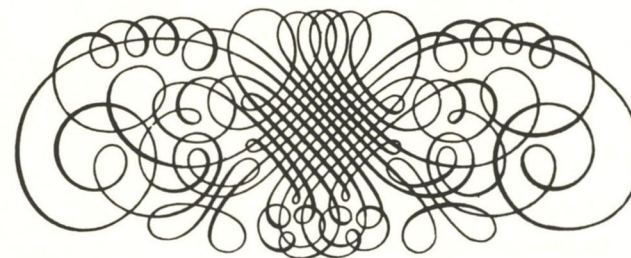


BEGINNINGS

Intention and Method

EDWARD W. SAID



Basic Books, Inc., Publishers / New York

PN
441
S3

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Said, Edward W.

Beginnings : intention and method.

Includes bibliographical references.

1. Literature—History and criticism—Theory, etc.

I. Title.

PN441.S3 809 74-78306

ISBN 0-465-00580-2

Copyright © 1975 by Edward W. Said

Printed in the United States of America

Designed by Vincent Torre

74 75 76 77 78 79 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

For Mariam

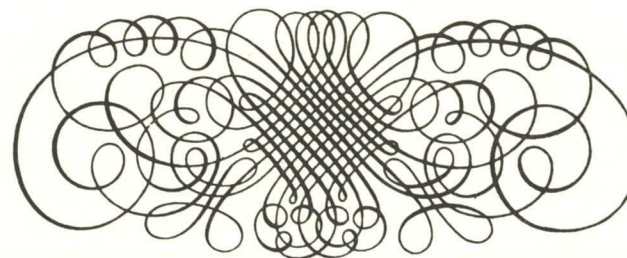
Wadie

Najla

Hillard Fd

Sp King 22 Mar 1977 BNA

450373



I
WHERE, or when, or what is a beginning? If I have begun to write, for example, and a line has started its way across the page, is that all that has taken place? Clearly not. For in the act of asking a question about the meaning of a beginning, I seem to have discerned vague outlines of significance where very little had been suspected. Claude Lévi-Strauss suggests that the mind's logic is such that "the principle underlying a classification can never be postulated in advance. It can only be discovered *a posteriori*." Moreover, language, which seems to be man's most influential instrument of classification, is, according to Lévi-Strauss, "an unreflecting totalization [of] . . . human reason which has its reason and of which man knows nothing."¹ To identify a point as a beginning is to classify it after the fact—even if, as I shall try to show, this need not also mean that because one uses language to study beginnings one is condemned to a useless exercise. Yet a beginning is often that which is left behind; in speculating about beginnings we sometimes resemble Molière's M. Jourdain, acquiring retrospective respect for what we have always done in the regular course of things. Only now, as we ask about beginnings, classifying something as a beginning seems to matter more than before. We find ourselves retorting that we know now and always have known how to begin—whether in terms of speaking, feeling, thinking, or acting in one way rather than in another—and that we will continue to know and to do so. If that is beginning, then that is what we do. When? Where? How? At the beginning.

Constructing the tautology that says one begins at the beginning depends on the ability of both mind and language to reverse themselves, and thus to move from present to past and back again, from a complex situation to an anterior simplicity and

back again, or from one point to another as if in a circle. It is the ability to do these things that makes thought both intelligible and verging on obscurity at the same time. We clearly know what it means to begin; then why question our certainty by reminding ourselves that in the realm of thought, beginning is not really a beginner's game. We deride the naïve thinker who, having discovered that thought can reverse itself, proceeds to claim that the order of things can also be summarily reversed; yet at other times we affirm such reversibility ourselves in order to make a point or move in a new direction. A revolutionary like Lenin is especially sensitive to left-wing communism because he knows reversibility as power and as limit, not simply as unconditional desire or phrase making. Swift is another intellect for whom language and politics are reversible processes—and like Lenin, Swift feels entitled to judge when a specific reversal is either realistic or not. The projectors in Book 3 of *Gulliver's Travels* who build houses beginning with the roof live a fantasy of reversibility; but in his political writings who more than Swift the hard-nosed pamphleteer wanted readers to see things clearly from the beginning—meaning that he wanted to reverse the ruinous trend of European war policy and the cancerous growth in the English language of neologism and cant?

The particular merit of *Gulliver's Travels* from the standpoint of beginnings and reversibility is that Swift seems to have designed the book as a set of experiments in changing directions. He did this as if asking himself what would follow from, say, switching a man's dimensions from normal to tiny, or from tiny to gigantic, or from human to animal. Most utopias are content with one switch, one new beginning, one reversal; but not the *Travels*, and this is its special interest for us here.² The third voyage is not about *changed* directions (as are places like Lilliput, Brobdingnag, and Houyhnhnmland), but about *changing* directions all the time, as a way of life. Hence the peculiarly chastening effect on Gulliver of seeing the Struldbrugs, those creatures whose immortality reverses the mortal goal of human life forever by canceling it entirely, thereby extending life into a kind of perpetual beginning. But it is mainly in the Academy of Lagado that Swift places the most irrepressible attempts at reversing processes:

The first Man I saw was of a meagre Aspect, with sooty Hands and Face, his Hair and Beard long, ragged and singed in several Places. His Clothes, Shirt, and Skin were all of the same colour. He had been Eight Years upon a Project for extracting Sun-Beans out of Cucumbers, which were to be put

into Vials hermetically sealed, and let out to warm the Air in raw inclement Summers. . . .

I went into another Chamber, but was ready to hasten back, being almost overcome with a horrible Stink. My Conductor pressed me forward, conjuring in a Whisper to give no Offense. . . . The Projector of this Cell was the most ancient Student of the Academy. . . . His Employment from his first coming into the Academy, was an Operation to reduce human Excrement to its original Food, by separating the several Parts, removing the Tincture which it receives from the Gall, making the Odour exhale, and scumming off the Saliva.³

Despite Gulliver's timid silence on the scientific worth of these experiments, no reader of Book 3 can ever doubt that Swift felt for them disgusted scorn. With regard to the ongoing War of Spanish Succession, however, Swift's partisan attitude in 1711 (as a pamphleteer engaged by the incumbent Tory government to attack the former Whig ministry) was equally scornful. Except that there, in his writing of this period, fifteen years before *Gulliver's Travels*, Swift could argue against the war as a piece of rank fantasy, even though it had already cost millions in treasure and thousands of lives over the course of ten years, and for an immediate peace with France, as if to deny entirely the goals which had hitherto motivated the war against France. His major work of this period is called "The Conduct of the Allies and of the Late Ministry in Beginning and Carrying on the Present War"; here is a sentence from its conclusion: "Is it therefore our Interest to toil on in a ruinous War, for an impracticable End, . . . or to get under shelter before the Storm?"⁴ But no less resistant a fact than an actual war is the spoken language. For this too Swift desired a reversal, which, had it appeared in *Gulliver's Travels*, we would have called "projection." In 1712 he addressed to the Earl of Oxford "A Proposal for Correcting, Improving, and Ascertaining the English Tongue." Decrying "the infusion of Enthusiastick Jargon," the "Manglings and Abbreviations," the constant "lapses into Barbarity" everywhere afflicting English, Swift proposed electing a group of persons who "should assemble at some appointed Time and Place, and fix on Rules by which . . . some Method should be thought on for *Ascertaining* and *Fixing* our language forever." All this despite actuality, and because Swift wishes a reversion to "that *Simplicity*, which is one of the Greatest Perfections in any language."⁵

Like many other writers, Swift generally ascribes a special privilege to simplicity, a concept with which the ideas of antecedence, novelty, and foundation continue to be commonly

associated. Classicism and neoclassicism are phenomena of simplicity. What matters in classicism and in the type of reflection of which it is a part (an interest in antiquity, giving special value to "primitive terms") is, I think, that the simple is usually accorded eminence because it came first, because it began that which has persisted and endured. And thus what is first, because it *is* first, because it *begins*, is eminent. Most utopian models derive their force from this logic. The beginning as first point in a given continuity has exemplary strength equally in history, in politics, and in intellectual discipline—and perhaps each of these domains preserves the myth of a beginning utopia of some kind as a sign of its distinct identity.⁶ To have begun means to be the first to have done something, the first to have initiated a course discontinuous with other courses. Consider the founders of dynasties, empires, nations (Aeneas, Cyrus, Washington), creators of traditions, realms of inquiry, methods of study (Moses, Luther, Newton, Bacon), explorers and discoverers of every kind from Archimedes to Scott, the instigators and achievers of revolution (Copernicus, Lenin, Freud). Related to such figures are the originals or eccentrics, like Dr. Johnson, who, while remembered for doing something in a characteristically eccentric way, nevertheless have not totally altered the framework of life in so decisive a manner.

To identify a beginning—particularly that of a historical movement or a realm of thought—with an individual is of course an act of historical understanding. More than that, however, it is what may be called an *intentional act*—that is, an act in which designating individual X as founder of continuity Y (a movement, say) implies that X has value in having *intended* Y. Although there are other ways of identifying beginnings, this one avoids the passivity of "origins" by substituting the intentional beginning act of an individual for the more purely circumstantial existence of "conditions."⁷ I suspect that the reason for the enduring attractiveness of legends like those of Hercules is that, in dealing with a distant past, the mind prefers contemplating a strong seminal figure to sifting through reams of explanation. Not that a beginning-individual like Aeneas or Luther is simply a hypostasis. Indeed, he must fulfill the requirements of an exacting and, as it were, inaugural logic in which the creation of *authority* is paramount—first, in the requisite feat of having done something for the first time, an original achievement that gains in worth, paradoxically, precisely because it is so often repeated thereafter.

For example, while criticizing the Russian Revolution, Rosa Luxemburg nevertheless can conclude:

It is not a matter of this or that secondary question of tactics, but of the capacity for action of the proletariat, the strength to act, the will to power of socialism as such. In this, Lenin and Trotsky and their friends were the *first*, those who went ahead as an example to the proletariat of the world; they are still the *only ones* up to now who can cry with Hutter: "I have dared!"

This is the essential and *enduring* in Bolshevik policy. In *this* sense theirs is the immortal historical service of having marched at the head of the international proletariat with the conquest of political power and the practical placing of the problem of the realization of socialism.⁸

Luxemburg's argument implies that "immortality" and "uniqueness" together enable an enduring value. The necessary creation of authority for a beginning is also reflected in the act of achieving discontinuity and transfer: while in this act a clear break with the past is discernible, it must also connect the new direction not so much with a wholly unique venture but with the established authority of a parallel venture.⁹ Erik Erikson's commemorative essay on Freud, "The First Psychoanalyst," describes precisely this phenomenon in much of its fascinating complexity. While Erikson portrays Freud in terms of the "dimensions of lonely discovery," he reminds us that Freud was forever the physician:

It appears to be part of a creative man's beginnings that he may change his field and yet maintain the manner of work which became part of his first identity as a worker. Freud had investigated the nature of brain lesions by slicing the brains of young animals and foeti. He now investigated memories as representative cross sections of a patient's emotional condition. . . . Thus, the search for traumatic events in the individual's forgotten prehistory, his early childhood, replaced the search for lesions in early development.¹⁰

Noting that the idea of a search is preserved, Erikson goes on to describe an accompanying shift in the idea itself. Thus the beginning of a new science gains some of its authority when it points toward—intends—a continuity forged from what Erikson calls *coordinates*. Psychoanalysis redeploys old elements, arranging them discontinuously with, yet *parallel to*, the traditional manner. Note Erikson's italics in what follows—each of the coordinate phrases has meaning in law and architecture, as well as in conventional psychology:

The dimensions of Freud's discovery, then, are contained in a triad which, in a variety of ways, remains basic to the practice of psychoanalysis, but also to its applications. It is the triad of *therapeutic contract*, a *conceptual design*, and *systematic self-analysis*.¹¹

Erikson concludes by recollecting Freud's early interest in law as a profession and his late concern with Moses:

With grim pride he had chosen the role of one who opens perspectives on fertile fields to be cultivated by others. As we look back to the beginnings of his work, and forward to its implications, we may well venture to say: Freud the physician in finding a method of healing himself in the very practice of emotional cure has given a new, a psychological rationale for man's laws. He has made the decisive step toward a true interpenetration of the psychological with the technological and the political in the human order.¹²

Freud's lonely discoveries originate what Foucault calls a discursivity—that is, the possibility of, as well as the rule of formation for, subsequent texts.¹³ It is this authority in Freud's beginnings that interests Erikson, as indeed it interests any student of modern thought. Let us then formulate this general definition for any beginning that involves reversal, change of direction, the institution of a durable movement that increasingly engages our interest: such a beginning *authorizes*; it constitutes an authorization for what follows from it. With regard to what precedes it, a beginning represents, as I have said, a discontinuity (whether or not decisively enforced). In the case of a tract like the *Poetics*, the text authorizes much of what we call literary criticism. And yet we cannot forget that the authority limits as much as it enables. Certain concepts are inexpressible “according to Freud” (or to Aristotle), for instance, just as the discursivity we call Freudian or Aristotelian is not simply the repetition of a few ideas but the construction of thoughts, continuities, and words in a manner authorized (discursively) by Freud and Aristotle, respectively.

Thus one beginning is permissible; another one like it, at a different time or place, is not permissible. What are the conditions that allow us to call something a beginning? First of all, there must be the desire, the will, and the true freedom to reverse oneself, to accept thereby the risks of rupture and discontinuity; for whether one looks to see where and when he began, or whether he looks in order to begin now, he cannot continue as he is. It is, however, very difficult to begin with a wholly new start. Too many old habits, loyalties, and pressures inhibit the substitution of a novel enterprise for an established one. When the Old Testament God chooses to begin the world again he does it with Noah; things have been going very badly, and since it is his prerogative, God wishes a new beginning. Yet it is interesting that God himself does not begin completely from nothing. Noah and the ark comprise a piece of the old world initiating the new world. As if obliquely

commenting on the special status of beginnings, Descartes observes in *Rules for the Direction of Mind*: “For the human mind has in it something that we may call divine, wherein are scattered the first germs of useful modes of thought. Consequently, it often happens that however much neglected and choked by interfering studies they bear fruit of their own accord.”¹⁴ Every human being is a version of the divine, Descartes seems to be saying, and thus what seems spontaneous in man is in fact due to the resumption of man's beginning connection with God. To begin is to reverse the course of human progress for the sake of divine fruits. Vico's understanding of “divine” always veers eccentrically toward divination, to which he would connect fabulation or poetization; for indeed there is something irreducibly poetic about new beginnings: “In the beginning was the Word.”

A beginning must *be thought* possible, it must *be taken to be possible*, before it can be one, especially at the formal or designated opening of a literary work; by contrast, the “trouble” with *A Tale of a Tub* is that its alleged author does not really believe that he can get started. The mind's work, in order to be done, occasionally requires the possibility of freedom, of a new cleanness, of prospective achievement, of special and novel appropriation. No one today is likely to undertake so synoptic and original a task as Herbert Spencer did in *First Principles* (1862), yet his confidence in the possibility of some fresh movement, if not its scope or object, still retains its force. The mind must have this confidence in the course of its continuing enterprises—historical, sociological, scientific, psychological, or poetic. In other words, it must be *possible* to obey Paul's injunction to the Romans, “Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind,” or, to agree with Marx's correction of previous materialists, “The point . . . is to change the world.”

Finally, and almost inevitably, for the writer, the historian, or the philosopher the beginning will emerge reflectively and, perhaps, unhappily, already engaging him in an awareness of its difficulty. This is true whether one thinks of beginnings in the past, in the present, or even in the future. Thus at a very practical level Erikson wonders where to begin in writing the biography of a great man: “How does one take a great man ‘for what he was?’ The very adjective seems to imply that something about him is too big, too awe-ful, too shiny to be encompassed.”¹⁵ Johan Huizinga, acknowledging that history in some way deals with “facts,” still wants to know how to begin to distinguish a “fact”:

To what extent may one isolate from the eternal flux of disparate units, specific, consistent groups as entity, as phenomena, and subject them to the intellect? In other words, in the historical world, where the simplest thing is always endlessly complex, what are the units, the self-contained wholes (to give the German *Ganzheiten* an English equivalent)?¹⁶

Erich Auerbach sadly acknowledges that even a "lifetime seems too short to create even the preliminaries" for what he calls a work of literary and historical synthesis, for no absolutely single-minded narrowness can accomplish the task:

The scholar who does not consistently limit himself to a narrow field of specialization and to a world of concepts held in common with a small circle of like-minded colleagues, lives in the midst of a tumult of impressions and claims on him: for the scholar to do justice to these is almost impossible. Still, it is becoming increasingly unsatisfactory to limit oneself to only one field of specialization. To be a Provençal specialist in our day and age, for example, and to command only the immediately relevant linguistic, paleo-logical, and historical facts is hardly enough to be a good specialist. On the other hand, there are fields of specialization that have become so widely various that their mastery has become the task of a lifetime.¹⁷

Ferdinand de Saussure's predicament in trying to find a beginning for the scientific study of language is exemplary for me:

What is both the integral and concrete object of linguistics? The question is especially difficult. . . .

Other sciences work with objects that can be considered from different viewpoints; but not linguistics. . . . Far from its being the object that antedates the viewpoint, [in linguistics] it would seem that it is the viewpoint that creates the object; besides, nothing tells us in advance that one way of considering the fact in question takes precedence over the others or is in any other way superior to them. . . . We are left inside the vicious circle.

From whatever direction we approach the question, nowhere do we find the integral object of linguistics.¹⁸

To begin is first of all to know with what to begin. Language is both the medium of study and—since *beginning* has a meaning primarily in and regarding language—its object. Any worker in discursive language (novelist, philosopher, critic, or historian) must use language to delimit the linguistic object he studies and deals with. During this primary delimitation the object is created and its future extension in meaningful discourse is assumed. The process of delimitation is what Saussure calls establishing a *viewpoint*. But what keeps the viewpoint from being either a return to the vicious circle of uncertainty or a sort of *deus ex machine*? Saussure writes: "As I see it, there is only one solution to all the foregoing difficulties: *from the very outset we must put both feet on the*

ground of language and use language as the norm of all other manifestations of speech. Actually, among so many dualities, language alone seems to lend itself to independent definition and provide a fulcrum that satisfies the mind."¹⁹ This observation made, our problems do not thereby end: they only become more immediately apprehensible and epistemologically clearer than before.

But if Saussure's reflections on a beginning for the study of language are exemplary, then next to them we must place Nietzsche's equally exemplary propaedeutic philosophy, first adumbrated in the notes collected under the title *Das Philosophenbuch* contemporary with and immediately following *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872, 1873, 1875).

All the laws of nature are no more than *relationships* between an X, a Y, a Z. We define the laws of nature as the relationships between a set made up of X, Y, and Z, each set of which consequently is known to us in relation to other sets of X, Y, and Z.

Strictly speaking knowledge is only a form of tautology and as such is empty. Any knowledge that is an advancement is really an *identification of the not-similar with the similar*, which is to say, something essentially illogical.

It is only by such methods that we acquire a concept, as if, for instance, the concept "man" was really something actual, whereas such a concept is our creation, made by sacrificing individual characteristics of men to a general concept. We theorize that nature proceeds according to such concepts: here, however, first nature then the concept are anthropomorphisms. The *omission* (*das Übersehen*) of what is individual about men gives us the concept, and our knowledge begins with the concept: this knowledge begins by *standardization* (*im Rubrizieren*) and by the establishment of *general groupings* (*im Aufstellung von Gattungen*). But the essence of things does not correspond to such arrangements, which are processes of knowledge and have nothing to do with actual things. Numerous individual characteristics determine a thing for us, not all possible characteristics: the coherence of these traits brings about knowledge of a thing subordinated to a concept.

We manufacture things insofar as they are *bearers of qualities* and we produce abstractions insofar as they are causes of these qualities. If a unity, for example a tree, appears to us to be a plurality of qualities and of relationships, then it is doubly anthropomorphic: first because the delimited unity "tree" (*diese abgegrenzte Einheit "Baum"*) does not exist, and it is therefore arbitrary to isolate an object according to sight or to form; [second] such a relationship is not the real absolute relationship (*die wahre absolute Relation*) but is tainted once again with anthropomorphism.²⁰

The ideas presented here form a sequential mini-genealogy of continuity, differentiation, conceptualization, and knowledge. All these, says Nietzsche, are products of the kind of beginning reflection we saw being performed by Saussure; and while

Nietzsche calls this kind of thinking "illogical anthropomorphism," he nevertheless acknowledges that it inaugurates knowledge. In his later works, Nietzsche studies in a more polemical mode the relations between mind and the pitfalls of language, drawing attention to only two principal features of this relationship. One, language is principally a means for and an instrument of differentiation. Thus man uses language to establish continuity, as well as to formulate concepts, by exploiting the ability of language to indicate (actually, to assert) the existence of continuity and concept alongside dispersion and particularity. A word like *beginning*, for instance, is a created general object whose function conforms as much to the individual user of language as it does to the universal laws of language. Two, both language and the particular use of it project human needs and instincts onto knowledge, which then proceeds dialectically to hold man in its grip. Furthermore, language as differentiation and as knowledge bears no necessary correspondence to reality. Saussure was later to describe this curious state of affairs as the arbitrary relationship in the sign between signifier (*signifiant*) and signified (*signifié*). Nietzsche is more insistent in maintaining that language *begins* the denominating function of knowledge by *omitting* many individual traits of objects; only after this does language *admit* concepts for what they can do to create unities or multiplicities (*Einheiten, Eigenschaften*), and even these are never unities held together internally by bonds of necessity (*die wahre absolute Relation*). All this is what Nietzsche means by *anthropomorphism*.

Nietzsche's thesis regarding anthropomorphism is explicated more fully elsewhere in the *Philosophenbuch*, notably in numerous passages on the crucial importance to man of *das Wollen* (will) and *das Tun* (action). The first is associated with need (*Not*), the second with the verb *schaffen*, to create. The job of the philosopher, Nietzsche says, is to recognize what feeling, what lack, what suffering or pain (*Leid*) causes universal Need; the artist's task is to create this feeling, to give it form. Whether as artist or as philosopher, man ultimately builds his world in that lacuna: "Er baut seine Welt in diese Lücke hinein."²¹ Art in its highest manifestation for Nietzsche is pre-eminently poetry or music, those noniconic languages that do not represent but rather create a special other world. Therefore, "truth" is described by Nietzsche as a verbal stream fashioning itself into a sort of canonical unity:

What, then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms—in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins.²²

What this says for our purposes is that language—and, by inclusion, a word such as *beginning*—is a necessary contingency, albeit one usually confused with "absolute truth" and "objectivity." This stance is relativistic, yes, but it is not the kind of manic hopelessness it is often taken to be. Nietzsche must not be interpreted, here or elsewhere, as a puerile, nay-saying nihilist. On the contrary, his interest in the difficult cohesion that makes up thought or culture includes, and appropriates, the subjective underside, or the charlatanry, of reason²³—those faculties of reason that remind us how earthbound are even its highest flights. Earthbound, but rational nonetheless.

Such considerations are forced upon the contemporary mind by the wish to grasp fully whether one's activity has either begun or will begin; Saussure and especially Nietzsche epitomize the importance to this wish of language, including its attendant molestations. Attempting such a grasp always compels the mind into a rational severity and asceticism, an understanding of which is a major goal of this book. In this chapter, therefore, I intend first to draw attention to—perhaps even to exacerbate, as Nietzsche does—the problem we face when we begin an intellectual task. My view is that an intensified, even irritated, awareness of what really goes on when we begin—that is, when we are conscious of beginning—actually projects the task in a very particular way. For this projection inaugurates the presence of an enterprise by signifying an intention to produce meaning. This is not at all to say, however, that a beginning either forecasts or causes meaning, or determines or envisions it—any more than a beginning predicts specific inconsistency, error, or detail. Second, I should like to arrive at an understanding, however tentative, of what sorts of beginnings really exist. The word *beginning* itself is and will remain a general term covering a large variety of scattered occasions; like a pronoun, it has specific roles to play, at different points in the discourse.²⁴ These roles, however, are as much in the control of reasonable convention and rule as they are in the control of reasonable assertion. I should like to examine all this as

it bears on the possible kinds of beginnings available to us. Lastly, I should like to record a part of the rational activity generated within us in the act of dealing with a beginning (where "rational activity," it will become clear, includes rational sentiment, passion, and urgency).

The best descriptive characterization of these enlivened ideas of rational activity that I know of is found in Bachelard's 1936 essay "Le Surrationalisme" (which also happens to be an indirect commentary on Bachelard's own rationalism). The essay rejects a rationalism based on dry-as-dust traditionalism, memory, and scholastic rigidity. Bachelard says: "One must return to human rationality its function as a force for turbulence and aggression. In this way sur-rationalism (*un surrationalisme*) will be established, and this will multiply the occasions for thought."²⁵ To use reason as a means of setting tasks, to generate thought in order to activate itself beyond the bounds and limits set by the mere historical conventions of reason—this experimental type of reason is to reality what for Tristan Tzara, the experimental surrealist, dream was to poetic liberty:

Where then is the duty of sur-rationalism? It is to regain hold of those forms, altogether purified and made economically functional by logicians, and fill them psychologically, put them back into life and motion. . . .

What must be sacrificed? Our crude pragmatic security or our own new aleatory and useless discoveries? No hesitation: one has to choose the side where one can experiment the most artificially, where ideas are at least fluid, where reason likes being in danger. *If, during an experiment one does not risk one's reason, then that experiment is not worth the attempt . . .* Each real discovery determines a new method and ruins a pre-existing one. *In other words, in the realm of thought imprudence is a method.*²⁶

The "forms" of which Bachelard speaks include such a one as "Beginnings." In what follows, therefore, I shall be treating beginnings as psychologically and vitally "filled" with the concerns of the mind. As for the sacrifices and the achievements of such a treatment, I can say only that Bachelard's claims strike me as worth making, although I cannot of course claim to have lived up to them.

II

The beginning as primordial asceticism has an obsessive persistence in the mind, which seems very often engaged in a retrospective examination of itself. We all like to believe we can always begin

again, that a clean start will always be possible. This is true despite the mind's luxuriance in a wealth of knowledge about ongoing reality, about what Edmund Husserl calls *lebendige Gegenwart* (the living present). Significant attention is paid by the mind to an ostensible point in the past from which the present might have evolved; there is as well a nervous solemnity—when the question is thought of—in the choice of a point of departure for a specific project. Indeed, in the case of the great modern rethinkers, the beginning is a way of grasping the whole project. Marx, to consider only one example, attacks Proudhon not only because of the latter's uncritically good intentions, but because of his misplaced priorities. "For M. Proudhon," Marx writes in *The Poverty of Philosophy*, "the circulation of the blood must be a consequence of the theory of Harvey."²⁷ As Georg Lukacs surmised in *History and Class Consciousness*, it was Marx's job to show first that the apparently immutable and objectlike beginnings hitherto accepted by the forms of bourgeois thought contributed to, rather than lessened, the separation between man and his nature. Then Marx went on to demonstrate that, as Vico had demonstrated before him, man is in fact the beginning of all study—but man for whom "the social reality of nature, and human natural science, or the natural science about man, are identical terms."²⁸ Clearly this signals a radical displacement of traditional thought, for in order to see man as the true origin of social change a new fusion between man and his activity must be considered possible and thereby rethought in man's mind. The very act of beginning must no longer set man apart from his end, but must immediately suggest significant connections between it and man. Marx thus tied his own interpretive activity to human activity in general at a common revolutionary point of departure.

Formally, the mind wants to conceive a point in either time or space that marks the beginning of all things (or at least of a limited set of central things), but like Oedipus the mind risks discovering, at that point, where all things will end as well. Underlying this formal quest is an imaginative and emotional need for unity, a need to apprehend an otherwise dispersed number of circumstances and to put them in some sort of telling order, sequential, moral, or logical.²⁹ Very frequently, especially when the search for a beginning is pursued within a moral and imaginative framework, the beginning implies the end—or, rather, implicates it; this is the observation around which Aristotle builds the *Poetics*. If the search is more modest, less urgent, than the tragic one, the

mind will look for a possibility in the past and will consequently look to the present and the future for a reflection of it, the result being three varieties or stages of possibility linked in continuous sequence. This sequence, however, seems to be "there," at a distance from me, whereas my own problematical situation is "here" and "now." For one rarely searches for beginnings unless the present matters a great deal; this is as true of comedy as of tragedy. It is my present urgency, the here and now, that will enable me to establish the sequence of beginning-middle-end and to transform it from a distant object—located "there"—into the subject of my reasoning. So conceived and fashioned, time and space yield a sequence authorized by a wish for either immanent or surface significance. Nietzsche states that the principal human faculty is the ability to perceive form (*Gestalt*); time and space, he adds, are but things measured according to a rhythm ("Raum und Zeit sind nur gemessene, an einem Rhythmus gemessene Dinge").³⁰ Ever the dialectician, Lukacs writes that "since consciousness here is not knowledge of an opposed object [there], the act of being conscious overturns the objective form of its object."³¹

While these verbal problems are very acute, they are nevertheless of crucial significance. A beginning suggests either (a) a time, (b) a place, (c) an object, (d) a principle, or (e) an act—in short, detachment of the sort that establishes distance and difference between either *a, b, c, d,* or *e* on the one hand and what came before it on the other. "All knowledge originates because of separation, delimitation, restriction; there is no absolute knowledge of a whole!" (Alles Wissen entsteht durch Separation, Abgrenzung, Beschränkung; kein absolutes Wissen eines Ganzen!).³² My beginning specializes still more, but the moment I unconditionally speak of *the* beginning, knowledge is theologized, as Kenneth Burke very cogently argues in *The Rhetoric of Religion*.³³ Once made the focus of attention, the beginning occupies the foreground and is no longer a beginning but has the status of an actuality; and when it cedes its place to that which it has aimed to produce or to give rise to, it can exist in the mind as virtuality. In all this, "beginning" alternates in the mind's discriminations between thought that is beginning and thought about beginning—that is, between the status of subject and object. Paraphrasing both Hegel and Vico, we can say that formally the problem of beginning is the beginning of the problem. A beginning is a moment when the mind can start to allude to itself and to its products as a formal doctrine.

In language we must resign our thoughts to what in *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche saw as "something [that] impels them in a definite order, one after the other—to wit, the innate systematic structure and relationship of their concepts."³⁴ Fifteen years earlier he had considered as a subject of interest "the philosopher caught in the nets of language."³⁵ Then later he spoke of "the unconscious domination and guidance by similar grammatical functions,"³⁶ of which language conceived as a system of concepts or of words is only a strong disguise; such a system merely gives the mind the right to a notion of formal beginnings. Language, as we perceive it in its universal use, has no beginning; and its origins are as marvelous as they are imagined—but they can only be imagined. Profoundly temporal in its manifestations, language nevertheless provides utopian space and time, the extrachronological and extrapositional functions over which its systematic determinism does not immediately seem to hold firm sway. Thus "the beginning," belonging as often to myth as to logic, conceived of as a place in time, and treated as a root as well as an objective, remains a kind of gift inside language. I shall be returning to this notion a little later. Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty have effectively argued for the equivalence of temporality and significance, yet philosophically and linguistically their view requires us, I think, additionally to acknowledge the mind as providing self-concerned glosses on itself over time, the mind as comprising its own philosophical anthropology.

What sort of action, therefore, transpires at the beginning? How can we, while necessarily submitting to the incessant flux of experience, insert (as we do) our reflections on beginning(s) into that flux? Is the beginning simply an artifice, a disguise that defies the perpetual trap of forced continuity? Or does it admit of a meaning and a possibility that are genuinely capable of realization?

III

Literature is full of the lore of beginnings despite the tyranny of starting a work *in medias res*, a convention that burdens the beginning with the pretense that it is not one. Two obvious, wide-ranging categories of literary starting point are the hysterically deliberate (and hence the funnier of the two) and the

solemn-dedicated, the impressive and noble. The former category includes *Tristram Shandy* and *A Tale of a Tub*, two works that despite their existence cannot seem to get started; in each the beginning is postponed with a kind of encyclopedic, meaningful playfulness which, like Panurge taking stock of marriage before falling into the water, delays one sort of action for the sake of undertaking another.

The latter category includes *Paradise Lost*, a prelude to portraying existence after the Fall, and *The Prelude*, which was to ready its author "for entering upon the arduous labour which he had proposed to himself." In both instances what was initially intended to be the beginning became the work itself. Although vastly different, both of these great English epics perform similar intellectual and psychological tasks. It is no accident, I think, that both poems are beginning poems—in the sense that each prepares for something more important to follow—and that both are therefore ways of delimiting, defining, and circumscribing human freedom. Of course, Milton and Wordsworth employ very distinctive frames of reference for understanding freedom; basically, however, each poet uses his poem to begin to *put* man in the world, to situate him. Thus in each case man at the outset faces, not an unlimited range of possibilities, but a highly conditioned set of circumstances in which his existence (that of Milton, Wordsworth, Adam, or *The Prelude's* narrator) is properly inaugurated. Both poems are radical in that they imagine human life as having a "beginning"; and in both an investigation of that beginning is the subject of the poem. Both poems open with several images of creatures in a free state—that is, unconstrained, wandering, extraterritorial. Compare Wordsworth's image of how he

escaped
From the vast city, where I long had pined
A discontented sojourner: now free,
Free, a bird to settle where I will,³⁷

in Book 1 of *The Prelude* with Milton's Satan:

Here at least
We shall be free: th'Almighty hath not built
Here for his envy, will not drive us hence:
Here we may reign secure, and in my choise
To reign is worth ambition though in Hell:
Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav'n.³⁸

In due course each poem develops correctives to such unrestrained sentiments. Wordsworth's are tied directly to the choice of a theme for the poem (this occurs at the end of Book 1), which in turn is associated with the decision to employ a vague, unbounded freedom for determinate ends:

One end at least hath been attained; my mind
Hath been revived, and if this genial mood
Desert me not, forthwith shall be brought down
Through later years the story of my life.
The road lies plain before me;—'t is a theme
Single and of determined bounds; and hence
I choose it rather at this time, than work
Of ampler and more varied argument,
Where I might be discomfited and lost. . . .³⁹

The choice of an autobiographical theme of course serves to evoke various phases and events in the poet's life. That this theme arises from a delimitation imposed at and for the sake of the beginning, however, accounts for the special type of vision which Wordsworth finally arrives at. I am referring not only to what he calls "the discipline/And consummation of a Poet's mind" (that is, of one who will now be able to go on after such a prelude), but also the scene on Mount Snowdon and the commentary upon it in the fourteenth book. This vision of "mutual domination" is "the express resemblance" of Imagination,

that glorious faculty
That higher minds bear with them as their own.
This is the very spirit in which they deal
With the whole compass of the universe:
They from their native selves can send abroad
Kindred mutations; for themselves create
A like existence. . . .⁴⁰

As a poem of beginning, *The Prelude* sheds its unconditional early liberty for the purpose of forging the beginning—as distinguished from a narrator's mere initial enthusiasm. By the time we come to Book 14 and the lines quoted above, we recognize that Wordsworth's mind is capable of intention, production, determination—albeit with a sense of the loss of youthful, animal instincts thereby incurred. The "glorious faculty" is the power to begin poetry, which is itself not mere effusion but a meaning that is embedded in human circumstances. Together, these circumstances and imagination begin the fruitful, mutual domination of self and

reality, of time and vision, that when articulated in language is poetry.

Milton's scheme is more complicated, but its resemblance with *The Prelude* is striking nevertheless. Milton is anxious to represent gradations of freedom in a continuum—God, His Son, the Angels, Adam, Eve—through which like a nomadic zero moves Satan, archangel and archfriend. Satan is the beginning—the cause of “Mans First Disobedience”—the *arché* in response to which the continuities of human history and destiny are arranged. Before the onset of Satan's machinations, Adam's earliest life had been a mystery to him:

For Man to tell how human Life began
Is hard: for who himself beginning knew?⁴¹

Poised against this ignorance is, of course, Gabriel's knowledge, God's, Satan's, and Milton's. The whole of the poem in a sense is devoted to making intelligible to man his historical beginning after Paradise is lost and like Wordsworth's narrator (the “I” in *The Prelude*), “Man” in *Paradise Lost* discovers the commencement of history even as he loses the relatively untrammelled freedom of innocence. Milton's more heroic vision unashamedly weaves in the sexual drama, which more than any other image conveys the novelty, as well as the nexus of intention, circumstance, and force, that always characterizes the beginning. As Adam tells Michael, after the latter has explained Christ to him:

O Prophet of glad tidings, finisher
Of utmost hope! now clear I understand
What oft my steddier thoughts have searcht in vain,
Why own great expectation should be call'd
The seed of Woman: Virgin Mother, Haile,
High in the love of Heav'n, yet from my Loynes
Thou shalt proceed, and from thy Womb the Son
Of God most High; So God with man unites.⁴²

It is from such radical investigations as *Paradise Lost* and *The Prelude* that the pun in the title of Beckett's play *Comment c'est* (*How It Is*)—a homonym of *commencez* (the command “Begin!”)—acquires its value. Yet not many writers would willingly combine the idea of a sort of universal beginning with the work's actuality; by the same token, in few works is the beginning so highly charged as in the two discussed here.

When a literary work does not dwell so self-consciously on its beginning as do the works just discussed, its actual start, as an

intelligible unit, is usually deliberately formal or concessive. (I must put aside the question of whether it is really possible to begin unselfconsciously, though I am convinced that is not. The issue is one of degrees of self-consciousness: *Tristram Shandy* is uniquely sensitive about getting under way.) Specifying points of departure grew increasingly problematical during the eighteenth century, however, a trend as eloquently reflected by the titles of two modern works dealing with that period—Frank Manuel's *The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods* and W. J. Bate's *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet*—as by their contents.⁴³

The search for such points not only is reflected in language, but is carried out in language and, as became evident to eighteenth-century thinkers like Vico, is necessary *because of* language. Polytechnical unlike any other human activity, language was discovered to be a suitable vehicle for posing questions of origin for purely linguistic as well as social, moral, or political reasons. Vico, miserable in his obscure position at Naples, sees the whole world of nations developing out of poetry; and Rousseau, for whom experience is clarified by words feels he is entitled to use them simply because he is a man of sentiments and a member of the *tiérs état*.⁴⁴ these are two prominent examples. Kant's *Prolegomenon to Any Future Metaphysics*, to speak now of a beginning that really aims to strip away the accretions of academic philosophy, undertakes a description of those radical conditions which must be understood before philosophy can be practiced. Nevertheless, Kant's *Prolegomenon* fully anticipates his *Metaphysics of Ethics* and *Critique of Practical Reason*—it is coterminous with them—as well as the critical method with which he refashioned European philosophy. And Coleridge, in his essay “On Method” (in *The Friend*), echoes Descartes in taking up the theme as follows: Method, which reflects the noteworthy mind in its work, its discipline, its sustained intellectual energy and vigilance, requires an “initiative,” without which things appear “distant, disjointed and impertinent to each other and to any common purpose.” Together, initiative and the method that follows from it “will become natural to the mind which has been accustomed to contemplate not *things* only, or for their own sake alone, but likewise and chiefly the relations of things, either their relations to each other, or to the observer, or to the state, and apprehensions of the reader.”⁴⁵

All such investigations have in common what Wordsworth calls “a cheerful confidence in things to come,”⁴⁶ which is another

way of describing what I have been calling *intention*. What is really anterior to a search for a method, to a search for a temporal beginning, is not merely an initiative, but a necessary certainty, a genetic optimism, that continuity is possible *as intended* by the act of beginning. Stretching from start to finish is a fillable space, or time, pretty much there but, like a foundling, awaiting an author or a speaker to father it, to authorize its being. Consciousness of a starting point, from the vantage point of the continuity that succeeds it, is seen to be consciousness of a direction in which it is humanly possible to move (as well as a trust in continuity). Valéry's intellectual portrait of Leonardo divulges the secret that Leonardo, like Napoleon, was forced to find the law of continuity between things whose connection with each other escapes very nearly all of us.⁴⁷ Any point in Leonardo's thought will lead to another, for, Valéry says in a later essay, when thinking of an abyss Leonardo thought also of a bridge across it.⁴⁸ Consciousness, whether as pure universality, insurmountable generality, or eternal actuality, has the character of an imperial ego; in this view, the argument *cogito ergo sum* was for Valéry "like a clarion sounded by Descartes to summon up the powers of his ego."⁴⁹ The starting point is the reflexive action of the mind attending to itself, allowing itself to effect (or dream) a construction of a world whose seed totally implicates its offspring. It is Wagner hearing an E-flat chord out of which *The Ring* (and the Rhine) will rush, or Nietzsche giving birth to tragedy and morals by ascending a ladder of inner genealogy, or Husserl asserting the radical originality of consciousness which will support "the whole storied edifice of universal knowledge."⁵⁰

Husserl merits special attention because the nearly excessive purity of his whole philosophic project makes him, I think, the epitome of modern mind in search of absolute beginnings; he has rightly been called the perpetual *Anfänger* (beginner). The course of Husserl's development is, in the main, too controversial, too technical a subject to warrant extended analysis here. Yet the meaning of his philosophical work is that he accepted "the infinite goals of reason" while at the same time seeking to ground understanding of these goals in human experience. Interpretation, a major task in both Husserl's and Heidegger's enterprises, is thus committed to a radical undermining of itself, and not only because its goals are pushed further and further forward. For also its point of departure, no longer accepted as "naïve"—that is, as merely given, or "there"—stands revealed to the scrutiny of consciousness;

as a result, the point of departure assumes a unique place as philosophy itself, "essentially a science of true beginnings, . . . *rizomata panton*," as well as an example of the science in action.⁵¹ Putting this differently: Husserl tries to seize the beginning proposing itself *to* the beginning *as* a beginning *in* the beginning. Pierre Thevenaz describes it perfectly:

In Husserl we see a circular movement which revolves around its point of departure, radicalizes it progressively without ever truly leaving it. This movement, by displaying itself simultaneously as reduction and intentionality, digs ever deeper, and in its exhausting "struggle for the beginning," for a beginning which is an end "situated at infinity," is consumed by a coming and going which Husserl himself characterized as zig-zag . . . Obviously, it is inaccessible in fact and can only be aimed at . . . The point of departure thus cannot be a *hold in being*.⁵²

What emerges precisely is the sentiment of beginning, purged of any doubt, fully convinced of itself, intransitive, and yet, from the standpoint of lay knowledge—which Husserl acknowledges to be "an unbearable spiritual need"⁵³—thoroughly aloof, because always at a distance, and thus almost incomprehensible. This kind of purely conceptual beginning is curiously reminiscent of the following lines from Wallace Stevens' "Of Mere Being," in which Being is that which cannot be held:

The palm at the end of the mind,
Beyond the last thought, rises
In the bronze distance,

A gold-feathered bird
Sings in the palm, without human meaning,
Without human feeling, a foreign song.

It is to Husserl that Valéry's phrase "a specialist of the universal" is best applied.⁵⁴

What is important to modern ascetic radicalism of the kind that Husserl carries to an extreme is the insistence on a rationalized beginning even as beginnings are shown to be at best polemical assertions, at worst scarcely thinkable fantasies. Valéry's Leonardo is a construction, after all, and Husserl's phenomenological reduction temporarily "brackets" brute reality. The beginning—or the ending, for that matter—is what Hans Vaihinger calls a "summational fiction,"⁵⁵ whether it is a temporal or a conceptual beginning. But I want to shift Frank Kermode's emphasis in *The Sense of an Ending* by stressing the primordial need for certainty at the beginning over the usually later sense of an ending.⁵⁶ Without at least a sense of a beginning, nothing can really be done,

much less ended. This is as true for the literary critic as it is for the philosopher, the scientist, or the novelist. And the more crowded and confused a field appears, the more a beginning, fictional or not, seems imperative. A beginning gives us the chance to do work that compensates us for the tumbling disorder of brute reality that will not settle down.

IV

Having gone so far as to imply that a beginning might as well be a necessary fiction, and since I consider this an important idea, I shall take the time here to examine the idea, and its place in thought, in schematic detail. In briefly surveying the lore of beginnings in the preceding sections I have been making two related distinctions with regard to my chief concern hereafter, which is the production of either artistic work or knowledge. The first of these distinctions is between an intransitive, "pure" beginning and a transitive, problem- or project-directed beginning. The second distinction—with which I shall be primarily occupied now—is that between a "real" transitive beginning and a "fictional" transitive one. In following chapters I shall be discussing this latter distinction as a uniquely modern problem, as a problem that was formulated and dealt with only after a period of some historical development: here, however, I want to outline the nature of the problem.

A transitive beginning assumes the following circumstance: an individual mind wishes to intervene in a field of rational activity. The historian is a ready example: he wants to write a history of X and therefore he must rationally find a suitable point at which to start his formal work. This is by no means a simple proposition, since in choosing a beginning he confers upon it a certain status based on its ability to intend the whole of what follows from it. The specific, characteristically modern pressures affecting anyone making such a choice are, first, his awareness that any such choice is in large part arbitrary (since a real—i.e., empirical, verifiable, concrete—beginning cannot be truly ascertained without either faith or Archimedean instruments, both of which are inapplicable or irrelevant); and secondly, his awareness that his field—whether history, sociology, linguistics, literature, philosophy, the sciences—is disposed, or laid out and ordered, not by calendars but

according to structures ordered internally by rules, sets, impersonal groupings.⁵⁷ These two pressures are different sides of the same coin. Together, they conspire to discourage beginnings. They constantly remind the individual worker that gone are the days when knowledge or artistic production could be considered essentially the outgrowth of specific events, beginning on a certain date, emanating from a particular person.

This is not entirely a qualitative observation, since it is quite possible to argue that the proliferation of information (and what is still more remarkable, a proliferation of the hardware for disseminating and preserving this information) has hopelessly diminished the role apparently played by the individual. The analyses of the knowledge revolution and of the scientific revolution by Michel Foucault and Thomas Kuhn, respectively, assigns greater importance in transmitting and recording information to impersonal orders, the *epistémé* and the paradigm.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, for reasons that seem to be inherent in man's biology—that is, "instinctual" necessities—the notion of beginning persists. Those modern thinkers (we most profitably think of them now as a sort of group) who are most responsible for banishing beginnings by reshaping knowledge into vast, impersonal unities and discontinuities were also passionate radicals, minds bent on discovering beginnings. Think of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* and *Genealogy of Morals*; think also of the metaphors involving the concept of "depth" and of the disputatious radicalism in Marx and Freud.⁵⁹ What is interesting here is a transformation that takes place in the conception of beginnings, and this transformation is congruent with the change taking place throughout the creative disciplines. Satisfying the appetite for beginnings now requires, not beginning as event, but beginning as either *type* or *force*—for example, the unconscious, Dionysus, class and capital, or natural selection. These beginnings perform the task of differentiating material *at the start*: they are *principles* of differentiation which make possible the same characteristic histories, structures, and knowledges that they intend.

Of these beginning principles it is impossible, by definition, to have any direct, actual, unmediated experience; such beginnings challenge our ability to characterize them, since our perception of their form and function is always indirect. On the one hand, there is a vast body of particular "events" that are given meaning, however complex and diffuse, by specifically inaugural principles;

on the other hand, there are inaugural principles whose own beginning is permanently hidden from view. Each side of this dichotomy produces its own complex set of problems. Each corresponding set of problems is a response to the other, a way of dealing with the basic question the other set poses; both sets are all about beginnings. I shall now spell out these problems as simply as possible, and then go on to discuss and illustrate them.

A. If a field of knowledge comprises a wide-ranging array of "events" governed by impersonal rules; if this field cannot be rationally understood in terms of the genetic concepts formerly exemplified by heroes, founding fathers, continuous temporal narratives, and divine ordinance; and if nevertheless the field is universal, that is, if it involves the individual human regardless of will, by means of applying such notions as class, mind, pattern, structure, history, or evolution—if all these, then what power is left to the individual freely to act, to intervene, to motivate, when he wishes to effect a rational beginning for a course or project in that field?

B. If it is found that the individual as existential explanatory concept, as originating and organizing *cogito*, as a principle of sufficient anteriority, or as authoritative subject does not possess the power wholly to appear as mover, founder, or origin of a field of knowledge—if all this, then what particular beginning concept has displaced the individual by virtue of transforming the beginning in terms of intention and method?

This pair of problem sets, then, underlies the following:

—the emergence of a particular sort of problem for the contemporary understanding—for example, the problem of the notion of beginning as construction, or as fictional construct.

—revived attention to past thinkers and systems of thought which have recently acquired new and intense relevance—the work of Marx and Freud, for example.

—the adoption of a particular attitude toward knowledge which regards it, not as fixed and immutable, but as performing an enabling function, serving as a threshold to further discoveries and knowledge.

—the introduction of methodological initiatives of a kind that restore to the individual researcher the capacity for redefining, regaining and rethinking his position, and thus which give his position rational, active, even revolutionary status.

These innovations are most interestingly observed in an extended account of the problem sets, A and B, to which I now return.

A. **The Individual Versus the System.** Prior to his *Course in General Linguistics* (1910-11) Saussure was engaged in research on methods of Latin verse composition. Although the research was never published, it has recently been made the subject of a book by Jean Starobinski, *Les Mots sous les mots: Les Anagrammes de Ferdinand de Saussure*.⁶⁰ As he was to be in the *Course*, Saussure was concerned here with the relationships in linguistic performance between individual motive and initiative, on one side, and systematic involuntary behavior on the other. In having discovered, he believed, a peculiar habit of repetition in Latin verses, Saussure tried to determine the extent to which this habit was consciously practiced. The problem first engaged him during his attempts to determine how the meanings of legends became defined. He found that meaning is produced in the process of discourse itself—because of discourse; thus there is no such thing as preexisting meaning that merely becomes solidified or confirmed by force of practice. Since legends are verbal objects diffused phonemically, he then tackled the problem of the production of meaning. In the Saturnians, which is poetry governed by systems of regularity, he found that certain lines concealed hypograms—that is, rhythmically important letters, distributed along the length of the line, which when taken together and rearranged yielded a message, or what Saussure called a *word-theme* (*mot-thème*). Here are two examples:

Taurasia Cisaunia Samnio cepit
ci io pi

—an anagram of *Scipio*

From a Delphic oracle reported in Livy:

AD MEA TEMPLA PORTATO
A A PL PO O

—an anagram of APOLLO⁶¹

From small examples of this sort Saussure extended his investigation to longer and larger units of composition; he studied Virgil and Lucretius this way, then Latin verse composed in eighteenth-century England. According to Starobinski, at no point did Saussure ever mystically assume the word-theme to be a sort of magical quantity that obscurely yielded the poetry. For

Saussure never said that the full-developed text pre-existed in the theme-word (*le mot-thème*); the text constructs itself *upon* the theme-word, and that is something altogether different. The theme-word at the same time

opens and limits the field of possibility of the developed verse. It is the poet's instrument and not a vital seed out of which the poem grows: the poet is compelled to re-use the theme-word's phonic materials, if possible in their normal sequence. For the rest, the poet acts as he pleases, distributing words and phonemes in such a way as to satisfy the other rules of versification and intelligibility. The theme-word certainly antecedes discourse; yet nowhere does Saussure let us believe that by mysterious privilege the theme-word already *contains*, in concentrated form, the discourse reposing upon it. What the theme-word does is lend itself to the play of composition: after having had the density of a complete word, it unlocks its phonic links in order to become a canvas.⁶²

Yet the prevalence of this phenomenon in Latin verse assured Saussure that no Latin poet could produce a text without the use of a word-theme. What stands immediately and practically behind any example of Latin verse, then, is not a creative subject-author, but rather a certain verse-engendering word; therefore, every Latin poet must have utilized a pre-text before and while producing his finished text. Starobinski rightly remarks that all of these studies raise the question of whether in first isolating and then studying this habit of composition, and finding it everywhere, Saussure was not also, or instead, *constructing* the anagrammatic method to suit his disposition to find it everywhere. Having raised this question, Starobinski goes on usefully to observe that the more valuable thing is to determine the relevance of Saussure's discoveries (i.e., the isolated anagrammatic word-themes). While he fails to pursue this question very far beyond Saussure's own predilections for understanding the internal constraints operating upon every user of language, Starobinski's observation has itself a general bearing upon some nontrivial issues.

Saussure's search for a method takes it for granted that language in use makes sense at the level of performance, not through prior ordination. The rules of composition are "present" because they are being employed, although Saussure was unable to find explicit reference to them in any Roman manuals of verse technique. This could mean either that the Latin poets were only unconsciously aware of what they were doing (even though the techniques they used to achieve anagrammatic statements seem highly sophisticated), or that this technique had been assimilated into poetic practice as thoroughly as grammatical rules had been into verbal performance. In either case, as Starobinski puts it, Saussure had before him a phenomenon whose beginning was obscure, but whose influence was strong enough as to have *regularized* poetic composition. Saussure's studies are therefore

directly tied to a long tradition, in the West and elsewhere, of seeking to demonstrate that productions of the mind, most notably language, follow wholly compelling, universal patterns of behavior. This tradition, moreover, stands polemically opposed to a more liberal one that argues for the innovative powers of individuals to change these patterns, to inaugurate new patterns by setting individual precedents.⁶³

Varro's *De Lingua Latina* regards the thesis underlying the first of these two traditions natural insofar as the study of language is concerned: words in a language are derived by analogy from consensually held paradigms of regular order. The view of the opposing tradition he calls "voluntary": words in a language are (to a greater or lesser extent, of course) anomalous, "the product of the individual person's volition, directing itself apart from control by others." Varro's own position, predictably enough, is a combination of both views.⁶⁴ Lest this be considered a perfectly natural compromise, however, it is worth mentioning here the very fierce debate between the schools of Kufa and Basra during the Islamic Middle Ages. The former were known as the anomalists, the latter the analogists.⁶⁵ To take yet another example, Vico's *New Science* is in part directed against those who argue that language and custom move from place to place in history by anomalous derivation and borrowing; Vico maintains, in opposition to this view, that language, and by extension all verbal production, follow regular patterns that are drawn from the individual's unconscious mental dictionary that are analogous in history from nation to nation.⁶⁶

That all this is by no means an academic or purely philological question will be demonstrated, I trust, in the last chapter of this book. Yet I should still note here how the conflict between the partisans of analogy/regularity/universality and the partisans of anomaly/irregularity/locality has taken many forms and has invaded many fields. The battle between the ancients and the moderns in neoclassical France and England and the romantic debate over originality and tradition, are two literary manifestations of the argument. There has been great interest recently (see, for example, *The Art of Memory* by Frances A. Yates and *Religion and the Decline of Magic* by Keith Thomas)⁶⁷ in the quasi-encyclopedic and esoteric organization of popular knowledge in medieval and Renaissance society; here, too, regular and total formations of knowledge are seen as dominating the mentality of an era. Karl Polanyi describes in *The Great*

Transformation the difference in political economy between what he calls the radical illusion within a marketview of society—"there is nothing in human society that is not derived from the volition of individuals"—and the opposing contention that "power and economic value are a paradigm of social reality."⁶⁸ Lévi-Strauss goes into lengthy detail in the four volumes of *Mythologies* in seeking to show how mind's "seemingly un-controlled inventiveness" nevertheless reveals that "the human mind appears determined even in the realm of mythology, [and] *a fortiori*: it must also be determined in all its spheres of activity." This by virtue of "the existence of laws operating at a deeper level" than that of surface behavior.⁶⁹

The interplay between these "deeper" laws and individual creativity, which according to Noam Chomsky, for example, combine and recombine "given" elements, is the aspect of this debate most relevant to contemporary understanding, and more specifically to contemporary rationalism.⁷⁰ One need only mention philosophies as wolly disparate as those of Freud, Chomsky, and Foucault to document the problem's compelling interest. Fundamentally, we can generalize fairly by saying that the issue now seems to be focused on the position of differentiation in human reality: Do the significant or systematic differences that individuate the various activities and productions of mind really begin at the level of self, or are they located more basically (or transcendently) at a general epistemic level, a transindividual level? As Nietzsche put the question presciently with regard to Homer one hundred years ago: "Was the person created out of a conception, or the conception out of a person?"⁷¹

B. The New Beginning-as-Construct. As was frequently the case with his predecessors in the eighteenth century, Nietzsche's interest in the creative personality revolved around the "Homeric question." Was Homer the author of both poems? Was he a person? Was this person "Homer?" Or was "Homer" a generic, functional name of some sort? Nietzsche's conclusion, in a passage which I shall quote in a moment, shows a curious hesitation. What seems to unsettle Nietzsche is the conception of an individual person, whose use he finds essential in assigning the epics not to an "idea" or "a people" but to a person, yet from which he backs away when it comes to confining the author of the poems to a single name. He resolves the dilemma by raising an author's creative

authority to the level of an "aesthetic judgement" made by later poets, readers, or critics, and at the same time he maintains the validity of the particular idea of a person (as opposed to general ideas like "a movement" or "a people" or "an age") as author.

Homer, the poet of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, is an aesthetic judgement. It is, however, by no means affirmed against the poet of these epics that he was merely the imaginary being of an aesthetic impossibility, which can be the opinion of only very few philologists indeed. The majority contend that a single individual was responsible for the general design of a poem such as the *Iliad*, and further that this individual was Homer. The first part of this contention may be admitted; but, in accordance with what I have said, the latter part must be denied. And I very much doubt whether the majority of those who have adopted the first part of the contention have taken the following considerations into account.

The design of an epic such as the *Iliad* is not an entire *whole*, not an organism; but a number of pieces strung together, a collection of reflections arranged in accordance with aesthetic rules. . . . But that stringing together of some pieces as the manifestations of a grasp of art which was not yet highly developed, still less thoroughly comprehended and generally esteemed, cannot have been the real Homeric deed, the real Homeric epoch-making event. On the contrary, this design is a later product, far later than Homer's celebrity. Those, therefore, who look for the "original and perfect design" are looking for a mere phantom. . . .

We believe in a great poet as the author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*—but not that Homer was this poet.⁷²

Nor is this peculiar conclusion the end of Nietzsche's remarks. He goes on to ascribe such investigations as his to philology, a science "enclosed and surrounded by a philosophical view of things, in which everything individual and isolated is evaporated as something detestable, and in which great homogenous views alone remain."⁷³ As an example of things "individual and isolated" Nietzsche cites the questions of a learned man about Homer: "Where does the good man live? Why did he remain so long incognito? A propos, can't you get me a silhouette of him?"⁷⁴ Faced with aesthetic events of such magnitude as the epic, Nietzsche finds the existential concept of "person" too comically weak to explain them. The event is anomalous, yet its domestication, its confinement to texts and organic wholes—at a later date—takes place nevertheless. On that later date a process of refinement occurs to make the anomalous event conform by analogy to regular formations we call "epic poems." There are thus two Homers: Homer One, gone forever, exhausted in the burst of inexplicable creativity that results in "an infinite profusion of images and incidents"; and Homer Two, with us

today, an aesthetic judgement on the former, a fictional construction associated by later generations with Homer One and with two whole poems.

Nietzsche's division of Homer into two components bears resemblance to Oscar Wilde's fascination with the aesthetic powers of criticism to provide accurately inaccurate interpretations of creative energy.⁷⁵ What we need to emphasize is the extent to which the construction of such explanatory notions for artistic production relies paradoxically upon both an idea of energy—the synthetic power presumed to bring together creative work and give it form—and an individualized type which has some of the attributes of a person but not an existential identity. Precisely this sort of construction characterizes Freud's Moses, for example, or Nietzsche's Dionysus or his Zarathustra. Hans Vaihinger's *Philosophy of As-If* occupies the space between construction and actuality, more or less doing for philosophy what narrative fiction in the eighteenth century did for narrative history. The Marxist or para-Marxist use of such constructions as world-view, ideology, paradigm, or class as analytic instruments indicates no disregard of reality, but rather an acknowledgement that individuality per se fails to include transindividual experiences like economic or social development. Lucien Goldmann's schema of "potential consciousness," however much it may differ from Freud's Moses, comes from the same sort of insight into the communal reality of men and from the same certainty that that reality cannot be comprehended anecdotally or biographically.⁷⁶

I do not wish this list of illustrations—for it is only a list at bottom—to stand for a rigorous methodological critique: that is not what I am doing. I am really circling around a very acute problem faced by any researcher whose primary evidence is textual. The problem can now be put in the following ways: To what extent is a text itself not something passively attributable, as effect is to cause, to a person? To what extent is a text so discontinuous a series of subtexts or pre-texts or paratexts or surtexts as to beggar the idea of an author as simple producer? If the text as unitary document is more properly judged as a transindividual field of dispersion, and if—as Darwin, Marx, and Freud respectively read natural history, economic history, and psychological history as textual fields of dispersion—this field stands as the *locus princeps* of research, where does it begin if not in a "creative" or "producing" individuality?⁷⁷

No one can doubt that there is an original (in the vague,

somewhat passive sense of that word) if not a beginning connection between text and individual author, yet to readers, as even to a writing author, a text is not whole, but distorted. For writing is not coterminous with nature, and therefore it deforms its subjects (life, liberty, happiness) more than it forms them.⁷⁸ Reading and writing have this in common: they are particular distortions of general realities. There is violence in texts, which is answered by the reconstructions of the examining critic. Here is Freud:

Thus almost everywhere noticeable gaps, disturbing repetitions and obvious contradictions have come about—indications which reveal things to us which it was not intended to communicate. In its implications the distortions of a text resemble a murder: the difficulty is not in perpetrating the deed, but in getting rid of its traces. We might well lend the word "*Entstellung*" [distortion] the double meaning to which it has a claim but of which today it makes no use. It should mean not only "to change the appearance of something" but also "to put something in another place, to displace." Accordingly, in many instances of textual distortion, we may nevertheless count upon finding what has been suppressed and disavowed hidden away somewhere else, though changed and torn from its context. Only it will not always be easy to recognize it.⁷⁹

Freud is speaking of the Hexateuch, a more than ordinary text; yet as a general characterization of texts we can let it stand until Chapter 4. To begin to apprehend a text is to begin to find intention and method in it—not, in other words, to reduce a text to a continuous stream of words emanating from a disembodied causal voice, but rather to construct the field of its play, its dispersion, its distortion. But this subject is discussed in detail in a later chapter.

Insofar as a text, for reader or writer, cannot supply, no matter how much it says it is supplying, its whole field or even its intention in advance, it can properly be said to begin, therefore, with a large supposition. This is: herewith meaning is to be produced in writing, meaning more rather than less vague, but meaning intended in writing as opposed equally to no-meaning intended, or to meaning intended in painting, sculpture, music, and so forth. From then on, from that beginning, which to the extent of its generality and dreamy ill-defined ambition is a fictional construct, more precise meaning is gradually approached during the course of the work. Wordsworth's freedom at the opening of *The Prelude* and Milton's (or Satan's, his surrogate) at the opening of *Paradise Lost* are illustrations of the large intention "I am free, therefore I *intend* now to put it to use to mean written

work, form, or achievement, which in turn puts my freedom into the world as something more than just an assertion." This beginning intention to mean is, I have said, a construct, or at least fictional, insofar as it says or avows much more *at* the beginning than it in fact is. Satan's declaration of freedom ignores the circumstances of his ejection from Heaven, his secondary status in the order of being, and so on, and Milton purposely leaves this in suspense until hundreds of lines later. Perhaps it was precisely because Satan luxuriates so freely in the beginning that Blake guessed Milton to be of the devil's party. For indeed the one kernel of *Paradise Lost* that still puzzles readers, Christian or not, is Lucifer's beginning on his own to move away from God even before the poem opens: there can be no more irreducible beginning than that. So, too, writing moves away from speech, or from music.

Supposition, construction, fiction: how can we justify connecting them not simply with a portmanteau word like *beginning* but with intention and method? Fortunately there is a series of works that programmatically dramatizes precisely these connections: Valéry's essays on Leonardo, of which the first (1894) is aptly enough entitled "Introduction to the Method of Leonardo da Vinci."⁸⁰ In all three essays Valéry disavows any biographical aim; his Leonardo, he says, is a construction made to fit the image of a mind whose universally diverse activities and "infinitely keen perception of the difference of things" were conducted with absolute rigor.⁸¹ "Whoever pictures a tree must also picture a sky or background from which the tree stands forth; in this there is a sort of logic that is almost intangible and yet almost unknown. The figure [Leonardo] I am presenting can be reduced to an inference from this type."⁸² This Leonardo (who prefigures Monsieur Teste) is a mind imagined by another mind that wishes to comprehend the invariable logic of variations, the continuity between discontinuous objects, the homogeneity of heterogeneity. Thirty-five years later, in his third return to "Leonardo" (each treatment philosophized more than the previous one), Valéry saw in that mind "some indefinable inner attitude for effecting continual interchanges between the *arbitrary* and the *necessary*."⁸³ An "indefinable inner attitude" and an "almost intangible" and yet "almost unknown" logic for dealing with the surprises of reality consequently suggest to Valéry an intelligence conceived neither as cause, nor as effect, nor as image. Each of those alternatives is an expression of method without force. To

avoid what he calls the "automatism" of such hypotheses for Leonardo, as well as their anecdotal humbuggery—this is the problem.

Inevitably, method is a law of continuity found "among things of which we cannot grasp the law of continuity."⁸⁴ Valéry's construction of Leonardo is an attempt to articulate such a method imagined as intentional power for connecting things. As Valéry will use the word therefore, a *construction* is equivalent to an intention: the unity of a construction/intention is its method. The peculiar quality of Leonardo's method, already hinted at through the many negatives Valéry uses to describe it, is that it cannot be known outright, nor can it be experienced directly. Always in flux, this force is "at once the *source* of energy, the *engineer*, and the *restraints*."⁸⁵ Valéry therefore puts himself at exactly the point where this force is located during the construction of *its* projects. "Constructing takes place between a project or a particular vision and the materials one has chosen."⁸⁶ Thus Valéry constructs a Leonardo who is himself constructing. "The truth may be that we cannot form a clear conception of anything unless we might also have invented it."⁸⁷ If an image is not the aim of such construction, what is? One aim is to experience the human joys of "the conscious act of constructing," that power of mind to "expand any of its conceptions to the point at which they are no longer conceivable."⁸⁸ Another aim is to experience knowledge as discovery; Valéry sees this aim as similar to "the tremendous undertaking of philosophy, . . . *an effort to transmute everything we know into what we should like to know*."⁸⁹ Most important is the aim of dealing successfully with voids, rifts, lacunae, discontinuities in the world to which thought turns itself.

We have arrived at the conception that parts of the world let themselves be reduced, here and there, to intelligible elements. Sometimes our senses suffice for the task; sometimes the most ingenious methods must be employed; but always there are voids. The attempts always remain lacunary. It is here that we find the kingdom of our hero. He has an extraordinary sense of symmetry that makes him regard everything as a problem. Wherever the understanding breaks off he introduces the productions of his mind. . . .

This *symbolic* mind held an immense collection of forms, an ever lucid treasury of the dispositions of nature, a potentiality always ready to be translated into action and growing with the extension of its domain. A host of concepts, a throng of possible memories, the power to recognize an extraordinary number of distinct things in the world at large and arrange them in a thousand fashions: this constituted Leonardo.⁹⁰

Marginally, Valéry notes that this process entails the abandonment

of "images and the whole notion of visual and motor representation." Leonardo is the despair of modern specialized man, whose virtue is the absence of thought; Leonardo "must circulate through barriers and partitions. His function is to disregard them."⁹¹

Leonardo's language is formal. Valéry's description of Leonardo, however, is discursive. In attempting to reconcile the two modes in the last essay, Valéry faces the problem of how the mind articulates itself in language without recourse to either sheer privacy or complete banality. How can the mind's *hostinato rigore* be rendered intelligibly? Through common speech (*le langage commun*)—which often wears out the philosopher who tries either to make his thought speak or to transmit his inner reality. Common speech, writes Valéry,

will doubtless continue to serve as the initial and general instrument for establishing relations between external and internal life; it will always be the means of teaching us the other languages that have been consciously created; it will adjust these potent and accurate mechanisms to the use of still unspecialized minds. But gradually, by contrast, it is coming to be regarded as a first crude means of approximation.⁹²

Approximation to what? To "aberrant modes of existence":

But they are monsters full of lessons, these monsters of the understanding, these transitory states—gaps in which the known laws of continuity, connection and movement have been alerted; domains where light is associated with pain; fields of force in which we follow strange circuits between the poles of fear and desire; matter composed of time; abysses literally of horror, love, or quietude, regions bizarrely welded to themselves; non-Archimedean realms that defy movement; perpetual sites in a lightning flash; surfaces that cave in as they couple with our nausea, bend with our slightest intentions The wonder is not that things are, but that they are what they are.⁹³

Common speech, then, is the beginning, but it is very complex. Valéry's reading of Leonardo is a construction precisely because it begins with what Leonardo himself began: a demotic or vernacular language. For Valéry as critic, for Leonardo as a construction being constructed, common speech leads to other, less ordinary structures than those delivered by pictorial representation. We must emphasize Valéry's own insistence on the abandonment of images that occurs when common speech (that is, discursive language) is accepted as the initial mode of expression, a point of departure for further expression. What Leonardo is able to do from common speech is to arrive at a realm ("the paradise of the sciences")

comparable to that attained by the richest thought when it has become assimilated to itself, and recognized, consummated in a little group of words and symbols He exists . . . almost without images.⁹⁴

Words are the abandonment of images. Yet Valéry insists that Leonardo's art was really architecture, albeit architecture defined (by Valéry) as a sort of extraordinary poetic language. Here is an example of what he has in mind:

Architecture is commonly misunderstood. Our notion of it varies from stage setting to that of an investment in housing. I suggest we refer to the idea of the City in order to appreciate its universality, and that we should come to know its complex charm by recalling the multiplicity of its aspects. For a building to be motionless is the exception; our pleasure comes from moving about it so as to make the building move in turn, while we enjoy all the combinations of its parts, as they vary: the column turns, depths recede, galleries glide; a thousand visions escape from the monument, a thousand harmonies The architectural structure interprets space, and leads to hypotheses on the nature of space, in a quite special manner.⁹⁵

Even architecture, which disposes of the most solid materials, is a hypothesis about space, in much the same sense that words on a page do not produce meaning directly but first divide the page—and consequently thought and poetry—into significance. Printed words constitute a hypothesis about verbal meaning that is formulated in different ways by writer and reader.

The willed relationship between material and setting is another way of defining intention and construction; construction begins on the level of physical experience (words on a page, stone in space, trees against a background), and proceeds thereafter to the composition of a multiplicity of meanings. Mallarmé's preface to "Un Coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard" probably confirmed, if not actually originated, the practice of exaggerating the physical and spatial aspects of written language. Mallarmé explained to readers that the asequential spaces on the page were to cause *un espacement de la lecture*; as for the white spaces next to the letters, they

assument l'importance, frappent d'abord; la versification en exigea, comme silence alentour, ordinairement, au point qu'un morceau, lyrique ou de peu de pieds, occupe au milieu, le tiers environ du feuillet: je ne transgresse cette mesure, seulement la disperse Il ne s'agit pas, ainsi que toujours, de traits sonores réguliers ou vers—plutôt, de subdivisions prismatiques de l'Idée Tout se passe, par raccourci, en hypothèse; on évite le récit.⁹⁶

*"take on importance, after having first struck one; versification demands this, as a surrounding silence, ordinarily, to the point that a piece, either lyrical or having few feet, takes up in the middle, about a third of the page: I do not transgress this rule, I only disperse it. . . . This is not a matter, thus as always, of regular sonorous features or lines of verse—rather, it is a matter of prismatic subdivisions of the Idea Everything occurs, in an abridged fashion, hypothetically; one avoids narrative."

To compose as writer or as reader, echoed Valéry, does not consist of "trying to picture, with the help of document, the hero of the novel."⁹⁷ Everything Mallarmé and Valéry say of composition, construction, or intentional language means, I think, that they assert the difference between a set composed of linear sequence, pictorial representation, and biological generation on the one hand, and, on the other hand, a set comprising words dispersed in space, verbal presentation, and the transformations of which language is capable. To begin in (or with) language, therefore, is to abandon the first set for the second. What is hypothetical (or fictional) here is that such composition has no immediately observable equivalent in reality; the hero of a novel, however, *represents* or *embodies* such an equivalence. Nevertheless, both Mallarmé and Valéry misread novels polemically, I think, in order to clarify the difference between language and visual reality (or visual reality's visual representation).

If this long excursus into Valéry's Leonardo seems to substitute rarefied indulgence for reasonable speculation, then one can bring out the tendentiousness of Valéry's thought by juxtaposing it to that of Freud, his contemporary. For Freud the material of mental life is analyzable through language, since only words can engage the unconscious skillfully enough for them to bear its stresses. Dreams are not simply images that tell, for rather it is the interpretation of dreams by words—the dreamer's words, the analyst's interpreting words—that tells about dreams. Among many other negative characteristics of the unconscious, the absence of pictures fairly describes it, according to Freud. Despite his frequent comparisons between psychoanalysis and archeology, Freud carefully distinguished material phenomena like rock, temples, and statues from psychological energy. He said that mental life is apprehended by psychoanalysis from three standpoints—dynamic, economic, and topographical—each of which deliberately resists visual analogy. When, very late in life, Freud assessed the role of construction made by the analyst during analysis, there, too, he steered clear of pictures. The analyst's task, Freud writes, "is to make out what has been forgotten from the traces which it has left behind or, more correctly, to *construct it*."⁹⁸ Yet two things weigh against the analyst in the task—"that psychical objects are incomparably more complicated than the excavator's material ones and [that] we have insufficient knowledge of what we may expect to find." Therefore, "for analysis the construction is only a preliminary labour."⁹⁹

Immediately thereafter Freud considers the problem of accuracy, especially as the patient's affirmation or denial of the analyst's hypotheses is a sign only of unconscious pressure on the patient, not of the analyst's perspicacity. Thus at any given point or in any section of the construction, accuracy cannot be determined. The principal reason is that there can be no direct correspondence between a mental construction—whether made by the patient, the analyst, or both together—and actual events. Writes Freud:

The "upward drive" of the repressed, stirred into activity by the putting forward of the construction, has striven to carry the important memory-traces into consciousness; but a resistance has succeeded—not, it is true, in *stopping* that movement—but in *displacing* it on to adjacent objects of minor significance.¹⁰⁰

The result of displacement is distortion or, to use Freud's word, delusion. So curiously methodical is this process of distortion in the attempt verbally and analytically to construct anything in words that Freud remarks, for example, how an event of importance to the patient may remain forgotten while details surrounding it are recalled with amazing clarity. To convince a patient that his recollection of these details is part of a delusion is fruitless. "On the contrary, the recognition in these details of a kernel of truth [buried in or distorted by auxiliary details] would afford common ground upon which the therapeutic process could develop." Freud's most complex insight now comes forward:

But none the less I have not been able to resist the seduction of an analogy. The delusions of patients appear to me to be the equivalents of the constructions which we build up in the course of an analytic treatment—attempts at explanation and cure, though it is true that these, under the conditions of a psychosis, can do no more than replace the fragment of reality that is being disavowed in the present by another fragment that had already been disavowed in the remote past. . . . If we consider mankind as a whole and substitute it for the single human individual, we discover that it too has developed delusions which are inaccessible to logical criticism and which contradict reality.¹⁰¹

Both sorts of delusions, the patient's and the analyst's, build up around a kernel of historical truth that by definition appears exclusively in verbal substitutions for the truth, or as an *already repudiated* experience. Words, therefore, stand at the beginning, *are* the beginning, of a series of substitutions. Words signify a movement away from and around the fragment of reality. This is another way of characterizing the human capacity for language.

To use words is to substitute them for something else—call it reality, historical truth, or a kernel of actuality. For Freud and Valéry—as for Mallarmé, Nietzsche, Conrad, and others whose project is a radical one—language is the beginning of *another* enterprise which, despite its seeming irrationality, has method. The difficulty of this method is that it does not imitate nature, but rather displaces it. This method does not center about a *cogito*, nor does it issue from the *cogito*; in fact, the individual subject has little more than a provisional authority to construct hypotheses (substitutions) bearing a perhaps distressing, perhaps seductive resemblance to delusions. Finally, the logic of this method is not to be found in biological succession—that is, filiation—but as in the Oedipus complex, in departures and divergences from it or entanglements of it.

The net result is to understand language as an intentional structure signifying a series of displacements. Words are the beginning sign of a method that replaces another method. The series being replaced is the set of relationships linked together by familial analogy: father and son, the image, the process of genesis, a story. In their place stands: the brother, discontinuous concepts, paragenesis, construction. The first of these series is dynastic, bound to sources and origins, mimetic. The relationships holding in the second series are complementarity and adjacency; instead of a source we have the intentional beginning, instead of a story a construction. I take this shift to be of great importance in twentieth-century writing. Indeed, a principal argument of this book is that a strong rationalist tradition in modern writing has for too long been hidden behind a facade of gloomy, irrational nihilism linked to a dynastic ideology. The progressive advance of knowledge, to which this shift belongs, displaces the burden of responsibility from origin to beginning.

What this means is that one can understand the history of the novel—as we shall be doing in Chapter 3—as a development from ideas of originality to their bankruptcy. In a certain kind of twentieth-century criticism, the crucial importance assigned to structure represents the beginning of purposive movement away from the automatic causality hitherto underlying the traditional life-and-work schema. Language and mind consequently play a redefined role in discourse—linguistic and psychological—about language and mind. Most important, the text is transformed from an original object into produced and producing structure whose laws are dynamic not static, whose materiality is textual not

genetic, and whose effect is to multiply meaning not to fix it. To grasp a beginning within these changes is in effect to have recognized the ending of one mode of thought and to have begun anew. With what type of consciousness this occurs is depicted in the final paragraph of Mallarmé's "Le Démon de l'analogie":

Mais où s'installe l'irrécusable intervention du surnaturel, et le commencement de l'angoisse sous laquelle agonise mon esprit naguère seigneur c'est quand je vis, levant les yeux, dans la rue des antiquaires instinctivement suivie, que j'étais devant la boutique d'un luthier vendeur de vieux instruments pendus au mur, et, à terre, des palmes jaunes et les ailes enfouies en l'ombre, d'oiseaux anciens. Je m'enfuis, bizarre, personne condamnée à porter probablement le deuil de l'inexplicable Pénultième.*¹⁰²

The narrator begins by asking about a phrase ("La Pénultième est morte") whose meaning eludes him, yet which sounds as if it has been said before, or as if it is one in a series capable of explanation. One syllable from this phrase (*nul*) recalls a lute's tone; the narrator himself feels like a wing sliding over the instrument. As he walks out of his apartment and then into the street he sees his hand reflected in a shop window caressing something; as he repeats the phrase he remarks with horror that he is only repeating himself: "Je sentis que j'avais . . . la voix même (la première, qui indubitablement avait été unique)."¹⁰³ At that moment he stands at the beginning, surrounded by analogies—the shop window exhibiting dispersed lutes and wings, a recollection of the discomposed Muse now no longer the origin of poetry—facing the prospects of language he himself speaks. This language has no source or meaning other than in his efforts both to begin again and to make meaning. The preceding sounds and meanings are only that—what has gone before. If they have meaning, it is the meaning of whatever has ended, so that a beginning may begin. Analogy is not exact correspondence, but a similarity between units (the word, the lute, the wing) that the writer must himself assemble. Finally, the structure he must make now is fictional in that it cannot imitate what is, but must be a new structure of meaning. The methods of the old Muse are insufficient, and so too is the modern writer, for he is no Muse-inspired seer. He must take his place in the community of

*"But where the irrecusable intervention of the supernatural, and the beginning of that agony under whose sway my formerly sovereign mind now agonizes—where this lodges itself is when I saw, lifting my eyes, in the instinctively followed street of antique-dealers, that I stood before a lute shop that sold old instruments hung on the wall, and, on the ground, yellow palms and wings, buried in the shadow, of former birds. I ran away, strange, a person condemned to mourn the inexplicable Penultimate."

writing produced as writing, not as original speech (i.e., speech bound to one origin). This new mode is one of intentional, methodical repetition.

V

Auerbach's retrospective analysis of his own work as a critic reactivates many of these arguments with reference to literary scholarship. In his essay "Philologie der Weltliteratur"¹⁰⁴ he at first rejects the possibility of imposing continuity on all literary production merely by endless fact-gathering; the immediate richness of literature is too great for that. He proceeds, however, to the description of a synthesis performed by the critic, one that depends on the choice of an appropriate *Ansatzpunkt* (point of departure). I think that Auerbach's use of *Ansatzpunkt* (and not *Anfang*, "beginning") is deliberate; thus the constitutive, or constructive, sense of beginning could be stressed. Neither "myth" nor "the baroque," Auerbach stipulates, "can be suitable points of departure for they are concepts as slippery as they are foreign to true literary thought";¹⁰⁵ rather a phrase like, say, *la cour et la ville*, fully embedded in the verbal reality of a historical period, will present itself to the researcher's mind (since it is a phrase common in seventeenth-century writings and not an entirely manufactured one) and will thereby link itself to the regulating inner movement of the period being studied. What is essential to Auerbach's meditations is the critic's willingness to begin with the proper instrument of discovery, forged from the language of the period being studied.

Auerbach felt the *Ansatzpunkt* to be a term in the mind's operation. It appears at first as a simple, single digit: he uses the word *figura*, for instance, because it is found to have a special place in many Latin texts. Detached from history and problematized because of an insistence that attracts the researcher's puzzled attention, key words like *figura* seem suited for a new addition to our knowledge; they play a role similar to Saussure's *mot-thème*. Yet a mechanical arithmetic is avoided when the *Ansatzpunkt* is revealed as a symbol in a formidable algebra. A point of departure is intelligible, just as X is intelligible in an algebraic function or *figura* is intelligible in Cicero's orations; yet its value is also unknown until it is seen in repeated encounters with other terms in the set and with other, parallel functions or

texts. Thus the importance of a word like *figura* or of the phrase *la cour et la ville*: in the research, both emerge from a mere list of their repeated occurrences to enter history, which Auerbach construes as ready in his scholarly work to incarnate them—ready, that is, to change them and be changed by them. No longer mere words or unknown symbols, in Auerbach's writing they enact the combination of past and future woven into the historical fabric of language. A mute term, relatively anonymous, has given rise to a special condition of mind and has evoked the poignancy of time. The beginning is an effort made on behalf of discursive continuity; thus a term is converted into reconstructed history, a unit into a synthesis.

At first a recurrence among other sentences, Auerbach's *Ansatzpunkt* turns into a problem that asks the reason for its persistence. *Nihil est sine ratione*. And persistence will give the critic the opportunity to view a literature, or a so-called period, as information amenable to study, as information in need of interrogation. The extraordinary success of *Mimesis* is considerably the result of the questions Auerbach asks of the text. His chapter 1 is not the result of an empty chore—"compare and contrast Homer and the Old Testament"; rather, Auerbach seems to have asked himself why Homer's text wanders verbally in a way that Exodus does not. Such interrogation creates notable effects, of which one is the adumbration of hypotheses already contained in the question. Thus the disparities between texts by Racine, Corneille, Vaugelas, and Molière are regularized by an overriding code of significance—embodied in a repeated phrase, like *la cour et la ville*, to which these texts seem directed—that links them all and makes each of them intelligible despite the great differences among them. Both Auerbach and Spitzer describe their evidence as philological. Spitzer writes: "The philological character of the discipline of literary history . . . is concerned with ideas couched in linguistic and literary form, not with ideas in themselves (this is the field of the history of philosophy) or with ideas as informing action (this is the field of history and the social sciences)."¹⁰⁶

Elsewhere Auerbach commends Zola for his daring, not to say for his undertaking a hopeless task, in attempting to deal novelistically with the tremendous complexity of the modern world; this same world philosophically considered offers a panorama of warring "facts," and is the one faced with trepidation by a literary scholar of Auerbach's learning, or considered philosophically by a philosopher of Husserl's radical energy. In his

Cartesian Meditations Husserl charges that "instead of a unitary living philosophy, we have a philosophical literature growing beyond all bounds and almost without coherence. Instead of a serious discussion among conflicting theories that, in their very conflict, demonstrate the intimacy with which they belong together, the commonness of their underlying convictions, and an unswerving belief in a true philosophy, we have a pseudo-reporting and a pseudo-criticizing, a mere semblance of philosophizing seriously with and for one another."¹⁰⁷ Yet only through the voluntary imagining and the radical asceticism of a formal willingness to undertake the bolus synoptically can the researcher, whether novelist, critic, or philosopher, even begin his task.

I use *formal* in two interrelated senses. First, *formal* means differentiated coherently and integrally. For example, when Spitzer speaks of philological evidence, he differentiates that from philosophical evidence. This may seem unclear to a scholar not of Spitzer's generation, so we can say that differentiation is sometimes the specialized function of a received tradition, of a discipline, of an institution—in this case, of philology. Second and more important, *formal* means differentiated by virtue of constitutive function. For Spitzer not to have spoken mechanically of philology there had to have been training and practice in putting together evidence, which seemed as a result to cohere, whose function is ultimately to articulate further the field of philology. In both senses of *formal*, therefore, the beginning of an enterprise is a hypothesis projected; it is subsequently to be tested and confirmed. This is very far indeed from a sort of ritualized program to be followed automatically by the would-be philologist. In his preface to *Les Mots anglais* Mallarmé described a formal willingness to do philology as a particular kind of *intention*, "a double effort of memory and of intellect." This following description applies well enough to any study of words whose number and strangeness require methodical handling:

L'étude, véritable d'un idiome étranger, ébauchée petit, doit être continuée par vous, grand ou grandissant. Tout un dictionnaire s'offre, immense, effrayant: le posséder, voilà la tentative, la lecture de livres aidant et une fois sus les rudiments de la grammaire. . . . Un pareil fouillis de vocables rangé dans les colonnes d'un lexique, sera-t-il appelé là arbitrairement et par quelque hasard malin: point; chacun de ces termes arrive de loin, à travers les contrées ou les siècles, à sa place exacte, isolé celui-ci et cet autre mêlé à toute une compagnie. . . . Tant d'actes, complexes et bien oubliés, recommançant avec docilité, pour vous seul, attentif à leur histoire: but des plus nobles et tout philosophique. . . . Le don suffit; mais la méthode aussi: et

elle relève de qui a fait ou va faire ses "humanités." Toute une espece de réminiscences, vague ou aventureuses, le cédera à la vraie Mémoire, faculté qui se juxtapose à des notions ou à des faits: et le meilleur moyen pour savoir, reste la Science.*¹⁰⁸

Beginnings and continuities conceived in this spirit are an appetite and a courage capable of taking in much of what is ordinarily indigestible. Sheer mass, for example, is compelled into a sentence or series of sentences. Books, names, ideas, passages, quotations—like the ones I have used—adjust to a system of relationships formally postulated for them; this is why Swift's "Modest Proposal" is so perfectly illustrative both of itself as a cannibalist tract as well as of the operations of criticism as formal rethinking. For the obduracy of Irish peasant bodies that are coerced into a marvelously fluent prose not unlike the obduracy of books and ideas coexisting in something we call either verbal reality or verbal history. A literary critic, for example, who is fastened on a text is a critic who, in demonstrating his right to speak, makes the text something that is continuous with his own discourse; he does this first by discovering, then by rationalizing, a beginning. Thus the critic's prose, like Swift's as it mimics the cannibalism it propounds by showing how easily human bodies can be assimilated by an amiable prose appetite, swallows resisting works, passes them into passages that decorate its own course, because it has found a beginning that allows such an operation. In the cheerful optimism that it sometimes gives rise to, the beginning resembles a magical point that links critic and work criticized. The point is the meeting of critic and work and it coaxes the work into the critic's prose. In finding a point of departure invariably in the meeting of his criticism with the text criticized, is the critic merely refinding his vision, his biases, in another's work? Does this involve the hope that "prior" texts have

*"The true study of a foreign idiom, started as a small rough effort, must be continued by you, made large or enlarging. A noble dictionary presents itself, immense, frightening: to possess it, that is the effort to be made, the reading of books helping the process and also, once they are known, the rudiments of grammar. . . . Such a medley of vocables ranged in the columns of a lexicon will appear to be placed there arbitrarily by a malign chance: not at all; each of those terms arrives to its exact place from afar, across countries and centuries, this word isolated from all others, this one mixed in with a whole company. . . . So many [linguistic] actions, complex and well forgotten, beginning their movement docilely, especially for you, who are attentive to their history: one of the most noble of goals and one altogether philosophical. . . . A gift suffices, but method also: and it rests with he who has done or who will do his 'humanities.' A whole genre of reminiscences, either vague or adventurous, will yield him up to real Memory, a faculty in juxtaposition with notions or facts: and the best way of knowing remains Science."

prepared one's validity or right to exist with foresight, as Borges says of Kafka's precursors?¹⁰⁹ That *Ansatzpunkt* exist with one's name on them? What, in fine, is the critic's freedom?

VI

These are difficult questions. Let us examine Auerbach a little more. His *Ansatzpunkt*, as I said above, is a sentence or phrase, once spoken or written in a distance we call the past but now mute: *la cour et la ville*, for instance. Yet the recognition of its wanting-to-speak, its importance in the present, transforms the *Ansatzpunkt* from an uninteresting recurring motto into an instrument for the critic's work; like Aeneas' moly, it guides the critic through previously unnegotiable pathways. There must of course be an act of endowment or assertion on the critic's part before an innocuous verbal "point" can turn into the privileged beginning of a critic's journey. The critic's belief, as well as his reflective examination of the point, together germinate into a criticism that is aware of what it is doing. Since a beginning of this sort projects a future for itself in cooperation with the protocols of critical prose—nowadays we speak of texts, meanings, and authors as coexisting in "literature"—the critic would like to devise a means of working with this set of conventions. He would also like to preserve what is unique and possibly strange in his own work. At the sheer level of the writing itself, the critic accepts the determination of linguistic and critical convention while hoping to retain the freedom of possibility: the former is governed by historical and social pressures, the latter by a point of departure that remains exposed to its contingent, and yet rational, status, one that encourages interrogation and retrospection. In the critic's work, therefore, a vigilant method and a record of that method's accomplishments are produced together. Valéry's invention of the *implex*, with its capacity for multiplication, its systematic variations, and its contingency is an ebullient rendering of this union.¹¹⁰

The point of departure, to return to it now, thus has two aspects that animate one another. One leads to the project being realized: this is the transitive aspect of the beginning—that is, beginning with (or for) an anticipated end, or at least expected continuity. The other aspect retains for the beginning its identity

as *radical* starting point: the intransitive and conceptual aspect, that which has no object but its own constant clarification. It is this second side that so fascinated Husserl (I spoke earlier of a beginning *at* the beginning, *for* the beginning) and that has continued to engage Heidegger. These two sides of the starting point entail two styles of thought, and of imagination, one projective and descriptive, the other tautological and endlessly self-mimetic. The transitive mode is always hungering, like Lovelace perpetually chasing Clarissa, for an object it can never fully catch up with in either space or time. The intransitive, like Clarissa herself, can never have enough of itself—in short, expansion and concentration, or words in language, and the Word. The relationship between these two aspects of the starting point is given by Merleau-Ponty: "Whether it is mythical or utopian, there is a place where everything that is or will be is preparing, at the same time, to be spoken." ("Qu'il soit mythique ou intelligible, il y a un lieu où tout ce qui est ou qui sera, se prépare en même temps à être dit.")¹¹¹

Mythical or utopian, this place of which Merleau-Ponty speaks is probably the realm of silence in which transitive and intransitive beginnings jostle one another. Silence is the way language might dream of a golden age, and words, R. P. Blackmur says, are sometimes "burdened with the very cry of silence," with their very opposite and negation.¹¹² Yet we do speak and we do write. We continue to use language, its burdens and confusions notwithstanding. The capabilities of language are not beggarly. For articulated language is also a way of apprehending, of alluding to, and even of dealing with what is unknown, or irrational, or foreign to it, whether we call the unknown a myth, a dream, utopia, or absolute silence. We never know, Eliot says, in any assertion just what or how much we are asserting. The unknown can even be called a beginning insofar as the beginning is a concept that resists the stream of language. Since in its use language is preeminently a reality, a presence, any reference to what precedes it and to what is quite different from it is an unknown. Says Valéry: "Creative Ignorance. . . . Why, yes; before the Word is before the Beginning. Before . . . the Before!"¹¹³ If, as I speak, I refer to a beginning, I am referring to what is not immediately present, unless I am referring to the transitive, useful beginning defined as present for the purpose of the discourse. The intransitive beginning is locked outside language: it is unknown, and so labeled, as in Foucault's magistral *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*, where he demon-

strates the "madness" in post-Renaissance Europe. And yet I can and often must refer to "the beginning," as Husserl did, even though it seems perpetually to refuse me.

Let me try another way of explaining this. When I read a page I must keep in mind that the page was written, or somehow produced in an act of writing. Writing is the unknown, or the beginning from which reading imagines and from which it departs in what Sartre calls a method of guided invention.¹¹⁴ But that is the reader's transitive point of view, which is forced to imagine a prior unknown that the reader calls writing. From the point of view of the writer, however, his writing—as he does it—is perpetually at the beginning. Like Rilke's Malte he is a beginner in his own circumstances.¹¹⁵ He writes for no real reason other than his writing: he writes in order to write, or, as Sartre says of Genet, to write something that he can read.¹¹⁶ What he has already written will always have a power over him. But it, too, while he writes, in the presence of his act of writing, is an unknown. It is felt but not present. The writer is the widow of an insight. As Eliot says:

It seems to me that beyond the namable, classifiable emotions and motives of our conscious life when directed towards action—the part of life which prose drama is wholly adequate to express—there is a fringe of indefinite extent, of feeling which we can only detect, so to speak, out of the corner of the eye and can never completely focus; feeling of which we are only aware in a kind of temporary detachment from action.¹¹⁷

The unknown absence, felt by the mind, is represented by modern poets, critics, and novelists as an antecedent power that incriminates and is *refracted*—the word is Harry Levin's—in the present: its mode of being, whether as horizon or as force, is discontinuous with the present and partial in appearance.¹¹⁸ The great prior reality—whether we call it history, the unconscious, Leonardo, God, or writing—is the Other (Milton's "great task-master's eye"), present before, which is crucial to our Now. The unknown is a metaphor for felt precedence that appears in glances backward, as an intimation of surrounding discomfort, as a threat of impending invasion, always ready to wreck our tenuously performed activity. It is Eliot's backward look, "the partial horror and ecstasy"; it is Conrad's darkness, seemingly at bay yet ever closer to springing forward and obliterating mind and light; it is Kafka's trial that never takes place but is planned before K can do anything, a trial endlessly circumvented but oppressively present in its very impingements; it is Borges' ruins that gradually reveal

themselves as part of a terrible plan whose entirety one can never fully perceive, ruins always felt to be immortal. Or, in radical criticism, it is the deep anterior claim of the writing, sometimes willfully forgotten, sometimes deliberately attenuated, but always haunting the critic whose reading abuts the mountains and the caverns of another's, an author's, mind at work: such critics write critical poems imitating the behavior of the mind. At its best, radical criticism is exactly like all radical activity: full of its own changing, and haunted by its opposite, by the discontinuities of the dialectic of writing, which it must reenact and record. Thus, according to Blackmur, "criticism keeps the sound of . . . footsteps live in our reading, so that we understand both the fury in the words and the words themselves."¹¹⁹

Here, it seems to me, Freud's 1910 essay "The Antithetical Meaning of Primal Words" is very relevant. In the work of the philologist Karl Abel, Freud found linguistic and historical confirmation of his view that signs or words in a dream can mean their opposite or at least something radically different from their appearance. Words in ancient Egyptian, according to Abel, simultaneously imply their opposite and even their negation. "Man," he goes on, "was not in fact able to acquire his oldest and simplest concepts except as contraries to their contraries, and only learnt by degrees to separate the two sides of an antithesis and think of one without conscious comparison with the other."¹²⁰ Abel, unlike Freud, was a meliorist: Freud believed that words in fact continue to imply their opposite, the known carrying with it a considerable freight of the unknown. Reading thus involves us in a regressive movement away from the text to what the words drag along with them, whether that is the memory of the writing or some other, hidden, and perhaps subversive opposite.

Because we must deal with the unknown, whose nature is by definition speculative and outside the flowing chain of language, whatever we make of it will be no more than probability and no less than error. The awareness of possible error in speculation and of a continued speculation regardless of error is an event in the history of modern rationalism whose importance, I think, cannot be overemphasized: this is to some extent the subject of Frank Kermode's *Sense of an Ending*, a book whose justifiable bias is the connection between literature and the modes of fictional thought in a general sense. Nevertheless, the subject of how and when we become certain that what we are doing is quite possibly wrong *but at least a beginning* has to be studied in its full historical and

intellectual richness. Such a study would, for instance, show us when and how a novelist felt what he was doing was *only* writing a novel and not an essay, how and when a critic attributed to his criticism the power to predict its own invalidation, and when a historian saw the past projecting itself in his work.

VII

Let me recapitulate some of the things I have been trying to describe. The choice of a beginning is important to any enterprise, even if, as is so often the case, a beginning is accepted as a beginning after we are long past beginning and after our apprenticeship is over. One of the special characteristics of thought ever since the eighteenth century is an obsession with beginnings that seems to infect and render exceedingly problematic the location of a beginning. Two kinds of beginning emerge, really two sides of the same coin. One, which I call temporal and transitive, foresees a continuity that flows from it. This kind of beginning is suited for work, for polemic, for discovery. It is what Emile Benveniste describes as the "axial moment which provides the zero point of the computation" that allows us to initiate, to direct, to measure time to construct work, to discover, to produce knowledge.¹²¹ Auerbach calls his *Ansatzpunkt* a handle by which to grasp literary history: we find it for a purpose and at a time that is crucial to us; but the act of finding it ought never to be all interrogation, examination, and reflection unless we are willing to forego work for preliminaries. A beginning is a formal appetite imposing a severe discipline on the mind that wants to think every turn of its thoughts from the start. Thoughts then appear related to one another in a meaningful series of constantly experienced moments.

There is always the danger of too much reflection upon beginnings. In a sense, what I have been doing in this meditation proves the hazards of such an undertaking. A single topic can become the *idée fixe* mockingly transformed by Valéry into an epidemic of limitless titles: "On Omnivalent Ideas"; "On Omnivalence as a Depressive Stimulus"; "On Omnivalence, and the Treatment of Abnormal Favorities"; "On Omnivalent, Anti-logical Hyperfavoritism". . . .¹²² In attempting to push oneself further and further back to what is only a beginning, a point that is

stripped of every use but its categorization in the mind as beginning, one is caught in a tautological circuit of beginnings about to begin. This is the other kind of beginning, the one I called intransitive and conceptual. It is very much a creature of the mind, very much a bristling paradox, yet also very much a figure of thought that draws special attention to itself. Its existence cannot be doubted, yet its pertinence is wholly to itself. Because it cannot truly be known, because it belongs more to silence than it does to language, because it is what has always been left behind, and because it challenges continuities that go cheerfully forward with *their* beginnings obediently affixed—it is therefore something of a necessary fiction. It is perhaps our permanent concession as finite minds to an ungraspable absolute.

The absolute's felt absence has, I think, seemed particularly necessary to the modern mind, mainly because the modern mind finds it exceedingly difficult, perhaps impossible, to grasp presence immediately. To paraphrase A. D. in Malraux's *La Tentation de l'occident*: we lose the present twice—once when we make it, and again when we try to regain it.¹²³ Even in the midst of powerful impressions upon us we find ourselves resorting to using intervening techniques that deliver reality to us in palpable form. We are peripatetic converts to every mediation we learn, and learning, the process Vico described as autodidactic philology, then seems more and more to be a matter of submitting to various linguistic fatalisms. A critic, for instance, cannot take in literature directly; as Auerbach said, the field is too minutely specialized now, too vastly spread beyond our immediate ken. So we create sequences, periods, forms, and measurements that suit our perceptual needs. Once we have seen them, these orders are left alone: we assume that they go on ordering to time's end, and there is nothing we can do about it. These mediating orders are in their turn commanded and informed by one or another moderately intelligible force, whether we call it history, time, mind, or, as is the case today, language. In *Le Visible et l'invisible* Merleau-Ponty writes:

If we dream of finding again the natural world or time through coincidence, of being identical to the 0-point which we see yonder, or to the pure memory which from the depths of ourselves governs our acts of recall, then language is a power for error, since it cuts the continuous tissue that joins us vitally to the things and to the past and is installed between ourselves and that tissue like a screen. The philosopher speaks, but this is a weakness in him, and an inexplicable weakness: he should keep silent, coincide in silence, and rejoin in Being a philosophy that is there ready-made. But yet everything comes to pass as though he wished to put into words a certain

silence he hearkens to within himself. His entire "work" is that absurd effort.¹²⁴

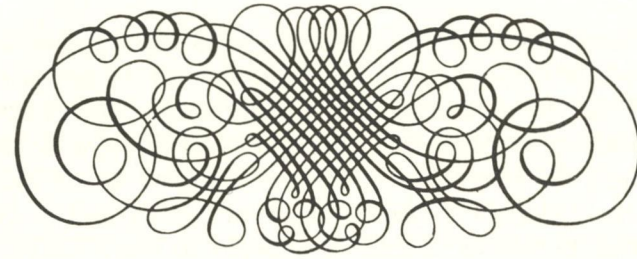
Everything that is left after these orders of mediated presence are accepted we call unknown. But, as I have tried to show, the unknown remains with us to haunt us from its horizon even after we have consciously begun. Thus the two types of beginning I have been describing are separate in analysis, but not really altogether separate in practice. When, after we begin, we hint at the unknown we involuntarily borrow the words of our experience, using them to harken back to an aspect of our experience at the beginning. The archetypal unknown is the beginning, which is also the certification of what we presently do. Newman called such a beginning an economy of God, and Vaihinger called it a summational fiction. We might call it radical inauthenticity, or, looking as far back as Husserl and Stevens did, the tautology at the end of the mind, or with Freud, the primal word, literally, with an antithetical meaning: the beginning that is not *the* one. Such a beginning is the partially unknown event that makes us—and with us, our world—possible as a vessel of significance.

The most peculiar thing about such a partially unknown beginning—aside, that is, from its enduring shadow in our minds—is that we make and accept it at the same time that we realize that we are "wrong." Its wrongness, however, resides in its *difference* from the merely accidental. Properly considered, a beginning shows us how much language, with its perpetual memories of silence, can do to summon fiction and reality to an equal space in the mind. In this space certain fiction and certain reality come together as identity. Yet we can never be certain what part of identity is true, what part fictional. This will be true as long as part of the beginning eludes us, so long as we have language to help us and hinder us in finding it, and so long as language provides us with a word whose meaning must be *made* certain if it is not to be wholly obscure.

CHAPTER

THREE

The Novel as Beginning Intention



I

IN its fully developed form as the great classical novel, from Defoe to Dickens and Balzac, narrative prose fiction is by no means a type of literature common to all traditions. Even in those traditions of which it is a part, the novel has had a limited life. This, I think, is an important fact. It may not tell us what the novel is, but it can help us to understand what needs the novel has filled and what effects it has produced among readers, societies, and traditions in which the genre is significant. Let me limit myself to a brief example that illustrates some of what I mean. Modern Arabic literature includes novels, but they are almost entirely of this century. There is no tradition out of which these modern works developed; basically at some point writers in Arabic became aware of European novels and began to write works like them. Obviously it is not that simple; nevertheless, it is significant that the desire to create an alternative world, to modify or augment the real world through the act of writing (which is one motive underlying the novelistic tradition in the West) is inimical to the Islamic world-view. The Prophet is he who has *completed* a world-view; thus the word *heresy* in Arabic is synonymous with the verb "to innovate" or "to begin." Islam views the world as a plenum, capable of neither diminishment nor amplification. Consequently, stories like those in *The Arabian Nights* are ornamental, variations on the world, not completions of it; neither are they lessons, structures, extensions, or totalities designed to illustrate either the author's prowess in representation, the education of a character, or ways in which the world can be viewed and changed.

Thus even autobiography as a genre scarcely exists in Arabic literature. When it is to be found, the result is wholly special. One

of the finest and most famous books in modern Arabic letters is Taha Hussein's three-part autobiography *Al-Ayam* (sometimes translated as *Stream of Days*), of which the first part (1929) is the most interesting. It describes the author's boyhood in an Egyptian village early in the century. At the time he wrote the book, Hussein was already a learned man of letters and ex-Azharite whose later European education wrought in him a unique fusion between the traditional Islamic and occidental cultures. Hussein's achievements as a scholar, however, do not explain a remarkable feature of *Al-Ayam*. For almost every childhood occurrence narrated by Hussein is in some way connected with the Koran—not as a body of doctrine, but as a presence or fact of everyday life. Thus the boy's greatest ambition is to memorize the Koran; his father is happy when he does his recitation well and angry when he does not; his friends are all fellow learners; and so on and on. The book's narrative style bears no resemblance to Koranic Arabic, so there is no question of imitation and hence of addition as in the Christian tradition. Rather one's impression is that life is mediated by the Koran, informed by it; a gesture or an episode or a feeling in the boy's life is inevitably reduced (always in an interesting way) back to a relationship to the Koran. In other words, no action can depart from the Koran; rather each action confirms the already completed presence of the Koran and, consequently, human existence.

Examples like this make it apparent that a central purpose of the Western novel is to enable the writer to represent characters and societies more or less freely in development. Characters and societies so represented grow and move in the novel because they mirror a process of engenderment or beginning and growth possible and permissible for the mind to imagine. Novels, therefore, are aesthetic objects that fill gaps in an incomplete world: they satisfy a human urge to add to reality by portraying (fictional) characters in which one can believe. Novels are much more than that, of course. Nevertheless, I should like now to consider the institution of narrative prose fiction as a kind of appetite that writers develop for modifying reality—as if from the beginning—as a desire to create a new or beginning fictional entity while accepting the consequences of that desire.

Every novel is at the same time a form of discovery and also a way of accommodating discovery, if not to a social norm, then to a specialized "novelistic" reading process. As Harry Levin has said, the novel is an institution, wholly differentiated from the more

generalized idea of "fiction," to which even the most unusual and novel experiences are admitted as functions.¹ Every novelist has taken the genre as both an enabling condition and a restraint upon his inventiveness. Both these factors are time- and culture-bound, but how exactly they are bound has yet fully to be studied. My thesis is that invention and restraint—or as I shall call them, "authority" and "molestation," respectively—ultimately have *conserved* the novel because novelists have construed them together as *beginning* conditions, not as conditions for limitlessly expansive fictional invention. Thus the novel represents a beginning of a very precisely finite sort insofar as what may ensue from that beginning. In this respect the classical novel has been a far more conservative and more precisely constraining beginning than would otherwise be expected of a genre so explicitly committed to fabulation. Alain Robbe-Grillet makes this point in his polemic attacking outdated conceptions of the novel, "Sur quelques notions périmées" (1957),² an essay that accurately notes just how severe and timebound are critical constraints upon the form.

By my two terms, *authority* and *molestation*, I wish to indicate the kind of perspective I am now adopting. *Authority* suggests to me a constellation of linked meanings: not only, as the OED tells us, "a power to enforce obedience," or "a derived or delegated power," or "a power to influence action," or "a power to inspire belief," or "a person whose opinion is accepted"; not only those, but a connection as well with *author*—that is, a person who originates or gives existence to something, a begetter, beginner, father, or ancestor, a person also who sets forth written statements. There is still another cluster of meanings: *author* is tied to the past participle *auctus* of the verb *augere*; therefore *auctor*, according to Eric Partridge, is literally an increaser and thus a founder.³ *Auctoritas* is production, invention, cause, in addition to meaning a right of possession. Finally, it means continuance, or a causing to continue. Taken together these meanings are all grounded in the following notions: (1) that of the power of an individual to initiate, institute, establish—in short, to begin; (2) that this power and its product are an increase over what had been there previously; (3) that the individual wielding this power controls its issue and what is derived therefrom; (4) that authority maintains the continuity of its course. All four of these abstractions can be used to describe the way in which narrative fiction asserts itself psychologically and aesthetically through the technical efforts of the novelist. Thus in the written statement,

beginning or inauguration, augmentation by extension, possession and continuity stand for the word *authority*.

Now, *molestation* is a word I shall use to describe the bother and responsibility of all these powers and efforts. By that I mean that no novelist has ever been unaware that his authority, regardless of how complete, or the authority of a narrator, is a sham. Molestation, then, is a consciousness of one's duplicity, one's confinement to a fictive, scriptive realm, whether one is a character or a novelist. And molestation occurs when novelists and critics traditionally remind themselves of how the novel is always subject to a comparison with reality and thereby found to be illusion. Or again, molestation is central to a character's experience of disillusionment during the course of a novel. To speak of authority in narrative prose fiction is also inevitably to speak of the molestations that accompany it.

Authority and its molestations are at the root of the fictional process; at least this is the enabling relationship that most fiction itself renders. Later we shall examine some reasons why this is so. But the problematic of novelistic fiction from the early eighteenth century on is how narrative institutes, alongside the world of common discourse, another discourse whose beginning is important—indeed, crucial—to it, located as it is in the responsibility taken for it by the begetting writer/speaker. Yet this fictional progenitor is bound by the fact that he is always at a remove from a truly fundamental role. It is no accident, I think, that James and Conrad, those exceptionally reflective autumnal craftsmen of fiction, made this tantalizing distance from a radical beginning the theme of much of their best work. *Heart of Darkness* explores beginnings paradoxically through a series of obscuring narrative frames; borne from one narrative level to another, Marlow's African adventure gains its power from the uniqueness, the strangeness, of its persistence in those levels, not unequivocally from the strangeness of the experience itself. The heart of the matter—Kurtz's experience—is posited outside Marlow's discourse, which leaves us to investigate, if we can, the speaker's authority. By the end of the tale we are aware of something that Marlow has given birth to that eludes empirical verification, even as it rests most securely upon the fact that Marlow has delivered it. Here, in most of its senses, authority is involved, except that we are required to accept that authority as never final. There is derivation, begetting, continuity, augmentation—and also a nag-

ging, molesting awareness that beyond these there is something still more authentic, beside which fiction is secondary.

No writer before Freud and Nietzsche to my knowledge has so obsessively investigated some of these notions as Kierkegaard, whose meditations examine more than a century of fictional authority. To read *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* (written in 1848; published 1859) simply as commentary on his own work is to rob it of its most useful insights. For there Kierkegaard probes what is fundamental to all writing (preeminently fiction and personal discourse) in the center of which is the relationship between a focal character whose voice for the reader is authoritative and the nature of the authorship such a voice entails. It is of a kind with the relationship between Isabel Archer, for example, the movement of whose consciousness the reader attends to very carefully, and the type of writing James had to practice in order to produce her. Behind both is the generative authority that as secular critics we characterize as "imaginative," but which Kierkegaard the Christian called "divine governance" (*Styrelse*). The role of such governance is described only after Kierkegaard lays out the principles that have distinguished his work. He has been writing two sorts of books, he says: aesthetic and religious. The former sort seems to contradict the more obviously urgent religious works, but Kierkegaard wants it understood that the aesthetic books have been designed, in manner at least, to deal with serious questions in a mode suitable to the frivolity of his contemporaries. Taken alone, then, the aesthetic works would be confusing, not to say hopelessly lacking in seriousness. But viewed as necessary preparations for the directly religious works, his aesthetic writings become indirect, ironic communications of higher truths.

Here we have the characteristic Kierkegaardian figure of repetition. The aesthetic works are what he calls a dialectical reduplication of the truth: "For as a woman's coyness has a reference to the true lover and yields when he appears, so, too, dialectical reduplication has a reference to true seriousness."⁴ There is a strict connection between aesthetic and religious, one that binds them together in bonds of necessity: the religious is a prior, more important truth given in secondary, ironic and dissembling forms. The aesthetic works do not occur in a void, even though it appears otherwise, so striking is the freedom of their expression. We must remember, therefore, that "there is a

difference between writing on a blank sheet of paper and bringing to light by the application of a caustic fluid a text which is hidden under another text."⁵ The aesthetic hides or signals the religious, just as Socrates' comic personality conceals the deepest seriousness. We accept the indirect mode, which seems to nullify the truth in order that the truth might emerge more fully later. This is, says Kierkegaard, a teleological suspension practiced so that the truth may become truer.

Kierkegaard's authorship is a deliberately composite one; and the patron of his enterprise is Socrates, to whom he devoted his master's thesis, *The Concept of Irony*. What always interests Kierkegaard is the difficulty of speaking directly to an unresponsive audience about matters for which silence is the most suitable expression. The difficulty, however, reflects as much on the author's weakness as it does on that of his audience. In an extremely long footnote to a phrase in chapter 3 of *The Point of View*, Kierkegaard argues that his total authorship is a superfluity only because he has depended on God and has been a weak human being; otherwise his work would have come to grips with the human situation and "would have been interrelated with the instant and the effective in the instant."⁶ So in his aesthetic works Kierkegaard is the strong author whose mode conceals the true weakness vis-à-vis God which the religious author was at pains to reveal. The aesthetic, then, is an ironic double, a dialectical reduplication, of a religious truth. The human author augments and is strong, whereas with regard to the divine he is weak; the divine causes his work to stand apart and to appear to be superfluous to the here and now.

One aspect of authorship, then, is its contingent authority, its ability to initiate or build structures whose absolute authority is radically nil, but whose contingent authority is a quite satisfactory transitory alternative to the absolute truth. Therefore, the difference between Abraham's true authority in Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* and the narrator's contingent authority is that Abraham is silent, whereas the narrator universalizes in language; the point is that any absolute truth cannot be expressed in words, for only diminished, flawed versions of the truth are available to language. This is as much as to say that *fiction alone speaks or is written*—for truth has no need of words—and that all voices are assumed ones. The importance of Kierkegaard's formulations is that he is particularly adept in describing the tactics of his authorship, with its recourse to revealing pseudonyms, and that he

is more generally accurate in describing the tactics of writing that commit the author self-consciously to using an assumed voice. This voice sounds certain because it apparently (or in fact) *intentionally* determines its own way and validates its pronouncements by acceptable and sometimes dramatic means. Thus Kierkegaard, calling himself Johannes de Silentio in order ironically to remind us how far his words are from Abraham's silence and truth, writes the following mock disclaimer in *Fear and Trembling*:

The present writer is nothing of a philosopher; he is, *poetice et eleganter*, an amateur writer who neither writes the System nor *promises* of the System, who neither subscribes to the System nor ascribes anything to it. He writes because for him it is a luxury which becomes the more agreeable and more evident, the fewer there are who buy and read what he writes.⁷

Yet the assumed voice's authority is a usurped one, for behind the voice is the truth, somehow and always unapprehendable, irreducible to words, and perhaps even unattractive, to which the voice remains subservient in an entirely interesting way. (It is perhaps worth suggesting here that the novel is the aesthetic form of servitude: no other genre so completely renders the meaning of *secondariness*.) Here again Kierkegaard is very subtle. The relationship between truth and its artistic version is dialectical, not strictly mimetic—by which I mean that Kierkegaard permits the aesthetic a maximum freedom without losing an awareness of the aesthetic's rewording of the religious, without forgetting its precarious status. In other words, we are to understand the dialectical connection as making ironic the convincing pretensions of the aesthetic.

Any novelistic narrative has for an immediate referent the act of speaking or writing: "I speak . . .," or "It is spoken . . .," or "He speaks" Beyond that, of course, the narrative is not obliged to be "real" except in the formal ways analyzed at great length in such works as Wayne Booth's *Rhetoric of Fiction*.⁸ Kierkegaard's insistence upon the inventiveness and freedom of the aesthetic (i.e., the fictional) mode emphasizes how narratives do more than simply and generally repeat reality: they create another sense altogether by repeating, by making repetition itself the very form of novelty. Thus, as Gilles Deleuze has shown, such intentional repetition opposes the laws of nature and the moral law, goes beyond good and evil, and stands against the generality of habit and the particularity of memory. Moreover, such intentional repetition "appears as the *logos* of the solitary, the singular, the *logos* of the private thinker."⁹ The actuality of the

narrative process is repetition, it is true, but it is not the repetition of backward but of *forward* recollection. Kierkegaard links repetition with the essence of creation, not of slavish transcription:

If God himself had not willed repetition, the world would never have come into existence. He would either have followed the light plans of hope, or He would have recalled it all and conserved it in recollection. This He did not do, therefore the world endures, and it endures for the fact that it is a repetition. Repetition is reality, and it is the seriousness of life.¹⁰

Kierkegaard everywhere insists on the individuality of the aesthetic repeating voice. It is neither abstract nor vaguely communal. In an important passage in *The Concept of Irony* he discusses the most distinctive feature of the ironic, aesthetic voice:

But the outstanding feature of irony . . . is the subjective freedom which at every moment has within its power the possibility of a beginning and is not generated from previous conditions. There is something seductive about every beginning because the subject is still free, and this is the satisfaction the ironist longs for. At such moments actuality loses its validity for him; he is free and above it.¹¹

What the ironic voice goes on to create is a "usurped totality" of progression based on a seductive beginning. Insofar as an author begins to write at all he is ironic, since for him, too, there is a deceptive, subjective freedom at the outset. The distance that separates him from actuality is a function of his personality—which, Kierkegaard says, "is at least momentarily incommensurable with actuality"¹²—and, we might add, of his continuing, augmenting authority. But we must never forget the abiding truth, from which the author departs in search of his new fulfillment.

Kierkegaard's analysis of authorship exposes the uneasiness and vacillation with which narrative fiction begins and from which it develops. If we suspend for a moment our lifelong familiarity with fiction and try not to take the existence of novels for granted, we will see that the seminal beginning conception of narrative fiction depends simultaneously upon three special conditions. The first of these is that there must be some strong sense of doubt that the authority of any single voice, or group of voices, is sufficient unto itself. In the community formed among reader, author, and character, each desires the company of another voice. Each hears in the other the seductive beginning of a new life, an alternative to his own; and yet each grows progressively aware of an authenticity systematically betrayed during the course

of the partnership—the novelistic character feels this most of all. Our interest in Dorothea Brooke in *Middlemarch* rests on our perception of her expectations of some life different from the one she presently leads; impelled by those expectations, she becomes another person in her marriage to Dr. Casaubon. What she leaves behind during that unhappy episode she later recovers in a form tempered by the experience of self-deception. Initially dissatisfied with herself, she doubles her life by adding a new one to it. She does this by the authority of her personality, yet her travails are no less the result of that molesting authority. So too for Eliot, who creates Dorothea in the enactment of her (Eliot's) will to be another. Similarly the reader, who allows Dorothea the benefit of his doubt about his isolated self.

The inaugural act of usurpation once performed—because of pleasure taken in a free beginning, because of a desire to reduplicate, to repeat life in a more accessible form—there follows consolidation of the initial gain by various means. One is by the accumulation of prerogatives. Notice how skillfully this is done by Huck Finn at the opening of his narrative, as he asserts his right to tell us *his* version of things:

You don't know about me without you have read a book by the name of *Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, but that ain't no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain and he told the truth, mainly. There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth. That is nothing. I never seen anybody but lied one time or another.¹³

Other means include strengthening one's belief in one's project, cultivating psychological arrangements, and placing useful as well as frightening things in convenient locations.

In the chapter in *Capital* entitled "The Secret of Primitive Accumulation," Marx traces the growth of capitalist society from the dissolution of feudal society in terms that deserve mention here: he claims that once the individual has "escaped from the regime of the guilds, their rules for apprenticeship and journey-men, and the impediments of their labour regulations," he becomes a free-seller of himself, and thereby a producer first-hand.¹⁴ Of course, Marx adds, this is really just another form of enslavement, for man has been robbed of his personal means of production: he therefore creates others, alternative to his own, and then falls prey to the illusion that he has free labor power. The real power is elsewhere, but the illusion persists that the individual is in control of his life as he generates values and prerogatives suitable to his condition. This is perfectly consonant

with what Pip does in *Great Expectations*. Self-created, he labors to be a free gentleman leading a gentleman's life while in fact he is enslaved by an outcast who has himself been victimized by society. By his schemes Pip grants himself the right to manners, thoughts, and actions that dispose of life with grand ease. It is with the exposure of the falseness of these schemes, as well as with the actual successes he manages, that the novel is concerned.

The systematic reinforcement of illusions, which Marx and Engels treated earlier in *The German Ideology*, underlies Pip's course in *Great Expectations*. His progress up the social scale is supported by every character in the novel, so committed is everyone (Joe Gargery included)—in thought, at least—to an ideology that equates money with privilege, morality, and worth. Although the novel itself licenses Pip's expectations, it also mercilessly undercuts them, mainly by showing that these expectations are inherently self-limiting. That is, Pip can neither hold expectations nor realize them without a patron who makes them possible. Thus Pip's freedom is dependent upon an unnamed patron who requires visits to Jaggers, who requires that no questions be asked, and so on. The more Pip believes he is acting on his own, the more tightly he is drawn into an intricate web of circumstances that weighs him down completely; the plot's progressive revelation of accidents connecting the principal characters is Dickens's method of countering Pip's ideology of free upward progress. For Marx, the equivalent of Dickens's plot is history, which progressively reveals how one or another "freedom" is in fact a function of class interest and alliances and not really freedom at all: hence the illusion of free labor-power that allows the worker to think he can do as he pleases, whereas in fact he dangles on strings pulled by others.

- ① The second special condition for generating narrative fiction is that the truth—whatever that may be—can only be approached indirectly, by means of a mediation that, paradoxically, because of its falseness makes the truth truer. In this context, a truer truth is one arrived at by a process of elimination: alternatives similar to the truth are shed one by one. The elevation of truth-resembling fiction to preeminence becomes a habitual practice when fiction comes to be considered the trial of truth by error. In trying to account for this rationale we enter a realm of speculation to which the best guide is Vico. In *The New Science*, Vico focuses his inquiries on a point of original juncture of three primal elements: human identity, human history, and human language. Since these

are also the components with which the novel must begin its work, each of which it in turn individualizes, the correspondence between Vico and the engenderment of a novel is worth examining. Let us keep in mind, first of all, that in the center of a novel is the character who, unlike his counterpart in the classical drama, is not conceded at the very outset to be a known figure. Tom Jones, Clarissa, Robinson Crusoe, Tristram Shandy, Ahab, Julien Sorel, Frederic Moreau, Stavrogin—all these are figures deliberately and specifically original, however much they are generally of one type or another; they are not Oedipus or Agamemnon, for whose portrayal the dramatist relies upon a common mythic past, or upon a community of socially invested values and symbols. A novel's protagonist may resemble a known character, but the filiation is an indirect one. Whatever we recognize in the novelistic character we do at another level of much less prominence—that is, at the level of private authority.

Authority, says Vico, comes from *auctor*, which "certainly comes from *autos* (*proprius* or *suus ipsius*)"; thus the word's original meaning is "property." Property is dependent upon human will and upon choice; therefore, it is axiomatic for Vico that "philology observes the authority of human choice, whence comes consciousness of the certain." So the study of language recovers the conscious choices by which man established his identity and his authority: language preserves the traces of these choices, which a philologist can then decipher. Opposed to philology is philosophy, "which contemplates reason, whence comes knowledge of the true."¹⁵ Note the demarcation: on the one hand, language, authority, and certain identity, on the other hand, the true. Certainty pertains to poetic creation (and its understanding to philology), for creation does its work in three forms of authority: divine, human, and natural. By this Vico means that human history is made by man in three stages of mythologized power, three phases of locating human interests and forming agencies to maintain them. In the divine phase, the gods fix the giants by chaining the latter to earth (*terrore defixi*): whatever man fears he divides into a subduing and a subdued power. Thus Jove and the chained giants. In the second or human phase, the giants, who have been wandering the earth, learn to control their bodies, thereby exercising will. They inhabit caves, and settle there, domesticated. Finally, after a long period of settlement, they become lords of dominion, occupation, and possession. A third division occurs: there are *gentes maiores*, or

the founders and originators of families, on the one hand, and the people over whom they rule on the other hand.¹⁶

Vico's term for this succession of periods, "poetic history," designates not so much a "real" sequence as a retrospective construction. What the construction describes, however, is real enough, even if its figures are highly metaphorical. It is the institution of a humanized milieu, populated with beings and maintained by an authority that conserves itself while slowly being reduced from grandiose powers to more and more sharply differentiated functions—just as, for example, in *Mansfield Park* Fanny apprehensively enters the wealthy environment of her aunt's house, then slowly comes to understand and live with it enough to disapprove of her cousins' mistreatment of its spirit. The pivotal moment in Vico's sequence is the Flood, or great rupture, an event that separates man's history into two distinct types that thereafter flow concurrently: sacred history and gentile history. Of the first Vico has little to say, except that it is in a sort of permanent rapport with God. The second is mankind's, an alternative to the first: it is the "new" life sought by Julien Sorel, or the one created perforce by Crusoe. Like Kierkegaard, Vico sees things in a double perspective, aesthetic and religious. And like Kierkegaard's writing, his is more fluent, more at home in the former than in the latter. The important point is that both men see that the aesthetic (or poetic) requires a reconstructive *technique* (since it is an order of repetition), that it gives rise to a special manner of being and to a universe of distinctions, while always remaining conscious of its alternative status. What is most interesting about this alternative consciousness is that it is a valid and even necessary institution of life despite the relative subservience of its position, which we may call aesthetic and ironic with Kierkegaard, or poetic and fictional with Vico.

The third special condition for the generation of novelistic fiction is an extraordinary fear of the void that antedates private authority. This, I think, is one of the less well-noted themes of the novel which extends at least as far back as *Robinson Crusoe*. For in the shipwreck that casts him into his island wilderness, Crusoe is "born," with extinction always threatening afterward, and with his new-gained and constantly experienced authority over his domain providing the safeguard of his continuing existence. A whole range of principal characters in fiction are based upon the same premise: orphans, outcasts, parvenus, emanations, solitaires, and deranged types whose background is either rejected, myster-

ious, or unknown. Sterne's fascination with Tristram's birth toys with the seemingly limitless hovering between nullity and existence that is central to the novelistic conception of character and to its representation in language. Were it not for a rejection of the anonymous void, both Ishmael and Pip, for example, would be unthinkable. Ishmael pointedly tells us that his narrative of shipboard existence is a substitute for the philosophical flourish with which Cato threw himself upon his sword. And the bond between the character's novelistic life and the death from which he is stayed while he lasts before us is querulously summed up in *The Nigger of the Narcissus* by James Wait, who announces, "I must live till I die."

I said parenthetically above that the novel is a literary form of secondariness; here we can refine this generality to say that the novel makes, procreates, a certain secondary and alternative life possible for heroes who are otherwise lost in society. In a sense, the novel's attitude as a formal institution toward its *dramatis personae* is that of a chiding father who has endowed his children with a patrimony and an abode he himself cannot really ever relinquish. In being the author—and notice how this applies equally to the writer/author, the novel-father/author and the character/author—one engages oneself in a whole process of filiation not easily escaped. In this (as in so much else) *Don Quixote* is exemplary. There is the Cervantes-Sidi Hamete-Quixote relationship. There is the Amadis-Quixote relationship, there is the astonishingly fertile link between Quixote and Panza—now one, now the other rears his partner in the furthering and fathering forth of illusion; and there is, as every novelist and historian of the novel avers, *Don Quixote* itself as parent novel. James Wait's "I must live till I die" is an alternative way of saying that as a novelistic character he must live in that abode, in the family of men (the crew) which is taken by the novelist to be the stuff of fiction and which is, so far as the plot is concerned, inherited from life and from the life of novels, therefrom to be fashioned into a line of succession. This line and this sense of heritage, it seems to me, stands at the absolute center of the classical novel; and yet how interestingly secondary, how intentionally flawed and derived a line it is. I shall return to it presently.

In using Marx, Kierkegaard, and Vico to point up requisite conditions for fiction I have tried to parallel their thought with the novel's ground in human experience. Thus the philosopher or historian belongs in his work to a common mode of conceiving

experience of which another version is the novel. I refer, of course, to such common themes as succession, sequence, derivation, portrayal, and alternation, to say nothing of authority itself. Here we may remark the similarities between thought that produces philosophical works, for instance, and thought that produces novels. Yet the difference is no less crucial. It is a difference in degree. The difference between Kierkegaard's anthropology of authority and, say, Pip's in *Great Expectations* is that Pip is *more* of an augments, continuer, and originator, both because Dickens willed it so and because that is Pip's essence as a character. As to the productive impulse that has such staying power that is not commonly diverted into either philosophy or history (Tolstoi is an exception), we can look ahead briefly to Freud for an explanation.

In any of the reconstructive techniques, whether history, philosophy, or personal narrative, the objective, according to Freud, is both to create alternatives to a confusing reality and to minimize the pain of experience. In other words, the project is an economic one. Yet insofar as it is also a repetitive procedure it has to do with instincts leading the mind over ground already traveled. Some instincts are life-promoting, others return one to the primal unity of death. The novelistic character gains his fictional authority, as we saw, in the desire to escape death; therefore, the narrative process endures so long as that essentially procreative will persists. Yet because a character's real beginning takes place in the avoidance of the anonymity of pure negation—and this is nowhere more beautifully described than in the first and last volumes of Proust's novel—there is a simultaneous pressure exerted upon him by that which he is always resisting. The demystification, the decreation or education, of illusions, which is the novel's central theme—and, paradoxically, its own alternate theme—is thus an enactment of the character's increasing molestation by a truer process pushing him to an ending that resembles his beginning in the midst of negation. The sheer length of the classical novel can almost be accounted for by the desire to initiate and promote a reduplication of life and, at the same time, to allow for a convincing portrayal of how that sort of life leads inevitably to the revelation of a merely borrowed authority. The element that contains as well as symbolizes the whole enterprise is, as recent critics have shown, the language of temporal duration.¹⁷

But whether we depict the narrative in temporal or strictly verbal terms, the important thing is that one must understand narrative as wholly qualified by the extremely complex authority

of its presentation. Pip, Dorothea, and Isabel (in *The Portrait of a Lady*) are flawed by their illusions, by a skewing of their vision of themselves and of others. Yet all three of them *move*: out of them rises, from them *begins*, a sense of motion and of change that engages our serious interest as readers. For Pip's illusions there are, as an unforgettable counterpoise, Miss Havisham's solitary paralysis: whereas he generates a life for himself whose falseness is more and more manifest, she does next to nothing, memorialized in the sarcophagus of Satis House. Late in the novel he tells her accusingly, "You let me go on"; what is enough for her is only the beginning for Pip. And Dorothea's affections and aspirations contrast sharply with Dr. Casaubon's frigid personality, symbolized by his unfinished, locked-up manuscript. Lastly, James contrasts Isabel's flights with Osmond's perfect retreat at Roccanera, the one whose manner is that of a beautiful projector, the other the creature of a prison from which all humanity has been excluded. Within a novel, then, the principle of authority provides a motion always attempting to steer clear of obstacles that emerge to inhibit, maim, or destroy it utterly.

In historical novels of the early nineteenth century there are figures of authority to whom the protagonists are subordinate. Cardinal Borromeo in *I Promessi Sposi* and the King in *Quentin Durward*, to mention only two examples, each serves within the novel as a reminder of the limits to a character's secular power, limits that are vestiges of the "real," historical world, the truer realm, which persist into the fiction. Yet the function of each will become incorporated into the character's increasing self-consciousness of his weakness in the world, in the same way that the Marshalsea Prison in *Little Dorrit* is still more a psychological molestation of poor Mr. Dorrit when he is free than even it was in reality. The incorporation of reality into the great realistic novels of the mid-nineteenth century is performed by converting figures of secular authority into forms of sociomaterial resistance faced by the protagonists. If these forms are not imaginatively represented by cities—as in the Paris of Balzac and Flaubert, Dickens's London, and so forth—they are nevertheless felt by such figures as the Underground Man to be the generally hostile outer reality.

Such exterior circumstances exist at the level of plot. I want now to return to the authoritative character as the novel's conceptual matrix. Sometimes, as in Goethe's *Wahlverwandschaften* or Laclos's *Liaisons dangereuses*, the fiction is sustained by pairs

whose destiny is always intertwined. Edward, Otilie, and Charlotte produce Goethe's story through a complex series of partnerships whose permanence is practically ontological in terms of the novel's existence; similarly Valmont and Merteuil, whose schemes together are the veritable abstract without which the plot could not be. Richardson's *Clarissa*, in comparison, is an example of private authority resisting interventions, yet beseeching Lovelace's interventions by the deep attractiveness of her inviolate privacy. In the case of Pip—which I want to analyze in some detail—we have a remarkably economical individual character. From Pip, Dickens is able to derive a very diverse range of originating circumstances (circumstances that give rise to an entire world), which taken as a group provide a perfect example of the authoritative or authorizing fictional consciousness. The more remarkable is this economy when we realize that Dickens makes use of every traditional narrative device—development, climax, linear plot sequence, physical setting, realistic accuracy of detail—together with a thoroughly imaginative method of using them, in so complete a way that even James and Eliot cannot match him. *Great Expectations* reposes upon Dickens's portrayal of Pip as at once the novel's condition for being, the novel's action, and the character in it: this gives the notions of authority and molestation I have been discussing an archetypal form. The first-person narration adds to the purity of Dickens's achievement.

Pip's name, he tells us at the outset, is the sort of beginning sign for the identity he is left with after he mixes and shortens his given name Philip Pirrip, words no longer meaningful to him but inherited by him "on the authority" of his parents' tombstones and by his sister's command. He lives, then, as an alternative being: as an orphan without real parents and as a harassed surrogate son of a much older sister. Throughout the novel the initial division will be perpetuated. On the other hand, there is Pip's natural, true genealogy that is banished from the novel at the outset, but which makes its appearance fitfully through Joe, Biddy, and the new little Pip who springs up near the novel's end. The fact that Joe Gargery is like a father to him, though in fact being his brother-in-law, makes Pip's alienation from the family continuity all the more poignant. On the other hand, the second branch in the novel's order is a substitute family, which has its roots in the unpleasant household of Mrs. Joe. Once established by Dickens, this order recurs throughout, with Pip going from one incarnation of it to another. This is the novel's most insistent

pattern of narrative organization: how Pip situates himself at and affiliates himself with the center of several family groups, families whose authority he challenges by trying to institute his own through the great expectations that finally destroy him. Each family is revealed successively to belong within the sphere of another, more dominant, prior one. Miss Havisham and Estella's circle later admits Jaggers, then Magwitch, then Molly and Compeyson. And after each revelation Pip finds himself a little more self-implicated and a little less central. Each discovery informs him that his beginning has been preceded by compromises that emerge, one after the other, to wound him.

In this sequence of discoveries Dickens allows Pip, even though he seems occasionally to be fortunate, to see how there is a necessary connection between himself and prison and crime. Those fearful things are real enough, as are, too, the harshness of his childhood, the schemes of Magwitch and Miss Havisham (his alternate parents), and the bankruptcy to which he arrives later on. Set against this theme is the motif of reassembling unpleasant fragments—for nothing is given whole to Pip, or to anyone else—into new, fabricated units. A brief sojourn at Miss Havisham's is transformed by Pip into an extraordinary adventure which, despite Joe's solemn warnings, he will repeat again and again. The ironical significance of Pip's constructions is accentuated by Wemmick's house, that fantastic melange of remnants fabricated into a mock-medieval castle by the man's irrepressible desire to create a better life at Falworth—and also by Wopsle's acting, for which Shakespeare is only a beginning excuse for a rather free improvisation. These, like Pip, are *bricoleurs*, who, "brought up by hand," by fits and starts, assert their authority over the threats of unpleasant dispersion.¹⁸ The image of a fabricating hand and its cognates is carried over into almost every corner of the novel: for example, chains are filed through, a release effected, and the hands retied in a different manner. Pip is linked by strong hands with Magwitch's and with Miss Havisham's compensatory impulses and, through Estella, with Molly's exceptionally powerful hands. After his breakdown, Pip finds himself reposing like a baby in Joe's paternal arms.

The basic scheme I have been describing is the cycle of birth and death. Pip's origin as a novelistic character is rooted in the death of his parents. By his wish to make up for that long series of graves and tombstones he creates a way for himself; and yet, over the novel's duration, Pip finds one route after another blocked,

only to force open another. Like Isabel and Dorothea, Pip as a character is conceived as excess, wanting more, trying to be more than in fact he is. The augmentations are finally all rooted in the death from which he springs, and to which he returns in the end. Only by then a new, more authentic dispensation has been bred, which finally yields up a new little Pip:

For eleven years I had not seen Joe nor Biddy with my bodily eyes—though they had both been often before my fancy in the East—when, upon an evening in December, an hour or two after dark, I laid my hand softly on the latch of the old kitchen door. I touched it so softly that I was not heard, and I looked in unseen. There, smoking his pipe in the old place by the kitchen firelight, as hale and as strong as ever, though a little grey, sat Joe; and there, fenced into the corner with Joe's leg, and sitting on my own little stool looking at the fire, was—I again!

"We giv' him the name of Pip for your sake, dear old chap," said Joe, delighted when I took another stool by the child's side (but I did *not* rumple his hair), "and we hoped he might grow a bit like you, and we think he do."¹⁹

Between them, the two Pips cover an expanse whose poles are true life, on the one hand, and novelistic life on the other. Both Dickens in *Great Expectations* and Flaubert in *Madame Bovary* use money to signify the protagonists' transitory power to shore up their authority to dream and even for a while to be something they cannot long remain being. Catherine, the aged farmworker, little Pip, Joe and Biddy—these are the inarticulate, abiding natures that money cannot touch nor illusion tempt.

Together little Pip and old Pip are Dickens's way of aligning the molestations of truth against an imperious authority badly in need of restraint. That Dickens makes the alignment explicitly only near the novel's end is a sign of how, relatively late in his novelistic career, he had come to see the problem of authority as rooted in the self and therefore to be checked primarily also by the self: hence little Pip appears only to *confirm* Pip's transgression, his subsequent education, and his irremediable alienation from the family of man. One indication of Dickens's later acute understanding of the self's way with itself is that in *Great Expectations* Pip undergoes the experiences of mystification and demystification on his own, *within himself*; whereas in *Martin Chuzzlewit* two estranged Martins, one young and one old, educate one another into a family embrace. In the later novel Dickens represents the harsher principles of authority—that at bottom the self wants its own way, unshared, and that its awakening to truth entails a still more unpleasant alienation from

others—which in the earlier novel he had divided between a pair of misunderstanding, willful relatives. The self's authority splits apart again later in the century—for example, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, in *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, and, later still, in "The Secret Sharer." In all three of these works, however, the alter ego is a hidden reminder of the primary self's unstable authority. Jekyll's sense of "the fortress of identity" includes as well a recognition that the fortress has hideous, molesting foundations. Dickens refused to embody these recognitions *outside* the individual, as would Wilde, Stevenson, and Conrad: it is imperative in Dickens's view that such an individual as Pip should become the architect equally of his expectations and of their destruction. Doubtless he saw Pip's predicament as one communally shared and even abetted. But nowhere is there any excuse for Pip—neither orphanhood, nor poverty, nor circumstance—that can reduce the deliberateness of his choices, his individual responsibility, and his often venal compromises with reality, all of which return finally to burden him:

That I had a fever and was avoided, that I suffered greatly, that I often lost my reason, that the time seemed interminable, that I confounded impossible existences with my own identity; that I was a brick in the house wall, and yet entreating to be released from the giddy place where the builders had set me; that I was a steel beam of a vast engine, clashing and whirling over a gulf, and yet that I implored in my own person to have the engine stopped, and my part in it hammered off; that I passed through these phases of disease, I know of my own remembrance, and did in some sort know at the time.²⁰

Here the severe repetitiveness of his realizations and their insistent parallelism appear to Pip as the actual material of a reality from which he has hitherto hidden himself. After such knowledge he can only be "a weak helpless creature" and thankful for the Gargery family's solicitude; but he remains an orphan.

Yet Pip's history begins with the loss of a family and—no less important—with a favor performed out of fear. Pip's act of terrified charity is the germ of his later experience; so far as the plot is concerned, it is the author of his history and, of course, of his troubles. One might be perhaps too rash to say that in its bases at least, Pip's act, with its extended consequences, is an aesthetic dialectical reduplication, even an ironic one, of the charity we associate with Christ's ministry and agony. And yet, directly or not, novels too reflect the ethos of the Christian West. The original instance of divine errancy, the Incarnation, transformed God into

man, an alternative being—the record of that mystery is given in language that only approximates the deed.

So, we might say, novels represent that process and its record at many removes, and after many secular transformations. The beginning attribution of authority to a character by a writer; the implementation of that authority in a narrative form, and the burdens and difficulties admitted as a result—all these are ways by which the almost numinous communal institutions of language accept and conserve the imprint of an individual force. This is why the novel is an institutionalization of the intention to begin. If in the end this institution chastens the individual, it is because he needs to be reminded that private authority is part of an integral truth that it nevertheless cannot fully imitate. The authority of any single piece of fiction repeats that insight, for invariably the central consciousness of a novel is found wanting in the wholeness which we normally associate with truth. Each piece of fiction, therefore, excludes a larger truth than it contains, even though it is the novelist's task to make his readers see active relationships among various orders of reality or truth both inside and outside the text. In few major novels does this activity dominate the author's concern more fully than in *Nostromo*, and so it is to a detailed examination of that work that we must now turn.

II

Despite its extravagant range of national and social origins, the cast of Conrad's *Nostromo*—the most massive of his works—is bound together by two inner affinities. The first is that everyone in the novel has an unflagging interest in the fortunes of Costaguana, for the most part in the form of a private vision of personal advantage. Charles Gould, for example, considers the good of Costaguana synonymous with the good of his work in the San Tomé mine. The second affinity is that nearly everyone seems extremely anxious about both keeping and leaving a personal "record" of his thoughts and action. This anxiety seems to be based upon an extraordinary preoccupation with the past, as if the past, left to itself, given only ordinary attention and no official recording, were somehow unthinkable and without sufficient authority.

After a few pages of impersonal geography and history, the

reader is led into Costaguana along the way cleared by Captain Mitchell, the English sea captain who has led a life of rather unthinking courage. For Mitchell, life in Costaguana has been a series of adventurous episodes, which he proudly dubs "historical events." When he later informs his audience that, like a much-lived much-traveled Aeneas, he too was a part of these events (*quarum magna pars fui*), the sizable distance separating his ingenuous record from the reality appears even wider. His loquacious and insistent recollection of the past takes for its theme the high adventure of life in Costaguana, though the dominant variation on that theme is the inherent rascality of the "foreign" mind. Mitchell's unfortunate run-in with the sanguine Sotillo—in which Mitchell clearly emerges as the victor—emphasizes the disparity between "colonial" and native, a disparity that removes Mitchell's recitation of his activities even further from the truth. In short, Mitchell has little sense of the complexity with which his artless narrative has been coping.

In no characterization does Mitchell's narrative miss the mark so widely as in his portrait of Nostromo. But in this Mitchell is only as wrong as everyone else. That the admirable *capataz de cargadores* has sacrificed his honor to a desire for a spotless, enviable reputation is a matter known only to Nostromo. Only Nostromo understands the meaning of his remark to Dr. Monygham in a moment of passionate irritation with the *hombres finos* who have apparently robbed him of his enviable reputation. He will later find out that he still has the reputation and, with it, an immensely onerous burden.) "The capataz is . . . destroyed," he says at this point; "there is no capataz" (p. 487).²¹ As the town, the republic, of Sulaco grows in prestige and wealth many years later, so also does Nostromo grow in eminence within the new republic. Yet he lives *outside* his fame, which to our eyes seems a thing apart from him, as if a great public reputation possessed its own authority. The man and his reputation have become completely distinct; to Sulaco, though, Nostromo's carefully engineered record of heroism *is* Nostromo, and Sulacoan independence is attributed to his efforts.

The more modern and civilized citizens of Costaguana are no less sanguine about the records they want left. Their subtle intelligences allow them, however, a scarcely more accurate sense of history. More nervous, more sophisticated and introspective, their "records"—kept by them in various ways—are hardly more than poignant abstractions for which there is little evident use.

Martin Decoud, the originator if not the executor of Sulacoan independence, finds time in the midst of a fierce bombardment to write his sister a letter that may never reach her.

In the most sceptical heart there lurks at such moments when the chances of existence are involved, a desire to leave a correct impression of the feelings, by which the action may be seen when personality is gone, gone where no light of investigation can ever reach the truth which every death takes out of the world. Therefore, instead of looking for something to eat or trying to snatch an hour or so of sleep, Decoud was filling the pages of a large notebook with a letter to his sister. (p. 255)

No matter how urgently recorded and felt, feelings like this are regrettably private; counterbalancing them in the novel is Don José Avellanós's enduring record in which the country's elder statesman leaves a public narrative of Costaguanan political life. His book, *Fifty Years of Misrule*, is written out of disinterested political wisdom; Decoud's letter to his sister, and his subsequent activity on behalf of Sulacoan integrity, are motivated by his lover's illusion.

Neither, if judged by their practical effects on Costaguanan history, can compare with the record left by Charles Gould, writ large in the incredibly influential history of the San Tomé silver mine whose economic and moral authority overrides the country with ever-increasing strength. Holroyd, who thinks of himself as leaving a record of his Christian altruism; Sir John, the British railroad builder who crisscrosses the land with steel rails that signify progress and expansion; and Gould, their reticent minion in Sulaco—these three work for the mine together under the auspices of Costaguana's major *idée reçue*: material interests. In the minds of their agents, these interests give rise to so dehumanized a set of goals that spiritual life petrifies into a slavish round of work in the service of the mine. The record of this work is, of course, preserved in the history of the mine's grand success.²²

To this maliciously successful record, Giorgio Viola's touching faith in "liberal" politics provides a sad and hopeless foil. His dedication to an irrelevant ideal—irrelevant because Costaguana is so thoroughly dominated by silver interests—makes him, in Sulaco, a relic to whose ponderous silence and majestic bearing the city is vaguely deferential. His one decisive act, the accidental murder of Nostromo, is a ceremony inspired by an ancestral record of "honor" and Garibaldean ethics. Inadvertently, Viola mars the record of Nostromo's perfection; this is the climax to what Douglas Hewitt calls Conrad's "deflating" of Nostromo.²³

Conrad's account of the novel's composition in his introductory note written many years after *Nostromo*'s completion in 1904²⁴ is very much like all of his other "notes": engaging, affable, and relaxed. In the phrase "the most anxiously meditated of [my] longer novels" (p. 1), for example, one gets only a *sense* of the trouble the novel caused him. Yet a random sampling of letters to friends written by Conrad while composing the novel reveals a struggle with difficulties of a sort that make "anxious meditation" seem an innocuous euphemism. Early in 1903, some weeks after he had begun the novel, he wrote H. G. Wells a letter that concluded with the following remarks:

I . . . am absolutely out of my mind with the worry and apprehension of my work. I go as one would cycle over a precipice along a 14-inch plank. If I falter I am lost.²⁵

In May he wrote Edward Garnett, his "literary confessor,"²⁶ that *Nostromo* was not yet one-quarter written: "I am indeed appalled at myself when I think what rotten contemptible bosh it must and shall be. By Jove I am too tired and with a heart worn too threadbare to be honest."²⁷ Conrad's honesty with his friend A. H. Davray was sufficient, on August 22, to describe a terrible state of affairs produced by stupor of mind, a disgust of his pen, and a terror of the inkpot. With half of the novel now written, he had embarked upon a terrible journey from which he could expect no relief: "Solitude is taking me over: it is absorbing me. I see nothing, I read nothing. It is like being in a tomb which is at the same time a hell where one must write, write, write."²⁸ On the same day he described himself to John Galsworthy as "a mental and moral outcast, . . . always deeper in the mire."²⁹ As the year wore on, writing *Nostromo* became more and more of a physical task. He wrote Wells on November 30 as if the book were threatening him with a physical catastrophe:

Things are bad with me—there's no disguising the fact. Not only is the scribbling awfully in arrears but there's no "spring" in me to grapple with it effectually. Formerly in my sea life, a difficulty nerved me to the effort: now I perceive it is not so. However, don't imagine I've given up, but there is an uncomfortable sense of losing my footing in deep waters. . . .

I say so because for me, writing—the only possible writing—is just simply the conversion of nervous force into phrases. With you too, I am sure, tho' in your case it is the disciplined intelligence which gives the signal—the impulse. For me it is a matter of chance, stupid chance. But the fact remains that when the nervous force is exhausted the phrases don't come—and no tension of will can help.³⁰

On December 5 he had reached page 567 of the novel, and at that moment, writing to A. K. Waliszewski, he felt it necessary to observe about himself that he had become "an Englishman . . . and a *homo duplex*, in more than one sense."³¹ The letter was written at a time when Conrad knew that appeals to his publisher for sympathy for his overworked capacities and for his terrific spiritual problems with his work would neither earn pity nor gain an extension of deadlines. In 1902 he had weathered a severe crisis with William Blackwood, then his publisher.³² Now, at work on the most troublesome project of all, Conrad realized that the shortest way to the world's affections was a show of cheer; he hoped that a stiff upper lip would make him more understandable to his adopted countrymen. The horrors of composition continued, of course, but he developed a rather mannered outward composure. He literally created a genial, outward Conrad, his *persona*, to whom struggles with work were unknown except as manifestations of an underground second-self over whom he had no control.³³ As Conrad continued in later years to please his successfully won-over public, the underground man disappeared; the evasive and charming author of the introductory notes remained instead. So amiable and authoritative a personage could not discuss such embarrassments as, for example, the loss of spiritual footing; molestations like that were better left in an ignorant, hidden past. Thus the personal record the author presented to his public was as different from the realities that the record concealed as Captain Mitchell's "historical events" are different from real events. (Mitchell, of course, is ignorant of what really happened; Conrad was not, obviously.) The "*homo duplex* in more than one sense" that Conrad spoke of to Waliszewski refers, I think, to the consciously authored doubleness of his life at the time that he was working on *Nostromo*. If for no other reason than a desire to forget what was extremely unpleasant to him, he postured outwardly as if everything was fine, and—because he seemed to have little choice—he continued his hellish efforts to finish his novel.

By the early part of 1904 he was again writing Wells, this time assuring him that "no one's position is too absurd to be argued with. An enlightened egoism is as valid as an enlightened altruism—neither more nor less."³⁴ The meaning of this assertion is that Conrad had arrived at a point where two opposing positions, or realities, seemed to have equal validity. Was this not another way of saying that his real struggles with *Nostromo* on the

one hand, and his public image on the other, were each making acute claims on him? Each demanded from him a sort of ultimate recognition. Two equally articulate individualities fighting within the same single existence led him to the brink of madness: on April 5, 1904, he wrote to David Meldrum that he was "verging on insanity."³⁵ That he managed to go on with what he used to call "that dread thing" is, I think, something of a miracle. He suffered many bouts of debilitating illness, his wife was also frequently ill, and, as his letters to William Rothenstein show, he was almost continually in financial straits. Writing Rothenstein on June 27, he said:

I dare do nothing. Either my soul or my liver is very sick. If it is the liver then the cold shall make it worse. Even here I go about shuddering when a cloud passes over the sun. And I am tired, tired, as if I had lived a hundred years. Reverting to the matter of that salvage you are conducting to preserve a rather rotten old hulk (but full of the best intentions)—I think. . . . [Here follows some detailed advice and requests about some money Rothenstein was arranging to get for Conrad.] It is late—and tomorrow is another dread day. G. Graham has been here for the Sunday and we talked much of you. He is in very good form and very friendly but the episode of his visit has not refreshed me as much as I expected. I am not myself and shall not be myself till I am born again, until after *Nostromo* is finished.³⁶

The agony was terminated a short time later: *Nostromo* was finished on August 30, 1904. Eight years later he wrote André Gide of the novel in terms that expressed a combination of incredulity and alienation, for by 1912 the composition of *Nostromo* had become a problematic experience he could no longer stand to recollect in detail: "It's a black oven [*un four noir*], you know. I, I have a kind of tenderness for that enormous machine. But it doesn't work; that is true. There is something that prevents it from working. I don't know what. All in all, even with all my tenderness, I myself cannot stand to read it."³⁷ Because Gide was one of Conrad's closer friends, the letter has none of that impersonal whimsy of which Conrad was capable in his introductory notes. Nevertheless, it is quite apparent that a disengagement has occurred in Conrad's mind between the actual process of composing the novel and his manner of recalling the experience some years later. Perhaps the manner of the later recollection was only a convenient way of narrating a messy affair; after all, who inclines to specific details when details—unpleasant ones with neither shape nor focus—are all that one remembers?

There is an interesting parallel to be drawn between the characters of *Nostromo* and Conrad himself. In each case the

individual has performed or witnessed problematic, jumbled action from which a descriptive record is distilled and then authorized for public consumption. So restless is this action, so engrossing its complications, that, at the time it occurs, the individual is totally immersed in it. When the action is later recalled, it has become "history," which in the novel at least is usually a comparatively thin record whose author is a known figure: his work appears as a summary definition of the past. In their recollection of the past, the characters of *Nostromo* are also affected by their idealism, which, to judge by its force, borders on vanity. Nostromo's ideal of what a brave man should be forces him to hide the secret of his scandalous theft; among his fellow citizens he pretends that the silver has sunk to the bottom of the Golfo Placido so that they may continue to believe that his "record" of behavior is still unimpeachable. There is little doubt that his interest in the silver is quite subordinate to his concern about his reputation. But the novel's task is to represent the actuality, the record of it by an individual, and the individual himself in the act of being an author as he mediates between actuality and record. All three of these things add up to *Nostromo's* dense fabric.

So strong a plan of representation derives, I think, from Conrad's habit of viewing his life as an uneasy compromise between two conflicting modes of existence. Because it reflects Conrad's radical uncertainty about himself and also the tension he so often felt between opposed positions on any given matter, it is a complex habit. The first mode is to experience reality as an unfolding process, as action-being-made, as always "becoming." To experience all of this is to feel oneself in the midst of reality. The second mode is to feel reality as a hard quantity, very much "there" and definable. To experience this is to view reality retrospectively, since only in looking back upon what has already occurred can one master the unceasing movement of action-being-made. In other words, the first mode is that of the actor, the second that of the author. Yet because mastery inevitably means control, the retrospective view modifies, and even contradicts, the richly complex dynamics of a specific action. In *Nostromo* the two modes are of course the conflict between immersion in action and the retrospective definition (record) of that action; and as readers, we are expected to note the often startling disparities between action and record that such a conflict produces.

We are also expected to ask whether a correspondence between the record and the action is ever to be hoped for.

Presumably such a correspondence is possible for most people in some situations, yet it is never even momentarily allowed in *Nostromo*—except, as we shall see in a moment, in Emelia Gould's mind. The rest of the time the characters who carry out the retrospection distort reality almost beyond recognition. This is one of the novel's peculiarities—that each character is portrayed as the author of a record in conflict with several other records. That is why nearly every character seems curiously myopic about Costaguanan politics. No one wants to see the whole of what is really happening. Instead everyone sees what he likes to *believe* happened. The result of this myopia in Costaguana gives *Nostromo* one of its principle subjects.

The reconciliation between action and record is performed by Mrs. Gould, the only character in the novel with really accurate vision. She has the capacity both for understanding action as it happens and for being aware of the psychological traps men create for themselves as they cast a congratulatory glance back over their activity and plan new action. It is, after all, because the retrospective inaccuracy of a personal record breeds inaccurate, wrongheaded self-assessments that Charles Gould is so pathetic a figure in the novel. A lifelong education in the pathetic mismanagement of a life comes to Emelia during the course of her marriage to Charles. She watches him slowly drawn away from her by the attractive personal challenge he finds in the mine. The more successfully he copes with the challenge, the more he is claimed by material interests. For his success is measured in the enlarging scope of his material interests: he is Charles Gould first, and then he becomes *el rey de Sulaco*. But Emelia can admire the king at the same time that she knows the other Charles, a poor slave who sacrifices himself to the delusion that silver, his silver, can be humane. The more he is a king, the less able he is to know what a slave really is.

Emelia's ability to see accurately and at the same time charitably to accept people for what they are is so unique in the novel that every one of the men is attracted to her. Dr. Monygham sees her as a good fairy seated in a charmed circle at the Casa Gould. Decoud quite naturally gravitates toward her quiet house and honors her even as he loves Antonia Avellanos. It is left to Nostromo—perhaps because he has dared the most—to pay her the supreme compliment, which is to reveal his dishonoring secret to her. During that wonderfully described, hushed moment toward the end of the novel, the uncomfortable vacillation between what

Nostromo is and what he has made others believe about himself—the authorized version—is revealed to Mrs. Gould. The spell he has cast on Sulaco is broken, and he is exposed as a thief. Because the Republic of Sulaco owes its independence to his daring ride over the mountains for royalist help (“He carried all our lives in his hands,” p. 539), it also is exposed as a state based on a sham reputation. Here is a portion of the scene:

“Nostromo,” Mrs. Gould whispered, bending very low, “I, too, have hated the idea of that silver from the bottom of my heart.”

“Marvellous!—that one of you should hate the wealth that you know so well how to take from the hands of the poor. The world rests upon the poor, as old Giorgio says. You have been always good to the poor. But there is something accursed in wealth. Señora, shall I tell you where the treasure is? To you alone. . . . Shining! Incorruptible!”

A pained voluntary reluctance lingered in his tone, in his eyes, plain to the woman with the genius of sympathetic intuition. She averted her glance from the miserable subjection of the dying man, appalled, wishing to hear no more of the silver.

“No, capataz,” she said. “No one misses it now. Let it be lost forever.” (pp. 624-25)

The intense poignancy of the scene is all the more effective when we remember the agonies of Conrad’s creative life. It is not difficult to imagine him wishing for some relief from the deception of the pose he was forced to assume. Nevertheless, he must have known that his entire creative existence could remain viable only so long as he maintained his masquerade as a cheery writer of tough adventure yarns. He could never confess himself to anyone, but he could do it vicariously in nearly every one of his stories. For all of his heroes hide some shameful secret, and each of them dreams of the day when he can be cleared before those he loves best. Yet Conrad’s severity of vision enables Mrs. Gould to express understanding and assurance without granting either one or the other to anyone else in the novel. Busy Sulaco has become so prosperous that its shabby past can no longer embarrass it. It stands above its complicated history, secure in the unambiguous record of its rags-to-riches adventure. Only Mrs. Gould knows Sulaco for what it is, but she can never make her knowledge effective. Her moment of greatest understanding and illumination is also her moment of least practical influence. Yet she knows that it is possible for the integrity and courage of one person to sustain the life of a nation. So, as Nostromo once saved Sulaco with his daring ride (although he had already by then dishonored himself), now she preserves Sulaco’s record by withholding a secret certain

to dishonor the country. Here, the refusal to be an author is a quality worthy of admiration. The tragic fact, of course, is that her courageous act is nugatory by the standards of modern politics; of what use is it to possess a morally harmful secret about a whole country? From what sort of real, tangible threat has she saved Sulaco? The magnificence of the moment does not entirely depend upon our admiration for Mrs. Gould, but also upon Conrad’s justly cynical depiction of her as a frail, politically powerless woman, childless, a parent without offspring as much as a good fairy without good deeds. One can picture her proclaiming her secret in order to arouse the conscience of Sulaco—and being diplomatically hushed by Don Juste, the elegant parliamentarian.

* * * * *

As in so many of his other works, in *Nostromo* Conrad pits the sea against the land as if they represented opposing values; unlike most of his “typical” works, however, *Nostromo* concerns itself mainly with land affairs. Yet the sea is very much a power of which Costaguana is aware: it defines the republic’s coast, a vast, inexpressibly strong and unchanging desert, very different in its eternal brooding from the petty self-seeking of land life. The sea swallows up Martin Decoud with huge indifference to his human littleness; in his final yielding to it, Decoud seems drawn to its unlimited power like a man seeking union with the infinite.

Decoud’s death very convincingly dramatizes the difference between land and sea. The values of the land in *Nostromo* have been concentrated into silver, which, when put to the test of the open sea off Costaguana, fails Decoud miserably. The history of the land is begun when values, like those of the silver, are made the focal point of all subsequent life. Yet silver gradually assumes still greater influence in the lives of Costaguanans. By the end of the novel it has practically become the *raison d’être* of the independent Republic of Sulaco. Decoud goes as far as to call the silver-producing mine “the greatest fact in the whole of South America” (p. 237). The silver enslaves everyone in the novel except Mrs. Gould, for whom alone silver’s valuable solidity and hardness is not an attraction. The trouble is that silver seems to provoke visions of concrete power and achievement in the minds of its devotees. Men want to model their lives into perfect, hard blocks of silver; yet they do not realize that such lives will be stunted and selfish. From its beginning, the craze for silver displaces normal human judgment so completely as to divert the broad course of human activity into a narrow stream that

resembles molten silver flowing into an ingot mold. This prisonlike activity is the record of Costaguana suffering under the influence of "material interests," a general dementia of which silver fetishism is a particular branch.

To have put all of this into the book is not a simpleminded social novelist's trick to shock readers into an appreciation of the value of spiritual interests—or, for that matter, of "sea" interests. *Nostromo* has little to do with advocating other interests over material ones. It accepts material interests as a fact and not as a fantasy to be wished away. The novel does, however, use Costaguana's beginning passion for these interests in order to trace a pattern, ostensibly social, historical, and economical, which makes pertinent reference to human psychology and to a kind of inscape of Conrad's mind. Thus *Nostromo* is a novel about political history that is reduced, over the course of several hundred pages, to a condition of mind, an inner state. It is like a *trompe-l'oeil* painting of a city that upon closer inspection turns out to be an anatomical drawing of the brain.

Like all great novels, *Nostromo* has an almost inviolable objective impersonality; but unlike most great novels, *Nostromo* also has a very subjective personality of its own that criticizes and undermines the objective edifice. This point cannot be emphasized too strongly, for it has become customary to speak of *Nostromo* as belonging to the same class of fiction as *War and Peace*, in terms not only of size but also of manner and conception.³⁸ In sheer size, of course, the two novels are similar; but beyond that, comparing them is not valuable. *Nostromo* aspires to no authority on matters of history and sociology, and neither does it create a normative world that resembles our own. Rather, it is the result of a strangely idiomatic vision (something which *War and Peace* is able to conceal definitively) that obviously derives from the almost incredibly peculiar life and vision of its author. Finally, *Nostromo* is most assuredly not the product of a great established literature. Even though it is written in English, its author was not an Englishman but a Polish émigré who was educated in France. Because its origin as a novel is so devious, *Nostromo* bears little resemblance to novels in either French, English, or Russian. It is most profitable to compare the novel with novels written in the more insecure, individualistic, and nervous American tradition. *Nostromo's* closest counterpart anywhere—at least in strangeness of idiom and intention—is *Moby Dick*.

There are certain clues planted in *Nostromo* that incline one to

view the novel as a solid, objective edifice undermined and haunted by a private vision; and since these clues need to be connected with one another and with what we have been saying about the silver, they require detailed description. The most immediate fact in the novel is Costaguana, somewhere on the coast of South America, a country whose history reflects the continent of which it is a part. The heritage of South America is, "as the great Liberator Bolivar had said in the bitterness of his spirit, [that] 'America is ungovernable. Those who worked for her independence have ploughed the sea'" (p. 206). In this struggle for independence the "ancestral Goulds," whose presence in Costaguana is so "indelible" (p. 52), participate very actively. They have been there for three generations, prospering as merchants, revolutionists, and liberators; they are well known and respected. Until the era of Charles Gould, however, no Gould could command the respect and influence that earns the mine's latest owner the title *el rey de Sulaco*. The background of this title is what, in the Gould chronicle, concerns the novel most.

Unlike his ancestors, Charles has come to Costaguana after many years of life abroad; in this he is similar to the majority of characters in the novel. Each of them has a period of expatriation from Costaguana—on the one hand because of exile, or, on the other, because of foreign birth. In the first group are Decoud, Montero, and Don José; in the second *Nostromo*, the Violas, Dr. Monygham, and Captain Mitchell. During the course of the novel each of these characters earns his citizenship in Costaguana either by an act or by a process of naturalization. Charles Gould's naturalization is accomplished under urgent pressures. He grows up as a homeless Englishman in Europe who is helplessly tied to a desperately angry father. Thousands of miles separate the boy and his father, and the boy grows into manhood with a need for attachment and purpose. Gould senior has been given the mine concession against his will as a payment for a loan, and since the mine is sterile he wastes his life in frustration. Charles, however, becomes more interested in the mine at the same time that his father is slowly being killed by it (p. 63). What for the father had been a bitter waste of effort is a challenge to the son's moral strength: not only will the mine vindicate his father's tenacity, but it will also be the instrument of Costaguana's betterment. At this point Charles cannot see that his own ambitions and the country's improvement are almost the same thing. In young Emelia he finds a worthy companion and steward of his hopes, and he marries her

immediately after receiving news of his father's death. In the following passage Conrad characterizes them at the time of their marriage:

These two young people remembered the life which had ended wretchedly just when their own lives had come together in that splendor of hopeful love, which to the most sensible minds appears like a triumph of good over all the evils of the earth. A vague idea of rehabilitation entered the plan of their life. That it was so vague as to elude the support of argument made it only the stronger. It had presented itself to them at the instant when the woman's instinct of devotion and the man's instinct of activity receive from the strongest of illusions their most powerful impulse. The very prohibition imposed the necessity of success. It was as if they had been morally bound to make good their vigorous view of life against the unnatural error of weariness and despair. (pp. 81-82)

When transplanted from Europe to Costaguana, "a vigorous view of life" and an "idea of rehabilitation" become modern concepts that implicitly defy Bolivar's bitter maxim. Charles can be defiant because he is young; and as any reader of Conrad's "Youth" will remember, youth has a facility for romanticizing unpleasant realities. Charles also has a severe sense of rectitude; he is like an architect who sees that a building is "off" because of some defect in construction and cannot resist correcting it. Yet making a success of the mine represents more to him than the fulfillment of a moral imperative. Once he realizes that "the mine had been the cause of an absurd disaster" and that "its working must be made a serious and moral success" (p. 64), Charles begins to respond to the attractions of action considered for its own sake. He thinks that doing something is always better than doing nothing, particularly as his father's plight has taught him the unhappiness of inactivity. Charles's plan is to rebuild the mine, to rework it, and so to "plough the sea" to which Bolivar referred. Furthermore, the mine project is Charles's way of disproving his father—and God—neither of whom had seen anything of worth in Costaguana.

And he asked his wife whether she remembered a passage in one of his father's last letters where Mr. Gould had expressed the conviction that "God looked wrathfully at these countries, or else He would let some ray of hope fall through a rift in the appalling darkness of intrigue, bloodshed, and crime that hung over the Queen of Continents."

Mrs. Gould had not forgotten. "You read it to me, Charley," she murmured. "It was a striking pronouncement. How deeply your father must have felt its terrible sadness!"

"He did not like to be robbed. It exasperated him," said Charles Gould.

"But the image will serve well enough. What is wanted here is law, good faith, order, security. Any one can declaim about these things, but I pin my faith to material interests. Only let the material interests once get a firm footing, and they are bound to impose the conditions of which alone they can continue to exist. That's how your money-making is justified here in the face of lawlessness and disorder. It is justified because the security which it demands must be shared with an oppressed people. A better justice will come afterwards. That's your ray of hope." His arm pressed her slight form closer to his side for a moment. "And who knows whether in that sense even the San Tomé mine may not become the little rift in the darkness which poor father despaired of ever seeing?"

She glanced up at him with admiration. He was competent; he had given a vast shape to the vagueness of her unselfish ambitions. (pp. 92-93)

Charles embarks upon his mission, his mind preserving "its steady poise as if sheltered in the passionless stability of private and public decencies at home in Europe" (p. 53). He believes in work, in honesty, in self-possessed conduct, in steadfastness. Like the other characters in the novel, he believes that if he abides by his program (which he believes will be his record for the future) and acts according to it, then the results foreseen by the program will in fact be realized. The more he believes and then acts on his belief, the more tenaciously he clings to his beliefs—and the less capable he is of thinking critically about what he is doing and why. Man, Conrad reminds us, "is a desperately conservative creature" (p. 61). Gould's conservatism—as anyone's might be—is of the kind that banishes thought from his existence on the grounds that thought might produce ideas capable of damaging what is being conserved. In time, Charles falls victim to a vicious circle of activity as completely as his father was frustrated by the futility of South America. "Action is consolatory. It is the enemy of thought and the friend of flattering illusions. Only in the conduct of our actions can we find the sense of mastery of the Fates. For his action, the mine was obviously the only field" (p. 72).

It seems to Gould that life—instead of being, as Marlow had put it eloquently and somewhat evasively in *Heart of Darkness*, "a mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose"³⁹—is the satisfactory realization of an easily understandable logic. Take for your beginning the most chaotic place on earth, believe something strongly enough, apply it to that place, and you are able to author a new beginning whose intention is to make order out of chaos, because underneath everything there is a benign continuity. The discernment of that order, however, is

subject to the burdens—indeed, to the molestations—of all individually authored schemes; but no one seems aware of so disastrous a snag. Even as wise a man as Don José Avellanos believes in benign impersonal continuity. The title of his book reminds us that for all of those fifty years of misrule there could have been a right rule. Old Giorgio Viola intuitively knows the right rules merely by looking at his treasured portrait of Garibaldi; Decoud at first lives his life according to the rules of a boulevardier; and Captain Mitchell stubbornly applies the ramrod-stiff code of the imperialist English gentleman among the “natives.” Each of them insists that his view of the world is the right one. It is a familiar rationale. More than likely, Conrad may have discovered its abstract pattern in Schopenhauer, who, as Galsworthy informs us, had been a great favorite of Conrad’s.⁴⁰ For what is an uncritical, sustained belief in order but egoism based on the assumption that “the world is my idea”? The purpose of this egoism is a sense of mastery over life, and its true beginning perhaps the fear that life may not be worth living after all, or that without a decreed beginning life cannot have method.

As always, Emilia Gould is different from the others; or, if she is not different at bottom, her character is less overtly venal. As a young girl she seems to have been so sure of her competency in living as to expect an equal competency in anyone she would love. “Charles had struck her imagination from the first by his unsentimentalism, by that very quietude of mind which she had erected in her thought for a sign of perfect competency in the business of living” (p. 54). When she becomes the first lady of Sulaco, “gifted in the art of human intercourse” (p. 50), we are given superficial evidence of the competency in her; a more profound sign of that competency is her realization that it is only Charles who can give “a vast shape . . . to the vagueness of her unselfish ambitions” (p. 93). Another person, an incompetent one, might have stood in his way; but *she* dedicates herself—with *noblesse oblige*—to the furtherance of his ambitions. Society in Sulaco is hers; whereas her husband conquers the land financially and politically, she conquers it socially.

A woman with a masculine mind is not a being of superior efficiency; she is simply a phenomenon of imperfect differentiation—interestingly barren and without importance. Doña Emilia’s intelligence being feminine led her to achieve the conquest of Sulaco, simply by lighting the way for her unselfishness and sympathy. She could converse charmingly, but she was not talkative. The wisdom of the heart having no concern with the erection or

demolition of theories any more than with the defence of prejudices, has no random words at its command. The words it pronounces have the value of acts of integrity, tolerance, and compassion. A woman’s true tenderness, like the true virility of man, is expressed in action of a conquering kind. (pp. 73-74)

Conrad leaves us in little doubt that the “action of a conquering kind” (which we shall discuss a little later) is undertaken by the Goulds because they have committed themselves from the beginning of their married life to the world they have created, the world in which their “unselfish ambitions” are given concreteness and form. At the moment that Emilia accepts her husband on that unhappy day in Italy many years ago, Conrad writes, “immediately the future hostess of all the Europeans in Sulaco had the physical experience of the earth falling away from under her. It vanished completely, even to the very sound of the bell” (p. 69). Charles’s world becomes hers, and the history of their married life becomes the history of the mine (p. 73). The mere business of living is transformed by them into watching over a vested interest. It is their world and they become unthinkable without it: life turns into a perpetually renewed act of attachment. Their beginning provides their later existence with ceremony and continuity.

The norm of Charles’s existence is the constant saving of the country from the savagery of its inhabitants (pp. 53-54). Every intellectual and spiritual value that usually complicates human life (scepticism and self-criticism, for example) is put aside. Instead, all values derive from the silver ingots that, standing for the beginning of life, have become life’s goal. To the Goulds, and indeed to everyone in Costaguana, the silver is not merely the object of a simple concupiscence; if it were that, it would have been easy, as Conrad’s predecessors among the Victorian sages had done, to rail at the obvious corruptions brought on by the cash-nexus. No, the silver has “a justificative conception, as though it were not a mere fact, but something far-reaching and impalpable, like the true expression of an emotion or the emergency of a principle” (p. 118). It follows that “the San Tomé mine was to become an institution, a rallying-point for everything in the province that needed order and stability to live. Security seemed to flow upon this land from the mountain-range” (p. 122).

With his “shoulders sustaining the whole weight of the *imperium in imperio*” (p. 164), Gould is to Costaguana as Shakespeare’s Prospero is to his island. The management of the

mine, his constant visits to it, and the dynamite he plants in it are evidence of his commanding executive spirit regarding the mine. He is able to radiate magical influence into every corner of Sulacoan life; the Casa Gould is Sulaco's version of Prospero's cave. But just as Prospero has sacrificed his own dukedom for the scholar's robes, so conversely has Gould sacrificed his proper estate, his humanity, for the mine. Emelia Gould is her husband's only concession to humanity, for, as he once tells her, the best of his feelings are in her keeping (p. 79). Such a remark makes it possible, I think, to speak of the death of Gould's soul, if we mean by *soul* that entity in man which is most concerned with human feeling and activity. The engrossing work that Gould performs for the mine's sake has claimed his attention so thoroughly (particularly as it is work requiring a minimum of human feeling) that his soul has become supererogatory and simply ceases to exist. As evidence of this death, one ought to consider, for example, that for a character so apparently powerful in Sulaco Gould radiates an extraordinary passivity, especially when he is compared with his wife and with the three energetic characters in the novel—Decoud, Nostromo, and Dr. Monygham—who also undergo a death of the soul.

Gould dies in the mine's service but is never reborn out of it. Rather than ennobling him, it debases him, and he "lives" on a purely mechanical level as a dehumanized organizer, the archforeman of an endless mechanical process. There is something of the same depressing effect of Gould's activity in Lawrence's description of Gerald Crich in *Women in Love*, who totally organizes his family's coal mine into what becomes, for Lawrence, a monument to death-in-life. Decoud's agony on the *Isabel* is that he suffers a death whose cause is the crushing of his soul by a solitude that he cannot resist. Even if Decoud's struggles against the overwhelming power of silent immensities do not save him, he has nevertheless remained vital right up to the end: his recollections of Antonia and his ironic musings on his predicament are proofs of his human activity, even though his beginning is an insubstantial sentiment. Gould of course survives human solitude only because he concedes his human problems and works uniquely for the sake of an inhuman process. Nostromo dies a metaphorical death on the Golfo Placido, but he is reborn a thief and a scoundrel. Monygham, too, has died when, under the torture devised by Guzman Bento, he betrays himself completely. Yet he later chooses a myth—Mrs. Gould—and begins to live again, using it to

prop up his existence. Emelia, who is frequently described as a fairy, is something of a magic triumph for all that is best in humanity. Is it not magic, in so threatening and dehumanized a world, for her soul to retain its identity so that she is herself, alive and human, at every point in the novel?

Emelia's resilient consistency of character is remarkable because *Nostromo* is so concerned, even obsessed, with rapid change, with inaugurations of new states, with a cascade of beginnings that initiate novel visions, actions, and protagonists. There are constant changes from one political status to the next, from one emotional mood to another, from one personal confrontation to another. The paradox is that all these bewildering changes occur for one unchanging reason: the silver, the arch-beginning. In his own life, Gould typifies the change made for the silver's sake: while his feelings are in someone else's keeping, he has become the mine's wholly devoted steward. Since, in so becoming, he has given the country one firm, unimpeachable, unchanging value—the silver—and has himself become as constant as the mine, it remains for everyone else to adjust to these constant values. Each person believes himself to have made a perfect adjustment, and yet each of these adjustments provokes discord. The reason for this is quite apparent: to everyone, the best adjustment is the final possession of the mine. No wonder that immediately after the mine is established in Costaguana a whole series of revolutions takes place. Only when Gould decides to intervene on the side of the Blanco party is order restored; Gould and the Blancos bring Ribiera, who is "their own creature" (p. 41), to power.

The extent of "revolutions," of inaugurations into new states, in Sulaco is further complicated and enriched by Conrad's subtle, yet functional, adumbration of the South American setting. He shows, for example, the relationship between the atmosphere of the New World and the art of declamation (p. 91) which presses for continual changes in the emotional and political status quo. Also, he understands the effect of Old World Caesarism upon the emerging political mentality of the New World. The brilliantly accurate account of the Monterist revolt is a result of Conrad's grasp of this phenomenon. Most remarkably, he catches the climate of ungovernable excess that dominates life in Sulaco once there has occurred the critical break from the values that the silver has dislodged—a break for which the Goulds are perhaps responsible.

Conrad's representation of life in Sulaco is so consistently convincing in both its dramatic and social aspects that one tends to forget that he is depicting a world based upon unreality. The mine's service is extremely demanding, and it is long; but it is not, as one might think merely "normal": the illusion of normality is all the more remarkable when Conrad extends it to cover all phases of life in Costaguana. Yet to have considered the implications of the action of the novel, as we have done, is to see the entire foreground of the novel as undergoing a prolonged revelation of horror, a revelation initiated at the beginning of the mine's influence and ending with Nostromo's death. In order to make this a little clearer, it will be useful to review the distinction made in the first part of this discussion between action and record in *Nostromo*. To read *Nostromo* as if its intensely articulated surface were all there was to it (and, I hasten to add, the richly documented surface is designed to give the illusion of all the truth one needs to know) is to read a record very much like the ones created by the various characters in the novel. This is another way of saying that *Nostromo* is masquerading as an ordinary political or historical novel. The real action, on the other hand, is psychological and concerns man's overambitious intention to author his own world because the world as he finds it is somehow intolerable: this action underlies the historical and political events in *Nostromo*. The horror occurs in the gradual, prolonged discovery that the world created by one man is just as intolerable as the world he has superceded. Such a far-reaching conclusion needs political and historical substantiation; hence *Nostromo*'s bias for connecting individuals to history, and history to the cruel designs of life.

The example of Charles Gould is instructive. In his decision to take up his father's work in the mine he is given very little real choice. Can one believe that he could have done anything else except return to Costaguana and make a moral success of the mine that had killed his father?

Two big lamps with unpolished glass globes bathed in a soft and abundant light the four white walls of the room, with a glass case of arms, the brass hilt of Henry Gould's cavalry sabre on its square of velvet, and the water-color sketch of the San Tomé gorge. And Mrs. Gould, gazing at the last in its black wooden frame, sighed out:

"Ah, if we had left it alone, Charles!"

"No," Charles Gould said, moodily; "it was impossible to leave it alone."

"Perhaps it was impossible," Mrs. Gould admitted slowly. (p. 231)

Because he is a man, and because life has placed him at an impasse ("Forget about the mine that has killed your father and do something else"), Gould must resort to action of a begetting kind. What begins for him as a sort of sophisticated vengeance in the name of his father turns, before he is aware of it, into a desire to master life, to make it subservient to him. Like many of Conrad's other protagonists, Gould is decoyed by life into an impossible course of action. The difference between Kurtz and Gould is that whereas Kurtz pronounces on the machinery of existence—"The horror, the horror"—Gould is silent: he goes on with the work he has begotten.

The major similarity between Kurtz's experience in Africa and Gould's in South America is to be found in the atmosphere, which, because it is conducive to extremes of thought and emotions (perhaps because it is "foreign"), stimulates the protagonist to further efforts at mastery. The so-called New World of South America is Conrad's metaphor for the whole modern world which, because of its addiction to extreme forms of action stemming from willful beginnings, persuades morally convinced people of the necessity for action of a mastering, conquering kind. The articulate Decoud muses on the character of the New World:

There is a curse of futility upon our character: Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, chivalry and materialism, high-sounding sentiments and a supine morality, violent efforts for an ideal and a sullen acquiescence in every form of corruption. (p. 189)

Left to themselves, Quixote and Sancho might destroy each other in a crazed war. But, as Decoud says, behind this deeply divided character are "the natural treasures of Costaguana." They "are of importance to the progressive Europe represented by this youth" (p. 189). So Gould, the representative of progressive Europe, seeks to possess that treasure because it means revenge for his father, the imposition of order in the New World, and the chance to dominate.

Gould is convinced that what he does is right. Once again the prescient Decoud comments indirectly: "It seemed to [Decoud] that every conviction, as soon as it becomes effective, turned into the form of dementia the gods send upon those they wish to destroy" (p. 221). The real horror of this thought becomes apparent when one reflects on the impossibility of life without conviction. Life is authoritative action: action is based upon conviction: conviction is the molestation underlying dementia: therefore, life is dementia. Decoud himself proves this. Raillery to

man's futile attempt to author his world + leave a record

here closer to Miller

but what about Mrs. Gould?

him is a way of life: he scoffs at everything and accepts nothing. Yet he leaves Sulaco on a crazy errand with the silver because he is a man capable of a lover's illusion (which is a form of conviction whose aim is domination). As he dies, the illusion becomes less and less applicable to the terrifying solitude that underlies the life without action to which he is committed on the Isabel. His more successful companion, Nostromo, is another example of the process repeated. Decoud dies, but Nostromo emerges from the darkness as a thoroughgoing cheat. In the end Nostromo is also destroyed, and we are left asking the same question about life that Conrad himself is asking: is there any other pattern, any other outcome for an intentional beginning, in life? In Sulaco there is an unreal prosperity based on Gould's mission and Nostromo's exploit. On the Golfo Placido, what is there but solitude and death?

After Nostromo returns from the sea, and after he rides over the mountains to save Sulaco, we are reintroduced to Sulaco, once again by Captain Mitchell. If his first guided tour of the city (which occupied the early part of the novel) was inaccurate, the second is nothing but well-intentioned propaganda. As if to underline the irony in Mitchell's views on Sulaco's new-found prosperity, Conrad has him take a hypothetical visitor on a tour of all the main "places of interest"; the point is that propagandistic descriptions of monuments, as Nietzsche once observed, provide one with the most insufficient and inaccurate sort of history. And so goes the chronicle of Sulaco. It flourishes in its monumental prosperity, with its silver exports reaching every corner of the world, and excludes, in the manner described by Foucault, everything inimical to it. In Foucault's terminology one can also say that Sulaco's archives contain rarefied versions of its history. "The most famous and desperate affair" (p. 582) of one man's life has thus produced the very richest rewards. The reader is caught up in the jocular warmth of a wealthy country, jealous of its prestige and power, a partner among civilized nations. No one in Sulaco (except for Mrs. Gould) has second thoughts about the origins of Sulaco's power and wealth: no one remembers Costaguana, no one really cares about Decoud's death, no one worries much about the meaning of Sulaco's independence. This, of course, is the way of political life, and Conrad portrays it realistically and "archeologically."

But we must remember that Sulaco is a newly created state and that as such it represents the triumph of Gould's work, which

has been to create his own world, to rule it, to possess it completely. Just as the silver has come to symbolize an objectified, justificative value, so too does Sulaco represent the objectified wish of one man. In defying life's intractability, Gould has escaped into a world of his own making—a world, however, that finally makes a prisoner of him. Only his wife is able to articulate her awareness of the horrible perfection that this plan has achieved:

She saw the San Tomé mountain hanging over the Campo, over the whole land, hated, wealthy, more soulless than any tyrant, more pitiless and autocratic than the worst government, ready to crush innumerable lives in the expansion of its greatness. He did not see it. He could not see it. It was not his fault. He was perfect, perfect. . . . But she saw clearly the San Tomé mine possessing, consuming, burning up the life of the last of the Costaguana Goulds; mastering the energetic spirit of the son as it had mastered the lamentable weakness of the father. A terrible success for the last of the Goulds. . . . An immense desolation, the dread of her own continued life, descended upon the first lady of Sulaco. With a prophetic vision she saw herself surviving alone the degradation of her young ideal of life, of love, of work—all alone in the Treasure House of the World. The profound, blind, suffering expression of a painful dream settled on her face with its closed eyes. In the indistinct voice of an unlucky sleeper, lying passive in the toils of a merciless nightmare, she stammered out aimlessly the words:

"Material interests." (pp. 582-83)

Even though Emelia, like most of Conrad's female characters, is content to endure in virtual silence, it is necessary for the critic to discover what is common both to so eloquently expressed a sense of horror as hers and to Conrad's urgent passion to incarnate this horror so painstakingly in fiction. To this discovery—which is a discovery of Conrad's vision of life's beginning machinery—we must now turn.

* * * * *

In her comprehending silence at the end of the novel—which is ironically set off against Giorgio Viola's uncomprehending and murderous silence—Mrs. Gould achieves a balanced view of past, present, and future: "It had come into her mind that for life to be large and full it must contain the care of the past and of the future in every passing moment of the present" (p. 582). This is the wholeness of vision which *Nostromo's* winding narrative stream has been seeking ever since the novel's murky, disorienting early pages. In the confusion of its uncertain focus, *Nostromo* resembles many of Conrad's other tales in which the course of the narrative stream is unclear; because of this we are never really certain about the novel's time scheme. Thus the present seems most reluctant to

Mrs. Gould again

take and hold center stage, unless dragged before us and kept there by a willing volunteer like Mitchell, the simpleminded type (and like Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*) whose purpose is to set things moving, perhaps because he feels himself "in the thick of history" (p. 150). Even Mitchell only starts his narrative and proceeds to add a few reflections, before he is pushed aside, almost dissatisfiedly, by a torrent of qualifying recollections. Within the first eighty-five pages in the novel we pass from a general description of Costaguana to Ribiera's rescue, to the Viola family, to Nostromo's part in the rescue, to the dinner party on the eve of the railroad's inauguration, to Sir John's trip, to Henry Gould's presidency under Bento, to tea at Don José's house, to the history of the mine, and then to the courtship of Charles and Emilia Gould—as a prelude to the story of the slow establishment of the mine in Sulaco, which is the burden of part 1 of *Nostromo*. Part 2 revolves around two long scenes: the one between Decoud and Antonia at the Casa Gould, and the rescue of the silver by Decoud and Nostromo. Finally, in part 3, the novel takes up the defeat of the Monterist revolt and the new era in Sulaco's history, during which period Nostromo is killed. Interspersed are the stories of Dr. Monygham, Hernandez, Father Corbelan, Hirsch, and Sotillo; there are also some important interludes provided by scenes between the Goulds and scenes at the new parliament. Yet all this unfolds without benefit of any linear chronological order.

This roundabout narrative approach, as opposed to a straightforward linear one, was of course promoted and practiced by both Conrad and Ford Madox Ford, Conrad's erstwhile collaborator.⁴¹ Conrad and Ford argued that the approach allowed them the maximum in psychological realism, since, as in real life, one does not comprehend an event all at once; instead, knowledge of an event comes to the mind in small pieces and is only gradually pieced together. The concentrated, prepackaged "reality" presented by earlier novelists, they felt, cannot do justice to life's diffuse complexity. In *Nostromo*, however, the narrative's reluctance to pin down the present is perhaps the result of a more interesting and functional hesitation to begin, a hesitation seemingly induced by the "cool purity" of Higueroa, the tall mountain "which seemed to hold itself aloof from a hot earth" (p. 29) and from Sulaco at its foot, and which shames and humbles the inconsistent, weak, and wavering humanity below. Higueroa holds Sulaco in its gaze as if it, Higueroa, were the eye of God, turned away from the Golfo Placido and now brooding over Sulaco.

The mountain is a transcendent, constantly felt presence in the novel; awesome and monolithic, it represents an aspiration as unattainable by the novel's fragmented action as Mallarmé's *azur* is by his tortured soul. It may have been the contrast between Sulaco's atomized political life and Higueroa's solid, abiding presence that led Arnold Bennett, writing to Conrad concerning *Nostromo* in 1912, to maintain that "the said mountain [is] . . . the principal personage in the story."⁴² While Bennett's remark of course is an exaggeration, the force of the mountain is nevertheless unmistakable. One can imagine Conrad feeling the grand, Olympian presence of the mountain in the narrative and, seeking a comparable human force in the panoramic action he is about to relate, hesitating, explaining, qualifying. Where to begin? From his own experience he knew that a master mariner, for example, commands the art of sailing with the same authoritative, consistent domination that Higueroa commands Sulaco. In Sulaco's political life there is no analogous dominant individual. Life is too untidy, man too weak. The narrative's meanderings comprise a search for such a superior man, a man who, like Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, compels history.

All of this is rather speculative. Is it not safer to remark that Higueroa's presence endows the novel with a sense of height and space and depth? There it stands, its solidity giving the novel a specific spatial perspective. Yet an examination of Conrad's many available letters to his closest personal friends reveals a desperate search in his personal life for Higueroa's positive qualities of consistency, power, and unity. The mixed elements of his life—his Polish birth, French cultivation, and English citizenship, and his double career as a sailor turned man of letters—gave him an acute sense of splintered individuality. In his letters to Marguerite Poradowska between 1890 and 1895, for example, he often appears in pursuit of a single workable identity. While these extremely self-conscious letters for the most part ramble on, when Conrad briefly finds himself he displays a lucid awareness of a persistently dual "selfhood": one is "afraid" of oneself, he writes,

of the inseparable being forever at your side—master and slave, victim and executioner—who suffers and causes suffering. That's how it is! One must drag the ball and chain of one's selfhood to the end. It is the price one pays for the devilish and divine privilege of thought; so that in this life it is only the elect who are convicts—a glorious band which comprehends and groans but which treads the earth amidst a multitude of phantoms with maniacal gestures, with idiotic grimaces. Which would you be: Idiot or convict?⁴³

Later, to Edward Garnett, he laments the absence of starting points in his stories and attributes this absence to the fact that his life seemed to have had no clear starting point;⁴⁴ so confused was he about himself that his mind could seize upon no point in either time or place for the purpose of beginning to write. Perhaps his most pathetic lament is in an 1895 letter to Edward Noble, an apprentice writer: "[Yours] is an individuality," he writes, "that will stand wear and tear, that has resistance and power—while I shall be used up in a short and miserable sputter of dim flame."⁴⁵ Whenever he persevered in his hope that his individuality might achieve lasting strength, he worked himself into a rage at the folly of such a thought; individuality, he concluded, was a mere sham. He wrote Garnett of this in 1896:

When one looks at life in its true aspect then everything loses much of its unpleasant importance and the atmosphere becomes cleared of what are only unimportant mists that drift past in imposing shapes. When once the truth is grasped that one's own personality is only a ridiculous and aimless masquerade of something hopelessly unknown the attainment of serenity is not very far off. Then there remains nothing but the surrender to one's impulses, the fidelity to passing emotions which is perhaps a nearer approach to truth than any other philosophy of life. And why not? If we are "ever becoming—never being" then I would be a fool if I tried to become this thing rather than that; for I know well that I never will be anything. I would rather grasp the solid satisfaction of my wrongheadedness and shake my fist at the idiotic mystery of Heaven.⁴⁶

But to "grasp the solid satisfaction of [his] wrongheadedness" was not within Conrad's ability. He needed an inner security of mind and character to sustain him, even in wrongheadedness, that his lonely battles with his fiction made impossible. In describing the progress of his work to his friends, he wrote frequently of struggles in a black cave, of being in a terrible nightmare, of rowing across an ocean of ink without any goal in sight.⁴⁷ Thus he considered his portrayal of MacWhirr in *Typhoon* to be the portrayal of an unimaginative man single-mindedly standing up to nature's worst, as something of a counterbalance to his own lack of strength of character. In 1901 he wrote to William Blackwood about a book of naval experiences, written by an Admiral William Kennedy, which apparently contained much that Conrad considered reminiscent of *Typhoon*:

Now a book of that sort is the man—the man disclosed absolutely; and the contact of such a genuine personality is like an invigorating bath for one's mind jaded by infinite effort after literary expression, wearied by all the unrealities of a writing life, discouraged by a sunless, starless sort of mental

solitude, having lost its reckoning in a grey sea of words, words, words; an unruly choppy sea running crosswise in all the endless shifts of thought . . . A wrestle with wind and weather has a moral value like the primitive acts of faith on which may be built a doctrine of salvation and a rule of life.⁴⁸

Having created in MacWhirr a character of consistency and strength, though, Conrad came to the unexpected conclusion that he should hold MacWhirr in emphatic disrespect, reasoning that the vitality of someone like MacWhirr failed to compensate for whatever desirable virtues (skepticism, for instance) were lost in achieving such a "consistent" character. Beneath this rather shrewd reasoning, as in his letter to Galsworthy later in 1901, is the obvious fact that Conrad's disrespect derived from his envy for what he personally lacked:

Say what you like, man lives in his eccentricities (so called) alone. They give vigour to his personality which mere consistency can never do. One must explore deep and believe the incredible to find the new particles of truth floating in an ocean of insignificance. And before all one must divest oneself of every particle of respect for one's character. You are really most profound and attain the greatest art in handling the people you do not respect.⁴⁹

So curious an amalgam of attitudes accounts for such diverse types in Conrad's shorter fiction as Kurtz and MacWhirr. As consistent characters they are puzzling to the reader because of Conrad's shifting point of view toward them. Are either Kurtz or MacWhirr noble or admirable? The difficulties this question raises can be traced to the deathly inner emptiness in which lies, for better or for worse, the real individuality of these characters. Because of the extraordinary sense of inner lifelessness communicated by these apparently heroic figures, Conrad can be said to have a truly ambiguous conception of character. Although these characters are endowed with the consistency and courage that Conrad believed absent in himself, they also remind one of spectres. The same can be said of Charles Gould and Nostromo. Each in his own way rescues the action of the novel from aimlessness; each dominates it authoritatively and momentarily, just as Higuera dominates Sulaco. Each such individual in a sense "authors" the action of a large part of the fiction. Conrad's habitual image for authority in his fiction is a rescue, usually one performed by an able man who is later revealed to be a sham. Thus in the first third of *Nostromo* there are two "rescues" of Costaguana's history: Nostromo's rescue of Ribiera and Gould's rescue of the San Tomé mine. Gould is figuratively captured by the mine at the outset: because of his servitude, rather than

despite it, he rises in political importance, and in so rising he matches Higuero's eminence on a more mundane level. Yet his submission to the cause of silver is, as we said earlier, a sort of suicide. Perhaps this image is Conrad's way of forcing us to believe that the consistency of character gained by Gould (which is institutionalized in his royal title) is not worth the sacrifice of his human "eccentricities."

Nostromo is a different case. He is presented to the reader in the most flattering way as the dashing devil-may-care leader of Sulaco's dockhands. Yet from the beginning his personality is somewhat paradoxical, for he is, as Mitchell remarks, the leader of "an outcast lot of very mixed blood" (p. 15), and he is also Nostromo—literally bosun and "our man"—to all of Sulaco. The outcast and the man who is "one of us" remain the two aspects of his formidable character that hold our interest, even though the second, popular aspect will grow like a cancer to envelop the other, freer, outcast one. (There may even be an intended connection between his name, "our man," and the mine he serves in the later part of the book: the San Tomé silver can say confidently of him, he is *mine*.)

Nevertheless, in part 1 Nostromo is allowed an extraordinary moment of beautiful, unspoiled freedom. To my mind it is the most splendidly theatrical moment in all of Conrad's fiction, belonging, for the sheer excitement and immediacy of its effect, next to Hemingway's superb description of Maera, the proudest and the most tragic of matadors, in *Death in the Afternoon*. Maera's pride and his unparalleled manly carriage are quite equal to his bravery and skill with the bulls.⁵⁰ Like Maera, Nostromo has, during his moment of real glory, an inner, authentic nobility that matches his dazzling appearance. Resplendent in his uniform, the mounted capataz is confronted by Pasquita, his Sulacoan sweetheart; the lovers are surrounded by a crowd that is curious about Nostromo's every act. He is this crowd's man just as surely as the matador is the arena's man when he is fearless and free. The girl hurls a flower at Nostromo's face, and then she taunts him; he remains slow and careless. When she threatens to stab him for his indifference, he leans down and picks her up, asking at the same time for a dagger. He lets her cut off all his silver buttons, and then he is finished. "The circle had broken up, and the lordly capataz de cargadores, the indispensable man, the tried and trusty Nostromo, the Mediterranean sailor come ashore casually to try his luck in Costaguana, rode slowly towards the harbor" (p. 144).

Is it not right that a man with such "unapproachable style" and "finished splendor" (p. 138) command the destiny of Sulaco? Here is the complete hero for whom the novel has been searching.

The capataz's triumphs do not, however, go uncriticized. In the first place, Conrad heaps too many flattering phrases upon him. The relevant technique, which characterizes the style of the whole novel, is Conrad's excessive use of appositional phrases. Thus Nostromo is not just the capataz, but also "the indispensable man, the tried and trusty Nostromo"; Decoud is the "boulevardier," the "universal wit," the "lover"; Gould is the "king of Sulaco," the "hope of Costaguana," the "perfect man"—and so on. A source of constant ironic shocks, excessive in its jocularity and courtesy, the technique is Dickensian. Phrases of this sort used repeatedly cannot be developed; hence they serve to remind us of the character's beginning authority, of his initial desire to be a public institution or monument or record. Further criticism of Nostromo is furnished explicitly by Teresa Viola, who cannot resign herself to the successes he gains because she believes that he unashamedly kowtows to the English. Her constant objections to Nostromo's behavior are like mocking echoes of the adulation he receives from everyone else. For the most part, however, she succeeds in piercing his perfect camouflage of style and splendor to glimpse the equally perfect vanity that drives him. What enables her success in this is the "intimacy of antagonism as close in its way as the intimacy of accord and affection" (p. 280). Yet Nostromo tolerates her for her husband's sake. The old man has a "personal quality of conviction . . . his terribilitá" (p. 35) that Nostromo deeply respects. Not that Nostromo lacks an equally intense conviction; rather, Viola's is somehow more objective than Nostromo's completely subjective, degenerate self-conviction, a trait that perhaps renders him vulnerable to Teresa's attacks even though she does not understand that for all his vanity Nostromo is as amoral (rather than immoral) as any animal. It is not, as she believes, the "fine words," but the silver, that corrupts him: it makes him a slave to his own unthinking vanity and greed. The silver also makes his reputation a problem, for until his magnificent exploit in the Placido he had managed to blend the two aspects of his character (the popular and the outcast) into a free, profitable, and rather picaresque existence.

Because of his uninhibited vanity and faith in himself, Nostromo distrusts Decoud's skepticism. Decoud appears to be "an idle boulevardier" whose "cosmopolitanism [is] in reality a

mere barren indifferentism posing as intellectual superiority" (p. 168). Worse yet, Decoud "had pushed the habit of universal raillery to a point where it blinded him to the genuine impulse of his own nature" (p. 169). Only when he submits to "that note of passion and sorrow unknown on the more refined stage of European politics" (p. 173) is Decoud able to accept himself and put a stop to the scoffing that alienates him from his inner self. Only when he becomes submerged in the rather attractive sentimentality of his love for Antonia Avellanosa does Decoud begin to act like a rational patriot who welcomes the responsibility of serious action—which is based, paradoxically enough, on a lover's illusion.

All this time Gould is tenaciously committed to the mine he has rescued and rehabilitated. When part 2 begins, Sulaco has itself become involved in Gould's commitment, for Sulaco's civic existence is now completely dependent on the mine. Besides Gould, only Nostromo occupies a position of comparable (though not equal) power in the city. When a Monterist invasion threatens the city, the duty of tending the silver is divided, quite properly, between Gould and Nostromo: Gould will remain in Sulaco in control of a charge of dynamite buried in the mine, and Nostromo will take the silver ingots themselves out of the city. Decoud is chosen to go with Nostromo because it is generally believed that the educated, intelligent patriot is a necessary complement to the foreign man of action.

Together the two men leave Sulaco in the middle of a very dark night. The episode is described with a compelling tension, one far more controlled in tone and contour than the journey Marlow takes into the heart of darkness. (Interestingly, the presence of Hirsch, the cowardly stowaway, gives the scene something of the same macabre absurdity to which Marlow, in his description of the Congo voyage, insistently draws attention.) There is no masking narrative voice as there had been in *Heart of Darkness*, and so the distracting aspects of that voice—its breathless insistence, its ill-timed jocularity—are avoided. The greater effectiveness of the later passage, however, is due as much to the episode's relevance to Conrad's personal predicament as it is to his strengthened technical assurance. The setting of the difficult adventure could have been taken straight out of his anguished letters, perhaps even from this one written to Garnett in 1899:

The more I write the less substance do I see in my work. The scales are falling off my eyes. It is tolerably awful. And I face it, I face it but the fright

is growing on me. My fortitude is shaken by the view of the monster. It does not move; its eyes are baleful; it is as still as death—and it will devour me. Its share has eaten into my soul already deep, deep. I am alone with it in a chasm with perpendicular sides of black basalt. Never were sides so perpendicular and smooth, and high. Above your anxious head against a bit of sky peers down—in vain—in vain. There's no rope long enough for that rescue.⁵¹

As the two men row the lighter out from the harbor, each knows that the importance of the task is completely transforming his existence. Sulaco's material interests become irrelevant to Decoud, who is now "in the toils of an imaginative existence, and that strange work of pulling a lighter [which] seemed to belong naturally to the inception of a new state [now] acquired an ideal meaning from his love for Antonia" (p. 294). Yet in a short while he feels himself "on the verge of delirium" (p. 295) resulting from his overintensified exertions in an unreal cause. This immediately recalls Conrad's own sentiments as he worked on the novel. Conrad's letter to Edmund Gosse on March 23, 1905, contains the declaration that "I have often suffered in connection with my work from a sense of unreality, from intellectual doubt of the ground I stood upon."⁵²

Nostromo has no sympathy with this sort of intellectual convolution. Because he is certain that only "sheer desperation will do for this affair" (p. 306), he is inspired to new extremes of vanity and bravery. Even Decoud, who has always known the extent of Nostromo's vanity, is surprised by his behavior: "The natural characteristic quietness of the man was gone. Something unsuspected by every one had come to the surface" (p. 313). This is Nostromo's bloodthirsty determination to live up to his reputation, a determination that sweeps aside all barriers of class between the two men and compels Decoud into his service.

During this absolutely central episode in the novel, the two men are intellectually and spiritually poles apart. Nostromo not only exults in the darkness but turns it into an advantage because he is so certain of himself; Decoud, on the other hand, suffers the immense handicap of self-doubt and feels himself in the grip of a growing sense of unreality. One man recoils when confronted with the beginning of a major exploit, the other welcomes the opportunity to author it. Yet Decoud gradually becomes accustomed to the oppressive darkness. "It was part of a living world, since, pervading it, failure and death could be felt at your elbow" (p. 314). Nostromo is the quintessential man of action who is working to secure his great reputation even more firmly; Decoud is

a man of thought who suddenly discovers himself in a totally unfamiliar situation. Neither man is really working for himself, for in their efforts on behalf of the silver both recognize and serve a common master:

Each of them was as if utterly alone with his task. It did not occur to them to speak. There was nothing in common between them but the knowledge that the damaged lighter must be slowly but surely sinking. In that knowledge, which was like the crucial test of their desires, they seemed to have become completely estranged, as if they had discovered in the very shock of the collision that the loss of the lighter would not mean the same thing to them both. This common danger brought their differences in aim, in view, in character, and in position into absolute prominence in the private vision of each. There was no bond of conviction, of common ideas; they were merely two adventurers pursuing each his own adventure, involved in the same imminence of deadly peril. Therefore they had nothing to say to each other. But this peril, this only incontrovertible truth in which they shared, seemed to act as an inspiration to their mental and bodily powers. (p. 328)

The authentic ring of this scene derives, I think, from Conrad's obsessive notions about himself. The two adventurers are the double strain in Conrad's life which, as we noted earlier, he had come to believe made him a "*homo duplex*." The atmosphere of deadly peril in which the two men find themselves uncongenial partners represents the nightmare world that Conrad inhabited as he worked on his fiction. The analogies between Conrad and the two men extend even into the past histories of Nostromo and Decoud. The Genoese adventurer is a sailor whose desertion of his ship is kept rather noticeably in the background; throughout his career Conrad was fascinated with the idea of desertion, a theme so recurrent that Gustave Morf, an early critic of Conrad, based his integral reading of Conrad's fiction on it.⁵³ Moreover, Nostromo is a thoroughgoing man of action who has successfully moved his profession from sea to land; if this is still Conrad talking about one of the two men he was, Nostromo is an idealization of the sailor-turned-landlubber that Conrad himself had become. Yet the capataz is also an opportunist and an adventurer, which is one of the unavoidable results of being a professional man of action. It is significant that Conrad rather defensively anticipated the danger of being called an opportunistic adventurer himself, perhaps because he felt that at some point in his sea career he had been one. Interestingly, he once wrote a correspondent a somewhat petulant reminder that he was not a simple adventurer.⁵⁴ Decoud is Conrad's portrayal of himself as the confused intellectual for whom the ground he walks on is subject to doubt, the author for

whom even the simplest sentence was very hard to begin. Decoud's most serious moments (which occur during the long scene when he discusses his ideas with Antonia at the Casa Gould) echo the romantic, self-doubting tone of Conrad's letters to Marguerite Poradowska.

Before considering the real purpose of the mission undertaken by Nostromo and Decoud it is necessary to consider Conrad's reasons for bringing together the two men in the episode. If one recalls that *Nostromo* examines the problematical relationship between action and historical record, then the combination of Decoud and Nostromo represents the relationship on a human level. (It goes without saying that the two men are sufficiently realized as characters also to represent themselves more than adequately.) In terms of the novel's total concerns, the masterful scene on the Golfo Placido takes up the issues of a true intellectual knowledge of action versus the flattering distortions of a created record; of individuality that is realized in a problematical, difficult life in the world versus individuality that believes and makes others believe in itself; of a complicated inner dimension versus a strategically simplified exterior; of Decoud's complex and passionate understanding of the wholly difficult realities of his situation versus Nostromo's desire to make his reputation the dominant image in Sulaco's life—in short, of Conrad's authentic voice in his rich, confusing private writings versus the voice he created for his prefatory notes.

All these conflicting alternatives are forced to surface by the crisis in Sulaco's history, when, like an author about to begin his writing, characters must determine a starting point and with it, of necessity, a future course of action. What now happens to Sulaco is to be decided by the deportment of the two men. The analogy in Conrad's life to the "objective" historical crisis in the city is the personal and artistic crisis he had reached by 1902. He felt that he was not producing well enough, that he never had enough money, that his whole existence seemed to be in the most unimaginable disarray (a point his publishers were always willing to make); there seemed to be no alternative solution to his predicament except drastic action. Shortly after this crisis a new Conrad emerges, a Conrad who, as I have noted elsewhere, publicly replaces the tortured figure of the preceding twelve years.⁵⁵ This new person is mirrored in the success Nostromo achieves because of Decoud's timely death. A smiling public man emerges whose place in the new Sulaco is based on a deliberate fraud. If Nostromo is partly an

idealized apology for a life of action, he is a shattering criticism of the public personality. *Nostromo* is the beginning of a new phase.

Gould's connection with all of this is interesting. His sustained immersion in his work at the mine typifies man's identification of life with work, or, as Conrad had put it in *Heart of Darkness*, with efficient devotion to an idea.⁵⁶ Nostromo and Decoud are irrevocably tied to this devotion, even though each thinks that he is acting for his own reasons. In the same way that Gould is "run" by Holroyd, Nostromo and Decoud are "run" by Gould. None of the three has any freedom; each is the sustainer of another's vanity—Decoud of Nostromo's, Nostromo of Gould's, and Gould of Holroyd's. After Decoud's death, Gould muses that

the only thing that was not changed was his position towards Mr. Holroyd. The head of the silver and steel interests had entered into Costaguana affairs with a sort of passion. Costaguana had become necessary to his existence; in the San Tomé mine he had found the imaginative satisfaction which other minds would get from drama, from art, or from a risky and fascinating sport. It was a special form of the great man's extravagance, sanctioned by a moral intention big enough to flatter his vanity. Even in this aberration of his genius he served the progress of the world. (p. 21)

In the immediate context of the work he does, each man, according to the novel, believes himself and is believed by others to be free, especially if he seems to have begun at the beginning; from the point of view afforded the reader by the total action of the novel, exactly the opposite becomes true. The king of Sulaco is as subjugated as the lowliest peon working in the mine. In what way, one wonders, is Gould different from the Indians to whom the mine is a fetish (p. 442)? If both the workers and their master are subservient to the mine, does the fact that the grand Englishman doesn't work with his hands mean that his spiritual slavery is any less degrading? True, Gould has position, but that is all he has. If Decoud and Nostromo on the Golfo Placido represent Conrad's double nature engaged in a struggle for freedom—and even though the victory is Nostromo's we are left in little doubt that it is a morally inferior one—then Gould, ever at his post with one finger on the detonator, embodies the ever-continuing process of life at its most disheartening, vainest level. It is the level at which man insists upon creating his own world and then seeks to preserve the values of that world at all costs. Better to destroy that world than change it: *he* might change, but *it* must not. The rescue of the silver brings both Nostromo and Decoud closer to Gould in this respect.

As the action sorts itself out in the Monterist revolt and in what follows the revolt, an extremely depressing truth becomes evident: once rid of confusion by such author-heroes as Gould and Nostromo, action, or history in the making, is clearly proceeding, beneath its seemingly chaotic surface, according to some inherent malignant plan, a sort of ultimate molestation which no one can escape. As this plan becomes apparent, a remarkable similarity emerges between the current of a person's life and the process of history. In a human life—Gould's, for example—it might appear possible to believe in the freedom of one's initiative or of one's action; at the same time, when such freedom is viewed from a more accurate perspective, the same activity is seen to be unfree. These mutually contradictory views also apply to the novel's total action: the action at the beginning of the novel seems to wind its confused way forward until a hero appears who can dominate it in order to give it intention and method, whereas it eventually becomes apparent that the action has merely been searching for a hero (Nostromo or Gould) to own, to use, to enslave.

It was no accident that Conrad so conceived the novel. The moral of such a conception is that the fabric of life is manufactured by some devilish process the purpose and logic of which is profoundly antihuman. Man is never the author, never the beginning, of what he does, no matter how willfully intended his program may be. The substance of this belief was expressed by Conrad in a powerful letter to Robert Cunningham Graham:

There is a,—let us say,—a machine. It evolved itself (I am severely scientific) out of a chaos of scraps of iron and behold!—it knits. I am horrified at the horrible work and stand appalled. I feel it ought to embroider,—but it goes on knitting. You come and say; "This is all right: it's only a question of the right kind of oil. Let us use this,—for instance,—celestial oil and the machine will embroider a most beautiful design in purple and gold." Will it? Alas, no? You cannot by any special lubrication make embroidery with a knitting machine. And the most withering thought is that the infamous thing has made itself: made itself without thought, without conscience, without foresight, without eyes, without heart. It is tragic accident—and it has happened. You can't even smash it. In virtue of that truth one and immortal which lurks in the force that made it spring into existence it is what it is—and it is indestructible!

It knits us in and it knits us out. It has knitted time, space, pain, death, corruption, despair and all the illusions,—and nothing matters. I'll admit however that to look at the remorseless process is sometimes amusing.⁵⁷

The idea is wholly despairing and eminently private. Authority, it asserts, permanently resides outside man. Every beginning, every

record meticulously kept, every intention maintained is by definition secondary because antedated by a process that has no respect for man and his rationale. Such an idea, with its deceptive invitation to action and its destruction of hope, is reflected in *Nostromo* by the textual web of personal "records" held together by a "machine" that scants man and human action. All this endows *Nostromo* with what Henry James, Conrad's admiring colleague and friend, would have called "a deep-breathing economy and an organic form."⁵⁸ Conrad's remarkable achievement lies in his ability to project this esoteric vision of life into the public, solid, and real world of Costaguana. No wonder that writing the novel proved such a strain on Conrad; to have remained so fanatically true for so long to his extreme pessimistic view of human existence must have been painfully difficult. It is indeed possible to feel, as one reads the novel, the war going on between Conrad and his fiction.

Readings of *Nostromo* that overemphasize its political dimension detract from the novel's overall effect. The accession of Nostromo to the role of principal hero, for instance, is very disconcerting to strictly political interpretations. Why should so much time be given to Captain Fidanza's private life? With its political course charted anew, Sulaco ought to retain stage center instead of playing a supporting role in a semiconventional story of covert passion and mistaken death. The fact is that Nostromo has become, toward the end of the novel, a miserably haunted creature because he has attempted to live as if the machinery of existence did not exist. He has not attempted this by his own will but because a lucky accident has conferred great wealth upon him and forced him to become a sort of author in spite of himself. As he muddles on he remains sufficiently interesting to Conrad to warrant the continuing special attention that is so obvious in the famous passage describing Nostromo's "rebirth"—a passage that in fact reiterates his natural qualities, for it is these qualities that will enable him to go on alone. He understands that he is thrust into an existence beyond that of conventional society and that the treasure, which is suddenly his, is the cause. But his growing attachment to the silver and the suffering he endures for its sake make it plain that he is still the victim of life's antihuman machinery. Now he begins to feel a secret shame that intensifies his moral disgrace—the price exacted by life from one upon whom it has bestowed the status of "hero" or "father of his country." Consequently, the idea of the treasure and secrecy become

connected in his mind (p. 551), and so when Viola is entrusted with keeping the new lighthouse, Nostromo sees this as a calamitous event:

He was struck with amazed dread at this turn of chance, that would kindle a far-reaching light upon the only secret spot of his life, whose very essence, value, reality, consisted in its reflection from the admiring eyes of men. All of it but that; and that was beyond common comprehension, something that stood between him and the power that hears and gives effect to the evil words of curses. It was dark. Not every man had such a darkness. And they were going to put a light there. A light. He saw it shining upon disgrace, poverty, contempt. Somebody was sure to . . . Perhaps somebody had already . . . (pp. 586-87)

Nostromo is nevertheless an unusual man. Only he and Mrs. Gould finally know all that there is to be known of life's horror, he by experience, she by the knowledge he gives her of it. Perhaps Dr. Monygham could also have shared this knowledge, but he is too much under Mrs. Gould's spell to know it for himself. No, it is Nostromo alone—like Kurtz and Lord Jim—who knows the dread secret and feels its shame; this, after all, is the purest beginning of all. Nostromo's tragedy—which has something farcical about it (p. 405)—is that his shame is for a colossal secret for which the world seems to have no use. Even in this, life, the machinery, has tricked him. He must bear the burden of slavery to the silver that also belongs to Sulaco, although he alone is selected to feel this burden. Society cuts him off from itself by making it impossible to reveal his secret to anyone.

When he dies, Sulaco has time only for its material interests; no one except Mrs. Gould has been made any wiser by his death. Those who care that Nostromo is dead, people like Viola and his wretched daughter, live in a silent world of immense, empty spaces across which floats an incoherent cry symbolizing mankind's inarticulate sadness for itself. The immobility that ends *Nostromo* is a sterile calm, as sterile as the future life of the childless Goulds, in which all action is finally concentrated into a cry of motionless despair. No better ending for the novel could have been written. Existence has worked its worst, and after that there is only an acceptance of what is everlastingly true and hence everlastingly novel; having shown that, the novelist's pen drops from an exhausted hand. The only relief now would be for one who no longer contemplated life's machinery. But because Conrad was a possessed realist, for him such relief was not possible; a short time after completing *Nostromo* he was to begin work on *The Secret Agent*.

* * * * *

Since *Nostromo* contains a highly passionate, almost religious, vision of life, it is fitting that Father Roman—the one character in the novel who is schooled in the tradition of grand visions—express the outlines of the vision most convincingly:

Political atrocities . . . seemed to him fatal and unavoidable in the life of a state. The workings of the usual public institutions presented itself to him most distinctly as a series of calamities overtaking private individuals and flowing logically from one another through hate, revenge, folly, and rapacity, as though they had been part of a divine dispensation. (p. 443)

Roman's interpretation is affected, of course, by his creed. Thus the divinity he mentions does not contradict Conrad's representation of a "divine" machinery in life, but it errs on the side of optimism by assuming the divine to have a benign purpose. Similarly, Roman envisions a logic to the complications caused by human weakness; but he does not, as Conrad does, see logic—equally relentless and disastrous—in the "divine dispensation," in the machinery that manufactures human life. The major qualification enjoined by *Nostromo* upon Roman's vision is that such weaknesses as hate, revenge, and folly do not alone carry calamity through time. For human courage, idealism, and hope, like human weakness, are also aspects of being human and being active as a human individual. Man's fault, in other words, is that he is alive, the very fact of his authority as a human being, for in being alive he nurtures and sustains weaknesses that turn into strengths and strengths that turn into weaknesses. Every moment of life is filled with activity, and that activity issues from human beings whose motives are invariably tarnished by their "humanity."

For Conrad the palpable harshness of the world and hence of life in that world is itself something that provokes one into attempting to master it and, failing at those attempts, into allowing it to incriminate itself in the very process of failure. Thus while Charles Gould, and indeed all of Sulaco, like the rest of mankind, have fallen in love with their own creations (p. 442), Conrad's precept, his example in the writing of *Nostromo*, was not to have fallen in love with *his* creation. The ultimate greatness of that novel is that life, through Conrad, authorizes it, but that Conrad, life's harried agent himself authored by life, had enough strength finally to withhold affirmative consent to it. The lesson is one of self-abnegation, and it has intimately to do with a general

loss of faith in the ability of novelistic representation directly to reflect anything except the author's dilemmas, of which one is that he is both human and a writer. Conrad's position is that of a man wholly in life, yet a man decoyed into depicting a life process of which he is a part. Any attempt made to lead one's life as Nostromo does results in either silence or death.

This is a radical impasse arrived at through fiction by an author for whom writing is a form of exposure or investigation. Such an attitude in an author developed partly out of the institutional logic of novels, given the dynamic of molestation and authority I discussed earlier. Conrad's exceptional status thus lies in having produced a novel (and novels) implicitly critical of the beginning premises of all earlier novels. Instead of mimetically authoring a new world, Nostromo turns back to its beginning as a novel, to the fictional, illusory assumption of reality; in thus overturning the confident edifice that novels normally construct Nostromo reveals itself to be no more than a record of novelistic self-reflection. What had once been the novel's creative abundance becomes here regressive production: the metaphors, the method, and the attitudes have changed radically, as the beginning premise has become more problematic and more intrinsically a function of the novel's *textual* ontology. The greater significance of this will become apparent as we proceed to examine groundbreaking novels roughly contemporary with *Nostromo*. Whereas in the classical novel there had been both a desire to create or author an alternate life and to show (by molestation) this alternative to be at bottom an illusion with reference to "life," the later version of this desire was a revulsion from the novelist's whole procreative enterprise and an intensification of his *scriptive* fate. Not only does this reaction constitute a critique of the traditional theory of mimetic representation, it also radically transforms the idea of a text.

III

The discovery by Jude and Sue, at the scene of suicide and murder of their children, of a wretched note of explanation for the deed—"Done because we are too menny"—does nothing to attenuate their grief.⁵⁹ Ever since he so inopportunistly enters their lives, Little Father Time is the emblem of their misgivings about life, and these misgivings are lamentably fulfilled in the

premature deaths he causes. This scene in *Jude the Obscure* is almost too sad and despairing even for Thomas Hardy, but the pun in the last word of the child's suicide note should not pass without comment. For just as the superannuated boy himself sums up all the disasters heaped by time upon man in general and upon Jude in particular, so too the pun—a sort of distant echo of Nietzsche's cry "human, all too human," in withdrawal from the distressing quality and sheer weight of being human—itself sums up that which perhaps turned Hardy away from fiction after completing this novel. And that was the observation, which had become increasingly more explicit in one after another of his previous novels, that if fiction is to be narrative at all, it must necessarily be linked to and coeval with the very process of life itself; and furthermore, if narrative is to be mimetic as well as productive, it also must be able to repeat as well as record the "fathering-forth," "the over and overings" (the phrases are Gerard Manley Hopkins's) of human life, the essence and image of which are biological self-perpetuation and unfolding genealogy based on the procreative urge, marriage, and family.

Hardy's case in *Jude the Obscure* is, I believe, the recognition by a great artist that the dynastic principles of traditional narrative now seemed somehow inappropriate. Narrative was no longer, as before, first fashioned by the writer according to the sequential character of time, and thereafter given to the reader to be read, or possessed, along the printed line in which his eyes and mind repeated by miraculous multiplication the sense and direction of life. These principles, so far as Hardy was concerned, can be said to have terminated in an epitaph: "Done because we are too menny." For coinciding in these words are man, his death, and a futureless despair. *Jude the Obscure*, however, moves to its own distraught conclusion, one that would be adopted henceforward by Hardy as the crux of his purposefully short and compressed poetry.⁶⁰ That poetry depicts an impasse among things human, spiritual, divine, and inert, an impasse that is aesthetically useful to Hardy because it isolates things from one another and, mocking the sterility of time, proceeds to reassemble them in order to let them be destroyed. Time-bound narrative here cedes its spacious character and its familial coherence to crabbed, often destructive convergences in which time and purpose are emasculated at the moment of coincidence. One thinks in particular of Hardy's majestically ironic poem "The Convergence of the Twain," and of its final stanzas, with the scornful pun "intimate welding." The

poet here is speaking of the ocean liner *Titanic* and the iceberg that destroyed it:

Alien they seemed to be!
No mortal eye could see
The intimate welding of their later history,
Or sign that they were bent
By paths coincident
On being anon twin halves of one august event,
Till the Spinner of the Years
Said "Now!" And each one hears
And consummation comes, and jars two hemispheres.⁶¹

Both Little Father Time's name and his presence yield up further observations which, we may feel—as did the bishop who reportedly burned his copy of *Jude the Obscure*⁶²—do great damage to the sacrament of ongoing human life. For the boy is neither really a son nor, of course, a father. He is an alteration in the course of life, a disruption of the archeology that links generations one to the other. His death is the affirmation, or realization, of this indisputable role that he plays, just as Jude's successive dreams—of scholarship, of architectural ambition, of patrimonial and matrimonial order—are realized in about equal measure in his tormented life with Sue Bridehead and in the gingerbread models of Christminster he is reduced to selling near the end of the novel. Three conditions of radical, or beginning, divorce are interconnected here: the divorce of man from his generative role either as man or as author; the divorce of man from time; and the divorce of man from his "natural" intentions.

This celibacy is gained at a very high price indeed; and we may look to George Gissing's parable of the narrative life, *New Grub Street*, to see the sacrifice made flesh. Every writer in this grim vision of the economics of narrative manuscript production is either sterile, blind, or celibate; otherwise he is not a writer but a manager. The books produced are a wilderness of mirrors that reflect the doomed effort to produce without originality, to originate without energy, and to fable without bread. For neither the nutrient of man nor of his work is given to the writer: it must be quarried from unyielding matter, either the word or the world, and thereafter wastefully enshrined in the tedious plots of three-volume society novels.

Gissing's unrelentingly naturalistic *New Grub Street* and Hardy's valedictory novel are both reflections of something like an event, near the end of the nineteenth century, in the life of the

novel itself. And since the novel is alternative, fictional history bounded traditionally (as is history) between birth and death, we search in fiction, as when reading history, for configurations of sense, character, event, motive, and significance that link the absolute terminals of each to the names, forms, and identities we can discern. In fiction and in history, narrative, to borrow a phrase from Joyce, is the ineluctable modality of the legible. We must ask ourselves now: what is the significance of the moment in the life of fictional narrative exemplified by, among other events, Father Time's death in *Jude the Obscure* and Reardon's death in *New Grub Street*—deaths whose monuments are, respectively, a punning note and the terrifying vision of bookdom's graveyard, the Reading Room of the British Museum?

Modality no longer fruitful, but stopped short, brutally interrupted, pushed inward. A moment that will drive Bernard Shaw, the erstwhile novelist, into dramatic forms like that of *Major Barbara*, forms that energetically imitate not the new modes of hardheaded realism, socialism, and materialism which are lauded in the play's preface, but the "new" modes of Dionysiac celebration, dithyrambic irrationality, musical fluidity. For in rewriting *The Bacchae*, Shaw was noisily substituting the rebirth of bloodthirsty individualism, the gospel according to Undershaft-Dionysus, for the stultified rigor of decent bourgeois life, which—he asserted—the conventional novel took for its subject. A moment that will turn Samuel Butler's hero Ernest Pontifex into a symbol of rejection of family and, conversely, into a symbol of acceptance of a mysterious force independent—like his munificent Aunt Althea—of biological life itself. Yet Oscar Wilde deserves greater credit than do either Butler or Shaw for seeing that, for the artist, the natural continuity of things had been ruptured. In leaving life to servants, Wilde recognized that his capricious, though earnest, illusions were at least creative and worthy of bothering with, whereas life was neither one nor the other. Yet Wilde's artistic triumph made inevitable his personal tragedy: the happy narcissist on the page intended the pilloried defendant in court—a theme to which we shall return in Chapter 4.

Let me now integrate what I have been speaking about into an account of narrative itself. Fulfilling the special conditions (discussed in Section I of this chapter) for novels in practice requires basically that two things be available to the novelist: first, the technique of consecutive explanation, and second, the liberty to return to whatever he has already passed over in the narrative

sequence. The fundamental example is the *Odyssey*. The ideal course of fiction can be characterized as including one or more instances of returning to a point of fertile beginning in the past from which the narrative subsequently unfolds and to which it can repeatedly return. The variations of which this rather simple scheme is capable are apparent not only in novels themselves, but also in such seminal works as Harry Levin's *Gates of Horn*, Georg Lukacs's *Theorie des Romans*, and René Girard's *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque*.⁶³ Disparities of method and intention notwithstanding, such critical studies illustrate the way in which, to use I. A. Richard's phrase, the novel in particular and fiction generally are speculative instruments—that is, the way in which readers have used novels to engage their own narrative histories, or the way in which fiction participates historically in the most intimate actualities of human life.

As we saw, the primordial discovery of a novel is that of self—and *primordial* is intended here in a privileged way: the primordial as the preeminent, as the prior, as the first validating condition for intelligibility. In a novel such as *Tom Jones*, for example, the foundling is discovered immediately after birth, only to be rediscovered—and this is the function of the narrative—through a series of adventures that clarify the circumstances of that birth: he is given paternity. By extension (and I intend the sexual pun), Tom himself becomes capable of paternity, although this, also by extension, is to be fulfilled outside the novel. It is precisely the contours and the occasionally embarrassing intimacies of this process with which *Tristram Shandy* tampers. The eighteenth-century novel is like the eighteenth-century personality (one can think of Swift and Dr. Johnson as characters, together with Tom and Tristram), growing out of the initial, somewhat grudging acceptance of egoism, slowly transformed by time and unceasing activity into an irreducible character whose special virtue is that he welcomes and easily assimilates stories about him. Whether in a novel, or in Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, or in the ongoing sequence of Swift's work, narrative redefines ego so that it emerges as strong historical identity; as Meredith saw, the Book of Life and the Book of Egoism—the novel—gradually became synonymous.

An important qualification to this characterization of narrative and its novelistic version is the condition of secularity. If, regarding what I have been saying so far, the fundamental text is the *Odyssey*, then the fundamental antitext or antitype is the New

Testament, and especially, of course, the Fourth Gospel.⁶⁴ Fictional narrative is thus an *alternative* departure, a set of misadventures that *begins* away from the Origin (a term almost theological in that it must be understood in the strictest sense possible—as pure anteriority and, paradoxically, as pure genetic power). For that Origin, a unique miracle, cannot be duplicated or incarnated within the absolute boundaries of human life. The history of imitation in the West, as both Auerbach and Curtius have shown,⁶⁵ is the history of a gradual literary specialization of styles whereby the models of imitation slowly lose their exemplary force and their Originally divine reference. We might keep in mind, for instance, the distinction between Thomas à Kempis and *Don Quixote* and how it is that what I have referred to as the reflection of the Christian ethos nevertheless took place in two such different works. It is from an aberrant version of this ethos that the classical novel derives the unvarying temporal structure that Lukacs calls ironic.⁶⁶

Thus the novel's mimetic ambitions are essentially secular, even though the hero's ambitions, as in the case of *Don Quixote* himself, could have timeless and noble religious antecedents. Religious narrative, Christ's biography, and what Vico called sacred history are founded upon and *originate* in the original mystery of a Virgin Birth that can never be wholly verified, but which demands recognition and unqualified acceptance; whereas secular narrative, our concern here, is based on—*begins* in—the common and indisputable fact of natural human birth—or, using more severe terms, in the natal banishment of man from immortality and in his initiation into an afflicted family, not one that is apostolic but is rather a problematical combination of repression and love. This, as Stephen Dedalus poignantly comes to recognize, has the profoundest implications for the verbal artist, since the words of the language he uses are lapsed recollections of the single Original Word. Narrative lives in the temporal, quotidian element, that element which commemorates the absence of timeless mystery.

In view of its mortal strictures, and insofar as it is centrally concerned with the lives of men and women, narrative also contains the seeds of its own aging and death. In order to be read, a life has to be discovered; to be discovered, a life must have begun; to begin is equivalent to having a beginning; and to have a beginning, a life must in some way be novel. While narrative in the great period of the European novel affirms each of these

tautologies, it is the manner of the affirmation that is crucial: how does narrative affirm the beginning as time, place, quality, or deed? By methodically realizing the verbal intention to create—in short, by wedding a mimetic, verbal intention to time. Hence, for instance, the linear successive form of biography. But all happy families (and marriages), Tolstoi says in *Anna Karenina*, are the same, all unhappy families (and marriages) different. In order to be original and recognized as such, a life must be different and novel. And to be different is to sense most of the time that one's life has an uncommon, even unhappy, destiny. By the time the novel became a specialized institution in nineteenth-century bourgeois society, narrative had been subverted for an adulterous purpose: no longer a marriage between intention and time, narrative had become a private arrangement between an original character (Julien Sorel, for example) and that character's version of time. Such a character is hungry for the distinction of more and more originality. His time is no longer the property of the community, nor of the family man, but is rather an illicit dream of projected self-fulfillment whose highly subjective achievement by the novel's end has been radically undermined and molested by the refusals, sacrifices, renunciations, and selfishness on which it was based.⁶⁷ Such a life resembles orderly biography less than it does a series of collisions and compromises. The difficulties presented by realism derive from its ambiguous attitude toward these arrangements made between time and character, arrangements which seek to replace the bonds of community with the creative, subjective freedom of unfettered emotion. Yet this new private affair—especially in its compulsive form—tends to represent the substitution of irresponsible celibacy for fruitful marriage. This last observation, however, sometimes only reflects orthodox morality, for inasmuch as celibacy stands for irresponsible freedom, it also represents constraints or, as I have already noted, deliberate renunciation.

Hardy's Jude and Little Father Time are luckless epigones (for one can scarcely call them children) of the mid-nineteenth-century bachelor-protagonist: titans like Captain Ahab in *Moby Dick* and sorrowful orphans like Pip in *Great Expectations*. In figures like Ahab and Pip the realistic novelist depicts man's freedom of choice in determining his own fate by showing him, from his beginning, renouncing the common destiny for the sake of one that passes for an "original" one. What destroys both Pip and Ahab, who otherwise differ so much in temperament and energy,

is that neither can simultaneously pursue the quest that defines his putative originality and participate in the generative processes of life. The austere realism pervading both novels results from the fact that the narrative of the hero's life is based upon a beginning (which in each case defines their character in and for the novel) that is deeply flawed. Pip is brought up "by hand" and lacking a true family; Ahab loses his family when he loses his leg. Neither character can have (Turgenev's Bazarov is another instance) a true biography. The more radical the flaw, the more symmetrical is the novel's structure of balance between authority and molestation—the more closely, that is, does the novel resemble a kind of dream edifice constructed of insubstantial hopes. A quest for what Ishmael calls the ungraspable essence of life—whether that essence be a phantom, a whale, the sea, or even the theory and practice of being a gentleman when one is merely a country lad—can be narrated only at the expense of *not* narrating life's ordinary generative process. Pip's great expectations depend on the generosity of some unknown person, whom he secretly believes to be Miss Havisham. He flatters himself by believing that she has turned back from the brink of marriage for the express purpose of being able to endow him with the benefits of a handsome will. Yet the will, in one sense, is his own; in a more literal sense, however, it belongs to a convict, who is banished from society and who compensates for his isolation by making a gentleman-son out of Pip.

One should not overemphasize the similarities between two such different, but so strangely celibate, novels as *Moby Dick* and *Great Expectations*. But what strikes one with great force in both works of will (and I use the word *will* in the sense of both "volition" and "inheritance") is how the main character in each discovers that he has substituted volition for inheritance. Both Pip and Ishmael stand to one side of life's generative processes, and yet each occupies the narrative center of his novel just as Fidanza occupies the center in the last part of *Nostromo*. In Pip's attempt to fill in the blank of his true origins with the wealth of fantasy, in Ishmael's attempt to embark upon a whaling voyage of instruction, in Ahab's demonic chase of *Moby Dick*—in each of these three linked analogies, the narrative of adventurous exploits is, first of all, a beginning that replaces the obscurity of ordinary life; second, a willed effort the character exerts thereafter to live exclusively in search of his projected aims; and third, a discovery that at the beginning of the quest there stands an unwelcome

cipher, that the quest itself is an attempted impregnation of life by sterile self-will and by a written record, and that the end of the quest is decipherment, by which I mean the effacement of the cipher with its elucidation by death, spiritual, physical, or both. Near the end of each novel there is a poignant scene wherein a kind of alter-protagonist is collected into the bosom of a family. In *Great Expectations* this is the scene to which I have already referred, where Pip sees little Pip, Joe and Biddy's son. In *Moby Dick* Ishmael, no longer a *Pequod* "isolate," becomes a member of the *Rachel's* crew. The common pattern here is the initial rejection of natural paternity in the narrative, which then leads to a special procreative yet celibate enterprise, which in turn leads to death and a brief vision of what might have happened had the narrative and the initial act of self-isolation never been undertaken. All this illustrates how narrative returns to discover its beginnings in the act whereby the generative faculty was sacrificed to celibate individuality. In each case, therefore, the novelist has committed himself to producing a record of that celibacy.

Marx's discovery of the imaginative role played by money in mid-nineteenth-century Western society is analogous to the discovery made by the novelist's record of a celibate enterprise. What I have been calling the alternative life willed by a novel's protagonist Marx calls "the confounding and compounding of all natural and human qualities." Money is always in evidence during the course of the realistic novel. It seduces the protagonist from natural procreation to a "novelistic" enterprise, to living with great expectations. Much of Dickens, Balzac, Flaubert, Thackeray, James, and Gogol is contained in the following account by Marx of how money gives fiction its potency:

If I long for a particular dish or want to take the mail-coach because I am not strong enough to go by foot, money fetches me the dish and the mail-coach: that is, it converts my wishes from something in the realm of imagination, translates them from their mediated, imagined or willed existence into their *sensuous, actual* existence—from imagination to life, from imagined being into real being. In effecting this mediation, money is the *truly creative* power.

... Being the external, common *medium* and *faculty* for turning an image into reality and reality into a mere *image* (a faculty not springing from man as man or from human society as society), *money* transforms the *real essential powers of man and nature* into what are merely abstract conceits and therefore *imperfections*—into tormenting chimeras—just as it transforms *real imperfections and chimeras*—essential powers which are really impotent, which exist only in the imagination of the individual—into *real powers and faculties*.⁶⁸

These observations are noteworthy for the (perhaps inadvertent) mixture of sexual, monetary, and literary metaphors. Marx apparently conceived of an intersection where material power, the verbal incarnation of reality, and sexual generation interact in ways "confounding and compounding"—and it is this very interaction that the realistic novel manipulates. The result, in that type of novel and in Marx, is the description of something that is unnatural even while being almost entirely effective—something, that is, capable of holding one's attention and enduring despite its eccentricity.

There is still a further stage in the narrative's developing consciousness of its (by now) peculiarly unnatural aims. The chief of these aims, as I said earlier, is to wed inaugural promise to time—to be, in other words, the course of such a marriage, the issue of which is discovery, explanation, genealogy. The narrative represents the generative process—literally in its mimetic representation of men and women in time, metaphorically in that by itself it generates succession and multiplication of events after the manner of human procreation; yet the history of the nineteenth-century novel documents the increasing awareness of a gap between the representations of fictional narrative and the fruitful, generative principle of human life. These are divergent paths that eventually become completely irrelevant to one another. The awareness, therefore, is that narrative cannot represent, cannot truly mime, marriage and be original fiction at the same time.

The purpose of Flaubert's lifelong struggle with the dull and the humdrum was to show that the novel could be made productive at exactly those points where life is not. The novelist's monstrous project is by means of fiction to make a desert bloom—into fiction. Emma Bovary's adultery enhances her beauty, which seems unconnected not only to the circumstances of her marriage, child, and husband, but—Flaubert here intensifies the eccentricity even further—in its terrible artificiality parallels and yet overcomes the failure of Charles's experiment to straighten Hyppolite's clubfoot. The subtlety of Emma's beauty escaped even from the folds of her gown and from the line of her foot.⁶⁹ Like the novel, she is a made object whose express intention is to spite her "natural" failure as a mother and wife. Note, in the following description, how Flaubert uses words to create an altogether nonvisual, and hence literary impression: Emma is a beautiful verbal object *because* she has overstepped the limits of

what is commonly expected of a bourgeois family woman, or even of a natural object.

Never had Madame Bovary been so beautiful as at this period; she had that indefinable beauty that results from joy, from enthusiasm, from success, and that expresses the harmony between temperament and circumstances. Her cravings, her sorrows, her sensuous pleasures and her ever-young illusions had slowly brought her to full maturity, and she blossomed forth in the fullness of her being, like a flower feeding on manure, on rain, wind and sunshine. Her half-closed eyelids seemed perfectly shaped for the long languid glances that escaped from them; her breathing dilated the fine nostrils and raised the fleshy corners of her mouth, shaded in the light by a slight black down. Some artist skilled in corruption seemed to have devised the shape of her hair as it fell on her neck, coiled in a heavy mass, casually reassembled after being loosened daily in adultery.⁷⁰

Such characters risk being dissolved into a shapeless mass of fragments. What holds them together, as Lukacs has said of *L'Education sentimentale*, is time, which

brings order into the chaos of men's lives and gives it the semblance of a spontaneously flowering, organic entity; characters having no apparent meaning appear, establish relations with one another, break them off, disappear again without any meaning having been revealed. But the characters are not simply dropped into that meaningless becoming and dissolving which preceded man and will outlast him. Beyond events, beyond psychology, time gives them the essential quality of their existence The life totality which carries all men here becomes a living and dynamic thing: the expanse of time which the novel covers, dividing men into generations and integrating their actions in a historico-social context, is not an abstract concept, not a unit conceptually constructed after the event, . . . but a thing existing in itself and for itself, a concrete and organic continuum. This totality is a true image of life in the sense that no value-system of ideas enters it except in a regulative function.⁷¹

Although Lukacs's celebrated description accurately emphasizes the importance that Flaubert ascribes to time, it fails to make the distinction between the peculiarly sterile time within the novel and the concrete and organic continuum "established by empiric time in the natural and social human community." And this distinction is crucial: even though it occurs most decisively and explicitly at the end of *L'Education sentimentale*, it is the novel's beginning premise. Our final glimpses of Frédéric are in two scenes, one with Marie and the other with Deslauriers. Both scenes are incidents of unconsummated sexual passion. Marie visits Frédéric in March of 1867 (all of the novel's main action takes place between 1840 and 1848); she is an old woman with white hair and wearing a black lace veil. They reminisce together,

Frédéric astonishing her with his memories of events many years ago. Yet he is disappointed, and to conceal his real feelings he falls to his knees before her; his speech is a patently false one, yet "she rapturously accepted these adorations for the woman she no longer was." When she leaves him a little later, it is forever; but her slightly ridiculous final moment is to snip off one of her white locks for him. "Et ce fut tout"—that was all.⁷²

A few months later Frédéric and Deslauriers are together, going over their former lives. Neither has amounted to much. The novel closes as both think back to 1837 (three years *before* the novel opens) when as boys they paid a visit to the local brothel. Overcome by heat, apprehension, and the sudden sight of so many women at his disposal, Frédéric runs out without doing anything and, because he has no money, Deslauriers must follow. They agree that that period was the best time of their lives.⁷³ The two scenes have in common not only unconsummated passion, but also a place at the end of the novel where, in a sense, they reveal novelistic time entirely capable of unity and unnatural order. Insofar as both scenes reveal to us the novel's true beginnings—in Frédéric's addition to sentiments wholly inappropriate to reality (in one scene he is an old man playing the role of a lover twenty-seven years too late, in the other he ignores the lapse in his sexual experience in order to enjoy a suggestive memory of vaguely erotic good times)—at the *end* of the novel, they confirm the novel's structure and its plot, both of which reverse the order of nature. Like the 1848 events, the time of Moreau leads nowhere; but unlike those events, the novel has a compositional integrity which is ironically based upon sterility, celibacy, and eccentricity. Frédéric's authority as the novel's central character rests upon everything in him that has not developed naturally. Hence the winter-in-spring effect of the last scenes. So complete is the disparity between genealogical continuity and novelistic continuity that Flaubert, as if to be impudent, places these infinitely rich and suggestive primary scenes outside the main action of the novel—specifically, doubly defiant, at the end. Both scenes take place at moments of temporal detachment from the main body of events: one nineteen years *after* them, the other three years *before* them.

Dostoevsky in *The Possessed*, even more decisively than Flaubert in his novels, presents the disjunction between character as beginning authority and the character's actions in his time, on the one hand, and, on the other, the sequential order of time in

genealogical succession. This discontinuity feeds our ever-increasing suspicion of a narrator anxious to make outrageous events conform to the seeming order of his narrative. Our suspicion is aroused from the novel's very opening, so strongly, in fact, that we soon consider the narrator himself as much a Quixote as we do Stepan Trofimovitch. For what is one to make of a reporter whose introductory account of a character is as full of purposeful vagueness as that character himself? Here are some instances of what I have in mind, taken almost at random from chapter 1 of the Garnett translation:

Yet Stepan Trofimovitch was a most intelligent and gifted man, even so to say a man of science, though indeed in science, . . . well, in fact he had not done such great things in science. I believe indeed he had done nothing at all. . . .

Later on—after [Trofimovitch] had lost his post as lecturer, however—he published (by way of revenge, so to say, and to show them what a man they had lost) in a progressive monthly review, which translated Dickens and advocated the views of George Sand, the beginning of a very profound investigation into the causes, I believe, of the extraordinary moral nobility of certain knights at a certain epoch or something of that nature.

Some lofty and exceptionally noble idea was maintained in it, anyway. It was said afterwards that the progressive review had to suffer for having printed the first part. That may very well have been so, for what was not possible in those days? Though, in this case, it was more likely that there was nothing of the kind, and that the author himself was too lazy to conclude his essay. He cut short his lectures on the Arabs because, somehow and by some one (probably one of his reactionary enemies) a letter had been seized giving an account of certain circumstances, in consequence of which some one had demanded an explanation from him. I don't know if the story is true.⁷⁴

The hedgings, the doubts, the second- and third-hand reports, the ambiguous passive constructions, the leaps in argument—all are part of a textual fabric badly concealing its radical internal discontinuity as well as its disjunctive relations with reality. Furthermore, every human relationship in the novel seems to lack connection and defy consummation: marriages, in other words, are either ended or unrecognized, whether in the legal state or outside it. Consequently the relations between men and women, as well as those between parents and children, are uniformly skewed. A catalog of the abuse heaped upon the state of marriage, the family, and the individual, which would be a long one indeed, would suggest the extent to which the novel tampers with the most intimate continuities. The principal actors in the book are as disruptive in their effects upon us as are Pyotr Stepanovitch Verhovensky's designs for chaos.

Stavrogin is one such actor. Having refused every burden and gift offered him, having affirmed and denied all ties to others, yet having tortured himself about them either in explanation, settlement, or acceptance, he gives his written confession to Father Tihon. So confounding are Stavrogin's actions in the novel—as son, student, friend, husband, lover, revolutionary, comrade—that his confession, in intention at least, is presented as an instrument for straightening things out. What the psychologist-saint Tihon does is to show Stavrogin how the confession is *representation*,⁷⁵ a chronicle whose intention is to narrate a portion of Stavrogin's life and its great sin, but which conceals the man who has lived it behind the façade of its almost ridiculous ugliness. Tihon volunteers an alternative to publishing the document: silence and secret withdrawal from the world. Otherwise, he fears, either Stavrogin's confession once published will be construed as attempting to provoke the public, or that just before publication Stavrogin will be found to have committed another terrible crime “solely to avoid the publication of these sheets.”⁷⁶ One of the points of this difficult scene, I think, is that writing and psychology conspire to overwhelm any morality or ethic based upon a common sense understanding of consequence. Whereas such understanding stipulates that the consequence of a confessed crime is absolution for the believer as well as punishment, Tihon (whom Stavrogin calls a “cursed psychologist”) argues that so complex are the mind and its refractions in writing that one cannot expect to find any consecutive sense in them at all. A confession therefore might result in being accused of yet another crime, instead of simply requiring repentance, forgiveness, and retribution. Words do not necessarily tell what happens, since they have a life of their own, discontinuous with and eccentric to the “real” world. The insufficiency of narrative—which is what Stavrogin has written—is once again revealed; Dostoevsky's technique is to make text, sequential time and understanding, the biological order of human genealogy all, in his novel, totally discontinuous elements.

In such circumstances, as Hardy was less richly to recognize in *Jude the Obscure*, a man like Stavrogin cannot survive, and so he chooses death by suicide. He stands enigmatically in the midst of four other characters who are first poised at the brink of, and then like him plunge into, the psychological void separating conscious withdrawal from their inauthentic habitual roles, on the one hand, and, on the other, an infinite chaos which neither the historical

nor the natural senses can comprehend: Shatov is the victim of ritual murder, Stepan becomes the wandering oracle, Kirrilov elects self-conscious suicide, and Pyotr disappears into the interior of Russia. Stavrogin in a way represents their collective mystery. When he hangs himself, we feel—because Dostoevsky evidently wants us to feel it—that the narrative description of his death is now prodding the silent traces of death into a sort of supplementary verbal life.

Novels increasingly take the form of retrospective, puzzling adventure at the end of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth. The attention paid to narrative technique by James, Conrad, and Ford is evidence of the way in which the novel abandons its quasi-paternal role in favor of an almost total supplementarity. An event is presumed to have occurred—as in *The Good Soldier* or *Heart of Darkness* or *What Maisie Knew*—which the novel attempts to reconstruct by means of investigation; yet the reconstruction is performed as a form of discursive retrospective supplement to the event-as-action. Character then becomes an instrument for the author and reader to use in composing this supplement. Often the mode of this supplement is utterance—a speaking voice—and its goal commemoration. Thus in *Ulysses*, Bloom, Molly, and Stephen commemoratively, and in spite of themselves, repeat Homer; their words and actions recite the *Odyssey*, the original narrative, in the midst of which they have been inserted all along. A father bereft of his son, a son casting off his usurping family: these characters are ironically, impossibly reconciled in an impersonal and unattractive Ithaca. The resident Penelope performs her wifely and maternal roles in the endlessly postponing form of a speaking dream.

The note of betrayal running so strongly throughout *Ulysses* is partly, of course, a Joycean obsession. Yet the reader would do well to see in this theme another meaning: Stephen's constant preoccupation is with the idea that he will always be considered an Irish artist, a secondary person twice over; thus his art, as Buck Mulligan puts it, is well-symbolized by the cracked looking-glass of a servant.⁷⁷ History and society seem to have forced upon the novel its supplementarity, to which the novelist's most effective answer is a very difficult art whose connections with reality are seldom obvious. This is the betrayal of art by society, according to Joyce, and the retaliation of art. Nevertheless, such a rationale does not exhaust the meaning of betrayal. The problem is the author-novelist himself, upon whom the pressure of the novel as

institution weighs heavily. The novel's paternal role—to author, father, procreate a rival reality—appears to be increasingly a formal one. Authority gives way to repetition, as mimesis gives way to parody and innovation to rewriting.⁷⁸ Each new novel recapitulates not life but other novels. It is not much to say, I think, that the late-nineteenth-century phase of the novel I have been discussing can be characterized as one in which narrative loses the sense of beginnings with which it had commenced. And this because the author now considers himself as much a creation as his writing. This motif in the novel, present since *Tristram Shandy*, is one of the molestations of authority whose force never diminishes. If being “too menmy” induces the author to stray too far away from authority, then he can no longer be the old father. Instead, as human subject, he finds himself a subject of interpretation in the course of his authorship; the provisional character of his power to authorize a fiction seems ever more accentuated.

“When one has grasped that the ‘subject’ is not something that creates effects, but only a fiction, much follows.” Thus Nietzsche in 1887. If everything known can be reduced to the status of a fiction, and all truth to interpretation, then, according to Nietzsche the

will to truth is a making firm, a making true and durable, an abolition of the false character of things, a reinterpretation of it into beings. “Truth” is therefore not something there, that might be found or discovered—but something that must be created and that gives a name to a process, or rather to a will to overcome that has in itself no end—introducing truth, as a *processus in infinitum*, an active determining—not a becoming—conscious of something that is in itself firm and determined. It is a word for the “will to power.” . . .

Man projects his drive to truth, his “goal” in a certain sense, outside himself as a world that has being, as a metaphysical world, as a “thing-in-itself,” as a world already in existence. His needs as creator invent the world upon which he works, anticipate it; this anticipation (this “belief” in truth) is his support.⁷⁹

This is as much as to say that a writer can take nothing for granted. Each invention is an act of overcoming flux, a way of temporarily forcing a created subject-object upon the world. The more powerful the will (to power or to belief), the more durable, and hence more convincing, the truth it seeks to promulgate. Nothing separates “truth” in this definition from “reinterpretation”; the latter is the will to truth of one interpretation—more durable, more strongly argued—over others. Yet since no one interpretation can be said to be more original than another (no

interpretation is the first interpretation), to invent or to anticipate the world requires of the inventor a strong initial conviction of self. When, as in narrative, author and invention are tied temporally to the same beginning—the desire to narrate an event—the risk that author and invention will dissolve one into the other increases greatly.

The explicit results of such a dissolution are to be found, confirmed, and sustained in T. E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.⁸⁰ A passage from its formerly suppressed opening chapter demonstrates the difficulty Lawrence had in making his “truth”—his invention, his creation, his interpretation—endure (“the old men” in the passage refers to the victory of other interpretations):

In these pages the history is not of the Arab movement, but of me in it. It is a narrative of daily life, mean happenings, little people. Here are no lessons for the world, no disclosures to shock people. It is filled with trivial things, partly that no one mistake for history the bones from which some day a man may make history, and partly for the pleasure it gave me to recall the fellowship of the revolt. We were fond together, because of the sweep of the open places, the taste of wide winds, the sunlight, and the hopes in which we worked. The morning freshness of the world-to-be intoxicated us. We were wrought up with ideas inexpressible and vaporous, but to be fought for. We lived many lives in those whirling campaigns, never sparing ourselves; yet when we achieved and the new world dawned, the old men came out again and took our victory to re-make in the likeness of the former world they knew. Youth could win, but had not learned to keep: and was pitifully weak against age. We stammered that we had worked for a new heaven and a new earth, and they thanked us kindly and made their peace.⁸¹

In the rest of the book, however, every dream of glory from Western man's epic past is assembled by this scholar-adventurer-initiator-author-originator. The scene is a real war (World War I), the setting a real desert, given to Lawrence by history, in which to execute his perfect action, with beginning, middle, and end. The narrative rivals the titanic fictions of Dostoevsky and Melville by treating the realities of an accomplished desert campaign.⁸² It was Lawrence alone who could pick his goal, his prophet, and his warriors for this utterly male campaign. He seeks out Feisal in the same way that a poet seeks out his theme: “I felt at first glance that this was the man I had come to Arabia to seek—the leader who would bring the Arab revolt to full glory.”⁸³ And these chosen ambitions were to replace the vagaries of Arab existence and Muslim faith, which for too long had clung vaguely to Mecca

and Medina, with an entire project, superimposed on the nomadic givens like a grand pattern for a great house.

Out of the chaos was to come a story, characters, purpose. Whereas the Arabs wanted quite naturally to recapture Mecca and Medina from the Turks in a series of fixed battles, Lawrence wanted instead to take Damascus by a more-or-less unconnected series of moving attacks. Early in the book, as Lawrence rides through Arabia toward Medina, he reflects: "My thoughts as we went were how this was the pilgrim road, down which for uncounted generations, the people of the north had come to visit the Holy City, bearing with them gifts of faith for the shrine; and it seemed that the Arab Revolt might be in a sense a return pilgrimage, to take back to the north, to Syria, an idea for an ideal, a belief in liberty for their past belief in a revelation."⁸⁴ Thus Lawrence's creative presence shifts and reinterprets the Arab revolt's whole direction, just as, for instance, Joyce shifts the triviality of a June day in Dublin into a pattern of eighteen episodes out of the *Odyssey*. Lawrence's will converts the East into the forms of the West: not Medina and Mecca, but Jerusalem and Damascus; not Muhammad and his sherifs, but Christ the prophet played by Feisal; not mere desert tribes, but a congregation of the faithful, a People, led by a warrior-zealot-Paul-Auda. Even the classicist in Lawrence could be satisfied. For here, too, were Troy, Agamemnon, Achilles, and the Greeks. If accomplished then, such a many-tiered plan would be a triumph indeed.

Everything in *The Seven Pillars* is heavily determined by Lawrence's interpretations, which while he writes is retrospection, but as he acts in the book is anticipation. The work's subtitle is "A triumph," a clear enough phrase as anticipation of the revolt's victory; this is how Lawrence's contemporaries, and many of the Arabs, saw it. Yet in the book itself the narrative drifts ever further from triumph and further from sequential progress. Lawrence goes to Arabia as a young and energetic man, yet at the end of *The Seven Pillars* he emerges a broken man. At the beginning, he says, "I wrote my will across the sky in stars," and further on in the book he details this a bit further: "The desert was held in a crazed communism by which Nature and the elements were for the free use of every known friendly person for his own purposes and no more."⁸⁵

These purposes are defined by Lawrence in chapter 33, during an illness that has rendered him semidelirious. He realizes that the

house of war, as he calls it, must be designed carefully; but since the plan for it is imaginative, the elements have to be treated as if they, too, are nonmaterial. This transvaluation of his army and mission makes Lawrence invent a new science—composed, he says, of an algebraic, a biological, and a psychological part: even the rubrics are rarefied. The whole is designed to transcend logical sequence in the average mind. This was to be a war of detachment, not of contact; there would be no central point to the campaign, just raids spread out as far as possible; no front, no army, no confrontation. The plan was based on irregularity and extreme articulation. From then on in the book the writing becomes increasingly more technically detailed and less readable, for the text and the plan of the book have been transvalued into a special mode of existence, creating an actor and created by the author—in both cases, Lawrence himself.⁸⁶

A flaw, however, hinders the narrative. The flaw is the author himself, Lawrence, miming the Arab and yet acting the god, torn between his disguise as participant and his imperialistic will as unnatural father of the movement. The seven pillars are erected: Damascus is gained. Yet the gaps between the large blocks of the structure are signs of an origin betrayed in the very process of building. Thus in history the Arabs win, yet their original aim, a finished state, is withheld from them by historical necessity in the West. In the narrative, the book completes itself, yet its meaning resides almost wholly in the traduced aim and the violated integrity known only, and then very obscurely, to the author: "There seemed no straight walking for us leaders in this crooked lane of conduct, ring within ring of unknown, shamefaced motives cancelling or double-charging their precedents."⁸⁷ The text is a mausoleum commemorating a secret no longer remembered after Lawrence's postwar mind-suicide (the phrase was Lawrence's for his self-burial in the ranks of common soldiers); the secret resembles the mysterious initials, "S. A.," to whom the book is dedicated, and which provide the reader with a minimal clue—or a death without a corpse. Reduced to mere textuality, the book's virtue, as Lawrence wrote Lionel Curtis in 1923, was its secrecy; or, as he wrote to V. W. Richards in 1920, his narrative was to be "the-book-to-build-the-house."⁸⁸ Narrative has come to this, then: a house without women, without fulfillment, without family. Which is why Malraux says that "the Arab epic became in Lawrence's mind the medium for a grandiose expression of human

emptiness."⁸⁹ In his more diffident yet more direct way, E. M. Forster wrote to Lawrence: "I find something not quite satisfactory in your presentation of the human race."⁹⁰

IV

Both Malraux and Forster felt that Lawrence's portrayal of man was insufficiently "real" and solid. Forster's suggestion was to "put in more conversations," on the theory that since in real life men talk, they should also be seen talking in narratives. In conflict here, I believe, are the concepts of traditional novelistic man, whose portrayal relies exclusively on the conventions for depicting man institutionalized by the classical novel, and another sort of man—Lawrence's—whose presence in writing obeys only the exigencies of the writing—whatever those may be—rather than those prescribed by any existing genre. Lawrence had confessed that *The Seven Pillars* was an atypical mixture of confession and history, with the former almost always overriding the latter; Lawrence's own psychology was far from static, and thus the specific difficulties he encountered in rendering his hyperactive self-consciousness dictated not only his method of writing narrative history, but also his conceptions of history and change, of man in history, and of the kind of text that could deliver the fullest psychological account in the context of history. During the course of *The Seven Pillars*, Lawrence begins to become conscious of playing a part in events that he set in motion. He becomes thereafter an agent of what he has himself created among the Arabs, and from then on he turns into an unwilling transcriber of events. The text goes forward with himself in its very grip. When he is captured at Deraa, his masquerade as an Arab is exposed, and he is punished for it. As author, Lawrence becomes, during the last part of the book, a victim of his writing—a project that, like the Arab revolt, he must see through to completion despite his efforts to withdraw from it. Lawrence's failure to be sincere with the Arabs is balanced by his fanatical sincerity in rendering his hypocrisy. The revolt as a project is finally terminated, as is the book, but the result (as Lawrence well knew) was a shabby history of betrayal and manipulation, a shattered, unfinished monument. For Lawrence the book represented a perpetual confrontation with his personality, with his authority as a man in history: the

authority of a writer, an adventurer, a famous personality whose inescapable fate was to write a story of irregular initiation, irregular campaign, and irregular triumph.

There is a stark contrast between the epic grandeur of *The Seven Pillars*, to which most admirers of Lawrence respond very easily, and its far more complex and interesting psychological and textual problems. In 1886 Nietzsche had written of the difference between "the old mendacious pomp, junk, and gold dust of unconscious human vanity"—which in Lawrence corresponds to his successes in the Arab revolt—and the "basic text of *homo natura*."⁹¹ A narrative history such as Lawrence's history of the Arab revolt only implicitly incorporates the "basic text," yet within that text the dynamic of molestation and authority that I discussed earlier is less well-disguised and nearer the surface than it is in the classical novel. Both Lawrence's overburdened privacy and the public nature of the Arab revolt obviously violate the novel's conventional restraints. Yet along with Conrad, Dostoevsky, and Hardy, Lawrence feels very strongly the human encroachments upon the practice of being an author. And along with theirs his work reconsiders the fundamental problem of how to make language in general and narrative in particular more responsive than before to the task of describing man's nature. My argument is that central to such a description is the difficulty of rendering the sequential order of man's life in time, especially since language and psychology seem to operate outside the exclusively linear rules of progress or meaning. As we saw, the classical novel contained the molestations of psychology and language in the pattern of procreation and generation found in the genealogically imagined plot, the family, and the self. But such a pattern cannot properly begin or order writing once the human subject is no longer given as capable of such procreation, once as a subject its major feature is not the author's faith in it but the fact that it, and its author, are fictions together being produced during the writing.

The value of Lawrence's narrative is that it can be studied more freely than the novel as a work exposing the psychological, textual, and conceptual strains to which the novel was susceptible. I suggested earlier that these problems result from the specific cultural role of novels in the West: novels represent as well as contain change; they add to reality and interpret it; they accept the burdens, as well as the pleasures, of such desires on the part of the author and the reader. Thus a novel *begins* in a particular way and moves according to a logic of development implicitly

acknowledged by both author and reader. For the critic, however, this beginning and this development are not simply duplicated over and over during the course of the genre's history. Rather, the critic regards them as investigative instruments that not only contribute to the ideas of beginning and development but also change those ideas. The more those ideas change, the more radically (by definition) the novel can be seen as a reinterpretation of its own beginning and development, as well as those of man, the novel's protagonist. The attention I have paid to Conrad, Hardy, Flaubert, Dostoevsky, and Lawrence has had the purpose of characterizing a late stage in the changing conception of the novel as an enterprise for reflecting on beginning and development. Historically, this stage coincides with two other major efforts to deal with these issues on somewhat the same grounds as the novel does.

A very considerable part of what Nietzsche and Freud set out to do in their work is radically anthropological in the same sense as was the late-nineteenth-century novel. Each regarded the task of accurately describing man as fundamentally connected with three related problems. One is the problem of biography as embodied in genealogical sequence: to what extent is this sequence adequate for reflecting the ascertainable discontinuities in a man's life? Where in this sequence does one locate the beginning if, for instance, psychological knowledge is not based solely upon the fact of birth, but upon transpersonal, natural, and "prehistoric" forces like the unconscious or the will? The second problem is that of language in relation to human reality: how well does writing—how well *can* writing—incarnate this reality given that mimesis is scarcely a comprehensive technique? What sort of text is most faithful in rendering the complexities of human psychology? The third problem is that of dealing with man's fiction-making capabilities: if producing narrative is in some way a basic human tendency, how does one cognitively deal with fiction and image making in narrative? That is, is fiction utilitarian, or simply decorative?

It is fairly evident that all these questions are interrelated. But consider for a start Nietzsche's statement of the program of re-interpreting the three problems to which he, and presumably also Freud, would give assent:

To translate man back into nature; to become master over the many vain and overly enthusiastic interpretations and connotations that have so far been scrawled and painted over that eternal basic text of *homo natura*; to see to it

that man henceforth stands before man as even today, hardened in the discipline of science, he stands before the *rest* of nature, with intrepid Oedipus eyes and sealed bird catchers who have been piping at him all too long, "you are more, you are higher, you are of a different origin!"—that may be a strange and insane task, but it is a *task*—who would deny that? Why did we choose this insane task? Or, putting it differently: "why have knowledge at all?"⁹²

This passage's use of such metaphors and expressions as "translation," "interpretation," "basic text," and so forth to describe knowledge of man indicates how strongly Nietzsche feels to be the connection between man and language. Equally strongly, I think, he feels that all hitherto available and formal uses of language betray "the basic text of *homo natura*." To restore that text Nietzsche calls for a combined Oedipus—strikingly prefiguring Freud—and Odysseus who would begin the task by radically making knowledge the intention of the text.

But why should that be so: why should knowledge be sought anyway? Nietzsche's answer is as follows:

Learning changes us; it does what all nourishment does which also does not merely "preserve"—as physiologists know. But at the bottom of us, really "deep down," there is, of course, something unteachable, some granite of spiritual *fatum*, of predetermined decision and answer to predetermined selected questions. Whenever a cardinal problem is at stake, there speaks an unchangeable "this is I": about man and woman, for example, a thinker cannot relearn but only finish learning—only discover ultimately how this is "settled in him." At times we find certain solutions of problems that inspire strong faith in *us*; some call them henceforth *their* "convictions." Later—we see them only as steps to self-knowledge, signposts to the problem we *are*—rather, to that great stupidity we are, to our spiritual *fatum*, to what is *unteachable* very "deep down."⁹³

Intimations of Freud are present in this passage, too—not only in its use of imagery of depth to describe that which is unteachable, and presumably unconscious, in man, but also in its references to the dialectical learning process and—more important, I think—in its conception of man as problem. If, as the last sentence of Nietzsche's declaration seems to suggest, man's deepest reality is that he *is* a problem, then the insane task of gaining knowledge requires finding, first, a form of understanding that recognizes this truth, and second, a language and a text in which to contain, express, realize, fulfill, or incarnate this knowledge. Invoking ancient heroes like Oedipus and Odysseus concedes at the outset that the task is historically, fearfully, and perennially demanding. For such knowledge does not carry with it the ordinary rewards of

human self-aggrandizement, nor does it simply identify man with nature. Rather, this knowledge imposes upon man responsibility for his mind as well as for his "unteachable" participation in the facts of nature. Comparable ambition in seeking knowledge is found, I think, in the last lines of W. B. Yeats's poem "The Tower." The poet charges himself "to study in a learned school" in order to render his soul capable of regarding with equanimity the wreckage of his entire physical, sensual world—body, friends, beauty. Decrepitude will appear to

Seem but the clouds of the sky
When the horizon fades,
Or a bird's sleepy cry
Among the deepening shades.⁹⁴

Just as nature is a complex space in which events occur in temporal as well as spatial dimensions that are not uniformly linear or progressive, so man's knowledge of himself is (or ought to be considered) similarly complex. Yet "nature" cannot be grasped immediately; the very use of so general a rubric frequently disguises an enormous amount of ignorance, as Nietzsche himself most incisively observed. Rather, nature has to be interpreted, or read, just as man must be read and interpreted. This is a fundamental point which, in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud was to make many times and in many different ways. Dreams, he says at some point, do not come into being with the intention of being understood: they simply *are* (and they are problematical), they unscrupulously yield to any method of granting visual representation to dream-thoughts, and their unity is simply an illusion. Therefore, like nature under the gaze of the scientist, dreams are hieroglyphics which can only be understood by schooling oneself in their peculiar mechanisms. Yet the most problematical thing about dreams is that everyone, even their interpreter, dreams them. How, then, does one separate the object of study from the object of experience—or from the experience *tout court*? The relatively simple answer to this question is appealing indeed, and Freud seems not to have evaded it: first one experiences the object, then one analyzes it. Or, as most writers would say, first one gets the material oneself, then one studies it as something whose method of acquisition is itself significant.

Yet as with any novelist or reader, Freud at the very beginning is faced with deciding how to deal with objects of experience and analysis whose primary, absolutely basic feature is their subjective

distortion of reality—objects of experience, moreover, that are admitted fictions whose mode of existence is *as* experience. For one can not only legitimately doubt the value of a dream, but also legitimately question its boundaries, its relation to life, its recollection. Given these difficulties, it is obviously very hard to gather material on dreams, and even harder to make fast distinctions between the "real" facts and illusory ones regarding them. The *Interpretation* deals as much with the nature of psychological reality as with the meaning of dreams, but the book's fascination lies in the fact that Freud does not choose between illusion and reality until the very end. His policy seems to have been to record everything possible about dreams and then to sift out the true from the counterfeit. The structure of the book is therefore intended to reflect the stages of an investigation, not just its results. Such a structure, I think, consciously minimizes what would have been an otherwise passive transcription of "scientific" findings. In a sense Freud wishes his text to be the stage, the locale, where dream interpretation takes place.⁹⁵

However strong Freud's wish to make his investigations seem to be unfolding before the reader, he is too systematic a writer to deliver a slapdash text. Nevertheless, his text is ordered according to a planned dissociation, a dismemberment of image clusters (dreams) into fragments of thought—despite the fact that the claim to attention made by his objects of study is precisely their striking, if irrational and distorted, unity of composition. Such a strategy is of special interest to the student of literature. It is as if Freud were taking into account the impasse reached by so many late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century novels—as reflected by their tendency to represent supplements to activity the writer cannot fully capture and by their disillusionment with mimetic attempts to represent man in language. In both instances novelists turned to techniques that compensated for deficiencies in the novel's traditional mimetic strength. Conrad's use of interlocking and qualifying "records," Flaubert's use of temporality, the images of victimizing and enigmatic texts in Dostoevsky and Lawrence—these, as we saw above, have their roots, technically at least, in the traditional novel's radical dynamic of authority and molestation. In Freud's case he deliberately avoids the instruments socially, culturally, and institutionally linked in the West to the practice of fiction, even as his material is—and remains throughout his career—firmly connected to that same practice. For *dreams* we can easily imagine substituting the word *fiction*, for *distortion* the

term *point of view*, for *regression* and *condensation* the term *biography*, for *parents* the novelistic *family*, and so on. When Freud in one place states the value of dream interpretation, he even reads like Henry James's description of fiction as a house with many windows: "The interpretation of dreams is like a window through which we can get a glimpse of the interior of that apparatus" (p. 219).⁹⁶

Thus a further burden is imposed upon Freud. The *Interpretation* is not only an encyclopedia of dream interpretation, a theater for staging Freud's scientific investigations: it is also a text whose intention is to begin a discourse one of whose principal purposes is the conscious avoidance of certain specific textual conventions.⁹⁷ The first of these conventions is supplementarity, a defensive tactic used to separate the text temporally and spatially from the events it is describing. Thus the text comes after the event and its mode is verbal, whereas the events are taken to be "material." A second convention is the adoption of a logic of structure and argument based on temporal and spatial forward movement. Despite digressions and temporary regressions, the principal motion is sequential, a movement forward until, as the expression has it, a conclusion is reached. Third is the convention of adequacy, according to which the text is assumed to be fully equal to the task of conveying, incarnating, containing, realizing, or fulfilling its intention, its meaning, or both together. Most hermeneutics assumes this sort of adequacy, for the argument is that frequent "returns" to a text will yield up a meaning that is wholly knowable, and wholly embodied in the text—at least for the purposes of its adequate reading. Fourth is the convention of finality. Each portion of the text—each discrete unit, from the smallest to the whole of the text itself—is *in its place* more or less finally, by which I mean that neither what precedes each such unit nor what follows it is considered equal to it at that moment. A hierarchy is established in which the text or any subunit thereof fully and finally displaces every other text or unit at the moment of that text's appearance and/or reading. The fifth and final convention is that the unity, or integrity, of the text is maintained by a series of genealogical connections: author-text, beginning-middle-end, text-meaning, reader-interpretation, and so on. Underneath all these is the imagery of succession, of paternity, of hierarchy.

Some combination of these conventions is taken for granted, I think, in most writing before Freud and Nietzsche. My argument

has been that the classical novel employs all of these in its plot, subject matter, and development for the specific reasons and in the characteristic ways discussed above. In a sense, then, the novel most explicitly realizes these conventions, gives them coherence and imaginative life by grounding them in a text whose beginning premise is, as we have said above, paternal. This is decidedly not the case with Freud's writing, and a great deal of what I shall be saying specifically about *The Interpretation of Dreams* applies not only to other texts of Freud but also to the general textual theories of Nietzsche. I shall leave till subsequent chapters the question of how these theories can be construed as having a bearing on the attitude of other modern writers toward the text. Certainly at first glance Freud's general theory of dreams and of the unconscious seems undeniably to have influenced the vocabulary of modern writing. Yet no less a pioneering effort is Freud's textual practice itself in *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

In studying this text it is important, I believe, to keep in mind the conventions referred to above, as well as Freud's lifelong fascination with the role of the father. Not only does the latter play a key role in Freud's discussion of the Oedipus complex, but it also returns later in Freud's historical essays, such as *Moses and Monotheism* and *Totem and Taboo*. There are strong echoes of paternity as well in his analyses of the superego, of culture and of religion. A general observation worth noting here is that Freud's displacement and qualification in his psychology of the father's role—a role which is always complex and, despite radical qualifications upon it, highly ambivalent—is accompanied by parallel displacements and qualifications made in those genealogical, hierarchical, and consecutive conventions to be found in the idea of a text. Perhaps it is too glib to see in this Freud's interest in substituting brothers for fathers, copresence for consecutiveness, temporal and spatial simultaneity for the (relative) finality of sequence. None of these displacements comes about by assertion, however; rather, each is concomitant with Freud's special sort of analytical reasoning, in which a healthy respect for what he calls the wisdom of the ancients is combined with a daring insolence in advancing novel hypotheses. Another simple way of stating this is to call Freud's writing an amalgam of scientific and "traditional" wisdom.

It is no accident that the protocol of *The Interpretation of Dreams* is not at all that of a conventional scientific text, but rather that of a narrative account of multifaceted experiences

related to a presumably educated reader—though not necessarily a professional one. The text is shot through with many personal asides, bits of anecdotal history, retractions and corrections of views previously forwarded by the author himself (sometimes earlier in the same chapter). Freud's favorite narrative image, of course, is that of a rambling walk during which prospects open up, are closed off, or ignored. The most celebrated sentence in the book—"The interpretation of dreams is the royal road [*via regia*] to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind"—brilliantly transforms the pervasive image of a rambling walk into that of a highly purposeful and forceful journey toward a goal. Yet even in that very late statement in the book, Freud does not desert the possibilities of his earlier formulation: for when dealing with something so impervious to efforts at straightforward, final definition as the unconscious, it is fairly certain that yet again we will have to content ourselves with rambling toward it, even on the royal road.

At no point in the *Interpretation* does Freud scant the variety of his evidence—or, for that matter, the fact that most of it is inconclusive, contradictory, of doubtful origin, and even commonsensically useless. This is quite apart from the evidence of dreams themselves. As a writer, Freud says on numerous occasions, his job is to somehow make his prose adequate for extracting the useful from the dross. Yet his beginning principle is an extremely catholic one—is no less than the belief that all "psychical events are determined, [that] there is nothing arbitrary about them" (p. 514). A few pages later he says, "That is why in analysing a dream I insist that the whole scale of estimates of certainty shall be abandoned and that the faintest possibility that something of this or that sort may have occurred in the dream shall be treated as complete certainty" (p. 516). Therefore, all the evidence of (and on) dreams is interconnected, it is admissible, and it all works. How all the evidence is connected together and how and why it works is the problem. A still greater problem is presenting the evidence in language. Near the end of the book Freud indicates the scope of his difficulties:

In venturing on an attempt to penetrate more deeply into the psychology of dream-processes, I have set myself a hard task, and one to which my powers of exposition are scarcely equal. Elements in this complicated whole which are in fact simultaneous can only be represented successively in my description of them, while, in putting forward each point,

I must avoid appearing to anticipate the grounds on which it is based: difficulties such as these it is beyond my strength to answer. In all this I am paying the penalty for the fact that in my account of dream-psychology I have been unable to follow the historical development of my own views. Though my own line of approach to the subject of dreams was determined by my previous work on the psychology of the neuroses, I had not intended to make use of the latter as a basis of reference in the present work. Nevertheless I am constantly being driven to do so, instead of proceeding as I should have wished, in the contrary direction and using dreams as a means of approach to the psychology of the neuroses. I am conscious of all the trouble in which my readers are thus involved, but I can see no means of avoiding it. (p. 588)

If his text is one result of these insufficiencies, Freud is admitting here that it cannot be regarded as the unequivocally happy realization of his plans for it. The available guides for prose construction were not adequate for his material. He says earlier that as he writes he has had to keep at bay all the ideas associated with a particular dream, then adds, "And in the meantime the 'meaning' of the dream was borne in upon me. I became aware of an intention which was carried into effect in the dream and which must have been my motive for dreaming it" (p. 118). A (disguised wish for) intention is present and it works to give the dream a meaning, but an evident subdivision has taken place between presence and the awareness of it. In other words, whereas an intention must have determined the dream itself, the intention does not immediately and prescriptively yield to analysis. Instead, associated thoughts appear to the analyst; they cling to the intention as clusters around a nucleus or, as Freud says later, as mushroomlike growths around a deep node (p. 525). Just as any dream is a palimpsest, sections of which remain vivid while others are almost invisible or partial, so the analysis has the same quality.

Two practical, textual consequences follow, one more obvious than the other. First, Freud's text is constructed like a palimpsest. Thanks to James Strachey's precise editing, we can see physical signs of how, in each of the eight German editions, Freud interpolated new or revised material, sometimes to make new or revised points, sometimes to clarify old ones. The palimpsest goes beyond this sort of intervention. Since Freud's subject matter and his attitude toward it can be grasped only in verbal fragments (whether of dreams or of language—i.e. sequential prose), they must be able to accommodate important changes. Usually the reason for these changes is that the fragment as first apprehended was necessarily incomplete—that is, its intention, while present,

was not visible. Therefore, none of Freud's sentences at a given point in the text is a final statement, not even in its immediate context. Here is a perfect example of what I mean:

We shall be taking into account everything that has been brought to light by our analysis of unpleasurable dreams if we make the following modification in the formula in which we have sought to express the nature of dreams: *a dream is a (disguised) fulfillment of a (suppressed or repressed) wish.* (p. 160)⁹⁸

The typographical devices—the italics and the parentheses—used here to indicate Freud's later changes, emphasize the proleptic as well as the recapitulatory aspects of the observation. In addition, the parentheses on the printed page represent the mechanisms of disguise and repression, not only by virtue of their presence, but also, paradoxically, by their delayed appearance.

The second textual consequence is immediately related to Freud's analytic method. Every dream has a "plot" of its own that has no corresponding parallel in reality. In a real sense, dream continuity is, like the novel's plot, an alternative way of perceiving a movement of images: such a continuity may seem arbitrary, but it has an undeniable logic and order that we tend to deprecate with the thought that "it's only a dream." It is the construction of the dream that is unfamiliar, for the images themselves are not created images, but rather familiar, mostly mnemonic images combined in self-protective and unfamiliar ways (pp. 418-19). Freud's analytic way with these combinatory puzzles is to dissociate them from one another by first writing them down or speaking them aloud in sentences and then grappling with the possible meaning of the sentences one by one. That is, his verbal interpretation of dreams operates at the sentence (or even phrase) level rather than at the paragraph level, even though the latter more closely parallels the overall organizational pattern of the dream. In the sequence of dream-images Freud discerns certain types of barriers—distortion, condensation, displacement, secondary revision—whose function is to safeguard, even seduce, the dominant consciousness from experiencing an unpleasant encounter with the unconscious. By sidestepping the sequential order that images follow in the dream, Freud therefore lets "thought" emerge as a result of the analysis; and during the analysis he also discovers that a dream-thought reaches representation in imagery through dream-work. The sequence of images then achieves order by effacing the traces of dream-work and dream-thought. Because the dream-plot also usually frees itself of the powerful emotions

and desires that brought it into being, Freud likens the dream to corpses lying on a battlefield (p. 467). His interpretive task is thus to make the battlefield come alive again.

I have detailed these steps to show how methodic is Freud's decision not to let images and sequences, or plots made up of images, determine the order of his analysis. Similarly, in his text each image is dissected into its associated thoughts. Essential to this procedure is the transformation of the dream from images into words. The element of dreams is imagery (even though images in dreams sometimes "speak" using words); its logic, or plot, is the particular way that images can combine with one another. Once translated from images into interpretive language, the plot of the dream, and hence its image, loses its effective power to dominate one's attention. When the image becomes a sentence recorded as part of the interpretation, the "plot"—which Freud describes as using any means within its reach, "legitimate or illegitimate" (p. 411), illogical or contradictory (p. 318), to preserve its liberty—becomes a composition of "dream-thought," and the dream thus becomes amenable to analysis. The dream-image marks the beginning of an analysis whose method is consistently antivisual. Thus for Freud the beginning is when one departs from the dream-image, in the course of analysis, and enters the realm of language: here one sees the kernel of Freud's "speaking cure."⁹⁹

Freud's text consequently does not *supplement* the dream; on the contrary, it *opposes* words to the dream and its images. In place of discrete images the text substitutes relatively untidy explanations in prose. Whereas the images properly begin in the dream-day, their interpretive endings "cannot, from the nature of things," be definite (p. 525). Every statement made about the dream proceeds according to "*unknown*—or, as we inaccurately say, unconscious—purposive ideas" (p. 528); by a logic of double negatives, however, the images are guided by a known intention—namely, the intention not to be understood (p. 341). Furthermore, images are the guardians of sleep. Not only do they often allay anxiety (p. 267), but their visual form is directly linked to censorship, which can be bypassed by the interpretation. Since the dream-images and dream-thoughts have different centers (p. 305), the same is true of the dream-plot on the one hand and, on the other, of the verbal interpretation. Formally, the dream-plot designates a specific period of time and place, while the verbal interpretation is far more diffuse. Therefore, the text of the interpretation inhabits a totally *verbal* dimension of time: in

effect, this means that each discursive statement made during the interpretation is radically incomplete, for it is capable of infinite associations, each of which will substantially alter its status as a statement.

Freud has various ways of demonstrating this. The simile of the entrepreneur and his capital (p. 561), for instance, corresponds to the relationship between the dream and the unconscious. The wealth of an image (its arresting visual qualities) is separated from the illusion and attached instead to a far more interesting polysemy in thought. A version of this technique is Flaubert's placing of the final scene in *L'Education sentimentale* outside the main temporal frame of the action. Even if the young men's memory is of an abortive episode, which is only a silent spectacle, in other ways it is extremely fertile and wealthy: it produces much of the novel's plot. And this despite the fact that the memory is of something not done, just as in Freud wealth arises from that which is by definition unknown. For a prose text like the *Interpretation* this means that meaning cannot be imagined as residing in a finished object like the dream; nor for that matter can meaning precede its verbal description. Rather, the meaning of the unknown (unconscious) is something always being produced; each segment of an analysis builds a more complex sense—until, however,

there is often a passage in even the most thoroughly interpreted dream which has to be left obscure; this is because we become aware during the work of interpretation that at that point there is a tangle of dream-thoughts which cannot be unravelled and which moreover adds nothing to our knowledge of the content of the dream. This is the dream's navel, the spot where it reaches down into the unknown. The dream-thoughts to which we are led by interpretation cannot, from the nature of things, have any definite endings; they are bound to branch out in every direction into the intricate network of our world of thought. It is at some point where this network is particularly close that the dream-wish grows up, like a mushroom out of its mycelium. (p. 525)

At first glance, this seems to be Freud's way of introducing the idea of antecedence, attributing to it ultimate priority, and then throwing it out. This is not the case. He is saying that any sequence of discursive explanations normally is reversible: a sequence of sentences A through M, for example, increases our understanding additively: at M we know more than we did at A, and conversely, at A we know less than we knew at M. Furthermore, according to Freud, dream interpretation does not

work that way generally, although it does at particular moments. Instead of a linear progression from one end of the interpretation to the other (say, from A to M), the analyst encounters a "tangle" in the dream which either sends one to another sequence (A₁ to M₁) or stops one entirely. The new sequences of interpretation may either parallel the A-to-M set, intersect it, or contradict it altogether. In short, the interpretation as a whole cannot be visualized at all as having a linear trajectory from birth to maturity, or from ignorance to knowledge, or from absolute terminal to absolute terminal. Neither can one assume that the more antecedent a beginning point, the more certain and the greater the amount of sense. Interpretation is a field of understanding in which statements are dispersed but whose positions can be determined with regard only to certain (but not all) other statements. Not every statement is connected intelligibly with every other one. This is so because in the interpretation of dreams one is essentially dealing with a psychical locality (p. 536), not an anatomical one. Freud's description of regression, as an instance, employs topographical, formal, and temporal categories—all nonanatomical terms, just as his model of the "mental apparatus" is distinctly and explicitly structural, spatial, and temporal though not visual.

Let us return to the "tangles." Even if they do not add to our knowledge of the dream's content, they are nevertheless present. They stand for something there which the sequence of analysis hitherto adopted cannot affect. Yet these tangles are only barriers to an additive sort of knowledge; Freud nowhere says that they prohibit knowledge of a *different* kind. A way of breaking through the barrier is to be found, I think, in Freud's interpretation of the Oedipus story (pp. 261-64)—specifically, in a footnote that he added in 1914 and that was apparently the section of his text that provoked the most controversy. Freud himself found more value in the story as time went on: in 1919 he remarked the story's "undreamt-of" importance. In the myth, the hero is adept at solving a riddle, but is destroyed by the realization of his incestuous desires. The traditional lesson of Sophocles' play, says Freud, "is submission to the divine will and realization of [man's] impotence" (p. 262). More impressive is the fact that "the poet, as he unravels the past, brings to light the guilt of Oedipus, [and] he is at the same time compelling us to recognize our own inner minds, in which these same impulses, though suppressed, are still

to be found" (p. 263). That which resists interpretation—the tangle of thoughts—can be unraveled by the poet, but not without sacrificing Oedipus and, indeed, our pride and ignorance.

Many things are involved here. Once again Freud draws attention to a type of knowledge so devastating as to be unbearable in one's sight, and only slightly more bearable as a subject of psychological interpretation. In essence, this knowledge is of incest, which can be very correctly described as a tangling-up of the family sequence. For instead of a father and mother reproducing the line of generation in a son, and the son in his turn doing the same thing, the son becomes another lover of the mother and killer of his father. Oedipus is not simply king, father, and husband, but also parricide, adulterous son, royal criminal, and national calamity. The tangle of roles resists ordinary sequential understanding, for the original author of the family line, the father, is murdered and his place usurped by the son. What overwhelms Oedipus is the burden of plural identities incapable of coexisting within one person. In such a case the image of a man conceals behind its facade multiple meanings and multiple determinations. What in the classical novel had been a family romance becomes, in Freud's interpretation of the Greek tragedy, an almost unbearably complex tangling of opposites.

The collapse of the one into the many, of the genealogical line into a plurality of "unnatural" relationship, of systematic linear analysis into a tangled skein of problems—all these leave sustained effects in consciousness. For the writer a major effect is that the authority of what he says is undermined by the possibility that, unconsciously, he either does not or cannot say what he means. When Vico said that man achieves rationality when he conceives the gods as chaining the titans (in a gesture he sees as paving the way for the historical, linear procession of human life, and also for a narrative account of that life), Freud's text, as he says, serves to release those repressed forces. They do not come forth unaided, but by virtue of a conscious wish. This contradictory union obscures the otherwise clear sequence of conscious process:

My supposition is that a conscious wish can only become a dream-instigator if it succeeds in awakening an unconscious wish with the same tenor and in obtaining reinforcement from it. From indications derived from the psycho-analysis of the neurosis, I consider that these unconscious wishes are always on the alert, ready at any time to find their way to expression when an opportunity arises for allying themselves with an impulse from the conscious and for transferring their own great intensity on to the latter's lesser one. It will then *appear* as though the conscious alone had been realized

in the dream; only some peculiarity in the dream's configuration will serve as a finger-post to put us on the track of the powerful ally from the unconscious. These wishes in our unconscious, ever on the alert and, so to say, immortal, remind one of the legendary Titans, weighed down since primeval ages by the massive bulk of the mountains which were once hurled upon them by the victorious gods and which are still shaken from time to time by the convulsion of their limbs. (p. 553)

These convulsions are perceptible initially as a change in the form of a wish—or for that matter, in the form of a statement, image, or word. Verbal slips, dreams, and the like have in common with poetic form that they are *interventions* in the ongoing course of things, not additions to it. Where once stood a *pater familias*, or an unfolding plot, or a single image (like a Platonic idea of the father) that bred successive and genealogically related "children," we have instead a break in the sequence:¹⁰⁰ one image is then grasped as an inadequate summary of several thoughts; Oedipus is a king whose position in Thebes cannot exhaust his incestuous history; a text is not the sum of its words added together; an author—his scientific detachment and professional discretion notwithstanding—is not free of the unseemly implications of his writing.

Freud's words keep such ideas at bay. The text is not only not a supplement to them, it is a defense against them, an alternative way of dealing with them. For if such jumbles as can be produced by the incestuous, repressed unconscious are inexpressible in sequential discursive prose, they are nevertheless quite capable of suddenly breaking through the words. Beyond the reach of genealogy, and yet more devastating than any logically productive agency, these "presences" impart a new freedom of organization to words, children, ideas—all those pluralities freed from the domination of a single original cause, like the father or the image. This is a positive result. The text, for example, no longer need be confined to consecutive explanation, even as it remains scientific, rational, and realistic. Such is the case with Freud's discourse. On the other hand, the text is vulnerable: it will always appear to hedge its assertions; it can never be complete; it must constantly defend itself against the penetrations of the "tangled" obscure. Many years later, Freud's historical and anthropological researches led him to see these eventualities writ large in the story of the primal horde dislodging the father from his position of supremacy; the children all become brothers then, and the father is resacrificed and venerated in religious rites. Still later, in *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud averred how the idea of paternalism, before it

became oppressive, signified an advance in thought over the matriarchal idea: "Maternity is proved by the evidence of the senses while paternity is a hypothesis, based on an inference and a premise." Freud connects this advance with the discovery and acceptance of "intellectual [*geistige*] forces . . . [that] cannot be apprehended by the senses, particularly by the sight, but which nonetheless produce undoubted, and indeed even extremely powerful effects."¹⁰¹ That these effects may, like religion, comprise a higher, more spiritual illusion about *homo natura* does not controvert their strength.

In any case, Freud's repeated analysis of the ambivalent father throughout his career can be considered as confirming some general conclusions we can now put forward. In a material and legal way, the role of father for a text is taken by the author, whose ideas, argument, and conclusions are viewed as emerging sequentially in the writing, as being his offspring. As a scientist, of course, Freud had no wish to confine his text in this sort of enclosure. Yet his theory of infantile sexuality frankly acknowledges exactly this sort of regression, a determinism so severe that it literally spares no individual. Thus the text of the *Interpretation* can be traced back step by step to Freud's own self-analysis and the discovery of his own Oedipus complex; nevertheless, of this period he said, "Insight such as this falls to one's lot but once in a lifetime" (p. xxxii). An equally powerful motif in the book is its status as genuine interpretation whose value is at best illustrated—not validated—by its author's experience. What the prose keeps equally in abeyance is the formal disorder of unmethodical structure and the material disorder of private obsessions, problems, and experiences. It is much too fanciful to say that the *Interpretation* does away with, or kills, its author-father, Freud. But I think it is not too much to say that the book devises a textual solution for discussing what cannot be divorced from man's most intimate experience without concurrently becoming an impersonal recitation of laboratory results. Another way of expressing this is to say that the material determinism of a beginning is lifted from the writing, so that as a *text* it can be shown to have an effective, or theoretical, beginning.

Throughout the text there is something highly dramatic about the way Freud struggles to ground interpretation in something more theoretically distinguished as a starting point, or beginning, than his own experience. "Do as I do in remembrance of me" is not the kind of ritual celebration Freud expected of his readers.

Instead, I think, Freud willfully abandoned paternal originality in order to be able to erect in its place a structure of theoretical understanding. The key step in each of Freud's analyses in the book, as well as the structure's beginning, is the abandonment of quasi-natural continuity—continuity as paternal authority, as the dream's "plot," as Freud's narrative history of his experiences, as the "step-by-step" logic of consecutive explanation. Moreover, it was no small achievement to associate the abandonment of sequential continuity with the intentional shift to language, as well as with the bypassing of censorship:

Nevertheless, what Schiller describes as a relaxation of the watch upon the gates of Reason, the adoption of an attitude of uncritical self-observation, is by no means difficult . . . I myself can do so very completely, by the help of writing down my ideas as they occur to me. The amount of psychical energy by which it is possible to reduce critical activity and increase the intensity of self-observation varies considerably according to the subject on which one is trying to fix one's attention.

Our first step in the employment of this procedure teaches us that what we must take as the object of our attention is not the dream as a whole but the separate portions of its content . . . If . . . I put the dream before [a patient] cut up into pieces, he will give me a series of associations to each piece, which might be described as the "background thoughts" of that particular part of the dream. Thus the method of dream interpretation which I practise already differs in this first important respect from the popular, historic and legendary method of interpretation by means of symbolism and approximates to the second or "decoding" method. Like the latter, it employs interpretation *en détail* and not *en masse*; like the latter, it regards dreams from the very first as being of a composite character, as being conglomerates of psychical formations. (pp. 103-4)¹⁰²

What enables one to decode these conglomerates is the existence of a force called "secondary revision," whose function is to perform a "transvaluation of all psychical values" (p. 507). This transvaluation obeys certain rules that any analyst can uncover by interpretation and that form the basis of the codes peculiar to the dream.

No dream, then, is the privileged creature of its author, for each dream obeys the dictates of a universal "dream-work," a transindividual faculty present in each human and whose purpose is to produce dreams at night and daydreams during wakefulness. Regarding the decoding of secondary revision, as with decoding the other characteristics of dreams, no one can achieve meaningful results except in the analytic situation. Underlying the *Interpretation* is the analytic relationship between dreamer and interpreter. It is this relationship, I believe, that replaces the

author's univocity. Although the *Interpretation* is by Freud, it also marks the beginning—theoretical, formal, effective—of psychoanalysis, whose core condition of existence will thereafter become the analytic encounter, which corrects the distortions in the family tangles brought to light by interpretation. In several of his retrospective writings, Freud constantly emphasized that this relationship brings to light “an intense emotional” bond whose technical name is “*transference*, . . . a factor . . . which can claim, alike technically and theoretically, to be regarded as of the first importance.” When “it is affectionate and moderate, . . . [transference] is neither more nor less than the main-spring of the joint work of analysis.”¹⁰³ Insofar as interpretation is concerned, then, Freud sees analysis as a joint venture that makes possible a mutual discourse.

What keeps such a discourse from being hermetic—although it is hermetic in that it is mainly, though not exclusively, clinical—is that transference is of a part with “each person’s relations to his human environment.” In the evolving discursive relationship between patient and analyst, Freud prefigured and encapsulated a change very similar to the one that transformed the patriarchal primal horde into the brotherly clan. From being father, legislator, authority undisputed, the analyst becomes brother, interlocutor, discursive partner. Moreover, in Freud’s autobiographical sketches the reader becomes accustomed to yet another parallel transformation of this kind—the one in which Freud, the lonely “wounder” of man, becomes one of a band of like-minded scientists. In each case, Freud’s work accomplishes the institutionalization of its beginning intention, the effort to understand psychological reality as something essentially available only to interpretation, and yet available to neither direct representability (one cannot draw pictures of it, nor mimetically portray it in language) nor univocal statement. A beginning intention, therefore, is in constant need of reworking: it is not, like the “author” an origin to which, by virtue of precedence and unchanging being, everything can be referred for explanation. Above all, an intention in the psychoanalytic discourse is the immediate practical application of the mutuality between men which ensues when a repressive central authority is removed. Nietzsche’s distinctions between *origin* and *purpose* in the passage that follows correspond to the distinctions I have been making between *author* (origin) and *beginning intention* (purpose and interpretation):

The cause of the origin of a thing and its eventual utility, its actual

employment and place in a system of purposes, lie worlds apart; whatever exists, having somehow come into being, is again and again reinterpreted to new ends, taken over, transformed, and redirected by some power superior to it; all events in the organic world are a subduing, a *becoming master*, and all subduing and becoming master involves a fresh interpretation, an adaptation through which any previous “meaning” and “purpose” are necessarily obscured or even obliterated. . . .

Purposes and utilities are only *signs* that a will to power has become master of something less powerful and imposed upon it the character of a function; and the entire history of a “thing,” an organ, a custom can in this way be a continuous sign-chain of ever new interpretations and adaptations whose causes do not even have to be related to one another but, on the contrary, in some cases succeed and alternate with one another in a purely chance fashion. The “evolution” of a thing, a custom, an organ is thus by no means its *progressus* towards a goal, even less a *progressus* by the shortest route and with the smallest expenditure of force—but a succession of more or less profound, more or less mutually independent processes of subduing, plus the resistances they encounter, the attempts at transformation for the purpose of defense and reaction, and the results of successful counteractions. The form is fluid, but the “meaning” is even more so.¹⁰⁴

Nietzsche’s emphatic concerns here include identifying the interpretive discourse as a function of those in power. This is candidly to assert that between analyst and patient, for example, there exists a power over life: life is no longer the natural sequence of events, but has instead turned into an interpreted series, a made *career*, a reconstructed chain of interpretations. Such a series can in turn become something to be protected and conserved, similar to what in his later writings (like *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*) Freud was to describe as the “will to repeat,” its purpose and method. Nevertheless, the particular advantage of the analytic discourse lies in its ability to lay bare not only the system of resistance, inhibitions, complexes, and symptoms overlaying man’s ambition to love and work, but also the specific complexes discovered (or invented) by psychoanalysis, such as excessive transference, dependency, resistance to the discovery of resistance, defensive mechanisms arising in the analyst himself, and so on. Much of Freud’s metapsychological writing underscores this fertility. Because of it, psychoanalysis inspired new discoveries and made possible new revisions and interpolations; and not least of all, because of its fertility psychoanalysis evolved into an institutionalized form of discourse distinguished as much by its enemies as by its adherents, as much for the virtuosity of attacks upon it as for the ingenuity of its new formulations.

Of course, it is largely hindsight that allows us to associate this

fertility with Freud's unhappiness with the *Interpretation* as a written textual object. He did in fact find fault with the book's lack of form, its involved sentences, its indirect phrases, its incomplete mastery of the material (see his letter to Fliess, September 21, 1899).¹⁰⁵ As we shall see in the next chapter, this sort of dissatisfaction also characterizes the modern writer whose work intentionally begins moving away from the traditional continuities of form and toward projects whose trajectory must be created, in Merleau-Ponty's phrase, as a constant experience, without distinctive form, without authorizing imagery, without a predetermined "*progressus* toward a goal." Such a text as Freud's sacrifices what I have called finality, and with it adequacy, for the sake of a type of indeterminacy which, in Freud's case, is necessarily congruent with a reality largely unknown (the unconscious) and always incompletely grasped by language. Just as the author's vocation is transformed into a career by constant reinterpretation—a theme I shall also examine in chapter 4—so too the text yields up its formal completeness to a constantly reformed discursivity or productivity. Such a text cannot, by definition, be confined, either theoretically or ethically, within the limits of its language genealogically considered. This is not simply because it is assumed that the reader treats the text with a sometime accurate, sometime inaccurate, but always imperious will. Rather, it is because the subject of the text constantly experiences imperfect, incomplete realization, for which psychoanalytic interpretive language is by definition, if not supplementary—which it never is—then another alternative.

As much as he seemed to disparage and disown the efforts of his disciples to make of psychoanalysis an explicit *Weltanschauung*, Freud could not but recognize that the psychoanalytic viewpoint was in fact just such an alternative available to the culture. Its role was not limited to rivaling other disciplines, however; it also served to complement them and, in the case of literature, prolong them. One speculates what the later Freud felt as he witnessed the books he had authored becoming the fundamental authorizing texts of a new science. Probably he felt a strange combination of pride, resignation, and jealousy. He cannot have been ignorant of the fact that his texts established not only a precedent but also a sustaining structure of language; and it was this language that determined the bounds of *what was psychoanalytically possible to say*. From these doxological bounds Freud himself was not exempt. To read his later revisionist works (*The*

Ego and the Id, for instance, or *Civilization and Its Discontents*) is to witness the structure of psychoanalytic theory refining the possibility of even its author's statement, refining itself, placing new limits on itself and on him. This is especially true of Freud's reclaiming for the unconscious some of the "territory" he had previously found occupied by consciousness, which, in his wish to school it in rationality, seemed after all more closely allied with repression.

These tendencies in the Freudian text are aspects of the "serious consequences" that Freud said were involved with "the raising of the thought-process . . . above perception."¹⁰⁶ *The Interpretation of Dreams* began the step by laying out a vocabulary for dealing with a reality that was "unconscious," unknown, indescribable, and yet present. The text of the book, in describing dream imagery by means of quasi-grammatical combinatorial rules of formation, is a record of accommodations made between ascertainable work (the presence of the unknown in a dream) and the ascertainable limits of knowledge (beyond which the unconscious is a blank). This sounds very much like Freud's definition of a dream as a compromise between the wishes of two systems, unconscious and preconscious, "in so far as they are compatible with each other" (p. 579). The text, such as it is, with all the problems and characteristics we have discussed, is that maximum compatibility Freud was able to achieve between alternating presence and absence.

One of the most challenging motifs pervading the text of the *Interpretation* takes us still further into the question of presence and absence: "The unconscious is the true psychical reality; *in its innermost nature it is as much unknown to us as the reality of the external world, and it is as incompletely presented by the data of consciousness as is the external world by the communications of our sense organs*" (p. 613). Reported and transcribed dreams are among the data of consciousness, data which gained in substance, if not in reality, once they were admitted into analytic language (from memory) for interpretation. A dream is always private, although "a thought . . . is objectified in the dream, [and] is represented as a scene, or, as it seems to us, is experienced" (p. 534).

This experience achieves a heightened reality, however, when it is reported and analyzed. The virtue of psychoanalytic interpretation is that it confers upon even the most absurd and trivial dream experiences the materiality of a scientific object. Words are

the means of doing this, and it is the materiality of language that further objectifies dreams, draws them out from the recesses of subjectivity, where they guard sleep, and admits them into discourse. Freud's argument is that such a bringing to light, such a materialization, increases the analytic value of a dream by putting it into words; yet paradoxically, from the point of view of psychical reality, the verbal dream has lost still more of the reality which in the experienced dream took the form of distortion, displacement, and so on.

Carrying this logic a bit further, one can say that in analysis a further distortion takes place, since by translating the dream into words the original experiences are further removed from their first form. However, this does not seem to be in fact the case. A dream-image is itself a substitute for what Freud calls "the constrictions of thinking" (p. 344). "Each dream—whose distortions more or less closely expose the unconscious—therefore is a neater, more economic, more discrete device for bearing the pressures of the unconscious. Thus, for example, propinquity in subject-matter is expressed by the dream as propinquity in time": in just the same way, Freud adds, "if I write an 'a' and a 'b' in succession, they have to be pronounced as a single syllable 'ab'" (p. 247). Were thought to express itself in the same amount of time as a single syllable, thinking—as opposed to the manipulation of imagery—would take up more space, become crowded together, and fail to find a way to express a wish. For the image to be decoded, it would have to be attacked as a single entity and decomposed into the thoughts which it had replaced. Thus the images of a dream, the interpretive verbal transcription of the dream, and the attendant analysis belong to different orders of substitution. While taking different forms, each bears a trace of the unconscious: the image as distortion, the transcription as pseudocontinuity or plot, the analysis as thoughts leading to a (supposed) wish.

Now certainly no one of these seemingly distinct orders can be entirely detached from the others within the entire period of interpretation. No one can occur without the other, just as conceptually, for Freud, each order necessarily implies the coexistence of the others. Yet I think it is correct to say that Freud's general scheme in the *Interpretation* is that the "original" reality, the unconscious, is for the purposes of analysis given as a nonpresent, not immediately apprehendable force. Each successive verbal version of a dream, beginning with the image, through the

transcription, to a practically interminable analysis, does not so much make clear what the unconscious is as begin and continue the traces of the unconscious in language. The written text, because it is at least materially evident in print and on paper, is not the last effort to capture these traces; as part of a discourse presuming previous substitutions and assuming later ones (respectively, Freud's own self-analyses and his later writings) the text is part of an ongoing effort, a practically unending series of substitutions. In what direction and toward what sorts of either tentative or fixed conclusion the series may go cannot concern us here, although a remarkable indication of how profoundly and how dynamically Freud saw the process is given in his late paper "Analysis Terminable and Interminable."¹⁰⁷

Because it has the merit of constituting a rare moment of insight at the beginning of Freud's career, *The Interpretation of Dreams* is an inaugural text. Nevertheless, theoretically and even materially its status as a beginning *includes* its superceding itself as beginning. In other words, because it is a substitute, because it comes between a before and an after, because as a whole it cannot claim to have gone unequivocally forward from one point to another, what is most true of the text is that it collects traces of the unconscious in varying forms of verbal behavior, with varying degrees of distortion, occupying varying amounts of interpretive space. Even though certain stages are reached and certain points made, the dynamic of interpretation precludes a fixed beginning, even an arbitrary one to which one can refer retrospectively. All this is true of the text considered as part of an institution we have called the psychoanalytic discourse. Yet in one absolutely crucial sense, the text as a whole retains a particular beginning *function*. As the physical location where dream-thoughts are verbally created for the purposes of analysis, the text is, as Freud implies, continuously novel. Previously, attempts to arrive at a dream's meaning worked directly on its manifest content. But

we are alone in taking something else into account. We have introduced a new class of psychical material between the manifest content of dreams and the conclusions of our enquiry: namely, their *latent* content, or, (as we say) the "dream-thoughts," arrived at by the means of our procedure. It is from these dream-thoughts and not from a dream's manifest content that we disentangle its meaning. We are thus presented with a new task which had no previous existence: the task, that is, of investigating the relations between the manifest content of dreams and the dream-thoughts, and of tracing out the processes by which the latter have been changed into the former. (p. 277)

The text's innovation is that as a body it intervenes between

the dream-images (manifest content) and the dream's thought and meanings. The text allows—indeed, occasions, as Freud goes on to say—a comparison between the original dream-thoughts and their “translation” into the language of manifest dream-images. Lest this seem to make of the text a passive object, Freud indicates emphatically that the text is the producer and formulator of a new task; that is, the existence of the text as intervention between manifest content and meaning is coterminous with the task of showing the *connections* between manifest content and meaning. Another way of understanding Freud's meaning is to regard the text as coming into being whenever the task of connecting a dream's manifest content and the dream-thoughts is *intended*. Once this occurs, the dream can be regarded as a picture puzzle or rebus, and “each separate element [is replaced] . . . by a syllable or word that can be represented by that [pictorial] element in some way or other” (p. 278). So long as the replacement of one by the other continues, given individual particularities of style, culture, and historical circumstance, the text is being produced. The text of a specific book called *The Interpretation of Dreams* is the beginning of the text of other such interpretations, all of which, according to Foucault, we can consider as constituting the psychoanalytic discourse.¹⁰⁸

One does the text a considerable disservice, however, by failing to take account of its subversive force—indeed, its power to remind the reader of unpleasant ideas without which Freud's work would seem pallid. Among these ideas Freud included his theories of resistance and transference, although he realized quite unmistakably that even these lacked the negative effect of his ideas on sexuality. The latter, of course, left its imprint on the *Interpretation*, but in circumstances that Freud was later to elucidate more fully and more interestingly. In his “History of the Psychoanalytic Movement” (1914) he tells how his fight for “a new original idea”—the determining role of sexuality in psychical life generally and in the etiology of the neuroses particularly—helped offset the hostility that his propagation of the idea generated. Yet one day his “memories grouped themselves in such a way as to disturb this satisfaction.” He found that discovery of his idea in fact belonged to three other men—Breuer, Charcot, and Chrobak—whose timidity had caused them to draw back from their own conclusions. The difference between Freud and them was put this way by Freud:

I am well aware that it is one thing to give utterance to an idea once or

twice in the form of a passing *aperçu*, and quite another to mean it seriously—to take it literally and pursue it in the face of every contradictory detail, and to win it a place among accepted truths. It is the difference between a casual flirtation and a legal marriage with all its duties and difficulties. “Epouser les idées de . . .” is not an uncommon figure of speech, at any rate in French.¹⁰⁹

What they refused to do was commit themselves seriously to a problematical idea. Freud's way of doing his duty was, figuratively, to marry it, a course which he obviously identifies with public and theoretical profession of the idea. One offspring of the marriage is the *Interpretation*, a permanent written record of fidelity, winning its place—the metaphor fits very well with what we said of the text as doing what Nietzsche called reinterpreting, overcoming, and outstripping—among accepted truths. This is in contrast to the spoken but unwritten recognition of the idea by Freud's predecessors, who abandoned it as a rake would a passing flirt. That Freud would in this manner also reassert his paternal role as author rings quite beautifully true to his achievement, noted earlier, of ceding authorial paternalism in the *Interpretation* to a structure of theoretical understanding. For now in the “History” he shows that what the natural *father(s)* of the idea abandoned, he, as foster parent, legally adopted and nurtured. In other words, the idea of sexuality, which had been abandoned either to passing *aperçus* or to the casual obscenity, Freud *implanted* in scientific discourse. Or as he says on the same page in his “History”: “I have not of course disclosed the illustrious parentage of this scandalous idea in order to saddle other people with the responsibility of it.”

Thus the text constitutes responsibility to *old* subversive ideas, a haven for the wicked knowledge of the ancients, a place for cultivating what in the *Phaedrus* Socrates called “the living word of knowledge,” which is different from words “tumbled out anywhere . . . [with] no parent to protect them” (p. 276). In short, the text as well as the author reinstate difficult knowledge by giving that knowledge a sort of human pedigree. Even though the ideas contained in the *Interpretation* make of Freud (who quotes Hebbel here) “a disturber of sleep,” the ideas in the text, or perhaps the idea of the text, is restored to a human family that had disowned it. Because of the text, that is, dreams and other potentially disturbing manifestations of psychical life are shown to be connected genealogically *as knowledge* with previous kinds of knowledge whose unpleasantness, elusiveness, and universality

require the parental care and responsibility and solicitous courage of an author. What is distinctive about this knowledge is not that it needed someone to create it—for it is, after all, a timeless knowledge of “prehistoric” things—but that it needed a locale in which to be developed fully in order for it to become knowledge. Its “biography” is important only in that it has one (which proves that it is not the product of an alienated, celibate mind; but of a community), not because as such its genealogy can make it easier to understand or accept. For as one reads such a text, one is increasingly grateful for its ability to take physical responsibility for ideas whose direction is both out of sight and out of consciousness and, in a deeply troubling way, beyond the bounds of human biography.

When one thinks, for example, of Proust’s attitudes toward the novel or of Kafka’s use of fiction to respond textually to what is, among other things, certain and essentially elusive, Freud’s researches as the maker of a text about dreams appreciate in critical value for the study of novels. Freud’s frankness in admitting that his text haltingly transacts, as it were, between appearance and meaning, that its innovation resides in the fact of its beginning intervention between two fundamentally unending, unconfineable movements away from consciousness, that compared to it biography can be seen as either an aspect of interpretation or as evidence of transhuman problems, that the indeterminacy of its language is a sign of a radical compromise in order to deal with the present and the unknown, and, finally, that as a text its language and its textuality together comprise one element in a series leading further and further away from psychical reality even though nearer and nearer to discursive, institutional permanence—all these present the critic of novels with instruments for reading Mann’s *Doctor Faustus*, of all great modern novels the most thoroughly imbued with the history of novels as an institution, the novel most conscious of how overripe it is late in that history, and the novel nearest to a kind of dizzying anarchism in which the text as beginning effort coincides with the end, or final unsuitability, of man as a subject that can be represented using the written language.

The physical text of *Doctor Faustus* is the result of Zeitblom’s effort to preserve a portion of his own and his nation’s history during a period of unprecedented civil convulsion. More than that, however, his chronicle of Leverkühn purports to translate into

“human letters” the facts of a life and an achievement whose central feature is a radical, antihumanistic divorce from the life of men. Thus music and an artist’s constantly self-transcending career together comprise a total rejection of the premise that what is human is knowable, is verbally describable, is consecutively developing, is capable of subordination to “the human image.” On the other hand, Zeitblom’s life and time, as he writes, are in the grip of national changes in a Germany whose increasing irrationality eludes ordinary sense. The pages he produces therefore attempt a mediation (or intervention) between two parallel histories—one Germany’s, a manifest outer history of increasing eccentricity, the other Leverkühn’s, an inner career of musical works whose principal thoughts and cultural importance *require* representation in either words or images. The position of Zeitblom’s text between two such disparities strikingly reproduces the position of Freud’s text between the manifest content of dreams and their meaning. Like *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Zeitblom’s text allows for a comparative study between Adrian’s life and music and its translation into German history.

An exigency of the novel’s explicit textual project as I have described it, the Faustus-Devil story works in two principal ways. First, the text’s structure is an unlimited parody consisting of innumerable parallelisms. At bottom, such a structure reminds the reader that, as Freud had said to his reader of dreams, there are no innocent details in the text: as in a dream, each detail or image in some way corresponds with one or more dream-thoughts. If one such correspondence is admitted, no matter how arbitrary either the connection or the image, there must be correspondence everywhere—this is the fundamental rule of dream interpretation.¹¹⁰ In *Doctor Faustus* the “elements” of the text—characters, plot, motif, symbols, themes, and so forth—are themselves employed in the text as parallel elements. This technique supports Zeitblom’s effort to parallel Adrian and Germany. Just as Johan Leverkühn’s speculating over elements shows how inorganic crystals mime and parallel organic nature, so too each element in the text mimes, sometimes parodies, another element. Thus, to list a few examples: Zeitblom and Adrian, the scholar and the artist, *haetera esmeralda* and the motifs based on it in Adrian’s music, the structure of parallels in the novel and the tone-row principle of composition, Germany and Adrian, music and theology, Kaisersaschern and Pfeiffering, disease and genius, language and music, Adrian and Faust, parody and counterpoint—

and on and on. The point of all this is that nothing can exist *temporally* without corresponding with, standing in relation to, something else: because of such correspondence and the consequent engaging relationships (and not because of each "element" intrinsically), there is meaning. It is as theoreticians of this diacritical principle of meaning that Mann characterizes both the Devil and Adrian in their encounter. The result of that encounter is that every artistic achievement, moment, or gesture comes to appear as something that excludes every other one: this is itself a parallel of the Nietzschean idea of overcoming, in which the artist, by excluding everything except the aesthetic faculty, creates a "world." In reality, however, the artistic statement by ruthless exclusion *includes* (in the same way the excluded unconscious is included in the meaning of a dream) every other statement in order for it to make meaning: the opposition between aesthetic and nonaesthetic begins *aesthetic* meaning.

What the Devil reveals to Adrian is that in art there has been a turning against "the self-contained work." In music, for instance, the material

shrinks in time, it scorns extension in time, which is the dimensions of a musical work, and lets it stand empty. Not out of impotence, not out of incapacity to give form. Rather from a ruthless demand for compression, which taboos the superfluous, negates the phrase, shatters the ornament, stands opposed to any extension of time, which is the life-form of the work.¹¹¹

In both language and music, time imparts to composition the authority of sustained creation, the temporal duration of a prolonged world exemplified by the classical novel and the symphony. The Devil's observation emphasizes how the parallelism between the time of an artistic composition and the dynastic continuities of nature tends historically to make the artist regard art as an unhealthy encroachment upon nature. This is the phase realized in *Jude the Obscure*, among other works, where *compression*, the collapse of time, is felt to be the more proper prerogative of art. The more compressed in his work an artist becomes, the Devil becomes, the more power he exercises, the further from miming nature and truths his art moves. Art becomes increasingly "untruth of a kind that enhances power [and] holds its own against any ineffectively virtuous truth."¹¹² The demonic artist is given (or takes) the right in his work to break through temporality, as well as the meaning that is based upon the mimesis of nature in art, in order to become "elemental." In breaking

through time, the artist grasps the absolute beginning, free of all natural, historical, and social restraints, and in so doing becomes doubly barbaric, both absolutely primitive and the representative of the absolute refinement of all history and art. The Faustian contract requires that in return for that power and, ironically, for the fulfillment of that total power to begin, Adrian must ultimately pay the price of damnation, hell, silence:

Only it is not easy actually to speak thereof—that is, one can really not speak of it at all, because the actual is beyond what by word can be declared; many words may be used and fashioned, but all together they are but tokens, standing for names which do not and cannot make claim to describe what is never to be described and denounced in words. That is the secret delight and security of hell, that it is not to be informed on, that it is protected from speech, that it just is, but cannot be public in the newspaper, be brought by any word to critical knowledge, wherefore precisely the words "subterranean," "cellar," "thick walls," "soundlessness," "forgottenness," "hopelessness," are the poor, weak symbols. One must just be satisfied with symbolism, my good man, when one is speaking of hell, for there everything ends—not only the word that describes, but everything altogether. This is indeed the chiefest characteristic and what in most general terms is to be uttered about it: both that which the newcomer first experiences, and what at first with his as it were sound senses he cannot grasp, and will not understand, because his reason or what limitation soever of his understanding prevents him.¹¹³

Here the beginning and the end are finally one, since by demonic logic a radical element in its purity is an absolute presence basically resistant to time or development; hence the fact of its beginning is also its end.

If Zeitblom's text is, as we said above, a place where Leverkühn's career can be compared with German history, then the included whole of Adrian's discussion with the Devil in Zeitblom's narrative shatters the compromise of the old scholar's text. For the "fiction" underlying Zeitblom's writing is that although Adrian and Germany are disparate entities, a written document can relate them to one another: Mann's use of parallelism is vindicated by the material text itself, which with all its own internal parallelism and correspondence places itself *between* the artist's career and the national story, using the former to understand the latter. Yet the Devil's visit disturbs the text's intervening position—and now we come to the second principal use of the Faust-Devil motif. Just as the regularity of the "natural" human order is disrupted by the appearance of the Devil, in Zeitblom's text the regular course of his narrative is disrupted in chapter 25 by "Adrian's secret record." For this is the

only time in *Doctor Faustus* Adrian speaks directly to the reader. So anxious is Zeitblom to preserve the force of this "frightful and precious treasure" that he transcribes the words by hand from Adrian's music paper: not even the printer was to see the treasure. Moreover, Zeitblom must cease to speak in order that the new text can reach us. When the chapter ends, Zeitblom returns to his narrative "undisturbed" by the "unreasonable demands" that Adrian's text has made on the reader.

Yet Zeitblom seems aware, now as never before, that his text is a complex temporal object tied to "a threefold ordering of time"¹¹⁴—the reader's time, the chronicler's time, and historical time. Thus the text takes over, substitutes itself for Adrian's life, and redispenses that life into a text. Zeitblom reflects with an author's characteristic vanity:

Certainly the time in which I write has vastly greater historical momentum than the time of which I write, Adrian's time, which brought him only to the threshold of our incredible epoch. I feel as though one should call out to him, as to all those who are no longer with us and were not with us when it began: "Lucky you!" and a fervent "Rest in peace!" Adrian is safe from the days we dwell in. The thought is dear to me, I prize it, and in exchange for that certainty I accept the terrors of the time in which I continue to live on. It is to me as though I stood here and lived for him, lived instead of him; as though I bore the burden his shoulders were spared, as though I showed my love by taking upon me living for him, living in his stead. The fancy, however illusory, does me good, it flatters the always cherished desire to serve, to help, to protect him—this desire which during the lifetime of my friend found so very little satisfaction.¹¹⁵

Regardless of Zeitblom's protestations, the rawness and density of Adrian's own direct speech is not obscured, either literally and figuratively, by the comparatively neat, consecutive, humane narrative that Zeitblom has produced for the composer. Like Adrian's music, which is "heard" in the novel only as a function of Zeitblom's narrative, and like the third movement of Beethoven's Opus 111 whose absence is explained in Kretschmar's lectures, language cannot match the void it tries to describe. Adrian's silence, as composer and as damned genius, exceeds the powers of narrative to contain it. Indeed, Adrian's encounter with the Devil symbolizes precisely what stands outside verbal temporality—a sort of speculative delirium uniting absolute radicality with the satanic discontinuity following a moment of indescribably final and inventive rationality. For if the text as an intervention between manifest appearance and (artistic) thought is an interpretive compromise between the two, then any inter-

vention within the text overwhelms the compromise. Across written language there bursts proof of how a text is but one in a series of verbal substitutes for what cannot be put into words—substitutes leading to and from an "irrational" or unknown point.

The tendency of *Doctor Faustus* as a whole seems nonetheless to support the humanness of Zeitblom's effort to chronicle and historicize the elemental, the barbaric, and the nonverbal. The novel's cultural moment indicates as much, for in Mann's career it corresponds with a self-critical phase in which he came to terms with the question of German responsibility for the Second World War. Mann's feat as a novelist was to put into verbal and artistic form that which historically seemed either to negate or to transcend words and art. Thus Zeitblom's sense of duty coincides with Mann's: both recognize that in such circumstances as Germany's, even an act of narration is a moral act in which the narrator seeks, through the "humaneness" of narrative, to overcome the negation of narrative in German history. Because it is a temporal art of sustained duration, narrative also sets itself against the demonic thesis that the only serious art is "the very short, the highly consistent musical moment."¹¹⁶ Moreover, the biographical mode of the narrative, announced on the title page, was intended to restore to narrative its capacity for formal "play and pretence," which conflicted with everything about Adrian's life, with its interest in knowledge, intensity, atemporality, and unmediated statement. Therefore, the frequent rhetorical excesses of Zeitblom's text constitute a kind of salutary balance to the dionysiac intensity of the composer's icy rationality.

These characteristics represent a tendency that is, I think, acceptable to most readers of the novel; there can be little doubt that Mann rather consciously placed them as close as possible to the novel's surface. Yet also near that same surface is the fact that both Zeitblom and Adrian are deliberate creatures of the pen—Zeitblom for moral reasons, Adrian for Zeitblom's reasons. They belong less to the mimetic, representable world of the classical novel than to the authorizing power of *writing*, the very fact which signifies something quite opposed to the novel as an institution. As writing, *Doctor Faustus* intervenes in reality so that writing as presence may stand before, may attempt to *precede*, a total flight from the responsibilities of history. In writing, Zeitblom hopes to begin a restoration of Germany and of Adrian in the form of a text of some sort, for otherwise Adrian's tragedy

as well as Germany's would have to remain locked within the wordless cry of that last collapse: "I might compare his absentness to an abyss, into which one's feeling towards him dropped soundless and without a trace."¹¹⁷ The text is an effort, therefore, "to coordinate language and passion"¹¹⁸ within a formal structure.

But writing that not only is a beginning, but itself begins by introducing the notion of a formal structure existing outside ("not as framework but as houses") its material, plays with theoretical complexities that cannot be ignored. To what extent is the text like the paralyzed composer in 1939?—"he that was once Adrian Leverkühn, whose immortal part is now so called What a mocking game Nature here [i.e., in his physical appearance] played, one might say: presenting a picture of the utmost spirituality, just there whence the spirit had fled!"¹¹⁹ What is there to prevent writing from spinning out a clever surface, an "inaccessible communication" part ornament, part illiterate symbol? From being the form of secondary communication, with its mimetic authority derived genealogically from an "original" reality, the novel now deliberately draws the reader to its textuality. As with other great modern texts, *Doctor Faustus* on the one hand presents itself as the text of an artistic career while, on the other, its surface virtuosity and ambiguous rationale call attention to its career as a text in relation to which even its "author" is a subordinate function. The novel thus undergoes transformations peculiar to its institutional history; at the same time, it has become involved in a dynamic affecting all literature in the modern period—the specific problematic of a text. We must begin there now.

CHAPTER

FOUR

Beginning with a Text