Notes

Introduction

1. Critics using this oppositional model as a paradigm for understanding the literature I will be discussing include the following representative sample: Howe, Lyde, Nevius, L. Trilling, Chase, Gallo, Moore, D. Parker, Aarnes, Brucher, Överland, Takács, Quilligan, Costa, and Sorkin.

2. Among the best known of the numerous publications promoting ethical criticism are probably Allan Bloom’s Closing of the American Mind, Wayne Booth’s Company We Keep, and Gerald Graff’s Literature Against Itself.

3. Of course, there have been a number of significant attempts to account for the interaction of the individual and society in terms of the relationship between psychology and ideology, among them Habermas’s Communication and the Evolution of Society, Jameson’s Political Unconscious, Luhmann’s Differentiation of Society, and, earlier, Horkheimer and Adorno’s Dialectic of Enlightenment and Fromm’s Escape from Freedom. However, such texts do not provide the kind of dialectical conception of psyche and socius necessary to a full understanding of their existential symbiosis. Such efforts have usually been circumscribed by their reliance upon categories too discrete and static to illuminate the subtle ways in which the terms they separate overlap; or they have been limited by a teleology that inevitably issues in some form of reification reminiscent of Hegel’s Geist. These forms of reification include a priori, rationalist structures of communication; structuralist semiotics; psychological structures based on the hegemony of the ego; essentialist theories of human nature; and the like.

4. As Williams points out in “Dominant, Residual, and Emergent,” history doesn’t fit into tidy, chronologically discrete categories. At any given time in the history of a culture, one can isolate what he calls residual, dominant, and emergent values. These are, respectively, values left over from a time past, values that are currently the most pervasive and influential, and values just coming into being.

5. Versions of my chapters on The House of Mirth, Death of a Salesman, The Crying of Lot 49, and Something Happened have been published or are forthcoming under the following titles: “Beyond Morality: Lily Bart, Lawrence Selden,

Chapter 1

1. For example, Lily Bart has been variously seen as a rather independent, even somewhat rebellious, character (Ammons 30–34, Wershoven 58, Dimock 124), as the victim of an almost naturalistic determinism (Lyde 135, Nevius 56–57), and as her own worst enemy owing either to her tendency to act too quickly (Fryer 90) or to her tendency not to act quickly enough (Auchincloss 24).

2. Other critics who believe that Lily turns to Selden as a moral alternative to the Trenor-Dorset milieu include Dimock (134), Howe (124, 126), Lyde (129), and Walton (66).

3. I do not intend any kind of biological essentialism here. Certainly, men and women both are liable to the same kinds of commodified consciousness and capable of the same kinds of transcendental projects. (Indeed, one task of this chapter will be to explore the symbiotic relationship between Lily's transcendent project and that of Lawrence Selden.) Wharton's novel, however,foregrounds the psychology of self-reification to which women in our culture have, historically, been heir.

4. See, for example, Wershoven, Montgomery (897), Dimock, and Fryer (86).

5. High society then consisted of both old New York families (descendants of British and Dutch colonists) and nouveaux riches (post-Civil War, industrial millionaires) who were marrying/buying their way into the established families. The Gryces, Stepneys, Penistons, and Van Osburghs number among the first group; the Trenors and Dorsets are examples of the second.

6. See, for example, Wolff (116–17), D. Trilling (100), and Howe (124).

7. The belief of some critics that Lily is sexually responsive seems to be based on a confusion of erotic display with erotic feeling or on the fact that the critics themselves find her sexually attractive. See, for example, Fryer (77), McDowell (47), and D. Trilling (113). In contrast, Shulman notes that Lily does not act from "genuine sexual impulses" (16), but he develops the idea differently than I do.

8. See, for example, Wolff (111), Auchincloss (14), Lawson (36), and Walton (60).

9. Shulman discusses the conflict between what he calls Lily's "real self"—her ideal, moral self, which she and Selden associate with timeless
beauty—and her “captive self,” the crass, self-serving traits she shares with Bertha Dorset. However, Shulman doesn’t interrogate the psychological motives informing the protagonist’s desire for the ideal.

10. Nietzsche distinguishes between morality, which he defines as adherence to social conventions, and ethics, which he defines as the philosophical problematic underlying those conventions. While Wharton’s critics use these two terms interchangeably, it is clear from the way in which they use them that the issue here is, in Nietzschean terms, an ethical one: the philosophical implications underlying the adherence to, or breach of, social conventions are the area of critical concern.

11. Although they develop the idea differently than I do, Gimbel (36) and Wolff (116) both compare Lily to a child.

12. There is a good deal of disagreement about the nature and meaning of Lily’s death. For a representative sample, see Ammons (37, 42), Fryer (94), McDowell (43–45), and Walton (67). While Lawson believes, as I do, that death is “the only escape left for Lily” (34), he develops the idea differently.

Chapter 2

1. For similar views of Gatsby, see Trilling (234–35, 240–43), Chase (300–301), Gallo (41–43), Parker (34–36, 42–43), Stern (192, 197), and Moore (334). An important exception to this critical consensus is provided by Fussell, who believes that the novel represents Fitzgerald’s deliberate and scathing criticism of modern America, of the American dream, and of Jay Gatsby, the representative modern American (46–49).

2. While Harvey observes that Gatsby is Tom’s “double,” and Lehan notes that Gatsby “grotesquely resembles” Buchanan (111), they develop this idea differently than I do.

3. For example, Allen reduces the character’s role in the novel to nothing more than “a symbol for Gatsby” (110), and Burnam finds Daisy unworthy of “any exhaustive analysis” (107).

4. For an interesting argument that Daisy is more cold-bloodedly destructive—and evil—than either Tom or Gatsby, see Lockridge.

5. Three noteworthy exceptions to the tendency to sever Gatsby from his history are Bruccoli (223), Fussell (46–47), and Audhuy (119): they recognize that Gatsby shares the corruption of the world he lives in. However, they develop the implications of this observation differently than I do.

6. At the risk of oversimplification, the power of the commodity to subvert a narrative can be illustrated if one imagines Fassbinder’s Effi Briest in color. One effect of the film’s having been shot in black and white is that the power of the commodity over the viewer is thereby reduced: we can see rather clearly how the characters are seduced by their possessions because the black-and-white
screen allows us to remain sufficiently beyond the setting’s seductive appeal. It would have been, I think, more difficult to see the role played by setting, by the ubiquitous consumer objects that define so much of the characters’ lives, had the setting been rendered à la Doctor Zhivago or The Sound of Music.

Chapter 3

1. For similar arguments, see, among others, Schlueter and Flanagan, Bigsby, and B. Parker.

2. See, for example, Welland, Brucher, and Innes.

3. Many critics have made this point. See for example, Aarnes, Overland, Steinberg, and Bently. While Williams believes that the psychological and political dramas are fused in the play, he doesn’t analyze the nature of this fusion.

4. August notes the importance of Willy’s abandonment by his father and suggests that his early lack of a male role model is responsible for many of the male role problems he has as an adult.

5. For a complete discussion of the cultural manifestations of narcissism (including useful comparisons of the work of Freud, Melanie Klein, Heinz Kohut, Otto Kernberg, Christopher Lasch, and others), see Alford.

6. Schneider discusses “the return of the repressed” in the play, but he focuses his analysis on Willy’s guilty hatred of Ben and on Biff and Happy’s Oedipal murder of their father.

7. See, for example, Bigsby (116), Szondi (21), Mottram (31), and Jackson (16).

8. Of course, Happy’s success with the easy “pick-ups” during the restaurant scene is much more believable than his rather outrageous success with the fiancées of his executive coworkers. Although his stories of sexual prowess have the familiar ring of macho exaggeration, there is no sign in the text that we are expected to believe Happy is lying about his sexual exploits with these brides-to-be. This part of Happy’s history thus might be an example of how a playwright’s fantasy projection can inform characterization.

9. For readers whose familiarity with the play is derived primarily from the Volker Schlöndorff film version (with Dustin Hoffman), it is important to note that the sexual dimension present in Linda’s film characterization is not present in the 1949 text of the play. For example, in this film version, in response to Willy’s affectionate “Come on, give me a little something,” which he says to his wife as he leaves to ask Howard for a New York job, Linda performs a seductive little shimmy and runs gaily into the house. No such interaction between husband and wife occurs in Miller’s original version of the play.

10. Hadomi also notes that Willy’s suicide is an “act of self-deception” (157). While she doesn’t romanticize his suicide, neither does she analyze the motives behind it. She believes that Willy kills himself simply because “in his mind suicide becomes . . . equated with success” (168).
11. Although the set designer, Jo Mielziner, was responsible for the “dreamlike” environment that surrounds the Loman house, Miller liked this aspect of the set, he says, because it “was an emblem of Willy’s intense longing for the promises of the past” and “parallel with the script” (Timebends 188).

Chapter 4

1. For similar binary readings, see Hunt (40), Takács (302–4), Olsen (161), Quilligan (201), Hays (23, 32), and Green (37). Hite (80, 89), Ward (28–29), and Watson (71) believe, as I do, that while Oedip’s view of her situation rests on a binary understanding of contemporary reality, the text suggests that her view is mistaken; however, they develop this idea differently than I do. In contrast, Palmeri argues that Oedip “declines the either-or choice that her time presses upon her” (995), and Pearce suggests that Oedip finally transcends the emotional, if not epistemological, limitations of her binary world through her growing “commit[ment] to human connection” (147).

2. For similar readings of entropy in Lot 49, see Takács (297–99), Schaub (51–58), and Tanner (67). In contrast, Mangel might be taken to agree with me that in Lot 49 thermodynamic entropy and information entropy both tend in the direction of infinite disorder—which I read as utter randomness, nondifferentiation, or sameness—for she does not distinguish the two kinds of entropy at all. Even “the nature of language itself,” she observes, “fails [in Lot 49] to differentiate and order” (206).

3. For a fairly thorough account of the novel’s various levels of uncertainty or indeterminacy, see Olsen.

4. For a complete discussion of the mirror stage, see Lacan’s “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I.”

5. Indeed, Conroy argues, in his superb discussion of American consumer society, that Oedipa’s binary logic, itself an American cultural production, supplies throughout the novel the escape she seeks from the painful uncertainties of human connection. Similarly, Dugdale suggests that the protagonist uses the Tristano quest, like a religious quest, to escape the “repugnant aspects of her society” (129). I believe both critics, however, underestimate the degree and sincerity of Oedipa’s existential struggle.

Chapter 5

1. Other critics whose readings of the novel rest on the premise that the individual and the socius are interactive but discrete entities include, for example, DelFattore, Aldridge, Tucker, LeClair, Vonnegut, Strehle, Canaday, Merrill, and Potts.

2. As Heidegger has observed, fear is the way the inauthentic person lives
his or her anxiety about existential situatedness. For example, the groundless fear that one doesn’t have enough life insurance or that one’s house will be robbed are externalizations of—and attempts to avoid—this anxiety.

3. See also Merrill (93), Carton (44), Sebouhian (51), and Canaday (104). A noteworthy exception is Strehle, who believes that Slocum “deliberately murders his son” (110).

4. In his discussion of Slocum’s “coming of age” in the Lacanian Symbolic order, Mellard acknowledges, but does not analyze, the implications of the protagonist’s adjustment to his cultural milieu. Similarly, Sorkin notes, “That Slocum is normal, that in the end he epitomizes his culture, is precisely the problem” (52).

5. In contrast, Tucker notes that Slocum’s condition at the novel’s close is one he created for himself (328, 340); however, Tucker does not develop the implications of this observation.