CONVENTIONS OF 'CHARACTER' IN
MOLL FLANDERS, MIDDLEMARCH AND ULYSSES

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ABSTRACT

Through an examination of *Moll Flanders*, *Middlemarch* and *Ulysses*, this thesis attempts to demonstrate the limitations inherent in the common identification of novelistic character with human character or personality. It is based on the idea that character is a kind of language written and read relative to conventions originating in both the world of reality and the world of words; character necessarily refers to and is necessarily informed by cultural conventions and beliefs about man and the world on one hand, and literary conventions of genre or form on the other. While every novelistic character exists in relation to cultural and literary conventions, the apparent importance of these respective conventions may vary considerably according to the artistic intentions of an author. The novels chosen for study here permit the delineation of two extreme possibilities of authorial intention where the language of character is concerned. These correspond roughly to the disappearance and the appearance of character as language. In between these extremes lies a conceptually useful point of transition which marks the emergence of the language of character and explains its unequivocal appearance as a realization of novelistic potential.

In *Moll Flanders*, Defoe creates the illusion of an autonomous person, the "character-person," by appealing to cultural conventions of human behavior according to which Moll is capable of telling her own story, of being both subject and object of the language that actually creates her. He strengthens this illusion by incorporating and undermining elements of picaresque fiction, thus suggesting that Moll is not written at all. In *Middlemarch*, Eliot attenuates the illusion of the character-person and allows for the emergence
of the language of character by visibly using Will Ladislaw as an agent, a "character-agent," whose role as a parodic romance hero is visible relative to the literary realm. Eliot's sustained use of Will in the upsetting of romance conventions shifts the reader's attention from the world to the word and shows the character-person to be a conventional configuration of language created through the upsetting of traditional conventions. In 

*Ulysses,* Joyce undermines the conventions of the character-person to reveal character as language. Leopold Bloom begins his odyssey as a character-person, but is soon shown to be an agent whose role is partially determined by Homer's *Odyssey.* The shift from the world of Dublin to the words of the text allows the reader to see Bloom's odyssey as a voyage through the styles of the novel and to see Bloom, ultimately, as a "character-character": an arrangement of words, of linguistic signs on the page, that reach their most concentrated expression when "Bloom" assumes the form of a dot of ink.

The examples of *Moll Flanders,* *Middlemarch* and *Ulysses* suggest that a given character may occupy any position between the extremes marked by the disappearance and the appearance of the language of character and that any such position is entirely a matter of convention. Movement from one extreme to the other would seem to be assured by the novel's appetite for undermining traditional literary conventions of any kind. This upsetting of convention can underplay what a character owes to literary conventions and make language disappear into the illusion of the character-person. Or, it can highlight what a character owes to literary conventions and make language appear as an object in itself. Character itself can remind us that character is, after all, language.
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INTRODUCTION

If "the idea of character has fallen on hard times," the blame can be squarely laid on the shoulders of critics who insist on identifying novelistic character with conceptions of human character or personality.¹ Foremost among these critics, at least in recent times, is E. M. Forster whose description of characters as "people" raises its troublesome head in many handbooks to Literature.² Forster, of course, along with the handbook writers who follow his lead, knows perfectly well that character is language, but his definition, by metaphorically identifying the language of character with the illusion it traditionally creates, effectively ignores this fact and turns the study of an essentially literary phenomenon into a study of psychology or ethics. Without denying that authors often do use the language of character to create the illusion of personality, the limits to this constrictive approach to character can easily be demonstrated.

An analysis of character which hopes to be equally useful when applied to Moll Flanders, Middlemarch and Ulysses must ignore Forster's definition and base itself firmly on the premise that character is a kind of language. As such, character is both written and read relative to two main bodies of convention, one of which originates in the world of reality and the other in the world of words; character necessarily refers to and is necessarily informed by cultural conventions and beliefs about man and the


world on one hand, and literary conventions of genre and form on the other. But, while every novelistic character exists in relation to both cultural and literary conventions, the apparent importance of these respective conventions may vary considerably depending on the artistic intentions of an author. The novels chosen for study here permit the delineation of two extreme possibilities of authorial intention where the language of character is concerned. These correspond roughly to the disappearance and the appearance of character as language. In between these two extremes lies a conceptually valuable point of transition which marks the emergence of the language of character and which explains the final unequivocal appearance of language as a realization of novelistic potential.

Defoe uses the language of character in _Moll Flanders_ to create the illusion of an autonomous person, the "character-person." To this end, he disguises Moll's linguistic nature by first appealing to cultural conventions of plausible human behavior, the most important of which is undoubtedly her ability to say "I," to appear as both the subject and the object, the source and referent, of the language that actually constitutes her. Next, Defoe strengthens the illusion of Moll's personhood by incorporating and subsequently undermining conventional elements of picaresque fiction. This technique asserts Moll's reality as a person relative to the literary realm by suggesting that she is not a conventional literary construct, that she is not written at all. Moll's apparent autonomy and the transparence of the language of character go hand in hand; they both depend upon Defoe's success in pretending he does not create and use Moll for his artistic purposes, but merely describes her.
In *Middlemarch*, Eliot attenuates the illusion of the character-person and allows for the emergence of the language of character by visibly using Will Ladislaw as her agent in the telling of her, not his, story. Will's agency, his role as a "character-agent," appears relative to the literary realm. It is determined by Eliot's intention to upset or parody the conventions of romance. Whereas Defoe's occasional upsetting of picaresque conventions underplays what Moll owes to literature and asks that she be read as a real person inhabiting a real world, Eliot's sustained and highly visible upsetting of romance conventions shifts attention from the world to the literary realm and shows Ladislaw to be a literary character created through the upsetting of traditional literary conventions. If, like Defoe, Eliot ultimately uses traditional literary conventions to heighten the realism of her novel, it is equally true that in doing so, unlike Defoe, she reveals the character-person as a linguistic "cluster of signs" which, along with novelistic realism, is itself a convention.³

In *Ulysses*, Joyce exploits the convention-breaking potential of the novel to undermine the convention of the character-person and to reveal character as language. Bloom begins his odyssey as a character-person living in Dublin, but a series of Homeric allusions soon reveal him to be a character-agent whose role is partially determined by the words and actions of Odysseus, his literary progenitor. The shift in emphasis from the world to the literary realm initiated by the Homeric parallel in *Ulysses* is far more pronounced than that encouraged by romance convention in *Middlemarch*, which is not surprising given the differing referents of the two titles.

Joyce illustrates that such a shift is a prerequisite for the undermining of the conventional character-person and for the appearance of the language of character as a thing in itself by revealing the "I" of the character-person to be like the "eye" of Homer's Cyclops: a point-of-view, a style, a configuration of language created through naming. More than either Moll Flanders or Will Ladislaw, Leopold Bloom makes the reader see that a character in a novel is words on a page and not, as Forster would have it, a person.
CHAPTER ONE
CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

Character in the novel is first and foremost a type of language—a privileged type, perhaps, but language nonetheless. Thus, F.R. Leavis reminds us that "we talk of a novelist as 'creating characters', but the process of creating is one of putting words together."¹ Etymology supports this critical perspective: "character" is literally "a graphic sign or symbol standing for a sound, syllable or notion; e.g. a letter of the alphabet (Chinese or Runic characters); (collectively) writing, printing" (OED). If the linguistic nature of character is too obvious to warrant mention, then so is our tendency to obscure the obvious when we discuss character. Neither, in fact, is too obvious. We often stray from the traditional idea that the language of character imitates, describes, or creates the illusion of, persons like ourselves, into the fallacy of assuming that we speak of persons when we speak of characters: "we all of us, grave or light, get our thoughts entangled in metaphors."²

A partial explanation of the ease with which readers can see through the language of character to persons apparently being described can be found in the everyday use of prose itself. In being "used for the common purpose of life . . .," writes Virginia Woolf, "prose has taken all the dirty work on to her own shoulders; has answered letters, paid bills, written articles, made speeches, served the needs of businessmen,

¹F. R. Leavis, Introd., Towards Standards of Criticism (Bristol: Wishart & Co., 1933), p. 16.
shopkeepers, lawyers, soldiers, peasants." The "dirty work" of prose consists, no doubt, of the thankless servility required of a language used primarily for its ability to describe reality. And to be useful in the marketplace, prose must remain at the service of its referent: a contract between one businessman wanting to sell ten tractors and another interested in buying them is impossible without a shared belief that the tractors exist (or will exist) as described. The prose of the contract, if it is to be effective, must refer to reality as it is mutually perceived according to "common sense": "tractor" must describe a real machine capable of pulling plows.

The language of novelistic character, however, differs essentially from the referential language of the contract, because

In literature, questions of fact and truth are subordinated to the primary literary aim of producing a structure of words for its own sake, and the sign-values of symbols are subordinated to their importance as a structure of interconnected motifs.

In some literary works, the appearance of truthfulness and factuality (plausibility of a character's action, likeness between a character and an historical personage) is carefully cultivated, but this appearance is illusory: in literature, writes Northrop Frye, "the reality-principle is subordinate to the pleasure-principle," though "neither factor can, of course, ever be eliminated from any kind of writing." *4*

The fact that a novelist is under no obligation to tell the truth is

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made explicit in his calling his work a **fiction**: that which is, in some sense, not true. In bookstores, readers find novels under signs that read "Fiction," which suggests that we traditionally agree, before we buy a copy, to the author's right to lie. This fundamental agreement between reader and writer as to the significance of features appearing in a literary work is an example of a convention: "the accepted postulate, the contract agreed upon by the reader before he can start reading, is the same thing as a convention."\(^5\) Convention—whether traditional or new, whether pertaining to a legal document or a novel—is the precondition for the transmission of meaning; lack of agreement between reader and writer as to what the basic features of a text mean renders communication between the two impossible and makes the text, for all practical purposes, meaningless.

Conventions governing the reading and writing of novelistic character can be divided into three categories, even though the boundaries between these categories are often far from distinct; still, for the purposes of analysis we may speak of natural, cultural and literary conventions. Natural conventions account for those aspects of existence perfectly comprehensible on the basis of instinctive common sense. Language that falls into this category is "discourse which requires no justification because it seems to derive from the structure of the world, the text of the natural attitude."\(^6\) A character who puts food in his mouth for sustenance is easily understood by the reader because all persons act similarly in order to assuage their hunger; such an action is so natural that the very idea of its depending on convention for its

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\(^5\)Frye, p. 76.

comprehensibility seems incongruous.

Cultural conventions account for those aspects of the world that require explanation or justification; they take the form of knowledge and beliefs shared by some, but not all persons. A character who will not stop eating after his appetite has been satisfied can only be understood by appealing to conventions of, say, religion, psychology or biology, according to which the character would be gluttonous, orally-fixated or suffering from a digestive disorder. As Roland Barthes argues in Mythologies, the distinction between the natural and the cultural is often intentionally blurred; champions of a particular cultural convention (liberalism, marxism) virtually always seek respectability by aspiring to the unquestioned truth of the natural.  

Literary conventions, all of which stem from the poet's fundamental right to tell untruths (this writer, too, aspires to the natural) can only be learned from the study of literature. Through the experience of literary texts, we acquire expectations based on conceptions of form or genre, or on the relation of a text to others of its kind or to another specific text; in short, we learn to read, to travel in what Frye calls the "literary universe." Literary conventions, writes Culler, dictate that "the reader attends to character in a different way if he is reading a tragedy or if he is reading a comedy which he expects to end in multiple marriages." It follows that the character who eats at a marriage feast at the end of a fiction may be better understood as a "sign" of the work's genre than as a hungry person.

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8 Culler, p. 147.
Because they spring from literature itself, literary conventions determine the relevance of both natural and cultural conventions to the reading of novelistic character. For example, although a character may appear to be a person, he may—and often does—see without eyes, rebel without spirit, repent without conscience. He is capable of these "miracles" precisely because he is words on a page, no more and no less: "The unspoken word is often eloquent," writes William Gass, "a character has what he has been given; he also has what he hasn't, just as strongly." Thus,

it is not at all correct to assume that because Mr. Mulholland has thumbs, he has hands, arms, torso, self. That inference destroys the metaphor (a pure synecdoche), since his thumbs are all he seems to be. Mr. Mulholland is monumentally clumsy, but if you fill him in behind his thumbs, clumsiness will not ensue.\(^9\)

Distinguishing natural and cultural conventions from their literary counterparts in the novel is a difficult task. One reason is that the novel is both a cultural and a literary artifact. Another, more important, reason is that the novel is a literary form which traditionally attempts to pass for natural, truthful, lifelike or realistic, by creating word-worlds which embody or incorporate the natural and cultural conventions of its audience. Novelistic realism is still a literary convention, but one that enjoys the unique privilege of appearing to be convention-free, thus making the very idea of linguistic artifice or literary convention seem

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misplaced, if not plain heartless.  

The novel however belongs to literature as much as it belongs to the world, and its literariness adds another dimension to our perception of it. According to Menachem Brinker, in the novel, as in other art forms,

Any given impression of naturalness or conventionalization is, obviously, dually relative—relative to the basic conventions of the art form and also relative to the habits and expectations of its audience.

From a literary perspective, we can recognize that one of the basic conventions of the novel is its tendency to build on or to incorporate other literary forms: the novel, says Woolf, is "a cannibal which has devoured so many forms of art" and will devour "even more." Thus, one way the novel creates the impression of its own novelty is by incorporating elements of epic, tragedy, comedy, romance, picaresque fiction, autobiography, lyric poetry, and then upsetting these traditional forms through parody. From this perspective, the upsetting or breaking of traditional forms can be seen as a convention in itself—one that may well be closer to the novel's heart than the impression of reality it often creates; realism, too, is a convention that can be stood on its head.

Perhaps nowhere are the literary and cultural aspects of the novel so inextricably interwoven as in the language of character, and perhaps no

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11 Menachem Brinker, "Verisimilitude, Conventions, and Beliefs," New Literary History, Vol. XIV, No. 2 (Winter, 1983), p. 255. Anyone interested in the debate over convention, both social and literary, should consult this issue of NLH.

single word exemplifies the novel's ability to confuse the boundary between our words and our world better than the word "character" itself. In its general cultural sense, "character" is "the sum of moral and mental qualities which distinguish an individual," or account for his status as a person, for his personality (OED). That this sense has infiltrated the literary sense of the word can be seen by referring to virtually any handbook of literature. In A Glossary of Literary Terms, for example, Abrams defines characters as "the persons in a dramatic or narrative work" (emphasis mine).\(^\text{13}\) E. M. Forster implies a similar view in his choice of title for the chapters of Aspects of the Novel that deal with character: "Since the characters in a story are usually human, it seemed convenient to entitle this aspect People."\(^\text{14}\) The lack of any clear literary sense in "literary" definitions of character reflects the traditional predominance of realistic convention or, as the writer of a recent article on character puts it of, "the conventional assumption that character is readable only when grounded in the specific ideology of psychological coherence [which] equates 'character' with the principle of intelligible behavior it traditionally illustrates."\(^\text{15}\)

This "conventional assumption" produces what Barthes calls a "realistic view of character," a view shared by many critics who write


about novelistic character. In The Creation of Character in Literature, for example, Galsworthy writes that

there are certain primary reasons why the creation of individual character as the chief motive and function of the novelist may never be adequately replaced by the pursuit of fine writing, verbal dialectics, vibrational reproductions of life, or even by those subtle expositions of the generalized human soul. There is, for instance, a deep craving in most of us to have interest in oneself from time to time replaced by interest in the self of another. This craving is satisfied by the creation of character in fiction.

John Bayley, who admits that his conclusions about character must remain "embedded in the conception of personality," shares Galsworthy's view:

an author's love for his characters is a delight in their independent existence as other people, an attitude towards them which is analogous to our feelings towards those we love in life; and an intense interest in their personalities combined with a sort of detached solicitude, a respect for their freedom.

Henry James also assigns character a central role in the novel: "What is . . . a novel that is not of character? What else do we seek in it and find in it?" So does Virginia Woolf:

I believe that all novels . . . deal with character, and that it is to express character—not to preach doctrines, sing songs, or celebrate the glories of the British Empire,

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that the form of the novels, so clumsy, verbose, and undramatic, so rich, elastic, and alive, has been evolved.  

Although Galsworthy, Bayley, James and Woolf undoubtedly differ in their conceptions of what human character is and how it should be expressed in the novel, they all believe that the novel's primary function is to capture its essence.

That theirs is a cultural belief motivated and influenced by political conventions can be illustrated by comparing it to the arguments of those critics who do not accord character a place of special importance in the novel. In "Against George Lukács," Bertolt Brecht writes that "the novel certainly does not stand or fall by its characters, let alone characters of the type that existed in the 19th century." Further, it is absolutely false, that is to say, it leads nowhere, it is not worth the artist's while, to simplify his problems so much that the immense, complicated, actual life process of human beings in the age of the final struggle between the bourgeois and the proletarian class, is reduced to a 'plot', setting or background for the creation of great individuals. Individuals should not occupy more space in books, and above all not a different kind of space, than in reality.

To Brecht, if a novel is to be realistic it must portray the individual as a product of his social and economic conditions:

In the primeval forest of early capitalism individuals fought against individuals, and against groups of individuals; basically they fought against 'the whole of society'. This was precisely what determined their individuality.


Taking the idea of individual as "product" of social and economic forces to the extreme, a number of modern theorists have argued for the abolition of character—at least of the type admired by Galsworthy and James. Robbe-Grillet argues that the "novel of character belongs entirely to the past, it describes a period: that which marked the apogee of the individual," and that the twentieth century is essentially different from the nineteenth century which produced the classic novels of character:

Our world, today, is less sure of itself, more modest perhaps, since it has renounced the omnipotence of the person, but more ambitious too, since it looks beyond. The exclusive cult of the 'human' has given way to a larger consciousness, one that is less anthropocentric. The novel seems to stagger, having lost what once was its best prop, the hero. If it does not manage to right itself, it is because its life was linked to that of a society now past.  

The "marxist" position of Brecht and Robbe-Grillet depends on their belief that the individual is largely determined by the conditions of his existence just as surely—if more explicitly—as the "liberal" position of Galsworthy and James grows out of their belief in "the autonomy of the individual, irrespective of his particular social status or personal capacity." The nature of these beliefs is secondary to the fact that they all reflect adherence to religious, philosophical and political conventions; they are all rooted in opposing conceptions of man as he supposedly exists in reality: they all regard character as what Barthes calls the "character-person," though they disagree as to what or who this

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person is.\textsuperscript{24}

These ideological differences as to the nature and importance of character often inform the debate over the relative importance of plot and character: "the belief that character exists absolutely and apart from its acts turns up when almost anybody asks whether character or plot is more basic in a novel." Walcutt's equation of a character's "acts" or actions with plot suggests that the character/plot debate is a direct corollary of the realistic view of character. Of course, insofar as we are willing to accept the illusion that a character is an autonomous person and the plot is an undetermined action, we may admit that "there can be a vast difference in the relative importance of these two elements."\textsuperscript{25} A novelist who believes that a person's character is prior to and determinant of his action may be expected to consider character of primary interest, and to create the illusion that character determines the action, which in turn illustrates it. Conversely, a novelist who believes that a person's character is determined by what his circumstances dictate he must do may be expected to regard action as more worthy of attention, and to create the illusion that action determines character, which is of little or no interest in itself.\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{24}Roland Barthes, \textit{Image-Music-Text}, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), pp. 104-5. Barthes reveals his own ideological leanings by restricting this useful term to the bourgeois conception of the individual: "The 'character-person' reigns in the bourgeois novel.... what happens illustrates [him], it does not form [him]." I have expanded the term to cover both the marxist and the bourgeois person.

\textsuperscript{25}Charles Child Walcutt, \textit{Man's Changing Mask} (Minneapolis: U. of Minn. Press, 1966), pp. 6, 16.

Such illusions, however, often tell us more about the writer's beliefs about the world than about literature itself. We learn something about Henry James, for instance, when he writes that the traditional distinction between the novel of "incident" and the novel of character is outdated and "answers little to any reality"; the terms can, he says, be "transposed at will": "What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?"\(^27\) As Todorov has pointed out, had James really believed the terms were interchangeable, he would have written: "What is incident but the determination of character?"\(^28\) James is not really addressing the question of the relation of character and plot at all; he is, however, communicating his liberal belief that "the chief interest of a fictional work lies in its creation of fascinating characters or its psychological revelations."\(^29\)

Aristotle does not share James' perspective; he stresses instead the primacy of plot, "the arrangement of the incidents." Like that of James, Aristotle's position reflects—at least partially—his political and ethical beliefs; he regards action as the end of life, and he regards the end of life to be the proper subject of the poet: "tragedy is not the imitation of man, \textit{per se}, but of human action and life and happiness and misery."\(^30\) But Aristotle demonstrates considerably more literary insight

\(^{27}\) Henry James, p. 247.

\(^{28}\) Todorov, p. 66.


\(^{30}\) Aristotle, \textit{Poetics}, VI, 33; VI, 48.
than James by defining plot not simply as action or incident but as the 
arrangement of such action, or, as Abrams defines it more fully, "the 
structure of . . . actions, as these are ordered and rendered toward 
achieving particular emotional and artistic effects" (emphasis mine). 31

For Aristotle, as for Abrams, plot is a literary, a written, structure of 
action. This definition allows Aristotle to distinguish between ethos 
(that which reveals moral purpose and results from a choice between 
actions, and is therefore inherent in our notion of personality) and 
pratton (the performer or agent of an action). By arguing that tragedy is 
possible without ethos, but not without an agent performing the action, 
Aristotle provides us with a means of identifying a uniquely literary 
aspect of character that cannot be accommodated within the 
character-person.

This aspect is perhaps best understood if we recognize the literary 
character for what he is and not for what he usually pretends to be. 
Though he often appears to be a free-agent and thus to enjoy at least some 
measure of choice in his actions, he actually enjoys no such birthright; 
the literary character is inarguably an agent "who acts for another, a 
representative, an emissary" (OED). As such, and to the extent he performs 
the action required of him by the poet, he cannot reveal ethos. Aristotle 
conceives of the agency or function of a character in relation to the basic 
plot requirements of other works of the same genre—since these too are 
imitated by the poet. A skillful poet like Sophocles may create the 
illusion, for example, that Oedipus is free to stand or fall, but the 
experienced reader will recognize him as a tragic hero whose 
fall—regardless of the particularities of its motivation or its

31 Abrams, p. 127.
realization—is inevitable. Insofar as Oedipus' action can be seen to conform to the conventional plot of tragedy, he cannot reveal his personality—he can only reveal his function as agent. When a character's agency is revealed, we can speak of the character-agent; when a character's agency is concealed, we see only the character-person.

Aristotle, unfortunately, does much to obscure his crucial distinction when he assigns the fundamental agent-aspect or "core" of the character a "trait" which, to modern eyes, looks suspiciously like just another character-trait, which Aristotle emphatically states it is not. The tragic hero, he writes, is spoudaios—variously translated as noble, good, serious, weighty.\textsuperscript{32} The name assigned to this aspect of character, however, is far less important than the idea that it refers to that aspect which neither precedes, nor proceeds from, but is inherent in, the portion of a character's action which is demonstrably written, or determined by traditional generic conventions. Frye appears to have understood Aristotle in this light; however, in his terminology, the character-agent becomes the stock type:

All lifelike characters, whether in drama or fiction, owe their consistency to the appropriateness of the stock type which belongs to their dramatic function. The stock type is not the character but it is as necessary to the character as a skeleton is to the actor who plays it.\textsuperscript{33}

Aristotle's distinction between what we may call the character-person and the character-agent is crucial to the study of character because it allows us to separate the language of character from

\textsuperscript{32}O. B. Hardison, pp. 82-85.

\textsuperscript{33}Frye, p. 172.
the illusion it creates. The distinction is firmly grounded in the fact that literary character—whether in the novel or in drama—is written, or, as Barthes puts it, that "the discourse, rather than the characters, determines the action." Keeping this "realistic view of discourse" in mind, we can reject W. J. Harvey's argument that "we may sometimes legitimately assume a character's autonomy"; we can begin instead to appreciate what Culler identifies as "that fundamental tautology of fiction which allows us to infer character from action and then to be pleased at the way in which action accords with character."35

This study of character as a type of language in no way ignores the illusion of the character-person, or denies the pleasure that this illusion may provide.36 It does, however, because it is interested in character as language, devote less attention to the illusions this language can produce than to the ways in which it can be made to disappear or to appear depending on an author's intentions and, further, to the ways in which this disappearance and appearance of the language of character can become a thematic concern. Because, in the novel, the language of character most often centers around a proper name to create the illusion of the

34Barthes, S/Z, p. 18.


36Many Formalist/Structuralist analyses of character have failed to produce results because they ignored the character-person, or the mimetic aspect of character, and attempted to account for character as an agent completely determined by its function in the plot. For brief summaries of the attempts of Propp, Greimas, Todorov, and Bremond see Barthes, Image-Music-Text, pp. 104-107; and Culler, Structuralist Poetics, pp. 230-8. For a positively frightening example of the excesses of structural analysis of character, see Fernando Ferrara, "Theory and Model for the Structural Analysis of Fiction," New Literary History, Vol. V, No. 2 (Winter, 1974), pp. 245-68.
character-person, three individual characters have been chosen as the object of this study, remembering always that "the characters are types of discourse and, conversely, the discourse is a character like the others." They occupy relatively different positions along a gradient that moves from the invisibility of the language of character and its complementary thematic irrelevance, to the conspicuous appearance of the language of character and its resultant thematic importance.

Of the three, Moll Flanders comes closest to the autonomous character-person. Through the complicity of Defoe, who meticulously disguises all her literariness under the conventions of realism, Moll appears to enjoy all the privileges of a person, from freedom of action to freedom of speech. As a result, she hardly appears to be a literary character at all. Will Ladislaw, who inhabits a very different novel, can clearly be seen to function as a character-agent, an ill-starred romance hero used by Eliot in the telling of a story that is hers before it is any of the characters'. As the novel progresses, Will begins to appear as a literary construct, a "cluster of signs," determined largely by its role in Eliot's intentional upsetting of romance convention in favour of the probing realism appropriate to "A Study of Provincial Life."

In Leopold Bloom, Joyce reveals the linguistic nature of both the character-person and the character-agent. By showing how Bloom's action is significantly determined by Homer's Odysseus, Joyce undercuts the conventions of realism according to which these actions would be explicable in terms of psychological motivation and plausibility. He further suspends

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realistic conventions by removing the narration from the apparent control of a narrator—another face of the character-person. Thus freed from a human source and a human referent, the language of character becomes the character. When the character-person disappears into the language of the discourse, we see the "character-character," a tautological creature which confronts us with the truth that character is, after all, language.
CHAPTER TWO
MOLL FLANDERS AS CHARACTER-PERSON

Moll Flanders is a character-person par excellence. In Moll Flanders, writes Forster, "the character is everything and can do what it likes" and the novel's form "proceeds naturally out of her character."¹ The real credit for Moll's vitality, of course, belongs to Defoe who creates the illusion of her autonomy or authority by appealing to realistic conventions on the one hand and by simultaneously incorporating and undercutting picaresque conventions on the other. His disguising of the extent to which Moll is an artfully written arrangement of words partially determined by literary conventions effectively relegates the language of character to the role of an artless window which, however subjectively, reveals a supposedly real historical personage who is both the subject and object of this language.

Defoe's artful artlessness obliges readers and critics to adopt a realistic view of character and to judge Moll, if at all, in moral or ethical terms, as if she were a person. Moll, however, cannot surrender the autonomy that Defoe has written into her and many attempts to explain her end as revealing accounts of the "Gust and Palate of the Reader" rather than as accounts of Moll as a literary character.² The difficulty of explaining Moll is directly proportional to Defoe's success at creating the


illusion of her personhood, an illusion which depends on the invisibility of all artifice, including any signs of authorial intrusion or thematic intention, which would necessarily illuminate Moll's agency and therefore reduce her plausibility as a character-person. Defoe's artistic intention to make Moll real paradoxically requires that he refrain from displaying any artistry. Ironically, the surest sign of Defoe's artistic success resides in the attacks of critics who try to justify their own unsuccessful attempts to come to grips with Moll by asserting Defoe's artistic failure—if they admit he can be properly considered an artist at all.

Critics generally attempt to account for Moll's personality, as it unfolds in her interaction with her husbands, her children, her society at large and her conscience, by appealing to three bodies of cultural conventions or beliefs. As befits Moll's authority, these correspond to the categories that she herself implicitly or explicitly appeals to in trying (or not trying) to account for herself. From Moll's recurring allusion to the baneful influence of the devil and from her professed intention to make her story morally instructive come religions explanations of her behavior. From her belief that poverty has facilitated the devil's task come accounts of her behavior based on beliefs pertaining to the influence of social and economic conditions. And from Moll's implication that both the devil and poverty have affected what she essentially is by nature come explanations arising from beliefs and assumptions about human nature, personality and psychology.

E. M. Forster's reaction to Moll falls into this last category. Take, for example, his analysis of Moll's much-discussed reflection upon her theft of a child's gold necklace. The episode occurs two years after the death of Moll's banker-husband has put an end to her "sober, grave,
retir'd Life" and precipitated a slide into poverty that she has recently attempted to remedy through thievery (MF, p. 193). During this, her second theft, Moll has been tempted to kill the child, but fear at the thought of such a crime has led her to release her victim unharmed. Afterwards, she reflects:

The thoughts of this Booty put out all the thoughts of the first, and the Reflections I had made wore quickly off; Poverty, as I have said, hardened my Heart, and my own Necessities made me regardless of any thing: The last Affair left no great Concern upon me, for as I did the poor Child no harm, I only said to my self, I had given the Parents a just Reproof for their Negligence in leaving the poor little Lamb to come home by it self, and it would teach them to take more Care of it another time. (MF, p. 194)

Forster's interpretation of Moll's reflections is worth noting, both for what it says and for what it fails to say:

How just are her reflections when she robs of her gold necklace the little girl returning from the dancing-class! ... How heavily and pretentiously a modern psychologist would labour to express this! ... Whatever she does gives us a slight shock—not the jolt of disillusionment, but the thrill that proceeds from a living being.

Forster does not articulate what he thinks Moll expresses or reveals when she ignores her perplexing impulse to kill the child and proceeds to argue—in a laughably inconsistent manner—that, on the one hand, her guilt is attenuated by the poverty which has necessitated her crime, and that, on the other hand, the theft is really not a crime at all, but a good and charitable deed. Nor does he state whether Moll herself perceives the irony inherent in her inconsistency, though he implies that she does ... and she doesn't. Moll, he writes, is "neither hypocrite" ("one who affects qualities or virtues he does not have"), "nor fool" ("one deficient in
judgement or sense" (OED).³ Forster's silence is not bereft of eloquence: his subtle appeal to the unwritten text of the natural suggests that he, like Howard L. Koonce, finds Moll's "moral muddle" "thoroughly disarming" because it reveals a delightfully human nature deserving of admiration, not uncharitable judgement.⁴

Other critics, less enraptured by Moll's essential humanity, explain her thoughts, feelings and actions in terms of the determining influence of social and economic conditions. Robert Alter, for example, appeals to the authority of Max Weber and argues that "Capitalist rationalism, as Weber describes it, is the characteristic that permeates all the thinking and all the actions of Moll Flanders." Thus,

Moll Flanders can have such an amazingly easy conscience about her crimes because, however much she professes the contrary, they are not really crimes for her. The only act that she could sense profoundly as criminal would be for her to shirk her duty to accumulate capital.⁵

In a slightly different vein, Mark Schorer asserts that Moll's elusive sense of right and wrong can be explained as a product of her commercial society. Moll's morality, says Schorer, "is the morality of measurement [according to which] virtue and worldly goods form an equation . . . .

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³Forster, pp. 66-67.


Moll Flanders is our classic revelation of the mercantile mind." To Arnold Kettle, the social and economic conditions of her day also explain why Moll does not enter more fully into lasting human relationships: "Moll is forced to be an individualist by her decision to try to be free in the man's world of eighteenth-century England."  

Still other critics try to account for Moll's character by stressing the decisive influence of religion. Watt, for example, quotes Svend Ranulf's Moral Indignation and Middle Class Psychology to the effect that  

One of the strengths of Puritanism . . . lay in its tendency to convert its demand for righteousness into a somewhat uncharitable aggressiveness against the sins of others: and this, of course, carried with it a complementary tendency for the individual to be mercifully blind to his own faults.

G. A. Starr also sees Moll's character as essentially Puritan. He attempts to account for her rationalizations by referring to William Perkins, "the Puritan father of English casuistry."  

Although he attributes it a different significance, Robert Alan Donovan recognizes a similar religious influence in Moll's behavior: "Her puritanical system of moral valuations . . . serves in much the same way as her widow's weeds or duchess's costume to confer upon her a moral nature, but one that is quite superficial."  

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The common feature of all these critical explanations of Moll is that they are moral or ethical judgements of her character rather than evaluations of her as a character. They all accept implicitly or explicitly that accounting for Moll entails an attempt to "distinguish between... what Moll does and what she essentially is." All treat Moll as if she were a real person living under the real influence of social, economic and religious conditions. Collectively, they support Boardman's assertion that

One's judgement of Moll... depends on no strong textual dictates, but on one's own differing naturalistic expectations about real people in the real world. One turns inward, if one questions Moll at all, for plausible explanations of her conflicting blindness and insight, since Defoe is silent.¹²

Starr says much the same thing:

One's opinion as to which... aspect of Moll Flanders is most fundamental will probably depend less on the book itself than on one's personal convictions about the relative weight of psychological, economic, social, and religious 'explanations' of human behaviour.¹³

The insights of Starr and Boardman provide a context for James Joyce's comment that Moll Flanders is one of a trio of Defoe's female characters which "reduces contemporary criticism to a stupefied impotence."¹⁴ Moll accomplishes this feat by effectively reversing the traditional roles of character and critic. Traditionally, the critic is

¹² Boardman, Defoe and the Uses of Narrative, p. 119.
the one who explains or elucidates the literary character. But, as the above examples illustrate, explanations or accounts of Moll often disclose more about the ethical beliefs or ideological positions of the critics than about Moll as a literary character. The impotence that Moll's autonomy as a character-person imposes on critics has provoked more than one to question her success as a literary creation and Defoe's talent as an artist.

Discussing Moll's reflections on her theft of the necklace, for example, Watt expresses some reservation:

There is, however, some doubt about Defoe's intention: is it meant to be an ironical touch about his heroine's moral duplicities, her tendency to be blind to the beam in her own eye? Or did Defoe forget Moll as he raged inwardly at the thought of how careless parents are, and how richly they deserve to be punished?

According to this interpretation, Defoe's supposed preoccupation with what Watt assumes are his serious moral intentions leads to imperfections in the novel, and opens up the possibility that not only Moll, but also Defoe himself may be unaware of the irony inherent in the heroine's reflections:

there was no way in which Defoe could make good his didactic professions except by making Moll double as chorus for his own honest beliefs; and there is therefore good reason to believe that the moral imperceptiveness which is so laughably clear to us is in fact a reflection of one of the psychological characteristics of Puritanism which Defoe shared with his heroine.\footnote{Watt, pp. 128, 139, 140.}

Taken to its logical extreme, Watt's view would destroy Moll as a literary character and Defoe as an artist by reducing her to a simple, unartistic reflection of his mind, itself undoubtedly influenced by the
social, economic and religious conditions of eighteenth-century England.

Mark Schorer expresses exactly this position when he argues that Moll Flanders is a psychological projection of Defoe:

The Puritan and the journalist together, the first out of genuine suspicions of the idle and the second out of his conviction that nothing is more persuasive than fact, lead Defoe to deny that he is writing fiction at all. On the contrary, he tells us, he is merely editing the diary of a real and notorious character who must, for reputation's sake, present herself under a pseudonym. Thus at once Defoe saves his conscience and puts himself into his favorite position, the assumed role. He is not telling us about Moll Flanders, he is Moll Flanders.\(^{16}\)

The same apparent lack of artistry that creates the difficulty in accounting for Moll and leads to doubts about Defoe's artistry in general, also leads to reservations about his right to the title of the founder of the novel as a literary form. Watt, for one, is unwilling to grant Defoe this position:

the novel could be considered established only when realistic narrative was organized into a plot which, while retaining Defoe's lifelikeness, also had an intrinsic coherence; when the novelist's eye was focused on character and personal relationships as essential elements in the total structure, and not merely as subordinate instruments for furthering the verisimilitude of the actions described; and when all these were related to a controlling moral intention.\(^{17}\)

Though he seems to locate the origin of the novel long before Defoe, Boardman substantially shares Watt's assessment: "The moral indeterminacy of Moll, as expressive as it is, took Defoe away from the traditional

\(^{16}\)Schorer, pp. 281-2.

\(^{17}\)Watt, p. 147.
novel." Besides revealing something of the way in which literary conventions of form are partially determined by cultural values and beliefs, the opinions of Watt and Boardman acknowledge Defoe's success in realizing his artistic intention of making Moll real—so real that she does not appear to be written at all.

All such attempts to deny Defoe's artistry, as well the spirited defences of his artistic control they inspire, ironically constitute the greatest imaginable tribute to his artistry. Defoe's salient talent as an artist, as even his detractors admit, is his ability to create the illusion of unaltered reality. Even Watt says that "Defoe's talent... is the supreme one in the novel: Defoe is the master illusionist." On this point, Watt joins illustrious company. Charles Lamb writes that "the narrative manner of De Foe has a naturalness about it beyond that of any other novel or romance writer. His fictions have the air of true stories." And De Quincey observes that "Defoe is the only author known who has so plausibly circumstanciated his false historical records as to make them pass for genuine, even with literary men and critics."

Watt and other critics who would acknowledge Defoe as a master of illusion and would admire the impression of unaltered, unadorned reality his works provide, yet criticize them for not manifesting the reassuringly

18 Boardman, p. 131.
19 Watt, p. 147.
manageable order of literary creations, would have their cake and eat it too. The illusion that Moll is an autonomous person who uses language as a transparent medium to describe herself, however, precludes the appearance of any signs of controlled artistry which would reveal her as a literary creation partially determined by literary conventions. Defoe succeeds in effacing the contrived air of artistry by removing himself as "an internal, purposeful presence" in Moll's story and by assuming instead the role of "impersonal deity, presiding from afar." The price that must be paid for the resulting illusion of reality—a price which Watt and Boardman are unwilling to pay—is the artist's surrender of thematic control, of "his ability to sway his readers' minds."²²

Far from compromising Defoe's status as an artist or as a novelist, the techniques he uses to create the illusion of Moll as a character-person affirm his right to be esteemed as both an artist and a novelist whose works are central to the novel as a literary form. Defoe creates Moll as a vital, autonomous character-person in two main ways. First, he appeals to and incorporates the natural and cultural conventions of his day, including beliefs pertaining to religion, psychology, and social and economic conditions, by imitating the discursive, referential conventions of autobiography, criminal biography, religious tracts and journalistic reporting, all of which place language in the service of reality and truth. Second, he strengthens the illusion of reality thus created by incorporating visibly fictional elements of picaresque narrative, or the related semi-fictional rogue biography, and submitting these (and the charmed existence they would normally guarantee the heroine) to real-life

²²Boardman, pp. 112, 119.
social, economic, psychological and moral laws. In this way, Defoe strengthens the illusion of Moll's warm-blooded spontaneity relative to both reality and the literary realm.

The Preface of Moll Flanders provides a paradigm of Defoe's technique as master illusionist; it does not, as Watt and Schorer have argued, reveal Defoe's genuine didactic (and therefore unartistic) intentions. Any naive attempt to reduce the narrator of the Preface to an expression of Defoe's sincere moral intention is (or should be) thwarted by the first sentence, in which the narrator demonstrates his literary awareness by distinguishing between the fictional forms of the novel and the romance, and the history, a true or genuine account of real persons and events. He later confirms his literary acumen by touching on the profoundly literary problem of rendering goodness as interesting as evil:

   It is suggested there cannot be the same Life, the same Brightness and Beauty, in relating the penitent Part, as is in the criminal Part: If there is any Truth in that Suggestion, I must be allow'd to say, 'tis because there is not the same taste and relish in the Reading, and indeed it is too true that the difference lyes not in the real worth of the Subject so much as in the Gust and Palate of the Reader. (MF, p. 2)

Like Defoe, the narrator is perfectly familiar with the difference between fact and fiction and, on Defoe's behalf, he proceeds to use his knowledge to create the illusion that Moll is a real person.

The narrator's presentation of Moll's story as a "private History" gains in credibility when he says that he himself possesses her memorandums (MF, p. 1). He increases the plausibility of Moll's existence further by acknowledging that, like other persons, Moll is at least partially the product of her environment. Moll's original story, he says, was "written
in Language, more like one still in Newgate, than one grown Penitent and Humble" (MF, p. 1). He later elaborates on this appeal to natural convention, using it to explain why Moll's story remains unfinished:

"no Body can write their own Life to the full End of it, unless they can write it after they are dead" (MF, p. 5). He stresses the importance of Moll as a living presence beyond the words of her story by asking readers to pay more attention to what Moll becomes than to what she has been: "it is to be hop'd that . . . Readers will be much more pleas'd with . . . the End of the Writer, than with the Life of the Person written of" (MF, p. 2).

Having established the plausibility of Moll's existence by appealing to worldly natural and cultural conventions, the narrator strengthens this illusion relative to the literary realm by raising and then dispelling the possibility that Moll is a fiction written by an author, namely himself. He explicitly refers to himself at one point as "an Author [who] must be hard put to wrap [Moll's story] up so clean, as not to give room, especially for vitious Readers to turn it to his Disadvantage" (MF, p. 1). The narrator's "slip" raises the possibility that his "emendations" to Moll's memorandums, along with his other appeals to natural and cultural convention, are only ploys to strengthen the plausibility of the illusion he has created. This possibility is all the more credible in light of his obvious awareness of literary matters. The question then arises as to where, if anywhere, the signs of his alleged authority can be located in Moll's story.

Like Defoe, on whose behalf he is acting, the narrator never reveals his presence in Moll's story. He admits to having bowdlerized to some extent Moll's language:
The Pen employ'd in finishing her Story, and making it what you now see it to be, has had no little difficulty to put it into a Dress fit to be seen, and to make it speak Language fit to be read. (MF, p. 1)

He even admits that "some of the vicious part of her Life, which cou'd not be modestly told, is quite left out" (MF, p. 2). But he is far more reticent on the question of what he has added to Moll's story. His self-effacing, passive voice always allows for the possibility that he has no real claims to authorship at all, that Moll is the real author:

There is in this Story abundance of delightful Incidents, and all of them usefully apply'd. There is an agreeable turn Artfully given them in the relating, that naturally Instructs the Reader, either one way, or other. (MF, p. 2)

His claims are weakened even further, and Moll's are proportionately strengthened, at the closing of the Preface when he declines to include an account of the end of her life—in spite of the fact that it allegedly provides another point of view by which the veracity of Moll's story could conceivably be judged—by virtue of its stylistic inferiority:

In her last Scene at Maryland, and Virginia, many pleasant things happen'd, which makes that part of her Life very agreeable, but they are not told with the same Elegancy as those accounted for by herself; so it is still to the more Advantage that we break off here. (MF, p. 5)

Having paid Moll the compliment of esteeming her style more than objective truth, the narrator walks quietly from the narrative stage. And once he has disclaimed his own authority, to the advantage of Moll's, he refrains from interfering in her telling of her story. Through the narrator, Defoe thus grants to Moll a freedom that virtually guarantees her
plausibility as a person: freedom of expression. The illusion of Moll as an authoritative, autonomous character-person owes more to the way in which she seems to use words to tell her story than to any amount of realistic detail depicting her person, her emotions or her psychology, which perhaps explains why Defoe thought it unnecessary to have Moll provide her readers with her height or the colour of her eyes and hair.

According to a realistic view of character, Moll's ability to tell stories, to create or "mint" the name "Moll Flanders" (among others), allows her to survive by disguising her identity which, if known, would lead—as it eventually does—straight to the hell of Newgate. Her whole life's story attests to the truth that a good story, a plausible story, is more advantageous than the truth:

It was at Colchester in Essex, that those People left me; and I have a Notion in my Head, that I left them there, (that is, that I hid myself and wou'd not go any farther with them) but I am not able to be particular in that Account; only this I remember, that being taken up by some of the Parish Officers of Colchester, I gave an Account, that I came into the Town with the Gypsies, but that I would not go any farther with them, and that so they had left me. (MF, p. 9)

According to a realistic view of discourse, Moll's ability to account for herself through naming allows her not only to survive but to thrive and prosper as a plausible character-person. Because the language that is Moll appears to originate in a human source and to describe a human referent it remains inconspicuous as language and Moll does not appear to be the arrangement of words that she actually is. The credit for Moll's vitality, of course, belongs to Defoe whose appeal to both cultural and literary conventions makes Moll dually real and allows her to appear as if she were not written at all.
Many details of Moll's story strengthen the plausibility of her personhood in relation to natural and cultural conventions. In addition to her inconsistencies in thought, feeling, speech and action mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, as well as the naturalistic details highlighted by the narrator, Defoe supplies a number of other lifelike details. Moll's artless, matter-of-fact language, for example, appropriately fails her from time to time, as if to remind the reader that she is not, after all, a consummate artist. Speaking of the elder Colchester brother, she says: "He spoke this in so much more moving Terms than it is possible for me to Express, and with so much greater force of Argument than I can repeat." (MF, p. 55). Moll's lack of words is appropriate to her lack of education. Near the end of her story, she says: "till I wrote this, [I] did not know what the word Geographical signify'd" (MF, p. 327).

Defoe also ensures that, like any other person, Moll is capable of forgetting certain details of earlier incidents in her life. The gold watch she gives to Humphrey and claims she has stolen "from a Gentlewoman's side, at a Meeting-House in London" must have come from somewhere else: in her original account of that incident she says her attempt to steal it was unsuccessful (MF, p. 338). Far from revealing flaws in Defoe's artistry as Watt has argued, Moll's slip strengthens the uncontrived air of her story. Indeed, the loose chronological structure of Moll's narrative, many of whose episodes could conceivably be re-arranged without disturbing the overall effect, appears more influenced by the vicissitudes of her life than by any visibly literary or artistic principles or aims. It is to increase the plausibility of this illusion that Defoe incorporates elements of picaresque fiction into Moll's story and then, by upsetting them, pretends even more convincingly that Moll is not written at all.
Many critics have detected the influence of picaresque fiction in *Moll Flanders*, "picaresque" being "the autobiography of a picaro [or picara, as the case may be], a rogue, and in that form a satire upon the conditions of the time that gives it birth" (OED). The most important aspect of the picaresque in *Moll Flanders*, one which transcends the debate as to whether "picaresque" is an historical or formal term, is its obvious literariness. Before all else, writes Seiber, the picaresque is "a literary phenomenon, a work of fiction which is concerned with the habits and lives of rogues." The *picaro*, therefore, is "a literary convention for the presentation of a variety of satiric observations and comic episodes" (emphasis mine).

Establishing *Moll Flanders* as a picaresque narrative would facilitate the judging of Moll as a literary character by revealing her agency in relation to the conventional demands of the picaresque. Showing that Moll's heart is essentially that of the picaresque heroine might explain why she "in some degree escapes the bounds of everyday moral, social, and psychological laws." It might explain the "freedom from the probable psychological and social consequences of everything she does" that Watt considers "the central implausibility of Moll's character as Defoe has drawn it"; Watt himself admits that "the *picaro* enjoys that charmed immunity from the deeper stings of pain and death which is accorded to all those fortunate enough to inhabit the world of comedy." Further, the

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24 Watt, p. 105.


26 Watt, p. 106.
picaresque interpretation of *Moll Flanders* would allow the comic ending of the heroine's quest for security to stand as a satire of the hypocritical moral values of her society. Defoe, however, has no intention of using picaresque conventions to create such thematic clarity. Nor does he intend to make Moll more manageable as a literary character.

*Moll Flanders* does, of course, bear an apparent relation to picaresque narrative. Moll's story is episodic in structure, autobiographical in narrative point-of-view, and revelatory of a rogue

> Who was born in NEWGATE, and during a Life of continu'd Variety for Threescore Years, besides her Childhood, was Twelve Year a Whore, five times a Wife (whereof once to her own Brother) Twelve Year a Thief, Eight Year a Transported Felon in Virginia, at last grew Rich, liv'd Honest, and died a Penitent.

But, as Watt, F. W. Chandler and others have argued, few of Moll's episodes of petty thievery and deception have the contrived comic air of either picaresque fiction or the related semi-fictional rogue biography. Those episodes that do seem to owe something to picaresque fiction provide a fleeting glimpse of the charmed existence of the *picara*, but the rapidity with which these light moments are ironically adapted to the hard facts of Defoe's realism suggests that Moll is no picaresque heroine.

In her rhyming courtship with her brother, for example, Moll escapes for a moment the harsh reality of the world she inhabits, a world in which her body becomes a piece of merchandise. In this episode, Moll seems to delight in fine picaresque fashion in her deceiving roguery. She has her man on the hook and she *plays* him through the unworldly medium of poetry.

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27 See Watt, p. 119 for a discussion of the relation between these two genres.
The success of her comic ruse ironically leads to her despair when she discovers that the man she has caught and by whom she has had three children is really her brother. Moll's picaresque trick has led her to violate her own best advice and to make her own marriage, "like Death, be a Leap in the Dark" (MF, p. 75). If this episode reveals anything about Moll it is that she is not a picaresque heroine inhabiting a picaresque romance world.

Another episode which appears to owe something to the picaresque occurs when Moll is apprehended by the mercer who mistakenly believes she has stolen from him. Unsatisfied with her mere exculpation brought about by the appearance of the real thief, Moll, with the help of her governess, proceeds to stage a play in which she assumes the role of a gentlewoman whose pride and dignity have been wounded by the mercer's insulting behavior. So successful is Moll's acting that she finally obtains a settlement of some 200 l. Aside from the elaborate staging of this coup of deception, the picaresque element of the episode is highlighted when Moll appears before the magistrate and obtains an acquittal—in spite of speaking the name of her notoriety, or at least half of it, when she calls herself "Mary Flanders." According to the conventions of realism, Moll's use of this name is implausible because of the serious threat it poses to her welfare, but according to the conventions of the picaresque, Moll can both use it and profit by it. Once again, however, this charmed existence is short-lived: the next time she appears before the law she will be sent directly to the hall Newgate, a real place of real suffering.

The episode which perhaps best reveals the way the picaresque functions in Moll Flanders is the mutual deception of Moll and her Lancashire husband, Jemmy. Even Alter, who tends to stress the seriousness
of the novel, regards the "mutual revelation of the two would-be deceivers" as "a moment of real picaresque camaraderie." Both Moll and Jemmy have designs to marry the fortune that each pretends to have. Upon discovering that they have both been misled by a go-between, they turn their failure into a comedy by pooling what little money they do have (though Moll does retain a 30 l. note ... as well as her true name) and promptly falling in love. After Jemmy has left her for the first time—to return later after miraculously hearing Moll calling him from a distance of twelve miles—Moll exclaims that this implausible, unrealistic incident has affected her deeply:

Nothing that ever befel me in my Life, sunk so deep into my Heart as this Farewel: I reproach'd him a Thousand times in my Thoughts for leaving me, for I would have gone with him thro' the World, if I had beg'd my Bread. (MF, p. 153).

But, no sooner has she uttered these words than she returns to her mundane, unromantic preoccupation with money:

I felt in my Pocket, and there I found ten Guineas, his Gold Watch, and two little Rings, one a small Diamond Ring, worth only about six Pound, and the other a plain Gold Ring. (MF, p. 153).

Paradoxically, the appearance and immediate undermining of picaresque artifice heightens the illusion of Moll as a real person inhabiting a real world. The ironic juxtaposition of picaresque and realistic conventions in the above passages make Moll more real by suggesting that she is not a fictional picaresque heroine and by simultaneously raising problematic questions about her apparent level of

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28 Alter, p. 72.
self-consciousness or self-awareness. This interpretation seems to be justified by the vehemence with which critics who write on the picaresque elements of *Moll Flanders* stress that Moll is not determined by them. Watt, for example, argues that Moll is not a *picara* because "the essence of Defoe's fictional world [is] that its pains, like its pleasures, are as solid as those of the real world." According to Alter, it is more "misleading than instructive to call *Moll Flanders* a picaresque novel" because the "relaxation of existential seriousness of the picaresque" is missing: "In the world of *Moll Flanders* . . . the individual necessarily converts the conduct of his life into an austere discipline." In a slightly different vein, Chandler argues that Defoe moves away from the picaresque narrative through his partial subordination of incidents to character, itself the result of his "predilection for ethical studies [which] had made his thought pivot upon the moral quality of every act."31

As Chandler's comment illustrates, Defoe's use of picaresque conventions in *Moll Flanders* shifts the reader's attention from the way in which the novel's realism is partially created through the upsetting or transformation of traditional literary conventions, to the way in which the language of the text accurately reflects or describes reality. The illusion of Moll as a character-person depends precisely on such a shift, one that is not, incidentally, contradicted by arguing that the form of Defoe's fiction is partially determined by other referential, descriptive

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29 Watt, p. 106.

30 Alter, p. 77.

forms of discourse. Such arguments are quite common. Sieber, for instance, argues that

Defoe's so-called picaresque fiction derives from another tradition as John Richetti and others have demonstrated. The first-person narrative viewpoint, the concentrated interest on crime, crime reporting and courts of law are all part of the conventional elements of criminal biographies of the period.

And Watt asserts that: "Defoe's plot in Moll Flanders is closer to authentic biography . . . than to the semi-fictional rogue biography."\(^{33}\)

The biography, like the autobiography and journalistic reporting, relies on the descriptive rather than the creative power of language for its effect. Like all the conventions of realism used by Defoe, the biography places language in the humble, inconspicuous service of reality and thus serves to make Moll more real as a person and less manageable as a literary character.

By appealing to realistic conventions, Defoe effectively makes the language of character that is Moll disappear in order to create the illusion that she is a real person who is at once the subject and the object of this language. He cements this illusion relative to the literary realm by incorporating and then undermining the visibly literary artifice of picaresque fiction, thus suggesting that Moll is not a conventional literary character, not a written arrangement of words functioning as its author's agent. To the end of her narrative, Moll's greatest secret is that she is a character at all. Defoe's complicity in this secret guarantees Moll's notoriety as a character-person whose autonomy permits

\(^{32}\) Sieber, p. 55.

\(^{33}\) Watt, p. 120.
her to account for herself and to demand explanations of those who would attempt to usurp her right to do so.

As the attacks on Defoe's artistry indicate, the cost of creating the illusion of the autonomous character-person is high and most novelists are not interested in incurring it. In *Middlemarch*, for example, George Eliot subordinates the illusion of the character-person to her thematic and artistic intentions. She visibly uses Will Ladislaw to tell her story and, in doing so, reveals him as a character-agent whose function is partially determined by the romance conventions she intends to upset. Whereas Defoe subordinates completely the undermining of picaresque conventions to the illusion of reality he wants to create, Eliot acknowledges more openly the extent to which the language of character is determined or influenced by its relation to the literary realm. She comes much closer than Defoe to revealing character as a literary arrangement of words.
CHAPTER 3
WILL LADISLAW AS CHARACTER-AGENT

Will Ladislaw does not enjoy the same "authority of existence" as the autonomous character-person, Moll Flanders.¹ Far from allowing Will to tell his own story, Eliot uses Ladislaw as an agent who plays the role of romance hero, a role visibly determined by the very romance conventions she upsets and parodies in Middlemarch. The appearance of the character-agent, whose role is determined by the words of literature rather than by the facts of life, undermines the autonomy of the character-person by initiating a shift in perspective from the mimetic to the creative power of language, from the world to the word, from a realistic view of character to a realistic view of discourse. In the process, the language of character that is Will loses a measure of its transparency and begins to appear as a "cluster of signs"—both poetic and prosaic—created through an elaborate artifice of naming orchestrated by Eliot through the mediums of her characters.² Will's function as a character-agent precludes the possibility of reading him solely as a character-person. Critics who forget that he is a verbal construct which conforms to a combination of literary and cultural conventions are apt to regard Will Ladislaw as a "failure."

At their most naive, the objections to Will Ladislaw take the form of a moral disapproval of his character in relation to that of the heroine,


Dorothea. Like Sir James Chettam, one early critic of the novel objects that Ladislaw does not seem at all "worthy of the woman he wins." In the words of another early reviewer of the novel:

It is not easy to like young Ladislaw; one is tempted to think that, in marrying him, Dorothea makes nearly as great a blunder as she did in marrying Casaubon. How much pleasanter would it have been for Lydgate to be her husband?

Such critics find justification for their views in Will's dilettantish behavior, his petulant rebelliousness, his lack of discipline and strength. Dorothea, so the argument runs, is a remarkable woman with high ideals and a generous nature; she deserves better than Will, whose character, according to Henry James, is "insubstantial."

Slightly more sophisticated criticisms of Will's character tend to blend into objections, not of his character, but of him as a character. Employing the familiar analogy between character-creating and portrait-drawing, an early critic of the novel comments on "a certain indistinctness about [Will's] picture." Using the same metaphor, Henry James pronounces the insubstantial character of the hero a failure: "it lacks sharpness of outline and depth of colour; we have not found ourselves believing in Ladislaw as we believe in Dorothea... He remains vague and impalpable to the end." James's use of metaphor is revealing: novelistic prose should provide images so clear and concrete that they become

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4Rev. of Middlemarch by George Eliot, The Examiner, 7 December 1972, George Eliot and Her Readers, p. 87.

5Broome, p. 110.
"palpable." He says as much when he evaluates *Middlemarch* as a "treasure-house of details" and praises its "solidity of specification." According to James, the language of character must give us a clear picture of the human personality.

James does not say, in literary terms, exactly why Ladislaw's portrait lacks presence. Gordon Haight rightly suggests that "if Ladislaw is to be regarded as unrealized or non-existent, it cannot be on grounds of his appearance." Indeed, the description of Ladislaw's appearance is far more detailed and specific than that of Moll Flanders, whose eyes, nose, hair and skin are never described at all—a fact which has done little to dissuade critics of her reality. The reason James provides no literary explanation for Will's "failure" is that none exists unless we accept a realistic, "palpable" portrait of a masculine fellow as the sole standard by which Will can be judged as a literary character.

Such confusion of literary and cultural conventions typifies explanations of Will's failure. Arnold Kettle, for example, argues that Will is an artistic failure because of George Eliot's failure to understand and convey, in realistic terms, the nature of his social position:

The artistic failure of George Eliot with Ladislaw, her failure to make him a figure realised on the artistic level of the other characters of the novel, is inseparable from the social unrealism in his conception. Artistically he is not 'there', not concrete, because socially he is not concrete, but idealised.

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In Kettle's opinion, Ladislaw does not correspond to the "facts" of Victorian society:

Middlemarch is a wonderfully rich and intelligent book and its richness lies in a consideration of individual characters firmly placed in an actual social situation (it is because Ladislaw is never thus placed but remains a romantic dream-figure that he is a failure).

Like James and Kettle, F. R. Leavis believes that the task of the novelist is to be realistic in her character-portrayal, and that Will Ladislaw is a failed creation. Leavis, however, does not attribute the failure to the unreality of his social position; rather, he views Will, like Dorothea, as "a product of Eliot's own soul-hunger--another day-dream ideal self." According to Leavis, Will does not "exist" because he is a projection of the author's desire and is therefore indistinguishable from her own personality:

In fact, [Will] has no independent status of his own--he can't be said to exist; he merely represents, not a dramatically real point of view, but certain of George Eliot's intentions--intentions she has failed to realize creatively. The most important of these is to impose on the reader her own vision and valuation of Dorothea.

Will, of course, is also intended--it is not really a separate matter--to be, in contrast to Casaubon, a fitting soul-mate for Dorothea. He is not substantially (everyone agrees) 'there', but we can see well enough what kind of qualities and attractions are intended. . . . George Eliot's valuation of Will Ladislaw, in short, is Dorothea's, just as Will's of Dorothea is George Eliot's.

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Both Leavis and Kettle attempt to explain the failure of Ladislaw's character, or his failure as a character, by reaching beyond the bounds of literature to the cultural realm of politics and psychology: Kettle presumes that Eliot should be a social scientist and criticizes her lack of rigour; Leavis complains that she has failed to detach herself sufficiently from her creation. Both prefer to call into question the artistry of a novelist and a novel they greatly admire rather than abandon their narrow conviction that realism is the only convention against which Will can be judged. Their realistic view fails to account for either Ladislaw as a literary character or Middlemarch as a literary work.

The error of Leavis and Kettle in judging Ladislaw solely on the basis of realistic convention is similar to—though less justified than—the error of Schorer and Watt, who question Defoe's artistry because they cannot account for Moll Flanders on a similar basis. Of course, like Moll Flanders, Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life partially encourages their realistic reading from the start, by appearing to refer to and to describe a physical and historical reality beyond the text: a provincial town in the England of the First Reform Bill. But, unlike Moll Flanders, a work whose literariness is a carefully guarded secret, Middlemarch abounds with signs that advertise the novel's literary nature. These signs include the division of the novel into eight books, whose titles—"Old and Young," "Sunset and Sunrise"—often suggest intended literary juxtaposition and articulate central thematic dichotomies. In addition, the Prelude and the Finale frame eighty-six chapters, each beginning with an epigraph alluding to an implied or a specific work of literature. All of these signs, not to mention the countless allusions in the text to the works of Shakespeare,
Goethe, and Scott among many others, pull the reader's attention from the reality of nineteenth-century England to the literary realm in which Ladislaw is a character-agent with a specific role to play.

Eliot uses Ladislaw as the agent of her intention to upset and parody the imaginative world of romance whose idealism and heroism have no place in the reality of industrial England, in the "pinched narrowness of provincial life." In order to realize her intention, she makes Will play the role of a romance hero who combines elements of the primitive or "naive" hero of early romance with elements of the later "sentimental" re-creation of that type: the Romantic hero of the early nineteenth century.¹⁰ The above excerpts from the criticism of Leavis and Kettle prove these writers are aware of the romance associations surrounding Will, but their insistence on reading him as a realistic character-person prevents them from interpreting these signs as a vital aspect of Will's function as a character-agent.

Not surprisingly, Leavis and Kettle also fail to perceive the way in which the appearance of the character-agent encourages a shift in perspective from a realistic view of character to a realistic view of discourse. According to the former, Will is a person whose romantic (and therefore unrealistic) inclinations force him to struggle against the common pettiness of the "prosaic neighborhood of Middlemarch." According to the latter, a view Eliot appears to authorize through her literary metaphor, Will is a character-agent assigned the role of romance hero which forces him to struggle against the prosaic medium of Middlemarch. The character-person and the character-agent meet in the figure of the romance

hero. As Eliot moves this hero through a series of parodic quest cycles and explicitly sets him on and knocks him off his horse by tagging him with the poetic signs of romance and the prosaic signs of realism respectively, Will begins to emerge as a literary construct, a cluster of signs determined and informed by the literary realm of which the language of character is a part.

Northrop Frye identifies the complete form of the romance as the successful adventure or quest, to which there are three main stages: the stage of the perilous journey and the preliminary minor adventures, the agon or conflict; the stage of the crucial struggle in which either the hero or his foe must die, the pathos or death struggle; and the stage of the exaltation of the hero, even if he does not survive the conflict, the anagnorisis or recognition. In this conflict, the hero's enemy is associated with winter, darkness, confusion, sterility, moribund life and old age, and the hero with spring, dawn, order, fertility and youth (Anat., pp. 187-88).

Eliot's description of Ladislaw as a young man whose "bushy light-brown curls, as well as his youthfulness, identified him at once with Celia's apparition" assigns him his role of romance hero at the beginning of the novel (M, p. 58). Will's youth contrasts sharply with Casaubon's age, which identifies the dusty pedant, for his part, as the enemy: Mrs. Cadwallader calls him "'a death's head skinned over'"; Sir James says he has "'one foot in the grave'" (M, p. 67). As the conventional enemy of the hero, Casaubon is identified with the sterility of the land over which he presides, Lowick Manor and, by extension, the provincial society of Middlemarch. The narrator makes this connection explicit at the time of Dorothea's visit to her future home:
In this latter end of autumn, with a sparse remnant of yellow leaves falling slowly athwart the dark evergreens in a stillness without sunshine, the house too had an air of autumnal decline, and Mr. Casaubon, when he presented himself, had no bloom that could be thrown into relief by that background. (M, p. 54)

The reference to Will's "light-brown" hair is the first of many examples of light imagery indicating that the hero embodies a displaced sun-god myth typical of the hero of romance. According to Brooke (who is wrong about so many things, but positively oracular when it comes to Will), Ladislaw is "'trying his wings,'" he is "'just the sort of young fellow to rise'" (M, p. 241). In the words of another Middlemarcher, few of whom are noted for their high opinions of others, Will is a "brilliant young fellow" (M, p. 262). Once again, the narrator makes this analogy explicit:

Will Ladislaw's smile was delightful, unless you were angry with him beforehand: it was a gush of inward light illuminating the transparent skin as well as the eyes, and playing about every curve and line as if some Ariel were touching them with a new charm. (M, p. 152)

The ethereal, unworldly quality associated with the light imagery through the allusion to Shakespeare's sprite in the above passage accords nicely with the description of Will as Celia's "apparition" (specter, phantom, ghost). The hero's impalpable quality, and the mystery surrounding his first appearance, are accentuated by the mystery of his origins, another convention of romance comedy:

The anagnorisis in [romance] comedy, in which the characters find out who their relatives are, and who is left of the opposite sex not a relative, and hence available for marriage, is one of the features of comedy that have never changed much. (Anat., p. 170)
Generally (as in *Tom Jones*), the hero turns out to be of nobler blood than he has appeared to be. Thus, the mysterious origins of the hero constitute a reserve of potential or promise. And the question of who the hero is, genealogically speaking, is related to the question of who he is on the level of personality or character, which explains why, in romance,

the character of the successful hero is so often left undeveloped: his real life begins at the end of the [novel], and we have to believe him to be potentially a more interesting character than he appears to be. (Anat., p. 169)

Romance, according to Frye, "is nearest of all literary forms to the wish-fulfilment dream" according to which "the quest-romance is the search of the libido or desiring self for a fulfilment that will deliver it from the anxieties of reality but will still contain that reality" (Anat., pp. 186, 193). Thus, the hero's character is left undeveloped so as to possess "the neutrality that enables him to represent a wish-fulfilment." This convention appears in comedies and romances from Plautus's *Casina*, "where the hero and heroine are not even brought on the stage at all," to Dickens, where "the interesting characters are often grouped around a somewhat dullish pair of technical leads," to *Tom Jones*, whose very name suggests "the conventional and typical" (Anat., p. 167). Both Leavis and Kettle mention specifically that Will represents a kind of wish-fulfilment, but Gordon Haight is one of the few critics who perceive the nature and significance of the convention involved; he draws an analogy between Ladislaw and Scott's romantic heroes, many of whom are "mild, dreamy youths, thrown by chance into adventures in which they play largely passive
Most of Ladislaw's critics, however, fail to understand that he is not quite "there" because he is, at least in part, a romance hero; Lydgate actually likens Will to a character "dropped out of a romantic comedy" (M, p. 364).

Although the signs of his mysterious origins, of his relatively undeveloped character, of his youth and ethereal lightness, identify him as a romantic hero, Will's position in the innocent world of romance is threatened by a number of comments, epithets and allusions voiced by the narrator or other characters, which draw him toward the world of experience. The point between these two extremes is occupied by the Romantic hero, a recognizably literary type whose desiring self inhabits the wildest reaches of the imagination, and holds the real world in contempt.

Will's rebellious retreat from reality is mentioned by Casaubon, who says that the youngster calls himself "Pegasus, and every form of prescribed work 'harness'" (M, p. 60). Again according to Casaubon, as this mythological beast of imagination, the favoured of the Muses, Will is so far

"from having any desire for a more accurate knowledge of the earth's surface, that he said he should prefer not to know the sources of the Nile, and that there should be some unknown regions preserved as hunting-grounds for the poetic imagination." (M, p. 60)

The hero's rejection of reality in favour of the worlds of the imagination, his pouting and petulant manner, his dilettantish and hedonistic attitude toward life, his experimentation with opium, alcohol, and sumptuous food, his work as an artist, all label Will as a Romantic hero.

11 Haight, p. 38.
When Ladislaw is away in Europe, the narrator explicitly refers to the Romantic movement beginning to make itself felt around 1831, stating that Will frequents the long-haired artists who belong to it. She thus confirms Brooke's earlier remark that Will may turn out "'a Byron, a Chatterton, a Churchill,'" and his later comparison of the young man to "Shelley" (M, pp. 60, 263). Brooke's infelicitous error—at twenty-one, Will had already lived three years longer than Chatterton who died a tragic death at the age of eighteen—should suggest that these allusions are not to be taken solely as accurate historical references to these Romantic poets as men. The early allusions to Pegasus, poetry and the imagination all point to the fact that these poets captured the imagination of Europe, even Brooke's, because they somehow managed to embody their own poetic myths. Byron consciously played the part of Childe Harold and Don Juan, Shelley, referred to in one of Browning's poems as "sun-treader," embodied the intensity of a Promethean figure. According to Frye, in the period of Romanticism, the poet becomes what the fictional hero was in the age of romance, an extraordinary person who lives in a higher and more imaginative experience than that of nature. He creates his own world, a world which reproduces many of the characteristics of fictional romance. (Anat., p. 59)

By the time Will departs from Middlemarch, the weight of the reality of that provincial town has pulled the hero down from the heights of romance to the point where he must play the part of the Romantic hero, rebel, and leave in quest of the lost world of romance. In terms of the discourse, the hero has been subjected to conventions of realism, which are always a threat: if Eliot chooses to make his environment real, and the dreary November days chillingly cold, then the romance hero is in trouble.
Eliot hints as much when she ironically foreshadows the young hero's fate at the beginning of the chapter describing his departure from Middlemarch:

_He had catched a great cold, had he had no other clothes to wear than the skin of a bear not yet killed._ — Fuller

(M, p. 61)

The narrator's remark that Will's experiments with opium and alcohol had resulted in "nothing original" strengthens the author's suggestion that Will may not live up to his role of romantic hero, but she still allows for the _possibility_ that Will may rise to the stature of hero when she describes him as one of the world's "hopeful analogies and handsome dubious eggs called possibilities" (M, p. 61). And, well aware that such possibilities exist only in the hopeful realm of "grand presentiment," she refrains from over-indulging in speculation, in attempts to name or to know Will's actual potential. She frees the hero from further scrutiny by summarily sending him off to Europe:

_Let him start for the Continent, then, without our pronouncing on his future. Among all forms of mistake, prophecy is the most gratuitous._ (M, p. 62)

In this way, the narrator signifies her awareness that further speculation on Will's future would be a narrative mistake, since the hero can thrive only if his future is left as full of promise, as mysteriously vague, as his past. Only with the beginning and end of his life free from the bonds of time and history can the hero thrive in the realm of "once upon a time." At the same time, by sending her hero off to the protection of the continent, beyond the range of the harsh Middlemarch stage, Eliot reveals Will's function as a character-agent whose movement, words, whose very arrangement as a cluster of signs, are determined by the artistic demands of the novel.
The hero's journey or *agon*, which begins in the chill November, takes him eventually to Rome, a city of stupendous art and architecture warmly lighted by the glow of past glory and empire—a perfect hunting ground for the poetic imagination. There, far from the unfriendly medium of *Middlemarch*, Will reaches his zenith as a romantic hero. There, Dorothea is also raised to the heights as the object of the hero's worship, an "angel," a "Saint" (*M*, pp. 155, 160). But the more the narrator recounts of Will's thoughts and actions, especially during his meetings with Dorothea, the more she reveals the fragility of the hero's literary position and the degree to which it is vulnerable to harsh words and images.

Ladislaw (functioning as Eliot's mouthpiece), demonstrates more insight into the conventions of romance than many of his critics by objecting to Naumann's intentions to paint his mistress and render in concrete detail what must be left ethereal. In other words, what James and Leavis regard as the shortcoming of Eliot's portrait of Ladislaw, Will identifies as crucial to romance. This prompts him to warn Naumann:

> you want to express too much with your painting. You would only have made a better or worse portrait with a background which every connoisseur would give a different reason for or against. And what is the portrait of a woman? Your painting and Plastik are poor stuff after all. They perturb and dull conceptions instead of raising them. Language is a finer medium. (*M*, pp. 141-2)

Painting lowers the heroine by making her image concrete and, as Will's discussion of background suggests, placing her in a specific relation to the world that is subject to rational debate. Such relation or connection will not do in romance: if Dorothea is to be worshipped she must occupy a position beyond the worldly context. Will understands this perfectly well:
"Language gives a fuller image, which is the better for being vague. After all, the true seeing is within; and painting stares at you with an insistent imperfection. I feel that especially about representations of women". (M, p. 142)

Language may well be the finer medium, but not always in the sense that Will imagines: just as the sensibilities of the character-person are offended by the concrete image, so the character-agent can be made to wince under the burden of vulgar, common language:

No sooner did Naumann mention any detail of Dorothea's beauty, than Will got exasperated at his presumption: there was a grossness in his choice of the most ordinary words. . . . the ordinary phrases which might apply to mere bodily prettiness were not applicable to her. (Certainly all Tipton and its neighbourhood, as well as Dorothea herself, would have been surprised at her beauty being made so much of. In that part of the world Miss Brooke had been only a "fine young woman". (M, p. 161)

The ordinary words, phrases and details of Naumann's prosaic language are as incompatible with Will's romance world in Rome as the unimaginative, unpoetic, prose of the Middlemarchers who view Dorothea as a woman among other women: Celia profanes Will's divinity by referring to her as "Dodo." In the same way that Will's romance is shaken when Naumann refers to Dorothea as his aunt, so Dorothea's imaginings of marriage—that state of "higher duties"—with her "archangel" Casaubon are shattered by what the narrator describes as "Celia's pretty carnally-minded prose": "Her reverie was broken . . . by Celia's small and rather guttural voice speaking in its usual tone" (M, pp. 30, 17, 35). Both hero and heroine are threatened by the concrete image, the vulgar vision created by carnally-minded prose which, through its insistence on petty physical detail, its uncontrollable appetite for naming, tends to make both of them,
as well as the world they inhabit, too narrowly real for comfort. 
Ironically, the arrival of his heroine in Rome resubmits the hero to the 
prosaic conditions of the world he has tried to escape. 

Having become "one" with Casaubon in the matrimonial bond, Dorothea 
represents the blood relations which bind Ladislaw to the family of 
Middlemarch with all its unpleasant hierarchies and obligations. During 
his meetings with Dorothea, Will's debt to his benefactor, Casaubon, 
becomes a painful reality. And, just as serious, Dorothea eliminates the 
hero's freedom from Middlemarch time—"When George the Fourth was still 
reigning over the privacies of Windsor"—by placing this freedom in 
relation to the business of life in provincial England: the narrator tells 
us that she was "rather shocked at [Will's] mode of taking all life as a 
holiday" (M, pp. 139, 153). 

Once Dorothea had played her part in placing Will in relation to 
Middlemarch, he begins to understand his own situation. He sees that 
Casaubon is not the archetypal, mythological dragon of romance, but 
"something more unmanageable than a dragon: he was a benefactor with 
collective society at his back" (M, p. 155). Will's ultimate 
acknowledgement of the reality of existence that Dorothea's and Casaubon's 
visit to Rome represents comes when he states his intention to do what no 
romance hero can safely do: namely, to get a job in order to earn his daily 
bread. According to the conventions of realism, of course, his reasons for 
doing so are as valid as they are contradictory and complex: every man must 
work to eat, but exactly how a man harnesses himself to a job in order to 
be free is a paradox that the most talented apologists of capitalism have 
been hard-pressed to answer. Such venal complications constitute a tangle 
of mundane concerns that drag the romance hero down from his celestial 
heights.
Our last glimpse of Will in Rome leaves no doubt that Eliot intends us to keep in mind the increasingly ironic connection between him and the romance hero. The narrator comments on Will's comparison of Dorothea to a poem by saying that he shows "such originality as we all share with the morning and the springtime and other endless renewals" (M, p. 166). In addition to identifying the hero with the rising sun, she recalls our attention to the archetypal battle between the young hero and the old enemy: Casaubon's return at the end of Book Two, appropriately entitled "Old and Young," physically separates the hero from the object of his desire and Casaubon coolly remarks to his ardent bride that they need not "'discuss [Will's] future course'" (M, p. 167). From the moment he disappears from the reader's sight in Rome until he surfaces again in Middlemarch, the romantic hero recuperates a measure of his lost lustre because he represents the reader's wish-fulfillment desire for a mate for Dorothea. In the black and white world of romance, the only other choice is to favour Casaubon, whose habit of saying "my love when his manner was the coldest" makes this impossible (M, p. 167).

Eliot expresses Ladislaw's renewed vigour by making his return correspond with the seasonal rising of the sun in spring. She brings the hero home from his journey before he has been able to engage in the pathos or death-struggle; ironically, his enemy has been at home all along. In one sense, the enemy is Casaubon and the society he represents; in another sense, it is the realistic prose of the study. The goal of Eliot's study is to shed light on, and provide a clear view of, the "various entanglements, weights, blows, clashings, motions by which things severally go on" in Middlemarch (M, p. 216). Its primary convention is that, through close observation and precise referential language, a physical reality will
be faithfully and sincerely described. Will's return to Middlemarch places him under the harsh light and powerful lens of observation of the narrator:

Even with a microscope directed on a water-drop we find ourselves making interpretations which turn out to be rather coarse; for whereas under a weak lens you may seem to see a creature exhibiting an active voracity into which other small creatures actively play as if they were so many animated tax-pennies, a stronger lens reveals to you certain tiniest hairlets which make vortices for these victims while the swallower waits passively at his receipt of custom. (M, p. 44)

As this ironic foreshadowing of Will's fate suggests, the conventions of the study do not bode well for the romantic hero; under their light he must surely gather "the faultiness of closer acquaintance" (M, p. 71). Even Rosamond knows that in "romance it [is] not necessary to imagine much about the inward life of the hero, or of his serious business in the world" (M, p. 123). The language of the study, however, is concerned with nothing but the hero's serious business in the world. Will's descent from the poetic ideal of the romance hero, already begun in Rome, gains momentum the moment he sets foot in the "prosaic neighbourhood of Middlemarch" (M, p. 236).

Mrs. Cadwallader's cutting tongue immediately drags Will down from the heights of Brooke's rising star to refer to him as "'a very pretty sprig. . . . one who can write speeches'" (M, p. 241). Brooke himself corroborates this fall by dropping his earlier identification of Will with the Romantic poet/heroes of Byron, Chatterton, and Churchill, replacing it with a much more worldly trio of writers: "'He would make a good secretary, now, like Hobbes, Milton, Swift—that sort of man!'" (M, p. 241). Later, Brooke refers to Will as "'a kind of Shelley,'" meaning the statesman not the Promethean poet (M, p. 263). According to Brooke, Will has "the same
sort of enthusiasm for liberty, freedom, emancipation—a fine thing under
guidance—under guidance you know. I think I shall be able to put him on
the right tack” (M, p. 263).

The hero's descent from the metaphorical to the literal, from the
poetic to the prosaic, finds perfect expression when Will stoops to taking
a job as a lowly newspaper man. In doing so, he harnesses himself to the
epitome of carnally-minded prose. In its business of reporting the facts
and exposing relations of scandal, the newspaper, more than any other
literary form, is bound to the hard facts of life, to the ticking of the
clock, to the "sordid present" of the day. When Will begins work on the
newspaper he descends to the low rung of "those newspaper fellows" whose
very names, like "Keck," are an affront to the ear (M, p. 278). His
identification with the newspaper also places him in an incongruously
antagonistic relation to Dorothea, described by Eliot on the first page of
the novel as having the "impressiveness of a fine quotation from the Bible
. . . in a paragraph of to-day's newspaper" (M, p. 5). Unlike that of the
newspaper, the language of the Bible operates on a variety of literal,
metaphorical, allegorical and anagogical levels; it does not ignore the
history of real events, but it subordinates these to a spiritual truth
that transcends human reality. Whereas the language of the Bible
encourages the reader to see beyond the world, that of the newspaper brings
the reader, as well as the subject, down to earth. The language of the
newspaper, however, can incorporate Biblical language as surely as
Middlemarch can incorporate its idealistic citizens: Eliot's literary signs
keep drawing our attention back to the literary realm in which Will, as a
result of the names identified with him, is becoming an increasingly
prosaic cluster of signs. Will's association with the newspaper and its
vulgar interests appropriately subjects him to the gossip of his neighbors, to the "speech vortices" of Mrs. Cadwallader and others who feed like hungry birds on this verbal sustenance. As Sir James says:

"I find he's in everybody's mouth in Middlemarch as the editor of the 'Pioneer'. There are stories going about him as a quill-driving alien, a foreign emissary, and what not. (M, p. 278)

As a literary character, Ladislaw is determined and made known to the reader through naming, whether he appears to name himself through his own words, or to be named by other characters or the narrator. The gossip of other characters conforms to the same paradigm as the naming of the narrator—both can highlight either Will's illusory life as a character-person, or his literary life as an arrangement of verbal signs. Will's identification with newspaper prose does not prevent Eliot from re-assigning him the role of romance hero, which is exactly what she does when she describes Will's resolution to stay in Middlemarch in spite of the "fire-breathing dragons [that] might hiss around [Dorothea]," to defy Casaubon's ban and to travel to Lowick church to worship his heroine (M, p. 344).

As Ladislaw makes his way to the church, the narrator re-introduces the familiar light imagery:

Sometimes, when he took off his hat, shaking his head backward, and showing his delicate throat as he sang, he looked like an incarnation of the spring whose spirit filled the air—a bright creature abundant in uncertain promises. (M, p. 345)

At this relatively late stage in the narrative, Will's "uncertain promises" are perhaps not as limitless as they at first appeared, but the narrator
compensates for any troublesome detail in this regard by endowing him with a touch of "the mysterious rapport with nature that so often marks the central figure of romance" (Anat., p. 197):

the sunlight fell broadly under the budding boughs, bringing out the beauties of moss and lichen, and fresh green growths piercing the brown. Everything seemed to know that it was Sunday, and to approve of his going to Lowick church. (M, p. 345)

The romance conventions highlighted as the hero makes his way to church set the stage for a crucial struggle between these and the conventions of realism.

As he makes his way to church, imagining future events, Will experiments with tunes for a lyric he has composed. Barbara Hardy points out that this poem is "the one lyric of the novel, a fragile flight of feeling caught in the great prose narrative." Although the poem, like Ladislaw, shows signs of being infected with the "prosaic medium" of Middlemarch, it still stands out from the rest of the novel:

O me, O me, what frugal cheer
My love doth feed upon!
A touch, a ray, that is not here,
A shadow that is gone . . . . (M, p. 345)

Hardy's comments on the lyric are surprisingly applicable to the romantic hero:

The hinge on which this chapter turns is the 'uncertain promise.' Will is residing in his passionate moment, framing and forming it through lyric, and George Eliot seems to question and define the nature of his poetic medium by placing it in the testing flow of narrative action.

The language that is the romance hero, like the lyric with which it
is identified, is also destined to be tested by the prose narrative he inhabits. Both the lyric and the romantic hero function best in isolation from the facts of life: "Lyric derives its power from isolating strong feeling, and the novelist provides the history from which lyric is usually happily cut off."\(^{12}\)

When Ladislaw enters the church, he steps into the dangerous world of reality and leaves the charmed world of romance and lyric poetry behind. This transition must also be seen as a fall from the height of poetry and the related metaphorical worship of Dorothea, to the level of literal, descriptive prose. By sending him into the church, Eliot calls the bluff of romance convention, and brings the hero down to earth through a literal interpretation of his worship; quite logically, and quite ironically, this puts him in a \textit{real} place of worship. Not surprisingly, the hero fares badly.

Will expects to sit in the Tucker's pew, but they have left Middlemarch; he intends to gaze upon Dorothea, but Casaubon's presence prevents him from even glancing in her direction; his ideal vision is further marred by "Mr. Rigg's frog-face . . . something alien and unaccountable" (\textit{M}, p. 346). Eliot communicates the overwhelming reality of the church to the reader through an allusion to time and political history: "Even in 1831 Lowick was at peace, not more agitated by Reform than by the solemn tenor of the Sunday sermon" (\textit{M}, p. 346). She makes him feel the weight of social hierarchy and structure felt by referring to the

\begin{quote}
three generations of decent cottagers [who] came as of old with a sense of duty to their betters generally—the smaller children regarding Mr. Casaubon, who wore the black gown and
\end{quote}

\(^{12}\)Barbara Hardy, "\textit{Middlemarch} and the Passions," \textit{This Particular Web}, pp. 17, 18.
mounted to the highest box, as probably the chief of all betters. (M, p. 346)

Under the weight of these realistic details the romance hero is deflated:

There was no delivering himself from his cage, however; and Will found his places and looked at his book as if he had been a schoolmistress feeling that . . . he was utterly ridiculous, out of temper, and miserable. This was what a man got by worshipping the sight of a woman! (M, p. 346)

Thus, the ironic foreshadowing of Chapter Ten comes true. The narrator tells us that "The clerk observed with surprise that Mr. Ladislaw did not join in the tune of Hanover, and reflected that he might have a cold."

When Will finally leaves the church, "the lights were all changed for him both without and within" (M, p. 347). One light that continues to shine on Will as long as he remains in Middlemarch, however, is the narrator's observant eye. This light reveals that, far from transcending or rebelling against the narrowness of provincial life, Will's movement comes to be visibly determined by the gossip of his neighbours who make him out to be a "needy adventurer trying to win the favour of a rich woman" (M, p. 365).

While the unpleasant gossip about Will certainly inclines him to flee, he is not forced to leave until certain oppressive words are spoken and certain ugly facts are brought to light. The fact of Will's mixed genealogy, for example, which raises its head through his connection with Bulstrode, effectively eliminates his mysterious past altogether.

Farebrother is more correct than he can know when he says

"So our mercurial Ladislaw has a queer genealogy! A high-spirited young lady and a musical Polish patriot made a likely enough stock for him to spring from, but I should never have suspected a grafting of the Jew pawnbroker. However, there's no knowing what a mixture will turn out beforehand. Some sorts of dirt serve to clarify." (M, p. 527)
Thus robbed of his precious reserve of promise, and already suffering a cold, the hero is in real danger of expiring. He receives his next blow from his discovery of Casaubon's codicil. This legal document that explicitly states the unfitness of any union between Will and Dorothea is really just a physical, factual embodiment of Public Opinion: Casaubon's will is the will of the collective society of Middlemarch. Like many of the novel's ugly facts, the codicil comes to light through the gossip Rosamond has managed to pick up and convey inadvertently to Will. The hero receives his final blow through the medium of Mrs. Cadwallader, whose cutting tongue uses the image of Will flirting with Rosamond to precipitate Will's flight, to chase him away with "the vision of that unfittingness of any closer relation between them which lay in the opinion of every one connected with [Dorothea]" (M, p. 466).

Will's sordid past comes to light as a direct result of Raffles's "unaccountable urge to tell" about Bulstrode's past crimes; the codicil separating the hero and heroine makes itself felt to Will through Rosamond's chatter (M, p. 515). To gossip is to relate scandal; gossip is thus the "relation of scandal" referred to by the narrator. And because—as Mrs. Cadwallader's sharp tongue proves—gossip has the power to make statements lose "the stamp of an inference" and appear as fact, "relations of scandal" are often as real as relations of blood, birth, money and class (M, pp. 527, 44). And the "facts" brought to light through gossip, like all other factual detail of the novel, hang as so many millstones around the neck of the romantic hero.

When Will staggers off stage for the second time, Eliot signals the reader that, like the first time she summarily dispatched him to Rome, she
is still pulling the strings of her agent, still using him in the telling of her story. She does so by beginning the chapter of his departure with a telling allusion to romance literature:

He was a squyer of lowe degre,
That loved the king's daughter of Hungrie —Old Romance (M, p. 458).

Eliot uses the prosaic medium of the novel to remove all possibility of the hero's completing his quest, by outlining in nightmarish detail the form that the dragon may take in Middlemarchian society. Casaubon's death gives birth to his codicil, a legal dragon which throws the hero completely out of his element. Since he cannot kill his dragon, the second stage of the romance cycle (the death-struggle or pathos) is displaced. The third stage, (the anagnorisis) does occur when Will's parentage is revealed, but instead of facilitating his winning of the heroine this parentage makes him even less worthy of Dorothea than before. In effect, Will's departure marks the end of a failed cycle and the beginning of another which is not without ironic overtones.

Eliot forces Will to try a second time because she is not writing of "loves Olympian," but of man (M, p. 194). As Farebrother explains to Lydgate, the difference between the two subjects involves a difference of literary convention:

The choice of Hercules is a pretty fable; but Prodicus makes it easy work for the hero, as if the first resolves were enough. Another story says that he came to hold the distaff, and at last wore the Nessus shirt. I suppose one good resolve might keep a man right if everybody else's resolve helped him. (M, p. 139)

In Middlemarch, because the conventions of realism predominate over those of romance, first resolves are not enough. The disparity between the
expectations that accompany these opposing conventions is a source of irony:

As structure, the central principle of ironic myth is best approached as a parody of romance: the application of romantic mythical forms to a more realistic content which fits them in unexpected ways. (Anat. p. 223)

Will's second departure, like his second farewell to Dorothea (both the result of realistic complications), generates ironic humour:

It is certainly trying to a man's dignity to reappear when he is not expected to do so: a first farewell has pathos in it, but to come back for a second lends an opening to comedy. (M, p. 458)

By the time Will sets out to try a second quest, he has fallen to the point at which Brooke's conservative evaluation of him as a "Burke with a leaven of Shelley" seems generous (M, p. 366). His reputation suffers further when he travels to London to "eat his dinners" (to study law) (M, p. 395). Although he is ostensibly moving away from Middlemarch society, he is actually moving toward its very center by studying the law that is at once the heart and arm of that society's power. Will's metaphor of eating harks back to other images of devouring and swallowing, especially as they relate to another aspiring hero: "Middlemarch, in fact, counted on swallowing Lydgate and assimilating him very comfortably" (M, p. 114). In terms of the conventions of romance, Will's journey to London to "eat his dinners" is really the fattening of the sacrificial calf for slaughter:

Exiles notoriously feed much on hopes, and are unlikely to stay in banishment unless they are obliged. . . . and as to the suspicious friends who kept a dragon watch over her—their opinions seemed less and less important with time and change of air. (M, p. 586)
 Appropriately, Eliot has her rejuvenated hero rise again in the spring. She sets the stage further by re-creating that mysterious sympathy with nature for the meeting of hero and heroine:

The clear spring morning, the scent of the moist earth, the fresh leaves just showing their creased-up wealth of greenery from out their half-opened sheaths, seemed part of the cheerfulness [Dorothea] was feeling. (M, p. 567)

As every romance heroine should be, Dorothea is suspended, isolated from the realities of place and time: "Dorothea had less of outward vision than usual this morning, being filled with images of things as they had been and were going to be" (M, pp. 567-8). When Dorothea stumbles upon Will holding Rosamond's hands and speaking with "low toned fervour," however, her indefinite vision of the future is replaced by "the terrible illumination of a certainty" (M, p. 568). The "terrible collapse of the illusion" of a promising future with Dorothea drives Will to say that he has been "'dropped into hell'" (M, pp. 571, 570). Of all romance conventions, the mysterious future is the most precious; the total world of romance begins to collapse when the reader, like Will, is forced to see too clearly into the future:

We are on a perilous margin when we begin to look passively at our future selves, and see our own figures led with dull consent into insipid misdoing and shabby achievement. Poor Lydgate was inwardly groaning on that margin and Will was arriving at it. (M, p. 574)

In terms of Will's role in the discourse, the collapse of the promising future of romance marks yet another stage in his struggle with the conventions of realism which allow the naming of what must not be named. The articulation of the future finally pushes Will beyond the
conflict phase of his quest to the death-struggle, a phase which, according to Frye, is often followed by the sparagmos: the disappearance or dismembering of the hero, often though a symbolic swallowing like that of Jonah by Leviathan. The narrator provides the appropriate imagery when she says that Will's last meeting with Dorothea leaves him with "no more foretaste of enjoyment in the life before him than if his limbs had been lopped off and he was making his fresh start on crutches" (M, p. 588).

Will's third departure from Middlemarch marks yet another ironic repetition of the quest motif. This time, however, Eliot sends her hero only as far as Riverston, another provincial town, and brings him back within a day for the long-awaited reunion with his heroine. Instead of taking Dorothea in his arms as a good romance hero should undoubtedly do, however, Will must first deal with his troublesome hat and gloves:

He took her hand and raised it to his lips with something like a sob. But he stood with his hat and gloves in the other hand, and might have done for the portrait of a Royalist. Still it was difficult to loose the hand, and Dorothea, withdrawing it in a confusion that distressed her, looked and moved away (M, p. 592).

And then we are told that Will leans "against the tall back of a leather chair, on which he ventured now to lay his hat and gloves" (M, p. 592). As it has been from the beginning, the romantic hero's battle is really with these petty details. Even the couple's decision to marry occurs against the background of mundane considerations of money and career. To Will's complaint that he is hardly capable of keeping himself decently, Dorothea counters with an equally realistic statement:

"We could live quite well on my own fortune--it is too much--seven hundred a-year--I want so little--no new clothes--and I will learn what everything costs." (M, p. 594)
These details provide a resoundingly negative answer to the question Will has asked himself earlier:

Until that wretched yesterday—except the moment of vexation long ago in the very same room and in the very same presence—all their vision, all their thought of each other, had been as in a world apart, where the sunshine fell on tall white lilies, where no evil lurked, and no other soul entered. But now—would Dorothea meet him in that world again? (M, p. 589)

On the contrary, the union of the lovers suggests the triumph of the realistic conventions that convey the complexity of the real world. Eliot stresses the inexorable descent toward reality at the beginning of the chapter immediately following the reunion of Will and Dorothea by rooting the two of them in a temporal and social context, and parodying more "heroic" conventions against this realistic backdrop:

It was just after the Lords had thrown out the Reform Bill: that explains how Mr Cadwallader came to be . . . holding the 'Times' in his hands behind him, while he talked with a trout-fisher's dispassionateness about the prospects of the country to Sir James Chettam. Mrs Cadwallader, the Dowager Lady Chettam, and Celia were sometimes seated on garden-chairs, sometimes walking to meet little Arthur, who was being drawn in his chariot, and, as became the infantile Bouddha, was sheltered by his sacred umbrella with handsome silken fringe. (M, p. 595)

Were Eliot to end the novel at this point, the reader would still be able to redeem the romance world somewhat by insisting on the possibility of the hero and the heroine living "happily ever after" in a vague and distant future beyond the bounds of the text. Eliot does not allow the reader this luxury; instead, she draws the reader over the edge of the romance world by shrewdly appealing to his desire to know:
Every limit is a beginning as well as an ending. Who can quit young lives after being long in company with them, and not desire to know what befell them in their after-years? (M, p. 607)

The reader's desire to know, to be narrated to, to be told, is the obverse of the "unaccountable impulse to tell" that the narrator attributes especially to Raffles, but which applies with equal relevance to all the gossips, and other relators of stories in the novel. The character-person who most directly feeds the reader's desire to know is the narrator who uses all the other characters in the novel as mediums for the details, facts and relations that bring the story to its close. The Finale is the final expression of the narrator's impulse to tell.

By revealing marriage as a romance comedy convention, the narrator draws the reader's attention to the fact that Will and Dorothea's marriage derives its significance from the literary universe.

Marriage, which has been the bourne of so many narratives, is still a great beginning, as it was to Adam and Eve, who kept their honeymoon in Eden, but had their first little one among the thorns and thistles of the wilderness. It is still the beginning of the home epic. (M, p. 608)

Unable to curb her cutting tongue, she clarifies this dubious future even further by pronouncing Dorothea's fate:

Many who knew her, thought it a pity that so substantive and rare a creature should have been absorbed into the life of another, and be only known in a certain circle as a wife and mother. (M, p. 611)

The substitution of "absorption" for the ideal union of man and wife suggests that Dorothea is consumed, swallowed by her husband. This image of devouring refers back to the metaphorical identification of Dorothea
with a "fine quotation from the Bible" incorporated in "a paragraph of today's newspaper" with which Will is associated. Poetic justice has been done to Dorothea. Her fate prefigures that awaiting Ladislaw.

The narrator eliminates once and for all the vague promise of the hero's future when she definitively names what he becomes:

Will became an ardent public man, working well in those times when reforms were begun with a hopefulness of immediate good which has been much checked in our days and getting at last returned to Parliament by a constituency who paid his expenses. (M, pp. 610-11)

If the mythical dragon of romance is fully adapted to the realistic world of Middlemarch, it must take the form of collective society as represented by Parliament. Extending Brooke's metaphor of Middlemarch as "all one family, you know," Parliament becomes Hobbes' Leviathan, the collective body of the citizens, the voice of the commons (M, p. 367). In this light, the real death-struggle (pathos), and devouring of the hero (sparagmos) occurs when Will enters the mouth of the real dragon. In entering Parliament, Will lives up to the future he has charted for himself when he predicts that he will sell himself as a "mouthpiece" (M, p. 594). Any hopes of his escaping from his struggle with the monster are dashed when the narrator pronounces the final damning detail:

Mr Brooke lived to a good old age, and his estate was inherited by Dorothea's son, who might have represented Middlemarch, but declined, thinking that his opinions had less chance of being stifled if he remained out of doors. (M, p. 612)

The implication is clear enough: Will's "hopefulness for immediate good" is deceived, and his ideas expire for lack of air in the belly of the monster.
The final defeat of the romance hero, accomplished through the collapse of romance conventions in the jaws of prosaic realism, brings Will's role as character-agent to an end. The irony of the hero's failure to rise above his prosaic medium is heightened by Eliot's careful maintenance of the conventional mystery of his past and future and of his "insubstantial" personality as a character-person, which is not dispelled until the bitter end of the narrative when the romance hero is burdened with the last fatal details before being swallowed by the hungry prose.

Will's function as a character-agent, while perhaps never entirely distinct from the illusion of the character-person, is sufficiently prominent to shift the reader's attention from the illusion of the reality of Middlemarch to the reality of Middlemarch and the literary realm in general; from the impossibility of Will's attaining to heroic stature in the "prosaic neighborhood of Middlemarch" to the impossibility of sustaining romance convention in the medium of prose; from the way in which that ubiquitous "web of circumstance," along with their bourgeois desire for conformity, devours the Middlemarchers to the way in which the "carnally-minded prose" of the novel devours the romance hero.

If the language of character does not appear as a thematic concern in its own right, it is because, like Defoe, Eliot incorporates and undermines traditional literary conventions in order to strengthen the impact of her novel's realism. In contrast to the effect of Defoe's upsetting of picaresque convention, however, Eliot's upsetting of romance conventions reveals novelistic realism in general, and Will Ladislaw in particular, to be conventions in themselves. As Joyce illustrates so clearly in Ulysses, these conventions, too, can be undermined. By undercutting both the realistic source and the realistic referent of
literary character, and by relentlessly illuminating its agency in relation to literary conventions, Joyce makes the language of character an object of thematic concern—a character in its own right.
CHAPTER 4

BOLLOPEDOOM AS CHARACTER–CHARACTER

In the course of his odyssey through *Ulysses*, Leopold Blooms into linguistic configurations undreamt of in either *Moll Flanders* or *Middlemarch*. He begins as a man of apparently stable sexual and psychological identity in "Calypso," but in "Circe" Jollypoldy the rixidix doldy assumes the appearance of a woman who brings forth metallic man children only. Bloowhom's face resembles, among others, those of Lord Byron, Sherlock Holmes and Rip Van Winkle; and his words and actions, say the critics, suggest those of Christ, Moses, Elijah, Hamlet, Stephen Dedalus, Don Giovanni, Dr. Sigmund Freud, Dante, Italo Svevo and Odysseus of the nimble wits: when in doubt name Bloom.¹

In light of Bloom's countless transformations and metamorphoses, Dr. Mulligan's assertion that "he [Bloom] is more sinned against than sinning"--a humane judgement which allows, in modern generosity of spirit, for Bloom's "family complex" and his "metal teeth"--becomes laughably absurd, an effective parody of the realistic view of character. If Bloom is to be judged thus, then how shall we evaluate THE SOAP, THE BUCKLES and THE KISSES? The physician's assessment does, however, take on the colour of truth if we adopt a realistic view of discourse and read Bloom not for who he is as a character–person, but for what he is as a literary character: a configuration of language. From this viewpoint, the transgressor, the one who sins against Bloom, becomes the reader who consistently sees through the language of character to a fictional man who

can be described by the masculine pronoun "he."

Joyce, however, uses the language that is Bloom to prevent such mistaking of identity. The text of *Ulysses* is covered with verbal scars that mark breaks in literary conventions and provide glimpses of Ellpodbomool’s true identity, an identity not fully revealed until the hero’s homecoming is accomplished. And without his disguise, where is Bloom? According to the final sign in "Ithaca," she returns to where he comes from: “●.” The performance over, Bollopedoom assumes the existence of a dot of ink, a sign sufficiently opaque to remind the reader that literary character cannot be seen if it is seen through.

Without the benefit of the Telemachus chapters, the reader of the opening lines of "Calypso" would be justified in believing himself to be at the beginning of a far more traditional novel: "Mr Leopold Bloom ate with relish the inner organs of beasts and fowls" (*U*, p. 57), is not far removed from, "Miss Brooke had that kind of beauty which seems to be thrown into relief by poor dress." The conventions at work are the same: character or personality is revealed through action, taste in food, in dress, in interior decoration, etc. We are told, for example, that Bloom wears a "lost property office secondhand waterproof," a fact which reveals his financial status or illuminates an aspect of his personality.

Likewise, the description of the way Bloom "pulled the halldoor to after

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him very quietly, more, till the footleaf dropped gently over the
threshold, a limp lid" appears to reveal personality: his respect for
others (Molly is dozing), his meticulous interest in minute detail (U, pp.
58, 59). Such factual detail functions to create the illusion that Bloom
is a person, an advertising salesman who lives in a city, Dublin, which
exists beyond the text; such detail creates the appearance of reality.

In "Calypso," much factual detail is supplied through Bloom's
"stream of consciousness" or "interior monologue," terms used to describe
language in the text which, while not formally distinguished from the rest
of the narration, appears to describe Bloom's thoughts. Like other
realistic details of the novel, these thoughts strengthen the illusion that
Bloom is a person, and they do so in the same way that a character's speech
allows him to appear to be a person. What a character says or thinks is,
in this context, of secondary importance to his speaking and thinking at
all. The descriptions of Bloom's thoughts may be as convincing as the
description of the way in which he closes the door. But to confuse this
plausibility with veracity is to forget the cardinal convention that the
reality-principle in literature is always secondary to the
pleasure-principle.

Many realistic details in Ulysses function not faithfully to
describe the external realities of Bloom's mind and the city of Dublin, but
rather to illuminate the novel as a literary work which exists in vital
relation to the rest of literature. One such aspect of this relation is
the parallel between Leopold Bloom and Homer's Odysseus. As indicated in
the introductory paragraph of this chapter, the Homeric parallel is not the
only one of interest in relation to Bloom, but its influence on the
structure and characterization of Ulysses is the most important; it will,
therefore, be the focus of this analysis.
The "Calypso" chapter contains numerous Homeric allusions that pass initially for realistic description of the events of the morning of June 16, 1904. For example, Molly at one point asks her husband the meaning of "metempsychosis," a word-gem she has stumbled upon in her reading of "Ruby: the Pride of the Ring." "'It's Greek,'" says Bloom, "'that means transmigration of souls'" (U, p. 66). Looking for a suitable example to use by way of illustration, Bloom settles his thoughts upon the picture over Molly's bed:

The Bath of the Nymph over the bed. Given away with the Easter number of Photo Bits: Splendid masterpiece in art colours. Tea before you put milk in. Not unlike her [Molly] with her hair down: slimmer. . . . She said it would look nice over the bed. (U, p. 67)

The information provided in this passage about the working of Bloom's mind and about the level of Molly's taste in art also alludes to the nymph Calypso, who, in the Odyssey, holds Odysseus prisoner in her Mediterranean cave for years on end while he weeps for his home. Molly, too, is from the Mediterranean; her father was once stationed at Gibraltar. In Ulysses, the shadow of Calypso's cave becomes the "warm yellow twilight" of the Blooms' bedroom, which contrasts with the sunlight outside.4

As Bloom's thoughts show, Molly is not his only jailer. During his walk to the butcher shop, the warm rays of the sun against his funeral garb draw Bloom's mind far from Dublin to "somewhere in the east":

Turbaned faces going by. Dark caves of carpet shops, big man, Turko the terrible, seated crosslegged smoking a coiled pipe. Cries of sellers in the streets. Drink water scented with fennel, sherbet. Wander along all day . . . . Getting

on to sundown ... A shiver of the trees, signal, the evening wind ... Fading gold sky ... Night sky moon, violet, colour of Molly's new garters. Strings. Listen. A girl playing one of these instruments what do you call them: dulcimers. I pass. (U, p. 59)

The clouds of Dublin soon dispel Bloom's longing for this exotic land of "silver powdered olive trees," oranges and citrons. Under their grey weight Bloom's longing for the homeland of the Jews, his people, turns to a feeling of desolation:

No, not like that. A barren land, bare waste. Vulcanic lake, the dead sea: no fish, weedless, sunk deep in the earth ... A dead sea in a dead land, grey and old. Old now. It bore the oldest, the first race. (U, p. 63)

Like Odysseus, Bloom is a wanderer, a stranger in a foreign land who longs to return to his home.

These examples indicate that the correspondence between Ulysses and The Odyssey is only partial; Bloom is not completely determined by Odysseus. Deviations from the Homeric convention, such as the double role of Molly as Calypso and Penelope, Bloom's Jewish as opposed to Odysseus' Greek heritage, and his cat instead of Odysseus' dog, have provided critics with grounds for both serious speculation and light amusement. The initial effect of the Homeric parallel, according to Harry Levin, is to reduce Bloom to "mock-heroic absurdity." Indeed, Bloom is an advertisement-canvasser, not an adventurous warrior, and he does return at the end of his travels to a faithless Penelope who has cuckolded him that very day. Beyond this initial parody, argues Morton Levitt, lies another Bloom who "is more of a hero than he could ever imagine. With overpowering irony, Bloom, who can father no son, becomes in a sterile universe a sort

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of archetype of fertility."\(^6\)

Such comparisons of the two heroes in relation to their respective societies and historical conditions constitute no doubt a valid thematic approach to the novel. They shall not, however, be the focus of this chapter, which will deal instead with the way the Homeric parallel provides a clear backdrop against which Bloom may be revealed as a literary character. In this regard, the parallel functions in much the same way as the romance conventions do in *Middlemarch*, though it does so in a far more explicit, visible manner. As a literary character, Bloom is more firmly rooted in the literary realm than either Will or Moll: his odyssey takes him back not only to Homer's epic and Odysseus, but to the very spring of literary character—language itself.

Throughout *Ulysses*, all psychological, sociological, and historical explanations of Bloom's behavior and motivation must compete for relevance with the obvious explanations provided by the Homeric parallel. For example, when Bloom enters Barney Kieran's bar, he is acting in accord with the Homeric convention according to which Odysseus enters the Cyclops' cave; in effect, Bloom is Odysseus and the bar is the cave. It follows that all explanations of why Bloom accepts and smokes a cigar may be of secondary importance to the fact that he is continuing to play his role as set out in Homer. Does Bloom smoke the cigar because he is a smoker? Or is he a smoker because he smokes a cigar? Further, what kind of man smokes a cigar? Is Bloom orally fixated? All such questions are secondary to the will of the discourse: Bloom smokes a cigar because the narrative of *Ulysses* demands that he acquire an Odyssean stake with which to put out, if only rhetorically, the Cyclops' eye.

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Thus, one significance of the Homeric parallel lies in the way it clearly reveals the familiar tautology between character and action. Countless times during the course of Ulysses, the Homeric parallel assumes a visible position on the stage, providing a mirror image (more or less distorted) of Bloom's actions, showing them to be determined by the literary laws of the text. The more these laws—and their violations—make themselves felt, the greater the freedom of the language of character relative to its supposed referent outside the literary realm.

This view of Bloom, of course, is only one of many. Other readers might argue that Bloom's motive for smoking a cigar can be determined in relation to Odysseus' motive for devising the olive stake, that the Dubliner's personality can be discerned in the Greek's. Perhaps Odysseus' ruse manifests what W. B. Stanford regards as the hero's primary trait: "cleverness in the widest sense, a cleverness ranging from the highest wisdom and intelligence to the lowest cunning." Or, perhaps Odysseus' calculated action is a sign of his unquenchable thirst for life, or of his devotion to his men. All such explanations of the hero's personality, however, must compete with the idea that Odysseus may be functioning here purely as an agent of the gods. His eye blinded, the Cylops screams: "'So the old prophecy has come home to me with a vengeance! . . . All that has now happened [Telemus son of Eurymus] foretold, when he warned me that a man called Odysseus would rob me of my sight.'"

Odysseus' putting out of the Cyclops' eye is an episode of the

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hero's odyssey written by the gods, forgers of human deeds. Themselves characters in Homer's epic, the gods appear as the authors of Odysseus' deeds. And if the character, Odysseus, is without personality as a result, then Leopold Bloom is doubly so; the Dubliner is forced to re-enact the same deeds Odysseus before him was forced to act. The author of Bloom's deeds, however, prefers to stay offstage. What remains in view in "Cyclops" is the way the Homeric parallel suspends Bloom from the fictional reality of Dublin, replacing the realistic view of character with the realistic view of discourse.

According to the realistic view of discourse, which considers the character's environment to be one of the words, the most important point of divergence between the Homeric Cyclops episode and the Joycean version is the hero's relation to this environment. The difference between Odysseus and Bloom is striking in this regard. Whereas Odysseus appears to control the narration of the Homeric version, in Ulysses Bloom is largely deprived of the right to speak. And as both The Odyssey and Moll Flanders make abundantly clear, the ability to speak, to say "I", constitutes a narrative power of the most important sort: like Moll Flanders, Odysseus attains heroic stature at least in part because the discourse that gives him life permits him to say "I", to name himself and tell his own story.

In Homer's Cyclops episode, the framing narrator claims but a single sentence at the beginning of the chapter before passing the narrative reins to Odysseus: "In answer to the King, this is how Odysseus, the man of many resources, began his tale" (Odyssey, p. 139). Then, after a brief preamble, Odysseus introduces himself: "I am Odysseus, Laertes' son. The whole world talks of my stratagems, and my fame has reached the heavens" (Odyssey, p. 139). The self-assurance and confidence with which the hero
speaks is due no doubt to the fact that he is surrounded by an appreciative audience and out of range of the Cyclops. And from all outward appearance, he is also out of the range of the framing narrator; he is free to say what he likes. The hero's self-introduction mirrors the one he gives the Cyclops after having put out his eye. In between these two introductions comes another which gives the act of self-naming its true significance.

Trapped by the Cyclops, who seems intent on devouring his unfortunate visitors one by one, Odysseus is tempted to kill the monster immediately. Upon reflection he decides to follow a more prudent course by blinding him and escaping from the cave when the sheep are let out to graze. In order for his plan to work, Odysseus must ensure that the other Cyclopes will not come to the aid of Polyphemus. He does this by giving himself a false name:

"Cyclops," I said, "you wish to know the name I bear. I'll tell it to you; and in return I should like to have the gift you promised me. My name is Nobody. That is what I am called by my mother and father and by all my friends." (Odyssey, p. 149)

The success of this wile is complete. After Odysseus has put out his eye, the Cyclops begins to scream in agony. Hearing these cries, his fellow Cyclopes come to the mouth of the cave and ask if somebody is trying by violence to kill him, to which Polyphemus replies: "'O my friends, it's Nobody's treachery, no violence, that is doing me to death.'" "'Well then,'" his friends respond, "'if nobody is assaulting you in your solitude, you must be sick. Sickness comes from almighty Zeus and cannot be helped.'" Saying this they depart, leaving Odysseus to relish his victory: "'And off they went, while I chuckled to myself at the way in which my happy notion of a false name had taken them in'" (Odyssey, p. 150).
Odysseus' ability to name himself, and so blind the Cyclops metaphorically, more than his ability to blind the monster physically, allows his escape from bondage. The act of naming here is closely related to knowing: Odysseus gives himself a false name that is completely true to his purpose, which is to exercise his prowess as poet and liar using language that appears to, but actually does not, refer to reality. By the same token, the Cyclops' use of "Nobody," because he is unaware of the name's true import (and of the dangers inherent in his ignorance), can be seen as a false naming that works to his disadvantage. In Homer's Cyclops episode, the ability to speak, which is the ability to name, both constitutes and reflects the power of the one who speaks: once Odysseus has put out the eye of the Cyclops, he must remain silent for fear of his life; once out of range of the monster, his security permits him to speak his name freely and to taunt his victim.

Odysseus' apparent ability to speak is, as we have said, a narrative illusion. The same is true of Moll Flanders. Bloom's inability to control the discourse to the same degree as Odysseus is the direct result of Joyce's desire to call attention to this illusion, a feat to be accomplished only at the expense of Bloom as a conventional character-person. In order to destroy the illusion of the character's autonomy, the discourse of Ulysses plays with Bloom, gives him occasional control of the words that constitute him, lets him rise to the surface of the narrative, and then reclains this control and swallows him in a sea of words. In this way, the discourse draws attention to the subservience of character to language.

If the Homeric parallel is applied to the primary fictional level, we see that, whereas the Cyclops devours Odysseus' men by dashing their
brains on the ground and tearing them limb from limb with ravenous jaws, the Dubliners devour Bloom with their gossip. And to gossip, according to the OED, is "to give a name to." Naming can be a creative act as it was for God and, to a lesser degree, Adam, or, as the bar scene illustrates so clearly, it can be an act of destruction that robs objects of their integrity. In the mouths of his enemies, Bloom becomes a "'bloody dark horse,'" a "sloppy eyes", a "bloody mouseabout," a "'Virag,'" a "'new Messiah for Ireland,'" a "'wolf in sheep's clothing,'" one of the things that "contaminate our shores.'" a "'mixed middling." And underlying all these insults is the fact—a fact unspeakably ugly in the eyes of his enemies—that Bloom is a Jew . . . "'as cute as a shithouse rat'" (U, pp.333-6). The whole thrust of the gossip is to deprive Bloom of his integrity as a man. The concern he is said to have shown for his pregnant wife calls into question his masculinity: "'Do you call that a man?'" asks the Citizen. Rumours of Molly's affair with Blazes Boylan compromise Bloom's status as a father; Jack Power's mention of Bloom's two children prompts the Citizen to ask: "'And who does he suspect?'"

The effect the gossip has on Bloom is underlined by one of the chapter's numerous plays on words. In the following passage, John Wyse (wise because he asks "whys"?) asks for verification of the rumours he has been spreading at Bloom's expense:

-Isn't that a fact, says John Wyse, what I was telling the citizen about Bloom and the Sinn Fein?
-That's so, says Martin. Or so they allege.
-Who made those allegations? says Alf.
-I, says Joe. I'm the alligator.
(U, p. 335)
Like every play on words, this one shifts attention from the referent of language to language itself, and invites a closer look at the ways in which Bloom is devoured by the language of the text.

The greatest alligator of them all is of course the narrator, the inheritor (or usurper) of Odysseus' power to narrate, through whose eye, or "I," the reader gains access to the primary reality of Barney Kiernan's bar. In other words, the secondary level of narration determines how and when the reality of the bar shall find expression in the novel. As a character who is presumably in the bar, the narrator participates in the general attack on Bloom's integrity; in his capacity of narrator, he devours Bloom by depriving him of access to the narration.

Readers may, once again, find this explanation of what is happening to Bloom unconvincing. They may reject the idea that he is being picked up and dropped or swallowed by the discourse, and counter that "I" is a man, a character-person who is or was present at Barney Kiernan's, and who dislikes Bloom as much as the others do. The movement of the narrator's attention to and from Bloom could then be explained in terms of human psychology: the narrator acknowledges Bloom's presence only reluctantly, as he would that of a troublesome insect, and ignores his presence as much as possible.

The attempt to read "I" as a character-person, however, is resisted by the discourse of "Cylops" even more strongly than the attempt to do the same with Bloom, though the two are related as we shall see. Although the narrator's beer consumption and subsequent urination, along with his ability to speak (or write), are signs of his all-too-human "humanity," he is not quite a person like the others. His identity is intentionally
precarious. The reader's attempts to make a man of him by appealing to 
natural and cultural conventions are impeded by a combination of literary 
conventions, not the least of which is the Homeric parallel.

Regarded as a conventional character-person under the light of 
realism, "I" cannot be definitively fixed in any one physical location. 
Nor can one determine to whom he is speaking or at what time he is doing 
so. In his attempt to name the "unnamed" narrator and understand his 
story, David Hayman adheres to such logic:

He is after all a "person" in Joyce's Dublin, in the Dublin 
of Ulysses, and therefore must be in some way considered in 
the light of normal behavior. In that light, he must be 
telling the story to someone. If he is telling the story to 
someone, he must be telling it at a later period. If he is 
telling it at a later period, it is probably later that 
night. If it is later that night, it is very likely that he 
is telling the story in a pub, to a drink-donor, at about the 
time when Bloom himself is asleep on the strand.9

Hayman's effort to fill in the gaps involves the telling of another story, 
one that creaks sorely when it asks us to believe that the narrator's 
interjections, his swallowing of beer, and his urination correspond 
perfectly with identical events at Barney Kiernan's. The irony in his 
interpretation appears when he tries to justify his realistic view by 
arguing that such coincidence is conventional, and not unusual in 
fiction.10

Herbert Schneidau responds to this argument by countering that "I" 
is in fact in the bar during the narration, and that his narration is 
actually simultaneous with the events themselves, a kind of rehearsal, an

9David Hayman, "Two Eyes at Two Levels: A response to Herbert 
10Hayman, p. 106.
interior monologue of the story he will later recount over a beer or
two.\textsuperscript{11} Both interpretations strain the reader's credulity, and they do so
according to the very conventions of realism on which they are based. In
trying to make of "I" a character-person, both writers ignore significant
ambiguities or gaps which call into question their conventional view.

Any attempt to assign "I" a proper name constitutes a misreading of
the chapter. The desire to do so, however, is so strong that few critics
resist the temptation. Schneidau succumbs when he seals his interpretation
by concluding that "the Nameless One's name, at last, is Joyce."\textsuperscript{12} A
slightly less imprudent naming is that of Richard Ellmann, who conceives of
the "unnamed" narrator as a modern incarnation of Thersites, the
mean-spirited character of Shakespeare's \textit{Troilus and Cressida}. Ellmann's
reading is more acceptable because it is more literary, but it still
ignores the fact that "I," strictly speaking, is not unnamed at all.
Roland Barthes contends that:

\begin{quote}
In the story (and in many conversations), I is no longer a
pronoun, but a name, the best of names: to say I is
inevitably to attribute signifieds to oneself; Further, it
gives one a biographical duration, it enables one to undergo,
in one's imagination, an intelligible "evolution," to signify
oneself as an object with a destiny, to give a meaning to
time. On this level, I \ldots is therefore a character.\textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}

Many readers have noted that "Cyclops" is largely about mistaken
identity: Joe Hynes mistakes Geraghty for Herzog's creditor; Alf Bergan
mistakes someone else for Paddy Dignam; Bob Doran misnames Paddy Dignam as

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textsuperscript{11}Herbert Schneidau, "One Eye and Two Levels: On Joyce's 'Cyclops,'" \textit{JJQ}, 16 (Winter 1978), p.97.
\item\textsuperscript{12}Schneidau, p. 103.
\item\textsuperscript{13}Roland Barthes, \textit{S/Z}, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill &
\end{footnotes}
Willy. Barthes' correct assertion that \( I \) pulls in the direction of a realistic view of character should be carefully weighed in light of this endemic mistaking of identity. In fact, the pull of the \( I \) toward reality, troubled as it is by the textual barriers already discussed, is at least balanced if not overpowered by the counterpull back into the literary realm exerted by the Homeric parallel, specifically by the relentless allusions and word-plays on the narratorial "I" and the Cyclopean eye.

The Homeric parallel encourages the reader to recognize the essential literariness of the narrator, and to read him as a style instead of as a man. "I's" point of view is that of the Cyclops' eye, an impersonal eye which, as we have mentioned, has usurped the hero's power to narrate. Implied in this mean, myopic point of view is a distortion of reality that nonetheless constitutes reality for the reader. As part of the fictional world of Dublin, Bloom is not described by this eye as much as he is created by it: a character is not a man as much as it is a style.

This view of the role of the "I" narration is confirmed and highlighted by the tertiary narration, which takes the form of thirty-three interruptions of the "I" narrator's secondary narration. The hierarchy implied in this schema of primary, secondary and tertiary narration is misleading, both because the various levels are not completely separate from one another and because both the secondary and tertiary level levels are equally real from the reader's perspective.\(^{14}\) The secondary narration begins the chapter—"I was just passing the time of day with old

\(^{14}\)In her article, "Funfersum: Dialogue as Metafictional Technique in the 'Cyclops' Episode of Ulysses," JJQ, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Summer 1981), pp. 397-417, Mary Beth Pringle demonstrates how Joyce uses dialogue to blur the distinction between what she calls the "real" and "unreal" narrative strands.
Troy"—but the tertiary level sometimes takes the lead, as when it
foreshadows Bloom's imminent arrival with "Who comes through Michan's land,
bedight in sable armour?" (U, pp. 290, 296). In addition, the tertiary
narration closes the chapter, making it impossible to say that one level is
"about" the other. Since each of these two levels accounts for about half
of the chapter, the reader is justified in expressing doubt as to exactly
what constitutes the action of the chapter. Perhaps all we can say with
assurance is that we are dealing with the narrative of a narrative, which
suggests that the subject of the discourse is the discourse itself, and
that the reader's attention is being drawn to a closer look at the language
of character.

One thing is certain: these tertiary narratorial instructions cannot
be attributed to a narrator without doing considerable injustice to the
text; they are impersonal to a degree that defies any attempt to locate an
ego or personality behind them. To argue, as Ellmann does, that the
narratorial intrusions represent a single individual voice, be it that of
Pangloss or not, is erroneous.\footnote{Richard Ellmann, Ulysses in the Liffey
(New York: OUP, 1972), pp. 111-112. Karen Lawrence makes a similar criticism of Marylin
French's interpretation of "Cyclops"; see Karen Lawrence, The Odyssey of
Style in Ulysses (Princeton, N.J.: PUP, 1981), p. 102.} To say that the "voice" of "They believe
in rod, the scourger almighty, creator of hell upon earth and in Jacky Tar,
the son of a gun" emanates from the same narrator as "For nonperishable
goods bought of Moses Herzog, of 13 Saint Kevin's parade, Wood quay ward,
merchant, hereinafter called the vendor," is to ignore that the only real
speakers are the styles themselves, mock-biblical and contractual
respectively (U, pp.327, 291).

Stuart Gilbert's analysis is preferable:
At intervals the narration is taken out of the mouth of the nondescript vulgarian and becomes mock-heroic, Gargantuan, pseudo-scientific or antiquarian in style.\textsuperscript{16}

The exact terms used to describe the various levels of narration are less important than an understanding that when these narrations speak, the voice of narration speaks. In interrupting each other, the various levels or styles of narration call attention to the way they swallow the styles and characters of other levels, to the way they play with Bloom, pick him up like a puppet and carry him into word-worlds that both distort and create his "personality," and give him a significance radically different from that he has in Barney Kiernan's bar. The Bloom the narrator sees "sloping around by Pill lane and Greek street with his cod's eye counting up all the guts of the fish" is not the Bloom "Who comes through Michan's land, bedight in sable armour? O'Bloom, the son of Rory: it is he. Impervious to fear is Rory's son: he of the prudent soul" (U, p. 296). In the uncharitable eye of "I," Bloom is a pathetic skulking figure of a man; in the language of Irish myth, he is a parody of the Irish hero whose prudence points to his fabled descendence from the warrior-gods of Troy.

Each time Bloom is picked up by a new style he is effectively renamed or re-created. In the language of the medical report, Poldy becomes "the distinguished scientist Herr Professor Luitpold Blumenduft [who] tendered medical evidence to the effect that the instantaneous fracture of the cervical vertebrae . . . ." (U, p. 303). At the end of the chapter, Bloom, "old sheepsface," is raised from the common flock to the divine height of biblical prose as Elijah . . . only to be subsequently

\textsuperscript{16}Gilbert, p, 274.
cast out, a fallen angel:

When, lo, there came about them all a great brightness and they beheld the chariot wherein He stood ascend to heaven. And they beheld Him in the chariot, clothed upon in the glory of the brightness . . . . And they beheld Him even Him, ben Bloom Elijah, amid clouds of angels ascend to the glory of the brightness at an angle of fortyfive degrees over Donohoe's in Little Green Street like a shot off a shovel. (U, p. 343)

The final phrase of the chapter, "like a shot off a shovel," comes much closer than the rest of the impersonal narrations to the style of the Cyclopean "I", confirming perhaps the impersonality of that style, and suggesting that "I" is a style like all the others. In the course of his journey from style to style, the language that is Bloom becomes progressively detached from the reality of Barney Kiernan's and becomes the plaything of the discourse. His full emancipation as a literary character, however, will not occur until after he travels through "Circe," in which the character-person is formally put on trial.

Once Stephen and Bloom enter the gloom of "Circe," the primary narrative thread becomes even more difficult to follow than it has been in "Oxen of the Sun", where styles overpower factual events. According to Kenner, "Nothing, in 'Circe', distinguishes 'real' from 'hallucinatory', nor any part of the episode from any other." True, parts of the episode appear to be validated by other parts of the novel. For example, Bloom's potato seems real because it has appeared before and reappears after "Circe." Likewise, Stephen's money, entrusted to Bloom at Zoe's, becomes real when Bloom returns it to him in "Ithaca." Although such inner hierarchies of artifice inform much of our reading, they remain

tautological: they corroborate one fiction with another fiction. And Joyce seems to delight in showing that—even in the most objective fiction—two lies do not make a truth.

By far the greater part of "Circe" has a much more tenuous relation to the reality of Dublin; most of what happens is never verified elsewhere in the novel. Put another way, the reader often cannot see through the language of "Circe" to any referent. Nowhere is this more true than in regard to the language of character. For readers used to the comforting face of Bloom as a character-person, "Circe" becomes, according to Kenner, a kind of "hell."\(^\text{18}\) Like the hell of Dante, Joyce's hell is difficult to escape. This difficulty has not, of course, prevented critics from trying to dispel the disquieting shadows of "Circe" with the light of day by forcing them to conform to the standards of realism.

One such attempt is that of John Brophy, who sees the greater part of "Circe" as an emanation of Bloom's mind:

This unacted and perhaps unactable drama begins and ends with a realistic encounter, in a disreputable Dublin slum, between the young Stephen Daedalus (or Joyce) and the middle-aged Leopold Bloom, a newspaper-canvasser of Hungarian-Jewish descent. The middle and much the larger part of the action, however, is occupied by a compost of decaying memories, fears, desires, shames and glorifications, all hallucinatory, all taking place in Bloom's mind.\(^\text{19}\)

Brophy's view, as the allusions to the age, profession and nationality of the characters suggest, derives from a realistic view of character. While it may be reassuring in some respects, this interpretation fails to provide

\(^{18}\)Kenner, p. 123.

a means of distinguishing the "real" from the "hallucinatory." More important, no textual justification exists for such a view.

Kenner has shown that the vocabulary and memories of the "hallucinations" could not be all Bloom's. Thus, to regard the play within the fiction of Ulysses as substantially Bloom's hallucination makes no more or less sense than to regard the play-within-the-play in Hamlet as Hamlet's dream. Like Stephen's rarefied interpretation of Hamlet, this view may provide for interesting speculation. In the context of Ulysses, however, it is too much the reaction of a guilty reader who, like the King in Hamlet, confronted with a play that confuses the boundary of reality and fiction, recoils and cries "Give me some light." If we wish to avoid this embarrassing violation of convention, we may agree with Kenner that the language of "Circe" obeys a more elusive set of principles:

All we can safely say of their detail is that it tends to come from earlier in the book, a sort of collective vocabulary out of which, it seems, anything at all can now be composed.

As one aspect of this brilliantly obscure composition, Bloom is identified explicitly as a literary character. Each time we read "BLOOM:" we know that the literary character of that name will come to life in the works the text assigns it to speak. For the reader of "Circe" (who has no other choice in the matter, since the language of the text exists in such an ambiguous relation to any imagined extra-textual reality), Bloom is these words: literary character is the words he, she or it appears to speak—but not just these.

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20 Kenner, pp. 120-121.
21 Kenner, pp. 123.
The process of character-creation, the assigning of names to Bloom, is ultimately controlled, at least traditionally, by the playwright or author who assigns him his role and determines how the other characters will speak of him. In this sense, *Ulysses* is not fundamentally different from *Middlemarch* in which Eliot uses Mrs. Gadwallader and others as mediums for gossip about Will. In fiction, through direct narratorial comment, and in drama through the stage directions, the author may appear to name the character directly. In *Moll Flanders*, *Middlemarch* and *Ulysses*, the weight of these different ways of naming the character varies according to the relative authority the reader attaches to them, whence the urgent attempts on the part of critics to determine the source of literary language and establish its "truth-content." Thus, Will Ladislaw's rumoured affair with Rosamond, and Bloom's alleged niggardly unwillingness to share the money he is thought to have won on Throwaway, are seen by the reader as untrue, and therefore as unconstitutive of character. But as we have seen in relation to *Middlemarch*, and as "Circe" makes abundantly clear, all such naming creates character.

What Bloom describes as the "midsummer madness" of "Circe" is really just a ruthlessly democratic demonstration of the principle that the creative power of all words is equal. Perhaps nowhere is the suspension of the traditional convention of hierarchical language so obvious as in the stage directions. The authority of this form of language is generally beyond doubt; what it says in the context of the play is held to be true. If the stage direction says, "Enter Hamlet wearing black," then Hamlet will enter wearing black; in drama, the playwright inherits Circe's ability to transform and metamorphose. But in "Circe," even this convention is upset when the words of the characters determine what the stage directions will
be: language, not the playwright, possesses the divine power to create and to transform.

Typical of this reversal is Bloom's mention of a gazelle:

BLOOM: (Forlornly) I never loved a dear gazelle but it was sure to . . .

(Gazelles are leaping, feeding on the mountains.)

(U, p. 454)

Another is his announcement of the new Bloomusalem:

BLOOM: My beloved subjects, a new era is about to dawn. I, Bloom, tell you verily it is even now at hand. Yea, on the word of a Bloom, ye shall ere long enter into the golden city which is to be, the new Bloomusalem in the Nova Hibernia of the future.

(Thirtysnine workmen wearing rosettes, from all the counties of Ireland, under the guidance of Derwan the builder, construct the new Bloomusalem. It is a colossal edifice, with crystal roof, built in the shape of a huge pork kidney.)

(U, p. 459)

Bloom's transformations occur in much the same way. He becomes exactly what Zoe names him:

BLOOM: Laughing witch! The hand that rocks the cradle.
ZOEE: Babby!
BLOOM: (In babylinen and pelisse, bigheaded, with a caul of dark hair, fixes big eyes on her fluid slip and counts its bronze bunckles with a chubby finger, his moist tongue lolling and lisping) One two tlee: tlee tlwo tlone.

(U, p. 469)

And when his father speaks to him as a son, Bloom re-assumes his boyhood form:

RUDOLPH: (Severely) One night they bring you home drunk as dog after spend your good money. What you call them running chaps?
BLOOM: (In youth's smart blue Oxford suit with white vestslips, narrow-shouldered, in brown Alpine hat, wearing
gent's sterling silver waterbury keyless watch and double curb Albert with seal attached, one side of him coated with stiffening mud)

And when "DR DIXON" says that Professor Bloom, "a finished example of the new womanly man . . . is about to have a baby," the prognosis immediately becomes reality:

BLOOM: O, I so want to be a mother.
MRS THORNTON: (In nursetender's gown) Embrace me tight, dear. You'll be soon over it. Tight, dear.
(Bloom embraces her tightly and bears eight male yellow and white children.)

By the end of "Circe," the cluster of signs that equals Bloom has been arranged in a series of wild configurations. Bloom is a man, a boy, a baby, a woman. He is a variety of historical personages, including Christ; he walks through walls and hangs from a ledge by his eyelids. His wardrobe is protean. His ears are sometimes human, sometimes those of an ass. In short, Bloom is a cluster of signs which does not respect the limits of any reality external to the text. Like THE SOAP, THE KISSES and THE BUCKLES, Bloom is a character created by naming. Like any other word of the text, "Bloom" can undergo many playful transformations without losing its exchange value. This is established from the moment Bloom sets foot in nighttown:

On the farther side under the railway bridge Bloom appears flushed, panting, cramming bread and chocolate into a side pocket. From Gillen's hairdresser's window a composite portrait shows him gallant Nelson's image. A concave mirror at the side presents to him lovelorn longlost lugubru Boolooohoom. Grave Gladstone sees him level, Bloom for Bloom. He passes, struck by the stare of truculent Wellington but in the convex mirror grin unstruck the bonham eyes and fatchuck cheekchops of Jollypoldy the rixdix doldy.

(U., p. 428)
The language in "Circe" is a mirror—of sorts. The images it presents, however, do not reflect reality as much as they create it. Once character is freed of the task of reflecting reality outside of itself, its linguistic nature becomes the primary reality: language becomes a character. In other words, both the character-person and the character-agent give way to what we may describe as the character-character. The character-character, as its tautological name suggests, is a character that reveals its linguistic nature.

The character-character is not an easy fellow to live with, and it is with a sign of relief that most readers witness Bloom's re-emergence in the form of a character-person at the end of "Circe." The language at the beginning of "Eumaeus" appears to have assumed once again its traditional relation with reality. No such luck. As in "Cyclops" and "Circe," the language of "Eumaeus" still constitutes the primary reality. Kenner nicely expresses this predominance of language over reality when he writes:

In the latter half of Ulysses styles are like places: ports of call, with their special sounds and atmospheres and customs, in which the journeying hero lingers.22

With the return of apparent realism comes the re-emergence of the Homeric parallel. The narration of "Eumaeus" refers to Bloom as "our hero," and reminds the reader that the hero's journey is not yet accomplished: "The best plan clearly being to clear out, the remainder being plain sailing, he [Bloom] beckoned, while prudently pocketing the photo" (U, p. 579). And later, "seeing that the ruse worked and the coast was clear, they [Stephen and Bloom] left the shelter or shanty together"

22 Kenner, p.134.
Both heroes cross seas on their homeward journeys. The sea of Odysseus is the winedark sea of ships; the sea of Bloom is the sea of language. Each has its own perils.

The sea of "Eumaeus" is plagued with problems of reference, particularly in the objective, subjective and possessive cases of the pronoun. Expressions like "His (Stephen's) mind"; "her (the lady's) eyes"; "His hat (Parnell's)"; and "he purposed (Bloom did)" are interspersed throughout the chapter (U, pp. 533, 573, 585). These hints that the language is not capturing the reality of Bloom's progress down Dublin streets are confirmed precisely at that point when it appears to flaunt decorum to give us the reality of a horse's defecation:

The horse, having reached the end of his tether, so to speak, halted, and rearing high a proud feathering tail, added his quota by letting fall on the floor, which the brush would soon brush up and polish, three smoking globes of turds. (U, p. 585)

This imprecision of referent and gender threatens Bloom's re-acquired status as character-person. By the end of the chapter, Stephen and Bloom, making their way slowly home, begin to move once more out of the range of realistic language. For its part, the language abandons the two men supposedly walking toward the bridge and becomes playfully self-reflexive:

The driver never said a word, good, bad or indifferent. He merely watched the two figures, as he sat on his lowbacked car, both black—one full, one lean—walk towards the railway bridge, to be married by Father Maher. As they walked, they at times stopped and walked again, continuing their tête à tête (which of course he was utterly out of), about sirens, enemies of man's reason, mingled with a number of other topics of the same category, usurpers, historical cases of the kind while the man in the sweeper car or you might as well call it in the sleeper car who in any case couldn't
possibly hear because they were too far simply sat in his seat near the end of lower Gardiner street and looked after their lowbacked car. (U, p. 586)

The action of the characters moving in Dublin is replaced by the action of the language which calls itself into question by turning inward and referring back to an earlier allusion to an Irish song.\textsuperscript{23} The ending of the chapter reminds us that in \textit{Ulysses} language itself is the Sirens' song—the "enemy to man's reason."

"Ithaca" marks Bloom's return to a language even more realistic than that of "Calypso," his point of departure. The style of the chapter, the catechism, is a method of instruction by questions and answers that purports to discover the truth. The great irony of the chapter is that the closer Bloom moves to the end of his odyssey, the more the apparent objectivity of the language increases, the more he disappears as a character-person. This state of affairs suggests that the real disguise of the hero (language or character-character) has been the character-person all along. The closer the language of the text comes to describing Bloom, the more clearly he disappears as a character-person replete with idiosyncratic personality, leaving behind only the words that create instead of describe him.

Bloom's essentially literary nature is revealed once again through the Homeric parallel when he arrives outside his home and realizes that he has forgotten his key. The narration informs the reader that Bloom is faced with the following alternatives. "To enter or not to enter, To knock or not to knock." He is faced here with three different roles: 1) he can, like Hamlet, agonize and temporize over his decision; 2) he can play the

role of a person and knock; or 3) he can play the familiar role of Odysseus and employ his nimble wits:

Bloom's decision?
A stratagem. (U, p. 588)

Predictably enough, the Homeric parallel functions to suspend the conventions of realism and replace them with the literary convention of the Odyssey. Bloom's "decision" is not a decision at all; the choice has already been made by Odysseus.

As he journeys through "Ithaca," Bloom fades progressively into the language of the text. The closer he gets to home, the more he sheds the trappings of the character-person. Stephen sees him "through the transparent kitchen panes" as:

a man regulating a gasflame of 14 C P, a man lighting a candle, a man removing in turn each of his two boots, a man leaving the kitchen holding a candle of 1 C P. (U, p. 589)

Even this vague view of the character-person recedes when Bloom returns inside the house after Stephen's departure. Bloom intends to make his way to bed; his trials as a character-person, however, are not yet over:

What suddenly arrested his ingress?
The right temporal lobe of the hollow sphere of his cranium came into contact with a solid timber angle where, an infinitesimal but sensible fraction of a second later, a painful sensation was located in consequence of antecedent sensations transmitted and registered. (U, p. 626)

The cold factuality of this language would impress even Thomas Gradgrind: it sends the character-person into the space of the literary universe.

By the time Bloom enters the bed, the true place of Odysseus' homecoming, he is ready to assume the form of a depersonalized segment, of
note only for its relation to the equator:


The inaccuracy of the geographical description, noted by Don Gifford is typical of many objective, apparently accurate descriptions of reality in "Ithaca." These, combined with the dizzying description of the Blooms "both carried westward ... by the proper perpetual motion of the earth" (the earth actually rotates eastward), reinforce at the end what has been implicit from the beginning: the language of the text exists first and foremost in relation to the rest of the literary universe. The closing questions and answers of the chapter drive this point home with conviction.

With the question "in what posture?" we move away from the realistic bed outward to a mythological view of Molly as a fusion of Greek and Roman earth goddesses (Gaea and Tellus Mater respectively), and a view of Bloom as an image of himself. Both of these perspectives confound notions of real time, duration and place. Under the influence of this language, Bloom becomes a unity of opposites, "the childman weary, the manchild in the womb." The response does still bear a metaphorical or symbolic relation to reality, in that Bloom could indeed be weary because of his travels through Dublin. The next set of questions and answers may be construed as corroboration of this reading:

Womb? Weary?
He rests. He has travelled. (U, p. 658)

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24Gifford, p. 494.
But the remaining questions and answers belie this interpretation and reveal the true nature of Bloom's journey.

The question "With?" which presumably refers to Bloom's companion in travel, is met with a response that turns its back on Dublin and sails off on a voyage of rhyme:

Sinbad the Sailor and Tinbad the Tailor and Jinbad the Jailer and Whinbad the Whaler and Ninbad the Nailer and Finbad the Failer and Binbad the Bailer and Pinbad the Pailer and Minbad the Mailer and Hinbad the Hailer and Rinbad the Railer and Dinbad the Kailer and Vinbad the Quailer and Linbad the Yailer and Xindbad the Phthailer. (U, p. 658)

This whimsical response has little to do with any reality other than itself as a self-generated series of words rhyming more or less with "Sinbad the Sailor." The series is potentially limitless, but the author, who no doubt feels that his reader has borne enough hardship, comes to the rescue. We can almost hear him "pull the plug" on his homecoming sailor with the final "Xinbad the Phthailer" (emphasis mine).

The idea that Bloom has been travelling in the company of language is reinforced by the next question, "When?" which sets Bloom and the language of the text free from the restrictions of time and place:

Going to a dark bed there was a square round Sinbad the Sailer roc's auk's egg in the night of the bed of all the auks of the rocs of Darkinbad the Brightdayler. (U, p. 658)

The dangling modifier, the ambiguity of tense, the juxtaposition of noun/verb, square/round, singular/plural, dark/bright; and of the historical but now extinct bird of the north, the auk, with the mythical Egyptian bird, the roc—all of these contribute to produce a simultaneous contraction and expansion, specification and universalization, of
language. With language now at center stage, Bloom's journey is almost at an end. It is completed precisely at that moment when the last vestige of Bloom's disguise as a character-person is cast off and his true identity as a literary character is finally revealed. Where is this character?

Where?

Bloom's odyssey, like that of Odysseus, ends when the wandering hero returns to his home. Odysseus' home is the island of Ithaca. Bloom's is a dot of ink on the page. In answer to the last question of the catechism of "Ithaca," Joyce finally tells the truth about Molldopeeloob: "Bloom" is a linguistic sign, a "character."

This revelation has been unfolding from the beginning of Bloom's odyssey in "Calypso" where allusions to the Homeric parallel first shift attention from his wanderings as a character-person through the streets of Dublin to his voyage as a character-agent whose words and actions are partially determined relative to the literary realm. This shift away from the realistic view of character is accentuated in "Cyclops" where Joyce uses the Homeric parallel to show that the "I" of the character-person, like the "eye" of the Cyclops, is a point-of-view, a style. Through such reference to the literary realm, Joyce liberates the language of character from both a human source and a human referent and reveals Bloom as a configuration of signs created through naming. As the riotous naming in "Circe" suggests, the undermining of the conventions of the character-person leads to the appearance of language as a creative power in its own right. The realism of "Eumaeus" and "Ithaca" re-creates the character-
person, thus reminding the reader that Bloom's voyage is through the galaxy of styles that make up the novel and preparing him for the ultimate disappearance of this same character-person.

James Maddox has suggested that "The progression of Ulysses may be described as a series of trials of character. . . . As Ulysses moves toward its ending, its styles move further and further away from intimate contact with the characters." His realistic reading of character misses the point—literally and figuratively—of the ending of "Ithaca" because it insists on identifying the language of character with human personality. If we wish to read Ulysses as a trial of character, then it must be as a trial of the character-person, of the illusion created by the language of character at the cost of its own visibility. When Joyce upsets the conventional character-person he reveals it as an illusion created through naming; he makes the reader see that characters are styles, and not essences beyond or behind them. If the styles in the latter half of Ulysses do anything at all, they bring the reader closer to character as a kind of language.

If we are to see Bloom, as Levitt suggests we are, as a symbol of fertility, it is surely at or in the final point of his odyssey, the point in and from which Leopold blooms to cook his delectable calf-kidneys in "Calypso," to bear her metallic children in "Circe" and, preparatory to the end of his voyage and his obscure revelation, to climb into bed with Molly, or is it Moll? . . . "the one from Flanders a whore always shoplifting anything she could cloth and stuff and yards of it" (U, p. 677). Bloom's

face is infinitely more fertile than that of the character-person. His is the face of character: the face of Nobody.
CONCLUSION

Forster's realistic view of character cannot explain, let alone appreciate, the unequivocal appearance in *Ulysses* of the language that is Bloom. Nor can it explain the subtle disappearance in *Moll Flanders* of the language that is Moll. The reason for both failures is that, by naively identifying novelistic character with human personality, the realistic view of character ignores the linguistic nature of character altogether. But character is a kind of language. As such, it exists relative to the world and to the literary realm; it is written and read relative to cultural conventions and beliefs about the world on one hand, and to literary conventions of genre and form on the other. Only by approaching character with this realistic view of discourse can one hope to do equal justice to Moll Flanders, Will Ladislaw and Leopold Bloom. All three are conventional configurations of language partially created by the novel's subversive appetite for incorporating and undermining traditional literary conventions, though each manifests this fact to differing degrees depending on the artistic intentions of its author.

In *Moll Flanders*, Defoe uses the language of character to create an autonomous character-person. He highlights the relation of character to the world by creating the illusion that it describes a real woman living in the world of eighteenth-century England. He pretends that Moll enjoys the freedom of speech required for the telling of her own story. In order to strengthen the illusion of Moll's personhood and the transparence of the language that makes it possible, Defoe incorporates and undermines certain elements of picaresque fiction in such a way as to underplay Moll's debt to
the literary realm, to divert the reader's attention from the fact that she is written at all. Thus, Moll's remarkable autonomy as a character-person is due to Defoe's success in disguising the fact that she is partially created by the undermining of picaresque literary conventions and is therefore a literary convention herself, albeit a novel one.

Eliot's use of Will Ladislaw as her agent in Middlemarch reduces his autonomy as a character-person and makes it abundantly clear that he is not free to tell his own story. By using him as a key figure in her conspicuously sustained upsetting of romance conventions, Eliot shifts the reader's attention from the illusion that Will is a person living in nineteenth-century provincial England to the fact that he is a literary construct, a mixed "cluster of signs" created partially by the very romance conventions he is used to undermine. In contrast to Defoe's upsetting of picaresque conventions in Moll Flanders, Eliot's undermining of romance conventions in Middlemarch illuminates the relation of character to the literary realm and thus initiates the appearance of the language of character. If she stops short of making this language emerge as an object worthy of thematic attention by ultimately subordinating Will's function as a character-agent to his role as a character-person, she nevertheless reveals the character-person as a literary convention which depends for its vitality upon an author's success at underplaying its literary nature and thus keeping the language of character transparent.

In Ulysses, Joyce definitively upsets the conventions of the character-person in order to make the language of character appear as an autonomous entity worthy of thematic concern. Following Eliot's lead in Middlemarch, he sets about accomplishing his goal by shifting the reader's
attention from the illusion of Bloom's wanderings as a person along Dublin streets to his voyage as a character-agent following in the footsteps of Homer's Odysseus. Having made it clear that Bloom is created in part from the conventions of Homer's epic, Joyce further undermines the illusion of the character-person and the transparence of the language which creates it by doing away with the conventional notion that, like Moll, Bloom is capable of telling the story of his life. To this end, he uses the Homeric parallel of the "eye" of the Cyclops to draw the "I" of the character-person into the literary realm and to expose it as just another point-of-view, just another style. Once this crucial "I" of the character-person is established as a name like any other, character can appear as a configuration of signs created through naming: language can become a character.

The examples of Moll Flanders, Middlemarch and Ulysses suggest that a given character may occupy any position along the gradient between the extreme positions marked by the disappearance and the appearance of the language of character. If the three novels studied here are any indication, a character's position between or at these extremes is itself entirely a matter of convention. Conventions of character in the novel may be expected to change from historical period to historical period, from cultural context to cultural context, from novel to novel and, as Bloom's odyssey makes clear, from page to page within a given novel. Such change is virtually guaranteed by the novel's appetite for undermining traditional literary conventions of any kind. This upsetting of convention can function to underplay what character owes to literature and make language disappear into the illusion of the character-person which allows us to know about ourselves. But it also has the potential to highlight the literary
nature of character, to free language from its descriptive subservience to reality and to reveal the character-character which allows us to appreciate the ways we come to know about ourselves through fiction. By appearing in all its opaque glory, the language of character has the power to help us avoid getting "our thoughts entangled" in Forster's metaphorical assertion that a character is a person. Character itself can remind us that character is, after all, language. It is an old idea, but one that must forever be made novel.
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