I want to talk about something embarrassing: direct address to readers or audiences. In narrative contexts it always poses problems, unless the speaker is making a joke. Groucho Marx or Woody Allen or a character in a Godard film can turn to the camera to "break the frame" with an ironic remark and get a laugh, as can the narrators in novels by W. M. Thackeray, John Fowles, or John Barth. Direct address in narrative begins to embarrass, however, when it is no longer offered in jest—when the speaker who assails "you" is in earnest.

If I may judge by my experience of academic readers—colleagues and students—I can safely guess that you dislike serious direct address in texts. You find it preachy, or cute, or coy. You think of it as a technical error, a lapse of artistry, a cheap effect. It irritates you when you run across it in Victorian novels, and it is irritating you at this very moment, as you read. Why is that?

I contend that our prejudice against earnest (as opposed to ironic) direct address stems from our culture's aversion to feminine gestures. In Victorian novels written by women, earnest direct address evolved as an alternative to public speaking "in person," which was forbidden to respectable females. Realist novels provided opportunities for women to speak through their narrators to "you," in a serious, nonliterary way seldom practiced by male Victorian novelists. Those earnest interventions, those direct appeals to "you," took on a feminine gender in the middle of the nineteenth century. As women's narrators used them to intervene in their fictional texts, women novelists used them to intervene in history. Hence, in the feminine "gendered intervention," history and text converge while a feminine presence is projected, for the moment, into the reading experience.
And that feminine presence inspires embarrassment, even now, when women's literal presence in public is a matter of course.

Recent criticism focusing on the role ideology has played in forming the literary canon has taught us that women's writing has been systematically devalued, and for the most part flatly excluded from the Great Anglo-American Tradition. Most of that criticism concentrates on what narratologists would call the "story" (histoire) in men's and women's novels, or, as Seymour Chatman puts it, "the what in a narrative that is depicted" (19). Some elements of story that have been receiving attention from ideologically inspired critics include the nature of characters and events represented in fiction, the reiteration of typical scenes and themes, and the "moral" or message transmitted by the text. Until now, no one has scrutinized the "discourse" (récit) of mid-nineteenth-century novels, the precise ways in which those stories get told. By focusing on interruptions in the story—which Gérard Genette calls "narrative interventions," thus avoiding the negative connotations of "intrusions"—I propose to examine a less obvious difference between "masculine" and "feminine" Victorian texts. In analyses (not readings) of individual novels, I look at the structure, stance, content, and evident intention of passages addressed to "you," in order to uncover that difference.

I stress that these are analyses, not readings, because interpretation is not the goal of this study. I propose no new way of understanding what Victorian novels are trying to communicate. Instead, I am looking at how they try, in order to point out that critical prejudice against narrative techniques can be as much affected by issues of gender as can critical assumptions about the forms and contents of fiction.

The three parts of this book are themselves interventions in three ongoing conversations among critics. Part I enters the debate among feminist theorists over the usefulness of androcentric critical models for feminist criticism and offers a model combining feminism with structuralist narratology. Part II addresses criticism of novels written by male and female authors, examining narrative interventions as guides to what kind of novels these are. Following the model proposed in Part I, I analyze novels whose narrators rely upon feminine, masculine, and cross-gendered modes of intervention, looking at their authorial intrusions in the context of the novelists' gendered experience and their implied or expressed novelistic goals. Part III moves the conversation to the realm of history, both social
and literary. It describes the historical circumstances under which men and women found themselves making choices among modes of narrative stance in novels and it questions the theoretical and critical tradition that has suppressed or derided earnest direct address to this day.

In that it makes narrative interventions in nineteenth-century novels its central subject, this study does not seek to (re)do what other books on feminist theory or Victorian fiction have done. Because the combination of feminism, narratology, and Victorian studies must necessarily frustrate some critical expectations, even as it raises new ones, I want to outline what the book will not do, before beginning to do what it will.

First, although speaking of "gendered writing" inevitably raises the specter of "difference" in its many contemporary forms, I will not tackle more than a few of its manifestations. My primary concern with gender differences springs neither from deconstruction's model of différence nor from the new French feminisms' psychoanalytic theories of essential sexual difference. I am treating gender instead as a social construct, a set of learned behaviors that an individual adopts to express or demonstrate his or her gender identification. Gender, in this social or anthropological sense, includes outward signs of one's sexual identity, such as clothing, gestures, vocal inflection and—I would suggest—narrative strategies. Just as men and women can cross dress to present themselves in the mode associated with another gender, novelists, too, can choose (somewhat less self-consciously, no doubt) to use techniques associated with the other sex. Eve Sedgwick, Teresa de Lauretis, and Nancy Miller, among others, have looked into the ways gender colors the production of story in narrative; to complement what they have done, the present study concentrates on gender's influence upon discourse.

Though narratology's basic distinction between story and discourse and its precise language for describing textual phenomena are central to this project, I will not be limiting my categories of narrative stance to those already proposed by other narratologists. Among them, only Gerald Prince has elaborated a theory of the "narratee" (augmented by the work of Mary Ann Piwowarczyk) to account for the possible answers to the question, Whom does the narrator address? Prince has described the relation between narrator and narratee that prevails in many canonical texts, from the beginnings of the novel to the modern period. As I intend to show, however, the same relation does not always prevail in British and American novels of
Preface

the mid-nineteenth century. Like most contemporary narrative theorists, Prince takes it for granted that the narratee is always a fictive, created figure, standing in roughly the same relation to the actual reader as does the narrator to the actual author. In the strictest sense, this assumption is certainly valid: when actual readers vary so obviously, from period to period, or from person to person, the logical impossibility of "the real reader's" presence in any text is obvious. And, to be sure, every text must inscribe a created "reader" within either what Prince calls its "overjustifications" or what Wolfgang Iser has called its "gaps" and "indeterminacies." But analysis of narrative discourse has not yet accounted for texts in which the narrative voice seeks to efface the boundaries between the inscribed reader or narratee and the actual reader who holds the book and reads. At one extreme, a narrator might do this by speaking to Prince's "zero-degree narratee," who possesses only the minimal characteristics necessary to be competent to decode the text. At the other extreme, however, certain realist novels' narrators encourage the actual reader to identify with a narratee liberally endowed with characteristics and frequently addressed as "you."

Like other narratologists, I do not follow the traditional assumption that narrative interventions are, a priori, out of place in realist texts. Under the influence of an Anglo-American formalist theory of the most aesthetically pleasing way to render truth in fiction, critics in the first half of the twentieth century subscribed, for the most part, to certain prejudices about the impressionistic fictional forms best suited to maintaining an "illusion of reality." Modern criticism of realist fiction retains many Jamesian attitudes; following James, modern critics took it for granted that reminders of an author's presence, through narrative interventions and addresses to the reader, must necessarily disturb the illusion and thereby undermine the goals of realism. More recently, postmodern critics have returned to Dr. Johnson's commonsense observation that no one sitting in a London theater watching a play ever "really imagines himself at Alexandria" (329). When we look at the insistently metafictional frame that Thackeray, for instance, places around Vanity Fair, we are no longer surprised to realize that such novels are always and inevitably about novels, and that narrative interventions draw attention to this fact.

I am not willing, however, to rest comfortably with what has by now become a critical truism: all texts are self-referential, all writing mirrors itself, all fiction is, first and foremost, about fiction. These assumptions,
PREFACE

which serve critics of eighteenth- and twentieth-century novels so well, cannot account for all the conventions of nineteenth-century realism. Every novelist is interested in novels, and all fictional narratives comment, more or less overtly, upon the conventions of fictions that preceded them or the conventions they “take up, cite, parody, refute, or generally transform,” as Jonathan Culler puts it (Pursuit of Signs 38). But, as political critics (Marxists and, more recently, feminists among them) have long recognized, many of the realist novelists were also interested in the world of lived experience and in the impact their novels might have on it. Writers such as Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot, and Harriet Beecher Stowe thought of the novel as a vehicle for exerting influence on readers who would, in turn, work changes in the worlds of politics, society, and personal morality. These women novelists had very specific reasons for choosing the genre of realism. I suggest that their strategic reliance on earnest direct address illuminates their concept of what “realism” is.

When I turn my attention to the writers’ idea of realism, expressed both within and outside their texts, I indicate that I do not share some of the essential assumptions of semiotics, even though that field has been so closely allied to narratology in the past. Culler’s account of those assumptions helps clarify my reasoning. According to semiotics:

a text can be read only in relation to other texts, and it is made possible by the codes which animate the discursive space of a culture. The work is a product not of a biographically defined individual about whom information could be accumulated, but of writing itself. To write a poem the author had to take on the character of poet, and it is that semiotic function of poet or writer rather than the biographical function of author which is relevant to discussion of the text. (Pursuit of Signs 38)

Within the system of semiotics, this reasoning is perfectly consistent. But it ignores one commonsense fact that the irresistible influence of new historicism may permit us to reconsider: the work literally is a “product . . . of a biographically defined individual about whom information could be accumulated.” Someone wrote it, someone who inhabited a particular culture at a particular time, someone who made certain choices among all the literary codes and conventions available to him or her within that culture and time. A poetics that tries to account for conventions of
discourse in a given period or genre cannot ignore the place of those conventions in history, including the circumstances in which the author produced the text. From this observation we can easily proceed to a renewed interest in authors' manipulation of the relation between their texts and the actual people who read them. Semiotics recognizes that the readers in texts, the readers created by texts, are not "real readers," but it provides no framework for acknowledging the real reader who must, after all, exist for the text to have any function or meaning.

I will not try to propose a comprehensive theory of the relation between textual production and narrative discourse; I focus instead on the example of one genre in one time and language. I have chosen Victorian fiction for its didactic reputation: in depicting the "real world," realist novelists often tried to make genuine changes in that world by inspiring readers to transform their own notions of their moral and social selves, their sense of responsibility to others. Not every Victorian novel conforms to this aim of realist fiction—to change the world by representing it. But a realist novel that does attempt to alter the world it strives to represent requires a special relation between reader and text. For readers to act upon the novels' suggestions, they would have to take the texts seriously and think of the fictions as somehow true. Narrative interventions help to position the reader in relation to the text, at the same time expressing the novelists' own goals, either ironically or explicitly. Concentrating, then, on novels written in England and America during the heyday of the Victorian realist novel, from 1845 to 1865, I examine the role that narrative interventions play in establishing the reader's relation to the narrator and narratee, or—more broadly speaking—to the text.

For formal reasons, I do not analyze any texts whose narrators double as characters in the novel. Although Genette has shown, through his analysis of Proust, that there is no reason why a character-narrator in a modern novel cannot be "omniscient," Victorian novelists followed much stricter conventions than Proust did for limiting the knowledge of characters who narrate. The actual reader of David Copperfield or Jane Eyre can determine who is speaking and from what vantage point comparatively easily: David speaks or Jane speaks, either from the perspective of what he or she knows at that moment in the story, or from the augmented perspective of what he or she has "learned since," or from a mixture of the two vantage points the character-narrator occupies—narrative past and narrating
present. In novels like these that take the form of mock-autobiographies, the narrator's stance imitates that of a "real" autobiographer. But in texts with what used to be called omniscient narrators (or, to use Genette's more precise denominations, heterodiegetic narrators in extradiegetic situations of enunciation), the questions of voice and perspective in realist novels are more problematic. The real reader of *Vanity Fair* who pauses to wonder "Who is speaking?" is continually greeted by Thackeray in his guise as "manager of the performance" or "puppet master," a constant reminder of the fictionality of the text. I am identifying a particular kind of Victorian novel that literary theory has so far overlooked: realist novels with narrators who are not characters, but whose narrative strategy is nevertheless to use interventions that efface the fictionality of the text, rather than reinforce it as Thackeray's do.

I wish I could claim that I am not trying to defend serious narrative interventions in realist fiction, because in accordance with the principles of narratology, my goal is not primarily to evaluate texts or strategies. But I must confess that I like interventions, especially earnest ones, and that they have long been the parts of Victorian novels that most consistently attract my eye. Nevertheless, narrative interventions—whether distancing and ironic or engaging and earnest—have habitually annoyed even the most enthusiastic critics of the novels of the 1850s. The technique of pretending to confide in a "dear reader" is traditionally associated with novels that are, at best, drearily didactic and, at worse, cloyingly sentimental. Even in more recent criticism, which has rehabilitated narrative intrusion as one of the many conventions that combine to form the genre of the novel, the "dear reader" intervention is usually only defensible insofar as it is ironic, as in the novels of Fielding or Sterne.

I do not agree with the many critics, traditionalists and progressivists alike, who take it for granted that earnest direct address is always a sign of bad writing. Originating in the tough-minded, prescriptive stance of New Criticism, the objection to direct address in fiction has made its way into many contemporary critical approaches, even among theorists who no longer cling to "maintaining an illusion" as the first goal of realist prose fiction. We find it in Iser, when he speaks of the "boredom that inevitably arises when everything is laid out cut and dried before us" in texts that are so completely narrated as to leave too few gaps for the imagination to fill in (275); we find it in John Searle, when he observes that fictional texts like
Tolstoy's, containing "serious" statements about the message of the work, are "tiresomely didactic" (332); we find it even in Helene Moglen's recent work on narrative form and the ideology of gender. Performing an illuminating deconstructive reading of Dickens's *Dombey and Son*, Moglen explains a difference she sees between "sentimentality" (where emotion passes "between the author and reader" when a narrator addresses the reader on behalf of inarticulate characters such as dying children or suppressed women) and the more potentially radical mode of "melodrama" (where emotion inheres in the characters themselves, who have the opportunity to speak and act out their situations directly). According to Moglen, melodrama is a more effective mode of critiquing the realities it depicts because it is more memorable. Like Iser's and Searle's, her privileging the more dramatic mode seems to look back to the traditional preference among critics of fiction for "showing" over "telling."

But I do not see any reason why we should continue to assume— with James, Forster, Conrad, Ford, and others—that showing must be better than telling. The preference for showing, or for fiction that presents characters and situations dramatically rather than "narrativizing" them, has undeniably been instrumental in shaping the canon of texts that are studied as great works of literature. It partly accounts for the lowly place in the canon occupied by such strongly didactic, unabashedly narrated women's novels as Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* or Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Feminist criticism has gone a long way toward redefining literary canons to include such works, in which the story does not conform to the white-male-centered concerns of the "great American novel" whose mid-nineteenth-century conventions were developed by Cooper, Hawthorne, and Melville, often in reaction against popular female fictional traditions. Critics including Jane Tompkins, Elaine Showalter, and Annette Kolodny have shown how works that depict women's experience and women's perspectives have been neglected, and they have investigated various political and literary reasons for that neglect.

One reason for the devaluing of women writers that has not yet been identified is the role that narrative discourse has played. Nineteenth-century women's writing is closely associated with the sentimental and didactic technique of direct address to the reader that dominates texts like Rowson's and Stowe's. (Tompkins, along with other recent commentators including Ann Douglas, Nina Baym, and Thomas Gossett, takes it for
granted that this technique is objectionable on the grounds of its sheer
conventionality.) As my analysis of selected novels shows, both male and
female writers of the period were capable of intervening in both distancing
and engaging ways in their novels. But women novelists seem to have used
engaging strategies to stir readers' emotions more frequently and more
insistently than their male counterparts. This association between earnest
direct address and feminine writing can, I think, help explain much more
than the low status that sentimental novels have held in the canon. It may
also account for the critical reluctance to see earnest direct address in "great
novels" as something other than a stylistic lapse.

My purposes, then, are threefold: 1) to analyze the role that direct
address plays in realistic fictional discourse; 2) to investigate the connection
between gender and narrative strategies; and 3) to consider the ways a
narrative strategy's "gender" influences its reputation among critics and
theorists. In pursuing these ends, I combine the formalist approach of
narratology with the historical, social, and gender-based questions associ­
ated with feminist-contextual criticism.

As I said at the outset, I am more concerned with poetics than with
thematic interpretation. My research provides no startling new readings of
texts; on the contrary, the narrative strategies I analyze tend to reinforce,
rather than subvert, the current readings of what these novels "mean." I
emphasize instead how they "work" (or, in the case of the masculine-
gendered novels, how they "play"), and I hope this emphasis will illumi­
nate the impact that assumptions about poetics have had upon modern
literary history, even in critical texts that do not address poetics explicitly.

I believe that critical assumptions about the appropriateness of con­
victions to genres are often suppressed in scholarly writing, and I am
convinced that these assumptions are frequently based on unrecognized
gender-bias. By proposing a partial poetics of narrative discourse (as femi­
nists seldom do) that places conventions of discourse in the context of their
production (as narratologists almost never do), I hope to uncover one case—
the case of the engaging narrator in realist fiction—that will help reveal the
central roles both gender and poetics play (albeit covertly) in the history of
literary criticism and theory.
Acknowledgments

My first thanks go to the institutions that enabled me to complete this project by providing time, space, word processors, and community. I am especially grateful to everyone connected with the Harvard Mellon Faculty Fellowship program and Harvard's Center for Literary and Cultural Studies for giving me an invaluable year. The University of Vermont, too, deserves thanks for two summer grants supporting my research.

For their careful and intelligent readings of parts or all of the manuscript and for their useful suggestions, I thank Barbara Johnson, James Holstun, Shari Benstock, Robert Caserio, and Celeste Schenck. For conversations that changed my thinking about the project, I thank Susan Suleiman, Janet Riesman, and the members of the "Boston-Providence Victorians" group that Carolyn Williams coordinated at Boston University. And for unflagging, energetic support of the project, I thank Leslie Mitchner at Rutgers University Press.

I have received crucial support, too, from my friends Gretchen Van Slyke, Janet Whatley, and Brian Kent, and from my parents, Warren and Patricia Warhol. I appreciate their bearing with me through five years of often-agonizing book writing.

Blurring the lines among all these categories—institutions, colleagues, friends, family—are the members of my writing group, my own dear readers: Jo Ann Citron, Beth Kowaleski-Wallace, and Helena Michie. I hear their voices responding to mine on every page of this book. I hope they can forgive its flaws as generously as they have contributed to its strengths.

And finally, I thank Philippe Carrard, whose intellectual and emotional energy inspired and sustained this project, and from whom I have learned so much about celebrating difference—in gender and in other matters.