

For Jeffrey and Madeline

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The Rhetoric of Fiction

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Telling and Showing

The Author's Many Voices

In the next... chapters I shall look in detail at some of the more important arguments for authorial objectivity or impersonality. Most of these call for eliminating certain overt signs of the author's presence. As we might expect, however, one man's objectivity is another man's *bête noire*. If we are to have any degree of clarity as we make our way through attacks on the author's voice, we must have some preliminary notion of the variety of forms that voice can take, both in fiction and in attacks on fiction. What is it, in fact, that we might expunge if we attempted to drive the author from the house of fiction?

First, we must erase all direct addresses to the reader, all commentary in the author's own name. When the author of the *Decameron* speaks to us directly, in both the introduction and conclusion, whatever illusion we may have had that we are dealing immediately with Fiammetta and her friends is shattered. An astonishing number of authors and critics since Flaubert have agreed that such direct, unmediated commentary will not do. And even those authors who would allow it have often, like E. M. Forster, forbidden it except on certain limited subjects.¹

But what, really, is "commentary"? If we agree to eliminate all personal intrusions of the kind used by Fielding, do we then agree to expunge less obtrusive comment? Is Flaubert violating his own principles of impersonality when he allows himself to tell us that in such and such a place one finds the worst Neufchatel cheeses of the entire district, or that Emma was "incapable of understanding what she didn't experience, or of recognizing anything that wasn't expressed in conventional terms"?²

Even if we eliminate all such explicit judgments, the author's presence will be obvious on every occasion when he moves into or out of a character's mind – when he "shifts his point of view," as we have come to put it. Flaubert tells us that Emma's little attentions to Charles were "never, as he believed, for his sake... but for her own, out of exasperated vanity" (p. 69). It is clearly Flaubert who constructs this juxtaposition of Emma's motive with Charles' belief about the motive, and the same obtrusive "voice" is evident whenever a new mind is introduced. When Emma's father bids farewell to Emma and Charles, he remembers "his own wedding, his own earlier days.... He, too, had been very happy.... He felt dismal, like a stripped and empty house" (pp. 34–35). This momentary shift to Rouault is Flaubert's way of providing us with an evaluation of the marriage and a sense of what is to come. If we are troubled by all reminders of the author's presence, we shall be troubled here.

But if we are to object to this, why not go the next step and object to all inside views, not simply those that require a shift in point of view. In life such views are not to be had. The act of providing them in fiction is itself an obtrusion by the author.³

For that matter, we must object to the reliable statements of any dramatized character, not just the author in his own voice, because the act of narration as performed by even the most highly dramatized narrator is itself the author's presentation of a prolonged "inside view" of a character. When Fiammetta says "the love she bore the boy carried the day," she is giving us a reliable inside view of Monna, and she is also giving a view of her own evaluation of events. Both are reminders of the author's controlling hand.

But why stop here? The author is present in every speech given by any character who has had conferred upon him, in whatever manner, the badge of reliability. Once we know that God is God in Job, once we know that Monna speaks only truth in "The Falcon," the authors speak whenever God and Monna speak. Introducing the great Doctor Larivière, Flaubert says:

He belonged to that great surgical school created by Bichat — that generation, now vanished, of philosopher-practitioners, who cherished their art with fanatical love and applied it with enthusiasm and sagacity. Everyone in his hospital trembled when he was angry; and his students so revered him that the moment they set up for themselves they imitated him as much as they could. . . . Disdainful of decorations. . . . hospitable, generous, a father to the poor, practicing Christian virtues although an unbeliever, he might have been thought of as a saint if he hadn't been feared as a devil because of the keenness of his mind [pp. 363-64].

This unambiguous bestowal of authority contributes greatly to the power of the next few pages, in which Larivière judges for us everything that we see. But helpful as he is, he must go — if the author's voice is a fault.

Even here we cannot stop, though many of the critics of the author's voice have stopped here. We can go on and on, purging the work of every recognizably personal touch, every distinctive literary allusion or colorful metaphor, every pattern of myth or symbol; they all implicitly evaluate. Any discerning reader can recognize that they are imposed by the author.⁴

Finally, we might even follow Jean-Paul Sartre and object, in the name of "durational realism," to all evidences of the author's meddling with the natural sequence, proportion, or duration of events. Earlier authors, Sartre says, tried to justify "the foolish business of storytelling by ceaselessly bringing to the reader's attention, explicitly or by allusion, the existence of an author." The existentialist novels, in contrast, will be "toboggans, forgotten, unnoticed," hurling the reader "into the midst of a universe where there are no witnesses." Novels should "exist in the manner of things, of plants, of events, and not at first like products of man."⁵ If this is so, the author must never summarize, never curtail a conversation, never telescope the events of three days into a paragraph. "If I pack six months into a single page, the reader jumps out of the book" (p. 229).

Sartre is certainly right in claiming that all these things are signs of the author's manipulating presence. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, for example, the story of Father Zossima's conversion could logically be placed anywhere. The events of Zossima's story took place long before the novel begins; unless they are to be placed at the beginning, which is out of the question, there is no natural reason for giving them in one place rather than another. Wherever they are placed, they will call attention to the author's selecting presence, just as Homer is glaringly present to us whenever the *Odyssey* takes one of its many leaps back and forth over a nineteen-year period. It is not accident but Dostoevski's careful choice that gives us Zossima's story as the sequel to Ivan's dream of the Grand Inquisitor. It is intended as a judgment on the values implied by that dream, just as everything that happens to Ivan afterward is an explicit criticism of his own ideas. Since the sequence is obviously not dictated by anything other than the

author's purposes, it betrays the author's voice, and according to Sartre, it presumably will not do.

But, as Sartre woefully admits (see "All Authors should be Objective," below), even with all these forms of the author's voice expunged, what we have left will reveal to us a shameful artificiality. Unless the author contents himself with simply retelling *The Three Bears* or the story of Oedipus in the precise form in which they exist in popular accounts — and even so there must be some choice of *which* popular form to tell — his very choice of what he tells will betray him to the reader. He chooses to tell the tale of Odysseus rather than that of Circe or Polyphemus. He chooses to tell the cheerful tale of Monna and Federigo rather than a pathetic account of Monna's husband and son. He chooses to tell the story of Emma Bovary rather than the potentially heroic tale of Dr. Larivière. The author's voice is as passionately revealed in the decision to write the *Odyssey*, "The Falcon," or *Madame Bovary* as it is in the most obtrusive direct comment of the kind employed by Fielding, Dickens, or George Eliot. Everything he *shows* will serve to *tell*; the line between showing and telling is always to some degree an arbitrary one.

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

* * *

"All Authors Should Be Objective"

A second type of general criterion common to many of the founders of modern fiction deals with the author's state of mind or soul. A surprising number of writers, even those who have thought of their writing as "self-expression," have sought a freedom from the tyranny of subjectivity, echoing Goethe's claim that "Every healthy effort . . . is directed from the inward to the outward world."⁶ From time to time others have risen to defend commitment, engagement, involvement. But, at least until recently, the predominant demand in this century has been for some sort of objectivity.

Like all such terms, however, *objectivity* is many things. Underlying it and its many synonyms — impersonality, detachment, disinterestedness, neutrality, etc. — we can distinguish at least three separate qualities: neutrality, impartiality, and *impassibilité*.

Neutrality and the Author's "Second Self"

Objectivity in the author can mean, first, an attitude of neutrality toward all values, an attempt at disinterested reporting of all things good and evil. Like many literary enthusiasms, the passion for neutrality was imported into fiction from the other arts relatively late. Keats was saying in 1818 the kind of thing that novelists began to say only with Flaubert. "The poetical character . . . has no character. . . . It lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated. It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosopher, delights the camelion Poet.

It does not harm from its relish of the dark side of things any more than from its taste for the bright one; because they both end in speculation."⁷ Three decades later Flaubert recommended a similar neutrality to the novelist who would be a poet. For him the model is the attitude of the scientist. Once we have spent enough time, he says, in "treating the human soul with the impartiality which physical scientists show in studying matter, we will have taken an immense step forward."⁸ Art must achieve "by a pitiless method, the precision of the physical sciences."⁹

It should be unnecessary here to show that no author can ever attain to this kind of objectivity. Most of us today would, like Sartre, renounce the analogy with science even if we could admit that science is objective in this sense. What is more, we all know by now that a careful reading of any statement in defense of the artist's neutrality will reveal commitment; there is always some deeper value in relation to which neutrality is taken to be good. Chekhov, for example, begins bravely enough in defense of neutrality, but he cannot write three sentences without committing himself. "I am afraid of those who look for a tendency between the lines, and who are determined to regard me either as a liberal or as a conservative. I am not a liberal, not a conservative, not a believer in gradual progress, not a monk, not an indifferentist. I should like to be a free artist and nothing more. . . . I have no preference either for gendarmes, or for butchers, or for scientists, or for writers, or for the younger generation. I regard trade-marks and labels as a superstition."¹⁰ Freedom and art are good, then, and superstition bad? Soon he is carried away to a direct repudiation of the plea for "indifference" with which he began. "My holy of holies is the human body, health, intelligence, talent, inspiration, love, and the most absolute freedom – freedom from violence and lying, whatever forms they may take" (p. 63). Again and again he betrays in this way the most passionate kind of commitment to what he often calls objectivity.

The artist should be, not the judge of his characters and their conversations, but only an unbiassed witness. I once overheard a desultory conversation about pessimism between two Russians; nothing was solved, – and my business is to report the conversation exactly as I heard it, and let the jury, – that is, the readers, estimate its value. My business is merely to be talented, i.e., to be able . . . to illuminate the characters and speak their language [pp. 58–59].

But "illuminate" according to what lights? "A writer must be as objective as a chemist; he must abandon the subjective line; he must know that dung-heaps play a very respectable part in a landscape, and that evil passions are as inherent in life as good ones" (pp. 275–76). We have learned by now to ask of such statements: Is it *good* to be faithful to what is "inherent"? Is it good to include every part of the "landscape"? If so, why? According to what scale of values? To repudiate one scale is necessarily to imply another.

It would be a serious mistake, however, to dismiss talk about the author's neutrality simply because of this elementary and understandable confusion between neutrality toward *some* values and neutrality toward *all*. Cleansed of the polemical excesses, the attack on subjectivity can be seen to rest on several important insights.

To succeed in writing some kinds of works, some novelists find it necessary to repudiate all intellectual or political causes. Chekhov does not want himself, *as artist*, to be either liberal or conservative. Flaubert, writing in 1853, claims that even the artist who recognizes the demand to be a "triple-thinker," even the artist who recognizes the

need for ideas in abundance, "must have neither religion, nor country, nor social conviction."¹¹

Unlike the claim to complete neutrality, this claim will never be refuted, and it will not suffer from shifts in literary theory or philosophical fashion. Like its opposite, the existentialist claim of Sartre and others that the artist should be totally *engagé*, its validity depends on the kind of novel the author is writing. Some great artists have been committed to the causes of their times, and some have not. Some works seem to be harmed by their burden of commitment (many of Sartre's own works, for example, in spite of their freedom from authorial comment) and some seem to be able to absorb a great deal of commitment (*The Divine Comedy*, *Four Quartets*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *Darkness at Noon*, *Bread and Wine*). One can always find examples to prove either side of the case; the test is whether the particular ends of the artist enable him to do something with his commitment, not whether he has it or not.

Everyone is against everyone else's prejudices and in favor of his own commitment to the truth. All of us would like the novelist somehow to operate on the level of our own passion for truth and right, a passion which by definition is not in the least prejudiced. The argument in favor of neutrality is thus useful in so far as it warns the novelist that he can seldom afford to pour his untransformed biases into his work. The deeper he sees into permanency, the more likely he is to earn the discerning reader's concurrence. The author as he writes should be like the ideal reader described by Hume in "The Standard of Taste," who, in order to reduce the distortions produced by prejudice, considers himself as "man in general" and forgets, if possible, his "individual being" and his "peculiar circumstances."

To put it in this way, however, is to understate the importance of the author's individuality. As he writes, he creates not simply an ideal, impersonal "man in general" but an implied version of "himself" that is different from the implied authors we meet in other men's works. To some novelists it has seemed, indeed, that they were discovering or creating themselves as they wrote. As Jessamyn West says, it is sometimes "only by writing the story that the novelist can discover – not his story – but its writer, the official scribe, so to speak, for that narrative."¹² Whether we call this implied author an "official scribe," or adopt the term recently revived by Kathleen Tillotson – the author's "second self"¹³ – it is clear that the picture the reader gets of this presence is one of the author's most important effects. However impersonal he may try to be, his reader will inevitably construct a picture of the official scribe who writes in this manner – and of course that official scribe will never be neutral toward all values. Our reactions to his various commitments, secret or overt, will help to determine our response to the work. . . . Our present problem is the intricate relationship of the so-called real author with his various official versions of himself.

We must say various versions, for regardless of how sincere an author may try to be, his different works will imply different versions, different ideal combinations of norms. Just as one's personal letters imply different versions of oneself, depending on the differing relationships with each correspondent and the purpose of each letter, so the writer sets himself out with a different air depending on the needs of particular works.

These differences are most evident when the second self is given an overt, speaking role in the story. When Fielding comments, he gives us explicit evidence of a modifying

process from work to work; no single version of Fielding emerges from reading the satirical *Jonathan Wild*, the two great "comic epics in prose," *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, and that troublesome hybrid, *Amelia*. There are many similarities among them, of course; all of the implied authors value benevolence and generosity; all of them deplore self-seeking brutality. In these and many other respects they are indistinguishable from most implied authors of most significant works until our own century. But when we descend from this level of generality to look at the particular ordering of values in each novel, we find great variety. The author of *Jonathan Wild* is by implication very much concerned with public affairs and with the effects of unchecked ambition on the "great men" who attain to power in the world. If we had only this novel by Fielding, we would infer from it that in his real life he was much more single-mindedly engrossed in his role as magistrate and reformer of public manners than is suggested by the implied author of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* – to say nothing of *Shamela* (what would we infer about Fielding if he had never written anything but *Shamela*!). On the other hand, the author who greets us on page one of *Amelia* has none of that air of facetiousness combined with grand insouciance that we meet from the beginning in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*. Suppose that Fielding had never written anything but *Amelia*, filled as it is with the kind of commentary we find at the beginning:

The various accidents which befel a very worthy couple after their uniting in the state of matrimony will be the subject of the following history. The distresses which they waded through were some of them so exquisite, and the incidents which produced these so extraordinary, that they seemed to require not only the utmost malice, but the utmost invention, which superstition hath ever attributed to Fortune: though whether any such being interfered in the case, or, indeed, whether there be any such being in the universe, is a matter which I by no means presume to determine in the affirmative.

Could we ever infer from this the Fielding of the earlier works? Though the author of *Amelia* can still indulge in occasional jests and ironies, his general air of sententious solemnity is strictly in keeping with the very special effects proper to the work as a whole. Our picture of him is built, of course, only partly by the narrator's explicit commentary; it is even more derived from the kind of tale he chooses to tell. But the commentary makes explicit for us a relationship which is present in all fiction, but which, in fiction without commentary, may be overlooked.

It is a curious fact that we have no terms either for this created "second self" or for our relationship with him. None of our terms for various aspects of the narrator is quite accurate. "Persona," "mask," and "narrator" are sometimes used, but they more commonly refer to the speaker in the work who is after all only one of the elements created by the implied author and who may be separated from him by large ironies. "Narrator" is usually taken to mean the "I" of a work, but the "I" is seldom if ever identical with the implied image of the artist.

"Theme," "meaning," "symbolic significance," "theology," or even "ontology" – all these have been used to describe the norms which the reader must apprehend in each work if he is to grasp it adequately. Such terms are useful for some purposes, but they can be misleading because they almost inevitably come to seem like purposes for which the works exist. Though the old-style effort to find the theme or moral has been

generally repudiated, the new-style search for the "meaning" which the work "communicates" or "symbolizes" can yield the same kinds of misreading. It is true that both types of search, however clumsily pursued, express a basic need: the reader's need to know where, in the world of values, he stands – that is, to know where the author *wants* him to stand. But most works worth reading have so many possible "themes," so many possible mythological or metaphorical or symbolic analogues, that to find any one of them, and to announce it as what the work is *for*, is to do at best a very small part of the critical task. Our sense of the implied author includes not only the extractable meanings but also the moral and emotional content of each bit of action and suffering of all of the characters. It includes, in short, the intuitive apprehension of a completed artistic whole; the chief value to which *this* implied author is committed, regardless of what party his creator belongs to in real life, is that which is expressed by the total form.

Three other terms are sometimes used to name the core of norms and choices which I am calling the implied author. "Style" is sometimes broadly used to cover whatever it is that gives us a sense, from word to word and line to line, that the author sees more deeply and judges more profoundly than his presented characters. But, though style is one of our main sources of insight into the author's norms, in carrying such strong overtones of the merely verbal the word *style* excludes our sense of the author's skill in his choice of character and episode and scene and idea. "Tone" is similarly used to refer to the implicit evaluation which the author manages to convey behind his explicit presentation,¹⁴ but it almost inevitably suggests again something limited to the merely verbal; some aspects of the implied author may be inferred through tonal variations, but his major qualities will depend also on the hard facts of action and character in the tale that is told.

Similarly, "technique" has at times been expanded to cover all discernible signs of the author's artistry. If everyone used "technique" as Mark Schorer does,¹⁵ covering with it almost the entire range of choices made by the author, then it might very well serve our purposes. But it is usually taken for a much narrower matter, and consequently it will not do. We can be satisfied only with a term that is as broad as the work itself but still capable of calling attention to that work as the product of a choosing, evaluating person rather than as a self-existing thing. The "implied author" chooses, consciously or unconsciously, what we read; we infer him as an ideal, literary, created version of the real man; he is the sum of his own choices.

It is only by distinguishing between the author and his implied image that we can avoid pointless and unverifiable talk about such qualities as "sincerity" or "seriousness" in the author. Because Ford Madox Ford thinks of Fielding and Defoe and Thackeray as the unmediated authors of their novels, he must end by condemning them as insincere, since there is every reason to believe that they write "passages of virtuous aspirations that were in no way any aspirations of theirs."¹⁶ Presumably he is relying on external evidences of Fielding's lack of virtuous aspirations. But we have only the work as evidence for the only kind of sincerity that concerns us: Is the implied author in harmony with himself – that is, are his other choices in harmony with his explicit narrative character? If a narrator who by every trustworthy sign is presented to us as a reliable spokesman for the author professes to believe in values which are never realized in the structure as a whole, we can then talk of an insincere work. A great work establishes the "sincerity" of its implied author, regardless of how grossly the man

who created that author may belie in his *other* forms of conduct the values embodied in his work. For all we know, the only sincere moments of his life may have been lived as he wrote his novel.

What is more, in this distinction between author and implied author we find a middle position between the technical irrelevance of talk about the artist's objectivity and the harmful error of pretending that an author can allow direct intrusions of his own immediate problems and desires. The great defenders of objectivity were working on an important matter and they knew it. Flaubert is right in saying that Shakespeare does not barge clumsily into his works. We are never plagued with his undigested personal problems. Flaubert is also right in rebuking Louise Colet for writing "La Servante" as a personal attack on Musset, with the personal passion destroying the aesthetic value of the poem (January 9–10, 1854). And he is surely right when he forces the hero of the youthful version of *The Sentimental Education* (1845) to choose between the merely confessional statement and the truly rendered work of art.

But is he right when he claims that we do not know what Shakespeare loved or hated?¹⁷ Perhaps – if he means only that we cannot easily tell from the plays whether the man Shakespeare preferred blondes to brunettes or whether he disliked bastards, Jews, or Moors. But the statement is most definitely mistaken if it means that the implied author of Shakespeare's plays is neutral toward all values. We do know what *this* Shakespeare loved and hated; it is hard to see how he could have written his plays at all if he had refused to take a strong line on at least one or two of the seven deadly sins. I return in chapter V to the question of beliefs in literature, and I try there to list a few of the values to which Shakespeare is definitely and obviously committed. They are for the most part not personal, idiosyncratic; Shakespeare is thus not recognizably subjective. But they are unmistakable violations of true neutrality; the implied Shakespeare is thoroughly engaged with life, and he does not conceal his judgment on the selfish, the foolish, and the cruel.

Even if all this were denied, it is difficult to see why there should be any necessary connection between neutrality and an absence of commentary. An author might very well use comments to warn the reader against judging. But if I am right in claiming that neutrality is impossible, even the most nearly neutral comment will reveal some sort of commitment.

Once upon a time there lived in Berlin, Germany, a man called Albinus. He was rich, respectable, happy; one day he abandoned his wife for the sake of a youthful mistress; he loved; was not loved; and his life ended in disaster.

This is the whole of the story and we might have left it at that had there not been profit and pleasure in the telling; and although there is plenty of space on a gravestone to contain, bound in moss, the abridged version of a man's life, detail is always welcome.¹⁸

Nabokov may here have purged his narrator's voice of all commitments save one, but that one is all-powerful: he believes in the ironic interest – and as it later turns out, the poignancy – of a man's fated self-destruction. Maintaining the same detached tone, this author can intrude whenever he pleases without violating our conviction that he is as objective as it is humanly possible to be. Describing the villain, he can call him both a "dangerous man" and "a very fine artist indeed" without reducing our confidence in

his open-mindedness. But he is not neutral toward all values, and he does not pretend to be.

* * *

Emotions, Beliefs, and the Reader's Objectivity

Many of the attacks on allegedly non-aesthetic matters like plot and emotional involvement have been based on the modern rediscovery of "aesthetic distance." After an unrestrained binge of romantic emotionalism and literal naturalism, authors began to discover, as the nineteenth century moved to an end, that in removing the various artificialities of earlier literature they had raised more problems than they had solved; it became more and more clear that if the gap between art and reality were ever fully closed, art would be destroyed. But it was not until this century that men began to take seriously the possibility that the power of artifice to keep us at a certain distance from reality could be a virtue rather than simply an inevitable obstacle to full realism. In 1912 Edward Bullough formulated the problem of what he called "psychic distance" as that of making sure that a work is neither "over-distanced" nor "under-distanced." If it is over-distanced, it will seem, he said, improbable, artificial, empty, or absurd, and we will not respond to it. Yet if it is "under-distanced," the work becomes too personal and cannot be enjoyed as art. For example, if a man who believes that he has reason to be jealous of his wife attends *Othello*, he will be moved too deeply and in a manner not properly aesthetic.¹⁹ It is this second danger that was really an expression of something new in the air; when Bullough suggested that the artist should take steps to prevent under-distancing, he was in the vanguard of a great parade of authors and critics who have become enthusiastic for this or that "alienation effect," or who have deplored the common reader's demand that he should be deeply and emotionally involved in what he reads. Bertolt Brecht's effort to produce plays "of a non-Aristotelian kind," "plays which are not based on empathy," is only an extreme form of what many artists have sought, in their effort to break the bond with tyrannical reality.²⁰

The emphasis on the need for control of distance is obviously sound. But the novelist will find himself in difficulties if he tries to discover some ideal distance that all works ought to seek. "Aesthetic distance" is in fact many different effects, some of them quite inappropriate to some kinds of works. More important, distance is never an end in itself; distance along one axis is sought for the sake of increasing the reader's involvement on some other axis. When Chikamatsu, for example, urges that poets avoid all emotional epithets, he does so in order to increase the emotional effect in the reader. "I take pathos to be entirely a matter of restraint. . . . It is essential that one not say of a thing that 'it is sad,' but that it be sad of itself."²¹ When Brecht, on the other hand, asks for a "pervading coolness" (p. 71), he may seem at first to desire an increase in distance of all kinds. But what he really wants is to increase the emotional distance in order to involve the reader's social judgment more deeply.

The closer we look at the concept of distance the more complicated it appears. Of course, if we were content to see all literature as aspiring to one kind of involvement and

one kind only – a sense of realism, an ecstatic contemplation of pure form, or whatever – we could feel comfortable about seeking one kind of distance as well. Each critic could then offer his formula and try to convert readers to it: As much realism as possible, but enough distance from reality to preserve a sense of form; As close to pure form as possible, with only so much of impurities like plot as cannot be done without; and so on. But is our experience with actual works ever as simple as this approach suggests? Every literary work of any power – whether or not its author composed it with his audience in mind – is in fact an elaborate system of controls over the reader's involvement and detachment along *various* lines of interest. The author is limited only by the range of human interests.

Resisting, then, the natural temptation to substitute my own universal rules about which interests should be heightened and which suppressed to make the greatest literature, I must develop here an elementary – and perhaps to some readers rather obvious – catalogue of the interests that novelists have, in fact rather than in theory, played upon in constructing their works. Once the catalogue is completed, we may still be convinced that one type of interest is far superior to all others, but even so our legislations in its favor should be based on a fairly comprehensive look at the range of interests or appetites²² which our rules would forbid. The various kinds of purge – whether of unrealistic author's voice, of impure human emotions, or of the moral judgments which help to produce them – can be understood only in the context of what cannot be purged: some kind of interest that will grasp and sustain the reader throughout the work.

In setting up interest as a general criterion, I am aware of indulging in what may look like the apriorism that I have criticized. Why must all works be interesting? And interesting to whom? Cannot a work be simply "true" or "expressive" or "finely composed" – with the reader left to make of it what he can? To answer these questions properly would lead me far afield. Perhaps it will be sufficient to say here that *interest* is dictated to me by the nature of my topic: if I am to deal with literature as it affects readers, some kind of interest will always be central. Different general values would be dictated if I were trying to deal with works as reflections of reality, in which case truth would probably be my over-all term; or as expressions of the author's mind or soul, in which case some general term like sincerity or expressiveness might be central; or, finally, as realizations of formal excellence, in which case general terms like coherence, complexity, unity, or harmony would prove central. Literary works are, in fact, all of these things; one's choice of which aspect to emphasize is largely determined by the kind of question one wants to answer. What is more, there are unavoidable limitations in any one choice, as Abrams has shown so persuasively in *The Mirror and the Lamp*. There are also dangers and temptations that are avoidable – but only by the critic who can resist imposing his general commitment arbitrarily upon the rich variety of actual authors, works, and audiences. Whether I have done so in what follows is not, unfortunately, a question I can settle simply by laying my hand on my heart and swearing that I have tried.

Types of Literary Interest (and Distance)

The values which interest us, and which are thus available for technical manipulation in fiction, may be roughly divided into three kinds. (1) Intellectual or cognitive: We have,

or can be made to have, strong intellectual curiosity about "the facts," the true interpretation, the true reasons, the true origins, the true motives, or the truth about life itself. (2) Qualitative: We have, or can be made to have, a strong desire to see any pattern or form completed, or to experience a further development of qualities of any kind. We might call this kind "aesthetic," if to do so did not suggest that a literary form using this interest was necessarily of more artistic value than one based on other interests. (3) Practical: We have, or can be made to have, a strong desire for the success or failure of those we love or hate, admire or detest; or we can be made to hope for or fear a change in the quality of a character. We might call this kind "human," if to do so did not imply that 1 and 2 were somehow less than human. This hope or fear may be for an intellectual change in a character or for a change in his fortune; one finds this practical aspect even in the most uncompromising novel of ideas that might seem to fall entirely under 1. Our desire may, second, be for a change of quality in a character; one finds this practical aspect even in the purely "aesthetic" novel of sensibility that might seem to fall entirely under 2. Finally, our desire may be for a moral change in a character, or for a change in his fortune – that is, we can be made to hope for or to fear particular moral choices and their results.

Intellectual interests. – We always want to find out the facts of the case, whether the simple material circumstances, as in most mystery stories, or psychological or philosophical truths which explain the external circumstances. Even in so-called plotless works we are pulled forward by the desire to discover the truth about the world of the book. In works relying heavily on this interest, we know that the book is completed when we once see the complete picture. In Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha*, for example, our major interest is in Siddhartha's quest for the truth about how a man should live. If we do not think that the question of how a man should live is important, or that this author's insights on the question are likely to prove valuable, we can never care very much for this novel, even though we may enjoy some of the lesser pleasures offered by it. In many serious modern novels we look for an answer to the question, "What do these lives *mean*?" In others we look for completed patterns of theme, image, or symbol.

Very few imaginative works, however, rely entirely on a desire for intellectual completion. The pure literary forms that belong properly to this kind of suspense are the philosophical treatise which arouses our curiosity about an important question and the purely ratiocinative detective novel.

Completion of qualities. – Most imaginative works, even those of a kind that might seem to be cognitive or didactic in the sense of being built only on speculative or intellectual interests, rely in part on interests very different from intellectual curiosity; they make us desire a quality. Though some of the qualities which some works provide are often discussed under cognitive terms like "truth" and "knowledge," clearly the satisfaction we receive from the following qualities is to some degree distinct from the pleasure of learning.

(a) *Cause-effect.* – When we see a causal chain started, we demand – and demand in a way that is only indirectly related to mere curiosity – to see the result. Emma meddles, Tess is seduced, Huck runs away – and we demand certain consequences. This kind of sequence, so strongly stressed by Aristotle in his discussion of plot, is, as we have seen, often underplayed or even deplored by modern critics and novelists. Yet our desire for causal completion is one of the strongest of interests available to the author. Not only do

we believe that certain causes do in life produce certain effects; in literature we believe that they should. Consequently, we ordinary readers will go to great lengths, once we have been caught up by an author who knows how to make use of this interest, to find out whether our demands will be met.

The suspension from cause to effect is of course closely related, on the one hand, to curiosity – that is, to a cognitive interest; we know that whatever fulfilment of our expectations we are given will be given with a difference, and we are inevitably curious about what the difference will be. All good works surprise us, and they surprise us largely by bringing to our attention convincing cause-and-effect patterns which were earlier played down. We can predict that disaster will result from Achilles' anger; we could never predict the generosity to Priam as a crucial part of the "disaster," even though when it comes it can be seen to follow properly as a result from other causes in Achilles' nature and situation.

On the other hand, this interest is easily confused with practical interests, which are described below. It is qualitative, nonetheless, because it operates quite independently of our interests in the welfare of human beings. In fact it can conflict with those interests. The hero commits a crime – and we are torn between our appetite for the proper effect, discovery and punishment, and our practical desire for his happiness.

(b) *Conventional expectations.* – For experienced readers a sonnet begun calls for a sonnet concluded; an elegy begun in blank verse calls for an elegy completed in blank verse. Even so amorphous a genre as the novel, with hardly any established conventions, makes use of this kind of interest: when I begin what I think is a novel, I expect to read a novel throughout, unless the author can, like Sterne, transform my idea of what a novel can be.

We seem to be able to accept almost anything as a literary convention, no matter how inherently improbable. Even the most outlandish of mannerisms, like Euphuism or Finneganswackism, can perform the essential task of maintaining our sense of the artistic integrity of *this work* as distinct from all others and as distinct from life. Again, authors may surprise us by violating conventions, but only so long as conventional expectations are available in a given public to be played upon. When everyone prides himself on violating conventions, there is nothing left to violate; the fewer the conventions the fewer the surprises.

(c) *Abstract forms.* – There seems to lie behind each convention some more general pattern of desires and gratifications that it serves. Balance, symmetry, climax, repetition, contrast, comparison – some pattern derived from our experience is probably imitated by every successful convention. The conventions which continue to give pleasure when they are no longer fashionable are based on patterns of reaction that lie very deep. Fashions in verse form come and go, for example, but meter and rhyme and the other musical devices of poetry do not lose their importance.

With the surrender of verse, and with no conventional agreement whatever about what is good narrative prose style, writers of longer narratives have been forced to engage in a constant search for new ways of giving body to abstract forms.

(d) *"Promised" qualities.* – In addition to these qualities, common to many works, each work promises in its early pages a further provision of distinctive qualities exhibited in those pages. Whether the quality is a peculiar stylistic or symbolic brilliance, an original

kind of wit, a unique sublimity, irony, ambiguity, illusion of reality, profundity, or convincing character portrayal, there is an implied promise of more to come.

Our interest in these qualities may be static; we do not hope for or find a change in the quality but simply move forward looking for more of the same. Some good works rely heavily on this kind of interest (Montaigne's *Essays*, Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, collections of table talk and facetiae, modern novels of stylistic experimentation like Gertrude Stein's *Melanchtha*). Many of the realistic and naturalistic novels which were once popular and which now seem tedious relied somewhat too heavily on the sustained appeal of what was often called truth. Reading for the first time a novel dealing in the new vivid way with any new subject matter – whether the social reality about prostitution, slums, or the wheat market or the psychological reality about Irish Jews or American psychopaths – many readers were so fascinated by the new sense of reality, quite aside from the appeal of the facts as information, that little else was needed to carry them through to the end. But once this quality had become common, its appeal faded. Now that most commercial writers know how to portray violent physical reality, for example, with a vividness that would at one time have established an international reputation, only those novels which provide something more than physical reality survive.

The same danger threatens interest in any technique, even when the inherently more interesting procedure is adopted of providing some progressive change in the quality. Following James's masterful explorations of what "composition" could do for the novel, it was easy to believe that the reader's interest in technique was an adequate substitute for other interests, rather than at best a useful adjunct and at worst a harmful distraction. And some novels were written which encouraged this interest. When James and his eleven colleagues wrote *The Whole Family: A Novel by Twelve Authors* (1908), each author writing one chapter, each chapter using a different central intelligence to throw a different light on the events, no reader could help being mainly interested in the point of view rather than in what the point of view revealed: "I wonder what James will make of *his* chapter?"²³ But even with this much "suspense" introduced, interest in technique alone is likely to prove trivial.

Practical interests. – If we look closely at our reactions to most great novels, we discover that we feel a strong concern for the characters as people; we care about their good and bad fortune. In most works of any significance, we are made to admire or detest, to love or hate, or simply to approve or disapprove of at least one central character, and our interest in reading from page to page, like our judgment upon the book after reconsideration, is inseparable from this emotional involvement. We care, and care deeply, about Raskolnikov and Emma, about Father Goriot and Dorothea Brooke. Whatever happens to them, we wish them well. It is of course true that our desires concerning the fate of such imagined people differ markedly from our desires in real life. We will accept destruction of the man we love, in a literary work, if destruction is required to satisfy our other interests; we will take pleasure in combinations of hope and fear which in real life would be intolerable. But hope and fear are there, and the destruction or salvation is felt in a manner closely analogous to the feelings produced by such events in real life.

Any characteristic, mental, physical, or moral, which in real life will make me love or hate other men will work the same effect in fiction. But there is a large difference. Since we are not in a position to profit from or be harmed by a fictional character, our