Received Melodies: The New, Old Novel

Stewart J. Cooke

Department of English

McGill University, Montreal

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Abstract

New, old novels, contemporary fictions that parody the forms, conventions, and devices of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels, form a significant and increasingly popular subclass of postmodernist fiction. Paradoxically combining realistic and metafictional conventions, these works establish an ironic dialogue with the past, employing yet simultaneously subverting traditional fictional techniques.

In this dissertation, I subject five new, old novels--John Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor* and *LETTERS*, Erica Jong's *Fanny*, T. Coraghessan Boyle's *Water Music*, and John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*--to a detailed analysis, which compares the parodic role of archaic devices in each contemporary novel to the serious use made of such devices in the past. I argue that new, old novels, by juxtaposing old and new world views, foreground the ontological concerns of fiction and suggest that literary representation is constitutive rather than imitative of reality. Their examination of the relationship between fiction and reality places them at the centre of contemporary concern.

Résumé

Les nouveaux romans anciens, oeuvres de fiction contemporaines parodiant les formes, les conventions et les techniques des romans du dix-huitième et du dix-neuvième siècle, forment une sous-classe appréciable et de plus en plus populaire de la littérature romanesque post-moderne. Alliant d'une manière paradoxale les conventions du réalisme et de la métafiction, ces oeuvres établissent avec le passé un dialogue ironique employant et bouleversant à la fois les techniques romanesques traditionnelles.

Dans cette thèse, j'ai soumis cinq nouveaux romans anciens--*The Sot-Weed Factor* et *LETTERS* de John Barth, *Fanny* d'Erica Jong, *Water Music* de T. Coraghessan Boyle et *The French Lieutenant's Woman* de John Fowles--à une analyse détaillée qui compare la parodie des anciennes techniques dans chaque roman contemporain à l'utilisation qui en était faite sérieusement dans le passé. Je soutiens qu'en juxtaposant les vues du monde ancien et du monde moderne les nouveaux romans anciens mettent en avant les préoccupations ontologiques du roman et donnent à penser que la représentation littéraire constitue plus qu'elle n'imite la réalité. L'examen des rapports entre fiction et réalité que l'on trouve dans ces oeuvres les place au centre des préoccupations contemporaines.

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Introduction: Weeping at the Tolstoy Museum

"The only reason for the existence of a novel," according to Henry James in "The Art of Fiction," "is that it does attempt to represent life. When it relinquishes this attempt . . . it will have arrived at a very strange pass" (25). The ability to render a direct impression of life, to create an illusion of having lived another life, was what he admired most in realist novelists such as Turgenev and Balzac. Indeed, the lesson of Balzac, James tells us, was that the novel's "most fundamental and general sign . . . is its being everywhere an effort at *representation*" ("Lesson" 76), its "supreme virtue" being its "air of reality" ("Art" 33). To violate this carefully constructed illusion was anathema to James. In his opinion, the authorial intrusions of some English novelists, their playful manipulations of the reader, would "bring tears to the eyes of people who take their fiction seriously" ("Art" 25-26). James, who in some ways was the last high priest of literary realism, took his fiction as seriously as anyone. Hence, his castigation of Anthony Trollope. Because Trollope's narrator confesses to the reader that he is only "'making believe,'" James accuses him of betraying a "sacred office," committing a "terrible crime" ("Art" 26).

This censure is not surprising since for James, and for most critics both before and after him, the novel was the genre of representation *par excellence*. Since its beginnings, it has been seen as the literary form that is closest to life because of its common language, realistic characters, and ordinary events. Late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century

commentators from William Congreve to Clara Reeve distinguished it from the romance by virtue of its verisimilitude.[1] In the nineteenth century, Stendhal, in *Red and Black*, called it a "mirror moving along a highway" (289; bk. 2, ch. 19), which is able to reflect the entirety of life from the blue skies above to the mud and puddles below, from the ideal to the seamy. In the twentieth century, D. H. Lawrence, who considered the novel to be superior to works of poetry, science, and philosophy because it could master the "whole man alive" ("Why" 105) and could reveal "true and vivid relationships" ("Morality" 111), dubbed it the "one bright book of life" ("Why" 105).

Yet if James thought Trollope lacked seriousness, what would he, or Lawrence for that matter, have thought of the self-conscious intrusions of today's experimental novelists? In contemporary novels like John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, we are a long way from James Joyce's invisible artist, "refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails" (215; ch. 5). Fowles's narrator, on the contrary, suddenly intrudes to inform the reader: "This story I am telling is all imagination. These characters I create never existed outside my own mind" (97; ch. 13). Similarly, Gilbert Sorrentino interrupts *Imaginative Qualities of Actual Things*: "These people aren't real. I'm making them up as they go along" (27). Raymond Federman insists, "I am inventing most of this"

[1] William Congreve, "The Preface to the Reader," *Incognita* (1692): "*Novels are of a more familiar nature; Come near us, and represent to us Intrigues in practice, delight us with Accidents and odd Events, but not such as are wholly unusual or unpresidented, such which not being so distant from our Belief bring also the pleasure nearer us. Romances give more of Wonder, Novels more Delight*" (32-33); Clara Reeve, *The Progress of Romance* (1785): "The Romance is an heroic-fable, which treats of fabulous persons and things. -- The Novel is a picture of real life and manners, and of the times in which it is written" (Allott 47).

(114), in *Double or Nothing*. Steve Katz admonishes himself in *The Exagggerations of Peter Prince*: "Enough! Katz, you're making this all up. It doesn't make a bit of sense" (3). And B. S. Johnson bursts out in *Albert Angelo* with: "look what im really trying to write about is writing . . . .Im trying to say something not tell a story telling stories is telling lies" (165).

Far from seeing the novel as a superior vehicle for telling the truth, we seem to have returned to the eighteenth-century notion of the novel as a lie. A strange pass indeed. Clearly, the last one hundred years have seen an enormous change in our sense of the relationship between fiction and reality. It has become conventional in some critical circles, in fact, to enclose the word "reality" in quotation marks so that its problematic status is made clear. The mimetic novel, in both its realistic and impressionistic modes, has fallen out of favour with many novelists and critics who reject the traditional assumption that human life is most truthfully represented by the conventions of social, historical, or psychological realism. The American novelist Ronald Sukenick, for example, suggests that

> one of the reasons people have lost faith in the novel is that they don't believe it tells the truth anymore, which is another way of saying that they don't believe in the convention of the novel. . . . So once you get to the point where you admit that you are writing a book and it *is* a book, there really is no difference between fantasy and realistic action. It's completely continuous--it's all made up. (Bellamy 56)

Donald Barthelme, in his novel *Snow White*, mocks James's representational procedures by parodying James's advice to the novice writer to "'[t]ry to be one of the people on whom nothing is lost'" ("Art" 33). Believing that the artist can "trace the implication of things, . . .

judge the whole piece by the pattern" ("Art" 32), James recommends that the novelist write from experience and convert his impressions into concrete images or types in order to produce a reality. Barthelme's seven dwarfs receive rather different advice from their father:

> "Try to be a man about whom nothing is known," our father said, when we were young. Our father said several other interesting things, but we have forgotten what they were. . . . Our father was a man about whom nothing was known. Nothing is known about him still. He gave us the recipes. He was not very interesting. A tree is more interesting. A suitcase is more interesting. A canned good is more interesting. When we sing the father hymn, we notice that he was not very interesting. The words of the hymn notice it. It is explicitly commented upon, in the text. (18-19)

Barthelme turns James's assumptions about representation upside down. There is no point in tracing the implications of things if all subject matter from canned goods to moral issues is equivalent, if character cannot be known, and if artistic authority is indeterminate. Whereas James thought "that the art of interesting us in things . . . can *only* be the art of representing them" (Blackmur 9), Barthelme, disclaiming any interest in illusion, reduces his text to a series of discontinuous fragments. For him, James's recipes for the modernist novel are outmoded.

The novel's more vociferous detractors wish to reject it out of hand as a form based on outdated metaphysical and ideological assumptions. Alain Robbe-Grillet, for example, writes that the "novel of characters belongs entirely to the past, it describes a period: that which marked the apogee of the individual" (28). Similarly, plot is obsolete because "the technical elements of the narrative . . . tended to impose the image of a stable, coherent, continuous, unequivocal, entirely decipherable universe. . . . A hundred years later, the whole system is no more than a

memory" (32-33). Finally, art is a closed system: "[I]f art is something, it is *everything*, which means that it must be self-sufficient, and that there is nothing *beyond*" (43). Roland Barthes locates the break with tradition more precisely:

> [A]s soon as the writer ceased to be a witness to the universal, to become the incarnation of a tragic awareness (around 1850), his first gesture was to choose the commitment of his form, either by adopting or rejecting the writing of his past. Classical writing therefore disintegrated, and the whole of Literature, from Flaubert to the present day, became the problematics of language. (*Zero* 3)

Both Robbe-Grillet's and Barthes' polemics can be seen as early contributions to the current debate concerning the construction, dynamics, and function of representation in society in general and art in particular. Seyla Benhabib sums up this controversy as a "crisis of the representational episteme" (106). According to Benhabib, the classical notion of representation in which the mind was held to "mirror" nature has come under a three-pronged attack, which she labels "the critique of the modern epistemic subject," "the critique of the modern epistemic object," and "the critique of the modern concept of the sign" (108). The first critique (beginning with German Idealism and continuing with Marx and Freud through Horkheimer and Habermas) substitutes for the Cartesian spectator conception of the self "the view of an active, producing, fabricating humanity, creating the conditions of objectivity confronting it through its own historical activity" (108). The second (associated with Nietzsche, Heidegger, Adorno, and Horkheimer) sees a will to dominate underlying modern science, which, universalizing Cartesian doubt by dividing the world into a realm of appearances and a realm of essence or things-in-themselves, imposes "homogeneity and identity upon the

heterogeneity of material" (109). The third tradition (begun by Saussure and Pierce and sharpened by Frege and Wittgenstein) transfers the analysis of language from "the private to the public, from consciousness to sign, from the individual word to a system of relations among linguistic signs" (110). The upshot of this multi-directional assault, claims Benhabib, is a shift from "the paradigm of consciousness" to "the paradigm of language," from a focus on "the epistemic subject and the private activities of its consciousness" to "the public, signifying activities of a collection of subjects" (110).

In other words, many of today's literary theorists and epistemologists treat our knowledge of the world as a socially constructed body of statements with no absolute foundations. Rejecting realistic theories that deny that truth depends on us, they consider knowledge to be a "man-made fabric" (Quine 42) constrained by social needs and tensions. Perception, no longer passive, they view as operating within cognitive or explanatory frames, which provide criteria for evaluating and interpreting data. T. S. Kuhn, for example, writes of the need for "some implicit body of intertwined theoretical and methodological belief that permits selection, evaluation, and criticism" (16-17). Michael Polanyi speaks of an "active shaping of experience performed in the pursuit of knowledge" (6). And the pragmatic philosopher W. V. Quine considers truth to consist in "working a manageable structure into the flux of experience" (44).

In much literary theory, as a result of this epistemological shift, a metaphor of representation as creation has replaced the metaphor of representation as correspondence or reflection. No longer considered a straightforward, neutral imitation of an objective reality, representation is believed to play an inevitable role in the construction of what we know

as reality. According to Alan Thiher, literature for many writers is no longer a mirror but, rather, "a kind of model for the construction of reality in the same way that language games allow the articulation of the various taxonomies and models that literally articulate or construct what we take to be the real" (111). The American novelist E. L. Doctorow, for example, suggests that "[n]ovelists know explicitly that the world in which we live is still to be formed and that reality is amenable to any construction that is placed upon it. It is a world made for liars and we are born liars" (26). The novelist Raymond Federman claims that "SURFICTION" is "the only fiction that still means something today . . . not because it imitates reality, but because it exposes the fictionality of reality" (*Surfiction* 7). And the critic Robert Scholes proposes that realism is dead because "[a]ll writing, all composition, is construction. We do not imitate the world, we construct versions of it. There is no mimesis, only poesis. No recording. Only constructing" (*Fabulation* 7).

Although some writers seem to draw the conclusion from this reversal that all knowledge has become "mere" fiction, it does not necessarily follow that literature has been emptied of cognitive content. It does, however, render the status of representation problematic. Many of the writers whom we call postmodernist undertake a curious balancing act. Uncertain about what it is that language represents, they question the status of language within their works. On the one hand, they reject the realist notion that language reveals the essence of things. On the other hand, they accept, as Kate Linker puts it, that "[s]ince reality can be known only through the forms that articulate it, there can be no reality outside of representation" (392). Because representation mediates our very access to reality, it is inescapable. In Jacques Derrida's words,

the "immediate" is always already mediated: "*[p]erception does not exist* or . . . what is called perception is not primordial, . . . somehow everything 'begins' by 're-presentation'" (*Speech* 45 n.). And Roland Barthes' intertextual model, which transforms reality itself into a text constituted by semiotic codes, redefines representation as quotation:

> [T]he "realistic" artist never places "reality" at the origin of his discourse, but only and always, as far back as can be traced, an already written real, a prospective code, along which we discern, as far as the eye can see, only a succession of copies. (*S/Z* 167)

The effects of this new model of representation can be felt in contemporary art. The art critic Hal Foster describes what he calls a "poststructuralist postmodernism" . . . , which "launches a critique in which representation is shown to be more constitutive of reality than transparent to it" ("Polemics" 67). According to Foster, in its "critique of representation" postmodernism "questions the truth contract of . . . representation, whether realist, symbolic or abstract, and explores the regimes of meaning and order that those different codes support" ("Polemics 73). Given the premise that culture is utterly coded, that we are thoroughly and necessarily enmeshed in representation, postmodernist art acts as a kind of "fifth columnist" to render problematic the act of representation. That is to say, it is constrained to employ mimetic strategies to subvert the idea of mimesis. Lacking the modernists' faith in the privileges of the aesthetic imagination and the autonomy of the aesthetic realm, the postmodernists work within the confinement of representation, criticizing "from within, to create new possibilities" (Wallis xvi). Knowing that it is not a transcription of nature, postmodernist art works to demystify the processes by which meaning is created, revealing by means of self-

reference its own status as art, as a system of conventional signs, and discarding the assumptions and effects of mimesis. Rejecting the modernist notions of autonomy and originality, it employs strategies of "quotation, excerptation, framing, and staging," which uncover its use of already existing images and, hence, its implication in the "structures of signification" (Crimp 186).

Of course, the gap between the "illusionism" of James in 1884 and the "self-reflexivity" of today's novelists cannot be attributed solely to postmodernism. A tension between verisimilar illusion and aesthetic design exists in all novels and represents a perennial set of choices for the novelist whether he/she writes in the 1740s or the 1980s. As Robert Alter has shown in *Partial Magic*, the "Other Great Tradition" (ix), as he only half jokingly calls it, has been with us since the novel began. From Cervantes through Fielding, Sterne, and Diderot to Joyce, Beckett, and Nabokov, there has always been a stream of self-conscious fiction running alongside the mainstream of the novel. Alter defines this self-conscious novel as one that "systematically flaunts its own condition of artifice and that by doing so probes into the problematic relationship between real-seeming artifice and reality" (x).

Although Alter does not use the term, he is describing what we now call "metafiction,"[2] a form *The Harper Handbook of Literature* sums up as

[2] The term was first used by William Gass in *Fiction and the Figures of Life*:

> There are metatheorems in mathematics and logic, ethics has its linguistic oversoul, everywhere lingos to converse about lingos are being contrived, and the case is no different in the novel. I don't mean merely those drearily predictable pieces about writers who are writing about what they are writing, but those . . . in which the forms of fiction serve as the material upon which further forms can be imposed. Indeed, many of the so-called antinovels are really

"fiction that plays with the nature and process of fiction" (282). Other critics who offer definitions stress metafiction's laying bare of the fictional illusion and its criticizing from within. Margaret Rose, for example, sees metafiction's general function to be the "analyzing of the nature of fiction from within fiction" and one of its basic themes to be the "complexity of the production and reception of the text" (101). Robert Scholes claims that metafiction "assimilates all the perspectives of criticism into the fictional process itself" ("Metafiction" 106). Inger Christensen calls it "fiction whose primary concern is to express the novelist's vision of experience by exploring the process of its own making" (11). Patricia Waugh defines it as "fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (2). And Linda Hutcheon describes it as "fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity" (*Narcissistic* 1).

Contemporary metafiction, as written by an international set of authors including John Barth, Italo Calvino, Julio Cortázar, John Fowles, and Alain Robbe-Grillet, to name only a few of the more celebrated, does indeed play with the conventions of the form and the very idea of the novel as a genre or set of genres. By insisting on its fictionality, metafiction asks the reader to remember that he/she is reading a novel and to question that activity, to consider the relationship between fiction and reality. In other words, fictional theory enters the novel. By

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metafictions. (24-25)

shuttling back and forth between illusion and self-reflection, the metafictionist urges the reader to a greater awareness of literature as a construct comprising a system of conventions, devices, and codes. Whereas the conventions of realistic fiction, emphasizing the fictional world created, open a window outward onto a seemingly "natural" world, the conventions of metafiction, emphasizing the creation of fiction, direct attention inward to the activities of writing and reading (Gopnik 444-45). In formal terms, metafictions have "creative" rather than mimetic plots, i.e., their subjects are based upon principles of construction that call attention to themselves (Wright 116).

One of the more common strategies by which metafiction draws attention to its own processes is its use of parody, a form of stylistically signalled irony in which the object of imitation is another work of art. Since the eighteenth century, parody has been seen as a form of high burlesque consisting of an exaggerated imitation of a particular work or of the characteristic style of a particular author applied to a trivial subject matter.[3] The problem with the traditional definition, for the analyst of recent metafiction, is its inevitable association with ridicule. This confusion with satire can be found in the work of a number of critics. Margaret Rose, for instance, who describes parody in semiotic terms as a juxtaposition of two codes through quotation of another text, distinguishes it "from other forms of satire as a form dealing with the refunctioning, or criticism, of other preformed literary and linguistic

[3] See, for example, Joseph Addison: "Burlesque is therefore of two kinds, the first represents mean Persons in the Accoutrements of Heroes, the other describes great Persons acting and speaking, like the basest among the People" (Bond 2: 467; No. 249).

material" (44). Even Wayne Booth, for whom parody is a special form of irony, refers to "that form of satire called parody" and mentions its "object of ridicule" (*Irony* 123).

In contrast, Linda Hutcheon has gone to a great deal of trouble to persuade us that "modern parody is not ridicule" ("Parody" 202). Because she thinks that the treatments of parody by other theorists are inadequate to cope with the demands of contemporary metafiction, she looks back past the eighteenth century to the etymology of the Greek word *parodia* to support her claim that "parody . . . is a form of imitation . . . characterized by ironic inversion, not always at the expense of the parodied text" (*Theory* 6) and that its ends range from "the reverential to the playful to the scornful" (*Theory* 26).[4] Arguing that irony is the feature that distinguishes parody from other forms of adaptation, such as quotation, allusion, pastiche, etc., which imitate but do not transform other texts,[5] she

[4] F. J. Lelièvre, looking at classical examples, writes: "The humour of the parody is not, of course, necessarily at the expense of the original author: in fact it would not be true of most ancient parody to claim that it is so used" (71).

[5] Gérard Genette, in his study of "transtextuality," which he defines as "tout ce qui . . . met [un texte] en relation, manifeste ou secrète, avec d'autre textes" (*Palimpsestes* 7), defines parody and pastiche differently. The fifth of his five types of transtextuality, which he calls "hypertextuality," refers to the relation between a "hypotext," i.e., an anterior text, and a "hypertext" that modifies it in some way. If the hypertext adapts a specific model (i.e., a particular text), it is called a "transformation"; if it adapts a class of models (i.e., a period style or a genre), it is called an "imitation." Furthermore, if the transformation has a comic end, it is a "parody"; if the imitation has a comic end, it is a "pastiche" (34). Works like John Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor* and Erica Jong's *Fanny*, both of which are reactivations of the eighteenth-century English novel, are dubbed period pastiches, and Barth's *LETTERS* is labelled a generic pastiche. Genette's distinction between two discrete classes of adaptation is useful for analytic purposes, but his terminology runs foul of normal English usage. I shall use, instead, Robert Burden's terms, -- "local parody" (parodies of specific writers and works) and "general parody" (parodies of "conventions of writing, narrative techniques, modes of relationship with the reader") (137) -- which maintain the distinction while avoiding the

contends that contemporary parody is "repetition with critical distance" (*Theory* 6), an imitation that can be playful and constructive rather than belittling and destructive (*Theory* 32). Because it both embraces the parodied text and, paradoxically, keeps it at arm's length, so to speak, its relation to tradition is, in John Fowles's terms, "both a homage and a kind of thumbed nose" ("Ebony" 18).

The reactivation of "exhausted" devices and structures that one finds in contemporary parodic metafiction is anticipated theoretically, oddly enough, by a critical school that flourished in the 1920s. Although parody has traditionally received bad press as a negative or destructive form,[6] the Russian Formalists hailed it, on the contrary, as an important device in the evolution of literary forms. Parody's ability to "lay bare the device" by foregrounding the conventions of a genre and, thus, to "defamiliarize" its automatized devices was deemed a necessary and positive step in the creation of new forms. Making fossilized conventions

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terminological confusion.

[6] See, for example, F. R. Leavis:

> The cult of parody . . . belongs to that literary culture . . . which, in its obtuse and smug complacency, is always the worst enemy of creative genius and vital originality. . . . People who are really interested in creative originality regard the parodist's game with distaste and contempt. (Amis xv)

See also Earl Rovit:

> [T]he twentieth-century parody-novel which shapes itself under the superimposition of an external order will run the desperate danger of being a hollow vessel, a cosmetic rather than a cosmic design, decorative, playful, ultimately turning upon itself in bitterness, its ambiguities forced and mendacious because unrooted in the concrete ambiguities of human experience. (80)

obvious by means of ironic exaggeration, parody leads to the creation of new genres through the reconstruction of new material out of old elements.[7] From the "exhaustion" of old conventions comes replenishment, an opening up to new possibilities.

The Formalists' argument needs to be qualified by the recognition that parody does not occur only when forms are exhausted. Witness *Shamela* at the beginning of the English novel. There is a certain amount of historical accident involved in the creation of parody even though it usually occurs with well-developed genres owing to its dependence on the reader's familiarity with the form. Nonetheless, the Formalists begin to look like prophets when one considers John Barth's influential essay "The Literature of Exhaustion" and its companion piece "The Literature of Replenishment," published more than a dozen years later. The first essay, surveying the state of the art of fiction in 1967 at the height of the so-called crisis of the novel, discusses "*felt* ultimacies" (30) in the history of the novel and asserts that the contemporary artist is confronted with "the used-upness of certain forms or exhaustion of certain possibilities" (29).

[7] See Jurij Striedter:

> For Tynjanov "parody fulfills a double task: (1) the mechanization of a definite device, and (2) the organization of new material, to which the mechanized device also belongs." And only through this double function does parody comply with a general principle of literary evolution. For "every literary succession is, primarily, a struggle, the destruction of one totality and the reconstruction of a new one out of the old elements" but not "a straight line . . . which joins the younger representative of a given literary branch with the older." . . . Both Sklovskij and Tynjanov use the pair of concepts: "device" and "material"; both see parody as a laying-bare of conventional devices, which become in turn material for devices raised, so to speak, to a higher power. Both recognize therein a fundamental similarity between parody and general literary evolution. (459)

Barth suggests that the writer, faced with the impossibility of novelty, can transcend that difficulty by creating new works of art that deny that original works of art can be written. Parody is the "trick," that enables him "to have it both ways" (Bellamy 4), "to assimilate what's gone before us in the twentieth century . . . and yet tell stories" (Bellamy 5). Parody, which can combine both mockery and sympathy, enables the author to reject "exhausted" or traditional forms and styles and to continue to use them, to write "imitations-of-novels . . . which attempt to represent not life directly but a representation of life" (33), thereby renewing the form. Accordingly, Barth sees himself as "an author who imitates the role of Author" (33).

If all this sounds a trifle too decadent, as though Barth really believed that the novel was dead, his corrective, as he calls "The Literature of Replenishment," clarifies his position. It also indicates a general sense of renewal since 1967 occasioned by a better understanding of the role of metafictional parody. In this second essay, Barth claims that it is neither language nor literature but, rather, the "aesthetic of high modernism" that is exhausted ("Replenishment" 71). Repudiating the notion that "there is nothing left for contemporary writers but to parody and travesty our great predecessors in our exhausted medium" ("Replenishment" 7), he appeals for a postmodernist synthesis or transcension of the premodernist and modernist modes of writing. The ideal postmodernist writer, in Barth's opinion, should, like Italo Calvino, have one foot in the narrative past and one foot in the French structuralist present. That is to say, he/she should be free to use, albeit self-consciously, whatever old conventions he/she chooses rather than compelled to reject them categorically because of their supposed ideological content. What is needed is

not a revival of the past but, rather, an incorporation of the past and the present into a new synthesis.

According to the literary critic Linda Hutcheon, these two characteristics--self-reflexiveness and parody ("Beginning" 11)--distinguish postmodernist art and thought. For Hutcheon, too, postmodernism is a contradictory phenomenon that challenges the system within which it works:

> [P]ostmodernism is a fundamentally contradictory enterprise: its art forms (and its theory) use and abuse, install and then subvert convention in parodic ways, self-consciously pointing both to their own inherent paradoxes and provisionality and, of course, to their critical or ironic re-reading of the art of the past. ("Politics" 180)

Postmodernist practice in the arts--whether in painting, architecture, music, or literature--is committed to "a more generally shared collective aesthetic code" ("Politics" 182). While it incorporates past forms, it does so not nostalgically, but critically, ironically, self-consciously. It does not attempt to do without representation, to achieve an autonomous, non-mimetic form, but, rather, to use representational conventions to question representation itself.

The importance of parody as a device in postmodernist art relates to this process of critical refunctioning. Hutcheon, for instance, sees parody as "a perfect postmodernist form in some senses, for it paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies" ("Beginning" 17). The device is itself a formal analogue to the contents of postmodernist art, i.e., its very structure draws attention to the work's aesthetic component. It does not "hold . . . the mirror up to nature" (908; 3.2.24), as Hamlet thought art should, but, rather, to borrow Yeats's words from his poem "Statues," shows that "[m]irror on mirror mirrored is all the show" (608; l. 22).

The phenomenon is not confined to literature. George Rochberg, for example, abandons the modernist "notion of 'originality' . . . and the received idea that it is necessary to divorce oneself from the past" (Jacket notes) in his String Quartet No. 3. Combining and juxtaposing a variety of different musical gestures and languages, including parodies of Beethoven and Mahler, his Quartet "denies neither the past nor the present" (Jacket notes). Similarly, the architect Paolo Portoghesi contends that postmodernist architecture overcomes the "impassable enbankment erected by the avant-garde between past and present" (*Postmodern* 7). By means of an "ironic use of the quotation" (35), postmodernist buildings mark the "presence of the past" (14). And the art critic Donald B. Kuspit describes how postmodernist German painters such as George Baselitz parody "the perceptual conventions of mimetic representation" in order "to lay bare the artificiality and abstractness of all expression" (138).

None of this marks, of course, a return to the neo-classical notion of imitation as imitation of the ancients. The Augustans thought they were imitating nature when they imitated Homer or Virgil since the rules, derived from classical models, were but "*Nature Methodiz'd*" (Audra 249; 1.89). As Louis Mackey explains in this regard, "[i]nnocence once lost is lost absolutely" (220). Postmodernist "imitation" uses representational conventions against themselves. Its parody foregrounds what E. H. Gombrich calls the "subjectivity of vision" and the "sway of conventions" (197) by opening an ironic gap between parody and original. The viewer or reader, situated within the conceptual space between the two texts, is inevitably forced to reflect on art as a palimpsest, as a representation of representations.

John Barth did, however, return to the Augustans, more specifically to Fielding, for the matter and manner of his novel *The Sot-Weed Factor*, a work that was to be a precursor of several subsequent postmodernist syntheses of past and present. Probably because it was published in 1960, Barth's novel is not mentioned in Alan Friedman's review "Two Plots, Two Heroes" in the *New York Review of Books*, 27 Dec. 1981, in which Friedman claims to have spotted, if not the next "wave" in the "tide of postmodern fiction," at least a "ripple" (9). This phenomenon he describes as "[n]ot the New Novel but the Old," that is, "[t]he novel of a previous century written today" (9). Included in his list are William Golding's *Rites of Passage* and Leonie Hargrave's *Clara Reeve* as well as T. Coraghessan Boyle's *Water Music*, Erica Jong's *Fanny*, and John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*.

The last three of these plus Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor* and *LETTERS* are of particular concern in this study. They belong to that positive pole of postmodernist metafiction that imitates the conventions and structures of earlier novelistic forms in order to free the novel from a sense of the past as either a burden or a source of anxiety. Common to such novels is the use of devices drawn from the history of the novel. Among them, one finds a variety of kinds--memoir-novels, letter-novels, and third-person novels--in several different modes--picaresque, satiric, gothic, and cervantic. With their narrative title pages, descriptive chapter headings, division into books, and archaic diction and orthography, these novels mimic the appearance as well as the formal conventions and shapes of their eighteenth- and nineteenth-century predecessors.

They are not, appearances to the contrary, what we normally think of as historical novels. *The Harper Handbook*, noticing the family

resemblance, mentions that "recently, the historical novel has sometimes appeared in the guise of an ironic or parodic version of earlier novel style, as in John Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor* (1960), or in John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969)" (228). Fowles, however, explicitly disavows the form: "The novel I am writing at the moment (entitled *The French Lieutenant's Woman*) is set about a hundred years back. I don't think of it as a historical novel, a genre in which I have very little interest" ("Writing" 281). As mock-historical novels, new, old novels both are and are not historical novels, i.e., they benefit from, yet disassociate themselves from, the forms and conventions they employ. Although new, old novels share many features of the historical novel--historical time, actual figures from history, major historical events as background, social commentary--they focus not on history but on genre. They are concerned more with literary convention than with historical fact. Whereas historical novels, ideally at least, compromise "between the conflicting claims of past and present, achieving a useful perspective on various periods of history" (McEwan 1), new, old novels, making old devices serve current ends, unabashedly read the past from a present viewpoint. Historical novels apply fictional conventions to the materials of history in order to represent concretely and as accurately as possible the experience of men and women of another time. New, old novels render representation itself problematic by parodying traditional fictional conventions. They are intent on subversion, not verisimilitude. Like Hutcheon's "historiographic metafictions" (of which they appear to be a subclass), they incorporate a "theoretical awareness of history and fiction as human constructs, [which] is made the ground for [their] rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past"

("Beginning" 12).[8]

Theirs is, then, neither an uncritical return to the conventions of traditional realism nor a nostalgic attempt to recover a lost order. It is not a matter of "seeing the nineteenth century as still a going concern" (*Situation* 60), as Bernard Bergonzi puts it. Like the visitors who weep at Donald Barthelme's Tolstoy Museum, "[p]aper streamers," not tears, "c[o]me out of [their] eyes" (43). "At the Tolstoy Museum we sat and wept" (43), says Barthelme's narrator, parodying a biblical lament: "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion" (Ps. 137.1). Displaced and deprived of all that gives their lives value, the Jews of the diaspora can never return to their lost homeland, just as contemporary writers cannot really return to the certainties of nineteenth-century realism. Sharing the ambivalent feelings of Barthelme's narrator, neither awed by nor contemptuous of the giants of the great tradition,--"Some people," says Barthelme's narrator, wanted him [Tolstoy] to go away, but other people were glad we had him" (49)--the new, old novelists take archaic devices, conventions, and forms off the museum shelves to which modernism confined them and reuse them in contemporary contexts, thereby establishing an ironic dialogue with the past. Caught between a love of narrative and a theoretical position that questions it, neither repudiating nor slavishly imitating their modernist

[8] Hutcheon uses the term "historiographic metafiction" to refer to "those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet lay claim to historical events and personages" ("Beginning" 12). She gives as examples *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, E. L. Doctorow's *Ragtime*, William Kennedy's *Legs*, John Berger's *G.*, and Timothy Findley's *Famous Last Words*.

and premodernist forbears, they use past forms to get the twentieth century off their backs and under their belts ("Replenishment" 70).

In their technique, the new, old novelists occupy a middle ground between innovation and tradition. Unlike the novels of a realist like Margaret Drabble, for example, who claims that she would "rather be at the end of a dying tradition, which [she] admire[s], than at the beginning of a tradition which [she] deplore[s]"[9] (Bergonzi, *Situation* 65), their novels share the self-conscious emphasis on design and form typical of metafiction. Yet unlike more radical innovators like John Hawkes, for instance, who claims that he "began to write fiction on the assumption that the true enemies of the novel were plot, character, setting and theme" (Bradbury, *Today* 7), or Robbe-Grillet, who argues in *For a New Novel* that plot, character, omniscience, etc., are obsolete notions based on metaphysical premises that are no longer applicable, they do not, as John Barth puts it, throw out the baby with the bathwater ("Exhaustion" 32). Barth, in fact, refers rather disdainfully to the *nouveau roman* as a form of higher "realism" and argues for metafiction as an alternative approach to the problem of fiction and reality:

> The French . . . are of course the ones who are doing the curiousest things technically, and good for them, although the *nouveau roman* isn't just my cup of tea. They're all fighting Balzac, as I understand it, and I guess some of us are mad at

[9] In a recent interview, Drabble disassociates herself from her earlier position:

> "I said that back in the '60s and I disown it now. It sounds as if I saw myself as the last of the great Victorian novelists, when all I meant was that I didn't want to be faddish and write the kind of novels that come in boxes. I don't in the least see myself as Victorian, and a lot of interesting new work is being done." (H-11)

> Flaubert instead, in a friendly way. From what I know of Robbe-Grillet and his pals, their aesthetic is finally a more up-to-date kind of psychological realism: a higher fi to human consciousness and unconsciousness. Well, that's nice. A different way to come to terms with the discrepancy between art and the Real Thing is to affirm the artificial element in art (you can't get rid of it anyhow), and make the artifice part of your point instead of working for higher and higher fi with a lot of literary woofers and tweeters. That would be my way. (Enck 5-6)

Although he accepts Robbe-Grillet's analysis, Barth rejects his solution to the problem, suggesting instead a parodic baring of the device as a means of subverting, yet continuing to use, traditional fictional techniques. Parody permits a new equilibrium:

> [I]f you acknowledge and embrace the artificial aspect of art, which you can't get rid of anyway, then it doesn't necessarily follow, for example, that you have to abandon certain kinds of literary devices simply because they're metaphors for notions that are no longer viable. If you are working in the comic mode, you may be free *ipso facto* to make use of all sorts of conventions because you're parodying them. Your tracks are covered as far as the Robbe-Grillet argument is concerned, and at the same time you can exploit the outmoded conventions for all they're worth to get certain things done that you just can't get done in any other way. (Bellamy 15)

Similarly, John Fowles takes issue with Robbe-Grillet:

> I think it is now accepted, even in France itself, that the *nouveau roman* experiment has failed to prove its thesis. Its first successes were really *tours de force* of technique and proved quite the opposite of what Robbe-Grillet has claimed: that a greater "truth" can be got by jettisoning all the old methods of conveying character and narrative. All that was really proved was that though you *can* get from Winnipeg to Montreal by heading westwards, the more obvious direction still makes for a better journey for your fellow travellers--that is, your readers. ("Recollections" 185)

In place of the disruptive strategies--fragmentation, collage, cut-ups, aleatory structures, negatives, contradictions, paradoxes,

ostentatious typography--employed by other postmodernists, the new, old novelists challenge realism from within. Although they adopt narrative conventions derived from earlier historical periods, they avoid bad faith by self-consciously indicating that the form is an anachronism. Their imitations, because they are ironically distanced from their own structures, plots, characters, and language, express simultaneously a valuing and a mistrust of the conventions they use. Adopting traditional representational devices, they use them to challenge accepted ideas about representation by inverting the models they employ. Barth describes this procedure as "tak[ing] a received melody--an old narrative poem, a classical myth, a shopworn literary convention . . .--and, improvising like a jazzman within its constraints, reorchestrat[ing] it to present purpose" ("Reasons" 30).

It is probably an indication of the new, old novelists' central position in the fictional spectrum that they have been attacked by both traditional and avant-garde critics. The champion of "moral fiction," John Gardner, for example, who deplores "the advance guard," i.e., those writers who "no longer seek truth, or goodness or beauty, but address their talents to parody" (54), calls "the antique language of *The Sot-Weed Factor* . . . an aesthetic miscalculation" (94-95). At the opposite pole, the champion of the "post-contemporary," Jerome Klinkowitz, rejects "regressive parodists" like John Barth and Thomas Pynchon, whose "ironies and burlesques" are part of the "funereal" rather than the "re-creative" in recent fiction (*Disruptions* ix). Nonetheless, by avoiding the Charybdis of transparent representation as represented by Gardner, for whom the moral content and didactic function of art are all-important, and the Scylla of opaque representation as represented by Klinkowitz, for whom

fiction refers only to itself, the new, old novel, which neither surrenders to illusion nor rejects tradition, seems to be the positive step toward the replenishment of fiction that Barth thinks it is and that Russian Formalist theory predicts.

It is my contention that new, old novels, owing to their parodic incorporation and subversion of realistic forms, epitomize the postmodernist critique of representation. Structurally, these double-coded or "dialogic" novels, to use Mikhail Bakhtin's term, appropriate the discourses of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English novels into an orientation opposed to their own. The subsequent clash between the two voices, which results in the supercession of the earlier model by the later, lays bare within the novels themselves the shift from realist to postmodernist model. As mock-novels, what Flann O'Brien calls "self-evident sham[s]" (25), they achieve an equilibrium between old and new, acceptance and rejection, imitation and construction, realism and postmodernism.

In the following chapters, I shall look closely at the five new, old novels mentioned earlier. My purpose, less theoretical than practical, is to examine in detail the parodic strategies each writer employs in order to explain what the kind consists of, how it works, and its relation to its author's postmodernism. Focusing upon the specific literary devices, conventions, and genres the authors pick up from the pool of possibilities open to them, my method, like theirs, will be one of doubling back and coming forward. Just as Pierre Menard's *Don Quixote* cannot be interpreted in the same way as Cervantes' *Don Quixote* because it was written almost three hundred years later, these contemporary reactivations of antique genres cannot be read in isolation from the originals--whether specific

anterior texts or general styles and kinds--from which they derive. By analyzing the significance of particular devices in both their old and new contexts, I hope to illuminate the nature of each novelist's parodic transformations.

I begin in chapter two with John Barth's third novel, *The Sot-Weed Factor*, the first of his long, parodic works. Although the *The Sot-Weed Factor* retains the existential themes of his first two novels, *The Floating Opera* and *The End of the Road*, which Barth describes as "very short and relatively realistic" (Bellamy 6), it abandons their realistic mode of presentation. Parodying the form and conventions of the cervantic novel, particularly as employed by Fielding, Barth uses the representational techniques of the eighteenth-century novel to question the assumptions of realism. In chapter three, I discuss Erica Jong's third novel, *Fanny*, a work that foregoes in favour of parody the realistic technique of its predecessors, *Fear of Flying* and *How to Save Your Own Life*, while retaining their feminist tendentiousness. Inverting the conventions of a number of eighteenth-century originals, Jong foregrounds the subordinate representations of women in the eighteenth-century novel and, by implication, the twentieth-century novel and reveals the patriarchal assumptions that underlie both. In chapter four, I examine *Water Music*, T. Coraghessan Boyle's first novel and second book (parts of which won the Aga Khan Award of the *Paris Review*). Combining the historical parody of *The Sot-Weed Factor* with the absurdity of Boyle's earlier stories such as "Quetzalcóatl Lite," in which a collector embarks on a quest for a can of the fabled "brew of the ancient Aztecs" (171) (from his first book, *Descent of Man*, which won the St. Lawrence Award for Short Fiction in 1980), *Water Music* parodies the conventions and the ideology of the

nineteenth-century adventure novel. In chapter five, I look at John Fowles's third novel, which, after the lengthy rhetorical fiction *The Magus* and the brief realistic novel *The Collector* (written but not published in that order), marked the author's first real critical success. In *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Fowles's parody of the conventions and strategies of the Victorian novel and his overt discussion of their underlying significance reveal the ideological distance between the aesthetic constructs of the Victorian period and those of today. Finally, in chapter six, I return to John Barth. In *LETTERS*, his seventh work of fiction, Barth writes a sequel to all his previous works in the form of a metafiction the subject of which is its own construction. Parodying the conventions of the epistolary novel and the modernist novel, Barth attempts to transcend both in a postmodernist synthesis.

Chapter Two: Tilting at Windmills

(i)

In the preface to *Joseph Andrews*, Henry Fielding, worried about the kind of entertainment the reader might expect, promises a "Species of writing . . . hitherto unattempted in our Language" (10). Only in *our* language, however, for this "true History" (191; bk. 3, ch. 1) has Spanish and French antecedents. The title page, which declares the book to be "Written in Imitation of the *Manner* of Cervantes, Author of *Don Quixote*" (1), directs "the mere *English* Reader" (3) where to look. Calling his novel a "comic Romance" or a "comic Epic-Poem in Prose" (4), to distinguish it from the enormous French pastoral and heroic romances of d'Urfé, the Scudérys, and La Calprenède on the one hand and the sensational novellas of Behn, Haywood, and Manley on the other, Fielding associates it with the works of "Biographers" like Cervantes, Scarron, Lesage, and Marivaux where "Truth is only to be found" (185; bk. 3, ch. 1).

John Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor*, in contrast, does not have a descriptive title, but if it did it might very well read "Written in Imitation of the *Manner* of Fielding, Author of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*." Despite this omission, Barth proves himself to be as obliging as Fielding when he states elsewhere that in writing *The Sot-Weed Factor* he wanted to "see if [he] could make up a plot more complicated than the plot of *Tom Jones*, and wrap up all the loose ends without missing one" (McKenzie

137).[1] In so doing, of course, he was writing an imitation of an imitation, a fact made explicit when the novel's protagonist, Ebenezer Cooke, poet and virgin, describes himself as "a Don Quixote tilting for his ignorant Dulcinea" and vows to "joust with bona fide giants and bring them low!" (58; pt. 1, ch. 7).

The reviewers and critics of *The Sot-Weed Factor* could not help but notice Barth's debt to Cervantes and Fielding, but they seem rather confused about the novel's generic identity. Edmund Fuller, for instance, calls it an "imitation of such eighteenth-century picaresque novelists as Fielding, Smollett and Sterne" (111). Similarly, Denham Sutcliffe describes it as "begotten by *Don Quixote* upon *Fanny Hill*" (113) and labels it "a picaresque which is also a burlesque of the historical novel" (115). And Earl Rovit, in a more scholarly article, asserts that it is "almost a compendium of the eighteenth-century picaresque form" (119).

Their claim that *The Sot-Weed Factor* and, by implication, *Don Quixote*, *Joseph Andrews*, and *Tom Jones* are picaresque novels indicates either a loose usage of the term or a genuine misunderstanding of the genre.[2] What Fielding called comic romances, with *Don Quixote* as their

[1] Barth says something similar to John Enck: "When I started on *The Sot-Weed Factor* . . . I had two intentions. One was to write a large book . . . . The other was to see if I couldn't make up a plot that was fancier than *Tom Jones*." Still referring to *Tom Jones*, he adds: "I like a flabbergasting plot. Nowadays, of course, you couldn't do it straight; it would have to be a formal farce" (7).

[2] See Robert Alter, *Rogue's Progress* 83-103, for an account of *Tom Jones*'s assimilation of picaresque elements into a different tradition.

paradigm, we would today call cervantic novels.[3] This kind of novel portrays the adventures on the road and in wayside inns of a pair of protagonists who, like Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, have opposed views of the world. One of them is an innocent who, usually because of his reading, deludes himself as to the nature of reality. The other, more worldly, imbued with common sense, acts as a foil to his idealistic companion. In the push and pull between the antithetical perceptions of this couple are embodied the rival claims of idealism and realism, romance and novel. The one, looking back at the romance, is ready to charge at windmills; the other, looking ahead to the novel, asks, in effect, like Sancho Panza, "What giants?"[4] (*Don Quixote* 59; pt. 1, ch. 8).

The dialectic of illusion and reality is a structural device basic to the cervantic novel and of central importance to the writer of metafiction. It is formally embodied by a juxtaposition of past and present, specifically a literary past and an empirical present. In *Don Quixote*, for example, Alonso Quixano, having dried up his brain and lost his wits by incessant reading, tries to impose the conventions of chivalric romance upon the facts of daily life in sixteenth-century Spain. He rationalizes the world's resistance to his sallies of knight errantry as the work of evil enchanters. Similarly, in *Joseph Andrews*, Parson Adams, deriving his values from the Scriptures and Aeschylus's plays, cannot see that the-

[3] See George Watson, *The Story of the Novel*: "[N]either [the memoir-novel] nor [the picaresque novel] should be confused with the cervantic novel, where the hero, like Fielding's Parson Adams, is a victim of innocent illusions about the virtue of mankind" (26). See also Walter L. Reed, *An Exemplary History of the Novel*, which treats the picaresque novel and *Don Quixote* as "counterfictions" of each other (71).

[4] See Harry Levin, *The Gates of Horn* 42.

codes of Christian charity and classical morality are not the norm in a decidedly corrupt eighteenth-century England. Although his ideals are admirable, his naiveté, which does not allow him to perceive the vanity and hypocrisy behind the masks of the affected knaves he meets, makes him also ridiculous.

Just as Cervantes parodies an archaic form, the chivalric romance, so Barth, in *The Sot-Weed Factor*, returns to the eighteenth-century novel with the intention of making its devices serve new functions. Barth's technique in his parody of the cervantic novel, however, reverses that of his predecessors, Cervantes and Fielding. Whereas they contrasted old ideals and contemporary practice, he incorporates new ideas into an old form. In *The Sot-Weed Factor*, a late seventeenth-century setting, a pastiche of eighteenth-century English, and the conventions of the eighteenth-century novel serve as backdrop for a twentieth-century sensibility. His burlesque or comically exaggerated version of the genre subverts the old functions of its devices and conventions in favour of new, ironically distanced uses. Employing irony, hyperbole, and farce to expose or foreground and, thereby, to undermine the significance of the generic patterns and devices he revives,[5] Barth uses an old form as a

[5] The Russian Formalist critic Victor Shklovsky uses the term "defamiliarization" to describe art's ability to upset one's habitual or "automatized" ways of perceiving the world:

> The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects "unfamiliar," to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. *Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important.* (12)

In *The Sot-Weed Factor*, Barth "makes strange" the conventions of the eighteenth-century novel in order to direct attention to their

vehicle for a new philosophy. Pouring the new wine of absurdity into the old wineskin of the eighteenth-century novel, he replaces the ordered world view figured in Fielding's novels with an existentialist world view. Instead of the finite "closed world" of *Joseph Andrews* with its implicit hierarchical ordering, *The Sot-Weed Factor* portrays an infinite "open world," which is contingent and purposeless.[6] Fielding's monistic Christian view yields to a philosophical pluralism in which one's sense of reality is constructed by the different systems of concepts and measurement and the different forms of expression that one applies to it. In practice, this amounts to attaching new thematic values to old conventions. As Barth stated publicly at the University of North Dakota, his method is to "invoke some of the traditions of the English novel, and see to what account [he] could turn them, thematic account if you like, in addressing some contemporary concerns" (Mckenzie 137). By parodying the conventions of the realistic novel in its eighteenth-century version, he lays bare and discards the assumptions that underlie them.

In like manner, Barth puts the novel's setting to metaphoric and thematic use. Because Maryland is historically a border state between north and south as well as a tidewater area, i.e., a fluid boundary between land and water, it "can be a kind of emblem for other sorts of border states, ontological states, of personality, and the rest" (McKenzie

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significance.

[6] See Alexander Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Open Universe*, for the "substitution," in the seventeenth-century, "of an indefinite or even infinite universe no longer united by natural subordination" "for the conception of the world as a finite and well-ordered whole, in which the spatial structure embodied a hierarchy of perception and value" (viii).

151). A perfect setting, then, in which to juxtapose old values and new, certainty and scepticism, stable types and protean selves, fact and fiction, hierarchical order and contingent flux.

(ii)

Early in *The Sot-Weed Factor*, the narrator compares the way nature turns one character, Anna Cooke, into a "lovely young woman" and another, her twin brother Ebenezer, into a "goggling scarecrow" to the way "a clever author may, by delicate adjustments, parody a beautiful style" (8; pt. 1, ch. 2). Parody in *The Sot-Weed Factor*, however, functions not so much on the stylistic or linguistic level as on the narrative or diegetic level. Even though there are occasional echoes of Fielding's style, Barth's novel, for the most part, is not a parody of any particular eighteenth-century novel. Rather, it is written in a pastiche of eighteenth-century language, a device that, in itself, foregrounds the novel's diction and alerts the modern reader to its parodic play with older forms and conventions. As Robert Burden points out, pastiche, like parody, need not be a "negative device" but may be used to stress an "ironic awareness that language, literary form, themes and motifs regularly come to be written in . . . second-hand form" (135).

One of the typical traits of Fielding's writing, the balanced sentences that reflect the balanced and judicious mind of the narrator, is echoed in the opening sentence of *The Sot-Weed Factor* with its alliteration, sibilance, and onomatopoeia; its central chiasmas, and its concluding isocolon:

> IN THE LAST YEARS of the Seventeenth Century there was to be found among the fops and fools of the London coffee-houses one

> rangy, gangling flitch called Ebenezer Cooke, more ambitious than talented, and yet more talented than prudent, who, like his friends-in-folly, all of whom were supposed to be educating at Oxford or Cambridge, had found the sound of Mother English more fun to game with than her sense to labor over, and so rather than applying himself to the pains of scholarship, had learned the knack of versifying, and ground out quires of couplets after the fashion of the day, afroth with *Joves* and *Jupiters*, aclang with jarring rhymes, and string-taut with similes stretched to the snapping-point. (3; pt. 1, ch. 1)

In *The Sot-Weed Factor's* rhetorical flourishes, one can hear further echoes of Fielding. For example, Fielding frequently uses a form of the figure *epexegesis*, "to explain in addition." Typically, he puts it to ironic use in *Tom Jones*:

> One of the Maxims which the Devil, in a late Visit upon Earth, left to his Disciples, is, when once you are got up, to kick the Stool from under you. In plain *English*, when you have made your Fortune by the good Offices of a Friend, you are advised to discard him as soon as you can. (72; bk. 1, ch. 13)

In *The Sot-Weed Factor*, in an episode in which Barth satirically reduces the seventeenth-century philosophical contention between empiricism and rationalism to a struggle between Isaac Newton and Henry More for the favour of the young Henry Burlingame, Burlingame says: "'[I]n plain English, Eben, Newton grew as enamored of me as had More, with this difference only, that there was naught Platonical in his passion'" (23; bk. 1, ch. 3).

Similarly, Fielding will employ the figure *epanorthosis*, "to correct a word or phrase used previously." For example, in *Tom Jones*, after Tom has sold his bible to Blifil, ironically revealing Blifil's perfidy, the narrator remarks:

> Some People have been noted to be able to read in no Book but their own. On the contrary, from the Time when Master *Blifil* was first possessed of this Bible, he never used any other. Nay, he was seen reading in it much oftener than he had before been in his own. (144-45; bk.3, ch. 9)

The narrator of the *The Sot-Weed Factor*, describing that which marks Ebenezer off from his fellow poets, "none of whom left behind him anything nobler than his own posterity," remarks: "pale-haired and pale-eyed, raw-boned and gaunt-cheeked, he stood--nay, *angled*--nineteen hands high" (3; bk. 1, ch. 1).

Barth adopts not only Fielding's epic division of his novel into books but also his descriptive chapter headings. Some of his titles echo Fielding's humour and mock-heroic tone. For example, book 10, chapter 3, of *Tom Jones* is entitled:

> *A Dialogue between the Landlady, and* Susan *the Chambermaid, proper to be read by all Innkeepers, and their Servants; with the Arrival, and affable Behaviour of a beautiful young Lady; which may teach Persons of Condition how they may acquire the Love of the whole World.*

Part 3, chapter 3, of *The Sot-Weed Factor* is entitled:

> A Colloquy Between Ex-Laureates of Maryland, Relating Duly the Trials of Miss Lucy Robotham and Concluding With an Assertion Not Lightly Matched for Its Implausibility.

Other headings match Fielding's comic brevity. Fielding gives chapters 11 to 14 of book 8 the following titles:

> *In which the Man of the Hill begins to relate his History.*
>
> *In which the Man of the Hill continues his History.*
>
> *In which the foregoing Story is farther continued.*

In which the Man of the Hill concludes his History.

Barth responds in chapters 18 to 21 of part 2 with:

The Laureate Attends a Swine-Maiden's Tale.

The Laureate Attends the Swine-Maiden Herself.

The Laureate Yet Further Attends the Swine-Maiden.

It is in his parodies of the epic-romance tradition, a strategy that is central to *Don Quixote* and its successors, that Barth both imitates and distances himself from his predecessors. To direct his reader to the relevant tradition, Barth scatters throughout *The Sot-Weed Factor* allusions to both serious and mock epics, their authors, and their characters; punctuates his narrative with mock-epic passages and similes; and constructs his protagonist's journey around a series of mock-epic parallels to Odysseus's journey home after the conquest of Troy. Homer, Virgil, Dante, Cervantes, Milton, and Samuel Butler as well as *The Odyssey*, *The Iliad*, *The Aeneid*, *The Divine Comedy*, *Don Quixote*, *Paradise Lost* and *Hudibras* are all objects of numerous references.[7]

These are associated closely with two of the characters, one of whom, Ebenezer Cooke, hopes to write a "*Marylandiad*," an "epic to out-epic epics," about "the heroic founding" of the province of Maryland (75; bk. 1, ch. 9). When writing this work, he keeps his volumes of *Paradise Lost* and *Hudibras* nearby "as references" (230; pt. 2, ch. 13). Later on, after

[7] I am using Michael Wheeler's division of allusion into references (words, phrases, or passages that direct attention to an adopted text without sharing stylistic similarities to it) and quotations (identifiable words, phrases, or passages taken from an adopted text), both marked (i.e., indicated by means of punctuation or typography) and unmarked (*Allusion* 2-3).

several misadventures in the actual Maryland, he looks back upon his "harrowing odyssey" (374; pt. 2, ch. 25). In like manner, the wanderings of his friend Henry Burlingame III are linked with those of Odysseus. Early in the novel, for example, Ebenezer calls Henry "an Iliad Greek" (13; pt. 1, ch. 3), and Henry's search for a father is twice referred to as a "quest" (131; pt. 2, ch. 4; 638; pt. 3, ch. 14) and once as an "odyssey" (146; pt. 2, ch. 5). In addition, Henry's insatiable thirst for knowledge begins when, at age fourteen, he comes upon a copy of Motteux's *Don Quixote* and is "entranced by the great Manchegan and his faithful squire" (16; pt. 1, ch. 3).

Lest one forget that this is comic epic and these are mock-epic heroes, however, the adventures comprising these "quests" are usually described in mock-epic terms. Fielding frequently employed a mock-heroic manner as a satiric device to contrast the artifice and corruption of his own debased time with the simplicity of a classical ideal. In the preface to *Joseph Andrews*, he refers to "Parodies or Burlesque Imitations," which one can find "[i]n the Diction . . . as in the Descriptions of the Battles, and some other Places" (4). Burlesque, he tells the reader, is the "Exhibition of what is monstrous and unnatural," and our delight in it arises from its "surprizing Absurdity, as in appropriating the Manners of the highest to the lowest, or *è converso*" (4). Typical examples in Fielding's novels include battles between dogs and men and between self-righteous churchgoers and a vain, slatternly girl, both described in terms more appropriate to a battle scene in *The Iliad*.

Barth's extended mock-heroic passages in *The Sot-Weed Factor* serve a more farcical purpose. The exaggerated contrast between epic manner and ludicrous action results in caricature. Tom Jones and Joseph Andrews

remain heroes even though their battles are comically described; Ebenezer Cooke, in contrast, is an anti-hero. His foolish idealism and heroic conception of himself seem ridiculous when rendered by means of epic devices. For instance, upon perceiving his essence to be innocence and his role to be poet, he delivers the following apostrophe:

> "Life! I must fling myself into Life, escape to't, as Orestes to the temple of Apollo. Action be my sanctuary; Initiative my shield! I shall smite ere I am smitten; clutch Life by his horns! Patron of poets, thy temple be the Entire Great Real World, whereto I run with arms a-stretch: may't guard me from the Pit, and may my Erinyes sink 'neath the vertigo I flee to be transformed to mild Eumenides!" (70; pt. 1, ch. 8)

As a result of this rhetorical resolve to embrace life, Ebenezer determines to become poet laureate of Maryland. To prepare himself to meet Charles Calvert, Lord Baltimore, the proprietor of the province, from whom he hopes to wrest the laureateship, he first dresses himself as if for battle. The prototype of the device of the hero arming himself can be found in *The Iliad*:

> Among them
> Prince Akhilleus armed.
> . . . . . .
> Raging at Trojans,
> he buckled on the arms Hêphaistos forged.
> The beautiful greaves, fitted with silver anklets,
> first he put upon his legs, and next
> the cuirass on his ribs; then over his shoulder
> he slung the sword of bronze with silver scabbard;
> finally he took up the massive shield
> whence came a radiance like the round full moon.
> . . . . . .
> Lifting his great helm
> he placed it on his brows, and like a star
> the helm shone with its horsetail blowing free,
> all golden, that Hêphaistos had set in
> upon the crest. Akhilleus tried his armor,
> shrugging and flexing, making sure it fitted,
> sure that his gleaming legs had play.
> . . . . . .

> Now from a spear-case he withdrew a spear--
> his father's--weighty, long, and tough.
> . . . . . .
> Automédôn then
> took in hand the shining whip and mounted
> the chariot, and at his back Akhilleus
> mounted in full armor, shining bright
> as the blinding Lord of Noon. (468-69; bk. 19)

Ebenezer's clothing, if more fashionable, is decidedly less impressive:

> Not bothering to trouble his skin with water, he slipped on his best linen drawers, short ones without stirrups, heavily perfumed, and a clean white day-shirt of good frieze holland . . . . Next he pulled on a pair of untrimmed black velvet knee breeches . . . and then his knitted white silk hose . . . . On then with his shoes . . . of softest black Spanish leather, square-toed, high-heeled, and buckled . . . . [H]e left his waistcoat where it hung and donned next a coat of plum-colored serge lined with silver-gray prunella . . . . Then came his short-sword in its beribboned scabbard . . . and after it his long, tight-curled white periwig . . . . Nothing now remained but to top the periwig with his round-crowned, broad-brimmed, feather-edged black beaver, draw on his gauntlet gloves of fawn leather stitched in gold and silver . . . , fetch up his long cane . . . , and behold the finished product in his looking glass. (70-71; pt. 1, ch. 8)

The awesome spectacle of the battle-clad warrior in *The Iliad* is reduced in *The Sot-Weed Factor* to the ridiculous sight of the foppishly-dressed dandy. Achilles uses his sword to cleave Trojan heads and defeat the valiant Hector. Ebenezer's sword is ceremonial only. Confronted with real danger in the persons of the pirate captains Slye and Scurry, he behaves rather more ignominiously:

> "'Fore God, good Captains!" Ebenezer croaked, but legs and sphincters both betrayed him; unable to say on, he sank with wondrous odor to his knees and buried his face in the seat of his chair. (170; bk. 2, ch. 8)

Nor does he fare much better in another mock-heroic battle reminiscent of both Don Quixote's battle with the cats (677; pt. 2, ch. 46) and Joseph Andrews' battle with the dogs (238-43; bk. 3, ch. 6). The din that results when a sack full of cats with bells on their tails is lowered on a bell-covered rope to the Don's window finds a parallel in *The Sot-Weed Factor* in the uproar, consisting of the cries of frightened barnyard animals and the barking of dogs, triggered when Ebenezer accidentally urinates on a cat. As Don Quixote lays about him with his sword, one of the cats, jumping on his face, scratches and bites his nose. An equally vulnerable and, at the time, exposed organ of Ebenezer's almost suffers the same fate. Joseph Andrews, using a cudgel, dispatches a pack of hounds as readily as Achilles dispatches Trojans. The intrepid Ebenezer, in contrast, is treed by a pair of spaniels:

> The mouser woke with a hiss and flew with splayed claws at the nearest animal--fortunately not Ebenezer but one of Susan's shoats. The young pig squealed, and soon the barn was bleating with the cries of frightened animals. Ebenezer himself was terrified . . . . When he jumped back, holding up his breeches in one hand, he happened upon a stick leaning against the wall . . . . He snatched it up . . . and laid about him vigorously until the combatants ran off . . . . A moment later the respite ended: the barn was filled with quacks and squawks; ducks, geese, and chickens beat the air wildly in their effort to flee the cat, and Ebenezer suffered pecks about the head and legs as bird after bird encountered him. This new commotion was too much for the dogs, a pair of raucous spaniels: they bounded in from the yard . . . and for all the Laureate thrashed about him with his stick, they ran him from the barn and treed him in a poplar. (322-23; pt. 2, ch. 21)

Clearly, this is not the siege of Troy. Nonetheless, the episode is decorous compared to Barth's mock-epic rendering of an eating contest between an Englishman and an Indian to decide who would be king of the Ahatchwoop tribe. Captain John Smith's "Secrete Historie" describes in

minute detail this gustatory battle. To increase their appetites, the contestants slapped their bellies "untill the rumbling of there gutts did eckoe about the swamps like the thunder of vulcanoes" (562; pt. 3, ch. 7) and bounced their "buttockes up & down upon the earthe" until "the verie grownd shudder'd beneath there awful bummes" (562). The epic catalogue of delicacies with which the two gluttons stuffed themselves included "yellowe-belly'd sunne-fish," "fry'd star-fish," "boyl'd froggs," and "marsh ratts," as well as "oysters, crabbs, trowt, croakers, rock-fish, flownders, clamms, maninose" (563), to name only a few of the items on the menu. To facilitate the ingestion of the largest possible quantity of food, "[a]fter that each course was done, they did both ope there mowths wide . . . . so that they did vomitt what was eat" (564). Throughout this "wondrous feast," the prize, a maid named Pokatawertussan, did "twist & wrythe for verie lust upon the rugg, at two such manlie men" (564). As this was a battle to the death, the end came only when one of the contestants, stuffed beyond his capacity, "did let flie a tooling fart and dy'd upon the instant where he sat" (564).[8]

In addition to the mock-epic rhetoric of these extended passages, one finds epic similes applied to less than heroic subjects, such as the flatulence of Bertrand Burton, Ebenezer's servant:

> His innards commenced to grow and snarl like beagles at a grounded fox; the hominy and cider in him foamed and

[8] In another parody of the epic catalogue convention, also intended to highlight language rather than narration, two whores engage in a swearing contest in which they alternate for seven pages French and English synonyms for "hooker" (441; pt. 2, ch. 31). The usage is anachronistic. According to Eric Partridge's *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, the term "hooker" was not used as a colloquial synonym for "harlot" until the nineteenth century.

> effervesced; anon there came salutes to the rising moon, and the bedchamber filled with the perfume of ferment. (322; pt. 2, ch. 21)

Ebenezer, in another example, compares poets and lovers:

> "For as the lover craves of his beloved naught save her favor, which to him is reward sufficient, so craves the poet no more from his muse than happy inspiration; and as the fruit of lover's labor is a bedded bride, and the sign of't a crimsoned sheet, so the poet's prize is a well-turned verse, and the sign thereof a printed page." (73; pt. 1, ch. 9)

Mary Mungommery, the travelling whore of Dorset, describes the battering of her heart by Charley Mattassin, Burlingame's brother:

> "[M]y heart was a castle, and of two hundred men not one had come in sight of't. But my Charley, that had not even a lance to tilt with, in two minutes' time had o'ertopped the breastworks, spanned the moat, hoist the portcullis, had his will of every crenal and machicoulis, and raised the flag o' passion from the merlons of my keep!" (414; pt. 2, ch. 29)

And near the end of the novel, a disillusioned Ebenezer calls happiness

> "a waterhole on the desert track of life! The traveler mistrusts his fortune; shocked by the misery he hath passed, sickened by the misery yet to come, he rests but fitfully; the dates lie like pebbles in his stomach; the water turns foul upon his tongue." (684; pt. 3; ch 18)

Mock epic in *The Sot-Weed Factor* is not merely a matter of style but extends to the narrative structure itself. Ebenezer's journey, around which the novel is constructed, is a burlesque version of Odysseus's travels. As Russell Miller has shown in "*The Sot-Weed Factor*: A Contemporary Mock-Epic" (91-93), Odysseus's adventures during his return from Troy are parodically parallelled, in several respects, by the events of Ebenezer's peregrinations. I shall summarize these here: (1) both

Odysseus and Ebenezer sail east to west to regain their estates; (2) both are washed overboard and manage to get aboard again, Ebenezer being simply lifted back on board by the next wave; (3) both are forced to swim ashore, Ebenezer having had to walk the plank; (4) both are found naked and clothed by a woman, Ebenezer by a whore; (5) Odysseus meets Circe, Ebenezer a swine-maiden; (6) Odysseus visits the underworld; Ebenezer dreams of it; (7) Odysseus's men and Ebenezer's valet continually give them trouble; (8) both are dumped into the sea a second time; (9) both reach their destination but do not know it; (10) Odysseus's swineherd, Eumaeus, tells the story of his kidnapping and sale into slavery; Susan Warren, the swine-maiden, tells a similar, though false, story to Ebenezer; (11) Odysseus disguises himself as a beggar; Ebenezer becomes a servant; (12) Odysseus's house is overrun with suitors, Ebenezer's with conspirators and whores; (13) Athena settles the dispute with the kin of the dead suitors; the governor of Maryland settles Ebenezer's case; (14) both regain their estates; (15) Burlingame, like Telemachus, is seeking his father; (16) Joan Toast, like Athena, initiates Ebenezer's adventures and intervenes to help him regain his estate.

The strategy behind these plot parallels, as well as the mock-epic set pieces and similes, is to diminish the elements and conventions that make up the form. Ebenezer is no superhuman hero, a goddess becomes a whore, an enchantress becomes a driver of pigs, the suitors become criminals. The epic world of kings, heroes, and gods and goddesses is displaced not just to a world of parsons and footmen, bastards and squires, as in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, but to a burlesque world of foul-mouthed and pox-ridden whores, bloodthirsty and lustful pirates, brutal slave traders and stereotyped blackamoors, rude and greedy sot-weed

planters, flatulent horses and servants, and short-heeled wives and daughters. Its relation to the epic-romance tradition is, indeed, that of "formal farce."

(iii)

The Sot-Weed Factor's quixotic hero, Ebenezer Cooke, poet and virgin, is an historical, if sketchy, figure.[9] Described as a "[h]eron of a man, lean-limbed and long billed," whose clothes, although good, "h[a]ng on his frame like luffed sails on long spars" (3; pt. 1, ch. 1), and whose facial features never seem to settle down, he resembles the long-legged, finger-snapping Parson Adams with his tattered cassock hanging down to his knees. At the same time, Ebenezer's vigorous defence of his chastity resembles that of Joseph Andrews besieged by the lustful Lady Booby and the predatory Mrs. Slipslop. Unlike Joseph's beloved Fanny Goodwill, however, Ebenezer's Dulcinea, like the Don's, is a creature of his own imaginings. Joseph's desire to keep his "Virtue pure and chaste, for the Arms of [his] dear *Fanny*" (58; bk. 1, ch. 13), although initially a parody at Pamela Andrews' expense, results from a genuine love. Ebenezer's infatuation for the whore Joan Toast or, rather, for the vision he creates in her image, derives from his inexperience and his inability to distinguish between the real and the apparent. Whereas Joseph Andrews' chastity is represented as a Christian virtue, Ebenezer's chastity, which he elevates to an ideal by which he will live, is emblematic of the

[9] See Philip E. Diser, "The Historical Ebenezer Cooke," for a summary of the known details of Cooke's life.

refusal of experience. He wears his virginity as Quixote wears his armour, to protect himself.

Bertrand Burton, Ebenezer's proverb-spouting valet, is the second member of the novel's quixotic pair. As an embodiment of the nit-wit servant convention, he possesses the contradictory traits of simple mindedness and pragmatic cunning. On the one hand, he is one of the dullheaded, too doltish to be aware of "the truth that drives men mad" (345; pt. 2, ch. 23). Contentment for him is to be found in drink and women. Like Partridge, who eventually finds himself serving as Tom Jones's squire after being banished for allegedly seducing Jenny Jones, Bertrand is forced to share Ebenezer's travels after Ralph Birdsall catches him in bed with Betsy Birdsall, his wife. On the other hand, his commonsensical realism contrasts with Ebenezer's idealism. In fact, forced by circumstances to impersonate Ebenezer as poet laureate, he plays the role more convincingly than Ebenezer himself could have done. Unlike Ebenezer, who sees only ideals and is unable to penetrate masquerades, Bertrand sees through the postures people assume. As he succinctly puts it: "'*A whore's a whore what'er her station . . . and a fool a fool what'er his wealth*'" (213; pt. 2, ch. 12).

Yet for all his pragmatism, he, like Sancho Panza, becomes infected, partly because of his native greed, by his master's delusions. Sancho believes Don Quixote's promise to make him governor of an island. Bertrand, upon hearing Ebenezer's speculation that they must have been washed ashore on the Isle of the Seven Golden Cities, sets his heart on becoming a god-like ruler. At the novel's end, he dies dreaming of himself on a throne, accepting the tributes and maidenheads of his adoring subjects.

Barth creates a second foil to his protagonist in the figure of Henry Burlingame III, Ebenezer's childhood tutor and later companion. The tale of a foundling, like that of Tom Jones, Burlingame's story parodies the romance quest for identity and social integration at work in Fielding's novel. Found afloat as a baby, like Moses, Burlingame seeks to discover his ancestry and, thus, his public identity, his continuity with tradition. The perpetual outsider, freed from society's constraints, he represents a twentieth-century perspective embedded in a mock-eighteenth-century novel.

Through Henry, Barth establishes an existential notion of character, which stands Fielding's neo-classical conception of character on its head. The implied author of *Joseph Andrews* obligingly explains the latter. He informs his readers that, like Cervantes' book, "which records the Atchievements of the renowned *Don Quixotte*" (188; bk. 3, ch. 1), his book "is the History of the World in general" (188), which is to say, it represents character, as do romance and classical comedy, typologically. It "describe[s] not Men, but Manners; not an Individual, but a Species" (189; bk. 3, ch. 1).[10] Propriety demands not only that characters suit the genre in which they are found but also that they behave in accordance with the social role, humour, and age group they occupy and that they display a consistency in keeping with the timeless essence they

[10] Cf. Samuel Johnson, *Rasselas*: "'The business of a poet . . . is to examine, not the individual, but the species; to remark general properties and large appearances'" (26; ch. 10).

represent.[11] Accordingly, the lawyer in the stage-coach, who recommends picking up the beaten, naked Joseph for fear of litigation, "is not only alive, but hath been so these 4000 Years" (189).

Barth, on the other hand, parodies the neo-classical idea of character, showing it to be defined not by types but by one's acts. The narrator of *The Sot-Weed Factor* describes Ebenezer as "no person at all" because "he could never choose one role to play over all the rest he knew" (45; bk. 1, ch. 6). Like Jacob Horner in Barth's second novel, *The End of the Road*, Ebenezer suffers from "cosmopsis," Barth's metaphor for the absurd point of view. From this perspective, all possibilities appear equally attractive and all facts equally arbitrary. Unable as a youth to accept any state of affairs as actually the case, he "made little or no distinction between, say, the geography of the atlases and that of fairy-stories" (8; pt. 1, ch. 2). His imagination and enthusiasm, according to the narrator, were not "unalloyed virtues" (8):

> [T]hough they led him to a great sense of the arbitrariness of the particular real world, they did not endow him with a corresponding realization of its finality. He very well knew,

[11] See, for example, Dr. Johnson, *The Rambler*, 140, 20 July 1751:

> Sentiments are proper and improper as they consist more or less with the character and circumstances of the person to whom they are attributed, with the rules of the composition in which they are found, or with the settled and unalterable nature of things. (4: 377)

An adherence to neo-classical rules of probability similarly justifies Fielding's reduction in *Joseph Andrews* of Quixote's madness, which transforms reality, to Adams's misapprehension, which merely mistakes men's characters. In his review of Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* in *The Covent Garden Journal*, 24 Mar. 1752, Fielding praises her novel as "much less extravagant and incredible" (1: 281) than Cervantes' on the grounds of probability, a young girl being more likely than an old man to have her head turned by romances.

> for instance, that "France is shaped like a teapot," but he could scarcely accept the fact that there was actually in existence *at that instant* such a place as France, where people were speaking French and eating snails whether he thought about them or not, and that despite the virtual infinitude of imaginable shapes, this France would have to go on resembling a teapot forever.[12] (8)

As a result of this inability to choose, Ebenezer is subject to fits of complete immobility or existential stasis in which he is incapable of any action whatsoever. It takes the shock of the amorous advances of the whore Joan Toast to jolt him into realizing his essence as virgin and his role as poet, with "innocence as badge of [his] strength and proof of [his] calling" (60; pt. 1, ch. 7). His choice, however, is a parody of the existential choice, for it amounts to no choice at all. Seizing upon innocence as an "essence," he tries to protect himself against the constant need to make choices by imposing a simplistic and rigid scheme on the multifarious facts of the world. His idealistic conception of poetry is, like his virginity, actually an avoidance of the "tangled skein" of

[12] Barth associates this temperament with artistic creation:

> If you are a novelist of a certain type of temperament, then what you really want to do is re-invent the world. God wasn't too bad a novelist, except he was a Realist. . . . But a certain kind of sensibility can be made very uncomfortable by the recognition of the *arbitrariness* of physical facts and the inability to accept their *finality*. Take France, for example: France is shaped like a tea pot, and Italy is shaped like a boot. Well, okay. But the idea that that's the only way it's ever going to be, that they'll never be shaped like anything else--that can get to you after a while. . . . And it seems to me that this emotion, which is a kind of metaphysical emotion, goes almost to the heart of what art is, at least some kinds of art, and this impulse to imagine alternatives to the world can become a driving impulse for writers. I confess that it is for me. So that really what you want to do is re-invent philosophy and the rest--make up your own whole history of the world. (Enck 8)

the "*entire great real world*" (62; pt. 1, ch. 8), as the pimp John McEvoy puts it. He does not compose from experience but, like Don Quixote, attempts to transform reality by means of imagination, writing an epic poem about his passage to, and arrival in, Maryland before either takes place. The actual events, when they finally do occur, are decidedly unheroic.

Henry Burlingame, like Ebenezer, also suffers from the cosmic disease. Anachronistically alluding to Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Barth reveals Burlingame's resulting dissatisfaction with the gap between his own desires and the intransigence of the universe. Mary Mungommery, speaking of Charley Mattassin, tells Ebenezer: "'Ofttimes I felt his fancy bore a clutch of worlds, all various, of which the world these books described was one.'" Ebenezer, thinking of Burlingame's love and contempt for the world, finishes her sentence: "'Which, while 'twas splendid here and there . . . he could not but loathe for having been *the case*'"[13] (415; pt. 2, ch. 29).

Contrasting Henry's existentialism with Ebenezer's idealism, Barth parodies the romance emphasis on "essential" identity (i.e., the soul's essence) as opposed to external or "existential" features (Miller, *Romance*

[13] In a lecture entitled "Tales Within Tales Within Tales," Barth remarks that "Ludwig Wittgenstein, in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, defines the world (which is to say, reality) as being 'everything that is the case.'" Barth goes on to say that "the difference between the fantasy we call reality and the fantasies we call fantasy has to do with cultural consensus and with one's manner of relating to the concept-structure involved. What we call the real world, we relate to as if it were the case" (*Friday* 221). In *The End of the Road*, the Doctor tells Jacob Horner: "'There's no reason in the long run why Italy shouldn't be shaped like a sausage instead of a boot, but that doesn't happen to be the case. *The world is everything that is the case*, and what the case is is not a matter of logic'" (76; ch. 6).

57). In *The Sot-Weed Factor*, existence precedes essence,[14] and particular identity is a chimera. The numerous disguises and multiple roles assumed by many of the characters, especially the protean Burlingame, who appears as Lord Baltimore, Colonel Peter Sayer, Nicholas Lowe, Ebenezer Cooke, John Coode, Monsieur Casteene, Tim Mitchell, and Governor Nicholson, reveal that role-playing is everything. As Henry, disguised as Peter Sayer but speaking for his author, tells Ebenezer: "'The world can alter a man entirely . . . or he can alter himself down to his very essence,'" for "'he is a river running seawards, that is ne'er the same from hour to hour'" (125; pt. 2, ch. 3). Since man has no innate characteristics, and his memory is unreliable, he possesses no consistency of character: "'all assertions of *thee* and *me* . . . are acts of faith, impossible to verify'" (128; pt. 2, ch. 3). Because there is no absolute authority in the world of *The Sot-Weed Factor*, there are no grounds for believing anything to be certainly true. The world is a Heraclitean flux in which everything, including identity, is provisional. As Burlingame tells Ebenezer, man is but "'Chance's fool, the toy of aimless Nature'" (344), sitting upon "'a blind rock hurtling through a vacuum, racing to the grave'" (345; pt. 2, ch. 23). He advises Ebenezer to "'[f]orget the word *sky*" because "[t]here is no *dome of heaven* yonder'":

> [T]he constellations lost their sense entirely; their spurious character revealed itself, as did the false presupposition of the celestial navigator, and Ebenezer felt bereft of orientation. He could no longer think of up and down: the stars were simply *out there*, as well below him as above, and the wind appeared to howl not from the Bay but from the firmament

[14] In *The End of the Road*, Jacob Horner remarks that "[e]xistence not only precedes essence: in the case of human beings it rather defies essence" (122; ch. 10).

> itself, the endless corridors of space.[15] (346; pt. 2, ch. 23)

Once one has faced the truth, i.e., the absurdity of the universe, the only sane alternative, claims Burlingame, is to

> "make and seize [one's] soul, and then cleave fast to't, or go babbling in the corner; one must choose his gods and devils on the run, quill his own name upon the universe, and declare, ''Tis *I*, and the world stands such-a-way!' One must *assert*, *assert*, *assert*, or go screaming mad." (345; pt. 2, ch. 23)

This is Burlingame's existential philosophy, which he calls "Cosmophilism" (704; pt. 13, ch. 19), in a nutshell. Realizing that the world has no meaning, one gives it whatever value it has by one's choices and acts. Rejecting all conventional creeds, one must face one's situations and responsibilities and win through to authentic existence. Only thus can one endow an alien universe with value and give one's life meaning.

Under Henry's tutelage, Ebenezer comes to accept an existentialist world view. His fall from innocence follows a typical existential pattern. When he first grasps man's godless plight and the "[m]adness" of existence, like Sartre's Roquentin he is reduced to "nausea." His "stomach churn[ing]" (346), he "nearly falls into the stars" (340; pt. 2, ch. 23):

> For a swooning moment before he turned away it seemed that he was heels over head on the bottom of the planet, looking *down* on the stars instead of up, and that only by dint of clutching

[15] Cf. Joseph Addison, "Divine Ode: The Spacious Firmament":

> The spacious firmament on high,
> With all the blue aethereal sky,
> And spangled heavens, a shining frame,
> Their great Original proclaim. (1-4)

> his legs about the roan mare's girth and holding fast to the saddlebow with both his hands did he keep from dropping headlong into those vasty reaches! (346-47; pt. 2, ch. 23)

Later, after losing his estate because of his misplaced faith in innocence, he succumbs to despair. His sense of alienation allows him first to indenture himself as a servant and then basely to steal from and abandon his wife, the poxed whore Joan Toast. Not until he is faced with death at the hands of Indians and runaway slaves is he able to throw off his depression, accept the burden of freedom, and shoulder his responsibilities. Much earlier in the novel, Burlingame had chastised Ebenezer for his bad faith, that is, for allowing others to make his choices for him:

> "Damn me," Burlingame cried, "if thou'rt not fleeing responsibility! . . . responsibility to thyself. . . . '[T]is no more than an excuse for dropping the reins of your own life. 'Sheart, 'tis a manlier matter to set your goal and swallow the consequences!" (30; pt. 1, ch. 4)

By the end of the novel, Ebenezer has learned to accept the "burden of responsibility" (691; pt. 3, ch. 18). As he allegorically advises John McEvoy, who is wallowing in the "'Slough of Obligation'" (580; pt. 3, ch. 9), the "'pathway'" to authentic existence is to "'lay [his] flesh-and-blood privates on the line,'" a course that is "'a very boulevard; at one end lies your Slough of False Integrity--to call it by its name on the Map of Truth--and at the other stands the storied Town . . . where Responsibility rears her golden towers . . .'" (582; pt. 3, ch. 9). Barth signals Ebenezer's new sense of reality by repeating the allusion to Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. Weary by now of his innocence and wary of his exalted claims for it, he declares sadly: "'Innocence is like youth . . .

which is given us only to expend and takes its very meaning from its loss'" (608; pt. 3, ch. 11). When John McEvoy and Mary Mungommery draw opposed conclusions from that observation, Ebenezer replies: "'Tis beyond me what it proves . . . . I know only that the case is so'" (608). Learning that experience is inevitable and that freedom entails responsibility puts an end to his idealistic quixotism.

(iv)

Ebenezer learns his lessons about life, lessons that contradict Fielding's essentialist notion of character, in a plot that parodies eighteenth-century narrative convention. Underlying the Augustan conception of plot is the assumption that the realm of the actual, the lower world of human time and place, is intimately linked, vertically and hierarchically, with the realm of the truly real. The apparent chaos of the actual world governed by Fortune is subordinate to the ultimate order of Providence. This cosmology, in turn, is reflected in particular literary conventions. Although narrative devices common in eighteenth-century fiction, such as coincidences, discoveries and turns, and digressions, reflect the apparent contingency of the actual world, they are part of the work's larger structural pattern, just as Fortune is an aspect of Divine Providence (Miller, *Romance* 22). The unified, coherent plot of a novel is, ultimately, analogous to a unified, coherent cosmos.[16]

[16] See Martin C. Battestin's description of the Augustan "cast of mind," which "saw the moral drama of the individual life enacted within a frame of cosmic and social order . . . and whose view of art, conditioned by the principles of neo-Aristotelian aesthetics, saw the poem as fundamentally mimetic of this universal design" (10-11).

Fielding, like Barth, juxtaposed both old and new in creating his new species of writing. By integrating familiar epic-romance devices into a tightly organized plot, he rendered the new aspects of his novels--particular places and times, realistic characters, probable actions--more palatable. Barth, however, in parodying the same devices, does the opposite in *The Sot-Weed Factor*. He adopts traditional conventions self-consciously, rendering them unfamiliar by using them to embody modern content. He fills his novel with coincidence, for example, that salient feature of the eighteenth-century novel that has fallen into such disrepute with realist critics. To list just a few instances of this ubiquitous device: the Poseidon, the ship carrying Ebenezer and Bertrand to the new world, is attacked by pirates just in time to save Ebenezer from being sodomized by the ship's crew; Joan Toast is aboard the Cyprian, a ship full of whores, which the pirate ship then attacks; in the guise of Susan Warren, she is also one of the first people Ebenezer meets in Maryland; the French women whom Burlingame saves from pirates and whom Ebenezer and McEvoy meet after their release from Bloodsworth Island are Henrietta and Roxanne Russecks, the daughter and former mistress respectively of Andrew Cooke, Ebenezer's father; Drepacca, the African king whom Ebenezer releases and aids upon finding him bound and washed up on Maryland's shore, and who was a prisoner on the same ship as John McEvoy, later leads the group of runaway slaves that imprisons both Ebenezer and McEvoy; Long Ben Avery, the pirate who forces Ebenezer, Bertrand, and McEvoy to jump overboard, turns out to be Benjamin Long, Roxanne's long-lost lover.

By parodically exaggerating the device, Barth foregrounds it, a strategy that contrasts with Fielding's technique. Because Fielding eschewed the marvellous, his coincidences did not disrupt the verisimilar

surface of his text for an eighteenth-century audience. On the contrary, *Tom Jones* was criticized for being too close to life.[17] Barth's novel, on the other hand, farcically multiplies instances of the device so that a modern audience, already demanding of probability, cannot miss his parodic intent. In Fielding's novels, coincidences are but an aspect of an ordered cosmos in which there is no such thing as chance. As Pope succinctly puts the neo-classical view in *An Essay on Man* (50):

> All Nature is but Art, unknown to thee;
> All Chance, Direction, which thou canst not see;
> All Discord, Harmony, not understood;
> All partial Evil, universal Good. (1.289-92)

In *The Sot-Weed Factor*, Barth's ironic use of the convention inverts its significance. Chance, in Barth's novel, points to the contingency of an absurd universe rather than to Providential design.

From romance and comic romance, Barth picks up a second presentational device: digressions. These include oral recountings of the recent adventures or even life histories of many of the characters, written documents such as John Smith's "Secrete Historie" or Henry Burlingame I's "Privie Journall," and a fully-developed interpolated tale of the sort found in *Don Quixote*, *Joseph Andrews*, and *Tom Jones*. Indeed, characters in *The Sot-Weed Factor* seem unable to meet without telling each other stories. Barth uses this device to dramatize humanity's need for story to enliven and make sense of its experience. As one of the characters, Harvey Russecks, says, "a well-spun tale" (588) is life's greatest

[17] See, for example, Lady Luxborough to William Shenstone, 23 Mar. 1749: "I think [Fielding] produces personages but too like those one meets with in the world" (qtd. in Blanchard 70).

pleasure, and its tangled plot is no "more knotful or bewildered than the skein o' life, that a good tale tangles the better to unsnarl" (589; pt. 3, ch. 10). According to Harvey, the truth of life is revealed in the lies of stories: "[A] tale well wrought is the gossip o' the gods, that see the heart and point o' life on earth; the web o' the world; the Warp and the Woof . . . I'Christ, I do love a story, sirs!" (589).

Most of the information the reader gathers in *The Sot-Weed Factor* comes not from the omniscient narrator but from the stories, whether written or oral, told by the characters to one another. One receives, thereby, several competing versions of events, delivered from many different points of view. Barth's narrative method, which suggests that "reality" is fictive, is a metaphor for his pluralist epistemology. As Charles Harris writes, "[t]he implicit analogy between the 'world' of Barth's novel and the world we occupy suggests that the reader, like Eben and Henry, is also adrift among versions or fictions, some of his own making, some the constructions of others" (*Virtuosity* 66).

The novel's one formal interpolated story, a comic apologue like "The History of Two Friends" in *Joseph Andrews*, is told by Henrietta Russecks. In spite of Ebenezer's frequent intrusions, which resemble Abraham Adams's interruptions of "The History of Leonora," Henrietta manages to recount the story of her grandfather Cecile Edouard's attempts to build a house that would be completely invulnerable to Indian attacks. Every time Cecile thinks the work is completed, his valet, Jacques, points out defects in the design. Increasingly frustrated, Cecile throws Jacques out of an upstairs window, thereby bringing the tale to a close. The formal requirements of the story are satisfied with a portrayal of Cecile sleeping soundly. Ironically, however, the subsequent "history,"

reversing the tale's apparent outcome, reports the burning of the house and its occupants from the inside out. Attempting to create a safe haven from the world, Cecile had built a trap. Thematically, the tale illuminates Ebenezer's story--his refusal of experience, which is an attempt to keep the world out, meets with as little success as Cecile's attempt. Formally, the tale mirrors the novel that contains it in that the epilogues of both unravel the threads their endings tie up.

The "discovery," which reveals true identity, often by means of a distinguishing mark or token, is another device that Barth chooses to parody. Discoveries in comedy result in "turns" in the plot, sudden reversals that lead to a happy ending. In Fielding's novels, for example, foundlings turn out to be gentlemen--Mrs. Waters' and Mr. Dowling's testimony reveal Tom to be Mr. Allworthy's nephew, and Joseph Andrews' strawberry birthmark identifies him as Mr. Wilson's son[18]--enabling them to assume their proper stations in society after their marriages, their raised status rationalized by their genteel blood.[19] In Barth's parodic version, in contrast, Burlingame's farcical distinguishing mark, a congenitally dwarfed penis, proves him to be the son of the Tayac Chicamec of the Ahatchwhoop tribe. Far from confirming his place in society, the

[18] Barth told John Enck that one of the things he likes about *Tom Jones* is that "you can't meet anybody on the road who doesn't turn out to be your father" (7).

[19] See William Park, "New," on the "uneasy compromise between . . . individuality and fixed authority" in the eighteenth-century novel:

> [A]lthough the chief actors pay homage to a rigid social world, they in practice convey an extraordinary sense of social mobility, rising from the lowest circumstances (or behavior) into affluence and prosperity, all this of course disguised as a return rather than a rise. (121)

discovery of his birth places Henry outside the pale of civilization completely. Ironically, he turns out to be not a nobleman but a noble savage. In a travesty of the fortunate conclusion, his proposed marriage to Anna Cooke, Ebenezer's sister, never takes place, and he is never heard from again after he returns to the Ahatchwoops.

The recurrent theme of averted or even actual incest is another feature of both romance and comedy that Barth employs. In *Tom Jones*, mock-incest leads to Tom's moral reassessment, the apparent incest of his dalliance with Mrs. Waters providing the shock that propels him into maturity. Because Tom's is a comic world, however, his "tragic" response, while serving a serious function, is represented in comic or mocking terms. In *Joseph Andrews*, the marriage between Joseph and Fanny is momentarily blocked by the suspicion that they are brother and sister. The comic suspense generated is relieved when the plot takes another turn. The pedlar tells his story, and Mr. Wilson claims his son.

In *The Sot-Weed Factor*, the Tom Jones-Mrs. Waters episode is echoed within a parodic reworking of Chaucer's "Reeve's Tale." Ebenezer and John McEvoy, like Chaucer's two Cambridge students, meet a miller, Harry Russecks, who cheats and bullies his customers, whose wife is descended from nobility, and whose daughter sleeps in the same room with her parents. McEvoy, reversing the procedure in the "Reeve's Tale," releases Mary Mungommery's horse so that he and Ebenezer will be alone with Henrietta and Roxanne Russecks while Harry is off searching for the horse. In this tale, the women are willing accomplices in the seduction plot. In the "Reeve's Tale," the husband, accidentally hit over the head by his wife, cries out as he goes down "Harrow! I dye!" In Barth's version, Roxanne deliberately turns on the millstones causing the miller to fall

and fatally strike his head. Following this episode, Ebenezer comments: "'What a shameless, marvelous dramatist is Life, that daily plots coincidences e'en Chaucer would not dare, and ventures complications too knotty for Boccacce!'" (638; pt. 3, ch. 14).

Furthermore, just as Fanny Goodwill turns out to be Pamela Andrews' sister and Joseph Andrews to be Mr. Wilson's son, so Ebenezer and Anna find themselves to be half-siblings to Henrietta Russecks, whose mother was not only the twins' wetnurse but also Andrew Cooke's mistress. In contrast to Tom, Ebenezer's persistent, if no longer enthusiastic, adherence to his virginity enables him to resist the advances of Roxanne.

Barth's subversion of eighteenth-century narrative convention extends as well to larger plot structures. He parodies the classic pattern of departure, initiation, and return, derived from epic and romance, which underlies the action of much eighteenth-century fiction, including *Tom Jones* (Miller, *Romance* 25). The eighteenth-century version of this structural pattern generally involves departure from a country house, adventures on the open road, descent into the city, arrest or confinement, release, marriage, and restoration to the country (Park, "New" 120). The particular shape given it by Fielding consists of Tom's birth and youth in Paradise Hall; his expulsion after Thwackum and Square falsely report to Mr. Allworthy his drunkenness and pastoral encounter with Molly Seagrim; his wanderings, like those of a knight errant, to Upton Inn and thence to London; his imprisonment for allegedly murdering Fitzpatrick; his release upon Fitzpatrick's recovery; his restoration to his estate upon disclosure of his true parentage and Blifil's treachery; and his attainment of wisdom signalled by marriage to Sophia.

Barth adopts, but farcically extends, the same pattern, recounting his hero's "childhood, his adventures, and his ultimate demise" (4; pt. 1, ch. 1) in extensive, often improbable, detail. *The Sot-Weed Factor* begins, after a two-page introduction, with an account of Ebenezer's birth and youth, with Burlingame as his tutor, on an estate in Middlesex; his failure at, and flight from, Cambridge University; his sojourn among the "fops and fools" (3; pt. 1, ch. 1) of London; his expulsion to Maryland when McEvoy falsely informs his father that he is "drinking, whoring, and writing doggerel" (62; pt. 1, ch. 8); his misadventures among the corrupt justices, avaricious merchants, thieves, conspirators, and prostitutes of the new world; his imprisonment by rebellious Indians and slaves; his release to procure Burlingame, the chief's son; his restoration to his estate upon his realization that innocence leads to injustice; and his acceptance of responsibility signalled by consummation of his marriage to Joan Toast.

Barth's parodic imitation, however, despite its surface similarities to Fielding's novel, subverts by means of hyperbole the form it imitates, shattering its implicit cosmological order. "What marvelous plot, then, was afoot?" (269; pt. 2, ch. 16), thinks Ebenezer, a query the reader, confronted with an overblown impersonation of an eighteenth-century plot, could well echo. *The Sot-Weed Factor* is a tale of marvels, chock-a-block with intrigues, conspiracies, and political plots the "tangled skein" (62; pt. 1, ch. 8) of which is virtually impossible for Ebenezer and the reader to unravel. In the end, no one knows for certain what has happened. By overcomplicating the plot and refusing to resolve its conflicts, Barth both parodies the idea of human life as part of a

divine plan and mocks the idea of order that eighteenth-century plots embody.

The exaggerated complexity of Barth's plot is mirrored within the fiction by incessant plotting on the part of the characters, resulting in what could be termed epistemological burlesque. Both fact and fiction are dissolved into mere plotting, calling into question the grounds for distinguishing truth from error. The relative "merits," as Ebenezer would put it, or "interest," as would Burlingame, of the claims and counter-claims to proprietorship of Maryland put forth by Lord Baltimore, John Coode, Francis Nicholson, William Penn, and the rest of a large and colourful cast of historical actors all appear equally plausible. Much depends on who tells the tale, which is precisely Barth's point. Discrediting the received versions of Maryland's history, he postulates a number of conflicting versions based on "Secrete Histories" and "Privie Journalls." By emphasizing their narrative aspect and their lack of verifiability, and by revealing their writers' ulterior motives, Barth represents the materials of history as the stuff of fiction. There are, it seems, only competing, unverifiable versions of the truth. One is left with a radical scepticism about man's ability to interpret and, hence, to render the world. As the baffled Ebenezer concludes, "'I know of naught immutable and sure'" (128), to which Henry replies, "'Tis the first step on the road to Heaven'" (128; pt. 2, ch. 3).

The narrator of the novel shares Henry's scepticism. Whereas Fielding's dramatized narrator in *Tom Jones* manifests the traditional metaphor of the writer as a type of deity creating a world, Barth avoids the analogy by employing undramatized narration. Fielding's garrulous narrator, who almost becomes a character in his own right, frequently

addresses his "Fellow-Traveller," the "Reader" (913; bk. 18, ch. 1), discussing literary theory with him, guiding him, manoeuvring him into seeing things his, the narrator's, way. The narrator of *The Sot-Weed Factor*, in contrast, refrains from overt intrusion. Not until the epilogue does he, in the role of "Author" (743), address the "Reader" (744) directly. Parodying Fielding's farewell in *Tom Jones*, Barth calls into question the veracity of literary representation. Because *The Sot-Weed Factor*, like its predecessors, is a "history," the narrator pauses to consider "the rival claims of Fact and Fancy" (743; pt. 4). The implied reader is transformed from a fellow-traveller to a juror who sits in judgement upon the "Author" for having played "fast and loose with Clio" (743), the muse of history. The author's defence is that we all invent our pasts and that "Clio was already a scarred and crafty trollop" (743) when he found her. Nonetheless, if, despite all, "he is convicted at the Public Bar of having forced what slender virtue the strumpet may make claim to" (743), then he is quite prepared to join "with pleasure . . . his fellow fornicators, whose ranks include the noblest in poetry, prose, and politics" (743). Like the implied author of *Tom Jones*, who claims the right to make up the game's rules as he goes along, Barth's implied author knows that he may "override with fair impunity" (743) the distinction between "meager fact and solid fancy" (743; pt. 4). Far from inspiring confidence in his ability to depict life truthfully, he rejects that possibility, whether in art or in history.

Barth concludes his inversion of the implications of well-ordered plots by parodying the convention of closure. Like "The Tale of the Enchanted Castle," the epilogue sacrifices formal unity supposedly to satisfy the reader's curiosity. The "story" is told, but the "history"

continues. The closed plot opens up again, but what follows is not the traditional revelation of the protagonist's happiness after harmony has been restored. *Tom Jones*, which also portrays the future fates of the characters, presents a perfectly reformed Tom and the lovely and virtuous Sophia as master and mistress of the Western estate and Mr. Allworthy as doting great uncle. Even the treacherous Blifil has had a decent annual income bestowed upon him, thanks to the intervention of this fond couple, who cannot "be imagined more happy" (981; bk. 18, ch. 18).

The Sot-Weed Factor's ending, in contrast, lacks the pastoral vision with which *Tom Jones* concludes. Anna and Ebenezer pass their lives together raising Anna's and Henry's son, but they cannot be imagined happy. The "chagrined and wisened" (753; pt. 4) Ebenezer abandons poetry for almost the rest of his life, refusing even to acknowledge the fame he ironically gains as author of the satiric poem *The Sot-Weed Factor*. Neither Joan Toast nor her daughter survives a breech-birth. Burlingame returns to Bloodsworth Island and is never seen again unless, as Ebenezer believes, he spends the rest of his days impersonating Nicholas Lowe. Roxanne and Henrietta Russecks and John McEvoy are lost at sea. The truth behind the machinations and schemes of those shadowy but powerful figures, Lord Baltimore and John Coode, is never brought to light. The sense of order and certainty implied in the traditional happy ending is, thus, negated. Having tied up the threads of the plot, Barth unties them again in his epilogue, leaving the reader with a sense of disillusionment and disorder.

Parodic exaggeration, then, enables Barth to embody a modern philosophy in a traditional form. By multiplying his and his characters' plots until they are reduced to absurdity, he discredits the cosmology suggested

by the form he uses. The farcical complications of his highly-structured plot, as well as its foregrounded devices, parodic dénouement, and existential theme, subvert the reader's expectations and undercut the idea of order implied by Fielding's plots. Instead of an ordered world under the aegis of Providence, *The Sot-Weed Factor* embodies a world without order. In its contingent world, there is no ultimate order, no master narrative, that enables one to decide among the competing plots.

(v)

At the heart of *The Sot-Weed Factor*, beneath its stylistic pastiche, its parodies, its bawdy burlesque, and its "cheerful nihilism,"[20] is a serious concern with the contemporary novel's relationship to literary tradition. Ebenezer articulates this theme while trying to persuade Billy Rumbly, Burlingame's brother, to help save the colony from massacre:

> "But 'tis not the English case I plead: 'tis the case of humankind, of Civilization *versus* the Abyss of salvagery. Only think, sir: what you've acquired in less than a fortnight wanted two thousand years and more a-building; 'tis a most sweet liquor is't not? . . . I grant the English have used you ill, but to drive them out is to drive yourself back into darkness; 'tis to throw out the baby with the bath water!"[21] (662; pt. 3, ch. 16)

That one can apply Ebenezer's words to the situation of today's novelists is confirmed by Barth himself. In "The Literature of Exhaustion,"

[20] Joe Morgan, in *The End of the Road*, uses the phrase to distinguish between American pragmatism and French existentialism: "'where the hell else but in America could you have a cheerful nihilism, for God's sake?'" (44; ch. 4).

[21] In the revised edition, Barth removed the cliché. I have retained it for purposes of comparison.

discussing the exhaustion of literary devices and forms over time, he applauds Borges's "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*" because it is "a remarkable and original work of literature, the implicit theme of which is the difficulty, perhaps the unnecessity, of writing original works of literature" (31). Its "artistic victory" is that it "confronts an intellectual dead end and employs it against itself to accomplish new human works" (31). Revising the cliché slightly, he adds that "it's a matter of every moment throwing out the bath water without for a moment losing the baby" (32).

This is, of course, what Barth does in *The Sot-Weed Factor*. At a time when the idea of literary representation was becoming increasingly problematic, he made the question of "illusion" and "reality" a central theme in his metafiction. Like all metafictions, *The Sot-Weed Factor* contains a fundamental paradox: it constructs an illusion yet simultaneously lays it bare (Waugh 6). Ringing new changes on an old form, Barth uses, yet criticizes, the realistic conventions of the eighteenth-century novel. Exploiting the tension between contemporary theme and archaic genre, he turns the history of the novel against itself. As he told Joe David Bellamy,

> *The Sot-Weed Factor* was composed . . . with certain things in mind about the history of the novel. . . . By the time I began to compose *The Sot-Weed Factor* . . . I was more acquainted with the history of literature than I'd been when I began to write fiction. And so I began to untie my hands; I presumptuously felt them tied by the history of the genre. (6)

With one foot in the past and one foot in the present, he creates his own "new species of writing," a new, old novel.

The metafictional aspects of his models are probably what most attracted Barth to them. *Don Quixote*, *Joseph Andrews*, and *Tom Jones* were written at a time when the border between story and history, lies and truth, fiction and reality, was still quite fluid.[22] Their evident artificiality, in contrast to nineteenth-century realist novels, provides an appropriate vehicle for an epistemological attack upon the grounds for distinguishing truth from error. Accordingly, *The Sot-Weed Factor* contains several borders, physical, ontological, and aesthetic. Its characters not only live in a border state, Maryland, but also exist on an ontological border. Because they lack any sense of stable identity, their existence is a matter of role-playing. In addition, their incessant plotting draws the reader's attention to the border between fiction and reality. The novel draws no clear distinction between the two, a fact that is reinforced by making the "hero" a poet and dramatizing the problems of creation, of embodying the world in words.

Ebenezer's attempt, like Quixote's, to construct a world based on illusion is a metaphor for the strategy of the novel as well as for Barth's perception of how we all construct our worlds. Describing his quest in chivalric terms, Ebenezer states: "'When erst I entered the lists of Life . . . Virginity was a silken standard that I waved, all bright and newly stitched'" (629). Debating what moral to draw from his story, he wonders: "'is't that what the world lacks we must ourselves supply?'" (629; pt. 3, ch. 13). Barth's point is that in the absence of

[22] Bruce W. Wardropper, for example, sees "awareness of the ill-defined frontier between history and story" as distinguishing the novel from the romance (5).

any absolute reality, the world's meaning is created by man. Ebenezer's error consists in refusing to accept this state of affairs.

Nevertheless, just as Quixote, though mad, comes to appear noble next to those who torment him, Ebenezer's quixotism is not all wrong. As he says:

> "My brave assault on Maryland--this knight-errantry of Innocence and Art--sure, I see now 'twas an edifice raised not e'en on sand, but on the black and vasty zephyrs of the Pit. Wherefore a voice in me cries, 'Down with't, then!' while another stands in awe before the enterprise; sees in the vanity of't all nobleness allowed to fallen men." (629; pt. 3, ch. 13)

Absurdity makes Quixotes of us all: "'[B]lind Nature has neither codes nor causes'" (685), but, nevertheless, "'if aught in life hath value to us, we must not give o'er its pursuit'" (686; pt. 3, ch. 18). We are all responsible for creating our own values. As Burlingame points out, "'from the aspect of eternity and the boundless heavens,'" human life has no meaning, but from "'down here where we live,'" its problems are "'mountainous enough'" (611; pt. 3, ch. 12). There is "'something brave, defiantly human,'" even "'godlike,'" in perishing "'for some dream of Value'" (685). Objectively, such behaviour is insane; subjectively, it is divine:

> "To die, to risk death, even to raise a finger for any Cause, was to pennon one's lance with the riband of Purpose, so the poet judged, and had about it the same high lunacy of a tilt with Manchegan windmills." (685; pt. 3, ch. 18)

Thus, Barth transforms Quixote into an existentialist, a "committed" madman who understands the necessity of illusion, of bestowing value on a meaningless universe. Barth's point is both metaphysical and

metafictional. Lacking a system of absolute values, man must accept responsibility for his own relative values, even if the attempt is absurd. And just as one can order one's life while remaining fully aware of the world's ultimate meaninglessness, so the novelist can order his/her fiction while remaining fully aware of the absurd nature of creation. One acts and, hence, invests one's life with meaning, knowing that one is playing a role; one writes and, hence, invests one's work with meaning, knowing that one cannot fully capture reality in words. As an imitation of an imitation, that is, a mock comic romance, *The Sot-Weed Factor* formally acknowledges this truth, pointing to both the artificiality and the necessity of fiction.

For John Barth, the representational techniques of the realist novel reflect philosophical assumptions that no longer obtain in the modern world, in our present construction of "reality." Nonetheless, they still have an aesthetic validity that he, as an artist who values narrative, cannot ignore. For this reason, he is unwilling to accept "the modernist notion that plot is an anachronistic element in contemporary fiction" (Bellamy 7). As a "technically-up-to-date artist" ("Exhaustion" 30), however, he is left with the particular problem of how to write a post-modernist plot and still evoke the "aesthetic pleasure[s] of complexity, of complication and unravelment, suspense, and the rest" (Bellamy 7). His solution in *The Sot-Weed Factor* is to work in a parodic mode. If to write novels in our present age is a "quixotic" endeavour, as Barth clearly believes, his method is doubly quixotic, for he returns to the novel's roots, to *Don Quixote* and its English imitations, as a way out of the impasse. His mock eighteenth-century novel embodies a double-edged strategy. He writes both an eighteenth-century novel with a certain set

of assumptions and a postmodernist novel with a set of counter assumptions. Using realist conventions, he also debunks them; exposing earlier representational devices as tied to a particular time and place, he continues to employ them. Dismantling the representational practices of the realist novel, Barth nonetheless participates in them, thereby establishing a precariously postmodernist equilibrium.

Chapter Three: A Harlot's Progress

(i)

In 1978, Erica Jong wrote an introduction to the Erotic Art Book Society's edition of John Cleland's notorious novel, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, in which she praises the "energy and wit of the writing, the delightful cheerfulness of the heroine, the sheer healthiness and bounciness of its approach to physical love" (7). Viewing its brothel as "a microcosm of mid-18th century London life" and "as fit a setting for a literary work as Newgate Prison, a country estate in Somersetshire, or a sailing ship bound for America" (7), she sees it as "a rather representative novel of its period" (6).

Her favourable assessment of the *Memoirs* is not shared by two of Cleland's contemporaries, one real, one fictional. The first of these, James Boswell, in his journal entry for 31 March 1772, refers to the *Memoirs* as a "most licentious and inflaming book" (*Defence* 84). The other, Fanny Hackabout-Jones, the heroine of *Fanny*, Jong's eighteenth-century parody, calls it a "loathsome Book" (493; Epilogue), but she has personal reasons for disliking it. As the model for Cleland's "simp'ring Strumpet" (227; bk. 2, ch. 7), she bridles at the book's lies. "[N]ot one Whit of his 'Memoirs' is true," she says, "save the Christian Name of the Heroine, the bare Fact of her having been driven to a Life of Whoredom for a Time, and certain Features (tho' scarcely all) of the physical Description of his 'Fanny'" (176; bk. 2, ch. 2). Furthermore, she adds, in

addition to changing the colour of her hair from red to auburn and the colour of her eyes from brown to black, adding a cleft or pit to her chin, and inventing a man named Charles with whom she is supposedly in love, Cleland suppresses "[a]ll the most Curious and Compelling Facts of [her] Life" and makes her out to be "a perfect Ninny" (176; bk. 2, ch. 2). Worst of all, he gives a false impression of the harlot's life, portraying it as an idyllic "Bed of Roses" (227; bk. 2, ch. 7). In Fanny's opinion, "the sugar'd Tale of cloying Fanny Hill" (232; bk. 2, ch. 7), is as remote from reality as "the sugar'd Tale of virtuous Pamela is far from the Truth of Serving Maid and Master" (232; bk. 2, ch. 7).

Embarrassed, yet spurred on, by the publication of *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, Fanny writes her own memoirs to dispel the "dark and dingy Veil of Falsehood" (232; bk. 2, ch. 7) cast by Cleland over her life. This work, the "True and Compleat History of [her] Life and Adventures" (232; bk. 2, ch. 7) is no mere whore biography, however. Rather, in the manner of Richardson and Fielding, it is one of those new "Histories in which English Scenes and Characters of Low Estate [march] thro' the Pages of a Book in lieu of Lords and Ladies in Exotick Lands" (494; Epilogue). Indeed, she claims, her "*authentick* History" is more than a match for any "*fancied* History," for not only is it "as stirring as Fanny Hill's, or Pamela's, or e'en that of Tom Jones" (495; Epilogue), it is also true.

This is not to say, however, that *Fanny* does not owe a debt to Cleland's *Memoirs*. The two share many of the motifs of what William Park calls "the nightmare version" of the eighteenth-century model of the myth of wandering and return ("New" 120). Like Moll Hackabout in Hogarth's *A Harlot's Progress*, both Fanny Hill and Fanny Hackabout-Jones are

provincial innocents who come to London to seek their fortunes, both are tricked into entering a brothel by a well-dressed middle-aged woman, both become adept at selling a mock-maidenhead, both take part in aristocratic orgies, both become kept mistresses of wealthy men, and both flee the wicked city for an estate in the country.

The similarities are superficial, however. As Peter Michelson points out, Cleland's novel "parodies the techniques of the eighteenth-century novel," turning "a standard eighteenth-century plot into a paradise of erotic fantasy" (18). *Fanny*, on the other hand, does not focus like the *Memoirs* on description of sexual acts. Instead, it incorporates a broader range of motifs and events from the mainstream eighteenth-century novel. In addition, its eroticism is not an end in itself but, rather, part of a rhetorical pattern constructed to expose the sexual double standard of eighteenth-century society and the eighteenth-century novel. Cleland's novel, then, is a mere point of departure for Jong.

(ii)

Like John Barth, Erica Jong uses an eighteenth-century setting and the conventions of the eighteenth-century novel to embody a twentieth-century sensibility. Unlike Barth, however, she is interested less in the ontological status of literary representation than in the wider issue of social representation, in particular the representation of gender. Dissatisfied with the dominant representations of female sexuality in what is essentially a male literary tradition, she turns to the eighteenth-century novel in a much more tendentious spirit than does Barth. For Jong, the history of the novel duplicates a history of female oppression, which she attempts to uncover and overturn in *Fanny*. She is concerned both to

reveal how the conventions of the eighteenth-century novel (and, by implication, today's novel) represent women against the background of a masculine ideal that attributes to women a marginal status, and to construct a female identity that counters the male norm. Jong's is a feminist critique of representation, that is, a critique of patriarchy.

Like Fielding, Jong incorporates into her novel a panoramic view of eighteenth-century society and its literature. In it, one finds country houses, aristocratic rakes, country fairs, rope dancers, mountebanks, witches, roadside inns, buxom serving maids, highwaymen, venal lawyers, the squalor of London, whorehouses, Newgate Prison, Medmenham monks, masquerades, wetnurses, swaddled babies, sailing ships, deists, slavers, and pirates. In this extraordinarily violent world, particularly with respect to relations between the sexes, there is incest, rape, perversion, robbery, prostitution, torture, and murder. There are fictional characters, and there are real, historical characters: Annie Bonny, the pirate queen; William Smellie, the male midwife; Theophilus Cibber; William Hogarth; Jonathan Swift; Alexander Pope; and John Cleland himself. There is as well a large body of quotations, both marked and unmarked, taken primarily from eighteenth-century literature.

Jong's protagonist, Fanny Hackabout-Jones, is no ordinary eighteenth-century heroine. Highly critical of her society, with its ideology of female subservience and its sexist institutions, as well as of its literature, which incorporates and disseminates the prevailing myths about women, she brings a twentieth-century feminist perspective to a mock eighteenth-century novel. Fanny's adventures, which chronicle the stages of her "progress" from innocence to experience, from naive seventeen-year-old to independent woman and artist, are intended to explode the

essentialist definition of an irrational female nature still prevalent in the eighteenth century and to criticize the subordinate role allotted to women. Fanny, and the reader, learn to reject the character traits traditionally associated with women--helplessness, silliness, compliance, self-sacrifice, altruism, modesty, weakness, and, above all, chastity (Rogers, *Feminism* ch. 1). Whereas women were assumed in the eighteenth century, even by feminist writers, to be created for others (Rogers, *Feminism* 37), Fanny, and by implication her author, advocates independence and claims equal rights with men--social, economic, and sexual. In her opinion, "[n]either Sex must have Dominion o'er the other" (102; bk. 1, ch. 13).

Fanny's views, given the eighteenth-century setting, are revolutionary. As Katharine M. Rogers points out, "eighteenth-century Englishwomen lived in a traditional patriarchal society, male-centered and male-dominated" (7).[1] The social institutions of the time, which oppressed women culturally, economically, and legally, kept them almost entirely dependent on men. Marriage, for instance, although it conferred respectability, granted women no rights. Legally, a husband and wife were considered one person, which in practice meant that a wife's wealth and property were entirely at her husband's disposal. A woman who chose her husband unwisely or, more likely, who had an unsuitable mate chosen for her could lose her entire "fortune" without any legal recourse. As Fanny puts it, "[a] Woman with a fine Dowery can fall into the Hands of a Rogue who will not e'en allow her Pin-Money, and will gamble away her Widow's

[1] I am indebted to Professor Rogers for much of what follows concerning the situation of women in eighteenth-century England.

Jointure and leave her nothing but Play-Debts and hungry Mouths to feed" (21; bk. 1, ch. 2).[2]

The sexual double standard that Fanny laments was pervasive throughout the fabric of eighteenth-century society. Chastity was considered the supreme virtue, but only for women. Neither promiscuity nor adultery carried the stigma for men that it entailed for women. Not only were wives expected to overlook their husbands' infidelity, but legally they also had no right to divorce them. Divorce was granted, by an act of Parliament, only to men who could prove themselves cuckolds. Even separation, regardless of the circumstances, inevitably brought disgrace upon the woman.

Unmarried women faced their own set of difficulties. Disadvantaged in the first place because of their inferior educations, middle- and upper-class women found few professions open to them.[3] Not only were most occupations considered unsuitable for women, but there was also a strong prejudice against women competing with men for jobs. Writing was one of the few professions available to them, which helps account for the disproportionate number of women novelists in the eighteenth century. Even here, though, the double standard prevailed. Critics, as patronizing

[2] See Rogers, *Feminism*: "a wife could not sue or make a contract or, more important, control any of the family property: anything she had, inherited, or earned could be spent or wasted as her husband chose" (7-8).

[3] See Richard Steele, *The Spectator*, 342, 2 Apr. 1712: "All she has to do in this World, is contained within the Duties of a Daughter, a Sister, a Wife, and a Mother" (Bond 3: 272). See also Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, 81, 2 June 1711: "Female Virtues are of a Domestick turn. The Family is the proper Province for Private Women to Shine in" (Bond 1: 349).

toward women writers as Dr. Johnson toward women preachers,[4] did not take literary works written by women as seriously as those written by men, a lesson Fanny learns for herself.

According to the mature Fanny, the putative author of her memoirs, literature helps perpetuate the myth of female dependence. At one point in the novel, referring to sexual stereotypes, she is surprised by "the Pow'r of these Foolish Conventions" (102; bk. 1, ch. 13). She could just as well be describing novelistic convention, for literature, in her opinion, only reinforces traditional representations of women. She laments that "the Members of the Female Sex search in vain for Great Women on whom to model their perilous Destinies" (18; bk. 1, ch. 1). Just as patriarchal society views women "either as Bluestockings or unlearnt Painted Whores;[5] either as Trollops or as Spinsters; as Wives or Wantons; as Good Widows or Bad Witches" (176; bk. 2, ch. 2), so literature portrays them as abstractions. The female protagonists of "contemporary Novels and Romances" (18) are either "the Embodiment of Virtue or the Embodiment of Vice" (18), even in the work of the best male novelists:

> Neither Pamela Andrews, with her incessant Scribbling of her "Vartue," nor tiresome Clarissa Harlowe, with her insuff'rable Weeping and Letter-writing, nor yet the gentle Sophia Western of whom Mr. Fielding so prettily writes, nor the wicked Moll Flanders of whom Mr. Defoe so vigorously writes, shines out as an Example upon which a Flesh-and-Blood Female can model her Life. (18; bk. 1, ch. 1)

[4] "'Sir, a woman's preaching is like a dog's walking on its hinder legs. It is not done well; but you are surprized to find it done at all'" (qtd. in Boswell, *Life* 1: 463).

[5] The term "bluestocking," applied deprecatingly to the women who frequented Mrs. Montagu's literary assemblies, was not used in this sense until the late 1750s. The putative publishing date of Fanny's memoirs is 1751.

Intending "to show the Falsity of these Embodiments" (18), Fanny addresses her memoirs to her daughter Belinda, who will, she hopes, be better prepared for life "arm'd with the Lessons" (453; bk. 3, ch. 14) her mother has learned.

By creating a character who rejects the models that her society and its literature provide for her, Jong both criticizes the culturally dominant representations of women and offers an alternative. Her heroine, in attempting to create a self in opposition to the traditional roles allotted to women, finds herself increasingly marginalized, pushed outside society's conventional structures. This device, the observing of society from a perspective outside of it, enables Jong, like John Gay in *The Beggar's Opera*, to invert the orthodox view of society. And because *Fanny* is a memoir novel with a first-person point of view, the reader's perspective is similarly turned upside down. He/she enters a topsy-turvy world in which traditional values are exposed as corrupt, and revolutionary new values are embraced, a world in which thieves and whores are found to be honest, gentlemen and ladies to be dishonest. By this means, the inequities of the system are foregrounded or laid bare.

In effect, Jong portrays eighteenth-century England not as the best of all possible worlds, as some of its philosophers believed, but, rather, as the worst of all possible worlds, if one happened to be a woman. According to Isobel White, one of the witches that Fanny meets, Shaftesbury's optimistic philosophy merely rationalizes the patriarchal structure of society and denies women their rightful place: "'They speak of Reason and Enlightenment, of Nature's Mighty Plan in this Best of all

Possible Worlds, but for Women this Age of supposèd Enlightenment is dark as Darkest Night'" (317; bk. 3, ch. 3).[6]

This fundamental opposition between the sexes occurs throughout the novel. On the one side, Jong places reason, enlightenment, and cruelty; on the other, instinct, spirituality, and nurturing. Men, on the one hand, concerned with power, are the bringers of death, symbolized by images of "[t]he Cross, the Hanging Tree, the Bars of Prisons" (318; bk. 3, ch. 3). Women, on the other hand, are "the Bringers and Givers of Life" (317; bk. 3, ch. 3), symbolized by the circle. As Fanny puts it, "Women are truly blest in this Capacity of Child-bearing" (304; bk. 3, ch. 2) because in giving birth, women have access to a divinity within, which men are denied. Thus, *Fanny* inverts the status quo. The powers traditionally associated with men are revealed to be undesirable and the subordination of women to be not only unfair but also life-denying.

The progress, or quest for identity, that Jong's heroine undergoes, then, must be seen in relation to the social and literary representations of women in the eighteenth-century. By borrowing an eighteenth-century heroine and imitating eighteenth-century form, Jong contrasts Fanny Hackabout-Jones's behaviour and thought with the reader's conventional expectations regarding the actions and ideas of eighteenth-century heroines. She puts a sexually forthright female protagonist--an Isadora Wing in eighteenth-century garb--through the kinds of adventures usually

[6]Rogers, however, claims that "late seventeenth-century rationalism undermined some of the conventions restricting women by subjecting them to the test of reason" (2). According to Rogers, "the rationalists challenged the assumption that women should aim for a distinctively feminine, nonrational ideal" and "helped people see through the sentimental falsifications which . . . tended to obscure exploitation and oppression under the guise of 'love'" (2).

reserved for males in order to expose the hypocrisy of eighteenth-century (and, by inference, twentieth-century) society and to invert the sexual stereotypes inherent in eighteenth-century (and, by inference, twentieth-century) literature. By this technique of role reversal and thematic inversion, she creates in *Fanny* an alternative version of the eighteenth-century novel.

(iii)

Fanny's memoirs begin conventionally enough. The first-person narrator, recalling past events, explains how and why the book came to be written, assures the reader that the work is authentic, and employs the typical memoir formula: "I WAS BORN in the Reign of Queen Anne" (20; bk. 2, ch. 2).[7] Her adventures conform to the typical eighteenth-century model of departure, initiation, and return, except that the protagonist is female rather than male, Fanny Hackabout-Jones rather than Tom Jones. Like Tom, Fanny is a foundling (and, hence, outside of society's usual constraints) left on the doorstep, and raised in the household, of the local squire. Seduced at the age of seventeen by her stepfather Lord Bellars, a notorious rake, she flees Lymeworth, Lord Bellars's estate in Wiltshire, for London. Along the way, she falls in with, and witnesses the massacre of, a coven of witches at Stonehenge and is captured by, and becomes a member of, a band of highwaymen. Eventually, alone and destitute in London, she finds employment in a brothel, becomes a kept mistress, and gives birth to a daughter, who is later kidnapped. Pursuing

[7] Cf. Daniel Defoe, *Roxana*: "I WAS BORN, *as my Friends told me*, at the City of POICTIERS" (5); and *Robinson Crusoe*: "I Was born in the Year 1632, in the City of *York*" (3).

the kidnapper to sea, she joins a band of pirates and recovers her child. Upon her return to England, she is discovered to be Lord Bellars's illegitimate daughter, just as Tom Jones is found to be Bridget Allworthy's illegitimate son. Inheriting the estate, she is restored to her country home and, hence, to prosperity and affluence.

The high-spirited but good-natured Tom Jones must learn prudence before he is fit to assume his rightful estate. The equally high-spirited Fanny Hackabout-Jones must learn self-reliance before she can claim hers.[8] Learning, first of all, like Belinda in *Rape of the Lock* (153; 1.115), to "[b]eware of all, but most beware of Man" (22; bk. 1, ch. 2), Fanny undergoes an unsentimental education that enables her to see through the received ideas--legal, philosophical, moral, and religious--that sustain the status quo. Overcoming the hostility that her society displays toward women who refuse to submit to convention, she progresses, both literally

[8] Cf. the heroine of Fanny Burney's *Evelina*, who, as Patricia Meyer Spacks demonstrates, defines herself negatively:

> Like Tom Jones, she must learn prudence. But prudence for her, as for Fanny Burney, constitutes mainly avoidance, and she too is perpetually, and increasingly, dominated by fear of wrongdoing. . . . Evelina chooses dependency and fear, a choice no less significant for being thrust upon her. It amounts to the declaration of the identity that achieves her social and economic security. The identity she cares about most is given her from without by husband and father. The problem in achieving her woman's identity differs from its male equivalent, from Tom Jones's search for his identity, for example. Her education in society teaches her not to relinquish but to use her innocence and her fears. The discovery of prudence enables her to form new dependency relations. (178-80)

It is precisely those qualities--ignorance, innocence, fearfulness, and irresponsibility--valued in Evelina, which Jong has her own heroine reject. Evelina's propriety gains her entry into society; Fanny's independence leads to the demi-monde.

and figuratively, from timid lady to daring pirate, gaining her independence in the process.

Fanny's feminist education begins at home. Her stepmother's blighted marriage teaches her at first hand the unfairness of the marriage laws. Married to a rake, the unhappy Lady Bellars languishes in the country, driven half-mad by her husband's neglect and philandering. From her plight, Fanny learns "to be wary of the Male Sex and to view ev'ry handsome Gallant and Man of Pleasure as a likely Robber of [her] Wits and [her] Peace of Mind" (22; bk. 1, ch. 2).

Forewarned is not necessarily forearmed, however, when one is only seventeen and innocent of the way of the world. In a scene borrowed from Fanny Hill's initiation into the mysteries of sex in the *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*,[9] she is assaulted by her step-father. Unlike Fanny Hill, who is "warm'd and surpriz'd" (10; vol. 1) by Phoebe Ayres's advances, Fanny Hackabout-Jones is shocked and confused by her step-father's audacity:

> In a trice, my Petticoats and Shift are thrown o'er my Head, muffling my Protestations of Shock and Alarm, and a strong,

[9] Cf. *Memoirs*:

> My breasts . . . two hard, firm, rising hillocs . . . employ'd and amused her hands a while, till slipping down lower, over a smooth track, she could just feel the soft silky down that had but a few months before put forth, and garnish'd the mount-pleasant of those parts, and promised to spread a grateful shelter over the sweet seat of the most exquisite sensation, and which had been, till that instant, the seat of the most insensible innocence. Her fingers play'd, and strove to twine in the young tendrils of that moss which nature has contrived at once for use and ornament. . . . [S]he now attempts the main-spot, and began to twitch, to insinuate, and at length to force an introduction of a finger into the quick itself . . . . [H]er lascivious touches had lighted up a new fire that wanton'd through all my veins. (11; vol. 1)

> warm Hand plays Arpeggios o'er the soft, silky Moss that but a few Years before had begun to spring from the Mount-Pleasant betwixt my youthful Thighs, as velvet Grass springs from a silted River-Bank.
>
> His Fingers play'd and strove to twine in the Tendrils of that womanly Vegetation, but suddenly he begins to insinuate a Finger into the very Quick of my Womanhood, inflaming me beyond the twin Pow'rs of Modesty and Surprize to resist . . . . [H]e flips the Petticoats back to their Proper Place, surveys my Blushes with Amusement, caresses my Breasts, those great snowy Hillocks, tipp'd with rosy Nipples . . . . Whereupon he makes haste to withdraw, leaving me shockt, speechless, all but mute with Outrage mingl'd with shameful Pleasure. Fire cours'd thro' my Veins, filling me with Longing, Disgust, and Self-loathing. (28; bk. 1, ch. 3)

Naiveté is no proof against the stratagems of the practiced rake, and Fanny is soon maiden no more. With Fanny's seduction by Lord Bellars, Jong turns the conventional incest motif to her own use, making it a symbol of male oppression. Tom Jones is the victim of his own desires, and the shock of his apparently oedipal connection with Mrs. Waters determines him to mend his ways. Fanny is the victim of another's deceit and discovers that she has actually been seduced and impregnated by her own father who, eighteen years earlier, had used his power and position to make her mother his mistress.

It is, however, not only with respect to love that men prove themselves hypocrites to Fanny. Her disillusionment is deepened when none other than Alexander Pope quotes neo-classical philosophy to her to justify the dominance of men in the world of letters. The episode reveals how patriarchal ideology inscribes sexual differences as fixed, metaphysical categories in order to rationalize the subordination of women as divinely sanctioned. Dazzled by the beauty of Pope's poetry and entertaining dreams of literary fame for herself, Fanny is disappointed by his view that women have no place in the world of letters. Placing women below men and above children and dogs on the great chain of being, Pope

argues that women are meant to inspire poems, not to write them. In other words, women are objects of representation only. Anticipating the not yet written *Dunciad*, Pope tells Fanny that if women, like dullness, were to upset the "'Great Order by usurping Men in their proper Position of Superiority . . . they [would] reap nothing but Chaos and Anarchy, and i'faith the whole World [would tumble] to its Ruin'" (42; bk. 1, ch. 5).[10]

By means of ironic juxtaposition and parody, Jong ridicules Pope's argument. First, she has Fanny point out the incongruity of his words and actions. "[W]hilst speaking of God's Great Plan and the Mighty Laws of Nature," he is making "fair Headway against [her] Maidenhead" (42; bk. 1, ch. 5). Then, she turns the famous conclusion of "Epistle 1" of the *Essay on Man* into a rationalization of Pope's lust.[11] Echoing Pope's poem and parodying the episode in the *Memoirs* in which Mr. Crofts attempts a struggling Fanny Hill's maidenhead,[12] Jong brings the attack on Fanny's virtue

[10] Cf. *The Dunciad* 409:

> Lo! thy dread Empire, CHAOS! is restor'd;
> Light dies before thy uncreating word:
> Thy hand, great Anarch! lets the curtain fall;
> And Universal Darkness buries All. (4.653-56)

[11] Cf. *An Essay on Man* 51: "And, spite of Pride, in erring Reason's spite, / One truth is clear, 'Whatever IS, is RIGHT'" (1.293-94).

[12] See *Memoirs*:

> The brute had, it seems, as I afterwards understood, brought on, by his eagerness, and struggle, the ultimate period of his hot fit of lust, which his power was too short-liv'd to carry him through the full execution of; of which my thighs and linnen received the effusion. (19; vol. 1)

Fanny Hill describes Crofts as "a man rather past threescore, short and ill make, with a yellow cadaverous hue, great goggling eyes, that stared as if he was strangled; . . . and a breath like a jakes" (15; vol 1); Jong applies the same description to Mrs. Skynner, "a Stoop'd and Ancient Matron, with Skin of a cadav'rous Hue, and great goggling Eyes like a Frog, and a Breath as foul and fetid as a Jakes" (194; bk. 2, ch. 4).

to a premature conclusion:

> "[W]hate'er exists in Nature is but an Expression of God's Will, and if He hath placed Women below Men, you can be sure 'tis for a Noble Purpose. In short, whate'er is, IS RIGHT."
> Whereupon he loosen'd his Breeches . . . and stood ready to assault my Maidenhead, with the very Weapon made for the Purpose. But my Guardian Angel must have been attending me at that Moment, for just as he drew near my tender Virgin Cunnikin, his own Eagerness brought on the Ultimate Period of his Hot Fit of Lust, of which my firm young Thighs and clean Petticoats receiv'd the egregious Effusion. (42; bk. 1, ch. 5)

Jong parodies another line from the *Essay on Man* to make a similar satiric point later on in the novel. Whereas the earlier scene with Pope mocks enlightenment cosmology, the later episode attacks its privileging of reason, an attribute women are assumed not to possess. Pursuing the woman who has kidnapped her child, Fanny falls into the clutches of Captain Whitehead, a sadistic slaver. Whereas Pope is merely pathetic, Whitehead is perverted. A practitioner of bondage, flagellation, sodomy, and coprophilia, Whitehead, "a Perfect Deist" (369; bk. 3, ch. 8), justifies his cruelty by appeals to reason. Paraphrasing Pope, he asks, "'tis true, is it not, that 'little else can Life supply but some Good Fucks and then we dye'?" (371; bk. 3, ch. 8).[13] Similarly, when Fanny, attempting to dispute with him, quotes Pascal's assertion that "[*L*]*e Coeur a ses Raisons . . . que la Raison ne connait point*" (370), he replies anachronistically: "'Pascal, Pascal, . . . when I hear French, I reach

[13] Cf. *An Essay on Man* 11: "Let us (since Life can little more supply / Than just to look about us and to die) / Expatiate free o'er all this scene of Man" (1.3-5).

for my Pistol'" (370; bk. 3, ch. 8).[14] His sexual abuse of the manacled Fanny and her maid Susanna soon reveals his so-called reason to be merely a rationalization of his need to humiliate and dominate women.

Having lost her innocence and, like Tom Jones, her childhood paradise, Fanny undergoes adventures on the road that deepen her awareness of society's double standard. Fleeing Lymeworth in men's clothing, she gets a view of life from the other side of the fence. She quickly comes to relish the safety--"there is nothing quite so liberating as being free of the Fear of Ravishment" (60; bk. 1, ch. 8)--and the privileges--"first, the Privilege of being left in Peace . . . ; second, the very substantial Privilege of Dining where'er one wisht without being presum'd a Trollop; third, the Privilege of moving freely thro' the World, without the Restraints of Stays, Petticoats, Hoops, and the like" (61; bk. 1, ch. 8)--that male attire bestows. As one of the boys, she gains access to their unguarded opinions of women. For example, a lusty and unscrupulous poetaster, ironically named Ned Tunewell, explains why men condescend to females. Paraphrasing Chesterfield, he assures the disguised Fanny, who questions the right of men to dominate women, that "'Women : . . : are but Children of a larger Growth" (109; bk. 1, ch. 13).[15] At the same time, observing her own imperious treatment of women while impersonating a male

[14] According to William L. Shirer, Hanns Johst, playwright and president of the Reich Theatre Chamber in Nazi Germany, "once had publicly boasted that whenever someone mentioned the word 'culture' to him he wanted to reach for his revolver" (1: 242-43).

[15] See Charles Strachey, ed., *The Letters of the Earl of Chesterfield to His Son*: "Women, then, are only children of a larger growth" (1: 261; Letter 161). Chesterfield, of course, inverts Dollabella's remark, in *All for Love* 73, that "Men are but Children of a larger growth" (4.1.43).

as well as their flirtatious responses brings home to Fanny the power of sexual conventions and the need for "Equality betwixt the Sexes" (102; bk. 1, ch. 13).

From the Wiltshire witches that she meets, Fanny receives more positive instruction. These "wicca," or wise women, introduce her to the pagan worship of female divinity and teach her respect for the feminine principles of healing and love. From them, she learns that the Christian church's portrayal of witchcraft as the worship of the devil derives from its misogynist beliefs. She discovers also that the patriarchal model for society is historically situated and mutable, not divinely appointed and eternal, as Pope would have her believe:

> "[I]n Ancient Times, in the Pagan Albion of Old, Women were not as they are now, subservient to Men in ev'ry Respect. Rather they were Queens and Priestesses, responsible for the Fructification of the Crops, and the Multiplication of the Herds; they were the Leaders of the Holy Rituals." (75; bk. 1, ch. 10)

Jong's feminist point is that the patriarchal organization of society is not a "natural" and, hence, unchangeable state of affairs but, rather, a contingent construct that not only can but also should be transformed. When the entire coven is brutally massacred at Stonehenge, Fanny witnesses graphically "the Enmity and Fear that Men bear for Women" (74; bk. 1, ch. 10) and becomes convinced more than ever of the dire need for "greater Justice betwixt Men and Women" (102; bk. 1, ch. 13). The corrupting effect of power is such that no member of a dominant group can escape its effects. Most men will not rape or murder, she concludes, but, nonetheless, "e'en Good Men will be a little haughty upon Occasion" (102), and "if Men may rule Women in Daily Life, then 'tis not surprizing in the

least that some few Brutes should blood them upon the Down" (102; bk. 1, ch. 13).

Having rejected orthodox religion for what Alan Friedman dubs an "oracular feminism" ("Erica" 20), Fanny soon finds herself outside the law as well. To construct the story of Fanny's initiation into a band of highwaymen, Jong borrows heavily from both *Joseph Andrews* and *The Beggar's Opera*. The initial episode in which Fanny's coach is stopped by highwaymen, who force her to lie naked in ditches to stop other coaches, resembles that in which Joseph Andrews is beaten and robbed by highwaymen and left lying in a ditch until a coach stops for him. Among the passengers in both coaches there are distinct resemblances. Fanny's coach contains "a puff'd-up Lawyer from Bath nam'd Slocock" (111; bk. 1, ch. 13), who looks "Goats and Monkies" (114; bk. 1, ch. 14) at her,[16] while Joseph's contains a lawyer who advises picking up the injured Joseph only to protect the passengers from an indictment for murder should Joseph die. Fanny's coach carries as well "a Fine Lady nam'd Mrs. Pothers," who "took frequent Draughts from a silver Bottle which [she] claim'd was only Hungary Water" (111; bk. 1, ch. 13). When the highwaymen force the passengers to strip, Mrs. Pothers hides her face in her petticoat while crying out "'O me! A naked Man! A naked Savage! O me!'" (113; bk. 1, ch. 14). The lady in the coach that stops for Joseph cries out "'O J-sus, . . . A naked Man!'" (52; bk. 1, ch. 12) and covers her eyes with her fan. When these passengers, in turn, are robbed, the lady's little

[16] In the *Memoirs*, Mr. Crofts looks "goats and monkies" (17; vol. 1), i.e., gazes lecherously, at Fanny Hill. Cleland's allusion is to *Othello* (Harrison 1089): "You are welcome, sir, to Cyprus. Goats and monkeys" (4.1.274).

silver bottle, despite her protests that she had instructed her maid to fill it with hungary water, turns out to contain brandy.

Jong's highwaymen are no ordinary band of thieves. Led by the charismatic Lancelot Robinson, an eighteenth-century Robin Hood, they are revolutionaries who believe in democracy and the redistribution of wealth. In the inverted world of Lancelot and his Merry Men, as in John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*, the Law is "but a nasty Tangle o' Injustice fer the Poor an' Justice fer the Rich . . . . 'Tis a Bauble fer the Wealthy, the First-Born, the puff'd-up Legal Thief who steals with Writs and Settlements instead o' Pistols" (116; bk. 1, ch. 14). In a monologue pieced together from *The Beggar's Opera*,[17] Lancelot, who has survived a hanging and returned from the dead with a mission, turns the world upside-down:

> "The Gentlemen o' the Law are no better than the Gentlemen o' the Road. I'faith, they are worse. Fer we have Honour an' Loyalty an' they have none. . . . [W]hilst we may mimick the Manners o' High Life in our Clothes an' Baubles, yet we are proud to be Low Life in our Morality. Fer what is a Gentleman, after all, but a Thief? . . . Whilst we, who freely admit that we are Thieves, are truly Filchers o' nothin' but Toys. They steal Love an' Honour an' Life; we steal nought but

[17] Lancelot's oration combines Macheath's declaration of his "Honour and Truth to the Gang" (2: 24; 2.2.14), the Beggar's conclusion that "[t]hrough the whole Piece you may observe such a similitude of Manners in high and low Life, that it is difficult to determine whether (in the fashionable Vices) the fine Gentlemen imitate the Gentlemen of the Road, or the Gentlemen of the Road the fine Gentlemen" (2: 64; 3.16.18-22), and, most explicitly, Matt the Mint's speech:

> We retrench the Superfluities of Mankind. The World is avaritious, and I hate Avarice. A covetous fellow, like a Jackdaw, steals what he was never made to enjoy, for the sake of hiding it. These are the Robbers of Mankind, for Money was made for the Free-hearted and Generous, and where is the Injury of taking from another, what he hath not the Heart to make use of? (2: 23-24; 2.1.24-30)

Baubles. We but retrench the Superfluities o' Mankind." (117; bk. 1, ch. 14)

In Lancelot, Fanny meets not only a guide and mentor but also a man not dazzled by her beauty. An odd lover's triangle develops in which Fanny lusts after Lancelot, who lusts after Horatio (a classically educated former slave from Barbados), who lusts after Fanny.[18] Through Horatio, Jong introduces the feminist analogy between the oppression of women and the oppression of blacks.[19] Fanny comes to see that "a Woman's Fate was not much diff'rent from a Black's" (258; bk. 2, ch. 10) since both wear their destinies upon their skins.

An interlude in a London brothel run by the aptly named Mrs. Coxtart, Jong's equivalent for Cleland's Mrs. Brown,[20] enables Fanny to see through the hypocrisy of her society's moral codes. Pregnant, alone, and destitute, she does not scruple to become a whore rather than starve since, sensibly, she holds survival more dear than moral abstractions. Jong ridicules patriarchal notions of moral purity by having Fanny argue

[18] Unlike Cleland, Jong does not treat homosexuality as an aberration. Fanny Hill, after spying on two homosexuals, is left "burning . . . with rage, and indignation" at "so criminal a scene" (159; vol. 2). Mrs. Cole, to whom she relates her adventure, denounces homosexuals as "worthless and despicable" (159) and "scarce less execrable than ridiculous" (160; vol. 2). Fanny Hackabout-Jones, on the other hand, finds the triangle more galling than abhorrent.

[19] See Ferguson: "[I]n the twentieth-century women's movement, resistance to the oppression and exploitation of women (and, therefore, of all people) of color and the elimination of that injustice is now recognized as a necessary precondition of liberation" (xi-xii).

[20] Cleland's madam, who is "squob-fat, red faced, and at least fifty" (7; vol. 1), finds Fanny Hill, looking for a place in service, at an intelligence office. Jong's madam, a "Squab-fat Lady of at least fifty" (167; bk. 2, ch. 1), finds Fanny Hackabout-Jones, escaping a city shower, in a baker's shop.

against the idea that women ought to remain chaste even at the cost of their lives. Her speech echoes Falstaff's famous battlefield soliloquy:[21]

> Dishonour is worse than Death, say some--but I say that Dishonour is a trifling Thing compar'd with Death. For where there's Life, Honour may oft' be recaptur'd--many's the Duchess who started out a Whore--but where no Life is, what use is Honour? Honour will neither feed the Hungry, nor clothe the Shiv'ring, nor heal the Sick. Honour's like a Badge of Merit: worthless at Pawn, useless to warm the Bones, inedible, and sooner to tarnish than a silver Watch. . . . [A]ny Woman who rates her Honour according to the Diameter of one of her Nether Organs is a pure Fool. (373-74; bk. 3, ch. 8)

Necessity makes a whore of Fanny, but it does not shame her. She realizes that she is no different, except in her honesty, from all women living in a male-dominated and sexist society. Marriage, under the prevailing conditions, is mere bondage, a form of indentured service (21; bk. 1, ch. 2) or legalized prostitution (209; bk. 2, ch. 5) in which women are employed as brood mares (320; bk. 3, ch. 3). It is wives, who are "nought but Whores in bart'ring their Board . . . for their Bed" (209), and hypocrites like Pamela Andrews, that "wily Merchant of her Maidenhead" (209), who are truly immoral. In a world in which women have no power, every woman "must at some Time in her hapless Life make her Bread and

[21] See *1H4* (Harrison 647-48):

> Honor pricks me on. Yea, but how if honor prick me off when I come on? How then? Can honor set to a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or take away the grief of a wound? No. Honor hath no skill in surgery, then? No. What is honor? A word. What is in that word honor? What is that honor? Air. A trim reckoning! Who hath it? He that died o' Wednesday. Doth he feel it? No. Doth he hear it? No. 'Tis insensible, then? Yea, to the dead. But will it not live with the living? No. Why? Detraction will not suffer it. Therefore I'll none of it. Honour is a mere scutcheon. (5.1.131-43)

Butter with her Body" (209; bk. 2, ch. 5). Fanny's, at least, is an honest whoredom.

The brothel section is the part of the novel that most resembles the *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, yet, even here, the differences outweigh the similarities. The structure of Fanny's account of her life as a whore differs considerably from Cleland's account, which is "as studded with Inflaming Scenes as a Plum Pudding with brandied Fruits" (175; bk. 2, ch. 2). She finds that "it bores [her] to detail all the various and sundry Cocks that slipp'd betwixt [her] youthful Legs that Summer" (225; bk. 2, ch. 7). She writes, instead, about her more famous customers such as Theophilus Cibber and John Cleland. No ordinary whore, of course, the well-read Fanny trades lines from *Hamlet*, *Twelfth Night*, and *Othello* with the comic actor while he chases her about the room in pursuit of her mock-maidenhead. Cleland she portrays as a pimply youth who derives his greatest satisfaction from exchanging clothes and playing the virgin maid to Fanny's seducing rake. Avenging his literary distortion of her life, she judges him "[n]either proper Man, nor proper Woman . . . but an odd Blend of the twain" (231; bk. 2, ch. 7).

In contrast, she thoroughly approves of Hogarth, who frequents the brothel "both to satisfy his fleshly Lusts and to sketch the Girls" (223; bk. 2, ch. 7), because he realizes that "'tis the Woman who always suffers for the Sins of all Mankind" (226; bk. 2, ch. 7). Becoming Hogarth's model as well as his whore, Fanny is the inspiration for *The Harlot's Progress*. In Moll Hackabout, she sees aspects of herself: "[her] Name . . . a certain sad-eyed Look for the imprison'd Whore, the Curve of a plump Breast or slender Ankle" (226-27; bk. 2, ch. 7). In the fate of the luckless prostitute, she recognizes both the fate that she escapes and the

double standard that destroys the innocent yet allows the wicked to go free. By inverting the conventional punishment allotted to prostitutes in whore biography, Jong ridicules male myths concerning female sexuality. She rejects the notion that women must be pure in body and spirit or forever lost. Fanny is the angel of a different sort of house, yet she still maintains her dignity and pride.

Fanny's greatest admiration is reserved for Jonathan Swift, or "Presto," as she familiarly calls him. In the Dean, she finds a man who admires her intellect and shares her belief that the world is unjust and man irrational. Jong is at her most allusive here, constructing Swift's dialogue out of a pastiche of his writings. For example, echoing *A Tale of a Tub* (47; section 2), he asks Fanny, "'Is not Religion a Cloak, and Conscience a Pair of Breeches, which tho' a Cover for Lewdness as well as Nastiness, can be pull'd down for the Service of both?'" (216; bk. 2, ch. 6). Similarly, concerning his lack of preferment, he laments, as in "Verses on the Death of Dr Swift" (*Poems* 2: 567), "'Had I but curb'd my Tongue and Pen, I might have rose like other Men'" (217; bk. 2, ch. 6). He confesses also, as he does later in his famous letter to Pope, 29 Sept. 1725 (*Correspondence* 3: 102, 103), that he "wrote Satyres in order 'to vex the World rather than divert it'" (216; bk. 2, ch. 6) and that he has "'e'er hated all Nations, Professions, Communities, . . . and all [his] Love is for Individuals'" (221; bk. 2, ch. 6). "'Satyre,'" he tells her, as he was to tell the reader in the preface to *Battel of the Books* (Davis 1: 140), "'is a sort of Glass wherein Beholders do gen'rally discover ev'rybody's Face but their own'" (369; bk. 3, ch. 8). Nonetheless, he assures her, as he was to assure Charles Ford in a letter dated 14 Aug. 1725 (*Correspondence* 3: 87), that his *Travels* "'are admirable Things and

will wonderfully mend the World'" (221; bk. 2, ch. 6). She, in turn, sees him as a "slighted Lover of Mankind," who, like Othello (1099; 5.2.344), "lov'd not wisely, but too well" (222; bk. 2, ch. 6).

Fanny's creator seems to share her admiration for Swift's work. Certainly, Jong makes good use of his poetry to tell her tale. For example, when Fanny first comes to London, she is caught in a downpour right out of one of Swift's poems:[22]

> The Listeners fled in all Directions as the Heavens open'd up and the Gutter-Spouts began to pour with Rain, sending their Streams not quite clear of the Pavement. Draggl'd Ladies, holding up their Petticoats, ran for Shelter in the nearby Shops. Beaux fretting lest their Wigs be soakt and their Brocades spotted, did likewise. All Gallantry was forgotten in the Rush for Cover, and I e'en saw one Swain filch the oil'd Umbrella of a Sempstress, slapping her Bottom thro' her Petticoats and crying impudently, "Thankee kindly, Ma'am!" as he ran away. (166-67; bk. 2, ch. 1)

Indeed, Jong echoes the ending of Swift's poem three times in all.[23] In the first example, Fanny, not yet used to the noise, smell, and filth of London, remarks: "In the Kennels which ran down the mucky Centres of the Streets, one saw Fish Heads, Orange Rinds, Human Wastes--e'en dead Cats!" (163; bk. 2, ch. 1). Later, describing the area of Bartholomew

[22] Cf. "A Description of a City Shower," *Poems* 1: 138:

> NOW in contiguous Drops the Flood comes down,
> Threat'ning with Deluge this *Devoted* Town.
> To Shops in Crouds the dagged Females fly,
> Pretend to cheapen Goods, but nothing buy.
> The Templer spruce, while ev'ry Spout's a-broach,
> Stays till 'tis fair, yet seems to call a Coach.
> The tuck'd-up Sempstress walks with hasty Strides,
> While Streams run down her oil'd Umbrella's Sides. (31-38)

[23] See *Poems* 1: 139: "Sweepings from Butchers Stalls, Dung, Guts, and Blood, / Drown'd Puppies, stinking Sprats, all drench'd in Mud, / Dead Cats and Turnip-Tops come tumbling down the Flood" (61-63).

Close and Smithfield in which Hogarth grew up, she explains that "'[t]was a Cattle Market where the Oxen and the Sheep were driven up each Monday and the narrow ancient Streets were fill'd with Dung, Blood, Guts, drown'd Puppies, dead Cats, and straggling Turnip Tops" (223-24; bk. 2, ch. 7). Finally, standing at a window in Mrs. Coxtart's establishment, she watches "the Rain make Rivers of Garbage in the Street below--Rivers which carried all Manner of Offal from Orange Peels to Human Excrement, from drown'd Kittens to Shards of broken Glass" (271; bk. 2, ch. 12).

The prostitute's life teaches Fanny much about the vagaries and foibles of the opposite sex. Realizing quickly "that Men come to a Brothel as much for Understanding and Compassion as for the Fulfillment of their Lustful Desires" (215; bk. 2, ch. 6), she describes whores as "Clergy, of a sort" (215). Seeing through the pretenses of men, from strutting beaux to stinking polemen, she becomes aware of their enormous vanity. She disputes the aspersions cast on women, for their vanity is superficial only. Moreover, it is but an instinct for survival: "a Woman knows that in a World where Women have no Pow'r--Beauty, like Witchcraft, is her only Substitute" (234; bk. 2, ch. 8). The male sex, on the other hand, is cursed by a "constant Need of Homage--Homage to its Intellect and Wit, Homage to its Gallantry and petty Prowess betwixt the Bed-Clothes" (234; bk. 2, ch. 8).

One of the benefits of employment in the world's oldest profession, besides supplying the money to provide for Fanny's as yet unborn child and to keep Lancelot from dying in prison, resides in its not being a trade usurped by men. The few professions--such as dressmaking, millinery, and midwifery--traditionally staffed by women were gradually being infiltrated by men (Rogers, *Feminism* 19). Although one would expect childbirth to

remain the preserve of women, given the codes of modesty prevalent at the time, male obstetricians were, in fact, coming to supplant midwives for deliveries among the upper class.[24]

To further her theme of opposition between the sexes, Jong seizes on the historical debate concerning midwifery. In *Fanny*, the selflessness of the mother in the act of giving birth, an emblem of the life-enhancing qualities associated with women, is contrasted with the selfishness of the male obstetrician, concerned more with his own reputation than with the life of the child. Lord Bellars, whose mistress a disguised Fanny becomes, wants William Smellie, the male midwife, to perform the delivery. When Smellie's "Secret Implements" (308; bk. 3, ch. 2) fail to extract the child, he recommends killing it to save the mother. Susanna, Fanny's maid, brings in a female midwife, who delivers the baby by caesarian section, a technique that could earn its practitioner condemnation as a witch. Jong constructs the episode to emphasize the contrast between the male, working blindly with his "Metal Instrument of Torture" (309; bk 3, ch. 2), and the female, working tenderly with massage, herbs, and potions, the one concerned with death, the other with life. Once again, Jong inverts the eighteenth-century view and portrays a woman as superior to a male.

Having gained confidence, determination, and a focus for her life by giving birth, Fanny soon finds the role model she has been seeking. Her meeting with Annie Bonny, the pirate, a woman who combines beauty,

[24] Rogers describes how they "stigmatized the midwives as dirty and ignorant, though actually the women, who were less apt to be carrying lethal pathogens or to misuse forceps, did less damage than male doctors" (*Feminism* 19).

intelligence, and courage and who commands rather than follows men, forms the climax of her quest. Realizing that she has been "too timid and Lady-like" (452; bk. 3, ch. 14), Fanny vows to kill the lady in herself and play the pirate. Alongside the socially constructed but internalized image of the lady--guilty, fearful, jealous, passive--she locates that of the pirate--daring, courageous, forceful--struggling to be free. It is only by banishing the idea of the lady, breaking the shackles of convention, that she can be truly free, the mistress of her own fate. And it is this realization that completes her education and prepares her to assume her rightful estate.

(iv)

Erica Jong's use of eighteenth-century devices is at once less comic and more didactic than John Barth's. Her inversions are more thematic than formal, more local than universal. Like Barth, she too rejects the eighteenth-century notion of a divinely ordained, hierarchically ordered cosmos. Unlike him, she portrays the idea as underpinning the subordination of women by men. More interested in ideology than metaphysics, she exposes the absurdity of the female condition in a patriarchal society rather than the absurdity of the human condition *per se*.

Jong's method is most clearly seen in her use of coincidence, a convention with which *Fanny* is rife. In a typical inversion, Jong turns the conventional meeting between father and son into a meeting between daughter and mother. To paraphrase John Barth, in this novel you can't meet anybody on the road who doesn't turn out to be your mother. Isobel

White, the only witch to survive the massacre at Stonehenge, is actually Fanny's mother. She is also, not surprisingly, the midwife who is called in to save the life of her daughter and, as it turns out, her granddaughter. She turns up again as Lady Bellars's nurse, just in time to reveal the truth about the mystery of Fanny's birth before Lord Bellars's will arrives. It seems, however, that one can't avoid one's father either. When Fanny, in the guise of a nun, takes part in a meeting of a clandestine Hell-Fire Club, the "monk" who chooses her is revealed to be none other than Lord Bellars. The same dictum applies as well to her other lovers. The pirate ship that attacks Captain Whitehead's vessel and rescues Fanny from his clutches is manned by Lancelot, Horatio, and the rest of the Merry Men.

Jong's use of the device, however, is more ambiguous than Barth's. Its significance seems to waver somewhere between Fielding's belief in the workings of Providence and Barth's reduction of order to mere chance. Although Fanny rejects orthodox religion in favour of the matriarchical, non-hierarchical, nature-worshipping beliefs of wicca, the emphasis throughout the text is not on the "Great Purpose" (304; bk. 3, ch. 2) of the Goddess but, rather, on the vicissitudes of the actual world. Fanny is more concerned with the turnings of Fortune's Wheel--"The Wheel of Fortune spins, the Dice of Destiny are cast, and we do not choose our Costumes as for a Masquerade, but they are fitted for us by the Fates" (285; bk. 2, ch. 13)--and with the role of chance in life: "Was Destiny no more than a Game in which Merit was seldom rewarded and Vice was punish'd capriciously, if at all? . . . Ne'er had I truly seen Life as a Game of Chance before" (266-67; bk. 2, ch. 11). Even the ship she sails on is called the Hazard. Nonetheless, the import seems to be less

metaphysical than social. In a world dominated by men, a woman needs to create her own opportunities and take charge of her fate.

Like Cervantes and Fielding before her, Jong frequently interrupts her narrative to incorporate stories told by her characters. The reader is treated to the "astounding History" (119; bk. 1, ch. 15) of Lancelot Robinson and the "curious History" (134; bk. 1, ch. 17) of Horatio as well as to Annie Bonny's life story. He/she is privy also to a number of "edifying Digressions" (55; bk. 1, ch. 8) on subjects as diverse as dowries, love, lust, the English countryside, horses, disguises, philosophical enquiry, and witches in addition to the "History of Buccaneering," intended especially "for the Reader who is bent upon the noble Cause of Self-Improvement as well as the more pleasant one of Entertainment" (413; bk. 3, ch. 12). In fact, hearing so many tales leads Fanny, like Harvey Russecks, to insert her own digression on the art of story-telling:

> 'Tis frequently the case with Histories of e'en the greatest Men and Women, that if they have no Wit in their Expression nor Instinct for the Story-Teller's Craft, e'en the most stirring Adventures will seem dull. Mark this well, I told myself, when you come to write the History of your own Life; n'er forget that 'tis not Fidelity to Fact alone that makes a Story stir the Blood, but Craft and Art! And 'tis perhaps the *greatest* Craft to seem to have no Craft. (441; bk. 3, ch. 13)

The recognition scene, in which true identities are revealed and appropriate rewards and punishments meted out, is much like that of *Joseph Andrews* or *Tom Jones*. When the main characters are brought together at Lymeworth, Fanny is discovered to be the daughter of Isobel White and Lord Bellars. Lord Bellars having died of remorse in an Italian monastery, Fanny inherits Lymeworth and Bellars's considerable wealth. Having roamed

the world like Candide, Lancelot now declares himself "content to stay here an' cultivate [his] Garden" (484; bk. 3, ch. 16).[25] Accordingly, he, Fanny, and the Merry Men set up their *Libertalia* at Lymeworth, soon to be renamed Merryman Park.

Fanny's ending, on the other hand, departs considerably from the conclusion to the *Memoirs*. Cleland's novel ends with a "tail-piece of morality" (187; vol. 2) in which Fanny Hill, having acquired a fortune and having married Charles, her one true love, celebrates the superiority of virtue over vice. Conventionally, she justifies her story by writing that "if I have painted vice all in its gayest colours, if I have deck'd it with flowers, it has been solely in order to make the worthier, the solemner sacrifice of it, to virtue" (187-88; vol. 2).[26]

Fanny, too, retires to an estate with the man she loves. She does not, however, apologize for the life she has led. Instead, her memoirs redefine society's traditional notions of vice. Like Cleland's *Memoirs*, in this respect at least, *Fanny* celebrates rather than condemns female sexuality. Additionally, because of the laws, this novel cannot end with the conventional marriage. Fanny Hill hands everything over to her beloved Charles. Fanny Hackabout-Jones resolves, instead, not to marry rather than give her husband title to everything she owns, "Lands and Houses, Stocks and Bonds" (492; bk. 3, Epilogue).

[25] Cf. *Candide*: "*Cela est bien dit, répondit Candide, mais il faut cultiver notre jardin*" (260; ch. 30).

[26] Cleland echoes the preface to *Roxana* in which the "Relator" claims that "*when Vice is painted in its Low-priz'd Colours, 'tis not to make People in love with it, but to expose it; and if the Reader makes a wrong Use of the Figures, the Wickedness is his own*" (2).

Jong, like Fielding, writes an epilogue, but it does not describe how the characters live happily ever after. Fanny now has sufficient wealth to protect herself from the law and to write her books, but the world has not changed. The final lesson in her progress from naif to feminist teaches her that there is a double standard in literary circles as well as in society at large. Having achieved financial success as well as critical praise for her epic poem, *The Pyratiad*, written under the pseudonym Captain F. Jones, she makes the mistake of revealing that the author is a woman. Her last vestige of naivité is torn away when, to her astonishment, the literary reputation of her poem declines overnight. Much to her chagrin, she finds herself denounced as "a vain, unsext, unnatural Woman, a vile Seeker after Fame and Fortune, a Slut and a Whore" (492; bk. 3, Epilogue). She discovers, as Pope had warned, that for a woman to represent rather than be represented is viewed as a violation of the natural order of things. Although Fanny finds literary and financial success (if not reputation) and a refuge, the conclusion makes clear that it is still a man's world.

(v)

Jong's new, old novel is considerably more allusive than Barth's, evoking the eighteenth-century by incorporating episodes and diction from identifiable models into her text. Her novel echoes not only Cleland's *Memoirs* but also works by Defoe, Fielding, and Smollett, a fact that the reviewers were not slow to notice. Julia Klein, for instance, writing in the *New Republic*, dubs *Fanny* "a cross between *Tom Jones* and *Moll Flanders*, with a wink at *Fanny Hill*" (39); Pat Rogers, in the *Times Literary Supplement*, claims that *Fanny* has "[s]tylistic mannerisms by Fielding" and a

"plot rather by Smollett" ("Blood" 1190); and Gérard Genette, in *Palimpsestes*, describes *Fanny* as "*croisement si l'on veut de* Tom Jones *et de* Fanny Hill" (236).

The novel's prefatory material certainly supports their claims. As in most early novels, the title--*The True History of the Adventures of Fanny Hackabout-Jones*--signals the literary kind to which the work belongs. As is typical of memoir novels, it employs the common device of the heroine's name accompanied by the generic term "history" (to differentiate its "true" story from the lies to be found in mere novels). Also typical is the subtitle, which, swelling the title to fifty-two words,[27] summarizes the plot:

> Comprising her Life at Lymeworth, her Initiation as a Witch, her Travels with the Merry Men, her Life in the Brothel, her London High life, her Slaving Voyage, her Life as a Female Pyrate, her eventual Unravelling of her Destiny, et cetera. (1)

The title page concludes by announcing (as does the *Memoirs* in 1749) that the book was "Printed for G. Fenton in the Strand MDCCLI."[28]

Like *Joseph Andrews*, *Tom Jones*, and *Roderick Random* (as well as *The Sot-Weed Factor*), but unlike most memoir novels, *Fanny* adopts the epic convention of division into books, which are further divided into chapters, each with a descriptive heading amounting to a miniature plot summary. The debt to *Tom Jones* is readily apparent. As in Fielding's novel, *Fanny's* first chapter consists of "The Introduction to the Work or

[27] Cf. *Robinson Crusoe's* sixty-eight word title and *Moll Flanders'* sixty-nine word title.

[28] G. Fenton refers to Fenton Griffiths, brother of Ralph Griffiths, the actual publisher of Cleland's novel.

Bill of Fare to the Feast" (7). The second chapter, which consists of "A Short Description of my Childhood with particular Attention to the Suff'rings of my Step-Mother, Lady Bellars" (7), echoes Fielding's second chapter, "*A short Description of Squire* Allworthy, *and a fuller Account of Miss* Bridget Allworthy *his Sister*" (9). Book 1, chapter 15, offers "A short Hint of what we can do in the Rabelaisian Style" (9), while Fielding's book 4, chapter 2, promises "*A short Hint of what we can do in the Sublime*" (13). In addition, Jong's book 3, chapter 12--"Containing divers Dialogues betwixt Lancelot, Horatio, and our Heroine in which the History goes backward" (13) combines Fielding's book 8, chapter 9--"*Containing several Dialogues between* Jones *and* Partridge" (19)--and book 10, chapter 8--"*In which the History goes backward*" (21). Finally, Jong's last three chapters--"[T]he Beginning of the Conclusion of our History," "In which we draw nearer and nearer to our Conclusion," "Drawing still nearer to the End" (13-14)--and her epilogue, "In which our Author explains the curious Chain of Events which led to the Writing of this History" (14), repeat the joke of Fielding's last four chapters--"*Wherein the History begins to draw towards a Conclusion*," "*The History draws nearer to a Conclusion*," "*Approaching still nearer to the End*," and "*In which the History is concluded*" (29).

The remainder of the prefatory material incorporates several unmarked quotations from a number of works. Like Defoe, who complains in the preface to *Moll Flanders* that "[t]he World is so taken up of late with Novels and Romances, that it will be hard for a private History to be taken for Genuine" (3), Fanny, in her "History" (18), laments that "[t]he World is so taken up of late with Histories and Romances in which Vice fore'er perishes and Virtue triumphs, that the intended Reader may wonder

why Vice is not always punish'd and Virtue not always rewarded in these Pages" (18; bk. 1, ch. 1). The reason is that "[i]f these Pages oft' tell of Debauchery and Vice" (17; bk. 1, ch. 1),[29] they do so, like the pages of Fanny Hill's memoirs, for the sake of "Truth, Stark-Naked Truth" (17; bk. 1, ch. 1).[30] This truth, as Fanny sees it, is that life, for women as well as men, is a mixture of good and bad, tragedy and comedy: "'Tis a Feast in which one is serv'd delicate Viands as well as spicy Hashes and Ragoos; rotten Meats as well as exquisite Fruits; exotick Spices and Sauces as well as plain Country Fare" (18; bk. 1, ch. 1). In this, it is very like Fielding's bill of fare, "Human Nature," which he will present "at first to the keen Appetite of our Reader, in that more plain and simple Manner in which it is found in the Country, and shall hereafter hash and ragoo it with all the high *French* and *Italian* Seasoning of Affectation and Vice which Courts and Cities afford" (34; bk. 1, ch. 1).

Throughout the rest of the novel, allusion, both explicit and implicit, continues to be the most frequently used device. Marked quotations, usually naming the author but not the text, abound. These include excerpts from Pope's "Elegy in Memory of an Unfortunate Lady," "Epistle to a Lady," and "Epilogue to Jane Shore"; Prior's "Solomon and the Vanity of the World"; Dryden's *Absolom and Achitophel* and *The Hind and the Panther*; Swift's "On Poetry: A Rhapsody"; Milton's "Samson" and "Allegro"; Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*; La Rochefoucauld's maxims; Aphra Behn's

[29] Moll Flanders is described as "debauch'd from her Youth, nay, even being the Off-spring of Debauchery and Vice" (1; Preface).

[30] Cf. Fanny Hill's claim that "[t]ruth! stark naked truth, is the word" (1; vol. 1).

Oroonoko; Waller's "To Phyllis"; Locke's "Some Thoughts upon Education"; Hobbes's *Leviathan*; and Herrick's "Delight in Disorder."

Of course, the single greatest source of allusion for Jong is *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, a work whose style is beginning to attract serious critical attention. It has, in fact, become commonplace to praise Cleland's use of language.[31] The consensus among its defenders is that because of its style and unconventionality, Cleland's novel transcends its genre.[32] Cleland himself anticipates this concern by inserting into the work a discussion of the stylistic problems inherent in erotic literature. Thus, Fanny Hill begins her second volume by discussing her own style:

> I imagined indeed, that you would have been cloy'd and tired with the uniformity of adventures and expressions, inseparable from a subject of this sort, whose bottom or ground-work being, in the nature of things, eternally one and the same, whatever variety of forms and modes, the situations are susceptible of, there is no escaping a repetition of near the same images, the same figures, the same expressions, with this further inconvenience added to the disgust it creates, that the words *joys*, *ardours*, *transports*, *extasies*, and the rest of those pathetic terms so congenial to, so received in the *practise of pleasure*, flatten, and lose much of their due spirit and energy, by the frequency they indispensibly recur with, in a narrative of which that *practise* professedly composes the whole basis. (91; vol. 2)

[31] See, for example, Bradbury, "Comic": "the style is elevated and courtly, celebrating 'the liberty of nature'" (269); Sabor: "the most striking literary quality of his novel [is] its delicately periphrastic prose" (xvii); and Michelson: "*Fanny Hill* has a literacy and grace that make it nearly artistic" (29).

[32] See Sabor: "Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* deserves a permanent place not only in libertine literature but in the canon of the English novel" (xxvi); and Michelson: "*Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* is . . . a great work of art because it is a brilliant example of its genre, and it surpasses most other examples of its genre in its civilized celebration of sexual pleasure" (29).

The style that Fanny Hill does adopt is unmistakably Augustan with its balances and antitheses, euphemistic diction, and extended metaphors. By means of periphrasis, she attempts to strike "a mean temper'd with taste, between the revoltingness of gross, rank, and vulgar expressions, and the ridicule of mincing metaphors and affected circumlocutions" (91; vol. 2). Presumably, she wants to achieve a balance, like Mrs. Cole's bawdy house, between the "refinements of taste and delicacy" and the "most gross and determinate gratifications of sensuality" (94; vol. 2).

Cleland's periphrastic style, which avoids coarseness while presenting sexually explicit content, contains, according to Peter Sabor's count (xix), more than fifty metaphorical variations for "penis" (e.g., "engine of love-assaults," "master member of revels," "picklock," "red-headed champion") and several, though fewer, for "vagina" (e.g., "soft laboratory of love," "pleasure-thirsty channel," "cloven-spot"). Jong, in contrast, not only adopts the Anglo-Saxon words that Cleland, anxious to stay out of prison, avoided but also parodies Cleland's fastidiousness. In a chapter entitled "Of Flip-Flaps, Lollipops, Picklocks, Love-Darts, Pillicocks, and the Immortal Soul" (39; bk. 1, ch. 5), she associates these euphemisms, and others, with the characters of the men who use them:

> Doth he call it a Batt'ring Piece? Well then, he will probably lye with you that way. Doth he call it a Bauble? He is probably vain of his Wigs and Waistcoats as well. Doth he call it a Dirk? He is surely a Scotsman, and gloomy 'neath his drunken Bravado. Doth he call it a Flip-Flap? Well then, be advis'd: you will have to work very hard to make it stand (and once standing, 'twill wish for nothing but to lye down again). . . . (39; bk. 1, ch. 5)

Similarly, giving a "Short Hint of what we can do in the Rabelaisian Style" (119; bk. 1, ch. 15), Jong catalogues alphabetically, in a *tour de*

force reminiscent of the name-calling contest in *The Sot-Weed Factor*, the synonyms for "vagina":

> "It means the Fanny-Fair," says Lancelot, "the Divine Monosyllable, the Precious Pudendum, the Chearful *Cunnus* (in Latin . . .) an' in French, *l'Autre Chose*. O 'tis the Aunt, . . . the Best-Worst Part (accordin' to Dr. Donne) . . . . 'Tis likewise the Earl o' Rochester's Bull's Eye, an' Shakespeare's Circle (the little *o* to his great wooden one). . . . 'Tis the very Water-Gate o' Life, the Wicket, an' also the Workshop. 'Tis the Yoni o' the East Indies an' the Passion Fruit o' the West Indies." (120; bk. 1, ch. 15)

The language that Jong borrows from Cleland is primarily sexual. She lifts exclamations ("'O! I die'" and "'Ah! I can't bear it! I am going'" [108; bk. 1, ch. 13]),[33], phrases ("perhaps were we to prevail upon him ourselves--the old Tar said, looking Goats and Monkies at us--we should have better Luck" [348; bk. 3, ch. 6]), and descriptions of assorted sexual acts.

Jong's style, too, is primarily Augustan. Containing very few anachronisms,[34] the text includes typical Augustan devices such as the mock-Homeric epithet ("By then the rosy Dawn was creeping up" [109; bk. 1, ch. 13]), anaphora ("Is there no Villain in this World who doth not regard himself as a poor abus'd Innocent, no She-Wolf who doth not think herself

[33] Cf. *Memoirs*: "'Oh! Oh!--I can't bear it--It is too much.--I die. --I am a going--' were *Polly*'s expressions of extasy" (31; vol. 1).

[34] Pat Rogers points out a few anachronistic words ("tart," "dust-bin," "pansy," and "sucker," as well as "bill" and "focus" as verbs), the occasional lapse in idiom ("That must be quite some Letter"), and the odd anachronistic detail such as the use of house numbers before 1724 but concludes that they do not "seriously interfere with the author's purposes" (1190). Jong's aim, as she expresses it in an Afterword, is to be "true to the spirit, if not the letter, of the eighteenth century" (502).

a Lamb, no Shark who doth not fancy that she is a Goldfish?" [442; bk. 3, ch. 13]), and alliteration:

> Imagine, then, our Plight: we drift inexorably toward Africa upon a Sailing Ship full of distemper'd Tars, enslav'd to a Maniack with an insatiable Passion for Piss and Shit, shorn of our Curls and Courage, cast into the most melancholick of Humours. (383-84; bk. 3, ch. 9)

Drawing as it does on so many eighteenth-century sources and using language and orthography current mainly in the first half of the eighteenth century, Jong's historical pastiche is wholly convincing and entertaining.

(vi)

As memoir novels inevitably do, *Fanny* ends where it begins, with the writing of the novel itself. Piqued by the publication of Cleland's novel, which she sees as an outrage but which her creator considers "a classic of erotica" (503; Afterword), she picks up her quill and begins to write the work the reader has just finished. By having Fanny write a "true History" as a corrective to Cleland's lies, Erica Jong writes a new, old novel--not a local parody of the *Memoirs* but, rather, a general parody of the eighteenth-century picaresque novel.[35]

The dual perspective implied in Fanny's and her author's different opinions of John Cleland is typical of this kind of novel. On the one

[35] Barth, noticing the family resemblance, calls *Fanny* "a twentieth-century novel humorously imitative of eighteenth-century fiction" (*Friday* xiii). Gérard Genette cites both *The Sot-Weed Factor* and *Fanny* as examples of "*une littérature contemporaine, qui . . . se définit volontiers par son refus des normes et des types hérités du XIX^e siècle romantico-réaliste, et par un retour aux allures prémodernes (ou prépostmodernes?) des XVI^e, XVII^e, et XVIII^e siècles* (236). He refers to *Fanny* specifically as "*une autre performance de réactivation dix-huitiémisante*" (236, n. 1).

hand, Jong evokes the past by incorporating a considerable amount of eighteenth-century detail and a wealth of allusion, pastiche, and parody into her text. On the other hand, she distances the past by filtering it through the mind of a narrator who is, as Jong readily admits in her Afterword, "not a typical eighteenth-century woman" (504). On the contrary, "[i]n many ways her consciousness is modern" (504). In this manner, Jong opens up an ironic distance between the eighteenth-century morals, manners, and beliefs portrayed and the twentieth-century consciousness that assesses them.

Jong's particular postmodernist problem is how to write a novel that provides a feminist alternative to the culturally dominant representations of women in contemporary novels. Although she writes that *Fanny* "is intended as a novel about a woman's life and development in a time when women suffered far greater oppression that they do today" (505), it is clear that she is not satisfied with the lot of women today. Her strategy is tendentious and two-fold.[36] Returning to the eighteenth-century, to the beginnings of the novel, she uses the ironic gap between eighteenth-century representation and twentieth-century assessment to expose the patriarchal ideology that the form both incorporates and naturalizes. Parodying eighteenth-century texts, both canonical and non-canonical, she employs the novel's conventions against themselves, unmasking in the process the patriarchal relations they embody. And in the image of the brothel, she creates an appropriate symbol for the oppressed condition of women in a male-dominated society. At the same time, by creating a strong

[36] See Kuhn, "Passionate" 15-18, for a discussion of strategies of tendentiousness in feminist art.

female character who consciously reflects upon and rejects the subordinate roles that patriarchy offers her, she produces an alternative, oppositional representation. If John Barth's quarrel with the novel is ultimately ontological, Erica Jong's is political.

Chapter Four: The Heart of Darkness

(i)

In "Geography and Some Explorers," Joseph Conrad describes how the stories of those "worthy, adventurous and devoted men" (19), Mungo Park and James Bruce, stimulated his youthful imagination and curiosity and instilled in him a lifelong passion for geographical knowledge. The impression that Park's *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa* (1799) made on Conrad was such that even as an adult he found that he always associated the western Sudan with "an episode in Mungo Park's life":

> It means for me the vision of a young, emaciated, fair-haired man, clad simply in a tattered shirt and worn-out breeches, gasping painfully for breath and lying on the ground in the shade of an enormous African tree (species unknown), while from a neighbouring village of grass huts a charitable black-skinned woman is approaching him with a calabash full of pure cold water, a simple draught which, according to himself, seems to have effected a miraculous cure. (22)

Eventually, Conrad's fascination with the map of Africa led to his famous journey up the Congo River in 1890, the artistic distillation of which, nine years later, was *Heart of Darkness*.

Eighty-two years later still, not only Park's *Travels* but also Conrad's novella were to inspire the creation of another novel. T. Coraghessan Boyle's *Water Music*, a fictional version of Park's two expeditions to the Niger River (1795-97 and 1805-1806, respectively) is a metafictional reshaping of both these earlier works. Park's account of

his first voyage provides the historical background,[1] and Conrad's depiction of Marlow's voyage up the Congo provides the literary background for Boyle's dramatization of Mungo Park's journey down the Niger.

Yet Park's explorations are only half the story, for *Water Music* has a bipartite structure. Interwoven with the history of the gentlemanly Mungo Park is the tale of Ned Rise, con-man, denizen of the lower depths of London. Alan Friedman, reviewing the book for the *New York Times Book Review*, remarks that it has two heroes--one genteel, one vulgar--and two plots--both picaresque ("Two" 9). He is only half right. Boyle actually takes two distinct character types--the questing hero and the picaresque protagonist--from two antithetical genres--the adventure novel and the picaresque novel--and portrays their respective explorations of two different jungles--the wilds of Africa and the streets of London. Furthermore, by juxtaposing the anti-romance conventions of the picaresque novel with the romance conventions of the adventure novel, Boyle employs the existential cynicism implicit in the one to undermine the idealism of the other. Undercutting the formulaic expectations associated with the genre, he writes an anti-adventure novel that lays bare and mocks the imperialist ideology of the form.

(ii)

Divided, like an epic, into books, *Water Music* consists of three parts plus a coda, each of which has a title and begins with a motto, a

[1] Like Barth's portrayal of the genesis of Ebenezer Cooke's poem, Boyle's tale is as much the product of fancy as of fact. In the novel's Apologia, Boyle describes his intention as "principally aesthetic" and admits to having been "deliberately anachronistic," having "invented language and terminology," and having "expanded upon [his] original sources."

device much in vogue in the nineteenth century.[2] The ironic tone of the first book, however, entitled "The Niger" and preceded by an epigraph from Burns's "To a Louse," deflates the conventional image of the heroic adventurer. Beginning in *media res* with Mungo Park baring his buttocks to Ali Iben Fatoudi, Emir of the Oulad-Mbareck or "Moors" of Ludamar (Lupton 64), it goes on to portray the events of Mungo's first voyage to Africa in rather more revealing, not to mention ludicrous, detail than is given in his *Travels*. The effect is akin to mock epic. Treated to a series of burlesque rather than heroic adventures, the reader sees Mungo, ever the explorer, seducing Fatima, Ali's 382-pound queen;[3] Mungo escaping from the Moors;[4] Mungo euphorically leaping into the Niger, terrifying the inhabitants of Segu Korro;[5] Mungo meeting Mansong, the potentate of Bambarra, drinking the blood of slaves disemboweled in his honour; Mungo being beaten and robbed by Mansong's elite troops; Mungo receiving the hospitality of Aisha, the Mandingo woman in the episode Conrad describes; Mungo returning, apparently from the dead, to England.

[2] The novel itself begins with an epigraph taken from W. S. Merwin's "The Old Boast."

[3] "He scrambles atop her, feeling for toeholds--so much terrain to explore--mountains, valleys and rifts, new continents, ancient rivers" (58).

[4] The comedy is underlined by means of anaphora: "[H]e's steaming up a hill . . . running for his life, running for his liberty, running for all he's worth" (78).

[5] "All gathered to stand hushed and appalled while this impossible, inexplicable presence, this man in the moon fallen to earth, this white demon from hell chants, screeches, gibbers and sings, churning up the water, cursing the crops, bringing the sky down, and who knows what else" (103).

Boyle tarnishes Mungo's heroic image even further by implicitly comparing the explorer to the *picaro* Ned Rise, who undergoes a curiously parallel set of adventures of his own, capped also by an apparent return from the dead. While Mungo is busy exploring Fatima and the rest of Africa, Ned is waking up in a flophouse,[6] "feeling a bit like an explorer setting foot on a new continent" (6); running an "*Entertainment*" (18), starring Nan Punt and Sally Sebum, in the Reamer Room of the Pig & Pox Tavern in Maiden Lane; desperately leaping through the ice of the Thames to escape the clutches of the Bow Street Runners; selling "[f]rog's eggs and shoe blacking" (166) to the nobs of London as Chichikov's Choice, genuine Russian caviar; being beaten and robbed by Lord Twit and his henchman; being framed and hanged for Twit's murder.

The second book, entitled "The Yarrow" and preceded by an epigraph from Wordsworth's "Yarrow Unvisited," contrasts the fortunes of the two protagonists. As Mungo's star rises to its zenith, Ned's plunges to its nadir, setting up a meeting between the two in Africa and a consequent reversal of their respective fortunes in the third book. Book two details Mungo's hero's welcome in London society; his affair with the Baroness von Kalibzo; his difficulties in putting the story of his travels onto paper; his homecoming and marriage to Ailie Anderson; the dreariness of his medical practice in Peebles; his desertion of his wife and three children to lead a second expedition to the Niger.

[6] Like the tavern in Hogarth's "Gin Lane," this establishment boasts a sign that reads "DRUNK FOR A PENNY / DEAD DRUNK FOR TUPPENCE / CLEAN STRAW, FREE" (7). Describing the scene with its sleeping drunks, its odour of urine and vomit, and its sow lying beside an overturned chamberpot, the narrator remarks that "Hogarth would have loved it" (6).

Ned, in contrast, fares much worse. Rising from the dead on a dissection table, he is forced to become a graverobber or risk a second hanging. When that occupation becomes too dangerous, he flees London for Hertfordshire only to be shot at for trespassing by the gameskeepers of Squire Trelawney, a booby squire who sentences him to twenty years of hard labour, imprisons him for two months in a dry well, and remands him to the hulks, whereupon he is conscripted into the army and transferred to Fort Goree off the coast of West Africa.

The third book, entitled "Niger Redux" and ironically preceded by Virgil's exhortation to Dante in *The Divine Comedy* to let good sense be his guide, links the journeys of Mungo Park and Ned Rise. Recruiting men, Ned among them, from the garrison at Fort Goree, Mungo proceeds on his ill-fated expedition. The combination of the rainy season and Mungo's ineffectual leadership suffices to doom the whole enterprise. Illness, accident, and incessant raiding by wild animals and natives decimate the exploratory party. Foolishly deciding to have no contact with the natives owing to his fear of the Moors, Park and the few survivors sail down the Niger, disregarding all traditional boundaries, fighting off all attackers, until a massed group of men and the rapids of Bussa combine to bring the voyage to its disastrous close. In a parodic ending, which undercuts the conventions of both genres, the heroic adventurer drowns and the anti-heroic *picaro* becomes an African god.

(iii)

Like most kinds of travel literature, *Water Music* employs a third-person point of view. The omniscient narrator uses the present tense to

describe the action,[7] creating an effect of narrative immediacy--"writing to the moment," Richardson would say--as if the events were happening now, not 190 years ago. And in a sense they are, for this is a contemporary novel masquerading as an historical novel.[8] Because the narrator's perspective is that of 1982, not 1795, a viewpoint he makes obvious by means of anachronistic commentary, the reader receives constant reminders that this is not an historical novel even though it is set at the turn of the nineteenth century.

Unlike Barth and Jong, who incorporate their twentieth-century viewpoints into their respective texts thematically, Boyle conveys his linguistically. Although the characters, with one notable exception, speak the language of their time, the narrator speaks the language of our time. He peppers his speech with words that did not exist at the turn of the nineteenth century--e.g., paranoid (50), pushover (59), nitty-gritty (64), genes (76), sanitation squad (95), teenager (101), shiv (138),

[7] Boyle's narrator is omniscient spatially, psychologically, and, especially, temporally. He parodies the device of psychological omniscience, however, by carrying it to an extreme, giving the thoughts of a crocodile lying in wait for a victim:

> [A] colossal old riverine crocodile . . . has followed the rising waters deep into the recesses of the jungle in the hope of picking up an easy meal at the expense of some half-drowned, warm-blooded creature . . . . Things have gone splashing past him--easy marks--. . . but he's ignored them. . . . [H]e has his heart set on the pregnant woman, a sort of two-in-one treat. Or the stringy little man. Or that strange, pale newcomer. And he knows, as he's known all along, that sooner or later one of them will come fumbling down that bank to fetch a calabash of water. (148-49)

[8] Ken Tucker, in the *Village Voice*, describes *Water Music* as a "picaresque/experimental novel," a genre that renders "avant-garde fiction techniques into a commercial form, even while subverting that form to smithereens" (39). Other examples he gives include *The Sot-Weed Factor*, Gaddis's *JR*, Coover's *The Public Burning*, and Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*.

lollipop (141), roller skates (146), cocktail (149), and freshmen (340)--and habitually uses contemporary idiom. The reader sees Mungo "[l]aying it on the line" (42), reads Ned's thought that perhaps the expedition "isn't all it's cracked up to be" (313), sees Mungo "saved by the bell" (279) and Ailie "pushing to win, break the tape, drive the ball home" (321), and hears a character named Smirke call Ned Rise a "motherfuckin', faggot turd" (312).

Contrasting comically with the novel's contemporary colloquialisms--"It's no picnic, life on the Sahel, let's face it. Talk of scarcity and want, whims of nature: welcome to them" (21)--is a judicious selection of mock-elevated diction. For example, a beetle's leg contains "minatory serrations" (116), a coffle of asses consists of "solipedous quadrupeds" (326), Mungo makes his way through "umbrageous forests" (336), and a native rainmaker is the "local hyetologist" (343). In addition, one encounters adjectives such as "crepitating" (126), "caliginous" (155, 262), "testudineous" (234), "[f]rangible" (244), "susurrant" (322), "steatopygous" (341), "jactitating" (344), "sematic" (361), and "noctivigant" (363).

Water Music's linguistic potpourri is matched by its abundant intertextual allusion, much of which is anachronistic, ranging from epic poetry to pop music. In addition to juxtaposing actual historical figures and fictional characters, Boyle fills his text with references to classical myth and European literature, including among many others Homer and Sophocles, Catullus and Horace, Shakespeare and Jonson, Addison and Steele, Swift and Pope, Richardson and Fielding, Burney and Austen, Byron and Keats, Scott and Dickens. He includes marked quotations from Pope's *Dunciad*, 2.231-34 ("*Three catcalls be the bribe*" [12]); Marvell's "To His

Coy Mistress," 1-2 ("Had we but World enough, and Time" [59]); Shakespeare's *King Lear*, 3.2.1 ("Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks!" [69]), *Othello*, 1.3.290-91 ("*If virtue no delighted beauty lack*" [339]), and *Macbeth*, 4.1.44-45 ("By the pricking of my thumbs" [409]).

More frequently, and more challengingly, Boyle scatters throughout the novel unmarked quotations that echo literary works and pop songs. For example, there are chapters bearing the titles "Born Under a Bad Sign" (Albert King), "Oh Mama, Can This Really Be the End" (Bob Dylan, "Memphis Blues"), "Somebody to Lean On" (Rolling Stones, "Let It Bleed"), "Ned the Obscure" (like Jude, Ned is not permitted to rise above his class), "And Quiet Flows the Niger" (Sholokov, *And Quiet Flows the Don*), "Fathers and Sons" (Turgenev), and "The Heart of Darkness."

Additional echoes derive from a variety of sources, e.g., folksongs such as "The Lion Sleeps Tonight" ("'Weema-woppa, weema-woppa,' sang the women and children, while an old man . . . wove a snaking melody above it" [170]) and Arlo Guthrie's "Alice's Restaurant":

> The hulks, if anything, are closer and damper than Squire Trelawney's well, with the added liability of constant exposure to the reeking breath, runny bowels and festering phlegm of hundreds of hardened criminals, father rapers, generalized pederasts and blood drinkers alike. (288)

Other sources include Swift's "A Description of a City Shower" ("'You should of seen that, Ned--Smirke in the pillory. I let him have it with half a dozen rotted turnips and a dead cat'" [74]) and "Battel of the Books"[9] ("Innocence, beauty, sweetness and light: the combination is

[9] "*[I]nstead of* Dirt *and* Poison, *we have rather chose to fill our Hives with* Honey *and* Wax, *thus furnishing Mankind with the two Noblest of Things, which are* Sweetness *and* Light" (Davis 1: 151).

breathtaking"/[126]); as well as jokingly *The Odyssey* and *King Kong*:

> One man told him that the river ran to the world's end. Another that it ended in a violent whirlpool that sucked all things down into the waiting maw of a sea-beast called Karibdish. Still another that it enclosed the Mountains of the Moon and had its tributaries in the Kingdom of Kong, a land interdicted for its cannibals and the giant apes that roam its cloud-hung massifs. (142)

There are echoes of Coleridge's "Kubla Khan": "Golden fish drifted through transparent pools, pleasure domes sprang up on precipices overlooking the sea" (264); Nabokov's *Invitation to a Beheading*: "In France they were sending out invitations to a beheading" (40); and Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*: "For the rest, they were faceless multitudes, hard as stones, ready to strip the clothes from your back as you lay dying" (261); and *Hamlet*, 3.1.58, 78-79 (foreshadowing Mungo's death):[10]

> The canopy would provide shade and shelter, and the hide was impervious to any of the slings and arrows that might come Mungo's way as he cruised down the mighty Niger into the unknown and almost certainly hostile regions to the east. (382)

A more elaborate allusion is used to foreshadow the termination of Mungo's river journey in the rapids at Bussa. Like Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, who brings a curse upon his head by shooting an albatross with his crossbow, one of Mungo's men brings down a vulture. It comes as no

[10] See Harrison 906:

> The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
> . . . . . .
> The undiscovered country from whose bourn
> No traveler returns.

surprise to the reader familiar with Coleridge's poem that disaster soon follows:

> Suddenly a gunshot snaps out behind him, and he wheels round at the quick sharp surprise of it. It is Martyn, nearly on top of him, a musket smoking in one hand, the other clenched in a fist. Almost instantaneously a vulture slaps down on the deck. Stunned, bleeding, one wing askew, the bird scrambles to its feet and lifts its gleaming beak with a hiss. . . . The bird leaps once, twice, like a rooster dodging a cart, and then Martyn catches it across the back. Bones crack, the claws rake reflexively at the floor of the canoe, and Martyn hits it again. There is a moment of silence, the bird motionless. (422)

In addition, many of Boyle's similes and metaphors employ vehicles taken from other works of literature. For instance, to convey a sense of Ned's childhood, the narrator compares him to orphans found in Dickens's pages, using anaphora to foreground the analogy and to turn Ned's woes into comedy: "Not Twist, not Copperfield, not Fagin himself had a childhood to compare with Ned Rise's" (34). Similarly, to describe the panic that ensues when word of an impending invasion reaches an African village, he relies on the reader's knowledge of *The Divine Comedy* and *Paradise Lost*:

> Outside, it's a scene from Milton or Dante: weeping and wailing, self-flagellation, misdirection, panic, loss of faith. Mothers run childless, children motherless. (76)

Using *chiasmus* to mitigate the horror of the scene, Boyle achieves a comic effect through stylization. The flamboyance of his style lessens the impact of his narrative, redirecting the reader's attention from the events described to the language itself.

The artificiality of both the narrative manner and perspective of *Water Music* functions to turn all events into grist for Boyle's parodic

mill. With its mixture of high and low styles, contemporary slang and recondite diction, elite and popular culture, the novel continually draws attention to itself as language. Boyle's linguistic play--his farcical, low tone; ironic style; black humour; coarse jokes; ubiquitous allusion; and flashy similes--is both comic and self-conscious. His verbal virtuosity, which flaunts the metafictional opposition between fictional illusion and the laying bare of that illusion, both entices the reader into, and distances him/her from, the story.

(iv)

Both the contemporary diction and the anachronistic allusion draw attention to the text as a new, rather than an old, novel. Pulling in the opposite direction, however, toward the past, are a number of rhetorical and narrative devices, which achieve in miniature what the generic parody accomplishes on a larger scale. These range from figures such as anaphora ("She ate for fear, she ate for vengeance. She ate for beauty" [24]) and alliteration ("He leans farther . . . leaning and looking until he's literally hanging over mother and matron like some sort of molester" [236]), which foreground the language of the text, to tropes such as irony, which undercut the notion of heroism that sustains the adventure novel.

Boyle evokes, for example, an Homeric epithet--"As dawn stretches her rosy fingers over the rooftops of London" (253)--only to return the reader to an earthbound picaresque world. A "harelipped match girl" (253) stumbles upon a bound and gagged man in an alley. Behaving like the New Yorkers in Donald Barthelme's story, "The Glass Mountain," who rob the

knights that fall from the mountain, she immediately "sift[s] through his pockets" (253).

Similarly, describing the morning of Ned's trial, Boyle employs pathetic fallacy to foreshadow the impending travesty of justice. By choosing grotesque images, however, he mockingly highlights the device, exposing its contrived effect: "The day of the trial dawned like an infection, the sky low and pus-colored, the sun a crusted eye" (160).

Like Fielding and Barth, Boyle occasionally uses *epexegesis* to mock his own metaphors, e.g., when Johnson is dragged under by a crocodile. Again, however, his rhetoric undercuts the reader's sense of the seriousness of the scene. Mungo's anguish is stylized and rendered comic:

> As he watched Johnson's brow sink into the muck, he lost control of himself, carrying on like a Greek housewife at the funeral of her eldest son, or a federalist, forced by luck of the draw to inscribe his name last on a historic and revolutionary document. Purely and simply, he gave way to despair. (168)

More frequently, Boyle turns serious events into comedy through understatement. For instance, by understating the circumstances surrounding the harrowing death of Major Daniel Houghton, he parodies the explorer's heroism and his tragic end:

> Houghton sallied up the Gambia in a dugout canoe, drank from fetid puddles and ate monkey meat, and through sheer grit and force of intoxication survived typhus, malaria, loiasis, leprosy and yellow fever. Unfortunately, the Moors of Ludamar stripped him naked and staked him out on the crest of a dune. Where he died. (5)

Similarly, when describing a machine that extinguishes sight:

> The device was originally fabricated in the ninth century for al-kaid Hassan Ibn Mohammed, the blind Bashaw of Tripoli.

> Insecure about his infirmity, the Bashaw decreed that all who desired to come into his presence must first submit to having their eyes put out. He was a very lonely man. (7)

Or when Ned is startled while robbing a grave:

> [H]e finds himself diving for the shrubbery, rattled to the bone, a stray branch whipping at his face, the crush of a dead weed, and then that terrible stillness again. Lying there in the dark, feeling foolish, he begins to feel more strongly than ever that there are better ways of spending a cold winter's night. (229)

Boyle achieves a similar effect by the use of bathos:

> I've tramped the world under my feet, he said, laughed at fear, derided danger. Through hordes of savages, over parching deserts, the freezing north, the everlasting ice and stormy seas have I passed without harm. How good is my God! Two weeks after landing at Cairo he died of dysentery. (4)

Irony is, however, the device Boyle most frequently employs to ridicule the heroic ethos of the adventure novel. For example, to describe Mungo among the Moors--"It begins to occur to him that he may not make it after all, that he might just lie here and waste away, dauntless discoverer of the interior walls of a Moorish tent" (42)--as well as his less than attentive guards: "a seventh comatose guard was summoned to complement the six men tried and true who were already dozing before the entranceway" (52). Or to portray Mungo's anticlimactic entrance into Bambarra: "Long after the dust has settled, the explorer makes his grand entrance. On foot" (66). Irony by means of incongruity marks the narrator's description of the Moors in Bambarra, enjoying "an evening of feasting and good-natured raping and extorting" (77). And irony undermines the supposed scientific curiosity displayed by members of the African Association upon Mungo's return from Africa:

> They are excited, their faces lambent with the ardor of pure and disinterested scientific inquiry as they press him for details pertaining to the sexual preferences of the various tribes. (208-209)

There is also dramatic irony in Mungo's mistaken opinion of the broken-down dregs he has recruited at Fort Goree: "He's got himself thirty-five good men, strong, stalwart and true--not to mention eager and stout of heart" (310). His heroic enthusiasm is undermined by his cervantic inability to perceive the obvious.

Boyle also uses for comic purposes the convention, common in the eighteenth-century, of archetypal names, i.e., names that represent a character by resembling a word or phrase in common language (Watson 56-57). Ned Rise, for instance, can rise from the dead but not in society; Sally Sebum and Nan Punt are prostitutes; and Fanny Brunch, the dairy maid, excites lascivious appetites.

As is so often the case in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels, coincidence plays a significant role in the plot. Boyle's use of the device, like Barth's, inverts Fielding's association of it with the workings of Providence. For example, Mungo's, Johnson's, and Ned's lives are intertwined in a remarkable and highly unlikely fashion. Several years before Johnson and Ned meet on Mungo's second expedition, Johnson kills a man in a duel and is, consequently, transported to Fort Goree. His unlucky opponent is one Prentiss Barrenboyne, a gentleman who had taken the orphaned Ned Rise in off the streets and given him the only peaceful years he had ever known. Barrenboyne's death sends Ned back onto the London streets and eventually to Fort Goree where he meets Mungo. Many years later at Bussa, Mungo fails to kill his arch-enemy Dassoud, a Moor, because Ned, recognizing the pistol that Johnson has given Mungo,

snatches it from his hands. The sight of the pistol that ruined his life sends Ned over the edge, convinced that the universe is malevolent and life but "a bad joke" (427).

Boyle employs as well cliffhanger endings, a characteristic nineteenth-century device. As John Cawelti points out, suspense is one of the most common devices found in formula fiction such as adventure novels, and the cliffhanger is one of the simplest models of suspense (17). Boyle's use of the device contributes to his parody of the adventure formula, however, for the suspense generated in *Water Music* is more farcical than real. For example, the chapter entitled "Plantation Song" ends with an inspired piece of slapstick in which Mungo, bitten by a bushpig, manages to collapse Fatima's tent while falling into her lap. "You done blowed it now . . . . Blowed it now. Lord God Almighty, you done blowed it now" (48), sings Johnson. The amused reader must wait a chapter before learning that "he hadn't blown it. Not by a long shot" (51).

These devices are generally foregrounded by being placed in a farcical context. Occasionally, however, a convention is used self-consciously. For example, when Fanny Brunch learns of Ned's arrest for murder, the narrator comments: "At this juncture in the history of manners, it was considered *de rigueur* for a heroine to faint dead away when confronted with so sudden and devastating a turn of events" (153).

Finally, like most eighteenth-century novels, *Water Music*'s narrative is interrupted by digressions or interpolations of various sorts. The narrator sometimes inserts other kinds of narrative material, such as excerpts from notebooks and letters, and includes a recipe for baked camel ("Serves 400" [54]). At other times, he pauses to lecture the reader on assorted subjects such as servants' lives in Georgian England (128-29),

the unsanitary condition of the London streets (84), or even crocodile lore (145). Occasionally, he relates the life stories of various minor characters, e.g., "Dassoud's Story," "A.K.A. Katanga Oyo," "Glegg's Story," "Fanny Brunch," etc. Such digressions, as Percy G. Adams points out, were common to both eighteenth-century fiction and actual travellers' tales of the period (206). They help to give *Water Music* the structure, if not the language, of earlier novels.

(v)

The novel's two plots juxtapose the conventions of two opposed genres. In the Mungo Park story, Boyle employs the typical romance-adventure motifs of the young man setting forth and returning, the waiting heroine, hostile natives, captivity in strange lands, torture and narrow escapes, frightening animals, guns, slavery, cannibalism, and pitched battles (Green *passim*; Adams, ch. 5). In the Ned Rise story, he includes the usual picaresque motifs: an episodic plot; a lower-class protagonist trying to survive by means of his cleverness and adaptability; an extended journey through space and time and various corrupt social milieu; dishonourable birth; poverty, hunger, and delinquency (Sieber 31; Bjornson 4).

By playing the two genres off against each other, the pessimism of the one undermining the optimism of the other, Boyle parodies the Victorian adventure novel and the imperialist ideology it reflects. Although *Water Music* employs the romance journey structure and the device of the questing hero typical of the adventure novel, it does so only to undercut them. Often driven by curiosity or a restless nature, lured by excitement and adventure, the hero voyages into the unknown where he undergoes a series of tests or trials. Mungo puts it this way:

> I want to know the unknowable; see the unseen, scale mountains and look behind the stars. I want to fill in the maps, lecture the geographers, hold up a torch for the academicians. (90)

Boyle portrays this unquenchable thirst for knowledge as not entirely disinterested, however. Like many romance heroes, Mungo lacks both rank and fortune. Exploration represents his main chance for fame and glory. Johnson, Mungo's guide and Boyle's spokesman, astutely discerns the self-serving method in his madness:

> "You're consumed with a almost demonic obsession to prove yourself?"
>
> "Exactly."
>
> "And all the regular avenues is closed--you bein' a Scotsman and your father only a crofter. So you can't enter politics or take a commission in the army or hobnob with the elite in their drawin' rooms and clubs --"
>
> "Un-huh."
>
> "So what else is there? You rely on your courage and stamina and you go off to fathom the unknown and then come back a hero. Right?" (90)

The acuteness of Johnson's assessment comes as no surprise, for he not only speaks for his author but also functions as a foil to Mungo. Ostensibly an eighteenth-century African, Johnson is a twentieth-century American in disguise, a walking anachronism. He sings "the blues" (48), eats "[s]oul food" (53), remarks dryly that Fatima must be "big on slapstick" (53), shouts "[l]et's make tracks" (79), slaps hands ("Johnson holds out his hands, palms up. The explorer . . . reaches out and brushes the upturned palms with his own" [83]), claims that a Mandingo medicine man has "got his *mojo* workin'" (91), exclaims "Hot dog" (110), advises Mungo to "[s]tay cool" (111), and when in doubt asks, "Say what?" (135).

Ironically, however, far from setting off Mungo's heroism, Johnson exposes his foolhardiness. An extraordinary creation, Johnson, who

accompanies Mungo on both his expeditions, is a combination of several romance character types: the mentor, the trusted servant, and the noble savage. Kidnapped at the age of thirteen by Foulah herdsman and sold into slavery, he works in the Carolinas as a field hand for twelve years and as a house servant for three years before becoming the personal valet of Sir Reginald Durfeys, Bt., who brings him to London. Educating himself in Sir Reginald's library, he learns Greek and Latin, reads both the Ancients and the Moderns, and so admires Fielding that he attempts a Mandingo translation of *Amelia*. After killing a man in a duel, however, he is transported to Fort Goree, whereupon he deserts his post and returns home. His fee for guiding Mungo's first expedition is the complete works of Shakespeare; for the second, the works of Milton and Dryden and a signed edition of Pope.[11]

Mungo is not uncourageous. Nonetheless, he is far from the conquering hero. Although accompanied by an older and wiser companion in Johnson (a travel literature convention), he fails to learn the requisite lessons owing to his limited intelligence, his sense of superiority as a white man, and his romantic illusions. In fact, he is more the quixotic misadventurer who puts a false construction on the world than he is the romance hero. Boyle turns the quest romance of the courageous, heroic explorer related in Park's *Travels* into the cervantic tale of an idealistic but

[11] In creating Johnson, Boyle collapses two historical figures into one: the actual Johnson (a former slave in Jamaica who did, indeed, spend seven years in England before returning to Africa), who leaves Mungo shortly after the Moors release him; and Isaaqo, a trader who accompanied Mungo to the Niger in return for the monetary equivalent of two slaves (about £40). Johnson was to be paid 10 bars a month, and his wife was to receive 5 bars monthly during his absence (a bar was equal to 2 shillings) (Lupton 46).

foolish master and his pragmatic servant on the road in Africa, beaten and robbed everywhere they go. The erudite Johnson, unlike Mungo, recognizes the analogy and dubs Mungo's horse "Rosinante." The allusion is doubled, for like Ebenezer's horse in *The Sot-Weed Factor*, this emaciated, ulcerated, half-blind nag is "given to senile farting--great gaseous exhalations that swept the sun from the sky and made all the world a sink" (14).

Like Don Quixote's, Mungo's actions are frequently portrayed as ludicrous and he himself as a buffoon. For example, the reader sees him about to have his eyes put out, grinning foolishly as the screws are tightened:

> The explorer grins stupidly beneath his brazen cap. His eyes are gray. . . . Gloucester's eyes, they say, were gray. Oedipus' were black as olives. And Milton's--Milton's were like bluejays scrabbling in the snow. . . . The explorer grins. Oblivious. The onlookers, horrified at his mad composure, turn away in panic. He can hear them rushing off, the slap of their sandals on the baked earth . . . but what's this?--he seems to have something caught in his eye . . . . (9)

The black comedy of the scene turns Mungo into a caricature of the questing hero. The use of literary allusion to convey the action is typical of this novel as is the suspended ending. This paragraph concludes the chapter. Mungo is not saved until the next chapter, humorously entitled "Corrective Surgery," which begins with Johnson shouting "Stop!"

In a similarly farcical scene, Mungo is threatened in the dark by a menacing but unidentified animal. He attempts to dislodge a large stick to defend himself only to discover when the lights come on that he has been yanking on the leg of a dead horse:

> But there, he has something, a stick certainly--no, it's thicker and heavier, the size of a club. . . . [I]t seems to be stuck. . . . He jerks at the stick for his very life, in a fever, the snarling thing nearly beside him now, growls turned to roars, blood-starved, maddened, raaaaaaaaoowwwwwww!
>
> But of course the darkest hour comes just before the dawn. At that moment the scene is lit by the flash of a pistol, inundated by the report. There is an instant of revelation--the carcass of the horse, its stiffened leg in his hand, the searing venomous eyes and curled lips of the beast dissolving into the night. (134-35)

The elements of the scene are familiar--the ineffectual explorer; the heightened suspense; the last minute rescue by Johnson; the ironic cliché, which mocks the device while using it.

Ned Rise, in contrast, is no fool. He is the typical down-and-out picaresque hero, the wiseguy living by his wits, trying to better his social and material situation in a hostile and dehumanizing society. "'This is Africa, brother,'" says Johnson to Mungo. "'It's dog eat dog out here. If you weak, they goin' to knock you down and strip your ass bare'" (353). Ned could say the same about London. Despite his name, in his attempts to rise to a higher station, he is constantly being knocked down and stripped of everything he has schemed and worked for.

Boyle handles his picaresque materials parodically, however, flattening out his characters, rendering them almost cartoon-like. Take the matter of Ned's low birth. Employing, typically, an intertextual frame, the narrator hyperbolically catalogues the evils of Ned's childhood. Not even Dickens's orphans have it that bad:

> Not Twist, not Copperfield, not Fagin himself had a childhood to compare with Ned Rise's. He was unwashed, untutored, unloved, battered, abused, harassed, deprived, starved, mutilated and orphaned, a victim of poverty, ignorance, ill-luck, class prejudice, lack of opportunity, malicious fate and gin. His was a childhood so totally depraved even a Zola would shudder to think of it. (34)

Nonetheless, Ned survives as the picaresque hero always does. In a parodic recognition scene, Boyle illuminates the essence of the type:

> Ned was undergoing a transformation. . . . Then it came to him, hard and sudden, in a flash of recognition--he had a mission on earth. . . . and this was it: to eliminate Smirke, seduce Park and take charge of the expedition. . . . He clung there, a man with a purpose, a man who would fight and scratch, manipulate and maneuver--a man who would survive. (333-34)

Boyle's parodic treatment of the genre extends to its satiric element. Exaggerating the confrontation between the *picaro* and a hostile society, he portrays Ned Rise as a sacrificial victim by means of a recurring pattern of Christ imagery, beginning with a mock-adoration and ending with a mock-resurrection. Ned is born in a crib of straw in "The Holy Land" (34), i.e., a two-penny flophouse, in which there are three other lodgers; netted by fishermen after a desperate leap into the Thames, he is "like a man three days dead" (70); none of his friends suspects that "he'd risen from the dead" (71); he is hanged on Christmas day along with two thieves, one of whom is repentant, one of whom is not (193-96); the old hag who claims his body is "screeching and blubbering like the mother of Christ come to haul him down from the cross" (205); when he wakes, he "opens his eyes on Resurrection Day" (207); in the hospital he has "a fervent messianic look in his eye" (223), and whenever he thinks of meeting his lover, Fanny Brunch, he "rehearse[s] the miracle of his resurrection" (225); the narrator describes him as a "resurrected Christ" (359) and "a man who had been born to poverty and [who had] experienced the miracle of resurrection" (432); after the swamping of the boat at Bussa, he "open[s] his eyes on nirvana for the third time in his life" (432); to the pigmy tribe he meets, he is a "messiah" (435).

Boyle's generic parody continues in the novel's two subplots, both of which focus on the subservient, dependent role of women in nineteenth-century society. In the first plot, he further diminishes the explorer's stature by portraying his dreams of adventure as a juvenile escape from responsibility.[12] Percy G. Adams coins the term "Ulysses Factor" (151) to describe the lure of the unknown, the fascination with travel, that makes up the hero's call to adventure. Yet for every Ulysses there is a Penelope left behind. In Mungo's case, this is Ailie Anderson, whom he marries after his first African voyage. Waiting for Mungo to come home from his first voyage, Ailie takes up microscopy rather than spinning and explores inner worlds while Mungo is busy exploring the outer world. Plagued, like Penelope, by another suitor, she waits faithfully, never doubting that "like some galloping cavalier out of a medieval romance," Mungo "would turn up to save her from the dragon" (187). Unlike Penelope, however, Ailie is not the long-suffering angel in the house. Her patience has limits. When Mungo, delayed in London for several months, finally shows up on her doorstep, Boyle subverts the stereotype: "He looks into her eyes. They say no. They say I've waited too long. They say Penelope be damned" (239).

The erstwhile suitor is one Georgie Glegg, a man destined to failure, born anachronistically under a bad sign. Like Ned and ultimately

[12] See Patrick Brantlinger, "Victorians and Africans": "Africa was a setting where British boys could become men but also where British men could behave like boys with impunity, as do Haggard's heroes. Africa was a great testing--or teething--ground for moral growth and moral regression . . . . And since imperialism always entailed violence and exploitation and therefore never could bear much scrutiny" (190), it is little wonder that "Victorian imaginative discourse about Africa tended toward the vaguely discredited forms of the gothic romance and the boys' adventure story" (188).

like Mungo, Georgie is dogged by a malicious fate. In describing Georgie's birth, Boyle parodies the portents that attend the births of great men. A golden eagle lands on the weathervane of Georgie's father's house, leading to fistfights among the neighbours over its import, a farce that ends only when someone with a musket shoots the bird dead, sealing Georgie's fate. Like the slaying of the albatross in *The Ancient Mariner*, the killing of the eagle is "a disaster" because of which "misfortune settle[s] on the boy's shoulders like a winged apparition" (214). Accordingly, Georgie is doomed to failure in his attempts to win Ailie from Mungo, and she, in turn, is fated to spend her entire life waiting for a Ulysses who never comes home.

The woman Ned leaves behind after his apparent death from hanging is Fanny Brunch, the very type of the country maid. A beautiful milkmaid like Hardy's Tess d'Urbeyfield and Hetty Sorrel, Fanny is redolent of the dairy:

> Fanny Brunch was fresh from the creamery. Her breath was hot with the smell of milk, and it whispered of cribs and nipples and the darkness of the womb! Her skin was cream, her breasts cheeses, there was butter in her smile. (124)

The narrator of *Adam Bede* remarks that "[t]here are various orders of beauty, causing men to make fools of themselves in various styles, from the desperate to the sheepish" (82-83; ch. 7). Fanny's is of the former variety. By the time she had reached sixteen years of age, two country louts had hacked each other to death with hoes over her, and the local squire had abducted her and bound her to his bed. When, like many country girls of the century and its novels, she comes to London to enter service in an upper-class household, she is again pursued by an unwanted and

desperate lover. Adonais Brooks, a man whose neurotic sensibility takes the form of a perverted romanticism, throws himself out of a third-story window for love of her, breaking nine ribs and both legs and losing an ear in the process. Bearing a name reminiscent of Henry Brooke, the novelist of sensibility, Brooks insists that his friends call him Werther; reads the poetry of Collins, Smart, Cowper, and Gray as well as MacPherson's Ossian poems and Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*; and champions "passion over precision, sensibility over wit" (154). Having "[e]nough of Pope, Addison, and Steele! Enough of wit and urbanity and the heroic couplet," this mock-romantic calls for "life . . . blood . . . the grave" (154) and thrives on foggy streets, electric storms, blasts of wind, mountains, wounds, derring-do, and, above all, sex--"thrilling, voluptuous and morbid sex" (154).

Whisked off to Germany by Brooks before she has time to recover from the shock of Ned's seeming death, Fanny becomes a character in a gothic tale of castles, opium, debauched noblemen, and illicit sex. She eventually escapes, only to play a worse role: the fallen woman, homeless, penniless, friendless, an opium addict. Her end is conventional but no less pathetic for it:[13]

> She was a whore, an opium eater, a childless mother. All her beauty, all her stamina, all her resourcefulness had brought her to this. It was the nineteenth century. What else was a heroine to do but make her way to the river? . . . She made her way to Blackfriars Bridge one foggy night, pulled herself over the railing and toppled into the mist below. The flat

[13] Jo McMurtry describes the stereotype of the prostitute in Victorian middle-class fiction, "recognizable by her sunken cheeks, her ragged shawl, and the low moaning sounds she makes as she creeps barefoot through the snow to drown herself in the river" (188).

> dark water closed over her like a curtain drawn across a stage. (271)

While drawing attention to Fanny as a conventional figure in a particular kind of novel, Boyle elicits sympathy for her plight and condemns the society that makes her fate inevitable. Like Jong, he foregrounds the condition of women in the period, highlighting their passivity and consequent vulnerability to exploitation by men, just as he exposes the oppressive class system that victimizes unfortunates like Ned.

Boyle's technique, then, is to reverse the roles of his two protagonists and to invert the conventions of their respective genres. He portrays the romantic hero as an inept fool, a babe in the jungle. Conversely, he makes the picaresque anti-hero the true hero of the novel, a mock-Christ capable of surviving in any jungle, urban or exotic. The "great white hero" (an epithet sarcastically bestowed upon Mungo by Ned), unable to fulfil the heroic pattern of the adventure novel, falls from the heights of his initial triumph to an ignominious death. The *picaro* rises from the dead three times, finally to be reborn into a parodic nirvana in Africa. In one subplot, the explorer abandons his family, condemning his wife to a life of perpetual waiting and his eldest son to a fatal search for a lost father. In the other, a harshly oppressive society condemns a "fallen woman," whose only crime is to fall in love, to a self-inflicted death. The optimistic idealism of the adventure novel gives way completely to the pessimistic pragmatism of the picaresque novel with its emphasis on the gap between the ideal and the corrupt state of the actual world.

(vi)

The central fantasy of the adventure story, which Boyle debunks, is that of the hero "overcoming obstacles and dangers and accomplishing some important and moral mission" (Cawelti 39). In the novels of African exploration, which Patrick Brantlinger describes as "quest romances with gothic overtones in which the heroic white penetration of the Dark Continent is the central theme" ("Victorians" 188), this heroism is associated with notions of racial and cultural superiority. Conventionally, these novels, from H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, portray a "manichean universe" (Parry 23) divided between "warring moral forces--good versus evil, civilization versus savagery, West versus East, light versus darkness, white versus black" (Brantlinger, "Impressionism" 373-74). Abdul R. JanMohamed describes the ideological function of the "manichean allegory" (63), which is the central feature of colonialist representation:

> While the covert purpose [of colonialism] is to exploit the colony's natural resources thoroughly and ruthlessly through the various imperialist material practices, the overt aim, as articulated by colonialist discourse, is to "civilize" the savage, to introduce him to all the benefits of Western cultures. Yet the fact that this overt aim, embedded as an assumption in all colonialist literature, is accompanied in colonialist texts by a more vociferous insistence, indeed by a fixation, upon the savagery and the evilness of the native, should alert us to the real function of these texts: to justify imperial occupation and exploitation. (62)

The myth of the Dark Continent, which as Patrick Brantlinger shows developed during the transition from the outlawing of slavery in British territory in 1833 to the partitioning of Africa in the last twenty-five years of the century ("Victorians" 166), reflects "the processes of

projection and displacement of guilt for the slave trade, guilt for empire, guilt for one's own savage and shadowy impulses" ("Victorians" 196). Accordingly, the perils the heroes of imperialist novels must overcome are both physical and psychological, the journey into Africa symbolizing the descent into the subconscious mind. In attempting to bring light to the darkness of Africa, the European runs the risk of reversion to savagery himself.[14] In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow avoids this danger by focusing on surface details and refusing to look within. The idealistic Kurtz, who preaches the white man's burden, ends by succumbing to the darkness completely.

Heart of Darkness, the masterpiece of the imperialist genre, is the primary model for *Water Music*, albeit anachronistically. It is in contrast to Conrad's modernist remaking of the adventure novel into high art that Boyle's postmodernist version should be seen. Conrad's narrator tells us that Marlow's meaning envelopes his tale like a misty halo illuminated by moonshine. Boyle's story, on the other hand, fractures its literary model, revealing its true colours. By burlesquing the imperialist adventure novel, Boyle lays bare the racist ideology of imperialism and its literary rationalization and portrays exploration as exploitation. The narrator's late twentieth-century perspective and parodic technique enable him to ridicule the myths underlying imperialism by casting them in anti-heroic form and by inverting their manichean imagery.

[14] According to Brantlinger, "the myth of the Dark Continent contains the submerged fear of falling out of the light, down the long coal chute of social and moral regression" ("Victorians" 196). He cites the example of Charles Stokes, a "renegade missionary" (194), who became a slave trader and gun runner.

Accordingly, Mungo is represented as inept and his motives as self-serving. The racist polarities in his thinking are equally evident. Just returned from "the chaos and barbarity of Africa" (199), the exhausted explorer attends a concert featuring selections from Handel's *Messiah*. The effect of the music is sufficient to "drive back the darkness" of Africa:

> The sound of strings, organs and trumpet is an anodyne, washing him in the sweetness and light of civilization, whispering of precision and control, of the Enlightenment, of St. Paul's and Pall Mall, of the comfortable operation of cause and effect, statement and resolution. He is back, at long last he is back. Back in a society where the forms are observed and love of culture is a way of life, a society that nurtures Shakespeares, Wrens, Miltons and Cooks. Hail Britannia, yes indeed. (199)

The irony of Mungo's musings is that the most enlightened character in the novel is an African. In Johnson's ironic commentary, Mungo's prejudices stand exposed. For example, Mungo, waistdeep in the Niger, remarks:

> "Look at it, will you? Wide across as the Thames at Westminster. And to think: through all the ages, from the time of Creation till this very minute, it's tumbled along in ignorance and legend. It took *me*, old boy. It took *me* to uncover it." (104)

Although standing in the middle of a well-travelled trading route and facing a large, densely populated town, Mungo talks as if Africa has no history, no civilization, of its own. Johnson's dry response uncovers Mungo's egotism and Eurocentric point of view:

> Johnson glances back over his shoulder at the ranks of whitewashed buildings clustered on the hillside, the bamboo docks ranged along the shoreline, the dugouts bobbing at their tethers. "I can appreciate that, Mr. Park, and I extend my

> sincere congratulations. But if we don't get our asses over to the Mansa's palace and start grovelin' at his feet, we just might not live to tell about it." (104)

Nonetheless, *Heart of Darkness* and *Water Music* share several common conventions, e.g., the stock type of the Englishman, such as Captain Good in *King Solomon's Mines*, who insists on wearing English clothes and following English customs regardless of the setting or climate. At the start of their respective river journeys, both Mungo and Marlow meet men who keep up European appearances. In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow views as "'achievements of character'" the "'starched collars and got-up shirt-fronts'" (18) worn by the Company's chief accountant. It is to the accountant's office that he returns to escape "the chaos" (19) of the outer station. In *Water Music*, Mungo's African mentor, Dr. Laidley of the West African Company, is "the center in a chaos of colors, dialects, tattoos and nose rings, the single fixed point in an ever-shifting pattern of bizarre needs, wants and practices" (315). In contrast to Marlow, however, the narrator of *Water Music* illustrates the absurdity of Laidley's behaviour. Describing him as "[f]at and florid," he points out that Laidley wears "a dress shirt in one-hundred-ten degree heat and ninety-nine-percent humidity" and compares him to "a caricature of Ben Franklin" (184).[15]

Boyle's treatment of *Heart of Darkness* deepens as the novel progresses. In the first voyage, Conrad's description of Marlow's penetration into the "heart of darkness" is alluded to mockingly. Johnson, in a chapter entitled "The Heart of Darkness," sarcastically exposes the

[15] The parallel with *Heart of Darkness* is clearly intentional. The historical Dr. John Laidley was actually a slave trader (Lupton 42).

"mystery of Africa" cliché that underlies Conrad's novella. When Mungo asks a Mandingo soothsayer to tell his fortune, Johnson warns him:

> "[H]ey, this is *Africa*, man. The eye of the needle, mother of mystery, heart of darkness. And this old naked black man here with his feet all crusted up and his penis danglin' in the mud--he don't fool around." (92)

During the second expedition, however, the comedy darkens, taking on some of the tones of tragedy, and parallels between the two works increase. To begin with, Mungo makes what would be called a tragic error if committed by a more heroic figure. Enjoying the role of the great white hero, he wilfully chooses to ignore the fact that the timing of the expedition is all wrong since the rainy season is soon to begin:

> But as quickly as the thought enters his head--nasty and insinuating . . . he dismisses it. Why dwell on niggling little unpleasantries at a time like this? Here he is, after all, returned to the scene of his greatest triumph. Here he is with a boatload of provisions and trade goods, crates of arms and ammunition, the government behind him, bosom friends at his side. Here he is about to head up an expedition on the grand scale, with porters and armed guards and the rights and prerogatives of a captain in His Royal Majesty's service. Here he is on the deck of the *Crescent*, the wind in his hair, with a load of asses. (303)

The insistent anaphora ("Here he is"), culminating in the irony of the last sentence, uncovers Mungo's egotism and confirms the reader's suspicion that the great white hero is keeping the right company. As Johnson later says when Mungo refuses to believe that rain is imminent: "'You know somethin', Mungo--You just as big a ass as you was eight years ago'" (345).

As Mungo and his men proceed farther and farther down the river, Boyle's prose comes to more nearly resemble Conrad's brooding, obscure

style. For example, consider Marlow's description of his voyage up the Congo:

> "Going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings. An empty stream, a great silence, an impenetrable forest. The air was warm, thick, heavy, sluggish. There was no joy in the brilliance of sunshine. . . . [Y]ou thought yourself bewitched and cut off for ever from everything you had known once--somewhere--far away--in another existence perhaps. There were moments when one's past came back to one . . . in the shape of an unrestful and noisy dream, remembered with wonder amongst the overwhelming realities of this strange world of plants, and water, and silence. And this stillness of life did not in the least resemble a peace. It was the stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention." (34)

Similar images of inward movement, dream time, unbearable silence, and mysterious forces are used to describe Mungo's voyage down the Niger:

> It is like descending into the body, this penetration of the river, like passing through veins and arteries and great dripping organs, like exploring the chambers of the heart or reaching out for the impalpable soul. Earth, forest, sky, water: the river thrums with the beat of life. Mungo feels it--as steady and pervasive as the ticking of a supernal clock--feels it through the searing windless days and the utter nights that fall back to the rim of the void. . . . A presence. A mystery. A sense of communing with the eternal that drops a pall over everything . . . . It is almost as if they've fallen under a spell, the explorer and his men, as if their blood were flowing in sympathetic confluence with the river. (391)

The jungle entrances Mungo as it does Kurtz, casting a spell that he, also like Kurtz, will not live long enough to break. Kurtz, the idealist, falls prey to the darkness of his desires, unable to resist because ultimately "he was hollow to the core" (59). Mungo, on a lesser scale, does the same. The disastrous events that ensue, together with Mungo's dread of the Moors, take their toll on his psyche. Beginning as a

self-assured naif, he loses his self-confidence--"Self-doubt was something new to Mungo, something that had crept up on him like a growth, a malignancy, during the course of this second expedition. Self-doubt, and guilt" (384)--and falls victim to an consuming *idée fixe*, the desire to reach the mouth of the Niger at all costs. Like Kurtz, who indulges in monstrous passions, Mungo too succumbs to the darkness. His growing paranoia and increasing lack of restraint drive him to attack any canoes that approach his own, including three carrying women and children. Boyle characteristically filters the description of the massacre through the narrator's irony, which, undercutting the heroic clichés, reveals by means of incongruity what Mungo has become:

> Snatching up their weapons like the true-blue stout-hearted fighting men they are, saturated to the very clefts of their chins with true grit, blazing away like champions, like murderers. (401)

Nonetheless, just as Marlow finds something to admire in Kurtz--his ability to face the universal darkness and to express it in words--while knowing full well that he is merely choosing among nightmares, so Ned Rise finds something to admire in Mungo even though he considers him a "self-centered fool . . . conceited, mad with ambition, selfish, blind, incompetent, fatuous" (421). Mungo at least "has a focus for his life, a reason for living" (421), even if it is only "risking his fool hide to open up the map and get his name inscribed in history books" (422). In Ned's opinion, Mungo's dreams of adventure are valuable because they give his life "a reason, an organizing principle" (421). Mere survival is not enough.

Ned's comments notwithstanding, *Water Music* does not ultimately acquit the imperialist enterprise. In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow declares

that "'[t]he conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much'" (7). He goes on to say, however, that it is redeemed by "'[a]n idea at the back of it . . . and an unselfish belief in the idea'" (7). Both thematically and structurally, *Water Music* is sceptical about the "idea," the white man's burden. Undercutting the idealism of the adventure novel with the pragmatism of the picaresque novel, Boyle debunks the civilization-savagery opposition that fuels the imperialist myth. In *Water Music*, there are two jungles, two civilizations, both of which appear equally "dark."

Boyle establishes this sense of equality by means of a series of parallels between the two plots. For instance, instead of the romantic landscape typical of adventure novels, he creates two settings, both marked by disease, squalor, and corruption. His Africa contains no lost civilizations, no pastoral Elysiums (Etherington 40), only the Fever Coast, a place of "[h]eat, filth and disease" (298). The streets of his London are "as foul, feculent and disease-ridden as a series of interconnected dunghills, twice as dangerous as a battlefield, and as infrequently maintained as the lower cells of an asylum dungeon" (84). African aristocrats might be given to decadence:

> The potentate of Bambarra, having just finished an enormous breakfast (baked plantain, four varieties of melon, boiled rice with spinach, fried cichlids, sorghum pudding, palm wine), is in the process of slaking his lust with the aid of two prepubescent boys. (105)

But then so are European aristocrats, feasting on "Erbsensuppe, Beuschel and Gnagi, Bratkartoffeln, Fleischvögel and Hasenbraten," "mounds of shredded cabbage and beets," and a "dozen bottles of Rüdesheimer" (263),

and indulging in "an avalanche" of sex, "smothered in wine and opium" (265). Life in Africa might be, as Johnson says, a matter of "dog eat dog" (353), but life in England is governed by a system that emasculates the "penniless" and "powerless," "crushe[s] the downtrodden and reward[s] perjurers and thieves" (160). If the one setting is violent with the weak at the mercy of the strong, so is the other. Mungo is robbed by the Moors and by Mansong's guards and later killed by outraged Moors and tribesmen for violating tribal boundaries, but Ned is also robbed and beaten, frequently, by men of both high and low estate and is hanged because he constitutes "an outrage, a violation of the rules, a challenge to the system" (161).

In the final analysis, life, except for the privileged, is barbaric in both jungles. The "immense darkness" that the narrator of *Heart of Darkness* sees connecting the "uttermost ends of the earth" (158) is assumed as a given in *Water Music*. In both plots, this malevolence is personified, given a palpable form. In Africa, Mungo is pursued relentlessly by Dassoud, a superhuman Moor, ruthless, invincible, harder than the desert, larger than life. "Unreasoning, cold and deadly," a "cousin of the devil," Dassoud inspires in Mungo "an absolute, implacable, merciless hatred" (425). Ned, on the other hand, is dogged throughout his life by an old crone with a face like a "memento mori" (6), a gold ring through her lower lip, and a characteristic shriek that freezes one's blood. Looking "like the denouement of a Gothic tale" (7), this "old harridan" (196), like an *Erinye*, haunts Ned from the moment he draws "his first breath in a cold crib of straw" (196-97) until the moment he plunges into the river at Bussa, the cries of the vultures overhead echoing the cackle

of her laughter,[16] a sound "like knives grating against a whetstone" (411): "'Eeeeeee!' call the vultures, swooping low. 'Eeeeeeee-eeeeeee!'" (427).

Ned, inevitably, fails to recognize her consciously, but unconsciously, instinctively, he knows what she stands for: "There was something about her that made his blood run cold, something strange and terrible, something that reached back to his earliest memories and whispered *lost, lost, all lost*" (162). She is there at his birth, assisting the mother and trying to abduct the child (36). She runs the gin mill where the reader first meets Ned (6), and she is the proprietress of the women's clothing shop where Ned goes to buy a disguise (86-87). She is there at his trial, her laughter ringing in his ears as he is sentenced to death (167). After the hanging, she claims and sells his body (205). Ned meets her in a hovel in Hertfordshire where she lives with his illegitimate son (unbeknownst to him) whom she has kidnapped from the destitute Fanny Brunch (283-86). Finally, crossing over into the other plot, she makes her last appearance in the Scottish highlands where, as the wife of an old cottager, she taunts and frightens Ailie, Mungo's wife (411).

Evil, in the "bleak bitter universe" (334) of *Water Music*, is a universal fact. Under all human societies lies a heart of darkness. The picaresque world-view prevails. In both jungles, only the fittest, i.e., the privileged or the most ruthless, survive. Ultimately, this malevolent

[16] The hag's laugh corresponds to what Arsène in Samuel Beckett's *Watt* calls "the mirthless laugh," i.e., "the dianoetic laugh . . . . the laugh of laughs, the *risus purus*, the laugh laughing at the laugh, the beholding, the saluting of the highest joke, in a word the laugh that laughs--silence please--at that which is unhappy" (48).

world is governed by Rise's Law, which dictates that "when things start going too well . . . the Powers That Be swoop down on you like a dozen hurricanes and leave you buried under half a ton of flotsam and jetsam" (48-49). In this "fathomless universe" (425), the "Hand of Fate" (50), in the nightmarish shape of a balding crone, is there to slap down the upstarts.

(vii)

Water Music, with its clowning, its foregrounded language, its low tone, its cartoon-like characterization, its intertextual web, its slapstick, and its satire, turns the adventure novel on its head. To the very last, Boyle shatters the formulaic expectations associated with the genres he employs, undercutting the class system underlying the one and the imperialist ideology underlying the other. His anti-heroic version of the adventure novel concludes with Mungo failing to kill his arch-enemy before he dies, thus subverting the conventional expectation that the hero will triumph over the perils through which he passes. Furthermore, in a parody of the usual picaresque ending, Ned not only survives but also, contrary to the conventions of the genre, escapes the oppressive society that has persecuted him. At the end, it is Ned, the picaro, not Mungo, the explorer, who is saved from the abyss. With "pain driving like spikes through his hands and feet" (433), Ned "open[s] his eyes on nirvana for the third time in his life" (432). Reversing the light and dark imagery of the imperialist novel, Boyle makes this "paradise" "brighter, far brighter" (432) than the first two in which Ned awakes. This Eden is peopled by a pygmy tribe, headed by an old Adam who "could have been the first man on earth, father of us all" (434). To the pygmies, Ned, "no

outcast, no criminal, no orphan" now, is a "messiah" (435). Thus, his mother's hope that he would "'rise above all this shit'" (36) comes ironically true. In the novel's final reversal, he finds peace not in England, not in the sweetness and light of civilization, but in "the shadow of the Dark Continent" (431).

Like both *The Sot-Weed Factor* and *Fanny*, *Water Music* subverts the generic conventions it employs in order to demystify the illusions the form sustains. Boyle is as tendentious as Jong, although both his particular critique and his parodic strategy differ from hers. Where she foregrounds and challenges patriarchal representations of women, he exposes and attacks the covert systems of representation that inform the imperialist novel. Employing the bleak vision of the picaresque novel as a counter fiction, Boyle undercuts the adventure novel's representation of the explorer as heroic and his quest as noble and unmasks the mercenary motives that lie at the heart of imperialism, the interests that its representations both justify and occlude. His linguistic virtuosity, ironic wit, narrative hijinks, and use of pop culture turn the adventure novel into what one reviewer calls comic book fiction (an appropriate transformation of boy's adventure stories, one presumes).[17] Boyle's anti-elitist stance, which explodes the racist representations of the colonialist novel and the discriminatory social representations of the picaresque novel, focuses on the exploited and the marginal, portraying them as victims of a dark, dehumanizing society.

[17] See Tolson 10: "If this is the historical novel and the Victorian novel transformed into comic book fiction, it is High Comic Book Fiction, in the manner of John Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor*."

Chapter Five: Living Fossils

(1)

Near the beginning of John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, the hero, Charles Smithson, an amateur paleontologist, is shown gathering tests (i.e., petrified sea urchins) on the rocky beach west of Lyme Regis on a blustery March day in 1867. Gazing up at the lias strata in the "sombre grey cliffs" (10; ch. 1) above him, Charles, who is enough of a scientist to reject Linnaeus's ladder of nature, still sees "in the strata an immensely reassuring orderliness in existence" (54; ch. 8). Speaking from the vantage point of 1967, the narrator immediately adds: "He might perhaps have seen a very contemporary social symbolism in the way these grey-blue ledges were crumbling" (54; ch. 8).

Later, in the midst of one of his digressions, the narrator places his text in a literary as well as a geographical setting. He declares: "I have now come under the shadow, the very relevant shadow, of the great novelist who towers over this part of England of which I write" (262; ch. 35).[1] The great novelist is Thomas Hardy, "the first to try to break the

[1] In "On Writing a Novel," notes taken while writing *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Fowles echoes the novel:

> The shadow of Thomas Hardy, the heart of whose 'country' I can see in the distance from my workroom window, I cannot avoid. Since he and Peacock are my two favourite male novelists of the nineteenth century I don't mind the shadow. It seems best to use it. (291)

Victorian middle-class seal over the supposed Pandora's box of sex" (262; ch. 35), and this part of England, Dorset, is very much "Hardy country."

In these two passages, twenty-seven chapters apart, can be found key elements of the novel's thematic complex and formal structure. The story of Charles Smithson's escape from the reassuring but stultifying weight of Victorian tradition, its fossilized moral and social conventions, is matched by the story of the narrator's struggle against the constricting tradition of the Victorian novel with its fossilized literary conventions. Not only Hardy but also a host of other Victorian novelists and poets cast their shadows over *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. Charles, whose complacent acceptance of the "unquestioned assumptions of [his] age [and] social caste" (143; ch. 18) makes him a "poor living fossil" (281; ch. 38), struggles to be "more than an ammonite stranded in a drought" (202; ch. 25). The narrator, who is a contemporary of Barthes and Robbe-Grillet, struggles to be free of the metaphysical assumption underlying the omniscient convention of the Victorian novel, i.e., "that the novelist stands next to God" (97; ch. 13). *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is not a Victorian novel, but neither is it "a novel in the modern sense of the word" (97; ch. 13). Fowles's dilemma is familiar to the new, old novelists, but his solution is unique. Imitating a form the underlying principles of which he does not accept, he overtly juxtaposes old content and new philosophy. Like an echinoderm embedded in flint, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* consists of one sort of material (contemporary commentary) embedded in another (historical narrative).

(ii)

The plot turns on a device found in many Victorian novels--the love

triangle.[2] Smithson, gentleman, heir to a baronetcy, is engaged to Ernestina Freeman, a conventionally pretty, but bland, young woman, who would be characterless if not for an "imperceptible hint of a Becky Sharp" (31; ch. 5). Before long, however, he falls in love with, and breaks his engagement for, Sarah Woodruff, an unconventionally beautiful, intelligent, and determined young woman, who represents for Charles all the mystery and romance that his life lacks. In selecting Sarah over Ernestina, Charles chooses passion over duty, freedom over conformity.

The mysterious Miss Woodruff is, indeed, no ordinary woman. Fowles fashions her from a combination of the conventions of the orphan, the displaced person, and the fallen woman. The daughter of a tenant farmer obsessed, like Hardy's Jack Durbeyfield, with his remote ancestry, she is educated at a boarding school, a young ladies' seminary in Exeter.[3] Unfortunately, her education is a curse that makes her "the perfect victim of a caste society" (58; ch. 9), for it leaves her classless. A lady in appearance but not in fact, she can neither return to the class she has

[2] De Vitis and Palmer identify the triangle of Stephen Smith, Elfride Swancourt, and Henry Knight in Hardy's *A Pair of Blue Eyes* as Fowles's source ("Blue Eyes" 91). They suggest, in turn, that Hardy's novel "surely echoes" the Lucy Deane, Stephen Guest, Maggie Tulliver triangle in *The Mill on the Floss* (93). Kerry McSweeney also points to the parallels between Fowles's novel and Eliot's novel ("Variations" 137).

[3] Sarah, whom Walter Allen calls "a figure out of a Hardy ballad" (66), shares similarities with other Hardy heroines. Like Eustacia Vye, she is offered a job reading to an elderly woman (Wolfe 145), and like both Eustacia and Tess, her life is changed by an undelivered letter (Wolfe 145). Her pricking of her finger on a hawthorn bush during a meeting with Charles seems to be a double allusion. The incident, like Tess's pricking of her finger when she meets Alex d'Urberville, foreshadows her later deflowering by Charles. The fact that a hawthorn bush, rather than a rose bush, does the damage connects her with that other scarlet woman Hester Prynne, whose embroidered A, like Sarah's conspicuous grief, signifies her defiance of convention.

left nor rise to the one above. When her father goes mad and dies as a result of losing his property, like Maggie Tulliver's father, she becomes a governess, like Jane Eyre, like numerous Victorian women in the same predicament. She does not find a Mr. Rochester, however. Instead, caring for other people's children during an era when great stress was placed on family life, witness to a happiness she has no hope of enjoying, she comes to feel alienated, excluded, like one "allowed to live in paradise, but forbidden to enjoy it" (166; ch. 20).

Sarah is, of course, the French Lieutenant's Woman of the title or, as the locals more bluntly put it, the "French Loot'n'nt's Hoer" (88; ch. 12). Rumours of disgrace with a French naval officer, seemingly confirmed by her sorrowful countenance, black dress, and conspicuous gazing out to sea, account for this designation. The interesting twist in Fowles's use of the convention is that Sarah's story is a fiction, created and cultivated by Sarah herself. Denied an appropriate role in society, she plays the part of the "scarlet woman of Lyme" (121; ch. 16), deliberately setting herself "beyond the pale" (171; ch. 20). Rebelling against her fate, she consciously transgresses, or appears to transgress, Victorian sexual taboos, her time's idealization of women and insistence on moral purity. Outcast, relieved of the need to conform to social expectations and moral conventions, she is free to assert her individuality.

Sarah's desire for what we would now call existential freedom is something she thinks other women cannot understand. They are not alone. Neither Charles nor the narrator can understand her either. To Charles, she is an "enigma" (124; ch. 16), and it is this mysteriousness, this

sense of possibility, that disturbs and excites him. The narrator fares little better. To the question, "Who is Sarah? Out of what shadows does she come?" (96; ch. 12), he replies: "I don't know" (97; ch. 13). Later, in a passage that refers back to this one, he again betrays his limited omniscience with respect to Sarah's psychology:

> 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. (270; ch. 36)

There are sound technical reasons for keeping Sarah's motives from the reader.[4] She is as much a narrative device as she is a developed character. To reveal the workings of her mind would also reveal the workings of the plot and deprive the reader of any feelings of suspense. Sarah's scheming and manipulation of Charles precipitate his crisis of faith, which follows a pattern--a rejection of traditional beliefs followed by an agonizing self-consciousness leading to an acceptance of life's tragic realities--typical of Victorian intellectuals and artists (Buckley 85-86). She is not only the catalyst that sets the plot in motion. She is also Fowles's surrogate embedded in the story, linking Charles's progress toward existential freedom to the author's desire to endow his creation and his readers with a similar freedom.[5] Like Conchis

[4] McSweeney points out Fowles's sleight-of-hand here (140). Early in the novel, the narrator informs the reader of Sarah's "profundity of insight" and mentions her "fused rare power" of "understanding and emotion." These are, of course, internal views.

[5] See Fowles, "Writing":

> I am trying to show an existentialist awareness before it was chronologically possible. . . . [I]t has always seemed to me that the Victorian Age, especially from 1850 on, was highly

in Fowles's *The Magus*, she creates fictions that convert the hero from an inauthentic existence to a state from which he can win through to an authentic mode of life. Similarly, the narrator deceives the reader, setting up false expectations, revealing the import of events after the fact, refusing to allow access to Sarah's mind when it counts, pretending that he does not have total control over his characters. Consequently, the hero and the reader embark on parallel journeys, the former rejecting the religious and social conventions on which his society rests, the latter rejecting the narrative conventions designed to render those supposed truths.

Charles's journey from complacent acceptance of the fitness of things to a sense of existential flux and contingency is furthered by what Fowles calls "that most Hardyesque of all narrative devices: the tryst" ("Hardy" 36). Typically in Hardy's novels, this involves

> [t]he isolated meeting of a man and woman, preferably by chance, preferably in 'pagan' nature and away from the 'Christian' restraint of town and house, preferably trap-set with various minor circumstances . . . that oblige a greater closeness and eventual bodily contact . . . all this was transparently a more exciting concept than the 'all-embracing indifference' of marriage. ("Hardy" 36)

The usual result in Hardy's novels is a "gaining briefly to lose eternally" ("Hardy" 37).

And so it is in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. Charles first

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> existentialist in many of its personal dilemmas. One can almost invert the reality and say that Camus and Sartre have been trying to lead us, in their fashion, to a Victorian seriousness of purpose and moral sensitivity. (285)

glimpses Sarah as a black figure standing alone at the end of the Cobb, the stone breakwater in Lyme Bay, well beyond the steps that "Jane Austen made Louisa Musgrove fall down in *Persuasion*" (14; ch. 2). This is followed by five clandestine meetings, four of them in, or close to, the Undercliff, a wilderness on the cliff-face west of Lyme, which Jane Austen, also in *Persuasion*, describes "with its green chasms between romantic rocks" and its "scattered forest trees and orchards of luxuriant growth" (75; vol. 1, ch. 11). It is here, in this "English Garden of Eden" (71; ch. 10), that Sarah, the "wild animal" (118; ch. 16), can escape from the civilized but suffocating society of Lyme. It is here also that passion triumphs over duty and "the whole Victorian Age [is] lost" (75; ch. 10).

Charles's temptation begins with his first accidental discovery of Sarah asleep in the Undercliff. He is of two minds about her right from the start. He pities her, yet he desires her. Responding to "something intensely tender and yet sexual in the way she lay" (74; ch. 10), Charles perceives both her "innocence" and her "appalling loneliness" (74; ch. 10). She appears to him both "an innocent victim and a wild, abandoned woman" (172; ch. 20), both timid and forbidding. Recognizing her "independence of spirit" and "determination to be what she was" (118; ch. 16), he also apprehends her "darker qualities" (119; ch. 16). Her sensual eyes and mouth he associates with "foreign women" and "foreign beds" (119; ch. 16) in general, with Emma Bovary in particular. She is compared to a vision of the Virgin Mary (136; ch. 18), yet she is also a "Calypso" (140; ch. 18).

What unbalances Charles is the discovery of a "hidden self he hardly knew existed" (128; ch. 17). Besieged by sexual forces hitherto easily repressed, his sense of duty and propriety fights a losing battle. Initially, he flees from her "like a startled roebuck" (144; ch. 18), but it is not long before he is dissatisfied with Ernestina and, feeling entrapped, thinks of himself as "a Byron tamed" (128; ch. 17). The narrator conveys a sense of Charles's precarious position and of his inevitable fall by means of repeated images of natural catastrophe. Charles is "like a man about to be engulfed by a landslide" (140; ch. 18) or like a man standing on "a brink over an abyss" (143; ch. 18) or on the "brink of [a] bluff" (172; ch. 20). Finding himself "excited . . . to the very roots of his being" (181; ch. 21) by her, he is "beset by a maze of cross-currents and swept hopelessly away from his safe anchorage of judicial, and judicious, sympathy" (172; ch. 20). His attempts to rationalize his feelings notwithstanding--"he was not a moth infatuated by a candle; he was a highly intelligent being, one of the fittest, and endowed with total free will" (183-84; ch. 22)--he soon realizes the truth: "he really did stand with one foot over the precipice" (181; ch. 21).

Charles is wrong about the candle. In the fourth meeting with Sarah, in a dilapidated barn used for storing hay, the fire of "intense repressed emotion" (242; ch. 31) proves impossible to quench. The narrator describes Sarah as "all flame" (242; ch. 31) and tells us that Charles is reminded of Catullus's poem 51: "'Whenever I see you, sound fails, my tongue falters, thin fire steals through my limbs, an inner roar, and darkness shrouds my ears and eyes'" (242; ch. 31). Charles is

"like a man beneath a breaking dam" (243; ch. 31), defenceless against the onrush of passion until, inevitably, if still rather innocently, "[t]he moment overcame the age" (243; ch. 31).

Not until Charles comes to see Sarah at Endicott's Family Hotel in Exeter, however, does the dam finally burst. Unable to resist the "mystery" that she represents and an "intolerable thirst" to see her again, he is overcome by "a violent sexual desire" (334; ch. 46). Again the intensity of their feelings is conveyed by images of natural disaster. The silence between them is "as tense as a bridge about to break, a tower to fall" (335; ch. 46). What is at stake here is clear. Charles is embracing more than a woman. What motivates him is "the hunger of a long frustration--not merely sexual, for a whole ungovernable torrent of things banned, romance, adventure, sin, madness, animality" (336; ch. 46). In short, all that the castle walls of "Duty and Propriety" (353; ch. 49) were built to repel. He feels "like a child at last let free from school, a prisoner in a green field, a hawk rising" (336; ch. 46).

It is doubtful, nonetheless, that Sarah alone, even with the "tiger" (240; ch. 31) that she unleashes, could have brought Charles to turn his back on his society. Earlier, just before meeting Sarah in the barn, he had received perhaps an even greater shock. Called to Winsyatt, his uncle's estate, Charles finds his inheritance about to slip through his fingers. His uncle has decided to marry, shattering the "ineffable feeling of fortunate destiny and right order" (190; ch. 23) that thought of the estate had always evoked in Charles. His conception of himself as a gentleman had always been dependent on the traditional notion of rank.

The blow of losing Winsyatt means "los[ing] respect for everything he knew" (230; ch. 28). Far from feeling freed from obligation and responsibilities, he "had never felt less free" (229; ch. 28). In fact, in his mind, "he had no more free will than an ammonite" (230). The doctrine of the survival of the fittest, which had always seemed to confirm free will, now seems a cage. As a member of a vanishing class, "a superseded monster" (281; ch. 38), he sees himself as "one of life's victims, one more ammonite caught in the vast movements of history, stranded now for eternity, a potential turned to a fossil" (321; ch. 43). His great expectations turned to stone, he sees "universal chaos, looming behind the fragile structure of human order" (234; ch. 29). Having lost the paradise of Winsyatt, he feels himself excommunicated from society, from nature itself, "all paradise lost" (234).

Charles suffers from what the existentialists call the "anxiety of freedom--that is, the realization that one *is* free and the realization that being free is a situation of terror" (328; ch. 45). This "existentialist terror" (360; ch. 50) requires one to choose, to act authentically according to one's inner needs. Charles acts in Sarah's bedroom, but the necessity to continue to choose remains. The age itself, with its "iron certainties and rigid conventions," is an implacable foe, "the great hidden enemy of all his deepest yearnings" (350; ch. 48). Guilt drives Charles from Sarah's room to a nearby church where orthodoxy makes its last stand and loses. Surrounded by "gravestones embedded in the floor" with their worn names and dates, the "last fossil remains of other lives" (346; ch. 48), he is once again on the edge of a "bottomless brink" (350;

ch. 48). Discarding the great myths of his time, recognizing "that the wires were down" (346; ch. 48) permanently between man and God and that the dead are gone forever and can no longer judge us, Charles comes to understand what Sarah stands for: "the pure essence of cruel but necessary . . . freedom" (352; ch. 48). He chooses the freedom of hazard over the imprisoning shibboleths of his age and class--duty, honour, and self-respect--knowing full well the price he will have to pay.

(iii)

To create his parody of the Victorian novel, Fowles employs a number of nineteenth-century presentational devices. Among these is a technique of characterization by which external description modulates into internal description. From physical appearance and clothes, the narrator passes to interior views and assessments:

> Ernestina had exactly the right face for her age; that is, small-chinned, oval, delicate as a violet. . . . Her grey eyes and the paleness of her skin only enhanced the delicacy of the rest. At first meetings she could cast down her eyes very prettily, as if she might faint should any gentleman dare to address her. But there was a minute tilt at the corner of her eyelids, and a corresponding tilt at the corner of her lips . . . that denied, very subtly but quite unmistakably, her apparent total obeisance to the great god Man. An orthodox Victorian would perhaps have mistrusted that imperceptible hint of a Becky Sharp. (31; ch. 5)

Similarly, Fowles employs the convention of extended descriptive passages to establish the setting. The canvas on which the scenes are painted is, like Thackeray's in *Vanity Fair*, panoramic. Fowles takes the reader to both urban and rural settings, to both high and low estates. In

contrast to conventional domestic life in Lyme, he presents the "perfect world" (233; ch. 29) of the Undercliff in what one critic calls the "mossy, rural tone of Hardy" (Rackham 99). He makes use of as well the convention of the country estate with its (to borrow Nabokov's phrases from *Ada*) "romantic mansion . . . on the gentle eminence of old novels," its "regular rows of stylized saplings" (35) (avenues of lime trees, naturally), and its lawns, gatehouses, smiths, rustics, housekeepers, laundrymaids, etc. With the elegance of the English gentleman's London clubs, he contrasts the tawdry finery of the brothel and the squalid dwellings of the prostitute. His descriptions are represented with all the leisurely setting of scene typical of Victorian literature:

> An easterly is the most disagreeable wind in Lyme Bay--Lyme Bay being that largest bite from the underside of England's outstretched south-western leg--and a person of curiosity could at once have deduced several strong probabilities about the pair who began to walk down the quay at Lyme Regis, the small but ancient eponym of the inbite, one incisively sharp and blustery morning in the late March of 1867. (9; ch. 1)

Fowles portrays a cross-section of English society as well. By using the convention of parallel master and servant romances, the love affair of the gentleman and the merchant's daughter counterpointed by the love affair of the Cockney servant and the rural maid, Fowles is able to contrast the attitudes toward morality and social hierarchy of the upper and lower classes at a time of social and economic change. In the discordance between Charles's pride, based on birth, and his prospective father-in-law's pride, based on class, one is given an insight into the nature of those changes. In the prostitute, also named Sarah, whom Charles picks up

in London, one sees the fate that not uncommonly awaited women such as Sarah Woodruff.

According to some critics, Fowles's characters are taken from a wide spectrum of Victorian literature. The variety suggested lends support to Fred Kaplan's contention that the characters are composite variations on identifiable Victorian fictional heroes, heroines, and villains (112). Nonetheless, these supposed sources are not all equally convincing. The minor characters are fairly straightforward. Kaplan compares the sadistic and self-righteous Mrs. Poulteney, Sarah's employer, to Mrs. Clennam in *Little Dorrit*, Miss Haversham in *Great Expectations*, and Mrs. Proudie in *Barchester Towers*; Aunt Tranter reminds him of Aunt Bessie in *David Copperfield*; and he finds in Mrs. Fairley the type of the malicious housekeeper (111). Ian Adam compares Mr. Freeman, the *nouveau riche* entrepreneur, to Arnold's Philistine and thinks Serjeant Murphy resembles Serjeant Buzfuz of *Pickwick Papers* ("Discussion" 345); and the narrator himself compares Sam Farrow to his cockney counterpart Sam Weller, also of *Pickwick Papers* (46-48; ch. 7).

Among the major characters, the variety is greater. Suggested parallels to Ernestina include Rosamond Viny in *Middlemarch* (Adam, "Discussion" 345), Amelia Sedley in *Vanity Fair* (Kaplan 111), and, less convincingly, Esther Summerson in *Bleak House* (Kaplan 111). Charles has been compared to Arthur Clennam in *Little Dorrit* (Kaplan 111), Tertius Lydgate in *Middlemarch* (Kaplan 111), Angel Claire in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (Brantlinger, "Discussion" 343), and, most surprisingly, Jude Fawley in *Jude the Obscure* (Kaplan 111). Suggestions for Sarah's sources consist of

Tess d'Urbeyfield (Kaplan 111), Grace Melbury of Hardy's *The Woodlanders* (Rackham 100), Sue Bridehead of *Jude the Obscure* (Kaplan 111), Miss Wade of *Little Dorrit* (Kaplan 111), Maggie Tulliver of *The Mill on the Floss* (McSweeney 137), Eustacia Vye of *The Return of the Native* (Wolfe 145), and even Dorothea Brooke of *Middlemarch* (Kaplan 111). The sheer number of sources suggested for the major characters, despite some obviously unsatisfactory examples, is evidence that Fowles imitates aspects of various characters rather than specific characters found in Victorian literature.

The same is true of the novel's formal and thematic structures, which have also been the site of much intertextual excavation. De Vitis and Palmer ("*Blue Eyes*") document what they see as Fowles's debt to Hardy's third novel, *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. They point to the love triangle, the estrangement theme, echoes in characters' names, the fossil motif, marriages by elderly relations (Charles's uncle and Elfride's father), and to the fact that both Charles Smithson and Henry Knight are amateur paleontologists. Additionally, they see Hardy's thematic emphasis on the need to choose and the exercise of free will extended to the reader in the three endings of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*.

Their thesis seems ultimately unconvincing, nevertheless, when one considers that the triangle in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* consists of two men and a woman and that there are closer parallels in other Victorian novels such as *The Mill on the Floss*. The novels' endings are also very different. *A Pair of Blue Eyes* ends conventionally with Elfride's marriage to Lord Luxellian and her subsequent death, while in the final ending of *The*

French Lieutenant's Woman, Fowles tries to free his narrator, his characters, and his readers from past novelistic conventions. Moreover, Fowles claims that he did not have Hardy's novel in mind when he wrote his own novel (Huffaker 138, n. 28). He points, instead, to Claire de Durfort's *Ourika*, which he read not long before beginning to write *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and which he sees in retrospect as an unconscious influence.[6]

These seeming imitations of imitations have led Kaplan to conclude that the England represented in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is not so much the historical Victorian England as the England portrayed in Victorian literature.[7] In so doing, however, he places too much emphasis on Fowles's literary sources and not enough on his debts to Victorian essayists, his use of documentary material, and his efforts to explain the forces that propelled Victorian society. Fowles employs a number of devices, with one exception all common Victorian conventions, to convey this information and establish the texture of actual Victorian life. Most of the chapter epigraphs, a device George Eliot was fond of, are taken from Victorian poets, but Marx and Darwin are well represented with six and three respectively, Leslie Stephen with two, and Newman with one.

[6] "It came as a shock . . . to pick up *Ourika* one day and to recall that Charles was the name of the principal male figure there also. That set me thinking. And though I could have sworn I had never had the African figure of Ourika herself in mind during the writing of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, I am now certain in retrospect that she was very active in my unconscious" (Foreword, *Ourika* 7).

[7] "The history, then, is more in the fiction than in the fact, more in the literary products of the age than in the factual documents of the historians. Fowles has succeeded in writing a fiction, an historical novel of sorts, that is true to our knowledge of the period revealed through the period's imaginative literature" (111).

Others are taken from texts about the period or from actual Victorian documents such as newspapers and government reports.

Similarly, the narrator's digressions on various aspects of Victorian life, e.g., the sexual habits of both rich and poor, the separation of mind and body, the increasing stratification of society, the earnestness of the newly-rich merchant class, the upwardly mobile aspirations of an ambitious servant class, add to the reader's knowledge of the period. The opening of chapter 35 is typical:

> What are we faced with in the nineteenth century? An age where woman was sacred; and where you could buy a thirteen-year-old girl for a few pounds--a few shillings, if you wanted her for only an hour or two. Where more churches were built than in the whole previous history of the country; and where one in sixty houses in London was a brothel (the modern ratio would be nearer one in six thousand). Where the sanctity of marriage (and chastity before marriage) was proclaimed from every pulpit, in every newspaper editorial and public utterance; and where never--or hardly ever--have so many great public figures, from the future king down, led scandalous private lives. (258)

This generalizing style is common in nineteenth-century novels. The footnotes Fowles occasionally uses are not, but they, too, are designed to illuminate the cultural suppositions of the age for the reader. Collectively, such devices give an essayistic, didactic feel to the work.

By placing his characters in a substantive social milieu, showing how they are shaped by, and how they struggle against, the dominant forces of their society, however illusory these might turn out to be, Fowles is faithful to the Victorian novel. The expansion of causal structure is one of the most notable features distinguishing the nineteenth-century English

novel from its eighteenth-century counterpart. As Philip Stevick points out, the options available for showing cause and effect increased from providence, chance, and human will in the eighteenth century to include law, religion, social class, history, geography, education, etc., in the nineteenth (*Chapter* 180-81). Or as George Eliot's narrator in *The Mill on the Floss* remarks, responding to Novalis,[8] character is "not the whole of our destiny" (353; bk. 6, ch. 6). People are formed by, and need to be seen in, a social setting. The narrator of *Felix Holt* makes much the same point: "there is no private life which has not been determined by a wider public life" (45; vol. 1, ch. 3).

This perspective is a distinctive characteristic of nineteenth-century realism. To quote the narrator of *The Mill on the Floss* once again, "the observation of human life" is similar to observation in "natural science" in that it requires "a large vision of relations" in which "every single object suggests a vast sum of conditions" (238; bk. 4, ch. 1). Influenced by the growth of the physical sciences, Eliot was concerned with the laws governing both the material and moral worlds. The Victorian novel, of which hers are supreme examples, focuses on the individual in society, describing the effect of external forces on internal experience, reconciling material circumstances with moral development.[9] Fowles's incorporation of digressive cultural material, then, serves several purposes at once. It is not only a nineteenth-century convention in itself, but it is also used to explain the difference between then and

[8] In *Heinrich von Osterdinger*, pt. 2, Novalis writes: "Ich einsehe, dass Schicksal und Gemüt Namen eines Begriffes sind" (139).

[9] See Ioan Williams, *The Realist Novel* 174.

now and, by foregrounding the narrator's twentieth-century perspective, to draw attention to the fiction as a fiction.

(iv)

Fowles's imitation of the Victorian novel extends to what Fred Kaplan calls an "eclectic exploitation of styles and structures" (113). This diversity is achieved by rather stylized dialogue as well as quotations from, and parodies of, Victorian texts. To re-create a plausible Victorian tone, Fowles found it necessary to exaggerate the formality of the dialogue:

> In the matter of clothes, social manners, historical background, and the rest, writing about 1867 is merely a question of research. But I soon get into trouble over dialogue, because the genuine dialogue of 1867 (insofar as it can be heard in books of the time) is far too close to our own to sound convincingly old. It very often fails to agree with our psychological picture of the Victorians--it is not stiff enough, not euphemistic enough, and so on; and here at once I have to start cheating and pick out the more formal and archaic (even for 1867) elements of spoken speech. It is this kind of 'cheating', which is intrinsic to the novel, that takes the time. ("Writing" 284)

Fowles's stiffening of the diction imparts an eighteenth-century rhetorical quality to the text. Formal, aphoristic dialogue, for example, contributes to this archaic effect:

> "How are you, Mrs Poulteney? You look exceedingly well."
> "At my age, Miss Freeman, spiritual health is all that counts."
> "Then I have no fears for you." (103; ch. 14)

Often, the diction takes on a latinate quality: "Then Ernestina was presented, giving the faintest suspicion of a curtsy before she took the regina[l] hand" (102; ch. 14).

In addition, Fowles uses a number of rhetorical devices including periphrasis ("The sergeant-major of this Stygian domain was a Mrs Fairley" [25; ch. 4]), rhetorical questions ("Who is Sarah? Out of what shadows does she come?" [96; ch. 12]), personification ("But in that interval Fortune had put Sam further in her debt by giving him the male second edition he so much wanted" [417; ch. 59]), and irony:

> He thought a great deal . . . about Sarah on the long journey down to the West. . . . [W]hat came to Charles was not a pronoun, but eyes, looks, the line of the hair over a temple, a nimble step, a sleeping face. All this was not daydreaming, of course, but earnest consideration of a moral problem and caused by an augustly pure solicitude for the unfortunate woman's future welfare. (320; ch. 43)

This fussy diction is set off by the narrator's occasional interjection of modern idiom--"Come clean, Charles, come clean" (143; ch. 18). The tension between the two heightens the reader's awareness of the temporal disparity between narrator and characters.

Fowles further exploits Victorian styles through his use of allusion. In addition to the mottoes that head each chapter, he scatters quotations from Victorian literature and criticism throughout the text. For instance, one finds quoted the entirety of Arnold's "To Marguerite--Continued" (408-409; ch. 58) as well as excerpts from Caroline Norton's poem *The Lady of La Garaye* (115-16; ch. 16), Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (350-51; ch. 48), and John Morley's "Mr. Swinburne's New Poems: Poems and

Ballads" (*Saturday Review* 4 Aug. 1866) in which he calls Swinburne "'the libidinous laureate of a pack of satyrs'", (426; ch. 60).

Fowles also incorporates unmarked quotations into his text. In addition to alluding to Baudelaire and Thackeray, he concludes with the last line of "To Marguerite--Continued"--"And out again, upon the unplumb'd, salt, estranging sea" (445; ch. 61)--and refers to *Pilgrim's Progress*:

> It was to Charles as if he had travelled all his life among pleasant hills; and now came to a vast plain of tedium--and unlike the more famous pilgrim, he saw only Duty and Humiliation down there below--most certainly not Happiness or Progress. (278; ch. 37)

He paraphrases Oscar Wilde: "Charles adamantly refused to hunt the fox. He did not care that the prey was uneatable, but he abhorred the unspeakability of the hunters" (19; ch. 3).[10] And he parodies Henry James's style:

> An even greater still, whom one might have not very interestedly chatted to if one had chanced to gain entry to the Lowell circle in Cambridge, and who was himself on the early threshold of a decision precisely the opposite in its motives and predispositions, a ship, as it were, straining at its moorings in a contrary current and arming for its sinuous and loxodromic voyage to the richer though silted harbour of Rye (but I must not ape the master), Charles did not meet. (413-14; ch. 59)

The writer Fowles most heavily exploits, however, is Thomas Hardy. Like Hardy, he frequently generalizes from a particular incident ("In

[10] Cf. *A Woman of No Importance*: "The English country gentleman galloping after a fox--the unspeakable in full pursuit of the uneatable" (23; Act 1).

London the beginnings of a plutocratic stratification of society had, by the mid-century, begun" [81; ch. 11]), employs biblical quotations ("Mrs Poulteney had devoted some thought to the choice of passage; and had been sadly torn between Psalm 119 ['Blessed are the undefiled'] and Psalm 140 ['Deliver me, O Lord, from the evil man']" [41; ch. 6]), has his rural characters speak in dialect ("'And she bëen't no lady. She be the French Loot'n'nt's Hoer'" [88; ch. 12]), and uses pathetic fallacy to convey mood:

> He felt he never wanted to see Winsyatt again. The morning's azure sky was overcast by a high veil of cirrus, harbinger of that thunderstorm we have already heard in Lyme, and his mind soon began to plummet into a similar climate of morose introspection. (211; ch. 26)

He borrows as well one of Hardy's favourite devices, the comparison with a painting:

> Sarah's face rose before him, tearstained, agonized, with all the features of a Mater Dolorosa by Grünewald he had seen in Colmar, Coblenz, Cologne . . . he could not remember. (345; ch. 48)

Coincidence, a device inherited from romance and found in abundance in Hardy's novels, is also used by Fowles. In the following example, his mocking tone draws attention to the device:

> [H]e realized that he had lost his sense of direction and come out upon Oxford Street . . . and yes, fatal coincidence, upon that precise stretch of Oxford Street occupied by Mr Freeman's great store. (284; ch. 38)

The shadows cast by Hardy and others, seen in stylized dialogue,

borrowed techniques, allusion, and parody, whether acknowledged or not, evoke a nineteenth-century aura in the text. Nonetheless, an undercurrent of self-consciousness provides occasional reminders that this is parody--not Victorian literature but, rather, an imitation of Victorian literature. Fowles's pastiche of stylistic devices taken from diverse sources, not only contributes to, but also distances the reader from, his mock-Victorian novel.

(v)

In *The Chapter in Fiction*, Philip Stevick lists the chapter techniques commonly found in Victorian fiction. Contrasting the "progressive developmental units" characteristic of the period with the "static or exemplary units" of the eighteenth-century novel and the "formal abrasiveness" characteristic of modernism (173), he relates them to the expansion of the novel's causal structure in the nineteenth century. Among the typical Victorian beginnings and endings that Stevick describes and Fowles adopts in order to mimic nineteenth-century narrative structures are the previously mentioned generalizations about the period and the leisurely descriptions of setting. More striking, however, are the devices, such as cliffhanger endings, which he borrows from serial fiction. Chapter 29, for example, ends with Charles peering into Carslake's barn:

> I do not know what he expected: some atrocious mutilation, a corpse . . . he nearly turned and ran out of the barn and back to Lyme. But the ghost of a sound drew him forward. He craned fearfully over the partition. (235)

The reader does not learn what awesome spectacle greeted Charles until

chapter 31, which begins, with much irony:

> And now she [Sarah] was sleeping.
> That was the disgraceful sight that met Charles's eyes as he finally steeled himself to look over the partition. (239)

Interlocking endings and beginnings, a device characteristic of Hardy's and Thackeray's novels, is obviously one of Fowles's favourites. Chapter 6, for instance, ends as follows:

> It had not occurred to her, of course, to ask why Sarah, who had refused offers of work from less sternly Christian souls than Mrs. Poulteney's, should wish to enter her house. There were two very simple reasons. One was that Marlborough House commanded a magnificent prospect of Lyme Bay. The other was even simpler. She had exactly sevenpence in the world. (42)

Chapter 9 picks up from there:

> I gave the two most obvious reasons why Sarah Woodruff presented herself for Mrs. Poulteney's inspection. But she was the last person to list reasons, however instinctively, and there were many others. (56)

A related device consists of a figure frozen in some stance at the end of one chapter only to dissolve into action in a later chapter. Chapter 8 concludes with an overheated Charles refreshing himself in the Undercliff:

> But he heard a little stream near by and quenched his thirst; wetted his handkerchief and patted his face; and then he began to look around him. (55)

Chapter 10, after an initial description of the Undercliff, cuts to the same figure performing the same act:

> When Charles had quenched his thirst and cooled his brow with his wetted handkerchief he began to look seriously around him. (71)

Similarly, after kissing Sarah, the shocked Charles's last act in chapter 31 is to push her away and flee:

> An agonized look, as if he was the most debased criminal caught in his most abominable crime. Then he turned and rushed through the door--into yet another horror. It was not Doctor Grogan. (243)

The reader does not discover who is outside the door until chapter 33:

> It would be difficult to say who was more shocked--the master frozen six feet from the door, or the servants no less frozen some thirty yards away. (248)

The technique of writing toward peaks of interest and then, as Wilkie Collins advised, making the reader wait was widespread among Victorian novelists owing to the demands of magazine serialization. Although *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is hardly the large, loose, baggy monster that Henry James saw as typical of Thackeray's novels,[11] it does conform to the structural constraints of the serial novel. The effect is once again double-edged, for Fowles's use of these devices not only captures a nineteenth-century flavour but also draws attention to the artificiality of the conventions. Since this is not a serial novel, the conspicuous presence of serial devices foregrounds Fowles's critical

[11] See Preface, *The Tragic Muse*: "'The Newcomes' has life, . . . but what do such large loose baggy monsters, with their queer elements of the accidental and the arbitrary, artistically *mean*?" (Blackmur 84).

imitation. As a consequence, his handling of his chapter beginnings and endings, like his use of presentational and stylistic devices, enables him to create a convincing parody of the Victorian novel.

(vi)

At the beginning of chapter 13, Fowles makes the reader wait in another way, bringing the developing story to a halt, intruding in a manner that would have made Henry James wince. One must be doubly careful, however, when discussing the Victorian use of the intrusive narrator. On the one hand, naive comments about the device's novelty ignore its prevalence in Victorian novels (not to mention eighteenth-century novels). On the other hand, to attribute to its earlier use an intention to destroy fictional illusion by exposing the artifice of the work is to misrepresent the ends for which it was employed. Narrative intrusion in the Victorian novel was intended, rather, to create confidence in the authority of the narrator by giving access to the inner lives of the characters and by introducing generalities that established his credentials as an astute and trustworthy commentator on society. Instead of weakening the verisimilitude of the novel's portrait of society, the narrator's commentary and evaluations strengthened the illusion of reality by making connections between life and the fictional world.

Nonetheless, whereas Fowles's previous digressions merely increased the verisimilitude of the text by augmenting the narrator's authority, this one appears to break the illusion by questioning the convention of omniscient narration and its metaphysical underpinning, i.e., the

assumption that the novelist is analogous to God:

> This story I am telling is all imagination. These characters I create never existed outside my own mind. If I have pretended until now to know my characters' minds and innermost thoughts, it is because I am writing in (just as I have assumed some of the vocabulary and 'voice' of) a convention universally accepted at the time of my story: that the novelist stands next to God. He may not know all, yet he tries to pretend that he does. But I live in the age of Alain Robbe-Grillet and Roland Barthes; if this is a novel, it cannot be a novel in the modern sense of the word. (97)

That is to say, it is not a "new novel" of the sort Robbe-Grillet writes.[12] Instead, imitating Victorian convention, Fowles's narrator is omniscient in all three possible directions: spatially--"At approximately the same time as that which saw this meeting [between Charles and Sarah] Ernestina got restlessly from her bed and fetched her black morocco diary from her dressing-table" (76; ch. 11); psychologically--"But Mary had in a sense won the exchange, for it reminded Ernestina, not by nature a domestic tyrant but simply a horrid spoilt child, that soon she would have to stop playing at mistress, and be one in real earnest" (81; ch. 11); and, above all, temporally--"Mary's great-great-granddaughter, who is twenty-two years old this month I write in, much resembles her ancestor; and her face is known over the entire world, for she is one of the more celebrated younger English film actresses" (78; ch. 11).

[12] In "On Writing a Novel," Fowles argues specifically against Robbe-Grillet's rejection of omniscient narration:

> Nothing can get us off the charge of omniscience--and certainly not the *nouveau roman* theory. Even that theory's most brilliant practical demonstrations--say Robbe-Grillet's own *La Jalousie*--fail to answer the accusation. Robbe-Grillet may have removed the writer Robbe-Grillet totally from the text; but he has never denied he wrote it. (288)

The novel's temporal perspective--a narrator relating events that happened one hundred years previously--owes more to the narrative device of "remembered time," to borrow George Watson's term, than it does to the historical novels of, say, Sir Walter Scott. As Watson explains, this is the time that lies between the present and the historical, usually about thirty years past. It refers to a time still present to living memory that one either remembers oneself or has heard one's parents or grandparents speak of (92). *Adam Bede*, *Middlemarch*, and *Vanity Fair* are examples. Because Fowles uses a greater lapse in time, however, he cannot assume as much familiarity with the world he describes. He needs to explain the world of 1867 more than does, say, George Eliot the provincial England on the eve of the first Reform Bill that she renders in *Middlemarch*, which accounts for his frequent allusions to recent events. In a text that contains numerous references to actual Victorians--e.g., Darwin, Sir Charles Lyell, John Stuart Mill, Disraeli, etc.--one also finds references to Hitler, Proust, Stanislavski, and McLuhan, among others. If, at first, it is a bit jarring to encounter a mention of Henry Moore after a description of a windy March morning in 1867, it is no more so than when the narrator of *Middlemarch*, speaking from a vantage point in the 1860s, remarks that "[i]n those days the world in general was more ignorant of good and evil by forty years than it is at present" (139; bk. 2, ch. 19).

Not only is "remembered time" "the most Victorian of all points in time" (Watson 92), but it also allows Fowles to exploit the tension between the 1960s perspective of the narrator and the 1860s perspective of

the characters, enabling him to write a novel that is both traditional and experimental at the same time. He comments upon this procedure, which Patrick Brantlinger calls going "crab-backwards to join the avant-garde, imitating George Eliot as a way to emulate 'Alain Robbe-Grillet and Roland Barthes'" ("Discussion" 339), in "On Writing a Novel":

> *You are not trying to write something one of the Victorian novelists forgot to write; but perhaps something one of them failed to write.* And: *Remember the etymology of the word. A novel is something new. It must have relevance to the writer's now--so don't ever pretend you live in 1867; or make sure the reader knows it's a pretence.* (284)

Clearly, then, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is not an "old novel" either. Embedded in the main text of the novel is a parallel text that comments upon and puts into perspective the story told. The narrator's remarks on the difficulties of writing novels, especially an imitation Victorian novel, provide a formal counterpart to the tale of Charles and Sarah. The question is no longer how one lives authentically but how one writes authentically in a contingent, absurd universe. If in Charles Smithson's progress one begins in the nineteenth century and ends in the twentieth, the narrator's attempts to get beyond, yet still employ, the conventions of the Victorian novel take one similarly from nineteenth-century literary practice to twentieth-century critical theory.

Accordingly, the narrator mocks conventional expectations associated with narrative omniscience, alluding to Thackeray's metaphor of the novelist as puppeteer: "Perhaps you suppose that a novelist has only to pull the right strings and his puppets will behave in a lifelike manner;

and produce on request a thorough analysis of their motives and intentions" (97; ch. 13).[13] Still, he does not reject the device; he merely wants to change the metaphor. Because he is an existentialist, freedom is his highest value: "There is only one good definition of God: the freedom that allows other freedoms to exist. And I must conform to that definition" (99; ch. 13). The novelist must write accordingly:

> 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, not authority. (99; ch. 13)

Fowles has been accused of naiveté, or worse, when he speaks of giving his characters their freedom. In an interview, he reveals that he does not mean it literally. When asked if he subscribes to Sartre's dictum that the novelist cannot be God and, hence, should not be the omniscient narrator, he replies:

> It's silly to say the novelist isn't God, cannot pretend to be God, because the *fact* is that when you write a book you are potentially a tyrant, you are the total dictator, and there's nothing in the book that has to be there if you want to knock it out or change it. (Campbell 463)

Novelists, the narrator tells us, "*wish to create worlds as real as, but other than the world that is.* Or was" (98; ch. 13). Because "a world is an organism, not a machine" (98), it ought not to be overdetermined: "a planned world (a world that fully reveals its planning) is a dead

[13] Cf. *Vanity Fair*: "Come children, let us shut up the box and the puppets, for our play is played out" (666; ch. 67).

world" (98). In other words, if a novel is to live, the novelist must not have, or, at least, not appear to have, total control.

Although he is overtly discussing the very novel he is writing, the narrator denies that he has "disgracefully broken the illusion" (99; ch. 13). The "*hypocrite lecteur*" (99) may think that characters are either "'real'" or "'imaginary,'"[14] but the narrator knows better. "Fiction is woven into all" (99), and all our fictions are a matter of convention. When he interrupts an historical narrative to discuss novel writing, the narrator is merely embedding one set of conventions, the metafictional, within another, the realistic. Neither returns the reader to "reality." Both involve illusion: "My characters still exist, and in a reality no less, or no more, real than the one I have just broken" (99). And this process of creation is analogous to what we all do:

> You do not even think of your own past as quite real; you dress it up, you gild it or blacken it, censor it, tinker with it . . . fictionalize it, in a word, and put it away on a shelf--your book, your romanced autobiography. We are all in flight from the real reality. (99; ch. 13)

Much has been made of this digression, but one should not exaggerate its modernity. The dramatization of the "author" and the "reader," the one taking the other into his confidence and discussing the work at hand, is an old technique employed by realists as prominent as Trollope and Eliot. For example, the narrator of *Adam Bede* devotes, like Fowles, an entire chapter--"In which the Story Pauses a Little"--to a discussion of the novelist's art:

[14] See Charles Baudelaire, "Au Lecteur," *Les Fleurs du Mal*: "Hypocrite lecteur,--mon semblable,--mon frère!" (23; l. 40).

> "This Rector of Broxton is little better than a pagan!" I hear one of my readers exclaim. "How much more edifying it would have been if you had made him give Arthur some truly spiritual advice. You might have put into his mouth the most beautiful things--quite as good as reading a sermon."
>
> Certainly I could, if I held it the highest vocation of the novelist to represent things as they never have been and never will be. Then, of course, I might refashion life and character entirely after my own liking. (178; ch. 17)

Similarly, Trollope's narrator interrupts *Barchester Towers* with the following:

> But let the gentle-hearted reader be under no apprehension whatsoever. It is not destined that Eleanor shall marry Mr Slope or Bertie Stanhope. And here, perhaps, it may be allowed to the novelist to explain his views on a very important point in the art of telling tales. . . .
>
> Our doctrine is that the author and the reader should move along together in full confidence with each other. Let the personages of the drama undergo ever so complete a comedy of errors among themselves, but let the spectator never mistake the Syracusan for the Ephesian. (126-27; ch. 15)

Fowles's addresses to the reader may be more aggressive--the hypocritical reader, not the gentle-hearted reader--but he is still having it both ways, still imitating a nineteenth-century technique to create a twentieth-century metafiction. When Sarah, at Endicott's Family Hotel in Exeter, admires the nightgown she has just purchased (to seduce Charles the reader later learns), the narrator speaks of her as his creation:

> At last she pensively raised and touched its fine soft material against her cheek, staring down at the nightgown; 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. (269; ch. 36)

And in an example reminiscent of Nabokov, he refers to Charles as a part of a text: "And there, amid the iambic slog-and-smog and rhetorical question-marks, and the really not too bad 'vast calm indigos', let us leave Charles for a paragraph" (417; ch. 59).

Neither Fowles nor the Victorians dramatize their narrators as much as does, say, Fielding, but Fowles's narrator does occasionally make the reader aware of him as a contemporary. In the following example, speaking of a jug that Sarah has purchased, he uses both temporal and psychological omniscience to explain why she bought it and what eventually happened to it:

> [T]he Toby was cracked, and was to be re-cracked in the course of time, as I can testify, having bought it myself a year or two ago for a good deal more than the three pennies Sarah was charged. But unlike her, I fell for the Ralph Wood part of it. She fell for the smile. (268; ch. 36)

In introducing an excerpt from *The History of the Human Heart*, a pornographic work published in 1749, the same year as *Fanny Hill*, the narrator tells us how he happened to acquire it:

> What particularly pleases *me* about the unchangingness of this ancient and time-honoured form of entertainment is that it allows one to borrow from someone else's imagination. I was nosing recently round the best kind of second-hand bookseller's--a careless one. (293; ch. 39)

If he were to stop with this sort of minimal intrusion, Fowles would remain in the nineteenth-century mode. He carries the device one step further, however, unequivocally into the realm of twentieth-century metafiction by making his third-person omniscient narrator an actual

character in the novel.[15] In the first example, he enters Charles's train compartment. Bearded, fortyish, looking like an "ambitious butler" or even "a successful lay preacher" (387; ch. 55) like Charles Haddon Spurgeon, he is assessed by Charles as a "decidedly unpleasant man" (388; ch. 55). Fixing the sleeping Charles with a "cannibalistic," "leechlike" stare, a "mean and dubious" look such as that which "an omnipotent god . . . should be shown to have" (389), he debates what to do with his hero. He thinks first of a modernist ending but is foiled by the constraints of Victorian fiction:

> 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. (389; ch. 55)

He describes how fiction, which "usually pretends to conform to the reality," i.e., it puts "the conflicting wants in the ring and then describes the fight," actually "fixes the fight" (390; ch. 55) in favour of

[15] A comparison of the implied authors of *Vanity Fair* and *Breakfast of Champions* is instructive in this regard. Thackeray tries to validate his narrator's authority by making him an acquaintance of his protagonists:

> It was on this very tour that I, the present writer of a history of which every word is true, had the pleasure to see them first, and to make their acquaintance.
>
> It was at the little comfortable ducal town of Pumpernickel . . . that I first saw Colonel Dobbin and his party. (602; ch. 62)

Vonnegut, on the other hand, makes it clear that in his history every word is fictional. Like Fowles, he casts himself as a character in his own novel. Accosting his hero Kilgore Trout on the street, he reveals to him that he is his creator and demonstrates his power by sending Trout to the surface of the sun, among other places. In contrast to Thackeray, Vonnegut, too, intentionally flaunts the artificiality of his work.

the author's preferred outcome. However, since writers fix fights to show their readers what they think about the world around them, and since in this case he has "pretended to slip back into 1867" when "of course that year is in reality a century past" (390; ch. 55), he decides not to take sides:

> 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. (390; ch. 55)

He resolves this dilemma by a flip of a coin, steps off the train at Paddington Station, and disappears into the crowd.

He reappears in another guise toward the end of the novel. The ending that lost the toss--a romantic ending in which Charles and Sarah are reunited--has unfolded. Leaning against the parapet of an embankment across the street from 16 Cheyne Walk is a dandy with a "foppish and Frenchified" beard, an embroidered waistcoat, flashy rings, and a malachite-headed cane (441; ch. 61). Looking like a "successful impresario" (441), this magus, who assumes a proprietary air toward Rossetti's house "as if it is some new theatre he has just bought" and who "very evidently regards the world as his to possess and use as he likes" (441), sets his watch back fifteen minutes, an action that, as he rides away in a coach, causes the preceding scene to be replayed differently.

This brings us to the question of the alternative endings. Sometimes criticized, sometimes praised, the variant endings are designed to show that life is not just "one . . . throw of the dice" (445; ch. 61) but

consists of myriad possibilities. The conclusive endings of Victorian fiction imply a corresponding conclusiveness in life, a tying together of the threads of the plot to form an ordered whole. Anthony Froude's *The Lieutenant's Daughter* is the only Victorian novel to have more than one ending.[16] Critics usually point to the two endings of *Great Expectations*, but Dickens did not intend them to be alternatives. The version in which Pip wins Stella or, at least, looks likely to do so, replaced, at Bulwer-Lytton's urging, the version in which he is permitted only a final meeting with her.

Fowles, in contrast, gives his novel three endings. The first, which turns out to be Charles's daydreams on the train to Lyme, is a "thoroughly traditional ending" (327; ch. 45). The narrator, not for the first time deceiving his reader, tells him/her after the episode concludes that "the last few pages you have read are not what happened, but what [Charles] spent the hours between London and Exeter imagining might happen" (327; ch. 45). What the reader has read is a parody of a Victorian love scene and conventional ending. Charles, surrendering to the dictates of duty, returns directly to Lyme, strides manfully to Aunt Tranter's house, confesses to his meetings with Sarah, marries Ernestina, and lives the rest of his life conventionally, coping by means of "irony and sentiment" (324; ch. 44). Then follows a parodic epilogue in which the reader learns that Sarah disappeared from Charles's life and the narrator's sight forever; that Charles and Ernestina lived, if not "happily ever after" (325; ch. 44), at least together; that they had "let us say

[16] See Grosskurth 131.

seven children" (325); that Charles's uncle, Sir Robert, and his wife produced a pair of male twins within ten months of marrying; that Charles took over the Freeman business; that Sam and Mary, in the "monotonous fashion of their kind" (325), married, bred, and died; that Dr. Grogan and Aunt Tranter both lived into their nineties; and that Mrs. Poulteney was denied entrance at the Heavenly Gates from which she fell "like a shot crow, down to where her real master awaited" (326; ch. 44).

The reader has twelve chapters and almost one hundred pages to finish before he/she reaches another ending. In both of the last two endings, Charles, after a two-year search, finds Sarah, now called Mrs. Roughwood, in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's house.[17] Admitted by Rossetti himself, he recognizes Ruskin as he climbs the stairs to the third floor and learns from Sarah that William Michael Rossetti and, much to his horror, Swinburne also live in the house. In the first of the two endings, a romantic ending, Sarah's reasons for not wanting to marry--a desire to be herself rather than what a husband would expect her to be and fulfillment in work she enjoys and considers worthwhile--are uttered merely to test the depth of Charles's love. When she presents their illegitimate daughter, Lalage, their reconciliation is complete.

Nonetheless, even though the scene has been foreshadowed by an earlier episode with a prostitute, also named Sarah, and her child, this ending generally rings false in the light of previous events. A reference to Providence,--"it had been in God's hands, in His forgiveness of their

[17] In a letter to Barry Olshen, Fowles has admitted that he had Elizabeth Siddal in mind as a model for Sarah (Olshen 126, n. 8). Nonetheless, she seems to resemble Jane Morris more closely.

sins" (438; ch. 60)--although conventional, is out of place in a novel in which the hero has previously been "shriven of established religion for the rest of his life" (353; ch. 49). In addition, the sentimentality of their tender reunion is mocked by the sound of a pianist in the background mangling a Chopin mazurka while Lalage's banging reminds her father and the reader "that a thousand violins cloy very rapidly without percussion" (439; ch. 60).

In the third ending, the convention of the last chapter marriage is discarded. Sarah remains firm in her resolve not to give up her freedom and refuses Charles. Despite the narrator's attempts to give the previous ending more credibility by suggesting that the reader might find it more plausible--"But what you must not think is that this [ending three] is a less plausible ending to their story" (445; ch. 61)--the final ending is truest to the narrator's "original principle"

> that there is no intervening god beyond whatever can be seen, in that way, in the first epigraph to this chapter [i.e., in the process of evolution by means of random mutations]; thus only life as we have, within our hazard-given abilities, made it ourselves, life as Marx defined it--*the actions of men* (and of women) *in pursuit of their ends*. (445; ch. 61)

Only here does Sarah truly stand "for the pure essence of cruel but necessary . . . freedom" (352; ch. 48). Fowles brings his two themes, the existential and the aesthetic, together only in this final ending. Because of Sarah, Charles is, at it were, "reborn" (444; ch. 61). Disencumbered of all the conventions that kept him from living authentically, he is, in the words of the epigraph from Matthew Arnold that precedes this chapter, "*acting what* [*he*] *knows*" (440; ch. 61). Having "at last found an

atom of faith in himself, a true uniqueness, on which to build" (445; ch. 61), he walks out of the house and out of his age, straight into the twentieth century. Similarly, the narrator rejects the Victorian techniques he has hitherto employed in favour of an open ending based on existentialist principles of freedom. Appropriately enough, the novel concludes with the last line of "perhaps the noblest short poem of the whole Victorian era" (408; ch. 58), sending Charles out "upon the unplumb'd, salt, estranging sea" (445; ch. 61).

(vii)

Having learned to see through the illusions of "history, religion, duty, social position" (200; ch. 25), etc., because of Sarah, Charles, at the novel's close, is alone, an existentialist "outsider." Similarly, the reader has learned, because of the narrator, to regard as illusory the imaginative models, including the novel, by which man interprets his experience. In his essay, "On Writing a Novel," Fowles is explicit about the paradoxes of representation, reminding himself that "if you want to be true to life, start lying about the reality of it" (284). He continues:

> *One cannot describe reality; only give metaphors that indicate it. All human modes of description (photographic, mathematical and the rest, as well as literary) are metaphorical. Even the most precise scientific description of an object or movement is a tissue of metaphors.* (284)

In *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Fowles argues that the representational practices of the nineteenth-century novel, the metaphors the Victorians used to describe reality, are informed by metaphysical and

aesthetic assumptions he cannot accept. Lacking the Victorians' faith in the novelist's ability to apprehend reality directly and to represent it transparently, he writes a metafiction that undercuts by means of ironic commentary the realist conventions that it employs. Nonetheless, aware that we construct reality through our representations of it, Fowles stresses the potential of art to enhance our lives. Works of art (as well as science) "are essentially demolishers of tyranny and dogma; are melters of petrifaction, breakers of the iron situation" (*Aristos* 157), i.e., they counter our dominant systems of representation with less confining and oppressive representations. Far from entrapping one in a structuralist prison, language, embodied in imaginative artifacts, is a tool for creating human freedom. The novel might be "first cousin to a lie" (Foreword, *Poems* vii), but, paradoxically, it leads the reader to the elusive truths of experience. Although he subverts the conventions of realism in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Fowles retains his faith in the novel's importance. By baring the conventions of the nineteenth-century novel, he is able to use them without shirking his awareness of their problematic status. John Barth claims in "The Literature of Replenishment" that "there's no going back to Tolstoy and Dickens & Co. except on nostalgia trips" (70). Fowles, in his "'Victorian' novel that is a contemporary novel 'about' the Victorian novel" (Eddins 217), proves, however, that a critical revisiting is still possible.

Chapter Six: Return to Sender

(i)

Writing to his friend Aaron Hill early in 1741, Samuel Richardson mentions that he sees his first novel, *Pamela*, as introducing "a new species of writing" (Carroll 41). He bases his claim on the novel's design, in two senses of the word: unlike other novels, *Pamela* is both untainted by the "improbable and marvellous" elements of romance and intended "to promote the cause of religion and virtue" (Carroll 41). Nonetheless, as Robert Adams Day shows in *Told in Letters*, a study of epistolary fiction before Richardson, *Pamela*'s novelty lies not in its technical materials--"epistolary technique, moral purpose, dramatic devices, 'discoursing'" (210)--but, rather, in Richardson's development of them. Its prominent place in the rise of the English novel notwithstanding, *Pamela* is certainly not the world's, or even England's, first letter-novel. Growing out of Renaissance handbooks of instruction composed of real and imaginary letters (Watson 30), the epistolary novel, beginning with the translation into English in 1678 of Lavergne de Guilleragues' *Lettres d'une religieuse portugaise*, had been developing in England for sixty years by the time *Pamela* appeared. Readers in 1740 were as a result well accustomed to seeing letters, both fictional and non-fictional, in print.[1]

[1] Day estimates that letter-novels make up approximately one-fifth of the prose fiction published in English between 1660 and 1740 (2).

Told in Letters demonstrates clearly that although Richardson did not invent the letter-novel, he nonetheless transformed it into a respectable and artistic genre. Owing to Richardson's ability to synthesize and surpass the fictional methods of his predecessors, the English novel took a quantum leap forward. And those elements of *Pamela* that were genuinely new--the everyday language, the ordinary events, the development of detail, the psychological intimacy, the narrative immediacy[2]--were profoundly to influence the course of the developing English novel. The enormous popularity throughout Europe of both *Pamela* and *Clarissa* initiated a vogue for letter-novels that lasted for more than fifty years. The form was employed, to name only a few celebrated examples, by Rousseau in *La nouvelle Héloïse*, Smollett in *Humphrey Clinker*, Goethe in *Werther*, Laclos in *Les liaisons dangereuses*, and Fanny Burney in *Evelina*.

By 1800, however, the craze had petered out, instances of the kind appearing only sporadically thereafter. In the twentieth century, in George Watson's words, "the epistolary mode is a matter for self-conscious revival" (37); "it is," after all, "one thing to write a letter-novel in the late eighteenth century, when the form was in vogue--quite another to attempt it in the late twentieth" (3).

Nonetheless, John Barth has attempted just that. His own epistolary novel, *LETTERS*, written "in the late afternoon of our century if not of our civilization" (405-406; 18 June), is decidedly self-conscious about

[2] See, for example, George Watson's comments on the letter-novel's "impressive instancy and its approach to psychological truth, even to the stream of consciousness" (31-32) and Frederick Karl's contention that "the epistolary method was the sole way for the eighteenth-century novelist up to and even after Sterne to try to gain some *psychological* control over his characters" (318).

its generic heritage. Barth, posing overtly as "John Barth, the Author," one of the novel's seven correspondents, explains that after having spent some time experimenting with the oral narrative tradition, he now feels inclined "to reorchestrate some early conventions of the Novel" (654; 3 Aug.). More specifically, he is interested in "that earliest-exhausted of English novel-forms, the *epistolary novel*, already worked to death by the end of the 18th Century" (654).

Barth--not the implied author but, rather, the actual author "who imitates the role of Author" ("Exhaustion" 33)--is more specific about his intentions, admitting that, like all new, old novelists, he returns to the past to replenish the present, borrows something old to create something new:

> When I completed that project [*Lost in the Funhouse*], I found myself enormously interested in a different aspect of the narrative tradition. I decided to return to the eighteenth century--it wasn't my first visit--to examine the beginnings of the novel in English; my hope was to discover something I could orchestrate to my own purposes. . . . I thought it a challenge to keep with the notions and strategies of the old-time epistolary novel and, concurrently, deal with something like the here and now. (Reilly 3-4)

One of the advantages of the epistolary form that Barth was to discover is its intimate nature. Familiar letters, by definition private and personal, enabled eighteenth-century authors to reveal character and motive, analyze emotion, portray psychological truth, and present varying points of view (Day 8). Moreover, by incorporating a large amount of circumstantial detail and a narrative instancy--"an immediate impression of every circumstance" writes Richardson in *Pamela*'s "Preface by the Editor"--letter-novels achieve a high degree of verisimilitude, a sense of life as it is lived.

On the other hand, because the epistolary form itself is actually highly artificial and improbable, it presents certain technical challenges that would appeal to a writer as self-conscious as Barth. It is difficult not only to incorporate exposition and dialogue smoothly and believably into letters but also, credibly, to provide characters with writing materials and a place to write, time to write so often and so much, and opportunities to post their letters once written (Mylne 151-54). Although, as William Gass points out, Richardson was undoubtedly aware of the problems inherent in his form, he likely did not choose it as a source of artistic challenges ("Tropes" 37) but, rather, as a vehicle for a particular "meditative manner" ("Tropes" 40) that he wanted to achieve, a vehicle, moreover, with which he was already familiar. Barth, on the other hand, interested, like many contemporary writers, "in the question of inscription, notation; . . . of where the text starts, stops" ("Tropes" 40), saw in the novel in letters metafictional opportunities that Richardson would not have understood. The fact that the form is twice removed from reality because it imitates the familiar letter seems to have appealed to him.[3] In one of his letters, the Author remarks:

> By 1968 I'd decided to use documents instead of told stories: texts-within-texts instead of tales-within-tales. Rereading the early English novelists, I was impressed with their characteristic awareness that they're *writing*--that their fictions exist in the form, not of sounds in the ear, but of signs on the page, imitative not of life "directly," but of its documents. (52-53; 23 Mar.)

[3] In "The Self in Fiction," Barth refers to "that spookily contemporary sense, which all the inventors of the English novel seemed to share, of the documentary nature of their enterprise: novels in the form of . . . almost everything except novels, as if to say, 'It is not life we imitate, but writing: life's enscripted epiphenomena'" (*Friday* 209).

He is referring to the fact that because the novel came under attack in the eighteenth century on both moral and aesthetic grounds, most early novelists did their best to convince their readers that the work in hand was literally true. Lacking our contemporary sense of fictionality, eighteenth-century readers, to be properly edified and entertained, required assurance that what they were reading had actually happened. As a result, novels were labelled memoirs, histories, biographies, travels, lives, adventures, journals, diaries, confessions, voyages, rambles, and, of course, letters--anything that was more utilitarian and hence more respectable than fiction. The title-page of *Clarissa*, for example, makes no mention of a novel but promises instead *The History of a Young Lady*, and Burney's *Evelina* tells the *History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World*.

Barth's use of "documents," however, is actually more akin to Fielding's than Richardson's. Whereas Richardson takes great pains to ensure that the reader does not know that he/she is reading a fiction, Barth takes every opportunity to remind him/her. Richardson wants to hide the fictional contract; Barth wants to expose it. Richardson hides behind the mask of the Editor; Barth appears in the overt guise of the Author. Consequently, when that Author directly addresses the reader--"Dear Reader, and Gentles all" (42; 2 Mar.)--he sounds more like the self-conscious narrator of *Tom Jones* than the dissembling editor of *Pamela*.

Barth, then, benefits from both the advantages and the disadvantages of the epistolary form. He makes use of both its realistic narrative and its artificial structure, its illusionism and its self-consciousness. In so doing, he appears to be following the recipe for postmodernist fiction, today's "new species of writing," which he included in the "Literature of

Replenishment," an essay published shortly after *LETTERS*. In his efforts to define a postmodernist fiction that is "not . . . the next-best thing after modernism but . . . the *best next* thing" (71), he rejects neither realist nor modernist assumptions:

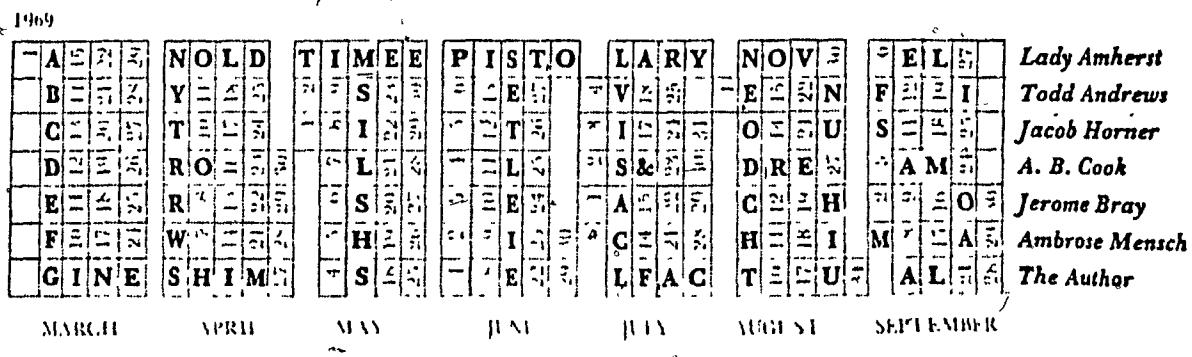
> If the modernists, carrying the torch of romanticism, taught us that linearity, rationality, consciousness, cause and effect, naive illusionism, transparent language, innocent anecdote, and middle-class moral conventions are not the whole story, then from the perspective of these closing decades of our century we may appreciate that the contraries of these things are not the whole story either. Disjunction, simultaneity, irrationalism, anti-illusionism, self-reflexiveness, medium-as-message, political olympianism, and a moral pluralism approaching moral entropy--these are not the whole story either. (70)

Barth sees little point in pretending that modernism did not happen, nor in embracing nineteenth-century realism as if the first half of the twentieth century did not take place. He suggests, instead, as a "worthy program for postmodernist fiction . . . the synthesis or transcension of these antitheses" (i.e., the "premodernist and modernist modes of writing") (70). Barth's "ideal postmodernist author," like Italo Calvino or Gabriel García Márquez, "neither merely repudiates nor merely imitates either his twentieth-century modernist parents or his nineteenth-century premodernist grandparents" (70) but integrates both, self-consciously, critically, into his work. In *Cosmicomics*, for example, "Calvino keeps one foot always in the narrative past--characteristically the Italian narrative past of Boccaccio, Marco Polo, or Italian fairy tales--and one foot in, one might say, the Parisian structuralist present; one foot in fantasy, one in objective reality" (70). And García Márquez, in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, creates a "synthesis of straightforwardness and artifice, realism and magic and myth, political passion and nonpolitical

artistry, characterization and caricature, humor and terror" (71). Combining both illusion and reality, artistry and humanity, these two exemplary postmodernist novels "rise above the quarrel between realism and irrealism, formalism and 'contentism,' pure and committed literature, coterie fiction and junk fiction" (70). Presumably, given the conjunction of publishing dates, it is in relation to this definition of postmodernism that Barth wants *LETTERS* to be read.

(ii)

LETTERS, in keeping with Barth's aesthetic, imposes a highly-wrought, self-reflexive structure upon the old form of the epistolary novel. Made up of eighty-eight letters (like the keys of a modern piano) intended "to reorchestrate previous stories" (191; 6 Apr.) of Barth's as well as "the preoccupations at once of the early Modernists and of the 18th-Century inventors of the noble English novel" (406; 18 June), the narrative shape of *LETTERS* arises more from external design than from the needs of the plot. The letters, with assorted postscripts and enclosures, are exchanged by seven correspondents, including "the Author," over a period of seven months (from March to September 1969), and each is assigned a letter of the alphabet as well as a date so that the design both resembles the title, *LETTERS*, and spells out the subtitle, *AN OLD-TIME EPISTOLARY NOVEL BY SEVEN FICTITIOUS DROLLS AND DREAMERS EACH OF WHICH IMAGINES HIMSELF ACTUAL*:



Three of the novel's fictitious drolls and dreamers--A. B. Cook IV (407; 18 June), Todd Andrews (394; 20 June), and Germaine Pitt (659; 13 Sept.)--find themselves, at certain moments, "at sixes and sevens." A metaphor for the process by which art creates order out of disorder, the phrase functions as a *mise en abyme*, an internal mirror reflecting the novel's structure. Not only the characters but also the Author are "play[ing] with . . . sixes and sevens" (667; 13 Sept.). *LETTERS*, Barth's seventh book, is divided into seven sections. In the sixth section, the sixth correspondent, in a letter divided into seven points (organized alphabetically), advises the Author to employ the theme of reenactment in his "epistolary Opus #7" (652; 25 Aug.) and, at the "6th 7th of [the] sixth seventh" (652) part (this advice given as the letter's sixth point), to "[f]ind or fashion a (skeleton) key that will unlock at once the seven several plot-doors of [the] story!" (653; 25 Aug.).

In his immediately preceding letter (still in the sixth part of the sixth section), Ambrose Mensch, the sixth correspondent, includes a plan for a story about Perseus (published in Barth's sixth book *Chimera*), which is divided into seven sections, the sixth of which is in turn divided into seven sections, the first two of which are further subdivided into seven sections each with its own sixth section divided into seven sections. The story itself is to consist of two cycles (the second echoing the first and both containing the familiar sixes and sevens) the scenes of which are displayed (within the story) as murals (like Dido's Carthaginian frescoes) on a wall "logarithmically spiraling out as in a snail-shaped temple"

(649; 4 Aug) so that the second-cycle scenes, each positioned behind its original, will echo rather than repeat their predecessors.[4]

In his reply, the Author accepts Ambrose's suggestion that the theme of "reenactment" (656; 24 Aug.), by which he means "the attractions, hazards, rewards, and penalties of a '2nd cycle' isomorphic with the '1st'" (656), be a "kind of key" (656) to the work.[5] Accordingly, *LETTERS* is full of repetitions, echoes, reverberations, and correspondences of all sorts. Barth recycles characters from his earlier works, portraying them as obsessed with the notion that the second halves of their lives reenact the first halves; depicts history as a series of cycles or self-cancelling repetitions; inserts numerous correspondences of event and diction within the correspondence of different characters;[6] and regenerates an old form and archaic conventions, all to effect what he calls "transcendence-by-reenactment" (Friday 170). His method, at what he perceives to be the mid-point of his career, is, like Ambrose's at the mid-point of his life, "to 'empty [him]self' before commencing its second half" (656; 24 Aug.).

[4] The chambered nautilus, which the "snail-shaped temple" resembles, is a non-literary analogue to *LETTERS'* "ground-theme of . . . reenactment versus mere repetition" (*Friday* 170). According to Barth, its "spiral reenacts the circle, but opens out . . . . The nautilus's latest chamber echoes its predecessors, but does not merely repeat them" (170).

[5] "[I]f one looks about to see, as I do, how many readings or aspects of a story can be made to reflect the main concerns of the story--if one endeavors to see that everything reflects everything else--then one of the things you might think of recycling along the way is recurrences in history: repetitions, echoes, reverberations, second cycles of human lives" (Reilly 10).

[6] The pun is intentional and is made first by the Author when, asking Germaine Pitt to keep their communication epistolary, he quotes Henry James's "notebook exclamation: 'The correspondences! The correspondences!'" (52; 23 Mar.).

Consequently, five of Barth's seven correspondents are characters or descendents of characters from his previous fictions. These are Todd Andrews, last seen in *The Floating Opera* where, after failing to blow up a showboat and its seven hundred occupants (including himself), he concludes, like Camus, that there is no more reason to commit suicide than there is to go on living; Jacob Horner, who, at the conclusion of *The End of the Road* after the death of his lover Rennie Morgan through asphyxiation of her own vomit while undergoing an abortion, returns to the Doctor and the Remobilization Farm; A. B. Cook VI, the protean patriarch of the intriguing Cook/Burlingame family, begun by Henry Burlingame III and Anna Cooke at the end of *The Sot-Weed Factor*; Jerome Bonaparte Bray, great-great-grandson of Harold Bray, the mock Grand Tutor of *Giles Goat-Boy*; and Ambrose Mensch of *Lost in the Funhouse*, who finds himself twenty-six years later "relost in the funhouse" (338; 12 May). Of the remaining two correspondents, one, Germaine Pitt, Lady Amherst, a British scholar transplanted from Hardy's Dorset to Maryland's, is a new character. The second is "the Author," John Barth, who writes to the others to invite them to be characters in his latest work, tentatively entitled *LETTERS*. His letters and their responses constitute the story of the genesis of *LETTERS*.[7]

Coming as they do from different, incompatible fictional worlds, these correspondents achieve for Barth the mixture of realism and fantasy

[7] Charles Harris points out that "by making the process of composing *LETTERS* a central element in the novel's plot," Barth naturalizes his strategy: "[R]eferences to that process, which in another context would constitute foregrounding, become in *LETTERS* wholly appropriate to the novel's 'realistic' base. Illusionism and anti-illusionism, realism and irrealism, coalesce" (*Virtuosity* 176).

that he advocates in "The Literature of Replenishment." Todd Andrews, Jacob Horner, and Ambrose Mensch, for example, characters from relatively realistic works, do not co-exist well with the chameleon-like Cook, whose ancestors are characters in a parodic cervantic novel set at the turn of the eighteenth century, and the insect-like Bray, who is "a great big bug mimicking a postmodern writer" (Barth, *Friday* 175), Gregor Samsa in reverse. All of these characters, realistic or fantastic, are assumed to live and interact in the same world, a world that includes John Barth one might add. By employing this common postmodern device, the inclusion of the author in his own novel, Barth intensifies *LETTERS'* synthesis of realism and irrealism, of Richardson and Borges if you will, a synthesis that by its very nature reveals the conventionality of both modes.

In addition, by superimposing the alphabetical letters assigned to the epistles onto a calendar turned on its side, Barth artificially eschews chronological order. One frequently, in fact, reads later letters first and gradually works one's way back to letters written earlier, a procedure that Barth claims is intended to get "a nice dramatic effect" (Reilly 12). Indeed, when an event occurs that the reader has learned about already in a later-dated but earlier-read letter, the resulting dramatic irony displaces his/her attention from what is being said to how it is being said.[8] Theoretically, since the reader knows the facts

[8] The technique is a means of breaking with the modernist emphasis on making it new. Barth told Joe David Bellamy that he found himself returning to the ancient notion that originality of plot is not important: "Always use a story that the audience knows already and then they'll pay attention to *how* you're saying it instead of what you're saying" ("Algebra" 7).

already; he/she will be interested more in the artistry than in the events.

LETTERS' narrative technique, according to Ambrose, "like an ice-breaker, like spawning salmon, incoming tide, or wandering hero, springs forward, falls back, gathers strength, springs farther forward, falls less far back, and at length arrives--but does not remain at--its high-water mark" (767; 22 Sept.). This intermittent movement, with its ebbs and flows, is a symbol not only of Barth's strategy in summing up his own *oeuvre* in order to move beyond it but also of the new, old novel's return to the novel's past in order to create its future. For Ambrose, and presumably for Barth, it stems from "a mighty urge to go forward by going back, to where things started" (336; 12 May), *reculer pour mieux sauter*. One does so, not by repeating the past, but by echoing and extending it: "Cycle II must not reenact its predecessor: echo, yes; repeat, no" (767; 22 Sept.).

The ostentatiously artificial design of *LETTERS*, its formal patterning, counters the narrative immediacy and psychological verisimilitude inherent in the epistolary form and enables Barth to strike a balance between realist illusionism and modernist self-consciousness. He couples a Jamesian "solidity of specification" with a self-reflexive defamiliarization of the conventions of representation. The equation reads as follows: "alphabetics + calendrics + serial scansion through seven several correspondents = a form that spells itself while spelling out much more and (one hopes) spellbinding along the way, as language is always also but seldom simply about itself" (767; 22 Sept.). Self-consciously portraying its own processes as well as a world beyond the text (which includes other novels), *LETTERS'* form is a metaphor for its concerns. Combining

"intratextuality" (i.e., references to its own literariness [Cancogni 44]) and a well-told narrative, *LETTERS* strives to be, like Barth's ideal postmodernist novel, "ravishing," both "the first time through" and "in the replay" ("Replenishment" 70).

What the form actually spells, however, is summed up in another equation: "Epistles + alphabetical characters + literature . . . = *LETTERS* (768; 22 Sept.). The title refers in the first place to the epistles of which the novel is composed as well as to "the role of epistles--real letters, forged and doctored letters--in the history of History" (654; 3 Aug.); in the second to alphabetical letters, "the atoms of which the written universe is made" (654); and in the third to *belles lettres*, or literature itself, a phenomenon increasingly under attack in the twentieth century. It is with *LETTERS* as a metafiction about "letters" of all sorts that the rest of this chapter is concerned.

(iii)

References to the epistolary tradition--its practitioners (Richardson, Smollett, Goethe, Rousseau, Burney) as well as their novels (*Pamela*, *Clarissa*, *Sir Charles Grandison*, *Les liaisons dangereuses*, *Werther*, *La nouvelle Héloïse*, *Evelina*) and characters--abound in this "novelsworth of letters, Richardson-fashion" (24; 5 Mar. 1812). Germaine Pitt, whose master's thesis is entitled *Problems of Dialogue, Exposition, and Narrative Unrest in the Epistolary Novel*, has edited the letters of Madame de Stäel, and A. B. Cook IV (whose letters are copied by his descendent A. B. Cook VI) is the author of the "notorious John Henry Letters" (110; 2 Apr. 1812) while his father, H. C. Burlingame IV, is perhaps the forger of the Nicola or Newburgh letters (281; 14 May 1812). Another

correspondent, Ambrose Mensch, who "has conceived a passion for old Samuel Richardson" (439; 19 July), likes to read not the text of *Clarissa*, "that endless novel" (439), but, rather, its "table of contents and Richardson's chapter summaries" (439) (conventions that *LETTERS* adopts).

Nonetheless, *LETTERS* does not constitute a simple return to an earlier form and time. On the contrary, Barth self-consciously parodies and turns to his own advantage the conventions of the genre. His treatment of point of view is exemplary. By increasing the number of letter writers and allowing them to read and react to each other's letters, eighteenth-century epistolary novelists were able to represent events from different angles. The ironic differences between the correspondents' interpretations and analyses generated a perspectivism not to be found in memoir novels, for instance. Although at first glance, *LETTERS*, with its seven correspondents, seems to be exploiting the genre's potential for polyphonic effects, a closer look belies the initial impression. Far from provoking further action, most of the novel's letters remain unread. Jacob Horner writes to himself; Todd Andrews to his dead father; A. B. Cook IV to his unborn children and to a wife who believes him dead; Ambrose Mensch to "Yours truly," the signature at the bottom of a blank note found in a bottle that he fished from the sea many years previously; A. B. Cook VI to a son who does not reply and whose whereabouts he does not know; Jerome Bray to his parents about whom he knows practically nothing, including their address; and Germaine Pitt to John Barth, who almost never replies.

Critical response to Barth's failure to develop fully the genre's potential has generally been unfavourable. David Lodge, for example, complains that "[t]here is little of this [perspectivism] in *LETTERS* since

there is little interaction between the correspondents" ("Folly" 608). And Philip Stevick, who begins by praising *LETTERS* as "an extraordinary exercise in intersecting perspectives, intersecting rhetorics, intersecting ways of organizing the world" ("Incongruent" 342), which brings together correspondents as different as Germaine and Horner, is ultimately disappointed by the incongruity of its several plots:

> Barth's book . . . does not invite us to enter a world: there are seven different and incongruent worlds. It does not invite us to enter the chess game of moves and countermoves that the older form provided, because the correspondents rarely interact or, when they do, generally only perfunctorily. (342)

Both critics miss Barth's point. In the older form, the presence of letter readers within the novel metaphorically brings the reader into the structure of the novel, enabling the implied author, through the responses of the internal readers, to control and shape the reactions of the implied reader. Barth's parody, however, lays bare the reader's interpretative role normally hidden by the convention. By including addressees who either do not receive the letters or do not reply if they do receive them, he increases the difficulty of the reader's task and foregrounds the process of interpretation itself.

The difficulty of communication is exemplified by the crossed-in-the-mails motif. The Author himself employs the device (along with the device of "economical statement,"[9] used by both Fielding and Thackeray):

[9] Arthur Sherbo uses the term to refer to "the kind of statement which advances a valid, or seemingly valid, reason for the omission of this, that, or the other" (59). For example, in *Vanity Fair*, describing the departure of Becky and Amelia from Chiswick Mall, the narrator says: "Then came the struggle and parting below. Words refuse to tell it" (16; ch. 1). Similarly, in *Tom Jones*, the narrator, depicting the reconciliation between Tom and Mr. Allworthy, remarks: "The first Agonies of Joy which were felt on both Sides, are indeed beyond my Power to describe: I

> My note to you of April 13, accepting your rejection of my proposal, must have crossed in the mails yours to me of April 12, tentatively withdrawing that rejection: a letter my pleasure in the receipt of which, as that old cheater Thackeray would write, "words cannot describe." (193; 20 Apr.)

Germaine Pitt's lament that "these crossings in the post are decidedly eerie and a touch confusing" (69; 26 Apr.) describes the frustration felt not only by the correspondents but also by the reader, who has to contend with numerous failures to connect and much consequent uncertainty in this novel.

Temporal polyvalence, an essential characteristic of epistolary novels, is similarly laid bare in Barth's work. The several different times inherent in letter-novels--performing an action, writing a letter about it, dispatching the letter, receiving a letter, reading it, and rereading it--are explicitly commented upon in *LETTERS*. Barth exposes the artifice of his work in a frame consisting of two letters from "The Author to the Reader," announcing that "*LETTERS* is 'now' begun" (42; 2 Mar.) and that "*LETTERS* is 'now' ended" (771; 14 Sept.).[10] In the first of these, we are told that

> every letter has two times, that of its writing and that of its reading . . . . And to the units of epistolary fictions yet a third time is added: the actual date of composition,

---

shall not therefore attempt it" (959; bk. 18, ch. 10).

[10] The quotation marks around "now" point to the temporal conventions of the epistolary novel as well as to the fact that Barth's design violates chronological sequence for the most part. Although the first of the two frame letters is the earliest-dated letter, it is not the first letter one reads. Similarly, although the last frame letter is the last letter one reads, it does not bear the last date.

> which will not likely correspond to the letterhead date, a function more of plot or form than of history. It is *not* March 2, 1969: when I began this letter it was October 30, 1973 . . . . Now it's not 10/30/73 any longer, either. In the time between my first setting down "March 2, 1969" and now, "now" has become January 1974. . . . By the time I reach *Yours Truly*. . . . And--to come at last to the last of a letter's times--by the time *your* eyes, Reader, review these epistolary fictive a's-to-z's, the "United States of America" may be . . . a mere memory. (44-45; 2 Mar.)

Similarly, in the second letter from "The Author to the Reader":

> *LETTERS* reaches herewith and "now" (the Author outlines this last on Tuesday, July 4, 1978. . . . (The Author drafts this in longhand at Chautauqua Lake, N.Y., on Monday, July 10, 1978, a decade since he first conceived an old-time epistolary novel by seven fictitious drolls etc. . . . (He types this on October 5, 1978, in Baltimore, Maryland. Time flies. . . . You read this on [*supply date and news items*]. How time passes. . . .) the end. (771-72; 14 Sept.)

The characteristic eighteenth-century method of overcoming the disparate times inherent in the epistolary form is exemplified in what Samuel Richardson called "writing to the moment," i.e., present tense description of events, either as they happen or shortly thereafter.[11] This device was designed to bridge the interval between event and expression and hence to create a sense of immediacy and tension regarding the outcome of events. Its shortcoming was its patent implausibility, e.g., the beleaguered Pamela warding off Mr. B's advances with one hand while furiously

[11] In the Preface to *Sir Charles Grandison*, Richardson refers to "[t]he Nature of Familiar Letters, written, as it were, to the *Moment*, while the Heart is agitated by Hopes and Fears, on Events undecided" (4).

scribbling an account of the battle with the other.[12] Barth parodies the device (with, perhaps, *Pamela* in mind) by having Lady Amherst (referring to the sleeping Ambrose Mensch) write:

> [M]y left hand creeps sleeping-himward as the right writes on; now I've an instrument in each, poor swollen darling that I must have again. He groans, he stirs, he rises; my faithful English Parker pen . . . must yield to his poky poking pencil pencel pincel penicellus penicillus *peeee*.[13] (70-71; 26 Apr.)

Barth, furthermore, calls attention to length, another of the technical problems of the letter-novel. Correspondents cannot plausibly be expected to write excessively long letters to one another, and these must not contain too much dialogue (rules observed more often in the breech, perhaps). Barth has Germaine Pitt self-consciously allude to the convention when she writes (in the middle of a very long letter): "So many words, so many pages (Werther's *longest* letter, that one of 16 June 1771 describing his introduction to Charlotte on the 11th, is a mere nine pages)" (360-61; 14 June).

Perhaps most importantly, however, Barth subverts the significance of the "found manuscript" convention, a popular device by which

[12] Fielding, of course, parodies the device mercilessly in *Shamela*:

> Mrs. Jervis and I are just in bed, and the door unlocked; if my master should come--Odsbobs! I hear him just coming in at the door. You see I write in the present tense, as Parson Williams says. Well, he is in bed between us, we both shamming a sleep; he steals his hand into my bosom, which I, as if in my sleep, press close to me with mine, and then pretend to awake. (313; Letter VI)

[13] As B. Cook VI also writes "of the circumstances of these transcriptions and what I've been up to this past month with my left hand, as it were, while the right transcribed" (583; 6 Aug.).

eighteenth-century novelists established the authenticity of their "documents." The author claimed to be merely the editor of real letters or memoirs, etc., which he/she had fortuitously found in an old chest or acquired in some similar way. Applying it not only to *LETTERS* but also to his earlier works, Barth reduces the device to absurdity. All his works turn out to be plagiarized from his characters. *The Floating Opera*, for example, supposedly came about as the result of a conversation between Todd Andrews and John Barth at a New Year's Eve party in 1954 at which they discussed Captain James Adam's Original Floating Theatre, the philosophical implications of suicide, Todd's "Letter to my Father," and his "Inquiry" into his father's suicide.[14] In addition, Ambrose Mensch is acknowledged to have written the original draft of three of the stories in *Lost in the Funhouse* (150; 31 Mar.) and to have provided the outline for the "Persiad" in *Chimera* (648-50; 4 Aug.), Jerome Bray suggests the plan for the "Bellerophoniad" (527-28; 8 July) and claims that *Giles Goat-Boy* is a perversion of his ancestor Harold Bray's *Revised New Syllabus* (28; 4 Mar.), and A. B. Cook VI claims co-authorship of *The Sot-Weed Factor* (406; 18 June). And in a more classic example of the device, the Author admits to having "derived the story line of *The End of the Road* from a fragmentary manuscript found in a farmhouse turned ski lodge in northwestern Pennsylvania" (365; 21 June). Jacob Horner's "crude, fragmentary, even dull" (340; 11 May) narrative, entitled "WHAT I DID UNTIL THE DOCTOR CAME," the Author supposedly transforms into his own novel.

[14] The Author comments that this "Pirandelloish or Gide-like debate between Author and Characters" [is] "as regressive, at least quaint, at this hour of the world, as naive literary realism: a Middle-Modernist affectation, as dated now as Bauhaus design" (191; 6 Apr.).

The Author reverses the significance of the convention by overtly revealing that he is "reimagin[ing] the beginnings of *The End of the Road* (339; 11 May), i.e., inventing "a fiction about a fiction" (341; 11 May). He undermines it even further by having his characters discuss and reject his claim, Cook VI, for example, remaining unconvinced by it because "the anecdote is as old as the medium of prose fiction" (365; 21 June). And finally, he responds to Jerome Bray's accusation of plagiarism by baring his use of the device in *Giles Goat-Boy*:

> It was my further pleasure to reorchestrate the venerable conceit, old as the genre of the novel, that the fiction is not a fiction: *G.G.B.* pretends to be a computer-edited and -printed, perhaps computer-authored transcript of tapes recorded by the goat-boy and . . . laid on the Author by Giles's son for further editing and publication. (531; 6 July)

Implicit in the found manuscript convention is a confusion of fact and fiction, a characteristic that Barth exploits not only by parodying epistolary conventions but also by mixing together imaginative and empirical worlds. By making his characters, if not authors, then at least readers of the fictions in which they appear, Barth imbues the characters with a sense of reality on the one hand and a sense of fictionality on the other. From their point of view, Barth's earlier works are but fictionalizations of their lives, but from the reader's vantage point, Barth confuses different levels of reality and renders problematic the question of representation in literature. The device is comparable to that by which Cervantes, in Part 2 of *Don Quixote*, has the Don and Sancho Panza read the story of their adventures recorded in Part 1.

Yet at the same time, the characters occasionally seem to speak of themselves as characters currently in a fiction. Todd Andrews, several

times, refers to the author and the plot: "I feel at least a grateful indulgence of that Sentimental Formalist, our author, for so sweetly, neatly--albeit improbably--tying up the loose ends of His plot" (278; 16 May). More overtly, while waiting impatiently for the telephone to ring, he petitions the Author directly and, apparently, successfully:

> Damn it, Author, this improvisation is wearing thin! Must I cue you, like an actor his tardy sound-effects man, who are supposed to cue me?
> *Just then, as if on cue, the telephone rang.*
> Ahem, sir: JUST THEN, AS IF ON CUE
> Attaboy. (566; 8 Aug.)

Moreover, Barth uses the device of coincidence to point to the author as creator. Calling the resemblances between the "fictional" characters in his novels and the "real" characters in *LETTERS* coincidental, the Author plays with the question of the ontological status of fictional characters, allowing the reader to look through both sides of the "funhouse mirror" (52; 23 Mar.) of art. From Germaine Pitt's point of view, the "half-prophetic correspondences" (59; 12 Apr.) between Barth's letters and the course of her life are distressing. From the Author's point of view, they are but "a muddling of the distinction between Art and Life" (51; 23 Mar.), a literary device that focuses attention on the "boundary between fact and fiction" (191; 6 Apr.).

A device closely related to the pretense that the epistolary novel is a collection of "real" letters arises from the editor's need to account, with some degree of plausibility, for his possession of these letters. Although Barth does not entirely neglect this convention--he has Germaine Pitt address all her letters to him; H. C. Burlingame VII send him both A. B. Cook IV's "posthumous letters" and A. B. Cook VI's letters;

and Todd Andrews will him his literary remains, including his letters--he does not reveal how the rest of the novel's epistles (Ambrose Mensch's letters to "Yours Truly" posted in bottles and thrown into the sea, for example) came into his possession. He parodies the device outright, however, when he questions how Todd Andrews' letter, written on a holiday, could have reached him the next day:

> How a letter written and presumably mailed by you in Cambridge on Good Friday could reach my office here in Buffalo on Holy Saturday is a mystery, considering the usual decorous pace of the U.S. mail. But on this pleasant Easter Sunday afternoon, having got through the *Times* betimes, I strolled up to the campus to check out some epistolary fiction from the library, found it closed for the holiday, stopped by my office, and voilà: its postmark faint to the point of illegibility; its twin 6¢ FDR's apparently uncanceled; the mystery of its delivery intact. (190; 6 Apr.)

The reader, who hardly needs the enclosed reminder that he is reading an epistolary fiction, has rather less difficulty solving the mystery. The passage is another self-reflexive reminder that the Author is in charge of deliveries in this novel.

The elusiveness of the boundary between fact and fiction and the uncertainty of discerning truth from falsehood are embodied fictionally in Barth's concern with "the role of real . . . , forged, and doctored letters . . . in the history of History" (654; 3 Aug.). The motif of "doctored letters," i.e., the altering of facts or of documents, runs throughout *LETTERS*. Todd Andrews, for example, thinks that *The Floating Opera* consists of "doctored facts for literary effect" (85; 4 Apr.); John Barth conceives an idea for a heroine, a "Great Good Friend of sundry distinguished authors," whose lovers are guilty of transcribing and altering her ideas, "i.e., 'doctoring' her letters to them" (51; 23 Mar.); A.

B. Cook IV, a master forger like everyone else in his family, writes "doctored orders" (496) and "doctored letters" (499; 16 July); and A. B. Cook VI is "an artful doctorer of letters" (349; 7 June). Even Jacob Horner, who has had a vasectomy, comically refers to himself as "a doctored male" (19; 6 Mar.).

Yet it is in the letters of A. B. Cook VI and his great-great-grandfather A. B. Cook IV, which tell the saga of the political machinations of eight generations of the Cook/Burlingame family, that the motif is chiefly focused. These protean descendents of Anna Cooke and Henry Burlingame III of *The Sot-Weed Factor*, who seem able to transform their appearance at will, participate in what they call "'the game of governments'" (25; 5 Mar. 1812) or "'action historiography': the *making* of history as if it were an avant-garde species of narrative" (72-73; 26 Apr.). The Cooks/Burlingames are not historians but "novelist[s] of history" (205; 3 May); they are the men and women behind the men and women behind the scenes of history. Creating elaborate scenarios of intrigue, counter-intrigue, betrayal, impersonation, forgery, and assassination, they have since the eighteenth century had a hand in many of the major political events of American and European history, including especially the American Revolution, the War of 1812, the Napoleonic Wars, a plot to free Napoleon from St. Helena and bring him to Louisiana, Pontiac's rebellion, and Tecumseh's Indian Confederacy.

This view of history as secretly shaped by masters of forgery, impersonation, and intrigue, whose motives and ultimate objectives are unascertainable, calls into question the status of historical fact and the validity of historical interpretation. The ability of historians to represent true states of affairs is portrayed as inevitably limited. His-

tory, *LETTERS* implies, is, like the novel, a fiction. "[N]ot only," concludes Germaine, "is there no 'non-disturbing observation'; there is no non-disturbing historiography. . . . [T]o put things into words works changes . . . upon the events narrated" (80; 26 Apr.). Because narrative inevitably falsifies what it purports to represent, "the acceptation of 'historical' documents as authentic is also an act of faith--a provisional suspension of incredulity not dissimilar, at bottom, to our complicity with Rabelais, Cervantes, or . . . Fielding" (298; 14 May 1812).

At the same time, the self-conscious plotting of the Cooks/Burlingames elucidates the concomitant theme of reenactment or the attempt to impose order on apparent chaos by searching out recurring patterns. All the manipulations and strivings of these master intriguers are subsumed under a distinct "Pattern of generational rebellion and reciprocal cancellation" (753; 17 Sept.). Each Cook or Burlingame, rebelling against the immediately preceding generation, "honor[s] his grandsire as a fail'd visionary, whilst dishonoring his sire as a successful hypocrite" (280; 14 May 1812). Reversing his tack at mid-life, however, each spends the second half of his life attempting to undo the effects of the first half.[15] As a result of this generational obsession, the history they fashion, like their personal lives, is seen as a series of reenactments or

[15] The generational conflicts of the Mack family repeat this Freudian pattern. In *The Floating Opera*, Harrison Mack, who has been disinherited because of his youthful radicalism, successfully contests his father's will. In *LETTERS*, Harrison's radical son Drew, in turn, contests Harrison's will. According to Todd Andrews, Harrison and Drew agreed on only one point: "either the Father kills the Son or the Son emasculates the Father" (89; 4 Apr.). The pattern's metafictional relevance is self-consciously underscored later in the novel when Madame de Staël draws an analogy between "the storm & stress" that exists "betwixt certain parents & their children" and that which exists between "innovative artists & the conventions of their arts" (283; 14 May 1812).

cycles. The War of 1812, for example, is known as the "Second War of Independence" and Tecumseh's uprising echoes Pontiac's earlier rebellion.

In similar fashion, several characters strive to find patterns or regularities in the flux of existence that correspond to aspects of their lives. Todd Andrews, for instance, after a lifetime of rational scepticism, begins in his seventieth year "to Perceive a Pattern in All This. . . . a *meaningful* pattern" (255; 16 May), all this being the events of his life. Whereas formerly he held the Tragic Views of history and order, i.e., the tendency to be sceptical in opinion yet optimistic in action (88; 4 Apr.) and the inclination to see patterns everywhere while remaining sceptical about their significance (255; 16 May) respectively, he becomes convinced that his life is recycling, that is to say, the events of the first half are parallelled by a set of correspondent events in the second half.

Jacob Horner also comes to perceive his life as cyclical. His lament is that roads do not really end but, rather, merely begin anew: "I Am Back at the Beginning of mine, where I Was in 1951" (279; 15 May). Horner's method of organizing the past is to impose an arbitrary pattern upon disparate events and people. Taking what he calls the "Anniversary View of history" (431; 15 June), Horner obsessively recites in alphabetical order significant events that have occurred, and the names of prominent people whose birthdays happen to fall, on the same date (regardless of the year):

> Cyrano de Bergerac, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Ring Lardner, Michelangelo: happy birthday. The Alamo has fallen to Santa Anna; its garrison is massacred. FDR has closed the banks. . Franco's cruiser *Baleares* has been sunk off Cartagena. Napoleon's back from Elba: we approach Day One of the Hundred Days. (18; 6 Mar.)

In addition, Horner is given the task, by Joe Morgan, Rennie's husband, of "'redreaming' the past" (431; 15 June). Morgan's ultimatum requires Horner to "Rewrite History," "*Change the Past*," "Bring Rennie Back to Life" (20; 6 Mar.).

Jerome Bray, a parodic surrogate of his author who wishes to bring about a "Novel Revolution" (30; 4 Mar.), which will put "[a]n end to letters" (528; 8 July), the "very seeds of Literature's limitations" (527; 8 July), and to introduce a "*New Golden Age*" (555; 16 Aug.) by engendering a "Hero who is both Saviour and Golden Destroyer" (555), likewise subscribes to a cyclical view of life. Bray, the author of several experimental novels as well as the prologue to *Giles Goat-Boy*,[16] hopes that the success of his current project, which uses "'revolutionary' computer programs to analyze, imitate, revolutionize, and perfect the form of the Novel" (531; 6 July), will enable him to ascend, in his life's second cycle, to his "granama," Kyuhaha Bray. Entitled successively NOVEL, NOTES, and, finally, NUMBERS, Bray's computer-generated novel, which he insists will "*contain* nothing original whatever, *but* [*will*] *be the quintessence, the absolute type, as it were the Platonic Form expressed*" (32; 14 July 1966), turns out to be "the world's 1st work of Numerature" (527; 8 July).

It is with Ambrose Mensch, however, that the theme of cyclical reenactment reaches its apogee. Failed novelist and friend of the Author, Mensch is *LETTERS'* other authorial surrogate. The putative author of a realistic novella *The Amateur* and three autobiographical stories ("Ambrose his Mark," "Water-Message," and "Lost in the Funhouse") included in *Lost*

[16] Like Barth, Bray also started but failed to finish a novel entitled "The Seeker" (34; 4 July 1967).

in the Funhouse, Ambrose's writing career resembles that of his creator. Like Barth's,[17] his writing, after a false start, moved toward irrealism:

> Tranquilly I turned my back on Realism, having perhaps long since turned it on reality. I put by not only history, philosophy, politics, psychology, self-confession, sociology, and other such traditional contaminants of fiction, but also, insofar as possible, characterization, description, dialogue, plot--even language, where I could dispense with it. (151; 31 Mar.)

Eventually conceiving a dislike for the legacy of modernism, Ambrose, like Barth, then investigated the history of the novel, looking for "a route to the roots" (40; 3 Mar.):

> I became reenamored . . . with that most happily contaminated literary genre: the Novel . . . . But not the Art Novel; certainly not those symbol-fraught Swiss watches and Schwarzwald cuckoo clocks of Modernism. . . . I examined the history and origins of the novel, of prose narrative itself, in search of reinspiration; and I found it--not in parodies, travesties, pastiches, and trivializations of older narrative conventions but. (151-52; 31 Mar.)

But, one presumes, in the use of older narrative conventions to synthesize or transcend the dichotomy between realism and modernism. Self-consciously incorporating the past into the present, Ambrose wants to "'*rescue' Fiction from its St. Helena by transforming it altogether, into something full and luminous*" (189; 31 Mar.).

This former formalist intends, in the "second cycle of [his] life" (765; 22 Sept.), to get beyond formalist games by purging himself of his "obsession for reenactment" (764; 1 Sept.). Hence, he makes both his plan

[17] The Author confesses to Germaine Pitt that he has "long since turned his professional back on literary realism in favor of the fabulous irreal, and only in this latest enterprise had projected . . . a détente with the realistic tradition" (52; 23 Mar.).

for the "Persiad" (described above, pp. 192-93) and the stages of his affair with Germaine echo "the succession of [his] love affairs" (650; 4 Aug.). Furthermore, in an echo of an echo, the weeks of the sixth stage of their affair parallel the earlier stages of the affair itself, culminating in their wedding during the sixth period of the seventh day of the sixth week of the sixth stage. On the seventh stroke of the sixth stage of the sixth lovemaking of the day, Ambrose has a seven-part vision of his seventh love affair of which the seventh stage with Germaine is but a foreshadowing (768; 22 Sept.).

Barth's metafictional strategy is to incorporate into his novel as many emblems or mirrors of his theme and form as possible. Just as he recycles, in order to transcend, the materials of the past (the novel's and his own), so the characters recycle, and appear doomed to repeat, their lives, and so "tragic history," as Marx suggests, "repeats itself as farce" (255; 16 May). Barth's and Ambrose's sixes and sevens, arbitrary patterns imposed on the world's confusion, are metaphors for the modernist notion that the artist creates order out of disorder. The cycles and mythic patterns in *LETTERS* seem in their diversity to call attention not to the regularity of the world but, rather, to the ordering power of the mind, in particular, the artistic mind. As Germaine Pitt suggests, they may be merely "Portentous Coincidences, or Arresting But Meaningless Patterns" (384; 5 July) that have nothing, finally, to do with the structure of reality but much to do with the structure of the novel.

Formally, Barth foregrounds the constructive power of art through a profusion of correspondences. By gathering the disparate events and characters of his novel into a web of correspondences, echoes, and allusions, he emphasizes that *LETTERS* is a product both of his imagination and

of a literary tradition. The use of the same allusions by different characters is exemplary. Ambrose Mensch, paraphrasing the fourth line of Donne's "Good Morrow" ("Or snorted we in the seven sleepers' den?"), remarks that he and Germaine slept soundly like "'two-sevenths of the snorting Sleepers in their Caves'" (198; 3 May). These same sleepers, "the Seven Ephesians" (48; 9 Mar.), appear in a list of the world's great sleepers in the Author's "*Three Concentric Dreams of Waking*," and A. B. Cooke IV, addressing his unborn child, asks, "Are you tranced like the Seven Sleepers? Or does it merely suit you to linger there, in that sweetest cave of all?" (279; 14 May 1812). And Jerome Bray, entering lists of sevens into his computer, includes the "Sleepers of Ephesus" (645; 26 Aug.).

Similarly, Germaine, echoing the first line of Eliot's *The Wasteland*, remarks that "April truly *is* the cruellest month" (58; 12 Apr.). The Author, not to be outdone, describing spring in upper New York state to Germaine, manages to indicate the source of her unmarked quotation as well as the original of Eliot's parody while making a third allusion of his own:

> If April . . . is the month of suicides and sinkings, that's because it's even more the month of rebeginnings: Chaucer's April, the live and stirring root of Eliot's irony. . . . You are not the One who settles a pillow by her head and says to Prufrock: "That is not what I meant at all. That is not it, at all. . . "?! (194; 20 Apr.)[18]

[18] Chaucer's April, of course, "with his shoures soote / The droghte of March hath perced to the roote" ("General Prologue" 17, lines 1-2). In Eliot's ironic version, "April is the cruellest month" ("The Burial of the Dead" 69, line 1). The quotation from "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is taken from lines 97-98.

In the same vein, A. B. Cooke IV, in one of his letters, echoes *LETTERS'* subtitle in the phrase "*Drolls & Dreamers that we are*" (482; 9 July); his descendent A. B. Cooke VI muses in one of his, "how drolly . . . I still dream" (583; 6 Aug.); and Jerome Bray writes, "I digress, like an old-time epistolary novel by 7 fictitious drolls & dreamers each of which imagines himself actual" (330; 13 May). And finally, John Barth's recollection of "Henry James's disinclination to hear *too much* of an anecdote the heart of which he recognized as a potential story" (52; 23 Mar.) is echoed by Todd Andrews's remembrance that "Henry James . . . used to want *not* to hear too much of an anecdote of which he wished eagerly to hear a certain amount, for imaginative purposes" (82; 4 Apr.).

In a similar manner, the myth of Bellerophon, which Barth adapted for one of *Chimera's* stories, is the most echoed motif in the novel. In *LETTERS*, Jerome Bonaparte Bray, who claims descent from Napoleon's brother Jérôme, seems at times to believe himself to be Napoleon, escaped from St. Helena into American exile. He reveals in a letter to Harrison Mack (from *The Floating Opera*) his "'*Bellerophonic' prospectus*"--first conceived aboard HMS Bellerophon as it carried him, i.e., Napoleon, to England--for a "2nd *Revolution, an utterly Novel Revolution*" (32; 14 July 1966). The Author, perceiving Bray's madness, reminds him that "'Bellerophontic letters'" (535; 27 July) are those, such as the one Hamlet has Rosencrantz and Guildenstern carry to England, that consign their bearers to death and warns him that, like Bellerophon, "by perfectly imitating the pattern of mythic heroism one may become not a mythic hero but merely a perfect imitation" (534; 27 July, 7 Sleepers' Day).

The advice is well given. Bray, disappointed for a while by his inability to make any sense of his computer's outpouring of numbers,

"wander[s] like downed Bellerophon devouring his own soul food" (525; 8 July). He is not, however, the only character to do so. Like the hero of Barth's (and Cook VI's) projected "Marylandiad," who was to wander about the Maryland marshes "'devouring his own soul' etc." (47; 9 Mar.), A. B. Cook IV, after a blow on the head, finds himself "wandering aimlessly along these marshes, 'devouring [his] own soul like Bellerophon'" (483; 9 July). And Ambrose Mensch's first attempt at fiction is "the tale of a latter-day Bellerophon lost in the Dorchester marshes, 'far from the paths of men, devouring his own soul,' who receives a cryptic message washed up in a bottle" (240; 24 May).

By parodying the epistolary characteristics of temporal polyvalence, writing to the moment, excessive length, the crossed-in-the-mails motif, and the found manuscript convention, Barth highlights the artificiality of a form that purports to be a real document. In the same way, he portrays historical documents, which are accepted as fact, as equally unreliable. Brought to the fore by the questioning of the ontological status of fictional characters and the subverting of the convention of perspectivism, the notion of an unordered state of affairs, of an ill-defined boundary between fact and fiction, underlies these parodies. Barth embeds in the characters' projected cycles and in the profusion of correspondences the idea that the role of art is not to mirror reality but, rather, to construct a verbal reality.

(iv)

Like the novel's ubiquitous correspondences and echoes, the Author's choice of names underscores the arbitrary and artificial nature of representation. First, drawing the reader's attention to his ABCs, so to

speak, Barth gives most of his characters at least one initial drawn from the first three letters of the alphabet: e.g., Ambrose Mensch, Lady Amherst, André Castine, Andrea King, Andrew Mack, Todd Andrews, Angela Mensch, Joseph Bacri, John Barth, Bea Golden, Merope Bernstein, Marsha Blank, Jean Blanque, Jerome Bonaparte, Joseph Brant, Jerome Bray, H. C. Burlingame, A. B. Cook. In addition, some of the names are transparently descriptive. For example, Ambrose Mensch is an everyman figure, Marsha Blank has a "mind and character to match" (239; 24 May) and features so regular as to be nondescript, Bea Golden becomes Jerome Bray's Queen B. and is transformed into royal jelly, Germaine Pitt writes interesting but digressive letters ("*But Germaine, Germaine, this is not germane*!" [4; 8 Mar.]), and Harrison Mack, who imagines himself the mad George III, perceives Reg Prinz as the Prince Regent.

More frequently, the same name will appear in widely separated contexts. For instance, Ambrose Mensch is attracted to Marsha Blank, his first wife, because he had set himself the task, ever since receiving a wordless water-message, "of filling in the whole world's blanks" (240) ("a marriage made in the heaven of self-reflexion," comments Germaine [240; 24 May]). Similarly, Jerome Bray assures his parents that "Marsha's Blank was filled per program" (640; 26 Aug.). Furthermore, in Bray's novel *The Wasp*, published under the pseudonym Jean Blanque, an entomologist, studying the flies known as blanks, is transformed into one of the objects of his research. Additionally, A. B. Cook IV uses the pseudonym Jean Blanque when swindling the Duc de Crillon out of £1200, and a Louisiana state legislator named Jean Blanque takes an interest in Cook IV's plan to rescue Napoleon from St. Helena and transport him to America aboard the schooner *Jean Blanque*.

Barth's overt play with names tends to focus the reader's attention on his characters as verbal creations and to highlight further his control over his text. It is part and parcel of *LETTERS'* "alphabetical preoccupations" (431; 15 June), a set of devices that lay bare the materials of which literature is composed. Barth uncovers the linguistic elements of his text in order to disrupt his novel's illusion and to force the reader to confront the arbitrariness of language as a medium of representation. Beginning with the title and the subtitle, he incorporates alphabetical, acrostic, and anagrammatical devices into his text.

Jacob Horner's Anniversary View of History exemplifies these alphabetical preoccupations. For Horner, like Ebenezer Cooke a cosmopsis sufferer, the habit of cataloguing events by "alphabetical priority" (98; 3 Apr.) is a means of arbitrarily making choices among apparently meaningless alternatives. Likewise, Ambrose Mensch acknowledges that he uses "Alphabetical Priority" (766; 22 Sept.) in his own work, but he advances an aesthetic reason for it, i.e., "to discipline, even if only by artifice, as in formal poetry, our real priorities" (766). For Ambrose, alphabetical structure, like a rhyme scheme, is a means of controlling his materials, not an end in itself. Like the alphabetical acrostic of which the subtitle is composed (see p. 174), his plan for the *Persiad* and his letter "Ambrose Mensch to Whom It May Concern (in particular the Author)" are both divided into seven parts labelled A to G. The plan also contains several subsections eaoh labelled A to G. In the letter, every sentence begins with the alphabetical character that heads the particular part it is in. Each sentence, in turn, is alphabetically ordered within its section. For example, in section B (my italics):

> *B* = mother of letters: birth, bones, blood & breast: the Feeder.
> *B*irthmark itches like an old bee-sting; my turn to confront the family nemesis?
> *B*ottled message: TOWER OF TRUTH 0700 9/26/69. . . .
> *B*reak-in at M. M. Co. remains unsolved. . . . (766; 22 Sept.)

Another of Ambrose's letters to the Author contains seven "alphabetized instructions" (652; 25 Aug.), the first words of which--"Author," "Bring," "Call," "Draft," Epistle," "Find," and "Go"--follow the same abecedarian pattern.

Others besides Jacob and Ambrose exhibit a preoccupation with the alphabet. Jerome Bray, for instance, is obsessed with "anagrammatical transposition" as a "key to the treasure" (331; 13 May), i.e., the numbers spewed forth by his home-made computer LILYVAC. Considering and then rejecting the possibility that the printout is a huge acrostic like the final paragraph of Nabokov's "The Vane Sisters," which he quotes, Bray concludes instead that he has a "*leafy anagram* of monstrous proportions" (331; 13 May).[19]

Both John Barth and Ambrose Mensch quote from the New England Primer--"Admiration, Beneficial, Consolation, Declaration, Exhortation" (38; 3 Mar.), etc.--and Barth sends Ambrose an "*alphabetical wedding toast*" (770; 7 Sept.) taken from an anonymous sixteenth-century *Hornbooke*

[19] Nabokov's narrator, on the day that he learns of Cynthia Vane's death, is intrigued by a melting icicle, the drops of which follow a "rhythm . . . as teasing as a coin trick" (75). He subsequently fails to decipher the acrostic message contained in his account of a dream about the Vane sisters, Cynthia and Sybil: "I could isolate, consciously, little. Everything seemed blurred, yellow-clouded, yielding nothing tangible. Her inept acrostics, maudlin evasions, theopathies--every recollection formed ripples of mysterious meaning. Everything seemed yellowly blurred, illusive, lost" (90).

of Weddyng Greetynge. Upon the same occasion, A. B. Cook VI gives an "alphabet toast" (681; 20 Sept.), used since the time of James II as a Jacobite code. Jacob Horner keeps a "hornbook," which, appropriately enough, contains an alphabetical list of cuckolds, and even Germaine Pitt, not much given to such games, finds herself living in an area of "alphabetic streets" (60; 19 Apr.). Dorset Heights consists of twenty-six streets in all: Germaine's L Street plus "five long vowelled avenues crosshatched through sand and weeds by a score of short consonantal streets" (59; 19 Apr.).

Barth's self-conscious manipulation of language into alphabetical patterns draws attention to his text as a linguistic construct. His use of parody achieves the same effect. Highlighting his style by critically echoing another text, he again makes the reader aware of language rather than narration. Two passages that parody the American national anthem illustrate the self-consciously patterned language found in the text. In the first, A. B. Cook IV leaves a note with Francis Scott Key (who is watching the bombardment of Baltimore in 1814), which urges:

> O Francis Scott Key,
> Turn the bolt on our plight! Open wide Music's door; see her treasure there gleaming! Golden notes bar on bar--which some more gifted wight that Yours Truly must coin into national meaning. For the United States of America's fate hitherto's to have been, in the arts, 2nd-rate. We've an army & a navy; we've a country (right or wrong): but we've yet to find our voice in some national song! (522; 16 July)

Stirred by the insistent rhythms of the passage, Key composes the "Star-Spangled Banner," a parody of which reappears later in the novel in Jerome Bray's cryptic, but informative, letter to his grandmother, which begins:

> O see, kin, "G. III's" bottled dumps--oily shite!--which he squalidly hauled from his toilet's last gleanings. 5 Broads

> stripped and, bride-starred, screwed their pearly ass right on our ram-part! You watched? Heard our growls and their screamings? Now Bea Golden ("G's" heir)'s Honey-Dusted 4-square: grave food for her bright hatch of maggots next year! Our females are all seeded; our enemies are not alive: so, dear Granama, take *me* to the hum of your hive! (755; 23 Sept.)

(v)

Barth not only parodies the narrative conventions of the epistolary novel and reminds the reader that his fictional characters are composed, not of flesh and blood, but of alphabetical characters, but he also calls attention to the literary tradition within which he writes. Echoing Barth's charge in the "Literature of Exhaustion" that the novel is exhausted, its forms and conventions spent, his characters discuss the failing health of prose fiction in these ill-lettered days. Germaine Pitt, for example, in her first letter to the Author, laments the decline "of the genre itself; perhaps . . . of Literature as a whole; perhaps even . . . of the precious Word" (5; 8 Mar.). For Todd Andrews, the novelist is a present-day Quixote, fighting illusory battles in a decidedly unheroic age:

> Nowadays the genre is so fallen into obscure pretension on the one hand and cynical commercialism on the other, and so undermined at its popular base by television, that to hear a young person declare his or her ambition to be a capital-W Writer strikes me as anachronistical, quixotic, as who should aspire in 1969 to be a Barnum & Bailey acrobat, a dirigible pilot, or the Rembrandt of the stereopticon. (84; 4 Apr.)

The quixotic Author, determined, nonetheless, "to break another lance with Realism" (52; 23 Mar.), employs an epic simile to make the same point:

> To be a novelist in 1969 is . . . a bit like being in the passenger-railway business in the age of the jumbo jet: our dilapidated rolling stock creaks over the weed-grown right-of-ways, carrying four winos, six Viet Nam draftees, three black welfare families, two nuns, and one incorrigible railroad buff, ever less conveniently, between the crumbling Art Deco cathedrals where once paused the gleaming Twentieth Century Limited. Like that railroad buff, we deplore the shallow "attractions" of the media that have supplanted us, even while we endeavor, necessarily and to our cost, to accommodate to that ruinous competition by reducing even further our own amenities: fewer runs, fewer stops, fewer passengers, higher fares. Yet we grind on, tears and cinders in our eyes, hoping against hope that history will turn our way again. (191; 6 Apr.)

Barth symbolically renders the novel's struggle for survival in a "rivalry between page and screen" (40; 3 Mar.) in which film is the opponent. The shooting of Reg Prinz's movie *FRAMES*, with which all the major characters are involved in one way or another, ties together the threads of the various plots. Another *mise en abyme*, *FRAMES*, which like *LETTERS* combines "the historical foretime and the avant-garde present" (450; 2 Aug.) and embodies the theme of echoes and reenactments, is very loosely based on Barth's works. As convoluted as *LETTERS*, it not only echoes Barth's other works and anticipates his works to come while reenacting the War of 1812 but also, in a fit of inversion, reenacts and echoes its own events and images (383; 5 July).[20]

In the running battle between FRAMES' director, for whom literature is but a "moderately interesting historical phenomenon, of no present importance" (654; 3 Aug.), and its scriptwriter Ambrose Mensch, for whom

[20] The War of 1812 sequences--the sack of Washington, the bombardment of Fort McHenry in Baltimore Harbour, the Battle of New Orleans, Jean Lafitte's involvement in a plot to rescue Napoleon--are intratextual echoes of A. B. Cook IV's letters. The burning of the Library of Congress and the National Archives by the British signifies for Prinz "the destruction of . . . the venerable metropolis of letters" (233; 17 May).

literature is "a call to arms" (333; 12 May), Barth embodies the theme of "Letters versus Pictures" (333), the written word against the visual image. Prinz wants to film "unwritable scene[s]" (234; 17 May), Ambrose to write an "unfilmable filmscript" (40; 3 Mar.). This "War Between Image and Word" (662; 13 Sept.), which develops into a full-scale "filming-within-the-filming" (446; 26 July), culminates with Prinz overturning a shelf full of books onto Ambrose, Ambrose clobbering Prinz with "good weighty Sam" (441; 19 July), i.e., a copy of *Clarissa*. The novel in letters, with its "files of troops . . . lead-footed L; twin top-heavy T's flanked by eager E's, arms every ready; rear-facing R; sinuous S" (333; 12 May), proves a formidable weapon for both Mensch and Barth in their struggle against literature's "enemies."

Richardson provides a solution not only to the altercation between letters and pictures but also to the so-called death of the novel. The episode is a dramatic metaphor for Barth's procedure, indeed for the procedure of the new, old novelists in general, the infusion of the eighteenth-century novel with contemporary concerns making possible the regeneration of prose fiction. This renewal is symbolically depicted in the union of Ambrose Mensch and Germaine Pitt. Inspired like the Author by Richardson, Ambrose rededicates himself to the printed word. Formerly of the opinion that the last hope of the profession of letters lay in innovative fiction, this member of the Mensch Masonry family lays aside his experiments in "concrete narrative" (227; 17 May) and embraces the Great Tradition--literally. Germaine Pitt, in her youth the intimate friend and inspiration of many of the great modernists,--"'lifelong mistress of the arts'" (52; 23 Mar.), comments the Author dryly--he sees as the "Muse of Austen, Dickens, Fielding, Richardson, and the rest" (41;

3 Mar.). Viewing her as "Literature Incarnate, or The Story Thus Far, whose next turning [he]'d aspired to have a hand in" (40; 3 Mar.), Ambrose asks whether, in this late stage of the twentieth century, the novel, like Germaine's womb, is completely exhausted or still fecund: "*Can a played-out old bag of a medium be fertilisd one last time by a played-out Author in a played-out tradition?*" (550; 16 Aug.). Ambrose's affair with, and marriage to, Germaine is another *mise en abyme*, an emblem of the synthesis of realism and formalism of which *LETTERS* consists:

> *Conflict*: last-ditch provincial Modernist wishes neither to repeat nor to repudiate career thus far; wants the century under his belt but not on his back. *Complication*: he becomes infatuated with, enamored of, obsessed by a fancied embodiment (among her other, more human, qualities and characteristics) of the Great Tradition and puts her--and himself--through sundry more or less degrading trials, which she suffers with imperfect love and patience, she being a far from passive lady, until he loses his cynicism and his heart to her spirited dignity and, at the *climax*, endeavors desperately, hopefully, perhaps vainly, to get her one final time with child: his, hers, theirs. (767; 22 Sept)

The answer to Ambrose's question, like many, is left up in the air at the novel's close. Germaine is indeed pregnant, but the father is probably Jerome Bray, not Ambrose. Humorously anticipating his critics, Barth suggests that the offspring of the Great Tradition of the English novel and the American experimental novel may very well turn out to be a monster.

(vi)

By constructing a symbolic or allegorical pattern and then laying it bare in this manner, Barth exposes also the border that he straddles between premodernism and modernism. It is fitting, then, that in *LETTERS*, as in *The Sot-Weed Factor*, he returns to Maryland, his emblem for "border

states" of all kinds. Not only does he set much of the novel's action in his home state's marshes and estuaries, borders between land and sea and symbols of his own creativity, but he also traverses a number of thematic borders--not just between realism and modernism but also between past and present, fact and fiction, word and world. That *LETTERS* represents, on the one hand, "a détente with the realistic tradition" (52; 23 Mar.) can be seen in its extensively detailed setting. That it has, on the other hand, an equally detailed and far-reaching intertextuality can be seen in its ubiquitous echoes of, and references to, other works and writers of literature.

In contrast to the irrealism of Barth's more recent works, *LETTERS* contains an abundance of realistic description set in discernible times and places. Geographically, the novel ranges from tidewater Maryland, upstate New York, Quebec, and Fort Erie to Algiers, Paris, and St. Helena. The locations of the various subplots are quite specific: the Todd Andrews and Jane Mack story takes place in Dorchester, Md., and Chesapeake Bay; Jacob Horner lives at the Remobilization Farm in Fort Erie; Jerome Bray, "King Author" turned "*Rex Numerator*" (638; 5 Aug.), lives on a farm, named "Comalot," in Lily Dale, N.Y., where he raises goats, houses the LILYVAC computer, and manufactures a potent narcotic called Honey Dust; Germaine Pitt teaches at Marshyhope State University, Redman's Neck, Md., and Ambrose Mensch lives in Dorset, Md.; A. B. Cook VI has homes in Quebec and on Bloodsworth Island, Md.; and John Barth teaches at SUNY, Buffalo. Temporally, the action shifts from 1969 to the American Indian Wars to the War of 1812 to the surrender, imprisonment, and attempted rescue of Napoleon. References to contemporary events, from student uprisings to Watergate, Marlon Brando's birthday to Lyndon Johnson's administration,

abound. And historical events, consisting of an almost inextricable mixture of fact and fancy, are rendered in extensive, seemingly exhaustive, detail.

Nonetheless, *LETTERS'* realistic rendering of the world is matched by its intertextual reflections. Barth's portrayal of the history of America is balanced by his concern for the history of the novel, particularly the epistolary novel. Not only does he take the main characters from his other works, but he also makes minor characters out of several nineteenth-century writers of varying literary merit, e.g., Joel Barlow, James Fenimore Cooper, Madame de Staël, Poe, Whitman, and Balzac. In addition, he saturates *LETTERS* with literary, biblical, and classical allusions, from *The Ocean of Story* to Borges's "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*." In all, there are references to more than 125 writers, their works, and their characters.

Like those in Boyle's *Water Music*, the vehicles of Barth's analogies frequently refer to other writers and texts. Germaine Pitt, especially, as befits her scholarly training, tends to place people and events against a literary background. For example, she reveals that Reg Prinz wears "spectacles like Bertolt Brecht's" (217; 10 May), that H. C. Burlingame VII's eyes are as "fiery as Franz Kafka's" (676; 13 Sept.), that Harrison Mack in his madness is "a Don Quixote inside out" (210; 10 May), and that Marsha Blank, upon being invited to Ambrose's and Germaine's wedding, "flounced and sniffed away as satisfyingly as a comeuppanced Rival at the end of a Smollett novel" (672; 13 Sept.). Concluding the lengthy letter in which she urges John Barth to accept an honorary doctorate from Marshyhope State University, Germaine feels "like Molly Bloom at the close of *her* great soliloquy . . .--say to us *yes*, to the Litt.D. *yes*, to MSU

yes, and *yes* Dorchester, *yes* Tidewater Maryland *yes yes yes*!" (11-12; 8 Mar.).[21] Forced by Ambrose, as part of a ritual reenactment of his previous love affairs, to wear clothes she considers too young for her, she "feel[s] . . . a walking travesty, female counterpart of that rouged and revolting old fop in Mann's *Death in Venice*" (346; 7 June). And fooled by Jerome Bray, who has assumed the appearance of André Castine, she "permit[s] [her]self . . . to be led off, a proper Clarissa" (455; 2 Aug.).

Barth's stylistic intertextuality includes as well parodies of the forms and motifs of the realistic novel. In addition to his play with coincidence and with epistolary conventions, he parodies the disguise motif found in so many romances and early novels. Jerome Bray and the members of the Cook/Burlingame family have the ability to change their appearance at will. Germaine Pitt mistakes Bray's identity because he is seemingly able to imitate André Castine's appearance perfectly, and A. B. Cook VI metamorphoses so well that people, including Germaine, who have met him in all three of his guises--as Cook, as Castine, and as Monsieur Casteene--(if, indeed, they are his guises) are uncertain of the nature of their connection. It becomes impossible to ascertain the truth about identity. Shapes continually shift, and appearances are deceiving.

Barth also includes a number of favourite eighteenth-century narrative forms within the novel's letters (Harris, *Virtuosity* 169). His

[21] Her response to Ambrose's marriage proposal--"I will. Yes. I will" (765; 1 Sept.)--also echoes Molly's memory of her acceptance of Bloom: "and yes I said yes I will Yes" (*Ulysses* 644; ch. 18). Jerome Bray ends one of his letters with "Lost Mother, old articifrix, key to the key, R.S.V.P." (427; 17 June), echoing the last sentence of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*: "Old father, old artificer, stand me now and ever in good stead" (253; ch. 5).

"texts within texts" are quite varied: A. B. Cook VI's letters read like historical novels, Germaine Pitt's like autobiography, Jacob Horner's like a journal, and A. B. Cook IV's like travel literature. Barth interpolates as well Ambrose Mensch's unfinished domestic novel *The Amateur*, which tells the saga of the Mensch family, and A. B. Cook IV's romantic, but supposedly true, tale of intrigue in Algiers, which recalls *Don Quixote*'s "The Captive's Story." Cook IV's relation of his story to an audience that includes Madame de Staël, James Fenimore Cooper, and a 12-year-old Honoré de Balzac parodically undermines the truth claims of realism. Both realists show themselves to be more concerned with credibility than with truth. Cooper, Cook writes, "question'd, not the verity, but the verisimilitude--that is, the plausibility as *fiction*" (300; 14 May 1812). Balzac, while rejecting some of the story's coincidences, wants to add such romantic conventions as kidnapping by pirates and capture by Indians. "'Too romantical by half, Master Balzac'" (301), replies Cook to the future French realist. The episode, humorous in itself, also points to realism as a matter of convention rather than an unmediated presentation of reality.

Barth parodies as well the motif of the death-bed confession. One of the novel's lesser mysteries, the paternity of Ambrose Mensch and his brother Peter, seems about to be solved when their dying mother begins to speak about her husband's jealousy and suspicion of his brother Karl. As usual, the device is self-consciously underlined, only to be undermined:

> We hung upon her words: was that famous marriage-bed mystery, as in a Victorian novel, about to have a deathbed resolution? But her voice gave out. Ambrose took her free hand . . . and called the name Karl to her. His mother smiled, closed her eyes, and spoke her last words: "He was right smart of a cocksman, that Karl." (558; 23 Aug.)

(vii)

Barth's parodic frustrating of the characters' desire for resolution in this episode mirrors in miniature the larger movement of *LETTERS'* plot. His not uncritical détente with realism ends abruptly when, after having built up for 752 pages a complex and mysterious plot, he collapses the entire structure, thwarting the reader's expectations and casting doubt on the metaphysical assumptions that accompany the very notion of plot.[22] As one gradually gathers together the seemingly disparate threads of the novel's several subplots, it becomes apparent that A. B. Cook VI has been manipulating events as part of his Seven-Year Plan to bring about a Second American Revolution (the exact nature of which remains vague). As Monsieur Casteene, he is the "Prime Mover" (475; 10 July) behind the Remobilization Farm, from which he controls the activities of a network of revolutionaries, including Jerome Bray, whom he is preparing "for a certain role he himself will be unaware of playing" (583; 6 Aug.). As A. B. Cook VI, he brings about the hiring, firing, and rehiring of Germaine Pitt at Marshyhope State University; turns the filming of *FRAMES* to his "own purposes" (583); and "discreetly manage[s] . . . a number of . . . . potential allies or adversaries" (583), including Todd Andrews, Drew Mack, and Jeannine Mack. As Baron André Castine,--the identity he preferred until 1953 when, like Dante, "*nel mezzo del cammin*" (583), he assumed the second of his two legal names, A. B. Cook VI--he is engaged to the wealthy Jane Mack whose fortune will help to finance the Seven-Year Plan.

[22] See Harris, *Virtuosity* 181-82, and Spanos 154.

Cook's last letter to his son H. C. Burlingame VII, in which he reveals that both A. B. Cook VI and André Castine are to disappear, leaving the revolution to be completed by Burlingame, includes a postscript that negates the above hypothesis. Apparently added by Burlingame, it asserts that Cook VI is an imposter, that A. B. Cook IV's posthumous letters are forgeries, and that he has himself seen to the destruction of Cook VI's body. According to Burlingame, the "whole elaborate charade of discovered and deciphered letters" to which the reader has been treated throughout *LETTERS* and "the very notion of a Pattern of generational rebellion and reciprocal cancellation" (753; 17 Sept.) are lies intended to lure him, Burlingame, into a deathtrap.

Moreover, in the novel's next letter, the reader, still reeling from the initial shock, is further confused by Jerome Bray's claim to have "stung and thr[own]" (757; 23 Sept.) Monsieur Casteene, who, as A. B. Cook VI, not only killed his father H. C. Burlingame VI (Bray's foster father Ranger Burlingame) but also intended to kill his son H. C. Burlingame VII. Nonetheless, Bray also believes that he has received a "Bellerophonic" (757) letter from his grandmother (likely written by Cook) instructing him, "like fallen Bellerophon wandering far from paths of men, devouring own soul" (757-58), to "deliver [him]self up Truth's rosy-fingered finger" (758). By this cryptic Homeric echo, he means that he will be inside MSU's Tower of Truth at sunrise on 26 September, the very moment that the tower, Barth's symbol for the contingent, relative nature of reality,[23]

[23] The Tower of Truth, built from inferior materials on marshy, shifting ground, is, before it is even completed, both as "cracked as the House of Usher" (439; 19 July) and "rising from a lie" (243; 24 May).

will be blown apart (like *LETTERS'* plot) by the dynamite charges planted there by Drew Mack and his accomplices.

The morning of 26 September finds three people in the tower: Bray, hoping to "ascend to [his] ancestors" (758), just as Bellerophon hoped to ascend to Olympus; Todd Andrews, completing "the last installment of [his] life's recycling" (737; 26 Sept.) by dying in the explosion; and Ambrose Mensch, whose "7th and surely terminal love affair" (768; 22 Sept.) will apparently be with death. There they will remain, for Barth suspends the action a moment before sunrise, ending, but not closing, his novel.

LETTERS' open ending subverts the the reader's desire for a solution to the mystery. "In as jigsaw fashion as a Modernist novel, the story emerges" (686; 20 Sept.), only to disintegrate into its component pieces. Yet as Ambrose tells the Author, the story's puzzles are merely a diversion: "the real treasure (and our story's resolution) may be the key itself: illumination, not solution, of the Scheme of Things" (768; 22 Sept.). Because there is no final, absolute truth, there can be no final, certain conclusion. Like the epilogue of *The Sot-Weed Factor* and the multiple endings of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, the open ending of *LETTERS* both foregrounds and subverts the device of closure. Rather than give the illusion that its language represents an ordered reality to which the unfolding of the plot is analogous, *LETTERS* concludes by rendering the question of representation problematic.

LETTERS seems to suggest that the world is both real and our construct. Its characters' projection of patterns onto their lives and its author's insistence on self-reflexively revealing the patterns in his carpet are metaphors for the process by which we all invest the world with meaning. *LETTERS'* modernist foregrounding of its medium is balanced,

however, by the realist idea that the text is isomorphic in some way with the world. Its auto-representation, its self-conscious highlighting of form, narration, and language, does not turn it into a hermetically-sealed text, signifying itself. Ambrose Mensch, surely speaking for his author, writes:

> 5. If one imagines an artist less enamored of the world than of the language we signify it with, yet less enamored of the language than of the signifying narration, and yet less enamored of the narration than of its formal arrangement, one need *not* necessarily imagine that artist therefore forsaking the world for language, language for the processes of narration, and those processes for the abstract possibilities of form.
> 6. *Might he/she not as readily, at least as possibly, be imagined as thereby (if only thereby) enabled to love the narrative through the form, the language through the narrative, even the world through the language?* Which, like narratives and their forms, is after all among the contents of the world. (650-51; 4 Aug.)

Rather than retreat into the ordered world of art, Barth emphasizes language's role in constructing the world. Accepting the reciprocity of fact and fiction, life and art, bringing together both premodernist realism and modernist formalism, he acknowledges, as Charles Harris puts it, "the world's ontological 'thereness' while insisting that the intelligibility of the world depends upon our ordering perceptions of it" (*Virtuosity* 185).

Paradoxically, the "Author" of *LETTERS*, while firmly in control on one level of the text, has seemingly no control on another. As the self-conscious creator of the novel, the puppet-master who overtly pulls the strings, he keeps the reader's attention firmly focused on his creation of the text and on his reader's reception of it. As one correspondent among many, one who remains on the periphery moreover, he is not in control of

events. Ultimately of course, this too is an illusion, a metafictional convention that both distances the reader from the text and involves him/her more actively in its creation. The implied author, standing behind all the correspondents, including "John Barth," is the novel's true self-conscious plotter. It is he who, through his selection of events, characters, manner, and language, foregrounds the narrative and linguistic structures of his text, including the final metaphor of the "Author" at work, writing his novel, rebuilding the house of fiction:

> rewriting, editing, dismantling the scaffolding, clearing out the rubbish, planting azaleas about the foundations, testing the wiring and plumbing, hanging doors and windows and pictures, waxing floors, polishing mirrors and windowpanes--and glancing from time to time, even gazing, from a upper story, down the road, where he makes out in the hazy distance what appear to be familiar loblolly pines, a certain point of dry ground between two creeklets, a steaming tidewater noon, someone waking half tranced, knowing where he is but not at first who, or why he's there. He yawns and shivers, blinks and looks about. He reaches to check and wind his pocketwatch. (771; 14 Sept.)

The Jamesian "spreading field" (or "'choice of subject'") (Blackmur 46) that "John Barth" sees is himself in the Maryland marshes, the haunt of his youth and his novels, dreaming *LETTERS* into existence.[24] And the

[24] Cf. "The Author to Whom It May Concern":

> I woke half tranced, understanding where I was but not at once who, or why I was there . . . . Two turkey buzzards circled high over a stand of loblolly pines across the creek . . . . The only other sign of life . . . was the hum of millions upon millions of insects . . . going about their business, which, in the case of one *Aedes sollicitans*, involved drawing blood from my right hand until I killed her. . . . I'd felt for a pocketwatch . . . . [F]rom my mind's eye-corner I could just perceive, not one, but several "youths," all leading--but by different paths, in different ages!--to this point of high ground between two creeklets. (46; 9 Mar.)

"pierced aperture" (or "'literary form'") (Blackmur 46) through which he watches is "*an old time epistolary novel by seven fictitious drolls & dreamers, each of which imagines himself actual*" (49; 9 Mar.). To James's emphasis on the consciousness of the artist, Barth adds a sense of history, an ironic placing of his text in relation to the past, both his own and the novel's.

Barth illuminates both the fictionality of fiction and the reader's participation in its creation. The key to the treasure is the process itself, the laying bare of representational techniques and the creation of new syntheses. Poised between a premodernist imitation of the order of reality and a modernist withdrawl into the art-work itself, *LETTERS*, in postmodernist fashion, transcends both by foregrounding the process of world-construction. In it, Barth employs a number of strategies to render a plural reality and, hence, to challenge representation. His exaggerated incorporation of characters from his earlier works, a parody of the device of *retour de personnages*, renders the fictional world of *LETTERS* problematic, as does the characters' concern with the recycling of their lives, i.e., their metaleptic sense that they are participating in a sequel (McHale 58). In addition, Barth confuses the ontological status of his novel by framing the whole within another level of "reality"; inserting a number of embedded representations; confusing history and fiction; employing an epistolary form, i.e., giving a series of representations that do not cohere; and constructing and then destructing a plot. Taking as its theme its own construction while simultaneously questioning its significance, *LETTERS* exemplifies the postmodernist concern with the problematics of constructing a fictional world.

Conclusion: The Dead Father

"*Dead, but still with us, still with us, but dead*" (3), writes Donald Barthelme in *The Dead Father*, addressing on one level the problem of literary tradition with which the new, old novel also grapples. Although the art novel has gradually turned inward in the twentieth century from the representation of objective realities to the representation of subjective consciousness to the representation of the process of writing itself, there is still no shortage of traditionally realistic novels being written, read, and discussed. Nor of modernist novels it seems, although the distinctions between modernist and postmodernist works are not at all clear. John Barth, for instance, considers Norman Mailer's and Saul Bellow's fiction to be premodernist ("Replenishment" 66), yet Irving Howe labels Mailer and Bellow postmodernists ("Mass" 431, 433). Whereas Barth ("Replenishment" 66), Gerald Graff (*Literature* 50), David Lodge ("Postmodernist" 237-39), and Richard Wasson ("Notes" 465) all admit Alain Robbe-Grillet to the postmodernist club, William Spanos ("Detective" 165-66) denies him entry. Although Barth dubs Gabriel García Márquez's magic realist works postmodernist ("Replenishment" 71), Linda Hutcheon, echoing the Cuban critic and novelist Severo Sarduy, calls them neo-baroque (*Narcissistic* 2). And seemingly in support of Barth's contention that his own novels and stories have "both modernist and postmodernist attributes" ("Replenishment" 66), James Mellard includes them in the category of "sophisticated Modernism" (*Exploded* 135), Gerald Graff (*Literature* 57) and Richard Wasson ("Notes" 467) call them postmodernist,

and Jerome Klinkowitz excludes them from the "post-contemporary" (*Disruptions* ix).

Despite its archaic appearance, the new, old novel is not an uncritical continuation of the nineteenth-century novel. Reading *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is not the same as reading a novel by Thomas Hardy. Rather, Fowles's parody, by virtue of its ironically distanced use of nineteenth-century structures, conventions, and language, is of a different kind altogether from its originals. The new, old novel, as parodic metafiction, self-consciously questions the methods and procedures by which it comes into being and, more generally, examines the problem of meaning itself. Far from marking a return to earlier certainties with respect to a shared sense of reality between writer and reader, it calls attention to the ontological difficulties involved in projecting a fictional world. Whereas George Eliot could assume that the language of her texts would, within limits, correspond to or picture reality[1], i.e., actual states of affairs in the world, the new, old novelists take into consideration one's inability to observe the world directly without imposing one's own categories and assumptions upon it. Assuming that one cannot get outside one's theories and beliefs to compare them with an uncontaminated reality, they ask, in Henry James's phrase, whether there is a "figure in the carpet" or whether, as one of Donald Barthelme's dwarfs puts it in *Snow White*, there is "just . . . carpet" (129). Self-

[1] See *Adam Bede*: "[M]y strongest effort is . . . to give a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind" (178; ch. 17). See also William Makepeace Thackeray, "Letter to David Masson," 6 May 1851: "[T]he Art of Novels *is* to represent Nature: to convey as strongly as possible the sentiment of reality" (Allott 67).

reflexively foregrounding the fictionality of their work, they render the act of representation itself problematic.

Although the new, old novelists share the modernists' critical responsiveness to contemporary culture, they do not idealize tradition as do, for instance, T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. The modernists reacted to the social crisis precipitated by the industrial revolution and manifested in the values of mass culture and modern industrial society.[2] Rejecting the immediate past, i.e., what they perceived to be the obsolescent values of nineteenth-century society, they embraced, instead, a broader historical perspective. Pound, for example, setting himself up as a mediator between history and society, refused the limitations of time and individual identity and forged an aesthetic of "contemporaneous culture."[3] By taking what he wanted from past culture and making his own contribution, he hoped to reestablish a positive historical continuity, to redeem society through art. By reclaiming tradition, art could provide order in a contingent world. What was perceived to be the collapse of nineteenth-century assumptions about literary form and the degeneration of social practice into an "immense panorama of futility and anarchy" (Eliot, "Myth" 177) could be countered formally (i.e., ordered, given a shape and significance) by new artistic techniques, such as Joyce's mythic method, which employ tradition as an underlying organizing principle.

[2] See, for example, Herbert Reed: "I do think we can already discern a difference in kind in the contemporary revolution: it is not so much a revolution, which implies a turning over, even a turning back, but rather a break-up, a devolution, some would say a dissolution. Its character is catastrophic" (Bradbury and McFarlane 20).

[3] See Pound's assertion in "*Praefatio Ad Lectorum Electum*," *The Spirit of Romance* that "[a]ll ages are contemporaneous" (8).

Lurking behind Eliot's "ideal order" of texts, his belief that all works of art have a "simultaneous existence" and compose a "simultaneous order" ("Tradition" 38), however, are notions of hierarchy and authority. In contrast, rejecting any notion of a master narrative, the new, old novelists refuse to grant a privileged status to art. Their parodies of traditional novels, which lay bare the very conventions, strategies, and devices they use, mock the teleological assumptions of the form they employ. Paradoxically, their imitations of imitations both subvert and continue the tradition of the novel by pointing to the inevitability of representation while denying art any ultimate or absolute value.

The new, old novel is clearly postmodernist according to some critics' definitions of the term. Umberto Eco, for example, emphasizes postmodernism's ironic relationship with the past: "The post-modern reply to the modern consists of recognizing that the past, since it cannot really be destroyed, because its destruction leads to silence, must be revisited: but with irony, not innocently" ("Reflections" 17). Similarly, Linda Hutcheon points to postmodernism's ironic dialogue with the past:

> What postmodernism does, as its very name suggests, is confront and contest any modernist discarding or recuperating of the past in the name of the future. It suggests no search for transcendent, timeless meaning but rather a re-evaluation of, and a dialogue with, the past in the light of the present. ("Beginning 25)

And Brian McHale, arguing that the primary concern of postmodernist fiction is ontological (10), describes the strategies by which postmodernist novels question our notions of reality by turning history into fiction and fiction into history (96).

The distinguishing characteristic of the the new, old novel, its parody of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fiction, places it squarely within these constructs of postmodernism. Realizing, as Eco says, that ours is "an age of lost innocence," the new, old novel accepts "the challenge of the past, of the already said" (17). Its parody of old conventions is, in Hutcheon's idiom, a contradictory strategy signalling both incorporation and subversion and, in McHale's, a strategy that calls attention to the ontology of the work. As Hutcheon would say, the new, old novel both mines and undermines antique styles and devices, uses them yet criticizes them from within. Because it is dependent on an antecedent, this type of novel criticizes yet does not reject tradition. Even though parody suggests that one can no longer write seriously in the style of the parodied text--exaggerated imitation, even of a work that one admires, implies that serious imitation is not possible anymore--it is, nonetheless, a strategy that enables the novelist to continue the traditional function of story-telling while remaining aesthetically up-to-date. Establishing an ironic tension between form and theme by placing contemporary ideas against a background of older literary forms, a technique that presupposes considerable historical awareness on the part of the reader, parody refunctions fossilized devices and conventions, regenerating them for new purposes.

The effect of the new, old novel's parody of earlier forms and devices is to question representation itself, to foreground the problem of how fictional and social worlds are constructed. Returning to traditional materials, the new, old novel exposes the building blocks of literature, the devices comprising the pool of possibilities from which the artist can draw to construct a world. Paradoxically, it puts mimetic devices to

metafictional use, creating palimpsests that emphasize the constructional rather than the representational aspects of art. Self-consciously picking up outmoded devices, many of them from non-canonical or popular genres, the new, old novel continues and helps to renew the tradition of the novel, not by elevating its status but, rather, by implicating it in the meaning systems by which we make sense of the world.

It is this parodic self-reflexiveness that distinguishes the new, old novel from the historical novel proper. As McHale explains, the "traditional" or "classic" historical novel attempts to "camouflag[e] the seam between historical reality and fiction" as much as possible "by introducing pure fiction only in the 'dark areas' of the 'official record'; by avoiding anachronism; by matching the 'inner structure' of its fictional worlds to that of the real world" (90). The "postmodernist revisionist historical novel," in contrast, foregrounds the seam by violating these constraints, i.e,. "by visibly contradicting the public record of 'official' history; by flaunting anachronisms; and by integrating history and the fantastic" (90).

The new, old novel violates, primarily, the second of these constraints. The double coding of parody enables it to superimpose two different ontological landscapes--an archaic textual landscape and a contemporary cognitive landscape. That is to say, it inserts contemporary ideas and values into a representation of the culture and literary form of an earlier century. What McHale points out about *The Sot-Weed Factor* (88) is true of the other new, old novels as well: avoiding anachronisms of material culture for the most part, they flaunt anachronisms of *Weltanschauung*. In *The Sot-Weed Factor*, Henry Burlingame expounds ideas and opinions current not in the late seventeenth century but, rather, in the

late 1950s when Barth wrote the novel. At the same time, Barth contradicts official history by incorporating secret histories, which debunk the legends surrounding the exploits of Captain John Smith. In *Fanny*, Fanny Hackabout-Jones possesses a feminist outlook greatly at variance with Augustan values, a device that enables Jong to satirize patriarchal attitudes both then and now. In *Water Music*, Johnson expresses contemporary ideas, and both he and the narrator speak in contemporary idiom. Although Boyle sticks mainly to Mungo Park's own record of his travels, the inclusion of modern language in an old genre and an historical setting encourages a perspective at odds with the values expressed by and in the form. In *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Fowles juxtaposes old and new values by means of overt narrative commentary and by including, like Jong, a heroine who thinks like a modern woman. Finally, violating the third of the constraints on historical novels, Barth integrates history and the fantastic by making *LETTERS* a sequel to all his previous novels, including the new, old novel *The Sot-Weed Factor* and the fantastic allegory *Giles Goat-Boy* (McHale 94). The upshot in all these novels is a foregrounding of the ontological boundaries of fiction and a postmodernist subversion of realist conceptions of reality.

Although by definition the new, old novel refers to other texts, it does not imply an escape from the world into a self-sufficient realm of intertextuality. Neither does it incorporate the structures of realism and naturalism into itself in order to "bring the novel to strangle itself" (42), as John Vernon suggests is true of contemporary metafiction. Nor is it mere pastiche, "the imitation of dead styles" (65) that Frederic Jameson claims postmodernism, reinforcing "the cultural logic of late capitalism" (53), requires. It establishes, instead, an equilibrium between

imitation and creation, between acceptance and critique of representation. On the one hand, it is conservative to the extent that its writers view literature as a model in some fashion for the world outside the text. Although its self-conscious focus on its own processes draws attention to the rules of its art, it does not succumb to radical conventionality and deny its representational nature. On the other hand, it is progressive in that its parody does recognize and make overt the conventionality and historically determined nature of meaning. Through its ironic reworking of the past, it exposes the ideological nature of all representations, both past and present. Its parodic strategies exemplify what Hutcheon calls postmodernism's "direct confrontation with the problem of the relation of the aesthetic to a world of significance external to itself, to a discursive world of socially defined meaning systems (past and present)--in other words, to ideology and history" ("Politics" 179-80). The new, old novel, then, is at the very centre of contemporary concerns in that it both foregrounds the ways in which we represent and hence construct the world and makes the novel a site for intervention and critique.

At the same time, by maintaining a sense of historical continuity and opening up the possibilities of literary discourse, the new, old novel differs from other forms of postmodernist literature. The non-fiction novel or "faction," as it is sometimes called, while recognizing the subjectivity of the narrative voice, accords privileged status to a particular type of narrative technique by its insistence on tying itself to the "facts." Both surfiction and the "self-begetting novel" emphasize the creative consciousness and the act of creation itself. "Fabulation," as Robert Scholes dubs it, divorces itself from realist techniques and a

sense of history. The French "new novel," by focusing on objects and narrative consciousness, restricts the narrative capabilities of language.

The new, old novel, in contrast, does not cut itself off from history. A metaphor for its procedure can be found in *LETTERS*. Jerome Bray's third novel, *Backwater Ballads*, is a cycle of 360 tales "told from the viewpoint of celestial *Aedes Sollicitans* [the kind of mosquito that bites the dreaming Author; see above, p. 232, n. 24], a freshwater native with total recall of all her earlier hatches, who each year bites 1 visitor in the Refuge and acquires, with her victim's blood, an awareness of his/her history" (29; 4 Mar.). The Author, her 360th victim, she "'infects' with narrative accumulation" (29; 4 Mar.). Similarly, the new, old novel, "infected" by the accumulated possibilities of the narrative tradition, does not reject old forms and devices. Instead, exposing their ideological content through parody, it neutralizes them and renders them fit for new functions. Rather than create new metafictional hierarchies, it is a truly relative fiction in which everything becomes available--the old, the new, the marginal. Its parodic strategy enables it to continue the traditional function of story-telling while remaining philosophically current, a distinctly postmodernist equilibrium.

A recent spate of new, old novels suggests that the kind may be of more than passing significance in the history of the novel. The past two years have seen the publication of at least four more new, old novels. Three of these--Bob Colman's *The Later Adventures of Tom Jones* (1985), Judith Terry's *Miss Abigail's Part or Version and Diversion* (1986), and J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* (1986)--treat a particular original while one--John Fowles's *A Maggot* (1985)--confesses a more general debt to Defoe. Of these, perhaps only *Foe* is a parodic metafiction of the kind that I have

been examining. In the first half of the novel, Coetzee presents a radically different version of events on Crusoe's island from those Defoe depicts in his tale. In the second half, in which he portrays the relationship between Susan Barton, a castaway on Crusoe's island, and Daniel Defoe, whom she hopes will turn her description of life with Crusoe and Friday into a novel, Coetzee develops the metafictional theme of the relationship between reality and art. Revising Defoe's story, introducing characters from *Roxana*, and presenting Susan as, on one level, Defoe's muse, Coetzee allegorically depicts the engendering of *Robinson Crusoe*.

An increasingly popular form, the new, old novel demonstrates that traditional narrative techniques, if used in a critical manner, may be available again in what Bernard Bergonzi calls a "reflective realism":

> By a 'negation of a negation' one might, after all, arrive at a new realism that would not be an inevitable or habitual cultural mode, but one possibility to be freely chosen by the novelist--out of a full knowledge of all the possible choices he might make. It would be a reflective realism, aware of the conventionality of fiction, whilst open to the world of experience; as a matter of deliberate choice and consideration for the reader it would preserve the traditional formal decorum of the novel whilst using the insights of problematical fiction. ("Fictions" 57)

The new, old novel's paradoxical combination of metafictional self-consciousness and realist conventions permits it to incorporate the history of the novel while challenging the representational model on which novels have traditionally depended. Employing realistic techniques parodically, it points to artistic representations as constitutive rather than imitative of reality. Self-consciously aware of its own procedures, it neither rejects nor repeats the past. John Barth's description of the chambered nautilus, "a crustacean who creates his spiral shell as he goes

along," could very well function as a metaphor for the new, old novel's methods:

> He wears his history on his back all the time, but it's not just a burden; he's living in it. His history is his house. He's constantly adding new spirals, new rings--but they're not just repetition, for he's expanding logarithmically. (*First* 129)

Parodying, not repeating, traditional materials, new, old novels build on Henry James's house of fiction.

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