THE RHETORIC OF AUTHORITY AND THE DEATH METAPHOR

by

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(Under the Direction of Christy Desmet)

ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I reexamine the "death of the author" critical phenomenon and argue that literary theory in this vein is less about the author than it is about authoritative discourse, which is very different. I use the death-as-absence and writing-as-death metaphors and a poststructuralist critique of authoritative discourse to investigate ways in which Anglo-American literary theorists, poets and writers of fiction have often posited metaphysical authorities as origins for their art in an attempt to remedy the absence signaled by writing. Building on theories suggested by Jacques Derrida and Mikhail Bakhtin, I examine ways in which some literary texts confront the challenge posed by the association of writing with absence while remaining skeptical of authoritative discourse. I argue that James Fenimore Cooper's *The Pioneers*, Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* can be characterized as American historical romances that challenge the logocentric assumptions of the realist novel tradition and portray authoritative discourse as a repressive social force. All four of these works use metaphors of death and feature epitaphs that symbolize the relationships among death, absence, writing and historiography.

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DEDICATION

I want to dedicate this work to Chris, my mom and the other babysitters who made both this project and two babies happen simultaneously.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION:

WRITING AND THE EPITAPH

Many years before his death, Benjamin Franklin composed the following epitaph, leaving a blank space where the appropriate year could be filled-in at the time of his death. First published in a 1771 almanac, the epitaph did not ultimately grace the final resting place of the writer, but the sentiment remains interesting:

The body of
B. Franklin
Printer
Like the cover of an old book,
its contents torn out,
and stripped of its lettering and gilding,
lies here, food for worms.
But the work shall not be wholly lost;
for it will, as he believed, appear once more,
in a new and more perfect edition
corrected and amended
by the Author.
He was born Jan. 6, 1707.
Died 17

B. F. (Stories 137)

On the surface, the old inventor's epitaph reflects his humorous wit, his down-to-earth American ethos, and his belief in a heavenly afterlife. He seems utterly unafraid of death, almost as if he is looking forward to that eventuality. His choice of metaphor, however, reveals that more than religious faith girds his courage. A world-famous celebrity during his time, Franklin was assured a place in the history books and could reasonably assume his works would be republished for some time after his undoing. Perhaps this secular
faith is the rock on which his "last words" are carved. An advertisement with an
unlimited run, the epitaph relies on two age-old cognitive metaphors: first, the popular
belief that the body is nothing but a shell, something practical but inconsequential;
secondly, the notion that republication is a kind of rebirth or resurrection. Franklin
considers the text a manifestation of its author and continual republication a sort of
earthly immortality. This writing-as-immortality metaphor has persisted throughout the
history of written discourse. To have your thoughts and ideas or even merely your name
recorded for posterity is to live forever in the annals of human thought. Epitaphs
constitute a qualified democratization of that belief, for even the lowliest member of the
middle class has a chance to "live on" in the memory banks of the graveyard. But since
its earliest manifestation, writing has also maintained a curious association with loss of
memory and has signified the absence or death of the author.

In *Phaedrus* (ca. 370 BCE), Plato depicts a debate regarding the value of writing
as opposed to speech. A relatively young art in 5th century BC Greece, writing was
subject to the skepticism that any newly-introduced technology invariably suffers. By
some, oral discourse was considered preferable and primary with regard to its position in
the evolution of human communication and in terms of its proximity to philosophical
truth. As Plato argued via the figure of Socrates, oral communication enjoys more
accuracy and promise because interlocutors can question one another, guide one another
closer to the truth thus, the Socratic dialectic. Effective interpretation of discourse is a
process involving both listener and speaker, questions and more questions. According to
Plato, "live" dialogue is the only true form of communication; writing, with its deathly
silence, produces only confusion. Socrates argues:

> Writing, *Phaedrus*, has this strange quality, and is very like painting; for
the creatures of painting stand like living beings, but if one asks them a
question, they preserve a solemn silence. And so it is with written words;
you might think they spoke as if they had intelligence, but if you question
them, wishing to know about their sayings, they always say only one and
the same thing. And every word, when once it was written, is bandied
about, alike among those who understand and those who have no interest in it. (141)

Using this speech/writing binary, Plato teases out what he considers analogous oppositions such as truth/falsehood, presence/absence, internal/external, life/death. These last two are elaborated in Plato's parable of the Egyptian god Theuth, the inventor of letters. When Theuth presents his new technology to the God Thamus,¹ "the ruler of all Egypt at the time," claiming that writing is an "elixir of memory and wisdom," Thamus replies:

Most ingenious Theuth, one man has the ability to beget arts, but the ability to judge of their usefulness or harmfulness to their users belongs to another; and now you, who are the father of letters, have been led by your affection to ascribe to them a power the opposite of that which they really possess. For this invention will produce forgetfulness in the minds of those who learn to use it, because they will not practice their memory. Their trust in writing, produced by external characters which are no part of themselves, will discourage the use of their own memory within them. (Phaedrus 140)

Clearly suited to serve Plato's purpose, this myth reinforces his condemnation of writing, adding to it the ring of authority. As Jacques Derrida argues in "Plato's Pharmacy," Theuth is an apt vehicle for Plato's complex critique of writing because he is also closely associated with death in Egyptian mythology. Furthermore, Derrida points out that Plato associates writing with the Greek word "pharmakon"; this slippery word can be translated as either "the medicine or poison" or both (Dissemination 70). Absence, death, poison, forgetting: the suspect technology of writing seems almost irrationally demonized in Phaedrus.

But Plato's suspicions are not, it turns out, completely unfounded. Though mythical, Thamus's admonition finally has a basis in reality. During his studies of orality, Walter Ong found that members of oral cultures exhibit powers of memory far beyond those of their literate counterparts, who have no pressing need for that faculty.
And in his discussion of this phenomenon, Ong makes the same Platonic figurative connections between writing and loss, writing and death:

There is hardly an oral culture or a predominantly oral culture left in the world today that is not somehow aware of the vast complex of powers forever inaccessible without literacy. This awareness is agony for persons rooted in primary orality, who want literacy passionately but who also know very well that moving into the exciting world of literacy means leaving behind much that is exciting and deeply loved in the earlier oral world. *We have to die to continue living.*

Fortunately, literacy, though it consumes its own oral antecedents and, unless it is carefully monitored, *even destroys their memory,* is also infinitely adaptable. It can restore their memory, too. Literacy can be used to reconstruct for ourselves the pristine human consciousness which was not literate at all –at least to reconstruct this consciousness pretty well, though not perfectly (*we can never forget enough of our familiar present to reconstitute in our minds any past in its full integrity*). (my emphasis, *Orality and Literacy* 15)

Though this technology provides the opportunity to record history, improving its chances of survival and seemingly fixing it (freeing it from the permutations it may have suffered in an oral retelling), it nevertheless externalizes history, making it something you do not need to know as long as you have your books.

With or without Ong's twentieth-century study, the speech/writing binary that figures speech as primary or "pristine" has been a central tenet of certain dominant strains of Western philosophy and rhetoric. The association of primary orality and memory plays into the Platonic belief in an "a priori" truth that is forgotten at birth, and orality's primal position in the evolution of human thought fosters the notion that oral cultures retained an original purity that mankind has been trying to recover since the advent of writing. Cultural associations between purity, originality and truth led to the association of speech or orality and truth, and many recent surveys of rhetoric and philosophy since Plato attest to the persistent association of speech with transparent meaning and even transcendent truth. Since speech has been considered the medium that emanates directly
from inner thought (without the technological filter that is writing), writing has been cast as its inept "bastard"\(^3\) child, something that must be monitored closely and distrusted because of its tendency to obfuscate the Truth. Only very talented writers, authors, could achieve the clarity needed to approach Truth in their texts by most faithfully transferring thought/speech to paper. Today, a work of literature is considered well written if it can be said to be truthful and lucid; writing often is viewed as a challenge to be surmounted in the game of communication, rather than an alternative and equally challenging medium to speech.\(^4\)

Poststructuralist theory in the twentieth century rejuvenated and revised the connection between writing and loss or death, this time positing interpretive uncertainty as the cause of "death." When Roland Barthes signaled "The death of the author," partially inaugurating what Frank Lentricchia called "the crisis" in literary criticism,\(^5\) the chorus of responses ranged from utter indignation to playful glee. Barthes's thesis was upsetting because it threatened literary critical certainty—suddenly the author's intended message, the point for many critics, was undiscoverable. What, then, would literary critics search for, and, more importantly, on what ground would they stand when lecturing or publishing? Author-centered schools of literary criticism had been proffering the belief that "authors," the most talented writers, knew exactly what they were doing when they wrote, that they were most able to render clear, precise, even truthful writing. To discover the meaning of any work, one had only to recover the intended message of the author, the origin. Text-centered schools believed that critics knew exactly what they were doing when they read such prose. Textual critics posited the reader and the text as the points of origin. Flying in the face of all that, Barthes argued that "writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin" (168). Critical certainty seemed a thing of the past. The argument demanded a drastic change in literary critical methods and implied that anyone adhering to the old critical systems was content with describing the emperor's new clothes.
It would be easy to overlook the subtleties in such a volatile argument. Though Barthes employed that basic conceptual metaphor as old as discourse itself, he invested it with new shock value by revealing its complex underside: if writing is death and a loss of memory, it is also a loss of control over meaning. In choosing this metaphor, Barthes was drawing on that almost 3000 year-old debate; indeed, his conclusions sound much like a reiteration of Plato's dialogue. But our understanding of language in the twentieth century has experienced significant changes with the advent of Freudian psychology, structuralism and later poststructuralism. Whereas speech had once reigned as the most transparent medium for meaning, Freud's concept of the unconscious complicated the links between thought and expression, suggesting that we do not necessarily know what we are saying when we speak. Structuralism paved the way for poststructuralist critiques of language that questioned the speech/writing hierarchy, challenging the primacy and perspicuity of oral language. Having leveled the playing field, poststructuralist theory treats all discourse as "writing" capable of semantic leaps and twists that confound the listener/reader. If Theuth's magical elixir, writing, was supposed to rescue history from the permutations and interpretive flourishes it suffered through years of oral retelling, it has finally left us quibbling over the meaning of the most minute phrases and words; we seem to have fulfilled Plato's grim prophecy even when we disavowed his faith in language and truth. But now we feel confident that this interpretive uncertainty plagues speech as well, even if that fact has been repressed for centuries. What this means is that we no longer have recourse to the spoken word or to presence when in search of the "true meaning" of any language act. In short, "true meaning" is situated somewhere between the abyss and never ending, rigorous critical debate. It is no wonder, then, that poststructuralists such as Barthes and Derrida have returned again and again to literary criticism –the discourse that has always attended to the subtleties and frustrations involved in meaning-making. From a poststructuralist perspective, literary criticism has much to teach the "non-fictional" discursive world.
This strain of Western philosophy and rhetoric has been discussed in depth by poststructuralists in particular, but the same debate regarding the character of writing has been *performed* in literature, where "literary theory" is articulated indirectly and perhaps more powerfully. Authors have been expressing an uncertain faith in their ability to make and control meaning for centuries, and they have employed the figure of death, since long before Barthes's pronouncement, to contemplate origins and the challenges of historiography. My study examines this sense of the death metaphor in novels that approach historiography as a contract with the dead and historical texts as the stages on which impossible dialogues with the dead are enacted. The novels I have chosen as my focus use epitaphs to explore the relationships between discourse and truth, truth and death. I argue that these four works can be considered "historiographic metafiction," a term Linda Hutcheon uses to describe novels that "are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages" (5). Metafiction occupies the space between fiction and non-fiction, even at times challenging that distinction.

The epitaph proves an apt literary form for this inquiry. As historical writing, epitaphs reflect the human experience condensed and often emotionally saturated. As both an instrument of memory and a potentially violent or "poisonous" technology, epitaphic writing is history in its most distilled form and with all of its inadequacies exposed. Using epitaphs, novelists have dramatized the relationship between writing and death, the fear of lost history, and the incapacity of language to describe life and/or death. In historical novels, epitaphs can represent both a focal point for narrative progression and the process of historiography itself. The fictional mourner standing before the grave is an image of the reader, who is also a student of history. The epitaph is a message delivered from the dead (author) to the living (reader) – a message sent by a ghost whose original intentions reverberate like a faint, inscrutable echo from the past and from the abyss. The light humor of Ben Franklin's epitaph hinges on his belief in both a positive
afterlife and an adulatory legacy. The novels of my focus use epitaphs to express a more complicated dread, a fear that discourse may be more pernicious than sustaining.

As verse, epitaphs in novels stand out stylistically, demanding special attention from the reader. The novel also creates a space in which epitaphs can be the focus of a sustained, dramatic meditation on death and writing from several points of view, those of the author, the characters and, in some cases, the narrator as well as the reader. In "Discourse in the Novel," Mikhail Bakhtin argues that, unlike the poet, "the prose writer does not purge words of intentions and tones that are alien to him, he does not destroy the seeds of social heteroglossia embedded in words, he does not eliminate those language characterizations and speech mannerisms (potential narrator-personalities) glimmering behind the words and forms..." (The Dialogic Imagination 298). It is precisely this type of semantically overpopulated prose that is reflected synecdochically in the epitaphs I have chosen to examine. Novelists who incorporate epitaphs into their larger works have the potential to contrast Bakhtin's "social heteroglossia" with the charged short form of a character's "last words."

My dissertation traces the themes of "the death of the author" back through American fiction, suggesting that this type of metaphorical death, the loss of control over meaning, has been the subject of metahistorical American novels from James Fenimore Cooper to Toni Morrison. Though themes related to the author's death gain a certain complexity in critical theory that may not be immediately apparent in the novels, many of the same crucial issues concerning discursive truth and history are broached in the latter. At the heart of "the death of the author," and by extension poststructuralism itself, lies the notion that writing does not unproblematically convey authorial intention. Writing is, rather, "that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost..." ("The Death of the Author" 168). It is precisely this loss of identity, realized through writing, that concerns these authors. I argue that American authors have used death and the epitaph to explore the desire for history and to express a
fear of misinterpretation, to suggest that language both sustains us and destroys us. The four novels I have chosen to focus on are writing imaginative histories structured by "real" events from American history. Already experimenting with the possibilities of historiography by situating their fiction among the "facts" of history, the authors contemplate history as a literary artifact, contesting the border between the "real" subjects of history and their characters. My aim is to discuss the way in which the approaches to death in these works are informed by and reflect both a long-held belief in the power of discourse to create rather than merely reflect history and the fear that, through the play of language, written discourse ultimately fails us in our attempts to preserve what we may view as individual truths.

In chapter one, "Following the Death Metaphor to Its Destination: Life," I focus on aspects of poststructuralism that seem most relevant to my particular thesis. Barthes, Derrida and Foucault are considered the three major theorists at the center of "the death of the author" critique, and much has been made of their contributions to this strain of poststructuralism in literary journals and in such studies as Sean Burke's *The Death and Return of the Author*. My treatment of Barthes and Foucault remains limited for that reason. By contrasting instead the theories of authorship offered by Derrida and Mikhail Bakhtin, whose ideas complement and contradict one another, my study approaches the question of authorship from the perspective of a poststructuralist reaction to Platonic notions of truth and writing (Derrida) and the struggle to define the novelist-as-author (Bakhtin). In my analysis of the novels, I identify two major impulses moving the authors: the will to historiography (the desire to recreate the past using the conventions of the novel) and a distrust of language (the ironic project of communicating the inexplicable, the belief that no story can accurately tell the story of the past). Because Bakhtin and Derrida address both of these impulses, they will be my theoretical touchstones.
Put simply, I utilize Derrida's concepts of the "trace" and "differance." Epitaphs function as the Derridean "trace," or that fleeting clue which ironically points more toward a loss than toward a discovery of meaning. The presence of the "trace," according to Derrida, ironically underscores the absence of linguistic certainty. Epitaphs represent a "trace" of people and cultures whose history cannot effectively be represented, preserved or recovered. Derrida's term, "differance," refers to the inability of language to have fixed meaning. He intends the term to suggest the double meaning (implied in the French) of both "to differ" and "to defer" in order to communicate both the constant change of meaning in language and the fact that the meaning of any given utterance is always just beyond our grasp, certainty is always "put off." In my study, I contrast the desire for fixed meaning represented by the epitaphs and the feeling, expressed in literary manifestations of epitaphs, that such meaning is impossible.

Whereas Derrida's poststructuralist theories illustrate the function of discourse on the level of the text, Bakhtin's "dialogism" and "heteroglossia" address the role of author and reader more directly. For Bakhtin, language is inhabited by the author (who is not dead), the subject and the reader all at once. It is also qualified by historical, geographical and cultural context. Yet language is not unitary or fixed. Bakhtin's theories will be useful in this study because he, like Derrida, focuses on the life of language, its "historical becoming." Unlike Derrida, he allows for a modicum of certainty in the interpretation of intention; in other words, whereas Derrida might argue that true and certain communication is always confounded, Bakhtin would suggest that such communication is complicated but not impossible. Their contrasting viewpoints stem from different approaches to subjectivity, or more precisely, the ability of the purposive subject (be it the author, character or reader) to populate discourse with his/her own intention. While they both characterize language as kinetic and internally contradictory, Bakhtin focuses on the novel as a space in which authors allow language to play. Derrida can conceive of no possible situation in which language does not play. Bakhtin's theories
express a faith in the possibility that language can mean many things, including precisely what its author intended. Derrida's theories foster a suspicion of self-apparent meaning in language, suggesting that the author's intended meaning may be as irrecoverable as the moment when each word was first written. Despite their differences, Derrida's reaction against "logocentrism" and Bakhtin's critique of "authoritative discourse" strike at the same cultural apparatus, discursive hegemonic ideology. Since historiography and the role of the author are central to my study, Derrida's and Bakhtin's strategies for resisting authoritarian writing prove extremely useful and informative.

Underpinning the "death of the author" is the notion that the author cannot be considered the originator of meaning, the ultimate referent for his text. His "death" figuratively liberates his texts and their potential from his illusory clutches. By killing him off, Barthes, Derrida and other poststructuralists signify their rejection of his determining presence in discourse. Though this poststructuralist theory has often been considered a product of twentieth-century thought, the role of the author and the source of literary invention have been debated since writing was first introduced. In order to suggest that American novelists, among others, anticipated the "death of the author" question in all of its complexity, I examine approaches to creative inspiration in chapter two, "The Author and the Metaphoric Mediation." Using Derrida's concept of the "metaphoric mediation," I argue that much dominant literary theory has depicted the author as nothing but a conduit or prophet who does not so much create art as he does re-present transcendent or abstract truths which already exist. Using "metaphoric mediations" such as "God's word" or an idealized "nature," "truth" or "reality," literary theorists and authors have granted their texts an unquestionable authority that bears no necessary relationship to themselves. Since the author's "death" is meant to symbolize the absence of an origin, I examine Anglo-American theories of literary origins with an eye toward the relationships among the author, his work and the work's meaning, or
"truth," finally focusing on the novel form and early theoretical distinctions between truthful fiction and fanciful romance.

In chapter three, "Historical Romances and the Epitaph as Historical Trace," I examine the historical romance as a form that has been viewed in contrast to the realist novel. While the latter has been associated with "real" life and concrete truth, the former has been cast as the opposite, a reflection of the author's fancy and unrelated to life as it is lived. Both in canonical literary theory, by authors such as Henry James and William Dean Howells, and critical reviews of fiction in the nineteenth century, a high literary standard took shape that privileged realistic fiction for its edifying examination of real life; to describe a work of fiction as a "romance," then, sometimes implied that the work was inferior. Twentieth-century literary critics have widely disagreed regarding the efficacy and the legitimacy of the realist/romance binary, but the controversy reveals how the determination of "truthfulness" and the relationship between writing and the "real" have remained central concerns of literary criticism and theory, especially regarding fiction. The close relationship between fictional narrative constructs and historiography in the nineteenth century, and more recent literary and historical theories that blur the distinction between fiction and history have contributed to a general confusion of the boundaries between the two. Some twentieth century literary critics have designated as "historical romances" those works that call attention to their fictionality, by employing fanciful or otherwise overtly imaginative elements, and their relationship to actual history through the use of historical events and/or figures. The authors of the historical romances I have chosen to examine combine those elements in order to question the social role of writing as both a tool of authoritarian discourse (in the determination of hegemonic truth and the ensuing repression of difference) and the possibility of artistic resistance to that repressive force. These themes relate to the death metaphor in complicated ways, since history represents a way of overcoming death through the qualified immortality granted by the written word, but death also signifies absence, silence and an unrecoverable past.
Historical romances present the imagination as a force for overcoming that silence, though their expressly anti-authoritarian stance maintains a skepticism about their portraits of the past.

In chapters four and five, I discuss each of the novels I have chosen in turn. They are: James Fenimore Cooper's *The Pioneers*, Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. While there are, undoubtedly, other novels that would be germane to a study such as mine, those I have chosen not only cover a wide expanse in the history of the American novel but also directly address some of the most important themes of American history, namely: colonialism, Puritanism, slavery, and racial and gender divides. They are as diverse in perspective and style as they are in subject matter, yet they share certain characteristics that link them under the rubric of this particular study. These authors are all historiographers, cultural critics and theorists. In dialogue with one another across two centuries of American fiction, they represent a range of styles, yet they share a preoccupation with American history and a suspicion of language. All four focus on periods of American history marked by incredible social strife. Their historical romances are all concerned with marginalized cultures and death; more importantly, they all focus on the function of writing as it relates to memory and the dead. In these works, the authors employ a backward-looking glance, eulogizing a historical period not their own and focusing on cultures potentially maligned by mainstream histories. In addition, all of these works focus on death, in some way, foregrounding the relationship between death and history.

Even more crucial to this study, though, is the anxiety all of these works share concerning the making of histories. While celebrating, either stylistically or thematically, the plasticity of history (the possibility that histories can be embellished retold, corrected—changed in many ways), these authors also express anxiety concerning the potential dangers of malleable histories and misinterpretation. Approaching history, and, indeed
language, from this perspective, these authors foreground the relationship between authorship and intention. They not only self-consciously fabricate "their own" versions of historical events but they also suggest that those versions, consisting as they do of discourse subject to innumerable interpretations, may not, ultimately, communicate what they intended at all. These authors all share either familial or strong cultural bonds with the periods and subjects they depict; thus, authorial subjectivity and agency become central to their narratives. Since each of these novels has a personal polemic element, this fear of misinterpretation is especially acute. Finally, each of these works uses the epitaph as a historical text, contrasting the concrete permanence of the object with the fluidity of history and creating an analogy in which the novel takes the place of the memorial, a discursive object subject to the misinterpreting gaze of its readership. Using epitaphs, the authors depict historical discourse as a religious and political tool and question our faith in the links between historiography and truth.

In *The Pioneers*, James Fenimore Cooper focuses on post revolutionary expansion, the dislocation and genocide of Native American tribes, and the destruction of the environment perpetrated by colonial settlers. In this and other Leather-stocking tales, Cooper depicts writing as the tool of the enemy, or at least that of the colonizing white man. His hero, Natty Bumpo, cannot read and distrusts writing and readers. In this fourth book of the Bumpo series (which happened to be written first), the sun sets on Natty and Indian John, the truly last of the Mohicans; the latter dies and the former lights out for the territory. The final scene takes place in a graveyard, where Natty comes upon the shiny newly-weds gazing at the newly erected headstones marking the graves of Col. Effingham and Indian John. This curiously crafted scene is saturated with meaning particularly because of the narrative inconsistencies Cooper risked in his attempt to end the novel with both the traditional marriage and the tragic downfall of the hero and his wilderness. I argue that Indian John's epitaph represents the final act of colonization in the novel and reflects Cooper's larger fear that his attempt to record the persecution and
genocide of Native Americans may ultimately be patronizing and inaccurate. In crafting the epitaph, Indian John's long-time friend Edward Effingham botches both the spelling and the pronunciation of John's Mohican name. Natty upbraids him; Effingham promises to have the epitaph "altered," and the story ends. This closing scene may represent Cooper's acknowledgment of flaws in his depiction of Native Americans as well as an apology for maligning his own ancestors. In either case, the end of the novel underscores the inadequacy, perhaps even the impossibility, of historiography in general.

Hawthorne approached historiography as a summoning of the dead whose stories beg to be told, and he was preoccupied with graves and the dust therein; The Scarlet Letter begins and ends in graveyards. In "The Custom House," Hawthorne describes his ancestors' "old dry bones" buried in the Charter Street burial ground at Salem, and he leaves us at the end of the novel in "that burial ground beside which King's Chapel has since been built," where Hester and Dimmesdale are interred (12, 262). The novel is a tissue of fabricated texts, ranging from the mysterious papers Hawthorne claims to have found in the Custom House to the epitaph on the tombstone that "served for both" Dimmesdale and Hester: "ON A FIELD, SABLE, THE LETTER A, GULES" (262). The letter A stamps the doomed couple with social scorn, and when it follows them to their graves it threatens to become the single defining mark of their existence. The lost history discovered by the author/narrator in the novel both reenacts Hester and Dimmesdale's sins and attempts to exonerate them while impugning their condemners. Like Cooper, Hawthorne often set his stories in the land of his forebears, and he was concerned with the politics of his familial legacy; thus The Scarlet Letter has an autobiographical tinge. In the introductory chapter, Hawthorne describes his connection to the history of Salem, intertwining his past with that of his "embellished" characters, and he makes a considerable effort to confound truth and fiction, even as he seems to be acknowledging his poetic license. Hawthorne suggests that he is atoning for the sins of his forbears with
the novel, yet he is not entirely sure that histories, semi-fictional or not, can accomplish that task since language has both the potential to create and to diminish possibilities.

As he does in much of his fiction, Faulkner uses the Civil War as the defining event of Southern history in *Absalom, Absalom!*. The novel is a complicated history of a southern town before, during and after the civil war and an elaborate commentary on the process of story-telling, or more properly, the nature of historical discourse. Rosa Coldfield has an unusually long inscription carved into Judith Sutpen's headstone in order to act out her own hatred of the patriarchal system she believes destroyed the women of her family. As the novel progresses, the reader finds that Rosa's stab at patriarchy, and Sutpen in particular, continually falters; her words are rendered ineffectual when filtered through the perspectives of the male characters in the novel. Likewise, Rosa's narrative backfires when Quentin and, particularly, Mr. Compson undermine her credibility by stereotyping her as a crazy old woman, or worse, a living ghost. I argue that the novel depicts a modernist struggle over the word and history, and that the epitaph ultimately signals the death of historical certainty. Rosa's epitaph represents her attempt to insert an autonomous, or univocal, female voice into a discourse dominated by the very men she denounces; and, predictably, the attempt is thwarted by the dismissive responses of the male characters. Her ultimate failing is her faith in the possibility of fixed meaning in language, which causes her to underestimate the potential for her meaning to become lost, changed or appropriated. The novel is a study in point of view, and the epitaph represents one version of the much larger, much more complicated story. Like the aforementioned authors, Faulkner shares a past with the novel, though in this case it is cultural rather than familial. Faulkner also seems to share Rosa's desperation, though not her naïveté.

Further removed from the Civil War than Faulkner but no less connected to its events culturally, Toni Morrison recreates in *Beloved* an actual event that took place during that era, the infanticide committed by an escaped slave mother who feared her
child would be returned to slavery. The unfinished epitaph that mirrors the title of the book represents an incomplete, polyvocal utterance, a statement that reflects the viewpoints of many characters and begs to be finished. In this novel, each of the main characters possesses a piece of a larger story that must be told, and their individual narratives are woven together to reconstruct the past. The inscription on Beloved's headstone also represents the utterance of a female character caught within a patriarchal social structure, but here there is no naive trust in the power of language to communicate unitary meaning; the fluidity of the word and the many-layered meanings in any utterance are accepted facts. In *Beloved*, Morrison addresses the power of language, its violent potential and its restorative powers. She uses the epitaph to underscore the importance of language and naming, particularly with respect to the dead in African belief systems. She suggests that language can reach across the abyss between life and death, with both positive and negative results.

In the conclusion, I examine the impact that a broader understanding of death metaphors could have on poststructuralism and the question of "the death of the author." Since poststructuralism rejects the notion of periodization, it makes sense to glance back, beyond the bounds of the twentieth century, for its effects. Likewise, poststructuralist theory invites the breakdown of genres, suggesting that novels may be no less "theoretical" than a more properly theoretical essay. For these reasons, it makes sense not only to look to literature for theory, but to use literature to illuminate theoretical ideas (rather than the reverse, which is more often the case). Metaphorical epitaphs reflect some of the central issues in poststructuralism since they relate subjectivity to discourse, and both to absence. In contemplating death, the authors of these novels were faced with the mortality of themselves and their thoughts and ideas. The irony of a well-established, published author fearing for the life of his/her ideas underscores the gulf between language and intention, one of the main issues of poststructuralism. It may be that Barthes's well-chosen metaphor represents more than just clever figurative language; the
reality of death makes the poststructuralist annihilation of the subject, or at least its
decentering, a fact that cannot be, and has not, in the long history of American fiction,
been ignored.
Metaphor is a tool so ordinary that we use it unconsciously and automatically, with so little effort that we hardly notice it. It is omnipresent: metaphor suffuses our thoughts, no matter what we are thinking about.

Lakoff and Turner

I. Death/Absence and Writing: a Marriage of Metaphors

We have always made sense of death using metaphor. In fact, an analysis of metaphors of death may teach us more about how metaphor functions than would an analysis of any other major conceptual metaphor, given our fascination with death's mystery. Since metaphors structure our very understanding, they often go unnoticed in simple expressions such as "he passed away." As Lakoff and Turner have suggested, in More Than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor, "metaphor is a tool so ordinary that we use it unconsciously and automatically, with so little effort that we hardly notice it. It is omnipresent: metaphor suffuses our thoughts, no matter what we are thinking about" (xi). And almost everything we "know" about death beyond the purely biological stems from metaphoric representations. In their exhaustive analysis of life and death metaphors, Lakoff and Turner point out that we generally conceive of death as a departure; thus phrases such as "He's gone," "He's no longer with us" and "He's among the dear departed" suggest that, prior to death, some thing (be it a spirit or some other entity) was here or among us. Underlying these examples are what Lakoff and Turner label "basic conceptual metaphors": "death is departure," "life is a journey" and "death is a final destination." These structures are distinguished from their "particular
linguistic expressions," as in "she's gone to the great beyond," because they structure our understanding on the deepest level, providing the cognitive basis for common metaphoric expressions.

Basic conceptual metaphors are so commonplace and easily identified (once you become sensitized to their presence in everyday discourse) that they seem no great challenge to the critical mind; it suffices to point them out and wonder at their pervasive presence in our discourse. But some conceptual metaphors are so intertwined with deeply felt religious and cultural belief systems that they take the form of a faith, exceeding the ordinary function of idiosyncratic metaphors. They no longer merely enhance understanding; rather, they become the tool of powerful rhetorics such as those employed by religious or political groups. In the service of dogma, they take on a completely new function—they become control mechanisms, operating dangerously on our unconscious minds. Lakoff and Turner intimate this potential:

> The very existence and availability of conventional conceptual metaphors makes them powerful as conceptual and expressive tools. But they have power over us for the same reason. Because they can be used so automatically and effortlessly, we find it hard to question them, if we can even notice them. ...Cognitive models are not conscious models; they are unconscious and used automatically. We cannot observe them directly; they are inferred from their effects. (Lakoff and Turner 65-66)

Basic conceptual metaphors could be construed as the most dangerous form of rhetoric since, once they become conventionalized, they are used "automatically, effortlessly, and even unconsciously" and we are "predisposed to accept [their] validity," though we rarely deconstruct their full meaning (62, 63).

In literary and rhetorical theory, the association of death and writing has relied on the almost unconscious workings of basic conceptual metaphors. Since the cognitive structures linking death and departure pre-date the association of writing and death, they were available to writing theorists when writing became a common tool of the ancient
Greek rhetors and philosophers. With "death as departure" already instilled in the popular consciousness, it seemed no great logical leap to associate writing (already figured as a departure since it removes the author from the scene of communication) and death, effectively stigmatizing the former while rendering the rhetorical mechanisms required to effect the comparison nearly undetectable because of unconscious associations. Plato, in particular, applied the writing-as-absence, and absence-as-death metaphors in order to warn against what he viewed as a dangerous new technology. Plato predicted and feared the lack of control philosophers and rhetors would suffer if their words and ideas were circulated, scrutinized, and misinterpreted, in their absence, in the form of writing. Apparently, Plato felt much more in control of language processes when engaged in oral dialogue, as in the Socratic Method. Approximately 2500 years later, the "death of the author" theory, or, more broadly, poststructuralism reasserted Plato's observations using the same writing-as-absence metaphor, though this time there was no nostalgia for an older, more perfect form of communication; poststructuralists assert that all language is subject to misinterpretation and that it is impossible to write or say exactly and only what you mean. Utilizing the "death as departure" metaphor, poststructuralism argues that the author has mistakenly been identified as the presence, or governing consciousness, that gives a text its meaning (the presence that in Plato's dialogic model would be the actual interlocutors and their verbal participation in dialogue). By de-centering the author, poststructuralism forces the reader to confront language as a free agent, capable of meaning many things at once and never the same thing twice. Poststructuralist characterizations of refracted or lost authorial subjectivity have been controversial because poststructuralism identifies and undermines a cultural, deep-seated belief in both the possibility of transparent meaning in writing and the author's ability to know and communicate in writing exactly what she means.

To some degree, literary interpretation, and the interpretation of writing in general, has always involved a search for the truth in a text. The relationships among the
author, the reader and the text have often been determined by cultural and/or religious belief in the origins and nature of truth. Ultimately, "death of the author" theories challenge critical attempts to identify truth in literature by removing the most obvious reference point for the interpretation of the work, the writer. These theories utilize the actual ramifications of death, the irreparable loss of the subject, to "kill off" an author whose unproblematic "presence" in his/her texts had become a powerful determining agent in literary interpretation. But the demise of the author signals the demise of any and all governing consciousnesses in language processes so that the literary critic, or any reader for that matter, is also incapable of determining, once and for all, the true meaning of a given text. In this way, poststructuralism challenges our notion of meaning-making in general, suggesting that writing, and by extension language, makes and perpetually re-makes meaning on its own, irrespective of the author's, critic's, and reader's attempts at control.

In "What is an Author?," Michel Foucault responds to Barthes's "The Death of the Author" by first tracing the link between death and writing. He argues that such a link "subverts an old tradition exemplified by the Greek epic, which was intended to perpetuate the immortality of the hero: if he was willing to die young, it was so that his life, consecrated and magnified by death, might pass into immortality; the narrative then redeemed this accepted death" (198). Foucault also points to Arabian narratives such as The Thousand and One Nights, in which Scheherazade prolongs her storytelling night after night in order to stave off the death that awaits her at the close of her narrative. The existence of written memorials and epitaphs themselves corroborate Foucault's claim that Western culture has long associated narrative with a kind of immortality. Yet Foucault's argument has flaws. He writes that "our culture has metamorphosed this idea of narrative, or writing, as something designed to ward off death. Writing has become linked to sacrifice, even to the sacrifice of life: it is now a voluntary effacement which does not need to be represented in books, since it is brought about in the writer's very
existence" (198). First, it is slippery of Foucault to cite works that may be written texts today but were originally oral—he carefully calls them "narratives" and only later sneaks "narratives, or writing" into the argument, seemingly disregarding the crucial difference between oral and written narratives. Undoubtedly, the Greek belief in immortality through epic was well in place before writing came on the scene; as Foucault points out, Greek epic immortalized the hero, but what of the author(s) or tellers of the tales? And though *The Thousand and One Nights* is said to have originated well after the advent of writing (10th century), it is widely accepted that the series of tales were originally oral (another minor point, perhaps, but one worth considering given the crucial role orality plays in Scheherazade's life-saving efforts. Had her stories been neatly printed and bound for the King to peruse at his leisure, the heroine would surely have met an untimely demise). On a similar note, Foucault incorrectly suggests that "our culture" only recently "metamorphosed" this heretofore uncomplicated link between writing and immortality into that between writing and death. As Derrida and others have shown in their analyses of rhetoric and philosophy since Plato, the association between the author and death was born simultaneously with writing itself. And as Foucault's essay unconsciously suggests, the difference between speech and writing has been a crucial factor in evolving attitudes toward writing, the author, life and death (as Derrida's exhaustive analyses of these binaries have shown).  

II. Between Plato and Aristotle: Placing the Writer in Paradoxical Positions

In the *Phaedrus*, Plato directly utilizes the "death-as-departure" metaphor by cleverly associating writing with death, as Derrida has argued in "Plato's Pharmacy," and by playing on the significance of departure, distance, and absence throughout the dialogue. First, Socrates and Phaedrus journey "outside the wall" of the city, gaining distance from the superficialities and technologies (writing) of the city and the writer of
the speech, Lysias, who, they are quick to point out, is "in the city" (*Phaedrus* 113).

Socrates calls attention to the physicality of the speech *Phaedrus* carries scrolled up in his tunic and plays on the location of the writer in this passage:

Phaedrus: ...I will repeat the general sense of the whole...
Socrates:  Yes, my dear, when you have first shown me what you have in your left hand, under your cloak. For I suspect you have the actual discourse. And if that is the case, believe this of me, that I am very fond of you, but when Lysias is here I have not the slightest intention of lending you my ears to practice on. Come now, show it. (*Phaedrus* 114)

Of course, Lysias is not actually there, yet Plato synecdochically transplants him to the scene, identifying the speech as an extension of Lysias himself. As in many of Plato's dialogues, Socrates entraps his interlocutor and then upbraids him for having become trapped. The *Phaedrus* is no exception. Socrates says, "Lysias is here," only to emphasize his absence in a later passage, when he really articulates his distrust of writing.

To further conflate discourse and the body, Socrates argues, "every discourse must be organized, like a living being, with a body of its own, as it were, so as not to be headless or footless, but to have a middle and members, composed in fitting relation to each other and to the whole" (134). Yet later, during the story of Theuth, Socrates, via Theuth, condemns the purveyors of writing and "their trust in writing, produced by *external characters which are no part of themselves*" (my emphasis 141). To further this physical separation of writer and text, Socrates argues, "Shall we suppose that he who has knowledge of the just and the good and the beautiful has less sense about his seeds than the husbandman?" (141). When Phaedrus responds in the negative, Socrates continues, "Then he will not, when in earnest, write them in ink, sowing them through a pen with *words which cannot defend themselves* by argument and cannot teach the truth effectually" (my emphasis 141). Clearly, Lysias is no longer anywhere present in this scene—he has been "killed off" by Plato's or Socrates's cleverly constructed rhetorical ploy. Cut off from its writer, the speech *Phaedrus* carries loses its worth.
Absence and presence prove more crucial than does actual content in Socrates's critique of Lysias's text. As I suggested in the introduction, Western philosophy has maintained a long, well documented association between presence, speech, and Truth, all of which find expression in the Greek word, *logos*, which can also be translated as the Word of God. Plato makes his reason for privileging speech clear in *Phaedrus*: with speech, the "source" is present and can be called on to defend his claims or resolve disputes over his meaning; in short, he can engage in a dialectical process with interlocutors. For Plato/Socrates, logos and dialectic represent the only professed paths to true wisdom. By the end of the dialogue, in true dialectic fashion, Socrates seems to allow that writing might be useful in some capacity, but that the intelligent man would always suspect its "certainty and clearness" (142). He maintains that writing in the public sphere is useless without the presence of the writer, so that writing completely loses its practical purpose. Plato expresses this same suspicion of writing in the "Seventh Letter," wherein he argues that his notion of truth can never be put into words: "It is not something that can be put into words like other branches of learning; only after long partnership in a common life devoted to this very thing does truth flash upon the soul, like a flame kindled by a leaping spark, and once it is born there it nourishes itself thereafter" (136). Out of a "reverence for truth," Plato even makes the curious assertion that "no treatise by me concerning [truth] exists or ever will exist" (136).

For Plato, particular instances of parole, written or spoken, cannot convey truth. Speech only engenders truth through the dialectic method, and speech is not the only tool of dialectic. In the Platonic scheme, other elements in the dialectic magically cause a non-linguistic, almost spiritual, realization to occur in the participants' souls—if their souls are predisposed to this attainment of truth. Natural ability, which cannot be taught, and proximity to a philosopher properly trained in the Platonic dialectic together create the conditions for truth. In the "Seventh Letter," Plato uses vague figures and almost spiritual terms to describe the epiphany resulting from the dialectic:

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It is only when all these things, names and definitions, visual and other sensations, are rubbed together and subjected to tests in which questions and answers are exchanged in good faith and without malice that finally, when human capacity is stretched to its limit, a spark of understanding and intelligence flashes out and illuminates the subject at issue. That is why any serious student of serious realities will shrink from making truth the helpless object of men's ill-will by committing it to writing. In a word, the conclusion to be drawn is this; when one sees a written composition, whether it be on law by a legislator or on any other subject, one can be sure, if the writer is a serious man, that his book does not represent his most serious thoughts; they remain stored up in the noblest region of his personality. (141)

Playing as he does on the absence of Lysias in the *Phaedrus* and the absence of the "serious man" in this letter, Plato underscores the absence of the *origin*, the store of the "most serious thoughts," Logos, or the speaker's soul. He attributes an ability to control and manipulate meaning (not just language) to the speaking subject, and argues that this ability disappears when language is made concrete in writing. This fully present, governing subject imposes an order on language that otherwise would not exist in Plato's formulation. Furthermore, the speaking subject encourages and emanates "good faith," a prerequisite of Truth, which, presumably, cannot exist between a reader and text. All of this suggests a social contract, a persuasion to belief. Conversely, writing engenders faithlessness and vulnerability precisely because it lacks an origin, a governing, father-like presence. As Socrates points out, writing "always needs its father to attend to it, being quite unable to defend itself or attend to its own needs" (*Phaedrus* 141). This aspect of the *Phaedrus* cannot be underestimated since it is one of the earliest elaborations of the link between Truth and patriarchy. In "Plato's Pharmacy," Derrida addresses the paternal metaphor in the *Phaedrus*:

Even if we did not want to give in here to the easy passage uniting the figures of the king, the god, and the father, it would suffice to pay systematic attention –which to our knowledge has never been done –to the permanence of a Platonic schema that assigns the origin and power of speech, precisely of *logos*, to the paternal position. Not that this happens especially and exclusively in Plato. Everyone knows this or can easily imagine it. But the fact that "Platonism," which sets up the whole of
Western metaphysics in its conceptuality, should not escape the generality of this structural constraint, and even illustrates it with incomparable subtlety and force, stands out as all the more significant. ("Plato's Pharmacy" 76)

By setting-up dialectic as an ideal and theoretically casting it as an exchange of ideas between partners in "good faith," Plato seems to support an equitable model for meaning-making, although the persistent teacher-student posturing of interlocutors in the dialogues reinforces, once again, the paternalistic model. Clearly, the father of logos in Plato's dialogues is Socrates, who is never merely a partner in the even exchange of ideas but rather a guide, some might even say a manipulating, paternalistic guide, the governing consciousness that allows Plato's dialogues to pretend to be something more than writing. This father is the presence that is missing from writing, and his intolerable absence signals not just an end to dialectic exchange but an end to paternalistic control.

Plato's professed distrust of writing notwithstanding, it remains painfully obvious that Plato, powerless against progress and undoubtedly interested in the possibilities, did fully utilize that technological terror, writing. As Jasper Neel has suggested in Plato, Derrida and Writing, Plato's critique of writing is entirely indebted to writing; its highly wrought structure would be unthinkable without writing. Though Plato staged his major works as dialogues, their verisimilitude is easily questioned. In his study of the Phaedrus, Neel argues:

No one thinks Socrates' second speech could be an extemporaneous, oral creation. No one thinks the sort of structure demanded by Socrates' dictum could be achieved in speech. Both emerge from writing. Plato was creating "thinking," and the only way he could create the kind of thinking he did was in writing, because the sort of disinterested speculation advocated throughout the Platonic canon is impossible in a preliterate culture (43).

Indeed, Plato's argument in Phaedrus proceeds by what Eric Havelock has termed hypotaxis: the subordination of one idea to another in a logical hierarchy, the use of broad generalizations that appeal to reason, and a questioning posture. This style is peculiar to
literate cultures. In *The Literate Revolution in Greece and Its Cultural Consequences*, Havelock argues that:

[T]he alphabet converted the Greek spoken tongue into an artifact, thereby separating it from the speaker and making it into a 'language,' that is, an object available for inspection, reflection, analysis...It could be rearranged, reordered, and rethought to produce forms of statement and types of discourse not previously available because not easily memorizable.... (my emphasis 7-8)

In short, though he professed a distaste for rhetoric, Plato did make use of the complicated rhetorical ploys only writing makes possible. He recognized both the practical applications of writing as a useful tool for disseminating ideas and writing's capacity to change the way we think, yet he clearly thought it a necessary evil.

Plato's ironic posture regarding writing is the source of a long-lived debate in Platonic studies. Some critics have made sense of the contradictions in the Phaedrus by dismissing it as the poorly written draft of a young Plato or, some say, the illogical ravings of an older, fading Plato. Others, however, have defended the dialogue, even suggesting that the Phaedrus does not condemn writing but rather cleverly warns against passive reading. Neel, whose critique of the *Phaedrus* is quite compelling, argues that Plato, whether old or young, knew exactly what he was doing:

Plato has created a Socrates who is a charming prisoner of the sequence of time in 410. Plato's Socrates does not know what is coming. But Plato knows, because he has moved into the one medium that allows both the creation of fictional time and sequence and the manipulation of the things inside that fictional creation. One who can only speak is a prisoner of uncontrollable sequence. One who writes, on the other hand, invents history first, then controls it, and finally determines its sequence" (my emphasis, *Plato, Derrida, and Writing* 13).

Plato recognized the power of writing and sought to foreclose its possibilities by employing devices such as coded binaries and false dilemmas, suggesting, in writing, that writing and rhetoric engender nothing but lies and faulty logic. "Plato has built himself a
formidable position indeed," Neel argues, "he has used writing, the one possible means to invent his specialized kind of 'thinking,' and then denied that means to all who follow him" (12).

Plato left at least one major hint of this self-conscious ploy in the Phaedrus. He can be credited with one of the earliest characterizations of writing as "play," a term Derrida and other poststructuralists have made central to their thought. At the end of the Phaedrus, Socrates intones: "But the man who thinks that in the written word there is necessarily much that is playful, and that no written discourse, whether in meter or in prose, deserves to be treated very seriously... –that man, Phaedrus, is likely to be such as you and I might pray that we ourselves may become" (142). Plato acknowledges (for the reader aware that "Phaedrus" is writing) that he is playing a game, though the text seems to take itself quite seriously. Still, Neel argues that Plato "could never accept the fact that instead of his writing writing, writing wrote him" (78). This naiveté seems almost unthinkable given Plato's shrewd critique of writing in the Phaedrus, yet perhaps all of his warnings about writing represent a sort of coded apologia. The anxiety Plato expresses in the "Seventh Letter" suggests that he is quite fearful of future written manifestations of his thought, particularly those not written by him:

I am told that since then [Dionysius] has written a book about what he learnt at that time, putting it together as if it were a treatise of his own, quite different from what I taught him; but of this I know nothing. I know that some others have also written on the same topics, but such men are ignorant even of themselves. But this much at any rate I can affirm about any present or future writers who pretend to knowledge of the matters with which I concern myself, whether they claim to have been taught by me or by a third party or to have discovered the truth for themselves; in my judgment it is impossible that they should have any understanding of the subject. (136)

Clearly Plato realized that his teachings and his life undoubtedly would be the subject of many books to come, and his own writings may be a self-consciously imperfect attempt to set the record straight.
In the *Phaedrus*, Plato does cleverly leave some room for a kind of writing, however ideal and impossible, that may transcend the depths of mere rhetoric. Near the end of the dialogue, Socrates remarks,

A man must know the truth about all the particular things of which he speaks or writes, and must be able to define everything separately; then when he has defined them, he must know how to divide them by classes until further division is impossible: and in the same way he must understand the nature of the soul, must find out the class of speech adapted to each nature, and must arrange and adorn his discourse accordingly, offering to the complex soul elaborate and harmonious discourses and simple talks to the simple soul. (142)

Here, Plato suggests that sharp critical powers might enable a writer to control his text, to an acceptable degree if not completely. If writing alone cannot convey truth, then the writer must have such an intimate knowledge of the truth and the soul that his texts will somehow lead his readers to a greater sense of abstract, unwritable truth. In the end, Plato suggests that the absence at the heart of writing can be overcome by writers (such as him) who know truth. Thus, Plato leaves room for later rhetoricians and philosophers to both follow his example and practice and teach writing. The above passage from *Phaedrus* practically reads like the thesis statement of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, predicting as it does the classifications and modes of rhetoric to be elaborated in his and other rhetorical texts to come. Since writing would prove the most important advance in communications and the most powerful ideological tool over the ensuing centuries, it had to be saved, fit into some workable scheme in which it could be identified with the governing will of its writer, rather than his absence. The result was a slowly yet gradually increasing faith in the ability of the very skilled writer to control language.

Although the *Phaedrus* and "The Seventh Letter" are among the few early Greek philosophical/rhetorical texts to address the issue of writing in this direct fashion, rhetoric, an art almost entirely indebted to writing, would find its elaboration in works to come. The evolving identification of writer and text found early expression in Aristotle's
Rhetoric. In his efforts to retain some of what he learned from Plato while simultaneously rejecting Plato's condemnation of rhetoric (and, by extension, writing), Aristotle walked a tightrope in Rhetoric. Much has been made of the ambiguous first sentence of the work, a short sentence which seems to both link and dissect dialectic and rhetoric: "Rhetoric is antistrophos [counterpart, correlative or coordinate] to dialectic" (28). Disregarding Plato's attempts to oppose the two diametrically, Aristotle demonstrates, throughout Rhetoric, a desire to link them. Yet Aristotle did not subscribe to Plato's notion that dialectic was a path to transcendent Truth. George Kennedy has pointed out that Aristotle's notion of philosophy was "much more pragmatic than that" (4).

Kennedy writes that:

...whatever his initial attitude, [Aristotle] eventually rejected fundamental Platonic concepts, such as the reality of transcendental ideas. In particular, the Forms of the Good, the Beautiful, and the True—which Plato accorded the status of the only absolute reality—were to Aristotle not independent entities but abstractions created by the human mind. (4)

Like Plato, Aristotle recognized the potential for writing to convey falsehood. Unlike Plato, Aristotle viewed this potential as a creative force which could be utilized in the name of the public good, albeit ironically. It was precisely rhetoric's ability to sway an audience en masse, using whatever means were available, including falsehood, to paternalistically lead the rest that attracted Aristotle, who shared Plato's belief that some men have natural leadership ability. This is apparent in the Rhetoric when Aristotle defines ethos, or the ethical appeal, the expression of a speaker/writer's character in a speech or text. Ethos is one of the three modes of persuasion available to the rhetor; indeed, Aristotle argues that the rhetor's ethical appeal "may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses" (Bizzell and Herzberg 154). In Book one, Chapter two of his Rhetoric, Aristotle describes the potential power of the ethical appeal:

(There is persuasion) through character whenever the speech is spoken in such a way as to make the speaker worthy of credence; for we believe
fair-minded people to a greater extent and more quickly (than we do others) on all subjects in general and completely so in cases where there is not exact knowledge but room for doubt. And this should result from the speech, not from a previous opinion that the speaker is a certain kind of person; for it is not the case, as some of the technical writers propose in their treatment of the art, that fair-mindedness on the part of the speaker makes no contribution to persuasiveness; rather, character is almost, so to speak, the controlling factor in persuasion. (*Rhetoric* 38)

What Aristotle ultimately describes during his discussion of ethos in *Rhetoric* is the creation of a discursive self. Ethos, he explains, should be established within the language of the text, rather than through familiarity with the speech-giver's actual life. As Edward Corbett explains in *Classic Rhetoric for the Modern Student*:

> The ethical appeal is exerted, according to Aristotle, when the speech itself impresses the audience that the speaker is a person of sound sense (*phronesis*), high moral character (*arete*), and benevolence (*eunoia*). Notice that it is *the speech itself* that must create this impression. Thus a person wholly unknown to an audience (and this is often the case when we listen to a speech or read an article in a magazine) could by his or her words alone inspire this kind of confidence...it is the discourse itself that must establish or maintain the ethical appeal... (81).

Independent of any outside opinion of the speaker, the self represented by the speech/text has its own identity. And what amounts to a falsehood (at least from a Platonic perspective) is rather a strength of rhetoric than a flaw, since the rhetor can then change his discursive self to fit any occasion.

Whereas Plato expresses fear bordering on paranoia in "The Seventh Letter" when he contemplates how written histories could distort his teachings and character, Aristotle depicts the mutability of ethos as a powerful political tool; rhetors can be someone new each time they present themselves, as the occasion demands. In his formulation of ethos, Aristotle seems to legitimize what had been the practice of sophists since long before his time –the creation of discursive selves which bear no necessary likeness to "real" selves for the sake of rhetorical persuasion. Though Aristotle does not expressly posit "absence" in the place of the author when he describes ethos as a rhetorical construction,
with his suggestion that any rhetor can assume an ethos for effect, he does absent the sort of foundational presence Socrates/Plato desires in the *Phaedrus*. Plato distrusted and vilified sophists precisely because of this disregard for the Truth. In his well-known attack on one of the most famous sophists, *Gorgias*, Plato condemns this very practice. Plato's *Gorgias* describes the power of the rhetorician:

> And I further declare that, if a rhetorician and a doctor were to enter any city you please, and there had to contend in speech before the Assembly or some other meeting as to which of the two should be appointed physician, you would find the physician was nowhere, while the master of speech would be appointed if he wished. (*Gorgias* 67)

Gorgias avoids arguing that such misrepresentation can ultimately be used to produce a public good, though this may be implied. Rather he focuses on the exceptional power of a tool that could have such an alarming effect on a group of people. That effect is precisely Aristotle's goal.

Rhetoric freed from any fidelity to transcendent truth is a much more powerful medium. In *Aristotle's Voices*, Jasper Neel argues that, throughout the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle attributes the effectiveness of the ethical appeal to this potential for chicanery, though he does not state the case so bluntly. After offering particular rhetorical strategies for different contexts, including throwing in maxims and self-praise to persuade particularly prejudiced audiences, Aristotle finally seems to address directly the schism between reality and discourse, to acknowledge that ethos is a construct. As Neel writes, when Aristotle directly addresses moral character, he reveals this proclivity toward fabrication:

> Aristotle tells rhetoricians to construct an ethos that *seems* to speak from lifelong ethical and moral principles not from intellect. As with the effect of sharp intellect in narrative, however, the ability to create an ethos that seems to present itself on a foundation of lifelong moral principle is nothing more than an effect of the speech; "lifelong moral principle" as a rhetorical self-incarnation is both a product of and a function of intellect, even though such "moral principle" seems to be self-sufficient and self-sustaining. Of course the intellect must be sharp enough to do its work and efface itself at the same time so as to create the appearance of never
having been there, never having done anything at all. (*Aristotle's Voices* 166)

Assuming that a *fictional* upstanding citizen would most likely present a more solid "foundation of lifelong moral principle" than any real person could, Aristotle prescribes this sort of false front. Writing's potential for falsehood is exploited, in what might seem immoral ways, to sway public morality and opinion toward a public good. The end justifies the means. As George Kennedy suggests, "Though conventionally pious, Aristotle preferred to live in the real world; his theory of ethics is not based on religious belief or reward and punishment in the afterlife (as is Plato's) but on how to achieve happiness in a secular society by rational control of the emotions" (4). Falsehood proves acceptable in Aristotle's interactions in the public sphere because, given his faith in the rigid caste system of Greece, he thought it only right that the few (Aristotelian trained rhetoricians) should lead the many (herds of ignorant citizens) by whatever means they desired, even lying. For Plato, falsehood was only negative. This incongruence may be one aspect of Aristotle's claim that "rhetoric is antistrophos to dialectic." In contrast to rhetoric, dialectic should remain a sacred, truth-seeking tool of philosophers and their students.

Between Plato and Aristotle, there are major shifts in the relationships among truth, writing, and authorial subjectivity. Plato suspects writing of such falsehood that only someone with intimate knowledge of the Good and the True should employ the dangerous device. The only writing Plato openly trusts is the ideal writing in the soul. Aristotle, on the other hand, brings civic-minded practicality to this question of good and evil. The rhetorician can wear different moral and ethical hats as the occasion demands, all for the sake of the public good, and the truth be damned (since it is alien to writing in the first place). What is most important in the Plato/Aristotle split, I believe, is the shift of control. Plato warns that writing has the potential to take control from the writer –that is precisely why it is dangerous. Aristotle teaches the writer/rhetor to control the text by
anticipating how his text will be received, and, more importantly, by making deliberate choices about how he is represented in the text.

This shift in the control of language also applies to Plato's and Aristotle's depictions of poetry. In both his well-known condemnation of poets in *The Republic* and his characterization of poets in *Ion*, Plato suggests that they are out of their minds and responding to inspiration that lacks logic and reason. In the latter dialogue, "Socrates" describes a Muse that descends from the heavens, charging poets with a compelling force that makes their poetry persuasive:

[The Muse] first makes men inspired, and then through these inspired ones others share in the enthusiasm and a chain is formed, for the epic poets, all the good ones, have their excellence, not from art, but are inspired, possessed, and thus they utter all these admirable poems. So is it also with the good lyric poets; as the worshiping Corybantes are not in their senses when they dance, so the lyric poets are not in their senses when they make these lovely lyric poems. No, when once they launch into harmony and rhythm, they are seized with the Bacchic transport, and are possessed --as the bacchants, when possessed, draw milk and honey from the rivers, but not when in their senses. (15)

Not merely inspired, but actually possessed, Plato's poet appears stripped of all of his creative agency; he seems nothing more than a temporarily insane conduit. Of course, Plato is not considering the poet a writer in this passage, since poetry was largely oral in 5th century B.C. Greece. Yet, if he had discussed poets as writers, he would most likely have looked heavenward for the original source of that writing. Conversely, when addressing the writing of poetry, Aristotle granted poets the comfort of their own senses and their own direction in his *Poetics*, consistent with his model of rhetorical control. But despite their contrasting views regarding the poet's role in the creative process, Plato's and Aristotle's approaches to poetry share crucial characteristics. Since neither Plato nor Aristotle viewed language as epistemic, they both limited the poet's ability to *create* accordingly. Poetry, like all language, is purely mimetic, a shadowy image of the real world. For Aristotle, the poet is more a conductor than a creator; by employing the
system described by Aristotle in *Poetics*, the poet can become a master at reflecting the world around him. Aristotle maintained a separation between the author and the texts he produces in *Poetics*, where he argues that the best poet distances himself from his subject matter to the point of self-erasure: "Homer deserves praise for many other qualities, but especially for realizing, alone among epic poets, the place of the poet's own voice. For the poet should say as little as possible in his own voice, as it is not this that makes him a mimetic artist" (*Poetics* 59). Though he could invent fictional characters and plots, he must make them utterly plausible and modeled on the real world, though they should have no relation to his own life. The poet's creative potential is limited to the realm of the known, and his voice remains impersonal. In poetry as in rhetoric, Aristotle's writer exercises his control over the form mainly via effective arrangement of commonplaces, concepts and ideas already present. As Sean Burke suggests in *Authorship: From Plato to the Postmodern*, both Plato and Aristotle "advanced theories of mimesis: the former negatively in terms of the artist copying a natural world which was itself a copy of the higher realm of Ideas; the latter positively as a representation of a significant action"(5-6). "In either case," he continues, "the mimetic picture accords very little significance to authorial inventiveness. On this view, the author renders reality objectively as an entirely receptive subject through whom impersonal truth is registered" (my emphasis 6). This "impersonal truth," whether its source is the heavens or the world around us, exists independent of language and the author-as-conduit is merely more in tune to that "truth" than your average man.

In both the Platonic and Aristotelian views, then, the writer and his text are separated in the name of truth. Plato points to the absence of the writer in writing to underscore his belief that transcendent truth must be closely identified with the body, since it is first registered in the mind, only secondly in speech and lastly in writing. Poets, being the tool of the muse in his scheme, appear remarkably similar to written texts: both convey language in the absence of its creator. Both are dangerous. In the
Phaedrus, however, Plato does leave room for an impossibly ideal writing capable of transcending the bounds of mundane writing; the philosopher who has knowledge of the truth of all things can alone create this ideal writing, though he remains skeptical of writing in general. Aristotle, on the other hand, sets aside the question of transcendent truth when he discusses rhetoric. Nevertheless, he believes that poetry is only beautiful and good if it depicts the world and man truthfully. In his Poetics, he suggests that careful observation, wide knowledge and objectivity are crucial to the creative process, and that a work cannot possibly be truthful unless the author removes all trace of himself from the text. For Aristotle, then, the best poetry conveys truth via the text and expressly independent of its author. He may not identify truth with the heavens, but he nevertheless posits a truth which the author must faithfully and respectfully reflect as objectively as a well-polished mirror.

III. The Author Was Never Really Dead: Derrida's Different Typology

The Platonic notion of an external truth that is first registered in the mind, secondly represented in speech and only thirdly reflected in writing, marks the early stages of what Jacques Derrida calls a "metaphysics of presence." By teaching writing as a precise art, secularizing poetry and yet maintaining the principle of impersonal truth, Aristotle signaled a direction that neo-Platonic theories of authorship would take: authors would gain agency as the orchestrators of texts and the inspired messengers of an objective, pre-linguistic truth. This faith in a "present," external origin of truth, or what Derrida terms "logos," created the conditions for the "death of the author" in the twentieth century, since poststructuralist theorists in the "death of the author" mode were responding to the identification of the author as that external, governing "presence" in relation to his text. Poststructuralism rejects both the notion that one external source
dictates the meaning communicated in a text and the idea that readers can and should turn to the author as the primary source of meaning when interpreting a text.

Derrida terms "logocentric" any philosophical, religious or other theoretical position that posits the presence of such a controlling will in language. Logocentrism, according to Jasper Neel, is "Derrida's shorthand term for any meaning that pretends to emanate from speech, logic, reason, the Word of God, or any other absolute origin that precedes and escapes the infinite play of writing" (Plato, Derrida and Writing 175). M. H. Abrams also effectively describes Derrida's use of the term "logos" in A Glossary of Literary Terms:

By logos, or presence, Derrida signifies what he alternatively calls an "ultimate referent" – a self-certifying absolute, ground, or foundation, outside the play of language itself, that is directly present to our awareness and suffices to "center" (that is to anchor and organize) the structure of the linguistic system in such a way as to fix the bounds, coherence, and determinate meanings of any spoken or written utterance within that system. (226)

According to Derrida, logocentric thought inheres throughout the history of Western philosophy, continually reinscribing the presence/absence binary, and thus shaping theories of authorship. Barbara Johnson describes as logocentric, "any signifying system...structured by a valorization of speech over writing, immediacy over difference, and (self-) presence over all forms of absence, ambiguity, simulation, substitution, or negativity."¹⁰ Derrida analyzes those binaries and argues that their primary function is to position that presence (whether it be Plato's forms, Aristotle's objective truth, the Christian God or the author) as the origin of pure, pre-linguistic truth, thereby stripping language of an independent epistemic function and ultimately encouraging readers to look beyond the text for the meaning communicated therein. From the logocentric perspective, language represents a mere shadow of the truth, and, according to Derrida,
speech is privileged over writing as the speaker's voice becomes a metaphoric instrument of unalienated, internalized truth.

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida responds to the Platonic tradition that he finds largely accountable for the perpetuation of such logocentric belief systems. As in Plato's parabolic separation of Lysias (the author) and his text, the whole of western metaphysics, claims Derrida, has assumed an analogous separation between the written signifier and the spoken signifier, creating that logic of interior and exterior. Though this cognitive metaphor pervades Western culture in his scheme, Derrida imagines its origin as a simple, logical determination, which begs interrogation. Since speech emanates from the body of the speaker, it appears direct, unburdened by techne:

The privilege of the *phone* [spoken signifier] does not depend upon a choice that could have been avoided. It responds to a moment of *economy* (let us say of the "life" of "history" or of "being as self-relationship"). The system of "hearing (understanding) –oneself-speak" through the phonic substance –which presents itself as the nonexterior, nonmundane, therefore nonempirical or noncontingent signifier –has necessarily dominated the history of the world, the idea of world-origin, that arises from the difference between the worldly and the non-worldly, universal and nonuniversal, transcendent and empirical, etc. (8)

Speech has no material existence, and since it emanates from the mind, it appears as natural, non-technical. Leaning on this logic of interiors and exteriors regarding language, logocentric philosophers and rhetoricians overlook or even suppress the technical aspects of speech in order to distinguish the purity of speech from the fabrication of writing; and, as Derrida argues, this characterization of speech has been used to reinforce broader, ideological binaries such as "the worldly and the non-worldly, universal and nonuniversal, transcendent and empirical" (8). When deconstructing the speech-writing binary and declaring that all language is subject to the same semantic slips, misreadings and misunderstandings, Derrida also dismantles the notion of the ideal, non-worldly, transcendent realm in which truth exists before, and independent of,
language. This view of language posits no objective, impersonal truth as a foundation from which the author can draw his meaning. All that remains available to the author is contained in and by the play of language, as Derrida writes, "...all that desire had wished to wrest from the play of language finds itself recaptured within that play..." (*Of Grammatology* 6).

According to Derrida, Plato's association of writing with absence and death misses the point, or diverts our attention from the larger point. From a poststructuralist point of view, Plato's Lysias represents nothing but a straw man suffering the annihilation meant for transcendent truth. Lysias's bodily presence in the *Phaedrus* would not have brought Socrates any closer to the true meaning of Lysias's text, since the complexity of language itself, and the irrecoverable context in which the speech was written shaped that meaning. For Derrida, writing reminds us that language is a construct, a complex of symbols, sounds and context that give meaning to what they represent rather than reflect a transcendent and constant system of meaning. The physical separation between the author and the text metaphorically signals the general lack of an absolute organizing center in language, and writing only serves as a metaphor for absence and death if one believes that language stands for a higher, abstract realm of meaning that exists somehow independent of language and is lost through the process of writing. In other words, for Derrida, the death of The Author should be understood as the death of foundational approaches to language and meaning-making, or logos. Derrida uses the terms "absence" and "death" when he discusses language in order to signal that break from foundations such as truth, God, nature, the all-knowing philosopher and the determining will of the author. But Derrida in no way dismisses the author as a point of inquiry.

In *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida*, Sean Burke summarizes the "death of the author" as a critical phenomenon. Barthes, Foucault and Derrida, Burke finds, have been considered the major proponents of that "death," though they are themselves utterly pre-occupied with
the questions of authorship and, especially in Derrida's case, they have spent much, if not all, of their academic energy studying particular authors. These facts inform Burke's overall thesis: "...the concept of the author is never more alive than when pronounced dead" (7). Burke presents this fact as an ironic flaw that begets contradictions and unanswered questions throughout the works of the three critics, and he all but dismisses the usefulness of the death metaphor in authorial studies. Indeed, Burke's thesis suggests he has almost forgotten that the word-concept "death" is used metaphorically, particularly by Derrida, who never sought to completely foreclose the question of the author. By arguing that Derrida's discussion of authors contradicts his use of the death metaphor, Burke oversimplifies Derridean thought. For Derrida, it is not only possible but imperative to consider authorial effects in the text while engaging in a deconstruction of authorial intention. By considering Derrida's critique of particular authors a prohibitive contradiction in his thought, Burke joins multitudes of critics who oversimplify this aspect of poststructuralist thought, depicting it as a nihilistic destruction of all points of reference that confounds criticism in general.11

In support of his thesis, Burke locates supposed contradictions in Derrida's Of Grammatology, wherein Derrida "paradoxically" dismisses the importance of Rousseau the author in textual analyses of Rousseau's Essay on the Origin of Languages and Confessions, even as he exhaustively relates Rousseau's life to the texts. Burke's main criticism of Derrida's argument at this point in Of Grammatology consists of a seeming contradiction. In the midst of his deconstruction of Rousseau's Confessions, Derrida claims, "There is nothing outside of the text" (158), and he explains this statement in the following way:

What we have tried to show by following the guiding line of the 'dangerous supplement', is that in what one calls the real life of these existences 'of flesh and bone', beyond and behind what one believes can be circumscribed as Rousseau's text, there has never been anything but writing; there have never been anything but supplements, substitutional significations which could only come forth in a chain of differential
Burke interprets this passage as Derrida's purposefully ambiguous and outrageous attempt to justify his use of traditional analytical tools such as biography in his deconstructive enterprises, despite his apparent rejection of the relevance, even the existence, of anything "outside the text." Burke admits that Derrida himself has always insisted on the usefulness of the author as a point of inquiry in literary criticism, and Burke finds it absurd for Derrida to suggest that "there is nothing outside of the text," given Derrida's proclivity toward wide-ranging, author-centered analyses. Letting these seeming contradictions speak for themselves, Burke all but dismisses Derrida's allusions to death and the author in *Of Grammatology* with the following statement: "Indeed, with this in mind, we might wonder if the opposition to the author that arises here has anything more than a strategic value" (137). But the puzzling statement, "there is nothing outside the text," may be one key to understanding Derrida's complicated approach to the author and writing, as well as the usefulness of the death metaphor.

In structuralist linguistics, language is described as an arbitrary system of signs that take their meaning more from the relationships among signs than from their correspondence to the "real" things they represent. Language, then, depends on a stable structure of relationships to function effectively. Derridean poststructuralism exposes the instability of that system, and systems in general, arguing that the very idea of a system implies the presence of a metaphysical, stabilizing center, which is somehow simultaneously part of that system and "above" or unaffected by the system. In "Structure, sign and play in the discourse of the human sciences," Derrida writes:

> ...it has always been thought that the center, which is by definition unique, constituted that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality. This is why classical thought concerning structure could say that the center is, paradoxically, within the structure and outside it. The center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the
center does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality *has its center elsewhere*. The center is not the center. The concept of the centered structure is in fact the concept of a play based on a fundamental ground, a play constituted on the basis of a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude, which itself is beyond the reach of play. (109)

Derrida's main argument, throughout his texts, is that nothing can be "beyond the reach of play." Therefore, Derrida explains, "it was necessary to begin thinking that there was no center, that the center could not be thought in the form of a present-being, that the center had no natural site, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of nonlocus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play..." (110). Derrida does not completely reject the significance of the author in the same movement by which he rejects that governing center; rather he analyzes the author, and everything having to do with the author, as a "function" or "nonlocus." Derrida is fully aware of the seeming contradictions arising from his simultaneous denunciation and invocation of the author. He treats the concept of the logocentric author like any other metaphysical concept, and as he states in "Structure," "There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to shake metaphysics. We have no language –no syntax and no lexicon –which is foreign to this history; we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest" (111). Clearly, Derrida is aware that his approach to the author will always be contradictory; his inability to completely control the sign "author" is in fact an enactment of his theory.

Rejecting that stabilizing center posited by structural linguistics, poststructural theorists argue that the relationship between any linguistic sign and its meaning, or signified, depends upon not only the relationships among signs but also the repression of other signifieds in order to give any particular sign its meaning. More importantly, poststructuralists insist that those repressed meanings are always conspicuous in their absence, undoing any particular sign's ability to simply mean one thing. Derrida uses the
term "trace" to refer to the repressed meaning of a word that only begins to become apparent through the rigorous deconstruction of that word in play. Nowhere in language is this meaning-through-difference more apparent than in writing, where the arbitrary nature of the relationship between sign and signified presents itself as a material difference. Derrida uses the saturated signifier "writing" to indicate this process of meaning-making through the repression of difference, or what Derrida terms differance (in which the second "e" becomes an "a" in order to invoke the two meanings of the French verb "differer": to be different and to defer).

Derrida presents his theory of "differance" as a response to metaphysics, and in his scheme, "writing" is nothing less than the overdetermined crux of that response. In her introduction to Of Grammatology, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak reveals the important role that "writing" plays in Derrida's critique:

The cloture of metaphysics found the origin and end of its study in presence. The questioners of that enclosure – among them Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger – moved toward an articulation of the need for the strategy of "sous rature." Nietzsche puts "knowing" under erasure; Freud "the psyche," and Heidegger, explicitly, "Being." As I have argued, the name of this gesture effacing the presence of a thing and yet keeping it legible, in Derrida's lexicon, is "writing," – the gesture that both frees us from and guards us within, the metaphysical enclosure. (xli)

Clearly, Derrida does not use the term lightly. He is not only aware of the contradictions implicit in his use of "writing" but foregrounds those contradictions as the main problematic in deconstruction. When Derrida writes of Rousseau, he is always referring to the signifier "Rousseau" simultaneously with the man called Rousseau and would argue that when he identifies effects in Confessions that relate to Rousseau's mother, he always also means the signifier "mother." The sign "mother" is more important than the "flesh and bone" mother, to Derrida, because the latter is only "mother" via language and the word is overdetermined by the countless uses, connotations and repressed meanings attached to the sign since its first appearance in language. Burke acknowledges
elsewhere that, to Derrida, all language is writing, and it is not possible to speak (or
write) of Rousseau's mother without it or before it. So in addressing Rousseau's "life" in
this way, Derrida is never leaving the confines of the broader "text." In his critique,
Burke forgets, for a time, that Derrida does not use the concept "writing" (or "text," for
that matter) except to put into play a complicated set of relationships that can never be
reduced or overlooked. For Derrida, there is nothing "outside" (or apart from) the text,
because there are no outsides or insides, no neat boundaries at all. Peggy Kamuf has
made this point: "Derrida's thinking, as you know, is all about the necessary
contamination of insides and outsides, and deconstruction always works at the margins,
on the limits of this organizing opposition" (A Derrida Reader 18). In literary theory, the
movement from structuralism to poststructuralism signals that blurring of boundaries
between signs, and since Derrida views knowledge as inscribed by sign systems that
always necessarily fail to maintain those boundaries, it is appropriate for Derrida to both
name and transgress his own boundaries.

Curiously, after taking Derrida to task for his allusions to "Rousseau," Burke
acknowledges that, despite the statement, "there is nothing outside of the text," Derrida
never meant to reject utterly the role of the author in the interpretation of texts.14 By way
of correcting a misconception of Derrida's thought, Burke notes that Derrida openly
declares the author to be one determining factor among many in the interpretation of
texts. In fact, Derrida attempts to forestall any misunderstanding with regard to his
deconstruction of the author in his essay, "Signature, Event, Context," where he addresses
the author question in terms of intention:

Thus, one must less oppose citation or iteration to the non-iteration of an
event, than construct a differential typology of forms of iteration,
supposing that this is a tenable project that can give rise to an exhaustive
program ... In this typology, the category of intention will not disappear;
it will have its place, but from this place it will no longer be able to govern
the entire scene and the entire system of utterances. (104)
Here, Derrida reveals a much more complicated approach to the author than simple rejection would require. Being expert at anti-binary thinking, Derrida does not carry out his exhaustive dismantling of logocentric "presence" throughout his work only to simply and reductively posit "absence" in its place. "Absence in the Derridean lexicon," Neel writes, "does not play the role of master term replacing presence and standing for a sort of transcendental signified in reverse. It does not indicate a nihilistic nothingness nor does it imply that meaning doesn't exist" (*Plato, Derrida, Writing* 154). Because Derrida uses "death" and "absence" to signify something beyond binary logic, the terms no longer represent the opposite of "life" and "presence." The only thing Derrida does absent from the scene of writing is authorial control over meaning. "What is put into question," Burke writes, "is the absolutely determinative hegemony of intention over the communicative act" (*Death and Return* 140). Burke continues:

> Intention is to be recognized, and respected, but on condition that we accept that its structures will not be fully and ideally homogeneous with what is said or written, that it is not always and everywhere completely adequate to the communicative act. There will be times at which crevices appear in its hold, at which language resists, or wanders away from the speaker's determinate meaning. Consequently, *though the dominion of intention over the textual process is to be rigorously refused, intention itself is not thereby canceled but rather lodged within a broader signifying process*. Intention is within signification, and as a powerful and necessary agency, but it does not command this space in the manner of an organizing telos, or transcendental subjectivity. (my emphasis, *Death and Return* 140)

In Derridean deconstruction, a "trace" of authorial intention can always be found among the multitude of effects in any given text. For Derrida, the author sublimates himself to the language system from the moment he participates in communication, but his "voice" (intention) is not entirely lost; in fact, it is the task of the reader to recognize that voice in contention with other forces at play in the text. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida writes:

> ...the writer writes *in* a language and *in* a logic whose proper system, laws, and life his discourse by definition cannot dominate absolutely. He uses them only by letting himself, after a fashion and up to a point, be governed...
by the system. And the reading must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he commands and what he does not command of the patterns of the language that he uses. This relationship is not a certain quantitative distribution of shadow and light, of weakness or of force, but a signifying structure that critical reading should produce. (158)

In this scheme, authorial control is surrendered because, no matter what the author intended, the meanings of the text are produced through the tensions manifest in a deconstruction of the text. The author's voice in chorus with other repressed effects of the language will form a chord (or discord) entirely unimaginable to the author at the outset. Derridean deconstruction, then, consists of distinguishing between what it appears the author meant to say, what has been referred to as the "programmatic intention," and what the text itself reveals, or the "operative intention."15 Moreover, Derrida tends to read the operative intentions in a text against the programmatic, exposing the slips that confound the author's conscious project.

Though Plato did not have the modern terms for "programmatic" and "operative" intentions at his disposal, it is precisely that tension between what the author intended and what the reader perceives that forms the basis of his critique of writing in the Phaedrus. As Derrida, Neel, and Burke16 have acknowledged, however, Plato did not utterly reject writing, despite his fear of its potential to misrepresent. He treated writing as a precarious tool that might prove useful when wielded by the wise philosopher/teacher. A type of writing allowed by Plato (Socrates), which remains both private to the philosopher and his students and answerable to philosophy in general by virtue of its "truth," is described toward the end of the Phaedrus. In an extended gardening metaphor, Plato argues that the "sensible husbandman" ("he who has knowledge of the just and the good and beautiful") would not plant his seeds in unfit ground (writing) but would rather "follow the rules of husbandry" (employ the dialectic method) "to plant and sow his seeds in fitting soil" (in a fitting soul) (Bizzell and
However, such a knowledgeable man may also amuse himself by writing useful memoirs:

SOCRATES: ...The gardens of letters he will, it seems, plant for amusement, and will write, when he writes, to treasure up reminders for himself, when he comes to the forgetfulness of old age, and for others who follow the same path, and he will be pleased when he sees them putting forth tender leaves. (my emphasis, Bizzell and Herzberg 141)

Just as Plato used the dialogue form to couch his writings as more-than-writing, he employed the "voice" of Socrates to ward-off any readers who may not be following "the same path" and thus might misread the text. Among sympathetic thinkers, however, such private writings may prove useful rather than dangerous because they would remain fairly predictable, following a trajectory laid out by a line of like-minded philosophers stretching back through time. But Socrates is quick to envelope that pro-writing statement with a second denunciation of writing, in which he argues that "serious discourse" (addressing subjects such as justice) "is far nobler when one employs the dialectic method and plants and sows in a fitting soul intelligent words which are able to help themselves and him who planted them, which are not fruitless, but yield seed from which there spring up in other minds other words capable of continuing the process for ever..." (Bizzell and Herzberg 141). When addressing this section of the Phaedrus in "Plato's Pharmacy," Derrida reinterprets Socrates's admonition in his own terms, determining how both "the trace" and "play" figure in Plato's scheme:

Hence the dialectician will sometimes write, amass monuments, collect hupomnemata, just for fun. But he will do so while still putting his products at the service of dialectics and in order to leave a trace (ikhnos) for whoever might want to follow in his footsteps on the pathway to truth. The dividing line now runs less between presence and the trace than between the dialectical trace and the nondialectical trace, between play in the "good" sense and play in the "bad" sense of the word. (Dissemination 155)
Socrates/Plato allows writing to enter the curriculum of dialectic philosophy as a teaching tool to be employed by philosophers who already have expectations of and for the text. "Play in the 'good' sense," is not really play at all, since it must "follow in the same path" as its predecessors. Derrida points out that, for Plato, "the best sense of play is play that is supervised and contained within the safeguards of ethics and politics" (*Dissemination* 156).

In another of his quibbles with Derrida's deconstruction of Plato, Burke argues that Derrida places too much emphasis on Plato's denunciation of writing and consequently overlooks the real object of Plato's critique in the *Phaedrus*, which is any non-dialogic communication, whether spoken or written. Since the connection between speech and truth, in contradistinction to writing and falsehood, is so integral to Derrida's central thesis in both *Of Grammatology* and "Plato's Pharmacy," Derrida must suppress any complication of that neat binary; to that end, he overlooks Plato's condemnation of non-dialogic speech, Burke contends. Burke compellingly demonstrates, with evidence from both the *Phaedrus* and the *Protagorus*, that Plato is critical of univocal speech, or speech in any situation in which the speaker is not available for questioning. 17 Burke writes:

All discourse which offers itself to debate, to question-and-answer, is approved in Plato's text in the same movement by which all unresponsive, univocal communications are condemned. These latter discourses will include both writing and non-dialogic speech. It is not speech (as a *logos* present to the individual) but *dialogic speech* that Plato upholds in opposition to *both* writing and unresponsive speech. (156-7)

But Burke's distinction between logocentric speech and Plato's dialogic speech forecloses the question of whether Plato's dialectic does in fact represent a responsive, equal exchange among interlocutors. Burke, among others, suggests that Plato offers the dialectic as a method of promoting critical thinking and change. Burke writes that "...what Plato fears in writing he fears also in the orality of the epic tradition, in any
discourse which might solidify into an unresponsive, 'unquestionable' body of received opinions, of dogma" (164). Yet while the dialectic does require at least two responding participants, it apparently does not require egalitarianism, as Plato's dialogues often depict exchanges between an all-knowing philosopher teacher (who very seldom radically changes his position during the process) and a naive student who is led to conclusions predetermined by the philosopher. In *Plato's Socrates as Educator*, Gary Alan Scott reveals a Socratic pedagogy that falls short of equal exchange:

In Plato's Socratic dialogues, the larger-than-life philosopher seems superior to every interlocutor with whom he converses, and although he always appears eager and willing to learn from those he examines in conversation, he never seems to learn much of substance, if anything, from his interlocutor about the topic of discussion. ...Moreover, Socrates is rarely portrayed in the role of student, just as he is rarely shown being interrogated in the way he interrogates others. Only twice in the dialogues is he cross-examined at length. And only twice does he really seem to be depicted as learning something of substance from another person and positioned in the role of a student, and both times it is with a woman, with the mysterious priestess Diotima in the *Symposium* and with Aspasia, Pericles' longtime companion, in the *Menexenus*. In many dialogues, he appears to be merely taunting or toying with his less able interlocutors. (27-28)

The apparent purpose of the dialectic is to enable the philosopher to bring his student closer to an extra-linguistic "spark" of truth via a question and answer format. Though the format of the Platonic dialectic seems to promote change and critical thinking, it does not threaten the philosopher-teacher's controlling will and therefore cannot be readily cast as the antidote to dogmatic thinking. Indeed, Plato/Socrates's suggestion that the philosopher's writing might be used to educate "others who follow in the same path" belies or at least exposes a crack in this notion of anti-dogmatic thinking.¹⁹

If Derrida over-emphasizes the sanctity of speech in Plato's approach to language and truth, he does not mischaracterize the importance of *presence*. Univocal speech and writing are equally denigrated in Plato's scheme because they both threaten the control of
the paternalistic philosopher. The depiction of the Platonic dialectic as a democratic, equalizing flow of language ultimately conflicts with the desire, whether benevolent or not, of the philosopher to control the destination of the dialogue. It is this desire for control and its constant undoing that Derrida witnesses in his deconstruction of the *Phaedrus*. And since Derrida views truth as a rhetorical tool of logocentric philosophy, he thereby rejects the notion that the Platonic dialectic proceeds along a value-free trajectory toward a transcendent truth. Likewise, Derrida's theory of the author as a decentered non-locus in the scheme of writing is a reaction against the depiction of the author as a controlling, centering will in the life of language. Without recourse to transcendent truth, the author's voice in the text becomes one, albeit significant, voice among many.

IV. Bakhtin's Dialogic and the Author As Opposed to Authority

Thus one must less oppose citation or iteration to the non-iteration of an event, than construct a differential typology of forms of iteration, supposing that this is a tenable project that can give rise to an exhaustive program ... In this typology, the category of intention will not disappear; it will have its place, but from this place it will no longer be able to govern the entire scene and the entire system of utterances.

Jacques Derrida

It is possible to give a concrete and detailed analysis of any utterance, once having exposed it as a contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies in the life of language.

Mikhail Bakhtin

Before Derrida, Mikhail Bakhtin posited a method of reading the novel that incorporates a dialogic view of writing and proto-poststructuralist ideas. In fact, Bakhtin's approach to the novel depends upon both what he calls "living" dialogue and the destruction of a dominating authorial will over language, the "life" and "death" of the author. In his now widely-known essay, "Discourse in the Novel" (1934-35), Bakhtin
describes a methodology for understanding and critiquing novels that breaks from author-centered modes of inquiry without completely rejecting the author as a point of inquiry and without offering an alternative foundational ground for meaning in the text. Bakhtin's ideas are at points naive (from a poststructuralist perspective) and can seem inconsistent, especially when his broad statements about language clash with his need to distinguish between language usage in different genres of literature. But parts of "Discourse in the Novel" do resemble the exhaustive "differential typology of forms of iteration" that Derrida calls for in "Signature, Event, Context" (104).

Both Plato and Derrida have been accused of perpetrating the very acts they condemn: Plato appears to condemn writing even as he is engaged in writing; Derrida appears to destroy foundational principles while drawing on biography and discrete bodies of ideas, "texts," in his deconstructive enterprises. Critics have perceived unwitting contradictions in both writers precisely because they have underestimated the degrees to which Plato and Derrida recognized and utilized the paradoxes implicit in their positions. To offer Bakhtin's "Discourse in the Novel" as an essay that has affinities with both Plato and Derrida may seem a transgression of the Platonic and Derridean critical approaches, since they are so often cast as diametrically opposed. But, as I argued in section two of this chapter, the very idea of neat oppositions is inconsistent with Derridean thought; Plato is everywhere in Derrida, and one could say that Derrida is everywhere in Plato. Nevertheless, any attempt to make a Platonic nostalgia for truth and presence coalesce with Derridean deconstruction is predestined to fail. But by examining the places where these two approaches collide in Bakhtin, I hope to foreground characteristics of the novel and the novelist that lend another dimension to the "death of the author" metaphor as it plays out in literary criticism.

In "Discourse in the Novel," Bakhtin declares the methodologies for critiquing the novel that were in wide usage at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries wholly inadequate due to a general failure among critics to recognize novelistic
discourse as a unique art form that combines elements of poetry and rhetoric and yet is never reducible to either. Critical attempts to account for the novel using the same stylistic criteria employed in the analysis of poetry, as well as attempts to relegate the novel to pure rhetorical analyses, have all failed, Bakhtin argues, because the novel is both of those things and neither. And due to this misunderstanding of the novel, Bakhtin suggests, the critical world has failed to learn the lessons novelistic discourse teaches about the nature of language in general.

What makes novelistic discourse unique is its peculiar ability to perform heteroglossia, the term Bakhtin uses to describe the condition of language in which the various forces at play in any particular utterance collide to form a chorus of meanings. Bakhtin argues that "discourse is a social phenomenon" and all language is "ideologically saturated" with stratified voices which speak from particular historical and social contexts ("Discourse" 259, 271). The concept of heteroglossia flies in the face of logocentric conceptions of language and the author because it denounces fixed, unitary meaning in language. Bakhtin characterized the dominant philosophical, linguistic and stylistic theories of language leading up to the early twentieth century as reductive, dogmatic homages to the individual:

Philosophy of language, linguistics and stylistics [i.e., such as they have come down to us] have all postulated a simple and unmediated relation of speaker to his unitary and singular "own" language, and have postulated as well a simple realization of this language in the monologic utterance of the individual. Such disciplines actually know only two poles in the life of language, between which are located all the linguistic and stylistic phenomena they know: on the one hand, the system of a unitary language, and on the other the individual speaking in this language. (269)

But, Bakhtin argues, "A unitary language is not something given [dan] but is always in essence posited –and at every moment of its linguistic life it is opposed to the realities of heteroglossia" (270). Though heteroglossia represents language in its fully realized state, some authors, particularly poets in Bakhtin's scheme, attempt to reduce language to an
artificial, unitary state in which the author's singular will is allowed to dominate. Bakhtin's description of poetic language sounds much like the sort of aestheticism advocated by Edgar Allen Poe in "The Philosophy of Composition" (wherein Poe argues that true poetry exists for its own sake) and later adopted by Henry James and certain dominant critical strains of modernism in the twentieth century. Bakhtin argues that in poetic language, the word directs itself toward the object to the exclusion of the other alien words characteristic of the social essence of language. Critical modes typically used in analyses of poetry, argues Bakhtin, suggest such an intimate relationship between the poet and his works that the poet appears to bend language to his own will through a "seizure" that Bakhtin describes in particularly violent terms. Poets transform words "into private property" by "artificially extinguishing" the internal dialogization of discourse ("Discourse" 294, 284). What is forced out of poetic discourse, in Bakhtin's scheme, is the word's confrontation with an alien other "in a living, tension-filled environment" (279). This approach to literary language fails when applied to the novel. By viewing language through the lens of the poetic form or any other unitary scheme, critics have grossly misunderstood the character of living language, which is dramatized in the novel through the multitude of voices, the social, historical and geographical contexts therein and the dialogic interactions among the characters, the reader and the text. Bakhtin uses poetic language as a theoretical opposite to novelistic discourse, wherein the form enacts the process of meaning-making, involving the author, the characters and the reader, as Gregory Clark has suggested:

Bakhtin values the language of the novel because it simulates the dialogical complexity of actual meaning-making. There a theme carried by written words is communicated to a reader only in the actual dialogical interaction of an utterance and an act of understanding, an interaction that, when it occurs in the acts of writing and reading, is not only interpersonal but also intertextual. (Dialogue, Dialectic and Conversation 14)
And for Bakhtin, meaning-making is perpetual. The meaning of any given word is not defined and fixed as an element of a closed system; rather, meanings are born and change as the specific contexts of their instantiations change.

Bakhtin frequently uses metaphors of life and the idea of process to characterize discourse in the novel, and he makes an important distinction between language as a fixed grammatical system and language as a social, meaning-making form in order to distance his theory of language from the abstractions of structuralism and literary critical analyses that underestimate the importance of context over text. In "Discourse in the Novel," he writes:

Language –like the living concrete environment in which the consciousness of the verbal artist lives –is never unitary. It is unitary only as an abstract grammatical system of normative forms, taken in isolation from the concrete, ideological conceptualizations that fill it, and in isolation from the uninterrupted process of historical becoming that is a characteristic of all living language. Actual social life and historical becoming create concrete worlds, a multitude of bounded verbal-ideological and social belief systems; within these various systems (identical in the abstract) are elements of language filled with various semantic and axiological content and each with its own different sound.

Because the meaning-making process is "uninterrupted," any particular instance of dialogue exists within a continuum of meaning, affected by and reflecting on language that came before and anticipating language yet to be. Language attains stable meaning through systems established in particular contexts; therefore, the meaning of any utterance must be understood as a function of the particular contexts in which it was written, set (as in a novel), read, and so on for as long as that utterance remains extant.

Since language remains answerable to a multitude of contexts, meaning cannot be unitary or dictated by any particular interlocutor. In "Dialogue, Monologue, and the Social," Gary Saul Morson makes this point:

Bakhtin understands discourse to be not an individual writer's or speaker's instantiating of a code but, instead, the product of a complex social
situation in which real or potential audiences, earlier and possible later utterances, habits and "genres" of speech and writing, and a variety of other complex social factors shape all utterances from the outset. Utterances address an "already-spoken-about" world and arise out of a socially constituted "field of answerability." The only way in which the individual speaker can be sole author of an utterance, according to Bakhtin, is in the purely physiological sense. (Morson 83)

"The word in language," Bakhtin writes, "is always half someone else's" ("Discourse" 293). Unlike his descriptions of poetry, Bakhtin's descriptions of language in the novel are virtually identical to his broad generalizations about the essence of language since, for Bakhtin, the novel form recreates the actual life of language. In the good novel (for there are bad novels, in Bakhtin's opinion, which do not effect heteroglossia and instead fail to live up to their own generic potential), the author does not attempt to reduce the multiplicity of language to service his own intentions. Rather, the novelist puts the heteroglot nature of language to stylistic use:

The prose writer does not purge words of intentions and tones that are alien to him, he does not destroy the seeds of social heteroglossia embedded in words, he does not eliminate those language characterizations and speech mannerisms (potential narrator-personalities) glimmering behind the words and forms, each at a different distance from the ultimate semantic nucleus of his work, that is, the center of his own personal intentions. (298)

The true novelist, then, welcomes the presence of alien intentions and tones in his text as another aspect of the artistry therein, not as an impediment to the clarity of his own intended meaning. Building on the slave-master analogy already glimpsed in his description of the poet's "obedient" language, Bakhtin depicts the novelist as a master who is content to share his power over language with the heteroglot forces already present:

The prose writer as a novelist does not strip away the intentions of others from the heteroglot language of his works, he does not violate those socio-ideological cultural horizons (big and little words) that open up behind heteroglot languages –rather, he welcomes them into his work. The prose writer makes use of words that are already populated with the social
intentions of others and compels them to serve his own new intentions, to serve a second master. Therefore the intentions of the prose writer are refracted, and refracted at different angles, depending on the degree to which the refracted, heteroglot languages he deals with are socio-ideologically alien, already embodied and already objectivized. (300)

Like an artist using collage, the novelist assembles parts of heteroglot language, using the content already present in words and communicating his own intentions by adding layers of meaning to those already present, his added meaning remaining one of the many effects of the novel as a whole.

In "Discourse in the Novel," Bakhtin occupies a theoretical position somewhere between the Platonic and Derridean positions discussed earlier. Of course, by placing such an emphasis on the truthful nature of a written form, Bakhtin seems to contradict Platonic suspicions of writing. But Bakhtin values the novel for precisely the same reason that Plato valued the dialectic: he believes that the novel dramatizes language users (in this case the author, narrator, characters and readers) working out their meaning through their interaction. According to David K. Danow, for Bakhtin "the word, first of all, is understood as being dialogical, since it takes cognizance of another speaker's word perhaps even prior to or at the very moment of utterance. It is conceived as a sign not only bearing meaning, or having a referent, but as being potentially engaged in continuous dialogue" (Danow 24). Indeed, Bakhtin writes, "the word is born in a dialogue as a living rejoinder within it" ("Discourse" 279). Furthermore, Bakhtin's vivid description of "the word breaking through to its own meaning" is reminiscent of Plato's "leaping spark" of truth that results from prolonged dialectic interaction in "The Seventh Letter." Bakhtin also uses a metaphor of light to envision the reunion of the word and its object:

The way in which the word conceives its object is complicated by a dialogic interaction within the object between various aspects of its socio-verbal intelligibility. And an artistic representation, an 'image' of the object, may be penetrated by this dialogic play of verbal intentions that meet and are interwoven in it; such an image need not stifle these forces,
but on the contrary may activate and organize them. If we imagine the intention of such a word, that is, its directionality toward the object, in the form of a ray of light, then the living and unrepeatable play of colors and light on the facets of the image that it constructs can be explained as the spectral dispersion of the ray-word, not within the object itself (as would be the case in the play of an image-as-trope, in poetic speech taken in the narrow sense, in an 'autotelic word'), but rather as its spectral dispersion in an atmosphere filled with the alien words, value judgments and accents through which the ray passes on its way toward the object; the social atmosphere of the word, the atmosphere that surrounds the object, makes the facets of the image sparkle. The word breaking through to its own meaning and its own expression across an environment full of alien words and variously evaluating accents, harmonizing with some of the elements in this environment and striking a dissonance with others, is able, in this dialogized process to shape its own stylistic profile and tone. (277)

Whereas monologic discourse attempts to "stifle" any "alien" words that may complicate the author's intention, dialogic discourse welcomes divergent meanings, interpreting their "interference" as part of the meaning-making process. Bakhtin argues that "traditional stylistics" (and by this he most often alludes to a structuralist approach) "encounters in its orientation toward the object only the resistance of the object itself" (276). By contrast, in his scheme, when a word directs itself toward its object it must also encounter "the fundamental and richly varied opposition of another's word" (276). Words enter into a productive argument with divergent intentions/words that produces a socially mediated meaning. True meaning-making, then, depends upon a dialogic process that enables the word to brush-up against others and form a chord, or spectrum of meaning. This process never ends, and the word is forever looking backward to former instances and forward to future possible meanings as it encounters new dialogic situations. Bakhtin calls the play of the dialogic word "unrepeatable" because he attaches so much of a word's meaning to the particular context, so that a word may suggest one meaning at a given time, in a particular place and social setting, and another, related but different meaning in another context. Words slip away from a reductive view of the author's original intention to "shape [their] own stylistic profile and tone" when they enter into the play of language. It
is as if the author plucks a word out of its active play, imbues it with his intention, and then returns it, slightly changed, to the living heteroglossia.

Plato and Bakhtin both appear to recognize the potential of language to confound truth and meaning by becoming dogmatic, and they both offer solutions wherein truth can only be glimpsed through "living" dialogic interaction. However, as I argued earlier, Plato's anti-dogmatic stance remains precarious, given his tendency toward the sort of imbalance of power witnessed in his dialogues. If the philosopher must lead his interlocutor through the dialectic, his influence cannot be entirely refracted in the name of egalitarianism. And Plato expressed a distrust of writing precisely because it can move through various contexts, obscuring the original intentions of the author. Though Bakhtin does offer the theoretical possibility that authors are capable of abducting heteroglot language and purging words of all intentions save their own, he argues that such attempts to dominate words transgress the true nature of language and meaning. Language moving through time and space, being encountered in various contexts, does not move hopelessly beyond a particular intended meaning; rather, this movement has already determined and will continue to determine that meaning. "Only the mythical Adam," writes Bakhtin, "who approached a virginal and as yet verbally unqualified world with the first word, could really have escaped from start to finish this dialogic interorientation..." ("Discourse" 279).

But by theorizing this continual movement Bakhtin did not intend to suggest a relativistic quandary in which all attempts at meaning-making remain fleeting or hopelessly overdetermined. Bakhtin depicted this never-ending process as both a defense against dogmatism and, as Danow points out, the potential for endless creativity:

No context is ever quite the same as another. It follows, therefore, that any utilization of the word within a given context must also be unique. Yet at the same time it is presumed that there inheres in both the word and its corresponding object an infinitely open-ended series of meanings, affording, with each contextual usage, a potentially new sense.... This feature of "unfinishedness" is regarded by Bakhtin as entirely positive.
For what is never completed may be further elaborated in a never-ending creative process, whose goal is further dialogue, from which accrues additional, deeper meaning... (Danow 33)

And for Bakhtin, attempts to arrest the movement and changeability of language are not merely stylistic choices. Though in "Discourse in the Novel" Bakhtin focuses much of his attention on the degree to which poetry somewhat innocently exhibits monologism, his overarching reaction against monologic discourse is political. Whereas Plato feared writing because it threatened the role of the philosopher/teacher in shaping understanding through dialogue, Bakhtin rejects monologic discourse precisely because of the dominating will, the force that represses the multiplicity of meanings. Bakhtin viewed the presence of such a dominating will in human culture as purely negative.

Though Derrida and Bakhtin differ on many points, their discussions of logocentrism and monologism, respectively, intersect with regard to aspects of linguistic theory and the politics of ideology. Like Derrida, Bakhtin considers the history of western ideas to have been dominated by a privileging of the individual and by reductive approaches to meaning-making. He insists that his view of heteroglossia does not merely reflect on how we read but also on how we have been taught to view the world. He makes this point explicitly in "Discourse in Novel":

We are taking language not as a system of abstract grammatical categories, but rather language conceived as ideologically saturated, language as a world view, even as a concrete opinion, insuring a maximum of mutual understanding in all spheres of ideological life. ... The victory of one reigning language (dialect) over the others, the supplanting of languages, their enslavement, the process illuminating them with the True Word, the incorporation of barbarians and lower social strata into a unitary language of culture and truth, the canonization of ideological systems, philology with its methods of studying and teaching dead languages, languages that were by that very fact 'unities,' Indo-European linguistics with its focus of attention, directed away from language plurality to a single proto-language—all this determined the content and power of the category of 'unitary language' in linguistic and stylistic thought, and determined its creative, style-shaping role in the majority of the poetic genres that coalesced in the channel formed by those same centripetal forces of the life of verbal ideological life. (271)
Bakhtin's description of these "centripetal forces" bears a striking resemblance to Derrida's notion of logocentric philosophy and the belief in a stable center from which meaning emanates. For Bakhtin, centripetal forces are in a constant struggle against the centrifugal force epitomized in heteroglossia, yet, just as Derrida's reaction to logocentrism cannot be reduced to a simple opposition (as when the decentering of the logocentric author results not in his death but in a complicated repositioning of his will in the text), Bakhtin's conception of these two opposed forces in the life of language is more complicated than its binary form implies.

Since Bakhtin embraces multiplicity and change so enthusiastically in "Discourse in the Novel," his views lend themselves to the sort of simple liberal-humanist interpretation that Plato's dialectic enjoys. The simple rejection of stagnating dogma in favor of never-ending dialogue suggests a view that makes room for all positions (one that could even be characterized pejoratively as relativistic). In "A Response to the Forum on Mikhail Bakhtin," Ken Hirschkop criticizes readings of Bakhtin that, he claims, tragically oversimplify and depoliticize the concept of dialogism in the name of liberalism and, ironically, the individual. After acknowledging that Bakhtin's theoretical writings exhibit internal contradictions and loosely defined terms, Hirschkop argues that certain critics' writing for Critical Inquiry's Forum on Bakhtin misinterpret his approach to dialogism vs. monologism and "evade the most radical aspects of Bakhtin's work in favor of an interpretation that renders him useful in the argument against the recent advances of post-structuralism and recent literary theory in general" (74). In Hirschkop's reading of the essays by Gary Saul Morson, Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson, the authors misunderstand Bakhtin's concept of dialogism. Morson, Holquist and Emerson suggest that dialogical communication happens in a "friendly" atmosphere where disagreements are politely acknowledged and, therefore, individual positions within the dialogue are not threatened or threatening. Hirschkop argues that those essays, and by extension all interpretations of Bakhtin that depoliticize dialogism by describing it in
purely friendly terms, fail to take into account the political turmoil informing Bakhtin's theory and fundamentally misunderstand the role of monologism in his writings:

What we find in common here is a definition of Bakhtinian otherness in terms of a fundamental uniqueness of the individual that ought to be respected, much as political liberalism in its dominant commonsense form emphasizes respect for the individual as a primary value. At the same time, this vision of dialogism holds out the promise of a coherent and peaceful society in which these individual voices are ultimately reconciled because they "take into account" each other's opinions. This is a far cry from that condition of fierce social struggle outlined by Bakhtin in "Discourse in the Novel," in which the dialogical forces of language actively contest the social and political centralization of their culture. Indeed, given the conditions of internal social warfare in which Bakhtin was writing in the 1920's and 1930's, it would be extraordinary if he thought of social difference in terms of amicable disagreement. This is not to say that a utopian vision of such a dialogism is not to be found in Bakhtin, but this utopia must be seen as a response to a decidedly nonutopian situation—that is, dialogism itself, as a certain kind of discourse, must be situated dialogically. (Hirschkop 74-75)

Gary Saul Morson's counter-response to Hirschkop's essay, "Dialogue, Monologue, and the Social," defends Hirschkop's targets (Morson included), contending that the writers involved in the Forum actually took positions similar to Hirschkop's. Not at all amicable, the whole exchange exemplifies the sort of politically charged, combative dialogue Hirschkop identifies with Bakhtin's dialogism.

Regardless of who makes the point most effectively, the inter-textual dialogue emerges as follows: Bakhtin's two approaches to dialogism leave plenty of room for misreadings. Bakhtin proposed dialogism as: 1. a category of certain types of discourse as opposed to others (wherein prose is dialogic and poetry is monologic, for example) and 2. as a response to Saussurean linguistics in which dialogism is presented as the natural form of all language and monologism is a perversion of that natural state. In the former, Bakhtin seems to set-up a neat binary that offers a choice; a liberal-minded thinker can simply choose dialogism rather than monologism, just as one might choose to be a democrat rather than a fascist. (This is similar to the sort of choice Plato/Socrates
seems to offer in the form of the dialectic. Plato rejects writing and, as Burke and others claim, any monologic utterance in favor of the dialectic, which is purportedly not monologic). But Bakhtin's other approach to dialogism presents no clear choice and no neat binary because monologism must reside within dialogism (as a form or, in some views, a mutation of the latter) if dialogism is to be understood as the basic state of all language. Indeed, the terms Bakhtin uses to dramatize the transformation of dialogism into monologism suggest a violent hijacking rather than a simple choice. In the following passage, Bakhtin characterizes monologic language use in political and, once again, rather violent terms:

The word in language is always half someone else's. It becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own. And not all words for just anyone submit equally easily to this appropriation, to this seizure and transformation into private property: many words stubbornly resist, others remain alien, sound foreign in the mouth of the one who appropriated them and who now speaks them: they cannot be assimilated into his context and fall out of it; it is as if they put themselves in quotation marks against the will of the speaker. Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated —overpopulated—with the intentions of others. Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process. ("Discourse" 293-4)

This appropriation may be a "difficult and complicated process," but it is part of our history, as Bakhtin's poet/novelist comparison and his critique of linguistic theory demonstrates. And the monologism/dialogism binary appears to break down once dialogism contains the possibility of monologism. By rejecting what he viewed as the peaceful coexistence of monologism and dialogism (in the form of amicable disagreement between individuals in dialogue), Hirschkop is attending to the violent tone
of Bakhtin's approach to monologism, a tone which seems inevitable given that Bakhtin himself was a victim of fascism during his lifetime. The link between Bakhtin's literary/linguistic theory and his lived experience, made most passionately in Hirschkop's essay, seems inevitable. In his introduction to *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by Mikhail Bakhtin*, Holquist gives an encapsulated biography of Bakhtin that demonstrates how mindful of political repression Bakhtin must have been, particularly during the writing of his most famous works:

Beyond the difficulties usually attending the careers of powerful but eccentric thinkers, there are, in Bakhtin's case, complications that are unique. Some of these inhere in his times: his two most productive periods occurred during the darkest years of recent Russian history: the decade following 1917, when the country reeled under the combined effects of a lost war, revolution, civil war and famine; and the following decade, the thirties, when Bakhtin was in exile in Kazakhstan, and most of the rest of Russia was huddling through the long Stalinist night. (xv)

The simple reification of the monologism/dialogism binary seems to be not only a crime against the more radical tendencies in Bakhtin's theory but also a misunderstanding of the haunting link between Bakhtin's work and his life.

Even when critics of Bakhtin's work focus on the monologic/dialogic binary (which also appears as a self/other or individual/social binary), the complexities in Bakhtin's writings inevitably complicate any thought on the subject. In "Answering as Authoring: Mikhail Bakhtin's Trans-Linguistics," Michael Holquist makes the boldest defense of the self/other reading of Bakhtin when he claims that the "unitizing force" in Bakhtin's thought is his "obsession, early and late, with the relations between self and other" (60). Holquist continues: "Bakhtin's lifetime concern with the interchange between those two poles of human being is why, at the banal but useful level where we speak of -isms, his work may be summed up as dialogism, since the particular way Bakhtin models the relation of self and other is a dialogue of a special kind" (60). But despite Holquist's focus on the self as opposed to the other in Bakhtin's thought, he later
acknowledges that Bakhtin rejected the concept of the self-identified individual and took pains to avoid the appearance that he was assigning "an overabundance of liberty to individual speakers" (65). Holquist ultimately argues that Bakhtin posited the self/other relation as a existing along a continuum, rather than as an opposition. Holquist's apparent inconsistencies ironically jibe with Bakhtin's own complicated view. As Morson points out, Bakhtin himself explicitly collapsed the individual/social binary in his writings, but did so in an incredibly complex and somewhat mystifying way. In Marxism and the Philosophy of Language, Bakhtin contended:

> The "social" is usually thought of in binary opposition with the "individual," and hence we have the notion that the psyche is individual while ideology is social. Notions of that sort are fundamentally false. ...
> 
> If the content of the individual psyche is just as social as is ideology, then, on the other hand, ideological phenomena are just as individual (in the ideological meaning of the word) as are psychological phenomena. Every ideological product bears the imprint of the individuality of its creator or creators, but even this imprint is just as social as are all the other properties and attributes of ideological phenomena. (Marxism 34)

Though he uses this passage to refute the existence of a neat individual/social binary in Bakhtin's thought affirmatively, Morson cannot do so without finally acknowledging the fact that "Bakhtin's argument here is a difficult and, at times, a hazy one, and thus there is some disagreement about its meaning among the contributors to the forum" (Morson 86). Indeed, it is easy to see how Bakhtin's claim that the individual is shot through with the social could invite the sort of benign "liberal humanist" readings that Hirschkop rejects. In the above passage, Bakhtin seems to suggest a fundamental equivalence among individuals, since they reduce to the social, and between the individual and the social. These are categories which both exist and do not exist. Similarly, monologism and dialogism are quite different yet contained in one another. Though dialogism is certainly the driving concept in "Discourse in the Novel," monologism remains a crucial element
throughout his work, one that must be defined against dialogism for either to be truly understood. By focusing on the pluralism of the dialogic, readers of Bakhtin fail to address, or perhaps even repress, the sinister specter of the monologic, which resurfaces throughout "Discourse in the Novel" as a fundamental social and political ill.

One form of the monologic/dialogic distinction that Bakhtin discusses later in "Discourse in the Novel" sheds more light on this complicated relationship and reveals more affinities between his work and Derrida's. In his discussion of "the authoritative word," Bakhtin moves beyond the bounds of pure literary criticism to describe a generalized, politically-charged form of discourse that moves through history yet does not change and, in fact, uses the stabilizing structure of its own unchanging past as a self-affirmation. Bakhtin writes:

The authoritative word demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power it might have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority already fused to it. The authoritative word is located in a distanced zone, organically connected with a past that is felt to be hierarchically higher. It is, so to speak, the word of the fathers. Its authority was already acknowledged in the past. It is a prior discourse. It is therefore not a question of choosing it from among other possible discourses that are its equal. It is given (it sounds) in lofty spheres, not those of familiar contact. Its language is a special (as it were, hieratic) language. It can be profaned. It is akin to taboo, i.e., a name that must not be taken in vain. ("Discourse" 342)

In contrast to the metaphors of life and movement associated with the dialogic, the images Bakhtin uses to characterize the authoritative word are of death and stagnation. The authoritative word is dogma, or, to use Derrida's term, it is logos. Authoritative discourse makes its claim in the name of history and yet it does not appear answerable to the sort of change history imposes on other forms of discourse. Its author (even when he is identified) is untouchable; the authoritative word descends from "lofty spheres" and therefore cannot be questioned. According to Bakhtin, authoritative discourse takes the following forms: "... (religious, political, moral; the word of a father, of adults, of
the authority of religious dogma, or of acknowledged scientific truth or of a currently fashionable book..." (342-343). Many of the items in the list are obvious, but the last is the most interesting since it suggests that the sort of unquestioning faith associated with religion and morality can be granted the texts of "fashionable" authors whose books are deemed "truthful," if only for a time. Therefore the authoritative word does not have to be historically validated as long as it presents itself as ageless, like an instant classic.

Despite his association of authoritative discourse and "fashionable" books, when Bakhtin discusses "the authoritative word," the author becomes relatively insignificant. When discussing poetic discourse, Bakhtin focuses on the failure of critical theory to characterize language accurately as essentially dialogic; in "Discourse in the Novel," Bakhtin argues that most literary theory leading up to the twentieth century was dominated by a formalist approach that focused on poetry and failed to recognize the futility of any single author's attempt to make language fully and finally obedient to his will. When Bakhtin characterizes poetic discourse as a form of monologic discourse, he seems more interested in contrasting his approach to discourse in the novel with that outmoded approach to discourse represented by literary criticism of poetry. In that case, the poet and the critic present poetry as a form of monologism in the name of aestheticism and the individual. With authoritative discourse, however, the language itself exercises its will on the listener/reader. Quite independent of its particular author (if he can even be identified) and the literary critic, the authoritative word "demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us..." (342). Its authority depends on the absence of an individual author (or his irrelevance, as is the case when an author claims to be God's prophet) because authoritative discourse cannot appear contingent or subject to question. And unlike the living word, authoritative discourse is not shaped by an anticipation of the answer. In his description of dialogism, Bakhtin gives primacy to the response, or the act of understanding:
In the actual life of speech, every concrete act of understanding is active: it assimilates the word to be understood into its own conceptual system filled with specific objects and emotional expressions, and is indissolubly merged with the response, with a motivated agreement or disagreement. To some extent, primacy belongs to the response, as the activating principle: it creates the ground for understanding. Understanding comes to fruition only in the response. Understanding and response are dialectically merged and mutually condition each other; one is impossible without the other. (282)

Since authoritative discourse represents, rather, the death of language, it allows no response. Authoritative discourse is positively hostile toward dialogism since it seeks a response which is merely unquestioning acceptance:

It is considerably more difficult to incorporate semantic changes into [authoritative] discourse, even with the help of a framing context: its semantic structure is static and dead, for it is fully complete, it has but a single meaning, the letter is fully sufficient to the sense and calcifies it. It is not a free appropriation and assimilation of the word itself that authoritative discourse seeks to elicit from us; rather, it demands our unconditional allegiance. Therefore authoritative discourse permits no play with the context framing it, no play with its borders, no gradual and flexible transitions, no spontaneously creative stylizing variants on it. (343)

A comparison of poetic discourse and "the authoritative word" as very different forms of monologism, which violate dialogism to varying degrees, brings the notion of a monologism/dialogism continuum into view. If the authoritative word is the farthest point on the monologic end of the continuum, it is because it appears authorless and thus unequivocal. Using the Bakhtinian scheme, language can be characterized as more or less monologic according to the degree to which it acknowledges its social, geographical, temporal and political contingency; though aesthetic poetry may present itself as answerable only to its own object, its own themes, it does not often present itself as authorless.  

Bakhtin contrasts "the authoritative word" with the "internally persuasive word." The latter represents persuasive discourse directed toward and conditioned by the
response. Its authority has no relation to an external force and only comes into play during the assimilation of the word by the responding individual. Bakhtin's complex merging of the individual and the social finds another expression in his discussion of that assimilation:

When someone else's ideological discourse is internally persuasive for us and acknowledged by us, entirely different possibilities open up. Such discourse is of decisive significance in the evolution of an individual consciousness: consciousness awakens to independent ideological life precisely in a world of alien discourses surrounding it, and from which it cannot initially separate itself; the process of distinguishing between one's own and another's discourse, between one's own and another's thought, is activated rather late in the development.... Internally persuasive discourse—as opposed to one that is externally authoritative—is, as it is affirmed through assimilation, tightly interwoven with "one's own word." In the everyday rounds of our consciousness, the internally persuasive word is half-ours and half-someone else's. Its creativity and productiveness consist precisely in the fact that such a word awakens new and independent words, that it organizes masses of our words from within, and does not remain in an isolated and static condition. (345)

By arguing that "the internally persuasive word" participates in a fundamentally social transaction during which individual consciousness is born, Bakhtin seems to contradict himself. After all, only pages earlier Bakhtin rejected philosophy, linguistics, and stylistics for their focus on "only two poles in the life of language," "the system of a unitary language" and "the individual speaking in this language" (269). But, once again, Bakhtin confounds binary thinking by refusing to reject entirely the concept of the individual in the name of the social. Rather, he situates the individual within a social process. By letting the social wash over him, and by gradually selecting from among bits of internally persuasive discourse and producing a bricolage of social bits in an arrangement unique to himself, in a particular time and in a particular place, the subject develops a socially-charged individuality. For Bakhtin, individualistic discourse does not represent utterly original and self-identified language (which could not, by definition,
communicate anyway) but rather, a series of choices that leave an imprint of the will behind those choices.

Though it was written before the "death of the author" concept became a movement within poststructuralist literary theory (and should therefore be considered proto-death of the author theory), Bakhtin's "Discourse in the Novel" offers an approach to the concept wherein a dialogic engine for change represents the life that authoritative texts repress in the name of finality and unquestioning acceptance. Instead of declaring the death of the author, Bakhtin argues that a certain powerful strain of western authority operates under the principle of death. In this respect, his theory is finally very similar to Derrida's, for they both see change and play as the dominant modus operandi in language. Both Derrida and Bakhtin react against authority but not against the author, whom they both found a crucial element in literary interpretation and meaning-making. Together, they certainly trumpet the death foretold in Plato's *Phaedrus*, since they both reject language that presents itself as unchanging truth. But the crucial difference between Bakhtin's approach to monologism and Derrida's approach to logocentrism is that Bakhtin focuses on the *production*, or amplification, of a certain kind of anti-authoritarian discourse (novelistic discourse, heteroglossia) whereas Derrida focuses on the *dismantling* of authoritative discourse via a critical approach (deconstruction). While deconstruction may be considered productive, it is by definition a reaction.  

Where Derrida sees language and meaning slipping through the cracks in logocentrism in ways that totally confound and even reverse any attempt at certainty and finality, Bakhtin sees monologism involved in a constant struggle with its counterpart, dialogism. Bakhtin constantly offers binary pairs that he later must dismantle, and Derrida begins with the dismantling because he views binary logic as a product of logocentrism. The crucial element these theorists have in common is the idea of change, otherwise described in terms of movement, play or life. Both Bakhtin and Derrida reject the centralized, static system of language described in Saussure's structuralism and further associate that
centralization with questions of authority and dogma. As I have already argued, Derrida's poststructuralist response has often been misconstrued as anarchic or nihilistic, since Derrida disavows stability in meaning. Conversely, Bakhtin's dialogism lends itself to the "liberal humanist" reading wherein everyone has an equal voice. Bakhtin dramatizes the entrance of diverse voices, periods and contexts. Derrida dramatizes the exit of certainty. But both theorists offer an approach to language and literature that resists authority. Whether that freedom is perceived as the beginning or the end of literary criticism depends wholly on point of view. It balances the fear of chaos with the dynamism of change.
CHAPTER 3

THE AUTHOR AND THE METAPHORIC MEDIATION

The word "author" derives from the medieval term, *auctor*, which denoted a writer whose words commanded respect and belief. The word *auctor* derived from four etymological sources: the Latin verbs *agere*, "to act or perform"; *auieo*, "to tie"; *augere*; "to grow"; and from the Greek noun *autentim*, "authority."

Donald Pease

*Create* came into English from the stem of the past participle of [root word] *creare*, [Latin] make or produce. This inherent relation to the sense of something having been made, and thus to a past event, was exact, for the word was mainly used in the precise context of the original divine creation of the world...Moreover, within that system of belief, as Augustine insisted, 'creatura non potest creare' –the 'creature' –who has been created –cannot himself create.

Raymond Williams

I. The Metaphoric Mediation Unmasked

In chapter one, I argued that Bakhtin and Derrida refigure the "death of the author" concept as the death of authoritative discourse. This is a crucial distinction because it explains how poststructuralist theory can maintain an interest in the relationship between the writer and the text as a component of any literary analysis. Poststructuralism, then, does not simply reduce to Barthes's "...destruction of every voice, of every point of origin" ("The Death" 168). The versions of poststructuralist critique exemplified in Derrida's *Of Grammatology* and Bakhtin's "Discourse in the Novel" do not remove the author as a point of inquiry but rather challenge the notion that the author, or any other stable "center," should be an overwhelming determining factor in the interpretation of a text's meaning. And as Linda Hutcheon puts it, "To decenter is not to deny..." (*Poetics of Postmodern 159*). In *The Death and Return of the Author*, Sean Burke makes a similar observation: "...the denial of an absolute authorial center implies
not the necessary absence of the author, but the redistribution of authorial subjectivity within a textual *mise en scene* which it does not command entirely" (184). Similarly, by following this trajectory of the "death of the author" question I do not mean to imply that authors are no longer of interest in the critique of the death metaphor as it relates to authoritative discourse. On the contrary, since authoritative discourse acquires its mystifying power partly by presenting itself as author-less, as descending to man from some "lofty height" (as Bakhtin put it), it seems even more crucial to stay mindful of the human authors and theorists who perpetuate this mystification.

Authors produce a form of authoritative or logocentric discourse when they claim to be representing an abstract truth of which language is a mere shadow. Or, as Derrida would put it, authors who produce language which they identify with nature, as opposed to culture, are producing authoritative discourse. The critique of authoritative discourse is crucial to Derrida and Bakhtin because they both believe language is a cultural phenomenon that takes its meaning from its dynamic use in cultural contexts and not from some static, transcendent realm where truth resides. Logocentric or authoritative discourse has historically sought validation by claiming to emanate from various centers such as: the Gods or God, truth, beauty, and as I will argue later, genius, good taste, and even "reality." Texts that purport to relate God's law or books that are deemed works of genius assume a mantle of transcendence that sets them apart from other texts. The western concept of a transcendent, central, determining principle has what Derrida calls "metaphysico-theological roots" in the Christian version of truth under the rubric of God. Using the unquestionable authority of God, Judeo-Christian writers of sacred texts could claim that they were God's mouthpieces and texts such as the Bible could be revered as more-than-writing, as logos itself. Run-of-the-mill secular writing thus assumed the subordinate status of the mundane, twice removed, shadowy bastard son.

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida contends that the privileging of speech over writing in western philosophy and linguistics results from the association of speech with an
origin that transcends the material world represented by writing. In the following passage, Derrida borrows technical terms from Saussurean structuralism, wherein signs (word-symbols) are the material signifiers of an immaterial concept, "referent," or signified. In logocentrism, according to Derrida, the referent is believed to exist before and independent of language, in a transcendent realm such as the mind of God, and it is best represented by speech, since speech appears to emanate directly from the mind, free from the limitations associated with a material existence. The written word, by contrast, represents that materiality. And when written discourse aspires to transcend the material realm (the realm of mundane culture), it does so through an association with logos in the form of a "metaphoric mediation": God, Truth, Beauty, etc. Derrida writes:

> Even when the thing, the "referent," is not immediately related to the logos of a creator god where it began by being the spoken/thought sense, the signified has at any rate an immediate relationship with the logos in general (finite or infinite), and a mediated one with the signifier, that is to say with the exteriority of writing. When it seems to go otherwise, it is because a metaphoric mediation has insinuated itself into the relationship and has simulated immediacy; the writing of the truth in the soul, opposed by Phaedrus to bad writing (writing in the "literal" (propre) and ordinary sense, "sensible" writing, "in space"), the book of Nature and God's writing, especially in the Middle Ages; all that functions as metaphor in these discourses confirms the privilege of the logos and founds the "literal" meaning then given to writing: a sign signifying a signifier itself signifying an eternal verity, eternally thought and spoken in the proximity of a present logos. The paradox to which attention must be paid is this: natural and universal writing, intelligible and nontemporal writing, is thus named by metaphor. A writing that is sensible, finite, and so on, is designated as writing in the literal sense; it is thus thought on the side of culture, technique, and artifice; a human procedure, the ruse of a being accidentally incarnated or of a finite creature. (my emphasis, 15)

Studies of Medieval conceptions of authorship bear out Derrida's claim that such a dichotomy has existed and demonstrate how ideal writing, the writing of truth in the soul that transcends the bounds of "literal" writing, ironically retained its transcendent status, even after being committed to actual scrolls or paper, through the evocation of divine inspiration and later through moral or political authorities. Though Plato hints that poets
are subject to wild, irrational and other-worldly inspiration in *The Republic* and *Ion*, he does so to contrast imaginative inspiration with the rational process of the dialectic and in order to make a case for the banishment of unpredictable poets from his republic. Centuries later, however, in the interest of religious authority, church-sanctioned Christian writers were deemed quite sane when they claimed to be the ghostwriters of God. Divine inspiration became a powerful tool in the effort to legitimize holy texts.

Sean Burke notes that

> Within an emergent Christian culture...the notion of inspiration was reconciled with that of autonomous truth via the notion of *auctoritas* or authority derived from God. Inspiration thus shed its Bacchic and irrationalist connotations to be seen as the direct revelation of Scriptural truth from God to the Evangelists through to the Church Fathers who assembled the Biblical canon. The Scriptural authors or *auctores* were thus granted the charisma of divinely-revealed truth which at the same time prescribed against any sense of individual originality. (Burke 7)

With this shift, writing ironically gained status "independent" of its human author, though auctores were clearly influential. The affirmed presence of logos in holy writing encouraged a reverential relationship between the community and the text that would persist even as religion lost its stranglehold on culture and ideology and writing became widespread and secular.

In "The Medieval Theory of Authorship," A. J. Minnis argues that during the thirteenth century the focus shifted "from the divine auctor to the human auctor of Scripture" (27). This shift resulted in an increasing interest in the interpretation of texts, though, as Donald Pease has observed, those "interpretations" were sanctioned by auctores, who maintained political and moral power through such control mechanisms. Pease writes:

> Over the centuries the continued authority of *auctores* derived from medieval scribes' ability to interpret, explain, and in most cases resolve historical problems by restating these problems in terms sanctioned by *auctores*. Such restatements commanded authority because they organized otherwise accidental events into an established context capable
of making them meaningful. The continued authority to make events meaningful in customary or traditional ways provided all the evidence necessary to sustain the *auctores' power.* ("Author" 106).

As the shift from divine auctoritas to secular author took place and the church *auctores* became increasingly unable to control culturally "dangerous" writing, another, secular control mechanism was put in place, according to Michel Foucault. From the Renaissance forward, the legal title of "author," which ultimately designates both creative ownership and culpability, reflects that desire to maintain control over public discourse. Foucault's depiction of the author in "What is an Author?" satirizes both the Platonic characterization of poets and the Christian rejection of "unholy" texts:

> How can one reduce the great peril, the great danger with which fiction threatens our world? The answer is: One can reduce it with the author. The author allows a limitation of the cancerous and dangerous proliferation of significations within a world where one is thrifty not only with one's resources and riches, but also with one's discourses and their significations. *The author is the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning.* ("What is an Author?" 209)

While the word of God in Christian texts signified a set of self-justifying truths or laws, the word of the secular author became *subject* to law. Foucault writes, "Texts, books, and discourses really began to have authors (other than mythical, 'sacralized' and 'sacralizing' figures) to the extent that authors became subject to punishment, that is, to the extent that discourses could be transgressive" (202). Perhaps ironically, the need to hold authors responsible for texts deemed transgressive or dangerous perpetuated logocentric thought, positioning the author as the all-knowing, all-intending "God" of his/her own text.

> Yet, despite the law and the increasing "ownership" of ideas and texts, the Platonic and logocentric characterization of the poet as a conduit linking mankind to higher forms persisted throughout literary theory, perpetuated by authors themselves. The notion of an external, alienating and idealized origin of meaning has held such sway throughout the history of literary theory that authors have continually striven to replace a
perceived absence at the heart of their writing with some form of the Derridean "metaphoric mediation," an external authority that validates and exalts the literary text. Having learned from Plato that truth exists independent of language, literary theorists and authors in the Platonic mode (and it is difficult to identify pre-twentieth century canonized authors who do not bear the marks of Platonic thought) often turn to religion, idealized nature, and even, finally, an idealized "reality" as the source of truth in their writing with the expressed purpose of elevating that writing above the confines of mundane culture. Even in the major treatises of British and American Romanticism, which perhaps more than any other period in Western literary history extolled the virtues of writing, poetry and the individual poet himself, metaphoric mediations are utilized to make the language more than what Derrida terms "writing in the literal sense" or writing "on the side of culture, technique and artifice" (Of Grammatology 15).

Bakhtin and Derrida use the death metaphor to associate authoritative discourse or logos with stagnation. They both contrast that death with an emphasis on change and play, and although neither rejects the author as a point of inquiry in literary criticism, they both de-center the author by blending his voice or his intending will with a dynamic chorus of others. Their theoretical positions, Derrida's in particular, challenge long-held perceptions of the author primarily because, as Burke contends, "...the author has been falsely analogized with the transcendent/impersonal subject" (Authorship xxvi). Much of the twentieth century literary theory that explores the relationship between the author and his or her text is rooted in psychoanalytic concepts of the subject. Poststructuralist psychoanalytic theory examines the author as the site of conscious and unconscious desires that are reflected in any given text. And an author's subjectivity, or his sense of a self-conscious, self-controlling being, constantly slips away from him in the play of language, which reveals his unconscious desires in ways unintended by the author. Psychoanalytic criticism in this vein is abundant, and its impact on theories of authorship has been profound. But when considering the problem of authoritative, or logocentric,
discourse, an examination of the author's subjectivity, or the question of subjectivity in general, does not suffice. It is not enough to argue that the author ultimately has little control over the meaning conveyed in her text when the author herself attributes that meaning to an authority which remains unquestionable and beyond the whims of consciousness in general. Thus, in order to understand the full scope of the death metaphor, or the displacement of authority in this instance, it does not suffice to point out that the author-god analogy is false. Any cursory examination of dominant literary theory written by canonized authors reveals that this simply false analogy derives from a long-evolving, persistent reliance on authoritative metaphoric mediations perpetuated by authors themselves. In their attempts to explain the origins of their poetry or the inspiration for their novels, western poets and novelists repeatedly invoke logocentric forms such as God or an idealized truth or beauty and, in many cases, literary theorists have followed in Plato's footsteps by denigrating writing as an imperfect instrument not adequate to the task of representing those transcendent forms, which are its subjects, for mankind. In one complicated gesture, authors both cloak themselves in authority by deferring to God or truth and thereby *decenter themselves* in the creative process. They become the conduits Plato described as a result of their own desire to position themselves on the side of authority somewhere between man and the transcendent or the ideal.

II. Some Romantic Figures and the Metaphoric Mediation as Transcendence

Literary theory and the concept of authorship took an incredible turn in what is known as the Romantic period with the emergence of the poet-prophet. Under the sign of poetic genius, the divine elements of the Medieval auctores and the growing influence of secular writing merged to create a peculiar type of author who claimed to possess a gift that set him apart from other men even as he lamented his mortal limitations and the limited capacity of writing to convey the transcendent. In theory, no author was ever so
intimately linked to his text as was (and is) the Romantic poet. In his influential critique of Romantic theory, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*, M. H. Abrams argues that before the Romantic Movement at the very end of the eighteenth century good poetry was widely accepted to be mimetic in nature. Building on the Platonic and Aristotelian models of mimesis in the creative arts, literary theorists believed that poetry should mirror nature and the ways of man, and the poet was at his best when he removed all trace of his own hand from his work in the name of perfect objectivity. All of this changed, according to Abrams, with the publication of Wordsworth's 1800 preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, when the mimetic mode was cast off in favor of what Abrams calls the expressive mode. In the Romantic period, Abrams argues, poetry no longer reflects the external world so much as it does the mind of the poet:

\[
\text{In general terms, the central tendency of the expressive theory may be summarized in this way: A work of art is essentially the internal made external, resulting from a creative process operating under the impulse of feeling, and embodying the combined product of the poet's perceptions, thoughts and feelings. The primary source and subject matter of a poem, therefore, are the attributes and actions of the poet's own mind; or if aspects of the external world, then these only as they are converted from fact to poetry by the feelings and operations of the poet's mind. (22)} \]

Both Abrams and Wayne Booth have noted that the Romantic period was marked by a "shift of critical emphasis" whereby critics and readers focused less on the text, and its formal characteristics, and more on "theories of expression dealing with the artistic process" (Booth 35-6). Similarly, popular theories regarding the relationship between the novel and the novelist during the nineteenth century reflect a wide interest in the author behind the novel. As Barbara Hochman has suggested:

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\text{Throughout the nineteenth century a narrating voice was associated with the idea of an author speaking through it. The author was generally presumed to be a human being whose "individuality" emerged from his or her text in the course of the reading experience. As a repository of authorial character, a book was a reader's "friend," and reading was "a} \]
kind of conversation" with the writer. This way of reading was reinforced by rhetorical strategies, particularly the use of a narrator whom the reader, often addressed as "you," was encouraged to associate with the author of the work—a real, sometimes biographically concrete person, and always a writer and storyteller.\(^5\) (*Getting at the Author* 2)

This is precisely the model of authorship that Barthes denounces in "The Death of the Author" when he complains, "The explanation of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the author confiding in us" (126). Barthes argues, "Once the author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile" (128). Of course, the explanation of a work is not always sought in the man or woman who produced it (in the strict sense). When a work is believed to have been communicated to man by God, for instance, as in the case of medieval scribes, or when a work is considered purely mimetic, critics and readers who believe in those forms and those links look beyond the writer for an explanation of the meaning in the text. Because of this complicated relationship between readers and texts, a simple rejection of the author does not effect an exhaustive anti-authoritarian ethic. In the twentieth century, New Criticism rejected the author as the source of meaning in a text only to replace that subjective authority with the purportedly objective authority of truth and beauty (or the authority of the critic himself); and the New Critic's strange bedfellow, poststructuralist critique a la Barthes, annihilated the author only to replace him with a sort of deified writing, according to Foucault, who argues:

> In current usage...the notion of writing seems to transpose the empirical characteristics of the author into a transcendental anonymity. ...Giving writing a primal status seems to be a way of retranslating, in transcendental terms, both the theological affirmation of its sacred character and the critical affirmation of its creative character. ("What is an Author?" 344)

It is all too apparent that a rejection of the author does not necessarily lead to an exhaustive anti-authoritarian ethic. Though there are notable differences in the New
Critical and Barthesian reactions against author-centered criticism, both responded to a phenomenon that achieved its apex in the eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries with the concept of the all-knowing, all-intending author, the literary genius. In his essay, "Author," Donald Pease argues that the genius actually has more in common with auctores than he does with the author. Authors, he argued, can be distinguished from auctores both chronologically, because authors reflect the increasingly secular world of feudal Europe, and according to their authority, since authors did not write under the sign of unquestionable religious authority. The genius, Pease argues, represents a third stage in the ideological evolution of the writer:

Having helped effect the historic change from a feudal and predominantly agricultural society and through a variety of other political and economic arrangements to a democratic and predominantly industrial Europe, the author was no longer a part of an emergent cultural process. Following the realization of an alternative culture he had earlier only envisioned, the author's work underwent a related change—from a reciprocal workaday relationship with other cultural activities into the realm of "genius," which transcended ordinary cultural work. Like the medieval auctor, the "genius" identified the basis for his work within the laws of the Creator. Consequently, the realm of genius was defined as utterly autonomous. (108)

Yet even when the genius is considered the wellspring of creativity, even when, as Abrams puts it, "a work of art is essentially the internal made external" (Mirror 22), metaphoric mediations appear in the artists' own aesthetic theories as external, pre-linguistic and authoritative sources of meaning that often trump or confound their own genius.

In The Mirror and the Lamp, it is Abrams's expressed purpose to depict the Romantic poet as the artist who, more than any other, rejected the role of conduit, yet an examination of major Romantic treatises reveals that what emerged from the mind of the poet was nevertheless often characterized as that imperfect shadowing-forth of the external, transcendent world described by Plato. And once again, language is blamed for
that imperfection. In perhaps the most famous statement of British Romantic literary
theory, Wordsworth's preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, the agency
attributed to the individual poet/author gains strength even as the source of inspiration, or
metaphoric mediation, grows more complex. Wordsworth's clear intention in the
"Preface" was to depict a human source of inspiration: "What is a poet? To whom does
he address himself? And what language is to be expected from him? He is a man
speaking to men... Poetry is the image of man and nature" (601, 602). When Wordsworth
claims that the poet is inspired by average men, and everyday experiences, he seems to
demystify inspiration, his tone is down to earth as is the plain style of the poems in the
volume. Wordsworth's decision to focus on common life seemed a bold statement
intended to subvert the opposition of high and low culture. As Abrams has observed,
"Wordsworth's serious or tragic treatment of lowly subjects in common language violated
the basic neoclassic rule of *decorum*, which asserted that the serious genres should deal
only with high subjects in an appropriately elevated style" (*Glossary* 127). But when
drawing his inspiration from the men and events around him, Wordsworth's poet
nevertheless focuses on transcendent emotion, to which only the poet's ear is attuned.
Wordsworth suggests that the average man cannot comprehend in his mind nor reproduce
in writing the true nature of his own experience, whereas the poet who may not share this
experience can nevertheless reproduce the emotions associated with that experience in
more vivid detail and with more clarity than the average man could even imagine.
Wordsworth describes this phenomenon in terms of absence vs. presence:

To these qualities [the poet] has added a disposition to be affected more
than other men by absent things as if they were present; an ability of
conjuring up in himself passions, which are indeed far from being the
same as those produced by real events, yet (especially in those parts of the
general sympathy which are pleasing and delightful) do more nearly
resemble the passions produced by real events, than any thing which, from
the motions of their own minds merely, other men are accustomed to feel
in themselves; whence, and from practice, he has acquired a greater
readiness and power in expressing what he thinks and feels, and especially
those thoughts and feelings which, by his own choice, or from the
structure of his own mind, arise in him without immediate external
excitement (my emphasis, 602).

Ironically, Wordsworth argues that real events, whether intense or not, are never
consciously registered in the minds of the average men who experience them. Rather, the
emotions associated with real events (which, he seems to suggest, comprise their
substance) can be reproduced within "the structure of [the poet's] own mind" though they
might be completely alien to his real experience (602). The Romantic poet has a greater
understanding of life because he has an intimate relationship with transcendent truth. As
Jerome McGann has suggested, "...the testing critique which Romantic poems direct
toward received ideas is always allied to a polemic on behalf of the special privilege of
poetry and art. The Romantic attitude ascribes to poetry a special insight and power over
the truth" (The Romantic Ideology 70). But despite this emphasis on internal inspiration
and the link between poetry and truth, Wordsworth goes on to reinforce a Platonic
depiction of writing, wherein poetry is once again the shadowy bastard son of
spontaneous, everyday speech:

But whatever portion of this faculty we may suppose even the greatest
poet to possess, there cannot be a doubt but that the language which it will
suggest to him, must, in liveliness and truth, fall far short of that which is
uttered by men in real life, under the actual pressure of those passions,
certain shadows of which the poet thus produces, or feels to be produced,
in himself (my emphasis 602).

Though "men in real life" do not have the capacity to comprehend their own language of
real passions, that is nevertheless the source of truth and, therefore, the wellspring of
poetic inspiration. Here, Wordsworth is performing an incredible balancing act; he is
unwilling to afford poetry a status superior or even equal to an idealized lived experience,
yet he dismisses the human capacity to understand experience, figured as absence,
without poetry, figured as presence. Poetry functions retroactively to make sense of what
we have already experienced but could not comprehend or express.
Wordsworth's formulation depicts a conscious/unconscious binary that separates the poet and the average man. Perhaps in his need to praise the poet's particular genius while maintaining an external source of inspiration for truth in poetry, he had to grant the poet this almost extrasensory perception. Wordsworth describes the poet's method as a transformation or experiment in split personalities:

So that it will be the wish of the poet to bring his feelings near to those of the persons whose feelings he describes, nay, for short spaces of time perhaps, to let himself slip into an entire delusion, and even confound and identify his own feelings with theirs; modifying only the language which is thus suggested to him, by a consideration that he describes for a particular purpose, that of giving pleasure. (602)

Here, the poet's subjectivity and the scope of his creativity are sublimated to the higher purpose of representing real life and real men. Though the poet may be able to comprehend the truth and beauty of experience, and though he comes closer than any other human to understanding the nature and intensity of those Platonic forms, he does not create truth and beauty within the medium of writing; he is more translator than creator. In the following passage, Wordsworth likens the poet to an editor:

[The poet] will apply the principle on which I have so much insisted, namely, that of selection; on this he will depend for removing what would otherwise be painful or disgusting in the passion; he will feel that there is no necessity to trick out or to elevate nature: and, the more industriously he applies this principle, the deeper will be his faith that no words, which his fancy or imagination can suggest, will be to be compared with those which are the emanations of reality and truth. (602)

In this passage, "reality and truth" themselves emanate words and act as the agents of good poetry, relegating the writer to the role of conduit between nature and the reader. Wordsworth stresses the realistic and mimetic, and minimizes the poet's personal input by limiting the scope of his "fancy and imagination."

But "fancy and imagination" take a slightly different turn in another of Wordsworth's critical efforts, the preface to the 1815 edition of his Poems. In this
preface, and its accompanying "supplementary" essay, the creative limitations imposed in the preface to the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* are slightly rescinded. The 1815 preface echoes Aristotle's *Poetics*, since Wordsworth sets out to systematize the six "powers requisite for the production of poetry" (801). In the end, however, only the powers of "imagination and fancy" command his full attention. Wordsworth counters a popular misconception, exemplified in W. Taylor's *British Synonyms Discriminated*, that imagination, like fancy, refers to the capacity to "distinctly copy in idea the impressions of sense" (803). Not so, claims Wordsworth; imagination implies original creation. Where fancy merely evokes and combines, imagination evokes, combines, "shapes and creates" (804). In the 1815 preface, the poet's imagination is not stretched to its limits in the attempt to reflect the world around him; rather, imagination enables the poet to stretch the limits of the known world:

> Imagination, in the sense of the word as giving title to a class of the following Poems, has no reference to images that are merely a faithful copy, existing in the mind, of absent external objects; but is a word of higher import, denoting operations of the mind upon those objects, and processes of creation or of composition, governed by certain fixed laws. (803)

These laws are grammatical and stylistic, and the creative imagination uses the medium of metaphor to create new ways of seeing and understanding, new relationships. In these new creations, Wordsworth stresses formal characteristics and words in relation to one another. Thus, individual words are not made anew in isolation, but they take on new meanings in the context of the poetic form and as the material of metaphor. "These processes of imagination," Wordsworth argues, "are carried on either by conferring additional properties upon an object, or abstracting from it some of those which it actually possesses, and thus enabling it to re-act upon the mind which hath performed the process like a new existence" (my emphasis, 804). It is no wonder that Wordsworth vacillates between a creative method based on addition and one based on originality. In
considering the relationship between poetry and originality, Wordsworth was treading relatively new ground. The eighteenth century was marked by a trend toward aesthetic "originality" made particularly significant by the fact that this period also gave the term its modern meaning. In the Middle Ages, writes Ian Watt, the term "original" meant "having existed from the first," but by the middle of the eighteenth century, it had come to mean "novel or fresh in character or style" (Watt 15). The complete rebirth of the term "original" bespeaks a cultural shift that reflects the waning influence of religion and the increasing importance of the secular artist. Yet Wordsworth was not quite a secular artist.

The Poet's creative power has its limits once again in the "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface" in Poems. As in the preface to Lyrical Ballads (1800), Wordsworth again addresses the failure of readers and critics in general to appreciate and identify subtlety and greatness. Wordsworth draws an analogy between a poetic sensibility and religious enlightenment, and while describing this relationship, he returns to the shadow metaphor:

The religious man values what he sees chiefly as an "imperfect shadowing forth" of what he is incapable of seeing. The concerns of religion refer to indefinite objects, and are too weighty for the mind to support them without relieving itself by resting a great part of the burthen upon words and symbols. The commerce between Man and his Maker cannot be carried on but by a process where much is represented in little, and the Infinite Being accommodates himself to a finite capacity. (808)

Wordsworth created his own paradox in this difficult passage. He seems to be offering poetry as a link between the material and spiritual realms; however, since the subject of the larger passage is the religious reader of poetry, "what [the religious man] sees chiefly as an 'imperfect shadowing forth'" is also the poetry itself, in all of its materiality (808). Later, Wordsworth actually sounds as if he mourns poetry's ties to the material world when he describes poetry as "ethereal and transcendent, yet incapable to sustain her existence without sensuous incarnation" (808). That writing has a material existence was
the core of Plato's distrust of the medium in the *Phaedrus*. Though Wordsworth echoes Plato in that regard, unlike Plato, he contends that poetry is the closest thing to transcendence on earth and it is certainly the vehicle of transcendent truth. He acknowledges that language is imperfect but only in as much as everything material is imperfect when compared to religious truth. This defensive posture is modeled after Christian apologists, according to Abrams, who argues that Wordsworth

...deliberately adapts to poetry the idiom hitherto used by Christian apologists to justify the radical novelty, absurdities, and paradoxes of the Christian mysteries. For Wordsworth claims in this essay that there are "affinities between religion and poetry," "a community of nature," so that poetry shares the distinctive quality of Christianity, which is to confound "the calculating understanding" by its contradictions. ("Two Roads to Wordsworth" 2)

Indeed, the posture of the Christian prophet appears to be an attempt to silence or at least "confound" the critics whom Wordsworth impugns throughout the essay. Yet Wordsworth does not strip the poet of agency by casting him as the mere mouthpiece of an unfathomable God. Rather, for Wordsworth, the poet serves as an interpreter between God and man, a prophet. And Abrams has shown that Wordsworth was not alone in the self-appointed role of poet-prophet: "...the more we attend to the central claims of some of Wordsworth's major contemporaries, in Germany as well as in England, the less idiosyncratic do Wordsworth's pronouncements seem. For a number of these writers also put themselves forward as members of the small company of poet-prophets and bards..." (Natural Supernaturalism 29).

Wordsworth suggests that poetry (writing) is both the actualization of the poet's special role as prophet and a great impediment to that role. When Wordsworth argues that truly imaginative writing has "no reference to images that are merely a faithful copy, existing in the mind, of absent external objects," he seems to be rejecting mimesis in favor of the poet's role as creator ("Preface," 1815 803). Yet, if the "Essay,
Supplementary to the Preface" is to be believed, even the best poetry remains a shadowy depiction of transcendent reality and truth, the so-called "indefinite objects," in Wordsworth's formulation. For Wordsworth, poetry contains the paradox implied by the divergent creative and mimetic theories, and he feels no need to eliminate either possibility, choosing rather to leave both theories available in passages such as the following: "Genius is the introduction of a new element into the intellectual universe: or, if that be not allowed, it is the application of powers to objects on which they had not before been exercised, or the employment of them in such a manner as to produce effects hitherto unknown" ( "Essay" 815). Wordsworth seems undecided as to how far he can push his radical ideas without alienating readers, who may not "allow" the author the power to create new elements, particularly if they are dogmatic Christians. A "new element" is a far cry from an original "effect." One implies God-like abilities; the other implies fresh insight only. One expands the universe of knowledge; the other simply illuminates a previously dark corner of that universe. The limits of the poet's power are determined by the nature of language, or writing in particular.

Wordsworth's belief in imaginative creation through metaphor suggests a theory of language in which writing (or poetry in this case) does not exclusively correspond, in a straightforward, structuralist manner, to familiar objects and ideas, does not merely name, but also suggests. The material, language, may be nothing new, but the medium, Romantic poetry, generates new relationships among words, and new meanings emerge as familiar words are made unfamiliar when juxtaposed in accordance with the stylistics of poetry. In his willingness to let both the radically creative and the mimetic exist simultaneously in poetry, Wordsworth may perpetuate a paradox, though his background in Christianity and Platonic philosophy gives him license to do so, particularly if that paradox can be perceived as a dialectic. In "The Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image," Paul de Man suggests that language itself imposes this dialectic:
For it is in the essence of language to be capable of origination, but of never achieving the absolute identity with itself that exists in the natural object. Poetic language can do nothing but originate anew over and over again; it is always constitutive, able to posit regardless of presence but, by the same token, unable to give a foundation to what it posits except as an intent of consciousness. The word is always a free presence to the mind, the means by which the permanence of natural entities can be put into question and thus negated, time and again, in the endlessly widening spiral of the dialectic. (137)

For Wordsworth, that "intent of consciousness" is born when the poet genius bends language to his will. Due in part to his association of poetry with the "indefinite objects" of God, truth and reality, as well as his sense that critics often misread his poetry, Wordsworth was acutely aware of the indeterminacy of language. Thus, he placed a sizable burden on the reader, suggesting that it takes a genius to recognize genius by locating the author's intended meaning among all of the permutations made possible by the fluidity of language. Wordsworth sounds particularly Blakean when he describes a poet-smith capable of defying the play of language in the creative process:

Remember, also, that the medium through which, in poetry, the heart is to be affected is language; a thing subject to endless fluctuations and arbitrary associations. The genius of the poet melts these down for his purpose; but they retain their shape and quality to him who is not capable of exerting, within his own mind, a corresponding energy. ("Essay" 816)

This passage plays with that persistent juxtaposition of the material and the spiritual, the static and kinetic, the object and its annihilation. But here Wordsworth introduces another pair in the proliferating dialectic: poet and reader. The poet emerges as a master or tamer of language, but his ultimate success depends on the reader, who must be capable of sensing the poet's intention, recognizing where and how the genius has wrested new meaning from language and thus achieved a transcendent, if shadowy, glimpse of truth. In Wordsworth's "Essay," language is a lens through which the indefinite objects may be glimpsed. Sensitive readers, perhaps those possessing a
Christian sensibility, may see clearly through this lens; for readers less attuned to the prophetic vision, language will remain an obstruction.

Ralph Waldo Emerson also reflects the influence of Plato and echoes the sentiments of his British contemporaries in his influential depiction of the poet, "The Poet" (1844). The transcendent Platonic forms of truth and beauty are described early in the essay, and Emerson links these to nature and the poet:

> For we are not pans and barrows, nor even porters of the fire and torch-bearers, but children of the fire, made of it, and only the same divinity transmuted and at two or three removes, when we know least about it. And this hidden truth, that the fountains whence all this river of Time and its creatures floweth are intrinsically ideal and beautiful, draws us to the consideration of the nature and functions of the Poet, or the man of Beauty; to the means and materials he uses, and to the general aspect of the art in the present time. ("The Poet" 242)

Like Wordsworth before him, Emerson describes the poet as a universal, inspired and inspiring man –someone quite different from his fellow men, possessing a special capacity to understand truth, beauty, and common humanity with great depth: "[The poet] stands among partial men for the complete man, and apprises us not of his wealth, but of the common wealth (242)." The average man may be sensitive to the "impressions of nature," but he cannot reproduce them in speech; "the poet," Emerson argues, "is the person in whom these powers are in balance" (243).

The poet uses his intuition to supersede the common man's perceptive abilities. In *The Liberating Gods: Emerson on Poets and Poetry*, John Q. Anderson describes Emerson's theory of the poetic mind as follows:

> The poet's mind, aware of its "ulterior intellectual perception," remains in a kind of alerted state of suspended receptivity. Accustomed as it is to dealing with intangibles, it is always ready to entertain intimations of truth which lie seemingly beyond the limits of provable knowledge and is able to understand them at once. To some degree the poet may induce these
flights by contemplation. The poet "resigns himself to his mood, and that thought which agitated him is expressed...in a manner totally new" (Works, III, 24). Through the intuition, "He is a beholder of ideas and an utterer of the necessary and causal" (Works, III, 8), because he has penetrated "into that region where the air is music," where he hears "those primal warblings," audible only to "men of more delicate ear" (Works, III 8). (Anderson 21)

Also in keeping with the Romantic trend evident in Wordsworth's prose, Emerson depicted poets as "liberating gods," while at the same time suggesting that they lack ultimate control over their medium and function more like messengers than creators, or that their creations emanate from a subconscious realm:

[The poet] pursues a beauty, half seen, which flies before him. The poet pours out verses in every solitude....In our way of talking we say 'That is his; that is mine;' but the poet knows well that it is not his; that it is as strange and beautiful to him as to you; he would fain hear the like eloquence at length. ("The Poet" 263)

The poet's consciousness lies somewhere between the transcendent realm and the world of men. He may be the "complete man," but he is still a man, and the Platonic forms truth and beauty (or what Wordsworth referred to as "the indefinite objects of religion") must remain just out of his grasp if they are to maintain their transcendent status in keeping with Emerson's theology of the Over-Soul. So the poet is always aspiring, and he reflects rather than creates. As Anderson has observed, Emerson believed that the poet's authority derives from his status as conduit between the Over-Soul and man:

This "authority" comes by intuition in moments of inspiration. "The poet works to an end above his will," Emerson asserts, "and by means, too, which are out of his will" (Works, XII, 71). The poet resembles the Greek oracle who falls under the sway of power beyond control and becomes the voice of that mysterious power. The poet temporarily abandons himself to the overwhelming inspiration so that the "celestial currents" of spirit flow through him and he speaks for the spirit. The relationship of this ecstatic state to Plato's "divine fury" is obvious. (Anderson 26)

Emerson differs from Plato and Wordsworth in his approach to language and, more importantly, writing. Rather than casting writing as a necessary evil in the translation of
the transcendent ideals for mankind, Emerson is reluctant to underplay the role of actual writing in both depicting and creating truth and beauty. Emerson places writing among the ideal forms created at the beginning of time. To a degree, he makes writing itself transcendent and argues that poets in his age are listeners and recorders whose ears are attuned to the poetry that exists in the ideal realm:

For poetry was all written before time was, and whenever we are so finely organized that we can penetrate into that region where the air is music, we hear those primal warblings and attempt to write them down, but we lose ever and anon a word or a verse and substitute something of our own, and thus miswrite the poem. ...Over everything stands its daemon or soul, and, as the form of the thing is reflected by the eye, so the soul of the thing is reflected by a melody. The sea, the mountain-ridge, Niagara, and every flower-bed, pre-exist, or super-exist, in pre-cantations, which sail like odors in the air, and when any man goes by with an ear sufficiently fine, he overhears them and endeavors to write down the notes without diluting or depraving them. ("The Poet" 244, 254)

Emerson's linguistic theories reconfigure the hierarchy established by Plato in the Phaedrus, wherein writing is the shadow of speech, which is itself a shadow of thought, because Emerson equates the roles of language and nature. In "Nature," Emerson's paradigm resembles Plato's:

Nature is the vehicle of thought, and in a simple, double, and three-fold degree.
1. Words are signs of natural facts.
2. Particular natural facts are symbols of particular spiritual facts.

But Emerson's attitude toward this hierarchy is quite different from Plato's. Whereas Plato stressed the distance between the ideal realm, language and (at the furthest remove) writing, Emerson focuses on analogous relationships among the terms in his scheme. By understanding that the relationship between language and nature is analogous to that between the natural and spiritual realms, man can better understand his relationship to the spirit. In "Nature," Emerson writes, "It is not words only that are emblematic; it is things which are emblematic. Every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact. Every
appearance in nature corresponds to some state of the mind and that state of the mind can only be described by presenting that natural appearance as its picture" ("Nature" 20).

Emerson believed that language was originally created by poets who understood, or could hear and interpret, this inherent connection between words and things. And poetic language is the purest because it announces the connection between the natural world and language through metaphor. "An enraged man is a lion, a cunning man is a fox, a firm man is a rock, a learned man is a torch... Parts of speech are metaphors," Emerson writes, "because the whole of nature is a metaphor of the human mind. The laws of moral nature answer to those of matter as face to face in a glass" (24). Emerson again stresses the link between nature and poetry in "The Poet," wherein he suggests that to write is to recreate nature and that good poetry must be as perfect as nature. When this condition is met, he contends, "we participate in the invention of nature" ("The Poet" 255).

For Emerson, language does not hinder perfect communication, but rather man's inability to relate simply, honestly and purely to language is a symptom of some other corruption. He writes:

A man's power to connect his thought with its proper symbol, and so to utter it, depends on the simplicity of his character, that is, upon his love of truth and his desire to communicate it without loss. The corruption of man is followed by the corruption of language. When simplicity of character and the sovereignty of ideas is broken up by the prevalence of secondary desires—the desire of riches, of pleasure, of power, and of praise—and duplicity and falsehood take place of simplicity and truth, the power over nature as an interpreter of the will is in a degree lost; new imagery ceases to be created, and old words are perverted to stand for things which are not; a paper currency is employed, when there is no bullion in the vaults ("Nature" 22).

And it is that constant recreation of "new imagery" that perpetuates a vibrant and honest understanding of the world. Emerson believed that dogmatic thinking, and, more importantly, dogmatic language could corrupt the communion of man and spirit. This conviction is reflected in his assertion that true meaning is fleeting because it is
contextual and that understanding is based on point of view, which changes through time and depends on the reader/writer involved in the interpretive act. In "The Poet," he writes:

> But the quality of the imagination is to flow, and not to freeze. The poet did not stop at the color or the form, but read their meaning; neither may he rest in this meaning, but he makes the same objects exponents of his new thought. Here is the difference betwixt the poet and the mystic, that the last nails a symbol to one sense, which was a true sense for a moment, but soon becomes old and false. For all symbols are fluxional; all language is vehicular and transitive, and is good, as ferries and horses are, for conveyance, not as farms and houses are, for homestead. (260)

Perhaps detecting the potential foreclosure of change and the stagnation of creativity made possible by his pre-written, eternal text, Emerson locates the real force of language in the interpretive act. Various interpretations and symbols, he argues, "are equally good to the person to whom they are significant. Only they must be held lightly, and be very willingly translated into the equivalent terms which others use" ("The Poet" 260). And he blames religion for utilizing "too stark and solid" symbols to the detriment of the popular imagination. The most important role of the poet is to liberate the common man from a prison-house of stagnant thought: "Therefore we love the poet, the inventor, who in any form, whether in an ode or in an action or in looks and behavior, has yielded us a new thought. He unlocks our chains and admits us to a new scene" (259). The religious dogmatist, or "mystic" in Emerson's formulation, is dangerous because he creates a seemingly necessary, static link between sign and signified in an attempt to exercise control over language and thereby culture; whereas the poet, through a process Emerson refers to as "metamorphosis," is witness to a continually changing landscape of signification.

As Derrida would do over a century later, Emerson reverses the typical logic of Platonism and structuralism that positions language as a mere supplement to the world of things; rather, Emerson plays with the notion that things may stand for words or concepts.
Citing Swedenborg, whom Emerson found to "stand eminently for the translator of nature into thought" ("The Poet" 260), he describes the play of symbols he refers to as metamorphosis:

I don't know the man in history to whom things stood so uniformly for words. Before him the metamorphosis continually plays. Everything on which his eye rests, obeys the impulses of moral nature. The figs become grapes when he eats them. When some of his angels affirmed a truth, the laurel twig which they held blossomed in their hands. The noise which at a distance appeared like gnashing and thumping, on coming nearer was found to be the voice of disputants. ("The Poet" 260-261)

Language becomes a transcendent form through the play of the symbol, of metaphor, rather than any particular connection between things and the signs commonly attached to them. And the true poet is one who remains sensitive to the transitory nature of symbols and their crucial role in understanding. Emerson reifies the eternal Platonic forms of truth and beauty and, like Plato, he reacts against dogmatism and static meaning. But he does not believe that any attempt to capture truth and beauty in writing necessarily demeans them; rather, he suggests that truth and beauty reveal themselves through writing.

What emerges from "The Poet" is a repositioning of writing as not just a tool for understanding but as the process of understanding itself. Emerson's poet is more sensitive to the effects language and metaphor have on our understanding, and, in his poetry, he attempts to reveal truth and beauty through change and difference. Curiously, though, the role of the writer/author in Emerson's scheme is, familiarly, underplayed in the final analysis. Despite their characterization as "liberating gods" and the crucial role their works play in shaping culture, authors themselves are best when invisible, refined out of existence:

An imaginative book renders us much more service at first, by stimulating us through its tropes, than afterward when we arrive at the precise sense of the author. I think nothing is of any value in books excepting the transcendental and extraordinary. If a man is inflamed and carried away
by his thought, to that degree that he forgets the authors and the public and heeds only this one dream which holds him like an insanity, let me read his paper, and you may have all the arguments and histories and criticism. (259)

If a text is going to carry its readers away, it must not be marred with too pronounced an authorial presence. The prophet must be capable of erasing any trace of himself from his text. The theory of poetic composition that positions the poet as a conduit for God, Nature, or Beauty facilitates this erasure, since very little of the poet's own personality, beyond his genius for detecting these forces and recording their essence, is acknowledged in the final product, which presents itself as transcendent.

Wordsworth's and Emerson's descriptions of the poet are unmistakably influenced by their religious views, which explains their complicated dichotomies between man and the transcendent. But even Shelley's "A Defence of Poetry," in which the poet seems to answer only to himself, reveals an authority that is internal but still uncontrollable—the unconscious mind. Sean Burke argues that Shelley's essay inaugurates an internal source of inspiration and a rejection of external authority:

Rather than see inspiration in conflict with the originality of the work, Shelley affirmed a model of the poetic self generous enough to bound not only that which is given to it in consciousness but also those intuitions which arise unbidden from the unconscious....Like Sidney, Shelley accords the highest didactic worth to poetry, but diverges radically in asserting that this worth is independent of any external authority and derives from the fecundity of the creative imagination itself. (9)

Shelley depicts the poet himself as a sort of God, demonstrating the stature the author has gained by the Romantic period; this is particularly clear in his decision to incorporate Torquato Tasso's praise of the poet in his essay: "[Poetry] justifies that bold and true word of Tasso: 'Non merita nome di creatore, se non Iddio ed il Poeta'" [No one deserves the name of creator save only God and the poet] (760). For Shelley, as for Tasso, only the poet can do what God can do: create something out of nothing. Yet though he has the capacity for this power, he remains subject to the will of a mystifying
force. What Burke does not address in his brief summary of Shelley's "Defense" is the degree to which "the creative imagination," localized in the psyche of the individual poet though it may be, nevertheless appears out of the poet's control. While there may not be a properly external authority at work in Shelley's scheme, there remains a metaphysical, uncontrollable, even at times undetectable force guiding the poet; and, according to Shelley, poets are "compelled to serve the power which is seated upon the throne of their own soul" (762). In perhaps the most famous passage from the essay, Shelley describes a frenzied poet-conduit much like Plato's in the *Ion*:

> [Poets] measure the circumference and sound the depths of human nature with a comprehensive and all-penetrating spirit, and they are themselves perhaps the most sincerely astonished at its manifestations, for it is less their spirit than the spirit of the age. Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration, the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present, the words which express what they understand not; the trumpets which sing to battle, and feel not what they inspire: the influence which is moved not, but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the World" (50).

Shelley seems to have replaced God with Poetry and made poets the high priests of this new religion. But through his fidelity to "unapprehended inspiration" and "gigantic shadows" he ironically demeans the agency of the writer and the power of writing itself.

III. The Novelist Inherits the Metaphoric Mediation as Truth, The Ideal Real

Reinforcing Plato's depiction of the poet in the *Ion*, Romantic theories of transcendental inspiration perpetuate a mystification of the writing process and the role of authors themselves, who seem to be psychic mediums or conduits rather than craftsman. This was precisely Edgar Allan Poe's problem with popular Romantic depictions of the poet and his art in the mid nineteenth century; Poe, like other writers and theorists of his day, drifted away from the mystical theory of inspiration, preferring
instead to focus on the work-a-day toil of the writer. This attitude informs the thesis of his essay, "The Philosophy of Composition" (1846):

Most writers –poets in especial –prefer ecstatic intuition –and would positively shudder at letting the public take a peep behind the scenes, at the elaborate and vacillating crudities of thought –at the true purposes seized only at the last moment –at the innumerable matured fancies discarded in despair as unmanageable –at the cautious selections and rejections –at the painful erasures and interpolations –in a word, at the wheels and pinions –the tackle for scene-shifting –the step-ladders and demon-traps –the cock's feathers, the red paint and the black patches, which in ninety-nine cases out of the hundred, constitute the properties of the literary histrio. (1535)

What started with Plato's denigration of "possessed" poets who are out of their minds when they compose had become "ecstatic intuition," a comfortable veil for poets who believed in, or at least wanted to perpetuate, the image of the prophetic, spontaneous genius. "The fact is," Poe argues, "originality (unless in minds of very unusual force) is by no means a matter, as some suppose, of impulse or intuition. In general, to be found, it must be elaborately sought"(1539-40). Using himself as an example, Poe proceeds to describe the quite elaborate methods by which he toiled at completing "The Raven," revealing an almost scientific approach to rhyme and meter, climax and denouement that would have made Aristotle proud.

The relationship between literary creation and toil was certainly not new to the nineteenth century, though the Transcendentalists inspired Poe to remind us that writing was in fact work. Yet the association of writing with work was objectionable to many literary-minded folk since it not only de-romanticized the author-genius but also created a link between writing and the middle class, between writing and money. That literary writing could be a job was a fact made painfully clear by the increasing popularity of the novel, from the eighteenth and particularly into the nineteenth century. As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar suggested in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, the possibility that
writing could have such a practical application only emphasized the lower status of the novel and novelist:

That novel-writing was (and is) conceivably an occupation to live by has always, however, caused it to seem less intellectually or spiritually valuable than verse-writing, of all possible literary occupations the one to which the nineteenth century assigned the highest status. ...Verse-writing – associated with mysterious 'inspiration,' divine afflatus, bardic ritual –has traditionally been a holy vocation. From the Renaissance to the nineteenth century the poet had a privileged, almost magical role in most European societies, and 'he' had a quasi-priestly role after Romantic thinkers had appropriated the vocabulary of theology for the realm of aesthetics. (546)

Since the novelist was not credited with the artistic genius of the poet when he first emerged, he required the legitimizing effect of high-minded literary theory to gain stature. Subsequently, when theories regarding the English novel emerged, the categorization and evaluation of prose works involved culturally determined criteria, such as morality, truth and good taste, masquerading as objective realities.

Literary critics have very divergent ideas regarding the beginnings of the novel partly because of a dichotomy that is most often considered dubious. When the novel first began to receive critical attention, its writers and critics responded to the charge that fiction was inferior to poetry (evidenced by its lack of form and, more importantly, by its wide middle class appeal) by distancing the novel from the prose romance. The romance supposedly appealed to the lower classes and/or the immoral because it featured fantastic plots and unrealistic characters, and in this it was supposed the opposite of the novel, which was early-on defined as a serious-minded depiction of real life as it is lived. In The American Historical Romance, George Dekker explains that "...the novel/romance opposition is a legacy of Renaissance Humanism's hostility to artistic expressions of what it denounced as medieval monkish ignorance and superstition..." (16). He continues:

Although at its best this critique was inspired by a desire, at once scholarly and creative, to revive and nurture classical literary forms –especially the Homeric or Virgilian epic –it also received some prompting from two parties which otherwise took slight interest in belletristic endeavors. The
one, which we tend today to associate with "Puritanism" but which long antedated the Reformation, objected to the immoral influence of all of the more conspicuously mimetic forms of popular secular literature. The other, which reflected a new and increasingly dominant secular and scientific world view, materialist and skeptical in tendency, was suspicious of any representation of "reality" which stimulated the imagination excessively or which did not ring true to common experience and common sense. Although fundamentally opposed to each other, these great antagonists found a common enemy in romance and did not hesitate to use each other's and Humanism's arguments as well as their own. (16-17)

And writers of fiction who wanted to be viewed as serious artists distanced their work from the romance as much as possible by claiming fidelity to real life as it is lived. Though the term "novel" did not come into general usage until the end of the eighteenth century, the type of work later identified as the novel began its theoretical existence as fiction which was expressly not romance. When Henry Fielding and Samuel Richardson spoke of romance, it was with derision. Dekker alludes to the preface in the second volume of *Pamela*, which includes Richardson's hope that "...the Letters which compose this Part will be found equally written to NATURE, avoiding all romantic flights, improbable surprises, and irrational machinery; and the passions are touched, where requisite; and rules, equally new and practicable, inculcated throughout the whole, for the general conduct of life" (*Pamela* II, iv). For his part, Fielding complained that writers of romance demonstrated a distasteful excess of ego when they dared to create stories drawn entirely from their own imaginations "...without any assistance from Nature or History" (*Joseph Andrews* 258). Though novelists and critics would continue to define the novel against the romance for generations to come, the exact theoretical boundary between the two "genres" ultimately proves to be so unclear as to be practically useless. But the identification of the novel with realism and true life in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries indicated both a connection between literary theory and the modern philosophy of Descartes and Locke, and the influence of an educated elite who wanted to distinguish itself from the romance-reading public.
In his influential study *The Theory of the Novel*, George Lukacs states: "The novel is the epic of a world abandoned by God" (88). The anti-romantic, anti-transcendental stance of early novelists and their theoretical affinities with rationalist thought suggest a basis for Lukacs's claim. But just as annihilating the figure of the author in literary criticism fails to undermine all forms of authoritative discourse contained in the novel, removing God's influence from the creative process may only shift the site of authority. The novel's claim on realism is, of course, a form of authoritative discourse. "Modern Realism," explains Ian Watt in *The Rise of the Novel*, "...begins from the position that truth can be discovered by the individual through his senses... " (12). The effect of modern realist thinking on literary form was profound because, as Watt writes,

... the novel arose in the modern period, a period whose general intellectual orientation was most decisively separated from its classical and medieval heritage by its rejection –or at least its attempted rejection – of universals. ...Previous literary forms had reflected the general tendency of their cultures to make conformity to traditional practice the major test of truth: the plots of classical and renaissance epic, for example, were based on past history or fable, and the merits of the author's treatment were judged largely according to a view of literary decorum derived from the accepted models in the genre. This literary traditionalism was first and most fully challenged by the novel, whose primary criterion was truth to individual experience—individual experience which is always unique and therefore new. (Watt 13)

First expressed as an anti-traditional ethic emphasizing the personal, this most familiar version of realism nevertheless makes claims on truth which, by necessity, reflect a belief in objective realities and therefore suggest a generalization of human experience. The very concept of a widely agreed-upon truth implies cultural consensus and therefore countermands the personal. This focus on the truth of *individual* experience poses ideological problems for an era in which many literary theorists and, particularly, many literary critics were purporting to *inform* the reading public of what was true and real.
As literary theory and literary criticism bloomed in the nineteenth century, works of literature proliferated and literacy spread, critics interested in maintaining a cultural, largely class-based, hierarchy found it even more necessary to distinguish between high and low artistry. Yet since the theoretical trend was to reject purely religious explanations of how and where truth could be found in favor of more humanist schemes, there arose a need to replace the authority of divine inspiration with something more practical, an authority that could proceed via argument and examples. "Good taste" became one authority, though the role of taste and its arbiter, the literary critic, was widely debated among respected author/critics of the nineteenth century. Emerson made the following remarks in "The Poet," which begins:

Those who are esteemed umpires of taste are often persons who have acquired some knowledge of admired pictures or sculptures, and have an inclination for whatever is elegant; but if you inquire whether they are beautiful souls, and whether their own acts are like fair pictures, you learn that they are selfish and sensual. Their cultivation is local, as if you should rub a log of dry wood in one spot to produce fire, all the rest remaining cold. (241)

And despite his posture as critic in much of his work, Wordsworth expressed disdain toward literary critics in general, whom he is said to have considered mischievous. In "The Function of Literary Criticism at the Present Time," Matthew Arnold cites one of Wordsworth's letters in which critics are impugned; of literary reviews, Wordsworth wrote, "The writers in these publications, while they prosecute their inglorious employment, can not be supposed to be in a state of mind very favourable for being affected by the finer influences of a thing so pure as genuine poetry" ("The Function" 1002). Furthermore, Wordsworth considered "taste" to be one of the most dubious cultural qualifiers. In the "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface," he argues that the concept of culturally determined taste arises out of laziness and a lack of passion on the part of a people who no longer value the interactive, personal experience of art. Initially,
Wordsworth wants to reclaim "taste" for the individual poet and to distance the concept from the cultural elite he identified with literary critics. He writes, "...every author, as far as he is great and at the same time original, has had the task of creating the taste by which he is to be enjoyed: so has it been so will it continue to be" ("Essay" 814). As part of this task, the poet must break "the bonds of custom" (815). By adhering to the whims of a widely determined taste, the poet appeals to a readership too apathetic to involve their selves in the appreciation of art. Wordsworth argues:

[Taste] is a metaphor, taken from a passive sense of the human body, and transferred to things which are in their essence not passive—to intellectual acts and operations. The word Imagination has been overstrained, from impulses honourable to mankind, to meet the demands of the faculty which is perhaps the noblest of our nature. In the instance of Taste, the process has been reversed; and from the prevalence of dispositions at once injurious and discreditable, being no other than that selfishness which is the child of apathy—which, as Nations decline in productive and creative power, makes them value themselves upon a presumed refinement of judging. Poverty of language is the primary cause of the use which we make of the word Imagination; but the word Taste has been stretched to the sense which it bears in modern Europe by habits of self-conceit, inducing that inversion in the order of things whereby a passive faculty is made paramount among the faculties conversant with the fine arts. (815)

Clearly, Wordsworth feared that literary critics and the concept of "good taste" threatened to destroy the very personal reading experience by dictating what and how to read.

Later nineteenth century theorists and critics used "taste" (along with the qualifier "good") to defend the artistic and social caste systems threatened by the rise of literacy. To insure that popular opinion did not dominate in a world bereft of supernatural guidance, the cultural elite cast literary good taste as something more legitimate than a subjective picking and choosing; thus the nebulous but rhetorically powerful concepts of idealized truth, beauty and reality were maintained as the fundamental properties of good writing and high art in general, and literary critics took on the task of identifying art that demonstrated these characteristics. In "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time"
(1864), Arnold's elitist tone reflects this emphasis on high culture. Like the poet in Wordsworth's, Emerson's and Shelley's schemes, Arnold's critic serves the necessary function of directing readers toward what is true and beautiful in the world, yet the common man was never his romanticized poster-child. Arnold had nothing but disdain for the "Philistines" of the uncultivated middle class, who, he suggests in the essay, are so unaware of truth and beauty that their ignorance threatens the very existence of high culture. For Arnold, the respectable critic operates independent of the masses and cannot be influenced by politics or what he calls "the practical spirit": "Criticism must maintain its independence of the practical spirit and its aims. Even with well-meant efforts of the practical spirit it must express dissatisfaction, if in the sphere of the ideal they seem impoverishing and limiting" (1015). Echoing Wordsworth, Arnold expresses a fear that literary critics working en masse may lose sight of the truth and be seduced by popular notions. But while Wordsworth seemed afraid that the critic would undermine the personal element of art, Arnold suggests that the common man needs to be rescued from his depraved personal taste: "The mass of mankind will never have any ardent zeal for seeing things as they are; very inadequate ideas will always satisfy them. On these inadequate ideas reposes, and must repose, the general practice of the world" (1013). But the literary critic should belong to that elite group whose good taste enables them to shepherd the masses toward what is truthful and beautiful. Arnold continues:

...whoever sets himself to see things as they are will find himself one of a very small circle; but it is only by this small circle resolutely doing its own work that adequate ideas will ever get current at all. The rush and roar of practical life will always have a dizzying and attracting effect upon the most collected spectator, and tend to draw him into its vortex; most of all will this be the case where that life is so powerful as it is in England. But it is only by remaining collected, and refusing to lend himself to the point of view of the practical man, that the critic can do the practical man any service; and it is only by the greatest sincerity in pursuing his own course, and by at last convincing even the practical man of his sincerity, that he can escape misunderstandings which perpetually threaten him. For the practical man is not apt for fine distinctions, and yet in these distinctions
truth and the highest culture greatly find their account. (my emphasis, 1013-14)

These sentiments were not peculiar to British literary critics/theorists; William Dean Howells dismissed the popular novel by declaring the majority of novel readers to be idiots in his lecture, "Novel-Writing and Novel-Reading: An Impersonal Explanation." That his audience was a clearly defined fraternity of the upper class, or at least an educated elite, is made obvious by his tone: "I can only whisper, in strict confidence, that by far the greatest number of people in the world, even the civilized world, are people of weak and childish imagination" ("Novel-Writing" 237). For Howells, as for other British and American critics of the age, men of taste were needed to rescue literature from the depraved masses who desperately needed guidance if they were ever to discover truth. And truth, in this case, had both philosophical and moral implications.

Just as Edgar Allen Poe associates truth with morality, and both with prose, in "The Philosophy of Composition," nineteenth century literary reviewers interested in developing criteria for the successful novel often judged novels by the degree to which they reflected "truthfulness" and moral rectitude through the characters and situations they depicted. In Novels, Readers, and Reviewers: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America, Nina Baym found "truth" to be an essential ingredient in the artful novel for antebellum critics. Perhaps ironically, novels were judged superior by critics if they sacrificed plot in the name of ideas and moral principles. Baym observes:

...between (say) 1820 and 1860, reviews increasingly asked questions about the views of life contained in a novel and judged novels as superior when their views accorded with a vision of a morally governed universe. This judgmental strategy was continually in tension with the idea of the novel as an artistic form as well as with the dynamic principle of plot as the novel's formal essence. It was also the chief source of disagreement between reviewers and readers at large, as critics strove to make novels "better" by praising those that were "serious," while readers apparently continued to buy and read novels that simply told stories and consequently provided more immediate pleasure and entertainment. (24)
This trend reinforced the concept of the low-art popular work of fiction (initially characterized as romance) versus the bourgeois novel of "truth" and "reality" (associated with high moral standards). Much literary theory in the late nineteenth century reinforced the association of an idealized, "truthful" reality with good taste and morality. K. K. Sharma argues that "...before Flaubert and James, theoretical novel-criticism was mostly mimetic in nature and moral in tone, and mimesis was only the means to achieve the end –viz. morality" (Sharma 1). Alternative theories of realism in the eighteenth and nineteenth century removed the moral component, claiming that it was absurd to associate "real" life with culturally imposed order. According to Ian Watt, early French Realists "...asserted that if their novels tended to differ from the more flattering pictures of humanity presented by many established ethical, social, and literary codes, it was merely because they were the product of a more dispassionate and scientific scrutiny of life than had ever been attempted before" (The Rise of the Novel 11). In "Realism Reconsidered," George Levine argues that English realists believed they were representing life most accurately when their novels advocated a moral ethic because they believed in a necessary relationship between the real and the good:

Realism, like any literary method, reflects both inherited conventions and a way of looking at the world, a metaphysic, as it were. It implies certain assumptions about the nature of the real world... English realism, the type with which I will be most directly concerned, tended, moreover, to assume that the real is both meaningful and good, while French realism has consistently tended away from such moral assumptions to lead more directly to the notion of an indifferent universe and to that even more specialized kind of realism, naturalism. (238)

Baym's analyses of antebellum literary reviews bears-out Levine's claim –building on the English model, novels in America were considered realistic when they were also morally good. And Baym does not fail to recognize the pernicious effect of this truth test. Commenting on a Harpers reviewer who, in 1860, hailed "true" novels that depict "the characters and circumstances which surround us all, and with which we are most
Baym writes, "He takes for granted that [the novel's] 'we' speaks for 'us all,' and that what we-all see around us every day is the real" (Baym 168). She continues:

This is not the same as saying that people are interested in books about people like themselves, a statement that would recognize experiential pluralism and the gap between human perception and the constitution of reality. It is a far more arrogant assertion, advocating, albeit unawares, the truthful novel as an agent of cultural indoctrination, of instruction. ...the novel, which appears historically as an occasion for self-gratification and pleasure, is being conscripted by the reviewing establishment as an agent of social control. When we remember that the great population of novel readers was thought to consist of the less educated, and to be concentrated among the young and especially the female, we might interpret all these gestures as support for a stable patriarchy. (168-170)

Of course, to approach literary criticism (or any art criticism) from a relativistic point of view whereby individual works appeal to individual people is to undermine both the authority of the literary critic and the status of the cultural elite, for whom the designation of "high" and "low" art is both a reification of their elevated station and a reinforcement of their value system reflected in that art. This link between reality and goodness only underscores the degree to which the very concepts of morality, truth and reality are utterly ideological, things which are produced by culture and remain highly subjective; this is the central irony of realism.

In "Writing and the Novel," Barthes describes this belief in a reality which surrounds us all as a "mythology of the universal typifying the bourgeois society of which the Novel is a characteristic product" (95). He continues:

...it involves giving to the imaginary the formal guarantee of the real, but while preserving in the sign the ambiguity of a double object, at once believable and false. This operation occurs constantly in the whole of Western art, in which the false is equal to the true, not through any agnosticism or poetic duplicity, but because the true is supposed to contain a germ of the universal... (95)

This is the lie to which literary realism owes its form, a lie which is completely innocent except when it masquerades as the truth as it does in many theoretical approaches to the
realist novel in English. "The history of the novel in English from Defoe to the present," argues George Levine, "reveals the dominance of 'lying' in the convention of realism itself" ("Realism Reconsidered" 243). Supposed fidelity to the truth was a central aspect of the novel form from its inception, though literary theory regarding the novel changed radically toward the end of the nineteenth century.

When two of the most influential American literary critics of the later nineteenth century, William Dean Howells and Henry James, theorized the novel, they used a similar, familiar vocabulary, but their views differed in important ways. Since both men were concerned with the elevation of the novel form, they often describe an idealized form of fiction that strives for truth and beauty. Their critical works reveal an enduring emphasis on good taste and an increasing interest in the relationship between fiction and history as another strategy for elevating the novel, but where Howells adheres to the principles of realism, James takes the theory of fiction in a more complicated direction, one that would profoundly shape novel theory in the twentieth century.

In his lecture, "Novel-Writing and Novel-Reading: An Impersonal Explanation" (1899), Howells devotes much of his attention to a taxonomy of the various forms of fiction. Predictably, he addresses the subject of the romance, but since he cannot bring himself to denigrate Hawthorne, "Mrs. Shelley," Robert Louis Stevenson or Adelbert von Chamisso, Howells must sub-divide the category of romance and declare that while "the romance is of as great purity of intention as the novel," "romanticistic novels," on the other hand, are abhorrent because they exist on the border-line between the romance and the novel (237). While the romance "deals with life allegorically and not representatively," the "romanticistic" novel "professes like the real novel to portray actual life, but it does this with an excess of drawing and coloring which are false to nature... It seeks effect rather than truth; and endeavors to hide in a cloud of incident the deformity and artificiality of its creations. It revels in the extravagant, the unusual and the bizarre" (237). Although Howells's lecture does not overtly expound on morality, the tone of his
argument suggests that he rejects romanticistic novels because he considers them depraved and thus untruthful. In his collection of critical essays, "Criticism and Fiction" (1891), Howells condemns "pseudo-realists" who "are the worst offenders" because they "sin against the living" (316). Howells's comments echo those made by Fielding and Richardson a century before. And, of course, he points out that "romanticistic" novels are the most popular—a fact which, to Howells, indicates that they must be inferior.

When describing the good novel, Howells reiterates the "truth test" Baym witnessed in earlier literary reviews:

I conceive that apart from all the clamor about schools of fiction is the question of truth, how to get it in, so that it may get itself out again as beauty, the divinely living thing, which all men love and worship. So I make truth the prime test of a novel. If I do not find that it is like life, then it does not exist for me as art; it is ugly, it is ludicrous, it is impossible. ...The truth which I mean, the truth which is the only beauty, is truth to the human experience... ("Novel-Writing" 235-6)

Howells's religious tone and his suggestion that "all men" have a common bond in their love of beauty complicates his over-arching claim that novels must be, above all, realistic and modeled on real human experience unless you read his essay against the backdrop of the English/American association of the real and the good. And that is precisely Howells's backdrop. In "Criticism and Fiction," Howells suggests that living in the age of reason has caused the general populace to develop a more mature approach to life and a greater sense of morality. They are not only able to approach taboo subjects with scientific scrutiny rather than morbid fascination, but they also behave better in general:

The manners of the novel have been improving with those of its readers; that is all. Gentlemen no longer swear or fall drunk under the table, or abduct young ladies and shut them up in country houses, or so habitually set about the ruin of the neighbors' wives, as they once did. Generally now people call a spade an agricultural implement; they have grown comparatively decent; there is no doubt about that. They require of a novelist whom they respect unquestionable proof of his seriousness, if he proposes to deal with certain phases of life; they require a sort of scientific decorum. He can no longer expect to be received on the ground of
entertainment only; he assumes a higher function, something like that of a physician or a priest, and they expect him to be bound by laws as sacred as those of such professions; they hold him solemnly pledged not to betray them or abuse their confidence. (344)

A novelist, then, is charged with protecting and promoting the moral and spiritual health of her readers, who look to fiction to reinforce their real, morally superior situation in life. Though this seems quite a burden, Howells muses that this mission is infinitely superior to its opposite, the promotion of debauchery, which is practiced by French novelists in particular ("Criticism" 342).

Taking not quite the opposite but still a very different tack, James rejected the classification of fiction into types. In fact, in "The Art of Fiction" (1884), he suggests that critics employing the division novel/romance often do so out of intellectual laziness:

The novel and the romance, the novel of incident and that of character – these clumsy separations appear to me to have been made by critics and readers for their own convenience, and to help them out of some of their occasional queer predicaments, but to have little reality or interest for the producer, from whose point of view it is of course that we are attempting to consider the art of fiction. (439)

While he may not have considered himself a realist as opposed to a romanticist, James did argue that novels should reflect human experience and, most importantly, be truthful. He emphasized the importance of realism in fiction by linking novel-writing with historiography. In "The Art of Fiction," James considers it the novelist's duty to present his story as history (in other words, to participate in the lie). He charges novelists who call attention to the fictional nature of their novels with "a betrayal of a sacred office" (433). Such a revelation is "a terrible crime" because, he argues: "It implies that the novelist is less occupied in looking for the truth (the truth, of course I mean, that he assumes, the premises that we must grant him, whatever they may be), than the historian, and in doing so it deprives him at a stroke of all of his standing-room" (433). In this essay, James's approach to truth in the novel is quite complicated. He stresses the
subjective nature of truth ("the truth...that he assumes") while identifying the novelist with the historian, a connection that links our perception of reality with the attempt to record events "objectively." Since James believed that the substance of novels should be derived from real human experience, he viewed the novelist as a type of historian. What the novelist can do that the historian cannot is depict human life in such detail and with such feeling that the broader questions about human existence (such as the philosopher would pose) can be considered.

This link between fiction and history epitomized the great novel for Howells as well, who contends, "The historical form, though it involves every contradiction, every impossibility, is the only form which can fully represent any passage of life in its inner and outer entirety. It alone leaves nothing untouched, nothing unsearched. It is the primal form of fiction; it is epic" ("Novel-Writing" 249). Like James, Howells argues that novelists should play the part of historians in every way in order to achieve perfection: "If, then, [the novelist] could work entirely in the historian's spirit, and content himself and his reader with conjecture as to his people's motives and with report of them from hearsay, I should not call this form impure or imperfect" (248). For both James and Howells, every effort to blur the line between fiction and history elevates the novel by making it seem to represent life truthfully, which is "the only reason for the existence of the novel," according to James (432). But James's and Howells's theories of the novel take different paths when they turn to questions of creative process and the representation of truth.

James and Howells both compare the novelist to the painter. Such analogies were ubiquitous in nineteenth-century literary reviews, according to Baym, and they reveal a conceptualization of the novel that emphasizes mimesis and at the same time enables critics to avoid the difficult questions about how writing achieves this supposed realism. The vocabulary of painting and other visual media such as the daguerreotype enabled reviewers to judge the relative success of novels without addressing conflicting
perceptions of reality or the complicated nature of the writing process itself. Baym writes:

Besides downplaying plot and the emotional responses it engendered, talking about novels as though they were pictures obscured or mystified such other elements of fiction as style and characterization, producing criticism that praised a novel for representational fidelity without providing any clue to how that fidelity had been achieved. To some degree this was a useful strategy in that it enabled reviewers to avoid grappling with the basic question of how non-linguistic experience or existence (putting aside for the moment the matter of whether anything can be experienced without language) can fairly be represented through it. (Novels, Readers and Reviewers 153)

Baym further suggests that realism itself created this ideological dilemma, since works that claim to be representational beg the question of how literary representation is successfully achieved. However, to grapple with this question, one would have to reveal art "as artifice" and thus make the novel seem "less real" (154). Avoiding the more complicated questions about ideology and the writing process allowed reviewers to fulfill two desires, according to Baym: "...first, to separate novels from their powerful emotional affect in favor of a more measured, intellectual response; second, to enforce through the novel a particular idea of reality and the human situation within it. ...the use of painterly rhetoric left the novel's lifelike illusion undisturbed" (154).

When Howells uses the language of visual art in "Novel-Writing and Novel-Reading," he assumes that objective reality is something that a novelist (and his or her good readers) can empirically identify and communicate in writing. In Howells's scheme, writers and readers possessing good taste and "self-knowledge" have such a refined facility with language that the medium is rendered almost invisible and utterly clear communication takes place. He uses an analogy to painting to explain this clarity:

After all, and when the artist has given his whole might to the realization of his ideal, he will have only an effect of life. I think the effect is like that in those cycloramas where up to a certain point there is real ground and real grass, and then carried indivisibly on to the canvas the best that the
painter can do to imitate real ground and real grass. We start in our novels with something we have known of life, that is, with life itself; and then we go on and imitate what we have known of life. If we are very skillful and very patient we can hide the joint. But the joint is always there, and on one side of it are real ground and real grass, and on the other are the painted images of ground and grass. I do not believe that there was ever any one who longed more strenuously or endeavored more constantly to make the painted ground and grass exactly like the real, than I have done in my cycloramas. ("Novel-Writing" 241)

In "Criticism and Fiction," Howells uses a similar analogy wherein he compares a "wire and card-board" grasshopper to its real counterpart. He suggests that writers who look to the classics (or the "ideal," fabricated grasshopper) for their inspiration betray the true mission of art, which is to represent real life (the real grasshopper). The real artist, he claims, will "reject the ideal grasshopper wherever he finds it, in science, in literature, in art, because it is not 'simple, natural, and honest,' because it is not like a real grasshopper" ("Criticism" 301). Though his aim is to reject the ideal in favor of the real, Howells never considers the degree to which the concepts of simplicity, nature, and honesty, not forgetting "the real," are idealized through their reification in realism.

Howells concedes that, in his time, the novelist has yet to achieve his ultimate goal, which is to help readers "understand the real world through his faithful effigy of it; or, as I have said before, to arrange a perspective for you with everything in its proper relation and proportion to everything else, and this so manifest that you cannot err in it however myopic or astigmatic you may be" ("Novel-Writing" 249). In other words, Howells awaits the novelist who is such a master of language and the form that every reader imaginable would not only be moved by the novel but would also come to a greater understanding of the world through his or her complete, uncomplicated identification with, and understanding of the novel. Though he laments the failure of the novelist to fulfill his "supreme office" and though he spends many paragraphs trying to describe precisely what makes the perfect novel, novelist and reader, Howells never addresses the possible incapacity of language itself to effect a transparent and perfect
picture of life. He continually attributes this failure to the author, and he expresses an 
earnest faith that novel-writing and novel-reading will evolve to a point at which the 
theory will perfectly represent life. Howells makes this fantastic claim despite hints in his 
text that he is mindful of the role language itself, or "the joint," plays in the creative 
process. One such hint reveals itself in Howells's contradictory statements regarding 
authorial intention. Though readers of good taste can "seize with exquisite intelligence" 
the author's intention in a novel, authorial intention does not ultimately determine the 
evolution or final shape of the novel, since:

...there is so much which is unintentional and involuntary, that one might 
very well believe one's self inspired if one did not know better. For 
instance, each novel has a law of its own, which it seems to create for 
its own. Almost from the beginning it has its peculiar temperament and 
quality, and if you happen to be writing that novel you feel that you must 
respect its law. You, who are master of the whole affair, cannot violate its 
law without taking its life. It may grow again, but it will be of another 
generation and another allegiance. No more can you change the name of a 
character without running the great risk of affecting its vital principle; and 
by the way where do one's characters get their names? They mostly 
appear with their names on, an integral part of themselves. This is very 
curious but it does not evince inspiration. It merely suggests that the 
materials which the imagination deals with are not fluid, not flexible, not 
ductile; but when they have once taken form have a plaster of paris fixity, 
which is scarcely more subject to the author's will than the reader's. (242)

Like Poe before him, Howells rejects the notion that the author is inspired because of the 
mythical, romantic connotations such theories evoke. But Howells's extended 
personification of the novel in this passage establishes a metaphysic that belies his own 
attitudes to demystify the creative process. For Howells, the author is not the captive 
conduit of some external force. Instead, he fathers uncontrollable self-willed entities that 
spring fully-formed from his mind, already inhabited by characters with predetermined 
names. Howells suggests that those creatures of the imagination can absent both the 
author and the reader from the meaning-making process. He continues:
I hope this is not very mystical for I hate anything of that sort, and would have all in plain day if I could. The most I will allow is that the mind fathers creatures which are apparently as self-regulated as any other offspring. They are the children of a given mind; they bear a likeness to it; they are qualified by it; but they seem to have their own life and their own being apart from it. Perhaps this is allowing a good deal. (242)

Clearly, Howells is painfully aware that this passage is mystical. Like literary theorists before him, he could not fully articulate his theory of the creative process without this attempt to explain the lack of control over language he experiences when he writes. Since the external force that has such an impact on the process in Howells's scheme is a self-governed writing rather than the muse or some other familiar, spiritual inspirational model, Howells tries to mask its mystical quality, rather unsuccessfully. Like Wordsworth in "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface," Howells gives language itself agency and depicts the writing and reading experience as a battle of three wills: those of the author, the reader and the novel. By constantly lamenting the failure of the novelist to achieve that perfect, truthful representation of life, Howells unwittingly expresses frustration with language processes that will never refine themselves out of existence, no matter how talented the novelist may be.

Howells never makes a full account of this brief, unconsciously proto-poststructuralist theory of the self-willed novel. Instead, in his utter devotion to the cause of realism, he suppresses the mysticism of the "third will" thesis and asserts his belief that the novel will some day depict real life truthfully and transparently through perfect, unhampered communication between the author and reader. This goal inspires Howells's choice of the historical novel as the highest form, for he believes that when fiction is presented as history, it is somehow purer than fiction. Howells praises the historical novel as "the form which is the least artistic, is the least artificial; the novel of historic form is the novel par excellence; all other forms are clever feats in fiction, literary, conscious" (249). The novel's resemblance to history derives from its subject matter – human experience. And, ironically, Howells praises the historical novel for its lack of
artistry because he believes that the artist's foremost task is to derive his fiction from human experience and not from his imagination. Howells claims, "It is a well ascertained fact concerning the imagination that it can work only with the stuff of experience. It can absolutely create nothing; it can only compose" (236). This hearkens back to the creative limitations imposed by Wordsworth in his Preface to "Lyrical Ballads." And like the Wordsworth of the "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface," Howells argues that the ultimate success of a work depends on the reader's ability to identify its greatness by recognizing its truth. "For the reader," Howells claims, "the only test of a novel's truth is his own knowledge of life. Is it like what he has seen or felt? Then it is true, and for him it cannot otherwise be true, that is to say beautiful" (236). Though Howells seems to be suggesting that a novel's success or failure fluctuates with respect to the reader, such is not the case, for Howell's leaves no room for doubt or subjective fancy when he declares novelists such as Dickens to be abysmal. Indeed, readers who appreciate novels that do not appear to Howells to be true are victims of "bad taste" in his opinion (236). The end result of the limitations Howells places on art is that taste, cultivated in readers from similar stations in life who share experiences, becomes the ultimate determiner of the success or failure of a novel because only men of taste recognize and value truth. To be successful, the novelist must have a like-minded, assenting audience. And when these conditions are met, the communication between the author and reader is utterly transparent because it is truth. Howells argues that there are readers who "distinctly know who [the author] is and what he has written" and can therefore "seize with exquisite intelligence his lightest and slightest intention in a book" (239). Howells wants the historical novel to be so like true life that the reader can make a seamless, almost unnoticed transition from life to the page, and it is the novelist's charge to make it so. This impossible task seems to become much easier when you consider your audience to be very much like yourself.
James wrote "The Art of Fiction" in 1884, presumably fifteen years before Howells delivered the "Novel-Writing" lecture. However, the argument presented in "The Art of Fiction" reads like a response to many of the central tenets of realism later articulated by Howells. Furthermore, James reiterated the main theses of "The Art of Fiction" in later essays such as "The Future of the Novel" (1899), which is contemporaneous with Howells's lecture. James's expressed desire in "The Art of Fiction" is to free aspiring novelists from restraints imposed by critics eager to describe the perfect novel and novelist. Though James argues that novels should be truthful, he depicts the writing and reading processes and the determination of a novel's truthfulness as highly subjective. His dedication to the project of realism is tentative, partly because he has a much more complicated notion of reality:

The characters, the situation, which strike one as real will be those that touch and interest one most, but the measure of reality is very difficult to fix.... It goes without saying that you will not write a good novel unless you possess the sense of reality; but it will be difficult to give you a recipe for calling that sense into being. Humanity is immense, and reality has a myriad of forms... (436)

I needn't remind you that there are all sorts of tastes... I am quite at a loss to imagine anything (at any rate in this matter of fiction) that people ought to like or to dislike. Selection will be sure to take care of itself, for it has a constant motive behind it. That motive is simply experience. As people feel life, so they will feel the art that is most closely related to it. (440)

Using such phrases as "it goes without saying" and "I needn't remind you," James insinuates that these facts are obvious and uncomplicated, and he seems ready to declare art appreciation largely subjective. After all, at the very end of the essay, James argues that "the only condition" he can think to attach to a novel is that it be "sincere" (444). Elaborating on this theme in "The Future of the Novel," James argues:

[The novel] can do simply everything and that is its strength and its life...there is nothing we can mention as a consideration outside itself with which it must square, nothing we can name as one of its peculiar...
obligations or interdictions. It must, of course, hold our attention and reward it, it must not appeal on false pretenses; but these necessities, with which, obviously, disgust and displeasure interfere, are not peculiar to it—all works of art have them in common. (339-340)

James takes a pluralistic, liberal view regarding the potential of the novel, which is not to say that he found all novels appealing. His tone is less condescending than Howells's, but James also bemoans the depravity of the popular novel in "The Art of Fiction." Though he cannot imagine anything "people ought to like or dislike," he concurs with the general feeling among canonized aesthetes that many novels appeal to the lowest appetites of the common man ("The Art of Fiction" 440). James insists that the novel is "as free and as serious a branch of literature as any other," yet he worries that the abundance of bad novels may cause one to doubt that fact:

Certainly this might sometimes be doubted in the presence of the enormous number of works of fiction that appeal to the credulity of our generation, for it might easily seem that there could be no great character in a commodity so quickly and easily produced. It must be admitted that good novels are much compromised by bad ones, and that this injury is only superficial, and that the superabundance of written fiction proves nothing against the principle itself. It has been vulgarised, like all other kinds of literature, like everything else today, and it has proved more than some kinds accessible to vulgarisation. (434)

Clearly when James argues that novels can "do anything," his hope is that they will do nothing without intelligence, dignity and a bit of moral rectitude. But despite this hint that he found "everything" vulgarized in the mid nineteenth century, he nevertheless wanted good novels to be based on life experience.

Like Howells, James considers experience the only true inspiration for the novelist, but he specifically qualifies what he means by experience, giving the term a much broader definition than Howells and suggesting, contrary to Howells, that the novelist's imagination plays a crucial role in shaping those experiences. James's approach to experience is structuralist rather than empirical. He does refer to the novel-writing process as a matter of collecting evidence, but novelists use a combination of experience
and imagination to do so, and they do not have to experience particular events in order to
write convincingly of them. He cites the example of a novelist who wrote of "the nature
and way of life of the French Protestant youth," though her only contact with French
Protestant youths consisted of a passing glance (437). She was able to do this because, as
James points out, "She knew what youth was, and what Protestantism; she also had the
advantage of having seen what it was to be French, so that she converted these ideas into
a concrete image and produced a reality" (437). The talented author can write truthfully
"from experience," piecing together composite sketches based on her knowledge of broad
categories (i.e. youth, Protestantism, French). While this method sounds logical, almost
scientific, James did not believe that your average novelist employing that method would
succeed. Like his predecessors, James characterized the great novelist as a genius, and he
did not shy away from "mystical" descriptions of that genius, as he reveals in his
definition of experience:

What kind of experience is intended, and where does it begin and end? Experience is never limited, and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spiderweb of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness, and catching every airborne particle in its tissue. It is the very atmosphere of the mind; and when the mind is imaginative—much more when it happens to be that of a man of genius—it takes to itself the faintest hints of life, it converts the very pulses of the air into revelations. (436)

James's "man of genius" sounds suspiciously like a prophet whose special abilities compel him to write. But James's mysticism reflects a burgeoning interest in psychological processes, rather than a belief in transcendental inspiration. By defining experience broadly, James maintains the realist creed that life experience is the principal inspiration for the novelist even as he grants the novelist qualified imaginative freedom.

In keeping with the nineteenth century critical tradition, James employs an analogy between novel-writing and visual arts in "The Art of Fiction" to stress the mimetic nature of both. Novelists are not only philosophers and historians but painters
who use words to create their images; James writes, "...as the picture is reality, so the
novel is history" (433). But James is just as interested in the act of seeing as he is in the
accuracy or realism of the image depicted. In his prefaces to the New York editions of
his works, analogies to the visual arts reveal the complexity of his approach to the
creative process. "Seeing" proves extremely important to James's literary theory because
of his emphasis on personal experience and his aesthetic, which is ultimately based on
point of view. His well-known "house of fiction" metaphor famously employs a theory
of artistic vision that is both pluralized and intensely personal, since there is "not one
window, but a million—a number of possible windows not to be reckoned, rather; every
one of which has been pierced, or is still pierceable, in its vast front, by the need of the
individual vision and the pressure of the individual will" (Prefaces 46). While each
perspective offers the same opportunity for fulfillment, viewers have diverse capabilities;
the true artist not only sees differently but sees more completely:

   He and his neighbors are watching the same show, but one seeing more
   where the other sees less, one seeing black where the other sees white, one
   seeing big where the other sees small, one seeing coarse where the other
   sees fine. And so on, and so on; there is fortunately no saying on what,
   for the particular pair of eyes, the window may not open; "fortunately" by
   reason, precisely, of this incalculability of range. (Prefaces 46)

Like Wordsworth and Emerson before him, James suggests that the artist is more open,
more receptive than the average man, but though James emphasizes the imaginative
power of the artist throughout his works, he enters into the same paradox evident in both
Wordsworth's and Emerson's critiques of the poet: the artist may possess an
extraordinary imagination, but his function, ultimately, is to record, not to invent. Later
in the prefaces, James writes:

   The person capable of feeling in the given case more than another of what
   is to be felt for it, and so serving in the highest degree to record it
dramatically and objectively, is the only sort of person on whom we can
count not to betray, to cheapen or, as we say, give away, the value and
beauty of the thing. (Prefaces 67)
As Dorothy Hale observes in *Social Formalism: The Novel Theory from James to the Present*, James requires just two things of the novelist, sincerity and wonderment. It is the artist's ability to experience wonderment that makes him sensitive to the artistic subject and able to record that subject without imposing his own view. "Paradoxically," Hale writes, "the artist who most fully conveys this vibration of wonder to the reader is the least personal... A superior sensibility is revealed precisely to the degree that it 'records' 'dramatically and objectively,' without, that is, the self-interest that would interfere with the appreciation of the subject's virtues" (29-30). Hale continues:

> In the prefaces, it seems, James outlines two competing ideals of novelistic authorship: on the one hand, the successful novelist is the one who most transparently expresses his unique "impression" of life; on the other hand, the successful novelist is the one who does not allow his own views to prevent life from making its "impression" on him. In the first case, the novelist is best when he projects his views; in the second, when he refuses to project them. (*Social Formalism* 27)

Hale argues that James attempts to reconcile these opposing views by elaborating his theory of point of view. For James, when the artist "converts the very pulses of air into revelations," he is actually revealing the latent possibilities already inherent in the artistic subject rather than creating or changing that subject. By employing point of view, the artist does not in fact rely on any subjective qualities of his own other than his special ability to bring-out the beauty and wonder of his subject. Citing the prefaces, Hale writes, "Indeed, the workshop of the artist's imagination is nothing other than the 'quarter in which his subject most completely expresses itself'" (*Social Formalism* 34). Just as Wordsworth felt that it is the poet's unique ability to work with the poetic form, and figurative language in particular, *rather than his power of invention* which allows the poet to capture and translate beauty and truth, James depicted the novelist as the same kind of imaginative arranger.
James's influence on twentieth century novel theory was profound. His formalist approach to the novel de-emphasized morality and dramatic content, the focus of most novel criticism that pre-dates his influence. He is credited with inspiring what would become one of the most compelling debates in twentieth century novel theory, the concept of "showing vs. telling" advocated by Percy Lubbock, Ford Madox Ford, the New Critics, and others; and challenged by Wayne Booth, Gerard Genette, Barthes, feminist critique and many, many others. James himself seems a wholehearted advocate of "showing" (the mode in which the author/narrator is utterly absent in the text in the name of objectivity) rather than "telling" (when the author intrudes via direct narratorial participation or, as the critiques of the showing/telling binary suggest, what occurs in any text since all texts bear the imprint of their authors). James believed that art's only reason for existence is the representation of real life, and he believed that novels best accomplish this feat when the novelist exercises his special ability to exhibit the wonder of life without leaving an authorly residue. But what appears ironic to a twenty-first-century reader is his simultaneous emphases on objectivity and point of view, since for the latter-half of the twentieth century literary critics used point of view to highlight radical subjectivity and to deconstruct the myth of objective truth. But for James, the difference between subjective and objective truth seems almost irrelevant, since truth is made available only through the artistic object when it is recreated by the artist. The novelist must strive for an "air of reality" and all novelistic effects succeed only so much as they contribute to the novel's "illusion of life" ("The Art of Fiction" 437). "It is here," James contends, "in very truth that [the novelist] competes with life; it is here that he competes with his brother the painter in his attempt to render the look of things, the look that conveys their meaning, to catch the colour, the relief, the expression, the surface, the substance of the human spectacle" (437). Just as Wordsworth had done almost a century before, James challenges the artist to depict life better than life itself. He introduces the subjective lens of the author only to polish that lens to the point of rosy transparency.
James's novel theory differs from Howells's and from the doctrines of realism precisely when the author emerges as a crucial mediator between life and art. For James, truth is not an ideal to which art aspires, but one which art makes possible.

As authoritative discourse in the form of truth, or "the real" inches its way back toward the author, it begins to lose its logocentric potential, for its persuasive power lies in its ability to appear transcendent, to act as if it never had an author, only transcribers. Authoritative discourse depends upon that independent foundation. Romantic thinkers such as Wordsworth and Emerson posited religious or spiritual authority as the inspiration for their works; such utterly transcendent models of authority are difficult to question since they depend on faith. But when early novel theorists and English realists expressly turned their backs on romantic models and relied instead on the authority of empiricism and the real, they ironically made themselves more vulnerable to deconstruction. As Baym argued, by claiming that good novels depict the truth that we all see around us, novel critics left themselves vulnerable to the most obvious of critiques. Catherine Belsey has argued that it is precisely through the posture of literary realism that positivism opens itself up to deconstruction. In "Constructing the Subject: Deconstructing the Text," she reads Sherlock Holmes stories as examples of realist texts and makes the following observation:

The classic realist text instills itself in the space between fact and illusion through the presentation of a simulated reality which is plausible but not real. ...In adopting the form of classic realism, the only appropriate literary mode, positivism is compelled to display its own limitations. Offered as science, it reveals itself to a deconstructive reading as ideology at the very moment that classic realism, offered as verisimilitude, reveals itself as fiction. In claiming to make explicit and understandable what appears mysterious, these texts offer evidence of the tendency of positivism to push to the margins of experience whatever it cannot explain or understand. (369)

As depictions of "real life" that formally rely on fabrication yet make unequivocal claims on "truth," realist texts ask us to believe in imaginative truth without seeing that as an
oxymoron. And the degree to which literary critics in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries associated truth and "realism" with moral uprightness and suggested that both truth and the real were products of good taste reveals the cultural role played by realism and the novel of ideas. No matter how altruistic authors in this realist mode may have been, they nevertheless perpetuated a hegemonic view, an adherence to individualism that ultimately negated the experiences of many "real" people among their audiences. As literary theorists and novelists became increasingly interested in point of view, this easy link between the individual and the representation of reality became much more complicated.

In the following chapter, I follow the romance/realism binary to its logical undoing: the historical romance. I argue that historical romance novels, or novels that involve specific events from history yet fabricated characters and plots, formally challenged the notion of authoritative discourse, in the forms of historiography and realism, by borrowing the persuasive power of the real and suggesting that real events are a matter of point of view. While Henry James believed novels could teach us that point of view can illuminate the real, I will suggest that the historical romances I examine argue that what the novel teaches us is the fact that the real is point of view. Furthermore, by focusing on historical romances that employ death as a major theme, as a metaphor for miscommunication and as a symbol of the problematic posed by the novel form, I intend to take the literary theory relating death and anti-authoritarianism in a new direction.
CHAPTER 4
HISTORICAL ROMANCE AND THE EPITAPH:
REALITY AND FANTASY BLUR

Historical Discourse gives itself credibility in the name of the reality which it is supposed to represent, but this authorized appearance of the "real" serves precisely to camouflage the practice which in fact determines it. Representation thus disguises the praxis that organizes it.
   Michel de Certeau

It is not individuals who have experiences, but subjects who are constituted through experience. Experience in this definition then becomes not the origin of our explanation, not the authoritative (because seen or felt) evidence that grounds what is known, but rather that which we seek to explain, that about which knowledge is produced.
   Joan W. Scott

I. Point of View and the Undoing of Authority

The object of the classic realist novel is mimesis, an accurate representation of concrete reality that bears no mark of the subjective consciousness of the author. As I argued in the last chapter, this attempt at pure objectivity is rendered all the more impossible, as well as ironic, when you consider the importance of the individual and individual experience to the realist project. When Henry James altered novel theory by making point of view an essential and dominant stylistic device even as he, too, insisted on an air of reality and truth in his novels, he complicated the realist belief that empirical evidence, gained by the individual through his own experience and presented to the world as known fact, could supercede point of view to create a reality recognizable by all. In other words, James made it clear that one's point of view always shapes how and what one sees (or reads, or hears, etc.). What's more, James suggested that the consideration of point of view is what makes novels, and art in general, interesting; the "house of fiction"
would be a very boring place indeed if it had only one window. While this approach seems obvious to us now, nineteenth century approaches to the novel, in critical reviews and literary theory, often proceeded under the assumption that the truthfulness of a "true" depiction of life was something everyone in their right mind would agree upon, something that cut across race, gender, class, nationality, and so on. In specifically distancing the realist novel from the romance, writers such as Henry Fielding and William Dean Howells were denouncing the imaginative departures from "reality" that they identified with romanticistic writing. Whether this rejection took the form of moral abhorrence or aesthetic revulsion, it was clearly an attempt to depict unrealistic novels as utterly inferior, if not worthless. Even Henry James argued that the only reason for the existence of the novel is that it should reflect life as it is lived. But when "life as it is lived" becomes a complicated distillation of divergent points of view, the approach to realistic representation changes drastically.

While James added a much-needed complexity to novel theory and literary criticism when he suggested that good taste has myriad forms and one man's work of genius might be another's failure, he did not radically break from a traditional Anglo-American approach to meaning-making and the role of the artist. In fact, throughout "The Art of Fiction" and the prefaces, James echoes Wordsworth and, to a lesser extent, Emerson, when he explains that writers do not create so much as they apprehend and tastefully select artistic subjects. He describes the artist as:

The person capable of feeling in the given case more than another of what is to be felt for it, and so serving in the highest degree to record it dramatically and objectively, is the only sort of person on whom we can count not to betray, to cheapen or, as we say, give away, the value and beauty of the thing. By so much as the affair matters for some such individual, by so much do we get a picture dim and meagre. (Prefaces 67)

Here James perpetuates some assumptions about the creative process, and particularly writing, that enjoyed a history extending back long before novel theory, assumptions
which spurred some of the hottest debates in twentieth century novel theory. First, he assumes that impersonal, utterly objective apprehension is possible, and second, he suggests that writing can be a completely transparent medium for delivering this vision or understanding to a reader. In *Social Formalism: Novel Theory from Henry James to the Present*, Dorothy Hale suggests that "...[James's] resistance in the Prefaces toward offering any more value-laden description of a superior artistic vision than that is seen 'more' shows how James strives to preserve the relativity of perspective while also retaining a standard by which to judge artistic achievement" (26). James represents a pivotal figure in literary theory in general, since he bears the marks of both a Wordsworthian approach to transcendent truth (the truth that artists can best comprehend and record for mankind, the truth of life) and a twentieth-century pluralism that rejects imposing value-systems and narrow determinations of what "good" art should be. Yet, following Wordsworth and others, James *did* insist that the artist could best depict the wonderful object by remaining completely absent from the text himself. In the twentieth century, this approach in novel theory became the much-debated principle of "showing" (mimesis) and not "telling" (diegesis).

In one of the most comprehensive critiques of the "showing vs. telling" approach, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Wayne Booth considers the value of "showing" only to reason that it is finally impossible. Advocates of "showing" rail against the value-laden rhetoric of authors or narrators whose authoritative intrusions into the text both undermine the realism therein and demean the relationship between the reader and the text by "telling" the reader what to think about a character or a situation. Booth writes:

> Since Flaubert, many authors and critics have been convinced that "objective" or "impersonal" or "dramatic" modes of narration are naturally superior to any mode that allows for direct appearances by the author or his reliable spokesman [the narrator]. Sometimes...the complex issues involved in this shift have been reduced to a convenient distinction between "showing," which is artistic, and "telling," which is inartistic. ... But the changed attitudes toward the author's voice in fiction raise
problems that go far deeper than this simplified version of point of view would suggest. Percy Lubbock taught us forty years ago to believe that "the art of fiction does not begin until the novelist thinks of his story as a matter to be shown, to be so exhibited that it will tell itself." He may have been in some sense right—but to say so raises more questions than it answers. (8)

Booth argues that various forms of "showing" improve the overall effect of fiction, as when an author suspends outright moral judgment of a particular character, trusting in the reader's understanding of a character as he or she is revealed through acts or speech. By relying on dramatic craftsmanship rather than straightforward moralizing, or "telling" the reader what to think, an author can heighten dramatic tension and engage the reader's intellect more completely, according to advocates of "showing." "Showing" perpetuates the realist illusion, because the reader seems to have an unmediated relationship to the text. But by removing "direct addresses to the reader" and "all commentary in the author's own name," one does not erase all trace of the author from the text. "Even if we eliminate all such explicit judgments," Booth writes, "the author's presence will be obvious on every occasion when he moves into or out of a character's mind—when he 'shifts his point of view,' as we have come to put it" (17). An author's choices regarding what to show and how to show it are just as revealing as any direct commentary could be. And finally, Booth concludes:

In short, the author's judgment is always present, always evident to anyone who knows how to look for it. Whether its particular forms are harmful or serviceable is always a complex question, a question that cannot be settled by any easy reference to abstract rules. As we begin now to deal with this question, we must never forget that though the author can to some extent choose his disguises, he can never choose to disappear. (20)

For Booth, novels always involve a combination of showing and telling, whether the author intends such a negotiation or not.

The assertion that authors cannot simply depict life as it is lived without also revealing a value system that is either implicitly or openly stated is crucial to liberal
humanist critiques such as Booth's. "Telling" reveals the fallible human hand that directs the pen or punches the keyboard, and by remaining mindful of that authorial lens, point of view, or voice, the reader remains aware that value judgments are being made. Because writing always reflects values it is always a morally significant act, according to Booth. "When human actions are formed to make an art work," Booth writes, "the form that is made can never be divorced from the human meanings, including the moral judgments, that are implicit whenever human beings act" (*The Rhetoric of Fiction* 397). Therefore, it is ludicrous to suggest, as James did, that whenever the artistic subject "matters for" the artist "by so much do we get a picture dim and meagre" (*Prefaces* 67). The subject always matters for the artist in that his choices are revealed throughout, no matter how aloof he may present himself to be. While this position undermines the aesthetic vision of many nineteenth century realists and twentieth century modernists, it creates solid footing for political and social approaches to the novel espoused not only by humanists such as Booth, but by feminists, African-Americanists, Marxists, Queer theorists and other literary critics. In as much as empiricist realism consciously or unconsciously promotes hegemonic value systems, the deconstruction of such positivism has the opposite effect. Yet poststructuralist, or what some call "social," approaches to authorial voice complicate the showing/telling binary and the sort of liberalism associated with Booth further by suggesting that while there may be no "showing," because there is no way for a human being to write objective, value-free prose, there is also no discrete, completely self-aware author revealed in, or controlling the "telling."

In *Social Formalism*, Dorothy Hale argues that certain literary critics in the twentieth century, among them Booth, Roland Barthes and Bakhtin (and critics in the Bakhtin circle) were influenced, whether consciously or unconsciously, by James's approach to point of view. Hale argues that critics, such as Percy Lubbock, who neatly place James within the "showing" camp misunderstand the complicated nature of James's approach to point of view. What such Jamesian disciples miss is James's enduring
interest in the "radical alterity" of the artistic object. While, from one perspective, James seems to champion the individualism of nineteenth century realists when he asserts that the novelist should draw his material from his personal experience of life, Hale argues that James's appreciation for the artistic object entailed an acknowledgement of the fundamental alterity represented by that object. For James, the artistic process always involved a confrontation with what psychoanalytic and other critics have called the "other." In this sense, when James the novelist gazed through any of the windows in his "house of fiction" he was always acutely aware of the lens differentiating him from the object of his gaze. While this aspect of Jamesian theory does not utterly negate his appropriation by critics such as Lubbock (because James did religiously advocate the absence of the authorial voice in the text), it does complicate the assumption that James believed "showing" could or should render a completely unmediated representation of the artistic object.

Hale's approach to Jamesian novel theory ironically reconciles James's affinity for realist truthfulness and his mindfulness of point of view by dovetailing two seemingly opposed concepts. In her critique, alterity becomes strangely intermingled with a positivist account of reality. Hale argues that social formalists build on Jamesian point of view and finally regard the novel as a form in which perfect, unmediated representation can take place through the author's confrontation with radical alterity. She writes:

So strong is the belief among social formalists that there is no meaning beyond subjectivity that subjectivity itself becomes in this tradition the only possible meaning. But because social formalists are equally committed to a moral belief in the intrinsic good of alterity—that humans are most fulfilled when they come to know sympathetically persons who are substantially different from themselves—they have a stake in mitigating the radical relativism of their ontological position. They thus ascribe to certain representational forms the power to fix and limit subjective mediation through the concretization of identity: they imagine in particular that the form of the novel can accurately instantiate both the identity of its author and the identity of the subject the author seeks to represent. (8)
Although she works through liberal humanism, poststructuralism and dialogism, Hale's argument finally returns novel theory to its nineteenth century origins, which is where she wants it to be since she designates James its father. Though her argument is complicated and detailed, her particular critiques of Barthes and Bakhtin illustrate an approach to the relationship between writing and alterity that critically mistakes the contributions of poststructuralism and dialogism to the deconstruction of logocentrism and authoritative discourse.

As I argued in Chapter one, a popular reaction against poststructuralist theory takes the form of a rejection of relativism; such critiques of poststructuralism, whether they address the author or the subject, argue that a radical destabilization of signifying structures in language leaves us with no social, political or otherwise meaningful position from which to have an effect on our world. The assumption is that one must have a stable position, or voice, in order to have agency. Hale effectively contrasts the positions of Barthes, Bakhtin and James, but she misreads Barthes and Bakhtin when she suggests that they both argue for a stable concretization of identity similar to James's wonderful artistic object. Her argument echoes the misreading of "the death of the author" I traced in Chapter one and signals the importance of a reexamination of the relationships among poststructuralism, Bakhtin's dialogism and agency in the novel.

As another theorist in Hale's line of social formalists, Barthes does address many of the questions posed by Booth, though his overall approach is quite different. Booth brings the author back to the novel in full force, even arguing that an author's presence is so significant that "the author makes his readers" (*The Rhetoric of Fiction* 397). As I have already shown, Barthes destroys the author in "The Death of the Author." What he leaves us with is writing, or discourse, and since Barthes takes a poststructuralist approach, he also discounts any necessary, simplified link between writing, or the sign, and its referent, or the "real" object the sign is supposed to indicate. Instead, Barthes argues that writing in the novel is constituted of a series of codes which intersect but do
not necessarily form a stable structure; writing refers to more writing in an endless, shifting "constellation" of meanings. Barthes explains his use of the term "code" in *S/Z*:

> ...we use *Code* here not in the sense of a list, a paradigm that must be reconstituted. The code is a perspective of quotations, a mirage of structures; we know only its departures and returns; the units which have resulted from it (those we inventory) are themselves, always, ventures out of the text, the mark, the sign of a virtual digression toward the remainder of a catalogue...they are so many fragments of something that has always been *already* read, seen, done, experienced; the code is the wake of that *already*. Referring to what has been written, i.e., to the Book (of culture, of life, of life as culture), it makes the text into a prospectus of this Book. (20-21)

In this scheme, writing is utterly social because its meanings are derived from its use in history and culture; we only begin to understand particular texts when we relate them to other texts that came before and when we acknowledge that future texts will once again change our understanding. But this network of texts cannot become a stable structure (not even one that, like T. S. Eliot's monuments, simply shifts a bit when new texts are added) because even different readings of the same text will yield different interpretations, since language is defined by such plurality. When Barthes explains that we know the language code only by its "departures and returns," he describes a transitory glimpse at stable meaning that sounds similar to Derrida's trace. Both theorists characterize language in this way (Barthes using a spatial metaphor, Derrida a visual, and both suggesting a temporal element as well) in order to stress the constant change that makes final, stable meaning impossible. But the code and the trace exist as a way out of complete relativism for both theorists –just because meaning constantly changes does not mean that we cannot discuss it and have a methodology for observing those changes.

Though he claims, "...writing is the destruction of every voice, of every origin..." (168) in "The Death of the Author," Barthes nevertheless describes his five codes as "the five voices" in *S/Z*. These voices, however, do not designate points of origin as the term
"author" often does. Instead, they are "off-stage" and their origin is "lost in the vast perspective of the already-written" (21). Barthes explains:

...the convergence of the voices (of the codes) becomes writing, a stereographic space where the five codes, the five voices, intersect: The Voice of Empirics (the proairetisms), the Voice of the Person (the semes), the Voices of Science (the cultural codes), the Voice of Truth (the hermeneutisms), the Voice of Symbol. (22)

So although Barthes is utterly uninterested in the relationship between the particular author and the text written by him, he is nevertheless bearing witness to meanings suggested by a given text that reflect on people, culture, history, and human attempts to understand. For Barthes, as for Derrida, writing is not a neutral tool that simply reflects the politics of the writer, as it seems in Booth's scheme when he argues that the altruistic author can shape the minds of his readers according to his good-faith agenda. Rather, language is the space from which that agenda emerges as part of a shifting network of codes (along with many other, unintended communications). Writing may be related to the author's intending will, but it will never be completely sufficient to an author's intentions, nor will it remain limited to her agenda. It is what Bakhtin calls a "living rejoinder."

Barthes does not acknowledge the influence of Henry James in S/Z, although certain passages in the text bear an unmistakable resemblance. Most significant is Barthes's refiguring of the "house of fiction" metaphor. In reconceptualizing the figure, Barthes preserves the idea that description entails a view as if through a window, but he emphasizes the function of the frame to stress the limitations presented in any particular view:

Every literary description is a view. It could be said that the speaker, before describing, stands at the window, not so much to see, but to establish what he sees by its very frame: the window frame creates the scene. To describe is thus to place the empty frame which the realistic author always carries with him (more important than his easel) before a collection or continuum of objects which cannot be put into words without
this obsessive operation (which could be as laughable as a 'gag'); in order to speak about it, the writer, through this initial rite, first transforms the 'real' into a depicted (framed) object; having done this, he can take down this object, remove it from his picture: in short: de-depict it (to depict is to unroll the carpet of the codes, to refer not from a language to a referent but from one code to another). Thus, realism (badly named, at any rate often badly interpreted) consists not in copying the real but in copying a (depicted) copy of the real: this famous reality, as though captured through the pictorial matrix in which it has been steeped before being put into words: code upon code, known as realism. This is why realism cannot be designated a 'copier' but rather a 'pasticheur' (through secondary mimesis, it copies what is already a copy)..." (54-55).

Where James used the "house of fiction" metaphor to underscore the potential plurality of views (the many windows), Barthes suggests a suppression of plurality caused by the frame. In fact, it is the frame, and not the writer, that "creates the scene" (54). In Barthes's scheme, the novelist's relationship to the artistic object, or "real life," is always mediated by his own limited and limiting viewpoint, which is actually made up of linguistic codes that reflect the wider culture and take their meaning from their relationship to the whole of writing as it changes through time. When Barthes explains that "to depict is to...refer not from a language to a referent but from one code to another" (55), he moves beyond the structuralism that would make direct mimesis possible to a poststructuralist position that stresses the relationships among words rather than the relationship between the "real" and language or that between a particular writer and his text. For this reason, whenever the writer writes, she manipulates codes, perhaps adding to or slightly changing their meaning, but by entering into writing, she joins a discussion that is already in progress and will continue after she has finished contributing. In Barthes's scheme, the writer's own voice is insignificant when compared to the coded voices that are spoken by language itself. And since Barthes considers individual texts as parts of the larger body of discourse, he stresses the limitations of the points of view represented by any one text.
Jamesian "point of view" designates an origin that suggests authority; the author's particular genius enables a view of the artistic object that results in a "true" depiction. Where James argued that there may be different and equally "true" points of view, Barthes preserves plurality by objecting to point-of-view-as-origin in the same way that he rejects the association of his "voices" with origins other than culture. During his reading of *Sarrasine* in *S/Z*, Barthes remarks that, at points in the narrative, it becomes difficult to determine "who is speaking" (41). Barthes writes, "Here it is impossible to attribute an origin, a point of view, to the statement. Now, this impossibility is one of the ways in which the plural nature of a text can be appreciated. The more indeterminate the origin of the statement, the more plural the text" (41). Barthes rejects point of view because, as Hale observes, for Barthes, "...the aesthetics of point of view always has the same motivation: to justify faith in the coherent self of possessive individualism" (Hale 103). The individuality of an author, or even of a character in a novel, is not a point of inquiry for Barthes because, as he argues, the "I' which approaches the text is already itself a plurality of other texts, of codes which are infinite or, more precisely, lost (whose origin is lost)" (*S/Z* 10). Barthes's revision of Jamesian point of view partly maintains James's trajectory by moving in the direction of plurality, but Barthes's anti-authoritarian ethic entails a total rejection of categories such as "true" and "false." Barthes writes: "A multivalent text can carry out its basic duplicity only if it subverts the opposition between true and false, if it fails to attribute quotations (even when seeking to discredit them) to explicit authorities, if it flouts all respect for origin, paternity, propriety, if it destroys the voice which could give the text its ('organic') unity" (111). Like Bakhtin, Barthes views plurality in writing as itself anti-authoritarian: "...this is in fact the function of writing: to make ridiculous, to annul the power (the intimidation) of one language over another, to dissolve any metalanguage as soon as it is constituted" (98).

In her desire to cast Barthes as a social formalist, to argue that he "ascribe[s] to certain representational forms the power to fix and limit subjective mediation through the
concretization of identity," Hale ultimately argues, as others have, 6 that when Barthes does away with the author he simply replaces him with discourse, granting discourse all the authority formerly attributed to the author. "Barthes attributes to the vocal codes," she writes, "a collective and cultural identity (so absolute as to seem free, i.e. without origin), possessing an authority and agency far greater than any particular speaking subject" (Hale 109). By characterizing the codes in this way, Hale underestimates the centrality of Barthes's anti-authoritarian ethic to his theory and the role of plurality as a means toward that end. Because Barthes does not attribute to writing any more value-laden goal than that it be allowed to achieve the plurality that defines it, that it be understood as an ever-changing cultural phenomenon, it is inaccurate to discuss his theory of writing in terms of positive authority or concrete identity. Indeed, Hale herself describes Barthes's approach to writing as "textual anarchy" (111).

Another, even more important misreading in Hale's Social Formalism is her claim that, in the end, Barthes's approach sacrifices communication. While Hale underestimates the implications of Barthes's pluralism in her characterization of writing as concrete identity, she nevertheless remains mindful of the effect elusive meanings would have on simple communication. "To coordinate this textual anarchism with the appreciation of alterity," Hale writes, "Barthes must discard as a goal what every other theorist we have discussed assumes is fundamental to that ethics –communication. ...Barthes declares that 'idyllic communication...suppresses everything other, every subject..." (111). Not explaining Barthes's use of the term "idyllic" in this passage, Hale grossly oversimplifies Barthes's discussion of communication in S/Z, and Hale echoes the familiar criticism of poststructuralist theory: the slippery-slope assumption that radical plurality forecloses the potential for communication. In fact, Barthes specifically qualifies his characterization of "idyllic communication" in the following way: "One might call idyllic communication which unites two partners sheltered from any 'noise' (in the cybernetic sense of the word), linked by a simple destination, a single thread" (131).
This is the sort of perfect, transparent communication dreamt of in classic rhetoric and positivist empiricism as well as some of the nineteenth century reviews of realist novels I discussed in Chapter two. It is said to take place between like-minded intellectuals whose facility with language is complete. Many, if not most, linguists, literary theorists, educators and psychologists in the twentieth century have problematized the notion of idyllic communication, arguing instead that communication always risks misunderstanding. Furthermore, Barthes does replace "idyllic communication" with another sort: "narrative communication":

Narrative communication is not idyllic; its lines of destination are multiple, so that any message in it can be properly defined only if it is specified whence it comes and where it is going. ... Idyllic communication denies all theater, it refuses any presence in front of which the destination can be achieved, it suppresses everything other, every subject. Narrative communication is the opposite: each destination is at one moment or another a spectacle for the other participants in the game... (131-132)

Clearly, what Barthes objects to is an oversimplified conception of communication. In S/Z, Barthes demonstrates his approach to narrative communication when he selects a passage from Sarrasine and follows the "five lines of destination" associated with the question, "Who is Zambinella?" (131). These lines of communication run between characters and, finally, "from the discourse to the reader" (132). Although Barthes complicates this final connection, he considers those complexities to be strengths of the novelistic form. He explains that "...sometimes [the line between the discourse and the reader] transmits snares (in order not to reveal the secret of the enigma too soon), sometimes ambiguities (to arouse the reader's curiosity)" (132). But, above all, Barthes is careful to qualify his contrast between idyllic communication and narrative communication to insure that the latter is not mistaken for non-communication:

Thus, in contrast to idyllic communication, to pure communication (which would be, for example, that of the formalized sciences), readerly writing stages a certain "noise," it is the writing of noise, of impure communication; but this noise is not confused, massive, unnameable; it is
a clear noise made up of connections, not superpositions: it is of a distinct "cacography." (132)

By assuming that complex, refracted communication is necessarily non-communication, Hale reiterates the sort of all-or-nothing stance so familiar in critiques of poststructuralism. She assumes that agency can only be effected from a stationary, stable position and that the perpetual-motion pluralism implied by Barthes's theory necessarily sacrifices agency when it refuses to stand still.

Hale takes a similar approach in her reading of Bakhtin's dialogism. Bakhtin's and Barthes's theories of the novel are comparable in many ways, the most important of which is their mutual stress on the plurality of language. Bakhtin and Barthes argue that language derives its meaning from its various and changing cultural contexts and that language cannot be understood except as it relates to those contexts. Both theorists reacted against authoritarian linguistic and critical models, but Bakhtin was less interested in the erasure of the author as a point of inquiry. Rather, Bakhtin argued that the novelist projected his point of view into his work as one among many. In this, Bakhtin felt that the novel, more than any other literary form, most closely represented language as it actually functions, language as dialogism. "The word in language," wrote Bakhtin, "is always half someone else's" ("Discourse" 293). Bakhtin, then, de-centers the author in his critique of meaning in the novel because, he writes, language "lies on the borderline between oneself and the other" (293). Hale argues that, like Barthes's, Bakhtin's pluralism ultimately results in the complete loss of referents and thus discounts the author's point of view along with all other particular points of view. In her critique of Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, she writes:

...what we learn by examining both the author's and the characters' dialogic activities is that the best point of view is that which is plural and not singular. But to have a plural perspective is, as we have also seen, to have no identifiable point of view, a conclusion that is reflected in Bakhtin's praise for Dostoevsky's narration as "narration without perspective." (174).
Though Bakhtin seems to be taking the familiar Jamesian (et al) position that to remove the author from the text is the ultimate goal of the novel, it is more accurate to view his use of "perspective" here as similar to Barthes's use of "origin." Bakhtin's main concern is that the author's point of view should not be the primary source from which meaning in the novel is derived and should not be viewed as the "correct" perspective because he felt that individualistic accounts of meaning in the novel were disingenuous. In another passage from *Problems*, it is clear that, just as in "Discourse in the Novel," Bakhtin views meaning as something that is always shared. This is also a characteristic of Dostoevsky's art that Bakthin greatly admires:

The idea –as it was *seen* by Dostoevsky the artist-- is not a subjective individual-psychological formation with "permanent resident rights" in a person's head; no, the idea is inter-individual and inter-subjective--the realm of its existence is not individual consciousnesses but dialogic communion between consciousnesses. The idea is a *live event*, played-out at the point of dialogic meeting between two or several consciousnesses. In this sense the idea is similar to the *word*, with which it is dialogically united. Like the word, the idea wants to be heard, understood, and "answered" by other voices from other positions. (88)

Clearly, Bakhtin wants to cast meaning as something created by the multiple consciousnesses encountered in and encountering the text. It follows, then, that Bakhtin does not reject point of view as a factor in meaning making; rather, he disperses the agency once attributed only to authorial point of view among the author(s), characters and readers of any given text. As I argued in chapter one, Bakhtin viewed this dispersal as a way to undermine authoritative discourse by allowing many different interpretations, some of which may be contradictory, to be taken into consideration, diffusing the power of any one correct interpretation. In "Discourse in the Novel," Bakhtin declares point of view a crucial aspect of all languages and an important consideration in the understanding of how meanings are made:

... all languages of heteroglossia, whatever the principle underlying them and making each unique, are specific points of view on the world, forms
of conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values. As such they all may be juxtaposed to one another, mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and be interrelated dialogically. As such they encounter one another and coexist in the consciousness of people who write novels. ... They may all be drawn in by the novelist for the orchestration of his themes and for the related (indirect) expression of his intentions and values. (291-292)

This passage suggests that Bakhtin's dispersal of point of view does not result in an annihilation of all reference points but, instead, qualifies any particular point of view by setting it in a necessary relation to others. Once again, as Linda Hutcheon explained in *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, "to decenter is not to deny" (159).

Barthes and Bakhtin utilize point of view, as radical pluralism for the former and heteroglossia for the latter, in order to decenter authoritative models of reading the novel. While both theorists stress the connectedness of culture, history and discourse, they reject approaches to novelistic writing that identify singular, conclusive origins of meaning, and they reject interpretive schemes that seek authoritative, and thereby static, readings of any novel. While Barthes's approach to discourse in the novel represents an informative departure from the Jamesian model, his work may finally be less useful to my study because, in the end, Barthes asks us to treat all discourse as one. He is less interested in the character of discourse as it takes shape in particular genres than is Bakhtin, who argues that the novel is uniquely suited to teach us about language processes in general. Though Bakhtin encourages closer scrutiny of the novel form and Barthes urges readers to ignore the boundaries between linguistic genres, they both attempt to change our understanding of how language *means* by deemphasizing the particular intentions of the author, since author-centered schemes reify a world-view based on the correspondence of perfectly described individual experience and universal truths.

Barthes rejected the realist novel because, by making empiricist claims on the truth of human experience, realism not only misrepresents the actual character of
language processes but also reinforces a hegemonic view whereby "genius" members of
the intellectual elite reveal to all the true nature of life. The crucial role that language
plays in constructing reality, rather than merely reflecting it, was utterly suppressed in
realistic schemes, according to Barthes:

> These facts of language were not perceptible so long as literature
pretended to be a transparent expression of either objective calendar time
or of psychological subjectivity...as long as literature maintained a
totalitarian ideology of the referent, or more commonly speaking, as long
as literature was 'realistic.' ("To Write..." 138).

Yet while the theoretical underpinnings of literary realism are unacceptable to
poststructuralism, so-called "realist" novels themselves can remain the subject of
poststructuralist inquiry, particularly when they are viewed more as imaginative
enterprises that may bear a striking resemblance to a particular reader's experience of life
but are nevertheless understood to be mediated by discursive conventions, various points
of view, and cultural, geographical and historical markers.

II. The Historical Romance: Refracted Reflections of Reality

Literary critics from the time of Henry James forward have questioned the
distinction made between the novel and the romance, but some have availed themselves
of the dichotomy in order to describe a perceived weakness in early American novels.
Though the nineteenth century marked a significant flowering of the novel form in both
Britain and America, American novels of the time have sometimes been considered
inferior, and the fact that the great majority of those American novels can be labeled
romances seems to offer an explanation of their inferiority to those who consider the
realist novel the greatest achievement of the form. Critics such as Lionel Trilling, in his
influential "Manners, Morals and the Novel" (1947), and Richard Chase, in his equally
highly regarded work, *The American Novel and Its Tradition* (1957), argue that
nineteenth century American novelists wrote romances because America in its infancy had no rich cultural and literary traditions and no extensive history from which novelists could draw their subjects. Trilling and Chase have both argued that nineteenth century American novels lack social complexity (and thus lack a sense of reality) as a result of national cultural naiveté or because the national imagination remained tinged by a Puritanical tendency toward allegorical dramas between good and evil. Although this contention has been widely disputed, similar explanations for the unique character of nineteenth century American novels were first given by the novelists themselves. James Fenimore Cooper, often considered to be the first great American novelist, considered the undeveloped nineteenth-century American cultural identity to be an "obstacle against which American literature has to contend" ("The Literature..." 17). But Cooper argued that this lack impacted all American writing, from history to poetry. He continued,

There is scarcely an ore which contributes to the wealth of the author, that is found, here, in veins as rich as Europe. There are no annals for the historian; no follies (beyond the most vulgar and commonplace) for the satirist; no manners for the dramatist; no obscure fictions for the writer of romance; no gross and hardy offences against decorum for the moralist; nor any rich artificial auxiliaries of poetry. (17)

In his Preface to Home as Found, Cooper comes closer to the Trilling/Chase position, when he laments that "no attempt to delineate ordinary American life, either on the stage or in the pages of a novel, has been rewarded with success. ... It would be indeed a desperate undertaking, to think of making anything interesting in the way of a Roman de Société in this country" (24). But taking the opposite tack, Hawthorne argued that the American environment imposed limits on the writers of romance in particular. In the "Preface to The Marble Faun," Hawthorne explains that he set his romance in Italy because such a "poetic or fairy precinct," far away and ancient, provided a more suitable setting for a romantic work ("Preface to The Marble Faun" 64). According to Hawthorne, America in the nineteenth century was a land where "actualities" were
"terribly insisted upon" (64). "No author," he explains, "can conceive of the difficulty of writing a romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a commonplace prosperity, in broad and simple daylight, as is happily the case with my dear native land" (64). As one of the greatest writers of American romantic fiction, Hawthorne appears to have had very little difficulty uncovering the shadows and mystery latent in the early American experience. Yet though Cooper and Hawthorne, in their different ways, seem to reinforce the assumption that American writers were faced with peculiar limitations, their approaches to the novel/romance distinction is much more complicated than the approach I have so far delineated. They believed that romantic fiction could reflect reality and be truthful.

Trilling links reality and "manners," suggesting that literary considerations of real life must involve detailed analyses of particular social conditions revealed through the depiction of realistic characters involved in complex social interactions. Following Trilling, Chase argues that British novels of the period incorporated more detail and more accurately represented real life in all of its complexity, whereas American romances involved fantastical plots and implausible characters and were therefore unrealistic. And, though Trilling and Chase laud authors such as Hawthorne and Melville for their artistic merit, their willingness to depict American Romance as relatively unsophisticated preserves the original pejorative connotation of the term "romance." Their characterization of certain nineteenth century American works of fiction as romances seems no great deduction since, as David Hirsch has pointed out, "...it was common practice in both England and America at the time to use such subtitles as 'A Tale Founded on Fact,' 'A Tale of Truth,' 'A Historical Narrative,' or simply 'A Romance'..." (Hirsch 44). But, as Hirsch also notes, such subtitles did not necessarily reflect a neat novel/romance binary, and it did not mean that writers of romance were disinterested in questions of reality. Although Hawthorne labeled many of his works romances, he also
stressed that his intention was to explore the relationship between the imagination and reality. Hirsch writes:

Hawthorne, of course, called his longer works of fiction romances, but one need not assume that he intended this as an advertisement of his "turning away from reality," or as an inability to face Locke's world. ...Moreover, in "The Custom House," usually taken, along with the Preface to *The House of the Seven Gables*, as the classic statement of his method as a "romancer," Hawthorne establishes not a turning away from reality but the novelist's tendency to obliterate "the dividing-line between the actual and the potential, the real and the imaginary, the historical and the fictional..." (Hirsch 44-45)

Indeed, although Hawthorne offers his own description of the difference between the novel and the romance in his prefaces, the upshot of his taxonomy is his sense that the romance form provides greater creative "latitude," not that it is less truthful or unrealistic. In the Preface to *The House of the Seven Gables*, Hawthorne argues:

When a writer calls his work a Romance, it need hardly be observed that he wishes to claim a certain latitude, both as to its fashion and material, which he would not have felt himself entitled to assume had he professed to be writing a Novel. The latter form of composition is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man's experience. The former –while, as a work of art, it must rigidly subject itself to laws, and while it sins unpardonably so far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart –has fairly a right to present that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing. (54)

The difference between a romance and a novel is mainly one of degrees, according to Hawthorne, many of whose works are so infused with elements of actual American history that one wonders how the romance was ever characterized as utterly fantastical or unrelated to "real" life. Though Cooper often acknowledges that romantic writing partakes of the ideal, he addresses the relationship between reality and fiction in his prefaces, and he insists that his works were attempts to communicate truth, though not the truth of particular historical facts and details. In the Preface to *The Pilot* (1823), Cooper straightforwardly explains that "the writer of Romances...is permitted to garnish a
probable fiction, while he is sternly prohibited from dwelling on improbable truths" (19).

In his Preface to *The Pioneers* (1823), Cooper expresses his belief that fiction cannot be successful if it does not reflect reality: "...I have come to the conclusion, that the writer of a tale, who takes the earth for the scene of his story, is in some degree bound to respect human nature" (4). Cooper adheres to this guideline despite the fact that it may be "a formidable curb to the imagination" (4). But, later, in the 1832 introduction to the same work, Cooper confesses that he might have written a "far better book" if he had not relied so much on his own experience when describing the scenes and characters of the novel (6). "This rigid adhesion to truth, an indispensable requisite in history and travels," he explains, "destroys the charm of fiction, for all that is necessary to be conveyed to the mind by the latter had better be done by delineations of principles and of characters in their classes, than by too fastidious attention to originals" (6). Cooper's attempts to represent reality on the American frontier are much more concerned with philosophical meditations on truth, though he insists on the accuracy of the "types" he employs as characters, his descriptions of the landscape and many of the situations dramatized in his plots.

In *Reality and Idea in the Early American Novel*, Hirsch offers at least a partial explanation for the persistence in twentieth century literary criticism of the connection between reality and the novel as opposed to the romance. Ultimately, Hirsch comes to the same conclusion as Barthes does in *Writing Degree Zero*; the reality associated with the novel is overwhelmingly a reflection of middle class values. Tracing novel theory from Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel* through Trilling and Chase, Hirsch finds that when these critics identify realistic writing, the major prerequisites are "manners and a rigid and well defined class structure" (Hirsch 39). According to Hirsch, these are the "only legitimate agents which can be used to communicate reality" offered in the schemes of Trilling and Chase. In their struggle to define the highly ideological and subjective concept of "reality," so that they may then decide which works of fiction reflect that
reality and which do not, proponents of the realist novel often measure reality using the principles of mimesis and empiricism, with little regard as to the subjective nature of either, Hirsch argues. This approach forecloses the question of whether language, or more precisely writing, can even effect a mimetic representation of life, class structure, manners, or anything other than language itself. What the Cooper and Hawthorne prefaces make clear is both of these writers were involved in an exploration of the relationship between reality and fiction *when they wrote romances*, though they may have had different views regarding what constituted reality. Hirsch argues, in fact, that the approach to reality in authors such as Hawthorne and Melville was a direct challenge to empiricism. The writers of nineteenth century American romance did not "turn away from reality," he writes, "on the contrary, what they did was to attack 'reality' at its most vital center and in a most meaningful way" (Hirsch 44). Hirsch continues:

> They sought to encompass reality, but not the reality of Locke. In fact, they were often consciously rejecting and attacking the world that Locke built; though they may not have accepted the world as Locke presented it, they were very much aware of what he had created. (44)

When authors such as Hawthorne employ the literary conventions of allegory and symbolism while insisting on an important relationship between such imaginative content and reality, they suggest that reality is not the sum of its material parts, that a sense of reality is not obtainable through even an exhaustive detailed observation of daily life. By exploring the relationship between reality and fiction, writers of romance also foreground the fictionality of reality. Historical romance, in particular, dramatizes that relationship and flouts the thematic limitations often imposed on the romance. As Michael Davit Bell has argued, American romance writers "attribut[ed] to reality itself the 'romantic' or 'poetic' qualities of subjective imagination," and by doing this they "attempted to bridge the chasm between fantasy and experience, fiction and fact..." (Bell 15). Historical romance, argues Bell, is particularly suited to bridge the gap between "fiction and fact"
because that genre offers "an apparent mode of reconciliation" by "viewing 'romance' as a 'historical' or 'realistic' mode whose 'reality just happened, luckily, to be 'poetic' or 'romantic'" (15).

If a romance is, as Hawthorne would have it, a work of fiction in which the author grants himself imaginative "latitude," then a historical romance would be a work of fiction that utilizes historical elements within the context of a highly imaginative, and perhaps even at times implausible narrative. Though there is some disagreement as to what, exactly, makes a novel historical, a general definition offered by Harry Shaw in *The Forms of Historical Fiction* (1983) seems the safest. Whereas many kinds of novels "can incorporate a sense of history," writes Shaw, history is "foregrounded" in historical novels (21). "When we read historical novels," Shaw continues, "we take their events, characters, settings, and language to be historical in one or both of two ways. They may represent societies, modes of speech, or events that in very fact existed in the past...or they may promote some sort of historical effect within the work, such as providing an entry for the reader into the past..." (Shaw 21). Such a broad application of the term "historical" may seem liberal to a modern reader, since the dominant tendency in twentieth century historiography has been to focus on names, dates, statistics and other "verifiable" empirical data, but historiography was not always so scientific. In the early nineteenth century, according to Linda Hutcheon, "literature and history were considered branches of the same learning tree, a tree which sought to 'interpret experience, for the purpose of guiding and elevating man'" (Hutcheon 105). Dominick La Capra has contended that, "until the professionalization of history in the late nineteenth century, there were strongly interactive relations between novelistic and historical narratives, indeed at times an almost agonistic rivalry" (La Capra 8). In their mid-late nineteenth century critical essays on novel form, both Henry James and William Dean Howells argued that the novelist should pose as a historian and that his highest achievement would be to write novels that appear to be history. But when history took on the qualities of a
science toward the end of the nineteenth century, literary and historical studies went their separate ways. Hutcheon designates the German historian Leopold von Ranke as the pivotal figure in this shift. After "the rise of Ranke's 'scientific history,'" writes Hutcheon, "...came the separation that resulted in the distinct disciplines of literary and historical studies today, despite the fact that the realist novel and Rankean historicism shared many of the same beliefs about the possibility of writing factually about observable reality" (105). Recent historiographic theory has reinsinuated the relationship between fiction and history, more for the purpose of exposing the fictionality of history than to assert the historicity of fiction. But the two are now commonly considered inseparably intertwined in the interest of undermining empiricist, authoritative modes of historiography. Fiction and history, explains Hutcheon,

...have both been seen to derive their force more from verisimilitude than from any objective truth; they are both identified as linguistic constructs, highly conventionalized in their narrative forms, and not at all transparent either in terms of language or structure; and they appear to be equally intertextual, deploying the texts of the past within their own complex textuality. (105)

Although the academic disciplines of history and literature diverged in the late nineteenth century, the historical romance continued to investigate their relationship. Though some contemporary novels designated as "historical metafiction" by critics such as Hutcheon and Patricia Waugh have been read as fresh attempts to reassert the fictionality of history, it must be said that while historiography may have attempted to purge itself of fiction for a time, fiction never stopped dabbling in the historical. Many of the crucial themes relating poststructuralism, the novel and history, which are too often considered peculiar to late twentieth-century theory, were contemplated in historical romances in the early nineteenth century.

In Fiction and Historical Consciousness: The American Romance Tradition, Emily Miller Buddick argues that the unique, if ironic, form of the historical romance
enables the author to question the apprehension of reality. "American historical romance," she argues, "renders a double consciousness of interpretive processes. Its symbols and allegories enforce an awareness of the unknowability of material reality. Simultaneously, it presents a world that, however defamiliarized, is still intensely recognizable" (Buddick ix). This "double consciousness" addresses the problems I have been outlining regarding determinations of what is real and truthful by refusing to reduce that process to an empirical science. Instead, historical romances challenge the simple opposition of reality and fiction by suggesting that, for the purposes of the inquisitive although subjective mind, the two are inseparable. Using Hawthorne as an example, Hirsch points out that the romantic reality he sought "can be considered 'tangential to society' only if it is assumed that problems of society, like Nature and knowledge in general, 'can be explained in terms of their own conditions" (Hirsch 46). Once it is acknowledged that society is not merely a collection of self-evident facts, that reality is much more complicated than any positivist account could convey, then the neat novel/romance binary that identifies reality with a sober catalog of daily life breaks down. But by confusing fantasy and reality, or by relating the two, historical romances do not necessarily disengage from social problems or questions regarding the nature of reality. Buddick argues that the "processes of defamiliarization and representation" she describes "do not neutralize each other" (ix). She continues:

On the contrary, the American historical romances insist on the reality of history and society in order to cast doubt on the mind's autonomy and to force the imagination to consider something outside itself. Focusing attention on past worlds, which, as historical entities, have already become fictions of reality, the romances heighten the tension between mind and world. (ix)

By viewing reality in terms of historiography-as-discourse, these novels call our attention to the constant slipping-away of what we "know" as reality through time. Just as poststructuralists challenge fixity and certainty in language processes by focusing on the
unrecoverable complexities of intention as the author writes, so historical romances view
reality as a challenge to our imaginations, something we only aspire to know.

Another affinity between poststructural approaches to language and the historical
romance is the decentering of individualistic models of authority. Unlike the genius
author of the realist novel or the "scientific" historian, the writer of historical romance
typically does not guarantee his observations through an appeal to empirical evidence or
personal experience, does not present his work as a transparent picture of the world
unrelated to his own subjective viewpoint. Buddick makes this point. "In historical
romance," she argues, "the reality of the past is verifiable through agencies outside the
single perceiving self. What the self imagines, therefore, must always meet the test of
someone else's evidence" (ix). Deconstructions of twentieth century historiography by
theorists such as Hayden White and Joan W. Scott have also questioned the value of
individual experience as evidence in the writing of history. Scott, in particular, argues
that when marginalized groups such as feminists use "the evidence of experience" to
validate their positions, they unintentionally reify authoritative discursive structures. She
writes:

By remaining within the epistemological frame of orthodox history, these
studies lose the possibility of examining those assumptions and practices
that excluded considerations of difference in the first place. They take as
self-evident the identities of those whose experience is being documented
and thus naturalize their difference. They locate resistance outside its
discursive construction and reify agency as an inherent attribute of
individuals, thus decontextualizing it. (399)

When Barthes insists that his model of discursive "cacography" is not intended to posit a
simple pluralism wherein multiple "true" viewpoints make room for one another, he is
trying to avoid just the sort of reification of authoritative structures described by Scott.
This is precisely why Barthes is uninterested in the origins of discourse and focused,
instead, on the activities of discursive elements. As Buddick characterizes it, historical
romance offers a *version* of history that asks to be evaluated along side other *versions* of history, not a representation of history that, first and foremost, positions itself in relation to the "real" events that have occurred. In that way, historical romance does not point toward an actual historical origin so much as it questions the ways in which we make sense of the past. By self-consciously employing literary devices such as allegory and symbolism, historical romance calls attention to its literary and discursive nature in ways the realist novel specifically avoids.

Although she refers mainly to contemporary fiction, Hutcheon's characterization of postmodern fiction is also germane to a discussion of the historical romance form. "Postmodern fiction," she writes, "poses new questions about reference. The issue is no longer 'to what empirically real object in the past does the language of history refer?'; it is more 'to which discursive context could this language belong? To which prior textualizations must we refer?'" (Hutcheon 119). Furthermore, she argues, historiographic metafiction "self-consciously suggests" that "there is no presence, no external truth which verifies or unifies, that there is only self-reference" (119). Historiographic metafiction uses this thesis to "signal the discursive nature of all reference –both literary and historiographical" (119). Hutcheon anticipates the conventional response to this poststructuralist claim, so she takes pains to explain that by signaling "the discursive nature of all reference" historiographic metafiction does not then, necessarily, posit a philosophical relativism that utterly forecloses any discussion of identity, but it does situate identity:

> The referent is always already inscribed in the discourses of our culture. This is no cause for despair; it is the text's major link with the "world," one that acknowledges its identity as construct, rather than as simulacrum of some "real" outside. Once again, this does not deny that the past "real" existed; it only conditions our mode of knowledge of that past. We can know it only through its traces, its relics. (119)
Although particular historical romances in the nineteenth century do not address these themes quite as self-consciously as do postmodern novels, in their very form they make use of postmodern approaches to historiography. Contrary to Hutcheon's assertion, postmodern fiction in the twentieth century does not pose entirely "new" questions about reference.

III. Epitaphs, Trace and Dialogues With the Dead

The epitaph represents a particularly apt rhetorical and literary form for illustrating the complicated connection romanticists such as Hawthorne have made between fantasy and reality. They are historical forms which also often partake of the imaginative, particularly when they exhibit prosopopoeia, or the trope of the dead voice speaking to the living. Epitaphs that pose as the voice of the dead describing the comfort of death or the peace of eternal life after death fictionalize the unknown and attempt to allay our fear of death. Literary epitaphs also foreground the relationships among death, writing, memory, imagination, and culture. As the long history of literary theory has shown, these subjects are relevant to any literary project, but they gain a certain urgency and poignancy in the epitaph because epitaphs make us mindful of the mortal limits we face. As Wordsworth argues in the third of his essays "Upon Epitaphs," the normal pressures of writing are exaggerated for the author of an epitaph because of his anxiety "to do justice to the occasion" ("Upon Epitaphs (3)" 128).

In the three essays "Upon Epitaphs," Wordsworth makes some peculiar claims about language, which suggests that just as the writing of epitaphs poses unique challenges, so does the theorizing of epitaphic conventions. Many of Wordsworth's typical literary critical themes surface in the essays. He continues to believe in the possibility of Truth in writing, and he once again argues that taste and artifice demean writing terribly. While elaborating the key elements of a quality epitaph, Wordsworth
insists that the lines be true, that they reveal the good essence of the deceased (even if that person behaved badly), and that they "...should speak, in a tone which shall sink into the heart, the general language of humanity as connected with the subject of death –the source from which an epitaph proceeds –of death, and of life" ("Upon Epitaphs (1)" 90-91). It is ironic, though consistent with a paradoxical thread running through Wordsworth's literary theory, that Wordsworth warns against both artifice and a sense of taste (or, what he once again describes as too much attention to the literary trends of the age). Art, he argues, is "the adversary of Nature" (128). He continues:

The far-searching influence of the power, which, for want of a better name, we will denominate Taste, is in nothing more evinced than in the changeful character and complexion of that species of composition which we have been reviewing. Upon a call so urgent, it might be expected that the affections, the memory, and the imagination would be constrained to speak their genuine language. Yet, if the few specimens which have been given in the course of this enquiry, do not demonstrate the fact, the Reader need only look into any collection of Epitaphs to be convinced, that the faults predominant in the literature of every age will be as strongly reflected in the sepulchral inscriptions as anywhere...and especially if the composition be in verse; for then it comes more avowedly in the shape of a work of art... (128)

Art, which Wordsworth more readily associated with artificiality than we do today, is the opposite of nature in his scheme, and so once again his recommendations to writers of epitaphs are mystifying: write verse without art and pay no attention to the art around you. Of course, Wordsworth uses any number of rhetorical and literary devices throughout his essays (as he does in his elegiac poetry), and he regularly refers to other writers, some who fail to produce "energy, stillness, grandeur, tenderness, those feelings which are the pure emanations of Nature, those thoughts which have the infinitude of truth" (128) and some who succeed admirably.

But "what is most needful in an epitaph to do," writes Wordsworth, "is to give to universally received truths a pathos and spirit which shall re-admit them into the soul like revelations of the moment" ("Upon Epitaphs (3)" 127-128). Though Wordsworth does
not delineate these truths beyond describing them as "the emanations of Nature," he does employ a complicated metaphor to describe the relationships among language, truth and the soul. The expression of those "thoughts which have the infinitude of truth" are "not what the garb is to the body but what the body is to the soul, themselves a constituent part and power or function in the thought..." (129). This is a telling figure, particularly since the larger subject remains the epitaph and Wordsworth's Christian beliefs require a separation of body and soul at the moment of death. To write expressions of truth on the gravestone is to capture a shadow or an image of the soul, to keep it earth-bound. Of course, it is no surprise that a man so utterly dedicated to writing and Christian ideology would make connections between language and the soul, and it is also no surprise that these connections should be so complicated. Building on a metaphysics suggested by Plato, adopted in Christian rhetoric and persisting through Western philosophy and art, Wordsworth attempts to leave writing on the side of the material, fallible, and cultural while at the same time preserving a special kind of non-writing that reflects the opposite, the eternal and ethereal Truth associated with the soul and, ultimately, with God. In chapter two, I argued that Wordsworth attempted a similar balancing act in other of his literary essays, though the material/metaphysical dialectic established in "Upon Epitaphs" introduces themes particularly relevant to a discussion of writing, death and the author.

Paul De Man's reading of the three "Upon Epitaphs" essays, "Autobiography as De-Facement," represents a detailed exposure of the explicit paradoxes that wind their way through Wordsworth's thematic schemes. Most importantly, De Man reveals the inherent contradiction in Wordsworth's curiously uncertain treatment of prosopopoeia. Epitaphs written from the point of view of the deceased, those that pretend to speak to us from beyond the grave, are common, says Wordsworth, and they serve the understandable purpose of demystifying death for those of us who are still alive. Often, such epitaphs praise the comforts of the afterlife or suggest that the deceased has finally
been given respite from the pains of life and is content to rest at peace. But Wordsworth
calls these "tender fictions," and, as fiction, they remain inferior to the other form of
epitaph: those presented from the point of view of the living friends or relatives of the
deceased, those that partake only of truth. But De Man argues that Wordsworth's
rejection of prosopopoeia contradicts the larger implications of his essays and his poetry;
De Man links prosopopoeia to autobiography and proceeds to demonstrate that the essays
"Upon Epitaphs" bear the marks of autobiography throughout, particularly when essay
three concludes with Wordsworth's own verses from "The Excursion," a poem that De
Man argues is highly autobiographical.

Another contradiction reveals itself in Wordsworth's extended "garb-body-soul"
metaphor. During his meditation on the difference between unnatural and natural
language, Wordsworth offers this warning:

> Words are too awful an instrument for good and evil, to be trifled with;
> they hold above all other external powers a dominion over thoughts. If
> words be not (recurring to a metaphor before used) an incarnation of the
> thought, but only a clothing for it, then surely will they prove an ill gift;
> such a one as those possessed vestments, read of in the stories of
> superstitious times, which had power to consume and to alienate from his
> right mind the victim who put them on. Language, if it do not uphold, and
> feed, and leave in quiet, like the power of gravitation or the air we breathe,
> is a counter spirit, unremittingly and noiselessly at work, to subvert, to lay
> waste, to vitiate, and to dissolve. ("Upon Epitaphs (3)" 129-130)

Clearly, Plato was not the only one to link words and poison, language and death.
Contemplating the danger that language poses to the dead, the possibility that the wrong
kind of writing might destroy one's character, misrepresent one's philosophy or expose
the poverty of one's soul, both Plato and Wordsworth warn against the use of writing,
though they both write. But Wordsworth's metaphorical chain "garb-body-soul"
ultimately reverses his stated thematic intentions. De Man points to this reversal:

> What is the characteristic of the language so severely condemned? The
> distinction between incarnate thought and "a clothing for thought," two
> notions which seem indeed to "have another and a finer connection than
that of contrast." De Quincey singled out this distinction and read it as a way to oppose compelling figures to arbitrary ones. But incarnate flesh and clothing have at least one property in common, in opposition to the thoughts they both represent, namely their visibility, their accessibility to the senses. ("Autobiography As De-Facement" 79)

Just as clothing is the outward appearance of the body, the body is the outward manifestation of the soul. So the difference between unnatural and natural language is merely a matter of degrees. De Man continues:

The language so violently denounced is in fact the language of metaphor, of prosopopoeia and of tropes, the solar language of cognition that makes the unknown accessible to the mind and to the senses. The language of tropes (which is the specular language of autobiography) is indeed like the body, which is like its garments, the veil of the soul as the garment is the sheltering veil of the body. How can this harmless veil then suddenly become as deadly and violent as the poisoned coat of Jason or of Nessus? (80)

For Wordsworth, language becomes "deadly and violent" when it betrays its own materiality, when it presents itself, openly, as artifice. Wordsworth's denunciation of popular taste makes his fear of this betrayal clear. Though he readily quotes from masters such as Shakespeare and Milton, Wordsworth warns his readers to be wary of literary trends popular in his own time. It is much safer to point to the absent, highly praised literary figures, as one would point to a prophet or ancient, because to do so preserves the illusion that their language emanates from a dimension without time or culture, directly from the spiritual realm. But though Wordsworth can identify great poet-prophets and associate their works with nature and truth, De Man's deconstruction demonstrates that Wordsworth can never quite get beyond the ultimate materiality and the mutability of both the body and writing. As Wordsworth revealed in the "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface" of the 1815 edition of Poems, he finally views language as an "imperfect shadowing forth" of what the religious man is "incapable of seeing" (808). Ultimately, all language is reduced to the limits Wordsworth imposes on unnatural or artistic writing. What "Wordsworth says of evil language," argues De Man, is true of "all
language including [Wordsworth's] own language of restoration" ("Autobiography As De-Facement" 80). He adds:

To the extent that language is figure (or metaphor, or prosopopoeia) it is indeed not the thing itself but the representation, the picture of the thing and, as such, it is silent, mute as pictures are mute. Language, as trope, is always privative. ...Death is a displaced name for a linguistic predicament, and the restoration of mortality by autobiography (the prosopopoeia of the voice and the name) deprives and disfigures to the precise extent that it restores. (80-81)

Wordsworth's inconsistent repression of that disfigurement in his theory corresponds to the dilemma posed by his simultaneous, though often contradictory, desires as both a poet and a Christian. Wordsworth the poet-prophet describes poetry as that element of the material world which best reflects the ideal; however, in order to maintain a belief in an ideal spiritual realm, in the final analysis, he must always consider the material realm inferior. But Wordsworth clearly intended for his "garb-body-soul" metaphor to suggest that while some writing constitutes mere representation, the potentially "evil" language in his scheme, other writing offers an albeit "imperfect" presentation of Truth, Nature and goodness, those things which must ultimately remain un-presentable.

In her study Poetry as Epitaph: Representation and Poetic Language, Karen Mills-Court suggests that poetry formally attempts to skirt the boundary between presentation and representation. Poetry, she claims, is "the most powerful attempt to incarnate voice, meaning, intelligibility, even 'Truth,' in language" (3). Mills-Court configures the relationship between truth/presentation and artifice/representation in much the same way that Wordsworth did in his essays "Upon Epitaphs," by suggesting that representation is a necessary evil in poetry, that the stylized, figurative language most often employed by poets announces itself as artifice more so than in other forms of writing. "Poets, more than any other writers," she argues, "need to secure presence in their work, but this desire is always threatened by the densely figurative powers that
poetry must employ more consciously than any other writing" (3). But, for Mills-Court, this problematic reveals a crucial fact of language in general. She concedes that "as uncomfortable as compromise always is, it may be the only position finally available to users of language...no choice between representational and incarnative language is genuinely possible. At least it is not possible as long as we use language to 'present' and 'describe' our own concepts" (3). This bind is expressed by Jacques Derrida, from two opposing perspectives, when he makes the following statements. First, he explains that any attempt to establish a fully realized voice, or a presentational mode in language necessarily fails: "...all that desire had wished to wrest from the play of language finds itself recaptured within that play" (*Of Grammatology* 6). Conversely, Derrida acknowledges the fact that any time we participate in language we utilize a system based on metaphysics and a logic of presentation:

> There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to shake metaphysics. We have no language –no syntax and no lexicon which is foreign to this history; we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest. ("Signature, Event, Context" 111)

Though Mills-Court's approach suggests a nostalgia for lost presence and Derrida communicates the opposite, their messages are the same. And Mills-Court views the epitaph as the perfect figure for conveying the undecidability of this dilemma. "The contradiction displayed by the speaking monument," she writes, is the fact that "the maintenance of presence and its undermining occur in the same gesture" (Mills-Court 4). It is this double-bind that Wordsworth held in suspension throughout the essays "Upon Epitaphs" because his faith in the communicability of Truth required that, under certain highly specialized circumstances, presence, in the form of Truth, is possible in poetry.
Like De Man, Mills-Court finds Wordsworth's "garb-body-soul" metaphor to be the most problematic slip in the essays because the metaphor reintroduces that circular bind even though it is intended to present a way out. She writes:

One of the things "the body is to the soul" is its residue, that which soul passes beyond, that which is left behind to mark the passing and, finally, to dissolve. Therefore, the notion of words as body is as dangerous as it is seductive, for the "word/body" is mortal, and as epitaph it points to the "otherness" and "elsewhere" of spirit. Thus, though it is "most needful" to present spirit, it is also "most difficult," and the rest of Wordsworth's statement exposes the difficulty as an *aporia*. If words as body are "constituent part and power" of thought, they are also that from which thought must escape if it is to be immortal. On the other hand, if thought is to remain stable and to be protected from an infinite drift through meaninglessness, it must be "incarnated." (Mills-Court 186)

An acute awareness of the imperfections of writing did not, of course, stop Wordsworth from writing, just as the Christian belief that all earthly materials are finally insignificant did not stop Wordsworth from utilizing poetry in the service of his beliefs. The dilemma maintains all of the negative connotations of an *aporia* only when Wordsworth seeks the impossible by presenting a way out, when he attempts to assign special privileges to certain kinds of writing as opposed to others. Instead of viewing some forms of writing as a strategy for avoiding representation, and thus avoiding death, Derrida focuses on the reciprocal relationship between death and life, and he argues that writing signals that relationship:

Representation is death. Which may immediately by transformed into the following proposition: death is (only) representation. But it is bound to life and to the living present itself which it repeats originary. A pure representation, a machine, never runs by itself... Writing, here, is *techne* as the relation between life and death, between present and representation, between the two apparatuses... in this sense writing is the stage of history and the play of the world. (*Writing and Difference* 227-8)
Viewed as an example of Derridean trace, as the vanishing shadow of presence, the epitaph exposes that life-death relationship perfectly because it demonstrates how writing brackets the finality of death even as it announces the fact of death.

Through the figure of the epitaph, writing seems to make the impossible (immortality on earth) possible, in a way that no other device can. And, as Wordsworth suggested, epitaphs sometimes offer a more obvious "tender fiction": that the gap between the "real" and the imaginative can be bridged by writing. Epitaphs can call our attention to the unknown more brutally and more compassionately than any other form of writing. Each of the four historical romances discussed in the next two chapters features a gravestone with an epitaph that bears important significance regarding both the nature of the characters in each work and the overall themes expressed in the novel. The epitaphs should be considered meta-discourse in each text, since they overtly represent writing about writing. They prove instructive in a poststructuralist deconstruction of the novels because they also foreground questions regarding identity and death, discursive intention, the stability of meaning and, most importantly, interpretation. Though these works span over 150 years, their thematic affinities indicate the importance of these major themes in the American novel. All four are what I would consider historical romances, and as such, they utilize the peculiar rhetorical and poetic conventions of the epitaphs they feature to comment on the intersections of history, the literary imagination and the artifice that makes both of those discourses possible and impossible: writing.
CHAPTER 5

THE PIONEERS AND THE SCARLET LETTER: HISTORICAL ROMANCE, THE EPITAPH AND UNDECIDABILITY

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone which no one knows except him who receives it. ...He who conquers shall be clad in white garments, and I will not blot his name out of the book of life; I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.

Revelation 2-3

I. Allegory and Symbolism: One Explanation for the Theme of Undecidability

In Allegory in America: From Puritanism to Postmodernism, Deborah L. Madsen traces a rhetorical opposition of allegory and symbolism to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who, through his observations of nineteenth century biblical scholarship, became concerned that too many of his contemporaries were reading the Bible allegorically, thereby denying the "living truths" embodied there. In Coleridge's scheme, allegory "simply points to a referent outside itself" and therefore cannot "embody" or "make incarnate abstract realities" in the way the symbolism can (Madsen 82). Whereas allegory "alienates the biblical image from the context of lived experience," by his logic, "symbolism reinstates the sacramental and redemptive dimensions of the Bible which is then seen as an extension of divine reality into the temporal world" (82-83). Given Coleridge's wide influence among aesthetes of his time, and considering the British and American Romantics' heightened interest in the agency of the individual genius, it is no surprise that, as Madsen suggests, this "theory of symbolism has the effect of locating the sacramental dimension of the biblical text in the perception of the reader or interpreter"
This shift to Coleridgean symbolism changes the identity of what Derrida calls the "father of logos." Derrida describes that father-son relationship in *Dissemination*:

> Logos is a son, then, a son that would be destroyed in his very presence without the present attendance of his father. His father who answers. His father who speaks for him and answers for him. Without his father, he would be nothing but, in fact, writing. At least that is what is said by the one who says: it is the father's thesis. The specificity of writing would thus be intimately bound to the absence of the father. (*Dissemination* 77)

When Coleridge grants poetic symbolism the power to bring "divine reality into the temporal world," he positions the poet-prophet as its earthly father, thereby maintaining its status as logos (presence) as opposed to writing (absence).

But the unintended consequences of Coleridge's allegory/symbolism dichotomy explain another nineteenth century literary trend, according to Madsen. She argues that the Romantic "investment in the subjective experience of the reader explains the attraction held by symbolism for a generation of Romantic writers, but it also explains the rise of indeterminacy and ambiguity in allegorical narratives written in the wake of Romanticism" (83). Madsen continues:

> ...the focus of allegorical narratives has shifted in the wake of Romanticism from the revelation of a sacred unity to the disclosure of an irresolvable aporia at the heart of the hermeneutic endeavour. ...[Allegorical] narratives seek a single meaning in history, nature and anterior texts, but remain skeptical about reconciling a multiplicity of subjective interpretations. ...allegorical narratives of the Romantic period and after are increasingly ambiguous about the extent to which the interpretative issues explored in the narrative can be displaced into the context of some authoritative anterior sacred text... (Madsen 84-85)

In Chapter two, I suggested that this aporia is foreshadowed in some of the major texts of Romanticism. Wordsworth's poet-prophet regrets that his raw material, writing, is limited by its very materiality so much that it can be grossly misinterpreted by critics; this is why his ideal readers would be very much like himself.² Madsen points out that Emerson so enthusiastically advocates the agency of the genius poet that he "undermines
radically the autonomy and transcendent authority of God" (84). She writes, 
"...Emerson's emphasis upon subjectivism in interpretation meant that conventional styles 
of rhetoric such as typology could no longer operate to close or to complete the narrative 
in a satisfactory way" (84). Since the "conventional typology" of symbolism in much 
early Western literature relies upon a system grounded by one transcendent authority, the 
introduction of a powerful and subjective human mediator between the realms of the real 
and the transcendent radically undermines that authority. Building on Coleridge's model, 
Madsen associates symbolism with the subjective authority of the poet-prophet; it 
represents the poet's ability to imbue a literary text with a fully present, yet transcendent 
meaning. Post-Romantic Allegory, in this scheme, represents the loss of transcendent 
meaning through the displacement of authority. Since Madsen traces that theme through 
works of Hawthorne and Melville in particular, she considers those works allegorical, but 
the neat opposition between the symbolic and the allegorical that Madsen posits is as 
popularly undetermined as the binary romance/novel. The distinction Madsen outlines is 
subtle, and critics have used the terms interchangeably. For instance, the familiar line of 
critique that accuses the romance of excessive fantastic symbolism often appears more 
like a critique of what Madsen would call allegory. One example would be Henry 
James's complaint that "the faults" of Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter include "a want of 
reality and an abuse of the fanciful element –of a certain superficial symbolism. The 
people strike me not as characters, but as representatives, very picturesquely arranged, of 
a single state of mind..." (Hawthorne 286). By Madsen's and Coleridge's definitions, 
James is describing allegory, not symbolism. As useful as the dichotomy is to Madsen's 
study, in analyses of literary criticism since the early nineteenth century it may be more 
important to attend to the contexts in which the terms symbolism and allegory are used 
than to settle on any fixed definition of either. The sort of skeptical dilemma Madsen 
identifies with allegory has also been considered a characteristic of romance irrespective 
of whether a particular romance is considered allegorical or symbolic, and her larger
point is instructive regardless of the problems posed by those unfixed terms: much nineteenth century American fiction employs allegory, or heavy-handed, "fanciful symbolism," in conjunction with themes of lost authority and the impossibility of untangling the connection (or disconnection) between the real and the transcendent. By dramatizing the wide-ranging possible interpretations of symbolism and allegory, writers such as Hawthorne question the possibility of unmediated authorial intention.

In both James Fenimore Cooper's *The Pioneers* and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, the elements of romance and allegory are set against the backdrop of particular periods in American history. Furthermore, Cooper and Hawthorne are personally close to the settings and people described, so lived experience, a hallmark of realism, is an important element in each work. Both authors professed an interest in the intersections of the real and the imaginary; the "neutral ground" of Cooper's early novel, *The Spy*, and the "neutral territory" described in Hawthorne's "The Custom House" have become central metaphors in the characterization of romance—the place where, to quote Hawthorne, "the Actual and the Imaginary may meet" (*The Scarlet Letter* 33). Despite the tendency in some literary criticism to neatly oppose the romance and the realist novel, it is clear that these writers of romance were so concerned with the events of "real life" that their major works are historical and, to varying degrees, personal. One criticism of Cooper, in particular, has been that his characters and his plot schemes are alternately highly autobiographical and unrealistic. Hawthorne is both praised for capturing the spirit of Puritan New England and faulted for his fantastic plot devices in *The Scarlet Letter*.

Though critics have alternately described *The Pioneers* and *The Scarlet Letter* as highly symbolic and allegorical, it is safe to say that both have consistently been characterized as "heavily" symbolic or mythic, and they both address the chaos that ensues as the result of the waning influence of sacred or official authorities. Both authors were profoundly concerned with the relation between language and authority, and the
novels address what Madsen described as the major preoccupation of the Romantic and Post-Romantic allegorical novel; they address "the conditions necessary for an accurate understanding of the relationship between the ideal and the real but conclude in paradox, with the discovery that the transcendent is dependent upon the temporal for representation but once represented in language the transcendent is no longer pure transcendence..." (Madsen 11).

The introduction of the Romantic poet-prophet and the ensuing paradigm shift whereby an individual, subjective writer and reader could assume the authority previously associated with God (or Plato's philosopher, as I suggested in chapter one) also introduces another crucial element in production and maintenance of authority: the social. Once the language of Truth becomes a matter of interpretation, it begins to lose the character of authoritative discourse, no matter how charismatic or persuasive the poet may be, since authoritative discourse must appear to have no origin. "The authoritative word," writes Bakhtin, "is located in a distanced zone...It is, so to speak, the word of the fathers. Its authority was already acknowledged in the past. It is a prior discourse. It is therefore not a question of choosing it from among other possible discourses that are its equal" ("Discourse in Novel" 342). Even though poets such as Wordsworth and Coleridge clothed themselves in the mantle of Christian rhetoric and enjoyed the implicit power of a white male hegemony, they also asserted their individual, human genius and their special ability to glimpse and represent truth. As literary critics themselves, they unwittingly reinforced the sort of skepticism that undermined their self-prescribed roles as prophets and geniuses. No matter how unnerving Wordsworth found common literary critics and despite his efforts to discredit them, their very existence suggested the fallibility of his prophetic power. They called attention to the fact that Wordsworth's poetry represented one attempt, among many others, to communicate ideal truth and beauty and that his success was a matter of opinion. In The Pioneers and The Scarlet Letter, Cooper and Hawthorne explore the undermining of both Christian and legal
authority that results from a proliferation of interpreters. Writing and the circulation and
cultural role of texts are crucial subjects in both novels, and both novels end with
epitaphs that underscore those themes.

II. Fenimore Cooper's Literary Quandary

*The Pioneers* is set in a town modeled on Cooper's father's own settlement,
Cooperstown, and many of the characters, including Judge Temple, are loosely based on
Cooper's family and the villagers he encountered during his brief stay there. Although
Cooper himself curiously both admits and then denies these autobiographical associations
in his critical writings,4 the undisputed history of his family testifies to his personal
connection to the book. Two of the main characters, young Oliver Effingham and Natty
Bumppo, seem to represent elements of Cooper's own identity as both the young
intellectual heir to Cooperstown and the man who attempts to explain Native American
culture to a white audience. Cooper was not entirely comfortable in either of those roles,
as his portraits of these two characters and the culture of Templeton suggest. In the final
scene of *The Pioneers*, Natty Bumppo, Elizabeth Temple, and young Oliver contemplate
the epitaphs engraved on the headstones that mark the burial sites of Indian John
(Chingachgook) and the senior Oliver Effingham. The scene is charged with thematic
significance.

First, Natty and young Effingham represent opposite examples of white American
men in the late eighteenth century. Oliver's identity remains ambiguous throughout most
of the novel, but the early suggestion that Oliver is part Native American proves to be
merely metaphorical and not actual. Although he has spent enough time among Indians
to become acquainted with their ways, Oliver remains a "gentleman." Less than subtle
hints that Oliver is a man of cultivated manners abound from the beginning of the
narrative. Despite his bloody gunshot wound, when the doctor arrives, Oliver blushes at
the thought of removing his suit coat in the presence of Elizabeth. He is also spied
touching the keys of the piano as someone familiar with their feel and participating in the
call and response prayers at the Christmas eve service when scarcely any of the settlers
even know that they should be kneeling. These signs of civilization do not entirely
escape Elizabeth's observation, but she does not allow her romantic feelings for Oliver to
blossom until she is assured of his lineage, later in the novel. Their romance is one of
many examples in Cooper's fiction of a love that can only succeed when the pair are
culturally and racially matched. It is ultimately revealed that Oliver can boast both a
respectable lineage and a superior European education, qualities that render him a
suitable match for Judge Temple's daughter and a proper heir of the estate. Despite his
family's loyalist past, a sin that Cooper finds forgivable among gentleman, Oliver
represents the white, male European heir to the new world; his destiny is predetermined
by history, and he embodies Cooper's somewhat uncomfortable but consistent suggestion
that the white settlers represent the march of progress and civilization.

Natty Bumppo, also known as Leatherstocking and Hawk Eye, occupies the
neutral ground between the white settlers and the "savage" natives. The most memorable
and long-evolving character in Cooper's novels, he is often viewed as a mythic and
excessively romantic figure whose inarticulate philosophizing ultimately fails to
communicate any coherent ideology other than a vague adherence to Christian values, a
fear of the environmental impact of westward expansion, and an appreciation of Native
American culture. But as Cooper's thematic mouthpiece, he is a complicated figure. It is
exactly his inability to fully articulate the political, ideological and moral tensions
resulting from the European colonization of North America that proves the most
interesting element of his character. He is an unlikely spokesman, uneducated and not
quite civilized. Though he takes part in official and semi-official military endeavors at
various points during the five Leatherstocking novels, at the start of The Pioneers, he has
been settled in a simple cabin deep in the woods of upstate New York for many years,
where he has hunted and fished in relative solitude until colonial expansion invades. To the settlers, he remains an enigma; he reluctantly interacts with the townspeople in order to acquire supplies and he sometimes attends church or appears in the town pub. But his cultural and ideological alienation from the main body of settlers is nearly total. His primary function in the novel is to register the "wasty ways" of the settlers and to witness their destruction of the Native Americans and the wilderness, yet he is totally disempowered as a result of his lack of education and his outsider status. His unrelenting admonitions have no effect on the behavior of the white townspeople.

Despite his ignorance, Natty remains Cooper's hero precisely because he is both a product of white colonial culture and alienated from that culture. In more ways than one, he is a translator; he speaks both for idealized nature, which is terribly violated by the white settlers, and as an intermediary between the white men and the Native Americans. His in-between status is made possible by his rejection of cultivated European manners and, at the same time, his tragic inability to fit into that invading culture translates into white terms the inevitable destruction of the Natives. His simple and inept philosophizing symbolizes the incongruity of the white culture, based on a "civilized" taming of both nature and the "savages," and the Indian cultures whose customs and lifestyles, whose very lives, must inevitably be destroyed. The white colonizers represent "book-larning," religious dogma and complicated class and legal structures that, in The Pioneers, ultimately have no stable basis and finally prove only as useful as the latest opportunistic interpretation renders them. The settlers possess the forms of an ordered, moral culture—they have the texts, the Bible, and Judge Temple's "volumes"—but they ultimately have no governing authority monitoring their behavior or the execution of the law in Templeton. Left to their own devices, the citizens with power in Templeton fashion the laws according to both a corrupted European model and their own whims. In The Pioneers, the complicated and destructive machinations of the settlers are as
inscrutable to Natty as the words on his best friend's headstone, and Cooper implies, throughout the novel, that language, and particularly writing, is the agent of chaos.

The intellectual and cultural gaps separating Oliver and Natty, the white civilization and the Native Americans are dramatized in the final scene when Natty is found examining the newly constructed graves. On the former site of Natty's modest cabin, which he burned to the ground in protest of the invasion of the settlers, the tiny cemetery designed by Oliver reflects European standards. The space is "surrounded by a circle of mason-work" and includes "a small gate" and "gay" "turf" (449-450). Next to Chingachgook's "simple slab" there stands "a rich monument decorated with an urn, and ornamented with the chisel," which is the grave of the loyalist Oliver Effingham, Sr. (450). This pronounced inequity reveals Cooper's very definite reinforcement of a caste system he seems to support throughout his novels. Indeed, the ascendance of Elizabeth and young Oliver, the perfectly matched couple, as the future proprietors of Templeton and the Temple estate seems to remedy the chaos plaguing the village. Immediately after their union, Elizabeth begins to set things straight in Templeton, and Oliver approves. "'I did not think you had been such a manager,'" he exclaims. And Elizabeth replies, "'Oh! I manage more deeply than you imagine, sir;''" though she knows that her matriarchy will only last "for a time" (449).

When the happy couple comes upon Natty in the grave yard, he is "stretched out on the earth" in front of Chingachgook's headstone, "pushing aside the long grass that had already sprung up from the luxuriant soil around its base" (450). The description suggests that the earth is trying to reclaim Chingachgook and erase the evidence that his grave was fashioned by the white men according to their customs. The grass also serves to dramatize Natty's attempt to read the words engraved on the "simple slab." He moves the grass "apparently to lay bare the inscription" (450), though he certainly cannot read it. Speaking aloud to himself, Natty says:
"Well, well—I'm bold to say it's all right! There's something that I suppose is reading; but I can't make any thing of it; though the pipe, and the tomahawk, and the moccasins, be pretty well, for a man that, I dares say, never seed 'ither of the things. Ah's me! There they lie, side by side, happy enough! Who will there be to put me in the 'arth, when my time comes!"(450)

The fact that Natty "can't make anything of it" recalls earlier scenes in the book, especially those in the courtroom when Natty cannot understand the inflated legalese of the caricatured attorneys. But though he cannot make out the language, he does note that the pictures carved in the stone reflect a white man's interpretation of Native American identity--an attempt to reach across a cultural barrier that ultimately proves inept. The mediocre representations of the pipe, the tomahawk and the moccasins prove a laughable tribute coming from the very people who caused Chingachgook's demise. And as if this display does not quite bring home the theme of cultural incongruity, the inscription of Chingachgook's name is mistranslated. "'What have you put over the Red-skin?'" asks Natty, and as Oliver reads the inscription, Natty has to correct him, more than once:

"This stone is raised to the memory of an Indian Chief, of the Delaware tribe, who was known by the several names of John Mohegan; Mohican" –
"Mo-hee-can, lad; they call theirselves! 'hee-can."
"Mohican; and Chingagook" –
"'Gach, boy; –gach-gook; Chingachgook; which, intarpreted, means Big-serpent. The name should be set down right, for an Indian's name has always some meaning in it"
"I will see it altered. 'He was the last of his people who continued to inhabit this country; and it may be said of him, that his faults were those of an Indian, and his virtues those of a man.'"
"You never said a truer word, Mr. Oliver..." (452).

Though Natty's response, "'you never said a truer word,'" is not intended ironically, it can easily be read that way. Despite the fact that Oliver himself has such close and extended contact with Chingachgook that he is suspected of being his relative throughout the bulk of the novel, he can no longer even pronounce Chingachgook's Indian name correctly. It is as if, along with his denunciation of his Indian blood in chapter forty, Oliver's reunion with white culture has erased his connections to Chingachgook and his Native culture.
The mispronunciation symbolizes not only Oliver's alienation from the Native Americans but also the fact that Native American language cannot be translated in written English without losing its meaning. That white men are responsible for memorializing and misrepresenting Chingachgook in his epitaph also reflects both Cooper's realization that he is among those powerful white colonizers who are writing the history of the Natives whom they are also destroying. It symbolizes both Cooper's sense of responsibility to the Indians and his fear that any attempt to record Native American culture as a chapter of white European history will necessarily miss the mark. Yet Cooper knew that his own novels would be among the first attempts by white intellectuals to represent Native American culture as sympathetic and complex, and he developed his portraits of Native American types through several novels despite his apparent discomfort with the politics of cross-cultural representation.

In Bakhtinian terms, Chingachgook's epitaph symbolizes Cooper's fear that a dialogic relationship between the white settlers and the Native Americans is impossible. Their respective languages, and by extension their cultures, are too alien to be assimilated, and despite Oliver's attempt to pay tribute to Chingachgook, the epitaph finally signals an insurmountable univocality. Despite his desire to portray Native Americans as a potentially sympathetic race in the Leatherstocking novels (I say potentially because some of Cooper's portraits of Native Americans reflect the more stereotypical and decidedly unsympathetic view), clearly Cooper has lost all hope that the European settlers will be able to live peacefully with the Natives. In his critique of Cooper's depiction of Native Americans, Gary Ashwill explains that Cooper's fatalism was not unique. "Sometime between the American Revolution and the publication of the first of James Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking Tales in 1823," writes Ashwill, "white Americans ceased to believe that Native Americans could become 'civilized'" (Ashwill 211). Although the majority of colonizers had originally assumed that the difference between the two races was merely one of degrees, the enduring failure of efforts to
assimilate Indians gradually led to the belief that the cause was hopeless (211). Roy Harvey Pearce labeled the resulting attitude toward the untamable Natives "savagism," and according to Ashwill, "Cooper's first two Leatherstocking Tales, *The Pioneers* and *The Last of the Mohicans*, were among the most influential dramatizations of 'savagism' in America, allegorically or symbolically justifying the white conquest of America by portraying it as a historically inevitable march of progress across the continent" (211). Throughout *The Pioneers*, Cooper uses his failed translator, Natty, to symbolize both his wish that the inevitable destruction of Native American culture could be avoided and his unwavering sense that history has already proved him wrong.

The most villainous characters in *The Pioneers* are also laughable. Richard Jones, Hiram Doolittle and Jotham Riddel, the agents of Natty's demise in the novel, represent the unthinking force of history that tramples Natty, the wilderness and the Native Americans. The fact that these characters are comedic and evil underscores Cooper's relatively lenient attitude toward the colonizers—they may be haphazardly committing genocide and raping the environment, but they are more bumbling fools than calculating imperialists. The end result is the same, however. By depicting these characters' chaotic, stumbling grasp at the reigns of authority in Templeton, Cooper seems to suggest that they can take no credit for their achievements. Rather, they have been rewarded by history, and their dominion is predestined; incompetence will not bar their victory. A similar point is made by Geoffrey Rans, who writes:

> We cannot doubt that Cooper's sympathies lay with the civilizers, but he lays bare the contradictions and futilities of their liberal virtues.... While Cooper endorses the civilized values—they are what he wants—his novels reveal ruthlessly the irreconcilable contradictions that undermine their reliability; even the most fundamental and mystified concept, the law, is shown to be woefully inadequate in both principle and practice. Even its chief spokesman Marmaduke Temple is not simply allowed naively to witness how imperfect his absolutes are but is rendered as a character who in practice chooses, whimsically, to ignore his responsibilities. (Rans 41)
Natty's inability to understand the inflated and ultimately laughable "learned" legal and religious rhetoric throughout the book not only symbolizes the incongruity of the "natural" cultures (the unlearned woodsman and the Natives) and the civilizers but Cooper also uses inflated empty rhetoric to reveal the settlers' lack of authoritative bases. The law is "woefully inadequate" because the agents of the law have no solid philosophical or moral ground on which to base their claims, only a shadow of what they remember to be the civilized European forms.

Though Marmaduke Temple has no formal schooling in the law, he is appointed Judge of Templeton because his superior station, with its suggestion of education and entitlement, has made him the most likely candidate. His inability to maintain order in Templeton stems partly from his preoccupation with other matters (the buried subplot of his efforts to locate Edward Effingham) and his unfathomable willingness to give the reigns of power, as a Christmas present, to his cousin Richard Jones, whom he appoints sheriff. This blatant nepotism is made still more unforgivable by the fact that Temple remains aware of Jones's ridiculous incompetence and selfishness throughout the book. Jones in turn deputizes other bumbling evil-doers in the narrative, and they proceed to flout the law whenever such a breach will benefit them personally. One of Cooper's dominant devices for revealing the incompetence of these characters is their malapropisms and empty rhetoric. Much of the time, Natty's failure to understand their language is as much a result of their idiocy as it is his own ignorance.

The early scene in the Bold Dragoon reveals both the inequities that compromise the law and the laughable character of those servants of the law on whom the settlers depend for justice. Cooper's descriptions of the lawyers in town partake of every negative stereotype ever volleyed at the profession. One of them, who is described as "a slovenly looking, shabby genteel young man...who was as much above the artisans around him, as he was himself inferior to the real gentlemen," reveals both his ignorance and his excessive pride when he engages in an exchange of pseudo-Latin phrases with the
doctor at the bar. Neither of them knows what the other is saying, but they play along for fear of being found ignorant. The lawyer pretends to be a servant of justice, but his pontificating reveals his naiveté and his greed undercuts his idealistic posturing. When the subject of Judge Temple's accidental shooting of Oliver arises, the lawyer complains that the Judge ought to be answerable to the law. He exclaims, "'This is a country of laws...The law, gentlemen, is no respecter of persons, in a free country. It is one of the great blessings that has been handed down to us from our ancestors, that all men are equal in the eye of the law, as they are by nater'" (152). His feigned deference to the Declaration of Independence is undercut when Mrs. Hollister points out that a rigid caste system and the impunity of the wealthy are also "blessings" that have been handed down with her simple reply: "'And a mighty big error ye would make of it, Mister Todd...should ye be putting the matter into the law at all, with Judge Temple, who has a purse as long as one of them pine trees on the hill'" (153). The unpalatable talk of bringing down the law upon the most powerful citizen in the town alarms the patrons at the bar to the degree that a "short silence" ensues. Indeed, the Judge is never made to account legally for the accident because of his power, because Oliver, being a gentleman, does not share the townspeople's litigious persuasions and because the Judge assures both Oliver and the Doctor that he will compensate them. But the event takes on greater significance when Natty brandishes his gun at Hiram Doolittle later in the novel.

Pieces of paper that signify power circulate throughout the novel. Jones's commission as sheriff basically takes the form of a Christmas note, handed to him by Elizabeth. The casual way she hands him the paper "surprise" during their Christmas morning walk underscores the alarming degree to which the wealthy distribute great power according to their own whims. Though Judge Temple seems blissfully unaware of the trouble Jones's appointment is bound to cause, he remains responsible for initiating the chain of events that result in the tragic dramatic climax of the novel. Another trivial yet powerful bit of paper brandished by a laughable, dangerous authority figure is the
search warrant Doolittle acquires under the guise of finding a deer shot out of season in Natty's cabin. His real motive is to discover the non-existent gold he, Riddel and Jones have convinced themselves is in the cabin. Natty's disregard of the search warrant results in his final downfall. Though he claims to regret his role in the matter, Judge Temple himself declares that Natty must be held accountable for his unlawful behavior. Although the Judge has no respect for Doolittle, he claims that an adherence to the law is necessary on the frontier, where chaos would ensue if the law were not respected. The fact that Temple himself actually shot a man only months before whereas Natty merely aimed his gun at Doolittle and his deputies never enters into the discussions of justice. Temple's hypocrisy and the hollow forms of justice in Templeton are symbolized by Natty's inability to understand the legal rhetoric bandied-about in the courtroom and his thwarted attempts to put his case into his own words. Natty's appeals to the "laws of nature" and the fact that he was a citizen of the wilderness long before the Judge and his "new laws" began to restrict his behavior are irrelevant in the court room. When Natty is subjected to the stocks to face public ridicule and later confined to prison, the injustice of Templeton's legal system is revealed, and the literal and figurative colonization of the wilderness are complete. Symbolizing a higher sense of order, Elizabeth conspires in Natty's escape from the law, reassuring Cooper's readers that the chaos caused by colonization will ultimately come to an end when Elizabeth and Oliver take the reigns of power and when Natty and Chingachgook are gone.

Another European institution that Cooper examines in *The Pioneers* is organized religion. Cobbled together, just like their justice system, the colonists' church reflects both their limited means and their lack of common tradition. With no established religious institutions to support them, the town is once again subject to the whims of its more powerful citizens. Richard Jones not only chooses the minister but also helps him write the sermons and runs the church services. Though he experiences some resistance from the settlers who represent diverse sects, his intention is to subtly impose his own
Episcopalian forms and doctrines. The Christmas Eve sermon delivered by the newcomer Reverend Grant, who answers to Richard in all matters, satisfies the settlers, whose only simple-minded requirement of religion is that it impose some sort of "doctrine." Though the sermon overtly addresses the challenge posed by the diversity of religions in the town, it has larger implications in relation to the novel:

"When we consider the great diversity of the human character, influenced as it is by education, by opportunity, and by the physical and moral conditions of the creature, my dear hearers," he earnestly concluded, "it can excite no surprise, that creeds, so very different in their tendencies, should grow out of a religion, revealed, it is true, but whose revelations are obscured by the lapse of ages, and whose doctrines were, after the fashion of the countries in which they were first promulgated, frequently delivered in parables, and in a language abounding in metaphors and loaded with figures. On points where the learned have, in purity of heart, been compelled to differ, the unlettered will necessarily be at variance....All that is now obscure, shall become plain to our expanded faculties; and what, to our present senses, may seem irreconcilable to our limited notions of mercy, of justice, and of love, shall stand, irradiated by the light of truth, confessedly the suggestions of Omniscience, and the acts of an All-powerful Benevolence." (127-8)

If Grant's mission is to reveal religious truths that have been "obscured by the lapse of ages" and to demystify a language that is so loaded with "metaphors" and "figures" as to be inscrutable to the general public, he fails miserably with this discourse because of his own inscrutability. Virtually none of the settlers understand his meaning; he fails to recognize that the cultural and intellectual gaps he identifies are utterly reified in his own relationship to his flock. Though his sermon is not aimed directly at Natty and Chingachgook, its themes address their particular situations.

Grant is interested in Chingachgook particularly, since he represents the savage who could be tamed by religious training, and he views Natty in a similar light. Yet his language is often inscrutable to them, even when his appeals are direct. During the dramatic scene of Chingachgook's death, Grant appears out of thin air, as if Cooper is so intent on finally revealing the incompatibility of the Native and Christian faiths that he
employs the literary device of deus ex machina in order to amplify the allegorical element of his message. Though Chingachgook, Natty and the rest of their party are surrounded by fire and in the middle of the woods, Grant suddenly and miraculously appears "clinging to the side of the mountain, and striving to reach the place where they stood," causing Oliver to exclaim, "Is the hill alive with people at a time like this?" (418). But Cooper is less concerned with the implausibility of his plot at this point than with his final contrast of the civilizer and the savage. During the extended passages when Grant attempts to rejuvenate Chingachgook's Christian sympathies with elevated rhetoric, Chingachgook is so far removed from his ministrations that he responds in his native language to Natty, the only one able to understand him. Frustrated by his inability to understand Chingachgook, Grant finally switches roles with Natty and Chingachgook, and he has to appeal to Natty for a translation of Chingachgook's final words. Chingachgook's disregard for Grant's efforts is his only palpable act of defiance in the novel. When Grant asks him, "do you hear me? do you wish the prayers appointed by the church, at this trying moment?" Chingachgook's mute response is full of disdain:

The Indian turned his ghastly face towards the speaker, and fastened his dark eyes on him, steadily, but vacantly. No sign of recognition was made; and in a moment he moved his head again slowly towards the vale, and begun to sing, using his own language, in those low, guttural tones that have been so often mentioned, his notes rising with his theme, till they swelled so loud as to be distinct. (419).

Whether Cooper means Chingachgook's final withdrawal into cultural isolation to represent a moment of clarity or to reflect the illogical behavior of a dying savage is unclear. The scene is foreshadowed earlier in the Bold Dragoon, when Chingachgook becomes so drunk that he drops his usual guarded manner and begins to speak and sing in his native language in the same low tones. Certainly, Cooper wants his readers to view Chingachgook as a tragic figure who struggles equally with his hatred of the white man and his failure to understand their culture. Misunderstandings proliferate during the
scene, as Natty misinterprets Grant's religiously charged figurative language, Grant fails to understand Chingachgook's defiance, and Natty no longer even attempts to act as translator. When Reverend Grant tries to administer Chingachgook's last rites, Natty laments, "Though all you say be true, and you have the scripter gospels for it, too...you will make nothing of the Indian. He hasn't seen a Moravian priest sin' the war; and it's hard to keep them from going back to their native ways" (421).

Like the law, Christianity loses its authority on the frontier because it is based on a system of moral education and traditions that are entirely alien to the "savages" and almost entirely alien to Natty. In keeping with the conventions of "savagism," Cooper's Chingachgook is depicted as unable to internalize the Christian teachings he has been exposed to, despite his own seemingly earnest efforts. Chingachgook's loss of Christian faith stands in contrast to Natty's simple but persistent testimonies to God, as if Cooper contends that his whiteness predisposes him to an internalization of that faith: "Although the faith of the hunter was by no means clear, yet the fruits of early instruction had not entirely fallen in the wilderness" (421). When Chingachgook resigns himself to death, Natty takes comfort in his belief that the Indian's "Wahcondah" is just another name for the one all-encompassing God whose mercy is colorblind. "Red skin, or white," says Natty, "it's all over now! He's to be judged by a righteous Judge, and by no laws that's made to suit times, and new ways" (422). Natty's simple religious belief in the justice of the afterlife both contrasts and mirrors the colonists' unexamined faith in their own revered legal system. Whether or not the comparison is intended to undercut Natty's faith, the systematic persecution of Chingachgook and Natty in the novel suggests that Christianity's religious diversity training has little effect on the civilizers. Nevertheless, if Natty is Cooper's hero in The Pioneers, and if Cooper does lament the impossibility of cultural assimilation in the New World, it may be that Natty's faith in a just God reflects Cooper's regret that radically different cultures cannot coexist in this life.
In *From Puritanism to Postmodernism*, Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury argue that "in inventing Natty, Cooper had found a prime subject, that of the alternative possibility secreted within the wilderness, an ideal life beyond legal and social conventions governed by moral ones in their Romantic essence" (Ruland and Bradbury 95-6). Natty's world remains ideal only so far as he is able to evade those legal and social conventions. A major element of that evasion is Natty's alternative knowledge. In *The Pioneers*, Templeton is a civilization entangled in pseudo-authoritative systems that Cooper associates with writing and "book larning." Richard Jones is the primary representative of chaotic authority: ";"I read," he boasts in chapter seven, "all kinds of books; of France as well as England; of Greece, as well as Rome" (93). Natty, by contrast, seems humbly proud of his lack of book-learning: ";"I am a plain, unlearned man, that has served both the king and his country, in his day, ag'in the French and savages, but never so much as looked into a book, or larned a letter of scholarship, in my born days. I've never seen the use of such in-door work..." (132). Though Cooper was an intellectual educated in the European tradition of what Natty calls "indoor work," he registers his distrust of the self-entitlement and unchecked authority associated with "civilization." Blinded by their assumed destiny and their adherence to European forms taken totally out of context, the civilizers fail to recognize the wanton destruction that surrounds them, and Cooper prophetically predicts that, despite the seeming abundance of land and resources, citizens of the new country should realize that "the evil day must arrive, when their possessions shall become unequal to their wants" (16). Judge Temple meekly complains that Jones and others are wasting resources throughout the book, but he is continually rebuffed by Jones's assurances that the woods and game will never run out. Jones is utterly uninterested in reasoned limits or guidelines regarding the use of resources unless the mandating of those limits can be viewed as an exercise of power. The crime the authorities eventually accuse Natty of is shooting a single deer out of season, a mockery of justice given the two major scenes in which Richard instigates mass
slaughters of birds and fish. But Richard delights in the thought of posting "advertisements" limiting the use of land for hunting in Templeton; he wants to write them himself. The image of Natty's woods dotted with "No Trespass" signs amplifies Cooper's association of writing and wanton, illegitimate power.

In the first chapter of *The Pioneers*, Cooper reassures his readers that the very institutions which had fallen into chaos during the early days of westward expansion, or the 1790's that are depicted in the main narrative, had regained their integrity by 1823.

The traveler making his way through the center of New York State in 1823 would witness a country utterly civilized:

Roads diverge in every direction, from even and graceful bottoms of the valleys, to the most rugged and intricate passes of the hills. Academies, and minor edifices of learning, meet the eye of the stranger, at every few miles, as he winds his way through this uneven territory; and places for the worship of God, abound with that frequency which characterizes a moral and reflecting people, and with that variety of exterior and canonical government which flows from unfettered liberty of conscience. In short, the whole district is hourly exhibiting how much can be done, in even a rugged country, and with a severe climate, under the dominion of mild laws, and where every man feels a direct interest in the prosperity of a commonwealth, of which he knows himself to form a part. (16)

It is as if Cooper spends the rest of the novel reminding us, painfully, that his ideal present world is the product of genocide and environmental destruction. This idealistic description ends with a pastoral scene of the settler, whose possession of the land is figuratively completed when he "leave[s] his remains to moulder under the sod which he tills," and his son, who "born in the land, piously wishes to linger around the grave of his father" (16). This scene is nearly identical to that which is described in the final chapter, though Chingachgook has no son left to mourn his passing and his grave marks a loss of home rather than the inheritance suggested in Chapter one. Enveloping the narrative with scenes of grave yard visits, Cooper foregrounds the relationships between history and death, progress and loss. The return of order symbolized by the description of New York
in 1832 is predicated on the death of Chingachgook (and, symbolically, the absence or
death of his people). Natty leaves, taking all hope of cultural assimilation with him.
Chingachgook's botched epitaph symbolizes the incommensurability of white and Native
discourses, since even Oliver's well-intended attempt to memorialize Chingachgook
misfires. Though the chaos of Templeton appears as another necessary stage in the			
taming of the "wilderness," a stage that, mercifully, passes, Cooper maintains that
immorality, greed and anarchy are basic elements of the civilizers' culture. Though the
return of order suppresses chaos, it could easily return. After all, the most calculating and
immoral character in the novel, Doolittle, also leaves Templeton in the end, "scattering
his professional science and legal learning through the land; vestiges of both of which
are to be discovered there even to the present hour" (446-7). And despite the
conventional romantic happy ending, including the restoration of Oliver's inheritance and
his marriage to Elizabeth, the final note is also tragic –the last scene does not depict the
wedding but rather the grave yard.

*The Pioneers* consists of competing univocal discourses. Among the civilizers,
their religious and moral pretensions, symbolized by the inflated religious rhetoric of Mr.
Grant, the fleeting allusions to the Declaration of Independence and the moral code of
gentlemen, fail to jibe with their laws or their practice. Natty represents the only
possibility of a translation. He alone could teach the settlers to live symbiotically with
the land, and, in a very literal sense, he is the only one who could translate
Chingachgook's language and behavior. But Cooper's characters perceive the gap
between the competing white and Native American discourses to be so utterly wide that
no dialogue is possible –even Natty gives up in the end. The proliferating textual
symbols of power that have no foundation in real justice represent a baseless authoritative
discourse that nevertheless goes unquestioned except by those who have no power to
challenge authority. Rhetoric is dangerous in *The Pioneers*, and Oliver's inept epitaph
symbolizes Cooper's fear that writing can do as much violence as it does service,
irrespective of the intentions of the author. By choosing to write historical romance, Cooper evaded the full responsibility of the historian. In his 1832 introduction to *The Pioneers*, Cooper almost apologizes for including factual details in his tale; "he would have made a far better book," he acknowledges, had he "confined himself" to a "general picture" rather than "literal fact" (6). Literal facts, he observes, and "a rigid adhesion to truth" are the essential elements of history, but they "destroy the charm of fiction" (6). Nevertheless, Cooper could not avoid the historical in his fictional works; many of the novels (all of the Leatherstocking novels and *The Spy*, for instance) involve historical elements and "literal fact." Cooper felt that certain ideas and principles were better conveyed in fiction, where the imagination could create possibilities negated by history, but his obvious proclivity toward political writing demanded that he lend his ideas the weight of history. Emily Miller Buddick argues that "the problem for Cooper was not whether writing could reproduce reality but whether writing could be made to reveal its biases and acknowledge its origins. Cooper believed the preference for fictional over historical composition itself represented a politics of writing, hardly neutral" (Buddick 5).

By depicting westward expansion and the Native Americans as both a product of his imagination and a part of American history, Cooper reveals the white, male, intellectual enterprise of historiography as an imaginative and potentially violent endeavor, and he knowingly leaves himself vulnerable to wide and varied interpretations of his intentions. Though his portraits of Native Americans seem alternately racist and paternalistic to modern readers, some in his contemporary audience complained that his Natives were too sympathetic. Cooper's recurrent themes of literary indeterminacy predicted such varied readings of his work.
III. *The Scarlet Letter:* Rhetoric as Unchecked Authority

Hawthorne also ended his greatest historical romance with a portentous epitaph. *The Scarlet Letter* is a story about interpretation and the changing cultural codes that, at times, seem to have no basis other than their association with opportunistic people and institutions of power, and at other times, seem inscribed in the very fabric of the world. The letter A serves as Hawthorne's sliding signifier, and he demonstrates how language can be a precarious weapon that, as a result of its ambiguous nature, can be turned against those who wield it. "As a single letter, the most indeterminate of all symbols, and first letter of the alphabet, the beginning of all communication," writes Charles Feidelson, Jr., "Hester's emblem represents a potential point of coherence within a manifold historical experience" (Feidelson 295). Hawthorne's depiction of Puritan Boston is an exercise in making sense of the past, but if he intends for the letter A to symbolize potential coherence, he also demonstrates how the forces of living, social discourse conspire to diffuse that coherence.

In keeping with his desire to write fiction that blends both the real and the imaginary, Hawthorne presents the A as a historical artifact in his "autobiographical" introduction, "The Custom House." He claims to find it in the abandoned "second-story" of the Custom-House among other historical documents, and he even challenges his readers to show up at his door and demand to see it. From the very beginning, the A simultaneously suggests history and forgetting. Though the scrap of cloth remains recognizable as the letter A, its craftsmanship "gives evidence of a now forgotten art, not to be recovered even by the process of picking out threads" (29). Conveying the actual physical presence of the A proves crucial to Hawthorne's narrative:

This rag of scarlet cloth, –for time, and wear, and a sacrilegious moth, had reduced it to little other than a rag, –on careful examination, assumed the shape of a letter. It was the capital letter A. By an accurate measurement, each limb proved to be precisely three inches and a quarter in length. It
had been intended, there could be no doubt, as an ornamental article of dress; but how it was to be worn, or what rank, honor, dignity, in by-past times, were signified by it, was a riddle which (so evanescent are the fashions of the world in these particulars) I saw little hope of solving. And yet it strangely interested me. (29)

Clearly, Hawthorne wants the reader to see and, later, to feel the letter. He begins by casting-about for explanations as to its purpose, but he proves so far off the mark with his suggestion that it must indicate some "rank, honor, dignity" that his guess-work amplifies the emptiness of the letter's significance out of its original context. Still, its mystery leaves him "strangely interested"; just as humans feel compelled to write history, to make sense of the past, Hawthorne is compelled by the A, even to the point of unwittingly placing it on his own breast, where it seems to induce a sensation of "burning heat...as if the letter were not of red cloth, but red-hot iron" (30). Enthralled by both the mysterious history indicated in the letter and the creative possibilities suggested by its indeterminacy Hawthorne is branded, as if his imagination, so dulled by his work in the Custom-House, suddenly and violently recovers from the torpor it has suffered during the previous years.

The letter represents the only spark of life in the Custom-House, where the daily events are so lifeless that Hawthorne's coworkers are most often leaning back in their chairs, asleep, surrounded by dust. It is an engagement with history and the imagination that finally saves Hawthorne from that interminable, death-like slumber. While he remains within the realm of mundane reality represented by the Custom-House, Hawthorne finds writing impossible:

So little adapted is the atmosphere of a Custom-House to the delicate harvest of fancy and sensibility, that, had I remained there through ten Presidencies yet to come, I doubt whether the tale of "The Scarlet Letter" would ever have been brought before the public eye. My imagination was a tarnished mirror. It would not reflect, or only with miserable dimness, the figures with which I did my best to people it. (31-2)

Reminding his readers that his is a historical tale, Hawthorne presents his romance as a version of a story already written –he does not invent it but merely brings it "before the
public eye." Likewise, the characters in *The Scarlet Letter* are not children of his imagination; he only struggles to bring them back to life, as the passage continues:

> The characters of the narrative would not be warmed and rendered malleable, by any heat that I could kindle at my intellectual forge. They would take neither the glow of passion nor the tenderness of sentiment, but retained all the rigidity of dead corpses, and stared at me in the face with a fixed and ghastly grin of contemptuous defiance. "What have you to do with us?" that expression seemed to say. (32)

In order to write his romance, Hawthorne has to spiritually and physically distance himself from the Custom-House, so he retreats to a "familiar room" in his home, where he finds that "neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other" (33). If the Custom-House is "the real world," then "fairy-land" is the world of the dead who await reawakening. Throughout "The Custom-House" chapter, Hawthorne is haunted by the ghosts of his forebears, and the ghost of the old surveyor, "Mr. Surveyor Pue," whose record of Hester Prynne's life is found wrapped in the scarlet letter. Pue seems to appear before Hawthorne, commanding him to re-tell the story of the A: "Do this," he charges, "...give your predecessor's memory the credit which will be rightfully its due" (31). Hawthorne responds, "I will" (31). The proper atmosphere for resurrecting the characters of the narrative proves to be a moonlit room, where "ghosts might enter...without affrighting us" (33). In that environment, "one remove father from the actual," a man might "dream strange things, and make them look like truth" (33).

*The Scarlet Letter* never moves very far from the graveyard and the ghosts of the dead because death represents a doorway to history that simultaneously offers the concreteness of a past reality and the fertile ground of imaginary play. Hester's story would not have presented so compelling an opportunity for Hawthorne's "intellectual forge" had it not been utterly forgotten and far enough in the past that her world would seem strange to Hawthorne's audience. Beginning as it does in "the real world" of the
Custom-House, the novel ends in a graveyard, the "fairy-land" of the imagination, and, situated between the real and the imaginary, the body of the story reads like a journey from one realm to the other. The letter A represents both the point of departure and the place of arrival, since the final line of the novel is the epitaph: "ON A FIELD, SABLE, THE LETTER A, GULES" (*The Scarlet Letter* 228). Just as Hawthorne lends his story a material historical significance by claiming to find the embroidered A and Poe's records in the Custom-House, the narrator of the tale concretely situates Hester's grave in a location that would have been familiar to his readers and claims that it can still be found at the graveyard at King's Chapel adjacent to the prison-house first described in Chapter one. Linking death and imprisonment, Hawthorne underscores the inevitability of both and contrasts the hopes of the original colonists with the grim reality of their cultural and natural limitations:

The founders of a new colony, whatever Utopia of human virtue and happiness they might originally project, have invariably recognized it among their earliest practical necessities to allot a portion of the virgin soil as a cemetery, and another portion as the site of a prison. In accordance with this rule, it may safely be assumed that the forefathers of Boston had built the first prison-house, somewhere in the vicinity of Cornhill, almost as seasonably as they marked out the first burial-ground, on Isaac Johnson's lot, and round about his grave, which subsequently became the nucleus of all the congregated sepulchres in the old church-yard of King's Chapel. (41)

That graveyard becomes the nucleus of Hawthorne's story, and he relies on the combination of its real presence, its historical remoteness and its spiritual fecundity to create the suggestive yet ambiguous imaginative terrain for his romance.

F. O. Matthiessen has argued that one of Hawthorne's "most fertile resources" was "the device of multiple choice" ("Integrity of Effect" 289). The letter A represents Hawthorne's most overdetermined symbol, and because of its many possible interpretations, the epitaph constitutes one example of thematic multiple choice in *The Scarlet Letter*. Most importantly, the epitaph's A can indicate two very contradictory
meanings. Many of Hawthorne's dark symbols are counterbalanced by symbols of hope or life: the gloom of the prison door contrasts with the rose bush that miraculously thrives in the barren soil, and Hester's grim letter A is also strikingly beautiful and ornate.

The same can be said of the epitaph. Though it seems the final indication that Hester and Dimmesdale could not escape the persecution of their culture and its blind religious zealously, it is also a reminder of Hester's perseverance and passion. The appearance and form of the epitaph are equally suggestive, as is Hawthorne's choice of words in the description:

All around, there were monuments carved with armorial bearings; and on this simple slab of slate—as the curious investigator may still discern, and perplex himself with the purport—there appeared the semblance of an engraved escutcheon. It bore a device, a herald's wording of which might serve for a motto and brief description of our now concluded legend; so sombre is it, and relieved only by one ever-glowing point of light gloomier than the shadow... (228)

The modest "simple slab" contrasts with the elevated tone of the epitaph, just as Hester's ornate A stands-out on the breast of her sober Puritan dress throughout the story. The heraldic wording also elevates the "sombre" memorial and mitigates the weight of Hester and Dimmesdale's sin, since, as Hyatt H. Waggoner has argued, "...the language of heraldry not only distanced, it lifted, enhanced, and ennobled, the deeds of which it spoke in its own peculiar symbolism. Illegitimate birth, for example, ceased to be a disgrace when emblazoned on a feudal coat of arms...public acknowledgment of the family's 'disgrace' on their shield 'wiped out' the stigma" ("Dark Light on the Letter" 321).

"Gules" is the heraldic term for the color red, which symbolizes life, love and passion throughout the novel. It is also the typical color of Pearl's dress, suggesting its association with wild abandon and rebellion against authority. "Sable," the heraldic term for black, has obvious associations with death and loss, and it also typifies Hester's sombre Puritan dress. Just as her body was a symbol of the red-black contrast as she
made her way around town with the red letter blazing-out on her breast, the epitaph is also meant to suggest that bold contrast. Waggoner and Robert L. Brant have both indicated Hawthorne's literary inspiration for the epitaph. It takes its form from the final line of Andrew Marvell's poem, "The Unfortunate Lover," wherein a tragic love that meets only adversity during life is nevertheless noble and inspirational. The final stanzas read:

This is the only Banneret
That ever love created yet:
Who though, by the malignant Starrs,
Forced to live in Storms and Warrs:

Yet dying leaves a perfume here
And Musick within every Ear:
And he in Story only rules,
In a Field Sable a Lover Gules.

Brant argues that Hawthorne's quote "testifies chiefly to his desire –his 'hope,' as he had put it in his first chapter –that he might find something somewhere in the story he was about to tell that would lighten or 'relieve' what he called 'the darkening close of a tale of human frailty and sorrow'" ("Dark Light on the Letter" 322). According to Waggoner, Hawthorne could not ultimately lighten his ending –even the "one ever-glowing point of light" in the epitaph is "gloomier than the shadow" (The Scarlet Letter 228). But, as we have seen, Hawthorne is very comfortable among shadows and gloom, where his imagination enjoys the relative freedom of ambiguity. Though the story of Hester and Dimmesdale offers little hope that cultural persecution sponsored by institutionalized authority, and internalized by that authority's subjects, can ever be overcome, the story of the letter A and the retelling it inspires through Hawthorne (as writer and narrator) suggest something quite different.

Though Waggoner argues that Hawthorne fails to maintain the optimism of his first chapter, it is equally true that the final chapter circles the reader back to the
beginning. Brant has argued that Hawthorne's Marvellian gesture attests to a heightening of the aesthetic rather than moral concerns of the romance at its close. Likewise, the envelope structure of the opening and closing scenes of the graveyard as the imaginative "nucleus" of the story and the recurrent focus on the letter A as an indicator of pure linguistic potential suggest a cycle that may be as reassuring as it is inescapable. Hawthorne's tale begins in autobiography with "The Custom-House," where he very openly suggests that he wishes to atone for the sins of his Puritan forebears, two of whom are noted for their cruel persecution of sinners. There have been readings of *The Scarlet Letter* that focus on Hawthorne's entanglement in Puritan guilt. It may be that his personal associations with New England, Puritan history and the "deep" "stain" of his ancestors' "cruelties" presented both the imaginative impetus for Hawthorne's viewpoint in *The Scarlet Letter* and, at the same time, foreclosed the possibility of a happy ending (12). The thematic weight of the tragic element in the romance is counterbalanced by the passionate life Hawthorne finds rekindled by the writing of that story. The historical romance form enables Hawthorne to tell a historical tale that is not the tale of his forbears, and the letter A signifies both the possibility of shifting viewpoints, as Hawthorne effectively does when he creates a protagonist in the likeness of a "sinner" persecuted by self-righteous Puritans, and the limitations posed by writing, which always remains answerable to social contexts and therefore cannot shed its darker associations.

In *The Scarlet Letter*, religion and law are identical; therefore, sins are crimes committed against both God and the community. Hawthorne frequently dramatized the repressive paranoia and hypocrisy generated by a community focused on sin, as in "Young Goodman Brown," and the relationship between theocracy and allegory, as in "The Minister's Black Veil." In the latter story, the veil is both symbolic of and identical to the minister's sin. It inspires more horror in the townspeople than the darkest sin could, yet the minister offers no explanation for his decision to shroud his face other than to indicate that sin has led him to enact such an atonement. In *The Scarlet Letter*, the A
initially symbolizes the same sort of simple, typological allegory – Hester bears it on her breast because, quite simply, she is an adulterer, and presumably nothing more. Because Puritanical religious allegory implies an uncomplicated link between its signifiers and the unmediated authority that guarantees their stable meaning, the changing meaning of the A challenges the most basic assumptions of Hawthorne's Puritan theocracy.

The main characters in the narrative represent the possible positions the A can take as it slides along the chain of signified meanings. As he plays with the indeterminacy of the A, Hawthorne also contrasts allegory, wherein the A flatly indicates a literal, stable and inescapable meaning, with subjective symbolism, the potential for the A's meaning to change according to viewpoint and context. As a figure of authority who is hiding an unpardonable sin, Dimmesdale and his secret represent the condensed hypocrisy of his entire culture, and his guilt appropriately consumes him. Though he engages in traditional forms of penitent self-torture, self-flagellation, prolonged fasting and all-night vigils, the townspeople interpret his behavior as consistent with his role as a model Puritan; indeed, it is so impossible for them to view him in any other light that his odd behavior only increases their admiration, reinforcing his allegorical role in their culture. Even during the strange night when he mounts the scaffold to reveal his sin he remains invisible to everyone but Hester, Pearl and Chillingworth.

Only Chillingworth, the intellectual outsider whose whole will is bent on discovering Pearl's father, recognizes Dimmesdale's excessive and fanatical behavior as an outward expression of hidden meaning. Dimmesdale's downfall is less a result of his adulterous sin than it is a function of his unswerving devotion to the Puritan community and the systemic forms that support it. By helping to maintain its legal system and religious codes of behavior, by specifically not disrupting the stability of either, as he thinks he would if he revealed that their most pious member was the arch sinner, Dimmesdale perpetuates the semblance of cultural stability. His sense of responsibility is his prime motivation, but his posture as a model of that stability is bitterly ironic. The
torture he suffers is a direct result of the community's allegorical world-view because their inability to link Dimmesdale to his sin creates the conditions for Chillingworth's revenge. Once Dimmesdale reveals himself, thus exploding the uncomplicated symbol of piety and revealing his radically contradictory identity, Chillingworth can no longer punish him for his hypocrisy. "Thou hast escaped me!" Chillingworth exclaims.

Unlike the Puritan settlers, Chillingworth does not think allegorically. He is an outsider whose viewpoint represents a mingling of European intellectualism and lessons learned during his time in "the vast and dismal forest" among the Indians—through Chillingworth, empiricism and "darker arts" become linked as alternative hermeneutics in contrast to Puritan ways of knowing. He has devoted his whole life to "the hungry dream of knowledge," and so his critical powers exceed those of the Puritans. When Hester insists that he will never discover the identity of her partner in sin, Chillingworth reveals that his alternative point of view enables him to uncover secrets that remain hidden to the simple-minded Puritans:

"Never, sayest thou?" rejoined he, with a smile of dark and self-relying intelligence. "Never know him! Believe me, Hester, there are few things, —whether in the outward world, or, to a certain depth, in the invisible sphere of thought, —few things hidden from the man, who devotes himself earnestly and unreservedly to the solution of a mystery. Thou mayest cover up thy secret from the prying multitude. Thou mayest conceal it, too, from the ministers and magistrates, even as thou didst this day, when they sought to wrench the name out of thy heart, and give thee a partner on thy pedestal. But, as for me, I come to the inquest with other senses than they possess. I shall seek this man, as I have sought truth in books; as I have sought gold in alchemy. There is a sympathy that will make me conscious of him. I shall see him tremble. I shall feel myself shudder, suddenly and unawares. Sooner or later, he must needs be mine!" (The Scarlet Letter 65).

Chillingworth's intelligence is "self-relying" rather than institutional, so he can bring together the radically different sources of knowledge to which he has been exposed. Though Puritanical theology perpetuates a belief in divinely revealed and self-present
meaning, Chillingworth believes in mystery and self motivated discovery. The "sympathy" that exists between Chillingworth and Dimmesdale derives both from their hidden identities and their sinfulness –Chillingworth does not overtly concern himself with his own sin as the Puritans do, but he quickly becomes the embodiment of everything evil because of his passionate hatred. Once he uncovers the A on Dimmesdale's breast, Chillingworth effects his torture by keeping the secret.

Unlike Chillingworth, who exists within the community but beyond its moral code, Hester becomes an exile who nevertheless has so internalized Puritan morality that she remains answerable to its expectations. Her regular trips within the circle of the community and her conventionally moral conduct (her humble demeanor, her devoted attention to her child and her charity work) force the community to redefine her social role and the meaning of the A. By stepping just outside of the concretized limitations of the Puritan identity assigned her but not entirely beyond the reach of the community, she creates the possibility of changing her identity and thus shifting the meaning of the A. Ruland and Bradbury explain this shift: "Forced to wear the sign, Hester by her life amends and complicates it, turning the 'A' from Adulteress to Able, to Angel, to any of several meanings available to a responsive reader" (Ruland and Bradbury 146). By first presenting the A with its allegorical associations in tact, by identifying it solely with Adultery, Hawthorne can then dramatize the deconstruction of that uncomplicated univocality. The A, explains Harry Henderson, "is first taken by the community as a sort of algebraic sign for a quality of the personality," but it is "transformed almost immediately by the author from the allegorical to the symbolic level. To an imagination dominated by literal readings of natural and social phenomena, nothing could be more subversive than symbolism" (Henderson 116). Ruland and Bradbury also argue that *The Scarlet Letter* is "a work where allegory is dispersed, freed of fixed moral meanings, and then reconstituted" (Ruland and Bradbury 146). They continue:
The red letter functions with just this ambiguity; it is now a hieroglyph planted in the heavens, now a fixed sexual accusation, now a letter over the heart that, taken into the heart, can be transformed, and now an unmanageable psychosomatic secret. It speaks to both the social law in its fixity and to the Romantic lore of self and humanity, where it can change. (147)

But rather than set up a binary that reinforces the possibility of fixity under "social law" as opposed to the "Romantic lore of self and humanity" (as Ruland and Bradbury seem to do) Hawthorne shows how these poles can collapse into one another. While the shifting interpretations of the A constitute a destabilization of Puritan discursive conventions, Hester's behavior is only marginally subversive. Hester is both a rebel and, finally, a model citizen. Her romantic heroism only extends far enough for her to periodically express a lack of remorse for her "sin" (thoughts that also cause self-doubt and guilt) and plan an impossible escape with Dimmesdale. Even after her long absence at the end of the book, she returns to take-up "her long-forsaken shame." When Hawthorne describes the changing meaning of the A at the end of the narrative, he does not suggest triumph so much as qualified tragedy: "But, in the lapse of the toilsome, thoughtful, and self-devoted years that made up Hester's life, the scarlet letter ceased to be a stigma which attracted the world's scorn and bitterness, and became a type of something to be sorrowed over, and looked upon with awe, yet with reverence too" (227). We respect Hester for her perseverance under terrible conditions, not her heroic rebellion. Hester's final conviction, that some day "a new truth would be revealed, in order to establish the whole relation between man and woman on a surer ground of mutual happiness," is undercut by her belief that a woman such as herself "stained with sin, bowed down with shame" could never be "the destined prophetess" of that truth. In the final analysis, she still identifies herself with the unpardonable sin originally indicated by the A.

The truly subversive character in the book is Pearl, yet she symbolizes both freedom and a loss of connection. Pearl is "the scarlet letter in another form; the scarlet letter endowed with life" (88). And she is one of the principle devices by which
Hawthorne reveals the letter's indeterminacy. Pearl is the living canvas of Hester's artistic imagination, and she is decorated as ornately as the A. She is the repository of all of the emotions Hester experienced during her passionate affair and the anger and rebellious antipathy Hester directed toward the community during her confinement in jail. But the combination of all of these complicated and unchecked emotions results in a creature who frightens Hester and remains an enigma within the context of the Puritans' ordered society. Hester's attempts to discipline Pearl result in failure because Pearl is uncontrollable:

Her mother, while Pearl was yet an infant, grew acquainted with a certain peculiar look, that warned her when it would be labor thrown away to insist, persuade, or plead. It was a look so intelligent, yet inexplicable, so perverse, sometimes so malicious, but generally accompanied by a wild flow of spirits, that Hester could not help questioning, at such moments, whether Pearl was a human child. (79)

Though Pearl constantly orbits Hester throughout the narrative, they remain disconnected. Like the letter, Pearl is a hieroglyph, unfathomable and unreachable, even for Hester. In addition to the many scenes in which Hester considers her alienation from her child, another scene crucial to an understanding of Pearl's role is her play in the graveyard. As if to reinforce his interest in the link between imaginative free play and death, Hawthorne depicts Pearl dancing on a grave in the cemetery:

Pearl looked as beautiful as the day, but was in one of those moods of perverse merriment which, whenever they occurred, seemed to remove her entirely out of the sphere of sympathy or human contact. She now skipped irreverently from one grave to another; until, coming to the broad flat, armorial tombstone of a departed worthy, –perhaps Isaac Johnson himself, –she began to dance upon it. (117)

Pearl flouts social mores at every turn. Witnessing her behavior in the graveyard, Chillingworth complains, "There is no law, nor reverence for authority, no regard for human ordinances or opinions, right or wrong, mixed up with that child's composition...Hath she any discoverable principle of being?" (117). Dimmesdale
responds, "'None –save the freedom of a broken law'" (117). Pearl's uncertain nature allows Hawthorne more play with the relationship between authoritative allegory and subjective symbolism. At times, she seems to be the embodiment or incarnation of unrestrained sin; she is often described as an imp or the spawn of Satan. But her symbolic role in narrative is more complicated. She reinforces Hawthorne's theme of undecidability because she is a hieroglyph that sometimes suggests a lawlessness bordering on chaos but also represents the life that remains repressed within the Puritan community; in her ornate red dress, she is the counterpart of the A and the red rose bush, the only color in the drab community. Pearl also symbolizes the possible connection between passion and order when, at the scene of Dimmesdale's ultimate confession on the scaffold, she finally connects to humanity. She bestows the kiss she had been withholding and thus pledges to "grow up amid human joy and sorrow, nor for ever do battle with the world, but be a woman in it" (221). Significantly, Hawthorne locates Pearl's happy ending in Europe, away from the Puritan repression that will reign for many more years in Boston.

Perpetuating the fantasy that the tale of the A was an actual historical event which Hawthorne only attempts to explain, the narrator finally casts his version of the story as one among many "theories": "We have thrown all the light we could acquire upon the portent, and would gladly, now that it has done its office, erase its deep print out of our brain; where long meditation has fixed it in very undesirable distinctness" (223). Of course, the nature of that "office" remains relatively unclear. Immediately after complaining that "the portent" had achieved an uncomfortable degree of fixity, the narrator turns to another contradictory interpretation of Dimmesdale's A. Despite his dramatic public confession of his sin, there remain "highly respectable witnesses" who persist in their faith that Dimmesdale was a model of Puritan behavior (224). They are so utterly devoted to the religious order he represents that they vehemently claim his admission of guilt was merely a parable meant to indicate that all men are stained with
sin; they view the minister's A as a mere metaphor, and insist that there was no actual letter on his breast. But theirs is just one of the "theories" among which "the reader may choose" (223). The only distinct meaning symbolized by the scarlet letter at the end of the book is, ironically, the ultimate indeterminability resulting from the letter's circulation within the social sphere, where interpretive certainty is impossible. The setting of *The Scarlet Letter* proves crucial to Hawthorne's examination of interpretive chaos because Puritan Boston presents the perfect contrast to that chaos. Hawthorne's interest in the Puritan imagination, argue Ruland and Bradbury, was "not just as a historical subject but because it raised the essential moral issues of his writing, indeed of his existence as a writer" (147). They continue:

He returned to it again and again in his stories and essays, finding his own way to write by shifting the Puritan allegorical mode away from its typological, providential meanings to a different level of human perception and artistic endeavor. The result was symbolic creation, where the moral and religious principles behind the initial allegory do not die in reductive translation but become imbued with the strange contradictions of human life; they take on uncertainty, indecipherability, ambiguity. The symbol is pluralized, moving between the public world and that of personal feeling, between the daylight of actuality, history and social iconography and the dark moonlight of the subjective imagination. (147)

While Hawthorne dramatizes the subjective imagination's play with authoritative discourse, he also suggests that this pluralization of meaning is in constant contention with society's attempts to restore order, and, indeed, he does not necessarily discount the value of social order. As the embodiment of both art and chaos, Pearl remains alienated from all of "humanity," not just the repressive Puritan community. She is the only character who escapes that repressive environment, but only after she finally makes her connection to the ideal social body and leaves Boston.
IV. Conclusion

In their historical romances, both Cooper and Hawthorne suggest that discursive authority relies on repression. Absolutely certainty, or univocality, cannot persist in complex social environments except by a force of will exercised by repressive authorities. At the same time, dialogism, or the play of language in its social contexts will always contain an element of univocality because, as Bakhtin argues, these centripetal and centrifugal forces in language cannot exist without one another. In order for language to have any stable meaning, in order for it to remain the tool of communication, it must rely on a system or structure that limits the possible meanings any given word can have. But a likewise powerful and essential force in language is the diversity, sometimes bordering on chaos, inherent in living, social language and caused by the multitude of different interpretive lenses actively making sense of the proliferating linguistic codes in their environment.

In his complicated portrait of westward expansion, Cooper expresses the tragic element in the repression of cultural diversity, but he also presents genocide and forced assimilation as necessary evils—a regrettable stage in the march of progress. Natty and Chingachgook are finally excluded from Templeton (by voluntary exile and suicide) because their cultural codes of behavior, symbolized in their language, cannot be subsumed by the "civilizers," whose authority, derived from a belief in manifest destiny and based on a fundamental hypocrisy, would crumble if its institutions remained subject to the chaotic disorder they suffer in the face of diversity. To bring the white European models of religion, law and social customs westward, the citizens and leaders of Templeton have to violently force cultural assimilation ahead of their wake. This entails the erasure or repression of racial and religious diversity and the imposition of a hierarchical class structure that insures the authority of patriarchs such as Judge Temple. Though Elizabeth and Edward seem to represent a more compassionate and morally
responsible future, they will only succeed because their Templeton has already been "civilized." The romance reads like Cooper's confession of guilt, and the epitaph symbolizes his lingering distrust of authoritative discourse as much as it literally represents his cautious participation in authoritative discourse. When he alternately links *The Pioneers* to the real events of his past in his original preface and later disclaims that link, he unwittingly reveals his discomfort with the authoritative posture of the historian. But whether or not Cooper connects the events of the book with his personal experience, the story he tells resonates with American history. Emily Buddick Miller has argued that, for Cooper, fiction "cannot directly transcribe the pure contours of the imagination that produces it (by disentangling the imagination from the sociopolitical realities that restrict and define it). Neither can it portray absolutely the sociopolitical reality that lies beneath its interpretations" (Miller 7). What Cooper does do in *The Pioneers* is expose that entanglement through an exercise of the imagination that can neither escape history nor represent the truth of the past.

In "The Custom House," Hawthorne insists that though the main events of Hester Prynne's life are recounted in Surveyor Pue's papers, in his retelling of the story he allows himself "nearly or altogether as much license as if the facts had been entirely of [his] own invention" (30). Apparently, he relates the dramatic scene in which he discovers the history and the ragged A only so he can lend his narrative "the authenticity of the outline" (30). But it seems an awfully elaborate conceit when the story's setting alone gives it the authenticity of a historical context. The existence of Surveyor Pue's "small roll of dingy paper" enables Hawthorne to present his romance as another version of a story, as one among other "theories" regarding the significance of the letter –thus the novel itself is a performance of the letter's "office," which is to expose the subjective nature of historiography and discourse in general. But in *The Scarlet Letter*, the proliferation of theories regarding the meaning of the A does not result in Hester's liberation from the cultural restraints imposed by the authorities who force her to wear the A. In the end, she
still thinks of herself as a woman "stained with sin" (227). "To understand the office of the A," writes Sacvan Bercovitch, "to appreciate its subtle combinings of process and closure, is to see how culture empowers symbolic form, including forms of dissent, and how symbols participate in the dynamics of culture, including the dynamics of constraint" ("How Culture" 383). Though the A can take on new meaning, it cannot completely shed the old, and because Hester has so internalized the ideological apparatus, Puritan religious law, that uses the symbolic power of the A to exercise cultural restraint, she continues to bear the A with all of its meanings in tact. By writing a historical romance in which the imagination self-consciously shapes historiography and yet remains answerable to the limits social discourse imposes on interpretive freedom and interpretive certainty, Hawthorne demonstrates a skeptical revision of Romanticism as well as historical realism. Ruland and Bradbury explain the former:

Hawthorne was teasing at the very spirit of Romanticism and expressing a doubt about the method that was thereafter to enter the self-challenging tradition of American Art. Emerson's poet was to be a seer, seeking a clear sight; but Hawthorne's artist is a creature of conscious contradictions, seeking and creating oppositions. Like many modern writers, Hawthorne was an author who would not claim authority. (Ruland and Bradbury 149)

Though he refused the role of the truth-saying prophet, Hawthorne nevertheless presented The Scarlet Letter as a reflection of reality when he so self-consciously insisted on its material link to the past. And he gives no indication that his imaginative version of the past bears any less social significance than Pue's, though it may prove more interesting. Leaving us beside Hester's grave, in a "neutral territory" where "ghosts might enter," Hawthorne's version of the artistic imagination invites shadows, playing on our association of death and uncertainty, as a strategy for avoiding authority.
Language –like the living concrete environment in which the consciousness of the verbal artist lives –is never unitary. It is unitary only as an abstract grammatical system of normative forms, taken in isolation from the concrete, ideological conceptualizations that fill it, in isolation from the uninterrupted process of historical becoming that is characteristic of all living language.

M. M. Bakhtin

[Bakhtin's] dialogism...takes into account the various determining and producing historical factors in our lives and at the same time allows for the idea of an active response on the part of the subject to these various discourses and other subject positions...They allow for a model of intersecting ideologies, in other words, a connection with history in society, as well as a model of connecting with others.

Mary O'Connor

I. The Thematics of Historical Romance and Poststructuralism in the Twentieth Century

I began chapter five by summarizing Deborah Madsen's approach¹ to the ideological differences between Anglo-American Romantic poetry, and its attendant theorization by poets such as Coleridge, Wordsworth and Emerson, and the romance fiction produced during the same period by authors such as Hawthorne and Melville. Madsen associates symbolism with the former group and argues that Romantic poetry uses symbolism as a device for conveying the truth and beauty that emanate from the world around us but also connect us to the transcendent realm via poetic prophecy. In this sense, symbolism functions much like Christian allegory in that it conveys truth, and yet it locates that truth in earthly experience described and mediated by the poet and interpreted by the reader rather than in sacred texts whose meaning is supposedly fully
present. The Romantic poet's social role, then, becomes increasingly akin to the role formerly played by God, though the poet must rely on the reader's attentive ear or even his good taste for the accurate interpretation of his texts. In allegorical romance fiction of the same period, Madsen argues, this displacement of authority takes the form of thematized indeterminacy. In a sense, then, both Romantic poetry and the romance define their uses of symbolism against medieval allegory with its supposedly unproblematic link between symbol and meaning. Charles Feidelson has argued that "the basic problem of romanticism" was "the vindication of imaginative thought in a world grown abstract and material" (30). In Feidelson's scheme, the post-enlightenment repositioning of authority from the sacred to the secular, from God making meaning in heaven to man making meaning out of his intellectual interaction with the world, found very different thematic expressions in Romantic poetry and romance fiction. For poets such as Emerson and Whitman, Feidelson argues, "the perception of multiple meanings in the objects and patterns of nature and language is affirmative. Informed by a metaphysical Unity-in- Variety, their symbolic imaginations are ultimately tied to the allegorical tradition, though in a much more supple and flexible, less rigidly fixed way than medieval allegorists" (Neutral Ground 30). For writers of romance fiction, however, symbolic interpretation becomes "tentative, indirect, indeterminate, and subversive not only of social consensus but also of literary tradition and textual stability" (30). In Neutral Ground: New Traditionalism and the American Romance Controversy, Thompson and Link describe how Feidelson, like Madsen, associates the major themes of romance fiction with a "clash" between allegory and symbolism:

The clash between the two interpretive modes of the allegorical and the symbolistic, argues Feidelson, often leads to ironic subversions of one sort or another. Most frequently, socially constituted fixity of meaning (as in Puritan typology) is undercut and revealed to be prismatic or kaleidoscopic; multiple meanings radiate out from an object or situation and alter their patterns according to the angle of perception of individual participants or observers. (Neutral Ground 30)
In the previous chapter, I traced these very themes through *The Pioneers* and *The Scarlet Letter*, which both question the "socially constituted fixity" of institutionalized legal and religious meaning in the new worlds of Puritan and frontier America. In those works, the indeterminacy of literary meaning as a social phenomenon symbolizes the subjective, unstable authority exercised by powerful social forces.

For critics, such as Nina Baym, who question the very existence of a "romance" movement in the nineteenth century, the tendency to divide literature according to retrofitted taxonomies whereby romances neatly fit into a group that can be chronologically and thematically characterized and distinguished from a group called the realist novel superimposes an order that did not exist (and creates authoritative categories for literary critics who specialize in canon formation). As I have argued, the slippery nature of the terms "romance" and "novel," as they were used in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, begs the question of their usefulness as categories, but since authors such as Cooper and Hawthorne did associate romance with an imaginative play not allowable in realistic writing, it remains useful to identify themes associated with linguistic play in their works. Whether or not we can call them romances and whether or not it helps to theorize their style in terms of allegory vs. symbolism (both strategies that make for neat literary criticism), both *The Pioneers* and *The Scarlet Letter* are preoccupied with the relationships among the imaginary and the real, literary and historical writing, and the loss of authority implied in the interpretive act.

One effect, I hope, of my thematic trajectory through American fiction will be to suggest that independent of the "controversies" created by literary critical typologies, certain connecting themes and stylistic devices provide ways of grouping works together that do not rely on their placement within specific "movements" or "periods." In his version of poststructuralism and his critiques of logocentrism and writing, Derrida suggests that the anxiety over the loss of authority associated with writing was born simultaneously with writing. Just as he describes logocentrism as a master-narrative of
Western philosophy that perpetually reinscribes centers of "objective" authority via structures of meaning that derive their stability only from hegemonic metaphysics, he also offers writing as a counter-narrative that exposes the destabilization of those authoritative structures. The anxiety over the loss of authority critics have associated with historical and/or allegorical romance in the nineteenth century should be viewed as an aspect of writing itself, rather than a preoccupation of any particular genre or period. Indeed, the very themes Feidelson, Madsen and others have attributed to romance fiction have also been widely cited as among the identifying characteristics of both modern and postmodern novels.

Though twentieth century American fiction has its own historical, social and philosophical catalysts for the themes of alienation and indeterminacy (world wars, technological "advances" such as the atom bomb, theoretical paradigm shifts in the wakes of Marxism, Freudianism, Fascism, Feminism and Civil Rights, to name only a few), many novels framed those themes in terms of the relationship between writing and certainty or authority. While it is often supposed that the both the imposition of authoritative social control and the fragmentation of authority can be reflected by writing, it may be more accurate to say that those social forces are embodied in writing as social discourse. That would be one way to explain why these themes are pervasive in post-enlightenment literature.

Because critics have spent decades trying to define and redefine romanticism, realism, modernism, and postmodernism with varying degrees of success that most often seem to hinge on the assumed credibility of the critic rather than any kind of critical consensus (which, unfortunately or not, is the goal of literary criticism writ large), it may seem unorthodox to discuss twentieth century works of fiction as historical romances, but Absalom, Absalom! and Beloved have stylistic and thematic aspects that make them quite comparable to the works discussed in chapter four and they have virtually all of the characteristics associated with historical romance, with the one exception that they
weren't written during the eighteenth century. *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Beloved* are historical novels that bear personal significance for both authors, since Faulkner's interest in the South stems from his own relationship to Southern identity and Morrison's interest in slavery and racism relates to her commitment to black American history. Both novels involve elements of the "real" historical periods they examine, and yet both foreground the literary aspects of historiography to suggest that making sense of the past involves more than relating the facts and dates. Telling the story of the past is an imaginative, interpretive endeavor; creating a clear meaning out of past events involves a discursive struggle that frustrates as much as it informs.

Though *Absalom, Absalom!* is often labeled a "modern" novel and *Beloved* a "postmodern" novel, the meaning of those labels remains ambiguous. In *Eliot to Derrida: The Poverty of Interpretation*, John Harwood reveals that, like so many literary critical terms used to describe "periods," the terms "modern" and "modernism" were only ambiguously and inconsistently used until "several decades after the 'modernist movement' in literature' is generally thought to have ended (Harwood 38). He designates 1965 as the year when "modernism" seems to enter critical parlance for good, but "postmodernism" appears right on its heals, in the same year (38). Indeed, Harwood suggests that the two terms have been "reified, not sequentially, but in parallel" (39).

Though many literary critics use "modernism" to designate a period from roughly 1890 to 1930 in which stylistic experimentation in poetry, fiction and drama took a radical leap forward, others use the term to suggest the ideological standpoint against which "postmodernism" defines itself. Harwood continues:

Some theorists regard 'modernism' as the first step towards the real revolution of the sixties and after, when the fog of mystification and logocentrism is finally dispersed by theory. Others –usually Marxist and/or feminist theorists –denounce it as an authoritarian, neo-fascist, male-dominated, totalizing, bourgeois ideology. There is little debate between orthodox critics who regard 'modernism' as good thing, and radical theorists who regard it as a very bad thing, since the arguments
have evolved independently, and the two groups seldom communicate. (Harwood 39-40)

Linda Hutcheon takes the approach Harwood attributes to "Marxist and/or feminist" theorists in *A Poetics of the Postmodern: History, Theory, Fiction*, when she suggests that a modernist ideology can be characterized as a nostalgic desire for "order;" in this view, modernist texts examine the chaos and fragmentation of identity associated with the present (early twentieth century) and "desire to order the present through the past or to make the present look spare in contrast to the past" (Hutcheon 118). But, in the same study, Hutcheon accuses modernism of "ahistoricism," particularly regarding the history of art, since the modernist platitude "make it new" privileged an aesthetic discontinuity with the past (Hutcheon 25). She associates modernism with "aestheticism, hermeticism and its attendant political self-marginalization," and describes postmodernism as an expressly anti-modernist engagement with the historical and artistic past, and with popular culture (23). But whether or not Hutcheon clearly defines the modernism to which post-modernism responds, her descriptions of the literary postmodernist revaluation of historiography seem an extension of major themes expressed by authors of historical romance in the eighteenth century.

In postmodern historiography, Hutcheon argues, there is "not so much 'a loss of belief in a significant external reality' as there is a loss of faith in our ability to (unproblematically) know that reality and therefore to be able to represent it in language" (Hutcheon 119). Contrary to a palpable critical misconception, postmodernism does not simply declare that there is "no external truth which verifies or unifies, that there is only self-reference" (119). Hutcheon continues:

Historiographic metafiction self-consciously suggests this, but then uses it to signal the discursive nature of all reference—both literary and historiographical. The referent is always already inscribed in the discourses of our culture. This is no cause for despair; it is the text's major link with the "world," one that acknowledges its identity as construct, rather than as simulacrum of some "real" outside. Once again, this does
not deny that the past "real" existed; it only conditions our mode of knowledge of that past. We can know it only through its traces, its relics. (119)

Historical romances like *The Pioneers* and *The Scarlet Letter* differ from Hutcheon's postmodern historiographic metafiction only by degrees. While they may not "self-consciously" reject the possibility of an "external truth which verifies or unifies," they certainly doubt the efficacy of such an ordering principle in the social world. Rather than question the very existence of authoritative truth, they may only express a fear that man can be abandoned by authority or that man can venture beyond the reaches of that authority. At any rate, *The Pioneers* and *The Scarlet Letter*, I argue, both suggest that "the referent" may "always already" be "inscribed in the discourses of our culture," but they do see this as a "cause for despair," as, I would argue, do the authors of *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Beloved*. In all four novels, the realization that human social life and, particularly, the history of that life are inscribed by discourse is alarming because discourse proves an uncertain ideological social mechanism, one that can be as dangerous as it is affirming.

It makes perfect sense that fiction from the early nineteenth and late twentieth centuries could share these thematic concerns about the relationship between writing and social identity, since, as Hutcheon points out, "narrative is what translates knowing into telling" (Hutcheon 121). This fact is also at the heart of Bakhtin's claims regarding the novel. While *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Beloved* express their concerns with authority and historiography on the thematic and symbolic level, as do *The Pioneers* and *The Scarlet Letter*, they also address them as an element of style. By challenging narrative conventions, such as the reliable and/or omniscient narrator, linear time-lines, and clearly attributed dialogue and inner monologue, they address not only what gets told when stories are told but how stories are told. In doing so, they more self-consciously challenge the reader to participate in the recreation of the histories they describe.
Faulkner and Morrison destabilize point of view in terms of the characters and the chronological and geographical settings of their narratives in order to present history and knowledge as problematic.

II. *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Beloved*: A Stylistics of Dialogic Discourse and the (Dis)placement of Authority

In *Absalom, Absalom!*, the unusually long epitaph that Rosa Coldfield has inscribed on Judith Sutpen's headstone is one of Faulkner's many symbolic devices for depicting the futility of univocal subjectivity in language. Although Rosa constructs this epitaph as commentary on a patriarchal system that objectifies and consumes women, her words are ultimately rendered ineffectual when they are filtered through the perspectives of the male characters in the novel. The male voices that clamor to respond to Rosa's story essentialize her femininity and use her presence as an opportunity to generalize about women. In this novel, Rosa is one among many characters involved in a struggle over the word. Her attempt to insert an autonomous, unified and distinctly female voice into the dominant discourse is thwarted by the dismissive responses of the male characters. Her ultimate failing is her faith in the possibility of uncomplicated univocal meaning in language, which causes her to underestimate the potential for her meaning to become lost or appropriated.

In *Beloved*, the unfinished epitaph which mirrors the title of the book may represent an incomplete, polyvocal utterance, a statement that reflects the viewpoints of many characters and one that awaits development. In this novel, each of the main characters possesses a piece of a larger story that must be told and their individual narratives are woven together to effect a reconstruction of the past. The inscription on Beloved's headstone also represents the utterance of a female character within a patriarchal social structure, but here there is no naive trust in the power of language to communicate any unitary meaning; the fluidity of the word and the many-layered
meanings in any utterance, both contentious and harmonious, are accepted facts. When contemplating the engraving on the "crawling already?" baby's headstone, Sethe acknowledges the many meanings and perspectives served in the single word "Beloved," finding comfort in the fact that at least part of that meaning is hers.

In "Discourse in the Novel," Bakhtin sees language as something which is inhabited, appropriated by various subjects and lived. A Bakhtinian reading of these novels could distinguish them by examining the degrees to which these authors allow their characters to inhabit their narratives, to take up subject positions, and to locate part of their own intended meaning even in the ever-changing patterns of signification. As Mary O'Connor has observed, "many feminist books begin with male voices embedded in the words of whatever women narrators, characters, or authors are speaking, but this male language is also the condition against which the books fight" (O'Connor 199). Where *Absalom, Absalom!* describes and dramatizes this condition of embedded voices, *Beloved* struggles with this condition. Ultimately, Faulkner seems to side with one version of the story, overriding the relativity of the contending voices in the name of truth. In *Beloved*, Morrison directly condemns authoritative discourse and offers, by contrast, a sort of heteroglossia that aspires to verbal forms in order to escape the hegemony she associates with canonical literary writing.

In *Absalom, Absalom!*, the multiple narratives seem to inform one another, but each narrator ultimately seeks to displace the last in an attempt to inscribe one, objective truth—to get the story "right." Faulkner focuses on the indeterminacy of language by dramatizing the shifting perspectives and showing variant meanings vying for a central position. Through this stylistic device, Faulkner questions the very nature of objectivity and truth, yet he does not offer the possibility of equivalent co-existent subject positions because, in the end, the white male voices dominate the novel. In *Beloved*, by contrast, multiple narratives form a community of meanings which co-exist in the word. Though this co-existence brings with it a certain tension, its ultimate effect is positive since the
African-American community in the novel has agency. Authoritative discourse in *Beloved*, such as that represented by the slave-owners and overseer, co-exists with the sub-altern discourse of the escaped and freed slaves, and, as we have seen, whenever authoritative discourse is relegated to one among many attempts to make meaning, it loses its power. The African-American characters in *Beloved* present their histories as counternarratives. Both authors focus on the impossibility of transparent representation in narrative and both explore the interplay of multiple perspectives, but where Faulkner simply problematizes our notions of history and the subject and then expresses nostalgia for a lost order that was distinctly white and male, Morrison offers an alternative model of historiography.

The stories of Thomas Sutpen and Sethe are as different as any story of a white male patriarch would be from that of an African-American escaped slave woman, and, perhaps, these novels are as different as any post-Civil War novel about the fragmented South could be from a post-Civil Rights African-American woman's historical recovery project. But these are both novels about ancestry and home-spun narratives passed down through generations. Both the structural similarities and thematic differences that distinguish these novels can be illustrated through an analysis of the characters' dialogic relationships to one another, the past, and the dead. To the extent that the gravestones in each novel stand as abbreviated forms of the larger narratives (and are figures that may represent the novel itself), a consideration of their symbolic content can illuminate the major themes in each, and provide a useful model for contrasting these works.

Although they use similar strategies in writing the past, Faulkner and Morrison have different reasons for returning to the Civil War/Reconstruction era to recover or reexamine the history of that period and they ways in which the modern identities of both the South and African-Americans were shaped by that period. For Faulkner, the decades surrounding the Civil War marked the end of the "old South" and introduced a period of social fragmentation that was to continue into the twentieth century. Faulkner's own
conception of his writing process was that it entailed "focusing on a single idea or memory or mental picture...working up to that moment, to explain why it happened or what it caused to follow" (Cowley 133). In *Absalom, Absalom!*, this universal existential question "why" drives the multiple narratives which make-up Thomas Sutpen's story and represents a response to national and regional disillusionment. Since part of the novel's project is to reflect the fragmented identity of the nation, its general tone is bleak, and the heteroglot nature of language, in the Bakhtinian sense, is highlighted to illustrate that fragmentation. The characters in *Absalom, Absalom!* are all alienated from language precisely because they rebel against heteroglossia and the stratification of consciousnesses embedded there –language seems to betray them at every turn. Despite the fact that the multiple narratives all find a voice in the novel, each character's self-determined identity is obscured due to this inability to make language bear out his or her own "truth." But the white male hegemony in the novel complicates Faulkner's overarching themes of social and discursive fragmentation because it casts that fragmentation as a fall rather than a necessary condition.

Deborah Wilson has aptly linked Faulkner's own ideology with that of Mr. Compson in *Absalom, Absalom!*, and this pairing suggests the privileging of Compson's viewpoint, though it does not necessarily prove that Compson is "right." In "'A Shape to Fill a Lack,': *Absalom, Absalom!* and the Pattern of History," Wilson juxtaposes Faulkner's Nobel Speech with Compson's monologue:

In his Nobel Prize Speech, William Faulkner claims that a writer (pronominally male throughout the speech) must leave "no room in his workshop for anything but the old verities and truths of the heart, the old universal truths..." "...In *Absalom, Absalom!*" published fourteen years earlier, Quentin Compson's father makes a similar observation in noticing "how so often when we try to reconstruct the causes which lead up to the actions of men and women, how with a sort of astonishment we find ourselves now and then reduced to the belief, the only possible belief, that they stemmed from some of the old virtues" (Wilson 61)
In "Paternalism and Liberalism: Contending Ideologies in Absalom, Absalom!," Kevin Railey offers some suggestions as to what these "old truths" might have been. He situates Faulkner between an ideology of paternalism which "established a static social hierarchy based on heritage, education, manners, and leisure; ruled by certain white men," and liberalism which "bases itself on the belief that all men are created equal; it stresses individualism, independence, social mobility, and economic fluidity within a society promoting equal opportunity" (Railey 120, 118). As a result of these "contending ideologies," Faulkner critiques hegemonic social systems even while he is paying homage to patriarchal foundations. It is this contradiction that allows us to discuss both Rosa's fight for subjective agency and her powerlessness. Her ultimate failure to thrive in an environment dominated by male voices seems a foregone conclusion.

In Beloved, the African-American female and male characters are united in their need to confront their past in slavery in order to recover some sense of self for the present. Sally Keenan has observed that Beloved "extends the limits of previous histories and autobiographical writings on slavery through its exploration of the ways subjectivity might be established and inscribed by those who have been denied its possibility" (Keenan 47). Morrison herself has said that her overall literary project in Beloved entails "assuming responsibility for people no one's ever assumed responsibility for" (Darling 5). She assumes this responsibility by recovering and rewriting the stories of a displaced and forgotten people, mixing elements of fiction and actual history to assert a link between literature and politics. Beloved is based on the story of a fugitive slave named Margaret Garner, whose well-known story has been the basis of other literary projects concerning the experiences of fugitive slaves; Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin, for instance, also took up Garner's story of infanticide. Keenan situates Beloved as "part of that momentum among writers and critics in the black community to look back across the span of their history in the United States in an effort to revision a story that has been made virtually invisible, a repetition of the effacement that had been enacted within the
institution of slavery" (Keenan 48-49). Morrison's revisioning of Garner's story gives a new meaning to the invisibility Keenan describes. Though Garner was clearly "visible" to abolitionists and journalists in the nineteenth century, she was often reduced to a flatly perceived symbol of tragedy. In Beloved, her story and Morrison's rendition of her character gains a complexity it lacked in earlier representations.

In the company of so may other renderings of the slave narrative, Beloved both joins the revisionary effort and questions the very nature of the literary revisionist enterprise; it is the female slave narrative re-told from the perspective of an African-American woman writing in the late twentieth century and sensitized to the complexities and precariousness of the written word. To present a new version of Garner's story as the current authoritative version would be to reify the structure of the original hegemony that effectively effaced her in the first place. Rather than "correct" history, Morrison locates counter-meanings, making new connections and setting them beside the old. Morrison relies on the polyvocality of language in order to recover those lost voices, but she situates them as part of what O'Connor calls a "composite voice," one which is made up of many. Characters in Beloved recover their stories collectively and assert their subjectivity by finding each other in their language, but they also find powerful reminders of the authoritative discourse of oppressive social mechanisms such as racism. They can revision, or revise their stories so that their intended meanings predominate for a time, but they cannot completely erase the historical meanings that inhere in language.

Historical narrative is a powerful tool for the construction of identity in both of these novels, but there is, ultimately, no naive trust of language in either work, since both are suspicious of the power of hegemonic symbolic systems. A complex dialectic of subjectivity and objectivity, naming and being named, forms the larger frameworks of these stories. Both writers attempt to recapture history by incorporating a surplus of subjective viewpoints which, taken as a whole, can bring the reader closer to "the truth" of the past. The intersubjective dialogue in both novels can be read as heteroglossia:
As a living concrete thing, as heteroglot opinion, language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's. ...Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated—overpopulated—with the intentions of others. Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process. ("Discourse in the Novel" 293-4)

This process of "populating" narrative with "one's own" intention, of appropriating language in order to reassert the self, creates the necessary link to the language of the past and to the narratives of other subjects for the characters in these novels. Carolyn Norma Slaughter argues that, in Absalom, Absalom!, "Telling the story is a futural appropriation of the past, is choosing, shaping, entering the future in terms of the past" (Slaughter 82). The (im)possibility of negotiating one's relationship to the events and characters of the past in order to move into the future is one of the crucial contrasting elements in these novels.

III. Absalom, Absalom! and the Pain and Pleasure of Historical Story-telling

In Absalom, Absalom!, the chain of story-tellers who reconstruct and repeat Sutpen's story (or, one might say, Faulkner's story of the South) are involved in a seemingly futile effort, grasping for an answer that will never be contained in any one of their narratives. Mr. Compson, perhaps the most fatalistic narrator in the novel, comments on this futility:

We have a few old mouth-to-mouth tales; we exhume from old trunks and boxes letters without salutation or signature...you bring them together again and again nothing happens: just the words, the symbols, the shapes themselves, shadowy inscrutable and serene, against that turgid background of a horrible and bloody mischancing of human affairs. (Absalom, Absalom! 80)
Trapped in a cyclical retelling, generations are compelled to repeat and supplement the same story as if through sheer verbal excess or by searching out the right words they could each finally uncover that inscrutable "why." Each narrator alters the story slightly, adjusts it to his/her own subjective lens, but despite their attempts to personalize the story, each narrator's subjectivity begins to dissipate. When trying to differentiate between the teller(s) and the tale(s), Quentin realizes that these distinctions are starting to blur together, that the characters are sounding alike, if not becoming alike. Through Quentin's lens, we begin to realize that this story is about all of them and none of them.

Rosa Coldfield summons Quentin to her house so that she can pass on her story of Sutpen, which is also, and more importantly, the story of her tragic life. She chooses Quentin to be the bearer of her story for several reasons: first, he is a descendant of an old local family whose history is intertwined with Sutpen's; secondly, he is about to leave their small Southern town for Harvard, so she hopes that he possesses the intelligence and clarity of thought to understand when he's hearing "the truth," and he can take the story out of its geographical context and, possibly, view it more objectively. His credibility and his youth make him the perfect candidate –being as young as he is, he represents a historical blank slate, and Rosa knows that she can talk him into taking her out to Sutpen's Hundred by seducing him with the mysterious talk that has no ending. That trip is a chore that will require a man's help though only a boy would be naive enough to do it.

And Quentin does not represent her only attempt to "set the record straight" for posterity, for there is also the inscription which she has carved in Judith Sutpen's headstone. The narrative is characteristically vague regarding who initially wrote the epitaph –it appears to represent the combined efforts of Judith, on her death-bed, and Rosa, who manages to get the headstone carved despite her total lack of financial means. The tone of the epitaph, as well as the placement of the grave in the far corner of the

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Sutpen cemetery, away from the others, reflects Rosa's attitude toward the family and the wrongs suffered by Judith:

Judith Coldfield Sutpen. Daughter of Ellen Coldfield. Born October 3, 1841. Suffered the Indignities and Travails of this World for 42 Years, 4 Months, 9 Days, and went to Rest at last February 12, 1884. Pause, Mortal; Remember Vanity and Folly and Beware. (Absalom, Absalom! 171)

Reflecting more directly on Rosa than they do Judith, the words inscribed on the stone are illustrative of one of the functions of discourse in this novel. The overabundance of words in the inscription mimics the verbal excess that marks the novel as a whole. It is as if Rosa is trying in vain to have the whole story told in this small space. As he is remembering his first glimpse of the stone, Quentin is listening to one of Shreve's retellings of the story. Quentin blurs the distinction between the text of the inscription and Shreve's retelling of "the story" when he repeats the mantra-like thoughts that he's been having while listening to Shreve speak: "Yes, to too much, too long" (Absalom, Absalom! 171). So even as Rosa has tried to inscribe the story onto Quentin's mind, it is being foisted upon him again by Shreve, who, he remarks, is beginning to "sound just like father" (171).

The epitaph also represents Rosa's attempt to gain control over language by literally having her words etched in stone. Quentin sees the stone as a power-play on Rosa's part. He says, "she decreed that headstone...she commanded that two hundred dollar headstone" (my emphasis, Absalom, Absalom! 171). But whether Rosa finally has command of the words engraved there is unclear. It is clear that she has taken much of the epitaphic rhetoric from "other people's mouths" ("Discourse in the Novel" 294). The admonition reflects Christian biblical rhetoric and a traditional epitaphic convention meant to invoke reflection, awe and a sense of powerlessness in the face of time and death. Rosa reduces Judith's life to a warning, communicating only bitterness and regret; there is no mention of forgiveness or an afterlife, only an end to that particular chapter of
human anguish. Though readers register Judith's story as a tragedy, it is clear that the
dominant tone and feeling conveyed in the epitaph reflect Rosa's emotions as they are
described throughout the narrative. But since the reader relies on Quentin's highly
subjective memory for the description of the epitaph, it may be that his sense of Rosa
colors that memory. And since Quentin "didn't need to ask who invented that"
inscription because he's sure he knows, the reader has no guarantee that these words,
whether remembered accurately or not, are actually Rosa's and not some condensed
version of how the filtering characters view Rosa (171).

Despite the fact that the epitaph has its own powerful context as the marker of a
grade site, the power of the initial meaning of the words necessarily changes as time
passes, and as the stone is viewed or the inscription is heard by different people,
including virtual strangers. The words in the inscription serve Shreve's intentions at one
point in the novel since they allow him to generalize about women and display his own
biases:

Beautiful lives –women do. In very breathing they draw meat and drink
from some beautiful attenuation of unreality in which the shades and
shapes of facts –of birth and bereavement, of suffering and bewilderment
and despair –more with the substanceless decorum of lawn party charades,
perfect in gesture and without significance or any ability to hurt.
\textit{(Absalom, Absalom! 171)}

Even if the epitaph does contain elements of Rosa's own intention and her attempt to
assert her voice, that attempt backfires as her language is rendered utterly ineffectual by
Shreve, whose voice and ideology reflect Mr. Compson's.

Bakhtin's notion of language as "property" is instructive in this case, since the
inscription has to be purchased and there is doubt as to whether Rosa actually had the
capital to acquire the "two-hundred dollar" engraved stone or if it was purchased for her
by the man who appointed himself executor of her father's estate. What is clear is that
after her father dies and she is left in poverty, the community decides to take care of her
because "certainly no man nor committee of men, would ever persuade her to go back to her niece and brother-in-law" (Absalom, Absalom! 171). Quentin assumes that the engraving is one of her demands on the charity of the community; thus, another voiced meaning in this utterance is the community's sense that Rosa is a crazy yet pitiable old maid who has to be humored and cared for despite her obstinate, bitter protest of men. Yet, this information has most likely come to Quentin via his father, who continually effaces Rosa's subjectivity, along with that of all Southern women, by referring to them as ghosts: "Years ago we in the South made our women into ladies. Then the war came and made the ladies into ghosts. So what else can we do, being gentlemen, but listen to them being ghosts?" (7-8).

To the extent that Rosa does inhabit the epitaph, the inscription reflects her desire to assert the lost identity and subjectivity of her female relatives. Rosa purposefully leaves the names of Judith's male relatives out of the text on the stone. In this way, she enacts her symbolic revenge against the men whom she blames for the tragic lives of all of the women in her family. Her homage to mother and daughter in the epitaph symbolizes her bitterness about her own childless status, for which she places blame on Sutpen. The tone of the engraving conveys her anger and that which she projects onto her niece and sister concerning their entrapment in a patriarchal system. But, ultimately, this symbol of female solidarity and resistance is effaced by Shreve's dismissals and Mr. Compson's "dust to dust" existentialism, which is particularly evident when he describes the unearthed worm freezing at Rosa's own grave site later in the novel in his letter to Quentin.

Rosa's vain attempt to write history is also a Faulknerian parody of authorial intention. The epitaph, then, reflects both "the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author" ("Discourse in the Novel" 324). The possible readings of the engraving are myriad because the internal dialogism of such "double-voiced prose discourse can never be exhausted thematically" (326). But the
destabilization of authoritative discourse implied by such dialogism is not whole-heartedly celebrated in *Absalom, Absalom!*; rather, the endless possibilities presented by dialogic discourse present an existential dilemma and subjective agency is muted to the point of ineffectuality. The fatalism of the epitaph corresponds to the nihilistic tone of the novel as a whole and reflects Faulkner's fear of the loss of history and, therefore, identity in the South, and in the modern world, for which the South stands as the prototype. Faulkner's own intention may be to suggest, as Shelley does in "Ozymandias," that art or, more particularly, writing and history are temporary, and that, in the face of time and culture, the written word will always lose its originally intended meaning.

But Faulkner's own reading of the novel is less fatalistic; he has said that *Absalom, Absalom!*, with its multiple narratives, could be understood to represent "thirteen ways of looking at a blackbird with none of them right" (Gwynn and Blotner 273-4). He believed that "when the reader has read all these thirteen different ways of looking at the blackbird, the reader has his own fourteenth image," which, he suggested, may be "the truth" (Gwynn and Blotner 273-4). Faulkner's sense of these thirteen autonomous "ways of looking" (which are actually ways of "telling") is analogous to Bakhtin's "unitary languages," or "languages of generations," which struggle to overcome heteroglossia" ("Discourse in the Novel" 270). The inescapability of heteroglossia may be the "truth" which only the reader can glimpse in Faulkner's novel. But if all of the characters in *Absalom, Absalom!* have the same limited vision and do indeed suffer the same refracted subjectivity, how can it be that *one* of them espouses an ideology of "old truths" which is so closely linked to Faulkner's own? Ultimately, the language of paternalism, as articulated by Mr. Compson, does predominate in this novel. The reader may be able to glimpse the contending ideologies in the dialogic landscape of the text, but she/he is ultimately encouraged to privilege one over the others. But if Mr. Compson has the clearest vision in *Absalom, Absalom!*, it is also a vision of loss.
Taken as a theoretical construct that implies only difference-erasing relativism, heteroglossia jibes with Mr. Compson's viewpoint in *Absalom, Absalom!* because it suggests the futility of individual attempts to have agency through historiography—thus the novel can be a stylistic parable in which the loss of identity and "old verities" associated with modernity find expression in the indeterminacy of language. When poststructuralist discourse and heteroglossia are aligned with nihilistic relativism, they become objectionable to some feminists and other political scholars (especially those in identity studies) because they seem to erase the very difference sub-altern groups want to assert. Pamela Dalziel has observed that recent criticism of Absalom, Absalom! has positioned the novel within a poststructuralist theoretical framework, arguing that indeterminacy and the "infinite play of signifiers" are actually what make up "the truth" of the novel (Dalziel 273). But *Absalom, Absalom!* also reveals how poststructuralism viewed as an antiauthoritarian ethic reflects the dismantling of repressive hegemonic social systems such as slavery and patriarchy, some of the "old verities" we associate with the romanticized antebellum South, whether or not Faulkner intended that theme. The south has fallen into chaos in *Absalom, Absalom!*, but that chaos also signals the disempowering of Mr. Compson and his ilk—it is the sort of a chaos that should not necessarily be dreaded by the victims of the previously oppressive, however stable, system.

Much has been made of the historiographical aspect of *Absalom, Absalom!*; critics such as Carl Rollyson, F. Garvin Davenport Jr., Harry B. Henderson III, John W. Hunt and Hyatt Waggoner all claim that, as Rollyson puts it, the novel "is complementary to works of twentieth century historiography" (Rollyson 78). These critics point out the changing nature of historiographical styles, even before the advent of postmodernism, to include emphases on the subjectivity of perspective, the personal and the creative narrativity of less "scientific" historiographical modes. Critics who argue that it is a mistake to view *Absalom, Absalom!* as significantly historical, such as Cleanth Brooks,
Olga Vickery, Ilse Lind and John Irwin, suggest that to do so undercuts the artistic, or novelistic, elements that result in a more complicated notion of how meaning is made than a historical account could offer. Since historical theorists such as Hutcheon and White have, in the last decades, questioned the difference between fiction about the past and "facts" about the past, the question of whether or not to consider the historical aspect of *Absalom, Absalom!* as a central concern of the narrative seems moot. Not only does the novel address the "problems" associated with recreating the past in narrative form, but it also offers contending methods for creating history. Mr. Compson deals with the past empirically, struggling to put together the facts he has learned in order to come to a conclusion about Sutpen. Rollyson argues:

> At a greater distance from the events he describes, Mr. Compson takes note of all the evidence he can scrape together and tries to reconcile the divergent and contradictory reports of Sutpen's career. Yet he acknowledges his failure to make sense of the evidence. Mr. Compson errs, I think, in believing that reconstructing the past is like a chemical formula. (87)

Though Mr. Compson's efforts to reduce history to a "chemical formula" seem to fail in the novel, in his methodology he is not unlike many historians toward the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, after what Hutcheon calls "the rise of Ranke's 'scientific history'" (Hutcheon 105). Compson "tends to discount," Rollyson argues, "the interpretative processes of the mind" (Rollyson 87). And Rollyson argues that Sutpen and Rosa make the same mistake. Sutpen, however, has very specific reasons for taking a materialistic view of the past. In his efforts to struggle out from under the repressive hegemony of Southern aristocracy, he bends his hole will toward becoming a self-made, Jacksonian aristocrat to spite the caste system that debased his family during his childhood –the people who would not let him in by the front door. He intentionally leaves his own history incomplete, thinking that a break with the past is an essential prerequisite for his upward-bound future. At certain points in Quentin's Father's
recollected of his father's story of Sutpen, Sutpen is supposed to have "just stopped telling" his own history: "He just stopped, Grandfather said, flat and final like that, like that was all there was, all there could be to it, all of it that made good listening from one man to another over whiskey at night" (Absalom, Absalom! 206). Deborah Wilson argues that Sutpen's lack of a "presentable" history is one aspect of his outsider status in the context of a South that privileged paternity and lineage. Because he does not come from a long line of respectable fathers, as does Quentin, he rejects the past just as he rejects the paternalistic social code that would make him morally answerable to his community.

Rosa's approach to history involves elements of the patriarchal system to which she has almost completely surrendered in the book, evident in her devotion to her father, her dream that life would have been better had she been a man, and her desire to pass her story on to Quentin because of his connection to a respectable male lineage. But she also offers a feminized counter-narrative. In opposition to the fact-gathering efforts of Mr. Compson, Rosa contemplates that there may be "true wisdom which can comprehend that there is a might-have-been which is more true than truth" (Absalom, Absalom! 115). But, just as Mr. Compson relegates Rosa to the ghost world, she considers herself a dreamer who regrets waking up: "Why did I wake since waking I shall never sleep again?" (115). Since the episode in which Judith gives Bon's letter to Rosa is related by Mr. Compson, the complicated image of people attached to strings like marionettes seems to combine elements of Compson's existentialism, Judith's frustration with her own powerlessness in a world dominated by men, and Rosa's feeling that history may be futile because stories are forgotten:

Read it if you like or don't read it if you like. Because you make so little impression, you see. You get born and you try this and you don't know why only you keep on trying it and you are born at the same time with a lot of other people, all mixed up with them, like trying to, having to, move your arms and legs with strings only the same strings are hitched to all the other arms and legs and the others all trying and they don't know why
either except that the strings are all in one another's way like five or six people all trying to make a rug on the same loom only each one wants to weave his own pattern into the rug... (*Absalom, Absalom!* 100-1)

This passage reflects the interconnected and contending narratives of Sutpen's life and Judith's sense that she is trapped in a universe without order. The feminine symbol of the rug foreshadows the "prisoner soul" with its "prisoner arteries and veins" that Rosa complains is subject to the "factual scheme" of destiny later in the novel. And as the loom passage continues, the symbol of the epitaph that is worn away by time suggests the futility of Rosa's efforts to memorialize Judith and the women of her family on Judith's actual headstone:

...and it can't matter, you know that, or the Ones that set up the loom would have arranged things a little better, and yet it must matter because you keep on trying or having to keep on trying and then all of a sudden it's all over and all you have left is a block of stone with scratches on it and after a while they dont even remember to have the marble scratched and set up or had time to and it rains on it and the sun shines on it and after a while they dont even remember the name and what the scratches were trying to tell, and it doesn't matter. (*Absalom, Absalom!* 101)

The "Ones that set up the loom" in *Absalom, Absalom!* are clearly white, Southern men who have failed to maintain order in the face of the modern disintegration of the caste system based on race and class. Rosa and Judith feel trapped by their destiny in a male dominated society, and as that society crumbles, their roles become complicated and confusing, though they have very little power to escape. What's more, their sense of powerlessness is made more acute by their fear that they will be forgotten by history.

This fear is reinforced by Mr. Compson, as Deborah Wilson has suggested, because "Mr. Compson claims that women are 'irrevocably excommunicated' from reality, that they draw sustenance from an unreality in which facts have no ability to hurt them, and that they can ignore 'incontrovertible evidence,' all traits that disqualify them from Faulkner's version of historical narrative" (Wilson 72). Wilson argues that "Faulkner's subversion of the female narrative tacitly endorses Mr. Compson's notion that women are
removed from reality” (Wilson 72). By consistently associating Rosa with dust motes, shadows and dreams, and by centering her narrative on her own selfish desire for revenge, Faulkner ultimately depicts Rosa as a willfully bad historian, but her estrangement from reality also gives Sutpen's story much of the mythic stature that makes it so compelling to the men in the novel. Rosa is an artist, or romance-maker, rather than a historian, though she presents her tale as the authoritative history of her life. Her story is a tragic romance, complete with elaborate settings and overblown dialogue, and her characters are two-dimensional allegories of good and evil. Her suggestion that Quentin could sell the story to a magazine to make money reveals both her cynicism, her feeling that her life could be amount to nothing but a popular parable, and her belief that the story has dramatic appeal.

Quentin and Shreve represent two more alternative versions of historiography. Because of his connection to his father and to the South, Quentin ultimately feels as trapped by Sutpen's history as Rosa and Mr. Compson. As an allegory of the South, Sutpen's story, and the process involved in telling it prove inescapable for Quentin: "I am going to have to hear it all over again I am already hearing it all over again I am listening to it all over again I shall have to never listen to anything else but this again forever so apparently not only a man never outlives his father but not even his friends and acquaintances do" (Absalom, Absalom! 222). Working through that history involves a confrontation with his Southernness, and his move to Harvard makes that identity more significant. The freezing night outside Quentin's warm dorm room accentuates his alienation from the South and from his father. By sharing the story with Shreve, Quentin can see it reflected in a non-Southerner, and at points during their dialogue Shreve's cavalier attitude only intensifies Quentin's anxiety. While telling the story enacts a kind of inevitable masochistic torture for Quentin, it provides Shreve with pure pleasure. Shreve repeats Mr. Compson's empirical method, trying to gather facts and fill-in blanks, yet he also approaches the story like a novelist or editor. Through inferences and
projections of his own morbid desires, Shreve develops the story, gaining pure pleasure from the dramatic scenes he invents. At times, Quentin feels the "real" story slipping away in Shreve's ecstatic recreation. In *The Play of Faulkner's Language*, John Matthews argues that Faulkner's novels lament the "loss of authoritative truth, the center, the signified realm, the place of origin, innocence" but they also display a "spirit of lively play about the possibilities of infinite interpretation" (Matthews 36). The Southern characters in the novel are primarily moved by their connection to the South and the sense of loss Faulkner associates with Southern history and a paternal code that has lost its authority; in Shreve, who is sufficiently removed from the history of the South, Faulkner created a character who could enjoy the pure pleasure of the unwinding and indeterminate tale without the emotional attachment and the personal stake in uncovering the "old verities" that elude all of the Southern narrators.

IV. *Beloved* and Historiography as an Incomplete Revisioning

In *Beloved*, the politics of representation are foregrounded since the characters engage in a revisionary project of bridging gaps to collectively recover the past and their subjectivity. The initial gaps in the histories of Sethe and Paul D represent more than just the typical lapse of memories that occurs over time and more than the geographical and temporal estrangement of former relatives and friends because memory in *Beloved* is fragmented as a result of, or a reaction to, traumatic events. But Sethe's repression of her history disables her own future and threatens to destroy her relationship with her remaining daughter. Revisioning the past for Sethe is not so much an attempt to set any record straight as it is an effort to understand how that past has determined her present. In this sense, history is a powerful determining factor in the construction of identity in *Beloved*, but that identity is social. By viewing identity as a process of social historical becoming, rather than an act of individual agency, Morrison acknowledges both the
oppressive and liberating elements of identity politics as they relate to discourse; individual consciousnesses cohabitate in language in relationships that can be both destructive and healing.

In *Beloved*, Morrison presents an instructive model for poststructuralist discourse that acknowledges the needs of the individual consciousness for self-determined meaning while at the same time revealing individuality as an effect of the social, as characters differentiate themselves by fitting into chains of stories stretching back through time and across familial and social connections. As Michael Barber has pointed out, "Morrison usually presents a third-person narration in which the narrator describes 'from inside' the character's thoughts and feelings." He continues:

> The narrator's third person perspective mutes itself by making Denver appear to be relating her own inner thoughts and then elides the differences between Denver's recollecting and Sethe's in such a way that we are not sure whether Sethe is narrating herself or whether we are obtaining Denver's recollection of Sethe's recollections. ...Not only are acts and their objects embedded within other acts, but one generation's memories of the previous generation can be embedded in the memory of a third generation subsequent to both these previous generations. Perhaps the greatest remedy for the unraveling of the past through time is to be found in human consciousness itself which can encompass in a single moment the thoughts of diverse people of diverse times. (Barber 353)

Barber relates Morrison's thematic and stylistic approaches to memory and consciousness to the theories of Max Scheler and Edmund Husserl, who depict memory and human consciousness as networks of relationships. The Husserlian description of human consciousness bears unmistakable resemblances to Bakhtin's theory of the heteroglot novel: the individual's attempt to gather-in memories contrasts with the dispersion of histories over time and through the many consciousnesses involved in giving those memories meaning, just as the centripetal and centrifugal forces in language effect an endless process of meaning-making and change.
In the wake of slavery, and in the face of a dominant white discourse which had historically effaced the subjectivity of the African/African-American people, many of the characters in *Beloved* resist memory because of their placement in the symbolic order inscribed by the dominant discourse of the past. Sethe cannot picture "Sweet Home" without seeing "boys hanging from the most beautiful sycamores in the world;" she cannot "rememory" her life there without recalling the notebook in which Schoolteacher listed her human and animal characteristics in two neat columns (*Beloved* 6). But, although Sethe wants to "beat back the past," her reunion with Paul D and the return of the repressed in the form of Beloved make "rememory" unavoidable, and the reconstruction of her history through dialogue with others also makes the future possible. Her story becomes "bearable because it was [Paul D's] as well –to tell, to refine, and tell again" (99). Ultimately, Paul D realizes that he too wants to unlock the past and "put his story next to hers" (273). In order to reclaim their history, they have to recover/reclaim their subjectivity. They have to be able to tell their individual stories, but they do this collectively. The dialogic form, then, serves the dual function of decentering the dominant white male discourse by insisting on a "multiplicity of social voices," and it exposes the incompleteness of any monologic language, thereby privileging the dialogic "links and interrelationships" ("Discourse in the Novel" 263).

The inscription on the headstone marked "Beloved" is illustrative of these larger themes and the function of discourse in the novel. Sethe, an escaped slave, murders one of her children when slave-catchers and her former overseer come to take her and her children back to the plantation. Upon witnessing the infanticide, the men who have come to collect her decide that she has "gone wild," so they leave her to the mercy of the law (*Beloved* 149). Because they associate Sethe with a natural order that positions her closer to the lower animals than to white humans, they fail to see the infanticide as an act of human desperation. When she violates the mother instinct they consider fundamental in female animals, they completely sever her relationship to the intended order of being.
Indeed, they can only keep the authoritative structure of that order intact by declaring her "wild." In retelling Margaret Garner's story, Morrison recasts that act as the most painful sacrifice Sethe could possibly make, and her willingness to commit infanticide rather than remand her children to slavery represents her own strength and exposes the abominations caused by slavery. In the latter case, the authoritative "order" represented by the slaveholders is exposed as an utter violation of the very "human" ideology of love and compassion symbolized in the archetypal image of the mother. The epitaph, "Beloved," constitutes an abbreviated form of Morrison's retelling because it reveals that Sethe had not lost her connection to her daughter, or by extension "humanity," when she committed the infanticide.

In the "now" that is the novel's opening, Sethe has been through jail time, her sons have run away and her mother-in-law has died, leaving only herself, her youngest daughter, and the ghost of her murdered baby to populate her house and her life. They are isolated from the community and from their history, which Sethe refuses to "rememory." The figure of the murdered child's headstone recurs in the novel, and raises many of the same issues concerning language that Judith's does in *Absalom, Absalom!*. Sethe also has to purchase the words engraved on her baby's stone; having no money, she pays for the inscription with her body. The narrator's language is alternately inhabited by the consciousnesses of the main characters in the story; "rememories" that Sethe initially refuses to vocalize are expressed in her thoughts. Often, sensual stimuli or the language of others trigger her unvoiced memories. A cool sensation that marks the presence of the baby ghost causes Sethe to remember the circumstances of the headstone's engraving:

> The welcoming cool of the unchiseled headstones; the one selected to lean against on tiptoe, her knees wide open as any grave. Pink as a fingernail it was, and sprinkled with glittering chips. Ten minutes, he said. You got ten minutes I'll do it for free. (*Beloved 5*)
Sethe doubts the depth of her own love for her murdered baby by wondering if she "could have gotten 'Dearly' too," if she had only given the engraver ten more minutes with her body (5). But, she remembers that what she got seemed like "the one word that mattered" (5).

The significance of this incomplete utterance hinges on the many voices which inhabit it simultaneously. An understanding of the word's internal dialogism, according to Bakhtin, must be achieved actively:

...an active understanding, one that assimilates the word under consideration into a new conceptual system, that of the one striving to understand, establishes a series of complex interrelationships, consonances and dissonances with the word and enriches it with new elements. ("Discourse in the Novel" 282)

Sethe chooses the word "Beloved" partly because she wants to express her love for her baby, but also because of the function which she knows the epitaph needs to serve socially. So the term is part hers. When Sethe considers that she could have added the word "Dearly," the narrator-as-Sethe's-psyche adds, "she could have had the whole thing, every word she heard the preacher say at the funeral (and all there was to say, surely)" (Beloved 5). "Beloved" is a term which represents part of the rhetoric of a Christian funeral service. In the novel, the word also symbolizes male sexual desire and the commodification of the female body. The unfinished epitaph reflects Sethe's refusal to surrender her body and her subjectivity completely; the objectified female body inhabits this word, and Sethe's withholding of part of herself symbolizes her resistance, however muted, to the oppressive system she cannot escape. Her most radical act of resistance, the infanticide, represents her active removal of her child from a white, patriarchal symbolic system that would have her enslaved. Toni Morrison has said that Margaret Garner's infanticide represents the mother's decision to assert her own subjectivity, to install her own system of signification: "She was saying, 'I'm a human being. These are my children. This is my script I'm writing'" (Conversations 272). With this metaphor,
Morrison directly addresses the relationship between the actual legal power of the slaveholders and the determination of meaning and identity through authoritative discourse. The comparison also suggests the potential violence of writing as an ideological apparatus. It is the means of both oppression and liberation.

The utterance "Beloved" is also inhabited by other social consciousnesses. Sethe reasons that this one word should be "enough to answer one more preacher, one more abolitionist and a town full of disgust" (*Beloved* 5). In this, she acknowledges the other intentions reflected in, and served by, the meaning-saturated term. She hopes that by adopting at least a piece of Christian rhetoric, she can appease other social groups she is forced to encounter when she does venture out of her home. The full significance of her reference to "one more abolitionist" resides in the recorded history of Margaret Garner. As Morrison points out:

She became a cause celebre for the abolitionists because they were attempting to get her tried for murder. That would have been a big coup because it would have assumed she had some responsibility over those children. But the abolitionists were unsuccessful. She was tried for the "real" crime, which was destruction of property... (*Conversations* 272)

With Sethe's desire to see the abolitionists appeased, Morrison may be commenting on the appropriation of slaves' stories for purely political purposes by abolitionists. In their attempt to have her crime redefined, the abolitionists were staging an ideological resistance to an oppressive justice system, and despite its practical importance in relation to their cause and the redefinition of African-American identity under the law in the United States, any change in the legal characterization of her crime still leaves Garner answerable to a system that is fundamentally inequitable to the point of hypocritical criminality. Finally, the "town full of disgust" is also addressed in the epitaph, since it appears to conform to social expectations, but again the incomplete utterance may also be indicative of Sethe's refusal to bend under the town's disapproval.
When the mysterious, wet figure appears in front of 124 and declares that she is Beloved, the epitaph takes on a whole new meaning. It is re-conceived, in Bakhtin's sense, by being changed into a name. Sharon Jessee draws connections between the events in *Beloved* and West African religious conceptions of the connection between the living and the dead. She points out that, "the dead, in African religion, want to be remembered...it is tantamount to a punishment to the recently deceased not to be identified by name..." (Jessee 200-201). It may be, then, that Beloved returns from the dead because Sethe is repressing her memory of the infanticide, and because she has to realize a name. In this sense, the word on the stone comes to represent a connection to the dead and symbolic systems that stretch beyond Western, Christian and Anglo-American conventions. By taking a name, Beloved enacts nommo, the West African belief in "the magic power of the word to call things into being, to give life to things through the unity of the word, water, seed," as William R. Handley has explained. What Beloved "calls into being," in turn, is Sethe's history –she hungers for stories of Sethe's life, and she consumes them just as she eats all of the food in the house. But Beloved does not remain a positive force in the novel. She represents a past that Sethe wants to wrap around herself, to retreat into, because, in part, she symbolizes an African life, a life before slavery. Denver, on the other hand, embodies Sethe's responsibilities in her present life, in America. It is no wonder, then, that Denver pursues a course of "uplift," venturing out of the house to earn a living and to learn how to read for, as her father is supposed to have said, "If you can't read, they can beat you" (*Beloved* 208).

But by seeking her place in American or Western culture, Denver does not rescue herself, or Sethe, from that African past; rather, she acknowledges a grim reality that they do not appear to have any alternative. They cannot go backward or stand still. What does finally rescue Sethe from the consuming embodiment of her past is a combination of Denver's communication with the outside, present world and a group of women who represent a distinctly African-American rescue party. The thirty women who show up
outside 124 to exorcise Beloved represent an amalgamation of African and American culture. At first, they are transported back in time and they experience a vision of Baby Suggs' famous party that seems to reaffirm everything that could be positive about their lives in America; it is as if the area around 124 has lost its position in time. Their African-American Christian call and response prayers that initiate their rescue eventually evolve into an indistinct musical "sound" that suggests pre-literate, African origins: "They stopped praying and took a step back to the beginning. In the beginning there were no words. In the beginning was the sound, and they all knew what that sound sounded like" (Beloved 259). The group of women represent African-American history because they all share, in one way or another, Sethe's past in slavery; they come to rescue her because they see Beloved, or the demon they believe her to be, as the return of that past. In her reconstruction of the past, Morrison oscillates between a history in language and one that is, mercifully, free of language. For Morrison, while nommo represents a connection to African culture, its role in African-American culture has to be problematic because of the logocentric nature of Western discourse. Though the recovery and revisioning of her past may enable Sethe to move beyond the stifling guilt that cut her off from most of her family and her community, the return of that past also brings with it the potential for Sethe to become so inscribed by her own stories and the endless retellings demanded by Beloved that it too threatens her future.

The name Beloved also informs our sense of Morrison's relationship to the novel and to writing. The double-voiced inscribing of the gravestone and the novel with the same "name" represents both the naming of ancestors, the "sixty million and more," and the naming of a literary tradition or history. The physical attributes of the novel testify to this link. The cover page and the pages that divide the novel into three sections are imprinted with traditional 18th-19th century headstone banners, one of which resembles a baby with wings. Thus the book itself is a headstone, and the text is a memorial to the yet-to-be-recovered stories of culturally effaced figures like Margaret Garner, whose
narratives offer potential foci for historical and literary reconceptualizations of African-American history and identity. If we consider the term "beloved" as it is traditionally incorporated into the rhetoric of the memorial service, it is missing its beginning as well as its end. The title of the novel, which also represents one of the most persistent images in the novel, calls our attention to an ongoing project of which this work is only one part; it may also represent an invitation or a challenge to other writers and scholars.

But Morrison also had serious reservations about participating in the literary establishment, or the production of novels. In "Memory, Creation, and Writing," Morrison says she wants to write fiction for "an illiterate or preliterate reader" (387). Her fiction, she claims, represents a departure from conventional stylistics because she specifically wants to distance her work from an authorizing and likewise inscribing literary establishment. As part of her reaction against post-enlightenment empiricism, Morrison remains wary of Western language and the literary tradition that have proved uncertain social mechanisms for African-Americans from the time of nineteenth century slave narratives, which often erased African-American cultural markers in the name of "uplifting" their subjects, of showing how "white" they could be. As a modern reconceiving of the slave-narrative, *Beloved* represents an attempt to subvert that paradigm. "Morrison cannot endorse the slave narratives' immense faith in the politically emancipatory potential of print literacy," argues Madhu Dubey, "in part because print literacy was so thoroughly implicated in the definitions of humanity, reason, and culture that bolstered the institution of slavery" (Dubey 195). Ironically, Dubey eloquently argues, Morrison's great American novels strive to be something un-literary so that they can avoid being subsumed by the essentially white, western hegemony represented by "the novel." Morrison is only partially able to avoid the stylistics of a novel in *Beloved*; after all, the literary establishment has had little difficulty identifying it as one. But what Morrison strives for is a work of fiction that centers around oral traditions rather than literary. Her desire is to create what Henry Louis Gates, Jr. has called "speakerly texts."
works that conceive of their audience as listeners rather than readers. Robert Stepto has made a similar claim for African-American texts in "Distrust of the Reader in Afro-American Narratives." "Although the novel cannot address the exclusively black audiences that formed the province of folk oral tradition," Dubey claims, "it can maintain a distinctively racial identity at a generic level, by appearing to salvage precisely those elements of folk community whose disappearance gives rise to the novel" (Dubey 190). In *Beloved*, according to Morrison and Dubey, those elements include orality and "a blending of the supernatural and the real" (190).

As Dubey acknowledges, neither oral folk traditions nor the "blending of the supernatural and the real" are alien to the novel form. Bakhtin, in particular, argued that oral folk discourse was a significant part of heteroglossia in the novel long before Morrison began to write. Furthermore, by incorporating magical and supernatural elements in her novels, Morrison may break tradition with the realist novel, but she can be positioned squarely within the traditions of magical realism, as Dubey argues, or historical romance, as I have tried to show. But by participating in these particular modes of novelistic discourse, Morrison nevertheless does still effect a departure from the logocentric, authoritative discourse I have associated with the white, male, Western tradition in the literary theory surrounding both Anglo-American Romantic poetry and realism. Like other historical romances, *Beloved* is caught between the desire to wrest a personal meaning from the word and the fear that language always involves the risk of erasing authorial intention, of reducing that personal meaning to an effect of the social and its potentially repressive hegemony. Both Handley and Dubey describe Morrison's attempts to transform her fiction into an extra-literary response to that hegemony as a central "predicament" in her work. "The African-American linguistic predicament, for Morrison," writes Handley, "is a displaced 'name' for death" (Handley 693). He continues:
In other words, Morrison does not deny the inevitable distortions of representation, or figurative language, but wants rather to affirm—both within the Western tradition of personification in storytelling and within the West African tradition, fragmented but not exterminated by the Middle Passage and a history of slavery—the power of nommo, the transformative power of the word. (Handley 693-4).

But, Handley also claims, "Beloved," the word that is so oversaturated with meaning in the novel and the one that represents the last word, "fights against erasure in order to stand as a testament to the regenerative power of the word as much as it stands in for an absence, 'in memory of'" (681). By offering an oral tradition that also stretches beyond the bounds of language to include extralinguistic musical sounds, according to Dubey, Morrison attempts to find a way to communicate African-American history without implicating herself and that history in the literary master narrative of Western discourse, but "the sonic community is a novelistic image that alludes to a plenitude of expression it can never attain" (Dubey 200). In the end, Beloved is a novel, not a piece of performance art and not a song. "One of the ways in which Beloved's literal return activates an oral (and anti-writerly) possibility," Dubey suggests, "is that it undoes death and gratifies a hunger for full presence, whereas writing is necessarily a record of absence, always bearing, in Walter Ong's phrase, 'an aura of accomplished death'" (197). In the end of the novel, however, Beloved effectively dies again. "This is not a story to pass on" is the refrain in the final chapter, "by and by all trace is gone" (Beloved 275). Perhaps Morrison considers writing an uncertain but nevertheless valuable tool for the revisionist histories she imagines. Ultimately, Beloved ends like many traditional novels; Paul D. returns and brings new life to Sethe: "He wants to put his story next to hers" (273). And, clearly, Morrison puts her historical romance next to other literary attempts to remember the ignored or forgotten stories of former slaves, though she worries that her novel-writing makes her complicit with the Western narrative of mastery that, she feels, may have been one of the root causes of slavery in the first place.
Unlike *Absalom, Absalom!*, Beloved stands within a recent tradition of feminist and African-American scholarship that seeks to revision literary history to *include* the heretofore silent voices of marginalized people. For this reason, some notion of a recoverable subjective presence is essential in the latter novel. Mary O'Connor argues that Bakhtinian dialogism can be "the exploration and activating of the unvoiced exiled world of women –that other place in all its variety" (O'Connor 215). If in *Absalom, Absalom!* Faulkner dramatizes the destabilization of the Southern identity by casting the heteroglot nature of modern language as a tragic loss of patriarchal subjectivity and meaning, it may be that part of Morrison's project is to point out the hegemonic nature of those ideals since she hearkens back to a time in the past and forward to a present when community and agency were and are linked, and when heteroglossia represents a strategy for undermining authoritative discourse. The polyvocality of language is analogous to the fragmentation of social cohesion in *Absalom, Absalom!*, but it is the realization of the multiple subject positions which make the recovery of lost voices possible in *Beloved*. Since Bakhtin's heteroglossia represents an expressly anti-authoritarian ethic, a specific counterstrategy to the logocentric potential in discourse, Morrison should be less wary of that element in her novels.
Aporia: 1. *Rhet.* the expression of serious or real doubt, as about where to begin or what to do or say. 2. *Phil.* a difficulty encountered in expressing the theoretical truth about something.

Webster’s Dictionary

In *Aporias*, Jacques Derrida examines several philosophical texts that attempt a history of death in the Western world and contemplate death as a possibility. These studies furnish Derrida with the perfect opportunity to discuss death as aporia, or, more precisely, to contemplate death as the ultimate aporia—the thing that no one can ever even pretend to know. Since one cannot experience one's own death, then death cannot enter into the realm of empirical knowledge as an experience. As he has through many of his works, Derrida deconstructs Western philosophy's attempt to impose a teleological order on life, or, more precisely the very concept of the empirical ordering of order. When death becomes the object of that attempt to impose order, the very attempt breaks down in the face of the unknowable:

This order of orders belongs to the great ontologico-juridico-transcendental tradition, and I believe it to be undeniable, impossible to dismantle, and invulnerable (at least this is the hypothesis that I am following here)—except perhaps in this particular case called death, which is more than a case and whose uniqueness excludes it from the system of possibilities, and specifically from an order that it, in turn, may condition. (*Aporias* 46)

This characteristically difficult passage suggests a radical destabilization of the very way in which we think we know. As the figure and the reality of something we cannot know, death represents a boundary for knowing that cannot be crossed, a possibility that cannot
be experienced as such. The other, now infamous, figure Derrida used to dismantle an equally expansive foundational concept in Western philosophy was "writing"; the usefulness of "writing" in Derrida's critique of logocentrism derives, in large part, from a similar aporia, an absence and the impossibility of response that also suggests death. As a conceptual endpoint, death proves useful to Derrida because, as he writes, "...culture itself, culture in general, is essentially, before anything, even a priori, the culture of death. Consequently, then, it is a history of death. There is no culture without a cult of ancestors, a ritualization of mourning and sacrifice, institutional places and modes of burial, even if they are only for the ashes of incineration" (Aporias 43). In the works I examined in chapters five and six, the authors all framed their works as stories of American culture, and they all view death as a significant cultural marker. Even though The Pioneers may be the only one among the four which is popularly considered an "early" American novel, they all participate in describing a culture that, in the grand scheme and especially in comparison to the long shadow of Europe, is relatively young, even still. As I pointed out earlier, Cooper and Hawthorne both remarked on the lack of American cultural history (by this they meant white Anglo-American cultural history) available to writers of fiction during the early nineteenth century. Faulkner could easily be said to have evolved his craft during the early stages of a properly "Southern" literature; certainly he thought this to be the case as do many of his critics. Morrison clearly sees herself as part of a movement of African-American literature that has flowered in the twentieth century, although part of that flowering involves recovery of a Black literary culture that has been in existence much longer though it was made almost invisible. As culture-makers, all four of these authors found death a useful symbol. In a sense, these novels all suggest that we can know a culture by witnessing its deaths.

For Cooper, the death metaphor presents an apt figure for communicating the complicated attitude he took toward American colonization and westward expansion because it enables his ironic presence/absence posture. In other words, by employing the
epitaph as a literary symbol and calling attention to the inadequacy of linguistic attempts to represent a native culture that is totally alien to his language, he can posit both the presence and the absence of that culture—he can attempt to memorialize Chingachgook even as he effaces the memorial as inadequate. The inadequacy of the epitaph is an important symbol in the book because discourse is also the most powerful tool of cultural expansion and hegemony. Cooper suggests that the foundations of Anglo-American pioneer societies, law and religion, amount to nothing but subjective discourse employed by the powerful to justify their selfish whims. As a somewhat proud representative of that culture, however, Cooper presents the chaos and loss of cultural foundations in Templeton as only a stage in the development of a new society. Since he ultimately endorses Anglo-American expansionism and imperialism, he has to posit Truth and Justice as late-comers, not absentees.

Just as the graveyard is among the first traces of a new settlement at the beginning of *The Scarlet Letter*, so death is an integral part of the culture Hawthorne portrays. The citizens of his Puritan Boston perform the solemnity and mourning associated with death in their very lives—they wear drab clothes as if in mourning, and they adhere to a rigorous, religiously inscribed self-denial of passion and other life-affirming pleasures. Within the narrative of *The Scarlet Letter*, though Dimmesdale looks forward to an afterlife when he can escape both the desires of the body and the guilt he suffers, his epitaph suggests that the A and all it signifies followed him to the grave. Since Hester willfully returned to the A as if it became her calling as well as her punishment, it is only fitting that her epitaph features the A. The final figure served by the A is the narrator or the figure of Hawthorne himself as he appears in "The Custom House." For him, the A is a fascinating link to the past that stirs his curiosity and restores his creative vigor. It also represents a responsibility he willingly takes on. Both Surveyor Pue and the ghosts of Hester and her fellow characters haunt Hawthorne, compelling him to serve their memories by bringing them back to life in his work. For
Hawthorne, the figure of death is pure creative possibility; he invokes spirits and shadows for inspiration and bathes himself in the darkness of the night, an environment that suggests both history and the uncharted terrain of the imagination. While his Puritan forefathers imposed a repressive hegemony through the manipulation of discourse, as do the Puritan authorities in his narrative, Hawthorne dramatized the disintegration of that authority via the pleasure and the play of language. Though he worries that his forebears would dismiss his literary efforts, if they could speak to him from their graves, he delights in the evolution of American culture that enabled him to take up the pen rather than the Bible.

In "The Paris Interview," Faulkner predicts, "If I had not existed, someone else would have written me, Hemingway, Dostoevski, all of us. ...The artist is of no importance. Only what he creates is important, since there is nothing new to be said" (355). Just as Emerson believed that all poetry was written before time in a transcendent text that the poet merely interprets, Faulkner suggests that all literary writing repeats the same eternal themes: "Shakespeare, Balzac, Homer have all written about the same things," he reasons, "and if they had lived one thousand years longer, the publishers wouldn't have needed anyone since" ("The Paris Interview" 355). In Absalom, Absalom!, likewise, the narrative transcends the individual character/narrators who tell and retell the story. At some point during the many recreations of Sutpen's history, Quentin realizes that the story represents a sort of allegorical parable about life, his life, his father's life, and so on. But Quentin finds no comfort in this paternalistic legacy. The inescapability of the story and his heritage causes his psychological tailspin and prefigures what readers of The Sound and the Fury already know, that Quentin will commit suicide. To a certain degree, Absalom, Absalom! is about the betrayal of a paternal legacy and the resultant social chaos, which is enacted in the fragmented narrative structure of the book. In this case, death does represent the loss of cultural stability and a historical rupture. Much of Southern literature, of which Absalom, Absalom! is one of the twentieth century's best
examples, involves a yearning, historical perspective that is not necessarily nostalgic for the past but is inescapably conditioned by the past. The civil war and the dramatic cultural changes in its wake have proved to be central foci of twentieth century literature about the South. In *Absalom, Absalom!*, Faulkner presents Southern history as a parable of loss and historiography as an existential dilemma. The "old verities" are there, he claims, for readers sensitive to their message, but those truths reflect a fatalism that he also conveyed in "The Paris Interview":

> The aim of every artist is to arrest motion, which is life, by artificial means and hold it fixed so that a hundred years later, when a stranger looks at it, it moves again since it is life. Since man is mortal, the only immortality possible for him is to leave something behind him that is immortal since it will always move. This is the artist's way of scribbling "Kilroy was here" on the wall of the final and irrevocable oblivion through which he must someday pass. (371)

Of the four literary epitaphs I examined in this study, only Faulkner's takes the form of an admonition. The sentiment of Rosa's cautionary words, and *Absalom, Absalom!"s attitude toward death are echoed in Faulkner's interview: language offers a sort of qualified immortality that bears little personal significance for the author except to indicate that he did exist. History forgets particular people and particular circumstances, which all seem to reduce to a timeless human condition.

Toni Morrison approaches her novel-writing as both a historian of African-American identity and as an author whose works challenge the literary establishment – she sees these two roles as one. In her essay, "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature," she argues that traditional literary canon formation in the academy has masked "a temporal, political and culturally specific program" in the guise of a search for "an eternal, universal and transcending paradigm" ("Unspeakable" 2). The culture posing as that "eternal" paradigm has been, as Faulkner's interview conveniently reveals, white, male and Anglo-American. In order to create
fiction that can be both recognized as American literature and at the same time suggest something quite different from the traditional literary product, Morrison employs narrative counterstrategies, such as her use of sound in place of language at points in *Beloved*. A similar strategy is her use of numbers as the first symbols in the book, which begins "124 was spiteful" (*Beloved* 3). Morrison wanted the numbers to disturb the reader's expectations: "The reader is snatched, yanked, thrown into an environment completely foreign, and I want it as the first stroke of the shared experience that might be possible between the reader and the novel's population" ("Unspeakable" 32). The ghost of Beloved is another "foreign" element for both the reader and the other characters, and neither the reader nor the characters can ever finally determine whether or not Beloved is indeed the ghost of the murdered baby, a former slave hiding her identity, a figment of the characters' imagination or an evil spirit. These theories and more abound in the critical readings of the novel. By keeping Beloved's nature and identity ambiguous, Morrison confounds the easy characterization of her novel as realism, as gothic, as magical realism or as historiography. In this way, she uses the aporia of death to suspend the critical judgment literary critics have traditionally exercised when they form canons. 124 represents a foreign terrain where the boundary separating life from death has slipped away along with our ability to make, or impose, sense. In "Unspeakable Things Unspoken," Morrison once again, and with the same intensity of irony, argues that the effect she wanted to achieve in *Beloved* required that she move beyond the confines of the traditional novel and language itself: "No compound of houses, no neighborhood, no sculpture, no paint, no time, especially no time because memory, pre-historic memory, has no time. There is just a little music, each other and the urgency of what is at stake. Which is all they had. For that work, the work of language is to get out of the way" ("Unspeakable" 33). But *Beloved* is nothing if not language. Sensitized to both the possibilities and the limits of language as a cultural marker, like other historical
romances, *Beloved* struggles against and with the role language must play in historiography.

Bakhtin argues that the novel is the perfect, and only, literary form for conveying the social character of language, which is also the essence of language. This is precisely because he sees the novel as the form in which the author allows language to slip away from her. The novel dramatizes "the word breaking through to its own meaning and its own expression across an environment full of alien words and variously evaluating accents, harmonizing with some of the elements in this environment and striking a dissonance with others..." ("Discourse" 277). Since Morrison is struggling against a hegemony she fears may have entirely subsumed the novel within its political program, she has reservations about writing in that form. By reading Morrison alongside Bakhtin, we can view her reservations as "dissonant" chords she intentionally strikes.

In *The Pioneers*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, and *Beloved*, the death metaphor functions as both an entryway into history and a reminder that any discursive recreation of the past necessarily relies on an imaginative capacity to explore an absence. The historical romance form, with its blending of reality and fantasy, creates the possibility for these authors to recreate the past while preserving the uncertainty associated with its absence. Historiography that presents itself as "scientific," as expressly non-fictional, sides with "presence" or authority. In *History: Science and Fiction*, Michel de Certeau depicts historiography as a discourse that functions "midway" between "ethics" and "dogmatism" (199). When it tends toward dogmatism, it "struggles against fiction," defining itself as a discourse that "effaces error from the 'fables' of the past" (200). "The territory" that the historian then "occupies," according to de Certeau, "is acquired through a diagnosis of the false...Consequently, fiction is deported to the land of the unreal, but the discourse that is armed with the technical 'know how' to discern errors is given the supplementary privilege of prerepresenting something
'real" (200-201). This is when historiography becomes what Bakhtin called "authoritative discourse," since, as de Certeau points out:

In effect, every authority bases itself on the notion of the 'real,' which it is supposed to recount. It is always in the name of the 'real' that one produces and moves the faithful. Historiography acquires this power in so far as it presents and interprets the 'facts.' How can readers resist discourse that tells them what is or what has been? They must agree to the law, which expresses itself in terms of events. (203)

Bakhtin argues that, in fact, readers are not given the option of resistance when they encounter "the authoritative word": "The authoritative word demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; quite independent of any power it might have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority already fused to it" ("Discourse" 342). When narrative historiography acknowledges its relationship to fiction, or its fictionality, and the distinction between the two discourses is challenged, then both can be viewed in relation to the "real," conditioning one another via an antiauthoritarian ethic.

Fiction, de Certeau claims, "is a discourse that 'informs' the 'real' without pretending either to represent it or to credit itself with the capacity for such a representation. In this way, it is fundamentally opposed to a historiography that is always attached to an ambition to speak the 'real'" (de Certeau 202). As I have argued, some nineteenth-century Anglo-American novelists sought intellectual and moral legitimacy when they claimed to be depicting "real life" and to be acting as historians, in the name of the "real." The authoritarian agenda implicit in Realism is revealed through the critical writings of canonical novelists such as William Dean Howells, who appeared to feel quite comfortable in his ability to determine which literary texts were more "real" than others. Anglo-American literary theorists before Realism, particularly those associated with Romantic poetry, made similar claims regarding "truth" in literature, though their authority was derived from religion or metaphysics rather than empiricism. Whether
literary critics locate a fundamental "truth" or the "real" at the heart of literary works, their ends are the same: they are attempting to cast literature as a form of certain knowledge and literary criticism or theory as the revelation of that knowledge. But, as de Certeau reminds us, "knowledge is insecure when dealing with the problem of fiction" (de Certeau 202). He continues:

...consequently, its effort consists in analysis (of a sort) that reduces or translates the elusive language of fiction into stable and easily combined elements. From this point of view, fiction violates one of the rules of scientificity. It is a witch whom knowledge must labor to hold and to identify through its exorcizing. It is only drifting meaning. It is the siren from whom the historian must defend himself, like Ulysses tied to the mast. (202)

In the twentieth century, poststructuralist critics such as Derrida and Barthes have used the "death of the author" metaphor to move literary or discourse criticism away from a search for certain knowledge, and thus away from authoritarian models of meaning-making. Bakhtin, who repositioned the author in relation to the uncontrollable social force of heteroglossia and dialogics, also offered an anti-authoritarian approach to reading the novel by questioning the author's ability to absolutely determine or contain the knowledge communicated in his work. This is not to say that these critics utterly disregard knowledge or communication. On the contrary, by refusing the reductive rubric of what Nina Baym has called "the truth test" and by modeling a form of criticism that analyzes the possible and changing meanings suggested by literary discourse, poststructuralist critics in this mode revitalize and complicate literary criticism by asking it to meet the challenges posed by the human mind as a historical and social entity, in all of its complexity.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: WRITING AND THE EPITAPH

Note on the Title: Rememory is a term created by Morrison and used in *Beloved*. Its main function, I think, is to combine the verb remember and the noun memory to underscore that history is a both a *process*, something that changes over time, and a constellation of individual memories, your own and those of others, that must be compared and contrasted in order to approach the truth. She also invokes the term "re-vision," introduced by Adrienne Rich in her essay, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision." Rich defines re-vision this way:

Re-vision –the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction –is for women more than a chapter in cultural history; it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. (35)

Using the prefix "re" in this manner has become a way to designate radical approaches to history and critical interpretation. I think the term is useful in my title since, first, *Beloved* is the last of the four books I examine, the culmination of my study; secondly, it characterizes my approach to history, which will be evident throughout the dissertation.

1 The mythological Thamus, also called Ammon or Zeus, king of all Gods, proves an apt figure for Plato since, according to Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg, he "delivered his prophecies only orally, as through the murmuring leaves of the Dodona

2 Derrida discusses or alludes to this binary frequently in his work, though his most in-depth examination of its role in the history of philosophy and rhetoric is in Of Grammatology (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1967). Other scholars, particularly in the field of rhetoric, have also identified and critiqued this binary.

3 In the Phaedrus, writing is cast as the bastard brother of "the living and breathing word." Likewise, Derrida refers to writing as an orphan "Plato's Pharmacy," Dissemination, trans. Barbara Johnson (London: Athlone Press, 1981) 77.

4 As a composition instructor, I often found my students believed they could verbally explain what they failed to make clear in writing. It may be more accurate to say that engaging in a Platonic dialectic with their instructor helped them articulate their thoughts through question and answer. It should be noted that what has come to be known in rhetorical theory as the Platonic privileging of speech over writing might be more accurately characterized as dialectic over writing, though the former remains a powerful binary in the history of Western thought.

5 See Frank Lentricchia, After the New Criticism (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1980) X.

6 Hutcheon uses the term "historiographic metafiction" in The Poetics of Postmodernism (New York and London: Routledge, 1988) to refer to "those well known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages..." (5). Hutcheon focuses on postmodern novels of the twentieth century in her work, but her terms prove useful to my study despite the fact that none of the four main novels I examine are necessarily considered postmodern, though a case could be made for each of them. In fact, Hutcheon's take on postmodernism and the terms she uses could be instrumental in broadening the scope of what we call the postmodern novel. She writes: "In most of the critical work on
postmodernism, it is narrative –be it in literature, history, or theory –that has usually been the major focus of attention. Historiographic metafiction incorporates all three of these domains: that is, its theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs (historiographic metafiction) is made the grounds for its rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past." (5) The same could be said for the novels of my study, though to varying degrees. My use of this term is further elaborated in subsequent chapters.

Bakhtin uses the terms univocal and polyvocal to designate the number of voices thought to inhabit any utterance. His position is that univocal utterances do not exist that in any utterance, the voices of author, character, reader, history, etc. are present.

CHAPTER 2

FOLLOWING THE DEATH METAPHOR TO ITS DESTINATION: LIFE

As I argue later in this chapter, the author has not always been the determining agent in literary interpretation, though both "death of the author" theories and the reactions they provoked might lead one to believe so.

In "The Death of the Author," trans. Geoff Bennington, Modern Criticism and Theory, ed. David Lodge (London and New York: Longman, 1988), Barthes announces "...writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin" (168). Though this is the premise of his essay, more complicated approaches to the death metaphor are discussed in this chapter.

Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976). His critique of what he calls the Western "metaphysics of presence" argues that philosophy, in particular, has long posited a fully-present, knowable Truth or origin as the basis for thought; he labels this "logocentrism." Thinkers from Plato to linguist Ferdinand de Saussure have argued that speech is the medium directly proceeding from this "origin." Derrida argues that no such origin exists because even to conceive of such a thing one relies on structures of thought peculiar to writing. See also Jasper Neel, *Plato, Derrida, Writing* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois UP, 1988).

4 I discuss my characterization of the author-text relationship as synecdoche later in the chapter. It suffices at this point to say that for the author to be present in the text, the text must be considered part of his/her metaphysical whole.

5 Though the authenticity of Plato's letters has been subject to question, The Seventh Letter is among those most widely accepted by scholars. Furthermore, while the authenticity of the section in this letter wherein Plato discusses writing has been questioned by some, it jibes so perfectly with his characterization of writing in *Phaedrus* that it seems appropriate matter for inclusion here. See Walter Hamilton's Introduction in *Phaedrus and The Seventh and Eighth Letters*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), for an argument in favor of the letter's authenticity and Ludwig Edelstein's *Plato's Seventh Letter* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966) for a dissenting opinion.

6 Albert B. Lord and Eric A. Havelock, following on the work of Milman Parry, have investigated the fundamental differences and shifts in consciousness and intellectual achievement brought about by the transition from orality to literacy in Ancient Greece. Havelock characterizes this change as a shift from paratactic to hypotactic structures of organization. The former relies on simple juxtaposition of ideas, concrete imagery appealing to the senses and emotions, and appeals to authority. The latter makes use of subordination, appeals to reason and text, and a critical approach to authority.
For a summary of criticism on both sides of this debate, see Jasper Neel, *Plato, Derrida and Writing*, chp. 2. In Ronna Burger, *Plato's Phaedrus: A Defense of aPhilosophic Art of Writing* (University of Alabama Press, 1980), Burger argues that the *Phaedrus* is a cautionary tale rather than a denunciation of writing. Burger argues that Plato recognizes the danger of an unquestioning reader and unquestioned writing, urging rigorous critique of writing akin to the dialectic method.


Burke himself ultimately acknowledges that Derrida never meant to entirely dismiss the author, and he laments that many readers of Derrida have misunderstood this point. This realization does not hinder Burke's own (mis)use of Derrida's approach to the author, however, particularly when Burke contends that Derrida's analyses of particular authors contradicts his position on the death of the author.


This paradox, the idea that literary (and philosophical) critique is problematized by the fact that our very language (and its traditional system of significations) reflects and perpetuates power structures such as logocentrism and patriarchy, has been a controversial topic among literary theories of the left, particularly


16 Burke argues that, contrary to Derrida's argument, Plato does not reject writing, per se, but rather any univocal utterance. In other words, according to Burke, Plato would find a speech during which no questions were asked and no dialogue ensued to be just as pernicious as writing. See Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author*, 157.

17 As Burke points out, in *Protagorus, The Collected Dialogues of Plato, Including the Letters*, ed. Edith Hamilton (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1963), Plato suggests that orators are "like books" since "they cannot either answer or ask a question on their own account" (329a). Furthermore, by the end of *Phaedrus*, Socrates views speakers and writers as capable of the same disgrace and immorality (see *Phaedrus*, 142).

18 Socrates is cross-examined only in *Protagorus* and *Gorgias*, according to Scott.

19 Other critics have also argued that the Socratic dialectic is more often the scene of a violent coercion or a systematic refutation that "disregards the will and desire of the other—the interlocutee" (Ballif 82). See Michelle Ballif, *Seduction, Sophistry, and the Woman with the Rhetorical Figure*, (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois UP, 2001). See also Brain Vickers, *In Defense of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988) 91-94.
20 The New Critics put literary criticism in the center position, just as much feminist criticism has done with gender, and so on. As stated earlier, Foucault, for one, accuses Barthes of using "the death of the author" to position language itself as the determining structure in literary interpretation; however, as I have argued, "death of the author" criticism in the Derridean poststructuralist mode rejects the very idea of a central, determining structure.

21 Though Bakhtin considers all language to be thoroughly and inherently dialogic, he nevertheless argues that poetic discourse is primarily monologic because the poet has imposed his will on the language, forcing-out the dialogic element (which, apparently, is not so inherent after all). Bakhtin's seemingly contradictory uses of the concept of dialogic have been controversial in critical approaches to his thought.

22 Neel makes precisely this argument in *Plato, Derrida and Writing*.

23 Though Bakhtin does not use the term "structuralism" in his critique, his allusions to "various schools of thought in the Philosophy of language, in linguistics and stylistics" which have "introduced" the concept of an abstract "system of language" clearly point in that direction. Bakhtin specifically distances his argument from structuralism with the following statement in "Discourse in the Novel," *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981):

What we have in mind here is not an abstract linguistic minimum of a common language, in the sense of a system of elementary forms (linguistic symbols) guaranteeing a *minimum* level of comprehension in practical communication. We are taking language not as a system of abstract grammatical categories, but rather language conceived as ideologically saturated, language as a world view, even as a concrete opinion, insuring a *maximum* of mutual understanding in all spheres of ideological life. Thus a unitary language gives expression to forces working toward concrete verbal and ideological unification and centralization, which develop in vital connection with the processes of sociopolitical and cultural centralization. (271)
Sean Burke's depiction of Plato's dialectic as an anti-dogmatic pedagogy of egalitarian exchange is certainly not the only one. Among others is Gregory Clarke, *Dialogue, Dialectic and Conversation: A Social Perspective on the Function of Writing* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois UP, 1990). But the very fact that the dialectic is championed in liberal-humanist pedagogies speaks for itself. As I have indicated, the form of the dialectic is not inherently patriarchal or otherwise oppressive, but the dialectic exchanges depicted in Plato's dialogues can hardly be considered open-ended or anti-dogmatic, suggesting that egalitarianism is not so easily achieved.

The essays Hirschkop directly denounces are: Gary Saul Morson, "Who Speaks for Bakhtin?" (1-19), Michael Holquist, "Answering as Authoring: Mikhail Bakhtin's Trans-Linguistics" (59-71), and Caryl Emerson's "The Outer Word and Inner Speech: Bakhtin, Vygotsky, and the Internalization of Language" (21-40), which are all located in *Bakhtin: Essays and Dialogues on His Work*, ed. Gary Saul Morson (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

Though the author of this work is V. N. Volosinov, many Bakhtin scholars have determined that Bakhtin was either the author using a pseudonym or acting as a collaborator. See Gary Saul Morson, "Dialogue, Monologue and the Social: A Reply to Ken Hirschkop," *Bakhtin: Essays and Dialogues on His Work*, and Michael Holquist's introduction to *The Dialogic Imagination*, wherein Holquist states:

There is a great controversy over the authorship of three books that have been ascribed to Bakhtin: *Freudianism* (1929), and *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1929; 2nd ed. 1930), both published under the name of V. N. Volosinov, and *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship* (1928), published under the name of P. N. Medvedev... The view of the present editor is that ninety percent of the text of the three books in question is indeed the work of Bakhtin himself. (xxvi)

As I will argue in Chapter two, authors (poets and novelists) frequently employ authoritative discourse in their works (as in when a poet uses highly charged religious
language or contends that his poetry represents "truth" or "the word of God," etc.). However, Bakhtin's theory that language is *essentially* dialogic requires that an author must ultimately fail in any attempt to reduce language to her will. Authoritative discourse is different because, being authorless, it appears to have come into being before language, however ironic that may seem, as a universal truth or the word of God.

28 Bakhtin's footnote here reads: "One's own discourse is gradually and slowly wrought out of others' words that have been acknowledged and assimilated, and the boundaries between the two are at first scarcely perceptible" ("Discourse in the Novel" 345, n31).

29 In fact, one of Sean Burke's points of contention with Derridean theory is the fact that, though Derrida de-emphasizes the author, nearly all of his critical works focus on particular texts by particular authors.

CHAPTER 3

THE AUTHOR AND THE METAPHORIC MEDIATION

1 There are too many psychoanalytic critics of the author to number here; some who informed my particular approach in one way or another include: Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, and Helene Cixous.

2 Although Abrams positions what he calls the "pragmatic" movement in poetic style chronologically between the "mimetic" and "expressive," he also suggests that "pragmatic" poetry had mimetic qualities, which is why I felt justified in opposing the "mimetic" and "expressive" without directly addressing the pragmatic in my study.

3 Other critics of British Romanticism, such as Jerome McGann and Anne Mellor, challenge Abrams's characterization of the Romantics, but Abrams fits perfectly in my scheme since I am tracing a Platonic line through literary criticism. Furthermore, Abrams's views are still influential despite his detractors.


As I have already suggested, in Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates distrusts writing because it can travel away from its author. When an author is not present to explain and defend the content of his text, the text can go about creating meaning on its own, which is often detrimental to the author's original intentions. This is one reason for Socrates's privileging of speech over writing.

Although this may seem a contradiction (since, as I have already pointed out, Abrams characterizes Wordsworth and the Romantic movement as post-mimetic), in *The Mirror in the Lamp*, 22, Abrams acknowledges that vestiges of the mimetic can be found in Wordsworth, whom Abrams sees as a sort of transitional figure.

Feminist critiques of binary logic, such as Cixous's "Sorties" *Modern Criticism and Theory*, ed. David Lodge (London and New York: Longman, 1988) 287-293, suggest a characterization of dialectic models as paradox because such oppositions suppress complexity in the name of certainty by offering an unresolvable yet perfectly stable opposition.

Emerson's God-equivalent is the Over-Soul. This concept reveals the complexity of Emerson's approach to the transcendent. Though Emerson describes the Over-Soul in transcendent, ideal terms (is it the "Unity," "the whole" and the "universal beauty"), he also characterizes it as containing "every man's particular being" and suggests that it is always all around us and in us. Thus, though the Over-Soul cannot be
said to exist independent of man in a higher realm, it is nevertheless metaphysical and omnipotent.

10 In "Author" Critical Terms for Literary Study, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1990) 105, as I have shown, Donald Pease argues that the literary "genius" emerged when there was no longer a "reciprocal workaday relationship" between writing literature and other modes of cultural production (the poet was the man of leisure producing poetry to elevate the soul rather than to make money). He argues that the genius entirely separated his form of cultural production from the political and economic spheres. It was by dissociating his work from politics and economics that the genius was able to assume the role of auctore, under the pretense that the truth conveyed in his works transcended the mundane, everyday realm. Pease does not consider the role of the nineteenth-century money-making popular novelist in his essay, and I argue that the critical reaction against popular novels arises from the perception that workaday novel writing undermines the genius and his role as auctore.


12 Arnold criticizes popular liberal humanist movements that form in the name of uncovering truth because of his faith in the radical individuality of the good literary critic. He is suspicious of any collective endeavor, even though his essay is written with an assenting audience in mind. He uses the term "Philistines" to mock liberal social movements.

13 This essay is transcription of a manuscript of a lecture Howells gave in 1899 during a tour of the American East and Midwest.

14 Baym quotes from the column "Easy Chair" in Harpers, Feb. 1860.
CHAPTER 4
HISTORICAL ROMANCE AND THE EPITAPH: REALITY AND FANTASY BLUR

1 This refers to James's famous metaphor, wherein he writes that "the house of fiction" "has not one window, but a million –a number of possible windows not to be reckoned..." See James, The Art of the Novel, 46.


5 As I pointed out in chapter one, Derrida uses the term "trace" to refer to the always-already absent meanings of a word that only begin to become apparent through the rigorous deconstruction of that word in play.

6 Foucault makes a similar claim in "What is an Author" Modern Criticism and Theory, ed. David Lodge (London and New York: Longman), 197-210.

7 Hale takes this line from Roland Barthes S/Z trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974) 132, though, as I argue in chapter three, his text is much more complicated than her use of the quote implies.

8 In S/Z, Barthes describes two kinds of writing: readerly and writerly. Using these terms as theoretical endpoints on a continuum, Barthes describes writerly texts as the ideal, the texts that do not yield themselves to the fixing, intending reader and that are always in process –hence active designation, writerly. Readerly texts are those that can be read because they present themselves as stable (every book you would ever find in a
book store or library is a readerly text). Though the purely writerly text does not (and cannot) exist, Barthes argues that some texts are more writerly than others.

Hale's misreading of Bakhtin's theory results in her final chapter, in which she suggests that subaltern scholarly groups such as African Americanists and feminists have found an unreliable ally in Bakhtin's theory because dialogism forecloses the possibility of positive identity or agency. In essence, she argues that Bakhtinian heteroglossia erases all difference, which I argue is a gross misunderstanding of his work, particularly in "Discourse in the Novel." By positioning Bakhtin as a relativist, Hale underestimates Bakhtin's dedication to antiauthoritarianism and the political nature of his claims.

In addition to many other critics, both David Hirsch in *Reality and Idea in the Early American Novel*, (The Hague: Mouton, 1971) and Harry B. Henderson III in *Versions of the Past: The Historical Imagination in American Fiction*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), criticize Trilling's and Chase's characterization of the romance/novel binary, arguing that the Trilling/Chase approach reflects a mid-twentieth century conservatism masquerading as liberalism. See following note.

In her well-known essay, "Concepts of Romance in Hawthorne's America," *Nineteenth Century Fiction* 38 (1984): 426-43, Nina Baym challenges the critical designation of the American romance (as opposed to the novel) as the dominant, and peculiarly American, form of longer works of fiction in the nineteenth century. She argues that influential mid-twentieth century critics such as Trilling and Chase used Hawthorne's casual and undeveloped distinction between the romance and the novel in his preface to *The House of the Seven Gables* to inaugurate the now familiar approach to American literature that designates the period before the civil war as the Romantic period and the major works of fiction published during that time as romances (as opposed to realistic novels). Baym's contention that the romance/novel distinction is ill defined and hardly useful is not original, since, as I have already shown, Henry James made the same claim in "The Art of Fiction" more than one hundred years before. Nevertheless, the
controversial dichotomy was not invented by Hawthorne, and the fact that many of our
canonized author/theorists addressed the romance/novel distinction, in one way or
another, well before the twentieth century suggests that the issues arising from the debate
are worthy of investigation, though I would agree with Baym that it hardly seems useful
to create entire curriculums around "romanticism" and to periodize according to
"romanticism" when we cannot agree what the term means, and when, as Baym and
Hirsch remind us, even so-called romantic authors had a relatively vague sense of what
the term was supposed to mean. It remains interesting to me as a way of analyzing the
truth-test imposed by authoritarian literary theorists who used the terms romance and
novel to suggest the realism of the latter. I found David Hirsch's *Reality and Idea in the
Early American Novel* (1971) most useful to my brief critique of the Trilling/Chase
approach to American romance.

13 Here, Hutcheon quotes Russel B. Nye's "History and Literature: Branches of
the Same Tree," *Essays on History and Literature* (Columbus: Ohio State University
Press, 1966) 123.
14 Here, Hirsch cites D. E. S. Maxwell. *American Fiction: The Intellectual
Background* (New York: Columbia UP, 1963) 188. Hirsch acknowledges that Maxwell
made a point similar to his own when he suggested that Hawthorne's "...territory was the
human soul, not in isolation or in its transcendent relations only, but in the bearings of
social life" (Maxwell 188).
15 In chapter two, I traced this same ironic thread through some of Wordsworth's
more famous literary critical essays, particularly the "Preface to the Edition of 1815" *The
Poetical Works of Wordsworth* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982) 801-806, and his
16 Aporia is a rhetorical and philosophical term that designates undecidability, as
in a proposition that can be proved neither true nor false.
CHAPTER 5

THE PIONEERS AND THE SCARLET LETTER:

HISTORICAL ROMANCE, THE EPITAPH AND UNDECIDABILITY


2. See Wordsworth's "Preface to the Edition of 1815" and "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface."

3. For an extended analysis of the "neutral" metaphor as it relates to the romance, see G. R. Thompson and Eric Carl Link, Neutral Ground: New Traditionalism and the American Romance Controversy (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999).

4. In his 1832 introduction to The Pioneers (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), Cooper admits that many of the scenes and characters described in the book are "familiar to his own youth." But, as Wayne Franklin has acknowledged, Cooper later "went out of his way in the Brother Jonathan pieces and elsewhere to demonstrate that Templeton and Cooperstown were not intimately related" (Franklin 78). See Wayne Franklin, The New World of James Fenimore Cooper (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1982).

5. Geoffrey Rans offers a comprehensive view of the varied critical opinion of Natty in Cooper's Leatherstocking Tales (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991). Among critics who explicitly do not reduce Natty to a flat mythic allegory are Rans and Jane Tompkins in Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), who argue that Cooper was much more interested in the particular social and political conditions of post-revolutionary America than other critics have acknowledged.

Cooper's prescient belief in the tragic inevitability of the destruction of Native American cultures in the white colonized areas was inevitable is reinforced by the fact that in the late eighteenth and early seventeenth centuries there were many active tribes still east of the Mississippi river, though Cooper's landscapes are utterly emptied of Natives. See Roy Harvey Pearce, *The Savages of America.*

In his "Preface to *The Leather-Stocking Tales,*" *The Theory of the American Novel,* ed. George Perkins (New York: Rinehart and Winston, 1970), Cooper reveals that some of his readers have complained that his books "give a more favorable picture of the red man than he deserves" (32). Cooper politely corrects them.


There are many critical readings of the significance of the A in *The Scarlet Letter,* among the most instructive are those by Waggoner, Ruland and Bradbury, Bercovitch, Feidelson and Henderson (see bibliography).


Many readings of *The Scarlet Letter* make precisely the opposite claim about Hester's heroic status, particularly feminist approaches such as Nina Baym's in *The Shape of Hawthorne's Career* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976). Baym argues that Hester develops a feminist ideology that allows her to remain independent of Puritan repressiveness and that she brings about social change. I find her story so tragic and her end so complicit with the role Puritan Boston has prescribed for her that I prefer to see her as a survivor rather than a heroine.
CHAPTER 6

ABSALOM, ABSALOM! AND BELOVED: HISTORY, MODERNITY AND THE ALWAYS INCOMPLETE UTTERANCE


3 See Nina Baym, The Shape of Hawthorne's Career.

4 As a source for the earliest indication that the term "modernism" had finally taken a hold on literary critics, Harwood cites Frank Kermode's "A Babylonish Dialect," Continuities (New York: Random House, 1968) 67-77.


7 A newspaper clipping describing a journalist's visit with Margaret Garner in her jail cell can be found in The Black Book. ed. Middleton Harris, Morris Levitt, Roger Furman, and Ernest Smith (New York: Random House, 1974).


11 See *Absalom, Absalom!* , 171.


14 As Dubey points out, Bakhtin considered folk and vernacular to play an important role in novelistic discourse. See *The Dialogic Imagination*, chps. 2 and 3.

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