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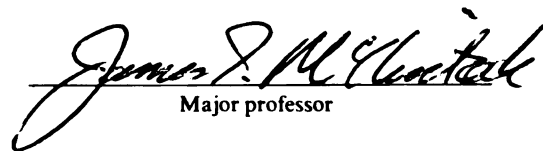
The Reinvention of the Eighteenth-Century Novel  
In Contemporary British and American Fiction

presented by

Robert Francis Scott

has been accepted towards fulfillment  
of the requirements for

Ph.D. \_\_\_\_\_ degree in English

  
Major professor

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THE REINVENTION OF THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY NOVEL  
IN CONTEMPORARY BRITISH AND AMERICAN FICTION

By

Robert Francis Scott

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

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1994



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## ABSTRACT

### THE REINVENTION OF THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY NOVEL IN CONTEMPORARY BRITISH AND AMERICAN FICTION

By

Robert Francis Scott

This dissertation examines the "reinvention" of the eighteenth-century novel in contemporary British and American fiction as a discernible and sustained literary movement. The fact that eight of the twelve works considered in this study were published in or after 1980 suggests that this tendency toward reinvention is, by and large, a quite recent literary phenomenon. My use of the term "reinvention" raises a series of important questions: What constitutes "reinvention"? Does it consist primarily of re-writing or re-presenting an earlier work? How can we distinguish between mere literary allusion or ventriloquism and true reinvention? Moreover, why should contemporary novelists wish to reinvent a past literary form at all and, in particular, why should the eighteenth-century novel appear to be such an attractive model? Most importantly, what is the impetus behind such a literary movement? These are the fundamental questions this dissertation proposes to answer.

In chapter one I trace the ways in which nine contemporary works variously reinvent the eighteenth-century novel. By looking closely at these nine works, I demonstrate that the impulse toward reinventing the eighteenth-century novel is a strong and varied one in recent British and American fiction. In chapters two, three, and four I examine

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a trio of recent American novels: John Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor*, Erica Jong's *Fanny: Being the True History of the Adventures of Fanny Hackabout-Jones*, and T. Coraghessan Boyle's *Water Music*. Despite formal and theoretical differences, these novels share certain fundamental qualities which distinguish them as contemporary fiction's richest examples of reinvention.

Chapter five discusses the principal reasons behind this recent interest in reinventing the early English novel. It explores why a significant number of contemporary British and American novelists feel compelled to enter into a complex dialogue with the eighteenth-century novel. In this final chapter I argue that the reinventive impetus guiding these recent authors is expressive of a palpable desire to revitalize the contemporary novel by returning to the roots of the form.

To Paula

I would  
guidance  
Uphaus,  
David M.  
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thank my  
support.

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## Chapter One

### **Rosaries, Earrings, and Garter Belts: The Various Forms of Reinvention**

There is at present something of a fashion for novels reflecting other novels, ironically and obliquely . . . . These, at best, are neither extensions nor offshoots, but playful and original tributes to the work that's set them off.<sup>1</sup>

Patricia Craig

#### Introduction

Patricia Craig is surely right that there is currently a fashion for novels reflecting other novels, both ironically and obliquely. However, while agreeing with Craig's basic contention, I would more accurately describe this phenomenon as a discernible and coherent sub-genre, even a sustained literary movement. In addition, more than simply "reflecting" other novels, many of the works which participate in this movement seek to "reinvent" one particular literary form -- the eighteenth-century novel. There are, in fact, a significant number of contemporary British and American novels which engage in this ambitious literary enterprise.<sup>2</sup> In this chapter I will begin the book-length task of establishing and defining the sub-genre of "reinvented eighteenth-century novels" and will start to trace the ways in which nine contemporary works variously reconfigure the early English novel within the literary context of postmodernism. Doing so will entail examining formal aspects of the eighteenth-century novel to which these contemporary writers are indebted as well as exploring

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the diverse ways in which these novelists draw thematically from the works of Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, Jane Austen, and others. What structural qualities, plot devices, characters, and narrative situations do they choose to appropriate and rework?

By any criteria, the nine novels considered in this chapter encompass a wide range of literary forms and styles. From epistolary novel to murder mystery and from spiritual autobiography to erotic tease, these novels embody the great diversity that British and American fiction has exhibited throughout the past forty years. Yet, for all their formal and stylistic differences, each of these novels is consciously indebted to the literature of the eighteenth century. Each, that is, appropriates and in turn reinvents earlier fictional models. Moreover, in spite of their marked differences, there are several discernible *degrees* of reinvention at work in these novels. First of all, there are novels whose use of eighteenth-century sources is largely allusive. For example, in Muriel Spark's *Robinson*, Jane Gardam's *Crusoe's Daughter*, and Stanley Elkin's *Boswell: A Modern Comedy*, the titular characters hearken back to or invoke associations with eighteenth-century figures, whether actual or literary.<sup>3</sup> The protagonists in the novels of Spark and Gardam share strong connections with Defoe's famous castaway while the hero of Elkin's novel recalls Samuel Johnson's biographer.

A second form of reinvention involves contemporary novels whose plots and characters strongly recall eighteenth-

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century works. These novels, set in the present but echoing eighteenth-century works, include Kingsley Amis's *Take A Girl Like You*, wherein the central characters and overall plot development resemble Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa: or, The History of a Young Lady* (1747-48); William Boyd's *The New Confessions*, which parallels the autobiographical reminiscences of an aging Scottish filmmaker with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *The Confessions* (1781-88); and Fay Weldon's *Letters to Alice on First Reading Jane Austen*, an epistolary novel modeled after a series of letters Jane Austen wrote to one of her nieces.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to these reinventions, there are also novels in which the eighteenth and twentieth centuries not only coexist within the same work, but are also shown to be interdependent. These works include John Hawkes's *Virginie: Her Two Lives*, John Fowles's *A Maggot*, and Peter Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor: A Novel*.<sup>5</sup> Hawkes's tale shuttles back and forth between the French countryside in 1740 and post-World War II Paris; Fowles sets his work in 1736 Devonshire yet includes a modern narrator who draws parallels between past and present; and Ackroyd's tale looks at the eerie interplay between eighteenth and twentieth-century murders. Essentially two-tiered in structure, this last group of novels frequently blurs the distinction between time periods and tends toward metafictional and self-reflexive narrative structures. Despite formal and thematic differences, however, all of these reinventive novels share a common literary strategy.



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As we will see in chapter five, all seek to restore a sense of vitality to the contemporary novel by returning to the origins of the form.

### Allusive Archetypes

In *Robinson* (1958) Muriel Spark presents an updated version of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* by placing the principal elements of Defoe's 1719 work into a contemporary context. Spark's novel is set on a small island in the north Atlantic named for and controlled by Miles Mary Robinson, a misanthropic recluse. Robinson's tranquil existence is disrupted when a plane crash strands three survivors on his island: Tom Wells, a salesman of religious trinkets, Jimmie Waterford, Robinson's distant relative, and January Marlow, a writer who has recently converted to Catholicism. Like *Robinson Crusoe*, January Marlow endures a religious crisis during her island stay. The nature of her crisis, however, is fundamentally different from *Crusoe's*, and, by allusively comparing the religious ordeals of these two disparate figures, Spark brings into sharper focus the distinctive spiritual development of a contemporary Catholic woman.

Through her novel's title and setting, Spark directly invokes associations with *Robinson Crusoe*. In terms of character, structure, and thematic focus, *Robinson* is also deeply indebted to Defoe's work. Like *Robinson Crusoe*, Miles Mary Robinson is a stubborn loner with a firmly held set of values. Pragmatic, sincere, and humorless, he is, like

Crusoe, "an austere sea-bound hero" (p. 137). Spark's associations with Robinson Crusoe also extend to January Marlow. Like Defoe's hero, Marlow is a castaway who keeps a journal detailing her island activities.

*Robinson* further resembles *Robinson Crusoe* in that it examines the religious crisis of an isolated individual and explores such theological issues as freedom of will and the presence of supernatural forces. It is in the nature of her protagonist's religious struggle, however, that *Robinson* differs most dramatically from its eighteenth-century model. Although both Robinson Crusoe and January Marlow experience a religious ordeal during their island stay, for Spark's heroine this crisis is far more deeply felt.

While the genuineness of his conversion is not in question, it is important to recognize that Crusoe does not undergo any sort of spiritual evolution; he merely moves abruptly from skepticism to belief. Prior to his embrace of Christianity, he has little use for religion, preferring instead to attribute his triumphs and setbacks to chance or fate. After his conversion, though, Crusoe comes to rely entirely on assistance from the "Hand of God." Furthermore, the difficulties he must overcome are principally material as it is raw survival, not spiritual enrichment, that occupies the majority of his early attention on the island. On the whole, Crusoe's acceptance of providential support provides him with peace of mind and allows him to work more efficiently. As a result, though he is geographically marooned, Crusoe is not spiritually isolated.

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Although Crusoe's belief in the "Providence of God" rarely wavers during his twenty-eight years of isolation, Marlow's faith in Catholicism is profoundly challenged during her three months on Robinson's island. A recent convert, her still evolving religious views are repeatedly assaulted by the forces of lapsed religious faith (represented by the ex-seminarian Robinson) and superstition (represented by the occultist Tom Wells). Marlow's contemplative nature also compels her to consider the religious, even sacramental ramifications of her island experience. Consequently, during the course of her isolation, she agonizes over whether she is a good Catholic, tries to safeguard her soul against "the deadly sin of pride" (p. 67), and fears the lasting consequences of living a life "so separated from the Sacraments" (p. 44). In forcing herself to wrestle with these issues, Marlow develops a greater understanding of the role of Catholicism in her life. Thus, the silver and burnished wood rosary she had previously prized for its physical beauty becomes for Marlow a potent religious symbol. In contrast to Crusoe, who is intrinsically unchanged at the end of his half a lifetime on the island, Marlow is fundamentally altered by her considerably shorter stay on Robinson's "apocryphal island" (p. 185).

In *Robinson Spark* thus appropriates elements from *Robinson Crusoe* in order to depict a contemporary Catholic woman's struggle to understand both herself and her religious faith. Physical isolation allows January Marlow the opportunity to scrutinize her spiritual life. Yet, her

process of spiritual development is difficult. "Through my journal," she notes at the beginning of her account, "I nearly came by my death" (p. 1). Marlow's stay challenges but ultimately confirms her faith and she returns to the world she left a stronger person. Because of her island experience, she is able to say in the last line of the novel, "all things are possible" (p. 186).

In *Crusoe's Daughter* (1985) Jane Gardam also draws connections between her twentieth-century heroine and Defoe's castaway. Gardam's novel chronicles the eighty plus years of Polly Flint, a withdrawn yet fiercely independent woman who comes to identify so strongly with Robinson Crusoe that she metaphorically envisions herself as his daughter. Both *Robinson* and *Crusoe's Daughter* invoke Defoe's stalwart hero; however, their reasons for doing so are fundamentally different. Whereas Spark allusively differentiates between the religious ordeals of January Marlow and Robinson Crusoe, Gardam explicitly pairs Polly Flint with Crusoe in order to offer a female-centered version of Defoe's classic tale.

Orphaned at the age of six, Polly is brought up by a pair of highly religious aunts in an isolated house on the salt-marshes of northern England. As she grows into adulthood, Polly's life comes to be dominated by the figure of Crusoe. Not only does she spend years annotating and translating *Robinson Crusoe* into German and French -- thus offering her own versions of the novel -- but Polly also begins to see parallels between her situation and Crusoe's. While Defoe's castaway is literally stranded on his Caribbean

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island, Polly, through a combination of circumstance and personality, is "marooned" in her house by the sea. "I'm a sort of Robinson Crusoe," she muses following the marriage of her Aunt Frances, "I'm all washed up at present" (p. 117).

"Perhaps if Robinson Crusoe had been a woman" (p. 123), Polly wonders, and her remark resonates throughout the novel. Although she senses a kinship with Crusoe in many respects, Polly recognizes that her sex fundamentally sets her apart from Defoe's hero. For example, in looking back on what she describes as Crusoe's "huge effort at self-respect," an adolescent Polly notes: "He was a man of course, so it would be easier. He didn't have blood pouring out of himself every four weeks until he was old. He would never feel disgusting" (p. 39). Here, and in her heroine's menopausal experiences, Gardam addresses the distinctive physical hardships inherent in being a woman.

*Crusoe's Daughter* also depicts the emotional trauma often endured by women in a male-dominated world. Tellingly, the one feature that unites the novel's principal female characters is that they have been abandoned by insensitive men. Polly's mother Emma Flint, for instance, is deserted by a selfish husband and withers away in a Liverpool lodging-house. Mary Youngusband, one of Polly's aunts, is so devastated by the rejection of a callous suitor that she turns to a life of religious piety. Mrs. Woods, one of the boarders at Polly's house, is a widow whose adventurous husband sought his fortune in the coffee fields of Africa and left her penniless. Each of these women has been "marooned"



by an uncaring man and each in turn reacts by stifling her femininity and isolating herself from both men and women.

Finally, there is Polly Flint. Left alone by her father's death and betrayed by Theo Zeit, the one man she truly loved, Polly seems destined to meet with the same fate as her impaired companions. Unlike these women, however, Polly speaks out against her situation. Her dissatisfaction first emerges in a letter to Aunt Frances during which Polly briefly notes that, had she been a boy, "money would have been found" (p. 77) to send her away to school. Later, in reflecting upon Crusoe's isolated existence, she offers a feminist analogy of their situations: "He was like women have to be almost always, on an island. Stuck. Imprisoned" (p. 133). As she grows older, Polly expresses her anger in stronger terms. In writing love letters to Theo Zeit, she rebels against "what woman are not supposed to do," noting, "Yet, I continued to tell everything, everything, as I am doing in this book, and as women are not supposed to do" (p. 163). Thus, despite her abandonment, isolation, and limited opportunities, Polly refuses to wallow in self-pity. Though cast away, she is not cast down. Like her "father," Polly ultimately learns to cope with her difficult existence. As she wistfully remarks at the novel's close, "there's something to be said for islands" (p. 224).

In *Crusoe's Daughter* Gardam departs from Defoe's fundamentally masculine tale in order to present a female-centered work which focuses on the daily struggles of a woman who is unable to function in mainstream society. Like

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Robinson Crusoe, Polly Flint is marooned, though her isolation is more emotional than physical and her "island" is an old house on the Northumbrian coast. In pairing the experiences of Polly and her "father," however, Gardam consciously bestows as much significance upon her heroine's domestic endeavors as Defoe accords the more exotic adventures of his hero.

In *Boswell: A Modern Comedy* (1964) Stanley Elkin connects his novel's hero, a celebrity-seeker named James Boswell, with the eighteenth-century Scottish biographer of the same name. A picaresque social satire, Elkin's novel centers on the efforts of an ordinary man to immortalize himself by becoming the founder of a club of well-known individuals. *Boswell: A Modern Comedy* is set in post-World War II America and, by effectively turning his hero into a modern version of the Scottish biographer, Elkin offers a sustained critique of contemporary American culture.

Besides their common name, Elkin's hero resembles Samuel Johnson's biographer in several significant respects. Like his eighteenth-century predecessor, Boswell has a prodigious memory and keeps a journal in which he records random musings on a range of people and topics. Alternatively admonitory and self-aggrandizing, these entries illustrate that the two Boswells share more than a healthy ego. Each also has an overriding tendency to bestow significance on the ordinary. Furthermore, both men act as reflectors of the experience of others. Remarks Elkin's hero: "I was a fourth -- Boswell, the world's sad fourth, who played other people's games by

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other people's rules. A reader of labels, of directions, a consumer on the most human of levels. Vampire. Sancho. Jerk" (p. 62).

Although he is clearly patterned after the historical James Boswell, Elkin's hero is a distinct literary creation. Among the important differences between the pair is that the earlier Boswell is far more discriminating in his admiration of great men. Elkin's boisterous hero, for instance, makes no distinctions among political leaders, professional athletes, or heads of corporations. All are celebrities and all are to be collected. In addition, whereas Johnson's biographer considers it his mission to tell a great man's story for posterity, the modern Boswell respects no story but his own.

In *Boswell: A Modern Comedy* Elkin creates the "modern Boswell"<sup>6</sup> he speaks of by ushering the archetypal celebrity hound and hanger-on into twentieth-century America. Elkin's novel is picaresque in structure, and, through Boswell's extensive travels -- New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Dallas, St. Louis -- the novelist is able to explore the society in which his hero lives. In particular, he examines the fifteen year period between 1945 and 1960, when America became an urban civilization. In an highly allusive manner, *Boswell: A Modern Comedy* attacks the abuses of consumer culture, the greed of huge corporations, and the hypocrisy of organized religion. Because he remains outside traditional structures, Boswell is in a position to criticize such aspects of American life as "the high espionage of high

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finance" (p. 211) and the ways in which success in today's culture is predicated upon "the subversion of self" (p. 212). The great tragedy of Boswell's existence is that the country in which he lives is no longer "a clean world" (p. 168). Instead, America is becoming less and less authentic. Traditional values have disintegrated and personal relationships are virtually impossible to sustain. As Boswell comes to realize at the close of the novel, American culture may provide its people with means for happiness yet it robs them of ends.

Finally, Elkin also adopts the journal format of the earlier Boswell, though he does so as a means of chronicling the diminution of modern heroes. Like his namesake, Elkin's Boswell is "on the make for all the great men of his time."<sup>5</sup> However, today's great men are not Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Joshua Reynolds; instead they are figures such as the Great Sandusky, a broken-down strong man, Messerman, the congregation-less rabbi, and Morty Perlmutter, the perverted Nobel Prize-winning anthropologist. Twentieth-century American heroes, Boswell's manic pursuit reveals, are more likely to be celebrities without being exceptional people. Tellingly, whereas the earlier Boswell found what he was looking for in the larger-than-life figure of Samuel Johnson, Elkin's compulsive hero never finds true greatness.

Each of the novelists in this first group of reinventions finds in eighteenth-century sources archetypal figures or situations which they in turn appropriate for contemporary purposes. Though Gardam and Elkin openly

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acknowledge their models, Spark's associations are more implicit. In addition, because she contrasts her heroine's religious crisis with Crusoe's, Spark's work also departs most dramatically from its eighteenth-century source. While her novel is also deeply indebted to *Robinson Crusoe*, Gardam's *Crusoe's Daughter* presents a female-centered version of Defoe's classic tale. Although they differ, however, both Spark and Gardam find the condition of being "marooned" a fruitful one for exploring issues of religion and gender. Elkin, on the other hand, discovers in the historical James Boswell an ideal figure for implementing his novel's cultural critique. By pairing his hero with the eighteenth-century biographer, Elkin is able to highlight the diminution of modern heroes and society. As we will see in the next set of reinventions, this strategy of contrasting past and present is a favored one among reinventive novelists.

#### Protagonists and Plotlines

In his romantic tragicomedy *Take A Girl Like You* (1960) Kingsley Amis chronicles the changing manners and mores of post-World War II Britain. Although set in the late 1950s, Amis's novel is essentially a modern version of Samuel Richardson's classic epistolary novel *Clarissa*. That is, in the figure of Jenny Bunn, a young woman seriously cautious in her dealings with men and stubbornly protective of her chastity, Amis creates a heroine who consciously hearkens back to Clarissa Harlowe. Moreover, in its depiction of the

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charming, amoral seducer Patrick Standish, Amis's novel also strongly recalls the villain of Richardson's novel, Robert Lovelace. However, in placing the principal characters and central plot development of *Clarissa* into a contemporary context, *Take A Girl Like You* ironically parallels Richardson's tale.

Shy, naive, and impressionable, Jenny Bunn moves to a suburb south of London to teach at an elementary school. Once there, the attractive school mistress meets Patrick Standish, a sportscar-driving bachelor ten years her senior. The pair begin dating and Patrick soon puts pressure on Jenny to sleep with him. Highly traditional, Jenny is torn between the excitement Patrick offers and her wish to be the "steady type who got married and had babies" (p. 50). Though sexually attracted to Patrick, Jenny wants to wait until marriage before going to bed with him.

Like Robert Lovelace, Patrick Standish is a problematic figure. Despite his intelligence, sophistication, and willingness to come to the aid of a distraught Sheila Torkington, he remains inherently selfish and irresponsible. Like Lovelace, he is a calculating man who will let nothing stand in the way of his wishes. Moreover, in getting Jenny drunk and "taking" her, Patrick robs the young woman of more than her virginity; he also destroys her moral resolve and self-determination.

The overall shape of Amis's novel is deliberately reminiscent of *Clarissa* in that it concerns the seduction and long postponed rape of a chaste young woman of a lower social

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class. Like Richardson's novel, *Take A Girl Like You* features a clash of opposing wills and is permeated with sexual tension. In each novel, the heroine must repeatedly ward off the advances of a worldly older man. Finally, in both works, when conventional courting fails, the aggressive male incapacitates and then rapes the heroine.

Despite these similarities of character and plot, there are several fundamental differences between *Take A Girl Like You* and *Clarissa*. Significantly, the tone of Amis's novel is considerably less tragic than *Clarissa*. Without denying its condemnation of Patrick's sexual assault, there is an ambivalence in Amis's novel which is absent from Richardson's work. In *Clarissa*, the heroine refuses Lovelace's proposal of marriage following the rape, and retires to a solitary dwelling where she dies of grief and shame. Jenny, on the other hand, does not turn away from Patrick. Though she comes to the conclusion that he is a "bastard," she accepts his peace offering of a set of earrings and wistfully takes him back.

Thus, although the central characters and narrative shape of *Take A Girl Like You* parallel *Clarissa*, the tone of Amis's novel is decidedly contemporary. In the figure of Jenny Bunn (her last name a play upon the popular eighteenth-century name "Fanny"), Amis places a character with an old-fashioned, almost eighteenth-century moral code, into a modern tragicomedy of manners. In depicting Jenny's progress among various rakes and rogues, *Take A Girl Like You* examines the ways in which traditional moral values are assailed in

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post-war Britain. Like Richardson's Clarissa, Jenny is a virgin whose inherent goodness acts as a catalyst to expose the dubious mores of others. However, in detailing a radically different fate for his modern heroine -- Jenny's temporary indisposition versus Clarissa's early demise -- Amis ironically parallels Richardson's model. What Amis's tale illustrates is that the advent of the welfare state and more advanced forms of birth control have cast older dilemmas into less intractable forms. In the morally ambivalent world of late 1950s Britain, the loss of virginity does not have the huge significance it had during Richardson's day. In *Take A Girl Like You* Amis satirically captures this shift in sexual mores.

In *The New Confessions* (1987) William Boyd draws extensive parallels between the eighteenth-century French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his novel's hero John James Todd, a contemporary Scottish filmmaker. Moreover, Boyd also invites comparisons between Rousseau's massive autobiography *The Confessions* and Todd's own sprawling memoirs. Despite the strong similarities between these two figures, Boyd does not turn the filmmaker into a twentieth-century avatar of Rousseau. Instead, *The New Confessions* ironically juxtaposes Todd and his memoirs with the French philosopher and his self-revelatory precedent. In so doing, Boyd's novel illustrates how one man succumbs to the uncertainty of twentieth-century life.

In a vivid and highly cinematic fashion, *The New Confessions* cuts back and forth from the past to 1972. From

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the remove of an isolated Mediterranean villa, John James Todd tracks back over his life story from the time of his birth near the turn of the century, through his silent film career, his service in two world wars, his blacklisting during Joseph McCarthy's House Committee Hearings on Un-American Activities, to his current self-imposed exile.

The erratic tenor of Todd's film career is forever altered by his discovery of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *The Confessions*. Introduced to this work as a prisoner of war, Todd finds in Rousseau's epic autobiography what becomes his life's leading passion. The eighteenth-century philosopher, Todd argues, was "the first truly honest man," and in his *Confessions* we see "the life of the individual spirit recounted in all its nobility and squalor for the first time in the history of the human race" (p. 197). Adopting Rousseau's brutal honesty as his guiding principle, Todd begins the enormous task of capturing the philosopher's life on film.

Throughout the course of *The New Confessions* Boyd draws elaborate parallels between the Scottish filmmaker and the French philosopher. Most noticeably, "John James" is a direct translation of "Jean-Jacques." In addition, events in Todd's life allusively parallel events in the life of Rousseau. Both of their mothers die in giving birth to them, both experience early professional setbacks and work for a time as footmen, and both are picaros whose uneven progress takes them through several levels of society. Finally, late in their lives, each deliberately isolates himself from

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This parallelism does not go unnoticed. In fact, when he first reads *The Confessions* Todd exclaims, "I could have been reading about myself" (p. 197). However, in comparing his life with Rousseau's, the filmmaker exhibits delusions of grandeur. Nowhere is this more evident than in the artistic achievements of the two men. While his career spans several decades, Todd's fame rests entirely on one film, *The Confessions: Part I*. Compared with the range and depth of Rousseau's literary and philosophical accomplishments, Todd's output is even less impressive.

The memoirs themselves show that Todd's account lacks the extraordinary egotism which characterizes *The Confessions*. In Rousseau's massive autobiography no incident is too insignificant or obscure if it somehow pertains to the philosopher himself. Todd, on the other hand, while egotistical, is much less self-absorbed and, as evidenced by his detailed progress reports on Doon Bogan, Eddie Simmonette, and Karl-Heinz Kornfeld, decidedly more attuned to the actions of others. Furthermore, despite his claim that "I have never put down as true what I knew to be false" (p. 13), Todd clearly lacks the brutally honest self-appraisal of his hero. Whereas Rousseau almost pleasurably acknowledges his shortcomings, Todd prefers to attribute his failures to what he terms "filthy luck." These personal and artistic differences make both Todd and his memoirs far less compelling than Rousseau and *The Confessions*. Such a contrast, however, is deliberate in that Boyd ironically

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juxtaposes these two figures in order to make us aware of how far Todd falls short of his professed ideal. As the novelist convincingly demonstrates, Todd is not a modern-day version of Rousseau; instead, he is a failed great man or, rather, a man whose greatness was short-lived.

To appreciate fully the significance of John James Todd, we must recognize that Boyd uses the filmmaker as a representative modern figure. That is, *The New Confessions* not only compares Todd's life with Rousseau's, but also sets the filmmaker's life against the major events of the twentieth century. Todd is born in 1899 and his uneven progress takes him through Paris in the 1910s, Berlin in the 20s, Hollywood in the 30s and 40s, Mexico in the 50s, and the Mediterranean in the 60s and 70s. In essence, Todd is a wayfarer through modern history, and by chronicling the filmmaker's painful and often tragic experiences, Boyd vividly captures the violence and dislocation which have typified the history of Western Europe and the United States since the turn of the century. Moreover, Todd's deeply felt uncertainties reflect the century in which he lives. In fact, *The New Confessions* closes with a weary seventy-three-year-old Todd finally surrendering to the "deeply paradoxical and fundamentally uncertain" (p. 528) qualities of twentieth-century life.

Combining history, biography, and literary criticism, Fay Weldon's *Letters to Alice on First Reading Jane Austen* (1984) is an epistolary novel modeled after a series of advisory letters that Jane Austen wrote to a niece. In this

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work Weldon transports Austen's real-life act into a contemporary fictional context by posing as an aunt whose letters of "literary advice to a young lady" (p. 26) offer a modern critical overview of Austen's age, life, and fiction as well as a spirited defense of the practice of writing literature.

Alice, the eighteen-year-old ex-punk niece of Aunt Fay, writes to her novelist aunt announcing two things: one, that she intends to write a novel and, two, that she finds the fiction of Jane Austen to be "boring, petty and irrelevant" (p. 11). Failing to see the pertinence of Austen's work in today's world, Alice wonders why anyone bothers to read her novels. Her aunt, in the midst of a global book tour, responds in order to convince Alice of Austen's worth. In a series of sixteen letters akin to literary sermons, she elaborates upon the reality and relevance of Austen's fictional world as well as the lasting impact Austen's writing has had on her own career as a novelist. Her central metaphor for literary creation is "The City of Invention," where houses equal books and travelers to the realm of fiction can wander through its various districts.

In her second letter, Aunt Fay attempts to bring Austen's age to life for Alice. Adopting a socio-historical approach, she focuses on the difficult living conditions for women near the close of the eighteenth century. Ranging widely, her overview includes such aspects as marriage, legal rights, childbirth, and career opportunities. In a rambling manner, Fay also provides a great deal of biographical

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information about Jane Austen and her family. In addition to discussing Austen's reading habits, domestic and educational training, and favorite forms of recreation, she also reveals such bits of family trivia as the existence of an epileptic brother and the fact that the son of a governor of India lived for a time at the Austen household.

While concerned with offering an accurate portrait of Austen's life and times, most of Aunt Fay's attention is devoted to placing Austen's novels into a modern critical context. There are, for instance, detailed discussions of *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1816), *Northanger Abbey* (1818), and *Persuasion* (1818). More generally, Fay discusses topics ranging from the novelist's depiction of fathers -- "Jane Austen's books are studded with fathers indifferent to their families' (in particular their daughters') welfare, male whims taking priority, then as now, over female happiness" (p. 26) -- to the increasingly serious tone of Austen's fiction. Wary of academic criticism, Fay encourages individual and idiosyncratic responses to Austen's work.

A mélange of literary forms, *Letters to Alice on First Reading Jane Austen* serves several purposes. First, the work is a celebration of Jane Austen's novels. Speaking as a fellow writer, Weldon seeks to express the lasting importance of Austen's fiction: "But no one burns *Emma*. No one would dare. There is too much concentrated here: too much history, too much respect, too much of the very essence of civilization" (p. 13). In championing Austen, Weldon also

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criticizes a patriarchal literary canon which has largely ignored the achievements of early female novelists. "Jane Austen," she notes, "was not the first woman novelist of any note, but merely the first history cared to acknowledge" (p. 43).

Finally, *Letters to Alice on First Reading Jane Austen* is a literary manifesto which offers encouragement to Alice and all others with literary aspirations, especially young women. In Jane Austen's letters to her niece, the novelist dissuaded her young relative from becoming a novelist. Weldon's fictional aunt, however, fervently urges her niece to write. Although she knows firsthand the difficulty of writing novels when life itself is "so novelettish" (p. 90), Fay nonetheless closes her letters to Alice with an assertion that captures her faith in the endurance of fiction: "And yet, I do believe, though all else fails, the City of Invention will stand" (p. 155).

In this second trio of reinventions, novelists link their protagonists and plotlines to well-known eighteenth-century figures or works. Moreover, in each of these novels, the primary effect is to throw into relief the modern era. In *Take A Girl Like You*, for example, Amis places the principal characters and narrative development of *Clarissa* into a contemporary context as a means of satirically highlighting the changing sexual mores of 1950s Britain. Similarly, in *The New Confessions* Boyd ironically parallels his hero and Rousseau in order to accentuate the diminution of modern times. In both of these novels, our familiarity

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with the eighteenth-century elements being invoked is crucial. That is, to appreciate fully the irony of these juxtapositions, we must recognize the discrepancies between the eighteenth-century model and the contemporary work.

This preexisting knowledge matters less in *Letters to Alice on First Reading Jane Austen* since Weldon provides much of the background information needed to understand her work's mixture of history, biography, and literary criticism. Nonetheless, Weldon's aim is also inherently critical as she critiques, both directly and indirectly, a patriarchal literary canon. Much like *Letters to Alice on First Reading Jane Austen*, the three novels which constitute the last set of reinventions do not echo a particular eighteenth-century novelist or work; instead, they combine a series of styles and themes.

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John Hawkes's *Virginie: Her Two Lives* (1982) presents two versions of a young girl's sexual education, one taking place in the French countryside in 1740 and the other in post-World War II Paris. Shuttling back and forth as if in a time machine, the novel parallels the brief lives of an eleven-year-old waif named Virginie. As a result of an unexplained instance of reincarnation, Virginie simultaneously exists in both the eighteenth and twentieth centuries. In the former, she is the child accomplice of Seigneur, a nobleman whose mission is to train women in the

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arts of love and then give them away to fellow aristocrats. In the latter, *Virginie* works for her brother, Bocage, a Parisian cab driver who opens up his ailing mother's house to a group of prostitutes. In recounting his heroine's double-track adventures, Hawkes's dense, highly allusive novel offers both a parodic literary excursion into and examination of erotic literature.

During his preface to the novel Hawkes explains that *Virginie* was conceived "in a reverie about de Sade," and, with its wayward explorations into the realm of flesh and desire, the novel clearly falls into the Sadean tradition. Tellingly, *Virginie* is set in 1740, the year of the Marquis's birth. Moreover, as in Sade's erotic tales, bondage, torture, and bestiality are depicted as sacramental disciplines through which women attain fulfillment.

While he accurately recreates the subject matter of Sade's fiction, *Virginie* is an inherently parodic work. As Hawkes remarks in his preface: "My subject was, from the start, that wisp of shell-pink space shared equally, I am convinced, by the pornographic narrative (in color photographs) and the love lyric, from the troubadours, say, to the present. Thus parody, archaic tones, and an overall comic flavor were inevitable, as were sources and influences." The parodic intentions of *Virginie* are evident within the very structure of the novel as the 1945 plot recapitulates, with increasing flatness, the 1740 plot; its rough surrealism and plebeian acts ironically paralleling the high-flown courtliness and emblematic eroticism of the

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country settings. Chief among Hawkes's parodic targets are male protagonists who fancy themselves "artists" with the power to "create" women. Throughout the course of the novel, Hawkes mocks the arrogance and absurdity of Seigneur and Bocage's quest to create "true womanhood" (p. 29). Correspondingly, *Virginie* also parodies male erotic fantasies which reduce women to distorted figures of patriarchal wish fulfillment.

Three years prior to the novel's publication, Hawkes discussed the genesis of *Virginie* with John Barth: "I want to write a novel called 'The Amorous Lives of the Gauls,' which is a title of an actual 17th-century book written by one Bussy-Rabutin (that name alone is enough to send one into erotic hysteria). Bussy-Rabutin wrote a gossip book about court life and got himself exiled for 20 years; I want to redo his book as a parody of a pornographic novel with a woman as the narrator."<sup>8</sup> Hawkes's use of the verb "redo" here is crucial because it is indicative of the author's conception of *Virginie* as a special kind of literary imitation. Hawkes reiterates such a view in the preface to his novel when he reveals that the "subject" of *Virginie* is an examination of the pornographic narrative from medieval times to the present day.

Viewing *Virginie* as a literary imitation is useful in understanding why its eroticism often appears stilted and artificial. That is, because Hawkes's concerns are primarily stylistic, there is a decidedly mannered air to the novel's erotic descriptions. Thus, while *Virginie* offers the

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trappings of erotic literature, it does so in an intensely rhetorical manner. In the opening section of the novel -- a poetic dialogue entitled "Her Poem" -- Hawkes asserts the literary over the sensual and thus sets up a paradigm for the novel as a whole. A preference for symmetry, particularly in the form of parallels, governs the novel's overall structure.

Throughout *Virginie* Hawkes explores the ways in which the two eras presented in the novel mirror each other. Not only are they linked by a preponderance of sexual activity -- deemed "charades of love" by both Seigneur and Bocage (pp. 17, 30) -- but they are also similar in terms of narrative situation. In each tale, five women are recruited for the purpose of erotic instruction by a rigorous master who refuses to participate in their training exercises. What unites these two eras most explicitly, however, is *Virginie* herself. Though she exists in two separate centuries, *Virginie's* voice and her experiences are virtually the same in each. She is the "wisp of shell-pink space" through which Hawkes unites the elegant and the earthy sections of the novel. By closely paralleling the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, Hawkes demonstrates that, despite differences in time, setting, and social class, sex itself has changed little in over two hundred years. Garter belts and pornographic magazines may have replaced satin gowns and tapestries of love, but the sexual activities themselves remain the same.

Finally, Hawkes's novel is a seductive parable about the powers of the imagination. In his preface to *Virginie* Hawkes

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reveals that among the novel's erotic "sources and influences" are works by Sade, Charlotte Bronte, and Georges Bataille. Subsequently, in his own carefully choreographed "charades of love," he draws us even further into his narrative by forcing us to piece together various tableaux. For example, after setting up an evocative scene in which five scantily clad women descend upon the dwarfish Monsieur Malmort, Virginie frustrates our prurient interest in what ensues by simply noting, "The night ends in smoke and darkness" (p. 47). Elsewhere, when Virginie wanders through Seigneur's château, recalls the voluptuousness of past activities, and asks herself "What shall she be made to do?" (p. 50), she articulates our own curiosity in the upcoming erotic exercises. In both these instances, however, the only "pornographic" element is the imagination we ourselves supply in completing these scenarios. By having Virginie hint at but not fully reveal certain activities, Hawkes effectively demonstrates that the imagined invariably outstrips the explicit. Fittingly, it is Virginie herself who expresses the novel's principal theme: "Few would believe," she ingenuously remarks near the end of the novel, "that from sources purely imaginary such happiness can be derived" (p. 191).

John Fowles's *A Maggot* (1985) explores the mysterious circumstances surrounding the disappearance of an eighteenth-century duke's son. At the heart of this novel lies a series of events which occurred inside a druid's cave in Devonshire on May Day 1736. A young gentleman, his servant, and a maid

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enter the cave. The young man never emerges, the servant is later found hanged with violets stuffed into his mouth, and the maid is so changed by what took place that she joins a radical religious sect. Is the visionary experience that occurred in the cave diabolical, interstellar, celestial, or none of the above? In attempting to answer this question, Fowles's multifarious eighteenth-century murder mystery has contemporary resonance.

Like *Virginie: Her Two Lives*, *A Maggot* was conceived in something of a reverie. As Fowles recounts in his prologue, an haunting image triggered the novel's opening scene: "For some years before its writing a small group of travellers, faceless, without apparent motive, went in my mind towards an event. Evidently in some past, since they rode horses, and in a deserted landscape; but beyond this very primitive image, nothing. I do not know where it came from, or why it kept obstinately rising from my unconsciousness." Describing his work as "a maggot" in the eighteenth-century sense of the term as a "whim," "quirk," or "obsession with a theme," Fowles closes the prologue by firmly asserting: "What follows may seem like a historical novel; but it is not. It is maggot."

Contrary to this assertion, *A Maggot* does, however, read like a historical novel. Certainly Fowles enhances the historical verisimilitude of his "maggot" by introducing facsimile pages -- complete with minute print and the long "S" -- from the "Historical Chronicle" portion of the *Gentleman's Magazine*. Richly detailed, these monthly

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bulletins provide an extensive overview of what is occurring outside the events of the story, in the larger world of politics, commerce, and criminal punishment.

With respect to its literary pedigree, *A Maggot* draws elements from a range of eighteenth-century sources. For example, Fowles's use of the epistolary format as a means of depicting character development recalls the novels of Samuel Richardson. In fact, one of the principal characters in *A Maggot* has the Richardsonian name of "Lord B---." In its willingness to mix fact and fiction, Fowles's novel also echoes the pseudo-documentary style favored by Daniel Defoe. Moreover, the novel's intrusive, chatty narrator is strongly reminiscent of the "Author" figure in Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*. Other characters in the novel, such as the boastful Serjeant Farthing, the virile manservant Dick, and the nosy servant girl Dorcas Hellyer, are recognizable types from Restoration drama. Finally, the aforementioned maid, known by her brothel name "Fanny," combines qualities of both John Cleland's *Fanny Hill* and Defoe's *Moll Flanders*.

While its literary elements align Fowles's novel with eighteenth-century fiction, *A Maggot* also contains the incongruous commentaries of a twentieth-century narrator. Wide-ranging in subject matter, these periodic remarks not only gloss events in the story, but also offer direct comparisons between past and present. Frequently pedantic, they range from the trivial -- sheep in eighteenth-century Devonshire "were smaller and scraggier than modern sheep" (p. 9) -- to more significant matters: "Her [Fanny's] time has

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little power of seeing people other than they are in outward; which applies even to how they see themselves, labelled and categorised by circumstance and fate" (p. 49). The effect of these schoolmasterly intrusions is often disarming, and through them we see that Fowles refuses to disguise the contemporary sensibility which governs his novel.

Nowhere is the novel's contemporary ethos more evident than in its epilogue. In this section Fowles self-reflexively places himself into the text of *A Maggot* in order to offer his views on the Shakers, the radical eighteenth-century religious sect whose foundation his novel dramatizes. Throughout this epilogue Fowles praises the courage of the Shakers, particularly their "sanity and self-control" (p. 453) in the face of religious and political persecution. Adopting an increasingly didactic tone, the novelist goes on to argue that it is from the dissenting spirit of the Shakers that we achieve the glories of the Romantic movement as well as the more problematic twentieth-century obsession with self. According to Fowles, this self-obsession -- "the Devil's great I" (p. 455) -- is directly responsible for today's moral laxity and spirit of excess. In his homage to the Shakers, Fowles brings the eighteenth and twentieth centuries together as the theological denouement of *A Maggot* has a profound bearing on our understanding of ourselves and our own time.

Despite periodic revelations such as this, however, *A Maggot* remains an inherently ambiguous work wherein the ramifications of even the simplest actions are probed. The

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majority of the novel consists of a series of question-and-answer sessions during which characters provide varying accounts of the events leading up to the disappearance of the duke's son. By foregrounding the multiple and often conflicting points of view of his characters, Fowles demonstrates that "truth" is a highly problematic concept.

Symptomatic of the novel's irresolution is the fact that we never learn what actually took place inside the druid's cave. What happened to the duke's son? If Dick committed suicide, then who stuffed violets into his mouth? What experience drove Fanny to religious ecstasy? Of the three who entered the cave, only Fanny emerges, and she offers two versions of what took place: one involving a satanic ritual, complete with sex and sacrifice, and the other involving a "great swollen maggot" (p. 355), a spaceship-like vehicle which transports the young woman to the pastoral utopia of "June Eternal." Which of these equally fantastic visions are we to believe? Though we may prefer one version to another, Fowles frustrates any attempt to draw firm conclusions about the novel's proceedings.

By way of a possible explanation, the novelist returns to his controlling metaphor: "I repeat, this is a maggot, not an attempt, either in fact or in language, to reproduce known history" (p. 449). As we now understand more fully, Fowles's image of a maggot is appropriate for this multivalent work. Formally, *A Maggot* is a "quirky" fiction which unites the genres of murder mystery, historical chronicle, epistolary novel, horror story, pornographic tale, romance narrative,

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and science fiction into an unique amalgamation. Thematically, *A Maggot* is an "obsessive" study of the shifting relations between time and truth. Given these "maggoty" qualities, the final insolubility of Fowles's novel is inevitable.

Peter Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor: A Novel* (1985) is a metaphysical thriller which looks at the eerie interplay between the eighteenth century and our own time. Ackroyd's novel revolves around a central mystery: do the grisly murders being committed in or near a series of London churches have their origin in evil acts which occurred in the distant past? In attempting to solve such a mystery, *Hawksmoor*, like *A Maggot*, invokes elements of the supernatural as it unites the past and the present.

Even-numbered chapters of the novel, told in the third person, detail the ongoing murder investigation directed by Nicholas Hawksmoor, a senior detective who works for the New Scotland Yard. Hawksmoor is stymied by a string of apparently motiveless murders whose sole connection is that they occur at the site of churches constructed by the eighteenth-century baroque architect Nicholas Dyer. Odd-numbered chapters recall Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722) as Nicholas Dyer, writing in 1712, recounts his parents' death during the Great Plague of 1665 as well as his own survival during the Great Fire of London the following year. In these chapters Dyer, Assistant Surveyour at Her Majesty's Office of Works, Scotland Yard, outlines his fiendish plan to erect seven fireproof churches

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in accordance with a black-magic pattern. To appease his destructive deity, Dyer consecrates these churches with the blood of innocent victims, usually young boys.

From Execution Dock and Rag Fair to Charing Cross and Fleet Street, *Hawksmoor* vividly recreates the ambience of early eighteenth-century London. Ravaged by plague and fire, the city is, as Dyer describes it, a "Wilderness of dirty rotten Sheds, allways tumbling or takeing Fire, with winding crooked passages, lakes of Mire and rills of stinking Mud" (p. 62). In scenes of Hogarthian clarity, the novel depicts a slum-filled London where beggars, urchins, and animals scrounge for scraps of food amid open sewers and piles of rotting corpses. *Hawksmoor* also evokes the intellectual currents of eighteenth-century life. Through the brilliant yet demented mind of Nicholas Dyer, we learn firsthand of the great advances made in the fields of "Opticks," "Pneumatics," the "Mathematicall Arts," and "Experimentall Philosophy." However, as a dedicated follower of "Sathan," Dyer bitterly opposes the pro-Enlightenment views of his colleagues, "the Cartesians and the New Philosophers" (p. 123).

Past and present London merge in *Hawksmoor* as events in the eighteenth century strongly resemble those in the twentieth. This is evident from the novel's beginning as chapter one closes with the death of a ten-year-old boy named Thomas Hill, who falls from the steeple of Dyer's first church and chapter two recounts the murder of another ten-year-old boy named Thomas Hill on the very same spot two and

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a half centuries later. Elsewhere, articles of clothing, gestures, smells, even snatches of conversations reverberate between the two eras. What ties these two periods together most emphatically, however, are the uncanny similarities between Dyer and Hawksmoor. Not only do these moody, unstable outcasts share the same Christian name, but each also has an eager assistant named Walter (the one named Pyne, the other Payne) from whom he attempts to hide his irrational impulses. Furthermore, despite the huge temporal gap between them, the pair live in the same solitary lodgings east of Leicester Square, patronize the same pub, and share oddly similar experiences. Finally, both men eventually descend into the same obscure madness. In fact, the novel culminates in a supernatural episode in which an overwrought Hawksmoor goes to Little Saint Hugh's church in Black Step Lane and sits side by side with the evil architect. In this final scene, there is a strong implication that the two men are linked across the centuries as each becomes "a child again, begging on the threshold of eternity" (p. 290).

By interweaving the eighteenth and twentieth centuries in his two-tiered narrative, Ackroyd chillingly suggests that not much has changed between the Age of Enlightenment and our own time. Today's London is as menacing and squalid a place as it was more than two hundred years ago. The "Doss Houses" of the 1710s resurface in the 1980s in the form of the abandoned tenements inhabited by prostitutes and vagrants. More disturbingly, the depravity of the past returns to haunt the present as the brutal murders of the eighteenth century

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A tale of terror as well as a novel of ideas, *Hawksmoor* is a compelling examination of the inadequacy of reason in an inherently irrational world. Though he lives in the Age of Enlightenment, the fanatical Dyer chooses to ignore the optimistic, rational approach of his mentor Sir Christopher Wren in favor of the dark secrets of a satanic cult. Similarly, though he has at his disposal the most sophisticated crime-fighting apparatus, *Hawksmoor*, in attempting to solve the series of murders, must rely on intuition, a book of eighteenth-century drawings, and an ominous note from someone calling himself "The Universal Architect." Yet, as the detective soon discovers, his sophisticated methods of detection are no match for a madman. It is only when he loses his mind and begins to sense a kinship with the killer that *Hawksmoor* is able to approach the heart of the novel's mystery.

*Hawksmoor* is also a self-reflexive work which frequently comments upon its own structural and formal qualities. Some of these comments are exceedingly subtle and conclusive: "All these events were random and yet connected, part of a pattern so large that it remained inexplicable. He [*Hawksmoor*] might, then, have to invent a past from the evidence available -- and, in that case, would not the future also be an invention?" (p. 208). *Hawksmoor*'s musings here allusively describe the organization of the novel's events ("random and yet connected") as well as Ackroyd's method of recreating the past (inventing from "the evidence available"). Other

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comments, like the following assertion by Dyer, are more openly and simply self-referential: "If I were a Writer now," the architect claims, "I would wish to thicken the water of my Discourse so that it was no longer easy or familiar, I would chuse a huge lushious Style!" (p. 234). This is only one of several instances in which Ackroyd explicitly connects Dyer's actions with his own work as writer.

*Hawksmoor* is best understood, however, when it is viewed as an elaborate game played between Ackroyd and the reader. In the opening sentence of the novel Dyer instructs his audience to pay close attention: "And so let us beginne; and, as the Fabrick takes its Shape in front of you, alwaies keep the Structure intirely in Mind" (p. 3). With its complicitous tone and direct address, this sentence immediately turns mere readers into critics or literary detectives. Subsequently, during the principal action of *Hawksmoor*, Ackroyd implements a literary game by installing various echoes, cross-references, and interconnections which we in turn must recognize and incorporate into our reading of the novel. In the most memorable of these, we come to realize that the recurring sign "M SE M" (which marks the site of some of the novel's critical action), omits the "U" - - that is, the "you" -- the reader who is needed to make sense of the plot. Like *A Maggot*, however, *Hawksmoor* fails to resolve its central mystery as Hawksmoor is taken off the case before he can capture the murderer. In a sense, though, this irresolution is inevitable and significant. That is, in attempting to solve the novel's mystery by rationally piecing

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together a series of clues, we adopt the same sort of approach Hawksmoor himself unsuccessfully employed. As a result, we, too, end up seduced by Nicholas Dyer and our own expectations as twentieth-century readers and, consequently, like Hawksmoor, are left in the dark.

By blurring distinctions between time periods, this last trio of novels is able to trace erotic, historical, and cultural continuities. The novels in this group are all two-tiered pastiches which draw from a wide range of eighteenth-century sources, literary as well as non-literary. Formally venturesome, these works combine old-fashioned storytelling with a keen awareness of postmodern techniques. As a result, they are both traditional and innovative. Finally, these works not only comment upon their own structural and formal qualities, they also compel readers to enter the fictional structure by inviting them to piece together various clues from their complex and finally insoluble mysteries.

### Conclusion

From Muriel Spark's 1958 novel *Robinson* to William Boyd's 1987 work *The New Confessions*, from romantic tragicomedy to picaresque social satire, and from spiritual study to erotic exercise, the nine novels examined in this chapter illustrate the great diversity of British and American reinventions of the eighteenth-century novel. Yet, despite striking and often fundamental differences among these works, what we see in each is an acute awareness of

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literary precedence. That is, whether they address religious, cultural, or erotic concerns, all of these novels engage in a dialogue with earlier fictional forms. In addition, these works are also inherently metafictional because they are novels about novels and novels which consider the possibilities of the form. Finally, none of these works, even those which engage in parodic strategies, denigrates its eighteenth-century model. Instead, these contemporary novels hold their eighteenth-century sources up as standards. In the words of Patricia Craig, all pay "playful and original" tribute to their literary ancestors.

Nine novels may not establish a tradition, but they do set up a context in which to understand other contemporary works that reinvent the early English novel. The reinventive movement has become a discernible literary phenomenon in the last thirty years, particularly the last fifteen, and it has preoccupied many of our best-known and most innovative novelists. Now it is time to turn to those works which comprise the richest examples of this movement: John Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor*, Erica Jong's *Fanny: Being the True History of the Adventures of Fanny Hackabout-Jones*, and T. Coraghessan Boyle's *Water Music*. These three novels represent contemporary fiction's richest examples of eighteenth-century reinvention because they adopt the setting, language, and, most importantly, the spirit of the eighteenth-century novel. As we will see, in returning to the early form, these contemporary novelists hope to rediscover sources of vitality for the novel.

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## Chapter Two

### "Dizzy with the Beauty of the Possible": *The Sot-Weed Factor* and the Attempted Exhaustion of the Eighteenth-Century Novel

As I am, in reality, the founder of a new province of writing, so I am at liberty to make what laws I please therein.<sup>1</sup>

Tom Jones

#### Introduction

With the 1960 publication of *The Sot-Weed Factor*<sup>2</sup> John Barth assumed the mantle of founder in the recent trend toward reinventing the eighteenth-century novel. Various descriptions of his third work as "a philosophical-picaresque extravaganza," "an ideological farce," and "a moral allegory cloaked in terms of colonial history,"<sup>3</sup> Barth offers in *The Sot-Weed Factor* a mock-epic, pseudo-historical work which wittily and unrelentingly parodies the early English novel. Deeply indebted to the stylistic and thematic conventions of the eighteenth-century picaresque, *The Sot-Weed Factor* chronicles the *Künstlerroman* of virgin-poet Ebenezer Cooke, while recreating the history and language of early eighteenth-century Maryland. *The Sot-Weed Factor* occupies a transitional position in Barth's oeuvre between such relatively realistic works as *The Floating Opera* (1956) and *The End of the Road* (1958) and the more surrealist and experimental *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968) and *Chimera* (1972).<sup>4</sup> Like Barth's first two novels, *The Sot-Weed Factor* satirically explores the conflict between innocence and

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experience. At the same time, however, the novel's preoccupation with calling attention to itself as a fictional construct manifests its affinity for the works which follow it.

*The Sot-Weed Factor and the Eighteenth-Century Novel*

A longtime admirer of the eighteenth-century novel, Barth readily acknowledges that his fiction has been strongly influenced by the work of such eighteenth-century masters as Henry Fielding (for his breadth of vision), Tobias Smollett (for his energetic satirizing), and Laurence Sterne (for his playful self-consciousness). In addition, while he claims to be no specialist in the field of eighteenth-century literature,<sup>5</sup> *The Sot-Weed Factor* undoubtedly arose from Barth's affection for the early English novel, expressed most enthusiastically in his afterword to Smollett's 1748 novel *The Adventures of Roderick Random*.<sup>6</sup> In this wide-ranging piece Barth praises the works of Smollett and Fielding for their "romping" mannerisms and "nonsignificant surfaces," declaring near its close that the eighteenth-century novel, with its inherent adventurousness, offers a refreshing alternative to contemporary anti-novels filled with anti-heroic protagonists.<sup>7</sup>

In spite of Barth's modesty, his novel's innovative and seemingly relentless refurbishing of eighteenth-century novelistic conventions indicates a great familiarity with the early novel. Certainly the most apparent way in which Barth

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directly invokes the form is in the size and scope of *The Sot-Weed Factor*. At over 800 pages, the novel is longer than most eighteenth-century masterpieces and only slightly shorter than *Tom Jones*. Moreover, like Fielding's classic, *The Sot-Weed Factor* possesses panoramic expansiveness. Huge and sprawling, its teeming storyline unfolds on two continents, spans the course of ninety years, and features a colorful cast of characters ranging the social spectrum, from lords to beggars, merchants to brigands, poets to prostitutes. Regarding the novel's enormous size, Barth has remarked that in writing his third book he wished "to perpetrate a novel so thick that its title could be printed horizontally across its spine."<sup>8</sup>

Barth's choice of verb here is an illuminating one because it hints at how the author views his third novel. In "perpetrating" a crime one violates the rules of society and by choosing this verb to describe his purpose in writing *The Sot-Weed Factor* Barth implies that with this novel he, too, wishes to break certain prescribed rules. Robert Scholes, discussing how both works attempt to recreate a past literary form, compares *The Sot-Weed Factor* to John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, noting that the latter is "an imitation of a Victorian novel in much the same way that John Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor* is an imitation of Fielding and Smollett."<sup>9</sup> Scholes is right to compare the novels of Barth and Fowles because both *The Sot-Weed Factor* and *The French Lieutenant's Woman* demonstrate what can occur when a contemporary novelist "perpetrates" the recreation of a

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While its formal elements align *The Sot-Weed Factor* with the early English novel, Barth's work undermines such a resemblance by presenting a convoluted tale which is profoundly at odds with the balance, order, and rationalistic convictions of the Age of Reason. *The Sot-Weed Factor* is an eighteenth-century novel in structure only; in essence it is an expression of John Barth's postmodern aesthetic. As Beverly Gross remarks, "*The Sot-Weed Factor*, disguised as an eighteenth-century novel, is really a radical definition of the novel of the twentieth century."<sup>10</sup> Beyond a mere recreation of the conventional elements of the early English novel, Barth uses the framework of *The Sot-Weed Factor* to put certain recent literary notions to a test, dissolving the eighteenth-century novel and reconstituting it so that it has contemporary resonance.

What Barth hopes to accomplish in *The Sot-Weed Factor* is to paradoxically "replenish" the early English novel by parodically "exhausting" its narrative, thematic, and linguistic possibilities. That is, for Barth, an influential literary theorist as well as novelist, the eighteenth-century novel offers a critical and aesthetic challenge -- how to create something new and original from an outdated literary form. As Barth notes in his seminal essay "The Literature of Exhaustion,"<sup>11</sup> the true postmodern artist is one who recognizes the "used-upness" of preexisting forms and knowingly employs these forms against themselves as a means of generating new art.<sup>12</sup> Barth has spoken of his third novel

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as an attempt "to invoke some traditions of the English novel, and see to what account I could turn them, thematic account, if you like, in addressing some contemporary concerns,"<sup>13</sup> and, indeed, in *The Sot-Weed Factor* the author deploys a variety of eighteenth-century novelistic conventions in order to make twentieth-century aesthetic statements concerning the potential direction of postmodern fiction. That a postmodern ethos infuses the traditional structure of *The Sot-Weed Factor* is evident from the following qualities: the novel's parodic stance toward recorded history, its metafictional tendencies, its acute awareness of itself as an exercise in literary imitation, and its corresponding sense of being a virtuoso literary performance.

#### *The Sot-Weed Factor and History*

*The Sot-Weed Factor* purports to be the biography of Ebenezer Cooke, Gentleman, Poet, and Laureate of Maryland and parts of the novel are based on historical facts. There was an historical Ebenezer Cooke (or Cook) who wrote a satirical and awkwardly vicious poem about colonial Maryland entitled *The Sot-Weed Factor*, which was published in London in 1708 under the full title: *The Sot-Weed Factor: Or, A Voyage to Maryland, A satyr, In which is describ'd the Laws, Government, Courts and Constitutions of the Country; and also the Buildings, Feasts, Frolicks, Entertainments and Drunken Humours of the Inhabitants of that Part of America*. However,

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excluding a 1934 biography by Lawrence C. Wroth,<sup>14</sup> little was known about the early American poet when Barth began composing his third novel. Because of Cooke's relative obscurity at the time, Barth was thus able to embellish existing materials or, if he wished, invent entirely new information. Essentially, though, Cooke's satirical poem acts as the starting point for Barth's novel, while resuscitating Cooke himself as the hero of *The Sot-Weed Factor*. Yet, by combining raw historical materials preserved in the *Archives of Maryland* as well as from Cooke's seven-hundred line poem and aspects of his own imagination, Barth was able to construct a massively complicated and richly detailed eight-hundred page novel.

As David Morrell ably demonstrates,<sup>15</sup> many passages in *The Sot-Weed Factor* either repeat or elaborate on materials present in the original poem, retelling in prose the poem's depiction of Cooke's voyage to Maryland and his ensuing disappointment with the land and its early settlers. Not only did Barth base portions of the novel's action on incidents in Cooke's poem, he also quoted extensively from its Hudibrastic verse. To complicate matters further, the satirical poem that Barth has Eben eventually compose, the work which refutes the glorious image of the New World intended for the proposed *Marylandiad*, is actually the original "Sot-Weed Factor" itself. Thus, Barth goes to great lengths to blur the lines between fictional works.

Increasing the novel's sense of verisimilitude is Barth's recreation of historical personages and events and

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his allusion to and quoting from actual documents of the time. For instance, from the *Archives of Maryland* he derived the basis for his depiction of the complicated politics of early Dorchester County, Maryland. Yet, as the novel soon makes clear, Barth is not content with sticking to the facts of history and *The Sot-Weed Factor* exhibits a great willingness to mix historical accuracy with parodic invention, essentially giving equal status to both. By blending the actual with the imaginative in such a manner Barth creates a uniquely fabulative arena in which historical figures such as Lord Baltimore, Governor Nicholson, William Clairborne, Captain Smith, Pocahontas, and Ebenezer Cooke himself interact with a gallery of fictitious characters such as Henry Burlingame, Joan Toast, Bertrand Burton, John McEvoy, Billy Rumbly, and Mary Mungummory.

Barth's treatment of the past in *The Sot-Weed Factor* is primarily facetious. As the author notes in his essay "Muse, Spare Me": "The use of historical or legendary material, especially in a farcical spirit, has a number of technical virtues, among which are esthetic distance and the opportunity for counter-realism. Attacked with a long face, the historical muse is likely to give birth to costume romances, adult Westerns, tiresome allegories, and ponderous mythologizing; but she responds to a light-hearted approach."<sup>16</sup> When Barth delves into colonial history, then, he goes not as a "squint-minded antiquarian" (p. 743) or local colorist intent on glorifying the past, but rather as a scandal-monger, exposing the dirt, danger, and inanities of

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times gone by. Leslie Fiedler argues that Barth, even in those novels that deal directly with the contemporary world, writes fiction that has "the odd effect of being worked up from documents carefully consulted and irreverently interpreted."<sup>17</sup> In history, Fiedler adds, Barth finds "not merely the truth, not really the truth at all . . . . but absurdity."<sup>18</sup> We see this debunking approach to history early in the novel where Henry More and Isaac Newton, two "powerful divines" of the Enlightenment, are portrayed as a pair of slobbering pederasts lusting over the favors of a young Henry Burlingame. Later, we learn of colonial hero William Penn's duplicitous political dealings on behalf of the British crown. While incidents of historical deflation such as this occur throughout the novel, the most damning way in which Barth undermines recorded history is through his invention of two bogus manuscripts, Captain John Smith's *A Secret Historie of the Voiage Up the Bay of Chesapeake From Jamestown in Virginia* and Henry Burlingame I's *The Privie Journall of Sir Henry Burlingame*.

Discovered by Henry Burlingame III during a search for his ancestors, *A Secret Historie* reveals the "real" tale of Captain John Smith and Pocahontas, one of the best-known episodes in early American history. This outrageous secret history recounts the "truth" behind the story of Smith's adventures, depicting his bouts with debilitating diarrhea, his obsession with pornography, his gluttony, and his voracious sexual drive. Witness Smith's account of his liaison with the "Salvage Queene" of the Accomacks:

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Farting, rape, and anal sex -- all are rendered in a mock-heroic tone which hilariously undercuts any pretense to heroism. Captain Smith may evoke the name of the Queen of England and allude to biblical passages, yet his brutish actions belie any gentility.

In the *Privie Journall of Sir Henry Burlingame* (pun clearly intended), there are similar behind-the-scenes explanations of historical events, including the sacred eggplant poultice which allows John Smith to overcome Pocahontas's "infrangible" genital condition and thereby save him and his crew from certain death. Burlingame's journal continually demythologizes the traditional saint-like image of Pocahontas by presenting her as a nymphomaniac who, after she loses her virginity to Smith, lewdly pines after the Captain's "frightful engine."

The effect of both these secret documents is to counter the self-aggrandizing portrait of his Virginia travels that Smith depicts in his own writings (of which, incidentally, there are themselves several versions) by offering its virtual antithesis. Thus, contrary to Smith's chivalric self-portrait, when we see the revered hero of history he is busy adding to his reputation as the "Master of Venereall

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Arts." Here and elsewhere in *The Sot-Weed Factor*, Barth comically transforms actual historical events and personages into fantastic, often grotesque forms.

Adopting Karl Marx's maxim that history repeats itself in the mode of farce, Barth mixes fact and fancy to create a fabulative, pseudo-historical work which suggests that the only patterns which characterize history are rhetorical ones used for rhetorical purposes. In approaching recorded history in such a manner, *The Sot-Weed Factor* is a prime example of "historiographic metafiction,"<sup>19</sup> a term coined by Linda Hutcheon to describe those works which are set in the historical past but that evoke the present, calling attention to acts of reading and writing, the nature of the text, and the larger social, ideological, historical, and aesthetic contexts in which communication takes place. Hutcheon explains:

By this [historiographic metafiction] I mean those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages . . . . In most of the critical work on postmodernism, it is narrative -- be it in literature, history, or theory -- that has usually been the major focus of attention. Historiographic metafiction incorporates all three of these domains: that is, its theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs (historiographic metafiction) is made the grounds for its rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past.<sup>20</sup>

Instead of separating the two forms or valorizing one over the other as traditional novels tend to do, historiographic metafiction conflates history and literature, demonstrating their often uneasy confrontation. "[Historiographic metafiction] does not deny the existence of the past,"

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Hutcheon contends, "it does question whether we can ever know that past other than through its textualized remains."<sup>21</sup> As an example of historiographic metafiction, *The Sot-Weed Factor* problematizes history, interrogating its claims to truth and validity and thereby forcing the reader to rethink history not as a universal truth, but instead as a human construct. The novel also demonstrates how historical accounts are by nature relativistic, as much a product of selection as they are empirical "facts." If this is so, Barth asks, if some versions of historical "truth" are dubious and biased, then why shouldn't novelists feel free to create their own versions of events? Who is to say which version is more authentic a rendering? As Henry notes throughout the novel and the narrator adds emphatically near its close, "we all invent our pasts, more or less, as we go along, at the dictates of Whim and Interest; the happenings of former times are a clay in the present moment that will-we, nill-we, the lot of us must sculpt" (p. 743).

What Barth does in *The Sot-Weed Factor* is to call into question recorded history by offering a revisionist version (or versions) of key events. For the author, history is "the stuff of metaphors" (p. 10) and comic ones at that. Furthermore, by juxtaposing public myth against personal interpretation in a burlesque manner, Barth ironically deflates the received view of a heroic American past and causes the reader to wonder whether cherished notions of American history are possibly fictitious themselves. In contrast to the rosy vision of the Colonies behind the

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writing of Eben's *Marylandiad*, early Maryland is shown to be a land strewn with brothels and opium dens, inhabited by rapacious villains, corrupt politicians, and poked prostitutes. As Eben learns upon his arrival, its legal system is a travesty of justice where, as one judge avers, "nobody gets a verdict he hath not paid for" (p. 396). Significantly, such a view is largely consistent with Cooke's 1708 satire.

Metafictional Tendencies in *The Sot-Weed Factor*

Barth not only undermines the credibility of recorded history by showing how judgments about the past are inherently fictional and subjective, he also suggests that such historical figures as John Coode and Lord Baltimore may not have existed at all; that they may be, as Eben puts it, "pure and total fictions" (p. 705). In doing so, he clearly "games" with history, much like Henry Burlingame himself does. As Alan Holder notes, the novel's own relation to the past would appear to be that of a "cosmic lover" as well, in the sense that the book: "refuses to commit itself to a particular conception of the past, of historical truth, but wants to embrace simultaneously a variety of possibilities -- that the heroes and villains of the orthodox view were indeed such, that the application of these terms should be reversed, that men did not exist at all."<sup>22</sup> The strong similarities between Barth and Burlingame, emphasized repeatedly throughout *The Sot-Weed Factor*, tellingly reveal

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the metafictional tendencies of Barth's third novel.

That Barth self-consciously employs Henry Burlingame as a catalyst for action in the novel is evident in the ways in which Eben's tutor always seems to appear or disappear at moments of crisis, either rescuing the naive poet from great peril, or, more generally, plunging him into still greater danger. Dropping in and out of the story under a wide range of guises, Burlingame sustains much of the plot's political intrigue and quite literally sets the principal action in motion. For instance, it is he who disguises himself as Lord Baltimore and sends Eben off to America, he who introduces the secret diaries into the story, and he who is responsible for gathering together all of the major figures for the novel's final revelations.

Yet the ubiquitous tutor does more than merely move the storyline forward; his actions also increasingly come to mirror those of his creator. For example, in the ongoing struggles between early Maryland's warring factions, Henry is unconcerned with questions of right or wrong, his sole aim is action: to match John Coode's ceaseless energy in staging a plot. As evidenced by the abundantly complicated and energetic storyline of *The Sot-Weed Factor*, this also appears to be Barth's primary concern as a novelist. Tony Tanner recognizes similar motives behind the actions of character and author when he states, "What Burlingame does *in* the book, Barth does *with* the book."<sup>23</sup> A protean fictionalizer who is able to spin elaborate narrative webs, Burlingame also closely resembles his creator in possessing an expansive

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imagination and heightened sense of language which seldom leaves him at a loss for words. We see this most strikingly in the Hudibrastic rhyming contest Henry engages Eben in as they travel on the road to Cambridge:

"Is't *mosquito*? asked Burlingame. "I'll say *incognito*."

"Nay," the Laureate smiled, "nor is it *literature*."

"'T'would be bitter-that's-sure," his tutor laughed.

"Nor *misbehavior*."

"Thank the Savior!"

"Nor *importunacy*."

"That were lunacy!"

"Nor *tiddlywinks*."

"'T'would gain thee little, methinks!"

Not content with double and even triple rhymes, Barth, in a virtuoso show of wit, introduces a sextuple rhyme:

"Nor is it *Piccadilly bombast*."

"You'd be sick-o'-filly-bum-blast!" (p. 384-85).

In this blatantly self-reflexive set-piece, Barth is clearly more intent on displaying his verbal dexterity than he is on developing his characters or advancing his narrative. In fact, character and author metafictionally merge here, as Henry's sole purpose in this episode is to act as a mouthpiece for Barth's word-wit.

Barth also uses Burlingame in a more subtle metafictional manner by having Eben's tutor embody the novel's premise that "character" is a changeable and inherently unstable concept. Throughout *The Sot-Weed Factor*

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Barth emphasizes Henry's protean qualities, especially his ability to implausibly exfoliate into a number of different characters. Nowhere is this capacity more exaggerated than in that scene late in the novel in which Burlingame astounds Eben by literally metamorphosizing before the poet's eyes:

His hands were busy as he spoke, and his appearance changed magically. Off came the powdered periwig, to be replaced by a short black hairpiece; from his mouth he removed a curious device which, it turned out, had held three artificial teeth in position. Most uncannily of all, he seemed able to alter at will the set of his facial muscles: the curve of his cheeks and the flare of his nose changed shape before their eyes; his habitually furrowed brow grew smooth, but crow's-feet appeared where before there were none. Finally, his voice deepened and coarsened; he drew in upon himself so as to seem at least two inches shorter; his eyes took on a craftier cast -- Nicholas Lowe, in a few miraculous seconds, had become Timothy Mitchell (p. 728).

Henry's actions here are living proof of Eben's despairing contention that "No man is what or whom I take him for" (p. 513) -- a remark which succinctly captures how Barth not only calls into question a character's sense of being, but also undermines the very notion of "character." By demonstrating the ease with which Burlingame is able to assume different identities, Barth exposes the rhetorical basis of characterization and metafictionally reinforces the fact that the figures in his novel are thoroughly fictive.

Barth's use of Henry Burlingame is only one way in which the author reveals the metafictional tendencies of his novel. As we will examine later, *The Sot-Weed Factor* also exhibits a strong tendency to self-consciously reflect upon its complicated design and verbal dexterity. In fact, throughout *The Sot-Weed Factor* Barth demonstrates a preoccupation with

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the technology of narration and physics of fiction, often acknowledging what it is that he is doing in the very act of doing it. Concerned as he is with the language that appears in the telling, Barth writes in self-conscious ways which explore the ruptures between life and art and openly lay bare the artificiality of his language. Because he believes that all modes of literature are inherently artificial, Barth feels that one may just as well celebrate their artifice. As he told John J. Enck: "a different way to come to terms with the discrepancy between art and the Real Thing is to affirm the artificial element in your art (you can't get rid of it anyway), and make artifice part of your point."<sup>24</sup>

The Sot-Weed Factor as an Exercise in Literary Imitation

Crucial to an understanding of Barth's aesthetic is recognizing the author's view that "reality" is, at its heart, linguistically based. Language, as Barth sees it, is neither a transparent nor a neutral medium and using linguistic conventions is integral to our construction of "reality." Explains Frank D. McConnell:

Barth, in an extreme degree, accepts the linguistic nature of man as man's generative definition. The philosophy, anthropology, even the psychoanalysis of the last twenty years all have, in their various ways, approached the common premise that man, under whatever aspect we choose to regard him, is primarily a linguistic animal, a creator of systems of signification, and that therefore the semantic and syntactic problems of language and language description have a particularly urgent relevance to the understanding and perhaps salvation of civilization. Barth, uniquely among American novelists, has created a body of fiction which embodies those linguistic anxieties which beset other realms of contemporary

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For Barth, because words and things do not exist in a one-to-one relationship, realism is not an entirely "truthful" literary technique. Furthermore, life does indeed imitate art, not only because certain actions resemble those depicted in art, but also in the sense that fictional concepts truly influence one's perception of the world. In essence, Barth advocates the notion expressed by the black doctor in *The End of the Road* that, "fiction isn't a lie at all, but a true representation of the distortion that everyone makes of life."<sup>26</sup> The only way to come to terms with this is to do as Barth does in *The Sot-Weed Factor*: to compose a true representation of a representation of life. In other words, what Barth attempts in his third novel is not to imitate the world directly (to do so is impossible) but the world as it has already been represented, and distorted, in an historical and formal representation of life -- the eighteenth-century novel. Barth's imitative intent is immediately apparent by virtue of the fact that his twentieth-century novel shares the same title as the eighteenth-century poem on which it is purportedly based. By consciously imitating a work of art which is by definition an imitation of life, *The Sot-Weed Factor* posits, in Barth's own words, "an imitation of the Novel by an author imitating the role of the Author."<sup>27</sup> Discussing Barth's imitative approach, Jerome Klinkowitz argues that the author, "prefers stories which represent, fictions whose events are metaphors for something else, not something in themselves." For Barth, Klinkowitz adds,

"fiction should forever be an imitation of an action, and not an action itself."<sup>28</sup>

One of the principal ways in which Barth imitates the eighteenth-century novel lies in how *The Sot-Weed Factor* attempts to recapture the documentary nature of the early form. "As I started digging into eighteenth-century fiction," Barth told Charlie Reilly in a 1981 interview: "I was struck by the almost uncannily modern sense that the inventors of the English novel had about what they were up to. That is, although they were spinning yarns, fabricating, entertaining, they never lost sight of the documentary nature of what they were doing."<sup>29</sup>

Because they wished to free themselves from the strictures of the epic and romance traditions and depict reality as it "truly" existed, early novelists filled their works with a preponderance of documents, letters, and physical details; all in an attempt to create what Ian Watt sees as the defining characteristic of the early English novel, its "formal realism."<sup>30</sup> According to Watt, the novel's first practitioners saw the form as "a full and authentic report of human experience" and therefore felt obligated to provide their readers with such features as individualized characters, specific passages of time, and detailed depictions of physical surroundings.<sup>31</sup> This increased attention to everyday detail, combined with a penchant for drawing from actual historical accounts of the time, lent authenticity, specificity, and a dramatic style of

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Barth's imitation of the documentary nature of the eighteenth-century novel is highly self-conscious and much of the "authentic" texture of *The Sot-Weed Factor* comes from its deliberate echoing of the early novel's emphasis on detailed physical description. The streets of London, its coffee houses and inns, as well as colonial outposts, swamps, and Indian camps -- all are vividly described. Even characters' clothing is rendered with a keen eye for realistic detail. Witness, for example, a portion of the nearly two-page description of the clothes Eben dons for his meeting with Lord Baltimore:

He slipped on his best linen drawers, short ones without stirrups, heavily perfumed, and a clean white day-shirt of good frieze holland, voluminous and soft, with a narrow neckband, full sleeves caught at the wrists with black satin ribbon, and small, modestly frilled cuffs. Next he pulled on a pair of untrimmed black velvet knee breeches, close in the thighs and full in the seat, and then his knitted white silk hose, which, following the latest fashion, he left rolled above the knee in order to display the black ribbon garters that held them up. On then with his shoes, a fortnight old, of softest black Spanish leather, square-toed, high-heeled, and buckled, their cupid-bow tongues turned down to flash a fetching red lining (p. 70).

Painstakingly enumerative, this passage consciously recalls the penchant for careful cataloging found throughout the novels of Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson. However, despite its richness of detail, this head-to-toe description of Eben's outfit is so excessively long that it eventually becomes tiresome. Why must Barth spend nearly two full pages describing the poet's clothing? What the overabundance of detail in this description makes clear is that Barth is not



so much interested in lending his own novel an air of verisimilitude as he is in calling attention to the fact that he is imitating the eighteenth-century novel's formal realism. In other words, *The Sot-Weed Factor* goes to great lengths to demonstrate Barth's intentions of offering "an imitation of the Novel by an author imitating the role of the Author."

Barth's imitative stance toward the eighteenth-century novel is also evident in his method of character depiction. For the most part, characterization in *The Sot-Weed Factor* amounts to little more than caricature as figures in the novel tend to lack genuine psychological depth. As Richard Betts notes, this is true even of the novel's hero: "The characterization of Ebenezer Cooke is certainly not one-dimensional but it never proceeds far beyond those aspects of appearance, age, origin, and manner described at the outset. Typically, characters are introduced by a brief sketch which prominently emphasizes an attribute which is either ludicrous, grotesque, or deformed."<sup>32</sup> We see this method of depiction early in the novel when we first meet Eben's coffee-house cohorts:

He found three of the group to which Burlingame had introduced him. One was Ben Oliver, a great fat poet with beady eyes and black curly hair, a very rakehell, who some said was a Jew. Another was Tom Trent, a short sallow boy from Christ's College, also a poet; he'd been sent to prepare for the ministry, but had so loathed the idea that he caught the French pox from a doxy he kept in his quarters by way of contempt for his calling, and was finally dismissed upon his spreading the contagion to his tutor and at least two professors who had befriended him . . . . The third, Dick Merriweather, was despite his surname a pessimist, ever contemplating suicide, who wrote only elegiac verse on the subject of his own demise (p. 41).

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Granted, these three figures are relatively minor, yet even more prominent characters in *The Sot-Weed Factor* remain closer to stereotypes than to individualized characters. This thinness of character development is expressive of Barth's deliberate attempt to get back to the ways in which the early English novel depicted character. Thus, while such type characterization may obliterate the potential for profoundly developed individual personalities, it is in keeping with the form he is imitating. As Barth himself has remarked, "I find myself, for example, in *The Sot-Weed Factor*, using stock figures, stereotype Jews and Negroes, just for fun, as they did in the eighteenth century."<sup>33</sup> This broad method of depiction often borders on the cartoonish, as when the narrator describes the slaves aboard the boat transporting Eben and Bertrand to Malden as Little Black Sambo-like figures whose forms of expression are limited to "averted smiles, great rolls of the eyes, and much shuffling of their feet" (p. 522).

Throughout *The Sot-Weed Factor* Barth purposely flattens, doubles, or stereotypes his characters so that they lack particularity and never come close to resembling well-rounded, realistic characters. Gaining their resonance from traditional picaresque figures, these crudely drawn characters are self-conscious rewrites of such stock figures as the idealistic naif (Eben), the ferocious pirate (Boabdil), the buffoonish miller (Harvey Russecks), the opportunistic manservant (Bertrand Burton), and the prostitute with a heart of gold (Mary Mungummory).

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Furthermore, the more general stereotyping of women as whore or virgin, Native Americans as noble or savage, and blacks as sexual athletes, also has a similar goal: to knowingly reveal the artificial and stylized qualities of Barth's imitation.

*The Sot-Weed Factor as a Literary Performance*

*The Sot-Weed Factor* is best understood if we view the novel as a literary performance, a highly self-conscious demonstration of Barth's narrative skill and verbal dexterity. Without disregarding its careful reconstruction, we are meant to read through the surface historical and narrative matter to the novel's two prevailing elements: the formidable mental scope and linguistic virtuosity of John Barth. This is evident on a large scale by the novel's byzantine plot and imitation eighteenth-century language and on a smaller scale in certain set-pieces. That Barth views his novel as a richly complicated narrative performance is evident by several self-reflexive remarks made by characters during the course of the novel. For example, before launching into a lengthy tale, Burlingame warns his protégé that the story he is about to tell is "a passing tangled one, with much running hither and thither and an army of names to bear in mind" (p. 137). Later John McEvoy, in recounting his narrow escape from Tom Tayloe, pauses to add emphatically, "We swim in an ocean of a story" (p. 539). Although they are spoken within the context of ongoing conversations, these remarks so aptly describe Barth's own novel that they immediately draw attention to their self-conscious intent.

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Barth has readily admitted that one of his principal intentions in writing *The Sot-Weed Factor* "was to see if I couldn't make up a plot that was fancier than *Tom Jones*"<sup>34</sup> and this line epitomizes the view the author has of his novel as a literary performance. Although its labyrinthine storyline purposely defies easy summary, at the heart of *The Sot-Weed Factor* lie two central tales: Eben's quest for a vocation and Henry Burlingame's search for his family origins. However, interlaced between these two principal plots are over twenty-five self-contained yet tangentially related sub-plots told by at least twelve different narrators, the majority of which are concerned with recreating the history of early Maryland. Moreover, although the main action of Eben's paralyzed response to "the beauty of the possible" (p. 11) and his eventual determination to do justice to his appointment as Poet Laureate of Maryland proceeds in a reasonably straightforward manner, the Burlingame plot and the reconstruction of life in colonial Maryland, both of which are patched together by secret documents, hearsay, and half-truths, unfolds in a seemingly frenetic and haphazard manner. These digressions and at times digressions within digressions largely determine the structure of the novel, a dizzying chain of events which Earl Rovit claims "reminds one of a pack of hounds with stuffed noses frantically sniffing out a non-existent covey of quail."<sup>35</sup>

Yet, while its dizzying series of storylines and sub-plots may lend *The Sot-Weed Factor* an appearance of

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haphazardness, the novel's byzantine plot is actually so tightly structured that no one part can be omitted. As David Morrell notes,<sup>36</sup> when Barth's editors at Doubleday requested that the author trim or omit several of the novel's episodes, they discovered that, unlike the usual picaresque novel, *The Sot-Weed Factor* was so carefully plotted that no part could be eliminated without damage to the whole. As we learn in the novel's close, no detail has been accidental or superfluous as each seemingly digressive passage and diverting tale is seen to fit into the story as a whole. By elaborately weaving the various narrative strands of the novel together, Barth calls attention to his mastery of its "tangled skein." The novel's obsession with an intricately constructed plot clearly echoes *Tom Jones*. As Ian Watt notes, Fielding's primary aim in his masterpiece is "not to immerse us wholly in his fictional world, but rather to show the ingenuity of his own inventive resources by contriving an amusing counterpoint of scenes."<sup>37</sup> By his tying up all the seemingly unconnected loose ends, by burling together each skein, Barth reveals that, as in Fielding's carefully made work, there is a great narrative plan at work. In fact, given its transcontinental storyline, inclusion of secret diaries, and strong penchant for digression, Barth's narrative juggling act in *The Sot-Weed Factor* is even "fancier" than that of Fielding's in *Tom Jones*.

Although Barth's mastery of his byzantine plot cannot be fully appreciated until the close of *The Sot-Weed Factor*, the author's self-conscious linguistic virtuosity is evident from

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the novel's lengthy and cleverly constructed opening sentence:

In the last years of the seventeenth century there was to be found among the fops and fools of the London coffee-houses one rangy, gangling flitch called Ebenezer Cooke, more ambitious than talented, and yet more talented than prudent, who, like his friends-in-folly, all of whom were supposed to be educating at Oxford or Cambridge, had found the sound of Mother English more fun to game with than her sense to labor over, and so rather than applying himself to the pains of scholarship, had learned the knack of versifying, and ground out quires of couplets after the fashion of the day, afroth with *Joves* and *Jupiters*, aclang with jarring rhymes, and string-taut with similes stretched to the snapping point (p. 3).

This sentence, with its density and baroque structure, immediately draws our attention to the ornate texture of Barth's stylistic imitation and captures well the opacity and overall complexity of the novel's plot. Tellingly, this passage focuses on language -- both directly in Eben's penchant for versifying and indirectly in Barth's own mastery of "the sound of Mother English." The narrator draws further attention to the novel's language several pages later when he metafictionally speaks of how "a clever author may, by deliberate adjustments, parody a beautiful style" (p. 8).

Barth has succinctly described his language in *The Sot-Weed Factor* as an "imitation" of eighteenth-century prose<sup>38</sup> but Leslie Fiedler offers a fuller and less modest description, deeming the author's language "no mere pastiche but a piece of ingenious linguistic play, a joyous series of raids on half-forgotten resources of the language."<sup>39</sup>

However one chooses to describe it, the novel's anachronistic prose style constitutes Barth's most inventive approach to

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While his resuscitation of such archaic expressions such as "'swoonds," "marry come up," "methinks," and "b'm'faith" is the most noticeable aspect of Barth's imitation eighteenth-century prose style, its effectiveness is closely tied to the way in which he manages to capture the cadence and rhythm of an earlier language. This is evident from the very first words spoken in the novel, a conversation between Edward, Eben, and Anna Cooke concerning the sudden dismissal of the twins' tutor:

"No need to go to the summer-house today, Ebenezer. Thy lessons are done."

Both children looked up in surprise.

"Do you mean, sir, that Henry will be leaving us?" Ebenezer asked.

"I do indeed," Andrew replied. "In fact, if I be not greatly in error he hath already departed."

"But how is that? With never a fare-thee-well? He spoke not a word of leaving us!"

"Gently, now," said Andrew. "Will ye weep for a mere schoolmaster? 'Twas this week or next, was't not? Thou'rt done with him."

"Did you know aught of't?" Ebenezer demanded of Anna. She shook her head and fled from the room. "You ordered him off, Father? he asked incredulously. "Why such suddenness?"

"'Dslife!" cried Andrew. "At your age I'd sooner have drunk him good riddance than raised such a bother! The fellow's work was done and I sacked him, and there's an end on't! If he saw fit to leave at once 'tis his affair. I must say 'twas a more manly thing than all this hue and cry!" (p. 9).

Colloquial expressions ("fare-thee-well"), inverted syntax ("if I be not greatly in error"), and frequent contractions

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("Thou'rt") -- all work together in capturing the locution of eighteenth-century speech. Barth further enhances the authenticity of his imitation by purposely using no images, allusions, and metaphors that were unavailable to the early English novelist. Witness, for example, the following outburst by Richard Sowter:

"Oh la, St. Roque's hound-bitch!" Sowter scoffed. " 'Tis but the vagrant track o' life, that beds ye now in clover, now in thistles. Make shift to bear't a day at a time, and ten years hence ye'll still be sleeping somewhere, and filling thy bowels with dinner, and rogering some wench from Adrian to St. Yves" (p. 428).

With its high concentration of idioms and aphoristic tone, this passage captures well Fiedler's image of Barth raiding the "half-forgotten resources" of eighteenth-century language.

There is, however, more to Barth's "imitation" than the eighteenth-century dialect spoken by the novel's characters. Unmistakingly commingled with this dialect is a more contemporary language which serves to move the storyline forward. We see such a style in the following excerpt:

Not long after his arrival in the Province some months previously, Governor Francis Nicholson had declared his intention to move the seat of Maryland's government from St. Mary's City, which was unhappily associated with Lord Baltimore, the Jacobean and Carolingian kings, and the Roman Catholic Church, to Anne Arundel Town on the Severn River, which enjoyed the double merit of a central location on the Chesapeake and an altogether Protestant history. Although the actual transfer of government records and the official change of the capital's name from Anne Arundel Town to Annapolis were not to be affected until near the end of February, the consequences of the decision were noticeable already in St. Mary's City: few people were on the streets; the capitol and other public buildings were virtually deserted; and some inns and private homes were abandoned or closed and boarded up (p. 499-500).

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Passages such as these, offering historical perspective and background information in the midst of Barth's anachronistic imitation, throw into relief the author's imitation eighteenth-century language and demonstrate how *The Sot-Weed Factor* blends modern as well as eighteenth-century styles. In this way, the novel's language acts as a sort of verbal time machine, cross-pollinating these two distinct eras as it calls attention to Barth's masterful performance.

The fact that his novel is so deeply and self-consciously indebted to *Tom Jones* demonstrates that, for Barth, originality is not a high priority. As *The Sot-Weed Factor* and other Barthian works such as *Chimera* (1972) and *The Last Voyage of Somebody the Sailor* (1991)<sup>40</sup> make clear, the author is fond of resurrecting past works and recasting old materials into new forms. Barth was trained as a musician (he attended Julliard, where he enrolled to study harmony and orchestration) and his approach to literary composition is analogous to the art of musical composition. As he remarks in *The Friday Book*: "At heart I'm an arranger still, whose chief literary pleasure is to take a received melody -- an old narrative poem, a classical myth, a shopworn literary convention, a shard of my own experience, a *New York Times Book Review* series -- and, improvising like a jazzman within its constraints, reorchestrate it to present purpose."<sup>41</sup> This sense of writing as "reorchestrating," of using sources and conventions as a kind of rescoring with the plot being roughly equivalent to the element of melody, governs Barth's compositional method in *The Sot-Weed Factor*.

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Patricia Tobin describes Barth's third work as "a superbly orchestrated echo" of the eighteenth-century novel<sup>42</sup> and in tracing the literary pedigree of *The Sot-Weed Factor* we see that it analogically draws from a great many eighteenth-century works, constituting almost a compendium of the early English novel. In fact, so pervasive is Barth's use of eighteenth-century sources that Stanley Edgar Hyman claims that "it would be easier to list the books it does not copy or burlesque."<sup>43</sup> As a three-part satire exploring the difficulty of achieving success in a world dominated by injustice and dishonesty, *The Sot-Weed Factor* has strong structural and thematic ties to Tobias Smollett's *The Adventures of Roderick Random*. In addition, *The Sot-Weed Factor* also copies or burlesques such other classic eighteenth-century texts as Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders*, Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas*, John Cleland's *Fanny Hill*, and, especially, Voltaire's *Candide* and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. Like Voltaire's work, *The Sot-Weed Factor* is a satirical novel of initiation in which a naive young man sallies forth into the world and meets with a series of rowdy and often absurd adventures that rob him of his innocence. Moreover, Eben's progression from innocence to disillusionment to self-sufficiency closely parallels *Candide's*. In the end, he, too, remains a disillusioned man left to cultivate his own garden. Also, like Swift's hero, Eben is an innocent figure in a strange universe, and like Gulliver he ultimately emerges from his journeying a more enlightened though more embittered man. Tobin captures

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nicely the novel's mélange of literary sources: "*Sot-Weed* is an echo of the multiple -- of Fielding's foundlings and male virgins, of Smollett's pirate ships and his gentleman with valet, of Defoe's shipwreck and Crusoe's fortunate find in *Friday*, of Tristram's abbreviated member and Uncle Toby's wound, not to mention extra-English borrowings belonging to Voltaire, Cervantes, and Rabelais. And it echoes the forms of the eighteenth century as shamelessly as its materials -- the quest for the father, the rogue narrative, the sentimental romance of the virgin, the captivity tale, the found and fictive historical document."<sup>44</sup> The enormous range of the works which *The Sot-Weed Factor* draws from indicates the exhaustiveness of Barth's approach. Yet understanding *how* the author reorchestrates these eighteenth-century sources is integral to an understanding of the novel.

#### Parodic-Exhaustion in *The Sot-Weed Factor*

Parodic-exhaustion is the principal literary technique Barth employs in his "philosophical-picaresque extravaganza." However, before turning to how *The Sot-Weed Factor* parodically exhausts the eighteenth-century novel, we must first understand Barth's more general use of parody. As we saw in his exaggeration of the early novel's formal realism and methods of character depiction, Barth frequently assumes a parodic stance toward eighteenth-century novelistic conventions. Yet, while *The Sot-Weed Factor* may parodically treat these conventions, Barth's underlying attitude toward

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the early novel is far from mocking or disrespectful. Instead, *The Sot-Weed Factor* affectionately appropriates these conventions, engaging in a parodic process that Linda Hutcheon describes as "repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signalling of difference at the very heart of similarity."<sup>45</sup> Parody, then, does not involve ridiculing or breaking with past forms; rather it enacts change as well as continuity, acting as both critique and homage. At heart a lover and perpetuator of the very conventions he parodies, what Barth does in *The Sot-Weed Factor* is to engage in a process with the eighteenth-century novel which is both critical and complicitous. Hutcheon calls this as an "insider-outsider"<sup>46</sup> relationship in which parodists work within the very system they are attempting to subvert. After all, conventions must first be installed, then they may be parodied.

In *The Sot-Weed Factor* Barth employs a parodic-exhaustive approach as a means of attempting to exhaust the narrative, historical, and linguistic possibilities of the early English novel. By adopting this three-pronged approach to reorchestrating the eighteenth-century novel, Barth hopes to maximize the possibilities inherent in the characteristic elements of the form and thereby replenish these obsolete conventions. That *The Sot-Weed Factor* is an example of the literature of exhausted possibility is evident by virtue of the fact that its comic overplotting and thematic exaggeration attempt to exhaust narrative possibilities; its excessively complicated approach to history attempts to

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exhaust historical possibilities; and its overabundant, highly enumerative and allusive listings attempt to exhaust linguistic possibilities.

The perpetual interest *The Sot-Weed Factor* has in creating a highly complicated narrative structure is clearly linked to Barth's tireless endeavor to make up a plot "fancier" than that of *Tom Jones*. That is, in putting together a novel whose rococco-like plotting surpasses the great structural complexity of *Tom Jones*, Barth attempts to outdo his eighteenth-century predecessor on an architectonic scale. The principal way in which he hopes to achieve this is by means of an aesthetic inflation: a comic hyperplotting which parodies, through exaggeration, the "plottedness" of Fielding's classic work. Essential to Barth's strategy are the numerous digressions from the novel's two main plots. Some of these, such as Eben's musings on innocence, chastity, and poetry, are merely a paragraph or two long. Others, though, such as the summary of early Maryland politics and Henry's examination of twin-lore, are considerably longer. In addition to these tangentially related digressions, the novel also introduces such self-contained stories as the "Tale of the Great Tom Leech," "The Unhappy End of Mynheer Wilhelm Tick," and "Billy Rumbly and the Church Creek Virgin." Because these digressions and interpolated tales continually interrupt the novel's two central quests, *The Sot-Weed Factor* gives the impression of being constructed of a series of loosely connected stories which easily blend together, one metamorphosizing into the other in a manner highly reminiscent of another eighteenth-century classic,

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In addition to this deliberately excessive plotting, Barth also directly parodies the structure of the eighteenth-century novel through his comic appropriation of one of the characteristic narrative conventions of the form: its windy chapter headings. As he does in parodying other aspects of the eighteenth-century novel, Barth's strategy is to introduce obsolete narrative conventions and then to knowingly overapply them. Once again, the model Barth has foremost in his mind as he parodies the structural elements of the eighteenth-century novel is *Tom Jones*.

Consider the following chapter headings from *Tom Jones*:

A dreadful Accident which befel Sophia. The gallant Behaviour of Jones, and the more dreadful Consequence of that Behaviour to the young Lady; with a short Digression in Favor of the Female Sex.

The Morning introduced in some pretty Writing. A Stage Coach. The Civility of Chambermaids. The heroic Temper of Sophia. Her Generosity. The Return of it. The Departure of the Company, and their Arrival at London; with some remarks for the Use of Travellers.

Compare Fielding's long-winded advertisement to the following chapter headings from *The Sot-Weed Factor*:

The Laureate Is Exposed to Two Assassinations of Character, a Piracy, a Near-Deflowering, a Near-Mutiny, a Murder, and an Appalling Colloquy Between Captains of the Sea, All Within the Space of a Few Pages.

The Poet Wonders Whether the Course of Human History Is a Progress, a Drama, a Retrogression, a Cycle, an Undulation, a Vortex, a Right- or Left-Handed Spiral, a Mere Continuum, or What Have You. Certain Evidence Is Brought Forward, but of an Ambiguous and Inconclusive Nature.

As the strong similarities between these chapter headings demonstrate, Barth clearly had Fielding's novel in mind when

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composing his own work. Yet, as we see throughout *The Sot-Weed Factor*, when Barth echoes eighteenth-century conventions, he does so in a parodic-exhaustive manner. Thus, if Fielding packs several adventures into one chapter, then Barth manages to squeeze in several more, "All Within the Space of a Few Pages." If Fielding's chapter headings tend to be long-winded, then Barth's strive to be longer-winded. This is not to say that Fielding's verbosity is completely without self-consciousness (he does, on occasion, use chapter headings to humorous effect), but Barth's resuscitation of this device is often so blatantly overdone that he seems to be winking at the reader.

While *The Sot-Weed Factor* faithfully adopts such major themes of the eighteenth-century picaresque as the journeying hero's quest for identity, his adventures along the road, and the question of uncertain parentage, the novel also distorts and upends other traditional themes associated with the form; notably, the difficulty of differentiating between appearance and reality and the tendency of the picaresque to exaggerate the misfortunes of its characters.

The ability of characters to distinguish between appearance and reality is an important theme in the eighteenth-century picaresque novel, where people and objects are often not what they seem. In addition to physically altering their appearances, picaresque characters also frequently assume false identities. For example, in *Moll Flanders* the heroine disguises herself as a young man and an elderly beggar woman, later also passing herself off as both a penniless widow and a woman of means. Furthermore, as we

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see in *Tom Jones*, mistaken identity may persist for years. In Fielding's novel the foundling hero, presumed throughout to be the son of Jenny Jones and Mr. Partridge, is finally revealed as the child of Squire Allworthy's sister, Bridget, and is thus the rightful heir to the Allworthy estate.

*The Sot-Weed Factor* parodies this central theme of the picaresque by exaggerating the form's obsession with mistaken identity. We see this most prominently in Henry Burlingame's ability to impersonate a ridiculous number of people, including Peter Sayer, Timothy Mitchell, Monsieur Casteene, Nicholas Lowe, Bertrand Burton, Lord Baltimore, Baltimore's evil adversary John Coode, Governor Nicholson, and even Ebenezer Cooke himself. Other characters also employ impersonations regularly: in addition to Henry, John McEvoy and Bertrand Burton also pretend to be Eben; Joan Toast pretends that she is Susan Warren, while Anna Cooke claims to be both Miss Meg Bromly and Mrs. Billy Rumbly. Although this shifting of personalities confounds Eben, the poet himself is not immune from this predilection for disguise as he is forced to switch places with Bertrand in order to ensure safe passage to the colonies. Elsewhere, Eben impersonates John Coode's servant, Sir Benjamin Oliver, and his father Edward. In fact, from the point at which he impersonates Bertrand onward, Eben never fully regains his identity until near the close of the novel.

Another of the characteristic qualities of the picaresque novel that Barth parodically exhausts in *The Sot-Weed Factor* is what Robert Scholes describes as a natural tendency of the picaresque form toward "a grotesque

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exaggeration of misfortunes; an intensification of everyday troubles into an ironic vision of a distorted cosmos, where a poetic injustice reigns."<sup>47</sup> In *Tom Jones*, for example, the hero is forced to overcome a series of misfortunes, including his bastard status, the great animosity borne him by the evil Blifil, a savage beating, separation from his beloved Sophia, and brief imprisonment. However, while these setbacks may have seemed disastrous at the time, they were ultimately surmountable. In *The Sot-Weed Factor*, however, the entire cosmos appears to conspire against Ebenezer Cooke, and Barth recounts with Voltairian gusto the gross misfortunes that befall his hero as Eben is duped into accepting a bogus literary post, pursued by murderous thugs, betrayed by his servant, kidnapped and nearly raped by pirates, publicly ridiculed by his colonial neighbors, twice cheated out of his family estate, made an indentured servant, captured by Indians, driven to physical and emotional exhaustion, forced to contract a deadly disease, deprived of his sole heir, and robbed of his literary legacy. So relentless are these threats to Eben's well-being that the beleaguered poet comes to recognize the validity in Burlingame's contention that man is "Chance's fool, the toy of aimless Nature -- a mayfly flitting down the winds of Chaos!" (p. 344). As the Laureate explains to Henry near the close of the novel, "I could not tell to save my life whether [all that has befallen him] 'twas a dream or not. And I remember reasoning clearly 'twas doubtless a cruel dream, for naught so wondrous e'er occurred in natural life" (p. 515).

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Eben is correct. The seemingly endless series of setbacks he endures are not natural; they are a product of Barth's parodic exaggeration of the picaresque penchant for dwelling on misfortune. All that can go wrong for Ebenezer Cooke does go wrong and Barth positively revels in continually recounting the mishaps his hero encounters. Not that Eben is blameless in all of this (his arrogance and stubbornness bring him much grief), yet he nonetheless appears pawn-like at times in the face of "aimless Nature."

A favorite parodic-exhaustive strategy of Barth's in *The Sot-Weed Factor* is "the comedy of excessive complication;" a strategy which involves presenting accounts which are so overly detailed and complicated that their extreme "busyness" becomes a source of comedy. Nowhere is this technique more in evidence than in Henry Burlingame's convoluted "Brief Relation of the Maryland Palatinate." In this overview of Maryland's early history, Henry (disguised as Lord Baltimore) regales Eben with a numbingly dense summary of the political intrigue surrounding the colony's foundation:

"Now, this Cornwaleys was a soldier and had lately led expeditions to make peace with the Nanticokes and drive back the Susquehannoughs. When we impeached him for freeing Ingle, 'twas said in his defense he'd exacted promise from the scoundrel to supply us a barrel of powder and four hundredweight of shot for the defense of the Province -- and sure enough the rascal returns soon after, cursing and assaulting all he meets, and pledges the ammunition as bail against a future trial. But ere we see a ball of't, off he sails again, flaunting clearance and port-dues, and takes his friend Cornwaleys as passenger.

"Twas soon clear that Ingle and Claiborne, our two worst enemies, had leagued together to do us in, using the English Civil War as alibi. Claiborne landed at Kent Island, displayed a false parchment, and swore 'twas his commission from the King to command the Island. At the

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same time, the roundhead Ingle storms St. Mary's with an armed ship and his own false parchment; he reduces the city, drives Uncle Leonard to flee to Virginia, and so with Claiborne's aid claims the whole of Maryland, which for the space of two years suffers total anarchy. He pillages here, plunders there, seizes property, steals the very locks and hinges of every housedoor, and snatches e'en the Great Seal of Maryland itself; it being forty poundsworth of good silver. He does not stick e'en at the house and goods of his savior Cornwaleys but plunders 'em with the rest, and then has Cornwaleys jailed in London as his debtor and traitor to boot! As a final cut he swears to the House of Lords he did it all for conscience's sake, forasmuch as Cornwaleys and the rest of his victims were Papists and malignants!" (p. 84-5).

Ironically, "A Brief Relation of the Maryland Palatinate, Its Origins and Struggles for Survival, as Told to Ebenezer by His Host" is anything but "brief" and consists of a mindboggling litany of names, places, and events. So overwhelming is this historical summation that, after more than twelve pages of immensely complicated recitation, Eben is driven to remark: "Ne'er have I encountered such a string of plots, cabals, murthers, and machinations in life or in literature as this history you relate me!" (p. 92).

As he does in expanding the seven-hundred lines of Ebenezer Cooke's 1708 poem into a sprawling eight-hundred page novel, Barth here engages in a process of parodic inflation. What he attempts to do in this section of the novel is to exhaust the historical possibilities of Maryland's early days by spinning out a dizzying array of scenarios. The key term in Barth's conception of history is "plot" and throughout the novel both his characters and the author himself suggest that Maryland's colonial history is little more than an inexhaustible series of plots

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and counterplots. This refusal to adhere to one particular view of history is comically captured by the aforementioned chapter heading "The Poet Wonders Whether the Course of Human History Is a Progress, a Drama, a Retrogression, a Cycle, an Undulation, a Vortex, a Right- or Left-Handed Spiral, a Mere Continuum, or What Have You. Certain Evidence Is Brought Forward, but of an Ambiguous and Inconclusive Nature."

Barth returns to his parodic-exhaustive strategy of excessive complication later in the novel when he has Burlingame deliver his long-winded and Slawkengergian-like "Pandect of Geminology" to Eben:

" 'Tis a hemisphere o'erridden with godly twins!  
Ebenezer marveled.

Burlingame smiled. "Yet it wants twin hemispheres to make a whole: when Anna and I turned our eyes westward, we found in the relations of the Spanish and English adventures no less a profusion of Heavenly Twins, revered by sundry salvages; and the logs of divers voyages to the Pacific and Indian Oceans were no different. Old Cortez, when he raped the glorious Aztecs, found them worshiping Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca, as their neighbors revered Hun-hun-ahpu and Vukub-hun-ahpu. Pizarro and his cohorts, had they been curious enough to ask, would have found in the southern pantheon such twins as Pachakamak and Wichoma, Apocatequil and Piquerao, Tamendonaré and Arikuté, Karu and Rairu, Tiri and Karu, Keri and Kame. Why, I myself, enquiring here and there among the Indians of these parts, have learnt from the Algonkians that they reverence Menabozho and Chokanipok, and from the Naked Indians of the north that they pray to Juskeha and Tawiskara. From the Jesuit missionaries I have learnt of a nation called the Zuñi, that worship Ahaiyuta and Matsaillema; of another called Navaho, that worship Tobadizini and Nayenezkani; of another called Maidu, that worship Pemsanto and Onkoito; of another called Kwakiutl, that worship Kanigyilak and Nemokois; of another called Awikeno, that worship Mamasalanik and Noakaua--all of them twins. Moreover, there is in far Japan a band of hairy dwarfs that pray to the twins Shi-acha and Mo-acha, and amongst the gods of the southern Ocean reign the great Si Adji Donda Hatahutan and his twin sister, Si Topi Radja Na Uasan . . . "

" 'Tis your scheme to drive me mad!"

"That is their name, I swear't."

"No matter! No matter!" Ebenezer shook his head as though to jar his senses into order. "You have proved to the very rocks and clouds that twin-worship is no great rarity in this earth!" (p. 496).

With its intercontinental range, multicultural roster, and seemingly limitless pairings ("of another called," "of another called," "of another called," "of another called"), Henry's recitation of history's "profusion of Heavenly Twins" is, indeed, maddeningly thorough. It is also more than a bit wearying. Nonetheless, as in *Tristram Shandy*, the novel's lengthy displays of learning, whether scholarly or arcane, possess undeniable gusto.

*The Sot-Weed Factor and Tristram Shandy*

The Shandean connection here is more than a passing one as *The Sot-Weed Factor* shares important ties to Sterne's classic. In fact, if *The Sot-Weed Factor* is indebted to Fielding's *Tom Jones* for its structure and thematic concerns, then it is equally beholden to Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* for its sense of linguistic exuberance. One can indeed say that Barth's novel owes its form to Fielding's "comic epic-poem in prose" and its spirit to Sterne's tale of "a COCK and a BULL." Certainly there are significant differences between the works of Barth and Sterne. Although each exhibits a penchant for lengthy digressions, for instance, *The Sot-Weed Factor* is more tightly organized and less governed by the



whims of its author than *Tristram Shandy*. Nonetheless, both novels are fundamentally alike in that each is a serio-comic literary "funhouse" which possesses huge narrative energy and exhibits obvious delight in parodically exhausting linguistic possibilities.

Leslie Fiedler's image of Barth joyously "raiding" linguistic sources in order to create his novel's hybridized language is particularly apt because it points to how Barth, much like Sterne in *Tristram Shandy*, exhaustively incorporates various levels of discourse into the linguistic structure of his novel. For example, *Tristram Shandy* not only parodically mixes colloquial expressions with French, Latin, and Greek, it also borrows language from military, legal, and medical treatises, theological tracts, scientific inquiries, and literary criticism. In a similar fashion, *The Sot-Weed Factor* attempts to maximize its linguistic possibilities by including such myriad forms of discourse as historical summations, philosophical dialogues, theological debates, as well as poetry, folklore, diary entries, and recipes. Furthermore, like Sterne's classic, Barth's novel frequently shifts from one level of speech to another, often parodically juxtaposing contrasting levels of discourse and creating what E. P. Walkiewicz describes as "a full-fledged anatomy that forces the reader to move rapidly from the elevated to the bathetic, from the sublime to the scatological, from the theoretical to the practical, and from the sacred to the profane."<sup>48</sup>

According to Mikhail Bakhtin, this willingness to

incorporate and mix various levels of discourse within the structure of one's work is evidence of what the Russian philosopher and literary theorist calls "heteroglossia." Put simply, heteroglossia is a multiplicity of languages drawn from a number of speech communities and dialects. A text which embodies heteroglossia would include "the social discourse outside the artist's study, discourse in the open spaces of public squares and streets, cities and villages, of social groups, generations and epochs."<sup>49</sup> Such a text would necessarily embody points of view and fields of vision other than those of the author. Thus, one would hear not only such national voices as English, French, or German, but also different languages within a single culture or speaking community. For Bakhtin, the novel, open as it is to various forms of direct and indirect discourse, is the one literary form truly capable of doing justice to the inherent heteroglossia of life. *Tristram Shandy* and *The Sot-Weed Factor* are thus excellent examples of heteroglossic novels because each liberates the possibilities inherent in various fields of discourse and allows these speech forms to move freely in the open-ended linguistic structure of their works.

A further Shandean quality that *The Sot-Weed Factor* embodies is a willingness to explore the linguistic possibilities of individual phrases or words. While Barth's novel resembles *Tristram Shandy* in its fondness for puns, witticisms, quips, and double-entendres, it is in the novel's outrageous word-games that Barth's exhaustive efforts are most striking and comprehensive. One of the more memorable

scenes in *The Sot-Weed Factor* is that in which Eben chances upon a pair of prostitutes trading insults, one finding over a hundred English slang synonyms for "whore," with the other responding in kind with an equivalent number of French epithets. Too long to quote in its entirety, the verbal battle commences:

"Whore!" shouted the first.

"*Bas-cul!*" retorted the other.

"Frisker!"

"*Consoeur!*"

"Trull!"

"*Friquenelle!*"

"Sow!"

"*Usagère!*"

"Bawd!"

"*Viagère!*"

and ends almost seven pages later with:

"Priest-layer!"

"Hore!"

"Harpy!"

"*Mandrauna!*"

"Diddler!"

"*Maraude!*" (p. 441-447).

In this celebrated tour de farce what begins as a simple name-calling contest between two characters soon escalates into a seemingly endless bilingual tussle. In fact, were it not for Eben's hasty retreat from the room, this exchange

might continue *ad absurdum*. By listing each of the over two-hundred words exchanged here, Barth diverts the attention of the reader toward the language and these epithets serve to obscure, not reveal, the "real" things that they represent. This is what Tony Tanner refers to as "foregrounding"<sup>50</sup> -- calling more attention to the words than what they signify -- and passages such as this reinforce Barth's belief that reality is based upon linguistic concepts.

The bilingual swearing contest and the other exhaustive listings in *The Sot-Weed Factor* give the impression that, while Barth eventually allows his characters to run out of things to say, the author himself is capable of going on indefinitely. That is, even as he continues to elaborate, enumerate, and itemize, Barth simultaneously manages to hint at a wealth of untapped resources. For instance, in Henry's "Pandect of Geminology" it is only Eben's impassioned plea which brings his tutor's cross-cultural pairings to a close. Because the poet interrupts what appears to be an endless torrent of twins, the implication here is that Barth's own "pandect" is even more exhaustive than Burlingame's. Similarly, although his list of synonyms for "whore" stops at 228, the tireless pace of this bilingual exchange implies that such a listing could just as easily number 328 or 428 or even 828. What Barth demonstrates in each of these listings is that examples need not be fully enumerated in order to exhibit exhaustion, they must merely be implied.

Employing this technique of exhaustion through enumeration and implication enables Barth to create an

overriding sense of plenitude; suggesting that, should he choose to, he could draw from a virtually inexhaustible supply of imaginative resources. In other words, whether he is listing historical events, pairs of twins, or English and French synonyms for "whore," only the limits of his own imagination prevent Barth from carrying on infinitely. The same powers that allow him to exhaust possibilities can in turn be used to create an infinite number of possibilities. As John O. Stark notes, "A writer using Barth's method in *The Sot-Weed Factor* could write an infinitely long novel if he invented an infinite number of journals or an infinite number of actions that he can claim to be historical."<sup>51</sup> Regarding this aspect of his compositional method, Barth himself has averred, "[The] impulse to imagine alternatives to the world can become a driving impulse for writers. I confess that it is for me."<sup>52</sup>

Yet why would Barth want to do this? Why does he continually allude to the literal and substitutive potential of his exhaustive efforts? First of all, in circumscribing a finite set and enumerating all of its members, Barth employs a rhetorical strategy which Hugh Kenner calls "the comedy of the inventory." Such a strategy, Kenner argues, actually makes exhaustiveness a virtue because it provides patterns which satisfy the reader's need for order while at the same time fulfilling our desire for completeness.<sup>53</sup> Although Barth employs the comedy of the inventory throughout *The Sot-Weed Factor* -- two of the more striking examples are his complete catalogue of Eben and Anna's favorite childhood

books (p. 5-6) and the full listing of the sixteen varieties of notebooks available at Ben Bragg's bookstore (p. 110) -- it is in the author's painstaking enumeration of each of the items consumed during the Ahatchwhoops' eating contest that Barth's comedic use of inventories reaches its peak. A synecdoche for America, this thirty-course menu, replete with original Native American terms and directions for preparation and presentation, plays upon the myth of colonial America as a land of limitless resources. Opening with an appetizer of ten *keskowghnoughmass* ("the yellowe-belly'd sunne fish"), the repast continues through such dishes as "boyl'd frogs," "buffle-head ducks," "marsh ratts," "beare-cubb," and "wild ryce," and concludes with "berries of divers sorts." By the time the *Sawwhonesuckhanna* ("a mild spirits they distill out in the swamp") finally arrives to wash these courses down, we, like the contestants, have had more than our fill (pp. 563-4).

What these seemingly endless listings make clear is that, for Barth, the term "exhaustion" does not necessarily have negative connotations. Instead of viewing "to exhaust" as meaning "to consume," "to wear out," or "to drain the strength and energy from," Barth offers a more positive term which implies rightful enumeration and completion. As Gerhard Joseph argues, "In his depletion of the picaresque mode, in his erudite catalogues of ideas, or in his name-calling contest between the prostitutes," Barth was trying in *The Sot-Weed Factor*, "to convey the impression that sheer exhaustiveness for its own sake contributes to a meaningful

comic order."<sup>54</sup> Patricia Tobin also sees exhaustion in a similarly positive light, noting that it is when the writer "affirms the literature of exhaustion as completion, without wearing out or depleting the possibilities, that the writing of such literature becomes a 'heroic enterprise' with a 'positive artistic morality'."<sup>55</sup> Thus, exhaustion is seen as enhancement, not diminution, and the process of exhaustion offers a valuable intellectual and aesthetic challenge. The great importance of this concept to Barth's literary outlook is evident from his lengthy essay on the subject, "The Literature of Exhaustion."

"The Literature of Exhaustion"

Originally published in the *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1967, "The Literature of Exhaustion" remains one of the most widely commented upon and highly influential documents of the postmodern era. In this manifesto-like essay, Barth argues that there comes a point during the course of literary history when artists begin to feel that certain forms and possibilities are used up or obsolete. This, Barth contends, is the "contingency" faced by the contemporary novelist. However, rather than being a cause for despair, such a situation presents the inspired writer with the opportunity to move beyond mere refutation or repudiation. Highlighting Jorge Luis Borges and Samuel Beckett as examples, Barth argues that there are select writers who are able to creatively confront such a dilemma by paradoxically

transforming these "felt ultimacies" of the present into material and means for their work; "paradoxically" because by doing so they transcend what had appeared to be the impossibility of accomplishing new and original literature. Although he deems both Borges and Beckett "just about the only contemporaries of my reading acquaintance mentionable with the 'old masters' of twentieth-century fiction," Barth's essay focuses on Borges, citing the Argentinean fabulator as one of contemporary literature's most innovative writers and theorists.<sup>56</sup> While Borges could not have directly influenced the writing of *The Sot-Weed Factor* (his works were not available in translation until 1962), both writers were formulating similar literary views and telling parallels exist.

Operating under the assumption that "intellectual and literary history has been Baroque" and has "pretty well exhausted the possibilities of novelty," Borges, Barth argues, turns ultimacy against itself, exploiting the notion that literary originality is impossible to paradoxically create innovative works of literature. Explains E. P. Walkiewicz: "Imagining labyrinths and libraries that embody 'all the possibilities of choice,' or contain 'every possible book and statement,' and exhausting by inference every potential alternative or combination, Borges manages not only to acknowledge the fact that the number of conceivable propositions of philosophy or forms of expression is finite, but frees himself of the obligation to explore every imaginable avenue or permutation and exerts that freedom to



complete his 'heroic' labors, make the most of his 'insight' and 'poetic power'."57 What creative writers like Borges do, then, is to deal with the situation of literary exhaustion by self-consciously incorporating it both thematically and technically into their work. In so doing they are able to push beyond the bounds staked out by their literary predecessors and parlay these "felt ultimacies" into new and original literature, drawing from a literary heritage which, as Barth sees it, is truly inexhaustible. "I agree with Borges that literature can never be exhausted," Barth has acknowledged, "if only because no singular literary text can ever be exhausted -- its 'meaning' residing as it does in its transmutations with individual readers over time, space, and language."58

During the course of "The Literature of Exhaustion," Barth speaks admiringly of Borges's story "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*"59 and understanding the concept of literary originality proposed by this brief tale offers critical insight into Barth's own aesthetic. Speculating on the idea of Pierre Menard, a French Symbolist poet, writing *Don Quixote*, the narrator of Borges's story remarks: "He did not want to compose another *Quixote* -- which is easy -- but *the Quixote itself*. Needless to say, he never contemplated a mechanical transcription of the original; he did not propose to copy it. His admirable intention was to produce a few pages which would coincide -- word for word and line for line -- with those of Miguel de Cervantes."60 The resulting work,

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the narrator claims, would not be a mere duplication of Cervantes's book. True, the words would be exactly the same. However, the passage of over three-hundred years would supply these words with new and possibly enriched meanings and, indeed, the narrator goes on to applaud Menard for the sophistication and subtlety of his word-for-word twentieth-century recreation of Cervantes's seventeenth-century novel.

Barth praises the idea of literary invention offered by Borges in this story as having "considerable intellectual validity"<sup>61</sup> and, like Pierre Menard in his *Don Quixote*, Barth in *The Sot-Weed Factor* reinvents an earlier form by "transmutating" it through a contemporary consciousness. Patricia Tobin asserts that for Barth and Borges repetition is a literary idea which gains validity through its "thorough historicization of the author and his time within the new recreation."<sup>62</sup> In a sense, both Menard's *Don Quixote* and *The Sot-Weed Factor* are rewrites, but, because they are "perpetrated" by a successor who is acutely aware of subsequent literary developments, their meaning is in some ways richer than the original works which they are recreating. To explicate his sense of reinvention, Barth characteristically draws an analogy from the field of music. If, the author maintains, one were to compose Beethoven's Sixth Symphony today, and if such a feat were performed "with ironic intent by a composer quite aware of where we've been and where we are," the result would be "an ironic comment . . . more directly on the genre and history of art than on the state of the culture."<sup>63</sup> This sense of an artist ironically

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reflecting upon another work and in the process offering an "ironic comment . . . directly on the genre and history of art" is exactly what Barth does in his third novel. As the author himself has admitted:

*The Sot-Weed Factor* was composed with certain things in mind about the history of the novel, including the history of my own novels. By the time I began to compose *The Sot-Weed Factor* . . . I was more acquainted with the history of literature than I'd been when I began to write fiction. And so I set about to untie my hands; I presumptuously felt them tied by the history of the genre and, less presumptuously, by the kind of things that I myself had been writing before.<sup>64</sup>

In "untying" his hands from the history of the genre, Barth chose not to follow his immediate predecessors (the modernists) but turned instead to his literary "great-grandparents," those writers like Tobias Smollett, Henry Fielding, and Laurence Sterne whose work represents the beginnings of the English novel. In a brief essay on Walt Whitman, Barth spoke about such a strategy:

Whitman's project of going forward by going *back*, beyond the immediate European conventions of verse and their American imitations, to something older, looser, freer, more epical and rough -- there were surely some resemblances there to *my* project of returning to the inventors of the English novel for my long story of Ebenezer Cooke, the misfortunate poet laureate of Maryland, in order as it were to make an end run around Flaubert and the modernist novel.<sup>65</sup>

By making his "end run around Flaubert and the modernist novel," Barth consciously bypasses the father in Harold Bloom's oedipal view of literary history as he returns to the roots of English novel. Circumventing the "agonistic strife" of antithetical competition with his modernist fathers, Barth avoids any immediately pressing sense of Bloom's "anxiety of

influence."<sup>66</sup> As Patricia Tobin notes, "If the precursor problem seems always to recede from Barth, it is because, as a post-oedipal postmodernist, Barth reaches back down the far-away centuries to a pre-oedipal and non-oedipal past -- for Homer, Scheherazade, Cervantes, Fielding -- to cultures in which the conflictual drama between fathers and sons does not occur."<sup>67</sup>

Willing to be a twentieth-century "son" to eighteenth-century "fathers," Barth's affinity for the progenitors of the English novel is a strong one. In fact, the best way to describe the intent behind Barth's parodic-exhaustive strategy in *The Sot-Weed Factor* is to say that it is "mock-epic" in the eighteenth-century sense of the word. Much like Alexander Pope's "The Rape of the Lock" (1714), *The Sot-Weed Factor* employs comic methods as a means of tackling serious aesthetic issues. Moreover, just as the mock epics of Pope and John Dryden did not mock the epic form, so too Barth's stance towards his eighteenth-century predecessors is far from mocking. Indeed, *The Sot-Weed Factor* pays homage to the early English novel, holding it up as a literary standard and recognizing that its "obsolete" conventions possess undeniable viability for the contemporary novelist.

Barth's decision to return to the early days of the English novel, to harken back to "something older, looser, freer, more epical and rough" is governed largely by his dissatisfaction with the possibilities of realism. Despite the fact that his first two novels (*The Floating Opera* and *The End of the Road*) were themselves primarily realistic,

Barth's third novel unremittingly parodies conventionally structured novels and signals the author's decision to break radically with the traditions of the realistic form. As Barth sees it, the traditional realistic novel, particularly the prearranged, carefully ordered works of such nineteenth-century novelists as Flaubert, fails to reflect life as it truly exists, with all its messiness and irresolution. Moreover, the realistic novel is inherently inadequate because, in its attempts at ordering reality, it cannot allow for a wide range of possibilities. Operating on the premise that the traditional realistic novel as well as its modernist successor are literary modes whose viability has been all but depleted, *The Sot-Weed Factor* paradoxically goes forward by regressing to a form of the genre which accepts the fact that reality is too chaotic to be accurately captured in a neatly organized narrative pattern. So, while Barth's novel may use material that is congenial to realism, he adapts such material in order to suit his own unrealistic, highly metafictional purposes. In thus exploiting the resources of realism while acknowledging their conventionality, *The Sot-Weed Factor* moves beyond merely rejecting literary models and even self-parody as it works to redefine the possibilities of obsolete and overly familiar conventions. What Barth's work does, then, is to offer within its structure both a novel and a critique of the novel form. In so doing, *The Sot-Weed Factor* widens the range of what the novel is conventionally taken to be while simultaneously mapping out future literary direction.

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Conclusion

*The Sot-Weed Factor* is an impressive literary performance. While deeply indebted to the structural, thematic, and linguistic elements of such eighteenth-century classics as *Tom Jones* and *Tristram Shandy*, the ethos of Barth's novel is nonetheless thoroughly contemporary. Metafictionally blending history and fabulation to foster a basic distrust of historical record and the realistic novel and generate a plot that is highly digressive and complex yet neatly concluded, Barth manages to self-consciously explore the fictive nature of "reality." Choosing the early English novel and American colonial history as the principal bounds for his literary performance, Barth proceeds to parodically exhaust as many possibilities as he can therein. Unlike the hapless Ebenezer Cooke, Barth himself is not "dizzy with the beauty of the possible." On the contrary, he thrives on the limitations placed upon him by these two areas. As Patricia Tobin asserts, "it is difficult not to get the impression that Barth loves his secondariness because he has inherited literary 'fixities and definites' and loves the literary game because it has built-in constraints."<sup>68</sup>

By employing imitation and orchestration to produce a "a philosophical-picaresque extravaganza" in which literary conventions are rejuvenated and linguistic alternatives are allowed to play freely, Barth creates the impression of plenitude and novelty as he reorganizes, regrammarizes, and reconceptualizes the eighteenth-century novel. By alluding

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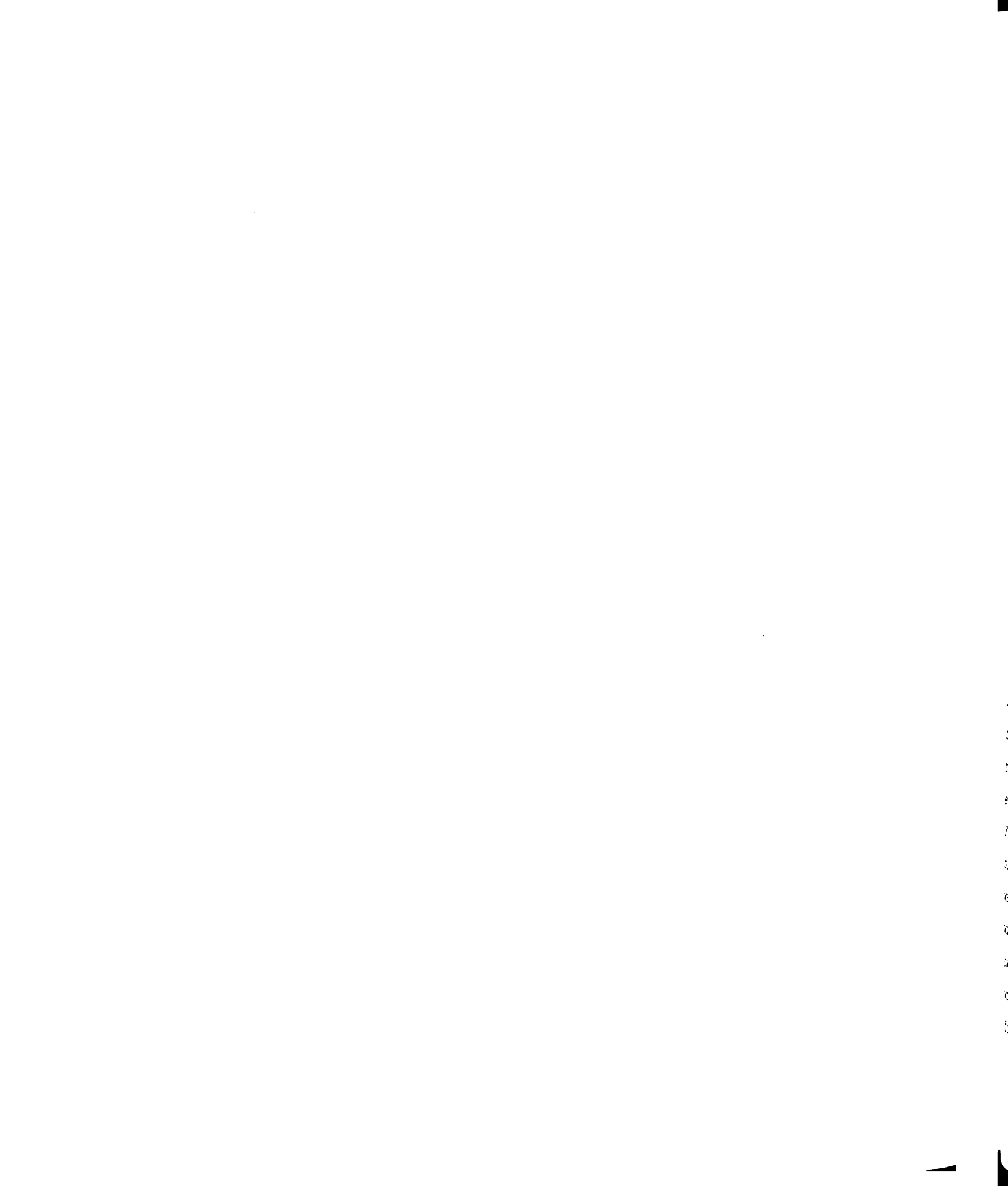
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to familiar eighteenth-century structures and themes and then parodically exhausting their inherent possibilities, Barth is able to deploy these conventions against themselves as a means of generating new work. Because he prefers reinvention to mere repetition, Barth passionately yet playfully explores "the beauty of the possible" as he attempts to follow the eighteenth-century novel to the very end of its aesthetic road. Like Henry Fielding before him, Barth intends to find a "new province of writing" which will turn what was once a literature of exhaustion into a literature of replenishment.



## Chapter Three

### "Sweets and Bitters": *Fanny and the Feminization of the Eighteenth-Century Novel*

Truth! stark naked truth, is the word, and I will not so much as take pains to bestow the strip of a gauze-wrapper on it, but paint the situations such as they actually rose to me in nature, careless of violating those laws of decency, that were never made for such unreserved intimacies as ours.<sup>1</sup>

*Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*

#### Introduction

In 1980, twenty years after the release of John Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor*, Erica Jong published her own reinvention of the eighteenth-century novel, *Fanny: Being the True History of the Adventures of Fanny Hackabout-Jones*.<sup>2</sup> Over four years in the writing, *Fanny* is a book which Jong, who wrote her master's thesis on Alexander Pope's "Epistle from Eloisa to Abelard" (1717) and began work on a dissertation in the field of eighteenth-century literature, had long wished to write. As she remarks in the afterword to *Fanny*, "But even as I wrote books like *Fear of Flying* and *How to Save Your Own Life*, and my first four books of poetry, I dreamed of writing a mock-eighteenth-century novel someday. Still, I wanted to wait until I was both free of the graduate student within me to do it lightheartedly, and yet calm enough in my own life to devote myself to the massive research I knew it would require" (p. 532). Like Jong's previous fiction, *Fanny* focuses on a woman's quest for independence and

self-knowledge. Unlike her earlier novels, however, *Fanny*, in a manner highly reminiscent of *The Sot-Weed Factor*, anachronistically recreates the stylistic, thematic, and linguistic elements of the early English novel.

A picaresque romp through the realm of literature and world of flesh, *Fanny* presents the adventures of an innocent orphan turned woman of pleasure in mid-eighteenth-century England. Fanny Hackabout-Jones, who claims to be the true inspiration behind John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1748-9) -- better known as *Fanny Hill* -- feels that she has been poorly depicted therein and offers a first-person, set-the-record straight response to Cleland's novel. What ensues is a female *bildungsroman* that charts Fanny's growth from virgin to whore, mistress to mother, and pirate to writer.

In *Fanny Jong* rewrites several eighteenth-century novels, most specifically *Tom Jones*, from the perspective of a twentieth-century feminist. Angry with the phallogentrism of such early writers as Samuel Richardson, Daniel Defoe, and John Cleland, Jong offers a sustained critique of these authors' works while imbuing her own "mock-eighteenth-century novel" with feminist values. She accomplishes this by first creating in Fanny Hackabout-Jones a protagonist whose character and actions stand in sharp contrast to the typical eighteenth-century heroine. Secondly, Jong radically rewrites literary tradition by reconceptualizing the eighteenth-century female novel of development and by imitatively recasting the picaresque novel into female terms.

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At the same time, she also reimagines the cultural history of the Augustan period by bringing a woman-centered view of the past to her novel. This literary and historical approach ultimately allows Jong to make amends for the misrepresentation of women in the eighteenth-century novel, while enabling the novelist to engage in a revisionist rereading of the canon. Finally, by presenting a novel whose formal elements harken back to the eighteenth-century yet whose feminist consciousness is decidedly contemporary, *Fanny* reveals the persistent nature of women's literary and cultural struggles.

#### *Fanny and the Eighteenth-Century Novel*

As *Fanny* repeatedly makes clear, Jong is an assiduous pasticheur, borrowing from the eighteenth-century novel whatever suits her needs. The novel's subtitle, title page, chapter headings, list of *dramatis personae*, and opening advertisement summarizing the protagonist's adventures, all echo eighteenth-century novelistic conventions. In fact, *Fanny* is much like *The Sot-Weed Factor* in that it manages to invoke conventions that most tellingly characterize the early English novel. For example, its employment of the educational journey as a structural motif for examining society and exploring character development ties *Fanny* to such works as Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas* (1759), as well as Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* (1742) and Tobias Smollett's *Humphry Clinker*



(1771). Indeed, with its rollicking three-part structure, episodic pace, and vivid cast of caricatures from the full range of society, *Fanny* resembles Smollett's picaresque in several fundamental ways. By satirically portraying a number of institutions and professions as the protagonist wends her way through a series of misadventures, *Fanny* also has strong ties to Voltaire's *Candide* (1759). Moreover, the novel's nautical adventures echo elements from *Robinson Crusoe* (1719-20) and *Gulliver's Travels* while minor characters such as "Molly," "Roxanna," "Sophia," and "Bridget" consciously recall figures from the works of Defoe and Fielding.

In addition to its literary sources, *Fanny* is also substantially indebted to the work of William Hogarth, notably the artist's series "A Harlot's Progress" (1732). These six engravings depict the rapid rise and even speedier destruction of Moll Hackabout, a young woman who comes from the country to earn her livelihood as a London seamstress. Heavily didactic, "A Harlot's Progress" is, as Sean Shesgreen describes it, "an account of the brutalizing effects of city life and a biting analysis of the institutions, classes and professions that exploit and destroy human beings and of the types of people that are attracted to them. Not least of all it is a tale of the vulnerable position of women in a society whose laws, customs and members are predisposed against them."<sup>3</sup> General Hogarthian influences are evident in the novel's use of period detail, its visualizing narrative, its comic realism, and its more general depiction of the squalor and cruelty of everyday eighteenth-century life. *Fanny* also

shares strong polemical ties to Hogarth since, as Shesgreen notes, "No other eighteenth-century artist portrayed so well the exploitation of women by men."<sup>4</sup> However, while the plot of *Fanny* mirrors to a certain degree the progression of Hogarth's *Moll*, Jong significantly alters this model by presenting a stronger female character who meets with a much kinder fate.

It is, though, within its very title -- *Fanny: Being the True History of the Adventures of Fanny Hackabout-Jones* -- that Jong's novel most directly reveals its literary pedigree. First, Jong's heroine shares the same Christian name as Cleland's *Fanny Hill* while her hyphenated surname combines those of Hogarth's *Moll Hackabout* and Fielding's *Tom Jones*. In addition, "Fanny" is the name of Joseph Andrews's chaste fiancée as well as a slang term for the female genitalia. By entitling her novel as she does, Jong thus deliberately invokes a series of literary predecessors to whom she succinctly and self-consciously links her own novel. Furthermore, her assertion of a "true" history (a narrative strategy common in the eighteenth-century novel) implies not only that her novel will refute other "false" accounts, but also that it will restore what has been omitted.

Although appropriating elements from a range of eighteenth-century novels, *Fanny* is most indebted, both structurally and thematically, to Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*. As Jong told John L. Kern in a 1981 interview, "The idea for the novel really started with the simple question, What if *Tom Jones* had been a woman?"<sup>5</sup> *Fanny Hackabout-Jones*

certainly has much in common with Fielding's knave-hero. Both are foundlings whose true paternity remains the novel's central mystery. Naive, trustful, and passionate, each must flee the safety and relative happiness of a country estate and set forth on the dangerous road to London. Along the way both undergo a series of adventures testing their innocence and idealism and reminding them that they cannot entirely escape the consequences of their past actions.

*Fanny* and *Tom Jones* also share a number of stylistic mannerisms and narrative *topoi*. Both are elaborately plotted and densely populated "historio-comic epicks" which open with a "Bill of Fare" and proceed with lengthy chapter headings detailing principal events. Like *Tom Jones*, *Fanny* is a "true history" filled with adventures in the picaresque tradition, including encounters with lusty maids, brushes with highwaymen, and near hangings. Comic and didactic, the two novels also share a frequent use of disguise and concealment, an inordinate reliance on coincidence, allusions to incest, and eventual revelations about inherited fortunes.

Like *Tom Jones*, *Fanny* features lengthy digressions and an obtrusive narrator who frequently interrupts the tale by segueing into such wide-ranging topics as gardening, great houses, medicine, and etiquette. Jong even shares Fielding's penchant for almost allegorical nomenclature, peopling her tale with such characters as the callous physician Dr. Smellie, the evil brothel owner Mother Coxtart, and Prudence Feral, the puritanical wet nurse. These figures are consistent with Fielding's practice of naming characters and

with his claim that he depicted manners rather than men. In the following passage, Jong's narrator elaborates on her debt to Fielding:

As a budding Poet and Playwright, I had indeed noticed that the Names of real People were oft' more curious and strange than the names of the Playwright's Personae. Which Brazen Grub Street Writer, i'faith, would dare to name a Man-Midwife, or Accoucheur, Dr. Smellie? Why 'tis a Name from a Comedy by Mr. Fielding -- a Name quite on the Order of Princess Huncamunca, or the Queen Dollallolla, or those Maids of Honour, Cleora and Mustacha, in love with those Courtiers, Noodle and Doodle! (p. 322).

Elsewhere in the novel, Jong self-consciously mimics Fielding's long-winded chapter headings. Witness, for example, the following advertisement:

Containing Anne Bonny's Legacy to our Heroine; better Reasons for Female Pyracry than for Male; a very tragical Incident; and the Beginning of the Conclusion of our History -- (but do not fear, we shall not leave our Reader without many more Epilogues, Appendices, and Farewells) (p. 14).

As in *The Sot-Weed Factor*, the intent here is to underscore, humorously, the chatty, adventure-filled chapter headings of *Tom Jones* as well as to appropriate Fielding's propensity for providing his reader with an overabundance of narrative signposts. Though parodic, the spirit is more affectionate than ironic or biting.

In literary form, both *Tom Jones* and *Fanny* follow the traditional structure of the *bildungsroman*. That is, in each novel the protagonist attains self-awareness only after being tested by a series of adventures. In the case of *Fanny*, however, this process of maturation has a sexual dimension missing in Fielding's tale. To begin with, it is Lord Bellars's assault on *Fanny* which forces her to flee from the

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only home she has known. Moreover, as she soon discovers, a young woman traveling alone is in a highly dangerous position. Before a week has passed, Fanny is captured by highwaymen, stripped, and used as a decoy for passing coaches. Although Fielding's hero also undergoes abuse at the hands of highwaymen, Fanny's vulnerability to rape makes her travels more inherently hazardous than Tom's. In fact, she must ultimately disguise herself as a man in order to reach London safely. Furthermore, while Tom's position as an able-bodied male affords him certain sexual liberties (recall his affairs with Mrs. Waters and Lady Bellaston), Fanny's sexual behavior is strictly bound by prevailing social norms. For instance, as she reflects upon her unexpected flight from Lymeworth, Fanny comes to the realization that "A Man might vent his Passions unafraid, but a Woman did so at her Peril - - particularly before Marriage" (p. 30). Finally, whereas Tom's union with Sophia Western is seen as the joyous culmination for both parties, Fanny understands what a woman compromises once she marries. As she notes, in marriage "the Wife gives up all (her Name, her Fortune, her very Health and physical Constitution) to secure the occasional Night-time Visits of a Knave with whom she shares nothing but a Roof and a Nursery full of screaming Babes" (p. 21). Thus, while both *Tom Jones* and *Fanny* depict the steady maturation of their protagonists, Jong's heroine undergoes certain hardships, such as rape and molestation, which are peculiar to her being a woman.

Jong's claim that *Fanny* answers the question, "What if

Tom Jones had been a woman?," while clearly true, is less indicative of her narrative intentions than one might suspect. Although it parodically treats Fielding's penchant for vivid names and long-winded chapter headings while also revising aspects of *Tom Jones* from the perspective of a female protagonist, *Fanny* does not radically critique Fielding's novel. Instead, it is more concerned with offering a direct and sustained response to three other eighteenth-century works: Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740), Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722), and John Cleland's *Fanny Hill* (1748-9). These three novels form the intertexts of Jong's novel, and the female protagonists of each influence the formation of Fanny Hackabout-Jones. Jong's grouping together of these particular novels is hardly surprising since each not only depicts the exemplary life of the title character but also shows the rule of female experience to be, as Nancy K. Miller puts it, "the drama of the single misstep."<sup>6</sup> Arguing that not one of the heroines in these male-authored novels "shines out as an Example upon which a Flesh-and-Blood Female can model her life" (p. 18), Jong's heroine proposes to refute, and in some instances rewrite, the female experiences depicted in these novels by presenting an admirable, eminently human heroine whose life stands as a testament to talent and fortitude.

In its narrative posture, confessional tone, and penchant for interweaving tendentious moralizing into the novel's structure, *Fanny* has strong ties to Richardson's *Pamela*. Both are first-person accounts of kind, if

obsessive, heroines who are initially seduced by wealthy older men. In each work, the epistolary conceit is dropped early on. Just as Pamela's "letters" to her parents are essentially prose chapters with descriptive headings, so too are Fanny's "letters" to her daughter Belinda. Moreover, the wit and feeling simplicity of Pamela's "writing to the moment" are often echoed in Fanny's account. Thematically, both *Pamela* and *Fanny* emphasize domestic concerns while exploring relations between the classes and the sexes. Finally, each novel closes with the conversion of a good-hearted rake.

Although it strongly resembles *Pamela* in these respects, *Fanny* takes direct issue with certain features of Richardson's novel. Most dramatically, Jong's heroine refutes the tacit rationale behind Richardson's sexual politics by refusing to barter her virginity for respectability. As she remarks, "But unlike wily Pamela Andrews, I was an Honest Whore and no Hypocrite! I hold my Body freely, but not my mind!" (p. 223). Pamela may use her "virtue" as a bargaining ploy for marriage to Mr. B, but Fanny lacks the hypocrisy of Richardson's heroine. Furthermore, whereas Pamela is inherently passive -- her overriding instinct in moments of crisis is to wring her hands or fall into a fit -- Fanny actively participates in her world. Forced to flee her Wiltshire estate, Jong's heroine not only survives the rigors of life on the road, she actually thrives: joining in turn a coven of witches, a band of highwaymen, a slave ship crew, and a group of pirates.



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While Pamela mutely accepts the sexual stereotypes of her age, Fanny rails against them. For example, despite a mutinous response, Fanny insists that her fellow crew members insert a feminist clause into their pirate oath. As she adamantly insists, if these men wish for true equality, they must accord women "a Place both in your Hearts and in your sacred Articles!" (p. 436). It is difficult to imagine Pamela standing up to anyone (she consistently crumbles before Mr. B and Mrs. Jewkes), let alone a group of hardened buccaneers.

With its depiction of an independent heroine and concern for women's issues, *Fanny* also has strong ties to *Moll Flanders*. Like Defoe's novel, *Fanny* provides a gritty portrait of London life as it recounts the adventures of a cunning, capable woman who lives in a patriarchal society which exploits her sexuality. Driven to their profession by economic necessity, both Fanny and Moll are streetwise prostitutes whose courage and ambition are tempered by cynicism and common sense. Alienated and marginal, these women endure great hardships on their way to material and personal success. The two heroines even share similar life experiences. As orphaned children, both Moll and Fanny are taken in by wealthy families who initially treat them as daughters but whose male members eventually become their seducers. Subsequent shared experiences include a stint in the infamous Newgate prison, love affairs with highwaymen, and inadvertent incestuous encounters.

Despite these strong similarities, there are important

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differences between these two heroines. Not only do they have radically different views on children -- Moll has a tendency to treat her numerous offspring in a dismissive, often heartless manner while Fanny cherishes her only daughter -- Fanny is also considerably less materialistic than Moll. The most striking of these differences, however, is the attitude each heroine holds toward sex. While both are didactic works which explore the difficult condition of being a woman in a patriarchal society, *Fanny* depicts the sexual aspects of such a dilemma in a much more forceful manner. For example, consider the attitude towards "modesty" displayed in the following passages. First, the narrator of *Moll Flanders*:

All possible care, however, has been taken to give no lewd ideas, no immodest turns in the new dressing up of this story; no, not to the worst parts of her expressions. To this purpose some of the vicious part of her life, which could not be modestly told, is quite left out, and several other parts are very much shortened. What is left 'tis hoped will not offend the chastest reader or the modest hearer; and as the best use is made even of the worst story, the moral 'tis hoped will keep the reader serious, even where the story might incline him to be otherwise.<sup>7</sup>

Unlike Defoe's narrator, Fanny refuses to adapt her tale so as to not offend "the chastest reader or the modest hearer."

Note the similar phrasing:

All possible Care has been taken to give no deliberate Offense to Modesty or Chastity; yet the Author avows that Truth is a sterner Goddess than Modesty, and where there hath been made necessary a Choyce betwixt the Former and the Latter, the Latter hath, quite rightly, triumph'd. If some of the Episodes in the ensuing History offend the gentler Sensibilities of an Age less lusty than that which gave me birth, let the Reader put it down to the Excesses of my Epoch (pp. 17-8).

Though both heroines possess great candor, Fanny is considerably more explicit in her descriptions of sex. Whereas Moll opts for euphemisms such as "I by little and little yielded to everything, so that, in a word, he did what he pleased with me; I need say no more"<sup>8</sup>, Fanny offers intimate detail: "But I roll'd it in my Hands and then betwixt my Lips until 'twas hard enough to suck upon, and when 'twas slick with Spittle and firm enough for Use, I lifted my Bride's Finery and sat upon his Cock, teasing and turning in corkscrew Motions until he swoon'd with Pleasure and, i'faith, quite fainted away" (p. 243). Not only does she lack the chaste reticence of Moll, but Fanny also makes no pretense about taking pleasure in the sexual act. Describing the aftermath of her first sexual experience, she writes: "Enmesh'd, entwin'd in mutual Stickiness and Sweetness, we lay together dying of Love. The Ecstasy was mutual and compleat" (p. 51). Thus, while Moll draws the curtains of modesty, choosing to emphasize the consequences of her sexual activity, Fanny pulls the curtain aside to reveal the very activity itself.

Finally, although both *Moll Flanders* and *Fanny* close with the integration of a wayward whore within a structured social setting, they differ significantly in that Fanny, unlike Moll, chooses not to marry the man in her life. Deeming the institution of marriage "a Form of indentur'd Service," Fanny explains why she and Lancelot Robinson will never wed:

I'd be damn'd if I'd give a Man -- e'en a Man as loving as my Lancelot -- Pow'r o'er my Lands and Houses, Stocks

and Bonds! Lancelot might share all that I had, but under the Law, if I married him, he would have Title to all, not I; for thus were Wives treated under Britannia's Statutes. I was resolv'd, therefore, ne'er to marry (pp. 524-5).

In contrast to her predecessors Pamela Andrews and Moll Flanders, Fanny Hackabout-Jones is able to divorce sexuality from propriety. Moreover, in her willingness to forgo the socially sanctioned rite of marriage, Jong's heroine ignores societal pressures and sets her own terms.

While it implicitly rewrites aspects of *Pamela* and *Moll Flanders*, Fanny singles out John Cleland's *Fanny Hill* as its primary literary target. In fact, the ostensible reason for Fanny's writing this tale for her daughter Belinda (who has the same name as the heroine of "The Rape of the Lock") is so that she will not be deceived by the other "nauseously sugar'd" account of her life by the "dastardly" John Cleland. Her own cautionary memoir, Fanny tells Belinda, will address issues that the author of *Fanny Hill* misrepresented or failed to write about. Thus, Fanny's *retelling* of her life story is intended as a revision of the slanderously false version of her life recounted by Cleland.

Now the same age at which Fanny herself had been thrust into the world, Belinda is mature enough to hear of her mother's lively adventures. Because she wishes to enlighten her daughter about the ways in which her culture treats women, Fanny purports to provide absolute truthfulness in her narration:

If these Pages oft' tell of Debauchery and Vice, 'tis not in any wise because their Author wishes to condone Wickedness, but rather because Truth, Stark-Naked Truth, demands that she write with all possible Candour, so

that the Inheritor of this Testament shall learn how to avoid Wickedness or indeed transform it into Goodness (p. 17).

In this sentence Jong not only captures the disingenuous tone common to the early English novel; her heroine's use of "Truth, Stark-Naked Truth" also deliberately echoes words by Fanny Hill -- cited at the opening of this chapter -- and implicitly turns them to better purpose.

Yet, in spite of Fanny Hackabout-Jones's protestations, her account and that of Cleland's heroine share strong similarities. Public narratives of private character, both are scandalous memoirs which follow red-headed country girls from their forced departure from a rural estate, through their boisterous education in London brothels, to their eventual happiness. Like her namesake in *Fanny Hill*, Fanny Hackabout-Jones's sexual experience begins early in the tale. As an innocent seventeen-year-old virgin, she finds herself succumbing to the charming words and groping hands of her stepfather, Lord Bellars. Cleland's Fanny similarly begins her sexual adventures early, though in her case the exploring hands are female. What ensues in each case is an erotic *bildung* filled with explicit depictions of such traditionally taboo acts as group sex, sadism, bondage, and transvestism.

Although both novels are replete with sexual escapades, in each the narrator has a tendency to interrupt her erotic recitation with awkwardly placed asides. Recounting, in intimate detail, an impromptu waterside orgy, Fanny Hill stops to deliver the following address to her epistolary friend, "Madam":

At the same time, allow me to place you here an excuse I

am conscious of owing you, for having perhaps too much affected the figurative style; though surely it can pass no where more allowably than in a subject which is so properly the province of poetry; nay! is poetry itself, pregnant with every flower of imagination, and loving metaphors, even were not the natural expressions, for respects of fashion and sound necessarily forbid it.

Resuming now my history. . .<sup>9</sup>

Fanny Hackabout-Jones similarly interrupts her steamy adventures to expound upon an array of topics. For example, at the height of a ménage à trois with poetaster Ned Tunewell and chambermaid Polly Mudge, Fanny offers the following commentary:

Friends we may find, but also lose. Parents (and e'en Children) may perish before we have had full Measure of Sweetness and Instruction from 'em. Riches do not shelter us from Nightmares and Melancholick Humours. Fine Clothes do nothing to prevent the Decay of our Bodies. But Truth is e'er a Comfort to us -- e'en if it be Melancholick. I'faith, as it astonish'd me to find myself in am'rous Play so soon after the Heinous Murders of my dearest Friends, so 'twill doubtless astonish you, my dearest Reader and Daughter. But perhaps there shall come a Time in your own Life when you shall do some strange and unaccountable Thing for which you may feel unaccustom'd Self-Contempt and Guilt, and then I pray you will think of your own Poor Mother and recollect that she hath done the same; and perhaps that will be some solace to you (p. 112).

In both novels, this sandwiching of moral asides between titillating descriptions has a similarly incongruous effect. However, while Fanny Hill's interruptions are as naive as they are self-indulgent, there is a knowing, self-conscious quality about those of Fanny Hackabout-Jones. As the latter remarks at one point, "But enough of that. Why interrupt my Tale with still another inflaming Love Scene, as if I were Mr. Cleland himself?" (pp. 239-40).

Perhaps the most significant change that Jong makes to



Cleland's model is to provide her heroine with a fully developed intellect. In contrast to Fanny Hill, Fanny Hackabout-Jones is accomplished beyond the boudoir, possessing a lively, inquisitive mind as well as a shapely body. Familiar with contemporary philosophy and well-versed in the classics, she fills her narrative with numerous literary allusions (Shakespeare and Milton being particular favorites) as well as a smattering of Latin phrases. A prodigious author, her range of works is vast: "I wrote Tragedies in Verse and Noble Epicks, Romances in the French Style and Maxims modell'd upon La Rochefoucauld's. I wrote Satyres and Sonnets, Odes and Pastorals, Eclogues and Epistles" (p. 314). Literary inclinations are not the only major difference between these two heroines, though, as Fanny Hackabout-Jones endures sadism and cruelty only as a means of saving herself and her daughter. This stands in sharp contrast to Fanny Hill, who often relishes the erotic humiliation she undergoes. Once, after being bound, gagged, and whipped so hard that blood is drawn, Cleland's heroine, seeing the arousing effect it has on her punisher, finds herself "charg'd brimful of the most intense desire" and eager to please. Despite her pain and "stinging-mad" anger, nothing can deter the ever-acquiescent Fanny Hill from fulfilling her role as a contented sex-object of men. On the other hand, when the sadistic Captain Whitehead strips, manacles, and flogs Fanny Hackabout-Jones, the experience is one of "horrible pain" and debasement, not arousal.

This difference in presentation points to one of Jong's

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principal intentions in *Fanny*: to expose the false eroticism of Cleland's sexual fantasies and the insidious ways in which he idealizes prostitution. As Fanny angrily remarks, Cleland's portrait of Fanny Hill "leaves the World to think that the Whore's Life is nought but a Bed of Roses. Of Clap, Consumption, the Evils of Drink, Death in Childbed. . . . , he hath Nought to say" (p. 240). Jong counters Cleland's tendency to fetishize women by offering the firsthand exploits of a woman who is intellectually as well as sexually sophisticated. Unlike Fanny Hill, who merely repeats her various sexual encounters without reflection, Fanny Hackabout-Jones is able to draw knowledge from her exploits. We see this most strikingly in her ongoing commentaries concerning the often close connections between prostitution and marriage: "And so I account my Whoring more honest than the common State of Matrimony, wherein the Wife is sold to her Husband in exchange for Land to be added to the Father's Holdings and reaps the Benefit of High Life from the Rental of her Flesh in the Merchant's Shop of the Matrimonial Bed!" (p. 223).

Both Cleland and Jong are fond of using double-entendres and loaded metaphors, often describing sexual organs in a witty, inventive manner. In *Fanny*, however, Jong's heroine deliberately mocks the phallocentrism of Cleland's lavish descriptions. For instance, while the author of *Fanny Hill* unabashedly uses such euphemisms as "grand movement," "pride of nature," and "master member of the revels" to describe the penis, Jong ironically undercuts Cleland's phallic

aggrandizement:

Doth he call it a Batt'ring-Piece? Well then, he will probably lye with you that way. Doth he call it a Bauble? He is probably vain of his Wigs and Waistcoats as well. Doth he call it a dirk? He is surely a Scotsman, and gloomy 'neath his drunken bravado. Doth he call it a Flip-Flap? Well then, be advis'd: you will have to work very hard to make it stand (and once standing, 'twill wish for nothing but to lye down again). Doth he call it a Lance-of-Love? Doubtless, he writes dreadful Verses, too. Nor is a Man's estimation of his own Privy Member necessarily infallible. The Politician who boasts of his Member-for-Cockshire, the Butcher who praises his Skewer, the Poet who prates of his Picklock, the Actor who loves his Lollipop, the Footman who boasts of his Ramrod, the Parson who praises his Pillicock, the Archer who aims his Love-Dart, the Sea Captain who adores his own Rudder -- none of these Men, howsoe'er lively their Mental Parts, is to be trusted upon his own Estimation of his Prowess in the Arts (and Wars) of Love! (pp. 41-2).

Cleland has a penchant for matching a man's profession with a corresponding name for his sexual organ (for instance, a young farmer's erection is deemed his "may pole") and in the preceding passage Jong parodically treats this tendency. In addition to Jong's satirizing of Cleland's machismo -- the author himself is depicted as an "indiff'rently endow'd" cross-dresser -- what we also see in *Fanny* is a conscious attempt to surpass Cleland's creative and abundant use of sexual terminology. Witness, for example, Lancelot's lengthy, highly literate and alphabetical catalog of names for female genitalia:

O 'tis the Aunt, the Arbor, the Attick, the Bath o' Birth, the *Belle Chose*, the Best-Worst Part (accordin' to Mr. Donne), the Bit o' Fish or the Bit o' Mutton (dependin' on whether ye are a Meat-Eater or no), the Bottomless Pit, the Bow'r o' Bliss, the Brown Madam. 'Tis likewise the Earl o' Rochester's Bull's Eye, an' Shakespeare's Circle (the little o to his great wooden one). 'Tis Cock-Alley an' also the Confessional; 'tis the Crack, the Cranny, the Cradle, the Cream-Jug, the Cuckoo's Nest, the Cuntkin, an' also Cupid's Alley. 'Tis

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the Dearest Bodily Part (at least to Mr. Shakespeare o' Stratford); an' some have call'd it Diddly-Pont, Doodle-Case, Dormouse, Duck-Pond, Dumb-Oracle, e'en Dyke. 'Tis the sweet Et Cetera, the E'erlastin' Wound, the Eye that Weeps Most when Best Pleas'd, the Faucet, the Fiddle, the Flapdoodle, the Fly-Trap, the Fortress, the Fountain o' Love, the Funniment, the Furrow, the Gap, an' o' course the Garden o' Eden. 'Tis a Gravity-Giver, a Gold-Finch's Nest, a Grotto, a Grove o' Eglatine (at least so it seems to Mr. Carew), an' also Safe Harbour an' Happy Huntin' Grounds. 'Tis the House under the Hill and the Ivory Gate an' e'en Itchin' Jenny! 'Tis the Jacob's Ladder, the Jampott, the Jelly-Bag, an' the Jewel o' Jewels! 'Tis a Kitty an' a Kitchen an' a Kettle. 'Tis a Lather-Maker, a Lamp o' Love, a Little Sister, a Lock o' all Locks, a Lucky-Bag, a Maryjane, a Masterpiece, a Milkpail, a Moneybox, a Mole-Catcher, an' e'en Molly's Hole. 'Tis a Mossy Bank, a Thankless Mouth, a Mustard Pott, a Mutton Roast, a Needle Case, a Nether Eye (to Mr. Geoffrey Chaucer), an' a Nether Lip as well! 'Tis a Nest, a Niche, an Old Hat, an Omnibus, an Oyster, a Palace o' Pleasure, a Peculiar River, an' also a Pen-Wiper (if ye scribble verses, that is). 'Tis at once a Pleasure-Boat an' a Plum Tree, a Portal to the Bower o' Bliss (or so says Mr. Herrick) an' a Pulpit, a Purse, a Pussy-Cat. 'Tis the very Queen o' Holes, the Quim, an' the Queynte. 'Tis also the Ring, the Rose, an' the Rufus. 'Tis the Saddle to ride in, a Seed Plot to hide in, a Scabbard, an' a very Seminary o' Love. 'Tis a Slipper, a Slot, a Slit, a Snatch-Box an' a Socket. By Jove, 'tis the South Pole, the Sperm-Sucker, the Split Fig, the Spot o' Cupid's Archery, the Sugar-Bason, an' the Temple o' Venus! 'Tis also the Tit-Mouse an' the Tool-Chest an' also the Treasury o' Love. 'Tis the Underworld an' also the Undertaker. 'Tis the Vineyard an' the Vestry. 'Tis the very Water-Gate o' Life, the Wicket, an' also the Workshop. 'Tis the Yoni o' the East Indies an' the Passion Fruit o' the West Indies (pp. 127-8).

This impressive litany of terms easily surpasses Cleland's fifty-odd metaphors for male genitalia. Exhaustive and, indeed, exhausting, Lancelot's esoteric listing of sexual slang no doubt alludes to Henry Burlingame's "Pandect of Geminology" in *The Sot-Weed Factor*. Nor is this propensity for cataloging an isolated trait as within the first two pages of the novel Jong also lists over fifty terms for

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prostitute, a set-piece undoubtedly meant to echo the "whore exchange" in Barth's novel. Indeed, as in *The Sot-Weed Factor*, such enumeration showcases the authors' range of knowledge and is part of their self-conscious display of their works as a literary performances.

Of equal, if not greater importance to this sense of performance is the elaborate language of Jong's novel. In the afterword to *Fanny*, Jong speaks of having "impersonated Fanny Hackabout-Jones for 527 pages" (p. 531), and this notion of impersonation is similar to Barth's concept of "perpetrating" in *The Sot-Weed Factor*.<sup>10</sup> That is, for both Jong and Barth the author acts as a literary ventriloquist, proposing not only to write about the Augustan age, but to do so as an eighteenth-century novelist. Integral to accomplishing this is the novel's language and, in a manner also reminiscent of *The Sot-Weed Factor*, *Fanny* reproduces its own pseudo-authentic eighteenth-century prose:

I rode into the Courtyard, inquir'd of the Landlord whether there was room or no, and being told that I might share a Room with another fine Fellow, I accepted in a trice, praying only to fall into Bed in my Breeches and collapse into the Sleep of the Dead. I almost wisht ne'er to awaken (p. 103).

More than merely honoring the eighteenth-century capitalization of nouns and other matters of punctuation, restoring the second person singular, and sprinkling her dialogue with tags like "prithee," "i' faith," and "marry come up," Jong's anachronistic language also captures the balance and aphoristic quality of Augustan language, "'Tis neither Rude Excrescence nor Gothick Error; 'tis neither too



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Jong's recreated language also resembles that of Barth's in *The Sot-Weed Factor* in that it is an essentially hybrid form that combines aspects from both the eighteenth and twentieth century. As Jong explained to Jean W. Ross, she was attempting to create in *Fanny* "a language that wasn't Fielding or Swift or Smollett, that had its own sound and evoked the 18th century and the balance and antithesis of the sentences . . . . I had to go back to that rhythm of language of a generation trained on the classics, on Horace and Catullus, and find a sentence that sounded 18th century and yet was not a turn-off for the modern reader, that was fun to read and pulled you along."<sup>11</sup> In spite of their linguistic differences (Jong's is a more poeticized language than Barth's), both novelists demonstrate that a mode of English no longer in use is still capable of expressing modern sensibilities.

#### Fanny as a Feminist Text

As we saw earlier, at the very beginning of her tale Fanny points out that her story will be unlike those of such previous fictional heroines as Pamela Andrews, Moll Flanders, and Fanny Hill. By distinguishing herself from these figures, Fanny not only exhibits an acute awareness of being part of a literary tradition; she also clearly articulates where she sees herself standing with respect to such a

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tradition. As she notes, Samuel Richardson, Daniel Defoe, and John Cleland have failed to create viable female figures because "either they prate of Female 'Vartue,' a Luxury which few Women can afford, and only the dullest and most witless can tolerate, or they condemn Female Vice in such Terms that upon reading these Male Authors, any spirited Young Woman should resolve to slit her throat" (p. 18). Not a single eighteenth-century novel, Jong's heroine laments, captures the inherently various nature of women. Pamela Andrews is too good, Moll Flanders is too wicked, even *Fanny Hill*, purportedly a woman's tale, is told from a phallogocentric perspective. None of these works depicts women as they truly exist, as a mixture of "Sweets and Bitters:" multi-dimensional beings who are neither obsessed with preserving their virtue nor utterly abandoned to vice. Thus, while Fanny proposes to set down her own tale, Jong in allowing her to do so simultaneously presents a truthful, modern portrait of a viable, fully human heroine.

*Fanny: Being the True History of the Adventures of Fanny Hackabout-Jones* reveals and celebrates those feminine experiences that Jong views as falsely represented by such novels as *Pamela*, *Moll Flanders*, and *Fanny Hill* -- male-authored works which, as Nancy K. Miller argues, "predicate the primacy of female experience and thus pose as feminocentric writing," but which are "neither female in impulse or origin, nor feminist in spirit."<sup>12</sup> In contrast to the novels of Richardson, Defoe, and Cleland, *Fanny* is a truly feminocentric work. Jong's novel, explicitly in its

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depiction of Fanny Hackabout-Jones as well as implicitly in its reconceptualization of the female novel of development and its feminization of the picaresque tradition, deliberately puts at its center the disruptive spectacle of a woman's desire.

Just as her "true history" seeks to dispel the feminine ideal presented by "female impersonators"<sup>13</sup> such as Defoe and Richardson, so too do the actions of Jong's heroine run counter to societal expectations. Near the close of Book II, after having endured the rape and stinging betrayal by Lord Bellars and the daily debasement of life as a London prostitute, Fanny remarks:

I had oft' wisht to be born a Man; 'twas clear as Crystal that a Man's Lot was easier than a Woman's. Yet I felt a certain grand Defiance, too, in having been born in Woman's Form, and making my Way despite all the Impediments that Man had placed for me to stumble o'er (p. 303).

Unlike the typical eighteenth-century heroine, who meekly accepts her lot in life, Fanny defiantly asserts her individuality in a society which deliberately impedes female initiative. A woman of action, she is able to overcome the enormous disadvantages of being poor, orphaned, and female by using her physical and intellectual gifts as instruments of power. Jong has stated that her heroines are "always looking for wholeness and integration in a society where women are not allowed to be bodies and brains both."<sup>14</sup> In *Fanny* we see her creating a figure who successfully unites the two. It is this capacity to be "bodies and brains both" that sets Fanny apart from her female predecessors and allows her to refute

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the eighteenth-century myth of women as passive, innocent, and naive.

Another quality that distinguishes Fanny from earlier heroines is her pursuit of literary fame. As a child, she dreams of becoming "a Famous Scribbler," possibly even England's first female poet laureate. However, despite her gifts as a writer, Fanny's culture has difficulty accepting a woman with literary aspirations. For example, although her epic *The Pyradiad* is initially well-received, when it is learned that "Captain F. Jones" is actually a woman, the response is one of disbelief. As Fanny notes during her audience with the King of England:

but now that I was seen to be a Woman, the King Himself was quite amaz'd that I should know a Foresail from a Mizzenroyal, a Bowsprit from a Boom! 'Twas suddenly as if I had become the Village Idiot who writes, by chance a clever Couplet; or a Babe that babbles, by mistake, a Latin Word! (p. 524).

Prior to her journey to London, Alexander Pope had scoffed at young Fanny's desire to write poetry, reminding her: "Men are Poets; Women are meant to be their Muses upon Earth. You are the Inspiration of Poems, not the Creator of Poems" (p. 43). By demonstrating how her heroine's subsequent literary success belies these sexist responses, Jong adopts one of her favorite strategies: undermining female stereotypes by inverting male-oriented concepts of women.

While Fanny's defiant, non-conformist behavior and literary ambitions are essential to Jong's depiction of her as a figure of strength, the most fundamental way in which the novelist asserts her heroine's power is by having Fanny tell her own story. In contrast to Defoe's novel, in which



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the heroine's text is revised by an authorial figure, and unlike the novels of Richardson and Cleland, where the voice of each heroine is filtered through a male authorial consciousness, the discourse of *Fanny* is doubly femino-centric: a feminist author creating a proto-feminist narrator-heroine. Furthermore, because Fanny occupies the privileged position of speaker, she is able to refute convincingly two earlier versions of her life, Cleland's highly idealized *Fanny Hill* and Hogarth's overly pessimistic "A Harlot's Progress." By inscribing herself as the "true" heroine of her own life's story, Fanny thus bestows upon herself a dignity and credibility denied her by previous, male-authored accounts.

According to Elaine Showalter, the female novelist of the late twentieth century has two literary lineages from which to draw: "If a man's text, as Bloom and Edward Said have maintained, is fathered," Showalter argues, "then a woman's text is not only mothered but parented; it confronts both the paternal and maternal precursors and must deal with the problems and advantages of both lines of inheritance."<sup>15</sup> In the case of *Fanny*, the male line, represented by such figures as Richardson, Defoe, and Cleland, is a visible, prominent presence and in her novel Jong confronts these authors, either by directly attacking their sexism or by implicitly exposing their false femino-centrism. Jong's response to her matrilineal line, however, is subtler and less antagonistic. It remains equally revisionary, however, as Jong goes back in time to retrieve and reconceptualize the

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eighteenth-century female novel of development. She accomplishes this in three principal ways: by introducing female sexuality to the novel, by championing the importance of the mother-daughter relationship, and by taking the novel as a literary form out of its traditional literary setting.

In writing a book concerning a young woman's coming of age, Jong places her novel within a venerable tradition for the eighteenth-century female novelist. As Mitzi Myers points out, "At the heart of most late eighteenth-century women's fiction is, as in Fanny Burney's classic and much borrowed subtitle, 'the history of a young lady's entrance into the world.'"<sup>16</sup> Like Burney's trilogy of female *bildungsroman* -- *Evelina* (1778), *Cecelia* (1782), and *Camilla* (1796) -- *Fanny* depicts the importance of physical appearance to a woman moving in a social world and the difficulties often encountered by women of intelligence. Unlike these three novels, though, *Fanny* openly confronts the psycho-sexual problems associated with a young woman's maturation. While male authors such as Defoe and Cleland were able to introduce female sexuality into their works, it was unacceptable for the eighteenth-century female novelist to address sexual matters. As Dale Spender notes:

It might have been all right for a man to write bawdy, to present a tale about the sexual exploits of a hero; but it was a very different matter for a woman to write bawdy, to write about a young man's amorous adventures and escapades (young women, of course, not being allowed to have them). The response to the woman writer would be outrage; for her to know such things was to be condemned as a woman and, hence, as a writer.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, whereas the novels of Fanny Burney and other

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eighteenth-century female novelists merely allude to the psycho-sexual difficulties inherent in a young woman's coming of age, *Fanny* depicts, with Hogarthian vigor, the emotional and physical trauma which often accompanies such a process.

In fact, not only does Jong directly address the traditionally taboo subject of female sexual appetite, but she also creates a heroine who is unafraid to assert her sexuality. We see this most dramatically in *Fanny's* relentless pursuit of Lancelot Robinson, the bisexual leader of the Merry Men. So great is *Fanny's* attraction to Lancelot that, after months of unsuccessful wooing, she literally forces the highwayman to make love to her. Elsewhere, *Fanny* has satisfying sexual encounters with several of her clients at the brothel (notably William Hogarth), as well as an exciting interlude with the pirate queen Anne Bonny. By offering a healthy view of her heroine's sexuality, indeed her bisexuality, Jong counters the negative coding of female desire found in the works of such authors as Richardson, Defoe, and Cleland. That is, although these and other eighteenth-century novelists were fascinated by female sexuality, their literary stance was largely one of fear and ambivalence. According to Vivien Jones, throughout the literature of the period "Female sexuality is simultaneously and inseparably constructed as both natural and unnatural, and its potentially anarchic power contained by reducing it to the socially sanctioned duty of motherhood."<sup>18</sup>

While motherhood may have been a socially sanctioned duty during the Augustan period, there is a noticeable

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absence of admirable mothers depicted in British novels of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Remarks Mitzi Myers, "Indeed, it is a critical commonplace that 'women novelists of the period from Fanny Burney to Mrs. Gaskell and George Eliot create very few positive images of motherhood'; mothers in the period are 'usually bad and living, or good and dead.'"<sup>19</sup> Certainly, in the works under examination here, motherhood plays a very minor role. For example, Fanny Hill only briefly alludes to her "fine children" at the very close of her tale; while Moll Flanders cannot remember the age or even sex of some of her children. Such an absence of positive models stands in sharp contrast to the ways in which mothers are portrayed in *Fanny*.

Motherhood and its attendant feelings are essential aspects of Jong's novel: *Fanny* abounds in lengthy descriptions of the emotional and even obstetrical aspects of maternity. Indeed, in many respects *Fanny* is a tribute to the unique bond between mother and daughter. Witness, for example, the joyous feeling of unity Fanny experiences as she nurses Belinda:

At length, when the little Creature attaches its tiny determin'd Mouth to our waiting Breast, we are wholly won o'er: the Mother and the Babe become once more one Being, breathing in Tune with the Great Breath of Life, with a Mouth whose Motions are not learnt but quite inborn, and strong as the Pulse of Nature itself (p. 346).

Although she achieves financial as well as literary success, Fanny is most fulfilled by having a daughter, even one who is the product of an incestuous rape. Moreover, the heroine herself benefits from maternal wisdom in the form of advice



from her own mother, Isobel White. As Mary Anne Ferguson contends, "Fanny counters Freud's claim that women never achieve moral autonomy because they never fully separate from their mothers." She adds, "Jong reverses this view by showing Fanny, originally a motherless foundling thrust into the world alone, as surviving because of her mother's aid and because of her identification with her mother."<sup>20</sup> Just as her mother had provided her with invaluable support, so too does Fanny ease the way for her own daughter's initiation into adulthood. Thus, motherhood is depicted as an ongoing cycle in which, as Fanny puts it, "To be a Mother is but half of our Fate; to bear one is the other " (p. 441).

The final way in which Jong reconceptualizes the traditional female *bildungsroman* is by taking the form out of its usual domestic setting and putting her heroine on the road. According to Ferguson:

The pattern for the female novel of development has been largely circular, rather than spiral: women in fiction remain at home. Instead of testing their self-image through adventures in the world, they are initiated at home through learning the rituals of human relationships, so that they may replicate the lives of their mothers.<sup>21</sup>

In *Fanny* Jong breaks with this pattern by having her heroine leave Lymeworth and venture forth into the world. Although she does eventually return home, Fanny first tests herself through a wide-ranging series of adventures. Furthermore, by allowing her heroine to have sexual experiences as part of her maturation process, Jong's *bildungsroman* takes on the characteristic elements of another literary genre, the picaresque.

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*In Rogue's Progress: Studies in the Picaresque Novel*

Robert Alter describes the general picaresque experience as follows:

A passionate but honorable young man is unjustly banished from the family estate. He takes to the road, where he is soon joined by a Sancho-like companion (in both cases, a Latin-quoting barber). In the role of vagabond, the hero wanders through all sorts of low life and, eventually, high life as well. We follow him on the familiar picaresque passage in and out of the clutches of thieving innkeepers, the arms of wanton females, the grip of prison doors. His often-professed devotion to his beloved does not deflect him from a career of adventure, for his story is oriented toward action, and neither he nor the characters that people his world possess any real quality of innerness. The hero's way leads from country to city, from relative rural simplicity to the sphere of refined corruption. In the end he emerges unscathed to marry his heart's choice, receive his withheld patrimony, and return to the country to settle down on the land of his ancestors.<sup>22</sup>

With minor variations (Fanny has no Sancho-like companion), the typical male picaresque progress strongly recalls that of Jong's heroine. Moreover, Fanny resembles the traditional picaresque hero in several fundamental respects. First, chance or circumstance has dealt her a difficult hand. As Fanny laments early in the novel, "Orphan'd, female, and a secret Scribbler -- what worse might the Fates bestow" (p. 32). Second, as a result of her fate, she struggles to survive on the margins of society. In Fanny's case, this involves enduring the outcast life of a prostitute. Nevertheless, in true picaresque fashion, she becomes a quick-change artist whose innate resourcefulness allows her to move in the world with relative ease. Finally, given her outsider status, Fanny is able to see the hypocrisy of

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"proper" society. As Alter notes:

The picaroon is an individual who does not act according to 'official' morality because, observing how such morality is more frequently preached than practiced, he realizes that he must ignore much of it in order to get along in the world. Since he has no set place in society and is not committed to the established order, he is free from the tribute of lip service to conventional morality which most people feel is exacted from them. He can call a thief a thief and a whore a whore, even when he is the thief or his wife is the whore.<sup>23</sup>

Like Moll Flanders before her, Fanny possesses the ability to look at her society in a critical, candid manner. She is particularly astute when it comes to recognizing society's unequal treatment of women:

To dress as a Boy gave one Privileges no Woman could e'er possess: first, the Privilege of being left in Peace (except by Robbers, who prey'd almost equally upon both Sexes); second, the very substantial Privilege of Dining where'er one wisht without being presum'd a Trollop; third, the Privilege of moving freely thro' the World, without the Restraints of Stays, Petticoats, Hoops, and the like. For I had form'd the Theory that Women should ne'er be entirely free to possess their own Souls until they could ride about the World as unencumber'd as possible. The Hoop Skirt, I reasoned, was an Instrument of Imprisonment. I might shudder with Horror at the Idea of the legendary Amazons cutting off one Breast, but sure I could not but understand their Motives (p. 63).

Social analyses such as these are given greater weight by Fanny's marginalized position. Having long been on the receiving end of abuse, she is well-equipped to comment upon cultural biases.

While adopting conventional elements from the eighteenth-century picaresque novel, Jong reshapes this genre by employing gendered themes and narrative strategies as a means of bringing a female viewpoint to a genre historically

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encoded as masculine. In addition, by reversing the sex of the knave-hero, Jong not only offers a feminist version of the form, she also expresses the phallogentric bias inherent in most generic conventions. "'Gender' and 'genre' are frequently paired words in the feminist critique," K.K. Ruthven argues, "and are encountered most often in connection with the complaint that women have at their disposal far fewer of the traditional literary genres than men have always had, and continue to have."<sup>24</sup> Jong clearly concurs with Ruthven's assertion, and in *Fanny* we see what happens when the picaresque, a genre traditionally associated with men, is appropriated by a woman.

Jong calls *Fanny* "the most radical book I have written"<sup>25</sup> and, indeed, her treatment of the eighteenth-century picaresque significantly alters this still on-going genre. For instance, while her novel adopts the picaresque penchant for emphasizing violence and cruelty, for Jong's protagonist these cruelties focus specifically on dangers to women, including as they do rape, domestic abuse, and the dangers of childbirth. As *Fanny* notes, "'Tis easier for a man to believe in the Nobility of his Destiny than for a Woman; the Fair Sex faces so many Obstacles, not the least of which are: Whoredom, Motherhood, and the Distractions of Love" (p. 415). Moreover, in Jong's rewriting of picaresque tradition women are not passive beauties or the willing pawns of men; instead they are healers, bandits, pirates, even writers.

It is important to recognize that by employing the

picaresque form Jong provides her heroine with a mode of literary expression that would have been unavailable to her in the eighteenth century. That is, although women wrote the majority of novels published during the period,<sup>26</sup> their literary options were extremely limited. "There were two main themes open to the woman novelists of the eighteenth century," explains Eva Figes, "and they were like different sides of the same coin: the conduct-in-courtship novel, and the novel of misconduct, of seduction, betrayal and ruin. One was an exemplar for young ladies to follow, the other a dreadful warning."<sup>27</sup> Thus, although the novel was widely recognized as "the woman's form" during the eighteenth century, the picaresque genre was off-limits to the female novelist. Remarks Figes:

The dominant male novel form during the eighteenth century was the picaresque, and its most successful exponents were Fielding and Smollett. Now, clearly, for both practical and moral reasons, the picaresque form was quite unsuitable for women writers. It was quite unthinkable for young ladies, and therefore young heroines, to wander about the countryside having bawdy adventures, or indeed, adventures of any kind. It might be desirable for young heroes to show their mettle by getting into scrapes and sowing a few wild oats amongst serving wenches and bawds, but it certainly would not do for young heroines, for whom ignorance was usually equated with innocence, and who never stepped beyond the threshold without being carefully chaperoned.<sup>28</sup>

To provide a woman with adventures was essentially to make her an unfit heroine of her time. "In the eighteenth century," claims Jane Spencer, "the very word *adventure* in connection with a woman implies a loss of virtue. . . . [The] ideal woman in eighteenth-century society is the woman about



whom there is nothing to say. . . . Any woman whose life is eventful enough to be the subject of romance has compromised feminine virtue."<sup>29</sup> *Fanny*, then, deliberately goes against eighteenth-century novelistic convention by depicting a heroine who compromises feminine virtue yet still manages to achieve happiness. Jong's novel further revises the picaresque tradition by creating a protagonist whose full realization stands in sharp contrast to the one-dimensionality of traditional picaresque heroes. Because the picaresque is oriented toward action, neither the hero nor the characters who people his world possess, in Robert Alter's phrase, "any real quality of innerness." While *Fanny* shares the picaresque's orientation toward action, it nonetheless offers a protagonist who possesses considerable inner complexity and depth. Finally, in what is her most radical break with literary tradition, Jong creates a heroine who freely adopts the male picaresque prerogatives of traveling, fighting, and copulating. In *Fanny* we thus witness Jong undertaking two related tasks: deconstructing the male-dominated picaresque genre and reconstructing the genre from a decidedly woman-centered perspective. What ensues is a unique literary form which unites the female-dominated tradition of "a young woman's entrance into the world" with the male-dominated tradition of the picaresque.

Fanny and History

Like *The Sot-Weed Factor* and other works of historiographic metafiction, *Fanny* adopts a skeptical stance toward recorded history, extrapolating from and embellishing upon what is known in order to create, *not* recreate, an historical past. Moreover, because her "true history" attempts to correct past representations, Jong is neither nostalgic nor sentimental in her treatment of either history or literature. To further complicate matters further, as a mock-memoir *Fanny* also raises important questions concerning the veracity of personal accounts. As Fanny Hackabout-Jones notes in the novel's closing paragraphs:

For was not my *authentick* History as stirring as Fanny Hill's, or Pamela's, or e'en that of Tom Jones? Orphan, Whore, Adventuress, Kept Woman, Slaver, Amanuensis, Witch, e'en a pardon'd Pyrate! By the Goddess, 'twas my own Life History that made a better History than any *fancied* History (p. 527).

Like Barth in *The Sot-Weed Factor*, Jong is not above willfully blurring the lines between authenticity and fancy in order to suit her novel's satirical intentions. For instance, while her sketch of Jonathan Swift accurately brings in such details of the writer's life as his *ménière's* disease, journalistic career, and relationship with Stella, it is doubtful whether the Dean's well-known love for horses ever extended to the bestiality that Jong depicts. Nor is Swift the only well-known literary figure demystified in *Fanny* since the heroine's tenure at a London brothel allows her to speak intimately about the sexual foibles of such luminaries as Alexander Pope (who suffers from premature

ejaculation), Theophilous Cibber (who is fond of bondage), and John Cleland (who favors women's clothing). Elsewhere, the novel reimagines certain literary events by Fanny's claiming to have played the muse to these and other men. In addition to her declaration that she is the true inspiration for Cleland's *Fanny Hill*, Fanny also takes full credit for inspiring Hogarth's "A Harlot's Progress": "E'en the name of his Trollop (which many assum'd was inspir'd by Francis Hackabout, the notorious hang'd Highwayman, or Katherine Hackabout, his hapless whoring Sister), was, in fact, inspir'd by my Tales to him (whilst posing in the nude) of my Travels with the Merry Men and Lancelot's naming me in accordance with my Fortunes!" (p. 240).

It is important to recognize that this revisionist stance toward literary history is not an isolated one in Jong's career. For example, her master's thesis at Columbia University suggested that in writing "Epistle from Eloisa to Abelard" Pope viewed himself through Eloisa's persona and that he subconsciously equated his physical disability as a hunchback with Eloisa's social limitations as a woman. More recently, in the 1987 novel *Serenissima*,<sup>30</sup> Jong's protagonist believes herself to be the inspiration for William Shakespeare's Dark Lady, even purporting to have coined some of the sequence's best-known lines. To conflate historical record and literary embellishment as she repeatedly does is perfectly acceptable to Jong because, as the author acknowledges in speaking about *Fanny*, hers is an aesthetic, and not specifically historical, undertaking: "I hope this

novel is true to the spirit, if not the letter, of the eighteenth century, for I am well aware that I have often stretched (though not I hope shattered) historical 'truth' in order to make a more amusing tale" (534). In spite of Jong's glib response, this rewriting of literary history is not simply expressive of a wish to create amusement, it is also an essential component of the author's more ambitious strategy for bringing a decidedly woman-centered view of the past to her novel.

As Barth does in *The Sot-Weed Factor*, Jong in *Fanny* supplies her recreation of eighteenth-century life with a wealth of period detail, quoting from the advertising sections of *The Daily Courant* and other "News-sheets," using "Dead Swag," "Bridle-Cull," and other slang terminology, and providing descriptions of the food, clothing, and cosmetics of the time. In fact, to an even greater degree than *The Sot-Weed Factor*, *Fanny* imaginatively reconstructs the textures of everyday life during the Augustan period, demonstrating at times a Swiftian relish for recounting the filth and danger of urban existence. Regard the following evocation of the smells, sights, and sounds of mid-century London:

The Streets were ill-pav'd and filthy with Offal of ev'ry sort. In the Kennels which ran down the mucky Centres of the Streets, one saw Fish Heads, Orange Rinds, Human Wastes -- e'en dead Cats! The Air above was as smoky here as it had been fresh and clear upon the River; and one hardly dar'd look up o'erhead at the Profusion of creaking Sign Boards, hung upon ornamental iron Brackets, which sway'd in the Wind like hang's Men, and obstructed whate'er Light and Air there might be, especially upon the narrowest streets. . . . Chairs, Horsemen, and Hackney Coaches jostl'd for place in the Streets, and the poor Pedestrian darted where'er he

could. 'Make way there!' the Chairmen cried, carrying their noble Passengers above the clamouring Throng. 'Stand up there, ye blind Dog!' the Fruit Peddlars would scream, as they pusht their heap'd Barrows of Fruit, halo'd with Flies (pp. 173-4).

Jong populates this vividly sketched landscape with character types from the full range of society, including rope dancers, jugglers, actors, pickpockets, pimps, prostitutes, blacksmiths, moneylenders, shopkeepers, artisans, and aristocrats. Nor is the author's evocation of the Augustan age confined to the realm of physical and material life. In addition to its ongoing allusions to one of the popular philosophical disputes of the time -- between Bernard Mandeville's theory of self-interest and the Earl of Shaftesbury's concept of social benevolism -- *Fanny* also touches upon such other topical issues as Locke's *tabula rasa*, Hobbes's theory of self-preservation, the Great Chain of Being, and the debate between art and nature as it applies to landscaping.

What sets *Fanny* apart from *The Sot-Weed Factor* as well as from those novels by her eighteenth-century male predecessors, is that Jong's novel illuminates an area unaccounted for in previous works: the actual, complex living conditions of women in the eighteenth century. For example, during the course of the novel we learn of such rarely documented subjects as women's precarious legal status in the household, the limited educational and occupational opportunities available to women, and the misogyny of the medical profession. Through *Fanny's* experiences, we are provided with detailed information about abortion techniques,

methods of birth control, the dangers of childbirth and swaddling, marital abuse and other, more subtle forms of sexual harassment. By accurately recreating what life was like for women during the Augustan period, Jong is both discovering and recovering feminine experience. Explains Gerda Lerner:

Women have been left out of history not because of the evil conspiracies of men in general or male historians in particular, but because we have considered history only in male-centered terms. We have missed women and their activities, because we have asked questions of history which are inappropriate to women. To rectify this, and to light up areas of historical darkness, we must, for a time, focus on *woman-centered* inquiry, considering the possibility of the existence of a female culture *within* the general culture shared by men and women. History must include an account of the female experience over time and should include the development of feminist consciousness as an essential aspect of women's past. This is the primary task of women's history. The central question it raises is: What would history be like if it were seen through the eyes of women and ordered by values they define?<sup>31</sup>

In answering the question "What if Tom Jones had been a woman?," Jong's novel fulfills "the primary task of women's history," and by presenting a "woman-centered" view of the eighteenth century, Jong's restorative task resembles that of historians of the history of women. Yet, although she seeks to reveal what has been marginalized and even silenced by traditional historical accounts, Jong does not wish to replace these accounts with her own versions of events. As Lerner argues: "Merely to substitute women's history for 'mainstream history' is to perpetuate the terms and categories which have kept women subordinate. What is needed is a more inclusive notion of history which is based on the

recognition that women have always been essential to the making of history and that *men and women* are the measure of significance."<sup>32</sup> In *Fanny* we see the beginnings of such an inclusive vision of the past.

Indeed, for all its overtly feminist themes, it is important to recognize that *Fanny* is not an exclusively feminist work, but one which calls for general acceptance. Without question, the novel celebrates the past accomplishments of one remarkable woman, but it does not do so entirely at the expense of men. *Libertalia*, the utopia *Fanny* establishes at Lymeworth, is for all people, not just women. According to Benjamin Franklin V, Jong's work "illustrates women's victory and that instead of flaunting their success and subduing men, women and men should work together and bolster each other."<sup>33</sup> As she has reiterated in a number of interviews,<sup>34</sup> Jong believes that the war between the sexes is unnecessarily limiting for both and sees women's past struggles and development as a source of liberation for all. Lois Gordon argues that "Although [Jong] has aligned herself with the feminist movement," her fiction "goes beyond the dilemma of being a woman in a male-dominated world . . . . to the ubiquitous need for human completeness in a fiercely hostile social and cosmic world."<sup>35</sup> Thus, by viewing *Fanny* solely as a work which focuses on the achievements of eighteenth-century women, one limits the novel's concern for a fiction (and a world) where human desire is not deformed by the constraints of power and gender.

Fanny and the Canon

By going back to the eighteenth-century novel in *Fanny*, Jong makes, as Barth puts it regarding *The Sot-Weed Factor*, "an end run around Flaubert and the modernist novel."<sup>36</sup> In other words, like Barth, Jong deliberately glides over the fiction of the nineteenth century. Her reasons for doing so are both reformatory and restorative. As Anthony Burgess explains, setting her novel in the eighteenth century provides Jong with the opportunity to correct a literary imbalance by filling a void in the existing canon. Arguing that the novelist's writing of *Fanny* is essentially an act of literary retrieval, Burgess notes:

A few critics will condemn what she has done because the writing of 18th-century literature is the task of 18th-century men and possibly women, and there is nothing to add to what, by its nature, has already been completed. There are answers to that. The romantic movement began with a pastiche of the past -- the Rowley and Macpherson fabrications -- but also with *The Ancient Mariner*, which used the vocabulary and metric of the old ballads. Most of our best-selling novelists write, because they know no better, in a calcified Victorian style. But Bernard Malamud, with *The Fixer*, wrote a 19th-century Russian novel that literature needed, and Ms. Jong may be said to have filled a gap in the great tradition of the picaresque novel.<sup>37</sup>

In its positing of a heroine who undergoes experiences akin to those of the typical picaresque hero, *Fanny* successfully fills the gap Burgess speaks of. Furthermore, by rewriting the genre from a woman-centered perspective, Jong not only critiques long-standing literary and cultural stereotypes; she also offers a constructive response to such misogyny. "In a literary tradition in which there are few recognized



women writers," maintains Adrienne Munich, "feminist critics assert their power rather than their victimhood by revising traditional wisdom and altering the meaning of the canon."<sup>38</sup> As we have seen, *Fanny* offers ample evidence that Jong, through her reconceptualization of the female *bildungsroman* and her feminization of the eighteenth-century picaresque novel, has altered the meaning of the canon. According to Sandra Gilbert, this tendency towards canon revision is endemic to feminist critics. She adds, "I should note here, incidentally, that words beginning with the prefix *re-* have lately become prominent in the language of feminist humanists, all of whom feel that, if feminism and humanism are not to be mutually contradictory terms, we must return to the history of what is called Western culture and reinterpret its central texts."<sup>39</sup> In *Fanny* we witness Jong returning to and critically reinterpreting several of Western culture's central texts, namely the works of those men considered "the fathers" of the English novel.

Highly polemical, *Fanny* exposes the flaws and inconsistencies of a patriarchal canon, questioning its adequacy because it lacks genuine female voices. Furthermore, by revealing the misogyny of traditional literary practice, Jong indicates the ways in which women have been excluded from literary history in general. Her ambitious strategy in *Fanny* is to force a revisionist rereading of the existing canon by radically critiquing several canonical male texts and by bringing a feminist ethos to such literary forms as the female novel of development and

the picaresque. Revealing how the early English novel has inaccurately depicted or absented women, Jong seeks to create a new paradigm which recognizes female experience as a source of autonomous art.

Fanny and the Trans-Historical Condition

Although dressed in eighteenth-century garb, Fanny provides a modern feminist context for understanding much of what takes place in the novel. Jong readily acknowledges her heroine's twentieth-century consciousness, calling her "a very modern wench in eighteenth-century dress."<sup>40</sup> Alan Friedman similarly deems Fanny "a contemporary heroine chained to a romantic sage with neoclassical links."<sup>41</sup> However apt these descriptions, Jong insists that her heroine is more than merely an eighteenth-century character with twentieth-century ideas grafted onto her. Rather, as the novelist explains in her afterword, Fanny Hackabout-Jones is a trans-historical figure:

I do believe that in every age there are people whose consciousness transcends their own time and that these people, whether fictional or historical, are those with whom we most closely identify with and those about whom we most enjoy reading. I have tried to write an interesting and entertaining novel, not an historical treatise, so the development of the heroine's character has always been more important to me than the setting in which we find her (p. 537).

Jong's rationale for imbuing Fanny with a trans-historical consciousness is essentially comparative. As the novelist told John L. Kern, "if you set a novel in 1740, it gives you

a great opportunity to show how much has changed for women and, in turn, how little."<sup>42</sup> Like Isadora Wing, the modern heroine in *Fear of Flying*, Fanny's quest for self-realization involves resolving the tensions between love and lust, art and motherhood, and finding a lover who will accept her as an intellectual and sexual equal. Moreover, the cultural critique Fanny engages in -- taking as its targets the trio of sexism, gender stereotyping, and male dominance -- remains relevant today.

What Jong does in *Fanny*, then, is to set her novel in the eighteenth century as an anachronistic means of demonstrating how little the plight of women has changed in two hundred and fifty years. As she explained to Kern, "After all, the real purpose of the historical novel is to satirize current society through the lens of the past."<sup>43</sup> By creating a work whose form hearkens back to the eighteenth century yet whose consciousness looks forward to the present day, Jong is able to dramatically reveal the persistent nature of women's literary and cultural struggles.

### Conclusion

Commenting on *Fanny* in *The Friday Book*, John Barth wryly remarks that in writing *The Sot-Weed Factor* he believed that he had created "a category of humorous twentieth-century fiction one would have thought exhaustible by a single instance."<sup>44</sup> Obviously, though, while Barth's own efforts at

exhausting the possibilities of the eighteenth-century novel were extensive, they were far from complete. In fact, although Jong, too, returns to the origins of the English novel and adopts the Barthian strategy of rewriting the form on a stylistic, thematic, and linguistic level, her reinvention differs significantly from Barth's.

Whereas Barth employs outdated forms against themselves in order to create new art, Jong rewrites several male-authored eighteenth-century novels from the perspective of a twentieth-century feminist. She accomplishes this by creating a heroine who is both "Sweets and Bitters": a complex, fully developed figure whose actions and words run counter to the eighteenth-century female ideal. Beyond merely answering the question "What if Tom Jones had been a woman?," Jong's novel offers a woman-centered pedagogic tale that radically challenges literary tradition while revealing the "stark naked truth" about the living conditions of women during the Augustan period. Finally, by endowing eighteenth-century literary forms with a contemporary consciousness, *Fanny* demonstrates the trans-historical nature of women's literary and cultural struggles.

## Chapter Four

### "But hey, this is Africa, man": *Water Music* and the Postmodernization of the Eighteenth-Century Novel

In writing what I have set about, I shall confine myself neither to his [Horace's] rules, nor to any man's rules that ever lived.<sup>1</sup>

*Tristram Shandy*

### Introduction

In 1981, a year after Erica Jong's *Fanny* was published, T. Coraghessan Boyle offered yet another reinvention of the eighteenth-century novel in *Water Music*.<sup>2</sup> Three and a half years in the making, Boyle's ambitious first novel introduces elements that resonate throughout the author's subsequent fiction, including a tragicomic tone, a satirical yoking of the mundane and the absurd, a penchant for hyperbole, and a manic prose style. A bawdy picaresque novel with two protagonists, *Water Music* chronicles the misadventures of Mungo Park (1771-1806), an actual Scottish explorer, and his fictional counterpart Ned Rise, a con-man from the London slums. Drawing parallels between Park's African expeditions, replete with dangerous wildlife and hostile tribesmen, and Rise's dubious exploits as a sex show operator, grave robber, and fake caviar peddler, the novel spans more than a decade and offers a panoramic view of life on two continents. Like *The Sot-Weed Factor* and *Fanny*, Boyle's novel is a mock-epic, pseudo-historical work which consciously adopts conventions associated with the early

English novel. Moreover, *Water Music* combines the playful erudition and metafictional tendencies of John Barth with Erica Jong's linguistic ingenuity and wide appeal to readers. However, Boyle differs significantly from his predecessors in that he deliberately exposes the postmodern ethos which governs his novel.

Assuming a skeptical stance toward historical record, *Water Music* trivializes revered figures and events from the past while problematizing the very nature of historical knowledge. Because the impetus behind his novel is aesthetic rather than scholarly, Boyle embellishes freely upon his original sources. In fact, much like Barth in *The Sot-Weed Factor*, Boyle views the eighteenth-century novel as a fruitful framework for showcasing his linguistic and narrative skills as well as his extensive knowledge of literary tradition. Yet, because he wishes to set *Water Music* apart from conventional literary forms, Boyle anachronistically infuses his use of eighteenth-century novelistic conventions with contemporary language and commentary. In so doing, Boyle postmodernizes the eighteenth-century form and thus provides it with resonance for a contemporary audience.

#### *Water Music* and the Eighteenth-Century Novel

Throughout the course of *Water Music*, Boyle demonstrates a great familiarity with the early English novel. In a manner reminiscent of both *The Sot-Weed Factor* and *Fanny*, *Water Music* manages to invoke formal and thematic

elements which most tellingly characterize the form. In terms of its general structure, for example, Boyle's novel consciously adopts the following eighteenth-century novelistic conventions: an apologia offering explanation of what is to follow, a three-part structure, occasional footnotes and disclaimers, and a coda detailing the fates of the novel's principal characters.

There are also, however, subtler ways in which Boyle's work demonstrates its debt to the eighteenth-century novel. For instance, like the early novel, *Water Music* exhibits a fondness for the interpolated tale. Among the more lengthy of these are the stories of the gargantuan Moorish queen Fatima, the Bedouin renegade Dassoud, and Ned's gin-soaked friend Billy Boyles. As in the novels of Henry Fielding, these tangential tales generally occur at moments of crisis and act to alleviate or draw out the tension of the principal narrative. Thus, just as Mungo Park is about to be blinded by a double-edged Moorish "bilbo," Boyle leaves the explorer and launches into the life story of Johnson, Park's Mandingo guide.

*Water Music* also adopts one of the defining characteristics of the early novel -- its penchant for explanatory asides. In fact, the narrator of Boyle's novel strongly recalls the intrusive Author of *Tom Jones* in that he frequently interrupts his main storyline to comment upon ancillary matters. Offering information and insight, these segues contain scrupulous detail on topics ranging from art, philosophy, and literature to criminology, cooking, and gravedigging. As in Fielding's "heroic, historical, prosaic

poem," conversational asides such as these are often awkwardly introduced into the novel. For example, while recounting Ned's first days with Fanny Brunch, the narrator digresses into a discussion on the quality of life for servants near the turn of the century:

It should be remarked at this juncture that the life of a servant in Georgian England was not one that allowed for a wide range of social intercourse. Servants, if they were fortunate enough to pass muster, were taken on for life. They were expected to give up their families, interests and former ties, their sex lives and the expectation of marriage. From the moment they were hired they lived entirely for the comfort and benefit of their employers, worker bees fussing round idle drones and swollen, helpless queens. The reward? Six or seven pounds per annum, a warm grate, a dry bed, and -- most importantly -- three square meals a day. At a time when the streets were lined with thieves and beggars, prices were soaring as a result of the war with France, housing was inadequate or nonexistent, and truckloads of spindly hollow-chested men and women were dropping dead of hunger every day, a position as chambermaid or footman was nothing to sneeze at. And a loss of self-determination seemed a small price to pay.

So it was with Fanny (pp. 128-9).

With its abrupt introduction, offhand mixture of fact and opinion, and chatty tone, this passage echoes such Fieldingesque interruptions as the following:

Here, reader, I beg your patience a moment, while I make a just compliment to the great wisdom and sagacity of our law, which refuses to admit the evidence of a wife for or against her husband. This, says a certain learned author, who, I believe, was never quoted before in any but a law-book, would be the means of creating eternal dissension between them. It would, indeed, be the means of much perjury, and of much whipping, fining, imprisoning, transporting and hanging.

Partridge stood a while silent, til being bid to speak.<sup>3</sup>

Like the novels of Tobias Smollett, Daniel Defoe, and



Henry Fielding, *Water Music* contains a colorful supporting cast. Ranging fully across the spectrum of society, Barth introduces such figures as Nelson Smirke, landlord of the Vole's Head Inn, prostitutes Betty Smoot, Nan Punt, and Sally Sebum, aristocrats Lady B and Lord Twit, as well as ruffians-for-hire Tom Thamp and Dirk Cramp. As these names indicate, Boyle deliberately employs the eighteenth-century novel's tendency to give characters tag names. Like Smollett's "Lord Quiverwit," "Captain Whiffle," and "Dr. Wagtail," and Fielding's "Lady Booby," "Allworthy" and "Jonathan Wild," Boyle's nomenclature succinctly, and comically, reveals key aspects of his characters' personalities. Finally, there is Ned's lover, Fanny Brunch, a woman whose Christian name invokes associations with such eighteenth-century heroines as Joseph Andrews's fiancée and John Cleland's prostitute.

While it echoes these general elements of the early novel, the particular literary form to which *Water Music* is most deeply indebted is the eighteenth-century picaresque. In accordance with such works as *Candide* and *Joseph Andrews*, Boyle's novel adopts the structural motif of the educational journey, a form often used for examining society and for exploring character development. Like Fielding's virginal hero, Ned, in his progress through eighteenth-century England, exposes societal vices and abuses. Moreover, in keeping with the pace of these and other picaresque novels, *Water Music* moves rapidly from incident to incident, allowing little time for reflection or perspective.

As in the traditional picaresque, *Water Music* posits a

central character who has been dealt a difficult hand and who must subsequently endure great hardship. Regard our introduction to Ned Rise: "He was unwashed, untutored, unloved, battered, abused, harassed, deprived, starved, mutilated and orphaned, a victim of poverty, ignorance, ill-luck, class prejudice, lack of opportunity, malicious fate and gin" (p. 34). A true picaro, Ned is a foundling whose sole asset is an innate resourcefulness. To move freely in a society which resents his very existence, he must frequently disguise himself, and Ned alternately poses as a fishmonger, traveling salesman, mortician's aide, and, when fleeing for his life, a well-to-do woman. The ease with which Ned assumes various identities calls to mind the chameleon-like adaptability of another picaresque figure, Moll Flanders.

Given his outcast position, Ned is able to view his society in a critical manner. Often victimized by the greed and hypocrisy of his social superiors, he, like Moll, knows the precariousness of being a member of the lower class. Nowhere is Ned's helplessness more acute than when facing the power of a prejudicial court system. During his defense against the charge of killing an aristocrat, a manacled Ned is repeatedly shouted down, pelted with rotten fruit, and eventually gaged and taken away for inciting a riot. Yet, while circumstances continually beat him down, the resilient rogue is able to survive again and again, "rising" above the crushing class system of the late eighteenth century and surviving, among numerous other traumas, his own hanging.

*Water Music* is also in keeping with the eighteenth-

century picaresque novel in its broad, one-dimensional method of character depiction. As Robert Alter argues, because the genre is oriented toward action, characters in traditional picaresque novels fail to possess "any real qualities of innerness."<sup>4</sup> Certainly this is true in *Water Music*, as virtually all of the novel's characters lack both particularity and depth. Forgoing psychological analysis, Boyle's characterization relies primarily on physical description and distinctive personality traits. As in the picaresque works of Defoe and Fielding, emphasis is on behavior, not motivation. This deliberately superficial method of characterization often borders on caricature as Boyle populates his novel with such stereotypical social characters as the effeminate aristocrat (Lord Twit), the jaded German count (Von Polker), and the beautiful, innocent country maid (Fanny Brunch). There are, of course, exceptions -- notably Ned Rise and Mungo Park's wife, Ailie, who emerges as a full, complex individual -- but the pattern of one-dimensionality generally holds true.

Although *Water Music* broadly adopts the formal and thematic conventions of the early English novel, notably the picaresque, those individual eighteenth-century works that stand most prominently in the background of Boyle's novel are Tobias Smollett's *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1748) and *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771) and Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759-67).

In a manner reminiscent of *Roderick Random*, *Water Music*

attempts to view the panorama of eighteenth-century life from the perspective of a picaro. Like Roderick Random, Ned's fortunes rise and fall regularly. Though his live sex shows and fake caviar scheme provide him with quick profit, outside forces invariably conspire to rob Ned of whatever prosperity he may enjoy. Marginalized by their societies, both Roderick and Ned endure a pattern of adversity which begins with childhood beatings and continues through terrible sea journeys, wrongful imprisonment, and the loss of a beloved.

Like *Humphry Clinker*, *Water Music* is a three-part, episodic novel with dueling picaros. Whereas Smollett's novel pairs the title character with Matthew Bramble, *Water Music* joins Ned Rise and Mungo Park. Furthermore, like *Humphry Clinker*, Boyle's novel is a caustic satire which explores the difficulties of achieving success in an inherently duplicitous and unjust world. Populated with a gallery of intense, vivid characters, each novel expresses its principal themes by contrasting several levels of society.

Perhaps the most striking similarity between Smollett and Boyle is their ferocity in depicting the squalor of Georgian life. This is clearly evident in the pair's fascination with man's corporeal nature. Witness, for instance; Matthew Bramble's descriptions of Bath's assembly rooms. These rooms, according to the temperamental squire, are filled with "a highly exalted essence of mingled odours, arising from putrid gums, imposthumated lungs, sour flatulences, rank armpits, sweating feet, running sores and

issues."<sup>5</sup> Now regard Boyle's description of Fanny's descent into Newgate prison:

When the massive iron door swung back on its hinges, the stink nearly knocked her to her knees. Inside the atmosphere was rank and caliginous; fumes rose from puddles, groans sifted through the shadows. She started forward gingerly, her pupils widening in the gloom. Muck pulled at her shoes, twisted claws reached out for her, the reek of urine stung her eyes (p. 155).

By providing authentic depictions of the filth and stench of eighteenth-century life, both Smollett and Boyle lend their works a pungent verisimilitude. The pair's graphic realism is also evident in their capacity to look unwaveringly at the misery of life. From *Roderick Random*, for example, comes this passage describing the harsh conditions aboard a British warship:

Here I saw about fifty miserable distempered wretches, suspended in rows, so huddled one upon another, that not more than fourteen inches of space was allotted for each with his bed and bedding; and deprived of the light of day, as well as of fresh air; breathing nothing but a noisome atmosphere of the morbid steams exhaling from their own excrements and diseased bodies, devoured with vermin hatched in the filth that surrounded them, and destitute of every convenience necessary for people in that helpless condition.<sup>6</sup>

Compare the above passage to Boyle's description of the horrific prison where Ned and Billy Boyles are unjustly sentenced for several months:

The hulks, if anything, are closer and damper than Squire Trelawney's well, with the added liability of constant exposure to the reeking breath, runny bowels and festering phlegm of hundreds of hardened criminals, father rapers, generalized pederasts and blood drinkers alike. It's pretty rough. Packed in at night, three to a berth, in the leaking, creaking holds of rotted tubs perennially mothballed in the Thames and stinking of their slow transubstantiation to sawdust and mulch (p. 288).

As these passages vividly illustrate, both Smollett and Boyle are attuned to the appalling conditions under which certain members of society were forced to live. Moreover, although the style of each novelist is often comic and robust, neither tempers his portrait with elements of false optimism.

Although it consciously echoes elements from Tobias Smollett's pair of novels, *Water Music* owes its greatest debt to Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. In fact, Boyle's novel shares several important characteristics with Sterne's tale of "a COCK and a BULL," including a non-chronological method of narration, a penchant for silly footnotes and bawdy set-pieces, and a conversational prose style laced with learned diction and comic hyperbole.

With respect to narrative progression, both *Tristram Shandy* and *Water Music* abandon chronology in favor of a more haphazard unfolding of time. In each of these novels, the principal storyline is continually interrupted by a series of digressions which either delve into the past or allude to future actions. As a result, events unfold in a non-sequential and, at times, disconcerting manner. In essence, each novel remains true to *Tristram Shandy*'s description of his story as "digressive, and it is progressive too, -- and at the same time."<sup>7</sup> One particularly disruptive temporal device employed by both Sterne and Boyle is their habit of freezing individual moments. Sterne, for instance, stops characters in the midst of picking up handkerchiefs, walking up stairs, and pausing to listen; sometimes not returning to

complete their actions until chapters later. Similarly, Boyle frequently leaves the figures in his novel hanging (quite literally, in the case of Ned Rise) until he returns to them from one of his numerous interpolated tales.

Another formal aspect shared by *Tristram Shandy* and *Water Music* is their occasional use of silly footnotes. From Sterne's novel, for example, comes the following bilingual clarification:

But the doctors of the *Sorbonne*, by a deliberation held amongst them, *April 10, 1733*, -- have enlarged the powers of midwives, by determining, That tho' no part of the child's body should appear, -- that baptism shall, nevertheless, be administered by injection, -- *par le moyen d'une petite Canulle*, -- Anglice, a *squirt*. [By means of a small injection-pipe. -- in English, a squirt.]<sup>8</sup>

Several paragraphs long, this inane note regarding baptismal procedures parodically replicates the practice of enhancing footnotes by filling them with jargon and foreign terminology.

One of the silliest footnotes in *Water Music* is the brief identification of "Tobaubo doo" as an area in central Africa where non-Africans called "hon-kees" live. Later in the novel, with tongue planted firmly in cheek, Boyle recounts the improprieties of Major T. W. Fitzwilliam Lloyd, a Royal African corps commander:

The transcript of the official proceedings against the former colonel charged him with eighteen accounts unbecoming an officer, including 'serving of tea to his staff while dressed in a lady's taffeta gown' and 'the compelling of eight privates, under penalty of court-martial, to rub down his naked body with dustmops while continuously rehearsing the phrase 'O, I am a lowly snake in the grass, depraved and despicable' (pp. 298-9).

As footnotes such as these demonstrate, both Sterne and Boyle are fond of using notes whose meticulous attention to detail belies their inherent ridiculousness. These facetious footnotes also demonstrate the playful nature of both novels, in particular, their love of verbal jokes.

Much of the humor in Sterne's comic masterpiece is sexual in nature as the novel abounds in set-pieces whose dénouements involve double-entendres or sexually suggestive puns. None is more elaborate than "Slawkenbergius's Tale," Sterne's bawdy story of "noses." Consider, for example, the following exchange between a trumpeter and his wife upon viewing the most prominent part of Slawkenbergius's anatomy:

"*Benedicity* -- What a nose! 'tis as long, said the trumpeter's wife, as a trumpet.  
 And of the same mettle, said the trumpeter, as you hear by its sneezing.  
 -- 'Tis as soft as a flute, said she.  
 -- 'Tis brass, said the trumpeter.  
 -- 'Tis a pudding's end -- said the wife.  
 I tell thee again, said the trumpeter, 'tis a brazen nose.  
 I'll know the bottom of it, said the trumpeter's wife, for I will touch it with my finger before I sleep."<sup>9</sup>

Playing upon Sterne's suggestive use of "nose," this exchange is only one of many scenes in *Tristram Shandy* which employs metaphors in a humorously sexual manner.

In spite of its penchant for morbidity, *Water Music* contains several scenes designed largely for bawdy effect. The most hilarious of these occurs in the midst of Ailie Park's aquatic interlude on Scotland's best-known loch:

Her eyes blink open, close, open again. Over her shoulder: what is that? Screened by his hair, the stiff geography of his ear. She's delirious. Delirious. He moves in her, but her eyes are open, she's craning her neck. It arches over the boat, rearing up, slick and muscular and wet -- impossible, it can't be -- a face



at the tip of it, serpent's eyes, the shadow falling across her flushed cheeks like a swift stinging slap.

No. It can't be (pp. 415-6).

With its blatantly sexual parallelism -- the dubious shape of the monster and its being "slick and muscular and wet" -- this scene rivals Sterne's phallic humor in "Slawkenbergius's Tale."

"Writing," notes the narrator in *Tristram Shandy*, "is but a different name for conversation,"<sup>10</sup> and this sense of the novel as an informal exchange between narrator and reader is evident throughout both *Tristram Shandy* and *Water Music*. In each of these novels, the narrator consciously adopts rhetorical strategies designed to initiate and foster dialogue. From the opening page of *Tristram Shandy*, when he assures the reader "Well, you may take my word," Sterne's narrator attempts to establish a close rapport with his audience. His most effective method for doing so is to refer to readers as "you." As the following passage illustrates, such a direct form of address breeds familiarity:

In the beginning of the last chapter, I inform'd you exactly when I was born; -- but I did not inform you, *how*. No; that particular was reserved entirely for a chapter by itself; -- besides, Sir, as you and I are in a manner perfect strangers to each other, it would not have been proper to have let you into too many circumstances relating to myself all at once. -- You must have a little patience. I have undertaken, you see, to write not only my life, but my opinions also; hoping and expecting that your knowledge of my character, and of what kind of a mortal I am, by the one, would give you a better relish for the other: As you proceed further with me, the slight acquaintance which is now beginning betwixt us, will grow into familiarity; and that, unless one of us is in fault, will terminate in friendship.<sup>11</sup>

With its frequent starts and stops, qualifications and clarifications, the above passage captures well the conversational qualities of Tristram's speech. This passage also demonstrates the complicitous tone he often adopts when speaking to his audience.

Like Tristram Shandy, the narrator in *Water Music* draws readers into his narrative by direct address:

It's no picnic, life on the Sahel, let's face it. Talk of scarcity and want, whims of nature: welcome to them. Talk of years when the rains won't come and the sweet bleating herds build monuments of bone to the sun. Or a well that goes salt, sandstorms that shear whiskers from your cheeks. Then there are the hyenas -- making off in the night with kids and goats, disemboweling them and leaving the pissed-on remains for vultures and jackals. And then there's the push south: the farther you go, the greater the risk of a sneak attack by the Foulahs or the Serawoolis. That'd be a fine thing. Your people in chains, cattle butchered, horses raped, kouskous devoured (pp. 21-2).

In this passage, the narrator establishes an immediate bond between himself and his readers; first by speaking to them as if they were actually present ("the further you go") and, more effectively, by informally joining with them ("let's face it"). Such a bond is strengthened by the narrator's chatty tone ("Talk of" and "That'd"). By stressing their commonality in such a fashion, the narrator hopes readers will more readily accept his unorthodox views on historical and literary matters.

Water Music and History

Boyle's stance toward history is immediately apparent in the opening paragraph of *Water Music*:

The year was 1795. George III was dabbing the walls of Windsor Castle with his own spittle, the *Notables* were botching things in France, Goya was deaf, De Quincey a depraved pre-adolescent. George Bryan "Beau" Brummell was smoothing down his first starched collar, Young Ludwig van Beethoven, beetle-browed and twenty-four, was wowing them in Vienna with his Piano Concerto no. 2, and Ned Rise was drinking Strip-Me-Naked with Nan Punt and Sally Sebum at the Pig & Pox Tavern in Maiden Lane (p. 3).

As this passage vividly illustrates, Boyle's rereading of the past, like Barth and Jong's, is skeptical and darkly comic. Furthermore, like these novelists, Boyle exhibits a fondness for lampooning cherished figures. As the author told Tobin Harshaw, "I've always been interested in deflating heroes."<sup>12</sup> One of the principal ways in which Boyle undercuts revered figures is by making snide comments about their private lives. For example, within the span of one brief passage, we are told that William Wordsworth has just been "in and out of France and Annette Vallon," Napoleon is "vigorously pounding at Josephine's gate," and a "snot-nosed" De Quincey "wanders the streets and wonders what a whore is" (p. 48). This *ad hominem* method of deflating famous figures -- especially by exposing their sexual habits -- calls to mind Jong's treatment of literary luminaries in *Fanny*.

In addition to these gossipy revelations, there are more subtle ways in which Boyle trivializes and humanizes

great people and events of the past. For example, interspersed throughout *Water Music* are historical overviews which place the events of the story in a larger context:

Christmas, 1797.

It's been a year of victory and defeat, of bold offensives and timely retreats. Thus, Napoleon has whipped the Austrians and annexed the major part of Italy, while Walter Scott has thrown in the towel with Williamina Belches and nuptialed Margaret Charpentier on the rebound. In Hampshire, Jane Austen, disappointed by the rejection of "First Impressions" (should she retitile it?), has churned out a gothic tale, "Northanger Abbey," and begun a little didactic romance called "Eleanor and Marianne." Horatio Nelson has been knighted and promoted to the rank of admiral for his part in the crippling of the Spanish fleet at Cape St Vincent, and John Wilkes, the fire breather, is succumbing to the weight of the world and will be dead inside of twenty-four hours. The Dutch have been prevented from landing a French army in Ireland, but the Irish are insurrecting nonetheless, and Pitt, desperately trying to effect a consolidation of England and Ireland, is exciting his monarch's ire over the question of Catholic emancipation. In the midst of all this, Coleridge and Wordsworth are quietly putting together a book that will break the back of neoclassicism as neatly as a gourmand breaks a breadstick (pp. 197-8).

In such passages as this, Boyle covers so much historical ground that events necessarily blur together. Moreover, by summarizing military, literary, and social history in such a furious and off-hand manner -- Napoleon "whips" the Austrians, Walter Scott "throws in the towel," and Jane Austen "churns out" *Northanger Abbey* -- Boyle effectively diminishes the individual significance of each of these events.

While his targets for historical deflation are numerous, Boyle's favorite is clearly Mungo Park. A quote from Robert Burns's "To A Louse" (1786) opens the novel's

first section and captures well Boyle's willingness to denigrate heroic figures:

Na, faith ye yet! ye'll no be right  
 Till ye've got on it --  
 The vera tapmost, tow'ring height  
 O' Miss's bonnet.

By immediately drawing comparisons between Park's quest to chart the course of the Niger River and a louse's attempt to reach the top of a woman's bonnet, Boyle succinctly belittles the grandeur of both the explorer and his expedition. Whereas Mungo Park was a heroic figure for such writers as Henry David Thoreau, Joseph Conrad, and Ernest Hemingway, for Boyle he provides little more than a focal point for the author's pseudo-historical spoof. Tellingly, the novel opens with a humiliated Park baring his "pale puckered nates" to a crowd of hostile Moors. Thus, from the outset of *Water Music*, Boyle begins debunking the traditional image of the explorer as indomitable.

He further undermines Park's heroism by foregrounding his negative traits. That is, despite Park's admirable quest to know the unknowable and his ability to endure great hardship with a stiff upper lip, Boyle demonstrates how the explorer's ignorance, pomposity, and moral blindness bring about the deaths of many. Stuffy and stubborn, he never attempts to understand Africa or its people. Ned, for one, views Park as "conceited, mad with ambition, selfish, blind, incompetent, fatuous" (p. 421). Nor does the explorer consider the wishes of his family and friends if they stand in the way of his dream of immortality. When Johnson, his faithful Man Friday, refuses to accompany Park on his

hopeless canoe voyage to Boussa, the explorer completely forsakes their decade of friendship, ordering Johnson to leave his presence and calling the man who saved his life "filth," "scum," and "nigger." Significantly, Boyle's novel shares its title with a 1715 instrumental suite by George Handel. Composed of an elaborate series of airs, dances, and fanfares, "Water Music" was written for a royal procession on the Thames. By alluding to the grandeur of Handel's piece, Boyle ironically underscores Mungo Park's pathetic procession down the Nile.

Boyle further undercuts the heroism of Park's expeditions by detailing the starvation, disease, and demoralizing bad weather endured by the explorer and his companions. Witness, for example, the company's behavior in the aftermath of a torrential storm:

Meanwhile, of the forty-one men remaining, excluding Mungo, thirty-eight are on their knees vomiting within minutes after the rain commences. Yellow Jack, dysentery, rash, fever, black vomit. The explorer has seen them before. Clutching their stomachs as if they've been gunshot, the men come straggling into the little clutch of naked thorns about which Mungo is frantically trying to throw up some sort of canvas shelter for the gunpowder, rice and rust-prone muskets. Some have managed to hold on to their asses, others have not. Nearly all of them collapse, gasping and shivering, on the puddled and puked-over patch of level ground the explorer has managed to roughly enclose (pp. 346-7).

This image of stalwart explorers vomiting and collapsing calls to mind the pathetic actions of Henry Burlingame and his diarrhea-ridden companions as they chart Maryland's tidewater region. In fact, both *Water Music* and *The Sot-Weed Factor* eagerly reveal the inglorious behind-the-scenes

struggles traditionally omitted from historical accounts.

In spite of its deflationary motives, Boyle's novel has considerable historical basis. There was indeed a tall Scottish physician named Mungo Park who was sent by Sir Joseph Banks and Britain's African Association to chart the course of the Niger River. Furthermore, despite his transpositions and exaggerations, Boyle's rendering of Park's tale is generally faithful to the explorer's own account. In 1795, at the age of twenty-four, Park traversed over 1,500 treacherous miles of West Africa's Senegal Basin, escaping after four months the captivity of "the merciless Moors" and making his feverish way on foot to the coast. Recording his adventures in *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa* (1799), the explorer was to meet with acclaim upon his return to England.

Besides capturing these and other events in *Water Music*, Boyle also incorporates individual narrative details which are consistent with the explorer's memoirs. For instance, Park's guide on his first expedition had returned to his home in Gambia from American slavery and seven years in England. Also, Park was protected from his Moorish captors by the intervention of Fatima, a woman celebrated for her vast proportions. Boyle's novel even introduces the fact that the explorer safeguarded his notes by hiding them in the crown of his hat. The author does, however, fudge a bit on the story of Johnson being snatched by an alligator - it was Park's second guide, Isaaco, who met with such a fate. Yet the principal actions remain true. Consistent as well are subsequent biographical details. Upon returning to

his home in rural Scotland, Park married, raised four children, established a medical practice, and longed to return to Africa.

As Boyle recounts in the third section of *Water Music*, the explorer eventually set out on a second expedition in 1805, this time to determine the source of the Niger River. Accompanied by a crew of British soldiers and native guides, Park's expedition took a canoe, the *Joliba*, down the Niger to the rapids at Boussa. Here, as the novel details, the explorer was attacked by natives and presumably drowned. Rumors of his survival persisted for years, as Park's body was never found.<sup>13</sup>

What is evident from Boyle's treatment of historical record in *Water Music* is that the facts of history fetter the author's imagination. That is, although the unvarnished events of Mungo Park's life would make for an exciting tale, they are simply inadequate for Boyle's ambitious literary aims. In order to create the sprawling structure of his three-part picaresque novel, Boyle not only embellishes upon the explorer's account, but also adds, as a counterpoint element, the adventure-filled story of the fictional Ned Rise. In using Park's journal as the starting point for *Water Music* while bringing back the explorer himself as one of the work's protagonists, Boyle's treatment of his original sources is very similar to Barth's use of Maryland's colonial history and the figure of Ebenezer Cooke in *The Sot-Weed Factor*.

With its penchant for intertwining the historical and



the fictional, *Water Music* clearly fits Linda Hutcheon's definition of "historiographic metafiction." According to Hutcheon, historiographic metafiction differs from traditional historiography in that they are not concerned with verifying "truths" about the past. Instead, these works treat historical record in an highly skeptical manner by calling into question the possibility of objectivist historical knowledge. Historiographic metafiction, Hutcheon contends, "while teasing us with the existence of the past as real, also suggests that there is no direct access to that real which would be unmediated by the structures of our various discourses about it."<sup>14</sup>

The brief chapter "Herodotus Be Hanged" provides the most comprehensive expression of Boyle's skeptical view of history. In this chapter, Lord Twit challenges the views of Herodotus, the "Father of History." Responding to the Bishop of Llandaff's claim that Herodotus's object was "not to divert us with fictions, but edify us with facts," Twit queries: "And what is history, pray tell, if not a fiction?" He then adds:

all of our cherished histories -- from those of the Greeks to that of our late departed colleague Mr. Gibbon -- are at best a concoction of hearsay, thirdhand reports, purposeful distortions and outright fictions invented by the self-aggrandizing participants and their sympathizers. And as if that weren't enough, this hodgepodge of misrepresentation and prevarication is then further distorted through the darkling lens of the historian himself (pp. 98-9).

This speech succinctly articulates Boyle's fundamental belief that historical accounts are as much the result of "purposeful distortions and outright fictions" as they are a

collection of empirical information. In fact, like *The Sot-Weed Factor*, Boyle's novel "self-consciously reminds us that, while events did occur in the real empirical past, we name and constitute those events as historical facts by selection and narrative positioning."<sup>15</sup>

During the course of *Water Music*, there are also several metacommentaries on the dubious veracity of historical memoirs. In the most blatant of these, Johnson, seeing how Park has embellished and sanitized his African adventures for a British audience, tells the explorer: "But this is the purest of bullshit. A distortion and a lie. About the only thing that's true is the seven-foot guards and the cash" (p. 121). Johnson is correct, and in scenes such as this Boyle further problematizes the nature of historical knowledge by calling attention to the inherent subjectivity of personal historical accounts.

Boyle is willing to treat historical record in such a skeptical manner because he has no desire to reproduce an authentic past. As he explained to Tobin Harshaw: "My interest is to use history to explore how I feel about things and communicate that to others -- hopefully in an entertaining and edifying and satisfactory way. Where the facts stand in the way of what I'm trying to accomplish, well, the facts have to be altered."<sup>16</sup> Boyle's remarks here recall Jong's comment in the afterword to *Fanny* that, "I hope this novel is true to the spirit, if not the letter, of the eighteenth-century, for I am well aware that I have often stretched (though I hope not shattered) historical

'truth' in order to make a more amusing tale."<sup>17</sup> Thus, not only do Boyle and Jong refuse to let existing facts impede their literary aims, both are also willing to "alter" these facts and "stretch" the truth in order to create more "entertaining" and "amusing" tales. This willingness to sacrifice historical accuracy for what he terms the "exigencies of invention"<sup>18</sup> is crucial to Boyle's strategy in *Water Music*. "I do the research and I think I know the history," the author told William Brisick, "but what I want to end up with is a story that uses the history, the characters and the place as elements in a satisfactory, artistic whole."<sup>19</sup>

#### *Water Music* as a Literary Performance

Boyle's reasons for venturing back to the early novel in *Water Music* are largely artistic. As he remarks in the novel's Apologia, "the impetus behind *Water Music* is principally aesthetic rather than scholarly." Put simply, the eighteenth-century novel provides Boyle with a fruitful framework for showcasing his considerable literary talents. As in *The Sot-Weed Factor*, we are meant to read through the surface historical matter to an appreciation of the author's linguistic and narrative skills. Like Barth, Boyle is a literary exhibitionist who continually calls attention to the originality and virtuosity of his "satisfying, artistic whole."

Nowhere is the novel's sense of itself as a literary

performance more explicit than in its wide-ranging catalogues:

In a month it will be green here. There will be rivers, ponds, puddles. Deadly cobra will part the grass side by side with three-step adders and the crested lizard called tomorrow-never-comes. Duikers will appear, skirting from shade to shade. Pangolins, guibas, caracals and chamas. Wood storks, gaunt as refugees, secretary birds with their ragged braids and hawk's legs and partiality for cold-blooded lunches. Addax, puku, eland and oribi. Aoudads, korins, mhorrs and mambas (pp. 62-3).

Teeming with the names and characteristics of largely unfamiliar animals, listings such as these self-consciously display the range and depth of Boyle's knowledge.

An essential aspect of Boyle's literary performance is the author's accurate depiction of Georgian life. Like Barth and Jong before him, Boyle is able to capture the texture of eighteenth-century existence by imbuing his novel with a wealth of period detail. In addition to its descriptions of the city's shops, ginhouses, prisons, and courts, *Water Music* also evokes the cultural ambience of late eighteenth-century London:

Prior to 1784, public executions were held at a place called Tyburn Tree, opposite the Marble Arch. An elaborate ritual was involved, and a good deal of hoopla as well. The condemned prisoners would ride through the streets on a cart, their elbows pinioned, the plain pine caskets beside them. Thousands turned out for the parade, bleachers were erected round the gallows, and makeshift stalls sold everything from small beer to gin, mackerel, muffins, gingerbread and tongue sandwiches. Hawkers did a brisk business in lurid confessions detailing the prisoners' crimes, or tear-jerk letters ostensibly written to their sweethearts at the eleventh hour. All too frequently the condemned were small fry -- sniveling forgers, starving women convicted of shoplifting, fifteen-year-old pickpockets -- and when this was the case the crowd was merciless, jeering and spitting, pelting them with stones and offal (pp. 192-3).

From public hangings at Tyburn Tree to outdoor concerts along the Thames, Boyle vividly recreates the forms of entertainment available to the average Londoner. However, although he strives to animate the breadth of eighteenth-century urban life, Boyle has a tendency to dwell upon the its seamier aspects. As the following passage demonstrates, this lends a scatological emphasis to the novel's overall depiction:

At this time in history the streets of London were as foul, feculent and disease-ridden as a series of interconnected dunghills, twice as dangerous as a battlefield, and as frequently maintained as the lower cells of an asylum dungeon. It was pretty rough. Drunks lay sprawled across the footpaths, some dead and stinking and blanketed with crows. Whole families squatted on streetcorners and begged for bread. Murders were committed in the alleys. There were yellowed newspapers clinging to the lampposts, smashed crocks and bottles underfoot, bits of produce and the bones of gamebirds and fowls moldering in the corners. There was pigeonshit. Mud, coal, dust, ashes, dead cats, rats, scraps of cloth stained with excrement, and, worst of all, open sewers (p. 84).

While densely detailed scenes such as this vividly illustrate Boyle's powers of description, they are but one aspect of the author's literary performance. Of equal, if not greater, importance are the novel's linguistic and narrative components.

Like both Barth and Jong, Boyle is fascinated by language -- he describes himself as "language-obsessed"<sup>20</sup> - and throughout *Water Music* he writes in ways which deliberately foreground his linguistic prowess. For example, Boyle is fond of using words like "algolagnial," "solipedous," "remurgient," and "testitudinous;" esoteric,

polysyllabic adjectives which send the reader scurrying for the dictionary. Another way in which the author demonstrates his command of language is by peppering his novel with showy, often incongruous similes. The eyes of John Milton are compared to "bluejays scrabbling in the snow," a victim is "snapped up like a cocktail olive" by a hungry crocodile, and idle men spend their free time "lounging around like hemophiliac princes." Although only two sentences in length, the following passage aptly illustrates Boyle's simile-laden prose:

Pennants are flying, mainsails, topsails and jibs rattling in the breeze, the prow slicing the water as neatly as a scythe while whales spout and dolphins leap and a fine invigorating salt-sea spray fans out over the rails like a nimbus. Sea and sky are a matched set, blue as delftware, and the sun is nothing less than a spotlight fixed in the middle of it all (p. 300).

A verbal showman who invests great energy into the surface matter of his novel, Boyle continually strives for effect. This is evident in such qualities of his prose as clever phrasing ("His head is a suppurating blister and gin is the only tonic"), Latin multiloquence ("Lightning tessellates the sky"), and striking descriptions (Fanny appears fresh from the creamery "with butter in her smile"). So strong is Boyle's penchant for performance that a number of passages in *Water Music* exist solely to illustrate the author's linguistic fluency. Consider, for instance, the following contorted, alliterative sentences:

Fishstink . . . . The oily stink of eels taken from the green water among the pilings, the salt-stench of skate and mackerel, the cold mud reek of pouters and perch and carp. He's snuffed them all -- tench and bream and saury pike, bearded ling, gouty blowfish, alewives,

hake and haddock (p. 70).

George Kearns captures well the baroque tendencies of Boyle's writing when he notes that the author "plays English the way Rachmaninoff played Rachmaninoff."<sup>21</sup>

As in *The Sot-Weed Factor* and *Fanny*, there is in *Water Music* an exhaustive centerpiece which self-consciously displays the author's powers of creation. In Boyle's novel, such a passage is the following "Hymn to Contagion":

Spotted fever, yaws, typhus and trypanosomiasis throve here. Hookworm, cholera and plague. There was bilharzia and guinea worm in the drinking water, hydrophobia in the sharp incisors of bats and wolves, filariasis in the saliva of mosquitos and horseflies. Step outside, take a bath, drink the water or put a scrap of food in your mouth and you've got them all -- bacilli, spirilla and cocci, viruses, nematodes, trematodes and amoebae -- all eating away at your marrow and organs, blurring your vision, sapping your fiber, eradicating your memory as neatly as an eraser moving over the scribbled wisdom of a blackboard.

From a cosmetic standpoint, the filarial diseases -- elephantiasis and loiasis (also known as wriggle-eye) -- were especially unfortunate. In elephantiasis, a mosquito-borne malady, teeming roundworms dam up the lymphatic system like insidious little beavers, causing the skin to erupt in granulomatous lesions and the legs and testicles to swell up like obscene fruits. Loiasis, on the other hand, focuses its ravages above the neck, and is transmitted by the bite of certain blood-sucking flies so abundant in the area that most mammals wear a sort of dark coat of them from dawn till dusk -- when the mosquitoes take over. In its final stages the disease is characterized by the appearance of the adult worms beneath the conjunctiva of the eye. The worms pulse and writhe there, active little ribbons of flesh, quietly going about their business of feeding, mating and eliminating waste.

If one managed to survive such horrors, there was always kala azar or dum dum fever. A chronic disease, invariably fatal, kala azar makes its presence known by the appearance of pustulating epidermal ulcers, marasmus and enlargement of the spleen. And then there was leprosy, the most dreaded affliction of them all.

Relentless in its gross deformation of the body, malignant and hideous in its gradual abrasion of the extremities and the slow but persistent degeneration of facial tissue that leaves its victims looking like pitted prunes. *Balla jou*, the locals call it: incurable.

And then of course there were the more prosaic diseases, the ones that were largely responsible for saving thousands of French, English, Dutch, and Portuguese colonials the expense of cemetery plots back in Paris, London, Amsterdam or Lisbon. Malaria headed the list, closely followed by dysentery and yellow fever (pp. 297-8).

Like the "Pandect of Geminology" in *The Sot-Weed Factor* and the listing of sexual slang from *Fanny*, this "Hymn to Contagion" is an exhaustive and exhausting set-piece which demonstrates both a grasp of esoteric knowledge and an impressive command of language. With its polysyllabic words ("trypanosomiasis" and "granulomatous"), clever similes (roundworms damn up the lymphatic system "like insidious little beavers"), and emphasis on the grotesque (lesions, pustules, and gross deformities), this passage is also typically Boylesian.

In this blatantly self-reflexive digression, Boyle is clearly more interested in displaying his range of knowledge and verbal dexterity than he is in advancing his narrative or developing its characters. Essentially an "hymn" to the author's own creative powers, this centerpiece, along with the novel's other lengthy listings, demonstrates that Boyle's capacity to create is virtually limitless. That is, in a manner reminiscent of Barth in *The Sot-Weed Factor*, Boyle utilizes his skills at itemization and enumeration to create an overriding sense of plenitude. Whether he is



listing species of microscopic organisms, types of freshwater fish, or varieties of German sausage, only the limits of his tropically fecund imagination prevent Boyle from carrying on indefinitely. Like Barth, Boyle creates the impression that, should he choose to, he could digress into yet another tale, depict yet another scene, and launch into yet another litany. Thus, for Boyle, as for Barth, "exhaustion" does not necessarily have negative connotations. As we see here, it can act as a liberating practice which provides the author with an occasion for displaying his knowledge and skill.

Because, as Craig Seligman rightly notes, "everything, in Boyle, is a handmaiden to the plot,"<sup>22</sup> the author continually draws attention to the rococo complexity of his novel's structure. Like Barth in *The Sot-Weed Factor*, Boyle showcases his prowess as a narrative engineer by demonstrating complete control over an extremely busy narrative. The most blatant way in which he does so is through his frequent use of cliffhanging chapter breaks. For example, early in the novel, just as Mungo is on the verge of being castrated, Boyle abruptly shifts the scene to a hungover Ned awakening in the basement of the Pig & Pox Tavern. In a subsequent chapter, the author cuts from Mungo and Johnson fending off the advances of a charging lion to a tea party at the elegant home of Sir Joseph Banks. By repeatedly manipulating the action and characters of his novel in such a manner, Boyle self-consciously highlights his ability to juggle several different storylines.

In addition to exhibiting a Barthian penchant for showcasing narrative control, Boyle also shares his predecessor's sense of symmetry and proportion. In fact, Boyle's favorite structural motif is to parallel the experiences of his two protagonists, and throughout *Water Music* he subtly demonstrates the ways in which Ned Rise's rake's progress through the dangerous underworld of London oddly resembles Mungo Park's journeys through the savage jungles of West Africa. Whereas Ned encounters a city rife with prostitution, graverobbing, and public hangings, Mungo enters a region where disease, starvation, floods, and cannibalism thrive. At times, these parallels are so effectively drawn that, when certain chapters open, we are initially unsure of whose adventures are being recounted. Boyle's ability to alternate between these two figures, along with his clever unification of the the pair in Africa, self-consciously attests to his powers of narrative construction.

The metaphor of orchestration is an appropriate one for the musical manner in which Boyle constructs his "satisfactory, artistic whole." Much like Barth in *The Sot-Weed Factor*, Boyle in *Water Music* spins out numerous, seemingly unrelated storylines and then unites them into an intricately orchestrated whole. Moreover, by entitling his novel "water music," the novelist offers an implicit comparison between the harmonic unity of Handel's composition and the narrative unity of his own work. In fact, at the end of the novel's first two sections Boyle actually plays upon the title as a refrain, entitling

chapters "Water Music (Slight Return)" and "Water Music (Reprise)."

Water Music and Literary Tradition

Boyle's sense of *Water Music* as a literary performance is evident not only in the novel's linguistic and narrative set-pieces; it also appears in the author's extensive knowledge of literary tradition. Literary allusions, especially those to eighteenth-century works, erupt on almost every other page. For example, early in the novel, Boyle details the beginnings of Johnson's self-education:

He read the Ancients. He read the Moderns. He read Smollett, Ben Jonson, Molière, Swift. He spoke of Pope as if he'd known him personally, denigrated the puerility of Richardson, and was so taken with Fielding that he actually attempted a Mandingo translation of *Amelia* (p. 11).

Besides mentioning prominent eighteenth-century novelists, poets, and playwrights, this brief passage also refers to such topical issues as the battle of the Ancients versus the Moderns and the critical reception of Samuel Richardson's novels. Elsewhere in *Water Music*, Boyle reprints lines from the poetry of Alexander Pope, alludes to "those scandalous novels of Horace Walpole and Mrs. Radcliffe" (p. 132), and remarks that the contents of a Scottish garden are arranged in a pattern "as orderly and serene as a page out of Goldsmith" (p. 236). A virtual "who's who" of eighteenth-century writers, Boyle's novel includes passing references to Walter Scott, James Boswell, Samuel Johnson, Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, Jane Austen, William Collins,

Christopher Smart, William Cowper, Fanny Burney, and Thomas Gray.

Nor is the novel's field of reference limited to the eighteenth-century as *Water Music* frequently alludes to nineteenth-century fiction. Though some of these allusions are cursory -- Ned's childhood, for instance, is succinctly summed up as "so totally deprived even a Zola would shudder to think of it" (p. 34) -- others, such as the following, are more fully developed:

She haunted the streets for a week, slept outside the shop on Monmouth Street every night. She ate nothing. The laudanum gave out. She lay in the alleyway back of the store, gasping for breath, her stomach punctured, heart torn out. She was a whore, an opium eater, a childless mother. All her beauty, all her stamina, all her resourcefulness had brought her to this. It was the nineteenth century. What was a heroine to do but make her way to the river? (p. 271).

With its vivid portrait of personal ruin and direct nod to nineteenth-century literary convention, this passage deliberately invokes associations with the work of another social critic, Charles Dickens. Such an allusion is hardly surprising given Boyle's admiration for the nineteenth-century novelist -- he deems Dickens the "quintessential artist, one who was a very popular author, and who also wrote brilliantly and well and originally"<sup>23</sup> -- and the fact that Boyle also received his doctorate in nineteenth-century British literature. Possessing a broad canvas of action, huge cast of characters, and richly evoked scenes, *Water Music* often reads like a Dickens work. Furthermore, as in Dickens's novels, characters appear to be in constant peril yet, the harder they strive, the deeper they sink. Boyle

expresses his debt to the Victorian novelist most explicitly in one of the novel's early chapters, entitled "Not Twist, Not Copperfield, Not Fagin Himself" as well as in the name of Mungo Park's closest friend in England, Charles Dickson.

Although the majority of its allusions are to eighteenth and nineteenth-century literature, chapter titles in *Water Music* also make reference to such twentieth-century works as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men*, and Flannery O'Connor's "Everything That Rises Must Converge." By continually alluding to works from the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, Boyle self-consciously demonstrates the breadth of his literary knowledge. However, Boyle wishes to do more than merely place his own novel within a wide and varied intertextual field; he also strives to set *Water Music* apart from conventional literary forms. The principal way in which he does so is by anachronistically infusing his use of eighteenth-century novelistic conventions with contemporary elements.

*Water Music* and the Postmodernization  
of the Eighteenth-Century Novel

Although it is set in the Georgian era and consciously adopts formal and thematic elements associated with the eighteenth-century picaresque, Boyle's novel is an inherently postmodern work. In essence, what the author does in *Water Music* is to postmodernize the early English novel by integrating recent fictional qualities and

techniques into the form's traditional structure. That a postmodern ethos governs *Water Music* is evident from the novel's contemporary language, its metafictional tendencies, its incorporation of popular and non-literary art forms, and its use of cinematic techniques.

Nowhere in *Water Music* do we witness anything akin to Barth's attempts at "perpetrating" or Jong's sense of "impersonating" eighteenth-century language. Unlike these two novelists, Boyle refuses to play the role of linguistic forger. Thus, in contrast to the pseudo-authentic eighteenth-century languages found in *The Sot-Weed Factor* and *Fanny*, the language of *Water Music* is almost entirely contemporary. Consider, for example, the narrator's account of Mungo Park's triumphant return to England:

Another reception, another round of drinks, another bank of faces. As best the explorer can ascertain, this is the twentieth bash thrown in his honor since he got back a month ago -- or is it the twenty-first? The pace is killing. But exhilarating. He goes from one lecture to the next, one drawing room to another. One night he meets a duchess, the next an earl. Mungo Park, son of a crafter, rubbing elbows with the high and mighty -- and not twenty-seven yet. Heady, is what it is (p. 208).

By sprinkling this passage with expressions such as "bash," "rubbing elbows," and "Heady," Boyle reveals that, while his tale unfolds in England and Africa during the late eighteenth-century, it is being rendered by a narrator whose language is that of 1980, not 1780. The contemporary sensibility of Boyle's narrator is evident in his use of colloquial phrases like "Ned froze his ass off on the street," "Ned gave her the finger," and "He took a drag on his reefer."

Besides the narrator, characters within the novel also express themselves in current vernacular, uttering such lines as "It's been a bitch of a day," "It was big of her," and "Beats the hell out of me." Johnson, in particular, engages in a great deal of modern wise-cracking:

"You coulda had the hide confricated right off you, you know that? I mean a sandstorm is nothin' to fuck around with" (p. 67).

"It's dog eat dog out there. If you weak, they goin' to knock you down and strip your ass bare" (p. 353).

"I mean, it's one thing to have some old white lady take a look at your tea leaves in her front parlor in Edinburgh or London or someplace -- but, hey, this is Africa, man. The eye of the needle, mother of mystery, heart of darkness" (p. 92).

In the novel's Apologia, Boyle declares "I have been deliberately anachronistic" and, by having his eighteenth-century characters utter thoroughly contemporary remarks like "Beats the hell out of me" and "but, hey, this is Africa, man," Boyle effectively dissolves the reader's ability to associate types of language with certain historical periods. We see the extreme self-consciousness of Boyle's linguistic dislocation in passages such as the following:

But as the explorer brushes by, he notices that they avert their eyes and clutch at their *saphies*, thick lips moving as if in prayer. 'Hot dog,' Johnson whispers, falling back on one of his arcane colonial expressions. 'You've got them awestruck' (p. 110).

By referring to "Hot dog" as an "arcane colonial expression," Boyle's narrator comically underscores the "deliberately anachronistic" qualities of the novel's speech patterns.

The above passage is only one of several in *Water Music* in which the narrator metafictionally calls attention to his narrative. For example, within the novel's first few pages, we are given the following description of the cellar at the Pig & Pox Tavern:

There's the dirt floor, mop in a bucket, walls of stone. Against the back wall, a double row of sealed casks: Madeira, port, Lisbon, claret, hock. In the corner, a shovel or two of coal . . . Two pewter measures the size of eggcups and a terra-cotta jug stand atop the plank in still life. A sow lies on her side beneath the makeshift bar, the swell of her jaw obscured by an overturned chamber pot (p. 6).

In the very next sentence, the narrator, as if emerging from behind the canvas, quickly adds, "Hogarth would have loved it," a remark which deliberately foregrounds both the act of writing and the function of the narrator.

According to Brenda K. Marshall, one of the defining characteristics of the postmodern novel is that the position of the author is one of discursive authority. The postmodern author, Marshall claims, "produces a text which manipulates (overtly and covertly) a reader-receiver. In the metafiction of postmodernism, this producing position is often given form through the narrator-author inscribed within the text, who openly acknowledges to the reader his or her presence and his or her power of manipulation."<sup>24</sup> In the preceding passages, we see Boyle consciously inscribing the narrator-author figure within the text of *Water Music*.

The novel's metafictional tendencies are also evident in Boyle's self-conscious manipulation of his narrative:

It's a long road to Hertfordshire. A road that goes by way of Enfield, various hayricks, an old virago's shack, the county jail and the hulks. But that's getting ahead of the story. Step back a pace and



remember the winter of '02, blustery and bitter, and the two ragged figures shivering their way up the Hertfordshire road, starved, penniless and fearful" (p. 280).

Boyle's interrupting his description with the remark "But that's getting ahead of the story" as well as his asking the reader to recall the winter of '02 deliberately break the frame of his fictional construct. Elsewhere in the novel, after discussing the reasons behind Georgie Clegg's flight to Edinburgh, the author begins a comparison between Georgie and Ailie Park, only to stop abruptly and add, "But that's another story" -- an instance which metafictionally alludes to his seemingly limitless capacity for generating interpolated tales. What Boyle does in each of these instances is to lay bare the narrative process by openly acknowledging to the reader his powers of manipulation and creation.

Throughout the course of *Water Music*, Boyle installs a number of metafictional turnstiles such as these that focus attention on his novel's fictional status. At times, the author even makes jokes at the plot's expense. Consider, for example, the following chapter titles: "Arise" (in which the character of Ned Rise is introduced), "Oh Mama, Can This Really Be the End" (wherein Ned struggles with a deadly fever), and "The Last Smirk" (during which Ned's nemesis, Nelson Smirke, is taken away by cannibals). By entitling his chapters in such a blatantly self-reflexive manner, Boyle almost seems to be winking at the reader.

As Linda Hutcheon argues, the merging of traditional literary forms with popular and non-literary elements is a

defining aspect of postmodern literature,<sup>25</sup> and in *Water Music* one of the principal ways in which Boyle adapts the eighteenth-century novel to the postmodern era is by incorporating elements from popular culture into his novel's traditional structure. More overtly contemporary than both *The Sot-Weed Factor* and *Fanny*, *Water Music* repeatedly alludes to such popular forms as television shows, radio jingles, and, as we see in the following lines by Johnson, even beer commercials: "That's sooloo beer you drinkin' there, Mr. Park. Black-roasted sorghum malt and the purest spring water, aged and krausened in strict accord with a ancient and closely guarded tribal formula" (p. 69). Attuned to all forms of culture, the novel is as comfortable making references to Greek tragedy as it is echoing the lyrics to pop songs. Larry McCaffery captures well the encyclopedic range of Boyle's allusive prose, "Mr. Boyle is a writer who alludes to a Verdi opera in one breath and to Devo's 'Satisfaction' or the Flying Lizards' version of 'Money' in the next -- or who might cite Shakespeare, Screamin' Jay Hawkins and George Romero's 'Night of the Living Dead' in a paragraph."<sup>26</sup>

*Water Music* not only moves fluidly between high and low forms of art, it also suggests that such cultural hierarchies are invalid. That is, rather than valorizing one form over the other, as traditional novels tend to do, *Water Music* joins the serious with more popular forms. Thus, in one sentence Boyle links the *Aeneid* with "The Owl and the Pussycat" while in another he segues from a

discussion of Euclidian geometry into a reference to "My Fair Lady." This ability to modulate between high and low culture is, according to Hutcheon, endemic to postmodernism. Postmodernist novels, she maintains, are "both academic and popular, élitist and accessible."<sup>27</sup>

Of all the forms of popular culture he incorporates into *Water Music*, Boyle borrows most extensively from the cinematic arts. This is immediately apparent in the novel's frequent allusions to such films as *Apocalypse Now*, *Born Free*, *Zulu*, and the Tarzan movies of the 1930s and 40s. Yet, if *Water Music* resembles one film in particular it is Steven Spielberg's *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Like this 1981 blockbuster, *Water Music* has a roller-coaster plot which effectively manipulates its audience by catapulting the hero through a series of incredible situations. Furthermore, both Spielberg and Boyle parodically treat the African adventure tale by ironically echoing such conventional aspects of the form as its stereotypical depiction of natives and its melodramatic tone.

The descriptive style and romping pace of *Water Music* are also highly cinematic, exemplifying what Steven Connor describes as the "familiar postmodernist aesthetic of montage . . . jump-cut, and discontinuity."<sup>28</sup> Boyle's use of montage technique is most evident in the novel's historical overviews:

The years peeled back like the skin of an onion, layer on top of layer. Beau Brummell fled to Calais in disgrace, De Quincey swallowed opium. Sir Joseph Banks and George III gave up the ghost. There were riots in Manchester, Portugal and Greece. Beethoven went deaf, Napoleon fell and rose and fell again, Sir Walter Scott

was shattered by the crash of 1826. Feathered bonnets came back into fashion and furbelows were all the rage (p. 435).

In passages such as this, Boyle pans over European history like a camera, blending images of the past into newsreel-like collages of personal trials, political upheavals, financial crises, and fashion trends.

Boyle's favorite cinematic technique is the jump-cut and during the course of *Water Music* he frequently uses this transitional device to move quickly from chapter to chapter. Early in the novel, for example, Boyle abruptly cuts from a scene of imminent danger -- "Dassoud lowers the pistol" -- to a peaceful winter setting -- "Outside, beyond the lace curtains and leaded windows, a lazy fat-flake of snow settles over the trees and gardens of Selkirk" (p. 29). Imitating the film jump-cut, these dramatic shifts in scene occur without warning; breaking off in mid-action, they are deliberately disarming.

As noted earlier, Boyle's "digressive-progressive" method of narration creates a strong sense of temporal discontinuity as chapters begin, digress, and resume once more. Throughout *Water Music*, Boyle manipulates time in an highly cinematic manner by using flashbacks and flashforwards in much the same way as these devices are used in films. Usually occurring between chapters, though sometimes within them, these transitions link verbal images just as cinematic cuts link visual images. For instance, near the close of the novel, Boyle uses the image of a silver-barreled dueling pistol to link Ned Rise's current

misfortune to past setbacks.

As we thus see, Boyle incorporates a range of contemporary cinematic techniques into his novel. It is, in fact, useful to think of Boyle as the "director" of *Water Music*, changing scenes, moving characters, and ordering cuts. The fact that three of the author's novels -- *Water Music*, *Budding Prospects* (1984) and *The Road to Wellville* (1993) -- have been optioned for movies clearly illustrates that Hollywood appreciates the cinematic nature of Boyle's fiction.

#### Conclusion

Like John Barth and Erica Jong, T. Coraghessan Boyle is attracted to the literary and comic opportunities inherent in the eighteenth-century novel. Yet, whereas Barth attempts to exhaust the possibilities of the form and Jong seeks to feminize it, Boyle wishes to reconceptualize the early English novel for a contemporary audience. He accomplishes this in several ways: by infusing the eighteenth-century novelistic conventions of *Water Music* with contemporary language and commentary, by metafictionally foregrounding the act of writing, by collapsing the distinctions between high and low forms of art, and by integrating cinematic techniques into the structure of his work. In treating the eighteenth-century novel in such a "deliberately anachronistic" manner, Boyle self-consciously breaks with existing literary "rules."

For Boyle, the early novel also offers a fruitful arena

for showcasing not only his linguistic and narrative skills, but also his extensive knowledge of literary tradition. It is, in fact, this breadth of literary knowledge, combined with an acute awareness of recent critical advances, that allows Boyle to postmodernize the eighteenth-century novel and thus bring the form into the 1980s.

## Chapter Five

### "A Renaissance of This Same Spirit": Reinventing the Eighteenth-Century Novel

Finally, both adversity and adventure imply a certain attitude toward the obstacles and settings-out, and this attitude, the spirit of adventurousness, has also been regrettably absent in modern fiction, for the same good reasons. I say 'has been' because there is evidence, in some really recent novels, of a renaissance of this same spirit: hints of the possibility of a post-naturalistic, post-existentialist, post-psychological, post-antinode in which the astonishing, the extravagant ('out-wandering'), the heroic -- in sum, the adventurous -- will come again and welcome into its own.<sup>1</sup>

*The Friday Book*

#### Introduction

In the four previous chapters I traced the ways in which twelve contemporary British and American works variously reinvented the eighteenth-century novel. In this final chapter I will discuss the principal forces behind this recent literary trend. More specifically, I will examine why it is that a significant number of contemporary novelists wish to enter into a dialogue with an earlier literary form and why such a form frequently happens to be the eighteenth-century novel. Also, I want to ask several specific questions. What is the nature of the reinventive process? What do novelists hope to gain by engaging in such a process? Who is the intended audience of reinventive novels?

The fact that so many novelists are turning to earlier literary forms suggests that this movement is a sustained

response to a crisis or impasse in the contemporary novel. In fact, I would argue that these novelists are turning to the eighteenth-century novel in an attempt to revitalize a form which is currently -- as John Barth has pointed out -- in an acute state of exhaustion. In other words, the reinventive impetus guiding these novelists is expressive of a palpable desire to restore a sense of "novel-ty" to the contemporary novel by returning to the roots of the form.

#### The Dilemma of the Contemporary Novelist

Beginning with José Ortega y Gasset in the mid-1920s, a growing number of literary critics have argued that the novel is in a state of depletion or exhaustion. In his lengthy essay "Notes on the Novel" Ortega y Gasset writes:

It is erroneous to think of the novel -- and I refer to the modern novel in particular -- as of an endless field capable of rendering ever new forms. Rather it may be compared to a vast but finite quarry. There exist a number of possible themes for the novel. The workman of the primal hour had no trouble finding new blocks -- new characters, new themes. But present-day writers face the fact that only narrow and concealed veins are left them.<sup>2</sup>

Ortega y Gasset closes this discussion of the novel with the following assertion, "In short, I believe that the genre of the novel, if it is not irretrievably exhausted, has certainly entered its last phase, the scarcity of possible subjects being such that writers must make up for it by the exquisite quality of the other elements that compose the body of the novel."<sup>3</sup>



Forty years later, in *Language and Silence*, George Steiner offered a similar literary prognosis, contending that the contemporary novelist is "grounded in historical circumstances, in a late stage of linguistic and formal civilization in which the expressive achievements of the past seem to weigh exhaustively on the possibilities of the present, in which word and genre seem tarnished."<sup>4</sup> During his wide-ranging study, Steiner sketches out the social and economic forces that have contributed to this state of exhaustion. In his view, the novel is rapidly becoming an inadequate literary form because it is increasingly incapable of reflecting contemporary reality.

More recently, a number of well-known critics have echoed the sentiments of Ortega y Gasset and Steiner. Susan Sontag, Ihab Hassan, Richard Poirier, and Robert Scholes -- all have written about literary exhaustion in one form or another. Sontag, for example, speaks of a "mood of ultimacy," Hassan of "apocalyptic silences," Poirier of "cultural dissolution," and Scholes of the "unbearable weight" of literary tradition.<sup>5</sup> While each of these theorists touches upon exhaustion, the two critics who have dealt most extensively with this concept are Tony Tanner and Bernard Bergonzi.

In *City of Words* Tanner surveys American fiction from 1950-1970 and finds that a very large number of novels embody the feeling of "everything running down." According to Tanner, this sense of exhaustion among American novelists can be attributed to what he calls an "ubiquitous dread of

entropy." Entropy, he explains, is a pervasive feeling that things are inexorably collapsing toward exhaustion and death. Listing an array of contemporary American novelists who have used the term in their work -- among them Thomas Pynchon, Norman Mailer, Saul Bellow, John Updike, Donald Barthelme, Stanley Elkin, and John Barth -- Tanner sees a direct correlation between entropy and the thematic concerns of post-World War II American fiction. "The feeling that, whatever the individual may do, he cannot help but contribute to the entropic process," is as Tanner puts it, "responsible for a great deal of pessimism in [American] fiction."<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, in *The Situation of the Novel*, Bergonzi describes the fate of the contemporary novelist as follows: "[he/she] has inherited a form whose principal characteristic is novelty, or stylistic dynamism, and yet nearly everything possible to be achieved has already been done." Unlike previous critics, Bergonzi believes that the exhaustion of the contemporary novel can be traced to one particular work, James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922). "If ever a novel indicated exhaustive finality and the end of a line of development," he argues, "then *Ulysses* does." Though he praises those novelists who "write in conscious relation to other literature," Bergonzi confesses that he remains "skeptical about the possibility of novels being able to burn up the world any more" because, as he repeatedly asserts, "the novel seems to have lost its newness, and to be no longer novel."<sup>7</sup>

Although Bergonzi and his fellow critics of exhaustion offer compelling discussions of the various causes of

literary exhaustion, the theorist who best addresses the dilemma of the contemporary novelist is novelist John Barth. While he, too, acknowledges that the contemporary novel is in a general state of exhaustion, what sets Barth apart from other critics is that he has identified specific ways for dealing with exhaustion.

John Barth: From Exhaustion to Replenishment

John Barth is the central figure of this study not only because his third novel, *The Sot-Weed Factor*, is the cornerstone work of the reinventive movement, but also because, throughout his fiction and criticism, he has proposed constructive ways for responding to literary exhaustion. Barth began writing in the late 1950s, and during the course of his lengthy career he exhibits a steady movement from a principally modernist sensibility to an evolving postmodern ethos. More significantly, in Barth's own terms, the author's critical focus ultimately shifts from what he calls a "literature of exhaustion" to a "literature of replenishment."

Although he had the advantage of following such literary pioneers as Jorge Luis Borges, Vladimir Nabokov, and Samuel Beckett, Barth differs from his immediate predecessors in one fundamental respect. As John O. Stark explains:

Unlike Borges and Nabokov, [Barth] has explained what they are doing. This evident self-consciousness -- part of an infinite regress since it focuses on a self-conscious literature -- has helped him to notice and to use in his fiction the most important landmarks in literary history that identify the path leading to the Literature of Exhaustion. He has also codified this

kind of literature and even mapped the next steps that fiction can take.<sup>8</sup>

Stark is correct: during his nearly forty years of writing Barth has sought to define both the import and direction of postmodernism by promulgating what he describes as "a worthy program for postmodernist fiction."<sup>9</sup> Closely attuned to the state of contemporary fiction, he has willingly assumed a role as one of its premier practitioners and theorists. Barth sets out his postmodernist aesthetic most explicitly in his deliberately paired critical essays "The Literature of Exhaustion" (1967) and "The Literature of Replenishment" (1979).

As we saw in chapter two, "The Literature of Exhaustion" offers a liberating response to the dilemma of the contemporary novelist. While acknowledging that certain literary forms have indeed been "used up," Barth proposes that writers combat this exhaustion by employing these "felt ultimacies" against themselves as a way of generating "new human work." Throughout his 1967 essay, Barth highlights Borges as the writer who best illustrates "a positive artistic morality in the literature of exhaustion." Borges, he argues, creatively confronts the situation of literary exhaustion by self-consciously incorporating it both thematically and technically into his work. "The Literature of Exhaustion" is an important piece of criticism because it both addresses a literary problem and proposes viable solutions.<sup>10</sup>

Twelve years later, in "The Literature of

Replenishment," Barth clarified and redefined the intentions of his controversial earlier essay. Maintaining that "The Literature of Exhaustion" was not about the "effective exhaustion" of language or of literature, but of "the aesthetic of high modernism," Barth seeks to correct any misreading of his earlier essay as "one more Death of the Novel or Swan-Song of Literature piece."<sup>11</sup> While many misunderstood his intentions, Barth explains that what he was trying to do in "The Literature of Exhaustion" was to articulate a program for postmodernist fiction:

In 1966/67 we scarcely had the term *postmodernism* in its current literary-critical usage -- at least I hadn't heard it yet -- but a number of us, in quite different ways and with varying combinations of intuitive response and conscious deliberation, were already well into the working out, not of the next-best thing after modernism, but of the *best next thing*: what is gropingly now called postmodernist fiction; what I hope might also be thought of one day as a literature of replenishment.<sup>12</sup>

In "The Literature of Replenishment" Barth outlines possible ways for bringing this "best next thing" after modernism into being. He begins by comparing definitions of the term "postmodernism" in the works of such literary critics as Jerome Klinkowitz, Ihab Hassan, Gerald Graff, and Robert Alter. Discovering that there is little consensus among these critics, Barth offers his own definition of postmodernism. "My ideal postmodernist author," he remarks, "neither merely repudiates nor merely imitates either his twentieth-century modernist parents or his nineteenth-century premodernist grandparents. He has the first half of our century under his belt, but not on his back." Barth singles

out Italo Calvino and Gabriel García Márquez as "exemplary postmodernists" because these writers fruitfully synthesize premodernist and modernist modes of writing.

Near the close of his essay Barth offers a brief description of the type of work that would fulfill his notion of the "literature of replenishment." Characteristically, he compares such a work to good music: "One finds much on successive listenings or close examination of the score that one didn't catch the first time through; but the first time through should be so ravishing -- and not just to specialists -- that one delights in the replay."<sup>13</sup> As we will soon see, this notion of delighting in the replay of an aesthetic form is an essential concept for the reinventive novelist.

What is evident from both "The Literature of Exhaustion" and "The Literature of Replenishment" is that, for Barth, the current state of exhaustion is not cause for despair. On the contrary, such a condition offers the creative contemporary novelist a valuable opportunity to create new and original literary forms. Barth's critical reflections on the novel are important not only in relation to his own work, but also because his constructive response to literary exhaustion has had a significant impact on subsequent novelists.

#### Reinvention: Repetition with a Difference

As we saw most extensively in the novels of Barth, Erica Jong, and T. Coraghessan Boyle, reinventive novelists do not return to the early novel in a naive or nostalgic fashion;

rather they return with an imagination tempered by recent literary developments. As makers of fiction in the second half of the twentieth century, these novelists are well aware that they cannot re-present the eighteenth-century novel as their literary predecessors originally did; they must do so with a certain degree of self-consciousness. As Barth explains in "The Literature of Exhaustion," if Beethoven's Sixth Symphony were composed today, without any self-consciousness on the part of the composer, the result would be embarrassing. If, however, such a feat were performed "with ironic intent by a composer quite aware of where we've been and where we are," then it would be an "intellectually serious" endeavor.<sup>14</sup>

Reinventive novelists manifest an ironic literary self-consciousness in several different ways: by revealing the novelist as artificer, by celebrating textuality and intertextuality, by openly parodying traditional literary forms, and by inviting the reader into the fictional workshop. Whatever their chosen method, by revisiting the eighteenth-century novel in a critical manner these novelists fulfill Barth's criteria of the "true postmodernist" as a writer who "keeps one foot always in the narrative past . . . and one foot in, one might say, the structuralist Parisian present."<sup>15</sup>

Because they incorporate and bestow new meaning upon earlier fictional models, reinventive novelists directly challenge T. S. Eliot's well-known contention that "novelty is better than repetition."<sup>16</sup> They demonstrate that

repetition, with an ironic difference, can result in novelty. Borges's short story "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*"<sup>17</sup> offers a helpful illustration of this notion of repetitive novelty. Menard, a French symbolist poet, proposes to offer his own version of *Don Quixote*. What he actually produces, however, is a verbatim copy of Cervantes's classic. In spite of this absolute identity between the two texts, the narrator of the story maintains that Menard's *Quixote* is infinitely richer than the original because the Frenchman brings his own altered historical perspective to the text. Thus, although the words of Menard's recreation are exactly the same, the passage of over three-hundred years has supplied these words with new subtlety, sophistication, and, of course, resonant ironies.

Although the example of Menard is an extreme one, Borges's notion of reinvention as the transmutation of an earlier literary form through a contemporary consciousness is precisely the strategy of the reinventive novelist. Whether they borrow plot outlines, themes, character types, or formal devices from eighteenth-century fiction, reinventive novelists subsequently infuse these familiar elements with a contemporary consciousness. By filtering eighteenth-century novelistic conventions through such a consciousness, they ensure that their works will have resonance for a contemporary audience. Given their wedding of traditional materials and innovative techniques, it is hardly surprising that a number of reinventive novels -- notably works by Barth, Jong, William Boyd, John Fowles, and Peter Ackroyd --



have met with popular as well as critical acclaim.

The Dialogic Nature of Reinvention

In the Bakhtinian sense of the term, the reinventive process is profoundly "dialogic" since it involves a sustained interaction between novelist and reader. During this process, a novelist encodes eighteenth-century literary allusions into the structure of the reinventive text: allusions which the reader must subsequently decode. Thus, whether they do so implicitly or explicitly, all reinventions suggest the background presence of eighteenth-century texts. In order to decode reinventive novels, we must first recognize these "embedded" texts, and then we must superimpose these texts upon the more recent work. If we fail to join background and foreground in such a manner, then we fail to fully appreciate the reinvention itself. In this sense, our understanding of the reinventive novel is predicated upon previous reading experiences. "A literary work can actually no longer be considered original," maintains Linda Hutcheon: "if it were, it could have no meaning for its reader. It is only as part of prior discourses that any text derives meaning and significance."<sup>18</sup>

The concepts of encoding and decoding bring to bear the following question: Who is the intended audience of these novels? Certainly the act of decoding reinventions requires a fairly sophisticated readership, one which is able to decipher a range of appropriations, echoes, and parodies. To

decode the meaning of a reinvented text, we must draw upon our acquired knowledge of traditional literary conventions.

Wallace Martin explains:

Readers have a large store of knowledge about stories and how to understand them, even if they have had little experience with 'great' literature. Our familiarity with literary and cultural conventions is apparent when they are satirized, inverted, or parodied, as they frequently are in fiction and films: if we get the point, we recognize the departure from the norm.<sup>19</sup>

As Martin notes, we must be able to employ our "large store of knowledge about stories" in a specialized manner since reinventive novelists assume that their readers possess the critical capacity to decode their use, or abuse, of eighteenth-century novelistic conventions.

Finally, the fundamentally dialogic nature of the reinventive movement reflects a strong desire on behalf of contemporary novelists to reestablish ties with their readers -- ties which existed in the eighteenth-century novel but which are largely absent from today's fiction. In the early novel the close rapport between novelist and reader is readily apparent in the form's highly conversational tone. For example, in the narrative structure of works such as *Tom Jones* and *Tristram Shandy*, there is an air of familiarity which serves to draw novelist and reader together. Although reinventive novelists rarely adopt the eighteenth-century strategy of directly addressing their readers, they do employ subtler rhetorical strategies to initiate and foster dialogue. The reinventive process itself is one such method since it involves novelist and reader collaborating in the completion of a communication circuit. Quite literally,

readers are co-creators of the reinventive text as novelists invite them to participate in the specific hermeneutic activities required to make sense of postmodern fiction.

### Reinvention and Literary Tradition

The dialogic nature of reinvention manifests itself not only in the rapport between novelist and reader, but also in the relationship between novelist and earlier fictional forms. As we saw in the previous chapters, contemporary novelists may enter into a dialogue with the eighteenth-century novel for a myriad of reasons: to comment implicitly upon current issues, to compare past and present literary practices, to make amends for earlier misrepresentations or omissions, or simply to place their works within a broader literary context. Whatever their individual reasons for engaging in such a dialogue, all reinventive novelists pay some form of tribute to their literary predecessors. None, that is, even those who engage in parodic strategies, denigrates eighteenth-century models. As Hutcheon explains, "any concept of textual appropriation must implicitly place a certain value upon the original."<sup>20</sup> While clearly respectful, contemporary novelists are not however at all averse to using the reinventive act as an occasion for showcasing their own literary skills. Indeed, there is often a strong sense of performance in reinventive works, a self-conscious display of narrative and linguistic virtuosity.

This penchant for performance is closely allied with the

competitiveness inherent in the reinventive act. In a very direct manner, reinventive novelists are stacking their works up against the works of earlier novelists, and, particularly in the cases of Barth, Jong, and Boyle, there is an overriding urge to outperform eighteenth-century precursors. In an obvious reference to his own practices, Barth argues that "any gutsy writer who happens to be afflicted with a formalist imagination would . . . feel compelled to go the existing corpus one better, or two or three better . . . in order to actualize an attractive possibility in the ancient art of storytelling that one's distinguished predecessors have barely suggested."<sup>21</sup> We need only recall Barth's ambition to create "a plot that was fancier than *Tom Jones*"<sup>22</sup> to see this principle in action. For Jong, going "the existing corpus one better" involves rewriting, from a femiocentric perspective, works like *Pamela* and *Fanny Hill*. For Boyle, such an act entails surpassing even the linguistic exuberance of *Tristram Shandy*.

#### "A Renaissance of This Same Spirit"

Although the reinvention of the eighteenth-century novel in contemporary British and American fiction is a discernible and sustained literary trend, only a handful of studies have even noticed it.<sup>23</sup> In *The Situation of the Novel*, for example, Bergonzi joins together a group of contemporary novels that "deliberately draw on earlier novels" yet, though he senses that these works constitute a coherent group,

Bergonzi wonders whether "a movement which . . . is basically circular can have the same significance and value as a forward or linear movement."<sup>24</sup> More directly, in *The Modern American Novel*, Malcolm Bradbury concludes his discussion of post-1960 American fiction by remarking that "many contemporary writers have been searching for the meaning of fiction at its roots."<sup>25</sup> While both Bergonzi and Bradbury refer obliquely to what I have called the reinventive trend, neither offers to describe its contours or to explain why so many contemporary novelists have chosen the eighteenth-century novel as the particular literary form they wish to reinvent. In my view, there are several important reasons behind such a choice.

First, by returning directly to the origins of the English novel, reinventive novelists effectively bypass the father in Harold Bloom's oedipal configuration of literary history.<sup>26</sup> In so doing, these novelists free themselves from the "agonistic strife" of competing with their immediate literary precursors, the modernists. "The Post-Modern implies a literature which lacks a known parenthood," argues Charles Newman.<sup>27</sup> While this claim is certainly true, it is important to recognize that the reinventive novelists' choice to effect a discontinuity with their literary predecessors is a deliberate one intended to relieve the considerable anxiety of following the likes of James Joyce, Joseph Conrad, and Virginia Woolf. If we all secretly wish to kill (or, in the case of women, seduce) our fathers, grandparents arouse no

such anxious feelings.

Reinventive novelists prefer the eighteenth-century novel to the nineteenth-century form also because, in their view, the former provides a more accurate lens through which to view the contemporary world. As Patricia Tobin explains, the early novel "conveys the formal illusion that reality is too chaotic to accept any authorial patterning beyond the narrative recording of it. The eighteenth-century novel, compared with the neat housekeeping of its nineteenth-century heir, is the house of fiction before the maid arrives."<sup>28</sup>

For contemporary novelists, the apparent disorder and irresolution of eighteenth-century works such as *Humphry Clinker* and *Tristram Shandy* are far truer to the conditions of contemporary life than the neatness and closure that characterize the nineteenth-century novel.

Reinventive novelists also return to the early novel in an attempt to reclaim abundance for the contemporary form. As we saw most dramatically in the novels of Barth, Jong, and Boyle, there is an effort on behalf of contemporary novelists to match the sheer immensity of eighteenth-century works such as *Tom Jones*, *Humphry Clinker*, and *Tristram Shandy*. With their panoramic scope, energetic plotting, huge casts of characters, and page-long prose catalogues, modern-day comic epic novels like *The Sot-Weed Factor*, *Fanny*, and *Water Music* actively contest the notion that the novel is in a state of exhaustion.

Barth's afterword to the 1963 Signet Classics edition of *Roderick Random* -- quoted in the epigraph to this chapter --

suggests another principal reason why contemporary novelists find the eighteenth-century novel such an attractive form to reinvent. As Barth rightly notes, in returning to the very roots of the English novel, novelists seek to recapture "renaissance" of the spirit of adventurousness, extravagance, and ebullience -- qualities which they feel are sorely lacking in today's fiction. "The eighteenth-century novel constantly gives the sense of a new and vigorous literary mode," Bergonzi maintains.<sup>29</sup> This sense of novelty is explicit in Fielding's contention in *Tom Jones* that he is "the founder of a new province of writing," while a sense of vigor is clearly implicit in Sterne's assertion in *Tristram Shandy* that he is unwilling to confine himself to "any man's rules that ever lived."

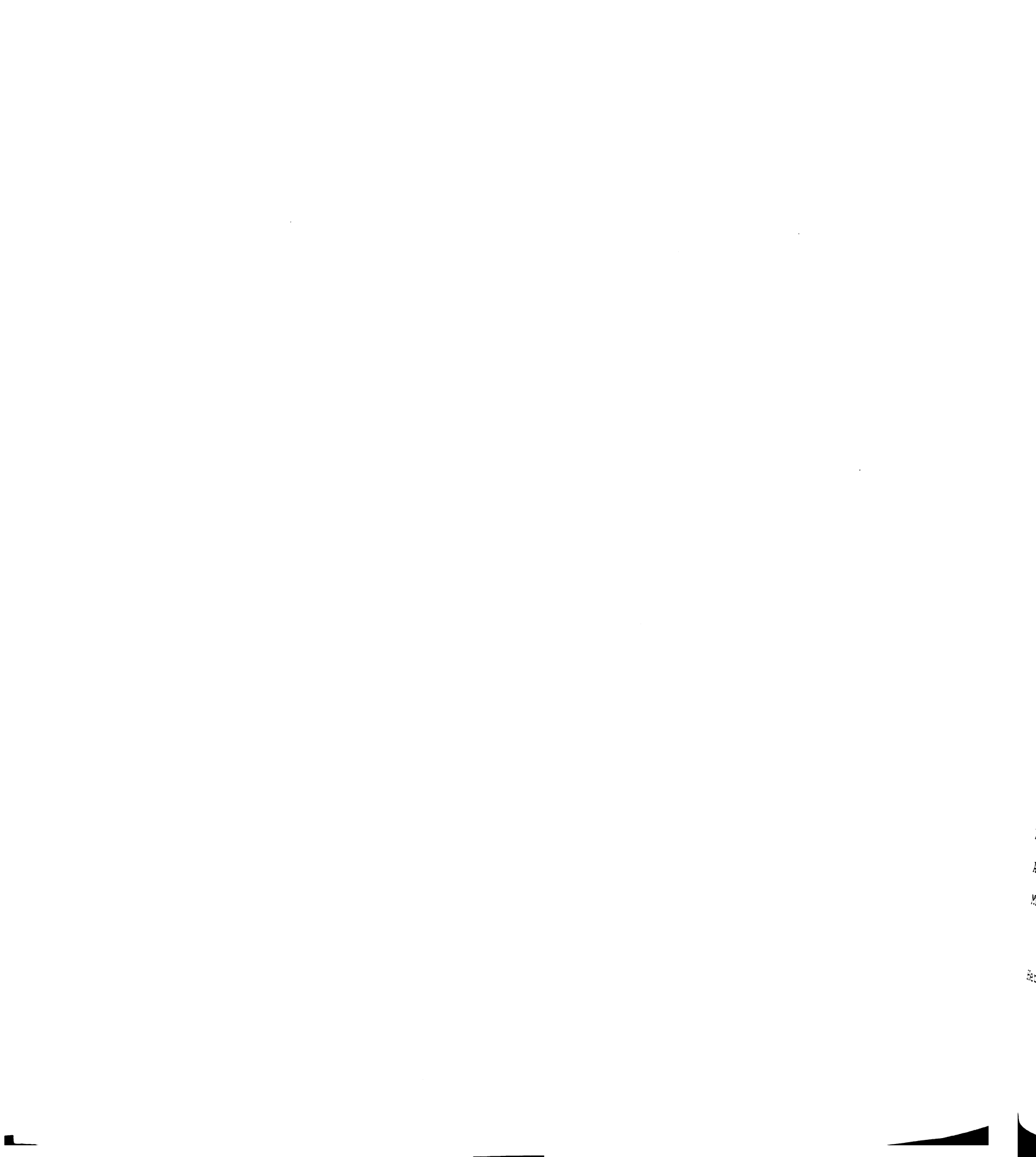
By returning to an era of apparent artistic innocence -- to a time when the novel was, in Barth's words, "older, looser, freer, more epical and rough"<sup>30</sup> -- these novelists hope to rediscover the sense of excitement experienced by the first novelists. As Beverly Gross remarks, "It is interesting that Barth chose precisely the milieu of Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding as the setting for his novel which *re-invented* the genre that they had invented in the eighteenth century -- as though by matching their setting Barth could join them at the starting line."<sup>31</sup> Although Gross is speaking specifically about *The Sot-Weed Factor*, her remarks apply equally well to other reinventive works.

A significant number of reinventive novelists wish to revitalize the exhausted contemporary novel by returning to

the roots of the form. Theirs is a conscious movement to take the novel back to its origins and, in so doing, to reinvest the form with vestiges of its former vitality and adventurousness. For these contemporary British and American novelists, to "reinvent" means not to copy or to imitate an original but to be once more inventive. We can see in their attempts at reinventing the eighteenth-century novel a palpable desire to return to a time when the form was in its infancy and not yet exhausted by more than two centuries of wear and tear, to harken back to an era when the novel was indeed "novel."



NOTES



## NOTES

### Chapter One

<sup>1</sup> Patricia Craig, "Crusoe and Daughter," *London Review of Books* 25 (1985): 20.

<sup>2</sup> Other examples of reinvention not discussed in this study include sequels to eighteenth-century works, such as Bob Coleman's *The Later Adventures of Tom Jones* (1985), Joan Aiken's *Mansfield Revisited: A Sequel to Jane Austen's Mansfield Park* (1985), Emma Tennant's *Pemberley: Or "Pride and Prejudice" Continued* (1993), and Julia Barrett's *Presumption* (1993). The year 1992 was a particularly fruitful one for reinventions as the following novels were set in the eighteenth century: Malcolm Bosse's *A Vast Memory of Love*, Allen Kurzweil's *A Case of Curiosities*, Susan Sontag's *The Volcano Lover: A Romance*, and Lawrence Norfolk's *Lempriere's Dictionary*. It is important to note, however, that this reinventive tendency is not confined to British and American fiction. We also see examples of such a movement in writers from France, Australia, Germany, and South Africa: Michel Tournier's *Friday, or the Other Island* (1967), Barbara Ker Wilson's *Antipodes Jane: A Novel of Jane Austen in Australia* (1984), Patrick Suskind's *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* (1985), and J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* (1986).

<sup>3</sup> Muriel Spark, *Robinson* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1958). Hereafter, page references cited in parentheses in the

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<sup>4</sup> Kingsley Amis, *Take A Girl Like You* (London: Penguin, 1960). Hereafter, page references cited in parentheses in the text. Fay Weldon, *Letters to Alice on First Reading Jane Austen* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1984). Hereafter, page references cited in parentheses in the text. William Boyd, *The New Confessions* (London: Penguin, 1987). Hereafter, page references cited in parentheses in the text.

<sup>5</sup> John Hawkes, *Virginie: Her Two Lives* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1983). Hereafter, page references cited in parentheses in the text. John Fowles, *A Maggot* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1985). Hereafter, page references cited in parentheses in the text. Peter Ackroyd, *Hawksmoor: A Novel* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985). Hereafter, page references cited in parentheses in the text.

<sup>6</sup> According to Elkin, a Boswell story provided the impetus for his second novel. Prior to its writing, a colleague of Elkin's at Washington University told the novelist about how Boswell once presented himself at Voltaire's door after an unsuccessful campaign by letter. This anecdote, from the biographer's 1764 journal, had a lasting effect on Elkin. The image of Boswell standing at the door of the French philosopher, he recalls, "struck me as being so funny that I thought a modern Boswell, on the make

for all the great men of his time, might be the source of an amusing novel." Midway through his own work, Elkin reproduces this incident when his Boswell camps outside the hotel door of the Great Sandusky. Quoted in David C. Dougherty, *Stanley Elkin* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1991) 17.

<sup>7</sup> Dougherty, *Stanley Elkin* 18.

<sup>8</sup> "Hawkes and Barth Talk About Fiction," *New York Times Book Review* 21 (1979): 32.

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<sup>2</sup> John Barth, *The Sot-Weed Factor*, revised edition (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1967). Hereafter, page references cited in parentheses in the text.

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- 8 Barth, *The Friday Book* 63.
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<sup>13</sup> Miller, *The Heroine's Text* xii.

<sup>14</sup> Shepherd, "Erica Jong" 189.

<sup>15</sup> Elaine Showalter, ed., *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985) 265.

<sup>16</sup> Mitzi Myers, "The Dilemmas of Gender as Double-Voiced Narrative; Or, Maria Edgeworth Mothers the *Bildungsroman*" in Robert W. Uphaus, ed., *The Idea of the Novel in the Eighteenth Century* (East Lansing: Colleagues Press, 1988) 68.

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- 23 Francis King, "A Voice from the Past," *The Spectator* (September 28, 1985): 29. In her review of *Hawksmoor*, King speaks briefly of a "creative nostalgia" which is "increasingly taking over the English novel." Alan Friedman, "Two Plots, Two Heroes," *New York Times Book Review* (December 27, 1981): 10. In a review of *Water Music* Friedman deems Boyle's novel another example of the "New Old Novel," a

form he describes as "the novel of a previous century written today, newborn yet already dignified by the wrinkles of an older age." Friedman posits the idea that these novels -- among them William Golding's 1980 novel *Rites of Passage* and *Fanny* -- constitute the "next wave" of postmodernist fiction.

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