directly assaulted by Burroughs' bombardment of our sensibilities, Kosinski instead traps us in a web of multiple meaning and possible interpretation. Both techniques result in unsettling a reader and both create problems for a reader's entering the narrative audience. In Kosinski's work, however, we come away from the book feeling unsettled and uneasy about the nature of our response to his fictional world—he has not imposed a definitive "story" upon us—either of the events themselves, the narrator's reactions to them, or even of their "meaning" in terms of a particularized world-view. We are clearly meant to feel adrift, as does the woman at the end, in a sea of possibilities, many of which are as acceptable as any other possible response. Certainly some responses are inadequate; Kosinski is a highly ethical author—we are not
supposed to come away from the book endorsing the narrator's actions or ideas. Were we to see the narrator's attitudes as representing Kosinski's, he would certainly have gone to greater lengths to engage us both with the character himself and with the kinds of experiences he undergoes. While meant to judge negatively the narrator's reactions to the violence and perversity of life and the world, we are left, nonetheless, to make our own choices, judgments, and consequent actions about the nature and depths of violence human beings are capable of in a way that Burroughs will not allow. And herein lies the essential difference between the two works, and it is this difference that will finally allow us to determine the limits of assaultive rhetoric.

On the narrative level, Naked Lunch is the direct presentation, ostensibly unedited, of some "detailed notes" Burroughs took during his fifteen years as a junkie. These "notes" generally take the form of vignettes, recounted by a variety of narrators, and almost all contain descriptions of obscene, disgusting, and most pertinently, violent "unspeakable acts," written in a generally obscene vernacular. As we begin reading, we discover that the "plot" is picaresque in the extreme: the "story" consists of the experiences of William Lee, a "double-four-eight-sixteen" narcotics agent who is himself an addict, who travels around
the country (often the world) with his friends, trying to
elude other narcotics agents who are ostensibly after him.
Included in this so-called plot are various interpolated
stories, told either by Lee or by the characters he encoun-
ters. Thus, not only is there no conventional plot upon
which to hang the various events, there is no consistent
narrative voice through which the "action" gets filtered.
Even Lee, while closest to the ethos presented at the end
of the Introduction, is not quite meant to be taken as
Burroughs' alter ego, as evident from the many footnotes
and asides in which Burroughs' "scientific" voice explains
various slang expressions common in the drug world. If
there is no plot in a conventional sense, there is progres-
sion, in this case, thematic and rhetorical progression
toward the following conclusions: 1) not just the drug
culture, but our entire society is based on the junk-
equation, what Burroughs calls "The Algebra of Need:" 2)
our society is essentially violent in all its manifesta-
tions; and 3) indeed, all human interaction is ultimately
conflictual. Despite the lively wit, lyrical prose style,
and satiric humor that also characterize the work (which
clearly account for much of the reason why one can continue
to read the book), the subject matter and content are
highly repugnant for most readers. Granted, there may be,
and no doubt are, some readers who might actually enjoy the
obscenities that pervade the book, (there is, after all, a large mass market for hard-core porn), but I doubt that many in Burroughs' intended audience share that reaction. How, then, do we explain the positive critical attention the book has received?

Rhetorically, Burroughs must extend an extremely powerful invitation to his readers to motivate a strong desire to read the book. He does so in the "Introduction," first by presenting an ethos compatible with our value system, second by generating both our sympathy for this narrative voice and our belief in his sincerity, and last by emphasizing the thematic issues of the work, thereby asking us to read what follows in light of these issues.

As part of establishing the ethos, Burroughs invokes the powerful generic convention of the "Confession". Ostensibly in line with such authors as Augustine and DeQuincy, the narrator gives us a confessional introduction dealing primarily with the "facts" of dope addiction, written in a predominantly detached, scientific voice:

I awoke from The Sickness at the age of forty-five, calm and sane....

...The Sickness is drug addiction and I was an addict for fifteen years. When I say addict I mean an addict to junk (generic term for opium and/or derivatives including all synthetics from demerol to palfium. I have used junk in many forms: morphine, heroin, delaudid, eukodal, pantopon, diocodid, diosane, opium, demerol, dolophine, palfium. I have smoked junk,
eaten it, sniffed it, injected it in vein-skin-muscle, inserted it in rectal suppositories. The needle is not important. Whether you sniff it smoke it eat it or shove it up your ass the result is the same: addiction (xxxvii-xxxxviii).

The passage clearly asks us to identify the narrative voice with Burroughs himself and begins to generate our sympathy by the no-holds-barred sincerity of this "confession."

Burroughs' next move is to generate our impulse to read thematically. Despite his warning in the opening paragraph that we are not to read the book "symbolically," ("The title means exactly what the words say: NAKED Lunch--a frozen moment when everyone sees what is on the end of every fork"), Burroughs proceeds to equate junk with an "evil" virus that pervades all of Western capitalist society:

Junk is the ideal product...the ultimate merchandise. No sales talk necessary. The client will crawl through a sewer and beg to buy....The junk merchant does not sell his product to the consumer, he sells the consumer to his product. He does not improve and simplify his merchandise. He degrades and simplifies the client. He pays his staff in junk.

Junk yields a basic formula of "evil" virus: The Algebra of Need. The face of "evil" is always the face of total need. A dope fiend is a man in total need of dope. Beyond a certain frequency need knows absolutely no limit or control. In the words of total need: "Wouldn't you?" Yes, you would (xxxix).

The use of the language of commercialism, "product," "sales talk" "consumer," "merchandise," and "client" sets us up to see what follows, if not as symbolic or allegorical, at the
very least as metaphoric of a larger disease that pervades our society. Stull makes the following case:

The transformations of the junk metaphor through the "many forms of addiction" include heroin itself, control, sex, bureaucratic power, technology, and even time. Burroughs is obsessed with control systems—from Mayan codices to Scientology—and control and sex begin to fuse more and more in his later novels.\(^{14}\)

Again, Burroughs creates a rapport with the reader through the honesty and sincerity of this "reformed" voice, both as the reformed addict and now as the "re-former" of society. Moreover, Burroughs warns us that much of what follows is "necessarily brutal, obscene, and disgusting," since it deals with this "evil" virus. Knowing that such a justification may not be enough, Burroughs claims:

Certain passages in the book that have been called pornographic were written as a tract against Capital Punishment in the manner of Jonathan Swift's *Modest Proposal*. These sections are intended to reveal capital punishment as the obscene, barbaric and disgusting anachronism that it is. As always the lunch is naked. If civilized countries want to return to Druid Hanging Rites in the Sacred Grove or to drink blood with the Aztecs and feed their Gods with blood of human sacrifice, let them see what they actually eat and drink. Let them see what is on the end of that long newspaper spoon (xlv).

Yet before moving into the actual narrative of *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs gives us a sampling of the kind of narrative voice that will guide us through the remainder of the book, and again we are asked to see this voice as Bur-
roughs' ("And speaking **Personally** and if a man speaks any other way we might as well start looking for his Protoplasm Daddy or Mother Cell...." [xlv].) The issues raised in this section reiterate the ones in the earlier pages, but in a very different voice, one that is more engaging, witty and humorous:

> And some of us are on Different Kicks and that's a thing out in the open the way I like to see what I eat and visa versa mutatis mutandis as the case may be. **Bill's Naked Lunch Room....**Step right up....Good for young and old, man and bestial. Nothing like a little snake oil to grease the wheels and get a show on the track Jack. Which side are you on? Fro-Zen Hydraulic? Or you want to take a look around with Honest Bill? (xlvi)

Thus, Burroughs makes the invitation to continue quite strong by the end of the introduction. Given what is to follow, Wouldn't You?

The first section of the narrative proper deals with the lowest rung of the hierarchy presented in the introduction—the character and position of the junkie/victim in society. Examples of all the "Wouldn't you's" abound ("lie, cheat, steal, inform...") and are presented in a negative light. As Lee puts it:

> You know how old people lose all shame about eating, and it makes you puke to watch them? Old junkies are the same about junk. They gibber and squeal at the sight of it. The spit hangs off their chin, and their stomach rumbles and all their guts grind in peristalsis while they cook up, dissolving the body's decent skin, you expect any moment a great blob of
protoplasm will flop right out and surround the junk. Really disgust you to see it. (5)

The passage works thematically in a number of ways and presents few problems in terms of a reader's value system or for entering the narrative audience. Our normative assumptions concerning junkies are here reinforced—they are shameless, they are disgusting, and they have lost all sense of "self," and hence are mere animals. The only potentially problematic aspect of the passage involves the simile comparing junkies to old people, and as we shall see, this technique often signals a Burroughsian condemnation of a social "evil." We do, in fact, often treat our senior citizens as second-class, stow them away in institutions and nursing homes and make them "invisible" so as not to be bothered with them. (Significantly, Lee becomes an "invisible man" later in the book.) By comparing junkies with senior citizens, Burroughs not only places us in a highly uncomfortable position to the extent that we recognize the validity of the analogy, he also uses our concept of junkies against us—tries to make us see them as human beings victimized by society and thereby arouse our sympathy for them. Moreover, the passage signals that the evil Burroughs is dissecting here is that of capitalism and its consequential consumerism. The eating metaphor is particularly apt: to eat is to consume and to consume is
to devour and destroy. Again, the act of eating is necessary to our physical well-being and Burroughs is much concerned throughout the book with the physical deterioration of humankind, its metamorphosis into either ectoplasm, clones, or insects. (That the physical state is inextricably linked to mental deterioration is more fully elaborated throughout the progression.) Hassan has perceived this motif in Burroughs' work and claims:

...Naked Lunch refers all its philosophic and political themes to the decayed substance of the human body. The technique is harshly reductive, a reversal of the process of Freudian sublimation; but it serves to debunk the complexities of civilization by thrusting upon us that strange reality which underlies them all: the diseased and obscene flesh. Disease and obscenity are the corporal evidence of our maladies.

Even more negatively portrayed, however, are the informers and narcotics agents, thus continuing with the hierarchy of power established by society, the structure of the "evil" virus Burroughs wants to examine. Two characters in this section, Willy the Disk and Bradley the Buyer, receive particularly scathing descriptions. Bradley is portrayed as a "vampire bat" who gives off a "narcotic effluvium" that renders his victims helpless while he eats them. Willy, as an informer and agent, receives even worse treatment:

Willy has a round, disk mouth lined with sensitive, erectile black hairs. He is blind
from shooting in the eyeball, his nose and palate eaten away sniffing H, his body a mass of scar tissue hard and dry as wood. He can only eat the shit now with that mouth, sometimes sways out on a long tube of ectoplasm, feeling for the silent frequency of junk. He follows my trail all over the city into rooms I move out already, and the fuzz walks in some newlyweds from Sioux Falls.

"All right, Lee!! Come out from behind that strap-on! We know you" and pull the man's prick off straight-away.

Now Willy is getting hot and you can hear him always out there in darkness (he only functions at night) whimpering, and feel the terrible urgency of that blind, seeking mouth. When they move in for the bust, Willy goes all out of control, and his mouth eats a hole right through the door. (7)

Thus, the people who occupy the level of power directly above the victim, are even worse than those they victimize. Indeed, they "feed" off the junkie, earn their living by victimizing the addict, and hence disintegrate into a psycho-physical state even more disgusting than the demoralized junkie. But not all readers who are willing to grant Burroughs his valid insights into the nature and workings of power addicts will assent to this overwhelmingly negative portrayal of law enforcement agents. Junkies are by and large noncontributing members of any society, do commit all manner of violent crimes to fulfill their need, and do themselves feed off the system and people. Hence, narcotics agents and cops are a necessary "evil" in our society; whether they are inherently more "evil" than "junkies" is a very debatable issue at best, and Burroughs'
portrayal of them runs the risk of alienating some of his readers at too early a point in the work. At this point, however, Burroughs is merely assaulting our generally accepted notions about junkies and police to force us to question our value system.

Nonetheless, the most problematic aspects of this first section surround the nature of the rhetoric employed and the quasi-realistic descriptions of the drug culture that forms the narrative content of the book. Despite our rhetorical agreement with Burroughs to accept a certain amount of brutality and obscenity, the world of the text is one with which his audience by and large has no direct experience. Moreover, it is a world about which most of I suspect would, like Bartleby, "prefer not to" know. As a result, it is extremely difficult for many readers to participate on the narrative level; there is little or no "shared experience" upon which to base our engagement, and the nature of this narrative world is off-putting at best. Nonetheless, I think Burroughs is here challenging the reader, forcing her to make that decision either to close her eyes (and the text) and ignore the social problems he wishes to expose or to continue reading and attempt to understand the harsh, repugnant reality of the drug world.

The second chapter introduces the character of Dr. Benway, perhaps the most despicable character in the entire
book, and extends the notion of addiction and control to the psychological level. Benway is currently an "advisor to the Freeland Republic," an indication that all is not well in the state of Freeland, despite our narrator's statement that the citizens are "well adjusted, cooperative, honest, tolerant and above all clean." Lee then goes on to tell us that "Benway is a manipulator and coordinator of symbol systems, an expert on all phases of interrogation, brainwashing and control," and that he had not seen him since "his precipitate departure from Annexia, where his assignment had been T.D.—Total Demoralization" (21). While there, Benway's "first act was to abolish concentration camps, mass arrest and, except under certain limited and special circumstances, the use of torture." Burroughs then proceeds to hand over the narrative to Benway himself, allowing him to reveal his despicable character in his own voice—that of the theoretical scientist seeking to gain knowledge for the betterment of society. In this case, however, the standard laboratory rats are human beings. Regarding torture, for example, Benway states:

While in general I avoid the use of torture—torture locates the opponent and mobilizes resistance—the threat of torture is useful to induce in the subject the appropriate feeling of helplessness and gratitude to the interrogator for withholding it. And torture can be employed to advantage as a penalty when the subject is far enough along with the treatment to accept punishment as deserved. To this end I
devised several forms of disciplinary procedure. One was known as The Switchboard. Electric drills that can be turned on at any time are clamped against the subject's teeth; and he is instructed to operate an arbitrary switchboard, to put certain connections in certain sockets in response to bells and lights. Everytime he makes a mistake the drills are turned on for twenty seconds. The signals are gradually speeded up beyond his reaction time. Half an hour on the switchboard and the subject breaks down like an overloaded thinking machine. (23-24)

So very reminiscent of the kinds of experiments of behavioral psychologists, the passage reinforces our already present suspicions about genetic research, cloning, etc. It is an image of science let loose on humanity, and plays upon our sense of the current conflict between the scientific method and humanism. Thus, the section works to reinforce our sense that Burroughs' thematic ends are ethically and morally sound; he has honored his end of the rhetorical transaction we entered into in the Introduction (we would accept a certain degree of brutality, obscenity, etc.) and we enjoy his exaggeration of the problem, recognizing the scathing satire.

Still, problems remain, particularly in the language Burroughs employs throughout this chapter. Certainly through sheer repetition if nothing else, we have become rather accustomed and inured to the kind of prose characteristic of the book—the graphic detail, the obscene words—but as if deliberately to antagonize us further,
Burroughs' description of the INDs at Benway's Reconditioning Center is repulsive in the extreme:

Gentle reader, the ugliness of that spectacle buggers description. Who can be a cringing pissing coward, yet vicious as a purple-assed mandril, alternating these deplorable conditions like vaudeville skits? Who can shit on a fallen adversary who, dying, eats the shit and screams with joy? Who can hang a weak passive and catch his sperm in mouth like a vicious dog? Gentle reader, I fain would spare you this, but my pen hath its will like the Ancient Mariner. Oh Crist what a scene is this! Can tongue or pen accomodate these scandals? A beastly young hooligan has gouged out the eye of his confrere and fuck him in the brain. "This brain atrophy already, and dry as grandmother's cunt."

He turns into Rock and Roll hoodlum. "I screw the old gash--like a crossword puzzle what relation to me is the outcome if it outcome? My father already or not yet? I can't screw you, Jack, you is about to become my father, and better 'twere to cut your throat and screw my mother playing it straight than fuck my father or vice versa mutatis mutandis as the case may be, and cut my mother's throat, that sainted gash, though it be the best way I know to stem her word horde and freeze her asset. I mean when a fellow be caught short in the switches and don't know is he to offer up his ass to 'great big daddy' or commit a torso job on the old lady. Give me two cunts and a prick of steel and keep your dirty finger out of my sugar bum what you think I am a purple-assed reception already fugitive from Gibraltar? Male and female castrated he them. Who can't distinguish between the sexes? I'll cut your throat you white mother fucker. . . .

So leave us return to the stricken field. One youth hath penetrate his comrade, whilst another youth does amputate the proudest part of that cock's quivering beneficiary so that the visiting member projects to fill the vacuum nature abhors and ejaculate into the Black Lagoon where impatient piranha snap up the child not yet born.... (39-41)
Aside from the appalling nature of the language and content of the passage, the question of voice is also significant. The "gentle reader" which the passage addresses, coupled with the later repetition and reference to the Ancient Mariner, indicates that we are hearing Burroughs' voice in this section, not Lee's. Consequently, we immediately recognize the ironic invitation being extended. The series of questions that comprise the first paragraph reinforces our sense that we are meant to see ourselves as the "gentle reader," and raises the issue of whether the questions raised are meant to be answered in the affirmative, that is, that we ourselves are capable of all this. If so, then Burroughs is deliberately assaulting the reader here for an as yet indeterminate reason. In some ways the passage is reminiscent of the rhetoric of southern bible cults and rabble-rousers, and the absent "Allelujahs" and "Amens" resound all the more strongly. But we in fact do not say "Amen," we do not see ourselves as capable of participating in such acts, and Burroughs' invitation to see ourselves in this manner serves only to antagonize us and cause us to reject the view of humanity he is putting forth. If Burroughs' intention in this passage, however, is more of an invitation for us to stand above with him and look down on the scene, the effect, while not assaultive, is nonetheless unsettling. We stand apart from the scene, but are asked
to imagine and witness the brutality and obscenity that make it up—an extremely uncomfortable position. Again, we are as yet unable to determine which of the two responses Burroughs intends. As Burroughs turns the speaking subject to the Rock and Roll hoodlum, our disgust becomes all the more strong as we recognize our enjoyment of the many puns, word plays, and semi-lyrical linguistic aspects of the passage. Part of our response is obviously conditioned by the extreme repugnance of the content—we are forced in a sense to focus on the linguistic cleverness as a defense against the scene being described. But such a response serves Burroughs' thematic purposes and justifies to an extent the view of humankind being presented; "like a crossword puzzle, what relation [to us] is the outcome?"
The biblical language that predominates in the latter half of the passage reveals Burroughs' thematic point about the beginnings and teleology of the human race—total death and destruction in a universe incapable of producing or sustaining the life force. Nelson explains the passage and our reaction in different terms, but with the same general sense:

Our shock is distinctly physical. Our most sacred biological illusions are threatened when we recognize the body as the residue of talk. The earth is a conglomerate of decaying bodies; talk is the true form of reproduction—reproduction that generates excrement. Speech, the true rhythm of our addiction to time, is un-
veiled as a disguised form of defecation. But the discovery signals an end to talk. Matter, the verbal incarnation of space in time, explodes outward into the universe. Scatology becomes eschatology.¹⁶

After leaving Dr. Benway with his INDs, a few chapters are devoted to reinforcing what we've "seen" and "learned" thus far. Burroughs takes a poke at virtually every aspect of our society—while doctors, narcotics agents, and politicians bear the brunt of his satiric indictment, housewives, lawyers, judges, professors, and businessmen also come in for their share of abuse. (For example, "as one judge said to another: 'Be just and if you can't be just, be arbitrary.'") Doctors and nurses are portrayed as further instances of addicts, ghoulishly delighting in their surgical activities which are themselves barbaric and pointless, and callously watching as the patient dies under their surgical ministrations.

Burroughs' next move is to take us for a visit to Hassan's Rumpus Room, a hellish nightclub place, reminiscent of stereotypical conceptions of opium dens. In this chapter, Burroughs portrays the hanging of a young man while being sexually abused, all in front of the audience at Hassan's. Thematically, the section supposedly harks back to Burroughs's statement in the Introduction about capital punishment. To the extent that one perceives capital punishment as a way of eliminating all aberrant members
of society, be their "crimes" violent or otherwise, one can perhaps draw a tenuous analogy. I suspect, however, that most readers can't, and the passage works instead to merely offend our sensibilities. How many of our intellectual class perceive homosexuality as a crime befitting execution? I'm not denying that for many readers the passage may in fact appeal powerfully to hidden fears and desires, I merely want to note that in terms of Burroughs' express avowal of his satiric thrust against capital punishment, the passage loses much of its force. It does, nonetheless, apply more readily to sacrificial rites, to the extent that one sees the boy as "innocent." Moreover, the lack of mimetic description in this chapter reinforces our notion that we are meant to interpret the action metaphorically. Mugwumps and Aztec daises do not exist in the real world, and the rather surrealist quality of the chapter as a whole, invite us not to take the action literally. Again, the scene has all the qualities of a drug-induced nightmare, and, after all, the book is ostensibly Burroughs' recordings of drug hallucinations. Nonetheless, the chapter is offensive in the extreme and is highly problematic due to the rhetorical transaction and lack of a discernible thematic point. The following excerpt illustrates this basic problem:
The Mugwump slips the noose over the boy's head and tightens the knot caressingly behind the left ear. The boy's penis is retracted, his balls tight. He looks straight ahead breathing deeply. The Mugwump sidles around the boy goosing him and caressing his genitals in hieroglyphics of mockery. He moves in behind the boy with a series of bumps and shoves his cock up the boy's ass. He stands there moving in circular gyrations.

The guests shush each other, nudge and giggle.

Suddenly the Mugwump pushes the boy forward into space, free of his cock. He steadies the boy with hands on the hip bones, reaches up with his stylized hieroglyph hands and snaps the boy's neck. A shudder passes through the boy's body. His penis rises in three great surges pulling his pelvis up, ejaculates immediately.

... The boy falls with soft gutty section through a maze of penny arcades and dirty pictures. A sharp turd shoots clean out his ass. Farts shake his slender body.... (76)

In this vision, we are asked to become a member of that fictional audience who "giggle." Even assuming that Burroughs is again inviting us to divorce ourselves and look down on the participants of the audience and scene, he still nonetheless forces us to participate to the extent that we are reading/imagining these hypothetical events. And the events portrayed are so repulsive that any participation is problematic and combative. For example, the language of the passage, despite its lack of overt mimetic force, ("Mugwump," "hieroglyphics of mockery," "stylized hieroglyph hands"), is nonetheless typical of much pornography. Burroughs is clearly asking us to respond accord-
ingly in the opening passage. The intrusion about the guests then intensifies our knowledge that our possible response is inappropriate: we do not and are not part of that fictional audience. As we proceed through the rest of the passage, our disgust becomes all the greater if we initially felt anything but repugnance; our recognition that we had been titillated is turned against us with a vengeance. An even greater problem arises when we realize there is no positive outcome of our having had to go through this experience—no new fisher king is born; there is nothing regenerative about the ritual murder. In addition, the chapter works thematically to reinforce the concept that the workings of Thanatos are more powerful than Eros; Burroughs' world-view seems to be one of unrelieved destructiveness.

Immediately following this chapter comes a brief visit to Interzone University where Burroughs parodies an English professor, using Coleridge's poem as the subject of discussion. Aside from the parody of university professors and classes, the chapter is rhetorically necessary to reiterate the Mariner motif. Realizing that the previous chapter was difficult for most readers to swallow, Burroughs must ensure that we see it in as thematic a light as possible, that we be willing to grant the thematic necessity of such descriptions and that we understand that Burroughs, like
the Mariner, is forced to tell his story of death and alienation to a society increasingly oblivious to the dangers it runs.

The next chapter, however, "A.J.'s Annual Party," portrays sado-masochistic activities, includes two hangings, and is presented as a "blue movie." Moreover, unlike the previous instance, this chapter is far more mimetic--Johnny, Mark, and Mary are presented as possible human beings (they are not Mugwumps), and the opening portrays the carnivalesque selling of a freak show (in this case a blue movie). Moreover, by drawing attention to the fact that what we are to witness is a film, Burroughs reinforces the mimetic force of the scene concerning our society--porn movies are a part of our culture, like it or not. Once again, then, with little comic relief in between, Burroughs forces an extremely repugnant and extended description of sexual perversion upon the reader.

Burroughs runs an extreme risk of losing his audience at this point--not simply because of the inherently disgusting nature of the subject matter and description, but because he forces you to witness this, that is asks you to become a member of the fictional audiences at Hassan's and A. J.'s and watch. People may choose to participate in such acts (after all, the audience has chosen to go to these places and be "entertained"), but Burroughs has here
exercised his power as author to force us into a voyeuristic role. A.J's party opens with an express (and derogatory) invitation to join the "guests," and with a mimetic representation of a blue movie:

A.J. turns to the guests, "Cunts, pricks, fence straddlers, tonight I give you—that international-known impressario of blue movies and short-wave TV, the one, the only, The Great Slashtubitch.

... On Screen. Red-haired, green-eyed boy, white skin with a few freckles... kissing a thin brunette girl in slacks. Clothes and hair-do suggest existentialist bars of all the world cities. They are seated on low bed covered in white silk. The girl opens his pants with gentle fingers and pulls out his cock which is small and very hard. A drop of lubricant gleams at its tip like a pearl. (89)

Rhetorically, the chapter works to insult us. In addition to the offensive introduction, the mimetic character of the initial part of the movie invites us to participate emotionally in the scene. In this sense, Burroughs is correct in his statement that "Naked Lunch demands silence from the Reader." We are damned if we do and damned if we don't.

If we do feel at all titillated by the description, we must acknowledge that emotional response and come to our own terms with it. Conversely, if we feel disgust, we must also question why. But these two possibilities exist only at the opening of the movie. The depiction of the hangings in the chapter and Mary's literally eating Johnny's body
certainly are repulsive in the extreme and no reader could possibly be emotionally involved.

Since neither chapter works in the Swiftian manner Burroughs claims in the Introduction, he has to that extent violated his rhetorical contract. We agreed to put up with a certain amount of brutality, but these sections go far beyond tolerable limits. Clearly, the repetition serves to further antagonize the reader, but it also serves to reinforce our sense that the brutality, violence, and obscenity has a thematic purpose. As a result, one is left with two possible solutions: either the book is flawed at this point, that is, the antagonizing of the reader works against the book, or Burroughs has a thematic or aesthetic reason for antagonizing his readers. Since the chapters occur at a relatively early stage of the narrative (approximately a third of the way through), the tendency is to reserve judgment, grant Burroughs the room to make clear to us the artistic necessity of this section, assuming, of course, that one's level of tolerance has not been strained to the breaking point.

The most important effect of the two chapters, however, lies in their power to guarantee that readers will resist entering the narrative audience of the book. As we have seen, having established a rapport with his audience in the Introduction, Burroughs has increasingly employed
rhetorical strategies designed to distance the reader from the narrative level. Thus, while on one level the book is about the drug culture and the kinds of hallucinations induced by different drugs, Burroughs has consistently asked us not to view the action in so literal a light, has consistently distanced us and our potential sympathetic responses to that world through the first part of the narrative. Had Burroughs' intention in the work been to depict the junkie's world and to create social change through society's increased understanding of that world, he certainly would avoid antagonizing his readers to the extent that he does. Social change will only occur if some degree of sympathy for the plight of the junkie is generated: Burroughs has certainly precluded that possibility by alienating us so strongly from the junkie's world. Critical response to the novel attests to Burroughs' success in preventing a reader's entering the narrative world of the novel.

Most critics either ignore these two chapters or make passing reference to them. If mentioned, they are cited as instances of Burroughs' condemnation of capital punishment. What is so very interesting about this phenomenon is that it reveals that the force of Burroughs' ethos presented in the Introduction is so strong that it carries most readers through these two chapters, and not only carries them, but
that the ethical justification Burroughs gave is not even questioned but accepted wholesale. Mottram and Lee present the most extended analyses of the two passages. Mottram states:

Burroughs presents a loveless world whose control is entirely in the hands of capitalists, doctors, psychiatrists, con men, judges, police and military, whose aim it is to perpetuate mass infantilism, apathy and dependence. Swift's physical nausea in *A Modest Proposal* and *A Discourse Concerning the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit* is tolerated through ironic comedy of acceptance. In Burroughs it tends to become horror of the obscenity towards which total power necessarily grows. This is why the climax of *The Naked Lunch* is a strictly non-pornographic satire against capital punishment, exposing the perverted sexuality of those who execute or witness or condone it. This scene will appear pornographic only to devotees of execution. It is in fact a necessary enactment of the central sexuality of power in the nation state. Latent neuroses may well be aroused in the reader by the negative satire in a work such as *The Naked Lunch*, but the work itself is singularly controlled.  

Lee's claims about the two chapters are remarkably similar to Mottram's:

What Burroughs is here diagnosing is the live 'pornography' of a society which rests its ultimate authority in the threat of capital punishment. For him, hanging is the final 'reel' in a society which has given rein to the cannibalistic, the sexual act of power and control. ... Hanging, a situation in which the victim is placed in total servitude to the punisher is, in Burroughs' view, a sexual act--one which calls into question the whole psychosocial basis of authority and punishment. Burroughs has transformed this act on the page
into a grotesque, repelling ballet of cruelty and sexuality.\(^{18}\)

Outside of Mottram's passing reference to "latent neuroses" and Lee's adjective in "repelling ballet," no discussion is made of the emotional effect of the chapters on the reader as being in and of itself significant, either thematically or morally. Thus it appears that Burroughs has indeed been rhetorically successful in his endeavors to distance us from the narrative content and to have his readers engage with the text thematically and on the authorial level.

Since I cannot accept that the passage works thematically in the way that these two critics at least do, I would seek to justify it in a different way, albeit one that remains thematic. Burroughs is here enacting upon the reader the violence portrayed on the narrative level; that is, the purpose of the two chapters is one of symbolic action in Burke's terms.\(^{19}\) Burroughs is deliberately perpetrating an authorial act of violence against the reader that reflects an act of violence analogous to the one present on the narrative level, one which demonstrates his thematic point that all human interaction is conflictual and an act of murder. Nelson, in a slightly different context, adopts much the same view:

\begin{quote}
Such critical disengagement implies a decision to reject the reading experience, to disguise and obfuscate Burroughs's disruption of our humanitarian assumptions. The posture is fami-
\end{quote}
liar from Swift's work. Adverse reaction to the language and forms of the novels, which occurs quite apart from an evaluation of their quality, is a defense against what they can do to us as human beings. Our uneasiness in confronting Burroughs's art has two sources. The first is an entirely justified suspicion that Naked Lunch may be read as a marriage manual, that Burroughs means to reveal the true violent content of our sexuality. The other, confirmed by his later novels, is a fear that Burroughs believes an act of murder is implicitly in every human contact.

Since the remainder of the narrative returns to a further elaboration of the thematic issues of control and power as they exist on an economic and political level primarily, one would have to explain why these two chapters occur so early in the work if Nelson's hypothesis—and my own—is to have any force. Part of the justification lies in Burroughs' aesthetic principles elaborated in the "Atrophied Preface" at the very end of the book and part lies in his rhetorical need to distance the reader from the narrative level so that the thematic issues become the dominant, and nearly sole, focus in the book. In this respect it is significant that Burroughs never again subjects us to quite the same verbal abuse as in the two chapters just discussed. Having gone about as far as he can to antagonize us, he steps back a bit and allows us to continue to explore the consequences of the societal diseases he identifies.
The remainder of the narrative extends the consequences and implications of power/control addiction to the political level, and satirizes virtually all political systems, exposing them as totalitarian in essence, regardless of the superficial forms they may take. The most important of the remaining chapters deals with the parties of Interzone, the Liquefactionists, the Senders, the Divisionists, and the Factualists. Of the three, the Senders are the worst, wishing to dominate the world through thought control:

The logical extension of encephalographic research is bicontrol; that is control of physical movement, mental processes, emotional reactions and apparent sensory impressions by means of bioelectric signals injected into the nervous system of the subject (162).

The Divisionists, as their name suggests, seek control through cloning, thereby reducing individuality to a meaningless concept. The Liquefactionists are presented in nearly as negative a light as the others; it is a party comprised by "dupes" except for one man. The Factualists, with whom the narrator is most closely aligned are not presented in quite so negative a light as the others; their saving grace is their emphatic desire for the "facts" of a situation, although their ability to escape the workings of political systems and their inherent totalitarian impulses is of course acknowledged nonetheless. Thematically, of
course, the purpose of the examples is to reinforce our sense that all power relationships are destructive and sadistic. As Burroughs points out: "You see control can never be a means to any practical end. . . . It can never be a means to anything but more control. . . . Like junk. . . ." (164). Ideologically, few readers are going to be troubled with this part of the narrative; most of us do in fact regard totalitarianism as "evil," and enjoy Burroughs' satiric humor throughout. Still, the question remains about the validity of his means of reinforcement, his repeated invitations to experience the thematic issues by entering his narrative audience.

The other part of the justification for the early placement of the two offending chapters is aesthetic, the grounds of which are most fully elaborated in the novel's final chapter. The final chapter contains bits and fragments of all the issues dealt with in the narrative, but more particularly with the nature of language, communication, and art in particular. Burroughs opens the chapter with two questions:

Why all this waste paper getting The People from one place to another? Perhaps to spare The Reader stress of sudden space shifts and keep him Gentle?

Aside from the irony and rhetorical nature of the two questions, they do not get answered in any coherent fash-
ion. Bits and pieces of answers are contained in the chapter, but interspersed seemingly at random. Indeed, the entire chapter consists of fragments of sentences, all falling apart grammatically and leading nowhere, "atrophy-ing" before they can complete themselves. Thus, Burroughs certainly does not spare the reader sudden shifts in perspective--his project does not include keeping the reader "gentle." In this sense, we can better understand the placement of the two offending chapters--like the narrative style and language, the placement of the incidents themselves is to a degree arbitrary.

Concerning the aesthetic nature of his project, Burroughs states:

You can cut into Naked Lunch at any intersection point. . . . I have written many prefaces (224); and

There is only one thing a writer can write about: what is in front of his senses at the moment of writing. . . . I am a recording instrument. . . . I do not presume to impose "story" "plot" "continuity". . . .(221)

Burroughs' statements concerning the aesthetic structure of the book accurately reflect the experience we have undergone in the reading of it; he has been true to his convictions, if nothing else, but his sincerity is still open to question. Despite his disclaimer that he does not impose any "plot" or "continuity" on the reader, he has nonethe-
less, and inescapably, imposed "story"—the story of his view of society and its effects on the individual. Moreover, Skau states that Burroughs himself qualified this statement:

Although he claims in Naked Lunch, "I do not presume to impose 'story' 'plot' 'continuity'...", he has since qualified this statement: "when I said that I was perhaps going a bit far. One tries not to impose story plot or continuity artificially but you do have to compose the materials, you can't just dump down a jumble of notes and thoughts and considerations and expect people to read it."21

Burroughs' view of language revealed in this final chapter is also extremely negative; language, and hence communication, are themselves subject to rules that suppress its real nature and force. Since Burroughs wants to fight against all forms of oppression/suppression, it comes as no surprise that his style should reflect this battle.

About language, Burroughs has the following to say:

The Word is divided into units which be all in one piece and should be so taken, but the pieces can be had in any order being tied up back and forth, in and out fore and aft like an innaresting sex arrangement. This book spill off the page in all directions, kaleidoscope of vistas, medley of tunes and street noises, farts and riot yipes and the slamming steel shutters of commerce, screams of pain and pathos and screams plain pathic....(229)

Moreover,

Gentle Reader, The Word will leap on you with leopard man iron claws, it will cut off fingers and toes like an opportunistic land crab, it will hang you and catch your jissom like a
scrutable dog, it will coil round your thighs like a bushmaster and inject a shot glass of rancid ectoplasm...and why a scrutable dog?

Taken together, the two statements help us understand the thematic necessity of the language of the earlier sections, the high degree of obscenity and brutality of description that characterizes the work.

Reinforcing the above statements, Burroughs has this to say about the nature of the artist/writer and his/her relationship to the thematic issue of power and control:

The writer sees himself reading to the mirror as always. . .He must check now and again to reassure himself that The Crime of Separate Action has not, is not, cannot occur. . . .

Anyone who has ever looked into a mirror knows what this crime is and what it means in terms of lost control when the reflection no longer obeys. . . .Too late to dial Police. . . .

I personally wish to terminate my services as of now in that I cannot continue to sell the raw materials of death. . . .Yours, sir, is a hopeless case and a noisome one. . . .

"Defense is meaningless in the present state of our knowledge, said The Defense looking up from an electron microscope. . . .

Take your business to Walgreen's We are not responsible Steal anything in sight I don't know how to return it to the white reader

You can write or yell or croon about it. . . .paint about it. . . .act about it. . . .shit it out in mobiles. . . .So long as you don't go and do it. . . ." (223)

Thus, the writer, like all the other victims in the book, is inextricably implicated in the power structure, inescapably bound to commit the same "crimes" as all the other
characters. The nature of capitalism, consumerism, and the power system leaves the artist with no viable way to communicate that "sells." Moreover, all communication is itself an act of violence that "has no defense" in the eyes of the power structure. As Nelson puts it:

Conventional narrative is an act of domestication, one that enables us to integrate revelation into our established associative channels. It offers the "White Junk" fix for readers who cannot bear violence and outrage in discrete, total encounters."22

The underlying assumption and implications of these views of language, communication, and art, however, are not so easy to swallow. Although Burroughs has convinced us of the artistic necessity of much of the violence contained in narrative, of the style in which it is presented, of the language used throughout, and of his need to prevent us from entering the narrative audience, we still may not be able to excuse Burroughs for placing us in a highly uncomfortable position in the Hassan and A.J. sections. While the book is brilliantly constructed to elucidate Burroughs' thematic concerns about power and its workings, it nonetheless establishes a battleground between author and reader, one that enacts those thematic issues. If we are to condemn the book, it must be on those thematic grounds and on the ideological assumptions underlying his rhetorical strategies.
The progression of the narrative has illustrated the following thematic principles: 1) All society is power-based, that is, that all levels and aspects of life are fed upon and controlled by a "higher" level; 2) All forms of control are oppressive by nature and hence "evil"; 3) All forms of human interaction are essentially violent in nature, because they demonstrate/exhibit the addictive drive of human beings to control everything around them; and 4) that the situation is hopeless: neither language, art, nor communication are exempt from the above principles. Thus the world Burroughs depicts is ultimately one of unrelieved horror, even worse than that portrayed by Orwell. The only form of existence posited in the book is solipsistic in the extreme and one is left wondering why Burroughs has even made the attempt to make us "see." For what use is "seeing" if it leads only to silence or violence as alternatives?

Nonetheless, we are still left with the problem of evaluation. Even though we can judge Burroughs' thematic intentions, we are still left in the uncomfortable position of acknowledging the power and necessity of his rhetorical strategies. In addition, my use of the word "judge" in this context only reinforces Burroughs' thematic contentions in the work. Again, Burroughs is forcing me to remain silent or be violent in my desire, and I should
mention right, to impose judgment on the world around me. His questioning of that right, indeed his ultimate denial of my right to judge, is part of what makes the book finally reprehensible.

Finally, however, what makes the book unacceptable is that Burroughs puts me in a position analogous to that occupied by the characters that inhabit the narrative world. As are they by society, so too has Burroughs victimized me, forced me to partake of his "naked lunch" in order to see a world-view I ultimately reject. In other words, I not only reject the themes presented in the book for their nihilistic bases, I further reject the rhetorical transaction Burroughs has enacted. Even my understanding that the rhetorical strategies enact the theme of the violent nature of all human interaction (which to a certain degree justifies the rhetorical assault), doesn't mitigate my emotional response to or rejection of that interchange. Ultimately, then, I want to say "no" to Naked Lunch. Burroughs has presented a world-view and its consequent rhetorical embodiment to which I refuse to give my consent and, taking my own pulse, wish to act "as if" I can escape his inescapable.
ENDNOTES

1William S. Burroughs, Naked Lunch (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1959) 224. All subsequent page citations are to this edition.


8Jonathan Swift, Gulliver's Travels (New York: Oxford UP, 1986) 111. All subsequent references will be to this edition.


10McKee, 30-31.

11Jerzy N. Kosinski, Steps (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1968) 57. All subsequent references will be to this edition.


20 Nelson, 212.


22 Nelson, 222.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

After all has been said and done, where, we may ask, have we gotten? We began this study with a rhetorical approach that sought to elaborate more fully 1) the nature of Rabinowitz's "gap" that must be bridged between the actual and authorial audiences 2) the consequences of that gap for interpretation and appreciation. To structure our analysis we posited four kinds of "gap": a "historical" or "ideological" gap stemming from a breakdown of shared presuppositions and knowledge about the world; a "formal" gap stemming from the consequences of author's intention and its material realization in the text for the reader's experience; a "rhetorical" gap deriving from the nature of an author's strategies to embody part of her intentions; and a gap that arises from an indeterminacy about what the author's intention was. Our investigation of these various problems has revealed the following:

1) Historical gaps are a particular subset of ideological gaps in general; that is, the kind of problem presented by historical texts lies not so much in our lack
of knowledge about the social context, which can be recovered by reference to other texts, but in the values and beliefs espoused by an author which no longer correspond to our own. In this sense, there is little difference in the effect of this kind of problem from that which arises in reading modern texts whose values and beliefs we do not share. The degree of conflict between an author's values and our own determines to a large extent the overall effect of this gap: the greater the distance between our own values and those of the author, the greater the difficulty for entering the authorial audience on either an emotional or intellectual level. Such historical problems tend to result in a reader's inability to emotionally experience a text appropriately; that is, while a reader may perceive the author's intended emotional effect on an intellectual level, that effect is never actualized in a material way; a reader simply never feels it. In Pamela, we saw that the conflict between our beliefs about what constitutes a "good" marriage for women and Richardson's diminished our emotional satisfaction in Pamela's fate although we could intellectually appreciate that fate. As we saw in the case of An American Dream, the effect of this problem can be quite severe and cause a reader to question the value of an existential approach to life, an
issue very much at the heart of Mailer's world-view, and certainly a response Mailer does not wish to engender.

2) Ambiguous texts present a very different kind of problem. Certainly such texts are pleasurable because of the ambiguity: much of the pleasure of *The Turn of The Screw* inheres in our watching James create and maintain two consistent and mutually exclusive narrative audiences. Nonetheless, such texts can generate problems for readers. First, of course, surrounds our notion of intentionality. Which of the two world-views, with their characteristic values and truth-claims, does "James" hold or wish his authorial audience to hold? In literary works one usually wants to know what an author is trying to tell us about her own view of the world so that one may juxtapose that view to one's own. But readers are by and large flexible creatures, willing to set aside certain experiences for others. Since it is impossible to discern James's position, we turn to the emotional component of his intention--the creation of horror. Yet even here we saw that the achievement of the perfect ambiguity diminished our emotional experience of the text: our experience of the horror of one or the other narrative level is diminished because our awareness of the other possible audience inhibits our full participation in either. A second problem arises naturally out of this situation.
The constant shifting from one audience to the other that The Turn demands makes for an uncomfortable reading experience. Not shifting, that is, remaining solely in one narrative audience or another, involves a willful repression both of the text itself and our awareness/appreciation of its beauty of construction. Thus, the text demands that we choose to be a certain kind of reader, neither of which is totally satisfactory. We either repress our cognitive awareness of the duality to experience the emotional effects of one of the narratives or we repress our emotional experience to enhance our intellectual ones. Both activities, of course, are never completely repressed, that is, both do exist at various points of our reading experience, yet the pleasure of both is consequently diminished. Yet this conclusion raises the issue of how this experience differs from that which occurs when readers confront texts with two competing intentions.

3) Works with multiple intentions present problems for readers to the extent that those intentions conflict with respect to our developing responses to the text. In Fowles's The French Lieutenant's Woman we saw how the conflict between his thematic intention to create an engaging fictional history and his aesthetic intention to write a postmodern novel generated tensions in the reading process. Our understanding of his two intentions was not
sufficient to mitigate our emotional disgruntlement that arose from their realization.

4) Rhetorical strategies, even when their purpose is recognized and appreciated as valid, may potentially prevent readers from entering the authorial audience of works. Certainly, shocking our conventional expectations, upsetting our routine ways of perceiving the world around us, and forcing us to look at the sordid side of the world which we often would rather ignore, are valid things to do with literature, but there are limitations. As we saw in the case of *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs' commendable intention to demonstrate the violent and power-based nature of all human interaction often did not justify his rhetorical strategies. The violence he enacted upon readers to demonstrate his thematic points and the position in which the reader was placed as a consequence of that violence caused us to ultimately reject his thematic claims.

Useful as these conclusions are for a study of these texts, their implications for interpretation and theory are far more profound. The examination of the individual texts largely provided a more focussed direction for further critical work than that with which I began. The study of problematic aspects of intentionality led to a clearer perception of the underlying philosophic basis and limitations of intentionality as a critical endeavor. Certainly,
all critical frameworks are limited; all are fraught with problems and concerns they are ill-equipped to handle. The strength of the critical methodology used in this study lies in its potential to elucidate reading transactions. It focuses on reading as a multi-faceted activity, as a complex interaction. For the activity of reading is at heart experiential—intellectual and emotional and ethical and ideological. What has emerged from this examination is primarily an interpretive and evaluative method based on what texts do to their readers or on what kind of reader texts ask their readers to become. Thus, while I began primarily with a rhetorical study of texts, I find I end with an ethical study.

The ethical criticism practiced these days often amounts to moral condemnations of various elements. Feminist criticism, for example, began primarily as endeavors to locate and identify textual elements that reflected the values of the male-dominated culture in which we live. Gilbert and Gubar's landmark work, The Madwoman in the Attic, is a case in point; they examine the myriad images found in literary texts that illustrate the ways in which 'woman has been 'penned up' or 'penned in.' As a sort of 'sentence' man has spoken, she has herself been 'sentenced': fated, jailed, for he has both 'indited' her and 'indicted' her. The hoped-for result of this "naming,"
was that women would become more aware of the ways in which they were represented by men and that such knowledge would enable them to transcend such male-generated representations. Marxist criticism, too, often seems content to "name" the ways in which works reflect the contradictions inherent in a capitalistic society. The value of the methodology outlined here lies in its ability to go beyond identification. What we need is a kind of transactive ethical criticism. Since we cannot read, write, or perform any action as a tabula rasa, since consciousness is a complex skein of ideas and emotions that are by nature "tainted" with moral, ethical, social, religious, and political values, we need to incorporate this fact in our practical criticism. The approach used in this study is a first step in this direction.

The kind of ethical criticism I envision would attempt to elucidate the various kinds of transactions literary texts call for, would evaluate those transactions in ethical terms, i.e., question whether the transaction is a "good" interaction, would examine in a text the points at which the values espoused by an author conflicted with those of the reader, would clarify the extent of that conflict and its effects, both local and overall, and would ultimately shed light on why some works speak to us in better ways than others. The concept of the "good" here is
predicated upon the textual transaction itself, not necessarily on what is represented in the text. Certainly, what is represented by an author often forms a basis for this determination; as we saw in Burroughs, the subject matter itself may be problematic for many readers. Yet our negative evaluation of Burroughs's work rested on rather different grounds; it derived from what Burroughs's text does to us and asks us to be. In other words, the approach I'm advocating sees texts as occasions for particular kinds of actions and interactions, it focuses on how the activity of reading defines us as certain kinds of beings doing certain kinds of things for the duration of the reading process. In the case of An American Dream, for example, part of our experience of the text included assenting to Rojack's murderous act; our evaluation includes a way of discussing how that assent affects us as individuals. In Burroughs' work, we saw that his rhetoric invited us to participate in certain acts abhorrent to us, and our negative evaluation rested primarily on that participation.

Yet we still need to address the question of validity; how applicable the findings of this study are to other texts. Certainly, in the case of Fowles, our conclusions are quite limited. While all literary works are individual cases, each unique in its own right, The French Lieutenant's Woman is a highly particularized case. Few works
exist in which there is such a clear-cut distinction in aims. The conclusions about James's work also appear to be of limited use; there just aren't that many texts like The Turn of the Screw. However, the remaining two areas of problematic transactions—history and rhetoric—seem to apply to a wide range of texts. Granted, the kind of historical gap examined earlier is a particular kind of historical problem. Often, readers can more easily enter the authorial audience if the problem arises from a lack of knowledge in an area that the author could reasonably assume his audience would have at their disposal. Knowledge of the Napoleon's invasion of Russia, for example, is extremely important when reading War and Peace in order to experience the full impact of the narrative. Yet the kind of historical problem that leads to breakdowns in textual transactions and the kind of problem presented by certain rhetorical strategies seem to arise from and inhere in a conflict of values and world-views between readers and authors. To that extent, then, these problems can be loosely called "ideological." If so, then this study has profound implications for political criticism as well.

It is commonplace today to acknowledge the political dimensions of language and literary art. Who says what and how they say it, who is excluded from the prevailing discourse and by what means, has tremendous implications
for humanistic studies. Such investigations have led to major revisions in departmental structure and policies and of the literary canon as well. To the extent that we now perceive language as power and rhetoric as the exemplification of the means by which that power is exercised, we have begun to question and examine the structures that support prevailing academic programs. Such questioning is necessary and beneficial, both to ensure our own growth and to further our professional ends in an age when humanistic study is very much under fire. Many have suggested that we institute more comprehensive programs of textual study rather than segmented departments of literature or that we try to combine composition and literature programs. This study grew out of a commitment to these assumptions and aims and, if little else, demonstrates the need for further work in this area.

The strength of the critical methodology used in this study lies in its strategic potential as a means for education and social change. A dynamic model of aesthetic experience not only more accurately describes our interaction with literary works but also gives more than lip service to the performative aspects of aesthetic interactions. It is not only a question of the active construction of meaning or reconstruction of an author's intent, but one of making explicit the way(s) our intellectual,
emotional, ethical and ideological responses to authorial invitations to do various things affects the nature of the texts we study and what we teach others to do with those transactions.
ENDNOTES

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