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The poet as liar

Lehner, David Jay, Ph.D.

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THE POET AS LIAR

by

David Lehner

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March 19, 1993
Date

Angus Fletcher
Chair of Examining Committee

19 May 1993
Date

[Signature]
Executive Officer

Professor Angus Fletcher

Professor Joan Richardson

Professor David Greetham

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

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Introduction

Poets are not liars; poetry and lying are separate activities. But poets have certainly been accused of being liars, and this was by no means a trifling allegation. In this book I want to take seriously this charge against the poets in order to see what kind of critical yield it produces. Specifically, I want to investigate the similarities between the linguistic structure of the lie and the inward activities of the poem.

My definition of the poet as liar will proceed, one might say, from genus to species: in Part I, I will try to show how poems and lies are alike in seven important respects; in Part II, I will distinguish poetry from lying in regard to five specific capacities and techniques. My main emphasis throughout will not be to argue that the poet actually is a liar, but rather that to consider the poet hypothetically as a liar affords us a new perspective on the dynamics of literary creation.

The idea of the poet as a liar had been, of course, a perennial issue in literary criticism. Plato banished the poets because of their lies. Aristotle tried to understand the nature of such lies. Sir Philip Sidney argued that a poet could not be a liar. Samuel Johnson maintained that even if the poet were a liar it should be impossible for a

sane man to be taken in by him. Samuel Taylor Coleridge claimed that the poet sometimes could not help being a liar, while Daniel Defoe had professed all of these views, plus a few more as well. Oscar Wilde argued that the literary imagination lived by lying; George Orwell held that in a world of lies literature would cease to exist. Today, although it is not customary for us to call the poet a liar, the issue is partially reflected in our discussions of "fictionality" and in our broader debates over "poetic language" or "discourse." The topic is a large and complex one, and is, in many ways, the central question in any theory of imaginative literature.

But although the question of "fictionality" has survived, in an important sense the issue of the poet as liar has died out. Earlier writers concerned themselves more with the problem of error, and with the serious political, moral, and religious consequences that resulted from such errors. But by the twentieth century most of these issues had disappeared from the critical landscape, to be replaced by an emphasis on the ability of poetry to convey truth, rather than to propagate error. Occurring simultaneously with this change of direction was a corresponding change of method. Roughly speaking, the new linguistic, analytical, and philosophical methods that were introduced into the study of literature were "truth functional," and were of little use in the analysis of

falsehood or lying. Indeed, over time they served to mask the original problem, so that now it is all but indiscernable.

Modern linguists have been largely silent on the nature of lying. In general, linguists have viewed lying as being structurally the same as telling the truth, with the difference only that the liar's statements happen to be factually false. The first linguist to question this view was Harald Weinrich, whose Linguistik der Lüge (1966) is a pioneering work in the field. Unfortunately, followers have been slow in coming. Weinrich's book even contains a chapter on lying in literature, but here especially one feels the need for further development. Another German writer, Gabriel Falkenberg, in his Lügen, Grundzüge einer Theorie sprachlicher Tauschung (1982), has argued convincingly for a distinctive linguistics of the lie. Falkenberg, however, is more concerned with the philosophical than the literary ramifications of the lie. Indeed, he devotes to lies in literature only a single paragraph. On our side of the Atlantic, there has yet to appear a single major treatment of the linguistics of lying.

When we turn to philosophy, the situation is much the same. In recent years linguistic philosophers have given to literary criticism invaluable tools for the understanding of fictional worlds, fictional discourse, and the "speech act" of literary production. Yet linguistic philosophy has

almost completely neglected the lie. And it is surprising that a literary theory based on speech act theory should have ignored the poet as liar, since one could argue that a lie is a paradigmatic case of a speech act. The point of a lie is not necessarily to convey information, but to do something in the world, to act upon the beliefs of another person so as to form or manipulate them in some predetermined way.

By neglecting the specific linguistics of lying, we have developed methods of analysis which, whether we recognize it or not, really give us a picture of the poet as a truth-teller, and not the poet as a liar. Thus today we have the curious situation that historically the greater part of literary criticism has been concerned with the poet as a liar, whereas in regard to technical sophistication most of the tools that we have at hand are designed primarily to analyze the poet as a truth-teller.

It is my position that this technical imbalance gives us a distorted view of the nature of literary language. I think that to redress this imbalance we need to put together a more comprehensive account of literary lying than we have had hitherto. Once we have developed this new account, we can begin to re-examine certain concepts in literary criticism in order to see what a more subtle understanding of the poet as liar can tell us. George Steiner sums up the situation quite well when he writes:

My conviction is that we shall not get much further in understanding the evolution of language and the relations between speech and human performance so long as we see "falsity" as primarily negative, so long as we consider counterfactuality, contradiction, and the many nuances of conditionality as specialized, often logically bastard modes. (217)

As it turns out, it is often from literary artists themselves that we find the most perceptive insights into the relation of literature to lying. Oscar Wilde, for example, in his essay/dialogue entitled The Decay of Lying has his character Vivian claim:

People have a careless way of talking about a "born liar," just as they talk of a "born poet." But in both cases they are wrong. Lying and poetry are arts -- arts, as Plato saw, not unconnected with each other -- and they require the most careful study, the most disinterested devotion. (14)

This quotation might be taken as the motto for my entire book. What I intend to chart are the most important

ways in which the arts of poetry and lying are "not unconnected with each other." But how do we develop this account if, as I maintain, it has never been done before? The different thinkers I will be looking at have all happened to concentrate on slightly different aspects of what it means for a poet to be a liar. Although they have important things to say about the poet as liar, they all discuss the concept on the way to arguing something else; none of them examine the poet as liar in and of itself. There is a need, therefore, to sythesize these ideas to see what shape the concept of the poet as liar assumes when it is considered on its own.

There is an additional need for a synthetic account, since the lack of coherence in our understanding of the poet as liar gives rise to unavoidable problems. Not the least of these is that the meaning of the words "poet" and "liar" often differs with each writer. For example, Sidney states:

Poesy, therefore, is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in the word mimesis, that is to say, a representing or counterfeiting, or figuring forth -- to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture; with this end, to teach and delight. (196)

Now all of the writers I have mentioned consider poetry as a

form of representation, but beyond that there is a great deal to argue about. For example, what degree of "figuring" do poetic representations demand, and to what extent does figuring -- or even representing -- constitute "counterfeiting," with its attendant suggestion of falsifying? I will try to articulate an account of poetry which will make it possible to discuss the poet as a liar without begging the question as to whether the poet's representations are automatically false or counterfeit. I will develop this account by arguing that there is a difference between a "true" representation and a "truthful" representation, and that the first term is relative to matters of fact whereas the second term is relative to matters of belief. I will then attempt to show that poems and lies operate primarily in the realm of beliefs and not of facts. This is the first and most important step in my argument, and is addressed in the first chapter.

When we turn to the word "liar," we encounter similar problems. For example, Sidney writes that "to lye is to affirme that to be true which is false" (216). On this thinking, Sidney maintains that given the uncertain state of our knowledge the astronomer and the historian can hardly escape the charge of lying, since they take it upon themselves to affirm to be true things that might turn out to be untrue. Sidney's definition of lying is based on the status of our knowledge of facts, and there is no suggestion

in his treatise that the intention to deceive is essential to the definition of a lie.

We may contrast Sidney's view with that of Coleridge, who asserts that "veracity does not consist in saying, but in the intention of communicating truth" (BL 85). In Coleridge's view an untruth may be necessary and even excusable if the speaker is in coercive circumstances. Furthermore, Coleridge is aware that true statements may be used to create an untrue impression. He writes:

Blifil related accurately Tom Jones's riotous joy during his benefactor's illness, only omitting that this joy was occasioned by the physician's having pronounced him out of danger. Blifil was not the less a liar for being an accurate matter-of fact liar. (CW 49)

Coleridge is here, of course, discussing a lie which takes place within a fiction, but he shows elsewhere that he is aware that the the problem of lying also exists between a speaker and his audience. In an entry to his Notebooks on January 11, 1805, Coleridge describes a conversation that had taken place the day before. He then comments: "I felt that in telling the truth I was conveying a falsehood" (2397). The multifaceted conception of truth suggested by this remark calls for further examination, the direction of

which cannot be accurately charted until we have a full and satisfactory account of what it means for something to be a lie.

The views of Sidney and Coleridge presented above differ primarily in the role given to intention in the definition of a lie. The question of intention, however, is only one of seven aspects among which I want to discuss the nature of lying. My own definition of a lie will be: the intentional propagation of a belief which the speaker himself believes to be untrue, and which is possible, probable, and intended to deceive. The distinctive characteristics of this view are: first, that it makes the primary realm of lying that of beliefs and not of facts; second, that the "language game" aspect of lying makes certain false statements, such as "I am twenty feet tall," when uttered in certain circumstances, not simply bad or unconvincing as lies, but actually impossible; third, that lies, in contrast to truthful statements, must be fashioned around probabilities; and fourth, that to be a lie a statement must be intended to deceive, which means intended to deceive a particular audience on a particular occasion. Arising from this last condition are two further issues: the nature of self-awareness, and the level of one's awareness of the beliefs of others. These six headings, plus a discussion of the moral responsibility of the liar, make up the seven main divisions of my treatment of the lie.

As I analyze this "language game of lying," as Wittgenstein has called it, I shall align with it the related concepts in literary criticism. Thus, when arguing that a lie operates in the realm of beliefs rather than facts, I will compare my view with the views of Aristotle, Sidney and others on the relation of poetry to facts and beliefs. When arguing that lying bears a special relation to conviction, I will discuss the views of Aristotle and Coleridge on the role of conviction in literature. When discussing lies and probability, I will consider the use of probabalistic reasoning in Shakespeare's Othello, and its role in the creation of lies. And so on. What I ultimately want to show is that an understanding of lying, as opposed to truth-telling, calls for a deeper and more perspicuous understanding of many of the ideas that happen to be essential to our understanding of literary works: the role of the speaker, the nature of one's beliefs, the level of one's self-awareness, one's understanding of one's audience, the use of figurative language, the nature of narrative, and so on. In short, I want to argue that a clearer understanding of the poet as liar will add to the richness and importance of some of the most fundamental concepts in literary criticism.

Part I Poets, Liars, and the Creation of Belief

Chapter I Facts and Beliefs

In distinguishing poetry from history, Aristotle states that "while poetry is concerned with universal truths, history treats of particular facts" (44). Sidney, echoing Aristotle, writes that the poet does not "tell you what is, or what is not, but what should or should not be" (203). Ben Jonson defines the poet as one "that feigneth and formeth a fable, and writes things like truth" (261). Harold Bloom, in our own day, has written that poets can only hope to "communicate opinion rather than truth" (70). All of these views direct us away from the world of certain fact and toward what is probable, what should ideally happen, or what we are prepared to believe should happen. The consensus seems to be that the poet should not be held to a standard of factual truth and falsehood.

In this connection it is interesting to note that, contrary to popular belief, when lying one does not necessarily state what is factually false. Rather, lies express what the liar only believes to be false. Naturally, one's belief that something is false cannot make it false, and to assume so would actually be to attribute a kind of infallibility to the liar whereby he could infallibly state

what is not the case (Falkenberg LT 329). As this would be impossible, we are forced to look elsewhere for our definition of a lie, and, as with poetry, we find it not in the realm of facts but in the realm of beliefs. Thus if we are to take seriously the proposition that the poet is a liar, then we are brought to the conclusion that poems, like lies, are not necessarily true or false representations of reality, but that they are indeed representations of possible beliefs about reality.

This first step in our definition of the poet as liar may sound a little strange at first, but it can be shown to be necessary. Suppose that by looking at my watch I establish the belief that it is a quarter before two o'clock and that I then tell you that it is quarter after two in order to get rid of you. I have lied by asserting what is contrary to my belief, but my statement may or may not be factually false. My watch could be slow, so that the correct time actually is a quarter after two. I have thus conveyed a true fact, but I have uttered a falsehood all the same (Falkenberg LT 328). Now, suppose that an author thought he had written a fictional tale and it turned out coincidentally that the characters and incidents he thought he had invented actually existed. Should such a work still be regarded as a fiction? This happened to Daniel DeFoe when he published The Four Years Voyages of Captain George Roberts (1726). Two years after the appearance of the book

a real Captain Roberts landed on shore who had actually been to several of the lands mentioned in DeFoe's Voyages (see Adams, 110). In this case, we would certainly say that DeFoe's work is still a fiction because DeFoe did not intend his work to correspond to this (or to any other) particular set of facts. DeFoe could not have intended this, since he did not know that such facts existed. Rather, DeFoe's work was intended only to create the belief in his reader of the possibility of such facts. Just as "factually untrue " is not the definition of a lie, "factually untrue" is not the definition of a fiction. Rather, it is a fiction only because it is believed by its author to be untrue.

But just because poems and lies operate primarily in the realm of beliefs and not facts, that does not mean that a poet who writes things that he does not believe is automatically a liar. There is a further condition to lying than just stating things that you do not believe to be true. What is essential to a lie is not simply that one person speaks and that another person forms a false set of beliefs, but rather that the listener is made to believe that the speaker also believes what is being said. This must be so, since one could form false beliefs in any number of ways, but an essential condition for holding the speaker accountable for having told a lie would be that the speaker had presented his views as though he himself believed them. Two friends in a bar, for example, who are "throwing the

bull" will indeed say many untrue things, but we would not say that they are lying to each other, because they clearly do not expect their partner to think that they believe what they are saying. They are not prepared to swear to or affirm their statements; they merely use them as a kind of verbal play.

One might say that the poet also uses language in this way, and that he therefore cannot be held accountable for having told lies since he does not attempt to convince his readers of his own belief in what he has written. The most famous formulation of this position comes from Sidney's Defense of Poetry:

Now for the Poet, he nothing affirmes, and therefore never lyeth. For, as I take it, to Lye is to affirme that to be true which is false. So the other Artists, and especially the Historian, affirming many things, can in the cloudy knowledge of mankinde, hardly escape from many lyes. But the Poet (as I sayd before) never affirmeth. The Poet never maketh any circles about your imagination, to conjure you to believe for true what he writes...and therefore, though he recount things not true, yet because he telleth them not for true, he lyeth not. (216)

It has been maintained that Sidney is not being

entirely serious when he says that the poet "nothing affirms, and therefore never lyeth." Some later commentators have felt that Sidney is here grasping the simplest solution at hand. This may be so. But however Sidney intended these remarks, they are nevertheless based on a more sound and penetrating linguistic insight than is commonly supposed. When seen against the background of the language game of lying as we have outlined it so far, Sidney's argument needs to be taken seriously. A speaker who makes no pretense of affirming or standing by his statements cannot be called a liar. And there is indeed a difference, as Sidney suggests, between the presentation of an idea and its affirmation.

We find a similar idea in Aristotle's book On Interpretation where he writes that "a sentence is a significant sound, any of whose parts has a significance of its own, but as an expression, not as an assertion" (149). Aristotle goes on to argue that there are different kinds of sentences, and that the question of truth or falsehood does not pertain to them all. "But let us leave the other kinds of sentence out of consideration," he writes, "since an examination of them belongs more properly to rhetoric or to poetry" (149).

This distinction between presentation or significance and the assertion or affirmation of what is presented or signified finds confirmation in the work of a much later

thinker, the logician Gottlob Frege (1848-1925). It will be worth taking a look at Frege's ideas on this matter, since he takes the issue of a division between presentation and affirmation a step further than Aristotle. The remarks from Aristotle suggest that the statements of the poets fall into a different category of utterance from ordinary declarative utterances. In the work of Frege, however, the possible gap between representation and affirmation is a fundamental characteristic of all sentences. In analyzing sentences such as "Is that a book?" and "That is a book," Frege writes:

An interrogative sentence and an assertoric one contain the same thought; but the assertoric sentence contains something else as well, namely assertion. The interrogative contains something more too, namely a request. Therefore, two things must be distinguished in an assertoric sentence: the content, which it has in common with the corresponding propositional question; and assertion. The former is the thought or at least contains the thought. So it is possible to express a thought without laying it down as true. The two things are so closely joined in an assertoric sentence that it is easy to overlook their separability. (7)

This separability of what a statement contains and whether

that content is laid down as true or not is at the center of the issue of the poet as liar. If we leave the issue in its present simple state, then Sidney's defense of the poets would seem to be insuperable. In fact, it will take several more chapters before I will be able to fully lay out the conditions under which I want to analyze lying, and thereby consider the poet as a liar. As the concept takes shape, however, we should see that the ways in which people affirm or hold to their statements are more subtle and complex than is often realized. Sidney himself gives us an indication of the problems inherent in a strict division of thought and affirmation when he argues that the poet, although he affirms nothing, is still able to guide men's actions and lead them to "well doing and not well knowing only" (198).

If poets can take this important moral role in life, in what way can we say that they affirm nothing? The answer to this will become clearer as we proceed, but what I can say at this point is something like the following. Although the poet may not affirm his belief in particular scenes and incidents, he may yet affirm beliefs or attitudes of a more general nature. There are in any complex human language ways of projecting new attitudes against the background of an entire conventionalized mode of discourse without making explicit the shape and nature of those attitudes. Even though we may not be able to point to each and every detail of an author's work and say whether or not he believes it,

it would certainly be odd to say that he believes and expresses nothing in his work. Although the poet may not affirm everything in his work, he will not disavow everything either. The question then becomes how we determine which beliefs belong to which category. And the answer is that these points may differ with every poet and even with every poem, and that what the poet holds true may or may not be explicit in his poem and may or may not be separable from his poem. Nevertheless it seems reasonable to assume that there must always be something in the poet's work that he believes is true and honestly expressed or false and dishonestly expressed. The poet, in this view, is only partially not a liar, and in that case what the poet actually believes behind the thin veil of poetry is always an important question.

There is another problem for the concept of the poet as liar which needs to be addressed here, although it will not be completely answered until later. This problem arises from theoretical questions derived from the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, and specifically from his article "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense." This short work has had a rather surprisingly large influence on several contemporary literary theorists, most notably Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man. In their view, it is not individual language users who lie but language itself which is the liar. The theoretical basis for their position is

Nietzsche's argument that literal meaning is impossible, and that metaphorical meaning, which is all that remains, gives us only the illusion of true meaning. Nietzsche writes:

Every concept originates by the equation of the dissimilar. Just as no leaf is ever exactly the same as any other, certainly the concept "leaf" is formed by arbitrarily dropping those individual differences, by forgetting the distinguishing factors, and this gives rise to the idea that besides leaves there is in nature such a thing as the "leaf," i.e. an original form according to which all leaves are supposedly woven, sketched, circled off, colored, curled, painted but by awkward hands, so that not a single specimen turns out correctly and reliably as a true copy of the original form. (249)

What Nietzsche seems to be demanding here is a one-to-one correspondence between sign and thing signified. Such an identification is by its very nature impossible, and from this impossibility Nietzsche concludes:

What is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, anthropomorphisms, in short, a

sum of human relations which were poetically and rhetorically heightened, transferred, and adorned, and after long use seem solid, canonical, and binding to a nation. Truths are illusions about which it has been forgotten that they are illusions, worn out metaphors without sensory impact, coins that have lost their image and now can be used only as metal, and no longer as coins.... Now, of course, man forgets that this is his situation; so he lies in the designated manner unconsciously and according to centuries-old habits -- and precisely by this unconsciousness, by this forgetting, he arrives at a sense of truth. (250)

Nietzsche's point is, as one would expect, powerfully argued, and it certainly has convinced a number of readers. But there may be something to be said on the other side. In fact, it may be not the correspondence of sign to thing but rather the possibility of generalizing from a sign to a plurality of things that constitutes the essence of language. The American linguist Leonard Bloomfield has said that the essence of language is that two people can say the same thing. Similarly, the linguistic philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein has said that the essence of all representation is that "A" and "A" can be recognized as the same sign.

Both of these views indicate that it is the potential identity of sign to sign and not of sign to thing that is essential to the functioning of a language. It is from this perspective that we must determine whether both lying and telling the truth are merely illusions.

The most famous literary example of the demand for an identity of sign and thing signified occurs in the third book of Gulliver's Travels where Swift describes characters who try to replace a language of words with a language of things. Swift's satire at this point has usually been taken to be a stab at Thomas Sprat's linguistic recommendations in his History of the Royal Society, but if this is true, then Swift was being less than fair to Sprat. The particular passage in question is that in which Sprat suggests that we "reject all the amplifications, digressions, and swellings of style, to return back to the primitive purity and shortness, when men delivered so many things almost in an equal number of words" (113). This is not an unreasonable demand. Swift turns this around, however, so that instead of having things represented by words (the normal arrangement), we attempt to have words replaced by things.

It is the theory of one of the projectors of the Academy of Laputa that "since words are only names for things, it would be more convenient for all men to carry about them such things as were necessary to the particular business they are to discourse on" (130). Rather than

wearing out our lungs with the production of words, the idea is that we could simply hold up the actual things that we wish to talk about. This system proves unworkable, however, since "if a man's business be very great, and of various kinds, he must be obliged in proportion to carry a greater bundle of things upon his back, unless he can afford one or two strong servants to attend him" (131). Swift represents the "wise men" of this community bent over like pedlars and crushed under the weight of the many objects they must carry around with them for their discourse.

The Laputian language of things fails because it is physically impossible for us to carry around all of the items we might wish to talk about. There is, however, a more profound reason to reject such a language of things as any kind of language at all.

Suppose we were going to design a language according to Nietzsche's demands. We would then have to have everything in the world represent itself as its own sign. Thus, if I wanted to say "There is a bee" I would not be allowed to do this simply by uttering those words. But I might be able to convey that meaning, for example, by opening my mouth and having a real bee come out. This would be all right so far, but now suppose that you wanted to say something about the same bee. You could not do it, for if you opened your mouth and a bee came out, it would not be the same bee. Thus if we tried to fulfil the Nietzschean demand, we would not even

have one of the basic conditions of a language, since two people could no longer talk about the same thing. And if we do not have the basic conditions of language, then of course we do not have the basic conditions of poetry or of lying either. On this account, that words can be removed from the things they signify is an essential condition of language, just as that words can be removed from facts is an essential condition of poetry and that words can be removed from one's beliefs is an essential condition of lying. In this strange way, it is the capacity for conveying falsehoods that is essential to the definition of a language. That is, that we can use its signs to misrepresent, to lie, or to make a fiction, are essential characteristics of a language.

The concept of the poet as liar as I have developed it so far rests on a few central claims: that it is in the nature of a language to be able both to represent and to misrepresent, that what are represented or misrepresented in poetry and in lying are the beliefs of the speaker or writer and not facts about the world, and that for a misrepresentation of a belief to be a lie the speaker or writer must convince his audience of his own belief in what he is saying. These are only the first steps in my analysis of the poet as liar, and it will not be until a later stage that we will begin to see the characteristic workings of this linguistic practice. Nevertheless, there will be a value in proceeding systematically, for in this way we will

be able to distinguish the basic categories of the concept of the poet as liar in their proper logical sequence. It is the purpose of the next chapter to consider the special role of conviction in both poetry and lying.

Chapter 2 Conviction

I have argued that both lies and poems operate primarily in the realm of beliefs and not facts. In this chapter I want to intensify that claim and argue that lies and poems are specifically designed to gain conviction in ways that ordinary true statements are not.

There is a subtle but important difference between the way information is conveyed in a truthful statement and the way it is conveyed in both poetry and lying. Outrageous and improbable things do indeed happen in real life, and when such events are truthfully reported they are often not at first believed. But this lack of belief presents no special problem for the truth-teller, for he simply has to offer evidence for the actual occurrence of the event, or explain the causes that brought it about. In other words, the truth-teller's story, no matter how absurd it may seem at first, can always be accompanied by the assurance "But it is true." And the truth-teller can always -- and, in the type of case we are describing, would naturally -- offer evidence and explanation for his tale. In short, the truth-teller can always invite examination into the story he presents.

The case of the poet and the liar is obviously different. The demand for proof or explanation of the poem or lie would almost immediately destroy its effect. To a

certain degree, poems and lies must "pass through" without creating undue suspicion. In the same way that children when they get in trouble and are afraid of being caught tell each other to "act natural," so too the poem and the lie must to a certain extent seem natural and inconspicuous. As Oscar Wilde puts it: "What is a fine lie? Simply that which is its own evidence" (184). But why should this be so? What purpose does this degree of naturalness and inconspicuousness serve?

By not arousing our suspicions by its absurdity or improbability, a poem or a lie is able to achieve some level of conviction in its audience. It is this degree of conviction that is central to the effectiveness of a poem or a lie. "As far as poetic effect is concerned," Aristotle writes, "a convincing impossibility is preferable to an unconvincing possibility" (73). The poet, in Aristotle's view, does not have to tell the truth, but he definitely has to appear to do so. The incidents of the plot must follow each other by necessity or probability, and the absurd and the miraculous should be avoided. Aristotle even goes so far as to state that absurd and improbable plots are not merely bad plots, but that "plots like these should not be devised in the first place" (69). Aristotle seems here to be making it almost a matter of definition that an acceptable story must be probable and credible.

The complement to Aristotle's view is the view of

Samuel Taylor Coleridge. If Aristotle thinks that it is the responsibility of poets to make their stories believable, Coleridge seems to think that it is the responsibility of the audience to see that the story is believed. Coleridge's famous formulation of this position comes in his Biographia Literaria where he mentions "that willing suspension of disbelief that constitutes poetic faith" (169). His use of the expression "poetic faith" is significant. He does not elaborate this point here, but it is an idea that goes deeper in his thinking than would at first appear. In some of his theological writings, published posthumously under the title Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit (1840), he again takes up the question of the suspension of disbelief. In discussing the possible discrepancies that may arise between the two parts of the Bible -- "the literature of the Hebrew people" and "the writings of the followers of Christ" -- Coleridge first claims that "there is a Light higher than all...the Word that is light for every man, and life for as many as give heed to it" (CS 26). He then explains:

If between this Word and the written Letter I
shall anywhere seem to myself to find a discrepance,
I will not conclude that such there actually is;
nor will I fall under the condemnation of them
that would lie for God, but seek as I may, be
thankful for what I have -- and wait. (CS 26)

The "poetic faith" that Coleridge refers to in Biographia Literaria is a faith indeed. It would seem to be directly related to the faith with which he receives the word of God. To always claim full belief in every part of a poem or the Bible might amount to a betrayal of conscience -- in the latter case it would be to "lie for God." But in both cases, we should suspend our disbelief, should "be thankful for what [we] have -- and wait."

Thus if we combine the views of Aristotle and Coleridge, we come up with a "cooperative " account of poetic activity. The poet must accommodate his plots to his audience, while the audience must entertain the inventions of the poet. Somewhere within this meeting place of poet and audience the poetic "conviction" noted by Aristotle can take place. It also needs to be pointed out that this cooperative aspect of communication is common to all language use, and is the basis, among other things, of lying. It is because liars accommodate their lies to their audience, and because people usually have a predisposition to entertain any new piece of information that they are presented with, that lies are able to have their effect.

There is a special relationship which lies and poems share in regard to conviction that they do not completely share with ordinary truthful statements. There is a sense in which both lies and poems are specifically directed towards conviction in ways that ordinary statements are not.

Aristotle has suggested that an improbable sequence of events would not even qualify as a story. Similarly, certain untruths could not be described as lies. For example, if I were to stand in front of you and say "I am twenty feet tall," could you actually imagine the conditions under which I could expect to convince you of this? You would think, rather, that I was speaking metaphorically, or attempting some kind of a joke. But if I persisted and seemed genuinely to believe and to want you to believe that I was twenty feet tall, you would not question my sincerity, but rather my sanity. My statement would have slipped off the edge of credibility, and so would have slipped off the edge of lying too.

A distinction which is implicit in the remarks of both Aristotle and Coleridge is that there is a difference between stating something and convincing somebody of something. As the philosopher R.M. Hare puts it:

To tell someone that something is the case is logically distinct from getting (or trying to get) him to believe it. Having told someone that something is the case we may, if he is not disposed to believe what we say, start on a quite different process of trying to get him to believe it (trying to persuade or convince him that what we have said is true). No one,

seeking to explain the function of indicative sentences, would say that they were attempts to persuade someone that something is the case. (LM 13)

In lying and poetry, however, there is a sense in which the intentional stating of a falsehood has persuasion built right into it. The attempt at persuasion, as Scaliger writes, "means that the hearer accepts the words of the speaker...Its end is to convince, or to secure the doing of something" (153). The issue is complicated, however, by the fact that it is precisely this element of persuasion that all good poets and liars attempt to disguise. Only a truly inept storyteller would state a falsehood that possessed so little credibility that he would then have to begin a process of persuading his listener that it was true. Instead, lies and poems are intended to persuade inconspicuously, as it were. Both lies and poems must seem natural, must not call attention to themselves, or invite investigation into their truth. As we have seen, Oscar Wilde, in discussing poetry and lying, has defined a fine lie as "simply that which is its own evidence" (184).

The matter of hidden persuasion, or of a lie being that which is its own evidence, raises several issues for the poet as liar. The first is that both poems and lies will need to be "fashioned" in ways that ordinary statements are

not. This issue gives rise to a second, which is the question of the skill of the fashioner. Again, as Wilde has said, "lying and poetry are arts...and they require the most careful study, the most disinterested devotion" (169). It may be possible, of course, to identify and describe the skills essential to the convincing poet or liar.

Aristotle writes that "above all, Homer has taught other poets how to tell untruths as they ought to be told, that is, by the use of fallacy" (68). Aristotle gives the following example:

In the Odyssey the irrational elements in the episode of Odysseus's being set ashore in Ithaca would obviously not have been acceptable if they had been treated by an inferior poet; as it is, Homer has managed to disguise their absurdity, charming it away by his other excellencies. (69)

It is not exactly clear from the context what "other excellencies" of style Aristotle is referring to, but in regard to the use of fallacy he seems to be thinking of the fallacy called affirming the consequent, which he deals with in his Sophistical Refutations. If we were to adapt this fallacy for use in fiction, we might say that it works something like the following: if the audience knows ahead of time that Odysseus will sooner or later arrive home in

Ithaca, then they may be fooled into overlooking certain improbabilities in the manner in which he is enabled to get home. The force of the correct consequence causes the audience to overlook any absurdity in the antecedent.

It is interesting that in Aristotle's view, the use of fallacy, a technique that fools or overrules the rational mind, could contribute to poetic effect. As we have seen, Aristotle believes that improbability in a tale must be avoided at all costs. Here Aristotle seems to be arguing that if improbable events must be narrated, then while doing so the poet must more or less reduce the critical faculties of his audience by temporarily confusing them with a fallacy. The mind draws back almost instinctively from the illogical, and through that gap or suspension of clear reasoning the poet may be able to propel his narrative. It is at this point that Aristotle's emphasis on the poet's role in creating conviction necessarily comes into contact with Coleridge's analysis of the role of the reader. In the face of a skillfully managed use of fallacy, we might say, the reader has no choice but to suspend his disbelief.

There is another side to the use of fallacy in the gaining of conviction. Confrontation with a fallacy almost always produces some level of mental stress. Then, when the mind is under this stress, it becomes prone to make irrational decisions, thus becoming more susceptible to the continued use of fallacy. We will look at Iago's techniques

in lying more closely in the next chapter, but what can be pointed out here is that one practice he employs is the use of fallacy in order to perplex in the extreme the mind of his victim Othello. Iago's reasoning regarding the handkerchief, for example, seems to be another instance of the fallacy of affirming the consequent. Iago's syllogism as he presents it to Othello is: If Desdemona was unfaithful with Cassio, then Cassio would have her handkerchief. Cassio has the handkerchief; therefore, Desdemona was unfaithful with Cassio. Put in this way, the fallacy in Iago's argument seems obvious. Othello has seen with his own eyes the affirmation of the consequent: Cassio has Desdemona's handkerchief. But from this one cannot move backward in the syllogism and attempt to prove the antecedent: that Desdemona was unfaithful with Cassio. Rather, it is the antecedent that is to be affirmed or denied and the consequent that is to be proved or disproved. But we must remember that Iago has already stirred up Othello's emotions, thereby initiating the vicious cycle of fallacy and frustration that makes one prey to further fallacy. As Iago tells us regarding this trick: "Trifles light as air / Are to the jealous confirmations strong / As proofs of holy writ" (III,iii,322-4). This practice, along with the "other excellencies" of his story-telling, allow him to pass his fictions through as though they were facts.

So far I have dealt mostly with the Aristotlean or the

author's side of the problem. On what I call the Coleridgean side of the argument, absurdity or improbability are problems for the audience to deal with, and it is perhaps important to point out here that it is perfectly normal, as Coleridge suggests, for someone to suspend his disbelief in order cope with improbable or absurd situations. This is true not only in stories and lies, but also in the similar disjunctions in experience caused by paradoxes and illusions. In the face of such disjunctions, "sometimes you just cannot help its being to you as if something were so, in a sense which excludes its being so; exclusively as if" (Hinton 117). It is, in fact, not an uncommon experience to momentarily rest content in an illusion or absurdity confident that things only appear to be what they are not, and that the appearance of their being so will soon be resolved. Indeed, the acceptance of partial understanding of a hypothetical situation is not only inherent to a confrontation with a fallacy, but is also an essential ingredient in the understanding of any language use. The mere reading of a sentence is enough to demonstrate the projection of possible significance into a future time. When you begin a sentence, you do not know whether it will turn out to be significant or not, but you read on "as if" it will have meaning, and usually it does. The fictional mode is analogous to this, only that the projection of significance may be extended through the

entire length of the piece. The degree of conviction we maintain in stories and lies is thus related to our capacity to accept partial understanding of certain hypothetical situations.

Thus if we now recombine the positions of Aristotle and Coleridge, we see that the meeting place of author and reader, though essential to a successful act of storytelling, is nonetheless fraught with complexity. We assign the blanket term "probable" to those stories which are able to successfully negotiate this treacherous middle ground. But, as we shall see, it is never a simple matter to say what probability is.

Chapter 3 Probability

In the previous chapter I argue that both poems and lies will be specifically directed towards conviction in ways that ordinary truthful statements are not. In this chapter I will discuss the principle means by which such conviction is achieved, which is the author's observance of probability. The first thing to point out, however, is that throughout literary history there has been no single theory of literary probability, but rather a complex and overlapping group of loosely related concepts: the apt, the likely, the seeming, the verisimilar, the possible, the accidental, the consistent, and so on (see Nelson 38). This variety is further complicated by questions about the different grounds upon which these probabilities were thought to act: fate, fortune, chance, providence, and others. Nevertheless, it is possible to say that no matter what the terms of the debate may have been at any particular time, certain stories in each period would have been accepted as probable and therefore believable, whereas other stories would have been condemned as improbable and therefore incredible. The point, both in fiction and in lying, is not whether a story is believed for all time, but only whether it is sufficiently believed so as to engage its intended audience.

One would expect different audiences to hold slightly different beliefs and so have slightly different senses of what things are "truth-like" or probable. When Homer, for example, says of Odysseus that "He spoke, and made the many falsehoods [pseudea] of his tale seem like truth" (XIX, 203), we can assume that the specific strategies he employed to hide his lies (Odysseus is speaking in disguise to Penelope) may differ from those, say, of Milton's Satan when he is deceiving mankind. Milton has Christ say to Satan in Paradise Regained:

that hath been thy craft,
By mixing somewhat true to vent more lies,
But what hath been thy answers, what but dark,
Ambiguous, and with double sense deluding? (I,432-5)

In this case, Christ is referring to Satan's use of the oracles, which henceforth will be silenced. But whatever the particular technique, the general strategy is that of buoying up falsehood with statements that will seem true to one's audience. Thus it should be possible to examine even a single successful storyteller or liar to reveal the basic principles of probability at work in the creation of belief. For this purpose I have selected as a representative storyteller/liar Iago from Shakespeare's Othello.

The choice of Iago raises a particular problem, since

he is a character within a fictional work, and not a poet or a real-life liar. Nevertheless, Iago's technique in lying demonstrates very concisely the wide range of rhetorical tools available to the liar, and a study of Iago's practice will at least tell us something about what Shakespeare believed a lie to be. As a character, Iago additionally shows the strange effects that the generation of a world of lies has on its creator. An examination of this effect will shed light on Shakespeare's own practice of gaining the conviction of his audience for the "falsehoods" enacted on the stage.

Iago seems to be well aware of the importance of probability to the acceptance of belief. In his first soliloquy, he carefully considers the likelihood that Othello will take up certain false statements as true:

He holds me well;
 The better shall my purpose work on him.
 Cassio's a proper man. Let me see now:
 To get his place, and to plume up my will
 In double knavery -- How, how? -- Let's see. --
 After some time, to abuse Othello's ear
 That he is too familiar with his wife.
 He hath a person and a smooth dispose
 To be suspected -- fram'd to make women false.
 The Moor is of a free and open nature

that thinks men honest that but seem to be so,
And will as tenderly be led by the nose
As asses are. (I,iii,390-402)

In fashioning his lie, Iago considers many factors that have a bearing on the creation of probability. First he considers his own apparent authority as a speaker ("He holds me well..."). In classical rhetoric this would be the single most important factor in determining the credibility of a statement. In this case, Iago seems well aware of his reputation as "Honest Iago." Iago then begins a process that we see him employ throughout the play: the creation of new lies as he goes along. Here he hits upon "to abuse Othello's ear/ That he [Cassio] is too familiar with his wife." It is interesting, however, that Iago precedes this statement with something that logically should come second, which is a consideration of the manner in which this untruth should be presented ("After some time..."). Normally we would think first of what we are going to say, and then perhaps go on to consider how best to say it. Iago's spoken inversion of this mental process presents us with a little glimpse into the accomplished liar's larger practice, which is to divorce speech from thought in order to manipulate the presentation of the latter.

Once the lie has been determined, Iago goes on to consider the plausibility of his evidence ("He hath a person

and a smooth dispose/ To be suspected -- fram'd to make women false"). Here, among other things, we begin to sense the reverberating complexity that inevitably arises when one deliberately descends into a world of lies. In what sense can Iago believe that Cassio, by his character and disposition, is "fram'd to make women false"? As we shall see, it is never entirely clear throughout the play to what extent Iago believes or disbelieves the lies that he creates.

Iago's final thoughts are the complement to his initial statement. He began by reflecting on himself, and he ends by considering the nature of his audience ("The Moor is of a free and open nature..."). This concluding passage tightly wraps up Iago's rhetorical package. He has thought through all of the major factors relevant to the generation of belief: his own authority as a speaker, the plausibility of his tale, the evidence that supports it, the time and manner of its presentation, and the nature of his audience. All that remains now is the actual presentation of his lie.

In Iago's second soliloquy, the plausibility of his own lie seems almost to have convinced him of its truth:

That Cassio loves her, I do well believe it,
 That she loves him, 'tis apt and of great credit.
 (II, i, 286-7)

But can Iago really believe that Cassio loves Desdemona, when the idea of it is an invention of his own mind? What we shall see as we continue to examine Iago's lies is that he seems to move statements through a spectrum from probable to believable to believed in fact. The idea of Cassio's love for Desdemona occurred to him in the first act, and so it has had time to settle in his mind and establish itself somewhere between believable and believed in fact. The idea of Desdemona's love for Cassio, however, is a new invention, and so at this point he is only willing to commit himself so far as to say that it is "apt and of great credit" -- that is, that it is the kind of thing that should be believed.

In his third soliloquy, after falsely advising Cassio, Iago begins:

And what's he then that says I play the villain,
 When this advice is free I give, and honest,
 Probal to thinking, and indeed the course
 To win the Moor again? (II, iii, 335-39)

Here Iago seems to be suggesting that a statement's probability depends partly on the free and honest -- in the sense of forthright -- manner of its presentation. Additionally, Iago reassures himself that his advice is "probal to thinking" and therefore reasonable and creditable. As always what is missing in Iago is any sense

that there is a moral dimension to the propagation of an untruth. What interests Iago is only the utility of the lie, and to be useful it must be believable.

Iago has said of himself "I am nothing if not critical" (II,ii,118). In regard to his technique of generating lies, we might say that he is nothing if not consistent. Right up to the end of the play, when he is finally confronted with his lies to Othello, he says:

I told him what I thought, and told no more
Than what he found himself was apt and true.
(V, ii, 176-77)

Indeed there is a sense in which it is this consistency that undoes him. In this passage, with the conjunction of "apt and true," we have Iago's strongest assertion of the relation of probability to belief, or even to certain knowledge. So strong is Iago's identification of the probable with the believable, and the believable with the true, that he brands Othello's improbable travel stories as "fantastical lies" (II,i 223). Thus it would seem that to Iago what is probable should be taken as true, whereas what is improbable, even though it may be true, should be condemned as false. This would be an appropriate principle for him, since his main concern in Othello has been with the creation of belief, and not with the discovery of truth.

This allows Iago to elaborate an entire world of lies, the fantastic "net/ That shall enmesh them all" (II,iii,361-2). And yet, as impressive as that structure is, it crumbles before the first bit of contradictory evidence: Emelia's statement that she stole the handkerchief at Iago's request. Iago's attack on Emelia confirms her words, and almost in an instant the strange system of probabilities that he has constructed seems more unlikely than the most fantastic traveller's tale.

Iago's technique in lying, remarkable as it is, constitutes only a single part of Shakespeare's larger concern, which is to make the improbable events in the plot of Othello seem probable to its audience. It has sometimes been said that the lying in Othello calls into question the very nature of truth and falsehood. I don't think so. Shakespeare places right at the beginning of his play a carefully developed example of the proper employment of probabilistic reasoning. The first words of the Duke regarding the reports of the invading Turks are: "There's no composition in these news/ That gives them credit" (I,iii,1-2). The rest of the scene takes its cue from that. The Duke and the Senators know that they may be taken in, and so they carefully sift, weigh, and compare their evidence. Regarding reports that the Turkish fleet has turned towards Rhodes:

Duke: How say you by this change?

1 Sen.: This cannot be

By no assay of reason; 'tis a pagent
 To keep us in false gaze. When we consider
 Th' importancy of Cyprus to the Turk,
 And let ourselves again but understand,
 That, as it more concerns the Turk than Rhodes,
 So may he with more facile question bear it,
 For that it stands not in such warlike brace,
 But altogether lacks th' abilities
 That Rhodes is dress'd in -- If we make thought
[of this,
 We must not think the Turk so unskillful,
 To leave that latest, which concerns him first,
 Neglecting an attempt of ease and gain
 To wake and wage a danger profitless.

Duke: Nay, in all confidence, he's not for Rhodes.

(I,iii,17-31)

Rather than act rashly, the council waits for further intelligence, and their patience is rewarded. The Turkish fleet reverses course once more, and the Duke concludes, correctly, "'Tis certain then for Cyprus" (I,iii,43).

Similarly, at the end of the play, Iago's lies are overruled by proofs more powerful than the tissue of probabilities he has woven. Emilia, in her dying words,

swears to her mistress's fidelity; two letters are found on the body of the slain Roderigo that describe the plot against Cassio; Cassio states that he found the handkerchief dropped in his chambers and reports that Iago, offstage, has "himself confessed it but even now" (V,ii,321). The audience is given no reason to doubt the truth of any of these statements. If anything, Shakespeare, like Iago, has tied up his package too neatly. Shakespeare seems at the end of Othello to be trying to minimize the improbabilities in his plot by localizing them in the relationship of Iago and Othello. Othello's final soliloquy, with its self-pitying egotism, fits in with this general movement towards consolidation at the end of the play.

Iago's lies are as devastating to Othello as the play's central action is to its audience. But in both cases, there is a method beneath the apparent chaos. Each lie and each new twist in the plot are planned and reasoned actions. In the end they project a world that is not improbable in itself, but in which improbable things do happen. Lodovico says "this would not be believ'd in Venice"(IV,i,242), and indeed it would not. The grave Venetian senators have not seen what we have seen: the deliberate creation of a system of probable falsehoods designed to deceive a specific victim. It is the directed nature of the action that makes it work. It is the purpose of the next chapter to explain the relationship between such deceptive actions and the

time, place and manner of their presentation.

Chapter 4 Acts and Occasions

Jonathan Swift has written "The devil is the Father of Lies and, which is more, his first Essay of it was purely Political" (E 8). Lying, from this perspective, is essentially related to action. Lying would have no point -- would cease even to be lying -- if it were not intentionally directed against some specific audience.

If, as I have argued, both lies and poems are deliberately fashioned around probabilities in order to gain the conviction of their audience, then the production of poems and lies may be considered as deliberate actions. Once this point is recognized, several issues arise in the analysis of the poet as liar. We will have to consider, first, what an action is. We will then have to examine the specific ways that both poems and lies fit into this general question of action.

Theories of action go back to ancient Greek philosophy, if not earlier, and were a perennial concern of philosophers until comparatively recent times. Research in this branch of philosophy fell to a low-point at about the middle of the present century, when it was all but abandoned. Fortunately, there has been a rebirth of interest in this field, and this revival now gives us a broader base to work

from. The account of lying action that I will develop derives largely from a theory of action propounded by a friend of Wittgenstein, the philosopher G.H. von Wright, although other roughly similar approaches would be possible.

If the writing of poems and the telling of lies are actions, then as such their success or failure will depend in part on the nature of the occasions on which they are employed. Both poems and lies may enact changes in belief, but, as von Wright puts it, "a change which is required in order to effect a certain change in the world as it is today, may not be required in order to effect this same change tomorrow" (VG 101). Thus for a complete understanding of either a poem or a lie, one would need to look at the belief encoded into the poem or lie as well as the belief intended to be acted upon. This second class of beliefs constitutes the elements which form our "notion of a state of the world" against which actions have their meaning (VG 101). This background of beliefs forms what I call the "occasion" of an action.

As I argue in chapter two, the relation of poems and lies to occasions is partly indicated by the fact that we talk of good and bad lies, or successful or unsuccessful stories, according to their believability. As we have seen, to Aristotle an unconvincing story should hardly be considered a story at all. A bad lie or an unconvincing story are those lies and stories that are unconvincing on a

particular occasion, and a bad liar or storyteller is someone who tells unconvincing tales. Now occasions are necessarily of some specific duration. Thus, a lie that was at first believed but then later disclosed before the occasion of its use was over would be a bad lie. Similarly, a dramatic plot which at first was believed but then lost its credibility before the play was over would be a bad plot. On the other hand, as Swift remarks, "it often happens that, if a lie be believed only for an hour, it has done its work, and there is no further occasion for it" (E 11). Thus it would seem that lies and stories not only gain their meaning from the occasion of their use, but that they may have no point, no lasting meaning, after the passing of that occasion. Although we do not often think of it, this has certainly been the fate of the majority of stories, poems, and plays either published or produced. An account of this phenomenon, incidentally, would be a necessary complement to our full understanding of those exceptional works that have indeed gained what we call literary immortality.

Another consequence of the occasionality of lies and literary productions is that it is possible that the literal meaning of a lie or a poem could be understood at a later time, whereas certain specific aspects of their use -- the specific circumstances of belief against which they were employed -- may be lost. When we come to deal with lying

and metaphor in chapter ten, for example, I will argue that in many cases it becomes impossible to determine whether a writer has meant his words to be taken literally or figuratively if we do not have sufficient understanding of the "discourse situation" in which his words had been employed.

In a certain sense, it is the occasion of their employment as deliberate actions that provides the social importance of lies or poems. The lie that is still believed and the poem that is still read are, we may assume, still able to act in some way upon the beliefs of their audience. After the lie is exposed, or the poem is no longer valued and read, we can assume that the occasion on which the poem or lie could exert its force has passed. In addition, to the extent to which we later come to feel that the poet has deliberately directed our attention towards or away from certain issues, to that extent we judge the poet, as we judge the liar, in the terms of personal responsibility for a deliberate action.

What I think we begin to see as we clarify the concept of the poet as liar is that the activities of poetry and lying are by their nature incapable of explanation from a single viewpoint. Rather, their existence and definition depend on a congeries of essentially interrelated components, literary, linguistic, epistemological, moral, and so on. My point here is to argue, as others have

maintained, that an analysis of the poet's intentions, expectations, beliefs about his audience, and so on, are legitimate concerns in criticism, and indeed are inescapable if we are to consider the poet's utterances within the specific occasion of their use, as we must if we are going to consider the poet as a liar.

Let us proceed, then, with our account of lying action. With truthful statements, or in statements we assume to be deductions from pure reason, there is often a certain sense of timelessness. Frege, for example, maintains that $2+2=4$ remains true even if there is no one left to think it. But lies are quite distinct from this. Lies, as I have said, are designed to produce a specific belief in a specific listener on a specific occasion. The act of lying produces a change in belief, and a change from one state to a succeeding state necessarily brings into account questions of time. Thus it would seem that an account of the logic of change is also important for lying, since in a timeless, unchanging world lying would have no point (see von Wright, NA vii).

If we could imagine a world in which change was impossible, or at least was not the result of deliberate action, then we could begin to appreciate the relevance of acts and change to lies and fictions. Fortunately, Jonathan Swift has presented us with just such a world in the fourth voyage of his Gulliver's Travels, although this aspect of

the story may not be apparent at first. In this voyage Gulliver encounters the horse-like creatures who call themselves Houyhnhnms. He tells us that "The word Houyhnhnm, in their tongue, signifies a horse, and in its etymology, the Perfection of Nature" (281). These creatures, we are told, are "wholly governed by reason" (321). By following the dictates of reason, they avoid all wrong and evil. Indeed, they "have no word in their language to express any thing that is evil" (323). Among the potential evils from which they are free is the evil of lying, and accordingly they also "have no word in their language to express lying or falsehood" (281). Occasionally a Houyhnhnm may say the thing which is not, as they put it, but the intention to deceive that would make this an act of lying is absent. Somehow the Houyhnhnms are able to conduct their business and govern their affairs without any conflict and so without any need for secrecy or deception. "Reason alone," they argue, "is enough to govern a rational creature" (306). But even their use of reason is somewhat different from ours:

Neither is Reason among them a point problematical as with us, where men can argue with plausibility on both sides of a question; but strikes you with immediate conviction; as it must needs do where it is not mingled, obscured, or discoloured by passion

or interest. (315)

Reason, which strikes the Houyhnhnms with "immediate conviction," tells them that the only thing that is of advantage to one is what is of advantage to all. With reason thus construed, the use of reason in lying becomes contradictory. The Houyhnhnms have no motivation to formulate a lie, and indeed the very idea of lying seems to them an absurdity. Gulliver relates of his Houyhnhnm "master":

My master heard me with great appearances of uneasiness in his countenance, because doubting or not believing, are so little known in this country, that the inhabitants cannot tell how to behave themselves under such circumstances. And I remember in frequent discourses with my master concerning the nature of manhood, in other parts of the world, having occasion to talk of lying, and false representation, it was with much difficulty that he comprehended what I meant, although he had otherwise a most acute judgement. For he argued thus; That the use of speech was to make us understand one another, and to receive information of facts; now if anyone said the thing which was not, these ends

were defeated; because I cannot properly be said to understand him, and I am so far from receiving information, that he leaves me worse than in ignorance, for I am led to believe a thing black when it is white, and short when it is long. And these are all the notions he had concerning the faculty of lying, so perfectly well understood, and so universally practiced among human creatures.

(286)

This final distinction, between the capacity for lying in Houyhnhnms and in human creatures, holds the key to the situation. In chapter one I suggested that it is precisely the capacity to misrepresent beliefs in the mind or facts in the world that could be taken to be the defining characteristic of language use. Now Swift's Houyhnhnms fail to be human creatures not so much because of their equine appearance, but rather because in a sense they are the slaves of abstract reason, and so are not capable of genuine, independent action. They are the "perfection of nature" who respond with "immediate conviction" to the dictates of some external power they call "reason," but exactly how these dictates come to them they cannot say. Reason simply exists and must be obeyed. What results is a kind of totalitarianism of thought whereby all secrecy, deception and misrepresentation are by their nature

impossible. The Houyhnhnms refrain from lying not because they find it morally reprehensible, but rather because they are incapable of the independent human action that would make it possible.

Plato, describing the perfect republic, says that "the only poetry admissible in our city is hymns to the gods and encomia to good men" (49). Similarly, the poetic creations of the Houyhnhnms contain only "exalted notions of friendship and benevolence, or the praises of those who were victors in races" (321). Swift seems to be suggesting that a state governed solely by reason will in the end destroy the freedom of expression inherent to lying and literature.

That Swift was aware of the multifariousness of ordinary human lying, and its relation to human action, is easily attested. After his work as a Tory propagandist, and the subsequent frustrations of his own political office-seeking under a Whig administration, Swift became almost obsessed with the subject of hypocrisy and lying in public life. In an Examiner article directed at the "Great Man," Sir Robert Walpole, Swift examines the geneology of the political lie:

Sometimes it is produced a Monster, and licked into Shape; at other Times it comes into the World compleatly formed, and is spoiled in the licking. It is often born an Infant in the regular Way, and

requires Time to mature it: And often it sees the
Light in full Growth, but dwindles away by Degrees.

(9)

What is notable about Swift's treatment of the lie is that it assumes as a part of the nature of the lie a complex relation to human action. Sometimes it is fashioned (licked into shape) but sometimes it arrives full formed. Sometimes it is spoiled by human intervention, and sometimes it dwindles away on its own. Contained in Swift's short "geneology" are all four of the central classes of human action. It is interesting in this regard to compare Swift's description of lying action to the account of action developed by von Wright.

According to von Wright's formulation, actions are divisible into four elementary categories. Those four types may be considered under two distinct conditions: one in which the initial situation consists in the presence of a particular state of affairs, and one in which it consists in the absence of that state:

The four actions of the first group can be generally described as letting a state continue to be present, destroying a state, letting a state vanish, and preventing it from vanishing (sustaining it). The four actions of the second

group can be generally described as letting a state continue to be absent, producing a state, letting a state come into being, and preventing it from coming into being (suppressing it).

(EDL 46)

According to this schema, if you encounter a situation in which you believe someone has been lied to, you could allow the lie to continue, destroy the lie, sustain the lie, or allow the lie to disappear on its own. In the second category, that of the absence of a lie, you could allow a potential lie to remain absent, create a lie, allow the lie to come into being without your help, or prevent the lie. Now for our purposes, we can assume to be identical the presence of the state of an absence of a situation, and the absence of the state of the presence of a situation. Thus we can reduce these eight types of action to the original four, that is, the two types of commission (productive and preventative) and the corresponding two types of omission (EDL 46).

Lies, as we usually imagine them, are actions of the type we might now call productive in the absence of a previously existing misapprehension. But if we think about it, we realize that there exist almost an infinite number of intermediate cases between what we could call productive spoken lies and non-verbal lying actions. For example, if

someone lies to you with my knowledge, or even in my presence, when only a word or a sign from me could prevent the lie from taking effect, then you would -- should the truth of the affair be revealed -- be justified in calling into question my truthfulness on that occasion. The meaning of such actions are "read off" just as naturally as the meanings of words, and to fail to act when someone is being lied to is to act in accord with that act of deception. Thus an awareness of our own intended actions, as well as a sense of the intended actions of others, become additional components of an analysis of the lie. Such intensified levels of awareness, I shall show, are not only characteristic of lying, but are also essentially connected to the process of literary creation.

Chapter 5 Self-Awareness

Samuel Johnson, when he wanted to call someone a liar, was in the habit of saying "He lies, and he knows he lies" (1101). Johnson used this form of expression to describe what we would call the intentional relation of an untruth -- that is, what we would simply call telling a lie. Johnson claimed that the second clause, "he knows he lies," was necessary because he felt that even an unwitting relation of an untruth should be called a lie. He had reason to regret this usage, however, as several of his acquaintances took offense at hearing themselves called liars when they had had no intention to deceive. Henry James, in What Maisie Knew, has his young protagonist ask about her father "Does he know he lies?...That's what mamma says I'm to tell him -- 'That he lies and he knows he lies'" (26). Maisie's statement causes a similar confusion. But these are exceptional cases, and it is clear from ordinary usage that lying is considered to be intentional, and that intentions are accompanied by a consciousness of the intention. Wittgenstein perhaps says it best when he states simply:

You know that you are lying; if you are lying,
 you know it...A lie has a particular surrounding.
 There is in the first place a motive there.

Something occasions it...The consciousness of lying is in the category of the consciousness of an intention. (RPP 139)

There is an obvious doubleness of thought involved in lying, an intellectual reservation or withholding of assent, which Blake has captured in the remark "Lie is contrary to passion" (554).

As I argue in chapter one, both liars and storytellers know when they are telling a lie or making a fiction. I argue in chapter three that both lies and poems need to be fashioned around probabilities. In chapter four I add the stipulation that "probable" for poets and liars would have to mean probable to a particular audience on a particular occasion. Thus self-awareness and a sense of one's audience become essentially interconnected. Sometimes in conversation, for example, we may begin to feel very strongly that we are being "understood" in a sense quite different to what we mean. It would seem that under these circumstances, if we knowingly leave our listener with a false impression, we could very well be taken to have lied to him.

An interesting result of this view would be that a liar could be liar partly because of his greater sensitivity both to his own words and to their effect on his listener. A more obtuse speaker, on the other hand, even when he does

leave a false impression behind, would not be considered a liar simply because he was unaware that his statements had been misconstrued. Thus "a sense of one's audience" would be something that both writers and liars would by definition share in common, in contrast to truth-tellers, who would not have to exhibit the same self-awareness. If this is true, then the question of self-awareness and sincerity would be a central concern of any account of the poet as liar.

W.H. Auden has written that "most writers...suffer occasionally from bouts of insincerity as men do from insomnia" (17). Auden continues:

Sincerity in the proper sense of the word, meaning authenticity, is, however, or ought to be, a writer's chief preoccupation. No writer can ever judge exactly how good or bad a work of his may be, but he can always know, not immediately perhaps, but certainly in a short while, whether something he has written is authentic. (18)

Auden's comment raises, among other things, the issue of the duration or fixity of the self which reflects upon itself and then judges the authenticity of its own creations. In Auden's view this evaluation occurs "certainly in a short while." We may compare Auden's position to that expressed in a short poem by W.B. Yeats

called "The Coming of Wisdom With Time."

Though leaves are many, the root is one;
Through all the lying days of my youth
I swayed my leaves and flowers in the sun;
Now I may wither into the truth. (94)

Here the process of self-awareness stretches over a period from youth to age. Such a statement forces us to posit a strong identity of the self in the poet. In the views of both poets, however, there is a sense of a self which persists and which can judge its own actions as either authentic or inauthentic, sincere or insincere.

We may contrast this view of the self with that of the critic Paul de Man, who argues that the self is merely a metaphor and that therefore "the self is a lie" (112). For de Man, the self and awareness of the self are not preconditions for one's sense of authenticity; rather, these things are themselves a lie. As I mention in chapter one, de Man's position is based on Nietzsche's belief that meaning should properly be singular and unmediated, but that instead we content ourselves with a multiplicity of "metaphorical" counterfeits of true meaning. As I try to show when discussing Nietzsche's view, the demand for a unity of meaning through a unity of thing to thing signified

actually results in the negation of meaning. What I would like to argue here is that de Man's extension of this view into a discussion of the self and self-awareness actually results in the negation of the self. By contrast, I would like to suggest that the concept of the poet as liar validates a less extreme position regarding self-awareness. Indeed, I think it can be shown that the question of the poet's sincerity is essentially connected both to his level of self-awareness as well as his attitude towards his audience.

If I were to summarize de Man's "deconstruction of the self as metaphor" (112) as briefly as possible, I would put it in the following way. The self may be considered as a text, and so the laws of meaning or meaninglessness in language may be applied to an analysis of the self. The true self must by its nature be entirely singular and unified, but the act of self-consciousness is pluralizing and "metaphorical." Thus:

The self which was at first the center of language as its empirical referent now becomes the language of the center as fiction, as metaphor of the self. What was originally simply a referential text now becomes the text of a text, the figure of a figure.
(112)

Mankind, however, chooses to forget the metaphorical origin of self-consciousness and attempts to recover the unity of the self through the creation of a false "literal" ground of meaning. But this maneuver is only a dodge and cannot overcome the deception inherent in the original act of self-awareness.

The degradation of metaphor into literal meaning is not condemned because it is a forgetting of a truth but much rather because it forgets the un-truth, the lie that the metaphor was in the first place.
(111)

If the self is a figure, and all figures or metaphors are lies, then the conclusion is inescapable that the self is a lie. The trap is completely closed, for even if the self should reflect on its situation, this would only compound the original lie, which, as we have seen, arose out of just such an act of self-reflection.

By calling the subject a text, the text calls itself, to some extent, a subject. The lie is raised to a new figural power, but it is nonetheless a lie. By asserting in the mode of truth that the self is a lie, we have not escaped from deception. (112)

De Man draws many troubling conclusions from this position, not the least of which is that "moral virtue is shown to originate out of lies" (112). "Society," de Man writes, "is held together by means of deceit" and consequently "moral education should increase one's skill at lying" (113). This moral education could perhaps be embodied in a literary education, since for de Man "philosophy turns out to be an endless reflection on its own destruction at the hands of literature" (115).

One wonders, however, by what means de Man is able to give literature this privileged position. The poet could be imagined as a kind of archetypal liar because of his self-conscious use of metaphor, but, of course, given de Man's arguments, the poet cannot help being a liar, and neither can anyone else. And this lands us right in the middle of an important problem, which is what sense it can make to call anyone a liar if everyone is a liar to exactly the same extent and in exactly the same way. What do we say, then, about actual, real-life lying? De Man has turned the rhetorical situation exclusively inward on the self, when properly it also faces outward towards the audience. What matters in rhetoric is not just how we reflect on ourselves, but how we reflect on ourselves in relation to the outside world. This dimension is especially important when we consider the rhetorical situation of the liar and, by extension, the poet as a liar.

It seems to me that the deconstructive position only appears to be potent and radical when it is seen against the background of a limited class of linguistic practices. For example, deconstructionists like de Man may maintain that true referring statements do not exist, but are they also willing to argue that lies do not exist -- that is, that the intentional manipulation of belief in order to deceive does not exist? This is a much harder pill for the sceptic to swallow. And if lies do exist, then the theorist of language will be justified in examining the linguistic grounds that allow lies to happen.

A further problem with the deconstructive position concerns the epistemological grounds of their argument. How, for example, could Nietzsche know that the "metaphor" of a leaf is the metaphor of a leaf, and not, say, of a stone? And how could de Man know that the metaphor of the self is the metaphor of the self, and not of something else? In both cases, their own employment of language commits them to some larger conceptual frame that allows them to make sense of the divisions they establish within it. In the short poem by Yeats quoted earlier, for example, nothing prevents the poet from recognizing himself in both the many lying leaves and in the single root of truth. Being of many minds, or even being self-deceived over a long period of time, may both be contained under a larger conception of the self. In a late essay, Yeats writes:

I think that two conceptions, that of reality as a congeries of beings, that of reality as a single being, alternate in our emotion and in history and must always remain something that human reason, because always subject to one or the other, cannot reconcile. I am always, in all I do, driven to a moment which is the realization of myself as unique and free, or to a moment which is the surrender to God of all that I am... Could these two impulses, one as much a part of the truth as the other, be reconciled, or if one or the other could prevail, all life would cease. (305)

In his poetry, Yeats has explored the different senses in which "the center cannot hold," and yet that does not mean that he believes that there is no center, or that one cannot try to make it hold. I cite Yeats's remarks here not as a conclusive refutation of the deconstructive position, but only to show that there is no necessary reason to adopt their position to the exclusion of all others.

A third problem with de Man's analysis of self-awareness is that it would seem to eliminate what Christopher Ricks has called "the most important pun in the language" (371) -- that is, the pun on the two senses of the word "lie." To lie is, in one of its meanings, "to rest,"

and when we say that the truth lies here or there we project an image of truth as resting, fixed, and stable. A fiction, untruth, or lie, however, may disrupt or displace the fixity of truth, and thereby open our eyes to the more complex modalities of human meaning. The pun in "lie" is charged by the contradiction between these two senses.

In Shakespeare's famous use of this pun in his sonnets, he situates truth in a more specific resting place: a bed. As Ricks comments, a bed, symbolically, is the paradigmatic testing ground of human truth. It is the place of love, of birth, and of death. Two people lying in bed together is, as Philip Larkin writes in his own poem on the same theme, "An emblem of two people being honest" (W 29). Hence "to lie in bed" produces an intensified form of the original lie/lie pun.

In the "stable" world view that we have been assuming, resting or residing in some fixed place is a component of truth. In the deconstructive world view, however, the world is in a state of flux, and thus all resting or residing is an illusion. Hence for the deconstructionist, the statement "the truth lies" would have no punning sense. Indeed, it would be as close as they could come to a literal truth or a literal falsehood, depending on which sense of lie they are considering. And yet, as interesting as this may be as a theoretical point, one might wonder what relevance it has to the actual use of language, in which puns do exist. How do

such theoretical insights help us understand specific instances of punning, such as Shakespeare's use of the lie/lie pun in his sonnet 138:

When my love swears that she is made of truth,
I do believe her, though I know she lies,
That she may think me some untutored youth,
Unlearned in the world's false subtleties.
Thus vainly thinking that she thinks me young,
Although she knows my days are past the best,
Simply I credit her false-speaking tongue:
On both sides thus is simple truth suppressed.
But wherefore says she not she is unjust?
And wherefore say not I that I am old?
Oh, love's best habit is in seeming trust,
And age in love loves not to have years told.
Therefore I lie with her and she with me,
And in our faults by lies we flattered be.

It is hard to imagine a poem of more poignant and extreme self-awareness, all of which arises out of the original denial of truth: "I do believe her, though I know she lies." The self-conscious acceptance of the lie starts a chain reaction that strains and transforms the self's relation to reality throughout the poem. This disorientation gains force until it culminates in the

brutal, punning self-irony of the final couplet: "Therefore I lie with her and she with me, / And in our faults by lies we flattered be." But none of this would come off without positing an integral "I", the self of the speaker, who half witnesses and half participates in the reverberating "modal" distortions of truth throughout the poem. Without the self, and awareness of the self, the lying in the poem, in both senses, would not have its special human significance. Lying and creating fictions necessarily involve us in an intensified self-awareness. The awareness expressed in the sonnet, moreover, points in two directions: the speaker knows he lies, and he knows that his lover lies. Lying and poetry, as we shall see, necessarily involve these two types of heightened awareness: one of the self, and one of the content of other minds.

Chapter 6 Other Minds

The act of successfully lying presupposes that the liar be able to predict what things his audience is likely to believe or disbelieve. To take a simple example: if you and I went to a casino together yesterday, then I should know that I cannot lie to you by saying that I have never been to a casino, although I may think that I could convince someone else of this. But I can only predict that I can create this false belief in another; I cannot know it with certainty. Just as the victim of the successful lie, by definition, does not know what is going on in the mind of the liar, so the liar cannot completely know what kind of things any particular audience is likely to believe. On the other hand, whatever the liar does say will suggest what beliefs he holds about the beliefs of his audience. That is, his lies are projections of what he believes his audience will believe. These two areas, the privacy of beliefs and the holding of beliefs about the beliefs of others, are crucial to our understanding of the poet as a liar.

Lies are possible because our thoughts are private. But, as we have seen, it is not only the thoughts of liars that are hidden. The thoughts of the liar's potential victim are also private, and this creates a practical difficulty -- not to say a danger -- for the liar. It is possible to

imagine a different state of affairs, as Jonathan Swift does, where people can perceive the false beliefs of others, but this is admittedly only a fantasy:

I have been sometimes thinking, if a Man had the Art of the Second Sight for seeing Lyes, as they have in Scotland for seeing Spirits; how admirably he might entertain himself in this Town; to observe the different Shapes, Sizes and Colours, of those Swarms of Lyes which buz about the Heads of some people, like Flies about a Horse's Ears in Summer: Or those legions hovering every Afternoon in Exchange-Alley, enough to darken the Air; or over a club of discontented Grandees, and thence sent down in Cargoes to be scattered at Elections. (E 10)

As Swift maintains, the ability to see lies as they float around the heads of their possessors would be quite entertaining. However, if this talent became general, then lying would cease to exist. Who would be taken in by a lie if he could see it coming? With the end of private thought, we have the end of lying.

I have defined lies as untruthful representations of beliefs. I will now add the obvious stipulation that such beliefs must be capable of being held secretly or privately.

This, of course, opens the possibility that the belief-worlds that people inhabit may conflict, and this fact is also essential to the existence of lying. There is a sense in which it is true that if everyone shared the same beliefs through and through, then no one could lie to anyone, since included in those commonly held beliefs would be everyone's beliefs about the beliefs of everyone else. There would be no gap into which a new false belief could be inserted. On the other hand, it does seem that both speaker and listener must share at least some beliefs in order for meaningful communication (and thereby the possibility of deceptive communication) to be possible. Therefore if lying exists, it must take place somewhere within these two poles of completely shared beliefs and completely private beliefs.

The notion of a "shared belief," however, is a confusing one. It is rather like some hypothetical realm that we feel must exist, but which vanishes or fades into insignificance as soon as we try to examine it. It might be worth our while, therefore, to concentrate instead on the important but often overlooked distinction between shared beliefs and what I have called beliefs about the beliefs of others. My feeling is that it is actually this second area that plays the dominant role in active communication.

Students of language have drawn up long and varied lists of beliefs that they feel must be shared between speaker and listener in order for a successful speech act to

be possible. These lists usually include such things as: I am speaking to a human being; this human being is in a position to hear and understand my utterance; this human being has always lived on or close to the surface of the earth; and so on. Now these "shared beliefs," such as they are, are certainly not in any ordinary sense present to the mind of the speaker at the time of his speaking, and this is not what the people who construct these situations are claiming. But it is hard to see in what way these beliefs can properly be said to underlie one's speech acts either. Rather, the more familiar we are with the circumstances of a particular utterance, the less likely we are to construct into it hypothetical beliefs of any kind. In a normal conversation, the statement "I was born in Pennsylvania" would probably have been occasioned by nothing more than the vague belief "He doesn't know that I was born in Pennsylvania." But even that belief, as close as it is to statement to be conveyed, most likely would not be present to the speaker's mind as a complete statement.

The distinction between shared beliefs and particular beliefs about beliefs is perhaps clearer in the case of speech acts which are attempted lies. You could not lie to someone by stating "I was born on the surface of the sun," but you could possibly lie by stating "I was born on the Costa del Sol." The operative realm of deceptive communication would seem to involve only those beliefs that

can be meaningfully exchanged, and this suggests that these beliefs are not shared prior to their expression, and that they may be newly created beliefs rather than pre-existing ones.

As I have tried to argue, predicting the beliefs held by one's audience is an important preliminary to the introduction of a new false belief, and this act of predicting is founded on an assumed discrepancy between belief worlds. Now, in regard to communication through literature, I would like to suggest that an author may act upon his audience by predicting the discrepancies that exist between his audience's beliefs and the beliefs he wishes to expound. To take an extreme example: propaganda writers in wartime will be keenly aware of such discrepancies in belief. The propaganda writer may know that the enemy soldiers do not eat babies, but he may believe that he can get his audience to believe this. What I would further like to suggest is that there is no clear-cut distinction between the intentional manipulation of belief practiced by the propaganda writer, and the normal techniques of manipulation practiced by the ordinary writer. If we are going to consider literary production to be a form of active communication, as I think we must, then it may be more valuable for us to examine the discrepancies between the particular beliefs about beliefs held by a particular author and his readers, than to look around for hypothetical

beliefs that may or may not be shared between them.

The importance to the literary artist of predicting, and thereby controlling, the content of the audience's beliefs has been studied many times. Bertrand Evans, for example, has reviewed all of Shakespeare's major comedies and tragedies from this very perspective. Discussing Hamlet, Evans points out that much of the dramatic tension of the play results from the discrepant levels of awareness that exist between the characters within the play. For instance, after the Ghost appears to Hamlet we have a situation in which Hamlet knows both that Claudius knows the truth about King Hamlet's death and that Claudius does not know that Hamlet knows this. Such knowledge gives Hamlet an advantage over Claudius that Hamlet could act upon, but fails to. Evans also points out that at this point in the play the audience knows everything that Hamlet knows, thereby giving them an advantage over Claudius similar to the one maintained (temporarily) by Hamlet (Evans 77).

One strength, it would seem, of employing a theory that considers the poet as a liar is that this helps us to account for the construction of fictional situations in which characters do not know things -- in which their beliefs are manipulated because their awareness is incomplete. These circumstances, in turn, may also reflect the unequal relationship that exists between author and reader. Once again, there would seem to be a particular

awareness of the contents of the beliefs of others that poets and liars share which they do not share with truth-tellers.

We may use this same perspective of beliefs about beliefs to go deeper into Hamlet. I suggested a moment ago that the propaganda writer must be keenly aware of the discrepancies between his belief world and that of his audience. Claudius, in his first appearance in the play, shows us a master propagandist at work, and accordingly his technique in deception shows the same awareness of the content of the minds of others. The very first sentence he speaks, although it begins with the memory of "Hamlet our dear brother's death," ends "with remembrance of ourselves" (I,ii,1-7). Claudius of course wants the court to put the memory of their dead king behind them, and he predicts, correctly, that no one has any knowledge of his role in King Hamlet's death (although Hamlet senses it in his "prophetic soul"). Claudius next employs the oldest device in the propagandist's bag of tricks: the threat of an external enemy, young Fortinbras, who threatens to reclaim the lands lost by his father. Again, since no one in Claudius's audience knows of what we might call the treachery within, he is able to successfully turn their attention where he wants it: outside of the court of Denmark.

But although there are no significant discrepancies of belief immediately within the court, there is a potential

discrepancy floating around the battlements of Elsinore and in the minds of the audience of the play. This discrepancy becomes explicitly established after Hamlet's interview with his father's ghost. As I have indicated before, this situation gives Hamlet an advantage in awareness over Claudius which the audience also shares. As Evans points out, Hamlet is unique among tragic heroes in that he is "gifted with a quality more regularly bestowed on villains -- superior awareness" (97). Because of this discrepancy between Claudius's beliefs about Hamlet's beliefs, and Hamlet's actual beliefs, Claudius, though he may abuse "the whole ear of Denmark" (I,iv,36), can no longer successfully lie to Hamlet, or to the audience.

The question of other minds and awareness of what one might be able to get other people to believe brings to the foreground the relation of lies and literary creations to political power. In many ways the struggle between Claudius and Hamlet is a struggle of shows or presentations through which they hope to hold sway over the people. Claudius is aware that his actions are restrained because Hamlet is "lov'd of the distracted multitude" (IV,iii,4). Hamlet, at the beginning of the play, knows that for his own survival he "must hold [his] tongue" (I,ii,159); then, at the end of the play, in his dying words, he is still concerned with his reputation in the larger world. Both Claudius and Hamlet realize that they are not locked in isolated combat, but

that they must project their struggles against a larger background.

Montaigne has written that a liar must possess a superior memory. This is only partially true. Rather, it is more important that the liar maintain appearances, that he "act natural." To exhibit too good a memory on certain topics would only serve to call attention to oneself. This fact, for example, is what underlies Hamlet's strategy in the "mousetrap." It is normal for people to have reasonably but not especially strong memories of their previous words and actions. The liar must be consistent with others in this. Hamlet predicts that Claudius will show an unusual sensitivity to the memory of King Hamlet's death, and he is right.

The battle between Claudius and Hamlet, we might say, is thus also a battle over memory -- the remembrance or the forgetting of a dead king. Claudius, as we have seen, wants the circumstances of the king's death forgotten, and so he attempts to project a sense of normality in his succession to the throne and in the continuance of the usual diplomatic activities of the court. Claudius's first speech is an instance of this, as is his insistence that Hamlet give up his mourning clothes, a sign to the people that the dead king is not forgotten. Hamlet will counter this control over presentation with his "antic disposition," a false presentation put on primarily to buy time. Later, Claudius

welcomes the arrival of the players to the court in the hope that a dramatic presentation might divert and entertain Hamlet, thereby partially restoring a sense of normality to the court. Hamlet, of course, perverts this presentation, and turns it into an explicit challenge to the legitimacy of the king.

The political battle between Claudius and Hamlet mirrors the struggles for power and representation among other dominant and oppressed groups, and it is at this point that we see most clearly the connection between lying, literature, and other minds to the larger issues of political power.

If a group of people are oppressed, then we might expect them, to a certain extent, to begin to express themselves in accord with the dominant society's sense of probability. We would also expect to find that successful authors from the oppressed group would have to possess a heightened understanding of the mentality of the dominant group in order to have their works accepted. For such works to be successful within the dominant society, they would also have to be to a certain measure insincere, since a more truthful work would seem less probable to the dominant group, and consequently would be condemned as false. To the extent to which the writings of an oppressed group must "look normal" to be accepted, to that extent they must be untrue to the history of that oppression. Speaking of women

writers in a male-dominated society, Adrienne Rich has written that "In lying to others, we end up lying to ourselves" (188). We may call this dilemma of the oppressed writer the success of failure, or the failure of success.

A further consequence of this inequality of power is that the moral responsibility of the work might be split between the author and its intended readers, since the author may feel himself to be in coercive circumstances. Coleridge in his Biographia Literaria has written:

Questions which cannot be fully answered without exposing the respondent to personal danger are not entitled to a fair answer; and yet to say this openly would in many cases furnish the very advantage which the adversary is invidiously seeking after. Veracity does not consist in saying, but in the intention of communicating truth; and the philosopher who cannot utter the whole truth without conveying falsehood at the same time, perhaps exciting the most malignant passions, is constrained to express himself either mythically or equivocally.
(85)

Truth is put under a strain in such circumstances, twisted and tortured like the victim of persecution.

In a record such as Frederick Douglass's Narrative of

the Life of an American Slave, for instance, we find graphically represented "the penalty of telling the truth, of telling the simple truth, in answer to a series of plain questions" (42). When speaking to their masters, slaves "suppress the truth rather than take the consequences of telling it" (43). Douglass confesses: "I have been frequently asked, when a slave, if I had a kind master, and I do not ever remember to have given a negative answer" (43). Even in the freedom of the North, where Douglass was given an opportunity to write of his experiences as a slave, he still encountered constraints on his presentation of the truth. The oppressed writer has in some way to negotiate a middle ground between the truth of his own experience and the lies of his general circumstances. The oppressed writer, it would seem, finds it impossible to be entirely true to the one, or entirely false to the other. As Graham Greene has put it, "The writer is always an agent: a double agent" (145).

Truth, in such instances, is perverted as a result of the writer's heightened awareness of the content of the minds of others. Our truths and our lies are filtered through our beliefs about the beliefs of others, as well as about what others might do to us because of our beliefs. The political and moral terrain between truth and lying is a battleground from which no one walks away completely unscathed. It is the purpose of my next chapter to survey

some of this treacherous moral territory.

Chapter 7 Moral Responsibility

If, as I argue in the previous chapters, poets and liars can deliberately act upon the beliefs of their listeners, then inevitably there arises the question of moral responsibility. In the case of lying, this is fairly clear cut. In spite of Nietzsche's suggestion, we have in fact no non-moral way of discussing lying. As D.Z. Philips and H.O. Mounce write in their book Moral Practices:

in our language there is no purely factual or descriptive term for lying. It is not that the term lying has no descriptive content, for clearly it has, but we only become aware of this descriptive content, we only learn to pick out acts of lying, in the course of learning the use of a term like wrong. From the outset, therefore, an act of lying has moral import for us. (10)

Caught up in this stage of moral development, of course, is learning to distinguish lying from telling a story. For a child, the moral dimension of speech has its origin in the self-awareness of its own capacity to conceal the truth. In Henry James's novel What Maisie Knew (1897), for example, we encounter the virtually infant protagonist

when "she was at the age for which all stories are true and all conceptions are stories" (24). Thus when Maisie's mother asks whether her ex-husband has sent her any message, the young child's response is: "He said I was to tell you, from him, [...] that you're a nasty horrid pig!" (24).

Maisie slowly realizes, however, that she is being used by each of her parents to hurt the other, and there dawns on her the conception that she need not be the transparent medium of truth that everyone expects her to be:

It was literally a moral revolution and accomplished in the depths of her nature....She had a new feeling, the feeling of danger; on which a new remedy rose to meet it, the idea of an inner self or, in other words, of concealment. (25)

As the story progresses, Maisie rarely lies in the sense of intentionally propagating an untruth. But, as I argue when discussing the variety of lying action, there are other ways of creating misapprehensions, and of these subtler deceptions Maisie becomes precociously adept. And since these practices are also the result of deliberate action, the practicer is morally responsible for the results of such deception.

If I may modify one of John Searle's remarks from his book Speech Acts, a person who makes an insincere statement

takes responsibility for the validity of a belief which he does not in fact hold (see 62). Thus inseparable from a description of the liar's statement and its occasion would be an ascriptive statement through which we ascribe to the liar responsibility for the consequences of his insincere speech act. This new class of ascriptive statements may be compared to other ascriptions of rights and property. For example, just as the statement "that is his" ascribes to someone certain rights in regard to property, "that is a lie" may ascribe to someone the responsibility for a failure of sincerity in communication (see Hart 145).

Another important set of reasons why lies cannot be analyzed purely descriptively rests on our belief that lies are intentional, and that the intentions of others are essentially private. As I argue in chapter six, the intentions of others must be private to at least some degree for lying to be possible. Thus the ascription to a person's statement that that statement is a lie necessarily involves attitudes towards intentions, actions, and moral value that may be absent from the description of ordinary statements.

That the creation of fictions also has morally complex ramifications has not escaped the notice of literary artists. Daniel Defoe, for example, discusses the question of the moral responsibility of the author from a bafflingly wide variety of viewpoints. In the eight prefaces to his works that we will look at, DeFoe takes eight different

positions on lying in print, from the most naive view (where the author is responsible for all misstatements of fact) to the most cynical view (where it is the reader's fault if he is deceived). By examining these eight views in ascending order of sophistication, we will be able to construct a framework within which to consider the moral responsibility of the poet as liar.

In the preface to The Storm (1704), one of his earliest attempts at reportage, Defoe begins his consideration of lying by stressing the seriousness of propagating a lie in print:

If a sermon be ill grounded, if the preacher imposes upon us, he trespasses on a few; but if a Book Printed obtrudes a Falsehood, if a Man tells a Lye in Print, he abuses Mankind, and imposes on the whole World, he causes our children to tell lyes after us, and their children after them, to the End of the World. (A2v)

To understand Defoe's position, we would have to answer both how a book could abuse mankind in the present as well as how it could cause our children to tell lies after us. The answer to the first would seem to be that a book containing untrue statements would abuse us not by enticing us to speak contrary to what we believe, but only by causing

us to believe, and thereby report, untrue things. There is no question here of a failure of good faith in our communications, only a failure to make factually true statements. As this view seems to demand a standard of infallibility for truthfulness, we might call this the extreme "naive" view of lying. As to our second question, Defoe seems to be thinking here of the conventional truth littera scripta manet, the written word remains, while merely oral lies fade into air. In this way, the falsehoods in a written work may cause "our children to tell Lyes after us, and their children after them, to the End of the World."

Defoe's other remarks in the preface to The Storm are consistent with the naive view we have assigned it. Speaking as the "editor" of the group of letters he has brought together, Defoe states:

If I tell a Story in Print for a Truth which proves otherwise, unless I, at the same time, give proper Caution to the Reader, by owning the Uncertainty of my Knowledge in the matter of Fact, 'tis I impose upon the world; my Relater is innocent, and the Lye is my own. (A3v-A4r)

According to this statement, even if the source of a falsehood lies elsewhere, its immediate spokesman or author is held accountable not merely for having unwittingly

related an untruth, but for having told a lie. Nor may the author justify an untruth by claiming that the story of which it forms a part is morally elevating:

I should stand convicted of a double Imposture, to forge a Story and then preach Repentance to the Reader from a Crime greater than that I would have him repent of: endeavoring by a Lye to correct the Reader's Vices, and sin against Truth to bring the Reader off from sinning against Sense. (A3r)

Thus, according to the naive view propounded in The Storm, any untruth propagated in print constitutes a lie, regardless of the source of the original falsehood or the purpose to which it is put.

Defoe develops a similiar though less rigorous view in the preface to his first published work of fiction, Robinson Crusoe (1719). Although Defoe mentions that the ensuing history may contribute "as well to the Diversion, as to the Instruction of the Reader," there is little sense that this statement made in extenuation of his claim to be offering "a just History of Fact" (x). In this preface Defoe seems to be pointing towards a view of lying in print that allows no room for doubt or equivocation concerning any statement of fact, although this time he does not explicitly draw out the various ways in which a story might be deceptive, as he does

in the preface to The Storm.

Defoe's softening of the conditions of truth is taken a slight step further in the preface to The Four Year's Voyages of Captain George Roberts (1726). In this work, Captain Roberts is supposedly his own editor and is writing his own preface. Of the composition of the history that follows he states:

as I was far from thinking to appear in Print ...
so had I taken no Notes but what were in confused
Scraps of Paper, having no Book to register them
regularly: to which Misfortune is owing a great
deal of that indigested Form in which this Treatise
appears. (A3r)

The Captain maintains that his story "is strictly and faithfully True in every Particular" (A2v), but he asks of his readers "that they will, on the score of Truth and Faithfulness, pardon the Inelegance, &c. of this unpolish'd Essay" (A3v). To what extent, however, can a reader expect absolute accuracy as to matters of fact in a story as chaotically and imperfectly composed as Captain Robert's tale claims to be? To credit this preface one would have to hold the liberal view of lying that the speaker is accountable for the truthfulness of what he believes to be the case, even though he may on occasion unwittingly get his

facts wrong. In this preface, we are given no definite reason to doubt the Captain's personal truthfulness; nevertheless, we may very reasonably suspect some of the particular facts that he relates.

Up to this point, the prefaces we have reviewed have raised questions of factual truth, the author's belief in what is true, inaccuracy as a source of untruth, and, in a negative way, the possibility that attending to some untruths could have a morally beneficial effect on the reader. In the two prefaces we are to consider next, DeFoe adds even more to this medley of concepts, and thus their analysis and evaluation depend increasingly on the relative rhetorical weight given to each element. In The Fortunate Mistress (1724), for example, Defoe places in the first paragraph the usual assurances that the following story will be diverting, instructive, and improving. It is not until the second paragraph that the editor

takes the Liberty to say, that this Story differs from most of the Modern Performances of this Kind, tho' some of them have met with a very good Reception in the World: I say, it differs from them in this Great and Essential Article, Namely, that the Foundation of This is laid in Truth of fact; and so the Work is not a story but a History. (vii)

The editor then describes the nature of the evidence for the ensuing history, and further recommends the "Noble Inferences" that may be drawn from it (viii). But in the penultimate paragraph, a new concept is introduced which significantly alters everything that has come before it:

Scenes of Crime, can scarce be represented in such a manner but some may make a Criminal Use of them; but when Vice is painted in its Low-priz'd Colours, 'tis not to make People in love with it, but to expose it; and if the reader makes a wrong Use of the Figures, the Wickedness is his own. (ix)

Considering the preface as a whole, the author seems to be saying that the truth of his story is morally secondary to the use to which it is put, and that the improper use of certain parts of the story could be the fault of the reader, and not of the author. We might call this concept "blaming the reader," and, as we shall see, it plays a significant role in several of Defoe's accounts of lying in print. As early as 1709, Defoe defended playwrights and actors against charges of immorality by putting the blame on the audience. Defoe claimed in The Review that

the vicious appetite of the town is so debauched that nothing else will please them....The poor

poets and players are then at a pinch; they must please you, or you won't come near; they must gratify your debauched taste, or you will not taste at all. (238)

Similarly, in the next preface we are to consider, that to Moll Flanders (1722), Defoe writes:

It is suggested there cannot be the same Life, the same Brightness and Beauty in relating the penitane Part, as in the criminal Part: if there is any truth in that Suggestion, I must be allowed to say, 'tis because there is not the same taste and relish in the Reading; and indeed it is too true that the difference lies not in the real worth of the subject so much as in the gust and palate of the reader. (viii)

According to these passages, the moral onus of interpreting a story incorrectly lies with the reader. Defoe concludes that the reader must show a "just discernment" in his reading in order to insure that the morally elevating parts of the story "appear to have more real Beauty in them" (ix).

But although the preface to Moll Flanders shares this particular aspect with the preface of The Fortunate Mistress, it differs significantly in that it does not make

any claims as to the actual truthfulness of the story it precedes. Defoe writes:

the Author is here supposed to be writing her own History, and in the very beginning of her Account she gives the Reasons why she thinks fit to conceal her true Name, after which there is no Occasion to say any more about that. (vii)

Even for Defoe, this is a rather quick exit from a thorny problem. I agree here with Lennard Davis that "the word 'supposed' is clearly operating in two ways: either Moll is intending to write or else is deceiving the reader by doing other than she is supposed to be" (FF 163). A similar ambiguity surrounds the use of the word "pretends" in a later passage. Defoe writes of his manuscript that the "Copy which came first to Hand" had "been written in language more like one still in Newgate, than one grown Penitant and Humble, as she afterwards pretends to be" (vii). Davis's reading seems to me correct that Defoe "uses the word 'pretends' in a double sense ... Is Moll simulating penitance or is she actually penitant? Defoe seems to have neatly straddled the line but entertains the possibility that Moll might be gulling the editor along with the reader" (FF 164). We might say that in the preface to Moll Flanders, Defoe abandons the scruples expressed in the preface to The

Storm, so that now neither the editor nor his relator needs to worry whether "the Lye is my own."

If no one is to be held accountable for a lie, then the next logical step is to give up making truth claims altogether, and this is what we find, in two different forms, in the prefaces to The Memoirs of a Cavalier (1720) and The Life of Colonel Jack (1722). The Memoirs purport to be the writings of an anonymous gentleman of some standing who had participated in the English civil wars. The editor claims that the manuscript was "long ago found by great Accident, among other valuable papers in the Closet of an eminent publick Minister, of no less Figure than one of King William's Secretaries of State" (A2r). The preface then goes on to speculate as to who this gentleman may have been. But the only claim the preface makes for the authenticity of the manuscript is the following:

There can be nothing objected against the general Credit of this Work, seeing its Truth is established upon universal History; and almost all the Facts, especially those of Moment, are confirmed in their general Part by all the writers of those Times, if they are here embelished with Particulars, which are no where else found, that is the beauty we boast of; and that it is that must recommend this Work to all Men of Sense and Judgement that read it.

(A2v)

Now if read carefully, this statement claims not that the work in question is true, but only that it cannot be proven to be false. The author's public life, we are told, is consistent with the established historical records. The story of his private life, the "Particulars, which are nowhere else to be found," are by their nature irrefutable. Thus Defoe in the preface to the Memoirs is trying to slip past us a proof that is not a proof, and from this it is a short step to abandoning all proofs entirely. This is Defoe's approach in the preface to Colonel Jack.

The most consistent of Defoe's prefaces, the preface to The Life of Colonel Jack (1722) begins with six paragraphs which form six variations on the same theme: the capacity of the ensuing tale to delight and instruct the reader. The matter of the tale's truthfulness is scrupulously avoided until the seventh and last chapter, in which the editor notes:

A BOOK founded on so useful a Plan, calculated to answer such valuable Purposes as have been specified, can require no Apology: Nor is it of any Concern to the Reader, whether it be an exact historical Relation of Real Facts, or whether the Hero of it intended to present us, at least in part, with a

moral Romance: on either Supposition it is equally Serviceable for the Discouragement of Vice, and the Recommendation of Virtue. (A2r)

Here the entire pretense of truthfulness is abandoned, and the work is presented solely on the strengths of its moral utility. Defoe had articulated a similar view in a letter to Robert Harley of 1704, the only difference being that in Harley's case the benefits supposedly to be gained by the recipients of the lie were political rather than moral:

Tho' this Part of Conduct is Call'd Dissimulation,
I am Content it shall be call'd what They will, But
as a Lye Does Not Consist in the Indirect Position
of words, but in the Design by False Speaking, to
Deciev and Injure my Neighbor, So Dissembling does
Not Consist in Putting a Different Face Upon Our
Actions, but in the further Applying that
Concealment to the Prejudice of the Person...
This is the Dissimulation I recommend, which is Not
Unlike what the Apostle Sayes of himself; becoming
all Things to all Men, that he might Gain some.
This Hypocrise is a Vertue, and by This Conduct you
shall Make your self Popular, you shall be Faithfull
and Usefull to the Sovereign and belov'd by The

People. (Letters 42-3)

Logically (although perhaps not pragmatically) this is the same view as in the preface to Colonel Jack; that is, that a consciously uttered falsehood intended to deceive is not a lie so long as it was propagated to benefit the person or persons deceived. This removes the question of lying in print from the realm of evidence and fact and places it completely into the realm of politics and morality. In G.A. Starr's summary of this approach, "Defoe holds that so long as fiction is not designed to 'Deceiv and Injure' the reader, but to delight and edify him, it cannot be branded lying; on the contrary, it can be defended as an 'honest cheat'" (200).

This might seem to be the most extreme view of fictional lying possible, but in fact it is not. As I have indicated before, Defoe has also maintained the view that being deceived or misled by a fiction may be the fault of the reader. According to this reasoning, even those who maliciously propagate falsehoods with intent to deceive could escape condemnation. This is Defoe's position in his preface to A System of Magick (1727). Of the body of magical doctrine, Defoe writes:

Even at its best, 'tis a Babel-like Confusion,
that speaks several Languages, and none to be

understood; a compleat Degeneracy of, or Deviation from, common Sense; a Complication of Negatives, that how many so ever you put together, won't make up one affirmative. (A5r)

According to Defoe, if we attend to the words of the magicians, we are "wickedder than the Magicians" (A4r), and "if we will debauch the Word with a degeneracy of Practice, the Fault is our own" (A5r). Defoe goes so far as to suggest that it is impossible for magicians to lie since what they speak is non-sense (A5r). Rather, it is the readers who in effect lie to themselves by construing a sense where none exists. In saying that the magicians affirm nothing, Defoe echoes Sidney's position that if a writer affirms nothing he therefore never lies. Here the writer can put untrue things into print, believe them to be untrue, intend them to deceive, practice that deception to the prejudice of the reader, and still not be accused of a lie because the fault lies with the credulity of the reader. This view, I would suggest, takes us as far as it is possible to go from the veiw of lying presented in The Storm.

Blaming the reader is not, however, an entirely unheard-of argument. In chapter five I discuss the "obtuse speaker" who is not held responsible for a lie because he is unaware that his words have been misconstrued. The

complement to the obtuse speaker is the gullible listener, who too readily credits whatever he is told. Suppose, for example, that I have just finished discussing my straitened financial circumstances and then add with a laugh "But of course I still have millions in a Swiss bank account!" My statement was clearly not intended to be taken seriously. But what if the gullible listener does take it seriously, believes it, and reports it after me? Am I therefore responsible for having told a lie? I don't think so, although in any particular case the matter might never be settled to everyone's satisfaction. After all, how serious is "seriously meant," and how gullible is "gullible"? It is sometimes impossible to determine. As I have been arguing throughout, the full range of modalities in human communication are extremely complex, and we can rarely lay down hard and fast rules.

But what conclusions can we draw from this survey of Defoe's prefaces, both about Defoe as a writer, and about the general question of the poet as liar? Several critics have tried to condense Defoe's observations on lying in print into a single theory of fiction. However, it may be that it is the diversity rather than the unity of his views that provides the key to his own concept of fiction. One might notice first that Defoe's most naive statement about lying appears in an early work (The Storm, 1704), whereas his most cynical expression occurs in a late work (A System

of Magick, 1727). This fact might lead one to expect a "developmental" view of Defoe's position. But when we look at the dates of the other works we have discussed, we find that a developmental theory will not hold. Here we find that Defoe articulates a rather sophisticated view of lying in his letter to Harley of 1704, and a relatively naive view in his Voyages of Captain Roberts of 1726. Indeed, if our analysis of the relative sophistication of the views in the prefaces is correct, then we find no correlation in the dates at all.

But this lack of correlation may point to the solution. It may be that Defoe did not consider his prefaces to be statements about fiction, but rather that he considered them to be integral parts of his fictions. Defoe's prefaces give the appearance of having been written ad hoc for each work solely with the intention of enabling that work to gain the belief of its reader. After all, in eight works supposedly presented by eight different editors we would expect to find eight different views of fictional lying, and this is what we do find. In this way, the realism of the individual work is enhanced by the realism of its preface.

As James Sutherland points out, Defoe's method of convincing his readers of the absolute truth of his stories depended upon the particularization of detail even to the point of including the irrelevant, inconsequential, and

inconsistent. "It is," Sutherland writes, "a wasteful method of convincing a reader, but it works" (48). And this may be all that we can say about Defoe's theory of fiction: that whatever method the author employs, it had better work. Defoe, like Aristotle, seems to take the very practical position that an unconvincing story is equivalent to no story at all.

Leslie Stephen writes of Defoe that "he had the most marvelous power ever known of giving verisimilitude to his fictions; or in other words again, he had the most amazing talent on record for telling lies" (4). This may be true. But, of course, from the perspective that I have been trying to develop, this would by no means be a criticism. And from this remarkable capacity for telling lies it does not follow, as Stephen suggests, that for Defoe "the division between the art of lying and the art of fiction was not distinctly visible" (13). Rather, the variety of Defoe's remarks and the systematic development of each view in each preface suggest that Defoe had a clear idea of the relation of lying to storytelling, only that he varied his moral evaluation of that relationship as he needed it. Again, this befits the pragmatic nature of Defoe's approach; no one owed him an audience, and so he had to hold one by whatever means possible. Moral considerations of the author, however important they may be, can only arise after that considerable task of securing an audience has been

sucessfully achieved.

Part II Lying and Poetic Practice

Chapter 8 Imagination

Both lying and poetry require an act of the imagination, but writers have disagreed on the role that imagination plays in the creation of falsehood and the discovery of truth. To Coleridge, the imagination is a combining or unifying force which "reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities" (BL 145). The sense of unity that imagination produces is the "ultimate end of all human thought and human feeling" and recalls the spirit to "its principle and fountain, who is only truly one" (BL 145). Imagination, thought of in this way, is the ultimate source of truth.

Coleridge considers the imagination under two aspects, primary and secondary, but in both instances the force of imagination mirrors the creative capacity of God, and through it we are able to create within ourselves an image of the highest truth:

The primary imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all Human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The

secondary imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency. (BL 202)

In his essays in the Friend (1809-1810), Coleridge shows that he is well aware of the many techniques that one may employ in the management of truth and falsehood, or what he calls falsitatem dispensativam (F 38). Nonetheless, though in actual communication truth may be perverted, he maintains that "it is a shameless assertion that truth and falsehood are indifferent in their natures" (F 39). Accordingly, Coleridge finds it impossible to consider truth and lying in what Nietzsche would call an "extra-moral sense." He writes:

By verbal truth we mean no more than the correspondence of a given fact to given words. In moral truth, we involve likewise the intention of the speaker, that his words should correspond to his thoughts in the sense in which he expects them to be understood by others: and in this latter import we are always supposed to use the word, whenever we speak of truth absolutely, or as a possible subject of moral merit or demerit. (F 43)

In Coleridge's view, truth, imagination, and moral responsibility are essentially related.

The opposite of Coleridge's view, as we have seen, is the view of Paul de Man, who holds that moral virtue originates out of lies (112). De Man's conclusion follows as logically from his premises as Coleridge's does from his. Rather than holding self-reflection to be a mirror of the infinite and thereby an intimation of the highest truth, de Man believes that self-reflection is an inescapable source of self-deception, leading to the conclusion that "the self is a lie" (112). If we carry this logic through to a consideration of the imagination, we produce a similar reversal. It was left to Harold Bloom, building on the foundations laid by de Man, to draw this conclusion. In The Map of Misreading Bloom writes:

At the center of the Romantic vision is the beautiful lie of the Imagination, the only god; but what is the Imagination unless it is the rhetorician's greatest triumph of self-deception. If the imagination, in poetry, speaks of itself, then it speaks of origins, of the archaic, of the primal, and above all of self-preservation. Vico is our best guide to the place of Imagination because he understood best this self-defining function

of Imagination. (79)

By "self-preservation" Bloom means "poetic strength" and independence. The imagination in Coleridge is unifying and connects the individual to the infinite presence of God; in Bloom it is self-creating and in that sense dividing, separating, individuating. And here we seem to come to an impasse. Is there no third way to view the role of imagination in literature? Must we plunk for a logic that forces us to conclude that the imagination is either the source of all truth, or the source of all error?

If we step back from this debate a bit we may be able to find a more general conception of the imagination. We may be able to think of the imagination as not only acting upon artistic creation, but as acted upon in many different ways by the changing circumstances in which imaginative artists find themselves.

Oscar Wilde, as we have seen, has his character Vivian in The Decay of Lying argue that "both poetry and lying are arts ... not unconnected with each other" (14). I have already examined the implications of this connection in order to clarify our thinking about the poet as liar. But Wilde's purpose seems to have been not to explore the poet as liar as a concept on its own, but rather to offer a defense of the poetic imagination. "The moment Art surrenders its imaginative medium," he writes, "it

surrenders everything" (43). Wilde sees truth and falsehood as separable from and acting upon imagination. It is from this perspective that I want to examine the nature of poetic imagination.

Wilde's Vivian claims of the modern writer:

He either falls into careless habits of accuracy, or takes to frequenting the society of the aged and the well-informed. Both things are equally fatal to his imagination, as indeed they would be to the imagination of anybody, and in a short time he develops a morbid and unhealthy faculty of truth-telling, begins to verify all statements made in his presence, has no hesitation in contradicting people who are much younger than himself, and often ends by writing novels which are so life-like that no one can possibly believe in their probability. (14-15)

Wilde singles out realism -- a method which Vivian calls "a complete failure" (25) -- as the greatest threat to the poetic imagination. He writes that "we are a degraded race and have sold our birthright for a mess of facts" (21). "No great artist," he contends, "sees things as they really are. If he did, he would cease to be a great artist" (40). Rather, "the imagination is essentially creative and always

seeks a new form" (32). Far from holding a mirror up to nature, art "anticipates life. It does not copy it, but moulds it to its purpose" (32). Indeed, he claims that "Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life" (30).

According to Wilde, an excessive emphasis on truth, embodied in an excessive reliance on verifiable facts, is destroying the arts. What then is necessary to restore art to its proper course? Before we can expect any progress in the arts "we must cultivate the lost art of lying" (45). Lying, as we have seen, may take many forms, but "the only form of lying that is absolutely beyond reproach is lying for its own sake, and the highest development of this is ... lying in art" (44).

Wilde writes that contemporary social reality is so depressing and essentially boring that he "cannot imagine anything better for the culture of a country than the presence in it of a body of men whose duty it is to believe in the supernatural, to perform daily miracles, and to keep alive the mythopoeic faculty so essential for the imagination" (42). Disapproving of imaginative writers who try to address social problems in their works, Wilde concludes that "the final revelation is that Lying, the telling of beautiful untrue things, is the proper aim of Art" (47).

Wilde's treatment of lying and art is so engaging, and the development of his argument so consistent, that we

almost forget to ask the obvious question, which is whether we think it is true or not. Should creative artists cultivate lying? And is the answer to that question the same in all times, and under all circumstances? We might contrast Wilde's ideas with those of George Orwell, whose essay "The Prevention of Literature" covers from a different point of view almost the exact same ground as Wilde's dialogue.

Orwell sees the greatest danger to the imaginative writer not in facts but in orthodoxy. He writes:

Everything in our age conspires to turn the writer, and every other kind of artist as well, into a minor official, working on themes handed to him from above and never telling what seems to him the whole truth. (60)

One could imagine Orwell responding that Wilde's dispute is not really with facts, but with an orthodoxy propounded by realistic writers that demanded an emphasis on a verifiable "reality." The dispute, in other words, will always be relative to time and place. Wilde seems to be aware of this himself when he writes:

Art never expresses anything but itself. It has an independent life, just as Thought has, and

develops purely on its own lines. It is not necessarily realistic in an age of realism, nor spiritual in an age of faith. So far from being a creation of its own time, it is usually in direct opposition to it, and the only history that it preserves is the history of its own progress. (45)

Thus in "an age of realism," as Wilde felt his to be, the poet will preserve the freedom of his imagination through lying, through "the telling of beautiful untrue things." The poet's determination to lie or to tell the truth will depend on his assessment of the cultural climate around him in relation to his art. Wilde, for example, claims that "newspapers, even, have entirely degenerated. They now may be absolutely relied upon" (12). If the propagandists have turned to truth, or, at least, are believed to speak the truth, then the artist may indeed feel himself driven to the false, the fictional, the untrue.

We may contrast Wilde's "opinion" -- if it is his opinion -- with that of Orwell. During the war, Orwell worked as a propaganda writer for the BBC, and he came away from the experience with the unshakeable conviction that all news broadcasts and newspapers were lies. Rather than an orthodoxy demanding facts, Orwell felt himself to be living

in an cultural climate increasingly dominated by illusion. More than that, he felt that there had developed among intellectuals an orthodoxy of the illusory, which demanded "a disbelief in the very existence of objective truth" (64). In those circumstances, according to Orwell, the proper weapons for the artist to take in hand are not lies but facts. He writes:

Freedom of the intellect means the freedom to report what one has seen, heard, and felt, and not to be obliged to fabricate imaginary facts and feelings. (62)

The imaginative writer is unfree when he has to falsify his subjective feelings, which from his point of view are facts. He may distort and caricature reality in order to make his meaning clearer, but he cannot misrepresent the scenery of his own mind: he cannot say with any conviction that he likes what he dislikes, or believes what he disbelieves. If he is forced to do so, the only result is that his creative faculties dry up. (65)

So what is the relation of lies to the creative imagination? Is the imagination preserved or destroyed by

lying? The key, I think, lies in Orwell's statement that the artist's subjective feelings are, from his point of view, facts. Being subjective or private or hidden does not make them any the less real. This hidden nature, indeed, is essential to the very question of truthfulness and lying. The truth-telling artist (in Orwell's sense) and the artist as liar (in Wilde's sense) are both able to preserve their imaginative vision of the world and to project with their words that vision, even when it represents what Wilde calls the "unreal and non-existent."

The poet and the liar, like the proverbial travel liar, return from a previously unexplored territory, their own imagination, and recreate for us what they found there. On the other hand, as both Wilde and Orwell suggest, the author's freedom to express what he has imagined may be threatened in many different ways. The artist, for example, must find a way to gain and hold an audience. Naturally he will fashion his imaginative creations so that they will stand out somewhat from what he believes his audience imagines about the world. Thus an understanding of the truthfulness of the imagination of the artist at any particular time will depend on an understanding of how each artist imagines the truthfulness of the imagined world around him. In this way, even theories about the imagination, such as Coleridge's and Bloom's, may be seen to arise from a specific set of imaginative projections about

the truthfulness of the world around them. One would expect, after all, the author of Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit to see himself responding to a very different social reality than, say, the author of Ruin the Sacred Truths. What we must look for is not an imagination which is the source of all truth or of all error, but rather an interactive imagination that mediates between the needs of the individual to express his vision and the capacity of society to accept it. All imaginative projections, in this sense, may be regarded as potential lies or as possible visions of a higher truth.

Chapter 9 Narration

Aristotle claimed that "Homer has taught other poets how to tell untruths as they ought to be told, that is, by the use of fallacy" (68). In this chapter, I want to consider the role of deception, fallacy, and falsehood in the creation of narrative tension. As I argue in chapter two, the practices of lying and poetry can be analysed from two perspectives: on the author's side, both lying and narrating a story involve the management of truth and revelation, starting from a situation that involves an untruth, fallacy, or disjunction; on the audience's side, unravelling a lie or following a narrative involve a capacity to hold in one's mind incomplete or inconsistent elements while still trying to make one's way forward.

Jonathan Culler, in a survey of the field of narrative theories, writes that many critics are searching for "a valid scheme" with which to "generate descriptions which correspond to our intuitive sense of particular plots" (13). As a result of this approach, many of the theories of narrative that have been put forward give the appearance of being little more than accounts of the critic's own activity of plot summarization. This is not the course that I want to take. We are certain that the events in a plot are connected by something, the question is what. And to

produce an artificial model whose structure resembles the structure of the original plot only multiplies our unanswered questions. We still need to know how the elements of the plot are connected, but also how the corresponding parts of our model are connected, as well as how the two entities, the plot and our model of it, are connected to each other.

This activity of model-building, however, is not so much wrong in its conception and application as it is in the expectations that we have for it. It is true that the more plots or "plot structures" that we study, the finer our sense may become of the way plots hold together and are driven forward. But we should not make the mistake of thinking that any one structure will explain the nature of narration in another. We might say, as Wittgenstein maintained in his Tractatus, that any one form of representation may "show" or reveal this structure in another, but that it cannot "say" it.

When discussing the nature of conviction in poetry, I argue that the reading of even a single sentence is enough to demonstrate the projection of significance into a future time. In order to make sense of a sentence, we must hold the first part of it in our minds as we move forward and connect its elements with the subsequent parts of the sentence. We must proceed as if the sentence will make sense, even though as we are reading it we do not know if it

will make sense. How then can we hope to use one sentence or narrative to explain the mystery of another when it embodies that mystery itself? In what follows I will try to illuminate the nature of narration through the use of various analogies, but I will do so with the awareness that what I am looking for can only be revealed by analogy and cannot be explained by analogy, or probably in any other way.

I want to argue that narratives pose "truth functional" problems, that is, that the potential falsity of a narrative contributes to its motive force. We all know that works of literature may "open our minds," but how is this sense of opening achieved, and what is its specific relation to the false? Plato argues that we raise children in an atmosphere of falsehood. "We give children fables," he laments, "before we give them physical exercises" (14). But even with this early training in falsehood, we tend to feel as we grow older that our vision of the world is true, and that we have an adequate hold on reality. Stories, however, re-awaken our awareness of new possibilities in experience, and, I would argue, fictional stories re-awaken this sense in a different way and to a greater extent than do stories that we feel to be true. Our sense of the possible is violently expanded by our sense of the false, just as a lie in personal relationships, when perceived, violently expands our awareness of the character of another person and their

relation to us.

There is a sense of danger involved in the possibility of losing our way which contributes to the tension we feel in following a narrative. The element of falsehood in a story is crucial to this sense of danger. The false paths always outnumber the true path, and this is unsettling. Montaigne has written:

If a lie had no more faces than one, as truth hath, we should be in far better terms than we are. For whatsoever the liar should say, we would take it in a contrary sense. But the opposite of truth hath many, many shapes and an infinite field. The Pythagoreans make good to be certain and finite, and evil to be infinite and uncertain. A thousand byways miss the mark, one only hits the same. (13)

The difficulty in finding and maintaining the true path has not gone unnoticed by literary artists. George Eliot, for example, interrupts the narrative of Adam Bede to comment:

So I am content to tell my simple story, without trying to make things seem better than they were; dreading nothing, indeed, but falsity, which, in

spite of one's best efforts, there is reason to dread. Falsehood is so easy, truth so difficult. The pencil is conscious of a delightful facility in drawing a griffin -- the longer the claws, and the larger the wings the better; but that marvelous facility which we mistook for genius is apt to forsake us when we want to draw a real unexaggerated lion. Examine your words well, and you will find that even when you have no motive to be false, it is a very hard thing to say the exact truth, even about your own immediate feelings -- much harder than to say something fine about them which is not the exact truth. (176)

We tend to forget what an enormous role falsehood plays in our lives. In an ordinary day, what percentage of our utterances are strictly speaking true? "Lying," Wittgenstein writes, "is a language game that needs to be learned like any other one" (PI sec. 249), and by this he means that we must learn not only what things we conventionally tell the truth or lie about, but also under what conditions we would describe a statement as a lie. The issue this raises is the management of truth in human discourse, as opposed to the straight-forward presentation of truth. We have to begin to think in terms not of

apparent truths that can be logically compared, but of revealed and hidden truths whose management is controlled by the conscious activity of the artist.

Frank Kermode has written on secrets, hidden truths and narration, and I want to explain his ideas briefly in order to distinguish my views from his. To Kermode, the secrets in a literary work are those aspects of it that operate behind, or beneath, or against the controlled and directed flow of the the narrative. "Secrets," he writes, are the "enemies of order, sequence, and message" (85). In Kermode's account, the secrets in a story stand between an author and his text, and are revealed solely through the interpretations of its various readers. Almost by definition, the author is excluded from the secrets that his own work generates, since, according to Kermode, an author must choose to "foreground" something, and whatever is foregrounded is not the secret (see 84). In whatever direction the author moves, the secrets in his own work elude him.

Now it seems to me a mistake to define secrets without reference to the conscious action of the author. I have maintained throughout this book that lying and creating a fiction are not just reporting things in the usual way but leaving out the truth. Rather, I have argued that lies and making fictions are complex and conscious human actions, and that they necessarily have unique linguistic, moral, and

epistemological ramifications for both the listener and the speaker. I think the same can be shown to be the case regarding secrets and narratives.

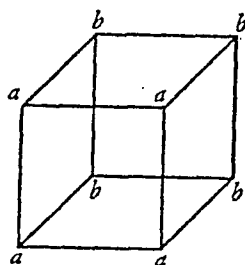
The first thing to notice is that having a secret and revealing or discovering a secret are not symmetrical activities. If I hide something, I really have two secrets: the thing that is hidden, and that I have hidden it. But this is not true in the reverse. If I reveal something, I do not have to reveal two things: the secret itself, and that I kept it secret. Similarly, if you think you have uncovered a secret in a text, you have not uncovered two things, the secret and that it was made secret -- that is, unless you can show that what you have found was made secret. And how could you attempt to prove that, without postulating a conscious act of concealment by the author?

Another way of looking at the situation is the following: what is hidden could either be a truth or a lie. But to "reveal" a secret always means to reveal the truth. If it isn't the truth, then you haven't revealed it. And how could you argue that you have revealed a truth in a certain work if it is not a truth of the author? To reveal my own secret truths about a work is not to "reveal" anything.

Just as with lying and making a fiction, having a secret and encoding a secret into a narrative are by their nature two-sided activities. An author will indeed use

secrets to motivate his plot. "Having a secret," we could say, is a part of the frame that contains the activity of "telling a story." The story poses a situation that is in some way problematical, paradoxical, anomolous, disfunctional, or false. It is the need for resolution of the originally posed "logical" or "truth-functional" problem that produces the dramatic tension of the story. Just how the artist will resolve this tension is his great secret. Storytelling is essentially an exercise in curiosity.

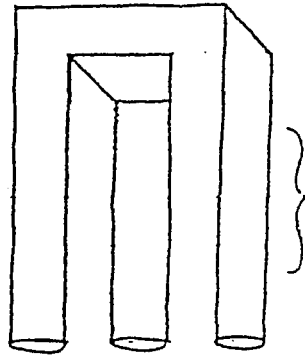
As I argue when discussing Coleridge's idea of the suspension of disbelief, it is actually not unusual for someone to temporarily accept an inconsistency, fallacy, or paradox without in fact believing that the resulting disjunction in experience is real, but only that it appears to be real. I would like to make a further distinction in the way such problems or disjunctions are presented to us. Consider, for example, the following visual paradox.



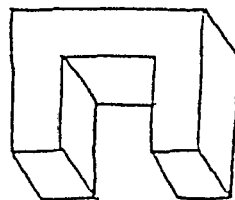
This single figure can represent at least three distinct mental facts. First, it can be seen as just a group of lines and letters on a page. Second, it can be seen as a cube. When seen as a cube, it can be seen either

with the "a" face to the front or with the "b" face to the front. It is impossible, however, to see it as a cube and to see both the "a" face to the front and the "b" face to the front at the same time. I call this kind of visual paradox "punctual" because the shift from one mental fact to another mental fact occurs in a moment.

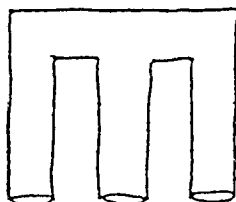
Now consider the next figure.



I call the paradox embodied in this figure "durative" because it is produced through the mind's holding simultaneously two conflicting mental facts. The mind interprets the figure simultaneously as an arch



and as a comb.



Because these figures share the same vertical lines, the visual information of the one figure "invades" the visual information of the other. It is impossible to say in the combined figure exactly where the disjunction between the two mental images takes place, only that it takes place somewhere in the area indicated by the bracket.

In a similar way, the disjunctions of truth and falsehood in a story are durative rather than punctual. The paradoxicality or strangeness of the situation projected by the story must be held in the mind over time. There are, furthermore, an infinite number of ways in which a story can pose these problematical situations. The false paths, as Montaigne has said, always outnumber the true path.

Looked at in this way, lies and narratives may be compared to mazes or labyrinths, which also are deliberately designed fallacies or true-false paths. To step into the labyrinth is the same as to step into the lie or the story. The labyrinth opens unexpected possibilities of movement and deception, just as the lie and the story open up unexpected possibilities of meaning, falsehood, and revelation.

The lie, the narrative, and the labyrinth share several

structural similarities. All three are human artifices which obey a specific set of rules in their construction. For example, the formal confines of the labyrinth mirror the special confines of probability imposed on the liar and the story-teller. Recognition and reversal, which to Aristotle are essential components of a well-made plot, are also peculiarly labyrinth-like concepts. There is, further, a principle of economy in lies, stories, and labyrinths. We assume that conscious human action must have some point. When we sense that we have been lied to, or that a story is being developed, or that we are in a labyrinth and not just a tangle of confusing passage-ways, we begin to concentrate our attention on discovering the primary motivation of the lie, the main point of the story, and the one true path of the labyrinth. Indeed, to pretend in our daily lives that we are making our way through a labyrinth is one of the most efficient ways of imagining our lives as following a narrative structure.

Angus Fletcher has written that "the denial that the labyrinth exists has a curious result: everything becomes labyrinthine" (CM 134). The lie, the story, and the labyrinth provide a structural background which gives direction to our ordinary, truthful and non-labyrinthine activities. I would add to this that the denial of the lie in literature has the curious result that everything becomes a lie. The view that reality is the liar, as I have shown,

is a conclusion that some contemporary theorists have already drawn. I think we can resist this view, however. Rather, it is because of our lack of understanding of the relationship of lying to literature that we draw the premature conclusion that reality, lying, and literature are indistinguishable.

Chapter 10 Metaphor

The association of lying and figurative language is old and well-established. The judges of the Areopagites forbade the use of figurative language in the presentation of the cases brought before them. Thucydides claimed that the poetical fashioning of the poets could never stand up to the test of reality. Thomas Hobbes held that for a politician to use metaphor was tantamount to lying. And, as we have seen, Paul de Man has argued that the self is a metaphor, and that therefore "the self is a lie" (112).

Donald Davidson, a contemporary theorist of metaphor, has written that "the parallel between making a metaphor and telling a lie is emphasized by the fact that the same sentence can be used, with meaning unchanged, for either purpose" (213). In opposition to Davidson, Eva Kittay has argued in a recent book that "lying is indeed a language use which necessitates no further semantic explanation. But metaphor, like irony, would be futile if it could not be 'read of the text'" (114) -- that is, if it could not be recognized as metaphor.

I want to enter this debate about metaphor and lying at the point of disagreement between Davidson and Kittay. I want to argue, against Davidson, that lies and metaphors are not semantically interchangeable, and, against Kittay, that

lying is not simply an example of "language use," and that its understanding does indeed require semantic analysis.

From the liar's perspective on language as I have developed it so far it should be fairly clear that Davidson cannot be right when he states that "the same sentence can be used, with meaning unchanged" as either a lie or a metaphor. "I am twenty feet tall" uttered when I am standing right in front of you would not qualify as a lie, although it might qualify as a metaphor. In fact, Davidson's remarks would seem to cover only a small part of the possible variety of lying actions. But in fairness to Davidson, his main concern is with metaphor and not lying, and his purpose in comparing the two is to argue that the characteristic features of both modes reside not in their semantic but in their pragmatic aspects. Davidson maintains that "what distinguishes metaphor is not meaning but use -- in this it is like assertion, hinting, lying, promising, criticizing" (214).

But although Davidson believes that lying and metaphor are alike in being examples of language use and not language meaning, he yet contends that the uses to which sentences are put in lying and metaphor are "so different that they do not interfere with each other" (214). Here again I disagree, for if lying and metaphor are completely separate activities, then it would be impossible to understand how metaphor could be used as a deceptive form of communication.

Davidson seems to want to flatten the characteristics of metaphor, and this may be the result of his employing a flattened view of human communication. Such one-dimensional accounts of literary language, I have suggested, are characteristic of linguistic and philosophical approaches that are primarily truth-functional, as Davidson's explicitly is. I want to argue, by contrast, that the practices of lying and metaphor are semantically complex, and that in that complexity the uses to which they are put may indeed overlap.

Let us examine Davidson's position further to see whether the use of metaphor is in fact as unproblematical as he suggests. Davidson states that a "metaphor says only what shows on its face" (214). He follows this with the assertion that the "literal meaning" of a metaphor is "fixed by its context" (215). But does a metaphor say only what shows on its face, and is it a simple matter to determine the literal meaning of a metaphor from its context? After all, the context of a metaphor may be other metaphors. What do we do then? And if a metaphor only says what shows on its face, how then do we identify it as a metaphor?

Davidson's position hinges on a strict distinction between meaning and use, and a denial that the activity of construal is a component of language meaning. He writes: "metaphors mean what the words, in their most literal interpretation, mean, and nothing more" (201). He

continues: "I depend upon the distinction between what words mean and what they are used to do. I think metaphor belongs exclusively to the domain of use" (202). Now the first thing we notice if we consider these two statements is that they seem to beg the question as to how we know what a metaphor is. If metaphor belongs entirely to the domain of use, then it is a little hard to see by what right Davidson can claim that he is dealing with a case of metaphor when he writes that metaphors mean what the words, in their most literal interpretation, mean, and nothing more. Rather, to be consistent, Davidson should limit himself to saying that a group of words mean what the words, in their most literal interpretation, mean, and nothing more. Such a statement may or may not be true, but it certainly does not tell us anything about the nature of metaphor.

According to Davidson, we recognize a metaphor by its patent falsity, which would be a product of the statement's meaning. This falsity is our clue that a statement may need to be construed, that is, that we may have to do something to the meaning presented. Acting upon the meaning of a statement, according to Davidson, takes us into the realm of language use. Davidson considers demands for construal to be rare and therefore adequate indicators of the presence of a metaphor. But is it really possible to isolate construal from meaning in this way? It may be possible to show that a certain degree of construal is present in all language use.

Whenever we are using language, either speaking and listening, or writing and reading, we are constantly and often automatically suppressing some aspects of the communication we are attending to while highlighting others. In the previous sentence, for example, the word "communication" was misspelled. This mistake would either have been passed over unnoticed or would have been suppressed by the reader as inessential to the meaning of the sentence. Other mistakes in communication are more serious and force the reader to stop and fill in or construe the meaning intended by the author. Examples of this type are also easy to imagine, so I will spare the reader the trouble of having to deal with one at the moment. The point is that these adjustments between construal and suppression go on all the time. They form a natural part of the verbal competency of all speakers.

Like mistakes, and like lies when they begin to be perceived, metaphors also cause a disruption in communication. But how do we know when to suppress and when to construe a group of words? I will refrain from calling the group of words a metaphor since this would be to beg the question that we know we are dealing with a case of metaphor even before we have begun to work on it, or it on us. Rather, it is only after we attempt to construe these words and find that they yield some second or non-obvious meaning that we begin to think that we may be dealing with an

intentionally constructed metaphor rather than an error in composition, or even a slip of the pen. Thus, we cannot say "here we have a metaphor, whose words mean what they say," and then begin to construe it; rather, we do not know that it is a metaphor until we have construed it.

Oversights such as Davidson's arise, I believe, from working with statements such as "Socrates is a midwife," which are more or less understood ahead of time to be examples of metaphor. A more realistic procedure would be for us to always imagine ourselves as much as possible in an actual linguistic situation in which we are constantly being presented with literal statements, metaphors, and mistakes. Some utterances do not need to be construed to make sense, while others stand senseless without construal. The important thing is to understand how we come to know the difference.

The human capacity for dealing with metaphors seems increasingly complex the more we look into it. The modalities of true/false, literal/metaphorical, and construal/suppression each exert their own force in their own way. Now we must add to this medly of concepts an understanding of the context within which metaphors have their life. As we have seen, Davidson's view of the context of a metaphor is rather uncomplicated: the context fixes the literal meaning of the metaphor before we begin to construe it. One obvious problem with this view is, as I have said,

that the context of one metaphor in a poem may be other metaphors. Further, the construal of one statement into another, or of one imagined state of affairs into another, may occur under a wide variety of what I call aspects of construal.

For example, in a poem by Craig Raine called "A Martian Sends a Postcard Home" (Hunter 73), the line "Rain is when the earth is television" is not an invitation to imagine the earth as a television set, but rather to compare how things look in a rainstorm to how things look through poor television reception. Similarly, in Philip Larkin's poem called "Livings" (H 14) the line "Radio rubs its legs" is not an invitation to conceive of a radio as having legs, but rather to direct our attention to the way the radio sounds. There are many other aspects under which any particular metaphor may need to be construed.

Also important to notice here is that something from outside of the specific location of the metaphor may be required to direct us to the proper aspect under which to begin to resolve the metaphor. For example, Raine's poem continues:

Rain is when the earth is television

It has the property of making colors darker.

Larkin's line is followed by:

Radio rubs its legs,
telling me of elsewhere.

We should not be too shocked by the idea that metaphors may be acted upon by things outside of themselves. Rather, when we come to think of it, it is the opposite tendency of viewing metaphors as in some way semantically discrete entities that would seem to be unusual. Most metaphors in poetry are compounded with other metaphors, while some metaphors make explicit reference to other metaphors. Thus, the clue from outside of a metaphor that leads us to the proper aspect under which to begin to resolve it may not only be necessary to the metaphor's meaning, but may itself be another metaphor. I can give examples of both types of this compounding of metaphors.

In Raine's poem, another element that clues us in as to what aspect under which to consider "Rain is when the earth is television" are the lines immediately preceding it:

Mist is when the sky is tired of flight
and rests its soft machine on ground:

then the world is dim and bookish
like engravings under tissue paper.

These lines, and especially the last two, also direct

us to the aspect "how things look." But a full understanding of the last two lines is dependent on the preceding two which provide us with the aspects under which to consider how "the world is dim and bookish." Now, in these first two lines, we are confronted with a very complex combination of metaphors indeed. If we were really to take the demands for an imaginative construal seriously, then we would first have to think of mist as the sky itself, and not as something that happens to or within the sky. Next, we have to think of the sky as personified to the extent that we can say of it that it feels tired. Further, we have to consider the sky not as a place in which other things fly, but rather as something capable of flight itself. We are additionally told that the sky is some type of a machine, and this creates a further problem since if the sky is a machine, how then do we say of it that it is tired? Machine is also modified by "soft," and this too calls for some type of imaginative construal, since we do not usually think of machines as soft.

Thus, if we really want to try to fix a "literal" ground against which to understand further metaphors, then we would have to construe just this one clause under the following different aspects: identity (mist=sky), personification (sky is tired), spatial relationship ("sky" is less than the whole sky since it flies within it), physical structure (soft machine), and finally a second type

of personification (machine is tired). Each of these different aspectival construals is relevant to the resolution of any of the others.

Understanding any one metaphor in the passage we have just considered would depend on an understanding of the other metaphors it is grouped with. This effect may be the result of the proximity of the metaphors within the sentence, or of the ordinary interrelationship of syntactic elements to each other (modifiers to antecedents, subordinate clauses to main clauses, and so on). But metaphors may indicate their relationship to each other more explicitly than this.

In another poem by Craig Raine entitled "Laying a Lawn" (Hunter 77), the poet begins by comparing folded pieces of sod to books. The poet describes how he carries the "crumbling tomes" of grass and places them on the ground "Bound with earth to last." The poet continues this metaphorical identification. He says that the pieces of sod are like "wordless books" and refers to the "simple text of grass" that he stamps into place with his feet. But developing along with this metaphorical identification is the idea that the earth itself is a book in which all our meanings lie buried. The poet then describes his young daughter who looks on as he works and compares her youth and innocence to the loss and decay symbolized by his own activity of laying the lawn. With this contrast suggested,

the poem concludes:

neither one of us can read
this Domesday Book.

Now the "this" in the last line of the poem refers to everything previously mentioned or suggested in the poem -- the whole mystery of birth and death, growth and decay, meaning and the loss of meaning. Further, since "book," through its previous identification, also means "earth," to say that they cannot "read/ this Domesday Book" is to say that ultimately they cannot understand the things that happen to them on earth -- that is, within the "real world" in which their previous words and actions have been described. Thus the final metaphor in the poem explicitly refers to and thereby potentially modifies every other metaphor in the poem.

So far, I have considered the complexities that arise when we consider the differing aspects under which metaphors may have to be construed, as well as the possibility that some metaphors may not be properly understandable independently of other metaphors. There are, however, even further complexities to consider in the relationship of metaphors to truth. Not only can metaphors refer to and act upon each other; they may also deny or undercut their own "literal" groundings. We can take the first stanza of the

poem "The Trees" (H 12) by Philip Larkin as an example:

The trees are coming into leaf
Like something almost being said;
The recent buds relax and spread,
Their greenness is a kind of grief.

In the first line of this stanza, the "literal" ground seems well-established: we are reading about trees coming into leaf. But immediately the poet alerts us that this event has meaning in terms of a corollary human activity: "Like something almost being said." In the next line, this anthropomorphic aspect is intensified by the use of the phrase "relax and spread." The metaphorical compounding of "coming," "almost being said," and "relax and spread" pushes the human emotion of release so prominently into the foreground that when we read the last line, "Their greenness is a kind of grief," we feel that it is the word "greenness" that requires more mental placing than the word "grief." Within just four lines, the literal/metaphorical standpoint of the poem gives the appearance of having been turned inside out. I would suggest that this is not an uncommon effect of the compounding of metaphors.

There are undoubtedly additional aspects of metaphor that add to its complexity, but even if we consider just these three factors -- aspectival construal, the compounding

of metaphors, and the shifting of the literal/metaphorical standpoint -- we see that the potential construal of a metaphor may be so complex that it becomes a psychological impossibility for the reader to hold all of the relevant aspects of the metaphor together in his mind at the same time. What this suggests is that there may often be a kind of "picturing" or "constellating" of the things suggested by the metaphor rather than a single semantic, conceptual, or logical resolution to the metaphor. A further consequence of this view is that the structure or appearance of these constellated associations will look different when viewed at different times, from different perspectives, or with different emphases. And it is here that we understand, at long last, how metaphor is related to lying and deception.

A message communicated metaphorically will be multiple in its potential meanings, and could lead one, in its attempted resolution, into an endless wandering among the relations of its suggested associations. It is only a short step from here to the use of metaphor in order to deceive. A speaker could, if he chose, predict the range of associations producible from a particular metaphor, use that metaphor in one of his communications, and then later deny that the primary sense taken up by the listener was the primary sense that he had intended. If the metaphor in question had been encoded carefully enough, and if the speaker had been skillful enough in his predictions of the

possible interpretations he was occasioning, then we might be hard pressed to prove that the speaker had lied on that occasion. Such deception requires a certain level of skill on the part of the speaker, but it is not unreasonable to assume that some measure of this ability is built into the verbal equipment of all speakers. If this talent is not always used for outright deception, it will at least be used for what I have called the management of truth and falsehood. Indeed, as Vauvenargues has said, "A liar is a man who does not know how to deceive" (see Gross 218).

Another conclusion that we can draw is that some of our assumptions about the nature of literary language may actually blind us to the complexity and potential deceptiveness of metaphor. The understanding of a metaphor in a given utterance may require us to assess things such as the speaker's intentions, the proper aspect of construal, and the degree to which the complexity resulting from a compounding of metaphors is to be either entertained or suppressed. Until we have an adequate account of such processes, we cannot conclude, as Davidson does, that lying and the use of metaphor do not share some common ground.

Another theorist of metaphor, Eva Kittay, also takes issue with Davidson's position, and her argument circles back on the issue of lying and metaphor in an interesting way. Kittay argues that if metaphorical language can be shown to be context dependent, then metaphor can qualify as

a case of language meaning and not just language use. Here Kittay and I agree. But Kittay, like Davidson, accepts the division between metaphor and lying, and it is here that we disagree. Kittay asserts that:

Whenever it is possible to construe the discourse in which the sentence is situated so that the proper interpretation of the sentence ... depends on the discourse situation itself, we have language meaning. And this is precisely what fails to be the case for lying. (115)

Throughout this book I have tried to show that the proper analysis of a lie does indeed depend on an understanding of the discourse situation in which it is uttered. If this is in fact the right view, then we may have to conclude that the distinction between lying and metaphor can not be as clear-cut as Davidson and Kittay maintain. In the passage quoted above, Kittay seems to be thinking only of a limited sub-set of those utterances that we could call lies. Specifically, she seems to be thinking of the successful propagation of a falsehood in the absence of a pre-existing misapprehension. But it is important to realize that this case is more or less an ideal type of lie in which the discourse situation is assumed ex hypothesi to be unproblematical. Such utterances qualify as lies in part

because they are assumed to be possible (not: "I am twenty feet tall"), probable (given the specific context), intentional (not, for example, uttered with an ironic tone), and otherwise inconspicuous as discourse. As soon as we move away from this ideal, however, lying shows a similar contextual dependency to metaphor. For example, just as one could distinguish old, assimilated or "dead" metaphors from new, active metaphors, one could contrast old, non-operative lies with new, operative lies. It is possible to find in earlier literary works statements that could be either false and metaphorically meant or false but meant as lies, but for which we cannot make a determination because of our lack of understanding of the context. Although this does not mean that we could not make a determination after we have done the appropriate historical research, it does suggest that there is a possible diachronic crossing point in the analysis of metaphor and lying. What makes a statement either a possible lie or a possible metaphor in a given context may be something beyond the literal interpretation of the statement which only an analysis of the discourse situation could bring out. Thus, by Kittay's criteria, we could say that if context dependency makes metaphor a case of language meaning, then lying is a case of language meaning also.

I agree with Davidson and Kittay that most lies must be fairly literally taken in order to be effective. I would

add the reminder, however, that the full analysis of those lies would still require an understanding of the context of beliefs upon which they were intended to be enacted, along with all that that entails. On the other hand, I would argue that the modalities of falsehood are not exhausted merely through an examination of literal statements from which the speaker withholds assent, as Kittay suggests (see 115). Although the determination that a statement is a lie and not a metaphor may seem a clear-cut matter when viewed from within our own discourse situation (synchronically, as it were), the discrepancies between the two become more and more noticeable when viewed diachronically, or at a greater and greater remove from our present situation. This fact also suggests that there may exist in our present context operative lies which, if we could discover them, would turn out to be not semantically interchangeable with metaphors.

Chapter 11 Allegory

Dante in his Convivio writes that in an allegorical work we have "a truth hidden under a beautiful lie" (see MacQueen, 54). George Puttenham in his Arte of English Poesie writes: "what else is your . . . allegory but a duplicitie of meaning or dissimulation under covert and dark intendments" (III,vii,154). Plato in the Republic maintains that even the claim to be speaking allegorically will not justify the falsehoods of the poets. In this chapter, I want to examine some of the connections between allegory and lying, especially in regard to the doubleness of meaning and intention inherent in both. I will make no attempt to deal comprehensively with allegory as a mode, nor will I discuss many actual allegories. Rather, I want to concentrate on what we might call the process of allegorization -- that is, the literary, linguistic, psychological, and social factors that contribute to its functioning as a device for the encoding and decoding of secondary, hidden and possibly deceptive levels of meaning.

The classic source of the kind of activity I am referring to is the fables of Aesop. These fables seem to have been used as a means of addressing contemporary political concerns in a way that was hidden or allegorical and therefore safe. Some of the fables, on the other hand,

address explicitly (if not "openly") the relation of social and political force to truthful presentation. It is through some of these fables that we might begin to explore the relationship of allegory to untruth. The first fable we will consider is quite short:

When the hares addressed a public meeting and claimed all should have fair shares, the lions answered: "A good speech, Hairy-Feet, but it lacks claws and teeth such as we have." (27)

The hares, we may assume, will never have the "claws and teeth" of the lions, but they can indeed gain power in their speech by making it hidden, two-sided, or allegorical. Of this technique the fable itself, of course, is an example. When the open modes of presentation become threatened, there is a motivation to develop alternative, allegorical modes. In the case of this particular fable, once its meaning has been absorbed by the community, the mere mention of "The hares and the lions" would serve as a reminder of the existence of political repression and censorship.

Censorship, we could say, provides allegory with its motivation and with its only authentic testing ground. "Allegory," as Angus Fletcher writes, "presumably thrives on political censorship" (A 328). "At the heart of all allegory," according to Fletcher, "will be found this

conflict of authorities. . . .Allegories are far less often the dull systems they are reputed to be than they are symbolic power struggles" (A 22-3).

But just as power struggles are rarely as simple as "us" versus "them," so too the modalities and distortions of communication will be correspondingly complex. The effect of force on truthful presentation distorts not only communication between social groups, but within them. We may look at another of Aesop's fables to illustrate this point:

A fowler spread his nets and tied his tame pigeons to them. Then he retired to a distance and waited for something to happen. In due course some wild pigeons came up and got entangled in the mesh. When the man hurried to the spot and began to lay hands on them, they reproached the tame birds for not giving warning when they saw their kindred walking into a trap. "In our position," the others replied, "it is more important to avoid giving offence to our masters than to earn the gratitude of our kindred." (89)

As I have argued earlier, oppressed groups may have difficulty in representing the truth even to themselves. The social forces exerted on any particular act of

communication may result in a variety of what I have called lying actions, and this category would include cases like the one described in Aesop's fable. The tame pigeons are used in what they know to be a false presentation of reality, but they do nothing to correct the misapprehension they have willingly helped to create. The fable portrays a struggle over presentation, and the fact that the tale is told through an allegory suggests that the occasion of its own presentation was part of such a struggle. The important point is that the choice of the birds to take part in this lying action, and the choice of the allegorist to encode his tale in an allegory, are both based on a rational assessment of their own situation. The lying action and the allegorical presentation, in other words, are linked to a rational intention.

As I have suggested before, the rational and intentional aspects of lying have been denied or at least precluded by some contemporary literary theorists. Such a position, if it could be maintained, would obviously make a comparison of lying to allegory futile. Paul de Man, for example, believes that the inescapably metaphorical and self-defining nature of language make true referential meaning impossible. Consequently, the activity that we call reading is really only an allegory of reading, and texts themselves only allegories of the impossibility of reading. I shall briefly review de Man's views regarding allegory and

lying in order to separate them from my own.

The basic assumptions of de Man's theories should by now be familiar to the reader. He claims, for example, that "the innumerable writings that dominate our lives are made intelligible by a preordained agreement as to their referential authority; this agreement, however, is merely contractual, never constitutive" (204). If there can be no true reference, according to de Man, then "what originally appeared to be a document or an instrument becomes a text and, as a consequence, its readability is put in question. The questioning points back to earlier texts and engenders, in its turn, other texts which claim (and fail) to close off the textual field" (204).

According to de Man, the necessary failure of true reference in any group of sentences cannot be answered "simply by claiming that they are lies whose opposite could be true, but by revealing their dependence on a referential agreement that uncritically took their truth or falsehood for granted" (205).

As I have tried to show earlier, the demand for a referential identity between sign and thing signified is an unreasonable one and leads only to contradiction and confusion. I think it can be shown that de Man's extension of this linguistic model to an investigation of allegory causes similar confusions. De Man writes of allegory:

The paradigm for all texts consists of a figure (or a system of figures) and its deconstruction. But since this model cannot be closed off by a final reading, it engenders, in its turn, a supplementary figural superposition which narrates the unreadability of the prior narration. As distinguished from primary deconstructive narratives centered on figures and ultimately always on metaphor, we can call such narratives to the second (or the third) degree allegories. Allegorical narratives tell the story of the failure to read whereas tropological narratives, such as the Second Discourse, tell the story of the failure to denominate. The difference is only of degree and the allegory does not erase the figure. Allegories are always allegories of metaphor and, as such, they are always allegories of the impossibility of reading -- a sentence in which the genitive "of" has itself to be "read" as metaphor. (205)

To de Man, allegories are the inevitable result of the structural properties of language. Unfortunately, the "allegories" he imagines are necessarily unreadable. We could summarize the main steps in de Man's argument as: language is metaphor; metaphors produce lies; the act of reading as though language does not produce lies is not

reading, but an allegory of reading -- or, to be more precise, an allegory of something (we do not know what), since "reading" by definition is an impossibility.

De Man seems to indicate that narratives can become aware of themselves as narratives and so turn back upon themselves to consider their own modes of presentation. This doubling back on the attempt at meaning de Man considers to be the defining characteristic of allegory as opposed to metaphor. In de Man's scheme of things, a text's self-reflection not only narrates some kind of a tale, but also narrates an allegory of story telling.

Now the usual notion is not that languages tell stories or create allegories, but that people do so by means of language. As with de Man's views on metaphor and lying, what is left out of this description of allegory is any sense that it might have a human dimension. What is denied is that allegorization is, as most people would assume, a motivated and intentional activity performed on specific occasions to fulfill specific needs. It is especially in its relation to its social and psychological motivations that allegory most resembles lying as I have analyzed it. It is this motivated and instrumental aspect of allegory, denied by de Man, that I want to discuss, as this shows most clearly the difference between his views and mine.

The allegorical intention is, at least in part, a lying intention. As Walter Benjamin puts it: "Majesty of the

allegorical intention: destruction of the organic and living -- the extinguishing of appearance . . . For the extinguishing of appearance, "l'amour du mensonge" (the love of falsehood or fallacy)" (41). Speech does not have to have an allegorical dimension, and neither does interpretation. But some motivation pushes the act of communication onto a second level. Political or social compulsion are the most obvious examples, but they are not the only kinds. Any number of psychological compulsions -- anxiety, boredom, anger, shame -- might serve just as well. Anxiety especially would seem to be a common ground out of which both lying and allegorizing often arise (see Fletcher, A 37, 330). The liar and the allegorist often find it impossible to express themselves in the "normal" way. They feel threatened by some aspect of reality and so try to change their relation to it. Their compulsions drive them to respond through conscious action, and the tendency to allegorize, like the tendency to lie, is an intentional and to varying degrees rational action performed against the background of a specific occasion.

As I have argued before, an intentional action will necessarily be accompanied by a consciousness of the intention. As Wittgenstein put it in regard to the act of lying, "If you are lying, you know it . . . the consciousness of lying is in the category of the consciousness of an intention" (RPP 139). Allegorization,

it would seem, also requires this second level of consciousness. Fletcher writes: "Allegoria manifestly has two or more levels of meaning, and the apprehension of these must require two attitudes of mind" (A 18). One of the purposes of this splitting of awareness in lying and allegory is to be able to think through not only the story you want to present, but also the conditions of belief you expect your story to be acting upon. Both the liar and the allegorist must fashion their stories so that the true significance of their words or actions are not apparent to at least some part of their audience.

But although both lying and allegory are intentional and self-aware, one apparent difference is that the secret or falsehood of the one mode is closed whereas with the other it is more or less open. One would normally think that allegory only works when it is felt or "read off" as containing a second level of meaning, whereas lying works by being inconspicuous as discourse. But as I have tried to show in the preceding chapters, the truly inconspicuous lie is in fact an unusual, ideal case. The inconspicuousness of a lie is the result of its "occasionality." That is, lies are directed against the specific beliefs of a specific audience on a specific occasion. To lie successfully implies a high degree of awareness on the liar's part of the knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs of his listener. It is only against this specially constructed background, however,

that a lie appears to be inconspicuous as discourse. From outside the direct occasion of its use, the lie begins to show the signs of its artificial construction.

A second and real difference between allegory and lying is their relation to obviously figural modes of presentation. Although, as I have argued, there will be cases in which metaphor and lying cannot be distinguished, nevertheless it can be taken as one of the bases of the language game of lying that people in general do not speak figuratively. Thus the danger for the liar would usually be in having the falsehood of his literal statements found out. In allegory, however, the situation is reversed: the danger for the allegorist is in being correctly read figuratively. This raises special problems for the allegorist. In allegory, we can direct our statements simultaneously towards two different audiences: one which is intended to understand the meaning behind our figurative utterances, and one which is not. In this sense, allegory would need to have built right into it some way of controlling the occasion of its utterance.

Northrop Frye has said that in allegory the author "tries to indicate how a commentary on him should proceed" (A 90). This factor would seem to be inherent to the nature of allegory as a mode. When you speak a lie, you speak it directly to someone, and thus you can usually respond immediately to the way in which your words are being

understood. When you try to write the lie down, however, you lose this opportunity for direct control over your audience. Hence in a written communication, or in a formally constructed allegory, one is forced to find a way in which to encode both truths and lies so that the appropriate readers will be either fooled or informed.

But whether written or spoken, the extra structuring and fashioning that go into lying and allegorizing call for an increased mentalization which, though it may be induced by an original anxiety, gives rise to further anxiety in its turn. This increase in anxiety, of course, is the premise upon which lie detectors are based. Anxiety holds a two-sided relationship to lying and allegorizing. Anxiety drives us to them, and they in turn produce anxiety.

Frye has written that political allegory is often characterized by irony, and the ironic tone would seem to be one the means by which the allegorist can somewhat alleviate the excessive anxiety produced by the mode. The ironic tone is the speaker's signal to at least part of his audience that he does not intend his words to be taken entirely seriously. The irony, or even humor, in the presentation of a falsehood may be important for the preservation of one's belief in oneself. Our use of irony, or humor, or even a half-hidden smile, is our reminder to ourselves that we are not taken in, and that perhaps it is the fault of others if they are.

Irony, one could say, mediates between allegory and lying. William Empson has said that "even the most obvious irony is a sort of playing at deception" (x). In comparing irony to allegory, Angus Fletcher has written that "we might call ironies 'collapsed allegories,' or perhaps, 'condensed allegories.' They show no diminishing, only a confusion, of the semantic and syntactic processes of double or multi-leveled polysemy" (A 230). I would like to add to this that we might call lies collapsed ironies. When we repress all signs in our communication that we do not intend our words to be taken seriously, we create the conditions in which our untruthful statements could be considered as lies. Thus, we might conceive of a spectrum which runs from lying through irony to allegory. To the extent to which irony is present in allegory, allegory becomes the negation of lying. A person who tried to "lie" while using an obvious tone of irony would not be taken to be lying, although he might be taken to be speaking allegorically. Conversely, as I have suggested, a person who told untruths without any tone of irony -- that is, without any sign to his audience that his words should be taken in any other sense than what they mean on their face -- would not be considered an allegorist.

The level of irony in one's lies or allegories is partly relative to the amount of anxiety one can stand both in the presentation of multiple levels of meaning and in the moral responsibility one is willing to take for one's

utterances. The liar and the allegorist leave the "flat" land of literal, truthful statement for a multi-leveled world that may become bafflingly complex. The perception of systematized levels of significance in an allegory can produce a heightening and sharpening of our awareness, but this heightening of awareness can have very different effects. The use of irony implies some type of self-awareness, and this self-awareness further implies a certain level of psychological order or control in the individual. When the controlled use of allegory produces this heightening of our perceptions, then allegory can be linked to the sublime, as it is in Kant. This aspect of the sublime is characterized by an "absolute overstraining of the faculties" (see Fletcher, A 245). On the other hand, should the allegorist's compulsive systematizing or the liar's compulsive lying go too far, the result may be a kind of grotesque sublime, a horror-show world in which every turn in the labyrinth of possible solutions leads one only deeper and deeper into semantic uncertainty. Once again, modes that arise out of anxiety may feed on themselves and produce ever more anxiety. Irony, as I have suggested, is both an agent and a symptom of the controlling of anxiety in allegory and lying.

In allegory we say one thing but mean another, and in lying we say one thing but think or do another. In both cases there is a purpose behind the splitting of words from

thought or words from surface meaning. But what happens when the purpose is lost sight of, either by the allegorist or the liar? The thoroughly compulsive liar, for example, would actually be more of an allegorist than a liar. After a time, the compulsive liar's words would no longer be believed according to their literal meaning. This would result in the collapse of his potential as a liar. But nonetheless, the compulsive liar's utterances might still be taken as a sign of something. One could say that although he would no longer be able to state anything, he would still be able to point to things. And under certain circumstances, even what the liar failed to point to could be significant. This type of "lying," like allegory, would call forth an intensified mode of interpretation. For example, if one were to scrupulously avoid all mention of the lions at the precise moment when their actions have been most threatening to us, this remarkable silence would actually serve to call attention to the activities of the lions.

Up to this point, I have emphasized the position of a dissident minority in society which feels itself incapable of addressing the truth directly and therefore looks for alternative forms of expression. Allegory in this role may be used as a means of subverting the status quo. But allegory can also be used -- and perhaps is more widely used -- as a means by which power groups can maintain the status

quo. One way of de-fusing strange or threatening ideas is to accommodate them to your own world-view -- in short, to show that they are not strange views at all, but rather ones you already hold simply couched in a different form.

The transition of foreign ideas from unassimilable to assimilable is rarely an easy one. Plato, for example, in his attacks against the poets, forbade the use of allegory because he did not trust the ability of people to separate the allegorical from the literal sense of a story. Plato writes in the Republic:

Hera tied up by her son, Hephaestus thrown out by his father because he was proposing to defend his mother against a beating, Homer's battles of gods -- all this is inadmissible, whether it was composed allegorically or not. Young people can't distinguish the allegorical from the non-allegorical, and what enters the mind at that age tends to become indelible and irremovable. (16)

When the alien veiws of the poet cannot be accepted as allegory, then they are condemned as lies. Which particular ideas can and cannot be successfully allegorized, however, will differ in different societies and at different times. Christian writers of the middle ages, for example, were able to appropriate and allegorize the same myths that Plato had

condemned.

As a general rule we might say that the poet is no longer feared as a liar when people feel that they have an adequate hold on reality. Consequently, it is only when some event reveals to us the lies in our lives that we begin to see the danger of the lies in literature. Here again the "lie" in literature is related to anxiety, only in this case it is the anxiety of the audience. In our own age, for example, people tend not to think of the poet as a liar. This fact would indicate that as a society we feel that we have an adequate hold on the way the world really is, and so have nothing to fear from poets.

Our sense of "reality," however, is itself composed of previously existing "lies" and allegories that have been individually assimilated or rejected in various ways and to varying degrees. This is especially true for literary scholars, whose work is directly concerned with the literary remains of such conflicts and evaluations. Northrop Frye has written:

It is often not realized that all commentary is allegorical interpretation, an attaching of ideas to the structure of poetic imagery. The instant that any critic allows himself to make a genuine comment about a poem . . . he has begun to allegorize. (A 89)

We might say that what goes for literary critics goes for all of the rest of us in our relation to society and politics. We attach ideas to the structure of events and, to an extent, reinterpret those events to our own needs. If we feel that our capacity for allegorization is greater than the poet's, then naturally we will not feel threatened by them. Thus a second reason why we no longer see the poet as a liar may be that our capacity for allegorization has become so powerful and instinctive that we no longer feel the anxiety necessary to make us rise up against the poet.

What we gain in ease and complacency, however, we lose in truth and reality. According to Walter Pater, when allegorical interpretation is used to synthesize discordant world-views, "the first necessity [is] to misrepresent the language, the conceptions, the sentiments, it was proposed to compare and reconcile" (23). And can we ever be sure that this is not what we are doing when we compare our own vision of the world with that of the poets? The relationship of truth to lying, as I have argued, needs to be analyzed from many different directions, and even then satisfactory answers cannot be found for all cases. The relationship of lying, poetry, and allegory to a society's beliefs about itself is no less subtle and complex.

Chapter 12 Literary Self-Reference

I have argued throughout this book that both lying and creating a fiction are necessarily self-conscious activities. Some imaginative writers, however, have attempted to intensify this element of self-consciousness by drawing the reader's attention to the fictive nature of their work. Cervantes, for example, has Don Quixote and Sancho Panza discuss a book about themselves called Don Quixote. They wonder, among other things, how the book's author was able to report things about them that had occurred when they thought they were alone. Similarly, the narrator in Laurence Sterne's Tristram Shandy discusses the truthfulness and accuracy of his history and yet laments that critics will probably consider the book a mere romance. Or, to take a recent example, in the stories of Jorge Luis Borges a character will sit down to read a work of fiction only to find that the frame of the "fictional" tale has engulfed his "real" world.

This practice of framing and reframing the fictional stance of a story has come to be called "metafiction." Although its origins go back a long way, it has seen a remarkable flowering in our own time. Accordingly, theorizing about metafiction has also expanded, and the results of much of this theoretical work have been interesting. On the other hand, there has also been a

tendency to make exaggerated claims for the power of the metafictional mode. Patricia Waugh, for example, in her book Metafiction writes:

In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text. (2)

Many writers have tried to explore in their works this twilight world between fiction and reality. John Barth, for example, in "Life-Story," imagines a fictional character who happens to be a novelist and who begins to question his own reality in relation to the fictional worlds that he creates:

He being by vocation an author of novels and stories it was perhaps inevitable that one afternoon the possibility would occur to the writer of these lines that his own life might be a fiction, in which he was the leading or an accessory character. (38)

The essence of the metafictional mode could not be more concisely put than this. There is always within it a questioning of the division between fiction and reality.

The phrase "the writer of these lines" gives Barth's

tale an additional self-referential spin, since in the context of the story there are no other lines to refer to except the ones that we are actually reading. Thus this "doubling" of self-reference produces an ambiguity which points both to the "real" writer John Barth as well as to his "fictional" creation. The use of such narrative devices makes it almost impossible to determine who is meant to be "speaking" in these works and what plane of reality they are supposed to be speaking about. Patricia Waugh concludes from the employment of such devices that "literary fiction simply demonstrates the existence of multiple realities" (89).

But do such self-conscious devices really force us to question the reality of the world around us? A character in a fiction may say that he has a reason to doubt the reality of reality, but that does not mean that there is a reason to doubt it. Rather, I want to argue that literary self-consciousness should more properly be considered as a symptom of the self-consciousness of the authorial voice, and not as an indication of the possible fictionality of the world outside of the novel. The metafictional or self-referential mode does not reveal the unreality of reality, but rather is a sign of the author's relation to that reality.

Some theorists have gone farther than this, however, and have asserted that the meta-fictional mode even calls

into question the possibility of representing this relation of author to reality. They believe that metafictional self-reference produces a kind of liar's paradox by means of which the very foundations of representation are shown to be paradoxical. Indeed, there have arisen whole schools of writers who devote their craft to the exemplification of this "paradox" in their works (see, for example, Helen Daniel's Liars: Australian New Novelists). I think it can be shown, however, that these claims also are exaggerated. The liar's paradox, although it may be irresolvable, can at least be given a precise formulation, and it should be possible to demonstrate that the "paradoxes" exemplified by these literary works are not actual cases of a liar's paradox.

In the case of theorists such as Derrida and de Man, it is not the use of self-referential devices that calls into question the meaningfulness of language, but language itself. To these theorists, the liar's paradox is taken to be the paradigm of all representation. To Derrida, the literary text produces "an endless series of inscriptions, a perpetual redoubling of text upon text, such that the 'original' act of mimesis will always be lost beyond recall" (Norris 50). To de Man, the interpretation of a sign leads one not to meaning, but to "another sign, and so on ad infinitum" (9). Mirroring the liar's paradox, the literary text, according to de Man, "simultaneously asserts and

denies the authority of its own rhetorical mode" (17).

These assertions of the essential paradoxicality of representation certainly fly in the face of common sense. What we do with language every day does not seem to be meaningless. So how do such views arise? I think what may be happening is that, if I may borrow a phrase from Wittgenstein, we have allowed a picture to hold us captive, in this case a picture of the liar's paradox. We have a vision of a paradox in representation, and then we indiscriminately apply that picture to what are only remotely similar situations. It would seem, then, that to free us from this picture we will have to clarify in our minds precisely what does and what does not belong in the category of a liar's paradox.

In order to compare literary paradoxes to the liar's paradox, we will have to start with a fairly complete and clearly articulated account of what a liar's paradox is. One of the earliest forms of the liar's paradox is the so-called paradox of the Cretan Liar in which Epimenides the Cretan says "All Cretans are liars." If Epimenides' statement is true, then it is false in his own case, since he would not be reporting an untruth. But if the statement is false (and if we take into consideration no other statements from any other Cretans), then Epimenides is telling the truth. Thus the statement produces a contradiction as it is true if it is false and false if it

is true.

Another version of the paradox comes from the medieval logician John Buridan: "What I am saying is false."

Buridan calls such statements "sophisms," and he analyzes this one according to the following scheme:

1. If the sophism is true it is false
2. If the sophism is false it is true
3. If the sophism is true it is both true
and false (from 1)
4. If the sophism is false it is both true
and false (from 2)
5. Either the sophism is true or it is false
(Principle of Bivalence)
6. The sophism is both true and false
(from 3, 4, 5)

What Buridan's analysis brings out in a more detailed way than the Cretan paradox is that the paradoxicality of the sophism is partly the result of what we could call its reversibility. When we try to establish 1 as true, 2 becomes true; when we try to establish 2 as true, 1 becomes true, and so on ad infinitum.

This last point, trifling as it may seem, is crucial since many statements that seem to be liar-paradoxical are not so because they are not reversible in this sense. For

example, the statement "Every statement is false" sounds like a liar's paradox because if every statement in the world did in fact happen to be false, then this statement would be true, hence rendering itself false. But if we reverse this statement, then we produce a proposition that is clearly true and non-paradoxical: "It is false that every statement is false" (see Hughes 185). Thus reversibility is an essential characteristic of a liar's paradox.

A third qualification for the liar's paradox is complete self-reference. Epimenides' statement in the Cretan paradox is not itself paradoxical because it is only a contingent matter that Epimenides happens to be a Cretan. The statement would not be paradoxical, for example, if I said it. Burridan's statement, "What I am saying is false," somewhat avoids this shortcoming by having the first person singular pronoun for the referring element, thereby making the statement's reference dependent only on the existence of the individual speaker. Most logicians today, however, prefer the following formulation: "This statement is false." Here the statement makes reference only to itself.

When we review the above criteria, we find that to be a case of a liar's paradox, a statement must be (1) contradictory, (2) reversible, and (3) self-referential. There are many paradoxes that appear to be liar-paradoxical without actually being so. In addition, there are many puzzles regarding self-reference in literature that may

appear to produce paradoxes without actually producing them.

Complete, paradoxical self-reference would lead, if we tried to resolve its contradictions, into an endless regress (see Mackie 286). Such a paradox would indeed cause the breakdown of meaning in any closed and strictly logical system of communication. Fortunately, the only such systems that we encounter are artificial ones, such as the languages encoded into computers. In human discourse, paradoxes are not so devastating. Even the most ardent logicians, mad about paradoxes, must sometimes rest from their labors, or ask, in non-paradoxical terms, for a cup of coffee or a bite to eat. And this fact should provide the first clue to our resolution of the "paradoxes" supposedly embedded in literary works. Nevertheless, for the point of argument I will assume that these various literary puzzles are indeed paradoxes in order to contrast them with the liar's paradox.

The first case to consider is what we might call the reader's paradox, such as we find in Don Quixote, in which a character in a novel picks up a book and begins to read about himself in the "same" novel that we are reading. This technique produces an uncanny mirror-in-a-mirror effect. If we think the situation through, we could imagine the fictional reader reaching the point in the novel in which he is reading the novel, and thus he would be reading about himself reading, and so on ad infinitum. If our text were a computer program and not a novel, then the "story" would

come to a crashing halt right there.

Of course, the novel could come to a halt, but that would not be because of the "paradox," but rather because the novelist felt that this was an appropriate place to stop. The infinite regress produced by the liar's paradox is driven by our desire to give a definite truth-value to a single proposition. But this is not what is happening in the novel. Rather, we are following a story, and if that story happens to include some "paradoxes" along the way, we think about them only to the extent that they impinge on the action or themes of the story.

More importantly, the regression produced by this literary technique is merely sequential and not logical. Although the use of regressive devices in a novel may be intriguing and stimulating, there is nothing contradictory about it. The "truth claims" of the novel, whatever they may be, are not contradicted by having a character within the novel read something about the novel.

What makes the liar's paradox unique is that it really says nothing about anything except its own truth conditions. But can we imagine a novel that is as genuinely consumed in its own truth conditions as the liar's paradox is? It would seem that with the mere existence of a character, or an alternate voice, or a changing viewpoint, or even a new situation, we have gone outside the range of a liar's paradox. Thus the reader's paradox cannot be a liar's

paradox since it is not completely self-referential and consequently does not produce a contradiction.

Our second puzzle we might call the speaker's paradox, in which a speaker in a fiction makes some comment about the fictional frame that surrounds him. This device is hinted at in Sterne's Tristram Shandy, and is used extensively by writers such as John Barth and Jorge Luis Borges. As with the reader's paradox, this would not really be a type of self-reference, but it might be what we could call reciprocal reference insofar as the novel makes reference to characters, and one of these characters makes reference to a novel (presumably the one we are reading).

As we have seen, whenever a novel begins to tell a story, it will be referring to more than its own truth conditions. The novel does not say simply "This statement is false." But even if this were in some strange way the full content of the novel, the character who questioned the reality of the novel would not be saying "This statement is false," but rather "That statement is false," and such a statement is clearly not paradoxical.

A third puzzle we might consider is what I will call the writer's paradox, in which a character in a novel sits down to write the novel we are presently reading. This device resembles the reader's paradox in that it produces a regressive effect, and it also resembles the speaker's paradox in that the writer can now comment on the truth or

falsity of the novel he is writing. But this paradox can also be answered in the same way as our other "paradoxes": the writer's reference to the novel is not self-reference, and consequently what the writer says about the novel will not be contradictory.

There is a significant variation on the writer's paradox which we might call the author's paradox. This occurs when an author seems to inhabit a realm half in and half out of his novel, creating it and discussing it as he goes along, or else commenting on it as it "creates itself." We see this technique in John Barth as well as in the works of Donald Barthelme. Here the writer can speak from "within" his work and, from this special vantage-point, give us a running commentary on the reality of his fiction or on the fictiveness of reality.

Half-way through Snow White, Barthelme presents his reader with a questionnaire to be filled out about the novel. The implications of this authorial intrusion are many. There is a suggestion that our answers could in some way change the outcome of the story: "Do you like the story so far? Yes() No() . . . In the further development of the story, would you like more emotion() or less emotion()?" (82). There are also questions that lead us in our interpretation of the story: "Have you understood, in reading to this point, that Paul is the prince-figure? Yes() No() . . . That Jane is the wicked stepmother-

figure? Yes() No()" (82). The questions are, of course, meant to be funny. Nevertheless, they do point out the direction the author thinks he is going in his work. So how is the reader to respond to these directions, especially if he finds himself disagreeing with the author?

What needs to be pointed out here is that authorial comments made within a novel are not by their nature "performatives" -- that is, to say in a novel that you have produced an effect is not the same as to actually produce that effect. In addition, the claim by an "author" within a novel to have written the novel is not a true statement about the novel, because the novel just is this statement, along with all of the others contained in it. The determination of the full meaning of a statement in a novel must be made within the novel, and therefore cannot be made about the novel. The "author" in the novel cannot properly be said to refer to the novel because he is in the novel.

The decisive factor in all of the literary "paradoxes" that I have considered so far seems to be the question of self-reference. Indeed, the crux of the liar's paradox is its self-referentiality, and the liar's paradox, despite its name, is not essentially concerned with lying. In order for someone to feel the paradoxicality of the speaker's situation when he says "I am lying," one must intensify to an unnatural degree the self-referentiality of the utterance. After all, when someone says "I am lying" that

usually means that some other statement is untrue, not that the present one is. It is doubtful that one could actually lie by speaking self-referentially, and this is especially so when the self-referential statement is "I am lying." As C.L. Hamblin puts it, "what is openly stated to be false is not, in the large view, a falsehood" (301).

As I have argued throughout this book, literature and lying do their work primarily in the realm of beliefs and not facts. Now if lies are contrary to belief but not fact, then there could be no "liar's" paradox as it is commonly conceived. That is, the logical paradox known as the liar's paradox is a paradox of reference but not of lying. In ordinary speech, to say "I am lying" is to assert that you believe that you have told an untruth. But, as we have seen, it does not follow from this that you have told an untruth.

If we were to consider the statement "I am lying" to refer to the speaker's present act of stating "I am lying," then the contradiction, if there is one, would only be one of beliefs, and not of facts. Thus I would translate the self-referential "I am lying" into something like "I do not believe in the sincerity of my words" or "I do not know what I believe." But these, of course, are not the assertion of any kind of fact.

The conclusion that I draw from this is that there may be many types of non-paradoxical and self-referential

statements that can be used in literature which will indirectly make comments on the speaker's belief in his own words. In regard to the status of one's beliefs, the classic modern example of the liar's paradox -- "I am Lying" -- can be shown to be essentially the same as statements such as:

My words mean nothing

I can make no sense out of anything

I have no reason to speak

I have nothing to say

By broadening the "liar's paradox" in this way, we find that such statements can indeed play an important role in literary dialogue, as they do, for example, in the works of Samuel Beckett. The appeal of such statements, however, will be primarily to the conditions of human belief. This allows us to say that when characters in a fictional work question the frame of their fictionality, this shows us an uncertainty as to the status of beliefs about the world, but not about the reality of that world itself. Thus an author who characteristically used these devices would be saying to his readers that he does not know what to believe about the world, or perhaps that there is something that prevents him from saying what he believes.

When confronted with a self-referential device in a

literary work, we would begin to analyse the author's total communicative act along the same lines that we would analyze any other disruption in communication. The dynamics that I have worked out for an analysis of the lie -- an attitude towards beliefs, a sense of probability, a motive for deliberate actions, a level of self awareness, an awareness of the content of other minds, a feeling of moral responsibility, and so on -- would all come into play. The author of a self-referential work may mean many things by his employment of this mode, or nothing. The determination of meaning, however, will have to come from within the work, and will not call into question the nature of reality, but only the author's beliefs about that reality.

Conclusion

What I hope to have shown in this book is that there are indeed structural similarities between poetry and lying which distinguish them from truth-telling. I also think it can be claimed that the similarities in the practices of poetry and lying align themselves in a systematic way, and that an investigation of this field offers a unique perspective on the nature of literary creation.

Perhaps the chief merit of this approach is that it forces the critical method to "open out" to the work of literature. By hypothetically viewing the poet as a liar the critic is constantly confronted by the subtlety and multiplicity of the act of communication. We approach the literary work with a "matrix" of interrelated concepts no one of which can be completely isolated or defined without the others. Although it may sound paradoxical, the more we concentrate on the poet as liar, the less likely we are to be trapped or hemmed in by a one-sided theoretical machinery. This is indeed a real benefit to the critic.

There is a certain sense in which many "advances" in literary theory have meant a loss to literary criticism. Critics have been told, for example, that "the author is dead" and that a consideration of an author's intentions is unnecessary; that writers are really only interested in

creating "a world elsewhere" so that an investigation of the author's real-life world is beside the point; that "all reading is misreading" so that a study of the author's literary sources is also mistaken; that the literary sign exists in "pure anteriority" to every subsequent sign, so that even within a single author's works no connections can be made; or, that every literary text is really only concerned with its own "textual problematics," so that the search for meaning itself becomes impossible. Such claims, if taken seriously, would leave little room for the critic to work in. But, from the perspective of the poet as liar, can such views be justified?

As I asked earlier, the skeptic in language may deny that true referring statements exist in language, but is he also prepared to claim that lies do not exist? This, as I said, is a harder pill for the skeptic to swallow. And if lies do exist, then the theorist of language is justified in examining the linguistic conditions that allow lies to happen. One thing that we find as we carry out this investigation is that our understanding of the act of communication expands in a systematic way, taking on literary, linguistic, epistemological, moral, social and political dimensions. Then, when we place the works of imaginative writers into this larger linguistic map, we find that our understanding of these literary works expands accordingly.

The result of this approach is that it frees the critic to pursue his work in an almost unlimited number of directions. Consider, for example, the question of "fictionality" itself. In the earlier part of this century, some literary critics adopted the position of the logical positivists that all statements could be divided into two groups: those used to convey information, and those used to express emotion. Poetry, it was felt, belonged to the second group. Not many critics, perhaps, are willing to defend this distinction today, but that is not the same thing as being able to offer a useful alternative to it. What I think the account I have proposed offers is what we might call a sliding scale from the factual to the fictive. It allows us to delve inside the linguistic creative act to see the variety of forces at work in the shaping of our lies and fictions.

A further strength of this approach is that it forces the critic to consider the poet's utterance as a unique and particular response to a complex imaginative situation. We see at once that no single perspective can tell us everything we want to know, and yet this multiplicity does not imply a lack of order or purpose. Every linguistic response may be unique, but that does not mean that the principles that underlie it are indiscernable. This constant attempt to see the underlying order in the individual response is, I think, characteristic of the

perspective of the poet as liar.

Another thing this perspective emphasizes is the importance of the social and historical situation in the determination of the meaning of a work. If the poet were a liar, we ask, what kinds of things would he have to know and do in order to have his beliefs accepted by the audience he is trying to reach? Here again, this perspective works in two directions. First, it shows that the "historical moment" is extremely complex, and that it cannot be adequately assessed for any author or any work without doing a great deal of historical research. On the other hand, this difficulty does not lead to a general skepticism. Rather, it arises out of an awareness that the conditions of meaning can be recovered, clarified, and re-examined.

As I have suggested in this book, the analytic tools that we turn on the literary work can also be turned on the productions of the literary critic. After all, our "secondary" literature is also written in response to a particular set of personal intentions and historical circumstances. This is the true significance of the self-reflective turn: not that it says something about itself, but that it says something about us.

Poets from Homer onwards have shown in various ways and to varying degrees their self-awareness of the creative act. But, as I have argued, this does not mean that the critic is condemned to an endless wandering in the halls of paradox.

Rather, our investigation, although it can begin with any aspect of a work, will open out (at least, so far as the individual critic is able to follow it) to the entire communicative act of the author.

Plutarch, writing "On the Study of Poetry," claims that:

When we first introduce our young men to poetry, there is nothing they should have learned so thoroughly, nothing so readily springing to their mind, as the proverbial saying that "poets tell many lies." (194)

Plutarch's idea is to consider the creation of the fiction first, and to see things such as "metre, trope, grand language, timely metaphor, harmony, and word order" (194) as subordinate to that. My point is almost the same: that we can not investigate the full dynamics of a literary work until we are able at least hypothetically to view the poet as a liar.

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