ARTHUR C. DANTO AND THE TRANSLUCENCY OF TEXT:

IMPERSONATIVE LITERATURE IN THE

LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY

THESIS

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my father, Ronald Collins. His passion for reading and talking about books gave me first an education, then a hobby, and ultimately a vocation. He was also a wonderful storyteller and a great student of the world. He helped form my character and abilities in ways I never truly appreciated while he was alive, and his firm belief in the value of higher education motivated me to continue this work after he died. Thank you.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In his seminal work of aesthetics, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, Arthur C. Danto examines the issue of what makes something art. Traditional definitions of art have often relied on readily identified clues of content or form. One could, a hundred years ago, identify a sculpture because it represented a clearly identifiable form in one of a few acceptable media. One could identify a novel by its plot structure, its length, and its focus on ordinary characters or situations. One could identify poetry by its line length and the presence of rhyme or meter. Furthermore, it was then easier to assess the value of a work of art using the standards of the day. To a realist, the novels of Sir Walter Scott were inferior because less real, in the sense that they centered on a fantasy world different from the daily lives of modern folk. To a modernist, the novels of Sinclair Lewis were inferior because less real, in the sense that they failed to account for the inner reality of a human mind.

Danto acknowledges a debt of spirit to nineteenth-century German philosopher G. F. Hegel. Hegel's philosophy concerns itself with the chronology of narratives, the study of how narratives such as art or history follow a trajectory of birth, growth, struggle and death. In Western civilization, Danto argues, art has followed the path outlined by Hegel. Different styles have pushed art to its limits of representation and expression until, in the 1960s-1970s,

art could not just represent a thumbtack or a piece of plaster or incorporate an existing thumbtack or piece of plaster into a work but *recreate* a thumbtack or a piece of plaster as a work in itself. Once art and life became visually indistinct, philosophy was forced to seek a definition of art that included both Monet's *Waterlilies* and Warhol's *Brillo Box*. Literature, too, has followed such a trajectory. Different styles, subject matters and themes have predominated as literature has paralleled the development of modern culture. As it has done so, various works have pushed the envelopes of form and content, raising a similar task for literary scholars. Any definition of literature that includes Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* must also include Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire* and any definition that includes D. H. Lawrence's "The Rocking Horse Winner" must include Harry Mathews' fictional recipe "Country Cooking from Central France: Roast Boned Rolled Stuffed Shoulder of Lamb (*Farce Double*)."

Accordingly, Danto's study is centered on a series of indistinguishables. He takes as his case a hypothetical set of works that happen to resemble each other exactly (in that each is a red square), but each of which claims to denote or express different content. In determining what makes some of these works art while others remain objects, Danto works toward an abstract definition of art. Within a Hegelian framework for the history of art, such an abstract definition is exactly what is required. As Danto notes,

> … art, historically considered, was raising from within itself
> the question of its being … . Until the form of the question
> came from art, philosophy was powerless to raise it, and once
> it was raised, art was powerless to resolve it. That point had
> been reached when art and reality were indiscernible. (*Beyond*
> 8)

Thus, when a work of art reaches the boundaries of what has traditionally been considered art, it necessarily begins to question those boundaries. However, the answer sought in such questioning is not merely an artistic answer but also a philosophical one. There is no visual

or tactile property of art, no style or manner, that can answer the question of what makes a thing a work of art. Such an understanding of artworks comes by necessity from a philosophical inquiry that is distanced from its subject and which brings with it a different context for understanding and analyzing questions. The definition of art resulting from Danto's philosophical inquiry is that "works of art are symbolic expressions, in that they embody their meanings" (*Beyond* 41). In other words, a work of art is more than its physical representation. When one has "exhaustively specified" (*Transfiguration* 148) both the form and the content of a piece of art, there is something left over, namely a rhetorical use of form, a point to be made or a purpose to express.

Once freed from the idea of progression inherent in a narrative of art, once art as a narrative was over and art's questions of itself were answered by philosophy, artists were able to see that art has no boundaries, that every choice of content or form is a conscious and acceptable choice. A work of art is no longer historically appropriate or inappropriate; rather it makes a philosophical statement about its content. After the end of a narrative of Western art history, "everything was permitted, since nothing any longer was historically mandated" (*Beyond* 9).

Furthermore, a rhetorical definition of art presupposes intentionality. The purpose of rhetoric is "to cause the audience of a discourse to take a certain attitude toward the subject of that discourse" (*Transfiguration* 165). If the author or artist wants the reader or viewer to take a certain attitude, then he or she will leave a trail of clues to guide interpretation. No matter what the work of art or how similar it is to life, the author must include guidelines, however subtle, as to how to react. Thus, "it is analytical to the concept of an artwork that there has to be an interpretation" (*Transfiguration* 124). Even in the

identical red squares postulated by Danto in *Transfiguration*, their creators left clues (in the form of titles) to guide interpretation.

Works of literature, inherently symbolic by their use of words, leave more obvious clues than titles. An author must be careful while constructing an artificial reality to plant the clues that will help the reader dismantle the fake. This step is important to the author's project of writing because readers respond to a work based on their reading of the *genre* as well as the form and content of that work. To make this distinction clear, consider the example of Harry Mathews' short story "Country Cooking," written in the form of a recipe. If Mathews fails to provide me clues in the work that let me know that I am reading a short story, I will respond to it as though I am reading a non-fiction recipe. My responses will be "This sounds good!" or "Who would ever take this much time to fix dinner?" Those responses, while valid and appropriate on a surface-level reading, fail to account for the rhetorical purpose of the work as expressed in Mathews' choice of genre. If Mathews provides me enough clues to determine that I am reading a short story, then in addition to any gastronomical reactions I might have, my responses to the work will be those of a *reader* as well as a cook.

Danto states that, with any class of art, "the greater the degree of realism intended, the greater the need for external indicators that it is art and not reality" (*Transfiguration* 24). Thus, when a work of art seeks to imitate reality exactly, its creator must be exceedingly careful to provide enough contextual information so that the reader responds on the appropriate level. While the author of a *Star Trek* novel may not need to emphasize the fictive nature of her text, the author whose work takes the exact form of a newspaper article will need several direct indicators that his work is fiction. One telling example of the consequences of misreading is the 1999 horror movie *The Blair Witch Project*. The movie

mimicked exactly the form of a documentary, down to the type of film used, the cinematography, the dialogue, and the abrupt ending. The backstory of the movie (detailed in the opening frames) was a plausible scenario wherein the footage about to be shown was found in the woods on a given, specific date following the disappearance of three young filmmakers (thus accounting for the presence of the film). The studio was careful to hire actors unfamiliar to most audiences, and to portray the movie as fact on their web site. Thus, when the movie was released, viewers responded to the movie as though it were documentary, expressing disgust and horror that those actions were *truly experienced* and that these were real people rather than characters. The presentation of a false reality caused audiences to become more involved with the story and characters than they would with a clearly fictional movie such as *Scream* or *Friday the Thirteenth*. The conversation in the media and on the Internet was expressed in tones of reality, rather than in the critical tone these viewers would have used in evaluating an artwork. Likewise, when the rumors began to play out and audiences realized that the movie was fiction, they began to reevaluate the movie as art. While earlier viewers responded to the movie's terrifying "facts," those later viewers who knew it as fiction responded to its grainy texture, ending and techniques. It suddenly became possible to discuss acting ability and theme once it was clear that there was rhetoric behind the choice of genre. In this case, the lack of clues to the audience caused a misreading of the work, one not completely dismissed until the announcement of a sequel fully confirmed the work's status as fiction.

Danto cautions us of the potential for such misreadings, stating:

> … mimesis itself, providing that the conventions of
> dislocation are clear to the audience, in fact inhibits just those
> beliefs that would be activated without those conventions.
> But then it is precisely the confidence that the conventions
> are understood which enables the mimetic artist to carry
> mimesis to its extreme point, to make whatever is to appear

> within the relevant brackets as much like what would be
> encountered in reality as he can manage. And his major
> problem may be phrased thus: to make whatever is so
> bracketed sufficiently like reality that spontaneous
> identification of what is being imitated is assured, the
> brackets themselves guaranteeing that no one will take the
> result for reality itself … the brackets are very powerful
> inhibitors of belief. (*Transfiguration* 23)

Authors have incorporated fragments of reality into their works for centuries, confident that the conventions Danto describes above would guide readers to an appropriate reading. Writers from Jonathan Swift in the seventeenth century to Umberto Eco in the twentieth have used the old gambit of claiming to find an existing manuscript and publishing it (rather than acknowledging the work as a creation). Furthermore, writers with a specifically rhetorical purpose often use the phrases "true story" or "based on a true story" to awaken non-fiction responses to creative works. In the nineteenth century, Walt Whitman wrote a short story called "Death in the Schoolroom" and subtitled it (falsely) "a true story." The tale that followed, while exaggerated enough to be recognizable as fiction, was foisted upon the reader as fact in order to elicit in its readers disgust, horror, and a drive to reform the educational system of the day. Other writers have incorporated fragments of what either are or appear to be reality into clearly fictional works.

Yet, the above examples do not truly represent the phenomenon of mimesis Danto explores in *Transfiguration*. In order to differentiate the literature I will be examining—what I will call impersonative literature—from that which merely incorporates reality, I will use a metaphor from the world of physics. When a surface is described as transparent, light passes through it easily and with little distortion. Objects on the other side of the surface are perceived easily and accurately; it is as though the surface were not even there. An opaque surface is the opposite—no light passes through, and any objects on the other side of the surface remain completely obscured by the form of the surface itself. There is an

intermediate type of surface, described as translucent. With this surface, light does pass

through, but with significant distortion. The objects on the other side are seen, but not

clearly and always with clear view of the surface itself. When looking through a translucent

surface, one sees always two things simultaneously: the object and the surface before it.

Literature can be similarly classed. The goal of most literature is to be transparent.

While the work may have a form, the rhetoric behind the work lies in its content. While

Amos Oz's *Black Box* may be written in the form of an epistolary novel, the letters are less

important than what is written in them, and, in fact, one can read the novel without being

concerned about the form at all. An interesting comparison is Nick Bantock's *Griffin &*

Sabine: An Extraordinary Correspondence. Bantock doesn't merely write an epistolary novel; he

includes simulations of the letters themselves, in envelopes stuck to the pages of the book,

and the postcards created by the protagonists reproduced on its pages, complete with

postmarks. While *Griffin & Sabine* includes actual fragments of reality, it remains nevertheless

a transparent text. Reading its form does not necessarily put the reader in conflict with his

or her response to its content, and the work does not explore the implications of its choice

of form in any depth.

While a transparent text aims to express pure content, an opaque text often arrests

the reader's gaze at the level of form. While the work may have content (such as characters,

plot or setting), it is often difficult to read the work without reading the way in which it was

written. This type of writing intensified in the 1950s and 1960s, as writers began pushing the

boundaries of fiction. In particular, the group of writers known as OULIPO (Ouvroir de

Littérature Potentielle, or Workshop for Potential Literature) were more interested in how

they wrote than in what they wrote. In fact, they accomplished the act of writing through a

variety of unusual and arresting constraints, such as avoiding the letter "e" in a novel

(Georges Perec's *La disparition*). While Perec's words (and therefore to an extent his plot) are determined by his chosen form, it is still possible to read the story without noticing its formal constraints. After all, as the title indicates, the formal constraint is a *lack* rather than an added presence. A more dramatic and immediately recognizable example of an opaque text is Walter Abish's *Alphabetical Africa*, in which the words the author uses in a given chapter depend on the alphabet (chapter 1 contains only words starting with "a," chapter 2 contains "a" and "b" words, etc.). In this extremely opaque text, the alliterative and repetitive force of the constraint batters the reader with the chosen form.

The third type of literature is more complex in that it requires holding in one's eye both the "what" and the "how" of literature. Just as a transparent text aims to tell a story without the distractions of a rhetoric of form, a translucent work can be read as a story. It can be read as what it says it is: a dictionary, a journal, a dissertation, or a critical work. Yet, the author leaves sufficient clues to mandate a second level of reading as well. As with an opaque text, there has been a very conscious choice of form, and as we read we question not just the story itself but its rhetoric as well. Often such works seek to recreate a reality and then destroy that reality in ways that reveal the works' rhetorical purposes. The work one reads in reading the content differs markedly from the work one reads in reading the form, and the sophisticated reader holds both open at the same time, as though they were a book of translated verse. These works were written after the death of modernism, in a time after the end of the narrative of literary history when no one style became historically mandated. Danto writes that "mimesis became *a* style" (*After* 46) after the narrative's end, one option among many and one whose use always provokes a certain questioning not provoked by other styles.

The classic example of a translucent text is *Pale Fire* by Vladimir Nabokov. This text purports to be a work of literary criticism, including an introduction, critical commentary, the text under critique (a poem called "Pale Fire"), and biographical notes on its author. However, the fact that this work is fiction leads the reader to question why Nabokov chose to present fiction in the form of scholarly critique. In reading the novel as non-fiction, the reader is assessing the work "Pale Fire" as poetry and the commentary of its scholarly critic in relation to their ability to explicate the text. In reading the novel as fiction, the reader looks for theme and characterization and suddenly realizes that the supposed critique of a fictional poem is simultaneously a critique of critiques.

Such works pose a radical challenge to both author and reader. In writing a work with two levels of meaning, the author must take great care to create a logical world on both levels. Both the story and the story about the story must make sense and follow the logic of their genres. Furthermore, the author must be careful, while striving for verisimilitude, to have brackets that are clearly defined enough to prevent a misreading while unobtrusive enough to allow the story within them to be realistic. The reader faces the unusual task of trying to assess the author's credibility. Is this what it says it is? If not, what is it? What, if any of this, is real?

One particular class of translucent works is what I will refer to as impersonative literature, or works in which the author deliberately impersonates a genre or form in such a way that calls attention to that impersonation. In these works, the author simultaneously sets up a "reality" and dismantles it so that the reader is presented with the fake and the real and must read both at once in order to arrive at the work's rhetorical point. In the remaining chapters of this thesis, I will examine how these works are constructed and dismantled and the rhetoric that underlies them. As exemplars of the class of impersonative

literature, I will draw from Harry Mathews' "Country Cooking," Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, Michael Crichton's *Eaters of the Dead*, Jerome Charyn's *The Tar Baby*, and Milorad Pavić's *Dictionary of the Khazars*.

CHAPTER TWO

SETTING UP THE FAKE

In Samuel R. Delany's novel *Trouble on Triton*, the protagonist Bron Helstrom

participates in an impersonative theater piece. He is accosted in the street by a woman who

seems to engage him in small talk. She takes him by the hand, and they follow an acrobat to

a clearing, where they come upon a group of acrobats and singers who perform a magical

piece. After the performance, the entire event is revealed as theater—Bron's companion is

an actress and playwright named the Spike, and everything about their interaction was

planned. The piece was established as a real incident by withholding the traditional trappings

of theater, such as an identifiable beginning, a program, a title, a stage, an audience of more

than one person, or a plot. Without these necessary brackets to reality, Bron was unable to

successfully identify the performance as fake. The Spike, appropriately the recipient of "a

Government Arts Endowment to produce micro-theater for unique audiences," had

successfully erased the boundaries of art and reality and set up the perfect fake (17).

The first level of meaning established by an impersonative text is the literal level. In

a literal reading, the reader takes the visual cues provided by the writer as true and reads

what the story purports to be. In order to be taken as true, the text must resemble as closely

as possible the genre it is imitating. However, since the writer must simultaneously discredit

his or her own text in order to allow for a second, non-literal reading, the extent of the impersonation varies depending on the complexity of the author's specific rhetorical intent.

Writers whose rhetorical purpose is relatively simple often have a less exact impersonation than those who are trying to examine multiple issues. For example, Harry Mathews' "Country Cooking" seeks to parody the pompous style of the gourmet cookbook. To achieve that purpose, he does not need to reproduce a color photo of the finished dish (which would be an expected part of a cookbook parody) or to create other recipes, a cover, a table of measures, or other traditional components of a cookbook. By choosing a short story form with a limited rhetorical purpose, Mathews has sacrificed verisimilitude for focus and humor. While this work shares many attributes of a recipe, it is in no danger of being mistaken for one.

An example from the other end of the spectrum is Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire*. Nabokov has an extremely complex rhetoric behind his choice of form, ranging from a critique of literary critics, to a critique of the university, to a critique of readers and writers. Consequently, his reproduction of reality is more detailed and less clear. Each element (the scholarly introduction, the reproduction of the text, the scholarly footnotes, the index) is important to some area of his point. Because he wants the reader to reflect upon all areas that connect to the experience of being a writer, he must reproduce his scholarly critique in every way possible.

Within this spectrum of reality, the author has several tools that he or she can use to achieve impersonation. The author can choose to imitate the physical appearance of the source genre through cover design, title pages, pagination and the like. Similarly, the author can ensure that the appropriate components of the source genre (prefaces, texts, subscription pages, etc.) are present. Next, the author may choose to develop the plausibility

of his or her text so that its existence is at least possible on both levels of reading. The author must also adopt the appropriate tone, diction and style for the type of text being imitated. Another element adopted by these authors is the reliance upon citation and quotation to engage the audience's belief in the literal level of the story. The story's credibility is further enhanced by the use of exact external fact indicators, such as names, dates, and historical events, which can be verified. Through the use and conjunction of any or all of these tools, the author can asymptotically improve the exactitude of his or her impersonation.

The Paratext

The first tool available to authors is what theorist Gérard Genette calls the paratext. Simply put, the paratext is what surrounds the text, what the reader has to navigate through just to enter the text. The paratext might include

> … titles, subtitles, authors' names and pseudonyms, format
> (e.g. folio or quarto), typesetting, cover design, prefaces,
> appendices, dedications, publication details, notes,
> frontispieces, illustrations, blurbs, dust jackets, and other such
> prompts which make books, but not necessarily texts, what
> they are (1-2).

While for many works the paratext is relatively unimportant and need never be productively called into question, for other works the paratext provides a valuable and necessary key to reading one or more levels of the work. In impersonative literature, in particular, the paratext can help establish the fake.

In *The Tar Baby*, Jerome Charyn relies on paratextual clues to give form to his satire of academics and their journals. He organizes elements of the biography of Anatole Waxman-Weissman into the paratextual structures of a journal, including letters to the editor, footnotes, contributing articles, historical notes and advertisements. Furthermore, as with any journal (but not with many novels), the pagination is discontinuous, with articles

begun on one page continued many pages later. *The Tar Baby* also contains other paratextual features of a journal, such as editorial information and a subscription blank. Each of these features can be read and interpreted as a part of the non-literal commentary on academia. For example, the editorial information is not just a preview of the "writers" of the issue (on the literal level), but also a commentary on the small-mindedness and pretentiousness of a collegiate faculty. All members of the editorial staff of the "journal" are also members of The School of Pragmatic Letters and Philosophies of Galapagos Junior College. The junior college aims to present a quality literary journal, but uses as its staff and contributors mainly those from within its own ranks. All of this can be read from the table of contents and editorial page.

Nabokov's *Pale Fire* also appropriates the paratextual features of a work of literary criticism. Included are all the appropriate features of such a work: a foreword, a poem (with appropriate features of a text to be examined, including a title, cantos, and line numbers), scholarly commentary and an index. As with any scholarly edition, there are three ways of using the text: to read it cover to cover, to read the poem first and the supporting materials second, or to read the poem and the supporting materials simultaneously, flipping back and forth between them. For the purposes of making a non-literal interpretation, how one chooses to use the text has a significant impact on the reading achieved. For example, a cover-to-cover reading of *Pale Fire* results in a very novel-like pattern of foreshadowing and suspense, as the character of the critic is developed. In such a linear reading, Kinbote reveals his identity as King of Zembla slowly, over the course of the supporting materials. Nabokov begins preparing the reader for this revelation as early as the foreword, by alluding to Kinbote's new red car (19-20) and his taste for caviar (22) and by alluding to a secret about himself known only to three people at the university (25). Throughout much of the

commentary, Kinbote's detailed knowledge of the King of Zembla's life provides ever stronger support for the idea that he is the missing king, culminating with the note to line 949, in which Gradus, who has been established by the text as searching for King Charles II, recognizes the king in the school library and is told by the library worker that that man, named Kinbote, lives on Dulwich Road (283). This identification is made explicit in the entry for "Charles II, Charles Xavier Vseslav, last King of Zembla, surnamed The Beloved" in the Index, which reads, "See also Kinbote" (306). Reading the poem and commentary simultaneously, flipping from the poem to the referenced endnotes, emphasizes the lack of connection between the criticism and its object that is part of the rhetorical purpose of the novel *Pale Fire* while inhibiting the development of character and suspense present in a linear reading of the text. Thus the paratextual set up of the work enables different readings that permit different understandings of the text. Only by realizing that this work is fiction and reading it like a novel do we get to enjoy the author's use of foreshadowing and character development.

Finally, *Eaters of the Dead* impersonates almost exactly the paratext of a critical historical edition. The book's subtitle, "The Manuscript of Ibn Fadlan, Relating His Experiences with the Northmen in A.D. 922," advertises a medieval non-fiction account. While Crichton is listed on the cover, he does not create a separate editorial persona (unlike Nabokov), which leaves open the possibility that Crichton is the editor. The work includes a Table of Contents, and begins with an introduction that accounts for the manuscript's presence and provides some historical background. While *The Tar Baby*'s sparse footnotes were largely frivolous and satirical (e.g., "Rubbish," "A cruel and flatulent speculation," and "Where did this brainstorm come from?" all on page 72), Crichton's text includes numerous footnotes, all of them serious and appropriate to nonfiction. *Eaters* is followed by a serious

anthropological discussion on the origins of the Mist Monsters and a list of sources of which most are real and may be verified. Even the text on the back cover uses ambiguity to leave open the possibility of the text's truthfulness, through the use of such phrases as "crafted," "truth," "fragments of an actual 10th-century Arabic manuscript," "shocking revelations," and "truth far stranger than fiction." But for the final seven pages of the work, added seventeen years after the rest of the novel, Crichton has presented a perfect physical imitation of a scholarly historical text.

Plausibility

Transparent texts do not need justification. Truman Capote did not have to explain how he came to write the tale of the Clutter family murders in *In Cold Blood*. His book was a true story, intended to be read only on that level, and the reader assumes, if he or she thinks about the matter at all, that Capote had merely done some in-depth research and interviews. The facts he relates in the book are simply not up for debate. Similarly, Charles Dickens did not have to account for how he came to write *A Tale of Two Cities*. The work being clearly fictional, the reader would simply assume he was making it up, the point of view is so clearly omniscient, and the events of the book are so laden with coincidence and fate that no reader would assume it to be anything other than fiction. In a slightly less transparent example, Umberto Eco begins *The Name of the Rose* with a statement of account: "On August 16, 1968, I was handed a book written by a certain Abbé Vallet" (xiii). This account is a perfunctory device whose "authenticity" is dismantled by the author's tone and the account's own absurdity, as when he writes, "I find few reasons for publishing my Italian version of an obscure, neo-Gothic French version of a seventeenth-century Latin edition of a work written in Latin by a German monk toward the end of the fourteenth century" (xvi-xvii) and is utterly forgotten in the text after the book's introduction.

An impersonative text, however, needs a more elaborate accounting for its own existence and greater plausibility. Being designed to be read on two levels, both levels must be at least somewhat plausible so that a dual reading remains possible. However, the degree of plausibility required depends on the author's rhetorical purpose.

Crichton's *Eaters of the Dead* is an excellent example of this type of impersonative tool. Challenged with the task of making the Beowulf story interesting, he first intended to use scholarly inquiry to strip away the fantastical elements of the legend and return to a more realistic tale. However, he was unable to begin because, in his words,

> Since a real scholar could not do what I intended to do, I
> found I could not pretend, in writing, that I had done so ... .
> Clearly I wanted an eyewitness account. I could not extract it
> from the existing *Beowulf* narrative, and I did not want to
> invent it. That was my impasse. But at some point, I realized
> I did not have to invent it—I could *discover* it instead I
> realized I already knew of such a person. In the tenth
> century, an Arab named Ibn Fadlan had traveled north from
> Baghdad into what is now Russia, where he came in contact
> with the Vikings ... . Ibn Fadlan had a distinct voice and
> style. He was imitable. He was believable. (195-6)

By choosing as his narrator a real person known to the historical community whose works had only partially been translated into English, Crichton makes a nonfiction reading of his book plausible.

Furthermore, Crichton goes out of his way to demythologize the legend. On the journey to the north, the sailing party encounters what the Norse refer to as "monsters," but Crichton describes these monsters in such a way that a modern reader would clearly identify them as whales. In case any suspicion of fantasy remains, Crichton effaces it in the footnote on page 75, in which he presents the scholarly dispute over Fadlan's account of "what is obviously a sighting of whales." Similarly, Fadlan writes that although "the glowworm dragon Korgon bore down upon us in thunder and flame," he was not afraid because he

soon saw that the "dragon" was merely a horde of horsemen carrying torches. Even the wendol, described as having the head of a bear but the body of a man, are revealed to be wholly human once the "headdress" of one warrior tumbles to the ground (127). Crichton further explains the wendol by pointing out the ubiquity of cannibalism in human history (94) and by providing scholarly arguments that they might have been lingering Neanderthals (183-8). Finally, Crichton alters some of the names from the original legend to further distance the novel from its mythological ancestor. Ultimately, Crichton's focus on plausibility makes it possible to read fantasy as fact.

Tone And Style

Nonfiction genres often have a characteristic tone and style, making the incorporation of those characteristic elements essential if the impersonative text is to be convincing. For example, a short story impersonating a newspaper article must have an objective tone, a straightforward (rather than ornate or figurative) vocabulary, and a journalistic (rather than a narrative) plot. The author may distort the tone or style for a specific rhetorical intent—such as showing that newspaper writers may be biased—but the appropriate tone and style are generally present to the extent that an identification of the piece as an example of that genre of nonfiction is possible.

Harry Mathews' "Country Cooking" is an example of the successful adoption of tone and style. First, the complete title of the short story, "Country Cooking from Central France: Roast Boned Rolled Stuffed Shoulder of Lamb (*Farce Double*)," evokes the style of a cookbook through its use of evocative words (for example, the adjective "country" often connotes home and family). Furthermore, the length of the recipe title and the translation in parentheses is characteristic of the long and descriptive titles found in French cookbooks. As a comparison, take the following titles from a real French cookbook: "Lamb Stew with

Fresh Spring Vegetables (*Navarin aux Petits Légumes Nouveaux*)" and "Filet of Sole and Salmon Braised in Cream (*Paupiettes de Sole et Saumon Baisées à la Crème*)" (Esquerré 64). Note that both the impersonation and the real thing use titles that describe cooking methods and include the main ingredients of the recipe.

Another characteristic of gourmet cookbooks is the imperative tone of the instructions. For example, in Madhur Jaffrey's *Indian Cooking*, she exhorts the reader: "Butchers have a way of trying to sell leg of lamb for stewing.... If you can, insist upon shoulder" (42). Mathews uses a similarly commanding tone: "The shoulder of lamb itself requires attention. You must buy it from a butcher who can dress it properly. Tell him to include the middle neck, the shoulder chops in the brisket, and part of the foreshank" (141).

A third characteristic of the gourmet cookbook is the absolute insistence on preserving the recipe's culture at any cost in time or ingredients. For example, Monique Esquerré writes in her French country cookbook, "Often people tend to use shortcuts, losing the basic ingredients of what gives mankind a sense of the good life .... For example, bread can be made in two hours, but it takes several hours to make good bread" (25). Compare that to Mathew's exhortation: "Do not *under any circumstance* use a baggie or Saran Wrap to enfold the quenelles. Of course it's easier. So are TV dinners. For once, demand the utmost of yourself: the satisfaction will astound you, and *there is no other way*" (144). Both emphasize the rewards of hard work and patience in traditional cuisines.

A final characteristic of the style of a gourmet cookbook is its unique method of combining narrative accounts of the chef's encounter with the culture or dish and the instructions for creating the dish. For example, in introducing the dish "Ground Meat with Peas" Jaffrey writes,

> I associate this dish with very pleasurable family picnics
> which we had, sometimes in the private compartments of

> slightly sooty, steam-engined trains, and sometimes in the
> immaculate public gardens of historic Moghul palaces. The
> meat, invariably at room temperature, was eaten with *pooris* or
> *parathas* that had been stacked tightly in aluminum containers.
> There was always a pickle to perk things up and some kind of
> onion relish as well. (44)

This passage is personal in tone, but mentions the cultural environment of "steam-engined trains" and "historic Moghul palaces." Further authenticity is garnered through the use of the foreign, italicized words. Mathews weaves the culture and traditions of Auvergne throughout the short story, describing his encounters with various citizens, recounting a story often told while the lamb is roasting, and near the story's end describes the actual feasting of the village. This biographical and cultural aspect of the story is established from the beginning, when Mathews writes,

> *Farce double*—literally double stuffing—is the specialty of La Tour Lambert, a
> mountainous village in Auvergne, that rugged heart of the Massif Central. I
> have often visited La Tour Lambert: the first time was in late May, when *farce
> double* is traditionally served. I have observed the dish being made and
> discussed it with local cooks. (141)

Here, Mathews incorporates a descriptive and poetic account of the terrain, an introduction to the significance of this dish in the region's culture, and a statement of his own participation in that culture. Those elements of style, combined with the piece's imperative tone, evocative language and emphasis on tradition, characterize the story as a recipe-story. Since Mathews is writing a short story, and his recipe will not come bound in a cookbook, annotated with terminology or illustrations, or incorporating any of the other paratextual elements of a cookbook, the story focuses on impersonating the tone and style of a cookbook in order to function on that level.

External Fact Indicators

One final way that impersonative works can cloak themselves in reality is to appropriate external fact indicators from the real world. They may refer to real places, events and people; incorporate quotations; and cite from sources. *These external fact indicators may not actually exist.* All that matters is that their existence in the real world is plausible and they are used in the text the way a real text would use real indicators.

For example, Milorad Pavić's *Dictionary of the Khazars* includes a historical description of the Khazar people and their history. This description is supported by a footnote detailing the research done on the Khazars as follows:

> A review of the literature on the Khazars was published in
> New York (*The Khazars, A Bibliography*, 1939); a Russian, M.I.
> Artamonov, wrote a monograph on the history of the
> Khazars in two editions (Leningrad, 1936 and 1962), and, in
> 1954, in Princeton, D.M. Dunlop published a history of the
> Jewish Khazars. (1-2)

This footnote is entirely appropriate for nonfiction. It includes names and years and real places. A book which references history only as background to a text would be likely to include a footnote like this one to direct the interested reader to potential resources outside the scope of the text.

Furthermore, Pavić uses historical figures and events, whose names sound "right" for the times and places described. For example, he references the Byzantine emperor Heraclius and Russian Prince Svyatoslav (2), and his characters reference great names such as Alexander the Great and Ramses III (63) and the monk Cyril (60-7). He mentions places, such as the Church of St. Sophia in Constantinople (62). He gives historical and biographical information where it would be appropriate in a real text, as in this example:

> In addition to Al-Istakhri's report ... there is also the report
> of Masudi the Elder, the author of *Golden Pastures*, who

> believed the Khazars[H] had abandoned their faith during the
> reign of Harun al-Rashid (786-809), a time when many Jews
> were being expelled from Byzantium and from the caliphate
> to Khazaria, where they were received without resistance.
> (133)

Note the dates given for Harun al-Rashid, the title of Masudi the Elder's work, the use of the

[H] cross-referencing symbol, and the historical reference to the expulsion of the Jews from

Byzantium. These details add authenticity to the "dictionary" by referencing people, places

and things outside of that dictionary that can be verified.

Conclusion

Writers of impersonative texts actively choose which elements of the target genre to

pick up and mimic and which elements to let lapse into fiction. While Harry Mathews's

"Country Cooking" provides an excellent impersonation of a gourmet cookbook's style and

tone, it fails to emphasize paratext at all. While *Pale Fire* uses the paratext of literary

criticism, its tone and style would be implausible for a published scholarly work.

For the final word on recreating a perfect fake, it is instructive to look at "A Factual

Note on *Eaters of the Dead*," in which Crichton writes:

> But certainly, the game that the book plays with its factual
> bases becomes increasingly complex as it goes along, until the
> text finally seems quite difficult to evaluate. I have a long-
> standing interest in verisimilitude, and in the cues which make
> us take something as real or understand it as fiction. But I
> finally concluded that in *Eaters of the Dead*, I had played the
> game too hard. While I was writing, I felt that I was drawing
> the line between fact and fiction clearly; for example, one
> cited translator, Per Fraus-Dolus, means in literal Latin "by
> trickery-deceit." But within a few years, I could no longer be
> certain which passages were real, and which were made up; at
> one point I found myself in a research library trying to locate
> certain references in my bibliography, and finally concluding,
> after hours of frustrating effort, that however convincing they
> appeared, they must be fictitious. (197-8)

In this passage, Crichton illustrates the danger in establishing a perfectly impersonative text. By failing to include clear brackets in his work, he allows for the special type of mistake described by Danto in *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*. Danto writes that once a work of art has succeeded in being exactly mimetic of reality, it becomes possible to "mistake an imitation for its designated reality and hence take toward what is presented the attitudes and expectations appropriate only to its counterpart on a different ontological plane" (21). Crichton writes that the work's warmest reception came from *Beowulf* scholars (199), who, after all, possess the background knowledge to readily identify the work as fiction despite its relative lack of brackets. When it was turned into a movie (*The Thirteenth Warrior*), all pretenses to fact were dropped and the story was presented as pure fiction. The popularity of the movie might well be attributed to the collapsing of the story into one level of interpretation, thus making the correct interpretation—that it is a work of fiction—easier to achieve.

CHAPTER THREE

DISMANTLING THE FAKE

As argued previously, an impersonative text has as its goal the reproduction of a genre of texts to a sufficient degree that the author's rhetorical purpose is achieved. Danto cautions that "the greater the degree of realism intended, the greater the need for external indicators that it is art and not reality" (*Transfiguration* 24). These external indicators, or "brackets," (23) mark what is within them as being part of the world of art and subject to an artistic interpretation. If the author wants his or her work to be appreciated as literature, then that author must take steps to partially dismantle the fake that was so elaborately established. For, if "part of the pleasure surely is due to the knowledge that it *is not really happening*," (*Transfiguration* 15) then the only way to evoke the reader's pleasure as a reader of literature is to provide the knowledge that the work being read is literature.

It could be argued that one of the failures of *Eaters of the Dead* as an impersonative novel is that it fails to provide sufficient brackets to indicate that it is literature. While the author ultimately informs the reader that the text is fictional, the reader does not have this information while reading, and thus potentially misses out on the pleasure of knowing for certain that what is read is literature. Other impersonative works more clearly establish themselves as fiction through the use of brackets, implausibility, inappropriate tone, ambiguity of facts, or literary elements.

Brackets

For a given work of literature, there exist certain conventions so strong that their presence in the text is often sufficient to trigger the correct reading of the work as literature. When these characteristics are present, the author may impersonate another genre as closely as he or she likes, for the brackets will ensure that "no one will take the result for reality itself" (*Transfiguration* 23). Thus, the first and foremost way a text can assure itself of being read as literature is to adopt the brackets associated with literature.

One of the key brackets of literature is the identifiable presence of an author. For instance, in *Pale Fire*, Charles Kinbote claims to be the editor of the poem with the supposed work of criticism, yet the book's front cover, back cover, vitas, and list of other works by the same author all list Vladimir Nabokov, who is not even mentioned in the text. Even without knowing Nabokov as a novelist, the intrusion of his name into "Kinbote's" text provides a clear signal that the book is literature. More strikingly still, Jerome Charyn is listed as the author of *The Tar Baby*, which, as a literary journal, should not have a single author. Charyn does not list himself in the list of contributors or make himself a character in his fictional journal; therefore, his presence as the author clearly signals the work as fiction. By contrast, the absence of an identifiable fictional author, or the deliberate misrepresentation that a work's character is its author (as was the case with *Robinson Crusoe*), takes away this bracket and leads to a possible misreading of the work as non-fiction.

Another tell-tale sign of literature is the presence of text proclaiming it to be fiction, in the form of subtitles, criticism, or on the dust jacket. On the cover page of *Pale Fire*, Nabokov provides the subtitle, "A Novel." Pavić further specifies that not only is his text a novel, but it is "A Lexicon Novel in 100,000 Words." Charyn does not name *The Tar Baby* as

fiction, but the text on the back cover does, calling it a "brilliant, audacious, story-filled novel."

One final example of how a writer can clearly identify a work as literature through brackets is to use an incorrect or inappropriate form. Mathews' "Country Cooking," unlike any "real" recipe, follows the form of literature, rather than of cooking. Instead of being broken down into a list of ingredients, followed by numbered directions, Mathews uses the readily identifiable form of the short story. He omits the glossy color photographs and begins the recipe with a dedication, an act common to literature but not to cookbooks. The ingredients are scattered throughout the "recipe," rather than gathered into neat columns for easy access and readability. His directions are unnumbered, and they are hardly in order. For instance, on page 143 he writes, "Earlier, you will have ground 3 3/4 lbs. of fish with a mortar and pestle," later adding that "at some previous moment you will have made the stuffing for the quenelles." These directions are uncharacteristically imprecise, and follow the time-bending logic of fiction rather than the sequential order of cooking.

Implausibility

Another way in which authors can assure a literary reading of a text is to deliberately introduce implausibility into the work. *Dictionary of the Khazars* renders itself improbable as early as the title page, by identifying the text to follow as being either male or female, a fanciful conception that ties into Pavic's theme of reader involvement by forcing the potential reader to make a choice between two nearly identical texts, one identified as male and the other identified as female. This first title page is followed by a second one, supposedly a facsimile of the original, which identifies this text as being a reconstruction of a text written in 1691 and destroyed in 1692. The question of what the current translator had to work with is amplified in the work's "Preliminary Notes," when Pavić writes, "It is

impossible to tell what the 1691 Daubmannus edition of *The Khazar Dictionary* looked like, since the only remaining exemplars, the poisoned and the silver (companion) copies, were both destroyed, each in its own part of the world" (8). With this introduction, the author has established the text as fantasy, at best loosely inspired by accounts of a distant people at a true crossroads in culture.

Nabokov similarly uses implausibility to dismantle his supposed work of literary criticism. Specifically, Kinbote's "interpretation" of "Pale Fire" is implausible as literary criticism, although successful as fiction. For instance, Shade writes:

> Here was my bedroom, now reserved for guests.
> Here, tucked away by the Canadian maid,
> I listened to the buzz downstairs and prayed
> For everybody to be always well, (pp. 35-6, lines 80-3)

In the context of the poem, this is a straightforward passage, recounting the innocent prayers of a young boy excluded from adult company. Nothing in the passage is sufficiently complex or undefined to require commentary, and the only plausible reason a critic would have for commenting would be to elaborate on some aspect of Shade's past. Instead, the first line quoted above is linked to a five-page commentary on the failed seduction of the young Prince of Zembla. The commentary improbably turns Shade's innocent childhood prayers into Kinbote's youthful decadence with only the phrase "my bedroom" to connect the two.

Inappropriate Tone

A third means of dismantling the perfect fake is to use inappropriate tone and style for the type of work being impersonated. Perhaps the clearest example of this technique is in *Pale Fire*. While Nabokov begins with a standard paragraph describing the poem "Pale Fire" and the manuscripts from which the present edition was prepared, he quickly introduces language highly inappropriate for a work of literary scholarship. For example, the

commentator clarifies his description of the dating of Shade's cards and apologizes for the

confusion, saying, "There is a very loud amusement park right in front of my present

lodgings." (13) Similarly, despite Kinbote's assertion that a professional proofreader has read

the manuscript, an editorial comment remains in the text on page 18 ("Insert before a

professional"), also inappropriate for a professional, scholarly work. Errors do occasionally

happen in a professional text, despite the most intensive proofreading. However, coming as

it does near the very beginning of the work but after Kinbote's comments about his

lodgings, the error casts more doubt on the author's credibility than it otherwise would.

Furthermore, as Kinbote continues to write, he becomes increasingly personal, recounting

his own amours in the foreword, including the details of his breakup with Bob (26-7).

Kinbote's commentary also includes examples of inappropriate tone and style. In his

note to lines 86-90, Kinbote comments that he found the paintings of Shade's Aunt Maude

to be "unpleasant but interesting," (113) an opinion out of place in nonfiction. In his note to

lines 39-40, Kinbote rightly associates a variant of these lines with Shakespeare's *Timon of

Athens*, but retranslates his Zemblan version into English, losing the poem's title in the

process (79-80). This type of carelessness is highly inappropriate in a work claiming to offer

a close reading of the text. Similarly, in his note to line 137, Kinbote fails to understand the

dictionary definition of one of Shade's words and dismisses it, saying, "Shade's phrase has no

real meaning [...] he seems to have fallen here under the spell of misleading euphony" (136).

Such a dismissal of the subject of his commentary is extremely inappropriate for a serious

scholar. These examples together identify the work as being other than what it presents

itself as.

Ambiguity Of Facts

Another way authors can cast doubt on their works is by introducing factual ambiguity into the text. For example, Pavić mixes the names of recognizable historical characters, such as Saint Cyril, with clearly legendary tales. In the section on Cyril, for instance, the author notes that some of the information was provided by the Daubmannus edition of *The Khazar Dictionary*, reiterating that "that edition was destroyed" (67). In other words, the reader is left with a sense that while the person discussed was real, and perhaps some of the facts presented were real, at least some ambiguous portion of the section was not real.

Jerome Charyn also makes use of factual ambiguity. On the publication information page, the journal is listed as being published "one-four times a year" with a subscription price of "$2.00-8.00 a year," an uncharacteristic vagueness that discredits the novel as a journal. Furthermore, it is described on the title page as "a sometimes quarterly review," but the date of the issue indicates that it covers a six-month period ("Summer-Fall 1972") and is "Number 1" of the volume. These facts are inconsistent with each other and with the index on pages 191-93, which also lists issues as appearing twice a year. Furthermore, the subscription price listed on the publication information page contradicts the information on the subscription blank at the end of the novel, which lists subscription as being either by the issue ($1.75/issue or $3/two issues) or for life ($12). While small journals are often irregular in price and frequency, they are seldom *this* irregular in both, and Charyn uses these irregularities to gently highlight the journal's lack of objectivity. Furthermore, a photograph of a young woman is reproduced on page 227, identified as "Sophie Waxman-Weissman (?)." The caption clarifies this ambiguity by stating that the photo "seems to be" a picture of Sophie. It further obscures the "fact" of the photograph by recounting a dispute between

the journal's editor, who believes that the girl in the picture looks like Sophie in the eyes, and Joachim Fiske, another contributor to the journal who finds "little discernable resemblance" to Sophie. Thus, the photograph is introduced and simultaneously withdrawn as a part of the documentary evidence of Anatole Waxman-Weissman's life.

Finally, Nabokov uses the names of places and people to further mark *Pale Fire* as fiction. For example, the name "Gradus," with its assorted aliases, sounds more like a literary villain that a real madman. His name marks him as a shadow, a gray entity, not quite real or solid, an impression that is readily apparent in this sentence: "while those that follow become gradually clearer as gradual Gradus approaches in space and time" (152). Kinbote's name, too, is symbolic, meaning "regicide" in Zemblan (267), a "fact" that becomes a part of the art of literature when Kinbote then writes, "a king who sinks his identity in the mirror of exile is in a sense just that" (267). Furthermore, while the novel claims to be set in our world, the place names sound suspiciously fictional: the Gulf of Surprise, Zembla, Wordsmith University, and Cedarn, Utana. The mixture of these fictional place names with real ones, such as Paris, Quebec, Wyoming, and Cannes, emphasizes the novel as being separate from, but based in, our reality.

Literary Elements

Another way in which writers can mark their text as fiction is by incorporating certain stylistic features of works of literature. These include structural devices, such as characters and plot, thematic devices, such as symbolism and motif, and figurative devices, such as hyperbole.

Upon examination, many of these works have the structure of fiction. For instance, *The Tar Baby, Pale Fire,* and *Dictionary of the Khazars* are presented as representatives of non-linear texts. Magazines are designed to be skimmed, with a table of contents to clue the

reader in on areas of likely interest and discontinuous pagination of articles that encourages

detours. Literary criticism of the type impersonated by *Pale Fire* invites a back-and-forth

reading to compare text and commentary. Dictionaries are, almost by definition,

disconnected entries on diverse topics. Yet, in all cases, the plot follows a literary arc.

Characters are introduced and recur throughout the text, foreshadowing is employed to

develop the plot, and a point of resolution is reached at the end of the book when some

mysteries are revealed and interrelationships are made clear. *Pale Fire* has already been

discussed in this context. Another example is that of *The Tar Baby*. In the beginning of the

book, all that the reader has are the hagiographic testimonials of Woodrow Wilson Korn, the

journal's editor. As the reader moves further into the book, each article effaces part of the

halo Korn has erected above the issue's honoree, Anatole Waxman-Weissman. Near the end

of the book, the Provost of Galapagos Junior College, Seth Birdwistell, systematically

debunks the articles preceding his, and the final article, by Margaret Chace, provides the

denouement to the story, explaining how the characters introduced in the preceding articles

are related. Similarly, *The Tar Baby* has consistent characterization. The same set of people

appear in some, or many, or all of the articles, whether in person or by reference. This, too,

proclaims the work as fiction.

    While *Dictionary of the Khazars* has less of a standard plot structure than either *Pale Fire*

or *The Tar Baby*, it does have a sense of continuity uncommon in dictionaries. As Callus

writes, "There occurs among the narrative's characters a desperate attempt to piece together

a higher truth, the clues to which are dispersed over the three books" (6). The explanation

for the search for Adam and for the existence of dream hunters appears at the end of the

book, in Appendix I, in the confessions of Father Theoctist Nikolsky. The book also

exhibits the structural characteristics of literature through shared characters. As the entries

unfold, one entry refers back to a previous entry and forward to the next, so that the entrants may have met in "real life," met in their dreams, or be reincarnations of one another. These relationships create a story, the story of the making and remaking of *The Dictionary of the Khazars*, that is quite unlexicographical.

Other works incorporate the thematic elements of fiction. *The Tar Baby*, for instance, has a theme, one carefully expounded by the novel's characters. In his final article, W. W. Korn recounts how Seth Birdwistell came up with the name "Tar Baby" for the journal. In Korn's version, Birdwistell says:

> I was thinking of the Hindu tar critter, who sized up your
> nature without sticking to you. His handlers carried him
> from town to town. You paid the handlers their price to look
> under his cloak, and having no Daddy and no soul, the critter
> could reflect the honey or the turpitude in each beholder's
> face. (159)

This theme of writing as a self-reflective activity appears throughout the book. While the ostensible subject of each article in the journal is Anatole Waxman-Weissman, the articles reveal more about their authors than they do about Anatole. Cynthia Waxman-Weissman talks more about her cheerleading days at Galapagos High School than about her relationship with Anatole. Joachim Fiske reveals himself as an uninterested teacher, looking down with distaste upon the impoverished children he taught. Even Birdwistell reveals himself in his critique of the journal, exposing his reactionary distaste for new thinking and the way he used *The Tar Baby* to promote favorites. In the final line of Birdwistell's article, he sums up the theme of the novel by saying:

> I was hoping for a subtle, varied magazine that would further
> the tar baby legend, reflect the voices and faces of Galapagos,
> and encourage indigenous art; instead, Korn imported Nina
> Spear, permitted Stefan Wax to befoul our frontispiece, and
> turned *The Tar Baby* into a flabby, corrupted image of himself.
> (190)

This theme of writing as a reflective act builds and resonates throughout the book, culminating in the overt statement of theme recorded above. The presence of a multi-layered theme is an identifier of fiction.

The presence of motif is another hallmark of literature. In *Pale Fire*, the recurring motif of Shakespeare in general, and *Timon of Athens* in particular, marks the text as being about more than the critique of a poem. The poem within the novel, the commentary on the poem, and the novel all share the name "Pale Fire," an allusion to IV.iii.437-438 of *Timon of Athens*: "the moon's an arrant thief,/ And her pale fire she snatches from the sun." The campus of Wordsmith College contains a "Shakespeare Avenue" (93). Before finding the secret passage that allows him to escape, the young King of Zembla remembers, then notes a copy of *Timon of Athens* on the closet shelf (125, 128). On page 155, the faculty of Wordsmith discuss the teaching of Shakespeare. Shakespeare reappears on page 208, as being a name most likely derived from Harfar Baron of Shalksbore. Kinbote makes an allusion to Ophelia on page 220, and in the note to 671-672, he derides poets who use literary allusions to create titles, mentioning Shakespearean works such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and the *Sonnets* but failing, ironically, to mention *Timon of Athens* (240). Kinbote's final reference to Shakespeare occurs when he looks unsuccessfully in his Zemblan translation of *Timon of Athens* for the source to the poem's title and recounts the story of his uncle, Conmal, who taught himself English with a dictionary and translated the version of *Timon of Athens* without "pale fire" in it (285). The recurring presence of Shakespeare and his works is a literary motif that helps tie together poem-and-commentary into a novel.

Perhaps the clearest example of using a literary device to mark a text as fiction is Mathews' use of hyperbole in "Country Cooking." While a recipe may be expected to

take time—after all, Thanksgiving Dinner is often started the day before to ensure that all dishes are ready by lunchtime—the times given to prepare *Farce double* are noticeably exaggerated. The dish requires five-six days to marinate the lamb, three hours to prepare the stuffing, six hours to cook, and uncounted hours for the auxiliary activities of making gravies, sauces, pastes and creams. The dish calls for exotic ingredients, including juniper berries, a special fish peculiar to the area, fresh truffles, special molds shaped like birds, a decoction of elecampane blossoms, walnut oil and wild boar's fat. Furthermore, the exaggeration of the difficulty of the recipe makes it clear that it can never actually be reproduced in the kitchen. It requires a twenty five quart casserole and a giant washtub for marinating, and the method of sealing the quenelles is so tricky that the author admits that not only has he never succeeded in it himself but that "even the nimble-fingered, thimble-thumbed seamstresses of La Tour Lambert find it hard" (145). These elements make it clear that the recipe is for entertainment purposes only and highlight it as a work of fiction.

Conclusion

In each work of impersonative literature, the author is faced with the necessary task of dismantling the fake he or she has erected. This combination of simultaneously building and destroying an impersonation is necessary to ensure that the reader appreciates the impersonation as fiction. Without this step, the reader may not take the next step and attempt to sort out why this creating and destroying of an impersonation was done in the first place and could potentially miss out on the rhetorical import of the work.

CHAPTER FOUR

TEXTUAL RHETORIC

Impersonative literature is set apart from mere parody just as impersonation of a person is more than the mere mimicry of that individual. In either case, the impersonation has a rhetorical point. There is more to the impersonation than an attempt to copy a different genre and exaggerate its unique characteristics. Rather, as any art, it is about more than what it says it is about. This is, in fact, the thesis of *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*: "works of art ... use the means of representation in a way that is not exhaustively specified when one has exhaustively specified what is being represented" (147-8). In other words, one can describe these impersonative works as what they impersonate, but there is still something more left undescribed, something more than the form they take. This "something," says Danto, is rhetoric.

Danto describes the function of rhetoric as causing "the audience of a discourse to take a certain attitude toward the subject of that discourse; to be caused to see that subject in a certain light" (165). In the case of impersonative fiction, the authors choose a particular form and create art so that the reader looks at the genre being impersonated in a new light or takes a certain attitude toward that genre. The challenge for the author is to make the audience aware of the appropriate attitude to take toward the artwork.

Authors have a variety of means by which they can highlight the work's rhetorical message. One is the historical information of the work's context. Another is the work's title, which Danto writes is a clear direction from the author (119), guiding the reader to a particular interpretation or set of interpretations and necessarily excluding others. If, as Danto writes, "every new interpretation is a Copernican revolution," (125) then the author's task is to provide clues that limit the number of new interpretations that are consistent with the work so that the reader and the writer are seeing the same work (or at least a similar one).

In each work of impersonative literature, there is a rhetorical message, and the author has left a trail of crumbs to guide the reader to interpret it. Furthermore, each author chooses a form to impersonate that directly furthers this rhetorical aim. To examine this relationship between rhetoric and form in impersonative literature, it is profitable to examine the textual rhetoric in each of the principal works studied.

The Tar Baby

Jerome Charyn's impersonation of a small academic journal has as its rhetorical message the idea that criticism is more about the critic than the object criticized. The choice of a journal for this message is ideal. A journal contains works by many different authors in several different genres representing varied theoretical points of view. *The Tar Baby*, for instance, contains works in seven genres by fifteen authors, including five letters to the editor, a poem and an interview. The works have a variety of theoretical perspectives; some, such as Plotch (who may be the computer, Kit Carson, in disguise) are blatantly confessional in their approach to Anatole Waxman-Weissman. Others, such as Dalton Chess, prefer to focus on Anatole as a part of his environment, while Fiske chooses to write about the dead

man's personal history. By choosing such a collection of diversity, Charyn strengthens his point.

One clue that Charyn uses to bring home this rhetorical message is the work's title. In the pages of *The Tar Baby*, Charyn's characters refer to the name of the journal. Birdwistell even provides a catalogue of tar baby imagery on pages 172-73. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the tar baby represents what is in the soul of the beholder. On the slenderest of actual evidence, the scholars in *The Tar Baby* reconstruct an Anatole who resembles their fantasies more than any likely reality. For example, Dalton Chess proposes to write "Galapagos: A Topographical Sketch," and comes up with the clever conceit of describing Galapagos by "tracing Anatole's route to school" (28). Yet, the following pages relate less of the local topography, or even the local history, than they relate speculations on Anatole's thoughts and conversations. Even more revealingly, Chess offers plenty of ideological digressions, distinguishing himself from Birdwistell and Gemeinhardt. He believes that these men obscure the truth about Galapagos and create a "sugarloafed Galapagos" for the tourists (33). Chess uses his reconstruction of Anatole to bolster his case, stating that Anatole was an earthy young man, in touch with Galapagos's less presentable elements, a boy who "had a good whiff of noodles, muck, and whoresweat" (33). He has Anatole crawling in the town dump, having a fictional conversation with the owner of the local whorehouse, and wandering through Chinatown on his way to school. These devices reflect on Dalton Chess in terms of his critical views, his attitude toward history, and his willingness to merge fiction and fact in order to support his thesis. *The Tar Baby* reveals Chess while leaving the absent Anatole in obscurity.

Pale Fire

Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, like *The Tar Baby*, offers a critique of academic criticism. However, while *The Tar Baby* suggests that criticism is largely a self-reflective activity, *Pale Fire* suggests that because of the critic's role as interpreter, there exists a potential in criticism for a critic to create, rather than interpret, meaning in the work, thereby substituting the critic's own agenda for that of the artist. *Pale Fire*'s rhetorical message might best be explained by saying that critical interpretation of a given work has the potential to be subjective, and some who practice criticism may be creating their own reputations and publications from the creative work and genius of the writer, thereby stealing the writer's achievement for a pale fire of their own.

Nabokov guides the reader to this rhetorical message in several ways. The title of John Shade's long poem, Charles Kinbote's criticism of the poem, and Nabokov's novel is "Pale Fire." As mentioned in Chapter 3, "Pale Fire" is a part of the novel's Shakespearean motif, and it comes from the lines in *Timon of Athens* in which Timon dissuades some thieves from stealing by describing all of the thievery of the universe. In these lines, the moon steals from the sun its brilliance and light to wear as her own "pale fire." The moon does not create the light, merely taking from the awesome creative force of the sun. Thus, the fire is pale, rather than vibrant.

This theft imagery is completely missed by Kinbote (who has only the Zemblan pocket edition of *Timon* with him in exile). Kinbote's criticism is a theft of Shade's fire. First and foremost, he used Shade. As Kinbote admits, he only knew Shade for a few months (18), and during most of those months Kinbote spies on Shade and Shade tries to avoid him. The friendship Kinbote claims to have with Shade is undermined by the antagonistic relationship between poet and commentator. As Kinbote writes in his Foreword, "Let me

state that without my notes Shade's text simply has no human reality at all" (28). The critic

sees himself as providing meaning to the text, as creating an integral part of the reading

experience of that text. Kinbote wants to provide more than the interpretation; he seeks to

provide the text itself. The critic, who admits he is incapable of putting his ideas into verse,

admits:

> I felt sure at last that he would recreate in a poem the
> dazzling Zembla burning in my brain. I mesmerized him
> with it, I saturated him with my vision .... At length I knew
> he was ripe with my Zembla, bursting with suitable rhymes,
> ready to spurt at the brush of an eyelash. (80)

The critic believes he has used the author to express well what the critic cannot express

artistically at all. In reading the final draft, he realizes that "the final text of *Pale Fire* has been

deliberately and drastically drained of every trace of the material [he] contributed" (81). Not

content to allow Shade's poem to speak on its own merits, he includes his own vision in the

commentary. For instance, in line 149 of the poem, Shade describes having a vast

perspective, as though he were standing "one foot upon a mountain." In his commentary on

this line, Kinbote takes the word "mountain" and uses it to tell the story of his mountain

escape. This commentary has nothing to do with the poem, being rather a critical attempt to

steal the power of Shade's verse to build the pale fire of his criticism. In essence, the novel

suggests that those who cannot do may instead offer criticism. Kinbote's criticism is about

his own agenda and has little to do with Shade's vision. The creative artist can be a victim of

the critics, often unable to reply to criticism and interpretation and often distrusted when he

does. The critic's words will be cited as long as the poem is read, guiding the interpretation

of the poem the critic did not create. Nabokov's rhetorical message is, at least in part, a

reaction to the horrifying (from the author's perspective) possibility that each work will have

new interpretations that, in Danto's metaphor, are a Copernican revolution apart from the

interpretation intended by the author.

Dictionary of the Khazars

Dictionary of the Khazars is a deeply layered work, one with many themes and messages.

The author chooses for its form a cross-referenced dictionary, combining words from the

three cultures that intersected during the Khazar Polemic. In making this choice of form,

one of Pavić's rhetorical messages is that culture shapes how we relate to every aspect of the

world, down to the level of individual words. There are foreign language dictionaries that

will tell you that the French word "chat" means "cat" in English, but Pavić argues through

this work that the two words may mean vastly different things in each language due to the

powers of history, tradition, culture, and experience.

The title of the work names it a dictionary, as does the title of the reconstructed

work it claims to present. Dictionaries are assumed to be the most objective kind of writing

possible, serving only to label objects and ideas without adding judgment, feeling, or

connotations to them. Pavić highlights the subjectivity of his dictionary in several ways.

First, the foreword informs the reader that the dictionary-novel (written originally in Serbo-

Croatian) is in a different language from the original *Lexicon Corsi*. In fact, the book says,

> ... it was impossible to preserve the order and alphabetical
> arrangement of the Daubmannus dictionary, in which three
> alphabets and three languages were used—Greek, Hebrew,
> and Arabic—and in which dates were given according to the
> three calendars of the three above-mentioned groups. Here
> all dates are calculated according to a single calendar, and a
> translation of Daubmannus' sources and his entries in three
> languages is given in a single language. (10)

By going through this explanation, Pavić shows us that even the simplest ideas—alphabetical

order, dates, letters—are inherently cultural. A Christian has to know how to "read" Jewish

dates in terms of her own calendar in order to understand the relation of an event to

Christian history. A dictionary, which is by definition in alphabetical order, would have to be reordered in every language so that the words are again in the proper sequence. Even these fundamentals of language are culturally dependent.

Pavić also establishes the dictionary as a cultural artifact through his entries. A useful example would be the entries on Princess Ateh, who appears in all three dictionaries. The Christian dictionary spends much of its time recounting legends of the princess, legends with a touch of the supernatural about them. For example, in this version the Princess's attendants write letters on her eyelids to protect her from evil while she sleeps. Also, the number seven, a common object of superstition, appears in the form of seven kinds of salt that the Princess tastes. Some of these legends serve as explanations of the natural world; for example, the legend that the Khazars were ever able to change their faces explains how hard members of that group were to distinguish by outsiders. Furthermore, in this entry, the Princess has no role in the Khazar polemic; the account disputes whether she was even there. Finally, she lived in the ninth century and wrote prayers. The entry sees her in the light of a culture where figures from the past are imbued with legend, superstitions are common, and women are colorful but insignificant.

In the Islamic entry, the princess writes love poems that are later used in the polemic. She is not only at the polemic, but a fervent participant. Condemned by the Christian and Jewish representatives to their hells, she makes an active choice to go to the Islamic hell instead. This entry, while about the same character, provides an entirely different cultural perspective. As a teacher and priestess, she has a significant role, and her writings are literary. She convinces through her passion and her expression of feeling.

The Jewish entry on Ateh reflects a third point of view. The entry begins by explaining the meanings of each letter of her name and how each provides insight into her

character, and continues with references from the Torah and numerology. Although Ateh writes poems in this entry, unlike the Islamic Ateh, the Jewish Ateh writes a cycle of poems in alphabetical order. The text also suggests she is the original author of the dictionary. She convinces through her powers of reason and argument, and for punishment is robbed of speech by the Islamic demon. This version of Ateh reflects a rational culture, one that analyzes all things for deeper meanings and insights.

In reading the three dictionaries that comprise *Dictionary of the Khazars*, one can see how culture permeates our view of the world. Our views of what role is acceptable for a woman in a debate, for example, color the ways in which we can conceive of a woman behaving in a debate. This all-pervasiveness of culture is Paviç's rhetorical message, and the form of a dictionary is ideally suited to deliver this message.

"Country Cooking"

In "Country Cooking," Mathews uses the form of a French provincial recipe to convey the rhetorical message that recreating a foreign culture is at best inauthentic and at worst impossible. Culture, such as the fictional culture of La Tour Lambert, can be studied but cannot be translated into a contemporary American kitchen.

The title of the work contains words that have highly positive connotations of tradition and nostalgia, words such as "country," "central," "France," and "roast." Mathews describes the dish as "old," regional" and "hearty" just in the opening paragraph (141). This choice of diction makes the recipe seem inviting, and the author repeatedly challenges the reader to attempt the dish. He dismisses the fears of the local cooks that the dish would be impossible to reproduce elsewhere, saying that the answer is "judicious substitution" (141). Yet, the advice given to American cooks results in changes ever further removed from the rural French culture that produced the original. For example, the American cook is to

purchase parts of a lamb at a butcher and use a weak solution of lye to scrape off the

inspection stamp—changing the quantities, preparations and probably the chemical content

of the meat (142). The type of fish used in the quenelles is found only in Auvergne, and

must be replaced by American cooks (142). The quenelles themselves are molded using

special molds that would have deep significance for a resident of La Tour Lambert but be

utterly meaningless to an American (143-44). The poaching liquid is made from a sparkling

wine peculiar to Auvergne and the lamb is "anointed" with a mixture including wild boar fat,

and again the American must substitute (146). These substitutions effectively mean that the

American cook would be using tools and ingredients foreign to American culture for reasons

that, as a person not from La Tour Lambert, have little significance. Danto's remarks about

the impact of culture on art apply equally well to Mathews' point: "One can ... without

question imitate the work and the style of the work of an earlier period. What one cannot

do is live the system of meanings upon which the work drew in its original form of life"

(*After* 203). The natives of La Tour Lambert have a rich and intricate system of meanings

centered around this dish; they find it a joyous feast and prepare the meal as a communal

tradition, involving story telling, traditional activities and roles. Transplanting the dish to

America most likely requires the cook to act alone, in the absence of tradition, and is a

ridiculous exercise. While it may be enjoyable to read about the culture of La Tour Lambert,

most readers would not attempt to recreate that culture. The same holds true for the dozens

of elaborate gourmet cookbooks on the market that specialize in recreating "country cooking

from central [name of exotic place]." The recipes may be interesting, but despite all the

authors' assurances to the contrary, most contemporary American cooks will not be likely to

attempt them. Those who do will still not find the same cultural significance in the exercise

that natives find because they do not participate in that culture's system of meanings.

Conclusion

At this point, it might be useful to summarize by contrasting the examples already discussed with *Eaters of the Dead*, a work whose form does not contribute to the text's rhetorical message. Crichton states in his "Factual Note" that the work's intended rhetorical message is that "*Beowulf* was a dramatic, exciting story" (193). To convey that message, Crichton could have chosen any number of forms. He could have retold the story as a historical novel, modernized the verse, written a play or screenplay or a piece of non-fiction. Any of these forms would have been acceptable because the message is not about novels, verse, academic writers, actors, movies or historians. The novel is about presenting an old, canonical source in such a way that its virtues become evident to a new generation of readers. In a sense, the book functions as criticism of *Beowulf*, providing assistance to the reader by giving him or her "the information needed to respond to the work's power which, after all, can be lost as concepts change" (*Transfiguration* 174). Once aware that the story being read is *Beowulf*, there is no longer any question for the reader of reading the work as being truly non-fiction, and the second level of reading present in other impersonative works is lost. One doesn't ask what Crichton is saying about historians, but rather what he is saying about *Beowulf*. This rhetorical message was achieved only with partial success. Crichton writes, "this playful version of *Beowulf* received a rather irritable reception from reviewers, as if I had desecrated a monument. But *Beowulf* scholars all seem to enjoy it" (199). Furthermore, a cursory survey of twenty-five random Internet reviews of the movie version of the novel revealed that only three reviewers mentioned that the book was based on *Beowulf*, suggesting that Crichton's rhetorical point may have been overlooked. The movie also got mixed reviews in the press, perhaps in part because it was being evaluated on its merits as a historical drama, rather than as a retelling of legend. More positive reviews by

individual readers suggest that at least some people received his message and developed a new appreciation for the source work. As such, his rhetorical message was only partially successful.

Whether or not Crichton achieved his rhetorical purpose of proving *Beowulf* to be an interesting and relevant tale, it is still clear that his project differs from the other works studied and may not be properly classed as impersonative. In the impersonative works studied, the authors construct and deconstruct a fake in order to make a rhetorical point that is directly related to the choice of form. In *Eaters of the Dead*, however, while Crichton constructs a fake edition of a historical text, once the reader realizes that the story is based on the legend of Beowulf (and most readers who have read *Beowulf* would recognize its general plot and characters in *Eaters of the Dead*) the story is no longer read on two levels and the reader sees only a retelling of legend. Crichton provides no other external clues to deconstruct the fake because for most readers they would be unnecessary. Furthermore, the work's rhetorical point is not furthered by its choice of form. While Crichton chooses the form of a historical edition, he is ultimately not impersonating one in the same way that the other authors are doing, and *Eaters of the Dead* is not an impersonative work.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

As we have seen thus far, impersonative works perform three tasks. They impersonate another genre, they simultaneously dismantle their own impersonations, and they perform these actions in order to make a specific rhetorical point related to the form being impersonated. While other works mimic another genre (works such as Bantock's *Griffin & Sabine*, Crichton's *Eaters of the Dead* and Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*), these works fail to perform one of the other three tasks. For example, *Robinson Crusoe* fails to dismantle its impersonation of a travel journal, leading credulous readers to believe it to be true until its exposure as a hoax. On the other end of the spectrum, while the form of *Eaters of the Dead* does not betray its fictional character, as soon as the plot and characters are recognized as being of *Beowulf* the fake is instantly and permanently dismantled. Likewise, for *Griffin & Sabine* and *Eaters of the Dead*, the form chosen for impersonation does not significantly contribute to the work's main rhetorical point. Those works that truly belong to the class of impersonative literature have all three tasks absolutely required of them.

Given the relatively small number of works that may be properly classified as impersonative, the question arises of what limits this genre. Danto discusses the role of experimentation in the arts, saying that first of all, these experiments "are defined by the rules of the genre they are working in" (*Transfiguration* 138). Ultimately, the fiction writer must have a beginning and an end, and generally must work with plots, characters, and

themes. While experimental writers test those rules, and occasionally break them, Danto

observes that the act of breaking rules presupposes the existence of those rules. In other

words, while a novelist or a sculptor may choose not to have a plot, and a piece of non-

fictional text does not have a plot, "the way in which their respective works lack stories

differs from the way in which the Manhattan Telephone Directory lacks one, for the novel

and the sculpture are defined through the fact that each belongs to a genre within which

such questions have application" (*Transfiguration* 138). Since impersonative works question

the nature of the genre impersonated, they follow and break these rules very deliberately.

Knowing and following the rules allows the author to create a believable impersonation, and

breaking some of those rules allows the author to make his or her rhetorical point. In a

sense, a work's form is about the interplay of following, bending and breaking the form's

rules, and therefore it is not surprising that writers of impersonative texts are perhaps more

limited than other writers in that they have the rules of two separate genres to consider.

Another limiting factor in the genre is that it is so experimental. Danto discusses

works whose main interest to the art community is that they were done at all (*Transfiguration*

136). While *Dictionary of the Khazars* is a deep work with multiple meanings and a complex

rhetoric, its uniqueness as a dictionary-novel means that any other work which set itself out

as a dictionary-novel would run the risk of being seen as derivative. The dictionary-novel

has been done, and well, and so have the literary criticism-novel, the recipe-story, and the

academic journal-novel. While there may be a plethora of other rhetorical points to be made

about dictionaries, criticism, recipes and the like, because there is but one exemplar of each

type in fiction, any new impersonative works on these topics would be read in relation to the

existing works, rather than being read independently as a representative of the impersonative

genre. Furthermore, the nature of impersonative works requires that the reader hold in his

or her mind both the impersonated form and the actual form of the text. The mere fact of the existence of an exemplar of the hybrid form raises questions in the reader's mind about the reality of what has been presented. It becomes harder to read a dictionary-novel as a dictionary once one is aware of the existence of dictionary-novels. Thus, the genre of impersonative literature seems to be fairly self-limiting.

Given the limits of impersonative literature, it is certainly relevant to explore the significance of this genre. This small class of works has a definite role in the great literary conversation. In particular, impersonative works are in a unique position to offer a meta-criticism of our means of expression. Rather than didactically expounding upon the weaknesses and abuses inherent in a particular genre, the impersonative work *demonstrates* those weaknesses or abuses through its impersonation. The viewer sees the follies of the impersonated form portrayed for him or her in fiction, and the demonstration is often more powerful and immediate than a mere description would have been. Thus, Nabokov can criticize criticism in fiction, having his fictional commentator act out for us the damage done by a bad critic. This creative method of exploring our means of explicating literature affords the reader a unique vantage point for observing some of the potential dangers of explication.

Another way in which impersonative works are significant within the larger realm of literature is that they challenge the reader in a way different from the challenges offered by other types of literature. For example, *Pale Fire* presents the reader with the challenge of reading a poem within a fictional commentary. Once aware that the work is criticism-fiction, the reader cannot read the poem as simply a poem. The reader has to decide upon an answer for several questions. Who is the poem's author? Is it really a poem? Does it have any significance to *Pale Fire*, or is it there just to provide the reader with criticism? Is it a good poem? Is it meant to be a good poem? How does Nabokov want me to feel about the

poem? How seriously am I supposed to read this poem? What does it mean to have a fictional poem? The mere presence of the poem challenges the reader to come up with a way of reading and assimilating the work's various components with the idea that they are all fiction. By mixing fiction and criticism and poetry, Nabokov has forced the reader to move beyond a passive role and to actively question all three genres represented.

Similarly, in *Dictionary of the Khazars* Pavić overtly challenges the role of the reader. By providing cross-references, he encourages the reader to read the book non-linearly. Furthermore, on pages 12-13 of the preliminary notes, he confronts the reader with an almost overwhelming array of possible ways to read the book, ultimately saying that

> each reader will put together the book for himself, as in a
> game of dominoes or cards, and, as with a mirror, he will get
> out of this dictionary as much as he puts into it, for, as is
> written on one of the pages of this lexicon, you cannot get
> more out of the truth than what you put into it (13).

His choice of form provides a unique challenge to the reader, forcing the reader out of a comfortable role of receiving meaning and into a new, potentially uncomfortable role of creating meaning.

Danto, too, speaks of the challenge that experimental works pose to their audience. He postulates that with less experimental forms predominating, audiences have developed a habit of scanning works, overlooking details that don't fit with the rules they have internalized. He states that for many readers, "the habit of scanning, which is essential to reading, is brought with us into the study, where we may find ourselves reading texts, until we deliberately intervene, somewhat as we would read a newspaper article" (*Transfiguration* 115). However, readers of impersonative literature cannot get by with scanning. They must actively read and question the work, and they are often presented with increased options for reading.

Another way this genre is significant within the larger body of literature is in the vastness of the distance it places between author and reader. While authors are often at least somewhat untrustworthy, impersonative authors are completely untrustworthy. In setting up a complete fake, then dismantling it, the author misleads the audience then deliberately makes them aware of the deceit. Aware that the author is not to be trusted, the audience then must question every word on the page and the motivation for those words. Suddenly, the text becomes about rhetoric, and the audience must decide what to believe, how the author wants them to feel, and how they wish to feel. These works take the separation between author and writer to an extreme and bring them into debate with each other, eliminating the illusion that the only dialogue in reading is between the reader and the text.

Ultimately, impersonative literature is one more way in which art interacts with the limits of its genre, taking risks and adding an additional level of rhetorical meaning. Danto's explorations of the nature of art are particularly germane to a discussion of impersonative literature, as these works, like the mimetic artworks Danto studies, have a sort of identity crisis. And like Danto's mimetic artworks, this identity crisis is a deliberately chosen form of expression designed, as all art is, to make a rhetorical point. Perhaps it is best to conclude this thesis by quoting Danto's conclusion to *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*. He writes that experimental art "does what works of art have always done—externalizing a way of viewing the world, expressing the interior of a cultural period, offering itself as a mirror to catch the conscience of our kings" (208).

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