Conclusion
Extensions and Reconsiderations

I

The resources of narrative and the inventive capacities of human storytellers are, I think, too vast and various for the multitudinous interactions of character and progression to be analyzed in a single study. Every reader can no doubt think of numerous narratives where the interaction of character and progression is different from the patterns examined here. Given this situation, this inquiry does not attempt to be exhaustive. It does, however, retain the vaulting ambition of comprehensiveness, the goal of establishing—and demonstrating in operation—theoretical categories and principles rich enough to have substantial predictive value and flexible enough to apply to new cases. Consequently, it has sought that richness and that flexibility by working with examples that would satisfy the twin criteria of representativeness and range. More specifically, through its choice of narratives and critical positions, this study has been attempting (1) to describe and analyze both typical and unusual relations among the components of character; (2) to investigate a wide spectrum of principles of progression; and (3) to undertake a broad sweep of the interpretive issues connected with viewing character and progression from a rhetorical perspective.

In this final chapter, I want first to make another step toward comprehensiveness by demonstrating the flexibility of the categories and principles already established, and then second, to move beyond the quest for comprehensiveness by reflecting on the predictive power of the theory, including the limits on that power. Rather than undertaking full-scale analyses of new narratives as I approach argument's end, I will seek to demonstrate flexibility by addressing some specific issues raised by three very different works: Norman Mailer’s The Armies of the Night, George Eliot’s Middlemarch, and Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway. The Armies of the Night is the flip side of If on a winter’s
night a traveler: a narrative where the protagonist is not a fictional construct but a historical person. What happens to the mimetic-synthetic relationship there? To what extent can Mailer the author's presentation of Mailer the character be considered synthetic? How does such a nonfictional protagonist perform thematic functions? Mrs. Dalloway poses the question of how the interaction between character and progression works in a narrative where so much of the progression is itself a gradual unfolding of character. The question is complicated further because Clarissa, though obviously central, is one among several characters whose inner lives Woolf opens to her audience. In answering the question, I will find it useful to examine Eliot's handling of the Fred Vincy-Mary Garth subplot in Middlemarch. What Eliot does there in elaborating the subordinate action while making it serve the main plot lines both looks back to what Austen does with Charlotte Lucas and Dickens with Wemmick and ahead to what Woolf does with Septimus Smith. In explaining how the subordinate characters function in those different progressions, the study will complete one strand of its own progression.

II

In the last paragraph of Book One of his account of the October 1967 march on the Pentagon to protest American involvement in the Vietnam War, Mailer the narrator describes the process by which Mailer the character became Mailer the author.

Then he began his history of the Pentagon. It insisted on becoming a history of himself over four days, and therefore was history in the costume of a novel. He labored in the aesthetic of the problem for weeks, discovering that his dimensions as a character were simple: blessed had been the novelist, for his protagonist had been a simple of a hero and a marvel of a fool, with more than average gifts of objectivity—might his critics have as much!—this verdict disclosed by the unprotective haste with which he was obliged to write, for he wrote of necessity at a rate faster than he had ever written before, as if the accelerating history of the country forbade deliberation. Yet in writing his personal history of these four days, he was delivered a discovery of what the March on the Pentagon had finally meant, and what had been won, and what had been lost, and so found himself ready at last to write a most concise Short History, a veritable precis of a collective novel, which here now, in the remaining pages, will seek as History, no, rather as some Novel of History, to elucidate the mysterious character of that quintessentially American event.
From our perspective, there are two especially noteworthy elements of this passage. First, although it claims that the writing of Book One made possible the writing of Book Two, the passage reveals almost nothing about the precise relation between them, about, for example, how the two parts constitute a single narrative or what the nature of that narrative might be. Second, the passage points to the irreducibly synthetic component of character even in nonfiction narrative: "[H]is dimensions as a character were simple: blessed had been the novelist, for his protagonist had been a simple of a hero and a marvel of a fool, with more than average gifts of objectivity.” Like Huck Finn in civilization, we’ve been here before, and like Huck, we’ve learned not to take everything at face value. As we have seen in The French Lieutenant’s Woman, when the narrator of a fictional narrative claims that the narrative is taking its direction from a character’s mimetic function, that claim actually foregrounds the synthetic component of the character. The same logic applies here. If Mailer the character is a “simple of a hero” and a “marvel of a fool,” it is because Mailer the author has emerged from his labor “in the aesthetic of the problem” with a decision to represent himself that way. Understanding the rationale for that decision will enable us to understand the connection between Books One and Two.²

Mailer begins his narrative by quoting Time magazine’s account of his performance during the weekend of the March:

A Shaky Start

Washington’s scruffy Ambassador Theater, normally a pad for psychedelic frolics, was the scene of an unscheduled scatological solo last week in support of the peace demonstrations. Its antistar was author Norman Mailer, who proved even less prepared to explain Why Are We in Vietnam? than his current novel of that title.

Slurping liquor from a coffee mug, Mailer faced an audience of 600, most of them students, who had kicked in $1,900 for a bail fund against Saturday’s capers. “I don’t want to grandstand unduly,” he said, grandly but barely standing.

It was one of his few coherent sentences. Mumbling and spewing obscenities as he staggered about the stage—which he had commandeered by threatening to beat up the previous M.C.—Mailer described in detail his search for a usable privy on the premises. Excretion, in fact, was his preoccupation of the night. “I’m here because I’m like LBJ,” was one of Mailer’s milder observations. “He’s as full of crap as I am.” When hecklers mustered the temerity to shout “Publicity hound!” at him, Mailer managed to pronounce flawlessly his all-purpose noun, verb and expletive: "**** you."

Dwight Macdonald, the bearded literary critic, was aghast at the
barroom bathos, but failed to argue Mailer off the platform. Macdonald eventually squeezed in the valorous observation that Ho Chi Minh was really no better than Dean Rusk. After more obscenities, Mailer introduced poet Robert Lowell, who got annoyed at requests to speak louder. "I'll bellow but it won't do any good," he said and proceeded to read from Lord Weary's Castle.

By the time the action shifted to the Pentagon, Mailer was perky enough to get himself arrested by two Marshals. "I transgressed a police line," he explained with some pride on the way to the lockup where the toilet facilities are scarce indeed and the coffee mugs low-octane. (Pp. 13–14)

Mailer's comment on the account, "Now we may leave Time in order to find out what happened," conveys a withering judgment on its accuracy, but his own subsequent description of his initial involvement in the march and of his behavior at the Ambassador seems to confirm the Time reporter's assessment of him.

The mimetic portrait Mailer draws of himself in the early scenes is that of a man who is not only a marvel of a fool but also a giant of an ego. Reluctantly drawn in to participating in the March, he anticipates it with all the eagerness of a blueblood MBA about to spend a weekend with a UAW local: "It was going to prove a wasteful weekend he decided with some gloom—he could have spent it more profitably cutting his new movie. . . . Mailer wished as the Washington weekend approached that the Washington weekend were done" (pp. 20–21). In his verbal jousting with Robert Lowell at the party before the Thursday night rally at the Ambassador, he replies to Lowell's compliment that Mailer is the finest journalist in America by saying, "Well, Cal, there are days when I think of myself as being the best writer in America" (p 33). When asked by Ed de Grazia, the organizer of the rally, if he would like to speak first—before Lowell, Dwight Macdonald, and Paul Goodman—Mailer replies, "There'll be nothing interesting to follow me" (p. 39). He jumps at the chance de Grazia offers him to be M.C., and takes pleasure in "thoughts of the subtle annoyance his role as Master of Ceremonies would cause the other speakers" (p. 39).

The gigantic proportions of the Mailer ego are nowhere more evident than they are in the events at the Ambassador, where Mailer, now drunk, acts the part of the self-indulgent M.C., and assesses the whole evening according to how well he is doing with the audience. He presents his own speech as an attempt to win greater applause from the audience than Lowell: "They gave Lowell a good standing ovation, much heartiness in it, much obvious pleasure that they were there in Washington on a night when Lowell had read from his
work. . . . to Mailer it was now *mano a mano*" (p. 61). Mailer's own speech—and the asides he makes about it in the narration—are comic enough to prevent it from being an utter disaster ("’they [reporters] alone have done more to destroy this nation than any force in it.' They will certainly destroy me in the morning . . . .’), but the speech is another egregiously self-indulgent and egotistical performance. Mailer claims to be the dwarf alter ego of Lyndon Johnson and delights in spewing obscenities with his adopted Texas accent. His report of his behavior fleshes out the account given in *Time*, but it leads the reader to conclude that Mailer got off easy at the hands of the Luce-ites. If John Marcher's main trait is his obsession, Mailer's—at this point in the narrative—is his egotism.

Slowly, however, Mailer's attitude toward participating in the events of the weekend changes and so too does the resulting character portrait. At the demonstration at the Justice Department on Friday afternoon, Mailer begins to feel a "’deep modesty on its way to him’" (p. 93). As faculty members walk up and deposit their draft cards in a bag to be turned over to the Justice Department,

he stood in the cold watching [them], yes always one by one, and felt his hangover which had come in part out of his imperfectly swallowed contempt for them the night before, and in part out of his fear, yes now he saw it, fear of the consequences of this weekend in Washington, for he had known from the beginning it could disrupt his life for a season or more and in some way the danger was there it could change him forever. (P. 93)

That night Mailer, Lowell, and Macdonald agree that they will seek to get arrested on the March. But Mailer wants to get arrested early so he can go back to New York for a party on Saturday night.

By the time that Mailer emerges from jail on Sunday morning, however, his change is complete. The experience of the march, his arrest for "’transgressing a police line,’” his night in Occoquan jail amid the company of numerous other demonstrators, his witnessing of his lawyer's argument with the U.S. Commissioner that eventually won him a suspended sentence: all these events have immersed Mailer in the weekend he wanted to avoid, and that immersion has humbled him, got him out of himself, and focused him on the significance of the march. Just as the narrative begins with a report of a speech he made, so it ends with such a report, this time from the *Washington Post*:

Novelist Norman Mailer, using a makeshift courtroom to deliver a Sunday sermon on the evils of the Vietnam War, received the only
prison sentence yesterday as justice was meted out in wholesale
lots for hundreds of anti-war demonstrators.

In his courtroom speech Mailer said, "They are burning the
body and blood of Christ in Vietnam."

"Today is Sunday," he said "and while I am not a Christian I
happen to be married to one. And there are times when I happen
to think that the loveliest thing about my dear wife is her unspoken
love for Jesus Christ... ."

Mailer said he believed that the war in Vietnam "will destroy
the foundation of this republic, which is its love and trust in
Christ." Mailer is a Jew. (P. 240)

In this case, however, the gap between what the press reports and
what Mailer’s audience sees is very large. Mailer’s speech is not
prompted by a desire to parade his ego before what he hopes will be
an appreciative audience but to express a feeling that the cumulative
experience of the weekend has given him:

standing on the grass, he felt one suspicion of a whole man closer
to that freedom from dread which occupied the inner drama of his
years, yes, one image closer than when he had come to Washing­
ton four days ago. The sum of what he had done that he consid­
ered good outweighed the dull sum of his omissions these same
four days. So he was happy, and it occurred to him that his clean
sense of himself, with a skin of compassion at such rare moment
for all... this nice anticipation of the very next moves of life it­
self... must mean, indeed could mean nothing else to Christians,
but what they must signify when they spoke of Christ within
them.... (P. 238)

Mailer’s turn to the idea of Christianity here recalls his earlier expla­
nation in the chapter “Why Are We in Vietnam?” (the explanation
delivered by the author as the character sleeps in Occoquan) that the
war represents a suppressed schizophrenia in the American charac­
ter: Americans worshiped the Mystery of Christ and the no Mystery
of the Corporation and found an outlet for the conflict in the war,
which at least opened up one’s emotions for the soldiers and the
orphans.

Now that he sees his own connection to the mystery of Christi­
nity, he gives his speech, the second paragraph of which was not
reported in full by the Post:

“Some of us,” said Mailer to the reporters and the photographer
and the microphone, “were at the Pentagon yesterday, and we
were arrested in order to make our symbolic protest of the war in
Vietnam, and most of us served these very short sentences, but
they are a harbinger of what will come next, for if the war doesn't end next year," then said he, feeling as modest as he had felt on the steps of the Department of Justice, "why then a few of us will probably have to take longer sentences. Because we must. You see, dear fellow Americans, it is Sunday, and we are burning the body and blood of Christ in Vietnam. Yes, we are burning him there, and as we do, we destroy the foundation of this Republic, which is its love and trust in Christ." (P. 239)

Viewed in this broader context, the speech seems sane rather than farfetched; although it is not an immortal speech, it does present Mailer making the kind of gesture for the whole antiwar movement he would have been incapable of four days before. This point is underlined by the final part of the coda to his own story. "As the days went by, he contracted to write an account of the March on the Pentagon, and wrestled with the difficulties of how to do it, and appeared on a television show and amazed himself. For if he had been half as conservative as Russell Kirk in prison, he was half as militant on television as H. Rap Brown" (p. 241).

In short, the narrative of Book One is the narrative of Mailer the character's alteration from the egotist who is greater than the event to the more modest man who is transformed by the event. Even as the narrative claims to be truthful, it also gives the protagonist a clear synthetic function: Mailer the character functions in the narrative in much the same way as a protagonist does in a Bildungsroman: he makes the passage from ignorance to knowledge. The thematic component of Mailer's character is more like that of Fowles's Charles Smithson than that of any other character we have seen. In one respect of course, Mailer and Smithson are very different: where Fowles emphasizes the extent to which Charles is typical of his class and his age, Mailer the author makes no such claims for representativeness. Nevertheless, the thematic function of the character is carried by the whole narrative rather than by particular traits being thematized. Charles functions as part of Fowles's narrative explanation of the shift from the Victorian Age to the modern, and Mailer functions to show the power of the march upon those who participated in it: it transformed even so great an egotist as himself.

Mailer's decision to treat himself this way has some further consequences for our understanding of the progression of Book One and for the relation between it and Book Two. By incorporating the reports of Time and the Washington Post and other newspapers into this narrative which focuses on his own participation in the march, Mailer is implicitly contrasting their methods for getting at the significance
of the events with his own. Their methods of course lead to reporting which flattens out the events, diminishes them, grinds them up in the great mix of personality and one-upmanship they seem so intent on pursuing. Mailer's methods are unusual, but they communicate a substance to the events that is conspicuously lacking in the mass media reports.

One of the most notable features of Mailer's method in Book One is that his account of all the events is largely restricted to the vision of Mailer the character. The narrative of the events at the Ambassador Theater is not interrupted by the more mature vision of the post-march Mailer the way that, say, the narration of *Great Expectations* is interrupted by the vision and voice of the mature Pip. One consequence of this technique is that the authorial audience may be repulsed not just by Mailer the character but also by Mailer the author. Because the authorial audience knows that Mailer the author and Mailer the character are, in some sense, the same person, our impulse is to view the author and the character as closely aligned: we may then conclude that the jerk up on the stage is also the jerk who wrote this book. Mailer employs various means—especially displaying a sharp wit and a style commanding in its flexibility and range—to prevent the authorial audience from simply giving up on him, but we may wonder why he would run the risk. The reason, I think, is not far to seek. By presenting the unmitigated view of Mailer the egotist at the outset, Mailer makes the effect of the transformation, gradual as it is, that much more powerful.

In Book Two, the Novelist, as Mailer says, "passes the baton to the Historian" who broadens his focus considerably and offers an account of the whole event from its planning to its execution to its last minutes and some of its aftermath. The history has a clear thesis: despite the failure of the American press to recognize what was going on, the March on Washington was a significant event in the history of the United States, one that planted the seeds for a new positive growth in the character of the whole country. This thesis comes through frequently, but it is perhaps most notable in three places, the first of which is Mailer's description of the rite of passage undergone by those who remained at the Pentagon after the battle of the wedge Saturday night and on into Sunday morning:

each generation of Americans had forged their own rite, in the forest of the Alleghenies and the Adirondacks, at Valley Forge, at New Orleans in 1812, with Rogers and Clark or at Sutter's Mill, at Gettysburg, the Alamo, the Klondike, the Argonne, Normandy, Pusan—the engagement at the Pentagon was a pale rite of passage next to these, and yet it was probably a true one, for it came to the
spoiled children of a dead de-animalized middle class who had chosen most freely out of the incomprehensible mysteries of moral choice, to make an attack and then hold a testament before the most authoritative embodiment of the principle that America was right, America was might, America was the true religious war of Christ against Communist. (P. 311)

The thesis about the significance of the march again emerges clearly in Mailer's penultimate chapter. He says that the real end of the march was probably in Occoquan and the jail in Washington, D.C., especially among a group from a Quaker farm in Connecticut who continued the protest by practicing noncooperation: "some of them refused to eat or drink and were fed intravenously. Several men at the D.C. jail would not wear prison clothing. Stripped of their own, naked, they were thrown in the Hole. There they lived in cells so small that not all could lie down at once to sleep. For a day they lay naked on the floor, for many days naked with blankets and mattress on the floor. For many days they did not eat nor drink water. Dehydration brought them near to madness” (p. 318).

Mailer speculates about the significance of their actions:

Did they pray, these Quakers, for forgiveness of the nation? . . . The prayers are as Catholic as they are Quaker, and no one will know if they were ever made. . . . But if the end of the March took place in the isolation in which these last pacifists suffered naked in freezing cells, and gave up prayers for penance, then who was to say they were not saints? And who to say that the sins of America were not by their witness a tithe remitted? (Pp. 318-19)

From here Mailer moves to the difficult—and poorly managed—metaphors of the final page, where he sets forth his vision of America about to give birth to either "the most fearsome totalitarianism the world has ever known" or "a babe of a new world brave and tender, artful and wild" (p. 320).³

The power and persuasiveness of Mailer's thesis about the march depend of course on the kind of analysis of its events he offers in Book Two, but it depends more crucially on the representation of himself in Book One. First, Mailer's analysis is frequently imaginative and speculative: his audience's willingness to follow him through his swoops depends upon the extent to which Book One allows us to feel he has earned the right to make them. Second, Book One implicitly but powerfully bears witness to the thesis about the significance of the march: the change in Mailer the character exists as a sign of the event's power to change the country. Then, finally, the two books together serve as a final testament to the power of the march and the
change in the character. Where he once looked upon the event as something to be gotten through, he has ended up being moved to write this extraordinary narrative about it. *The Armies of the Night*, in short, is an example of a narrative that uses the mimetic function of the protagonist in service of a thematic point about the whole event in which that protagonist played a small part.

III

In the discussion of *Pride and Prejudice* in Chapter 2, we have seen that Austen uses Charlotte Lucas's decision to marry Collins as a way to enhance the mimetic power and thematic force of Elizabeth's decision to refuse Darcy's marriage proposal. Because Charlotte takes on the thematic function of illustrating the power of the marriage market, Elizabeth's refusal develops her own thematically significant independence from the market's norms even as it further develops the authorial audience's understanding of her as a possible person. Dickens's use of Wemmick in *Great Expectations* is, in a sense, an elaboration of the same principle of narrative construction: the actions of the minor character, though not significantly advancing or retarding the actual forward movement of the narrative, take on a thematic function that plays a significant part in the progression by affecting the response of the authorial audience to the mimetic and thematic functions of the protagonist. Our sense of both the nature and significance of Pip's difficulty in relating his connection to the lower class with his existence in the upper is enhanced by Dickens's inventive use of Wemmick. Eliot in effect takes this same Principle of Indirect Affective Relevance about as far as possible by elaborating the role of the minor characters to such an extent that they have their own recognizable subplot.

The nature and purpose of Eliot's development of the sometimes complained about Fred Vincy-Mary Garth subplot can perhaps best be explained if we begin by noticing a curious feature of the novel's famous final paragraph:

Her finely-touched spirit had still its fine issues, though they were not widely visible. Her full nature, like that river of which Cyrus broke the strength, spent itself in channels which had no great name on the earth. But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.
What is curious here is that the authorial audience is very willing to accept the narrator’s claims about Dorothea’s contributions to the growing good of the world, but the narrative itself has repeatedly shown us Dorothea’s difficulties in making such contributions. Indeed, for most of the narrative Dorothea’s mimetic portrait emphasizes both her good intentions and her relative ineffectuality. Even her unselfish intercession in Lydgate and Rosamond’s marital difficulties has only a temporary positive effect: it neither prevents Rosamond from bending Lydgate to her will nor gives Lydgate enough solace and resolution to keep him from calling Rosamond his basil plant.

Why then does the authorial audience give credence to the narrator’s claim here? Or, to begin with the prior question, why doesn’t Eliot do more to show us Dorothea contributing to the growing good of the world? Another way of getting at the same point is to ask why the paragraph’s assertions about both Dorothea and the growing good of the world are so carefully qualified—the growing good of the world is only “partly dependent” on such unhistoric acts as Dorothea’s; our own situation is referred to as “not so ill,” and for that we are only “half” in debt to those living a hidden life. The penultimate paragraph not only provides the basis for an answer but indicates that the final paragraph is less a summary of Dorothea’s narrative than the final step in the completion of her story line. That penultimate paragraph provides a more accurate summary, and thereby underlines the major thematic point of Dorothea’s story, one to which our attention has been directed from the very first page of the Prelude:

there is no creature whose inward being is so strong that it is not greatly determined by what lies outside it. A new Theresa will hardly have the opportunity of reforming a conventual life, any more than a new Antigone will spend her heroic piety in daring all for the sake of a brother’s burial: the medium in which their ardent deeds took shape is forever gone. But we insignificant people with our daily words and acts are preparing the lives of many Dorotheas, some of which may present a far sadder sacrifice than that of the Dorothea whose story we know. (Pp. 577–78)

In other words, Eliot did not show us Dorothea doing more to contribute to the growing good of the world, and she does not leave her assertions about the world’s progress unqualified because of the weight Dorothea’s narrative has given to this major thematic point. Both Dorothea’s good intentions and her ineffectuality have been thematized. To show Dorothea doing more to contribute to the world would be to run the risk of undermining the thematizing of her ineffectuality.
fectuality. At the same time to give Dorothea's story its final development in the concluding paragraph, Eliot needed to find some mechanism to incorporate into the novel this secondary thematic point that, despite the impossibility of heroic action, the world can nevertheless improve. As Ralph Rader has suggested, her setting the action at the time of the Great Reform Bill is part of that mechanism.\textsuperscript{5} Over and above her choice of setting, Eliot establishes the mechanism both within and without Dorothea's story line—that is, in what she does in the progression of Dorothea's own story and in the creation and elaboration of Fred and Mary's.

As noted above, Eliot uses Dorothea's own story line primarily to demonstrate the narrative's major thematic interest. Yet the crucial events in the climax of the story line suggest the potential for a different emphasis. When Dorothea undergoes her dark night of the soul, we see her both openly acknowledging her own emotional needs in a way that she never has before—there is a new development in the mimetic component of her character—and going beyond them to think about the good of others. "What should I do—how should I act now, this very day, if I could clutch my own pain, and compel it to silence, and think of those three?" (p. 544). Through the events of this night and Dorothea's long talk with Rosamond the next day, Eliot establishes with great authority and emotional power that Dorothea has the \textit{capacity} to contribute to the growing good of the world. Indeed, in bringing Rosamond and Lydgate more closely together, at least for a time, Eliot does allow us to see that Dorothea can be a positive force for good: she is not totally ineffectual. Yet in a larger sense her contribution to Lydgate comes too late; the good it does is very severely qualified, not only in the Finale but even in the narrator's summary comments after Dorothea's visit to Rosamond:

Poor Rosamond's vagrant fancy had come back terribly scourged—meek enough to nestle under the old despised shelter. And the shelter was still there: Lydgate had accepted his narrowed lot with sad resignation. He had chosen this fragile creature, and had taken the burthen of her life upon his arms. He must walk as he could, carrying that burthen pitifully. (P. 552)

The reason that Eliot does not do more with the positive effects of Dorothea's intervention is of course tied up with what she has already done with Lydgate's story line. She has developed there a mirror reflection of Dorothea's own plot: a character with ardent desires to make the world better, through a series of his own mistaken choices in combination with the forces of Middlemarch society, is unable to translate those desires into effective action. In that respect, Eliot has
also developed the Lydgate plot to elaborate the primary thematic interest. But there are two major differences between the two story lines: (1) Lydgate does not face the obstacle to effective action that Dorothea's womanhood represents for her; and (2) he more clearly represents the way in which the idealistic individual's own egoism may contribute to society's frustration of his ideals; in that sense, he has a thematic function that Dorothea lacks. Because of his egoism, Lydgate is defeated more thoroughly than Dorothea, and because of his greater initial advantages the fall has a far greater impact than it would otherwise. In this respect, we can see that the Lydgate story is itself being summarized in the novel's penultimate paragraph, and we can apply the narrator's comments about Dorothea to him as well: indeed, he can be seen as having experienced a far sadder sacrifice than the sacrifice of the "Dorothea whose story we know." If Eliot were to show Dorothea's intervention as having more positive effects, she would undermine the way in which the progression has been thematizing the Lydgate story line.

Thus, Eliot needs another means to make possible the final development of Dorothea's story—and to develop the secondary thematic point. And the means she chose, I believe, is the Fred and Mary story line. Critics have sometimes complained that this strand of the narrative pales by comparison to the two major story lines, but I think that its differences from them are both purposeful and necessary. Even without a detailed look at their mimetic traits, we can see that Fred and Mary provide a counterpoint to Dorothea and Lydgate because they are less worried about reforming the world than about finding a place in it; they are in effect the representatives of the world that Lydgate and Dorothea would so much like to help. At the same time, they are individualized in such a way—Fred combines good nature and indolence, Mary common sense, industry, and loyalty—that the traits themselves provide both a good part of the basis for the instabilities in their story line and the grounds for the authorial audience to desire their union. Because their story line consists of the working out of that happy union through the unhistoric acts of many characters, it provides a very strong warrant for our belief in the narrator's assertion about the growing good of the world. Through Mary's constancy and Caleb's generosity, Fred is able to find a purpose for his life.

Even more dramatically, Fred is able to marry Mary through the unhistoric acts of Farebrother. Like Dorothea, Farebrother is able to put self to one side and not only intercede with Mary for Fred, but then later to sway Fred from his gambling. Furthermore, in Fred and Mary's eventual succession to Stone Court (itself made possible by
Bulstrode’s desire to make amends to Harriet by doing something for her family) the narrative presents the reclamation of one notable Middlemarch property. The transformation of Stone Court from the home of old Peter Featherstone to the place where Bulstrode is involved in the “murder” of Raffles to the scene of Fred and Mary’s domestic happiness is the narrative’s most visible sign of the growing good of the world.

From this vantage point, we can see that the effects created by this plot are, like those created by Charlotte Lucas and Wemmick, powerful because they complement the narrator’s functions. Eliot’s narrator can talk about the growing good of the world in the last paragraph because she has presented the narrative evidence to support her position. Without Eliot’s elaboration of the Fred and Mary subplot the last step in the completion of Dorothea’s story—indeed, in the completion of the whole narrative—would seem unearned; with them it works very powerfully. In sum, the Fred and Mary subplot is as crucial to the effectiveness of the final development of the Dorothea storyline as Dorothea’s own reactions in her dark night of the soul.

Although there is of course a lot more one could say about the complex interaction of the characters and subplots of Eliot’s narrative, this account of the Indirect Affective Relevance of the Fred and Mary storyline is sufficient to help explain some salient features of the relation between character and progression in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Woolf’s novel offers a different kind of progression from anything we have analyzed to this point. After we are plunged *in medias res* by the opening sentence, “Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself,” we are plunged inside Clarissa’s consciousness (what a lark!), and the forward movement of the narrative is governed by Woolf’s progressive revelation of her character; this technique emphasizes the mimetic component of her character. In effect, the opening plunge produces a tension of unequal knowledge about Clarissa between author and authorial audience. Clarissa emerges from the initial pages as a highly particularized, if unextraordinary, woman of the British upper class. She has a love of life and an awareness of its chaos; she dislikes discord and seeks to please others; she has the gift of knowing others by instinct; she wonders about the course of her life, whether she should have married Peter Walsh instead of Richard Dalloway.

Some of this revelation of the character contains a potential for further development in the progression: Clarissa’s love of life and her fear of its imminent chaos exist as a potential instability. The narrative does not build upon it directly, but it remains an opening to be
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exploited, and an issue to be explored in later sections of the narrative. Woolf soon does complicate the progression by tension in several ways. First, she introduces Peter Walsh, who among other things, raises questions about the significance of what it means to be Clarissa Dalloway in these circumstances; his most famous question of course is “What is the sense of your parties?” In a sense, Peter is asking the question analogous to one asked by the authorial audience: so, what's the point, or more politely, is the point the same as that of a dramatic monologue—fleshing out the mimetic portrait of the character—or is there also a thematic function associated with the character? Second, Woolf's technique of offering shifting and limited access to the consciousnesses of many characters and the repetitions of imagery within those different consciousnesses work together to suggest an underlying connection between them all. The third complication depends in part on this second method: Woolf develops the consciousness of Septimus Smith as, in effect, one side of Clarissa's own consciousness. Septimus is an example of a mind that has been overpowered by the chaos that Clarissa fears.

The previous analysis of Middlemarch helps explain what is distinctive about Woolf's use of Septimus here. The attention given to the revelation of his consciousness is again largely a part of a progression by tension rather than one by instability. To be sure, there is a progression towards his suicide that arises out of the developing instability between his mental state and the treatments suggested by Holmes and Bradshaw, but the narrative pays more attention to revealing his state than to generating expectations about his eventual fate. But just as the Fred and Mary plot serves to demonstrate that the world can become progressively better, so too this revelation serves to reinforce the power of Clarissa's anxiety about the danger of living. Just as Fred and Mary's story has its own independent development, so too does Septimus's. But that development does not follow the progression of an action; it is in effect a subplot of character. Woolf brings the two strands of the narrative more directly together than Eliot does: at the party, Woolf brings the internal instability within Clarissa to its climax as she comes face to face with the chaos brought into her party by the news of Septimus's death. At this point all the previous complications of the progression come together. The potential for the internal instability between Clarissa's attitudes toward life is now actualized: will her fear overcome her love? In coming to the fore, this instability also functions as a test of the significance of Clarissa's life. She has defended herself against Peter's questions by saying that her parties were “an offering” (p. 184) to life, a way of bringing together people who would not otherwise be
brought together. At this juncture, her ability to make such an offer-  
ing and her faith in it is severely tested: "Oh! thought Clarissa, in the  
middle of my party, here's death, she thought" (p. 279). And at the  
same time, her ability to work through the instability depends upon  
her capacity to integrate Septimus's death into the life that continues  
around her. Withdrawing from the main room, she thinks,  

Somehow it was her disaster, her disgrace. It was her punishment to  
see sink and disappear here a man, there a woman in this profound  
darkness, and she forced to stand here in her evening dress.  
She had schemed; she had pilfered. She was never wholly admirable.  
She had wanted success. Lady Bexborough and the rest of it...  

Yet in the course of looking out the window, Clarissa is able to turn  
the disgrace into gladness.  

She parted the curtains; she looked. Oh, but how surprising!—in the  
room opposite the old lady stared straight at her! She was going to  
bed. ... She was going to bed, in the room opposite. It was fascinating  
to watch her, moving about, that old lady, crossing the room, coming  
to the window. Could she see her? It was fascinating, with people still  
laughing and shouting in the drawing-room, to watch that old woman,  
quite quietly, going to bed. The young man had killed himself; but she  
did not pity him; with the clock striking the hour, one, two, three, she  
did not pity him, with all this going on. There! the old lady had put  
out her light! The whole house was dark now with this going on, she  
repeated, and the words came to her, Fear no more the heat of the sun.  
She must go back to them. But what an extraordinary night! She felt  
somehow very much like him—the young man who had killed himself.  
She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away. The clock was  
striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. He made her feel the  
beauty; made her feel the fun. But she must go back. (Pp. 283-84)  

Sparked by her connection with the old lady who goes on with this  
thing called life in a way very different from that of Clarissa, Mrs.  
Dalloway is able to enter imaginatively into both the old lady's life  
and Septimus's. She recognizes his suicide as a positive step, yet  
something very different from her own offering. In effect, Clarissa is  
able to accept her fear of life's chaos and subsume it under her love  
for life in all its variation. Woolf then ends the narrative by affirming  
the importance of Clarissa. Filled with new vitality by her integration,  
Clarissa does return to the others, and, as the final sentences indicate,  
produces an extraordinary effect upon her biggest doubter.
"I will come," said Peter, but he sat on for a moment. What is this terror? what is this ecstasy? he thought to himself. What is it that fills me with this extraordinary excitement? It is Clarissa, he said. For there she was. (P. 296)

The mimetic portrait of the character is complete, her thematic functions of illustrating the connectedness of disparate individuals and of demonstrating the possibility of affirming life in the face of its own terror are complete, and the author's implicit case for the value of such a character is complete. But no substantial change in Clarissa's fate or fortune has occurred. Her moment of integration may or may not signal a new permanent attitude toward life and her role in it. The narrative leads us to see it as an important victory for her, but it does not provide assurances that her fear of life's chaos has been overcome completely. Similarly Peter's acknowledgment of her importance to him is not presented as something that will significantly alter their relationship. The ending, in short, is in keeping with the rest of the narrative, which gives us a progressive revelation of character rather than the progression of an action.

Woolf's use of Peter Walsh represents a kind of thematizing that we have not encountered before—and helps us more fully understand the mimetic-thematic relationship of Clarissa's character. Peter's progression from questioning her value to affirming it does not direct the authorial audience to any specific thematic conclusion (the moment of integration does that) but points to the significance of this apparently unextraordinary woman. The thematic force here is subordinated to the mimetic portrait; it is Clarissa we are to focus on most fully, but through Peter we are told that this kind of a woman, with her flowers, her fears, and her festive parties, has a significance rivalling that of any of the great personages who linger on the fringes of the book. In one sense, Woolf uses Peter Walsh to supply an element of her portrait of a lady that Browning did not need in his portrait of a duke: Browning could let the Duke's remarkable actions and character speak for themselves; it is easy for audiences to accept the implicit significance and interest of the Duke and his actions. Woolf, on the other hand, needs a way to build the authorial audience's acceptance of Clarissa's significance into the narrative. Peter Walsh is that way—which is to say, Peter performs that synthetic function.

IV

I have suggested above that the comprehensiveness of this theory of character and progression ought to be judged by both the predictive
power and the flexibility of its theoretical principles; I now want to look more closely at their predictive power. The principles in a sense both lead one to predict and cause one to shy away from predictions—and that double movement is, I think, a source of strength. They lead one to predictions because they establish a set of categories for examining character, and the results of their application here represent a good cross-section of the possible relations among the postulated components of character. We have seen mimetic functions subordinated to thematic ones (1984, The French Lieutenant’s Woman, The Armies of the Night) and to synthetic ones (If on a winter’s night a traveler). We have seen thematic functions subordinated to mimetic ones (“My Last Duchess,” Mrs. Dalloway). We have seen mimetic and thematic functions move along parallel tracks where one is not clearly subordinated to the other, though one may be more centrally related to the progression of the narrative (Pride and Prejudice and, on the other side of the station, Middlemarch). We have seen the synthetic function of characters remain firmly in the background of works (“My Last Duchess,” Pride and Prejudice, A Farewell to Arms), and we have seen it move intermittently into the foreground (1984, The French Lieutenant’s Woman, Great Expectations). We have seen the mimetic and thematic functions of characters fused (“The Beast in the Jungle”) and the synthetic and thematic functions fused (If on a winter’s night a traveler). We have seen thematic functions in harmony (most of our examples) and in ethical conflict (A Farewell to Arms). These kinds of relationships, for the most part, are not unique to the individual narratives in which they appear, and so the analyses here can serve as a guide to possible patterns of character in other narratives.

Yet as the above parenthetical groupings indicate, the theory must move away from prediction because not all the generally similar relationships among the components of character get established in the same way. To take perhaps the clearest example, the progressions of the three narratives that I identify as all subordinating the mimetic to the thematic—1984, The French Lieutenant’s Woman, The Armies of the Night—are very different from each other. There are of course general patterns of progression too, and these patterns allow us to make such general predictions as (1) representations of actions will typically have mimetic and thematic functions of the main characters moving along parallel tracks while the synthetic functions remain in the background and (2) novels with a central thematic point such as 1984 will subordinate the mimetic function to the thematic function. The trouble with these generalizations, however, is precisely that they are too general. They do not tell us much more about any given narrative than its generic classification does. Once we notice a general simi-
larity between, say, the two tragic-like patterns we have seen—"The Beast in the Jungle" and A Farewell to Arms—we can only become more aware of how far removed the generalizations are from the ways in which a specific progression will establish the relations among the components of character. Noticing the differences between these two narratives—and indeed, among all the other narratives we have examined—will force us back from predictions about character and progression in any given narrative to the principles for analyzing it. Our narratives have given us numerous examples of when and how instabilities and tensions can be introduced, complicated, and resolved and those examples can function as a guide to others, but clearly not as a set of pre-formed molds into which others may be poured. In this respect, the demand for flexibility is more honored than the demand for predictive power; such a relationship is appropriate to the extent that the relation between character and progression in narrative is as diverse as I claim.8

The comprehensiveness of this inquiry needs to be considered in another way. What exactly are the nature of my theory's claims for comprehensiveness vis-à-vis other theories of character and progression? Does it purport to sweep all other approaches out of the way? What are its limitations? First, it claims to be a comprehensive rhetorical theory of character, not the comprehensive theory. As the introduction briefly suggests in its discussion of the structuralist approach to character, this theory is designed to enable its practitioner to achieve a certain kind of knowledge about texts, knowledge about them as communicative transactions between author and reader. It defines the text as the site of that rhetorical transaction, and it views those transactions as having both a formal and an affective structure. In effect, the study says that if you want to know how character and progression participate in these transactions between an author and his hypothetical audience, then read me. If, however, you want to read literature as, say, a sign of its creator's psyche and thus analyze the ways in which it reflects or reveals that psyche, then you are interested in a different kind of knowledge, one that for some critical purposes is more important than the kind offered here, but not one that this study claims to offer or conflict with. Such a study would take up what we might call the expressive component of character, the way in which at some level it is a part of its creator's character or personality. Such a study might usefully complement the conclusions of this one, but there is no necessary logical connection between them, i.e., the expressive analysis can neither convincingly confirm nor deny the conclusions of the rhetorical and vice versa.
Conclusion

At the same time, my attempt to develop a rhetorical theory of character does not mean that my principles and conclusions will never come into conflict with other approaches to the text. To the extent that Levin, Scholes, Brooks, and Fetterley have been concerned with establishing principles relevant to the transactions between authors and readers offered by texts, their somewhat different frameworks overlapped with mine, and I have tried to keep my discussions of them within the boundaries of the overlap. My response to Levin focused on our shared goal of developing interpretive methods that would correspond to the "literal particulars" of the text in an a posteriori rather than an a priori way; my analysis of Scholes focused on our shared principle that interpretations ought to meet the test of explanatory adequacy; my discussion of Brooks focused on his similar purpose of explaining "reading for the plot" rather than on his use of psychoanalysis per se; or, again, my concern with Fetterley was not with the value of her own response to the text but rather with the validity of her claim that accepting the overt story of *A Farewell to Arms* means buying into the covert one she identifies. I have had to work through the differences, within the areas of overlap, between my principles and those of these four critics in order to establish the particular claims of comprehensiveness and validity that I wanted to make.

Even within this restricted definition of comprehensiveness, some features of the theory may seem either strange or too limited or both. Because the theory may seem to read narratives written over a two-hundred-year span (from *Tristram Shandy* to *If on a winter's night a traveler*) in essentially the same way, it may seem to be traveling under the banner "Never historicize!" Can the differences of sociohistorical situatedness between Austen and Calvino be as irrelevant to the rhetorical transaction as the theory seems to indicate? The first part of the answer is that the appearance of irrelevance is deceptive. Since authors typically assume that their audiences know many things, including social and cultural codes extant at the time of their writing, those elements of sociohistorical situatedness are very much a part of the transaction and very relevant to the analysis of these narratives, though sometimes, like the synthetic function of characters, they remain in the background. Reading *Pride and Prejudice* in the authorial audience requires one to know such things as social conventions about visiting among the upper classes, social codes about feminine delicacy, what it means to have one's estate entailed, what it means to be the daughter of a gentleman, what it means to get one's money by trade in that society, and so on. One can always read the novel to see how it is using these codes and one can always read against those
uses. One might, for example, note the way that servants are used and treated in the novel and develop a critique about how Elizabeth's happiness and good fortune is juxtaposed with and dependent upon a working class that Austen herself takes for granted. Such a reading could go on to undermine any positive evaluation of both Elizabeth and the implied author. In other words, considering the sociohistorical situatedness of the narrative would in this case appear to have the effect of disrupting the congenial rhetorical transaction that I have sketched in Chapter 1—and one could imagine other such readings for the other narratives I have examined.

Notice first that the approach I have taken here does not preclude such readings but rather sketches the preliminary steps to them. To disrupt the transaction, to talk back productively to the text, one needs to know the grounds upon which it is being built, and one knows that, I claim, by analyzing the progression. In that sense, these kinds of readings are not only welcome within my approach but are variations, using both historical knowledge and ethical standards, of the kind of reading I have done of Hemingway. More generally, historical knowledge can be extremely important for the analysis of the progression, and the principles of my rhetorical approach dictate that it be used wherever relevant. For example, one must know conventions of both nineteenth- and twentieth-century Anglo-American narrative (as a minimum) in order to understand the progression of The French Lieutenant's Woman. Nevertheless, the necessary condition is not sufficient: knowing those conventions will not allow one to understand the functions of Fowles’s playing with them. To do that, one must look at the internal logic and affective structure of the whole progression. In this respect, the rhetorical commitment of my theory will always lead me to privilege the transaction itself more than the conditions under which the transaction is produced. This commitment and this privileging do not mean that the theory wants finally to turn away from history toward the realm of the “purely literary,” but rather wants to think about issues such as ethics and ideology as they are reflected in the rhetorical transaction of reading. That Hemingway was, like most men of his generation, a sexist is less important for my approach than the way the ideology of sexism is built into the rhetorical transaction of the narrative. The striking feature of that transaction, as we have seen, is how it requires the authorial audience both to watch Hemingway stand with Catherine above Frederic and to participate with him in his easy assumptions of her secondary, because womanly, importance.

As far as character itself goes, historicizing the narrative may reveal the greater significance of some attributes than others and may be
required for the authorial audience's understanding of some thematic functions. But if I am right that the progression itself actualizes thematic functions and focuses our attention on specific issues of the narrative, then what one most needs to know is the narrative conventions operating at the time the narrative is written. If one knows those conventions, then using that knowledge as part of one's analysis of the progression will act as a check on one's historical knowledge: it will reveal—or sometimes fill—gaps that we can then appropriately deal with.

Again because of my focus on the rhetorical transaction, if I were to historicize my project in another way and try to write a history of character and progression in the British and American novel, it would be a very different kind of history from one that would be written by a neo-Marxist or a new historicist critic. I would be interested in such things as the power relationships among different members of society during different periods of the last three centuries, and I would be concerned about the functioning of "ideological state apparatuses," because these things would affect the conditions of narrative and an individual author's awareness of the possibilities of character and progression at a given time. These matters, however, would not be the focus of my history. Instead, I would try to construct a narrative about the development of the variety of forms of progression with particular emphasis on the uses of character within progressions. I would try to explain such things as how the novel expanded and contracted and expanded again between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; how changes in the conventions of mimetic representation allowed for new ways to develop thematic functions; how the principles of progression in Fielding were complicated by Thackeray and Dickens, while those of an Austen novel were complicated by a James and then transformed by Faulkner; how new principles were forged out of potentialities in eighteenth century fiction by figures such as Joyce and Woolf. To the extent that my history told a neat, linear story, I would be suspicious of it not only because of the complex relations between the development of narrative and the development of culture in general but also because narrative itself has been so various and diverse at least since the eighteenth century. A history that was somehow adequate to that diversity would, I am convinced, cause us to refashion our understanding of how narratives relate to each other—and might therefore have implications for anyone doing a sociocultural history of the novel. I would need to have far greater erudition than I can now lay claim to in order to write such a history, but the line I have drawn here from Austen to Dickens to Eliot to Woolf in discuss-
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The Principle of Indirect Affective Relevance is a small, incomplete example of the kind of analysis this history would undertake.

In summary, then, my response to the question of the relation between my rhetorical theory and one that stresses reading through history is that the two are largely compatible, though the objects of their focus are quite different, and sometimes their findings will impinge on each other in significant ways.

Whether this theory of character and progression achieves its vaulting ambition or o'erleaps itself and falls on its face, it is with the value of the rhetorical transactions that I want to end. To participate in the progression of Winston's doomed rebellion, in Elizabeth's movement toward happiness, Marcher's struggle for tragic illumination, Charles's attempt to shed one age for another; to understand what it means to be a Wemmick or a Reader, to be tossed and turned by Hemingway's treatment of Catherine: these experiences offer no guarantee of improving our own characters but they do offer a kind of life that in its intensity and diversity would have preserved Marcher himself from the springing of the Beast. We are more fortunate than he, not simply in that we lack his obsession, but that we can live by reading Henry James—and George Orwell and Jane Austen and Charles Dickens and . . . and in doing that we live a life that by its very nature will have closure but not completeness.