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**"This is a true story": Fiction disguised as fact in the prefaces
of late seventeenth and eighteenth-century French and English
prose works**

Georgulis, Christine, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1988

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"THIS IS A TRUE STORY": FICTION DISGUISED AS FACT
IN THE PREFACES OF
LATE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY
FRENCH AND ENGLISH PROSE WORKS

by

CHRISTINE GEORGULIS

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in
Comparative Literature in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
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1988

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Dedication

To my mother, Tassia Georgulis, for her
constant support and encouragement, and
to the memory of my father, Stavros Georgoulis

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

"Cette Histoire semble n'avoir pas besoin d'un grand éclaircissement; il suffit de dire qu'elle est vraie .

. . . " ¹ "We need say nothing more to raise the Attention and Curiosity of the Reader to the Perusal of the following HISTORY, than that it is truly genuine " ² Such

prefatory assertions of literal truth introduce many late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century French and English works of literary invention. These claims indeed sufficed to capture the attention and the conviction of most

readers. "This is a true story" (Cette histoire est vraie) by its very declaration influences the way a reader reads a text even if he simultaneously entertains doubts as to its veracity. The word "true" often is what triggers reader

interest in the first place; it supplies the impetus for a potential reader to become an actual one. Perceiving the work as "true," the reader approaches the text with a

³ conscious or unconscious bias : an initial disposition to believe the content. Whether the reader's expectations of factual material are fulfilled within the main text is

⁴ another question. This dissertation examines and compares

these prefaces, which pretend to present authentic histories, biographies, memoirs, and letter collections.

I surveyed countless prefaces to seventeenth and eighteenth-century French and English prose fiction to comprehend common practices and patterns in order to distinguish typical treatment from original creativity; the latter often determined the success of the disguise. I give particular consideration to those prefaces and their works which by quality and/or popularity merit extensive analysis and evaluation.

i

Definition: The Fictional Preface

The term "fictional preface" will be used to identify conveniently that preface which purports to proffer a true account. "Preface," however, should first be defined. Formally, it is that part placed before the main text, whether of fiction or nonfiction. The preface may assume the form of a letter, dedication, apology, direct address to reader, editor's note, bookseller's notice, or statement of purpose. In relation to its content, the preface may summarize or explain its subject, trace the work's origin, include general background material or historical information, set forth the author's or editor's purpose or scope, and/or acknowledge assistance from others. The qualification of "preface" by "fictional" specifies that the content

contained within the preface is a constitutive part of the author's invented world. Unlike those prefaces which are separable from the main text and extrinsic to the work's total aesthetic coherence--these usually discuss literary theory and practice--the fictional preface is an integral part of the whole and intrinsic to the work's fictional and structural unity; there is no breaking of the frame.

ii

The Reasons for the Preface

To have or not to have a preface was hardly a question for the majority of writers at this time. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries inherited the preface as part of their classical rhetorical tradition.⁵ Seventeenth-century France in particular possessed a classical literary system which strictly adhered to a regulation of its forms and genres. These rules were brought to England via the 1660 Restoration and the French immigration of 1685 and operated there also, but not as stringently.

The classical preface originated as a way of communicating with its reader. Because it aptly fulfilled this purpose, authors repeatedly used it, and consequently through the passage of time the preface achieved the status of literary tradition. But eventually the preface lost its freshness for many and became a worn-out convention. Some authors indeed openly criticized the preface as a burden

and an obstacle to writing. Prévost complains: "Cette histoire n'a pas besoin de préface; mais l'usage en demande une à la tête d'un livre."⁶ An English writer also terms the insertion of a preface as a convention rather than a necessity:

I am told, that a Book without a Preface, is like a New Play without a Prologue, or a French Dinner without Soup; and tho' I cannot tell what to say, yet I am resolv'd to say something, tho' perhaps not any thing to the Purpose.⁷

But the preface was apparently an unavoidable evil, for even these negative remarks are uttered within the confines of the preface itself. A French prefacer astutely perceives the irony of this relationship:

Qu'on déclame tant que l'on voudra contre les préfaces, l'usage en subsiste; il en est comme des préjugés toujours combattus et toujours suivis. Celui-là même qui hait les préfaces en fait une, quand il dit qu'il en veut point faire.⁸

The authority of tradition and the habit of convention were not easily challenged nor broken, and as a result most authors felt obligated to include a preface even if they did so in protest.

On the other hand, yielding to a literary convention provides the same main advantage as is found in following any customary practice: it is easier to do. It becomes an automatic verbal response rather than a long-drawn-out

writing effort. By starting with a preface, the author solved what for many can be an agonizing obstacle: the beginning.

In contrast to complaining authors, others considered the preface essential to the reader's enlightenment. The previously protesting Prévost asserts: "Il seroit choquant de présenter au public un ouvrage de cette nature, sans y joindre quelque éclaircissement sur son origine."⁹ An English author, Francis Kirkman, argues:

[Prefaces] ought in my opinion to be twice read over: both before and after the reading of the Book, or else the intent and design of the Authour is unknown, for you may give a shrewd guess of the worth of the whole piece, by the Essay of the Authour's judgement.¹⁰

Marivaux similarly regards the preface as indispensable:

"Mais il en faut une: un livre imprimé, relié, sans préface, est-il un livre?"¹¹

Seventeenth and eighteenth-century French and English literature is socially oriented. Writers found it difficult if not impossible to begin their works cold, unannounced--to start their narratives without a transitional link preparing the reader for the main text.

Michael J. Kelly views the preface as satisfying an author's inner imperative to address his readers from the outset: "Its existence is correspondent to the storyteller's enduring need to make an initial statement of explanation and intent."¹² These authors did not just toss their audience into the text with no preliminaries, as do

some modern writers who want to convey a world of social alienation and absurdity, or who want to experiment with literary form. Their purpose was quite different; they sought to reflect a social order and to establish reader contact by means of a formal beginning. This focus upon audience also derives from classic rhetoric, whose goal was to move and persuade its listeners. Hence, aware that the manner in which an author presents his subject influences how the reader reads it, these writers created an aura of intimacy and trust within the preface to predispose the reader to believe the main text.

Another factor determining the inclusion of a preface was the publisher's demand for it; he too was interested in forming favorable relations with his prospective customers. In praising the work to follow, the preface serves as a sales strategy comparable to a modern book jacket or paperback cover. It also flatters its reader, who by the end of the sixteenth century, had gained economic importance. The public had become so accustomed to this literary overture that if a book did not possess a preface it was very likely neglected, as Kelly's study of the preface emphasizes: "The public seemed to show more interest in an elaborated advertised book of unknown quality than a book of unknown quality with nothing prefatory to recommend it."¹³ A metaphor of the period identified the preface as a "porch."¹⁴ Whether a potential buyer likes the porch very

often affects his decision to enter the "house" and very often affects his decision to purchase it. A French prefacer comments upon this ornamental as well as preparatory function of the preface:

Il me semble que les esprits, comme les sens, veulent être préparés. Retrançons de l'architecture les vestibules et les portiques; détruisons les avenues de ce château superbe; ôtons à la musique et à l'amour ces préludes charmants, qui valent souvent mieux que ce qui les suit; n'aurons-nous pas perdu de nos plaisirs?¹⁵

Before concluding this section, I should point out that the preface in addition made a practical contribution for the publisher; it added to the bulk of the work, which helped to justify its high cost.¹⁶

iii

The Importance of this Study

This dissertation evolved from the observation that the label "true" still possesses a magnetic effect on both modern readers and viewers. The popularity of nonfiction, the "nonfiction novel," and the New Journalism has risen significantly. Recent bestseller lists feature biographies, autobiographies, and memoirs; magazine racks display People, Us, True Stories, True Confessions, and True Romances; newsstands sell as "news" The National Enquirer, The Star, and The Globe. All tantalize by promising the truth about the famous and the infamous, as well as the

sensational or extraordinary in ordinary lives. Likewise, the fascination for "docudrama"--the dramatization of a true story--commands a massive share of television audiences. In fact, television docudramas also frequently begin their programs with an audio-visual "preface" which invariably claims: "The following is a true story . . . " or "This program is a dramatization based on facts . . . " Regardless whether these works or programs are adequately or realistically documented, the stamp of truth by its very inherent attractiveness suffices at least initially to instill belief. Similar popular reader reaction prevailed with the majority of late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century readers who were offered "true" accounts.

Surely one cannot help wondering why there is and has been such a human craving for what is perceived as "true," which is popularly defined as "real" people and events occupying historical time. On one level, such a fascination for designated "truth" demonstrates the seductive power of words; it emphasizes how automatically, how indelibly a name impresses. On another level, it focuses upon the mechanism of human belief. Rodney Needham in his Belief, Language, and Experience clarifies this process:

Belief has a connection with reality in that we believe what we take to be real Belief does not necessarily depend on real and decisive evidence. Notoriously, indeed, people do believe

without evidence, or upon insufficient evidence, or even without considering whether evidence is called for.¹⁷

A corollary to this discussion is the question of why there is and has been such a public prejudice against, if not rejection of, "fiction," which is generally defined in negative terms and as such dismissed as "not fact," "not real," "not true." The value of fiction as a touchstone of common humanity, as insight into life's possibilities, as a mirror of individual depth, or as a filter for emotions and thoughts has not on the whole been embraced by the mass culture. Although the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries did not only read "authentic" accounts but also romances, fairy tales, fables, and Oriental tales, its taste for the "true" predominates. This is not an era where authors proudly flaunt their works of artifice and creativity, but rather one which disguises its fiction in nonfiction and conceals its creators in anonymity: "C'est la fiction du non-fictif."¹⁸

Although this study does not propose to elevate the stature of these works, which have been for the most part judged as minor or negligible in literary worth, many of them were contemporary bestsellers. Of course, as has often been noted, popularity does not necessarily equal quality, but it does signify quantity: a great number of people read and enjoyed these transitory works. What a number of people bought and read with interest deserves

examination, if not for its artistic merit, at least for its value in revealing general principles concerning reader motivation and the relationship between reader and text.

In a PMLA article, Peter J. Rabinowitz affirms that popular books are significant for what they disclose about people's view of the world:

For while many widely read writers have little of substance, we can be fairly sure that an extremely popular book has captured something in the minds of a reasonably large segment of the actual reading public, that it ties in somehow with the way people actually think.¹⁹

René Wellek and Austin Warren in Theory of Literature also underline the importance of such minor material:

Within the history of imaginative literature, limitation to the great books makes incomprehensible the continuity of literary tradition, the development of literary genres, and indeed the very nature of the literary process, besides obscuring the background of social, linguistic, ideological and other conditioning circumstances.²⁰

Furthermore, the study of these fictional prefaces in particular sheds light upon the period's creative writing process as well as upon the early development of the novel.

According to Claude E. Jones:

Any serious study of developments, during the crucial seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in the form and aesthetic of prose fiction in English requires access to many dedications, prefaces, periodicals and other essays, and pamphlets.²¹

(This holds true for French literary developments as well.)

The preface which disguised its fiction as fact continued to be used in the late eighteenth century and in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. (Whether audiences were still convinced of the authenticity of such fiction is another issue.) For example, a fictional preface heads such a variety of works as Benjamin Constant's Adolphe, Stendhal's Chartreuse de Parme, Alessandro Manzoni's The Betrothed, Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter, Herman Melville's Billy Budd, Italo Svevo's Confessions of Zeno, Thomas Mann's Magic Mountain, and Albert Camus's La Peste. In addition, such modern works as William Styron's The Confessions of Nat Turner, Joyce Carol Oates's Them, Judith Rossner's Looking for Mr. Goodbar, and Carlos Castaneda's The Second Ring of Power contain a fictional preface as an integral part of the whole. The preface and its nonfictional pose have evidently throughout different periods and throughout different national literatures accomplished an author's purpose and fulfilled a reader's need. Therefore, the fictional preface is not an obsolete convention but still a viable means of beginning.

There is little critical material treating the preface as the fictional threshold of its prose work. Research has concentrated on the critical preface, which is detachable from the main text and extraneous to the work's total effect. It has usually been perused as a means of

attaining information about a particular period's literary theories and practices, and/or about an individual author's critical remarks and opinions. There has been an inadequate discussion of the fictional preface as a method of approaching and interpreting the literary work as a whole and as an angle of entry which adjusts the reader's reading as well as the writer's writing.

iv

Method

This dissertation addresses itself to three pertinent questions. First, why did authors disguise their fiction as fact? This involves reviewing French and English views and treatment of life and literature, fact and fiction, history and story, along with analyzing the taste of readers, the psychology of human belief, and the role of economics. Secondly, what devices, techniques, or methods are used in these prefaces to execute this pretense? This question entails identifying and classifying the means of achieving literal truth and describing their respective effects. Lastly, how did these prefaces function as the fictional beginning of their works? Since fictional prefaces cannot stand alone, they should be evaluated in relation to their main texts. Their success or failure depends upon how well they convinced their intended readers and upon how well they functioned aesthetically as an

integral part of the whole work.

Unless otherwise specified, comments made and conclusions drawn apply to both French and English fiction. As noted previously, French and English use of the preface originated from a common rhetorical tradition.²² The resemblances found in comparing their respective fictional prefaces derive from the mutual interpenetration of their literatures. Georges C. May delineates this reciprocal association: "The Channel was no one-way street and . . . the French and the British novel never stopped cross-fertilizing each other throughout the eighteenth century . . . and forever after."²³ Briefly tracing these interrelations will suffice to validate the grounds for comparison.

With the 1660 Restoration of the Stuart King, Charles II, who had been residing in France, the English also imported French classicism, as has already been mentioned.²⁴ French literary theory and rules were infused into English criticism, and their forms impregnated English writing. Furthermore, the 1685 Revocation of the Edict of Nantes drove thousands of French Huguenots to immigrate to England. Their significant literary activities influenced the host nation, and their translations of English works introduced the English language and prose fiction to the French, who until then had been practically ignorant of both.²⁵

In the early seventeenth century, French heroic

romances inundated England, but by 1700 their popularity had declined in both countries.²⁶ Mrs. Delarivière Manley, in her preface to The Secret History of Queen Zarah and the Zarazians (1705), condemns the reading of French romances as a "vice." This represents part of the backlash against Gallomania, but also simultaneously denotes the depth of the French presence. In any case, the shorter fiction that arose was also a French contribution. Charles C. Mish notes that the writers who created the new French fiction in the late seventeenth century were the same who through translations formed that of the English. The most important were Madame de Lafayette and Marie-Catherine²⁷ Desjardins.

The number of translations provides a reliable indicator of the degree of influence. For example, almost one half of all prose fiction published in England for the first time between 1660 and 1669 was translated from the French,²⁸ and about one third between 1700 and 1739 was translated.²⁹ After maturing through this stage of translation and imitation, the English later transformed and individualized the many literary forms which originated in France: nouvelle, scandal chronicle, memoirs, and letters.

Early English works such as Robinson Crusoe and Gulliver's Travels were well received in France, but the pendulum swung finally towards English dominance in the

1750's. The number of translations and titles with English names increased significantly at this time. The French translated approximately five hundred English works during the eighteenth century.³⁰ The combination of moralism and realism characterizing English fiction particularly attracted the French; with the publication of Pamela, readers were delighted and stimulated by this new combination.³¹ Henri Coulet remarks: "Les romanciers anglais, Fielding, Sterne, mais d'abord et surtout Richardson précipitent l'évolution, commencée au début du xviii^e siècle, du roman français vers le réalisme sérieux."³² Of course, some of the French in turn reacted against this anglomania; critics attacked the English as brutal,³³ uncouth, uncultured, and unsophisticated.

Although both countries were attracted to each other's literary efforts at various points during this period, their respective translations were not faithful renditions. Ethnic differences in attitudes, manners, and style determined how much a translator accepted, rejected, and changed. Also each nation held preconceived ideas as well as prejudices towards the other. To gratify their readers' taste, English translators of French works sensationalized bland passages, deleted boring ones, elaborated or added incidents,³⁴ and coarsened and enlivened the language. On the other hand, the French in their translations refined the English works for their readers, who were often shocked

and offended by the vulgarity of the characters' morality
 and behavior.³⁵ They viewed the depiction of the lower
 social classes as unbecoming and the use of physical
 violence and verbal abuse as immodest and tasteless.³⁶ For
 example, in his translation of Oroonoko, Pierre-Simon La
 Place substitutes a happy ending for Aphra Behn's horror-
 filled one. Particularly sensitive in their use of words,
 the French also purified the extravagance and crassness of
 English vocabulary. They consciously chose socially deco-
 rous language as opposed to the more natural English
 expression.

Having established this "preface" to the preface, I
 close with Henry Fielding's prefatory envoi: "Without
 further Preface then, I here present you with the Labours
 of some Years of my Life"³⁷

Notes

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

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CHAPTER II

WHY AUTHORS DISGUISED THEIR FICTION AS FACT

i

Introduction

Declarations of truth were not invented in the seventeenth century; they can be found in the Greek tales of the first century A.D. and throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance. They became, however, widespread and essential during our period.¹ Morality, social pressure, literary tradition, method of composition, readers' taste, and the publishing marketplace all contributed in varying degrees to seventeenth and eighteenth-century authors' denying, concealing, and eluding their works' fictional nature and relying upon the subterfuge of factual truth for their justification for being. While on the one hand, the significance of passing off fiction as fact underlines the popularity of authentic accounts, on the other hand, it underscores the low regard in which fiction was held at the time. Fiction's tainted reputation primarily prompted authors to engage in this literary dissemblance. It was morally, socially, and aesthetically objectionable.

Most seventeenth and eighteenth-century readers did

not trust and did not take seriously a work of fiction; this is still the prevalent attitude. Fiction is make-believe; it is non-being. It exists only in the abstract--in words--not in concrete actuality. Most people by nature are doubting Thomases; they must see to believe or they must be convinced that something is true to accept it. They prefer what is or was, rather than what will be, can be, might be, would be, or should be. They enjoy the immediate recognition and familiarity of facts, especially of recent accounts: the closer in time, the closer in identification. It is difficult to believe in the invisible, the future, the potential, the dream, or the imagined. (This is not to deny the present popularity of modern romances and science fiction, which are viewed as pure entertainment.) Hence, a peremptory judgment among most persons outside the field of literature is that fiction has little if no relevance in the "real" world of daily living; it lacks a serious "raison d'être." As such it is at best a form of recreation, but very often considered a waste of time.

Such a view ignores or discounts the perception that an invented world created by an author's imagination can convey universal, permanent truths, can transcend limiting facts, can reveal depth and understanding of human nature, can project unrealized possibilities, and can generate a wealth of ideas. A narrow vision of literature does not

observe that the concrete page is part of reality, part of the text of life, nor that words become "real," mentally tangible for their readers. Our period did not for the most part entertain these positive aspects of fiction.

ii

Moral Objections

The moral condemnation of fiction has existed at least since Plato's tirade against poetry; it has been blamed for engendering both individual depravation and civil decay. Defined as lying, fiction can only corrupt a common, naive public, while only truth can edify it. Novelists in particular poison the souls and minds of readers by depicting and as a result arousing sinful passions and actions. They present a distorted image of human emotions, especially in their favorable portrayals of ravaging passion. The Abbé Jaquin harshly denounces the novel for promoting libertinism, deism, irreligion, and the confusion of vice and virtue. He vehemently continues:

Puisque les Romans ont toujours été
 inutiles pour les belles-lettres,
 dangereux pour l'esprit, plus dangereux
 encore pour le coeur, la Religion, les
 moeurs et les Sciences sont également
 intéressées à les rejeter; qu'il est de
 la sagesse du gouvernement et de la
 vigilance des Magistrats de les
 proscrire; qu'il est enfin du devoir des
 parens de veiller avec la dernière
 attention, pour en empêcher la lecture à
 leurs enfans.²

In his essay on modern fiction, Samuel Johnson, although more moderate in tone, similarly indicts those many writers who "for the sake of following nature, so mingle good and bad qualities in their principal personages, that they are both equally conspicuous . . . We lose the abhorrence of their faults" Not all of life, "which is so often discoloured by passion or deformed by wickedness," should be imitated. He warns of the detrimental consequences:

These books are written chiefly to the young, the ignorant, and the idle, to whom they serve as lectures of conduct, and introductions into life. They are the entertainment of minds unfurnished with ideas, and therefore easily susceptible of impressions; not fixed by principles, and therefore easily following the current of fancy; not informed by experience, and consequently open to every false suggestion and partial account.³

iii

Social Objections

Reading fiction was judged a socially puerile, frivolous, futile activity. One was supposed to read devotional works, history, classics, handbooks which were personally beneficial and had practical application. One was not supposed to waste precious time nor hard-earned money on expensive novels whose only purpose was to idle away time and distract attention. The middle classes, especially those of post-Puritan England, particularly attacked fiction

as trivial and unprofitable.

Not only fiction's ill repute but also its corresponding lack of social prestige forced authors to assume the garb of fact and the guise of anonymity. Such writing was not deemed an earnest endeavor nor worthy of a mature man's preoccupation. In fact, it was not considered "man's work." Since many of the writers and most of the readers were women, fiction was associated with the lowly rank of the female. Although the question of the artist's validity and function in society was not a soul-searching issue at this time, authors were sensitive to pressures against publishing declared fiction and subject to a sense of inferiority. Coulet summarizes this concern:

Mais le discrédit jeté sur le roman et la crainte de n'être pas pris au sérieux ou d'être confondus avec les auteurs ridiculisés des âges précédents leur faisaient refuser le nom de romanciers: ils n'écrivaient pas de romans, ils publiaient des Lettres, des Mémoires, des Confessions, ils rendaient au mot "histoire" son sens de récit authentique . . .⁴

French writers in particular cared about their individual reputation and acceptance in society.

In addition, novelists resorted to this deception to escape censure for disrupting society and to protect themselves from legal penalty, for they were also viewed as endangering the existing status quo by introducing secular, anarchic, and iconoclastic ideas to a vulnerable audience.

Frederick R. Karl elaborates upon this point:

To read was to enter upon a long process of self-development and indicated dissatisfaction with one's place. Reading meant, also, the assimilation of dangerous ideas, for the novelists implied both a quasi-democratic criticism of a very undemocratic society and an equality of men dependent only upon achievement. Thus, the novelists were not necessarily full of high sentiment. Rather, they were often pushy rascals, attacking hypocrisy in government and church, mocking traditional values, creating small crises of belief, advocating adversary values.⁵

iv

Aesthetic Objections

Aesthetics too contributed to this cult of authenticity. For this period truth embodied the highest aesthetic value as enunciated by Boileau: "Puis donc qu'une pensée n'est belle qu'en ce qu'elle est vraie: et que l'effet infaillible du Vray, quand il est bien énoncé, c'est de frapper les Hommes."⁶ An English prefacer confidently asserts that his "following sheets . . . have one thing to recommend them, which is truth" ⁷ Fiction, identified as the opposite of truth, failed to gain critical approval.

Secondly, critics, especially those of seventeenth-century France, judged the novel inferior to other traditional genres; it was neither a legitimate nor an honorable form, for otherwise it would have been developed by classi-

cal writers. It lacked common rules of art and it lacked the dignity and authority of the ancients.⁸ Furthermore, they accused the novel of repeatedly violating decorum and verisimilitude. Extravagance, grossness, and incredibility characterize the novel's portrayal of characters and events. Coulet expatiates:

Au nom du goût: le roman n'avait pas de place dans la hiérarchie des genres littéraires; c'était un divertissement vulgaire, sans art ni pensée . . . Faire un roman était s'adresser à la partie la moins recommandable du public, aux femmes, aux mondains futiles, aux chambrières et aux laquais.⁹

Therefore, to elude this stigma of "roman"¹⁰ or novel and its automatic discredit and to encourage serious consideration of their works, authors opted for a truth-orienting title such as "history," "memoirs," or "letters" to validate their publications. Even when such disguises reached an obvious level of transparency, writers hesitated to declare the fictional nature of their work; so ingrained was the habit but also so insecure were its practitioners.

Another factor explaining the disguise of fiction as fact deals with the writing process itself; this literary mask facilitated an author's writing. If he fictionalized actual people and/or events, he solved the problem of creating a plausible plot; if he completely invented his account, the word "true" compensated for the absence of authorial ability. The pretense of literal truth also

smoothed the way for the reception of an author's work. He immediately won his readers' favor by freeing them from the guilt of reading fiction, which otherwise might prevent their total pleasure, and focused their attention upon the content rather than upon the form, which might suffer from defects in composition.

v

Readers' Taste

Even though many classes of readers mainly desired pleasurable works to while away their leisure time, they did feel the moral and social pressures against reading fiction. However, believing that they read "history," whose purpose is to teach and provide laudable models, readers eased their consciences. Under the sanction of "truth," they legitimized their prurient interests and indulged their appetite for suggestive, risqué material, while authors under the same authority justified the inclusion of such subject matter. In his preface to Mémoires de Mr. D'Artagnan, Courtilz de Sandras warns his readers that they may encounter some displeasing "amourettes," but for the sake of truth these had to be inserted.¹¹ This revelation, of course, secretly pleases the reader, for the forbidden fruit not only attracts but also assumes a heightened reality. "Just tell me that it is true and I'll ignore and forgive anything" encapsulates the attitude of

the time. Although a favorite dictum pronounced that literature instructed as well as amused, a work mattered only when it was "true." Being true makes a book "better," increases its worth, justifies the time and energy needed to read it. As Philip Stewart notes: "Deceit becomes a positive literary quality. It could cover the bitter taste of the lie and permit the reader to enjoy the story. It is for this reason that illusion was the salvation of fiction."¹² Thus, readers created a demand for disguised fiction which authors more than willingly supplied.

Besides the negative climate towards fiction, influencing popular taste, true stories by their very nature--by virtue of their having happened in real life--hold an intrinsic appeal for readers. Although fiction can entertain and engage a reader's attention through narration, and raise and fulfill his expectations, the label "true" intensifies his pleasure and increases his emotional response. The declaration that a book (as well as a film or television broadcast) portrays real people and real events automatically whets human curiosity, which is the single most compelling force driving people to learn about the lives of others. This innate craving feeds on what it believes to be true information. One finds it overwhelmingly enthralling to spy upon the private lives of others--to pry into their hidden thoughts, feelings, and problems. Histories, biographies, memoirs, and letters nurture this

human desire.

The disclosure in particular of supposedly genuine letters allows the reader access to the inaccessible: the intimate revelations of the heart and mind. With impunity, the reader trespasses the lines of social propriety to enjoy the delicious sensation of secret, guilty pleasures. F. Deloffre and J. Rougeot explain that part of the popularity of Lettres portugaises stemmed from the idea that readers thought they were reading the raw, unedited reactions of a victim of a fatal passion:

Cette façon de présenter les choses a sans doute, séduit un certain public, ému par la pensée de tenir entre ses mains le témoignage authentique d'une passion réelle, directement jaillie d'un coeur meurtri, ignorante des vains ornements de la littérature.¹³

Since one of the reasons for reading is to obtain vicarious satisfaction or compensation for the deficiencies of life,¹⁴ a reader undergoes a keener involvement when he believes in the authenticity of the account. A reader shifts into a different psychological gear when reading what he regards as true; he rather unconsciously adjusts his level of participation. He is naturally more likely and more willing to expose his emotions and to absorb himself wholly in the narrative. What occurs is comparable to the recognized placebo effect in medicine. By having faith in the effectiveness of a drug, a patient actually makes his body ready to accept a cure.

Thus whether a reader perceives a work as fact or fiction automatically determines his approach and attitude towards a text. The seal of truth evokes preconceptions of the text; it affects his emotional and intellectual reception of a work. For most, the idea of fiction erects a barrier between what a reader reads and what he feels. It hinders him unconsciously if not consciously from thinking, experiencing, and identifying deeply because he tends to dismiss its significance; it is only fiction; it did not happen. For example, when a reader or viewer finds himself upset, crying, or terrified while reading a novel or watching a movie, he reminds himself that "it is just a novel" or "it is just a movie." But if either one had been prefaced with "this is a true story," the response would have differed. The same person may exclaim, "Oh my God, this really happened!" Similarly, if an author depicts a gruesome rape/ murder which he presents as true, the reader may judge it as a justifiable exposure of a social evil. If it is fictional, the reader may accuse the author of sexual exploitation and sensationalism. The following passage, in which Needham explains Hume's definition of belief, clearly illustrates the influence of the word "true":

Hume argued that belief is "an act of the mind, which renders realities more present to us than fictions" (1888:629). His example is that of two people who sit down to read a book, one taking it as

a "true history": and the other as a "romance." They receive the same ideas, and in the same order; and the belief of the former reader, and the incredulity of the latter, does not hinder them in putting the very same sense upon what they read. But the influence of the book is not the same on each. The one who believes it as a true narration has "a more lively conception" of the incidents, and enters deeper into the concerns of the characters; whereas the other, who takes it all for a fiction, has "a more faint and languid conception" of these particulars.¹⁵

Critics may argue that a good work of fiction permits readers to enjoy the same vicarious pleasure as one of non-fiction, that quality literature reflects universal, human truths independent of time and place, and that readers react similarly to a work of fiction as to one of fact in accordance with Coleridge's "suspension of disbelief." They may contend that "truth" does not mold one's emotional or aesthetic reaction to a work but that rather the unity of form and content does so. But critics cannot dispute that given the social pressures against fiction and popular taste for facts, "truth" initially affected this public's motivation to progress into the text. They cannot dispute that the majority of seventeenth and eighteenth-century fictional readers--those without a thorough literary education and viewpoint--could only take seriously what had "actually happened," a point which brings up for discussion the kind of reader that existed at this time.

Statistics derived from the records of newspapers, and

the circulation figures of magazines, have determined that there were only about twenty to thirty thousand English readers of fiction out of a total population of six to seven million. An edition seldom exceeded four thousand copies.¹⁶ The French reading public and printings were even smaller.¹⁷ The literate audience consisted actually of the urban middle class, which constituted a minority in comparison to the illiterate millions composing the agricultural and laboring classes.¹⁸ Readers of fiction included upper servants, members of the nobility and gentry, the bourgeois, the rich, the young, and a majority of literate women.¹⁹ Among this small audience, there were different kinds of readers as there are now: the uncritical and the critical, the innocent and the experienced, the careless and the careful. John J. Richetti describes the majority as "literate and curious" rather than "educated and sophisticated."²⁰ They therefore were most apt to be seduced and deceived by the ploy of disguised fiction.

Another element contributing to popular taste in non-fiction and the publishing of pseudo-genuine accounts was the simultaneous rise of journalism--an interest in the news and facts of contemporary life. Coulet remarks upon this parallel relationship:

Le roman a aussi des accointances avec le journalisme naissant. En 1672, Donneau de Visé fonde le Mercure galant et promet à ses lecteurs de leur faire connaître ce qu'il y a "de particulier

et qui n'est pas su du tout le monde" dans les nouvelles publiques, "les véritables circonstances" des procès, des morts, des mariages. Les romans satisfont chez leurs lecteurs la même curiosité, parfois dans la même gazette, puisque Donneau de Visé annonce également "quelques aventures nouvelles en forme d'histoire" (ce qui suffirait à expliquer la brièveté des romans, réduits aux dimensions d'un article de revue); le public cherchait des clefs à toutes les "histoires": qu'elles en eussent ou non, elles contenaient, sous la décence du revêtement historique, la vérité vécue de la société contemporaine.²¹

Both newspapers and fiction elaborated upon facts to fulfill their readers' interest in sensational material. In outlining her purpose for the Life of Charlotta Du Pont, An English Lady, Penelope Aubin presents her "true" narrative as an equivalent alternative to a journalistic item:

I believed something new and diverting would be welcome to the Town, and that the Adventures of a young Lady, whose Life contains the most extraordinary Events that I ever heard or read of, might agreeably entertain you at a time when our News Papers furnish nothing of moment.²²

vi

The Status of History

Another reason why authors disguised their fiction as fact had to do with the absence of a clear distinction between "history" and story," both theoretically and linguistically. During this time, history was defined by

the way historians wrote it rather than by the unadulterated truth they supposedly wrote. Ignorant, biased, and dissenting, historians speculated upon causes and motives, invented speeches, and imagined descriptions. Considering the development of post-Renaissance history, or rather its lack of development, William Nelson concludes: "Histories were therefore by no means free of fiction; in fact they differed from it not in kind but only in the quantity of invention."²³ Fact and fiction, history and story coexisted in these literatures; fictionalized fact or "factualized" fiction--depending on degree--repeatedly appeared as history. Georges C. May similarly observes: "Ni la rigueur de la documentation, ni le souci de l'objectivité, ni la phobie de l'erreur ou de la lacune ne caractérisait alors l'historien."²⁴ In The Amours of Edward the IV, An Historical Novel, the preface praises the addition of art as enhancing "History" without altering the nature of truth:

You have true History, adorn'd with the greatest Lustre that Language and Art can add; And where Intrigue is introduc'd, it is with so much neatness and exactness, that it neither interferes with, nor offers the least Injury to Truth.²⁵

Mixing fact and fiction was not a new technique at the time, but one bequeathed by the past. Since Homer, one has recognized how much more credible a fabricated story is if one adds historical figures and incidents. On the other

hand, one has likewise noted how much more interesting a historical narrative becomes when one embellishes it with invented dialogue, characters, and incidents. As long as they remained unaware of the dissimulation, readers paradoxically wanted their facts in fictionalized form. (This too is true today with the New Journalism and the first-person biographies. ²⁶) They enjoyed the personalization of history by means of a story-like frame, as Prévost so well realized: "Le public aime les faits, et veut qu'ils soient intéressants." ²⁷ Facts are more palatable in the form of fiction. Joseph Addison also was aware of this popular preference:

We love to see the subject unfolding itself by just degrees and breaking upon us insensibly, that so we may be kept in a pleasing suspense, and have time given us to raise our expectations and to side with one of the parties concerned in the relation. I confess this shows more the art than the veracity of the historian. . . .²⁸

At the beginning, the enrichment of fact by fiction was an accepted writing practice. Several seventeenth-century works in particular display no reluctance or apology for this blending, but recommend it as increasing the reader's pleasure. For instance, an English prefacer reveals to his reader that he has combined truth with art:

The basis or foundation whereof thou wilt find (Courteous Reader) to be a real truth, though imbelish'd with such flowers of Poesy as I could gather out

of Apollo's Garden, that though mightest
be won with delight in the reading
thereof.²⁹

Similarly, Mme de Villegieu freely admits taking poetic license with historical facts. First she declares that "les Annales Galantes sont des veritez historiques" and then asserts: "J'avoûë que j'ai ajouté quelques ornemens à la simplicité de l'Histoire . . . Si ce [the words of lovers] ne sont ceux qu'ils ont prononcez, ce sont ceux qu'ils auroient dû prononcer."³⁰

Not only did authors deliberately combine fact and fiction, but very often they unconsciously confused the two. Robert A. Day explains that there was not only a "lack of rigid differentiation" between the two categories, but also there was lack of "consciousness of the difference."³¹ Coulet expands this point:

Les romanciers n'ont pas le sentiment
qu'une limite sépare le vrai de
l'imaginaire. Ils arrangent les faits
historiques, mettent sur le même plan
les souvenirs vécus et les contes
rebattus, les circonstances plausibles
et les invraisemblances criantes.³²

Semantic confusion with the word "history" which was interchangeable with "story" or an invented account of someone's life, further abetted the blurring of fact and fiction. The problem is more acute for the French, whose "histoire" refers to both true and imaginary relations. In her preface to The Secret History of Queen Zarah and the Zarazians, Mrs. Manley defines two types of history which

from a modern perspective form a contradiction in terms: a "true" history and a history to one's "Fancy."³³

Nevertheless, even without a distinct separation between fact and fiction, history and story, history was still identified as possessing the supreme value of truth; it was morally and educationally superior to fiction. History could correct the character and manners of society. According to Lenglet du Fresnoy, to study history "en un mot, c'est apprendre à se connaître soi-même dans les autres."³⁴ Mrs. Manley similarly defines true history's elevated purpose: "The chief End of History is to instruct and inspire into Men the Love of Virtue, and Abhorrence of Vice, by the Examples propos'd to them."³⁵ Thus, assuming the name of history gained validation for works of fiction. Stewart affirms that "historicity was a shield against all charges which could be leveled against the novel,"³⁶ as does May:

Persuadés que la valeur supérieure de l'histoire par rapport au roman romanesque était proportionnelle à celle de la vérité par rapport au mensonge, la plupart des romanciers . . . annexèrent tout simplement le roman à l'histoire et remplacèrent tout bonnement dans leurs titres le mot de "roman" pour celui d'"histoire."³⁷

Contemporary critical reaction concerning this mixture of fact and fiction, however, was mostly negative; most considered it an adulteration rather than an enrichment of reality. Few supported Aristotle's contention that litera-

ture was more universal than history and morally superior to it. Rather they denounced this fusion of fact and fiction as debasing truth and distorting history. The French especially condemned this imposture as not only deceiving present audiences, in particular the young, but those of posterity as well. Moreover, it even discredits actual truth. Bayle complains: "Ce mélange de la vérité et de la fable se répand dans une infinité de livres nouveaux, perd le goût des jeunes gens, et fait que l'on n'ose croire ce qui au fond est croyable."³⁸ With the increased critical reaction against this confusion and the growing awareness of the boundaries separating genres in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, authors no longer confessed to this combining technique but rather simply offered their fiction as literal truth.

vii

The Role of Economics

Although obvious but not often stated, the profit motive also played an essential part in authors' opting for "truth." They not only wanted to free themselves from the imputations of immorality, they also wanted to sell their works: they wanted to make money. Unless they asserted authenticity, their works would be unread and unsold. The public prejudice against fiction also did not escape the notice of publishers. They did not fail to realize that it

was in their self-interest to publish pseudo-authentic accounts. Q. D. Leavis voices the publisher's viewpoint: "If fiction could be disguised so that it could be acceptable to the virtuous (for whom "invention" meant lying . . .), fiction could be made to pay."³⁹

Obviously, the reasons for this literary pretense were many and varied. Their significance for modern literature and media will be discussed in the conclusion. This review of why authors disguised their fiction as fact leads one now to analyze how they did so.

Notes

CHAPTER II

WHY AUTHORS DISGUISED THEIR FICTION AS FACT

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7

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8

Georges C. May, Le dilemme du roman au XVIII^e siècle; étude sur les rapports du roman et de la critique, 1715-1761 (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1963), p. 16.

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10

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25

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32

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Mary de la Riviere Manley, "To the Reader," The Secret History of Queen Zarah, and the Zarazians (Albigion [London]: n. p., 1705), n. sig.

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35

Manley, n. sig.

36

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37

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38

Pierre Bayle, Dictionnaire historique et critique (1697), Article "Jardins," in Vivienne Mylne, The Eighteenth-Century French Novel: Techniques of Illusion (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1965), p. 14.

39

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CHAPTER III
DEVICES, TECHNIQUES, AND METHODS USED
TO DISGUISE FICTION AS FACT

i

Introduction

Since in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries a reader's interest in reading material frequently depended upon his perception that the prose work he was reading was literally true, authors had to devise appropriate means to create an aura of actuality, which they primarily achieved in their prefaces. They resorted to methods employed by anyone wishing to convince others of anything, whether it be a new product, a new policy, or a new theory: they concentrated on both substance and presentation. Authors cited facts, details, examples, documents, witnesses, and experts. If one uses plausibly these tools of truth, regardless of whether their content has been fabricated, one will elicit belief because of their form, which is crucial in constraining conviction.

Belief, in effect, defines "truth": "Our beliefs are our interpretation of reality."¹ To illustrate simply, if one sees an individual wearing designer clothes, driving an expensive sports car, and residing in a luxury apartment,

one commonly tends to conclude that this person is wealthy, for how else could he or she afford this lifestyle? But of course, there is an "else," another way of "affording," or rather of creating such an illusion: spending one's entire salary, living in debt, being supported by another, or any other number of explanations. But appearances are often the only grounds for believing and, as such, provide a means of deceiving.

In addition, context can shape human perception, as can be poignantly demonstrated by a Candid Camera episode. An eighty-year-old man went to a doctor's office located in a hospital and was introduced in all earnestness to a twelve-year-old "doctor" by an actual nurse. Although astonished, the man did not question that the boy was a doctor. It had to be true because of his surroundings and the manner of the presentation. The formal situation created credibility and, thus, the improbable became true. The underlying point is that frequently it is not so much "what" one is asked to believe, but rather "how" one is asked, that induces belief.

Both of these cited examples underline the fallibility of the human cognitive process, which the fictional preface exploits. It produces a semblance of literal truth based on the predicted errors of the reader's judgment. Methods of authenticating works of fiction in the minds of readers range from perfunctory poses to elaborate mechanisms; they

may bluntly claim or subtly imply the factual nature of the pseudoaccount. Within this diversity of devices, one may discern prevalent patterns. Before analyzing them, however, one should first review the truth-engendering techniques employed prior to the preface.

ii

Physical Structure

An author may begin to spin his web of belief through the physical structure of his work. To a certain extent, an author can inject doses of truth through the quality of the lettering, the arrangement of words, the texture of paper, the size of the page, and the layers of composition (the title page, the prefatory materials, and the main text). In his study of the preface, Michael J. Kelly observes the significance of this external aspect: "Underlying prefatory matter was the realistic assumption that a book's physical appearance counted almost as strongly as its contents."² Philip Stevick notes Samuel Richardson's particular consciousness of the impression and effect of the printed page upon the reader:

Being a printer, Richardson had a special proximity to the whole bookmaking process, to the power and force of the way words look on a page. As a novelist, he used type with an individuality and virtuosity exceeded in his time only by Sterne and scarcely equaled since.³

The medium itself, in this case the book or the

printed word, creates certain expectations within the reader. Before turning the cover, the reader expects a book to be true or make believe, fact or fiction. The way he subsequently perceives it depends, to a limited degree, upon the book's physical format. For instance, on the basis of tradition and/or experience, the seventeenth-century reader usually took the inclusion of a dedication as a sign of seriousness, and that of a preface as a statement of truth. (Today, one similarly regards a critical text with an index as "serious" or "scholarly" as opposed to one without.) Of course, these perceptions changed as readers learned to discern author manipulation.

This process of prejudging a book corresponds to the manner by which many consumers consciously or unconsciously choose one brand over another. They frequently believe that anything that is expensive, finely packaged, or well advertised is more apt to work than one which does not possess these outer trappings. The same principle applies in publishing. One may not judge a book by its cover, but one may very often be attracted to it and buy it, as designers of books jackets know. Lewis A. Coser et al. in their Books: The Culture and Commerce of Publishing point out that "it is the cover, more than the contents, that counts in the paperback world,"⁴ a world which aims to accommodate a mass-market mentality. Marketing experts have discovered that certain colors, lettering, and paper

draw readers more than do others. These factors all may have to do mainly with commercial considerations, but they do concern the process of reading, for these externals may actually generate the first impulse to read within a reader. Whether the reader continues further, or whether he is satisfied, is another matter.

Seventeenth and eighteenth-century authors, together with printers and booksellers, were aware of the effect of these extrinsic elements upon their readers. They clothed their works in suitable literary apparel: an elaborate title page, a sincere dedication, an authoritative preface, and an occasional authenticating portrait and/or map. Betrand H. Bronson also emphasizes that the physical appearance of a book was an essential constituent in its production:

The question of size in books has psychological implications not to be instantly resolved, which interplay with obvious practical considerations. When we have allowed for convenience at one end of the scale and conspicuous display at the other, there still remains a wide range of possible choices . . . It seems clear that the eighteenth century had a notion of correct relations between subject matter and physical size . . . The rules of proportion should be visible there as in architecture; and Luckombe confidently pronounces that a Dedication is to be set in letters two sizes larger than the body of the work; a Preface in Roman one size larger than the letter of the main body; the Contents in Italic of the same size as the body; the Index in letters two sizes smaller than that of the body; with other rules for the run-

ning title, and so on into minute details.⁵

Writers wanting to camouflage their fiction exploited the book's components to advance its nonfictional aura.

Reader sensitivity and susceptibility to the physical aspects of a book may be demonstrated by having a modern reader read an original edition of a purportedly true story as opposed to a modern explicative edition of it. The antiquated and distinct lettering and the age and texture of the brownish paper evoke the authority of the past; the absence of a contemporary critical guide abandons a reader solely to the blandishing words on the page. The various structural parts stressing truth will sway him towards conviction. The original edition preserves the flavor of the period, as well as its power of persuasion, for a first edition frequently leaves the modern reader, as it did its contemporary reader, guessing as to its authenticity. Without a literary knowledge of the period, it is virtually impossible to distinguish fact from fiction in many of these accounts.

iii

Title Page

As the reader's first written contact with a text, the title page must immediately attract a reader, so that he desires to turn the page. The title page also forms the first layer of the author's effort to conceal his work's

fictional nature and simultaneously instill belief in its "factuality." By using nonfictional titles, the title page christens a work as "true." Both French and English works of prose fiction prominently display such validating appellations as "vie"/life, "histoire"/history, "mémoires"/memoirs, "lettres"/letters, and other variations. Authors realized that a name is not just a name, but rather a concretizing identity. Consequently, the words "roman" and "novel," which frequently appeared in the seventeenth century, virtually disappeared in the eighteenth century because of their association with frivolity and immorality. In Paul S. Jones's bibliography, A List of French Prose Fiction from 1700-1750, only four or five works out of 946⁶ listed bear the name "roman" in the title or subtitle. Only twenty percent of 391 works listed in William H. McBurney's bibliography, A Check List of English Prose Fiction, 1700-1739, are entitled "novel."⁷

The seventeenth and eighteenth-century title page, however, contains more than a name; it very often summarizes the plot, reveals its source, conveys its purpose, judges the content, and sets the tone. In effect, an extensive title page prefaces the preface.⁸ Unlike modern publishers, who prefer a brief, eye-catching title, these early booksellers wanted to squeeze in literally as many elements as they could in order to capture as many readers as possible. The title page promised adventures, rarity,

romance, shipwrecks, salvation, escape, intrigue, sensationalism, secrecy, and morality, all under the banner of truth. In this manner, it aroused the reader's curiosity, even if some of the suspense was sacrificed, and moreover it guaranteed the reader a lot for his money.

The title page's use as sales strategy does not eliminate its function as a constitutive part of the entire created product, for it remains one of the work's beginnings. The printers may have played a role in composing titles, but the author made the ultimate decision concerning the contents of the title page: "Whether it shall be determinative, descriptive, or suggestive; whether to include or omit the writer's name; whether to add a motto, and of what sort: these decisions reveal the author."⁹

Another crediting device within the title page is the listing of the subject's aristocratic, official, and/or professional rank(s) to buttress his worth and authority. For example, Courtilz de Sandras frequently utilized an elaborate identification technique as in the Mémoires de Gaspard Comte de Chavagnac, Maréchal de Camp et Armée du Roy, Général de l'Artillerie: Sergent de Bataille de celles de sa Majesté catholique, Lieutenant Général des Troupes de l'Empereur et son Ambassadeur en Pologne. Although English writers were less lavish than their French counterparts, dignifying epithets adorn their title pages, as Joseph Addison observes: "I have indeed observed of late, that

few Writings sell which are not filled with great Names and illustrious Titles." ¹⁰ These ennobling epithets aim to convince the reader that a person of such social stature would not lie. The reader does not even notice that he simply assumes the physical existence of the subject.

The absence of an author's name on the title page also suggests that this is an actual account, not a fictional one; there is no creator or inventor, only the authorial subject. Only about fifteen percent of French and English works published between 1700 and 1739 have the author's name on the title page. ¹¹ In the early seventeenth century, authors also favored anonymity, but this was largely due to their fear of libel rather than for manipulative purposes. ¹² Although in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a few writers wanted to exculpate themselves from personal responsibility and liability, for the most part they resorted to anonymity to enhance the factual appearance of their works.

A correlating practice is the use of apocryphal initials, dashes, and asterisks to trigger belief, for these were interpreted as reflecting the author's fear of offending or ruining the reputations of "real" people. (Among the several examples are Mémoires de Mr. de B*** Secrétaire de Mr. L. C. D. R., Lettres de la Marquise de M*** au Comte de R***, The Perfidious P---, The Temple Rake or Innocence Preserved: Being the Adventures of Miss

Arabella R---y.) This device creates a teasing guessing game. The reader is so busy trying to figure out the characters' identities that he does not question whether the content is true or not. Addison describes the effects of this literary ploy:

The Reader generally casts his Eye upon a new Book, and if he finds several Letters separated from one another by a Dash, he buys it up and peruses it with great Satisfaction . . . It gives a secret Satisfaction to a Peruser of these mysterious Works, that he is able to decipher them without help, and, by the Strength of his own natural Parts, to fill up a Blank-Space, or make out a Word that has only the first or last Letter to it.¹³

The title page offers one more truth-inducing device: the pretense of translation. Besides lessening the chance of a work's being verified, by distancing the reader geographically from the events related, the author convinces him that these very often extraordinary or strange adventures actually did take place. The reader's frequent lack of familiarity with a foreign country and its customs encouraged this nonfictional disguise. For instance, the "translated" letters of a nun cloistered in a Portuguese convent had a greater mystique and an added dimension of credibility than they would have had if she were living in France (Lettres portugaises traduites en français). Likewise, the remarkable adventures revealed in the forced confession of a man brought before the formi-

dable Inquisition in Italy rang true for English readers because of the alien situation and setting (The Memoirs of Sigr. Gaudentio di Lucca-translated from the Italian).

This same bias to accept the incredible as having a greater probability of occurring the further away it takes place still exists. "The habits of scepticism stop at the frontier of the exotic . . . We are prepared to believe both the worst and the best about unknown regions anywhere, virtually on faith."¹⁴ Thus, today, one is more likely to believe reported atrocities in South America or in Africa than those occurring in our own backyard or in cultures similar to our own.

iv

Dedication

Customarily, a dedication precedes the preface. It concentrates on profusely flattering the person in question and only indirectly refers to the work itself. Rarely does it reinforce the image of truth initiated in the title. For the most part, the dedication sets the seriousness of tone by which the author wants his reader to receive his preface and text. One notable exception, however, is Aphra Behn's epistolary dedication (To Henry Pain, Esq.") to The Fair Jilt which, besides lavishing the characteristic words of praise, subsumes the role of the fictional preface by stressing the factual nature of her narrative:

This little History . . . is Truth:
 Truth, which you so much admire. But
 'tis a Truth that entertains you with so
 many Accidents diverting and moving,
 that they will need both a Patron, and
 an Ancestor in this incredulous World.
 For however it may be imagin'd that
 Poetry (my Talent) has so greatly the
 Ascendant over me, that all I write must
 pass for Fiction, I now desire to have
 it understood that this is Reality, and
 Matter of Fact, and acted in this our
 latter Age.¹⁵

Surely the reader cannot believe that the author would lie
 to her much-esteemed patron, or so Behn reasoned correctly.

v

Form of the Fictional Preface

At this point, the preface makes its entry. At first,
 the seventeenth and eighteenth-century was predisposed to
 believe the preface's content to be factual by virtue of
 the preface's traditional association with nonfictional
 material: the preface originally headed scientific, mathe-
 matical, philosophical, and historical treatises.¹⁶ In
 addition to implying literal truth by its very inclusion,
 the preface also weaves an author's factual fabrication by
 means of its own internal devices; the author manipulates
 the various formal elements of the preface: identification
 of the work's nature, disclosure of content, revelation of
 the text's source, corroborative evidence, explanation of
 prefacer's role, and reasons for publication. (These
 devices, which will be considered later in detail, may not

all necessarily be present.)

As has been mentioned, the preface derives its roots from classical rhetoric¹⁷ which, having lost its original meaning and purpose, penetrated all literary genres; its rules could be and were applied to any material whatsoever.¹⁸ Rhetoric shaped the development of prefaces by providing introductory and concluding formulae, as well as topoi on how to approach a subject. To review briefly, "inventio," the discovery of all available means of persuasion, is the most important part of oratorical technique and the most influential upon the preface. "Inventio" is composed of the five parts which comprise the judicial oration (where the aim is to prove something about the past): "exordium" or "proemium" makes the listener favorably disposed, attentive, and tractable; "narratio" exposes the facts in the matter; "probatio" argues the speaker's position; "refutatio" disproves opposing opinions; and "peroratio" or "epilogus" guides and sways an audience's perceptions and emotions.¹⁹ In terms of this study, the most important point about rhetoric is that the main purpose is to convince its audience of the "truth," regardless of the nature of that truth. Peter France clarifies:

In the end rhetoric remains characteristically intent above all else on swaying a public. It is less concerned with the discovery of the truth than with the means of successfully communicating any belief, whether true or false.²⁰

In the majority of instances, the preface directly addresses the reader, as is signaled in its title: "Au Lecteur"/"To the Reader," "L'Imprimeur au Lecteur"/"The Publisher to the Reader," "Avertissement au Lecteur"/"An Advertisement to the Reader," and other similar salutations ("Le Libraire au Lecteur," "Avis au Lecteur," "The Author to the Reader," "The Prefacer to the Reader," "The Epistle to the Reader"). The prefacer, like an orator, focuses upon gaining his reader's attention and favor by being ingratiating and solicitous. In his conversational style, the prefacer forms an intimate association with his audience which earns him its faith in his honesty and, thus, in the work's professed truth. The preface's apparent independence from the main text also reinforces the impression of the prefacer as an objective, authoritative voice, one which the reader will allow to direct his intellectual and emotional response to the text.

In this manner, the author often shapes the reader's interpretation of a text which the reader might not have achieved by reading the text alone; before turning to chapter one, the reader has been duly influenced by the prefacer's tone and comments. For example, Defoe's prefacer to Moll Flanders casts doubt on the sincerity of Moll's confession in his reference to the original "Copy which came first to Hand, having been written in Language more like one still in Newgate, than one grown Penitent and

Humble, as she afterwards pretends to be."²¹ He further implies that Moll may not be telling the full truth:

She liv'd it seems, to be very old; but was not so extraordinary a Penitent as she was at first; it seems only that indeed she always spoke with abhorrence of her former Life, and of every Part of it.²²

Consequently, as a reader enters the main text, he is distrustful of Moll's words, but not of her being; he may not believe her, but he does believe in her existence. Defoe's preface succeeds in portraying Moll as an actual, unreliable figure, but simultaneously prevents the reader from even considering her as fictional.

Another instance of prefatorial influence is in Bordelon's Gomgam ou L'homme prodigieux, transporté dans l'air, sur la terre et sous les eaux. The prefacer admits that the manuscript contains material that is difficult to believe: "On ne peut pas nier que tout cecy ne sente beaucoup la fable"²³ Yet his very expression of doubt allows him to suggest the possibility of truth, for although one cannot prove this account, one cannot disprove it either: "C'est un prodige qui paroît incroyable, il est vrai; mais il est vrai aussi qu'on ne peut pas prouver qu'il soit absolument impossible."²⁴ Considering the fantastic nature of the travels related, simply to have the reader entertain the idea that these adventures, although improbable, may not be impossible is to win "belief," for

the reader is disregarding the normal bounds of reality.

vi

Identification of the Work's Nature

In the fictional preface's asseverations of truth, various patterns emerge which, when catalogued in such a study as this, may seem repetitive and monotonous; however, when viewed in their individual contexts, these fictional prefaces effectively engendered in the reader an impulse to believe. One such method is for the prefacer simply to assume the offensive by directly declaring the work to be true without mentioning fiction at all. For example, "Cette Histoire semble n'avoir pas besoin d'un grand éclaircissement; il suffit de dire qu'elle est vraie. . . ." ²⁵; "We need say nothing more to raise the Attention and Curiosity of the Reader to the Perusal of the following History, than that it is truly genuine. . . ." ²⁶

The obvious question arises as to why readers should accept at face value such a prefatorial avowal, which often stands unsubstantiated. Apparently just the fact that this statement is made within a public medium inherently grants it a kind of "truth": it is written; therefore, it exists. The effect is similar to that of a rumor read in a gossip column: although unverified, it still plants its biased seed. It may never grow into actual conviction, but it lies there ready to shape one's judgment about someone or

something. It is difficult to ignore what one has read in a newspaper because of its imposing authority. Likewise the formal assurance embodied in the preface that the ensuing work is true may not completely capture the reader's confidence, but it suffices to nurture his willingness or disposition to believe, to formulate his preconceptions about the main text, and consequently to influence his manner of reading. Thus, the power of the printed word by virtue of its presumed objectivity and authority can bias a reader. Ian Watt elaborates:

The authority of print--the impression that all that is printed is necessarily true--was established very early Print, to the reader, is no fallible specimen of humanity-- no actor, bard or speaker who must prove himself worthy of credence: it is a material reality which can be seen by all the world and will outlive everyone in it It is more like an impersonal fiat which . . . has received the stamp of universal social approbation. We do not, instinctively at least and until experience has made us wise, question what has appeared in print.²⁷

Another main reason why words merely asserting truth can inculcate belief is that there are no separate vocabularies for fact and fiction. Usually the only way a reader distinguishes the two categories is with other words which inform him of the nature of the content: "This is a true story"; "This is a novel:" This fact is obviously what facilitates the nonfiction disguise. Without this identifying information found on the title page or in the pre-

face, most readers cannot tell for instance, an authentic letter from a fabricated one; research on external sources would be needed. If he thinks of the matter at all, however, the general reader somehow takes it for granted that he can differentiate between fact and fiction. It is by exploiting this erroneous premise that an author succeeds in his deception.

One can, of course, discriminate between a well-written work--one in which the characters and events are logical, probable, and convincing--and one which is not. But aesthetic coherence does not make the content factual; it makes it readable and artistically "true." Many readers accept badly written factual accounts because of the intrinsically irresistible interest of the subject matter; they read for facts alone. Therefore, literary ineptness need not diminish a work's claim to truth; on the contrary, it may make it seem more "authentic," for bad writing implies amateurism: the nonprofessional writer. As long as a reader believes what he is reading, he tends to overlook such subordinate concerns as unity, structure, style, and diction. This approach to the text helps to explain why so many ill-composed and now unreadable works of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were so popular then. Their "truth" value overrode their literary merit.

Another means by which prefacers assert truth is first to disclaim their fiction and then to claim to be factual;

occasionally the order is reversed. This defensive attitude arose from authors' anticipation of critical accusations against fiction and their consciousness of readers' growing awareness of the proliferation of such pseudo-genuine accounts. These prefaces divorce themselves explicitly from imaginative fabrications and stress facts as the essential element of their works; they insist upon real people, real events, and real places:

The Characters and Accidents therein are not made up of fictitious and fabulous Tales, but they are composed of clear Matter of Fact28

Mais l'Ouvrage que je vais donner au Public est d'un genre si éloigné de l'Allégorie, que je crois que son Titre seul et sa Texture me dispensent et de toute justification . . . Je dois cet hommage à la vérité, que je n'ai point le mérite d'une fabuleuse invention29

The Publick will soon perceive, that what is here laid before them, is neither Romance nor Forgery; but incontestable Matters of Fact, supported by authentick and legal Vouchers30

Parmi les faits que j'ai à raconter, je crois qu'il y en aura de curieux . . . j'ose assurer qu'ils sont vrais. Ce n'est point ici un histoire forgée à plaisir, et je crois qu'on le verra bien.31

Frequently, the prefacer's claim of truth and/or disclaimer of fiction did not adequately satisfy suspicious readers. To counter predicted charges of falsity, many authors had their prefacer verbalize the probable doubts of the reader in order, ironically, to eliminate them. By

admitting that he is aware that many readers will consider the work presented as fiction, the preface undercuts this perception; it is a psychological stratagem that puts the reader in a vulnerable frame of mind. He questions his initial doubts, and he is more willing to lend himself to the guidance of the prefacer, who gains the reader's trust by this apparent expression of frankness. Thus by imperceptibly manipulating the reader's suspicions, the prefacer succeeds in transforming a potentially negative reaction towards a text to a positive response.

To illustrate, the preface to The Perjur'd Citizen immediately addresses the reader's expected disbelief in the following account and at the same time arouses the reader's curiosity about the undisclosed content of the proffered work: "The extraordinary Methods that have been taken to suppress this Fact, have made many People cautious how they give Credit to any thing concerning it."³² He then explains how this scandalous catastrophe has been concealed by the families and friends of those involved and by all but one newspaper, "and that which made mention of it, did it in so obscure a Manner, that few took notice of it."³³ He also foresees that because of the mass of fabricated "true" accounts flooding the market, readers will be further incredulous: "To add to this; the many gross Impositions that have been lately pass'd upon the World for True Secret Histories, justly render every thing under that

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Title suspected." Calling attention to this literary phenomenon makes the reader more willing to credit this prefacer. He then proceeds to cite his source to reassure the reader.

In Prévost's Histoire de M. Cleveland, the prefacer/translator concedes that while (supposedly) translating this manuscript, he himself questioned the veracity of certain parts:

La plus grande partie de son histoire roule aussi sur des faits dont la mémoire est récente; de sorte qu'un lecteur ne doit pas craindre qu'on le transporte ici dans la région des fables. Cependant il faut convenir qu'il s'y rencontre des aventures extraordinaires, et qui semblent demander d'être attestées. C'est ce que j'ai reconnu moi-même en les traduisant; et je me suis trouvé engagé, par cette réflexion, à faire ici quelques remarques qui pourront arrêter le penchant que la plupart des lecteurs ont à l'incrédulité.³⁵

The prefacer assumes the role of the reader and as such the actual reader identifies with him. Subsequently, the prefacer continues in an elaborate fashion to dissipate the reader's doubts by reflecting upon the nature of truth, by researching historical sources, and by tracing the origin of the text. The reader, as a result, will also agree with the conclusion of the prefacer's "investigations": this is a true story.

In those cases where the events related seem extraordinary and particularly tax human credibility, the prefacer

again acknowledges this fact or forewarns his reader that he will not believe the following account. But then he immediately insists that such occurrences are very much within the realm of life's possibilities.³⁶ The prefacer usually resorts to the accepted cliché that life is often stranger than fiction; he repeatedly draws attention to the incredible events taking place in daily life. The prefacer to Courtilz de Sandras' Mémoires de Mr. L.C.D.R. reminds his reader: "Nous en voions arriver tous les jours de si extraordinaires, que ceux qui connoissent bien Paris, ne s'en étonneront pas."³⁷ In Penelope Aubin's The Life of Madam de Beaumont, A French Lady, the prefacer exclaims:

The Story I here present the Publick withal, is very extraordinary, but not quite so incredible as these [previously cited examples of rampant immorality]. This is an Age of Wonders, and certainly we can doubt of nothing after what we have seen in our Days³⁸

A French prefacer similarly points out how the extraordinary forms part of the ordinary fabric of existence: "Je traduis les faits tels qu'ils sont dans d'original; ils doivent paraître d'autant moins extraordinaires, que notre siècle nous a fourni des exemples, sinon semblables, du moins équivalens."³⁹ Thus by expressing and validating a reader's doubts, the prefacer disarms him and consequently nips his objections in the bud.

The above argument, "extraordinary but true," focuses upon another means of dispelling doubt: the use of logic.

Treating the reader with respect and granting him the ability to distinguish between the true and the false, the prefaceer appeals to his reason. The prefaceer requests the reader not to prejudge a work, but rather to consider it with a sense of open-mindedness and fairness. The prefaceer to La Terre australe connue argues:

Je sçay bien que ceux qui veulent mesurer la Toute puissance avec les bornes de leurs imaginations, ne regarderont cette pièce que comme une fiction faite à plaisir: mais il n'est pas juste de flater leur vanité, en épargnant des vérités qui doivent édifier toute l'Europe. Il ne faut avoir qu'une légère teinture de la raison, pour être persuadé que n'y ayant rien de l'impossible en toute cette pièce, on est au moins obligé de suspendre son jugement, sur ce qui est en effet.⁴⁰

To convince the reader that he is telling the truth, the prefaceer Duncan Campbell (The Secret Memoirs of the Late Mr. Duncan Campbell) argues that no one could possibly doubt the veracity of his autobiography because he leaves this account as his last will and testament, as his written confession to God. He certainly would not jeopardize the salvation of his soul, his life after death, by lying:

None therefore can be so Barbarous as to imagine I would wish to quit the World with a Fallacy, as I must do if I wrote any thing here in Injury to Truth, because, though at this Time I am in a tollerable State of Health, whenever I shall be called hence, this is my last Will and Testament to the Publick, and ought to be depended on as much as the last Words of a dying Man.⁴¹

To a largely religious audience, this line of thought would have won a reader's belief. In addition, the "posthumous" publication of these purported memoirs increased their "truth" value.

In Marivaux's La Vie de Marianne, the prefacer begins defensively by responding to those projected critics who would view this work as one of fiction written for the reader's diversion. Besides referring the reader to the explanation of the manuscript's existence to be found in the next chapter, the prefacer contends "logically" that if this were a novel, it certainly would not contain so much reflection and morality. This work reveals a woman expressing herself honestly and spontaneously; it is not a relation of adventures for the sake of attracting readers:

Ce qui est de vrai, c'est que si c'était une histoire simplement imaginée, il y a toute apparence qu'elle n'aurait pas la forme qu'elle a. Marianne n'y ferait ni de si longues ni de si fréquentes réflexions: il y aurait plus de faits, et moins de morale; en un mot, on se serait conformé au goût général d'à présent, qui, dans un livre de ce genre, n'est pas favorable aux choses un peu réfléchies et raisonnées. On ne veut dans des aventures que les aventures mêmes, et Marianne en écrivant les siennes, n'a point eu égard à cela. Elle ne s'est refusée aucune des réflexions qui lui sont venues sur les accidents de sa vie 42

Most probably, the reader does not dispute this reasoning; indeed, he more than likely proceeds with a bias towards considering the narrative as genuine.

In his Letters from a Persian in England to his Friend at Ispahan, George Lyttelton addresses his preface to the bookseller instead of the reader, for if he can supposedly convince a bookseller of his credentials as a translator and interpreter of Persian, as well as of the authenticity of the account, the reader too will be prevailed upon. After all, who can be more suspicious or can have greater literary judgment than an experienced bookseller? Or so a reader should reason. Hence, he should also accept the following argument:

I am aware that some people may suspect that the character of a Persian is fictitious, as many such counterfeits have appeared in both France and England. But whoever reads them with attention will be convinced, that they are certainly the work of a perfect stranger. The observations are so foreign and out of the way, such remote hints and imperfect notions are taken up, our present happy condition is in all respects so ill understood that it is hardly possible any Englishman should be the author.⁴³

If this is not totally persuasive, at least it provides a sufficient stimulus for the reader to turn the page.

Related to the use of logic in instilling belief is the method of asking rhetorical questions which gain the reader's agreement. In his elaborate preface to Mémoires de Mr. L.C.D.R., Courtilz de Sandras asks:

En effet, quel inconvenient peut-on trouver à l'égard de ce qu'il dit du Cardinal de Richelieu? ne sçait-on pas

bien que tous les Ministres sont misté-
rieux, ou du moins qu'ils le doivent
être, & que celui-là sur tout affectoit
cette qualité, comme le raporte fort
bien Mr. L.C.D.R.?⁴⁴

"Yes, of course, one knows" is the predicted answer. The author/prefacer of An Account of Some Remarkable Passages in the Life of a Private Gentleman realizes that many critics will scorn his account of God's visitation to him and consider him visionary, hallucinated or insane, but he applies rhetorical logic to compel his reader to conclude the following: "For what does all the force of their Conclusions of this Nature amount to, but this, that because there are many Tales and Romances, there are no true Histories, no real Accounts of Things?"⁴⁵ Surely the reader will agree that such is not a reasonable induction.

Prévost also opens his Voyages du Capitaine Robert Lade with a rhetorical question: "De qui attendroit-on des relations de voyages plus utiles et plus intéressantes que des Anglois?"⁴⁶ He then goes on to relate the naval background and the many explorations and exploits of the English. After eight pages of detailed historical facts and a catalogue of English discoveries, the reader is to deduce automatically that this account relates a similarly true voyage. Robert Lade's invented voyages simply blend into the previous review of actually recorded journeys.

In all the cited instances, prefacers, arguing logically, induce their readers to reach a desired conclusion--

specifically, this is a true story--by virtue of their power of reasoning.

As more and more of these self-proclaimed "true" accounts appeared, however, readers' suspicions concerning their authenticity also grew. In fact, many reached a point where they no longer could even believe the truth when actually confronted with it: "Since 'tis too true, that Truth is in Suspicion, the Suspicions of some fancy Truth but a Fiction."⁴⁷ This problem was cleverly exploited by some authors who, instead of using the above mentioned methods to identify the "true" nature of their work, countered the expected negative response by contrasting their "genuine" account to those current counterfeits. Their prefacer usually first points out that such a situation exists: the reader does indeed face a deluge of disguised fictional works. Hence, the prefacer's sympathetic attitude toward the reader's predicament sways the reader from the start to separate this "true" narrative from those other "gross Impositions."⁴⁸ For example, the prefacer to Eliza Haywood's The Fortunate Foundlings declares:

The many Fictions which have been lately imposed upon the World, under the specious Titles of Secret Histories, Memoirs, &c. &c. have given but too much room to question the Veracity of every Thing that has the least Tendency that way: We therefore think it highly necessary to assure the Reader, that he will find nothing in the following Sheets,

but what has been collected from Original Letters, Private Memorandums, and the Accounts we have been favoured with from the Mouths of Persons too deeply concerned in many of the chief Transactions not to be perfectly acquainted with the Truth, and of too much Honour and Integrity to put any false Colours upon it.⁴⁹

By pointing a finger at unbridled literary deceit, a prefacer also makes a reader prone to believe that he is dealing with someone of an opposite ilk, with someone sincere and straightforward. These prefacers declare their texts innocent of fiction and defenders of truth. In his introductory remarks to his Nouveaux Intérêts des Princes de l'Europe, Courtilz de Sandras righteously proclaims:

Je ne m'amuse point à déguiser les choses comme la plupart des gens font dans le siècle où nous sommes, et je suis de l'humeur de ce fameux Poète qui dit dans une des ses Satires, qu'il faut nommer un chat un chat, etc . . . Un des plus grands ornemens de mon Livre, c'est que j'y dis la vérité.⁵⁰

The desired effect is for the reader to appreciate, as well as believe, such honesty. In The Hermit, the prefacer differentiates the narrative which follows from those which have "so promiscuously blended together" truth and fiction, such as Robinson Crusoe, Moll Flanders, Colonel Jack, and the Travels of Lemuel Gulliver. His work is more useful than any of these "because every Incident, herein related, is real Matter of Fact."⁵¹

A derivative device is for the prefacer not only to

divorce his text from imposters, but also to maintain that if he were not such a lover of truth, he could also have lied or invented. In Tachmas, Prince de Perse, Nouvelle Historique, the prefacer states that he had ample opportunity to fabricate without detection, given the remoteness of the subject matter, but he preferred the truth:

Et comme la Vérité n'est jamais plus aimable que quand elle paroît toute nue, on a évité avec soin tous les ornemens étrangers dont on a coûtume de la charger dans ces sortes de matières. Ce n'est pas qu'on n'y eut pû joindre plusieurs circonstances vraysemblables qui n'auroient pû estre contredites; l'obscurité ou se passent toutes choses dans le Palais des Sophis, offroient un assez beau champ pour mentir impunément. Mais on a mieux aimé ne rapporter que fidèlement ce qu'on a appris de cette Nouvelle.⁵²

Duly impressed by this expression of candor, the reader should consequently allow himself to be guided by the prefacer's interpretation of the text.

Thus far, we have discussed how prefacers claim to present facts and/or disclaim fiction, but there are also prefacers who deliberately disassociate their work from any resemblance to reality in order to achieve, ironically, the same effect--literal truth. These authors expected their readers to see through this disclaimer, for many of these accounts are key novels or scandal chronicles. Thus, many readers then easily recognized the thinly veiled portrayals of recent events and famous figures, and so they considered

the denial only a shield against charges of libel or scandal. However, there are works which, in fact, are largely, if not wholly, fabricated, but which are intended to procure the reader's belief, even under the rubric of declared fiction. In the preface to The Happy Unfortunate, Elizabeth Boyd purposely tantalizes the reader with her ambiguous statement concerning the nature of her work in order to arouse his curiosity and interest:

As for the Persons, who are meant by the Characters, which the curious who have perused them in manuscript have already warmly enquir'd into, I shall only beg leave to add, that as I call my Book a Novel, not a History, I am not oblig'd to acquaint the Publick whether the Story's real or Fictitious, for supposing it the former, Self-interest, or what is much more prevalent with me, Generosity, would bind me in Honour never to reveal the Secret; nor would I betray any Person, if I was confided in, either to make a Friend, or ward off the Malice of an Enemy; and must beg my Subscriber's Pardon, if I leave them in the dark, or rather to their own private Judgement.⁵³

Although this is actually fiction, the reader is inclined to interpret it as factual because he prefers it so; truth intensifies his reading pleasure. Daryl J. Bem in his Beliefs, Attitudes, and Human Affairs observes that "because we believe something to be desirable, we persuade ourselves that it is true."⁵⁴ Aware of the reader's proclivity to construe reality behind the purported mask, authors were able to deny their invention in such a sugges-

tive manner as to inculcate belief. Even when this was not their deliberate intention, readers often ignored the prefacer's disavowal and tried to guess the identities of those involved. For instance, the prefacer of Madame de Lafayette's La Princesse de Montpensier declares the work to be the creation of the author, even though actual, historical names are used: "L'Auteur ayant voulu, pour son divertissement, écrire des aventures inventées à plaisir, a jugé plus à propos de prendre des noms connus dans nos histoires que de se servir de ceux que l'on trouve dans les romans."⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the general reader would tend to suspect that the account may, in fact, be true, not only because of the historical context, but also because of his innate desire for it to be so. Readers' search for facts behind fiction has not disappeared today, nor have prefatorial disclaimers:

This is a work of fiction. All the characters and events portrayed in this book are fictional, and any resemblance to real people or incidents is purely coincidental.⁵⁶

Any resemblance between characters in this book and any persons living or dead is purely coincidental.⁵⁷

These repudiations do not prevent modern readers, any more than they did earlier ones, from wondering upon whom these accounts are based; on the contrary they very often encourage conjecturing, especially in such flagrant teasers as The Greek Tycoon.

Finally, one should mention that some pseudo-genuine works contain prefaces which do not assert their authenticity. Having entitled their narrative "true" or having given it a nonfictional label, these authors have their prefacer begin by discussing directly the content or source of the manuscript. But his tone and approach imply unmistakably that the work is literally true. The uncritical reader yields to this unnoticeable suasion and accepts the assumption of authenticity. The French, in particular, favor this subtle method of manipulation. They concentrate mainly upon elaborating the source of the text with an engrossing story or adventure which testifies to its veracity. "Mon dessein dans cet Avertissement, est seulement de rendre compte de quelle façon le Manuscript m'est tombé entre les mains"⁵⁸ is a typical introductory statement. A detailed analysis of this device follows, after the discussion of the second principal part of the fictional preface: the disclosure of content.

vii

Disclosure of Content

Prefacers often reveal the events and describe the characters involved in order to engage the reader's interest, so that he desires to read on. Moreover, by absorbing the reader in the work, the author distracts him from questioning whether the story is actually true or not. For

example, in Courtilz de Sandras' La Vie de Gaspard de Coligny, the prefacer praises the glorious deeds of the heroic Gaspard and then relates how cruelly and unjustly he was executed, regardless of his self-sacrifice. At this point, the reader pities the hero and wants to know the reasons for his fate, rather than wondering whether this is an authentic account or not.⁵⁹

The more alluring the subject matter, the more easily it induces a reader to believe. As has been noted, very often one believes what one wants or would like to believe.⁶⁰ In purported nonfiction as in genuine nonfiction, content supersedes form; it is what is related that is significant, not how. Subject matter especially enjoys priority for the inexperienced or common reader, who ignores errors in the quality of the writing in favor of its pleasure.⁶¹ Philip Stewart notes, for example, that one of the most effective ways of attracting the eighteenth-century reader was through the proliferation of plots and subplots.⁶² What appealed to the late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century reader was a variety of subjects: historical accounts, domestic life, love, adventures, and sensationalism.⁶³ Their titillation was increased when they were labeled true,⁶⁴ which consequently heightened the reader's desire to accept them as such. Thus, the choice of subject matter could function as part of the author's repertoire of belief-instilling devices.

In their historical accounts, authors either elaborated upon actual events and lives, pretended to reveal the true version of a public scandal, capitalized on celebrated affairs but masked the names of the participants, or cast fictional characters within a historical framework. Apparently readers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were as much in awe of and fascinated with the private lives of their famous people as are those of our own century, which explains why secret histories, scandal chronicles, and key novels filled their best-seller lists. Hence, for the authors trying to achieve literal truth, selecting a contemporary subject provided both the security of the familiar and a platform for belief; the reader approached the text with a preconception that it was true. Indeed, the reason why many authors continued to use nobles, even invented ones, as protagonists, was that the reader viewed them as real from the beginning. As Stewart notes, no reader had memorized the Indicateur nobiliaire.⁶⁵ This accounts for the use of titled foreigners as well.

Although the eighteenth century still exhibited interest in reading about the aristocracy and military heroes, popular preference switched to the concerns and crises of domestic life, particularly in England.⁶⁶ The portrayal of the lives of private citizens enabled middle class readers to identify more easily with their problems and feelings than with those of the nobility. This vicarious gratifica-

tion also facilitated the author's guise of nonfiction: what is close to one's own experience seems true. One should, however, underline the fact that although domestic life filled many of these disguised novels, their depictions dealt with extreme situations or were degraded into melodrama, rather than imitating realistic living conditions. Love affairs, sordid entanglements, attempted rapes, incest, and murder characterize these works. Nevertheless, such narratives captured their readers' imagination and their credence.

Authors also preferred to write a "history" of an ordinary, unknown subject because it freed them from historical limitations; a private "life" could not be as easily exposed or disproved as could a falsified history of a public figure. But the reading public's lack of familiarity with the characters also meant a lack of initial belief; the text incurred the full burden of proving itself true. William Nelson observes:

As it is difficult to prove "domestic" stories of this kind false, so it is difficult to persuade the reader that they are true . . . The narrative must testify to its own truth, must be so like the truth that it can be no other.⁶⁷

Contributing to the complications of domestic life is love, the most popular of subjects. However, unlike its idealistic portrayal in the earlier romances, love, for the most part, is viewed from a classical Greek and Roman

perspective: a fatal weakness, disease, and menace.

According to an English prefacer: "Love is the most formidable enemy a wise man can have, and is the only passion

against which he has no defence."⁶⁸ Prévost's prefacer to

Manon Lescaut describes des Grieux as "un exemple terrible de la force des passions."⁶⁹

The victims of love and the victimizers, the male rakes and female coquettes, captivated audiences. Recognizing this popular taste, authors increased their readers' appetite for this material by asserting authenticity.

Extraordinary adventures--disasters, dangers, disappearances, disguises--also enticed readers. Exposing a human being to extreme conditions and testing his endurance in formidable situations fascinate others and prompt them to participate vicariously in these experiences. The claim that they are true increased their allure and permitted belief in the seemingly impossible. Since the extensive explorations of the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries, the reading public had, in fact, been inundated with volumes of authentic travel literature containing heretofore unheard-of cultures, customs, events, and exploits. Thus, the unusual in life accustomed readers to accept the credibility of the incredible in disguised fiction. Fraudulent journals containing strange adventures simply merged with the existing fabulous "reality."

A pervasive element coloring much of the content of

disguised fiction is sensationalism, which enthralled seventeenth and eighteenth-century audiences as it does our own, for human nature succumbs to an innate desire to be startled and thrilled. Scandal, seduction, deceit, and treachery readily gratified hungry readers, and both authors and booksellers indulged the public palate. Robert A. Day remarks: "If something sensational occurred to a person of note, booksellers quickly seized the occasion to present the public with letters purporting to be his."⁷⁰ Labeling such stories "true" intensified the titillation, as well as providing the necessary catalyst to promote reading in those morally hesitant; it soothed guilty consciences.

viii

Revelation of the Text's Source

A third part of the fictional preface deals with revealing how the text originated--who wrote it, when, where, and why was it written, and how did the prefacer receive the manuscript? Convincing answers to these questions dispose of doubts concerning a work's authenticity.

Trusting the teller of the story very often determines whether a reader believes a relation or not. Bishop Fell, in the "Life of Richard Allestree," which prefaces his friend's Sermons, declares:

In all endeavours of persuasion, the credit of the Speaker being of as great moment as the inherent truth and evidence of what is spoke, it will be reasonable that there should go along with this large collection of Sermons, some account of the Person who was the Author of them; for if it be made out, that they came from one of integrity and knowledge, who neither would deceive others, nor was likely to be deceiv'd himself . . . his discourses must carry with them a proportionable weight and value.⁷¹

Although a prefacer's admission to a lack of knowledge of the author does not necessarily decrease a work's credibility--in fact, on the contrary, it may attest to the sincerity of the prefacer and reinforce the truth of the text, as in the case of Les Lettres portugaises: "Je ne sais point le nom de celui auquel on les a écrites, ni de celui qui en a fait la traduction, mais il m'a semblé que je ne devais pas leur déplaire en les rendant publiques"⁷² --for the most part, however, a prefacer buttresses the authority of the purported author. One such method is to treat the author's impeccable reputation of honesty as a well known fact. The prefacer to The Hermit affirms:

As to the genuiness of this Treatise, I am further to assure the reader, that . . . Mr. Dorrington is allowed, by all who know him, to be a gentleman of unquestionable veracity, and above attempting an imposition upon the public.⁷³

In his Mémoires de Mr. L. C. D. R., Courtilz de Sandras' prefacer views these memoirs as so obviously true, because

"tous" know that the author was such an honorable man, that to try to verify them would be a waste of time:

Il semble presque inutile de vouloir justifier ce qu'il raporte dans ses Mémoires. Tous ceux qui ont été hommes de guerre, ou hommes de Cour, sçavent qu'il n'étoit pas capable de conter une fable pour une vérité et encore moins de l'écrire pour abuser le public.⁷⁴

The prefacer/publisher of Gulliver's Travels similarly vouchsafes his journal on the basis of Gulliver's almost legendary veracity:

There is an Air of Truth apparent through the whole; and indeed the Author was so distinguished for his Veracity, that it became a Sort of Proverb among his Neighbors at Redriff, when any one affirmed a Thing, to say, it was as true as if Mr. Gulliver had spoke it.⁷⁵

Even though readers then did not know who these character witnesses were, most did not question their identity nor consider the need to check; these prefatorial recommendations sufficed to infuse the idea of existing testimony. Thus, readers did not even notice that they were not only being persuaded to believe in the purported author's probity, but also necessarily in his assumed existence.

As for when and where a work was written, the closer in time and place to the contemporary audience, the more likely it is to arouse the reader's interest and engage his belief; hence, seventeenth and eighteenth-century French and English settings predominate. Focusing upon the speci-

fic moment in the author's life which prompted him to write can also bolster this nonfictional guise: he was in the throes of passion, enduring a crisis, before his death. In addition, the particular place where a writer composed his manuscript can also captivate a reader; writing within a convent, in prison, on a seafaring ship, or on a deserted island spices the prose.

Disclosing veritable motives for a subject's composing his true story offers another means of creating credibility. Frequently the reasons for an author's writing and for a prefacer's publishing ⁷⁶ overlap; they usually attribute their respective activities to a desire to expose the truth, to preserve a memory, to vindicate a victim, to purge their souls, to pass their leisure time, to obtain or grant pleasure, to satisfy a request, or, the favorite, to instruct and thus to serve their audience. To avoid compromising their integrity and hence discrediting their professed veracity both authors and prefacers usually did not express their goals of self-interest--gaining money and fame.

Most often, divulging why one writes occurs when the prefacer is the author as well, ⁷⁷ but occasionally the prefacer, as an objective third party, reveals the author's purpose. In Mémoires de Mr. L.C.D.R., the prefacer professes:

Je crois aussi que le principal motif qui a poussé Mr. L.C.D.R. à écrire n'a pas tant été le désir qu'il avoit de faire voir qu'il avoit été employé dans les affaires secrètes, que celui de rendre les autres sages par son exemple.⁷⁸

The prefacer to Robinson Crusoe similarly affirms the author's social and moral concern as actuating his account:

The story is told with modesty, with seriousness, and with a religious application of events to the uses to which wise men always apply them (viz.) to the instruction of others by this example, and to justify and honor the wisdom of Providence in all the variety of our circumstances, let them happen how they will.⁷⁹

In each instance, a presumably unbiased person, the prefacer, is voicing this positive view of the author; therefore, the reader is more likely to accept these altruistic motives, which already possess an inherent suggestion of truth by virtue of their selflessness.

Enlisting belief in a text's origins relies greatly upon the prefacer's explanation of how he obtained the manuscript for publication. Although some prefacers simply state without elaborating that they endured a great deal of trouble to obtain it, many create clever circumstances, which, however, were eventually imitated and hence became prefatorial clichés. Papers uncovered after the decease of the purported author form one typical means of acquiring a manuscript. One atypical use of this device is found in the preface to Nouvelle Ecole Publique des Finances, which

opens with a curé's discovery of the slain Frère Bruno, a mysterious hermit. The dead man's will reveals his until then unknown personal and professional background; he was a successful Parisian financier who at fifty had a spiritual transformation:

Un fantôme lui aiant apparu en pleine campagne (comme il le rapporte lui-même par son Testament) le menaça que s'il ne changeoit de vie, et n'abandonnoit ces Maitresses et tous ces infâmes plaisirs, qu'il seroit puni par une morte violente avant que l'année fut expirée; puis disparut.⁸⁰

This leads to his reform and resolution to become a monk. (The reader, however, still wonders why he died so violently, since he underwent these changes.) He bequeaths to his brother a trunk filled with family papers and a manuscript, meant to be destroyed, in which he treats contemporary conniving business practices. The brother's subsequent death in battle leads to the passage of this manuscript into the hands of the prefacer, a man who does not care about the reputations of those exposed and, on the contrary, wants these corrupt businessmen ruined, and so he publishes the work. The complicating twists and turns characterizing this preface make it a particularly realistic, dramatic, and engrossing one.

In another pattern, the prefacer pretends to unearth an unknown manuscript in some old drawer, trunk, or untouched spot, or in some strange manner. A manuscript

may even be stumbled upon in a common place as in Madame Desjardin de Villedieu's Le Portefeuille. The preface claims to have found a collection of letters in "un portefeuille de velours noir" while walking through the Jardin de Simples. Although describing the letter-case adds a realistic touch, this account strains modern belief in chance. Yet this explication would have passed as possible, if not probable, at the time of its publication in 1674, before the mass onslaught of such fortunate discoveries.⁸¹

In The Capacity and Extent of the Human Understanding, the introductory narrator also makes a chance discovery, but a more unusual one. While on a leisurely walk along the seacoast, he sees a small trunk coming in with the tide. Having pulled it out, he retrieves a journal. He authenticates this rather improbable occurrence, as well as stimulating the suspense, by delaying the disclosure of the contents. Because of the salt water, he has to wait three or four days for the manuscript to dry before he can read it:

The Leaves would not bear opening, without being torn to Pieces: so that, though my Curiosity was sufficiently raised to know what was contained in a Manuscript, which had fallen after so strange a Manner into my Hands; yet, I was forced, for that time to return it into its former Receptacle and wait till a fitter Opportunity offer'd.⁸²

This poignant detail and his concession concerning the strange circumstances surrounding the work's acquisition

win a reader's belief.

Certain authors capture their reader's attention immediately by transforming their prefaces into exciting adventures or interesting stories relating how their prefacers procured a manuscript. In Mirza-Nadir, the prefacer, using the present tense, provides an extensive narrative tracing his access to the manuscript. Traveling through Europe, he stops at . . . [sic] to visit his intimate friend M. de N., who is afflicted with the assumed loss of his son in Constantinople. During this visit, the prefacer, along with his friend, witnesses a shipwreck, and he fearlessly swims out to save a few of the survivors. Thus far, the reader should be duly impressed by and trusting in such a heroic man; the reader should also be moved by the heightened, emotional language characterizing his lengthy account. Both elements prepare the reader to accept the rather highly "coincidental" fact that the two children rescued were on their way to see M. de N.:

Ô fortune! . . . ô bonheur inespéré! .
 . . Monsieur, dit-il [the children's
 chaperone] à M. de N. . . ouvrez votre
 coeur aux plus tendres sentimens de la
 nature et de l'amitié; je vous remets le
 dépôt précieux dont j'étois chargé;
 voilà votre petit-fils, et voilà le fils
 de votre tendre ami le Marquis de Sr.
 T. 83

Although apparently melodramatic, this would have appealed to the sentimentality of the reader. The chaperone proceeds to pull out from a small "cassette" a manuscript

written by the long-lost friend to explain in full his past and present life and that of the son. This may appear to tax a reader's belief--how did the chaperone save the casket in the shipwreck?--but if the reader is properly caught up in the overwhelming events recounted, he would tend to grant credence and ignore the improbability.

Another original example is the pretext provided for the existence of The Memoirs of Sigr. Gaudentio di Lucca.⁸⁴ In the first preface, "The Publisher to the Reader,"⁸⁴ the publisher considers it his primary purpose to explain "how this curious Manuscript came to Light, considering the dark and deep Secrecy with which all things are transacted in the Inquisition."⁸⁵ This immediately would have spurred his English reader's interest, since the Inquisition was generally viewed as a formidable, if not evil, religious instrument. The manuscript contains Gaudentio's confession, as well as an account relating his arrest and examination by the Inquisition. The publisher further arouses his audience's curiosity by revealing the reason for Gaudentio's imprisonment: "He had dropp'd some Words of several strange Secrets he was Master of, with Mutterings of an unknown Nation, Religion, and Customs, quite new to the Italian Ears."⁸⁶ The manuscript is sent by the Secretary of the Inquisition at Bologna to his close friend and correspondent, Signor Rhedi, the head librarian at Venice. The publisher, praising Rhedi, a Catholic, as a man who

"loves and esteems a Learned Man tho' of a different Persuasion," recounts how he, an Englishman and Protestant, became friends with Rhedi because of their mutual love of "Learning and Antiquity."⁸⁷ By describing their developing friendship, the publisher sets up a plausible reason for Rhedi's allowing him to peruse one of his library's "rarities," the memoirs of Gaudentio.

The publisher, overwhelmingly impressed with the "Novelty of the Thing," asks to make a copy of it, but is at first denied:

He was answer'd, he could not permit the Manuscript to be taken out of the Library; nor could he, with Safety to himself, allow a Stranger, and of a different Religion too, the Liberty of staying so long in the Library by himself, as the Transcribing would take up.⁸⁸

However, Rhedi finally permits one of his own librarians to transcribe the work for him. By adding these realistic objections before the publisher attains a copy of the manuscript, the author inculcates within the reader a faith in its authenticity.

Another device to explain access to a manuscript includes a prefacer's claim to be a friend or relative of the author. A close relationship with the purported author allows the prefacer to vouchsafe personally the text's verity and grants the prefacer authority to represent the author's behalf. In The Jilted Bridegroom, the prefacer

sets out to exculpate the reputation of his dear friend, who not only has been victimized by love, but has ironically been socially condemned as a victimizer by the verbal viciousness of a coquette and her family. He presents his friend's account, a letter written to the prefacer along with letters that passed between the lovers, exposing how the coquette seduced, lied, led him to a proposal of marriage, and finally abandoned him for one with more money and land. The prefacer's righteous indignation at this "uncommon and vile" female abuse and brutality effectively convinces the reader of the narrative's "naked truth."⁸⁹

The prefacer to Prévost's Mémoires d'un Honnête Homme relates how he, a Frenchman, was traveling with an English gentleman through Europe and met in Germany a French prisoner accused of spying. Touched by this captive's miserable condition, the prefacer, disguising his French nationality because of the precarious political situation, wins permission to approach the prisoner, whom he befriends. He thus discovers that for personal reasons the prisoner has written down the events which ruined his fortune and peace of mind. For an unexplained reason (and one which the reader may overlook because of the length of the preface), the prisoner has made two copies. The prefacer boldly asks for one copy in order to assist him more conveniently. Persuaded that the prefacer is an honest man, the prisoner yields to his request as long as

he meets three conditions. The manuscript will never be published without a particular lady's consent, without her editorial power, and without the suppression of real names. Having sworn to these stipulations, the prefacer gains the manuscript, but he must conceal it from the Germans for fear of arrest.⁹⁰ Hence Prévost, by means of an engrossing episode based on the emotional involvement of the prefacer, captivates his reader's credulity.

In Gulliver's Travels, the publisher/prefacer declares himself to be an intimate friend and distant cousin of the author. This relationship supposedly explains why Gulliver left his journal in his custody to dispose of as he saw fit. Gulliver, however, in his letter to his cousin which precedes the publisher's preface, disputes having given him such blanket authority and vociferously protests the publisher's treatment of his manuscript:

I do not remember I gave you Power to consent, that any thing should be omitted, and much less than anything should be inserted . . . You have either omitted some material Circumstances, or minced or changed them in such a Manner, that I do hardly know mine own Work . . . I do in the next Place complain of my own great Want of Judgment in being prevailed upon by the Intreaties and false Reasonings of you and some others, very much against mine own Opinion, to suffer my Travels to be published.⁹¹

This written argument enhances the illusion of literal truth, for in real life people lie for self-interest, and

both friends and relatives quarrel. Thus, Gulliver's contradiction of the publisher's version increases the reader's interest and belief in the veracity of the text.

In another tactic, the prefacer claims to have heard from a reliable source a true story which he deems worthy of publication. Aphra Behn in The Unfortunate Happy Lady: A True History states:

I cannot omit giving the World an account, of the uncommon Villany of a Gentleman of a good family in England practis'd upon his Sister, which was attested to me by one who liv'd in the Family, and from whom I had the whole Truth of the Story.⁹²

Prévost's prefacer to Manon Lescaut listened first hand to des Grieux's account and wrote it immediately afterwards:

Je dois avertir le lecteur que j'écrivis son histoire presque aussitôt après l'avoir entendue, et qu'on peut s'assurer, par conséquent, que rien n'est plus exact et plus fidèle que cette narration.⁹³

The prefacer's commitment to the faithfulness of this relation should sway the reader as well.

Occasionally a prefacer will pretend to have witnessed the events described in the main text. Assuming the position of an objective reporter grants a journalistic validity to one's account. Ocular proof testifies to events having happened; what is related forms history. If telling a story as an eye-witness verifies its occurrence, similarly, telling a disguised fiction also becomes history. This

is a favorite device in Behn's works. In Oroonoko, she professes to be one of the sources of her narrative:

I was myself an Eye-witness to a great Part of what you will find here set down; and what I could not be Witness of, I receiv'd from the Mouth of the chief Actor in this History, the Hero himself, who gave us the whole Transactions of his Youth.⁹⁴

Since there is direct evidence supporting this relation, the reader should certainly be convinced of its truth, as he apparently was, considering the warmth of Oroonoko's initial reception. (Oroonoko was, however, first popularized by Thomas Southerne's dramatic version in 1696.)

Although in the majority of fictional prefaces, the prefacer is someone other than the purported author or subject of the work, he is sometimes the former or both. The lack of an unbiased voice is the main disadvantage of this type of preface, but, on the other hand, the prefacer as author or subject provides the reader with direct, personal contact with the source of the text. The immediacy and intimacy of the first person narrative generate an aura of truth; the "je" or "I" guarantees that these events really took place. It also allows the reader to accept more readily the prefacer/author's motive for writing.

For example, the prefacer of Mémoires de Madame la Marquise de Fresne is the Marquise herself. She begins with the assumption that most people are familiar with her unique life story and the rare adventures caused by her

husband's selling her to a pirate: "Il y a bien peu de
 personnes en France qui ne sachent mon histoire." ⁹⁵ This
 mere statement of presumed knowledge alone disposes the
 uninformed reader to perceive the work as factual. He is
 not likely to question whether in fact anyone has ever
 heard of the Marquise. The power of suggestion suffices to
 instill belief. The Marquise convincingly presents her
 reasons for writing her memoirs: to rectify false, slander-
 ous accounts against her and to encourage the reformation
 of her husband. She adds that since hers is a factual
 relation, for the sake of truth, she must necessarily
 divulge the negative side of her life, which compels the
 reader to believe that the Marquise desires to be honest
 regardless of the consequences. She proceeds to tantalize
 her readers further by implying the inclusion of sexual
 adventures, exoticism, and unimagined dangers.

In Secret Memoirs of the Late Mr. Duncan Campbell, the
 prefacer/author, Duncan Campbell, justifies this purported
 autobiographical account as resulting from a manifest
 concern about his reputation after death. His own written
 story will protect his name and preserve his memory by
 preventing distortions, fabrications, and rumours from
 becoming the truth in some biographer's version:

As no Person who has made any Noise in
 the World either for good or bad Quali-
 fications, can die without exciting a
 Curiosity in the Publick to know some-
 thing more after his Death, than could

possibly be learned while he lived, I doubt not, but as soon as I shall cease to be, several Pens will be employed in relating what I have been; and therefore think it more proper to write my own Life (with which I am certainly best acquainted) than to leave it to the Mercy of some Hackney Scribler or other, who, perhaps, is altogether ignorant of every Thing concerning me but my Name and Profession, yet will pretend to know more of me than even God Almighty did.⁹⁶

This incisive and cynical observation holds true today. The death of anyone famous or infamous impels many biographers to reap the commercial rewards of an instant life history, as in the recent accounts of Elvis Presley, John Lennon, and Tennessee Williams. This exploitative literary tendency has prompted many well-known figures to write their autobiographies. For example, in the preface to Ingrid Bergman's timely My Story, she ascribes her writing to her son's disquiet over the probable lies that will be spawned after her death. She cites his motivating statement:

"Mother," he said, "do you realize that when you are dead many people will throw themselves on your life story taking information from gossip columns, rumors, and interviews. We, your children, can never defend you because we don't know the truth. I wish you'd put it down."⁹⁷

This position of self-defense moves modern readers as it did Campbell's contemporary audience to believe in the truth of the work.

Sometimes the prefacer/author professes to have

written solely for his own satisfaction and not for publication. In the preliminary remarks to Prévost's Mémoires du Marquis de..., the Marquis protests an indifference to the prefatory convention and stresses his desire for personal catharsis. This, of course, spurs the reader's curiosity, which is the desired effect:

Je n'ai aucun intérêt à prévenir le lecteur sur le récit que je vais faire des principaux événements de ma vie. On lira cette histoire si l'on trouve qu'elle mérite d'être lue. Je n'écris mes malheurs que pour ma propre satisfaction: ainsi je serai content si je retire, pour fruit de mon ouvrage, un peu de tranquillité dans les moments que j'ai dessein d'y employer.⁹⁸

In the introduction to his Mémoires de Monsieur le Marquis D'Argens, D'Argens also claims to write only for himself. As a result, he can bare the naked truth, since he supposedly has no publisher, bookseller, or reader with whom to contend: "Rien n'a pû m'obliger à farder, ni à déguiser la vérité. J'ai dit naturellement ce que je pensois sur des⁹⁹ matières assez délicates." This seemingly makes sense if the reader goes no further, to wonder why the work was published if it was not originally meant to be; authors, indeed, did not expect most of their readers to challenge the prefacer's motive.

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Corroborative Evidence

In addition to asserting the truth of a manuscript, revealing its origins, citing supporting witnesses, and/or personally testifying to its veracity, a prefacer sometimes utilizes other means of corroborative evidence. At this point, however, the general reader should already believe the prefacer's claim of literal truth. Further forms of proof merely affirm this belief; they do not cause it. W. V. Quine and J. S. Ullian clarify this distinction:

"Evidence for belief must be distinguished from causes of belief. Often we gather evidence to defend a belief that we already hold, while the cause of our already having held the belief is forgotten or undiscovered."¹⁰⁰ In this case, the prefacer does the gathering for the trusting reader.

One method by which to strengthen one's contention of truth is to add an abundance of concretizing details, whose overwhelming sweep very often leads to a seductive sense of authenticity, as Philip Geyelin points out in reference to Henry Kissinger's memoirs, White House Years: "Just because one is seeing so much of what went on so vividly, the tendency is to believe that one is seeing the real thing and the whole thing."¹⁰¹ Even authentic history as viewed by an actual historical figure can convey a deceptive reality. Readers can be mesmerized by the sheer magnitude

of details which make them preoccupied with sorting them out rather than questioning their nature. Samuel Richardson also observes that it is "a necessity to be very circumstantial and minute, in order to preserve and maintain that Air of Probability, which is necessary to be maintained in a Story designed to represent real Life."¹⁰² Details are "the hidden persuaders"¹⁰³ which create authenticity accumulatively.

In Defoe's A True Relation of the Apparition of One Mrs. Veal, the prefacer insists: "The relation is matter of fact, and attended with such circumstance, as may induce any reasonable man to believe it."¹⁰⁴ Prévost, a master of elaborate prefaces, amasses fact after fact to consolidate his disguised fiction. Referring to the purpose of the preface, he declares:

Il ne suffit pas de lui [the reader] en annoncer le nom par un titre, il faut qu'il en connoisse la situation et le chemin pour y entrer avec assurance, il faut même qu'il soit informé de ce qu'il y doit rencontrer de curieux et d'agréable, pour éviter l'embarras des recherches et des incertitudes, qui diminueront la satisfaction qu'il se promet sur la route. Tel est le service que je vais rendre à mes lecteurs.¹⁰⁵

In most of his prefaces, he proceeds in length to inform the reader of all the particulars surrounding the composition, possession, and author of the manuscript.

Dating the preface itself, as well as signing it, rather than leaving it undated and unnamed, which was

customary, also enhances the impression of truth; it was written by someone during a specific moment in history. In Gulliver's Travels, "The Publisher to the Reader" is signed "Richard Sympson," while "A Letter from Capt. Gulliver to his Cousin Sympson" is dated April 2, 1727. In La Paysanne Parvenue, ou Les Mémoires de Madame la Marquise de L. V., the prefacer inserts a letter from the author addressed to him, "Lettre de la Marquise de L. V. au Chevalier de M," requesting his service; it is signed and dated. Both examples illustrate that specific dates and names grant a journalistic authority to a preface and consequently to the work as a whole; they solder the fabricated texture of literal truth. The reader perceives these characters as palpable people performing in the real world.

Some authors cited other written sources to support their version. For instance, Courtilz de Sandras in La Vie de Gaspard de Coligny mentions that other memoirs verify his biography:

J'ay plusieurs Mémoires entre mes mains,
qui me doivent donner de l'assurance .
. . C'est sur ces Mémoires que je
travailleray, et je ne croiray pas
perdre mes peines, si je puis faire un
portrait qui ressemble en quelque façon
à son Original.¹⁰⁶

Defoe, in his Memoirs of a Cavalier, similarly maintains this pose of substantiating proof:

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 for their general Part by all the Writers of those Times107

Although both authors do not name these accrediting accounts, the common reader does not require their identity either; he accepts their existence in good faith, which is exactly what the author expects.

When the prefacer, indeed, documents his source, he achieves even greater credibility. The prefacer to Le Czar Demetrius, Histoire Moscovite discusses the dispute over the Czar's claim to royalty. He sides with those historians believing that he was the son of Czar Bofilowits and cites the historian Margaret's L'Etat de la Russie (1606) as proving his legitimacy; he actually quotes a passage from this work, which gives the reader the impression of perusing actual research. Since Margaret was a Frenchman who served as a Capitaine des Gardes for Demetrius and hence witnessed the events related, his account possesses particular weight: "J'ai crû devoir l'en croire préférablement à tout autre, puis qu'il a été témoin oculaire des événements qu'il rapporte." ¹⁰⁸ The certainty of the prefacer's conviction, along with his supporting evidence, should secure the reader's accord for Czar Demetrius's existence and in the authenticity of the narrative.

Another persuasive method by which to enhance literal truth is the use of double or multiple layers of prefatory

material. The reader is addressed by two or more different prefacers who attest to a work's veracity. Such apparent objectivity and corroborating testimony incline a reader to believe the purported nonfiction. In Mémoires d'Anne-Marie de Moras, the editor's "Avertissement" first appears to reveal how the manuscript came to be written and published. Although Mlle de Moras never wanted her letters printed, her friend and correspondent copied them into a manuscript so that she could defend her socially stigmatized friend. One of those to whom the friend showed the manuscript, "une Femme de qualité," took the manuscript with the promise of returning it, but, having a grudge against the late Madame de Moras, she revenges herself by changing the manuscript to destroy completely the daughter's reputation. Only discovering the changes later, the friend in despair enlists a professional author to correct the copy in order to counteract "les progrès du poison de la calomnie."¹⁰⁹ As a result of the need for haste, the editor, unable to read the manuscript before publication, detects afterwards that one of the vindictive woman's calumnies against Madame de Moras remains on page 77. This entangling intrigue distracts the reader from reflecting upon the text's authenticity and ensnares his conviction. The reader is concerned about learning the reasons for this scandal which has ruined an apparently innocent young girl, and thus does not even consider the possibility that she is a fictional

creature.

The second preface, the "Introduction" written by Mlle de Moras to her friend, further increases the reader's interest in her fate. Enclosed in a convent and closely guarded, Mlle de Moras describes her desperate torment and also explains realistically how she is able to answer her friend's request to write. Using deception and bribery, she manages to get ink and paper and to have her letter delivered. She purposely includes this information to give credence to her words: "Après ce détail nécessaire pour la vraisemblance, la baze de la crédulité, j'entre en matière." ¹¹⁰ The reader, engrossed by her predicament, also is eager to enter the text, and consequently the idea of "lie" or "fiction" does not enter his mind.

The prefacer to Pylades and Corinna: or Memoirs of the Lives, Amours, and Writings of Richard Gwinnett Esq. and Mrs. Elizabeth Thomas refers to supposedly verifiable sources: a recorded lawsuit and named witnesses. (Actually this is a fictionalized version of an authentic court case.) The prefacer even quotes part of the legal transcript:

That these Papers, now offered to the Publick, are Genuine; shall be confirmed by an unquestionable Authority. Most of them were produced as Vouchers, in a Law-Suit, on the Behalf of Corinna, in order to recover the Legacy bequeathed her by Pylades, and bear the following Attestation, viz.

"These Letters were shewn to Sir

John Guise, Bart. Francis Seymour, and Augustine Pope, at the Times of the Examination taken in Chancery, in the Part of Elizabeth Thomas, Spinster, Complainant, against George Gwinnett the Elder, and other Defendants."111

The above is notarized by an Edward Northy. After this initial documentation, a letter to the father of Pylades by Corinna, the plaintiff and winner of the suit, follows; in sorrow she complains that her lover's will has been violated and that she has been wronged. Thus, official, objective pieces of evidence satisfy the reader's reason, and the personal voice of the grieved lover appeals to his emotions.

In Manon Lescaut, Prévost fabricates a double context of "truth." Its preface is entitled "Avis de l'Auteur des Mémoires d'un Homme de qualité"; it is a story within a story, a memoir within a memoir. The prefacer justifies publishing this work separately because its length would have interrupted the narration of his own life. After this "Avis," there is the "Première Partie," which contains an unlabeled continuation of prefatory material which sets up the meeting and relationship of the prefacer and the chevalier des Grieux. This assumes the shape of a short story which features the Homme de Qualité encountering a coach with twelve chained prostitutes being led for deportation to America. He becomes extremely curious, as does the reader at this point, about one exceptionally beautiful, young prisoner. Indeed, the sensationalism of the

material itself seduces the reader to believe it. The preface relates his first meeting with the mysterious, forlorn Chevalier, his subsequent service to him, and his chance meeting with him again two years later, at which time he finds des Grieux in greater distress: "J'y retournai en effet, plein d'impatience d'apprendre le détail son infortune et les circonstances de son voyage d'Amérique."¹¹² By this time, the reader is similarly devoured by his curiosity to know more about the chevalier and the captivating prisoner. Des Grieux, from sincere gratitude, now tells his pitiful story quite willingly, in contrast to his realistic refusal to do so the first time they met as strangers.

Occasionally more than two layers of prefatorial material initiate a work's fiction. For example, to substantiate An Account of Some Remarkable Passages of a Private Gentleman, the author provides detailed documents to precede the narrative proper. The first "document" is "The Attestation of an Eminent Physician of the College," who swears to the veracity of the author on the basis of his own personal knowledge of him and of that of others:

The Author of this Book was a Person of an Estate, Generous and Charitable, and could be under no Temptation to use any Base, or By-ends whatever to usher into the World this Religious Treatise . . . He was a diligent Searcher after substantial Truths.¹¹³

Having testified to the author's reputable character, the

eminent physician presents his own estimable credentials.

The second prefatory layer reads "The Publisher to the Reader." It mentions the existence of other witnesses willing to affirm the work's authenticity if anyone still doubts. Then there is "The Preface" written by the author. Anticipating critical mockery and disbelief, he insists that "if any think some Passages seem Strange, let them rest assured they are no less true."¹¹⁴ He stresses the high seriousness of his work, which is dedicated to the "Honour of God and the Service of Mankind."¹¹⁵ His moral purpose also explains his use of plain language: "The Stile is not polite, nor is the Method calculated to please the Sons of Art: My Business is not to amuse, but edifie; which engages me to write in as familiar Terms as possible."¹¹⁶ The reader should find himself respecting such an honorable and honest man.

The second edition also contains another document which certifies that additions appended are actually from the author's own original papers, and their truth is unquestionable. This latter is signed F. S., dated January 4, 1711, and then notarized by a Richard Mayo, one of the chaplains of St. Thomas's Hospital at Southwork, who furthermore swears to have been an eyewitness to the above attestations; he places his initials and states his official position as "an eminent Doctor of Physick, Fellow of the College and the Royal Society."¹¹⁷ This entire,

elaborate mechanism impresses the reader and imprints the idea of literal truth.

Miscellaneous evidence includes the occasional insertion of frontispieces, which feature portraits, maps, and illustrative scenes. They provide graphic proof of actuality; a picture is not only worth a thousand words, but also worth an assertion of truth. For example, in Gulliver's Travels, there are both a portrait of the reputable Mr. Lemuel Gulliver and a map of his purported voyages. These convey an immediate, concrete image of the subject's existence and travels.

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Explanation of the Prefacer's Role

Constraining belief in disguised fiction depends not only upon the content of the preface, but also upon the manner of its presentation--the prefatory voice: his identity, his tone, and his ties to the main text. Whether the reader believes the prefacer determines to a large extent whether he will believe the in-text narrator; thus, the prefacer must gain the reader's confidence from the beginning. Having introduced the work as true, induced reader interest in the subject, disclosed the manuscript's origins, and provided substantiating evidence (although he may not proceed in this order nor, indeed, include all of these elements), the prefacer has already established his

relationship to the reader and has influenced the reader's perception and approach towards the text. Since the preface is very often not the purported author of the main text, he will now define expressly his function as editor, publisher, bookseller, translator, or simply preface.

(The preface's title frequently announces his identity.)

These roles furnish a facade of objectivity; the reader assumes that a presumably unbiased editor, for example, would judge the work more impartially than an involved author.

Usually the preface (who is, in fact, most times the actual author) pretends to be the editor. Even if he assigns himself one of the other titles, he will also undertake editorial tasks. An editor/preface will either claim noninterference with a text or justify his textual changes. In the former case, he maintains that he has not added nor deleted anything in the manuscript; the reader, therefore, is assured of an authentic version. Unadorned truth represents the ultimate value which more than suffices to make a work pleasing. For instance, an English preface admits: "I was not willing to make any Alterations, knowing that Truth unadorn'd, is more agreeable than cloathed in all the Beauties of Roman Eloquence . . . Truth is sweetest when naked."¹¹⁸ Such an editor/preface correlates style and truth; he contends that one can deduce veracity from the language used. He comments on the

writing deficiencies--flaws, negligent style, lacunae in the text--to prove that an amateur, a "real" person, not a professional, is the author. Hence, truth, besides its qualitative function--its enhancement of a work's worth--also performs a formal function: it compensates for literary problems: "What it wants in Eloquence, it has in Truth."¹¹⁹

Furthermore, an editor/prefacer urged his readers to believe in the assumption that a work's artlessness reveals a work's sincerity, which is equivalent to truth. The simplicity of language and the naïveté of style presumably allow the reader to recognize its genuine nature immediately. The editor/prefacer to the Mémoires d'Anne-Marie de Moras declares: "La naïveté avec laquelle ils sont contez, prouve que la franchise & la vérité en sont les principaux ornemens, et mérite qu'on y ajoute foi."¹²⁰ In The Adventures of Lindamira, the "artless Pen" unveils the "Vertuous and Constant Lindamira."¹²¹ Prévost's preface to Histoire de M. Cleveland argues: "Pour ceux [malheurs] de M. Cleveland, ils sont exposés si naturellement, qu'ils semblent n'avoir pas besoin d'autre preuve que la franchise de son coeur et l'honnêteté invariable de ses sentiments."¹²²

On the other hand, it is implied or explicitly stated that a deception (or a novel) would be sophisticated, complex, and artificial. Crébillon's preface to Lettres

de la Marquise de M.*** informs his reader: "Vous n'y trouverez pas cette correction de style dont se parent nos écrivains: mais les négligences d'une femme spirituelle, sont des grâces que tout votre esprit ne saurait attraper."¹²³ Only one who has experienced these events could have written them in this manner. A fiction writer could never portray them in such a faithful fashion, or so the reader should believe. Obviously, this argument conceals the fact that one need not display skillfulness and cunning to simulate sincerity and, hence, truth. As expected, this point did not occur to most readers.

Noting gaps within a text also creates the impression of a genuine manuscript. In authentic memoirs, there are always instances of missing or lost pages, unexplained events, or unidentified people, as opposed to a fictional work whose content, created and controlled by an author, is supposedly fully developed and disclosed. In The Memoirs of Sigr. Gaudentio, the publisher/prefacer relates how he unfortunately lost some of the sheets of the manuscript as he traveled back to England from Venice. But the reader should reason: this is life; these mishaps naturally happen.¹²⁴ In his attempt to connect the narrative of Cleveland's memoirs, the editor/prefacer to Histoire de M. Cleveland confesses that he has committed an error in tracing Cleveland's whereabouts because his memoirs are interrupted at this point. To preserve the work's truth,

he has retained this flaw in preference to inventing a linking passage: "On voit que je me suis aperçu de ma faute: mais j'ai mieux aimé qu'elle subsistât, que de mettre une interruption désagréable dans mon ouvrage, ou de la remplir par quelque aventure de mon imagination."¹²⁵

This admission strengthens the reader's faith in his honesty and in the text's authenticity.

In contrast to the editor/prefacers who deny having altered the manuscript at all for the sake of truth, others with the same expressed purpose defend their editorial contributions--their corrections, omissions, additions, and expurgations--as necessary to facilitate reading and to accommodate public taste. Concerned about maintaining the attention of his audience, the publisher/prefacer to Gulliver's Travels acknowledges his deletions of certain technical aspects contained within the journal, such as the discussion of winds, tides, ship management, longitude, and latitude in order "to fit the Work as much as possible to the general Capacity of the Readers."¹²⁶ To assure his readers of his integrity and to safeguard the credibility of his text, the preface states that he is willing to show the unedited text to any interested traveler. This invitation to check the source for oneself frequently recurs; it boosts the reader's confidence in the preface's claim without jeopardizing seriously his pose. Familiar with human nature, a writer expects that most will not accept

this offer. His preface, thus, gains by his apparent forthrightness.

The preface/editor of Voyages du Capitaine Robert Lade exercises his editorial prerogative on the basis of his repugnance for the incredible; he has eliminated what he found unlikely to be true:

L'aversion que j'ai pour le merveilleux sans vraisemblance, m'a fait retrancher . . . de longs récits, dont je n'ai pas mieux senti l'agrément que l'utilité. Je n'aurois pas même fait grâce à l'histoire du dragon et des reptiles, si je ne m'étois souvenu qu'on en trouve des traces dans plusieurs autres relations.¹²⁷

Such a man, who so obviously despises lies, would not publish a fictional fabrication. The reader, in most cases, does not stop to reflect that probability is not an adequate criterion by which to judge truth; he does not realize that, not only what seems unlikely, but also what seems likely need not be true. The author counts on his reader not to delve too deeply into such problems, and he does, indeed, predict correctly the superficial reading habits of his general audience.

Morality also often justifies the intervention of an editor's pen. Because of the vulgar, obscene language of Moll Flanders's original account, the editor/preface felt obligated to bowdlerize it, "to put it into a Dress fit to be seen," as well as to censor "some of the vicious part of her Life."¹²⁸ These editorial modifications reinforce the

"fact" that Moll, although supposedly reformed at present, was a debauched sinner and criminal of the lower classes. Thus, the reader perceives Moll as an actual person who might lie, instead of a created character who might lie.

In addition to the two opposite stances towards editing, there are two separate positions upon the use of editorial evaluation. Some editor/prefacers insist that the reader should judge a work while an editor should only prepare a correct text. For example, Prévost's editor/prefacer to Campagnes philosophiques de M. de Montcal maintains that "le droit de juger appartient au public, et l'unique soin de l'éditeur est de lui présenter son objet avec toutes les préparations qui peuvent le mettre en état d'en porter son jugement."¹²⁹ This deference to and respect of the reader's judgment win the preface his trust. But this is often a disarming technique; flattered, the reader then tends to believe what follows, which ironically contains the editor/prefacer's judgment: "Mais il est vrai aussi qu'un éditeur ne s'en donneroit pas la peine, s'il n'étoit persuadé que ce qu'il offre au public mérite¹³⁰ effectivement son suffrage."

Those editor/prefacers who explicitly express an opinion about the work assume the role of reader, which creates an even closer relationship with their audience. They utter the questions, doubts, and reactions the potential reader will have. The preface's skepticism engenders

his reader's faith in his interpretation and opinion of the text, which, of course, are invariably positive. In the epistolary preface of The History of Prince Mirabel addressed from one friend to another, the prefacer rests his proof of authenticity on his personal ability to separate truth from falsehood and on his cautious nature. But this prefacer does not wish to strain their friendship; he proceeds to credit his assertion by tracing the origin of each part of the manuscript:

You know how Incredulous I am in Affairs of this Nature, and therefore may conclude that what I have pronounc'd to be Genuine, is grounded upon Authorities not to be shaken: But it's possible you will be Inquisitive, and push my Confidence in this kind to an open discovery of the means whereby so Valuable and Authentick a Manuscript came into my Hand: I shall endeavor to give you as much Light into the Secret as may convince you of the Truth of the Facts related131

One is inclined to reason that if the prefacer is so wary of fabrications, then once he is convinced of a work's authenticity, it must be so. Personal declaration of belief implies truth and persuades others to believe as well. Rodney Needham points out that "every assertion of belief is a claim on credence; a man who says that he believes something asserts that it is true, and thereby that others also ought to believe it."

Reasons for Publication

Complementing the prefacer's explanation of his role is his statement of purpose, which forms a final element of the preface.¹³³ Providing a plausible reason for publishing someone's true account furnished another means of securing credibility. Most commonly, the prefacer professes to fulfill the conventional Horatian formula: to instruct and to please. Courtilz de Sandras's pronouncement is typical of the period: "La vérité des événements qu'il y raconte, et la solidité des réflexions qu'il y fait, vous instruiront dans l'histoire en vous divertissant."¹³⁴ Some prefacers, however, emphasize the instructive and/or moral value of their works, rather than that of entertainment, because amusement is associated with telling an imaginative story, not a factual history. The more serious the purpose, the more truthful it seems. For example, in the History of the Lives and Robberies of the most Notorious Highway-Men, Foot-Pads, House-Breakers, Shop-Lifts and Cheats of Both Sexes in and about London and Westminster, sensational stories of "their most Secret and Barbarous Murders, Unparalleled Robberies, Notorious Thefts, and Unheard of Cheats"¹³⁵ are clothed under the respectable veil of morality. Their exposure is "a means to instruct and convert the wicked and profane persons of

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 this licentious age." Disregarding the anticipated cynics "qui veulent mesurer la Toute puissance avec les bornes de leurs imaginations," and who "ne regarderont cette pièce que comme une fiction faite à plaisir," the prefacer to La Terre australe connue claims to offer his readers inestimable value--divine wisdom--in issuing this text: "Je me suis déterminé de le donner au Public: parce que [le lecteur découvrira] une infinité de la divine
 137
 Sagesse."

A variation of the "to instruct" motif is the prefacer's assertion that he is performing a public
 138
 service. In contrast to "the many Fictions which have been lately imposed upon the World," the prefacer to The Fortunate Foundlings presents their rare and wonderful adventures to strengthen the moral fiber of society: "We flatter ourselves this Undertaking will not fail of receiving the Approbation of all who wish well to a Reformation of Manners, and more especially those who have Youth under
 139
 their Care." The prefacer of Nouvelle Ecole publique des Finances publishes the manuscript left by the murdered financial wizard turned hermit to expose and destroy business tyrants abusing poor people. He wants "la race éteinte et exterminée pour jamais, de tout ce qu'il y a de
 140
 Fermiers Généraux et de Financiers au monde." To enlighten society, the prefacer to The Affecting Case of the Queen of Hungary purports to rectify the malicious

distortions and misrepresentations of this historical figure by other writers: "She has had the additional Curse of falling into the Hands of Bad Writers, who have shewn her no Mercy. She has been misrepresented by some, libell'd by others, and expos'd by all."¹⁴¹

Occasionally, the prefacer stresses that the social benefits of a work are so great that he felt obligated to override the author's objections to its publication. This intensifies the reader's curiosity and his conviction that the text is true, since it was printed against the author's wishes; the stolen is more seducing than the freely given. For instance, the prefacer to the Mémoires de Mr. L.C.D.R. informs his reader:

Je donne ici ces Mémoires contre la dernière volonté de leur Auteur, lequel n'ayant sur vécu qu'un mois ou deux à sa retraite, me dit de les supprimer. Je n'en sçais pas bien la raison, si ce n'est qu'étant prêt de quitter le monde, il vouloit épargner quelques gens, avec qui il avoit eu des démêlés, et de qui il ne dit pas trop de bien. Mais cela ne m'a pas paru une raison sufisante, pour priver le public d'un ouvrage si curieux142

In the Voyages and Travels into Brasil and the East-Indies, the prefacer similarly chooses to disregard his brother's request to suppress the publication of his travel journals in order to serve society: "But, after his decease, considering with myself, that such useful collections ought not to be buried in oblivion, I thought fit to publish them for

the publick good."¹⁴³ The idea that the prefacer places the public first also elicits the reader's gratitude and, hence, his willingness to believe the prefacer's assertions of authenticity.¹⁴⁴

Some prefacers purport not only to benefit their own reading audience, but also posterity.¹⁴⁵ The prefacer to La Vie de Jean-Baptiste Colbert presents this biography from "le simple désir d'instruire la Postérité des principales actions de ce grand Ministre."¹⁴⁶ In The Honour of Merchant-Taylors, the prefacer considers this work essential to mankind because it provides proper role models for future generations:

Such worthy acts being recorded to posterity that others by reading what they have done might be incited to imitate their worthy examples, and such is (or should be) the chief end of writing Books, and was the main end intended in this.¹⁴⁷

This selfless concern and dedication to publish for a higher cause reverberates the ring of truth.

This analysis of prefatory devices reveals that they operate principally on the author's assumptions regarding his general reader, who is typically casual, content-oriented, unquestioning, and, thus, vulnerable to manipulation. The next chapter discusses whether these prefatorial stratagems actually succeeded in disguising fiction as fact.

Notes

CHAPTER III

DEVICES, TECHNIQUES, AND METHODS USED
TO DISGUISE FICTION AS FACT

1

D. M. Armstrong, Belief, Truth, and Knowledge (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 4.

2

Michael J. Kelly, "The Functional English Preface through the Eighteenth Century," (Diss. Univ. of Mass. 1968), p. 144.

3

Philip Stevick, Introd., Clarissa or the History of a Young Lady by Samuel Richardson (San Francisco: Rinehart Press, 1971), p. xxii.

4

Lewis A. Coser et al., Books: The Culture and Commerce of Publishing (New York: Basic Books, 1982), p. 219.

5

Betrand Harris Bronson, Facets of the Enlightenment: Studies in English Literature and Its Contexts (Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1968), p. 332.

6

S. Paul Jones, A List of French Prose Fiction from 1700 to 1750 (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1939), p. xv.

7

William H. McBurney, A Check List of English Prose Fiction 1700-1739 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1960), p. viii. The French were even more reluctant to use the word "roman" because of its semantic closeness to "romance." See text, p. 17.

8

A typical English example of prefatory material within the title page is "The Finish'd Rake; or Gallantry in Perfection. Being the Genuine and Entertaining Adventures of a Young Gentleman of Fortune Faithfully Extracted from Memoirs written with his own Hand, and design'd by him to be published, as is believed, had he not been prevented by Death. The Whole Being interspers'd with several curious, Whimsical, and Uncommon Incidents; particularly his Intrigue with a fine Coquette Milliner, near one of our

most noted inns of Court, whilst he was a student" (London: A. Dodd, 1733). Although less detailed, French title pages also include some prefatorial information. An example is Mémoires d'Anne-Marie de Moras, Comtesse de Courbon; Ecrits par Elle-même, Et adressez à Mademoiselle de *** Pensionnaire au Couvent du Cherche-midi (La Haye: Pierre de Hondt, 1740).

9

Bronson, p. 343.

10

Joseph Addison, The Spectator, No. 567, 14 July 1714, in Selected Essays from The Tatler, The Spectator, and The Guardian, ed. Daniel McDonald (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1973), p. 557.

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134 of 946 works listed by Jones have the author's name on the title page (p. xiii), and 37 of 228 original English works listed by McBurney have it.

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Henri Coulet, Le roman jusqu'à la Révolution (Paris: Armand Colin, 1967), p. 215.

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Addison, pp. 557-558.

14

"Deep Throat's Children," The New Republic, 2 May 1981, p. 10.

15

Aphra Behn, The Fair Jilt, in Oroonoko and Other Prose Narratives, ed. Montague Summers (1916; rpt. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1967), p. 70.

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See Tore Janson, Latin Prose Prefaces: Studies in Literary Conventions, Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis Studia Latina Stockholmiensia, No. 13 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1964) for a detailed discussion.

17

Cited in text pp. 2-3.

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Ernst Robert Curtius, European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, trans. Willard R. Trask, Bollingen Series No. 36 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1953), p. 70.

19

For a detailed discussion of the classical roots of the preface, see Janson pp. 24 ff., Curtius pp. 68-71, and Peter France, Rhetoric and Truth in France: Descartes to Diderot (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1972).

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France, p. 32.

21 Daniel Defoe, Moll Flanders: An Authoritative Text, Background and Sources, Criticism, ed. Edward Kelly (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973), p. 3.

22

Defoe, Moll Flanders, p. 6.

23

Laurent Bordelon, "Préface," Gomgam ou l'Homme prodigieux (Paris: Pierre Prault, 1713), n. sig.

24

Bordelon, "Préface," Gomgam, n. sig.

25

Marie Catherine Hortense Desjardins, "Avis," Nouvelles Affriquaines, Vol. II of Oeuvres Complètes (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1971), 247.

26

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27

Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1974), p. 197.

28

"To the Reader," The Jilted Bridegroom, introd. William Graves (1706; rpt. New York: Garland, 1972), p. 1.

29

Jacques Lamorlière, "Avertissement de l'Auteur," Mirza-Nadir ou Mémoires et Avantures du Marquis de Sr. T*** (La Haye: n. p., 1749), pp. vij-ix.

30

"Preface," The Unparallel'd Imposter: or, the Whole Life, Artifices and Forgeries of Japhet Crook (London: n. p., 1731), p. iii.

31

Mariiaux, "Première Partie," Le Paysan parvenu, introd. Frédéric Deloffre (Paris: Éditions Garnier Frères, 1969), p. 6.

32

"Preface," The Perjur'd Citizen or Female Revenge, introd. Malcolm J. Bosse (1732; rpt. New York: Garland, 1972), p. v.

33

"Preface," Perjur'd Citizen, pp. v-vi.

34

"Preface," Perjur'd Citizen, p. vi.

35

Prévost, "Préface," Histoire de M. Cleveland, Vol. IV of Oeuvres (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1969), iv.

36

This repeated reference to the extraordinary, unique, unheard of, but true, content stems from the ancient Greek topos: "I bring things never said before." See Curtius, pp. 85-86.

37

Courtilz de Sandras, "Préface," Mémoires de Mr. L.C.D.R. (La Haye: Henry Van Bulderen, 1687), sig. *2^r.

38

Penelope Aubin, "Preface to the Reader," The Life of Madam de Beaumont (London: E. Bell et al, 1721), p. vi.

39

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40

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41

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42

Marivaux, "Avertissement," La Vie de Marianne ou les aventures de Madame le comtesse de***, introd. Frédéric Deloffre (Paris: Editions Garnier Frères, 1963), p. 5.

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George Lord Lyttelton, "The Publisher to the Bookseller, Letters from a Persian in England to his Friend at Ispahan" (London: J. Millan, 1735), pp. iv-v.

44

Courtilyz de Sandras, "Préface," Mémoires de Mr. L. C. D. R., sig. *3r.

45

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46

Prévost, "Préface," Les Voyages du Capitaine Robert Lade, Vol. XV of Oeuvres (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1969), i.

47

Richard Franck, "The Epistle to the Reader," Admirable and Indefatigable Adventures of the Nine Pious Pilgrims (London: John Morpherw, 1708), n. sig.

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Courtilyz de Sandras, Nouveaux Intérêts des Princes de l'Europe (Cologne: Pierre Marteau, 1688), pp. 9-10.

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52

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Elizabeth Boyd, "Preface," The Happy Unfortunate; or, the Female Page, introd. William Graves (1732; rpt. New York: Garland, 1976), n. sig.

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Daryl J. Bem, Beliefs, Attitudes, and Human Affairs (Belmont, Ca.: Brooks/Cole Pub., 1970), p. 27.

55

Madame de Lafayette, "Le Libraire au Lecteur," La Princesse de Montpensier in Romans et Nouvelles, introd. Emile Magne (Paris: Editions Garnier Frères, 1961), p. 3.

56

These are typical disclaimers found on the copyright pages of modern novels. One example is Barney Leason, Rodeo Drive (Los Angeles: Pinnacle Books, 1981).

57

An example of the second disclaimer is in Judith Rossner, Looking for Mr. Goodbar (New York: Pocket Books, 1975).

58

"Avertissement," Mémoires secrets pour servir à Histoire de Perse (Amsterdam: n. p., 1749), pp. iij-iv.

59

Courttilz de Sandras, "Préface," La Vie de Gaspard de Coligny (Cologne: Pierre Marteau, 1691).

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Noted in this text, pp. 56-57.

61

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62

Philip Stewart, Imitation and Illusion in the French Memoir Novel, 1700-1750: The Art of Make-Believe (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1969), p. 155.

63

This is not to lose sight of the other kinds of prose writing during this period, such as devotional writing, especially in England, fairy tales (especially those of Perrault and Mme d'Aulnoy), and moral instruction.

64

See this text, pp. 22-24.

65

Stewart, p. 219.

66

French readers of 1662 or 1678 desired princes, but after the Regency and the social ascent of many parvenus, the reading public of 1735 accepted heroes of obscure birth, but who had climbed the social ladder. See Georges C. May, Le dilemme du roman au XVIII^e siècle; étude sur les rapports du roman et de la critique, 1715-1761 (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1963), p. 165.

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William Nelson, Fact or Fiction: The Dilemma of the Renaissance Storyteller (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1973), p. 108.

68

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Prévost, "Avis de l'Auteur, Histoire du Chevalier des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut in Vol. I of Romanciers du XVIII^e Siècle (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1960), p. 1220.

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72

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73

Longueville, "The Preface," The Hermit, p. vii.

74

Courtily de Sandras, "Préface," Mémoires de Mr. L.C.D.R., sig. *2r.

75

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76

The reasons given by prefacers for publishing a manuscript are discussed on pp. 87 ff.

77

See discussion on pp. 71 ff.

78

Courtily de Sandras, "Préface," Mémoires de Mr. L.C.D.R., sig. *4r.

79

Daniel Defoe, Robinson Crusoe. An Authoritative Text: Backgrounds and Sources, Criticism, ed. Michael Shinagel (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975), p. 3.

80

"Préface," Nouvelle Ecole publique des Finances, ou l'Art de Voler sans Ailes, 2nd ed. (Cologne: Adrien l'Enclume, 1708), p. vj.

81

Marie Desjardins de Villedieu, A Madame ***, "Le Portefeuille," ed. Jean-Paul Homand (Exeter, England: Univ. of Exeter, 1979), p.3.

82

John Kirby, Capacity and Extent of the Human Understanding; Exemplified in the Extraordinary Case of Automathes, 2nd ed. (London: R. Manby, 1747), p. 3.

83

Lamorlière, "Avertissement de l'Auteur," Mirza-Nadir, pp. xxvii-xxix.

84

See discussion of prefatory layers, pp. 77 ff.

85

Simon Berington, "The Publisher to the Reader," The Memoirs of Sigr. Gaudenzio di Lucca, introd. Josephine Grieder (1737; rpt. New York: Garland, 1973), p. iii.

86

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- 113 "The Attestation....," Account of...the Life of a
Private Gentleman, n. sig.
- 114 "The Preface," Account of...the Life, p. vi.
- 115 "The Preface," Account of...the Life, p. v.
- 116 "The Preface," Account of...the Life, p. vii.
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sig.

- 118 "Preface," A True and Impartial History of the Life and Adventures of Some-Body (London: n. p., 1740), n. sig.
- 119 "To the Reader," The Jilted Bridegroom, p. 2.
- 120 Mouhy, "Avertissement," Mémoires d'Anne-Marie de Moras, sig. *4^v.
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- 131 "The Introduction," The History of Prince Mirabel's Infancy, Rise, and Disgrace (London: J. Baker, 1712), n. sig.
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Louis Rigoine, 1699), n. sig.

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136

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137

Sadeur, "Au Lecteur," La Terre australe connue, n. sig.

138

It stems from the topos: "The possession of knowledge makes it a duty to impart it." See Curtius, p. 87.

139

Haywood, "The Preface," The Fortunate Foundlings, n. sig.

140

"Préface," Nouvelle Ecole publique, p. x.

141

"The Preface," The Affecting Case of the Queen of Hungary (London: T. Cooper, 1741), n. sig.

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144

The public's right to know frequently forms the main argument of newspapers and news media today to justify their publication of government leaks. Readers are more likely to pay attention and believe such information simply by virtue of their method of exposure.

145

The theme that the content is worth preserving for the benefit of posterity also stems from classical historical writers. See Janson, p. 149.

146

Courtilz de Sandras, "Préface," La Vie de Jean-Baptiste Colbert (Cologne: n. p., 1695), n. sig.

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CHAPTER IV

THE SUCCESS OF THE PREFACE AS A FICTIONAL BEGINNING

i

Introduction

A designated "beginning" responds to a primal demand in man for order and understanding. Edward W. Said, in his Beginnings: Intention and Method, discusses this point:

Formally, the mind wants to conceive a point in either time or space that marks the beginning of all things Underlying this formal quest is an imaginative and emotional need for unity, a need to apprehend an otherwise dispersed number of circumstances and to put them in some sort of telling order, sequential, moral, or logical.¹

A point of departure promises a point of arrival: the creation of something new, the hope of fulfillment, the goal of success. A narrative beginning initiates the reading process, forms the first part of the end product, and also determines to a great extent the content of the remaining whole. These opening lines of prose very often prove the most crucial to write, for they will focus or diffuse the reader's concentration, facilitate or hinder his progress into the text.

As one of the options available for commencing a

literary work in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the preface furnished a time tested and respected formula for overcoming this primary hurdle and allowed the work to flow in its desired direction. The preface not only solved the author's problem of writing a beginning, but also solved the problem of his immediately capturing his audience's attention.² Michael J. Kelly comments further:

Because practically all prefaces provide an entrance or transition to a work--the reader had to begin somewhere--they recommended themselves as useful devices while they generated the interest in a work that sometimes made the difference between sale or bookseller's dusty shelf, popularity or obscurity.³

To judge the success of the fictional preface, we must consider whether it disguised effectively its fiction as fact and inculcated belief, and secondly whether it functioned as an integral element of the entire text.

ii

The General Reader Believes

The majority of these pseudogenuine works did indeed succeed in convincing their general audience--as opposed to their fewer but more educated critics--of their literal truth. The fictional preface made the difference between belief and nonbelief, between reading and rejecting a text.⁴ Readers actually believed, for example, in the physical reality of the Portuguese nun, Oroonoko, Robinson

Crusoe, Manon, Marianne, and even in Gulliver. Modern bewilderment at such gullibility can be dispelled by recalling the typical fiction reader's minimal level of education, his immaturity in worldly matters, and his lack of reading experience.⁵ John Richetti considers the difficulty in explaining such credulousness:

The degree of belief accorded by readers to the "documentation" attached to even the most improbable work is an imponderable. The most that can be said is that this documentation may have been more important for one class of reader than for another . . . in order to accept and participate in the narrative.⁶

Authors characterized correctly their "class of reader," perceived his expectations, and predicted his reading responses. They catered to the reader's appetite for adventure, intrigue, and scandal, but also maintained him on his diet of "truth" to appease his moral objections. Writers realized that for the most part the word "true" sufficed to sway the literal minded reader to accept the text as factual.⁷ Philip Stewart points out that "if one who 'knows' he is reading fiction can 'forget' that, because his curiosity and emotions are stirred, how much more thoroughly can he fail to realize it in the first place when he is told it is history."⁸

The fictional preface also succeeded in its disguise because of the nature of human belief: its inherent liability to error.⁹ A person may hold a belief without corrob-

orating facts; "probability is relative to evidence, degree of belief need not be."¹⁰ Many people assume without ascertaining, accept without questioning. Such firm yet flawed beliefs as one's country representing the "right" side of international disputes, as one's gender determining one's capabilities, as one's activities befitting one's age, as one's personal wealth defining one's success, as the attractive person being the more estimable human being, as the more expensive product assuring superior quality, demonstrate the scope and significance of unfounded beliefs and underscore man's faulty process of perception. Thus, the successful preface had only to provide a semblance of verity--not positive proof--to elicit a reader's conviction.

The above examples also reflect man's proclivity to believe in what he wants to--because of self-interest, pleasure, convenience, background, and/or habit. Hence, another reason explaining the reader's acceptance of these prefatory pronouncements of purported fact is that he desired, whether consciously or not, the deception.¹¹ In an epoch virtually barren of imaginative stimulation, these pseudogenuine accounts satisfied his craving for mental and emotional diversion. Stewart describes the French reader: "There is good reason for believing that most readers of that day asked nothing better than to be fooled and that the abundance of prefaces dedicated to claims of veracity

arose from the desire to humor this initially amenable attitude."¹² Robert A. Day makes a similar observation of the English reader: "After the 'Augustan' reader had salved his moral or aesthetic conscience (whichever it was) with the preliminary premise that he was reading a true history, he (or she) settled down contentedly to tales of the wildest improbability."¹³ Despite the frequent Horatian assertions which infused an appropriate moral seriousness and thus suggested social sanction, the general reader sought amusement for its own sake, not as a byproduct of learning. This yearning for entertainment and escapism predisposed the reader to trust unquestioningly these various asseverations of truth. Patricia Meyer Spacks notes that "the power of literature to sway depends on the reader's enjoyment, which increases his vulnerability."¹⁴

Richetti adds:

[This audience was] eager for the basic pleasures of fiction--identification, projection, vicarious participation, and ideological alignment--and relatively insensitive to the more subtle and specifically "literary" satisfaction provided by the complementary features of style and structure.¹⁵

The seal of truth facilitated reader involvement with the text.

Although many readers--especially the more sophisticated and hence more suspicious Parisian readers¹⁶--were not completely duped by the prefatory artifice; nevertheless, they too yielded to the enticement of exposé.

Georges C. May elaborates:

Il va sans dire que la plupart des lecteurs n'avaient pas la naïveté de prendre au pied de la lettre de pareilles prétentions à l'authenticité absolue. Mais il est indubitable que le public de 1730 et même encore celui de 1761 était d'une crédulité monumentale, comparé au scepticisme universel de celui de l'ère soupçon qui est la nôtre aujourd'hui.¹⁷

Henri Coulet similarly describes the audience's attitude:

Le public ne croyait sans doute pas à l'authenticité de ces écrits . . . mais il goûtait l'illusion d'être dans le secret de l'histoire, et il pensait aussi, non sans raison, que l'affabulation recouvrait un peu de vérité, apprise par l'auteur auprès d'informateurs bien renseignés.¹⁸

Apparently the only existent but unexpressed stipulation in this tacit agreement between author and reader to produce and partake, respectively, in this pretense was the preservation of the nonfictional guise. Richard Altick comments that "so long as they had an air of genuineness--so long as their authors did not candidly admit that they were spinning tales--they could be read as improving literature, no matter how outrageous their romancing."¹⁹ More demanding than the English, the French required a veil of probability for their mask of literal truth. Frederick C. Green remarks that "the average reader, though perfectly willing to be deceived by the writer's fictions, insists on being deceived in a probable and intelligent manner."²⁰ A

contemporary author affirms this prerequisite:

La Fiction ne se pardonne qu'autant qu'elle n'est point appercue. Dès que le mensonge se trahit, il perd de sa séduction; l'intérêt qu'il avoit excité s'évanouit, et la raison rendue à toute la sévérité de son jugement, critique, et prononce, en quelque sorte, contre le plaisir du sentiment: l'illusion détruite, l'auteur manque entièrement son objet.²¹

In addition to the reader's desire for vicarious pleasure, avoidance of mental exertion also explains why many readers believed these fictional prefaces. It is simply more agreeable to accept rather than doubt the veracity of a work. Disturbing questions necessitate hard work: the reader must apply critical analysis and evaluation which distract him from his complete absorption in a text and in turn decrease his total enjoyment of it. Scudéry recognized the reader's reluctance to pursue such an inquiry: "Lorsque le mensonge et le vérité sont confondus par une main adroite, l'esprit a peine à les démêler, et ne se porte pas aisément à détruire ce qui lui plaît."²² Furthermore, this exacting effort very often would have had to acquire Herculean dimensions, for it was almost impossible at the time to disentangle fact from fabrication in many of the accounts.²³ Referring to The Travels and Adventures of Edward Brown, Esq. in which the author deliberately interweaves a great deal of historical information and verifiable details, making it cumbersome for the reader to check the data, Josephine Grieder states:

"To separate fiction from fact in a work so resolutely factual in its presentation . . . is no easy task and, indeed, one that probably did not interest greatly the average eighteenth-century reader."²⁴ The preceding comment pertains to most English pseudogenuine works as well as to most French ones. Coulet also remarks upon this literary fusion:

Plusieurs de ces romans sont "historiques" et difficiles à distinguer des ouvrages racontant une histoire vraie; le fabuleux et l'authentique s'y amalgament et il faudrait modifier le mot déjà cité de Bayle sur les romans de Mme de Villedieu: "on n'ose croire ce qui, au fond, est croyable," pour dire: "on n'ose pas ne pas croire ce qui au fond, peut-être, est incroyable," tant la vraisemblance et la précision des détails en imposent au lecteur.²⁵

Indeed, several fabrications eluded discovery until relatively recently. The Memoirs of a Cavalier succeeded in deceiving literary historians as a reliable first-hand account of the Civil War era until modern research disproved its factuality and designated it a work of Defoe.²⁶ The Lettres portugaises sustained its disguise as the passionate, desperate outpourings of an abandoned nun till 1926.²⁷ So inextricable is this intertwining of fact and fiction that there still exist today some works which defy definite classification.²⁸

iii

Unnoticed Clues to Detection

Given the fertile ground of reader credulity, writers did not have to worry nor work too hard to construct a successful preface. (Chapter three delineates in detail the various devices used to win a reader's conviction.) Yet for a modern reader, many of these prefatory productions provide clues to detection which apparently did not disabuse their general audience.

First, some prefaces leave certain questions unanswered--gaps which detract from the illusion of literal truth. For example, in The Adventures of Lindamira, the prefacer claims to correct only grammatical errors while preserving "the natural softness of the Female Pen" and asserts his purpose is "to expose vice and disappoint vanity, to reward virtue and crown constancy with success,"²⁹ but he does not declare how he gained possession of this manuscript which was supposedly written solely for the eyes of Lindamira's confidant:

Believe me, this is the greatest Proof I can give of my sincere Friendship to my dear Indamora; that I comply with her in a request so disagreeable to my own Inclinations, as to make her a Narrative of my Adventures, being so unfit to pen a History, although my own.³⁰

Crébillon's preface to Lettres de la Marquise de M*** ou Comte de R*** entitled "Extrait d'une Lettre de Madame

de ***, à M. de ****" informs M. de **** of Madame's discovery of the enclosed love letters, but there is no direct address to the reader to inform him of the identity of these two anonymous correspondents, nor how the lady discovered the letters in the papers of the Comte de R***, nor how this extract was obtained, nor who compiled the entire work.

Very often ambiguity within the preface also perforates the nonfictional pretense. In Challes's Les Illustres Françaises, there is repeated uncertainty within the preface as to the work's status. On the one hand, he states: "Si j'avois écrit des fables, j'aurois été maître des incidens que j'aurois tourné comme j'aurois voulu; mais ce sont des véritez, qui ont leurs règles toutes contraires à celles des romans."³¹ On the other hand, he jeopardizes his work's claim as a historical record when he dismisses labels and instead insists upon a timeless, moral truth: "Mon roman ou mes histoires, comme on voudra les appeller, tendent à une morale plus naturelle, et plus chrétienne, puisque par des faits certains, on y voit établi une partie du commerce de la vie."³² In The Strange Adventures of the Count de Vinevil, Penelope Aubin also asserts authenticity in an equivocal manner:

As for the Truth of what this Narrative contains, since Robinson Crusoe has been so well receiv'd, which is more improbable, I know no reason why this should be thought a Fiction. I hope the world

is not grown so abandon'd to Vice, as to believe that there is no such Ladies to be found, as would prefer Death to Infamy; or a Man that, for Remorse of Conscience, would quit a plentiful Fortune, retire, and chuse to die in a dismal cell³³

Aubin's following reference to her work as "trifle" and her promise to repeat her "performance"³⁴ if successful undercut any serious attempt to convey literal truth. Instead they imply that the prefacer will not only add, but make up more of the same invented material to cash in on the work's popularity.

From a present-day point of view--a critical, demanding one--these aforementioned instances of incomplete disclosure, ambiguities, and inconsistencies belie their factual claims, if not betray their fictional nature. Such discrepancies, however, did not concern nor even occur to³⁵ the common contemporary reader.

iv

As Part of the Whole

If one allows a pertinent, albeit a prosaic analogy, a preface is to its text as a card is to a gift. Although one may give a gift without a card or a card without a gift, giving both at the same time aggrandizes the present. The recipient usually opens the card first because he feels obligated, or desires to know the sender, or is curious about the contents, or expects to find something of worth

in it. The larger and brighter the card, the greater is its attraction. But even the small card marks its influence by identifying its sender as well as decorating the gift box. After reading the card, the recipient is either cheered, amused, indifferent, surprised, or disappointed. Subsequently opening the gift will fulfill, surpass, or frustrate his expectations. A fictional preface and its work have this kind of complementary or disparate relationship. As part of a whole, the seventeenth and eighteenth-century fictional preface ranges from being an elaborate extension of the text to a conventional stepping stone to it--from an essential stroma to a superfluous padding. The longer the preface--the more physically extensive--the more it appeared a constitutive, unavoidable part of understanding the whole.³⁶ The reader felt compelled to read five or more pages of preliminary material as opposed to one or two,³⁷ which he wanted frequently to pass over.

Although the more detailed and developed the preface, the more engaging the ploy, nevertheless the short prefatory assertion of truth also could contribute to the efficacy of the pseudoauthentic account. It very often affects the reader's approach to a text as well as his interest in it. For example, Lettres portugaises (translated ten times in England before 1740³⁸) exemplifies how a seemingly insufficient preface more than sufficed to elicit avid reader conviction in its factual nature. The thirteen line

preface provides no specific information concerning the epistolary nun nor her unresponsive lover, nor the unnamed translator, nor the circumstances of the letters' publication. Indeed, the prefacer admits his lack of knowledge: "Je ne sais point le nom de celui auquel on les a écrites, ni de celui qui en a fait la traduction."³⁹ Yet this apparently inadequate fictional préface implanted the idea of truth, validating and hence allowing the reader to accept and enjoy the raw, overpowering emotion by which the main text consumes its audience. Frederick C. Green observes: "It is doubtful if the unconventional and personal tone of the Lettres portugaises would have been tolerated without the fiction contained in the preface."⁴⁰

In another instance, Defoe's preface to Robinson Crusoe is much shorter and less convincing than that of his Moll Flanders. The absence of details, personal comment, and anecdote decreases its impact: "The editor believes the thing to be a just history of fact; neither is there any appearance of fiction in it."⁴¹ The main text outdid every expectation the reader may have derived from the brief, simple preface, but its mere presence similarly permitted the reader to devour the original and captivating adventures of Robinson Crusoe. This assertion of truth delivered the work from the level of imaginative fantasy and launched, if not assured, its popular success.

Regardless of length, in most cases the fictional

preface is the necessary literary link to bind reader and text. From the start it reduces the reader's distance from the story so that he turns to chapter one as an involved, active participant rather than as a detached, passive observer. Kelly comments: "The natural transition from the situation that is described in the preface to the treatise which arises from it imparts a sense of cause and effect to the whole and provides a structural unity."⁴² Even though the fictional preface is not physically a continuous part of the whole⁴³ and in many instances can be removed without disturbing the integrity of the story line, it is indispensable to the entire effect. In fact, the preface's position as a beginning and a formally distinct unit aids its main function of convincing the reader that the work is true. The reader believes that this separate section somehow does not count as part of the whole but rather acts as a private address to the reader. As an authoritative voice, the prefacer affords an accurate assessment of the ensuing text as well as moral, social, and aesthetic sanction to usher the trusting reader into the text. Without the fictional preface, the reader would be freer to figure out or wonder about the nature of the work, whereas with it he cannot help but be influenced in his perception of the contents as factual. It is harder to prove a work guilty of fiction when it protests its nonfictional nature as opposed to a noncommittal or "silent" work, which invites

the reader to be his own judge. Thus, once the reader has finished reading the preface, he has lost his "innocence"; he enters the main text prejudiced with prefatory expectations, which will either be fulfilled or frustrated.

v

The Main Text: Fulfilling the Preface's Claim

In the ideal situation, there is an integral union between a preface and its text: the main text imparts the "true" story promised in the fictional preface. From our present viewpoint, rarely is there a correspondence between declared literal truth and realistic depiction. Obstrusive improbabilities, disorienting narrative, inconsistent characters, and artificial dialogue within the main text undermine the preface's claim to authenticity.

For instance, Mirza-Nadir, ou Mémoires et Aventures du Marquis de Sr T*** is supposedly written to a father to reveal what happened to his long-lost son and his close
44
friend. In the preface, the chaperon, handing over the manuscript, says to the father, M. de N. . . , "Voilà Mr., lui dit-il ce qui vous instruira à fond de toutes les
45
circonstances" But the text features only the friend's account without any reference to the son nor to the newly-arrived children. This incompleteness contradicts the prefatorial description of the memoirs as arriving in their entirety from Constantinople. This discrepan-

cy leads to the conclusion that they are in fact fiction, unfinished by their actual (unknown) author).

Oroonoko: or, the Royal Slave tests our credence in various instances. They range from the preposterous, as in the Coromantien romance scenes which depict more a French court than an African kingdom, to a surreal brutality found in the last pages. Throughout, Oroonoko is presented as this rare, rather incredible, model of masculine perfection:

The most illustrious Courts could not have produced a braver Man, both for Greatness of Courage and Mind, a Judgment more solid, a Wit more quick, and a Conversation more sweet and diverting . . . He had nothing of Barbarity in his Nature.⁴⁶

At the end, this same Oroonoko severs his beloved, pregnant wife's head (with her permission) to prevent her being raped and murdered by their white oppressors after his own death. Overwhelmed by his grief, Oroonoko cannot execute his plan for revenge. He then cuts out some of his own vital organs, but instead of dying he is sewed back together by the merciless white men who sadistically beat, blind, and chop him up again in their own fashion.

The preface to the Mémoires d'Anne-Marie de Moras, Comtesse de Courbon convincingly and seriously sets up the circumstances and motive for publishing these memoirs.⁴⁷

The Comtesse de Courbon, socially disgraced and hence enclosed in a convent, is writing to defend herself to her

friend. However, the apparent gravity of the introduction clashes with the absurdity of her account. She relates how at eleven years old she wanted to get married, but she could not because she had not menstruated. So she faked it with chicken blood. The object of her affection was the fifty-year-old Comte de Courbon, who ranted words of love to his "divine de Moras."⁴⁸ Courbon fell to his knees to propose, but she responded "reasonably." She advised him to marry the woman proposed to him or never to see her again. He preferred death, which forced her declaration of love and drove her to elope. She refused, however, to consummate the marriage until her family approved. The story stops short, leaving a frustrated reader, as well as a frustrated husband. Of course, a real story might remain unfinished, but this ending contradicts the preface's assertion of full disclosure.

The above examples of failure to realize in the main text prefatorial promises denote deficiencies in literary achievement and in logic, but for most contemporary readers they did not signal a failure of the whole work. Such incongruities did not dissuade them from believing the assertions of literal truth.⁴⁹ Historical events and people need not be probable and credible; they need only to be perceived as such. Creating the illusion of reality--the dealings of daily life--concerns those authors writing novels, not those pretending to present literal truth,

because the "facts" bear the brunt of improbability and bad writing. Balzac acknowledged this axiom:

L'historien des moeurs [i.e., the novelist] obéit à des lois plus dures que l'historien des faits; il doit rendre tout probable, même le vrai, tandis que dans le domaine de l'histoire proprement dite, l'impossible est justifié par la raison même qu'il est advenu.⁵⁰

51

As discussed earlier, the idea that these pseudo-genuine works were true compensated for their lack of resemblance to actual reality, especially during the beginning of this literary period. The fictional preface, by creating a plausible context, instilled within the reader a faith in its veracity which sustained him through the main text, regardless of its inconsistencies. Once a reader accepted a work as authentic, he was less rigorous in his criterion of reality and less wary of deception as he entered the principal narrative. Vivienne Mylne's insight applies: "When we are convinced that the contents are historical or factual, we are predisposed to accept without query, and to maintain a steady attitude of literal belief."⁵² At the end of two hundred pages, the reader hardly remembers the preface, if at all. Seldom does anyone but a student of literature return to reread a preface to analyze its role and evaluate its effectiveness. The fictional preface is necessary as a beginning, as a springboard into the main text, and as such succeeds as an integral part of the whole.

A Different "Reality"

In La Paysanne Parvenue ou Les Mémoires de Madame la Marquise de L. V., Jeannette, the leading character, reflects upon the strange, incredible nature of her "true" adventures: "Il y a dans la vie des choses si singulières, produites par le hasard, que lorsqu'on y fait réflexion, il semble que l'art les ait amenées; effectivement rien n'est plus extraordinaire" ⁵³ The reader agreed. Under the premise of "true;" he readily accepted the extraordinary as "real" life. This brings us to a discussion of "realism." On the one hand, Stewart contends that the term should not be applied to this literary period:

The technical matter which concerns us is not just verisimilitude but "illusion": the writer was not only striving to be realistic, but to suggest to his reader that the story was not an invention at all--not even a "realistic" one. To call this "realism" would be anachronistic, for the word is a child of the nineteenth century, imbued with connotations of later literary doctrines.⁵⁴

On the other hand, regardless of the absence of the actual word, one can stress the relativity and multiplicity of "realism" as defined by the preconceptions of artist and audience at a specific time. Wayne C. Booth observes: "What seems natural in one period or to one school seems artificial in another period or to another school. Each

man trusts his own brand of reality " ⁵⁵

Indeed, the seventeenth and eighteenth-century demand for "reality" was not comparable to ours. What a modern views as distracting from a veritable depiction, such as narrative interruptions, conversational tidbits, emotional outbreaks, judgmental comments, often authenticated this period's works. Morroe Berger cites a pertinent example:

The intruding author is now widely held to make the entire relationship between author and reader less credible, yet at the beginning of the novel such "interruptions" of the narrative were thought to enhance credibility by suggesting that the author could personally attest to the truth of his story.⁵⁶

Generally readers were not concerned about an accurate depiction of "real" life. They ignored character inconsistencies, disdained "slice of life" depictions, accepted rhetorical flourishes, rejected common vulgarity, and were unaware of the absence of time, climate, and decor in descriptions. Readers cared about the pleasure, not the probability, of presumed facts. ⁵⁷ The seductive power of sensational content succeeded in reinforcing their prefatory perception of the work as literally true. Richetti expatiates on one such example:

The point is that Mrs. Manley's scandalous "revelations" appealed immediately to the prurient curiosity of her first audience; but they continued to be read because they succeeded in providing certain satisfactions fundamental to

fiction itself. In other words the scandal novel or "chronicle" of Mrs. Manley and Mrs. Haywood was a successful popular form, a tested commercial pattern, because it presented an opportunity for its readers to participate vicariously in an erotically exciting and glittering fantasy world of aristocratic corruption and promiscuity.⁵⁸

As a corollary, unappealing content repelled readers. Pseudogenuine accounts usually gained belief, but they did not always succeed in gaining popularity. Even though readers desired the designation of "true," they often rejected the stark realities of actual life. This was especially true of the more decorous French.⁵⁹ In Marianne, for instance, Marivaux's use of vulgar language to reflect the reality of an individual's character and class--specifically in the notorious scene between Madame Dutour, the seamstress, and the cab driver--repulsed its public. Green comments: "It shocked contemporary taste to see in print the language of the street and the reading public was frankly uninterested in the every day life of the lower classes."⁶⁰ Similarly Richardson's realism was "too low for French taste."⁶¹ French admiration for his works stemmed from their sanitized translations. This comparison does not mean that the English were necessarily more "realistic," only less linguistically sensitive or discriminating than the French. English works also suffered from discrepancies, implausibilities, and extravagances.

Unattractive content disenchanted English readers as well. For example, The Jilted Bridegroom is a very credible relation of female deception. As stated in the preface,⁶² it aims to warn unsuspecting men of female coquetry and to induce women to reform and renounce their flirtatious practices. Regardless of this work's believable framework and comparably high literary quality, we may assume that since it went through only one edition, it failed to win the majority of readers--women--because of its offensive subject matter.⁶³ Likewise the single edition of The Perjur'd Citizen, again a work with a very persuasive preface⁶⁴ and narrative, demonstrates how depressing material discouraged readers. It similarly portrays negatively the leading female figure. Having lost her "unloved" lover to another, Matilda, vain, haughty, and overbearing, during a moment of insane envy and egomania--⁶⁵ "all Hell within her Bosom" broke out--slashed her lover's throat.

vii

Literary Merit

If time is a measure of literary merit--as Samuel Johnson thought it was--then most of these pseudoauthentic accounts did not endure the test of time. They are not the great works of interpretive literature that touch readers with insights into human behavior and character. The same

qualities that make seventeenth and eighteenth-century purported nonfiction implausible to modern sensibilities⁶⁶ -- obvious plot manipulation, flat characterization, contrived dialogue--along with artistic deficiencies--pointless actions, extraneous, interpolated tales, verbatim repetition, careless style, stereotyped description--contributed to its lack of literary luster. But if one measures literary success in terms of Henry James's definition, then most fulfilled his formula:

The success of a work of art . . . may be measured by the degree to which it produces a certain illusion; that illusion makes it appear to us for the time that we have lived another life--that we have had a miraculous enlargement of experience.⁶⁷

Considering the limited scope of available fiction, the dearth of information and news, and the restricted position of many readers (especially women); then, indeed, seventeenth and eighteenth-century audiences underwent an "enlargement of experience." These pseudogenuine works seem to have at least provided the illusion of truth for their original audience. The period's different perception of reality⁶⁸ permitted a different criterion of literary merit. René Wellek and Austin Warren comment thus upon the changes in literary reception undergone by a text:

An individual work of art does not remain unchanged through the course of history. There is to be sure a substantial identity of structure which has

remained the same throughout the ages. But this structure is dynamic; it changes throughout the process of history while passing through the minds of readers, critics, and fellow artists.⁶⁹

Although today most of these works have changed into unreadable relics, they more than contented their first readers since such purported nonfiction was repeatedly imitated.

Evaluating a work according to its own era's standards affords a means of appreciating it to a greater extent than otherwise. For example, melodramatic sentiment was perceived as authentic. Stewart elaborates this point:

It is worth underscoring that what may sometimes seem to us belabored sentimentality was not so at all in its day: effusions were in no way considered "invraisemblables." Tears were supposed to engender tears, and there was no reason why the cooperative listener should not mingle his with the narrator's.⁷⁰

Where we see disunity and incoherence, seventeenth and eighteenth-century readers saw variety and novelty. C. R. Kropf states: "When modern critics look for unity in eighteenth-century texts they are usually looking for the wrong thing according to any historical sense of language."⁷¹ Digressions or stories within a story, regarded presently an anathema to realism, met the demand for diversity; they formed part of the desired aesthetic fabric and hence were an intrinsic part of the product. Stewart

points out that the "histoire" in a novel aiming as illusion "was popular because the public of its day was more avid for plots than we, and the more intrigue that could be squeezed between two covers, the greater was often deemed to be the quantity of pleasure contained."⁷² Kropf

concurr: "The conscious use of digressions in any genre was thought to carry with it certain psychological benefits in sustaining reader interest."⁷³ Digressions prevented boredom; they did not dispel the illusion of literal truth.

For instance, The Voyages, Dangerous Adventures and Imminent Escapes of Captain Richard Falconer contains a series of episodes (not always linked by the presence of the title character), multiple narrative voices, and a cataloguing of geographical documentation, products, foods, animals, and diseases. Aware of this disjointed result, Falconer himself comments: "I don't doubt but my Readers will laugh at me for this running from one Thing to another; but I relate 'em just as my Memory prompts me."⁷⁴ Viewed as a wealth of material rather than chaos, as interspersed information rather than confusing interruptions, its contemporary audience found this a very attractive account. The raw, "realistic," depictions of travel and survival enthralled them as in Falconer's relation of his being shipwrecked on an island without water: "I was forc'd to drink my own Urine for two or three Days together; . . . Strange Circumstances indeed! to wish to be devour'd

alive, as a Mitigation of my Misfortunes." ⁷⁵ As has
 already been noted, ⁷⁶ the lack of unity did not interfere
 with early readers' enjoyment; it reinforced the illusion
 of the lack of an artist's hand and hence strengthened the
 claim of authenticity.

Similarly, the main story of La Paysanne parvenue
 becomes a frame for other interjected stories. Inner
 circles of narrators engulf the account of the leading
 character Jeannette. Although each narration focuses upon
 a common theme: a beautiful, innocent female suffering at
 the hands of a rapacious, deceptive male, the various
 digressions are so long that we almost forget Jeannette's
 circumstances. We have certainly lost the momentum
 previously produced. In any case, this network of narra-
 tives captivated the curiosity of its readers rather than
 disrupting their concentration. They enjoyed Jeannette's
 shifting role from active participant to passive listener.
 They shared her enthusiastic response to these relations:
 "Le discours que me tint cette femme irrita ma
 curiosité" ⁷⁷

Although many of these works do not reveal the work of
 an artist or even a craftsman, there are notable exceptions
 to this absence of realistic accommodation to purported
 accounts of literal truth: Moll Flanders, Manon Lescaut,
Gulliver's Travels, La Vie de Marianne. These works,
 however, do not represent their age as much as they tran-

scend it; they have achieved the elite status of classic. Defoe, Prévost, Swift, Marivaux were virtually alone among their peers in maintaining plausibility in their narrative form. Two other worthy, usually overlooked examples of "realism" are Robert Challes's Les Illustres Françaises and Simon Berington's Memoirs de Signr Gaudentio di Lucca. Both, it is interesting to note, achieved immediate, enormous popularity and enduring literary merit.

Published anonymously, Les Illustres Françaises went through twenty editions between 1713 and 1753; it was translated into English in 1727.⁷⁸ Robert Niklaus refers to it as "a landmark in the development of realism."⁷⁹ Conscious of the setting as significant in conveying "life," Challes delineates seasons, weather, and time. He uses real names, introduces people of lowly station, portrays the problems generated by the disparity of social classes, features the environment as influencing human behavior, and includes frank discussions concerning the sexes and sex.

The work's preface promises some "histoires véritables"⁸⁰ which the main text indeed delivers. Within a complex of interweaving narrative voices and interlocking characters' lives, we are presented to different friends or acquaintances who renew their association on a number of occasions. As the stories unfold, we learn bits and pieces about them from their own telling and/or from others, for very often each individual possesses only partial know-

ledge. In the first story, "Monsieur Des Ronais et de Mlle Dupuis" told by Des Ronais to Des Frans, Des Ronais relates how Mlle Dupuis's father threatens to treat his daughter in the manner of Mlle de l'Epine's father. This leads Des Frans to ask who she was. Des Ronais knows only part of her story; it is to be completed later by Mlle Dupuis's cousin. Des Ronais also does not know the entirety of his own story. He believes himself betrayed by Mlle Dupuis, but it is in fact a misunderstanding to be rectified by another's revelations.

Throughout the text, Challes sustains the reality of each character's situation. We never forget that the speaker is addressing a friend or group of friends. For example, in the middle of his narrative, Des Frans stops himself to rest. Not only is this a realistic detail, but his ironic observation that he is not a "Héros de Roman" further reinforces the "truth" of this disguised fiction:

Mais Monsieur et Madame, poursuit Des Frans en s'interrompant lui-même, et en parlant au maître et à la maîtresse de la maison, je ne sçai si vous ne vous altérez point à m'écouter; mais moi je m'altère à tant parler: il faut être plus Héros de Roman que je ne suis, pour conter une histoire si longue d'un seul trait; faisons une pause.⁸¹

We also never forget that these are "real" people reacting spontaneously to these accounts. As a case in point, during M. de Terny's relation, "Histoire de Monsieur de Terny et de Mlle de Bernay," at the moment when he is to

read the love letter of Mlle de Bernay, now Madame de Terny, she withdraws in embarrassment, to which her relieved husband responds:

Tant mieux, dit Terny, sa présence me gênoit. J'en parlerai avec plus de liberté, et ne vous cacherai pas quelque circonstance que j'aurois tue devant elle. Je les [lettres] ai apportées toutes sur moi, elles sont longues; mais les religieuses n'épargnent ni le tems ni le papier, et donnent carrière à leur passion qui seule les occupe faute de dissipation, et comme elles ne m'ont point ennuyé, je crois qu'elles ne vous ennueront pas non plus.⁸²

He is right; his audience is more than interested. Madame de Terny's disconcerted departure heightens the curiosity of his listeners and readers. Indeed, the responses to, interruptions of, and comments on the different narratives by the fictive listeners doubtless reflect those of the real readers.

Another example of combined popularity and skillful execution is The Memoirs of Signr Gaudentio di Lucca; it ran through six editions before 1800 and was translated into French in 1746.⁸³ This work epitomizes the ideal integration of fictional preface and main text. Whereas most pseudogenuine accounts depend upon their prefaces to identify them as "true," the majority of the main texts could be read and understood without them; of course, the reader's approach to these texts would differ.⁸⁴ On the other hand, one cannot comprehend the main text of

Gaudentio without reading the prefatory layers.

Three separate prefatorial voices initiate the narrative as well as establish the work's veracity. They continue to contribute to the form and content of the main text. First, "The Publisher to the Reader" anticipates the reader's questions concerning the work's origins.⁸⁵ The Publisher remains an authenticating presence within the actual memoirs. For example, preceding the relation about the strange, utopic society by Pophar, its leader, the Publisher inserts the following appeal: "The Reader is desired not to censure or disbelieve the following Account, of the Origin and Transmigration of these People, till he has perus'd the Learned Remarks of Signor Rhedi."⁸⁶ As a result, the reader lets down his guard and becomes more hospitable to the account. Infusing realistic interaction, the Publisher himself comments on occasion upon Rhedi's footnotes. At one instance, he notes: "Signor Rhedi being an Italian one can't wonder he speaks so contemptibly of the Northern People; the Italians call them all Barbari."⁸⁷ At another point, he discovers Rhedi's omission of certain information: "I wonder Signor Rhedi took no notice of this in his Remarks. . . ."⁸⁸ The Publisher also inserts necessary explanations, as in the case of the missing passages⁸⁹ of the text:

Here the Reader, as well as the Publisher, will lament the irreparable Loss of the Sheets, which were mislaid at his coming

over; he [the Publisher] does not pretend to charge his Memory with what they contain'd; just having had Time to run them over in the Italian, when Signor Rhedi got them copied out for him⁹⁰

We do in fact regret this mislaid portion, which would have disclosed the tragic loss of Gaudentio's wife and children. The Publisher proceeds to inform us that Rhedi's death makes it impossible to recopy the manuscript.

The second preliminary layer, the "Introduction," in the form of a signed and dated letter from the Secretary of the Inquisition to Signor Rhedi, the librarian of Venice, enlists the librarian to do research on Gaudentio's confession in order to verify the content. The Secretary's remarks within the memoirs remind the reader that the account is "true." He reports upon what took place while Gaudentio was reading his written confession before the Inquisition. He notes the questions asked by his interrogators, as well as their thoughts and reactions. He even notes a realistic interruption:

Here the Superior of the Inquisition receiv'd a Message for some other Business; so we told him [Gaudentio] we would consider further of the Account he gave us, which, said we, might be true, tho' the Adventure was extraordinary; but we would hear the remaining Account of his Life another Time. He assur'd us with the most natural Air, that the whole, let it seem never so extraordinary, was real Fact.⁹¹

The Inquisition, as the inner audience, projects the doubts and queries of the text's external audience, the reader.

When the Inquisition eventually reaches a resolution affirming Gaudentio's account, the reader, having participated in the same process, has reached the same conclusion.

The third prefatory voice, Signor Rhedi, provides the objectivity and authority of an academic. Evaluating Gaudentio's memoirs, he declares: "He gives such a rational and circumstantial Account of his Adventures, that I am of the Secretary's Opinion, as to the Truth of it."⁹² Rhedi's extensive annotations within the main text solidify the work's authenticity. He furnishes detailed explications, historical references, scholarly collaboration, illustrative points, and occasional corrections. Such overwhelming (there are about twenty-one pages of footnotes) apparently indisputable facts aptly persuade the reader of the work's veracity.

Finally, as a narrator, Gaudentio himself, who prefaces his own confession within the main text, displays a heightened consciousness of the effects of his story. Referring to his relation of a heretofore unknown people, he demurs:

For if I should stay to describe the immense Riches, Fertility and Beauties of the Country, this Relation, which is designed as a real Account of a Place wherein I lived so many Years, would rather look like a Romance than a true Relation.⁹³

This expressed awareness paradoxically enhances the reader's belief. Gaudentio also demonstrates a sensitivity

to his ecclesiastical audience. He frequently inserts parenthetical remarks to cushion or justify the inclusion of certain improper material, as in his recall of the Bassa's daughter's excessive passion for him: "In the mean Time there happen'd an Accident to me, which is scarce fit for your Reverences to hear; nor should I ever have thought to relate it to you, only you laid your Commands on me to give an Exact Account of my whole Life."⁹⁴

viii

The Fictional Preface's Success and the Passage of Time

As we have already shown, seventeenth and early eighteenth-century audiences tended to accept at face value the various preliminary asseverations of truth⁹⁵; fictional prefaces were novel and ingenious in authenticating their work's factuality and readers themselves were novices, and ingenuous in differentiating fact from fiction. Joseph Addison describes the charms of novelty: "Everything that is new or uncommon raises a pleasure in the imagination because it fills the soul with an agreeable surprise, gratifies its curiosity, and gives it an idea of which it was not before possessed."⁹⁶ But novelty, by its very nature of a temporary state, wears off, becoming through stages familiar, usual, and ordinary. Booksellers capitalizing upon the popularity of professed truth glutted the market and surfeited the reader. Oliver Goldsmith comments

upon this common publishing practice:

It is usual for the booksellers here, when a book has given universal pleasure upon one subject, to bring out several more upon the same plan, which are sure to have purchasers and readers from that desire which all men have to view a pleasing object on every side. The first performance serves rather to awake than satisfy attention; and when that is once moved, the slightest effort serves to continue its progression; the merit of the first diffuses a light sufficient to illuminate the succeeding efforts, and no other subject can be relished, till that is exhausted . . . This manner, however, of drawing off a subject or a peculiar mode of writing to the dregs, effectually precludes a revival of that subject or manner for some time for the future; the sated reader turns from it with a kind of literary nausea.⁹⁷

Unlike novelty, which arouses curiosity and creates excitement, repetition engenders recognition and boredom. Continual prefatory insistence upon authenticity eventually undermined its assertion. The reader soon sensed, if not uttered, "The prefacer doth protest too much, methinks." Henri Peyre rewords this situation: "A suspicion soon creeps into the reader's mind when an author loudly proclaims his sincerity or his humility."⁹⁸ Reader questioning led some to qualify nonfictional titles such as "memoirs" and "history" with the words "true" and "genuine": Genuine History of Thomas Kouli Kan, Genuine Memoirs of the Life of Simon Lord Fraser of Lovat, True and Impartial History of the Life and Adventures of Some-body,

True and Genuine History of the Two Last Wars. French titles do not exhibit such semantic insecurity. Through repeated exposure and reading experience, however, readers learned to discern the devices of pretense. Thus, winning the reader's conviction became increasingly difficult with the passage of time, which transformed prefatorial claims of authenticity into literary conventions and amateur, dupable audiences into seasoned, dubious readers.

By 1750 the mask of "truth" had for the most part crumbled, but cracks of scepticism had appeared earlier.⁹⁹ In 1709, Richard Steele rebuked publishers for deliberately promulgating deceptions and demanded a marked distinction between memoirs and novel:

Some merry gentlemen of the French nation, who have written very advantageous histories of their exploits in war, love, and politics, under the title of memoirs . . . The most immediate remedy I can apply to prevent this growing evil, is, That I do hereby give notice to all booksellers and translators whatsoever, that the word Memoir is French for a "novel"; and to require of them that they sell and translate it accordingly.¹⁰⁰

(By the middle of the century, "real" letters along with memoirs were also recognized as having a large fictional element.)¹⁰¹ In 1711, a French prefacer observed the reader's growing tedium when confronted with predictable prefatory material: "Il est fort ordinaire aux Auteurs de faire des Préfaces inutiles, et aux Lecteurs de ne soucier

point du tout de les lire."¹⁰²

To overcome this practice of readers' skipping the preface, some writers incorporated the fictional preface within the beginning of the narrative proper. They eliminated the formal title but adhered to the claim of authenticity within the main text. Among those works with introductory passages explaining means of possession, origins, motives for writing before entering the main relation are In Capacity and Extent of the Human Understanding Exemplified in the Extraordinary Case of Automathes a Young Nobleman, La Belle Allemande ou les Galanteries de Thérèse, and Some Remarkable Passages in the Life of the Honourable Col. James Gardiner. In Mémoires turcs, the presumed author comments upon his background, purpose, writing style, and content of his memoirs within unlabeled preliminary remarks, but in the end he actually reveals to his reader his concealed stratagem: J'avois d'abord donné à ce petit préambule le nom de préface; mais ayant appris qu'on ne les lit plus, je me contente de dire à la fin que c'est une préface qu'on vient de lire."¹⁰³

Another authorial reaction to the onslaught of prefatory avowals and ensuing reader disbelief was literary parody. As early as 1734, Crébillon's L'Ecumoire derides conventional prefatory material. His satiric tone cues in the reader. Unlike the typical fictional preface, his is divided into three chapters. In the first chapter "De

l'origine de ce livre," Crébillon terms the work "un des plus précieux monuments de l'antiquité."¹⁰⁴ The author, Kiloho-ée, a thousand years older than Confucius, corruptly translated a translation of a translation. The "accuracy" of such a manuscript cannot escape the reader. In the second chapter, "Comment ce trésor a passé en France," Crébillon ridicules the authenticating device of explaining the present possession of the text. He relates how a Dutchman imperfectly translated the Chinese text into Dutch and brought it into Europe, where a German scholar translated and annotated it into Latin. Eventually an Italian bought the text and marred it further in his flawed Italian translation. Finally, the mutilated text reaches the height of absurdity in this French version: "Ce qui ne paraîtra pas extraordinaire, quand on saura qu'il [the translator] n'a étudié l'italien que deux mois, sous un Français de ses amis qui n'avait été à Rome que six semaines."¹⁰⁵ In the third chapter, "Inconvénients auxquels il a fallu remédier. Éloge du dernier traducteur," the preface explains his role as editor, but rather than minimize the extent of his corrections of the manuscript, he extols his contributions and considers his rendition superior to the original: "Je suis persuadé que Kiloho-ée est infiniment inférieur à cette traduction, quoique faite d'après une langue que je n'entends presque pas."¹⁰⁶

Literary facetiousness similarly characterizes The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman. Playing with the fictional preface, Laurence Sterne presents a mock version of one in Chapter Four, where he explains why he starts his "life and opinions" at the moment of his conception:

I know there are readers in the world,
as well as many other good people in it,
who are no readers at all,--who find
themselves ill at ease, unless they are
let into the whole secret from first to
last, of everything which concerns
you.¹⁰⁷

Hence, his description of the beginning of his beginning more than adequately, as well as humorously, elucidates the text's origins.

Alongside the jocular authors remained the serious ones who continued to use the fictional preface. However, to instill and enforce belief in an awakened public, writers confronted the ever-aggravating task of inventing new "authentic" circumstances surrounding a work's inception, original proof corroborating a text's veracity, and pretexts explaining possession of the manuscript. At this late stage, only the very cleverest authors succeeded in eliciting credence, or, among lesser writers, only the very naïve readers heeded their words. By 1775, it was more convincing not to make an attempt to reveal the sources of the "genuine" manuscript, as does the prefacer to The Pilgrim: "How these letters come into the hands of the

Editor were in vain to say at present; the fictitious accounts usually prefixed to publications of this period having obviated the credit of such as may be true." ¹⁰⁸ The prefacer's expressed reluctance to test the reader's tolerance confers a certain sincerity and hence emits credibility.

An exquisite example of fulfilling the fictional preface's potential during this "enlightened" period is Les Liaisons dangereuses ou Lettres recueillies dans une société (1782). The prefatorial apparatus or the battle of the prefaces--the publisher versus the editor--succeeds, apropos of the work's theme, in seducing the reader to read and believe the text. The unexpected beginning statement by the publisher ("Avertissement de l'Éditeur") doubting the authenticity of the letters disarms the reader: "Nous croyons devoir prévenir le public que, malgré le titre de cet ouvrage et ce qu'en dit le rédacteur dans sa préface, nous ne garantissons pas l'authenticité de ce recueil, et que nous avons même de fortes raisons de penser que ce n'est qu'un roman." ¹⁰⁹ He bases his opinion on his contrasting perception of their present age--its people and manners: "Plusieurs des personnages qu'il met en scène ont de si mauvaises moeurs, qu'il est impossible de supposer qu'ils aient vécu dans notre siècle: dans ce siècle de philosophie" ¹¹⁰ To prove his point, the publisher ends with supposedly incontrovertible evidence: "Nous ne

voyons point aujourd'hui de demoiselle, avec soixante mille livres de rente, se faire religieuse, ni de présidente, jeune et jolie, mourir de chagrin." ¹¹¹ But ironically he does not refute seeing young girls getting pregnant and being confined to convents nor married women committing adultery.

In the "Préface du Rédacteur," the editor begins by explaining his minor editorial role, commenting upon the lack of reader confidence in true accounts, and anticipating various probable objections to and criticisms of the text. Hence, he immediately undercuts the prior suspicions of the publisher. The editor does, however, express doubt as to whether a work exposing "les moyens qu'emploient ceux qui en ont de mauvaises pour corrompre ceux qui en ont de bonnes . . ." ¹¹² can attain popularity. But on the contrary, Les Liaisons dangereuses became an immediate success. Depraved characters and evil deeds lured the human psyche then as they do now.

Notwithstanding the few exceptions able to sustain the nonfiction disguise, ultimately the proliferation of fabricated factual accounts led to many readers losing faith in all declarations of truth; indeed, actual truth struggled for acceptance. Coulet notes this backlash effect: "Les gens sérieux ne croyaient plus à l'histoire; ils mettaient en question les témoignages, les traditions, faisaient apparaître l'incertitude des faits les mieux établis et des

explications les plus satisfaisantes."¹¹³ Correspondingly, most authors, having exhausted every possible prefatory ploy, found themselves exhausted in the effort. Nevertheless, even though the disguise became transparent, it did not disappear. Tradition persisted as a factor in extending the existence of the preface. For example, the prefacer to Histoire d'une Grecque moderne admits to his readers that his preface is unnecessary; in fact, he negates customary prefatory content:

Cette histoire n'a pas besoin de préface; mais l'usage en demande une à la tête d'un livre. Celle-ci ne servira qu'à déclarer au lecteur qu'on ne lui promet, pour l'ouvrage qu'on lui présente, ni clef des noms, ni éclaircissement sur les faits, ni le moindre avis qui puisse lui faire comprendre ou deviner ce qu'il n'entendra point par ses propres lumières.¹¹⁴

On the other hand, some writers retained the fictional preface as a useful convention: a mutual, unarticulated agreement between the writer and reader to play this literary game; the writer played at presenting facts, and the reader played at believing them. As a matter of convenience, maintaining the prefatory apparatus continued to make writing the beginning easier, if not effective, and it made the reading familiar, if not interesting. John G. Cawelti expatiates on the advantages of using a literary formula:

Audiences find satisfaction and a basic emotional security in a familiar form; in addition, the audience's past experience with a formula gives it a sense of what to expect in new individual examples, thereby increasing its capacity for understanding and enjoying the details of a work. For creators, the formula provides a means for the rapid and efficient production of new works. Once familiar with the outlines of the formula, the writer who devotes himself to this sort of creation does not have to make as many difficult artistic decisions as a novelist working without a formula.¹¹⁵

Unlike the English, the French also had to contend with official government censorship of novels; hence, the fictional preface helped to elude this kind of restraint. Mylne explains this situation as follows:

The myth of "memoirs," for all its transparency, was useful to novelists and readers alike. More people were reading and enjoying novels, more novels were being published; and yet the socially acceptable attitude towards the genre continued to be one of contempt or condemnation . . . Under these conditions, the novelists' claim to be producing something other than novels was a form of face-saving for all concerned.¹¹⁶

Niklaus adds: "The myth [of authenticity] died very slowly, for it had the peculiar advantage of disarming
¹¹⁷
censorship."

Although for the most part post-1750 audiences did not accept these pseudogenuine accounts as literally true, still, regardless of heightened reader awareness, they
¹¹⁸
believed that there was some truth in them. Stewart

says: "That the historical pretensions became conventional by no means necessarily signifies that no one ever believed them. In fact, there are plenty of indications that the acumen of readers was on occasion rather low." ¹¹⁹ Enduring reader belief in the face of nullifying past experience also has to do with the manipulable mechanism of human perception. As Daryl J. Bem observes: "Persuasion does not lose its effectiveness merely because the communication is known to be biased or known to be explicitly trying to persuade." ¹²⁰

Along with those writers who hesitated to break the habit of the fictional preface were those who equivocated in defining their works; ambiguity replaced assertion. For instance, Rousseau in his Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse discloses in his preface that he has never heard of any of the persons in the story mentioned in the actual countryside. He deliberately teases his audience over whether his work is fact or fiction:

Quoique je ne porte ici que le titre
d'éditeur, j'ai travaillé moi-même à ce
livre, et je ne m'en cache pas. Ai-je fait
le tout, et la correspondance entière est-
elle une fiction? Gens du monde, que vous
importe? C'est sûrement une fiction pour
vous . . . Quant à la vérité des
faits . . . que chacun pense comme il
lui plaira.¹²¹

The tremendous emotional impact of those letters, however, impelled the majority of his readers to believe in the human existence of his characters. Many sent letters to

Rousseau asking for the "real" identity of Julie and Saint Preux.

In Clarissa or The History of a Young Lady, Samuel Richardson was tempted to include a fictional preface explaining the discovery of these letters; he reluctantly omitted one. But Richardson also intentionally evaded an explicit declaration of fiction since at the same time his work's title implies nonfiction. In a letter to Bishop Warburton, Richardson explains his decision to eliminate the Bishop's prefatorial enunciation of the work's fictionality:

Will you, good Sir, allow me to mention, that I could wish that the Air of Genuiness had been kept up, tho' I want not the Letters to be thought genuine, only so far kept up, I mean, as that they should not prefatically be owned not to be genuine: and this for fear of weakening their influence where any of them are aimed to be exemplary; as well as to avoid hurting that kind of Historical Truth which Fiction itself is generally read with, tho' we know it to be Fiction.¹²²

Richardson correctly interpreted the need for maintaining "the Air of Genuiness." Philip Stevick comments thus upon the reader's intense reaction to, as well as his ambiguous perception of, Richardson's novels:

People behaved as if his characters were really alive. As the various segments of his novels appeared, people would meet him in the street or write him letters, imploring, demanding that he not let his characters do so and so.

And it is not clear, rereading many such letters now, whether those readers of Richardson were asking him, as author, simply to manage the forthcoming narrative in a way agreeable to them or whether they were asking him to restrain and compel the characters in the way in which one restrains an unruly German shepherd, as if the characters were alive but could be held in check by Richardson's superior will.¹²³

Expressed authorial ambivalence partially resulted from the writer's realization of the reader's increased awareness of spurious accounts, but also from the writer's unwillingness to lose the spellbinding effect of literal truth initiated by the prefatorial nonfictional disguise. At the same time, the absence of a writer's clear denial of authorship insinuates his subconscious yearning to declare ownership, to express pride in his work, to receive recognition as creator. For example, in Le Philosophe anglois; Histoire de Cleveland, Prévost provides an elaborate prefatory ploy to convince readers of the work's authenticity. Seven years later in his preface to Le Doyen de Killerine, he identifies that previous work as his invention, "un ¹²⁴ ouvrage d'imagination." Among the few authors who enjoyed flaunting their creative efforts, Henry Fielding is a prime illustration. In The History of Tom Jones, "The Introduction to the Work, or a Bill of Fare to the Feast" features the author as one of the main characters, if not the main one, the god figure, the chef whose menu lists "Human Nature" as the main course in this meal of "mental

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Entertainment."

Although authorial anxiety over declaring fiction to be fiction diminished in the latter part of the eighteenth century, whether from fear of social scorn or failure, it remained a factor in influencing writers to continue using the fictional preface. In 1764, Horace Walpole, fearful of ridicule, published his Castle of Otranto as a translation of an Italian text. His lengthy preface reveals his diffidence towards his role and his ambiguity towards his material:

It is natural for a translator to be prejudiced in favour of his adopted work . . . Yet I am not blind to my author's defects . . . Though the machinery is invention, and the names of the actors imaginary, I cannot but believe that the groundwork of the story is founded on truth.¹²⁶

As a result of the work's immense success, in the preface to the second edition, Walpole confidently strips away his translator's mask and commends his "new species of
127
romance" : "As the public have applauded the attempt, the author must not say he was entirely unequal to the task he
128
had undertaken."

For the most part, by the end of the century, fiction had gradually succeeded in asserting itself as an independent and valid form of expression, free from the need for a disguise, but also free to include it as a literary device. Readers tolerated, more easily, if not wholly accepted, the

"truth" of imaginative worlds and appreciated their worth as entertainment. William Nelson comments on this phenomenon:

Although writers of fiction continued, during the eighteenth century and after, to pretend more or less earnestly that they were really historians, only the altogether naïve . . . took them at their word or damned them as liars . . . The audience had come to accept such stories, not as perhaps true but rather with that willing suspension of disbelief of which Coleridge writes. It was agreed that narrative fictions might entertain and teach moral lessons (or immoral ones) and that the more "true to life" they were the more effective their teaching.¹²⁹

Kelly affirms that with the passage of time, readers no longer needed the nonfictional pretense to accept works of fiction:

The distrust of the imagination was slowly being overcome, and with the vindication of the imagination the need for such a device became less urgent. The novel was well enough established by 1778 to forego such supporting paraphernalia.¹³⁰

The novel and its readers grew out of their stages of infancy at least to adolescence, if not to adulthood.

Notes

CHAPTER IV

THE SUCCESS OF THE PREFACE AS A FICTIONAL BEGINNING

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- 2 See text, pp. 3-4,
- 3 Michael J. Kelly, "The Functional English Preface through the Eighteenth Century," (Diss. Univ. of Mass. 1968), p. 60.
- 4 Chapter III of the text analyzes the various devices used in the fictional preface to convince the reader of the work's authenticity.
- 5 For further discussion of the typical reader of fiction in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, see text pp. 25, 90.
- 6 John Richetti, Popular Fiction Before Richardson: Narrative Patterns 1700-1739. (New York: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 168.
- 7 See text, pp. 1, 6, 22-23, 45-46.
- 8 Philip Stewart, Imitation and Illusion in the French Memoir Novel, 1700-1750: The Art of Make-Believe (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1969), pp. 154-155.
- 9 See text pp. 6-7, 34-35, 46.
- 10 D. M. Armstrong, Belief, Truth, and Knowledge (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 108.
- 11 See text, p. 27.
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- 29 "The Preface," The Adventures of Lindamira, A Lady of Quality, introd. William Graves (1702; rpt. New York: Garland, 1979), p. 3.
- 30 Lindamira, p. 1.
- 31 Robert Challes, "Préface," Les Illustres Françaises, introd. Frédéric Deloffre (Paris: Société d'Édition "Les Belles Lettres," 1959), p. LXII.
- 32 Les Illustres Françaises, p. LX.
- 33 Penelope Aubin, "Preface to the Reader," The Strange Adventures of the Count de Vinevil and his Family (London: E. Bell, 1721), n. sig.
- 34 Aubin, "Preface to the Reader," n. sig.
- 35 See text, pp. 69, 74, 85-86.
- 36 See text, pp. 77-78.
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- 38 Day, p. 32.
- 39 Guilleragues, "Au Lecteur," n. sig.
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- 41 Daniel Defoe, "Preface," Robinson Crusoe. An Authoritative Text: Backgrounds and Sources, Criticisms, ed. Michael Shinagel (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975), p. 3.
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- 43 One exception is the "hidden" preface incorporated within the beginning of the main text; see text, pp. 127-128.
- 44 For a detailed analysis of this preface see text, pp. 66-67.
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- 46 Aphra Behn, Oroonoko and Other Prose Narratives, ed. Montague Summers (1916; rpt. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1967), p. 135.

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- 87 Gaudentio di Lucca, p. 126.
- 88 Gaudentio di Lucca, p. 188.
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- 92 "The Publisher to the Reader," Gaudentio di Lucca, p. x.
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- 114 Prévost, "Avertissement," Histoire d'une Grecque moderne, Vol. XI of Oeuvres (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1969), i.
- 115 John G. Cawelti, Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 9.
- 116 Mylne, p. 76.
- 117 Niklaus, p. 341.
- 118 See Coulet, p. 213.
- 119 Stewart, p. 30.
- 120 Daryl J. Bem, Beliefs, Attitudes, and Human Affairs (Belmont, Ca.: Brooks/Cole Pub., 1970), p. 73.
- 121 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Préface," Julie ou La Nouvelle Héloïse (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1960), p. 3.
- 122 Alan Dugald McKillop, The Early Masters of English Fiction (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1956), p. 39.
- 123 Philip Stevick, Introd., Clarissa or the History of a Young Lady by Samuel Richardson (San Francisco: Rinehart Press, 1971), p. xi.

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Prévost, "Préface," Le Doyen de Killérine, Histoire Morale, Vol. VIII of Oeuvres (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1969), vij.

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130

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CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

I took a final look round her sitting-room in the tower at Sissinghurst (a room I had entered only a half a dozen times in the previous thirty years), and came upon a locked Gladstone bag lying in the corner of the little turret room that opens off it. The bag contained something--a tiara in its case, for all I knew--and, having no key, I cut away the leather from around its lock to open it. Inside there was a large notebook in a flexible cover, page after page filled with her neat pencilled script . . . It was an autobiography written when she was aged twenty-eight, a confession, an attempt to purge her mind and heart of a love that had possessed her¹

Du reste, le narrateur, qu'on connaît[^] toujours à temps, n'aurait guère de titre à faire valoir dans une entreprise de ce genre si le hasard ne l'avait mis à même de recueillir un certain nombre de dépositions et si la force des choses ne l'avait mêlé à tout ce qu'il prétend relater . . . Bien entendu, un historien, même s'il est un amateur, a toujours des documents. Le narrateur de cette histoire a donc les siens: son témoignage d'abord, celui des autres ensuite, puisque, par son rôle, il fut amené à recueillir les confidences de tous les personnages de cette chronique, et, en dernier lieu, les textes qui finirent par tomber entre ses mains.²

When the postman brought me a parcel containing the typescript of The Brandon Papers my heart sank. I have learnt to fear such offerings. Nor was I reassured by a covering letter from Miss Marguerite Evans explaining that these were documents collected by her uncle, the late Maurice Evans, documents which she thought would be of interest to me, "since Lady Brandon was a close friend of Virginia Woolf and a member of the Bloomsbury Group" . . . According to Miss Evans, neither she nor her relatives knew anything of Maurice Evans' discoveries; his manuscript was left unread and remained unfound until a few months ago, when it was sent to me. (I present it here in the form in which I received it although, to help the reader through the text, I have provided chapter headings of my own together with a plan of Penny Villa and a Brandon family tree.)³

I must confess that if they [the following records] had fallen into my hands by chance and if I had not known their author, I should most certainly have thrown them away in disgust . . . I see them as a document of the times.⁴

I take my revenge by publishing them [a patient's confessions], and I hope he will be duly annoyed. I am quite ready, however, to share the financial spoils with him on condition that he resumes his treatment.⁵

In writing this account I have tried to keep reliance on memory to a minimum; I have been able to refer to much documentary evidence and, for part of this period, to a diary I kept. I intend to leave an annotated copy of this volume with my papers for the use of scholars who may someday pursue the period in greater detail.⁶

J'ai dit naturellement ce que je pensais sur des matières assez délicates. C'est là, je crois, la façon dont il seroit à souhaiter que tout le monde écrivit, et c'est aussi ce qui me met en repos sur le vérité de mon recit.⁷

It will be expected some account should be given of the motives of the present publication, the chief of which are, that the author, notwithstanding the scenes of life he is engaged in, cannot, when he reflects on the worthy family he has sprung from, and those noble ones he is allied to, help feeling some concern for his fame.⁸

C'est à vous que je destine et que j'ai legué tous les papiers qui se trouveront chez moi, après moi, et qui finiront, si je continue d'écrire ainsi que je l'ai fait jusqu'à présent, par former plusieurs volumes de Mémoires. Vous les publierez si vous voulez, ce qui me paraît sans inconvenients, parce que je suis bien assurée de n'avoir dit que la vérité, et que la vérité me paraît toujours bonne à faire connaître.⁹

By the words themselves, we are unable to judge whether the above prefatory statements are true or not. Without a publisher's note on the title page, an author's introductory explanation, a library's classification, or a bookstore's categorization, we cannot determine whether they begin works of fiction or nonfiction. These prefaces also support another main point of this study: the fictional preface not only survived the nineteenth century, but it has also functioned in twentieth-century western literature; it has transcended time and nationality. But unlike their seventeenth and eighteenth-century predecessors,

modern authors do not seriously attempt to disguise their fiction; they utilize the preface as a convenient literary device. In contrast to the religious, moral, social, and aesthetic pressures--the sinfulness of "lies," the perverting influence of fiction, the condemnation of reading and writing works of the imagination, the critics' disdain for the novel's lack of traditional legitimacy¹⁰--which forced seventeenth and eighteenth-century authors to deny their works' invention and earnestly assert their authenticity, twentieth-century authors continue to use the fictional preface, although infrequently, as an intermediary between reader and text and as a means of initiating "suspension of disbelief." It adds a dimension of "reality" rather than literal truth. Moreover, the fictional preface still facilitates writers' struggle to start a work of fiction; time has not alleviated the difficulty of beginning. John Steinbeck describes this anxiety as plaguing countless writers:

I suffer as always from the fear of putting down the first line. It is amazing the terrors, the magics, the prayers, the straitening shyness that assails one. It is as though the words were not only indelible but that they spread out like dye in water and color everything around them. A strange and mystic business, writing. Almost no progress has taken place since it was invented Hundreds of thousands of people are in my shoes--praying feverishly for relief from their word pangs.¹¹

The preface still offers a satisfactory means of dispelling

a writer's distress over how to begin. Michael J. Kelly concludes that the preface's functionalism is "its most general and continuing quality."¹²

Most of us today do not need a preface to justify our reading any type of book; rarely do we experience any guilt in our choice of reading material (unless perhaps pornographic in nature. For instance, there are readers who pretend to read Playboy for its literary content). Today parents are not worried, for the most part, that books corrupt their children's morals, because television programs, movies, videos, and rock music, not reading, have captured their children's attention and their own concern. Although we may not need excuses to read or write fiction, that does not mean that fiction's reputation ranks very high on our scale of values. Fiction is still generally viewed as entertainment with little social import.¹³ In both public esteem and in publishing sales, fiction remains secondary to nonfiction.

An eighteenth-century prefacer asked rhetorically: "Is there not Moral Truth, as well as historical? Certainly, there is, and this surely ought to be preferred, as tending to improve men's minds; whereas the other [history] can only instruct them."¹⁴ Ernest Hemingway also contended that an author's invention produces "a truer account than anything factual can be. For facts can be observed badly, but when a good writer is creating something he has time

and scope to make of it an absolute truth."¹⁵ Very few would agree with either writer's assessment of fiction's lofty role. Fiction's access to a higher truth was then and is now a matter of minority opinion among audiences and even among writers. The general reader persists in regarding "history" as socially more significant than literature. Indeed, literature today as a field of study or a profession has a marginal importance. Few, in fact, consider fiction enlightening, enriching, or even useful. It is at best a leisure activity, not a serious endeavor. A common bias of opinion is that fiction (and the arts as a whole) is certainly secondary to "real" work. The general populace still does not have much faith in the world of the imagination even though it enjoys the products of its creation (television, movies, videos.) As William Nelson observes, this lack of credence in fiction continues: "There seems to be a persistent reluctance to accept the artistic composition of verities as equivalent to the representation of verity" ¹⁶

Like their ancestors, contemporary writers still struggle to earn an adequate living. Except for a few well-known literary figures, who are recognized more as celebrities than for their writing achievements, such as Norman Mailer, Arthur Miller, Isaac Singer, most authors are unknown to the mass public. Most people think of writers as not really having grown up, as unrealistic, or

worse, as lazy or as snobs. They are dreaming, not living in the real world; they inhabit an Ivory Tower. The successful fiction writers are those whose works are transformed into movies; as a result, such authors as Sidney Sheldon, Judith Krantz, and Stephen King have become familiar. Although the word is still "the thing wherein the author catches the attention of his audience," most people are not even aware of the word's essential contribution. They do not appreciate nor do they recognize the "word-makers." Many know the names of actors, directors, and even producers, but most never remember the screen-writer. A movie is usually termed a director's film or an actor's vehicle, rarely a writer's creation. Since their social prestige is low, many writers' self-esteem must be low as well. They doubt their purpose and talent. Claiming to be a writer today as in the past takes courage, as well as a second career, if not a hefty bank account.

Similarly in the general consciousness, teaching literature ranks a couple of rungs above teaching home economics. Upon these teachers rests the challenge (or burden) of extolling the value of fiction. Teachers are constantly on the defensive to justify literature as a required course of study. They are hard put to convince their rather unresponsive, incredulous students of its power and worth, of its knowledge of human behavior and life's condition. Overwhelmingly, college students judge

nonfiction as more worthwhile than fiction, as the following sampling of opinions indicates: "I prefer nonfiction books because I like true stories. Fiction books are not so interesting because you can't believe them. I don't know if this makes much sense because I watch a lot of T.V. which is fiction." "Nonfiction is reality and from reality we learn about people and reasons for happenings."

"Reading something that I know happened keeps me interested longer than something that might have or could have happened." "There is not much one can gain from fiction."

"I prefer reading nonfiction because fiction is a waste of time." "I prefer to read nonfiction for the simple reason that nonfictional material is factual. Reading takes up a lot of precious time, and right now I cannot afford to waste my time reading fiction."¹⁷

"Relevancy" may no longer be in vogue among intellectuals, but it is still prominent in students' minds. When getting and keeping a job and worrying about economic conditions are the main concerns for most people, taking fiction seriously seems to be irrelevant. Most young people view college as a means to an end--a rewarding career--rather than as a process of learning for its own sake. Hence only texts providing "real" information possess significance.

The above opinions reflect those of the general public as a whole. Considering the prevalent negative evaluation

of fiction, it would be understandable if writers found themselves sorely tempted to disguise their fiction as fact. Although authors today, for the most part, do not face moral, social, or even literary pressures blocking their creative efforts as they did in the past, they do have to contend with readers' taste and the publishing marketplace if they wish to be read. While writing, on the one hand, is an expression of creative energy, on the other hand, it is also expressive of a desire to please, to be successful, and to make money. Writers must therefore take into account that nonfiction is still considered "better" by the great bulk of readers and that it still sells more copies than fiction.¹⁸ Thus when literature disguises itself as fact, it clothes itself in social worth; it joins the "real world" as if it belongs to it. Although modern authors seldom resort to declaring their fiction to be nonfiction within a fictional preface, as writers did in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they have, however, turned to borrowing facts. They have created new forms by mixing fact and fiction: the "nonfiction novel," New Journalism, and the docudrama.¹⁹ Their asseverations of truth have undergone severe criticism, not unlike that of their seventeenth and eighteenth-century predecessors.

We should note that present public interest in "true" material does not exclude the popularity of romances and science fiction, which are as fantastic and "unreal" as

seventeenth-century romances and fairy tales. Many readers want to escape temporarily from, not to, reality and purposely avoid reading and watching disturbing truths. They do not wish to become intellectually and/or emotionally involved. Life gives them enough problems without their having to deal with artistically presented ones. It is more relaxing to read an improbable romance or to watch a sitcom than to read nonfiction or to watch a docudrama. Obviously we enjoy both types of reading and viewing material.

i

Literary Merit

The literature of any historical period is usually characterized by mediocrity with some glints of excellence. In an interview, John Barth, for instance, remarks that "most of any generation's output is forgettable stuff . . .²⁰ A culture's trends are not necessarily its monuments." It is now a cliché to state that popularity does not most often accompany quality. Many books lacking literary merit do succeed in becoming best sellers today, as they did in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but they do not outlive the demand of their age. Such transient works captivate their contemporary audience and provide temporary gratification rather than perpetual stimulation. Crébillon understood that an author's prime aim in pleasing his

audience prevents him from achieving literary immortality:

"Tout Auteur retenu par la crainte basse de ne pas plaire assez à son siècle, passe rarement aux siècles à venir."²¹

But from this chaos comes order much later. Disguised fiction in French and English may not offer us many lasting examples of literary worth, but it does constitute a formative part of literary history, and it does offer us a view of literary taste. Such minor works as a whole represent "an interesting reflection of the taste of the period, for one may infer that their direct connection to contemporary settings, mores, and events was an element attractive to-- and perhaps even desired by--the reading public."²² Henri Coulet also notes the value of mediocrity:

Quand on considère la production moyenne, et non les sommets, on a à la fois l'impression de lire, au cours d'une époque donnée, à peu près toujours le même roman, et le sentiment de découvrir pourtant dans l'oeuvre la plus banale quelque chose qui méritait d'être dit, et que seul le roman permettait de dire²³

The fictional preface, specifically its truth instilling apparatus, influenced the development of fiction towards realism. Since eighteenth-century audiences eventually questioned the prefaces' unverified assertions of "truth,"²⁴ many writers worked harder in devising means to support their "nonfiction." Lionel Stevenson points out that "the significance of such books is not in any literary merit, but in the fact that their claim to be factual

reports forced the writers to strive for the illusion of reality as their primary aim."²⁵ Robert A. Day also agrees that "the insistence upon veracity had more effect on fictional technique than that upon virtue, since it promoted a search for mechanical devices to make a story seem true, rather than a reliance on the mere announcement that it was."²⁶ To substantiate their claims of presenting facts, authors found themselves forced to imitate the facts of reality; the literally true gave way to the true to life. In its choice of incidents, effective use of dialogue, and depiction of "actual" characters, Vivienne Mylne finds at least that "the [minor] eighteenth-century novel introduced techniques and practices which enriched the resources of later novelists for the representation of real life and the creation of literary illusion."²⁷ As a part of the whole, the fictional preface, in its pretense to authenticity, although it was often repetitive, predictable, and uninteresting, ably functioned in initiating a "realistic" atmosphere. Kelly asserts likewise that prefaces facilitated the birth of the realistic novel: "Prefaces from the Restoration through the eighteenth century reflect the labor pains of the realistic fiction that was being born at that time."²⁸

Popular Taste

These seventeenth and eighteenth-century works also remind us of fiction's initial function: it satisfies people's need to be entertained. It is a source of enjoyment for enjoyment's sake. If, as Jorge Luis Borges believes, a writer "should be judged by the enjoyment he gives and by the emotions one gets,"²⁹ then these seemingly negligible writers and their works served a worthwhile purpose in their time. (Of course, great literature entertains as well, but it challenges and engages all of our faculties and hence involves an active, educated effort to experience its texts.) Serious study of literature, on the other hand, subordinates, if not deprecates, the value of literature as momentary diversion; granting validity to popular taste has usually been regarded with intellectual disdain. In fact, critics and scholars often judge the works the "people" favor as tasteless, inane, and a waste of time. But such opinions should be challenged. Q. D. Leavis reviews for us why people read novels in the first place: to pass time pleasantly, to obtain vicarious satisfaction or compensation for life, to obtain assistance in the business of living, to enrich the quality of living by extending, deepening, reforming, coordinating experience.³⁰ This period's fiction fulfilled at least the first two

requisites.

Popular, transitory works perform a vital role for the specific moment in which they reign: they distract their readers from the daily turmoil of everyday existence. It is virtually impossible for modern audiences to imagine a world without television, radio and other such forms of entertainment, and thus we very often underestimate the immense influence of books--even if they are merely "pulp fiction"--upon people who depend upon these as a source of diversion from life's cares. Having finished reading a text, such readers do not dwell upon the meaning, structure, style, or significance of the work, but rather savor a sense of gratification. To digress briefly, I remember experiencing this type of satisfaction upon reading Gone With the Wind at fourteen. I was totally wrapped up in the lives of the characters. I kept wanting Scarlett to "smarten up," to stop being foolish and vain. I was convinced at the end that "tomorrow" she would recapture Rhett Butler's affection. I do not think that I have ever experienced such pure enthrallment in a text. I, of course, was reading without a pencil in hand. Most seventeenth and eighteenth-century readers of popular fiction were "fourteen" in their experience, expectations, and reactions. They felt uncritical joy or grief. They were totally absorbed in an invented world without any concern or consciousness of how this world was put together. This

pleasurable effect usually evaporates soon afterwards, but during the duration of the reading process, the reading material, regardless of its merit, enchants readers and becomes a part of their lives. Although this part of their lives may be considered "mental sleeping," one cannot deny, however, humanity's need for sleep, nor should one belittle the need for escapist literature; it is play in the world of work and worry.

In comparison to earlier times, our modern age cannot boast of a true elevation of taste. The quality of these seventeenth and eighteenth-century works of purported non-fiction can be likened to the serial pabulum served on television: the popular but vacuous soap operas, detective dramas, and situation comedies. Surely any literary critic is aghast at the rampant melodrama and trite dialogue aired on many of these programs. Yet most of their audiences accept such portrayed sentiments, if not the events, as authentic. Who can forget the world's preoccupation with the question of who shot J. R.? True, he was not considered a "real" human being, but the interest was "real" for many: "It's not true, but there are people like that out there." Viewers relish this world of make-believe in proportion as they are relieved from the stress of their real world.

iii

"Truth" Is Still Attractive

A conversation I once overheard illustrates the persistent attraction of "true" material. Two women were discussing the movie The Competition, which revolves around two young people who fall in love as they are competing for a music award. The young woman wins only to crush her lover's ego and to endanger their relationship. Listening to this summary of the film, the husband of one of the women interjected: "It must have been fiction if the girl won." Defensive, the wife quickly retorted, "Oh no. It is based on a true story." Meanwhile the girlfriend, her curiosity aroused, asked, "Is that right?" The wife replied in a lowered voice, "I don't know, but it sounds better." This anecdote, besides exemplifying sexism, underscores that being "true" still matters today as it did in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in producing an effect and in judging a work's significance. "This is a true story" still seizes our attention and evokes our empathy. We believe that the tears we shed when reading or viewing true material are not in vain or silly.

Perceived truth continues to bestow worth and to justify our investment of time. What we bring to a work, our preconceptions and prejudices, helps define it, whether it is a painting, a book, or a movie. We give it life in

our gaze, in our reading, in our viewing. The famous "The Man with the Golden Helmet," once held to be one of the most magnificent of Rembrandt portraits, has recently been established not to be his. Suddenly its monetary value of approximately eight million dollars has decreased to one
³¹twentieth the price. Physically the painting has not changed, but the perceptions and reactions of its audience, which enjoyed and esteemed it more when it was labeled a Rembrandt, have changed. It has lost value in the eyes of the beholder because it is no longer "true."

The stamp of truth, regardless of substantiation, still gains conviction because of the apparently constant characteristics of general audiences: their lack of critical awareness, their ready willingness to accept unquestioningly, their desire for pleasure, and their need for escape. Bordelon describes such readers' immaturity: "[Ils] ont cependant l'esprit aussi foible que celui des enfants, croient tout ce qu'ils lisent, pourvu qu'ils y trouvent du prodigieux de l'admirable, et de l'extraordinaire."
³²Modern readers of popular fiction share this childlike naïveté and overpowering concern for content. Just as carefree and careless in their reading as their earlier counterparts, they usually dislike and avoid digging deeply into a text. They want to enjoy, not tire, themselves. E. M. Forster observed the common readers' prevailing interest in story: "We are all like Schehera-

zade's husband, in that we want to know what happens next. Some of us want to know nothing else--there is nothing in us but primeval curiosity, and consequently our literary judgments are ludicrous."³³

Today we are still faced with a populace the majority of which does not read--not because of illiteracy, although there are far too many people who cannot read or write in our society³⁴--but because reading competes weakly against more appealing modes of entertainment: television, videos, movies, cable, M.T.V., and computers. Impatience and unreflectiveness characterize society today. Modern media provide an immediate and a more sensory, more social experience than the time-consuming, tranquil, isolating act of reading. Today it seems that most novels are written with the intention of their being converted into movies: very few read them. In fact, publishers often depend upon television or movie productions to spark sales in their books. For example, Alex Haley's Roots as a television mini-series attracted one hundred million viewers; as a result, the hardcover book sales rose within two years from six hundred thousand to six million.³⁵ Out of Africa and Shadows on the Grass by Isak Dinesen, two memoirs of colonial Kenya, became prominent bestsellers because of the movie version.³⁶ Most often, however, a cursory reading of newspapers and magazines, occupational reading, and "how to" books have supplanted leisure reading. Even

fiction reading on the subway has been replaced by the Walkman radio. Reading for enrichment and enjoyment has almost become an anachronism or an elitist pastime. Faced with this crisis in drawing an audience, many authors of fiction, like their seventeenth and eighteenth-century predecessors, have turned to writing "true" stories, as the following discussion will detail.

iv

The Enduring Popularity of Nonfiction

An analysis of American best seller lists for the last thirty years affirms the staying power of biographies, autobiographies, and memoirs.³⁷ Nonfiction is also popular in France and Britain.³⁸ Historical truth, especially of the recent past, impresses readers, just as it did their seventeenth and eighteenth-century counterparts.³⁹ They identify more strongly with a current affair or well-known celebrity. Biographies are even more popular when the subject is alive or has just died. There is always a rush by writers and publishers to capitalize on some celebrity's death; recent examples include Elvis Presley, John Lennon, Tennessee Williams, Grace Kelly, Rock Hudson. Joseph Addison criticized this exploitive practice in his age as many of us do in our own:

There is a race of men lately sprung
up among this sort of writers, whom one
cannot reflect upon without indignation

as well as contempt. These are Grubstreet biographers, who watch for the death of a great man, like so many undertakers, on purpose to make a penny of him. He is no sooner laid in his grave, but he falls into the hands of an historian; who, to swell a volume, ascribes to him works which he never wrote, and actions which he never performed; celebrates virtues which he was never famous for, and excuses faults which he was never guilty of.⁴⁰

Regardless of critics, the sooner after the subject's death or after the event such works appear, the "truer" they are for their contemporary readers. The more remote in time a subject is from its immediate audience, the less interested an audience is in the subject. For instance, the disclosures which have been made in the last few years about John F. Kennedy's sordid love affairs, his involvement with the Mafia, or the probability of more than one assassin in his slaying would have caused a commotion shortly after his death, but now evoke little reaction. The Watergate affair is no longer the intense, shocking scandal of its time; in fact, many now feel that former President Nixon was unfairly treated, and he is presently enjoying a new-found respect as one of America's political wise men. The passage of time changes the significance of certain historical events, as well as people's characterizations of others. Biographer Philip Ziegler supports this point:

There is a case for maintaining that facts, like medlars or manure, should be

allowed to mature before use. They may undergo a strange sea change in the intervening years. Details that seem of transcendental importance when first bruited abroad may well appear insignificant a generation later; mountains become molehills or molehills mountains.⁴¹

Time adds objectivity and clear-sightedness because it decreases passion; thus readers are less likely to believe immediately whatever they read about a past event or figure with which they are not personally connected. This helps to explain why most best sellers are soon forgotten and usually sell well only during their own time. They tap into a popular trend or preoccupation which eventually fades.

The enduring popularity of nonfiction rests mainly upon readers' ineffable attraction to the lives of the famous and infamous. Whereas the nobility and later the wealthy and socially prominent aroused seventeenth and eighteenth-century curiosity, today, for the most part, screen personalities, rock stars, sports heroes, successful achievers, and certain political figures supply the raw material for our output of "authentic" accounts. Having been viewed as larger than life on the movie screen, stars have become super-real for their fans. Television's small screen, on the other hand, has made these personalities a familiar presence in viewers' homes. Consequently audiences want to know more, if not all, about their personal, "real" lives. Best seller lists are, therefore, periodi-

cally filled with their biographies and autobiographies. A sampling of such recent compilations includes: Mommie Dearest (about Joan Crawford), Wired (about John Belushi), Lauren Bacall by Myself, Past Imperfect (by Joan Collins), Born to Run (about Bruce Springsteen), The Mick (by Mickey Mantle), Reggie (by Reggie Jackson), The Great Getty, Iacocca: An Autobiography, Yeager: An Autobiography, The Kennedys: Dynasty and Disaster, With No Apologies (by Barry M. Goldwater), Mayor (Edward I. Koch).⁴²

Not only are we drawn to true contemporary stories, but we are particularly seduced by thrilling and shocking ones, just as seventeenth and eighteenth-century readers were. As we have seen, most of these past readers must be seen as naive and gullible to have believed their period's disguised works of fiction,⁴³ but today we are still vulnerable to literary, as well as media, manipulation.⁴⁴ Most people continue to accept the printed word as fact without question.⁴⁵ Sizzling "true" content still sells newspapers and makes best sellers. We are still a public that craves sensationalism, thrives on scandal, devours catastrophes, and pries into the privacy of others. The fictional preface, as we have seen, exploited this human compulsion to know what people are hiding, and repeatedly promised to reveal the hitherto undisclosed facts about the famous. This formula certainly has not been lost on our present gossip columnists, tabloid reporters, or

publishers, who have elevated rumor to the status of fact. Indeed, modern society is obsessed with celebrity gossip. It has become a national pastime, filling the pages of newspapers, magazines, and books, as well as the "news" on television and radio. For example, the stormy divorce of Joan Collins, the escapades of Gary Hart, and the sins of Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart became front page news. The general public is so particularly fascinated with the real life of actors playing fictional characters that writers have fictionalized the actors' lives. After all, gossip by definition is half-truth, exaggeration, or pure invention. Ziegler notes that "as the subject of a biography is set closer and closer to the present day, so the lures of gossip and psychology become more insidious and the rules of history prove even more difficult to apply."⁴⁶ Author Margaret Drabble regards much fiction as operating "in the spirit of inspired gossip; it speculates on little evidence, inventing elaborate and artistic explanations of little incidents and overheard remarks that often leave the evidence far behind."⁴⁷ But this process of creative elaboration applies to some purported nonfiction as well, such as Jackie Oh! by Kitty Kelly, The Brethren: Inside the Supreme Court by Bob Woodward and Scott Armstrong, and The Intimate Sex Lives of Famous People by Irving, Amy and Sylvia Wallace and David Wallechinsky. In the last example, we are puzzled as to how to interpret this work of

"nonfiction"; it seems to be a tongue-in-cheek rendering, but we cannot be sure. In the preface, labeled "Foreplay," the authors claim to reveal concealed facts. Of course, we question their investigative techniques, but they anticipate our doubts: "Readers may wonder how we were able to obtain information about an area of human behavior so long hidden, kept secret and private."⁴⁸ They admit that their search was difficult, but they met the challenge by employing twenty researchers in the United States and others around the world. They read 1,500 biographies, correspondences, pamphlets, periodicals, newspapers, legal transcripts, divorce actions, diaries, medical reports. (This statement surely would convince any doubtful reader.) Hence, they were able to allow the subjects "to speak for themselves."⁴⁹

Even though many people realize that much in these sleazy works is false or misleading, they still consume them. They are inexplicably beguiled by them even though they may intellectually reject their content and worth. Seductive subject matter still elicits belief and undermines reason.⁵⁰ D. M. Armstrong remarks upon this inconstruable part of human nature: "Recognition of one's own irrationality does not necessarily abolish it."⁵¹ People may know that the National Enquirer, Star, and Globe contain gross inaccuracies and simply pander to the prurient interest of readers, but readers still cannot

reject, or rather they enjoy and believe, if perhaps secretly, even the most outrageous "realities," so delectable are these morsels of immorality and tales of excesses. As a result, these publications flourish in their version of "truth." (The National Enquirer is one of the top ten United States publications.⁵²) Generally, audiences do not need the whole truth to believe; a partial truth will do. This dictum is also true for seventeenth and eighteenth-century readers, who may not have been wholly convinced by the preface but preferred to believe it.

v

Audiences Still Vulnerable to Deception

How do readers know that a book claiming to be nonfiction is so? History can be invented, as any dictatorship can testify, or distorted by subjective interpretations or omissions. Readers simply trust, for example, that the New York Times book reviewer, an assumed expert, will know what is and is not true. They trust that libraries and bookstores classify and shelve their books according to correct categories; otherwise readers would be confused in cases where the authors do not specify the nature of their works. Of course, twentieth-century readers may bring a broader experience and education to a text than did their predecessors, so that they are not as easily fooled by false claims of authenticity. It is also more difficult to achieve such

literary deception because of our highly developed networks of information and resources of investigation, which could quickly debunk such pretenses, and because of mass media, which could quickly inform the public. But this does not mean that we are not occasionally taken in.

We discussed how seventeenth and eighteenth-century readers accepted many pseudogenuine accounts of travels to strange new lands because these works imitated actual journals, and people then yearned to learn of these remarkable explorations.⁵³ If life then was stranger than fiction, it is now even more so, as is attested to by the seemingly unimaginable horror stories and turns of events in the news. Today it has become a cliché to say that nothing can shock us; nothing seems incredible. So many occurrences once considered impossible have happened that people tend to accept practically anything as true in this very unstable, uncertain world; but these bizarre events no longer affect people with the intensity they once did. Television coverage, which has brought bloody wars, crimes, and catastrophes into our living rooms, has also inured many of us to them. In another illustration of what I am arguing, the whole world was duly astounded by Neil Armstrong's step for mankind on the moon, which seemed farfetched to suggest even forty years ago, but little attention was paid to ensuing flights. It took the Challenger disaster to renew public interest. In effect, the incredible has become a fact of

life; we take it for granted and accept it readily without much surprise. This conceding attitude parallels the one that led seventeenth and eighteenth-century readers to accept false prefatory claims.⁵⁴ As we will see, it is this same attitude which also makes us vulnerable to deceptions and misconceptions. We have observed that many people do not need evidence to believe.⁵⁵ As W. V. Quine and J. S. Ullian point out: "Sometimes an explanation has no evidence at all to support it apart from the fact that it would if true, explain something we want explained, and it can draw high credibility from this source alone."⁵⁶

For instance, we tend to believe immediately something negative about someone or something without much proof. Notwithstanding our ideal principle that one is innocent till proven guilty, once a person is labeled a suspect in a crime, most of us view him as guilty. Attorney General Edwin Meese actually stated that "you don't have many suspects who are innocent of a crime."⁵⁷

Recent literary and social history contains some striking examples of how twentieth-century readers have been duped. Clifford Irving's nearly successful attempt in passing off an invented, "authorized" biography of the eccentric Howard Hughes is a glaring instance of even experts, the publishing community, falling victim to fraud under the proper circumstances. McGraw-Hill wanted a best seller and in its zeal and/or greed unwittingly aided

Irving in his scam. Another major hoax, the discovery of the purported Hitler diaries, underscores people's tendency to accept almost unquestioningly what they read in newspapers and magazines, hear on television, and basically anything labeled true. The desire of the German publishers of Stern for these diaries to be true and to be the first to print such a scoop made them forgo a detailed investigation of authenticity. Hence, Konrad Kujau, the forger, and Gerd Heidemann, the former Stern reporter, were able to defraud the magazine of 3.8 million dollars between 1981 and 1983.⁵⁸ The reputable Sunday Times of London, which bought the British publication rights, also supported Heidemann's contention that the diaries were found in an East German hayloft after they had been lost in the crash of a plane flying to a stronghold in the Bavarian Alps in the closing days of World War II.⁵⁹ Before sceptical historians, former Hitler aides, and handwriting experts exposed the deception, some notable defenders, among which were numbered Hugh Trevor-Roper, British historian and expert on Hitler, Dr. Max Frey-Zeuler, head of Zurich's secret police scientific branch, and Ordway Hilton, an American graphologist, called the diaries "a major historical discovery that would contribute to the world's understanding of Hitler, the Third Reich and the events of the Nazi period."⁶⁰ Actually they have contributed to our understanding of human gullibility.

Besides literary hoaxes, we are also vulnerable to media hoaxes. An example of an audience's believing the impossible true is Orson Welles's November 1938 radio broadcast, "The War of Worlds" or more popularly "The Men from Mars." Listeners believed that there was an actual alien invasion because of the deadly serious presentation and because it was on the radio, a voice of authority. The horror-filled Hindenburg tragedy, which was broadcast live on radio, prepared the audience to believe Welles's performance. This is comparable to the more recent reaction of television viewers who watched Red Dawn. So "real" was the presentation that many believed we were under nuclear attack and, terrified, they phoned the television station to find out.

Although it is more difficult today for an author or creator to disguise the fictional as fact, to make the incredible credible, the above examples prove that it is not impossible. "This is a true story" continues to attract and convince audiences, at least at first, without much supporting evidence. Initial perception, not proof of fact, very often still determines ensuing belief.

vi

Mixing Fact and Fiction

The following lengthy discussion of modern literary and media forms shows that the seventeenth and eighteenth-

century fictional preface's main function--asserting literal truth while disguising fiction--has survived and has been adopted extensively in our nonfiction novels, "new" biographies, New Journalism, movies based on true stories, and docudramas. Although historical accounts today certainly do not display a flagrant disregard for facts as those in the past did, nevertheless, there is no "pure" history. The difference between the two periods in writing history is one of degree; today recording events predominates over elaborating them, but it does not exclude imaginative additions. The twentieth century has not solved the seventeenth and eighteenth-century problem of separating fact from fiction. Writers and critics still debate whether this fusion is a way of expanding fiction's limits or of destroying history's boundaries, a way of experimenting with story telling or of distorting facts. Thomas Griffith characterizes our age as "an androgynous time that distrusts rigid categories and delights in blurred distinction."⁶² The popularity of mixing fact and fiction also indicates that an audience's desire for and fascination with "true" material, regardless of its substantiation, transcends a particular literary period.

In 1965, Truman Capote proclaimed his In Cold Blood a "nonfiction novel." In 1968, Norman Mailer subtitled his The Armies of the Night: History as a Novel, The Novel as History. Semantic obfuscation reigns supreme, as is

illustrated in the following prefatory excerpts. Joyce Carol Oates begins Them with a seemingly conflicting assertion: "This is a work of history in fictional form--that is, in personal perspective, which is the only kind of history that exists."⁶³ (Many historians, of course, would disagree with her definition.) She then proceeds to discuss the actual people upon whom she based her work, and her role as witness. She admits to omitting "various sordid and shocking events of slum life . . . mainly because of my fear that too much reality would become unbearable."⁶⁴ (Too much reality was also deleted by the eighteenth-century French in their translations of English works.⁶⁵) But one can argue that such omissions distort actuality. Referring to his The Confessions of Nat Turner as a "meditation on history," William Styron explains his writing procedure:

I have rarely departed from the known facts about Nat Turner and the revolt of which he was the leader. However, in those areas where there is little knowledge in regard to Nat, his early life, and the motivations for the revolt (and such knowledge is lacking most of the time), I have allowed myself the utmost freedom of imagination in reconstructing events⁶⁶

"Freedom of imagination," a semantic equivalent to the "Art of Poesy,"⁶⁷ does not qualify as factual. E. L. Doctorow enunciates a more extreme position: "There is no longer any such thing as fiction or nonfiction; there's only narra-

tive."⁶⁸ Not only have these labels and assertions confused book consumers, but even critics flounder at times. The New York Times listed Mailer's Executioner's Song, which he terms his "true-life novel," on its fiction best seller list, but the compiler revealed his perplexity: "This is the true story of Gary Gilmore's life and death, but because the author, the publisher and the book-⁶⁹ stores are calling it fiction, it is listed as such." In Chariots of the Gods, author Erich von Daniken professes his theory that the earth was visited in the remote past by men from other planets who interbred with early man. He presents a number of archeological finds to support his thesis. Although scientists scoffed, it won several million credulous readers, making it the number one best selling "nonfiction" book of the 1970's.⁷⁰

Our discussion should not forgo mentioning that many authors who fuse fact and fiction deny their works' claim to be nonfiction from fear of a libel suit, which reminds us of the seventeenth and eighteenth-century concern over legal prosecution.⁷¹ A common disclaimer is "This is a work of fiction. All the characters and events portrayed in this book are fictional, and any resemblance to real people or incidents is purely coincidental."⁷² This type of repudiation is also found at the end of movies. Although such a statement disavows literal truth, it simultaneously attracts attention to its possibility, if not

probability; it teases a reader's curiosity. Recently, however, the disclaimer has not helped at least one author escape legal consequences. The Supreme Court upheld a ruling in which novelist Gwen Davis Mitchell was found guilty of libel charges brought by a psychologist who contended he was used as a model for one of her fictional characters in Touching.⁷³

Besides competing with multi-electronic forms of entertainment, fiction also competes with "the unreality of contemporary life."⁷⁴ The nonfiction novel allows authors to participate in both worlds. John Hollowell states: "The nonfiction novel has provided novelists with a disguise and retreat from fiction while permitting them to maintain their interest in fiction."⁷⁵ To arouse their detached and dwindling audience, authors not only mix their invented characters with actual events and people, a technique which has a long literary tradition, but they also mix real people in fictional situations. For example, in Doctorow's Ragtime, Freud and Jung take a ride through Coney Island's Tunnel of Love while Henry Ford and J. P. Morgan meet to discuss reincarnation. The author defends his unorthodox technique: "What's real and what isn't--I used to know, but I've forgotten. The book gives readers all sorts of facts--made-up facts, distorted facts--but I happen to think my representation of historical characters is true to the souls of them."⁷⁶ Others would argue that this is the

soul of lying. Henry Kissinger plays a pivotal role in Joseph Heller's Good as Gold. He is the object of the imaginary hero's hatred and a mirror image of him. This deliberate fusion of fact and fiction results in what critic Michiko Kakutani describes as "a kind of mythicized history, a work that conveys the feeling--not the facts--of a period, while emphasizing the author's own philosophical bent."⁷⁷ But mythicized history is no longer "history"; it is story.

Obviously placing history and story, fiction and non-fiction, side by side seems to form a contradiction. Yet many today, not unlike most of our early readers, have learned to accept them as complementary rather than mutually exclusive categories. Donal Henahan posits that man needs fiction in history:

The urge to throw a mythological haze around past events is so powerful and so prevalent in every age that some kind of primal force must be behind it. Truth, as hard to seize and hold as a raindrop, wants to flow downhill into a myth as surely as water wants to flow down to the sea.⁷⁸

Ironically, one reason for nonfiction's popularity is its similarity to fiction. The reader wants to be informed in an entertaining manner. People are not so much interested in facts as they are in fictionalized facts, although they are unconscious of this and would consciously deny it. The same was true in the seventeenth and eighteenth centu-

ries.⁷⁹ Readers prefer a personalized biography to a detached one, a first-person inside story to a third-person objective history, a docudrama to a documentary.

vii

"New" Biography

As we have discussed, the seventeenth and eighteenth-century fictional preface met the demand of its audience for biography by introducing many pseudobiographies.⁸⁰ At present, we are enjoying "the golden age of biography."⁸¹ Like their predecessors, many biographers today indulge in mixing fact with fiction. For instance, instead of using the traditional third person singular, much of modern biography relies on direct first person quotations to project authenticity and, at the same time, to foster an immediacy and intimacy with its readers. Illustrating the use of fictional technique, in his Citizen Hughes, Michael Drosnin claims that he examined nearly 10,000 previously hidden internal Huges documents. Using these as his foundation, he states in his preface:

I have tried, so far as possible, to tell the story revealed in these documents in Hughes's own words--to present his true story in his own voice--by weaving his memoirs into a narrative that places them in dramatic and historical context.⁸²

Some memoranda are "internally rearranged or edited" to eliminate extraneous matter.⁸³ Weaving and rearrangement mean

an inventive presentation. Kate Millett's The Basement is a detailed rendering of the actual death by torture of a sixteen-year-old girl. The author immerses herself in the victim's life: "I become Gertrude: I invent her, conceive her, enter into her . . . I am pregnant with Gertrude and I am a fraud." ⁸⁴ This plainly imaginative position is still described as nonfiction. Gore Vidal's best seller Lincoln depicts a fictionalized account of the Civil War Presidency. Novelist Berhardt J. Hurwood in his My Savage Muse: The Story of My Life by Edgar Allan Poe has imagined Poe's autobiography, based on authentic biographical elements. Of course, there is no attempt to deceive the readers, but the message is clear: "I" is preferable to "he"; subjective is "truer" than objective, or at least more interesting.

In writing traditional biography and autobiography, there is always memory distortion, hearsay, intentional and unintentional omission. The writer's process of selection and his own personality and biases also taint a work's objectivity. But this "new" biography contains blatant fiction. The question that must be asked is what is the consequence of inventing thought, emotions, and conversations in purported nonfiction? From a positive perspective, some view it as providing pleasure and original insight to readers. Fictional methods--showing instead of telling--intensify emotional impact and reader involvement. These new forms extend our methods of perception. The aim

is to reveal the subject's inner life through educated guess work and imaginative rendering. Many extol this creative nonfiction as leading readers into a genuine appreciation of history and inspiring them to delve further into the subject at their library's traditional nonfiction shelves. Marc Pachter, chief historian of the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C., proclaims that "by wedding the creative impulse to serious research, biography provides the storytelling of our time."⁸⁵ On the other hand, others, echoing the words of Bayle,⁸⁶ accuse such biographers of perpetrating an injustice on historical figures and of rewriting history to the detriment of present and future generations. In their personal interpretation of the past, they are manipulating people's apprehension of the truth. Virginia Woolf elaborates upon the biographer's dilemma:

Truth of fact and truth of fiction are incompatible, yet he [the biographer] is now more than ever urged to combine them. For it would seem that the life which is increasingly real to us is the fictitious life; it dwells in the personality rather than in the act . . . The biographer's imagination is always being stimulated to use the novelist's art of arrangement, suggestion, dramatic effect to expound the private life. Yet if he carries the use of fiction too far, so that he disregards the truth, or can only introduce it with incongruity he loses both worlds; he has neither the freedom of fiction nor the substance of fact.⁸⁷

To protect themselves from such imaginative biographers,

many celebrities, indeed, consider it imperative to write their own stories. (As we have noted, self-defense was also one of the prefatory reasons given for writing actual and fictional autobiographies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁸⁸)

Nonfiction should be accurate. Even though complete objectivity is humanly impossible, a creative transfiguration of history is not history. Fuzziness and uncertainty are a natural part of our condition, but deliberate inducement of such a condition compounds the problem. Historians and nonfiction writers should stick to verifiable facts and demarcate their speculations. Otherwise they betray their readers, who, if asked, would like to know what is literally true, but who nevertheless are willing to accept these hybrid forms if not pressed to think about their nature. Michiko Kakutani concludes that this dissolution of genres is "sort of immoral on the part of the writers, because there is an ethic that tries to distinguish between truth and lies--that's why we have the categories of fiction and nonfiction to begin with."⁸⁹ Blurring fact and fiction can weaken our ability to deal with the realities of the physical world and can undermine our ability to distinguish between actuality and fantasy.

viii

New Journalism

Our discussion has focused on the intertwining of fictionalized nonfiction and journalism in the eighteenth century⁹⁰; this link remains visible today. Competing for a limited audience, which for the most part prefers "to hear all about it than to read all about it," many newspapers, in order to attract more readers, have resorted to questionable methods: screaming headlines (an old ploy), overuse of unidentified sources, embellishment of quotations, insertion of gossip and celebrity news, and "all the news that's fit for fun" (prizes, games, lotteries). Scandal chronicles, key novels, and secret histories have disappeared, but their titillating content has been incorporated by many sales-conscious newspapers; sensationalism still sells.⁹¹ As a result, many journalistic publications have been accused of trespassing on the bounds of fact.

Unlike past journalists turned creative writers, such as Dickens, Doestoevsky, Hugo, Tolstoy, Hemingway, O'Hara, and Faulkner, their modern counterparts, Tom Wolfe, Tom Wicker, Jimmy Breslin, Joan Didion, and Gay Talese utilize novelistic techniques: dialogue, interior monologue, point of view, flashback, foreshadowing, and dramatization of events in their reporting, as well as in their fiction. Such reporters do not limit themselves to the external

world of facts, of the concrete, but also depict the internal world of the imagination, of the intangible. They record their individual impressions and reactions to the people and events making the news. They contend that they convey a more personal truth about actual events by allowing readers to experience the emotional realities underlying surface facts. On the other hand, this New Journalism (so dubbed by its key member Tom Wolfe in 1972), has been denounced as subjective and unreliable and as jeopardizing the basic principles of good journalism: fairness, accuracy, and objectivity. The reporter, according to his taste, eliminates boring details and includes the interesting but unverifiable; poetic license has given way to journalistic license. Facts are not left to speak for themselves. The reporter now leads his reader into the psyche of his subject. In his nonfiction best seller The Right Stuff, Wolfe projects himself into another's mind; he becomes an omniscient author. Bob Woodward and Scott Armstrong in The Brethren: Inside the Supreme Court attribute thoughts, feelings, conclusions, predispositions and motivations to each of the Justices, based mostly on memoranda, public statements, and hearsay. Critics condemn such fictional practices. A reporter can never enter the mind of a subject; he should only quote what a person tells him was felt or thought.

Recalling seventeenth and eighteenth-century

prefacers' claims to present a "true" story, some modern journalists have also presented outright fabrications. New York Daily News reporter Michael Daly was forced to resign for his invention of a story about British brutality in northern Ireland. He used a fictional source.⁹² It is too easy to go from an unidentified source to a nonexistent one; both are difficult to discover. Reporter Christopher Jones vividly described a month-long journey in the summer of 1981 with Cambodian guerillas; his fiction was uncovered by another columnist.⁹³ Investigative reporting can expose corruption and shocking situations, but it can also force the facts when motivated by a reporter's and publisher's desire for promotion, prizes, and sales. Janet Cooke, a reporter for the Washington Post at the time, won a Pulitzer Prize, which she eventually returned, for her article on a purported victim of drug abuse, Little Jimmy. She wrote that the boyfriend of the boy's prostitute mother shot heroin into the child's arm as the mother watched. Washington Mayor Marion Barry assigned hundreds of police to search for Cooke's fictitious youth. The Post invoked the first amendment to protect its source and did not help in the search. This manhunt led to the revelation of Cooke's fraud.⁹⁴

The Janet Cooke scandal showed how the world-renowned Washington Post could be a victim of a hoax. In its drive to sell newspapers, it found the story "too good" to check.

These examples of deception also bring into question the kind of information readers are consuming and how they are receiving it. We are vulnerable to such disguised fiction--basically for the same reasons seventeenth and eighteenth-century readers were vulnerable ⁹⁵ --because of our faulty assumptions. We assume that the printed word is "true" in newspapers. We assume that a reputable and responsible publication like the Washington Post would not lie. We assume the credibility of television news anchors. As long as we foster such passive attitudes, we will always be unguarded against the wiles of others.

ix

The Docudrama: A Modern Version of Fiction
Disguised as Fact?

Fiction disguised as fact is alive and well in television docudrama--presumably a dramatization of actual events and people--and the fictional preface has also found a place in this mass medium. Television producers often preface their programs, whether to notify parents of the use of language, violence, or sex inappropriate for minors or to inform viewers of the nature of a program's content. Docudramas usually preface their broadcasts with: "The following is a true story . . ." or "The following is a dramatization based on facts. The events have been recreated and the names of the characters have been changed." Such statements are announced as well as projected in

writing on the screen. Considering how television provides an incomparable example of an immeasurable appeal and influence upon the lives of countless people, visual and audiovisual assertions of truth are even more powerful than printed ones. Television producers know, as seventeenth and eighteenth-century writers and publishers knew, that the claim of a "true" story whets human curiosity. At least for audience ratings, "real" life has a wonderful replenishing supply apparently richer than that of the imagination. But audiences want "real" life only in dramatized form, not as documentaries, which relatively few watch. In his analysis of the docudrama, Eric Foner discovered that the claim of historical authenticity increases significantly the number of television viewers: "The claim of truth, according to one [network] executive, means ten extra rating points, an important consideration at a time of the fiercest ratings war in television history."⁹⁶ Since making money remains the "bottom line," producers have exploited this highly saleable and successful formula, as did publishers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁹⁷

There are two types of docudramas: those dramatizing historical events and characters and those based on true stories of extraordinary but unknown people. It is much easier to manipulate the facts and escape detection in depicting the latter, as did writers in the seventeenth and

eighteenth centuries when they dealt with domestic love stories and adventures instead of the more public lives of the aristocracy.⁹⁸ Most docudramas, however, are about celebrities or historical figures and events because audiences today, as in the past, are still fascinated with famous personalities. Docudrama subjects have included Gloria Vanderbilt, Prince Charles and Princess Diana, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, Grace Kelly, Sophia Loren, Eisenhower, Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt. Foner observes that "much of the interest in televised history is simply voyeurism, a video exposé of the secret lives of historical celebrities."⁹⁹

This point brings us to the controversy that surrounds this new genre. The docudrama is viewed either as a mass medium correlative to the nonfiction novel or as a modern version of disguising fiction as fact. Critics question whether this portrayal of the past is history or story, education or miseducation. David Fanning, an author of docudramas, provides a positive perspective: "It [the docudrama] combines a rigorous concern for facts that characterizes the best of journalism with the narrative strength and dramatic thrust of a screenplay."¹⁰⁰ Such writers justify the addition of fictional elements. Gerald Green, author of Wallenberg: A Hero's Story, thus defends his script:

A few changes had to be made in the interest of moving the narrative along. From the time of Homer, writers have always used fictional characters in real historical situations or mixed up real characters with fictional ones, as Tolstoy does in War and Peace. In Wallenberg there are no fictional characters, but there are a couple of composites or representative characters. 101

Many, however, would define "representative characters" as fictional.

Proponents of these devices argue that they are illuminating history and enlightening the public. David W. Rintels, author of several docudramas, prefers the term "fact-based drama" rather than "that bastard, hybrid, misleading, catch-all word 'docudrama.'"¹⁰² He defends the genre as similar to historical accounts, which also reflect the biases of the various historians who also cannot present the complete picture of a person's life or the whole truth because of the very elusive nature of the human condition. Nevertheless, according to Rintels, producing docudramas is an effort worth making.

Detractors view the docudrama as "artistically promising but factually treacherous."¹⁰³ The elements of a docudrama--invented dialogue, impersonation, staged scenes, attributed thoughts--disqualify it as authentic. For example, referring to the screening of Peter the Great, critic Richard Zoglin writes that "history is contaminated with hokey invention,"¹⁰⁴ while he describes the docudrama

Murrow as flagrantly romanticized.¹⁰⁵ Such opponents of docudramas contend that docudramas distort history, disregard facts, rearrange events, disseminate the writer's own prejudices, mislead the public, and damage the reputations of people who cannot easily defend themselves. Similar accusations were leveled by eighteenth-century critics at those writing pseudononfiction.¹⁰⁶

The preface aired and read aloud before the CBS film The Atlanta Child Murders illustrates the inherent confusion of mixing fact and fiction:

The following presentation is not a documentary but a drama based on certain facts surrounding the murder and disappearance of children in Atlanta between 1979 and 1981. Some of the events and characters are fictionalized for dramatic purposes. Certain scenes may be disturbing to young viewers. Parental discretion is advised.¹⁰⁷

Many protest that "certain facts" and "fictionalized" characters do not equal truth, yet the audience perceives them as true regardless of the above, supposedly clarifying, prefatory statement. This docudrama features the arrest and trial of Wayne Williams, convicted in 1982 of murdering two men and implicated in 23 other slayings. The film implies, however, that Williams is innocent. It adds a fictional, skeptical police detective. According to Zoglin, this addition exemplifies the abuse of the genre: "The movie slants the evidence to bolster its parable of Southern injustice."¹⁰⁸ This version understandably drew

the outrage of Atlanta officials, who denounced the script as unfair and inaccurate. In another example of blurring fact and fiction, Fatal Vision depicts convicted army captain Jeffrey MacDonald as positively guilty of killing his wife and children, but in reality the man presents a puzzle. The actual captain is perhaps a better actor, for he still persuades many of his innocence; the program, however, leaves no doubt as to his guilt.

Another main objection to docudramas is that we are bequeathing to future generations a misrepresentation of the past which may distort their judgment and negatively influence their decisions. (Again this objection reminds us of a similar concern in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. ¹⁰⁹) In their desire to entertain, docudramas simplify complex issues. Although there are often people who actually remember the facts and can dispute such renditions, eventually such contemporaries die; on the other hand, a videotape comes close to immortality and becomes history for posterity. Although he is an author of several docudramas, David W. Rintels, nevertheless, has some reservations:

My own concern is not that the average viewer has the undiscerning mentality of the mythical twelve-year-old--a theory I loathe--but that there are viewers out there who are in fact twelve years old. I do worry that make-believe makes belief. ¹¹⁰

Being easily impressed, children are most vulnerable to

such television programs. (Abbé Jaquin and Samuel Johnson similarly worried that disguised fiction misguided, if not corrupted, young people. ¹¹¹) But uneasiness is voiced that many people besides children are learning history from their television sets. The label "This is a true story" suffices to elicit belief from adults today, as it did from many in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. ¹¹² Similarly to past readers' association of the preface to nonfiction, ¹¹³ modern audiences associate the docudrama with television news, which most people assume to be true. Since many people today do very little reading on their own after having finished their formal education, they formulate judgments from what they see and hear on television and consequently learn "history" from these versions. Griffith points to the audience's befuddlement:

It is hard enough as it is for a newspaper reader or television watcher to tell fact from fiction. On television, where the ability to create a plausible fiction has run low, writers of "docudramas" put words never spoken by Churchill or Truman into their mouths. The confusion is compounded when the public is assured it is getting authentic words mouthed by actors. ¹¹⁴

We should not omit to point out that movies have also used a factual accounts as the basis of their screenplays. Whereas docudramas are specifically made for television's small screen, movies based on true stories project upon a giant screen and convey a bigger than life feeling. Even

though "based on a true story" is not equivalent to "true," most viewers do not discern the difference and most are overwhelmed by the physical scope of the portrayal. Here too we find an uneasy relationship between fact and fiction. Reds, for example, based on the lives of journalists John Reed and his wife Louise Bryant, uses within a fictional foreground actual witnesses to preface various segments of the film. Their testimony adds immediacy and authenticity, but it also masks flagrant departures from the truth, as with Bryant's arrival in Moscow after a purportedly arduous journey on skis through Finland. Woody Allen's movie Annie Hall begins with Allen acting as the prefacer, directly addressing his viewers and revealing the facts about his "life." It turns out that he is playing a character, but a contemporary audience possessing information about Allen's real life would naturally identify, if not confuse, the character on the screen with the actual actor.

x

"This Is a True Story": Still a Viable Disguise

"This is a true story," whether asserted in a book, on a radio broadcast, on a television program, or in a movie, is still a powerful prefatorial statement. It is also still a means of disguising fiction as fact. An eighteenth-century prefacer observed: "Puisque cette

ignorance du vrai, et ce goût pour le mensonge sont des imperfections inhérentes à notre nature, efforçons-nous d'en tirer parti."¹¹⁵ Many writers continue to take advantage of this human fallibility. We have always been and will always be vulnerable to manipulation by the written word, and in our era of the broadcast word as well. Most people are not aware of the power of language and its potential misuse by government, television, newspapers, and books to mold our thoughts and decisions. Generally, it is easier to yield than to struggle with seductive words.

To warrant the time and effort expended in conducting such an extensive and exhausting study, disguised prose fiction in seventeenth and eighteenth-century French and English literature should matter to the present. I believe it does. As part of literary history, the fictional preface's methods of instilling literal belief influenced the development of realistic fiction. Since popular taste still makes best sellers and nonfiction is still preferable to fiction, the fictional preface's primary assertion, "This is a true story," whether fabricated or not, is still a potent means of attracting readers.

Notes

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

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13

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