A Model of Gendered Intervention: 
Engaging and Distancing Narrative Strategies

Uncle Tom's Cabin is a very bad novel, having in its self-righteous, virtuous sentimentality, much in common with Little Women. Sentimentality, the ostentatious parading of excessive and spurious emotion, is the mark of dishonesty, the inability to feel . . . and it is always, therefore, the signal of secret and violent inhumanity, the mark of cruelty. (Baldwin 578–579)

Behold a reader (James Baldwin, to be precise) who is not even remotely engaged, who is more than distanced—is revolted, disgusted. As Baldwin's powerfully argued essay on Stowe's novel reveals, the social circumstances, political convictions, and aesthetic standards of individual readers can combine to construct insurmountable walls of resistance to narrators' tactics. Accustomed as she doubtless was to attacks from proslavery Southerners, Stowe would probably have been appalled to know that any black reader in any era would virulently refuse to identify with the sympathetic narratee her novel usually assumes.

THE NARRATEE AND THE ACTUAL READER

Discrepancies such as this between narrators' moves and audiences' responses warrant mention here: strategies are rhetorical features of texts, choices of technique indicating novelists' apparent hopes about the
emotional power their stories might wield. Strategies can misfire; they guarantee nothing. A reader's response cannot be enforced, predicted, or even proven. And, in the context of poststructuralist criticism, trying to determine a text's effect on a reading subject (trying, for instance, to ascertain the impact of interventions on the "illusion of reality") seems as futile as discussing an author's intention. Baldwin's expressed aversion to the "sentimentality" of *Uncle Tom* is itself rhetorically shaped for the purposes of his essay. In order to make his point, he may have constructed an image of secret inhumanity and masked cruelty more striking than what he actually experienced while he was reading—or, for that matter, he may have toned down his real feelings about the novel. Even in a case where a reader seems so candid in reporting his reaction to a text, it is difficult to make claims about the actual effect of narrative strategies. The participial forms of the terms *distancing* and *engaging* are not meant to imply an action that a text or a narrator could take upon a reader, but rather to identify the rhetorical moves these strategies represent. To understand their function in novels is to arrive at a new recognition of the narrative structures that constitute realism.

Studying narrative structures, such as interventions and addresses to the reader, is clearly not the same activity as studying "reader response," though in many ways the two approaches have converged in the critical imagination. Perhaps because the English translation of Prince's "Introduction to the Study of the Narratee" first appeared in Jane Tompkins's anthology, *Reader-Response Criticism*, theorists tend to identify the study of the narratee in fiction with the study of actual reading audiences or the reading process. An example of the conflation of the two areas of study is Mieke Bal's brief bibliographic section on "the Audience and the Reader," where she lists Prince's work on the narratee alongside that of Iser and Umberto Eco, which "discusses the reader's activity in building a fictional world while decoding a text" (*Narratology* 152). Although we should be grateful for having Prince's essay in so widely available a source as Tompkins's anthology, we should also be careful—as is Tompkins herself in her introduction¹—to distinguish between Prince's typology of the kinds of narratees that can occur in texts and the inquiries into the process, reception, and epistemology of reading that characterize the selections from Fish, Iser, Georges Poulet, Norman Holland, and the other reader-centered theorists represented in the anthology. The study of the narratee, like studies of
narrators, restricts its attention to the text, without reference to what happens when an actual person reads it.

Still, the temptation to conflate the two kinds of inquiry is strong: the narratee is, after all, a figure of a reader, or as Prince puts it, "someone whom the narrator addresses" ("Introduction" 7). It stands to reason that the degree to which an actual reader can or cannot identify with the figure being addressed affects that reader's reaction to the fiction. If I pick up a novel that assumes a narratee who has attitudes, opinions, and experiences that resemble my own, I am likely to read that novel with particular absorption. My response to the text would necessarily be affected by the attitude the novelist adopts toward the narratee I recognize as a mirror of myself. If the narrator needles, annoys, or offends me, my feeling about the literary work will be very different from what it would be if the narrator were to encourage, validate, and flatter me. Both kinds of reading, and all the range of attitudes between them, yield pleasures of their own. A detailed account of those pleasures would be, by definition, subjective, individualized, and perhaps too personal to be generally interesting (unless, indeed, it were written by someone like Roland Barthes).

In terms of the actual response of real readers, a systematic study of the relations between individual members of a reading audience and narratees in given texts would be difficult or even impossible to accomplish. Too much depends on variables: not only would readers' responses to being addressed through particular narratees vary according to their own subjectivity, it would also change with their moods, their relative degree of concentration or distraction, the number of times they have read the text in question, and so forth. This is not to suggest that studies of reader-response cannot or should not be done; it is only to point out that the kind of study that Holland or David Bleich conducts entails questions about psychology and epistemology that do not enter into investigations of such textual strategies as the role of the narratee.

Having acknowledged that descriptions of narratees in texts cannot account for the actual responses of real readers, I do want to dwell on the relationship of narratee to reader, not so much from the perspective of the audience as from the perspective of the text itself. Every choice that an author makes in constructing a fiction can be regarded as a matter of rhetoric, in that each strategy or convention of fiction that a novelist can use will have certain connotations, inherited from its forebears, models, and
antitypes among the fictions that preceded it. Depending on how actual readers situate themselves in regard to these conventions, their reactions to the text will be influenced by the text's rhetorical moves. If we cannot determine that actual readers would always (or even usually) respond in a certain way to any narratee, and if we cannot recover the author's original "intention" in creating the narratee, we can base some conclusions on textual analysis. By investigating the narrators' stances toward their narratees, and by comparing and contrasting the various stances of narrators within the genre of realism, we can arrive at a more specific poetics of how that genre operates textually. Without making any grand claims, then, about how actual readers, Victorian or modern, would respond to the narratees in realist novels, let us focus on responses that the novelists evidently hoped readers would feel. We can get at this hope, I believe, by inquiring into the relations narrators try to establish between the actual reader and the "you" in the text.

In recently revisiting his original theory of the narratee, Gerald Prince has admitted that his previous work no more than suggests "the possible differences between narratee, addressee, and receiver," which he takes "to be analogous to those between narrator, addresser, and sender" ("Narratee Revisited" 302). He mentions that studying the distinctions among these three entities (that is, the "you" that may be inscribed or encoded in a text, the implied reader suggested by that "you," and the actual reader who receives that "you") might lead to "a better appreciation of the ways particular texts—as well as narrative itself—can function" ("Narratee Revisited" 303). In fact, Prince's work on the narratee has assumed, as a general rule, a necessary distance between the narratee, the addressee, and the receiver of fictional texts. The canonic example, used by both Prince and Genette, is that of the narratee of *Le Pere Goriot* (Genette, *Nouveau discours* 9; Prince, "Narratee Revisited" 301). Certainly, as Prince and Genette have observed, when Balzac's narrator speaks to a "you" who sits in a well-padded armchair, holding the book with white hands, this narratee may or may not be a figure with whom the actual reader can identify. "If it should occur that the reader bears an astonishing resemblance to the narratee," Prince writes, "this is an exception and not the rule" ("Introduction" 9).

Prince is certainly correct for most novels in which the narrators and
narratees are—to borrow Genette's terms in *Narrative Discourse*—both extradiegetic (that is, where the act of narrating occurs outside the fiction) and heterodiegetic (that is, where neither narrator nor narratee functions as a character). The more specifically a heterodiegetic narrator characterizes the narratee, the less likely will be a resemblance between this addressee and the actual receiver of the text. A narrator who provides so much information about the narratee that the addressee becomes, as Prince says, "as clearly defined as any character" necessarily places a distance between the actual reader and the inscribed "you" in the text ("Introduction" 18). Such a narrator I call distancing. But not every narrator who intervenes to address a narratee does so to set the actual reader apart from the "you" in the text. Another kind, which I call engaging, strives to close the gaps between the narratee, the addressee, and the receiver. Using narrative interventions that are almost always spoken in earnest, such a narrator addresses a "you" that is evidently intended to evoke recognition and identification in the person who holds the book and reads, even if the "you" in the text resembles that person only slightly or not at all.

To be sure, narrative structures are always complex: novelists who typically employ distancing narrative interventions sometimes use direct address to engage their readers, and even the most consistently engaging narrators sometimes intervene in their texts in distancing ways. And, too, the critic cannot claim to distinguish authorial intent in textual manifestations. We can only read through the "tone" of authorial intrusions—and place our interpretations of what the intrusions say alongside extratextual assertions of intent—to find the signs of what writers wish their texts would do. But certain women novelists in mid-nineteenth-century England and America—particularly Gaskell, Stowe, and Eliot—seem to have been experimenting with engaging narrative as a strategy integral to their idea of realist fiction. Writing to inspire belief in the situations their novels describe—and admittedly hoping to move actual readers to sympathy for real-life slaves, workers, or ordinary middle-class people—these novelists used engaging narrators to encourage actual readers to identify with the "you" in the texts. An examination of the ways their works diverge from the conventions of distancing narrative intervention would not only help complete Prince's typology of the narratee but also contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the conventions of realist narrative.
I should pause to emphasize that when I refer to "the reader" I mean the actual reader. While this is a somewhat unorthodox thing to do in a work of literary theory, in some respects it follows the lead that other narratologists have taken. Like Genette (Narrative Discourse 260) and Suleiman ("Of Readers and Narratees" 91), I do not try to analyze the implied reader, the virtual reader, the ideal reader, or even (as I have mentioned) individual readers. The first three are figures created between the lines of novels, and as such, are unusually difficult to pin down: they are the products of literary interpretation of texts, and not textual features themselves. Just like individual readers, they are too variable and indefinable to categorize in a narratological study. When a created reader is inscribed within a text, I refer to that figure, with Prince, as a narratee. When I want to point to the relation between those fictive figures and the receiver of the text, the person—whomver it might be—who actually holds the book and reads, I call this latter entity "the reader." The actual reader, is, after all, an essential link in the chain of communication a text represents; without a receiver to process the text, the text lies inert, silent. The reader to whom I refer is not, like the narratee, a feature of the text or even (except in the strictest poststructuralist sense) a product of language. The reader is an unpredictable, infinitely variable person who is physically present in the act of reading—a person realist novelists often confessed to trying to visualize as they wrote.

Embracing Suleiman's proposal of "a moratorium on the implied reader, with more attention paid to narratees and actual readers, and to the possible relationships between them," then, I concentrate here on the relation in engaging narrative between the narratee and the actual reader ("Of Readers and Narratees" 92). I examine the differences in strategy and effect between distancing and engaging narrative interventions, providing specific examples of distancing narrative from works that are commonly mentioned in studies of the narratee (for example, Tom Jones and Vanity Fair) and juxtaposing them with examples of engaging strategies from Gaskell's, Stowe's, and Eliot's early novels. The two modes of intervention constitute the gendered difference that I see in mid-nineteenth-century fiction; as the examples here and in Part II indicate, the differences inhere in these male and female novelists' apparent ideas about the purposes and functions of realist fiction.
DIRECT ADDRESS: THE ENGAGING AND DISTANCING MODES

Generally speaking, a distancing narrator discourages the actual reader from identifying with the narratee, while an engaging narrator encourages that identification. Sketching out the similarity between the narrator-addresser-sender relationship and the narratee-addressee-receiver relationship, Prince has used a simple example that can help describe the significantly different rhetorical effects of distancing and engaging addresses to narratees. Prince writes, "Just as in 'I ate a hamburger for lunch,' the character-I is the one who ate and the narrator-I the one telling about the eating, in 'You ate a hamburger for lunch,' the character-you is the one who ate and the narratee-you the one told about the eating." Prince uses the example to show that "the difference between intra- and extradiegetic narratee is no more fundamental than the one between intra- and extradiegetic narrator" ("Narratee Revisited" 301). This can be true in only a limited sense, however, as we must realize if we consider the rhetorical effect these utterances would have on an actual interlocutor or an actual reader. Depending on (1) the accuracy of the statement about "you" and (2) the speaker's stance toward "you" in making the assertion, the relation between the narratee and the receiver of the statement could be either distanced or engaged.

Consider the effect the two statements about lunch might have in a real-world conversation. If I tell you that I ate a hamburger for lunch, you may or may not believe me, according to your sense of my reliability (you may not know me well enough to know whether I am characteristically truthful, or you may know that I habitually lie about my calorie intake) and according to anything you know about my lunch beyond my assertion (maybe you sat across the lunch table from me and watched me eat that hamburger, or maybe you watched me eat quiche instead). But you can never be certain whether my report of my own experience is true: possibly I did not lie about what I ate for lunch, even if I customarily do; possibly I slipped away after I had the quiche and secretly ate a hamburger as a second lunch. You may believe my statement or not, but you can never be as certain of its truth as you can be about my statement "You ate a hamburger for lunch." You know—if you are not impossibly absentminded—whether
you ate a hamburger, just as you know, while you are reading *Père Goriot*, whether your hands are white and your armchair is comfortable.

The example shows that in fact there is a difference between the narrator-addresser-sender relationship and the narratee-addressee-receiver relationship, a difference that must occur to the actual reader in reading the text. The reader may or may not be interested in how closely the narrative "I" resembles the actual author; readers can only speculate about such a resemblance, which—even if it exists—would have no bearing on the rhetorical effect of the text. But one can know whether the narrative "you" resembles oneself, and surely the way one experiences the fiction is affected by how personally one can take its addresses to "you."

Keeping this in mind, we can pursue the example for its distancing and engaging potentialities. The effect of my assertion "You ate a hamburger" will depend on your interpretation of my rhetorical intent. Since you know whether you ate a hamburger, you may assume that my assertion is not intended to convey information to you. If you know I saw you having quiche for lunch and I say "You ate a hamburger," my utterance will be ironic. I might expect you to respond with laughter, annoyance, or perplexity, but in any case—since you would be unable to identify your experience with my assertion—you would separate your actual self from the "you" in my statement. My remark would then be distancing.

The distancing narrator may evoke laughter, or even annoyance, from an actual reader who cannot identify with the narratee. The task of the engaging narrator, in contrast, is to evoke sympathy and identification from an actual reader who is unknown to the author and therefore infinitely variable and unpredictable. The engaging narrator is in the position I would be in if, to win your trust and support, I had to approach you, a stranger, and tell you what you had for lunch. I could try to win you over through what I say or through the way I say it, through the substance of my assertion or through my attitude in asserting it. I could make a guess about what you ate, based on my idea of what most people eat; engaging narrators often do base assertions about "you" on such general assumptions. Chances are, though, that my guess would be inaccurate, in which case I could only hope to win you with the appealing attitude I try to take in addressing you. In realist novels—engaging narrators functioning as their authors' surrogates in earnestly trying to foster sympathy for real-world sufferers—work
to engage “you” through the substance and, failing that, the stance of their narrative interventions and addresses to “you.”

While the distinction between engaging and distancing stances may seem inconsequential on the purely textual level, the significance of the difference asserts itself in novels that aim to inspire personal, social, or political change. When the narrator of Uncle Tom’s Cabin speaks to “you, generous, noble-minded men and women of the South—you, whose virtue and magnanimity and purity of character, are the greater for the severer trial it has encountered” (622), the speaker can have no certain knowledge of the virtue and magnanimity of actual Southern readers, nor of the Southern affiliations of any individual actual reader. Operating in a context where her information about the “real you” may be faulty, the narrator tries to win “you” with the ingratiating rhetoric of her engaging appeal. And if she can thus draw you in, she could possibly change your mind; if she does change your mind and you happen to be a Southern slave owner, she might change the world.

INTERVENTION STRATEGIES: THE ENDS OF THE SPECTRUM

In Gaskell’s Mary Barton (1848), Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin (1851—1852), and Eliot’s Adam Bede (1859), earnest, engaging strategies of intervention are strikingly present in passages of the novels addressed to “you.” Typically, these novelists’ engaging narrators differ from distancing narrators—such as Fielding’s in Tom Jones (1749), Thackeray’s in Vanity Fair (1846—1847), Trollope’s in Barchester Towers (1849), Hawthorne’s in The House of Seven Gables (1851) or Eliot’s in her first novel, Scenes of Clerical Life (1857)—in their explicit attitudes toward the narratees, toward the characters, and toward the very act of narration. The differences occur in five forms:

1. The names by which the narratee is addressed. Whereas a distancing narrator may specify a name or title for an extradiegetic narratee (for example, “Miss Bullock,” “Miss Smith,” or “Jones, who reads this book at his Club,” in Vanity Fair, “Your Majesty . . . my lords and gentlemen” in Dickens’s Bleak House [1852—1853]; “Madam” or “Mrs. Farthingale” in Eliot’s Scenes), an engaging narrator will usually either avoid naming the narratee or use names that refer to large classes of potential actual readers. In
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Mary Barton, the most straightforward example of the first engaging approach, the narrator never calls the narratee anything but "you." In Uncle Tom’s Cabin, the most extreme example of the second approach, the narrator will, Walt Whitman-like, specify narratees in a group ("mothers of America") or include large numbers of more specifically defined groups in passages of direct address ("Farmers of Massachusetts, of New Hampshire, of Vermont, of Connecticut, who read this book by the blaze of your winter-evening fire,—strong-hearted, generous sailors and ship-owners of Maine . . . Brave and generous men of New York, farmers of rich and joyous Ohio, and ye of the wide prairie states" [623]). Even such exhaustive lists exclude more readers than they can include. Straining against the limitations such specific names must enforce on actual readers’ ability to answer appeals to the narratees, Stowe’s narrator intersperses her novel with remarks directed simply to "Reader" or "you," designations that can signify any actual reader.

2. The frequency of direct address to the narratee. A distancing narrator, such as Fielding’s, often refers to "the Reader" or "my reader" as a third party, someone not present (as it were) at the narrative conversation. Actual readers perusing the novel are no more likely to take such third-person references personally than they would take remarks that refer to characters in the novel. "He" and "she," whether the pronouns stand for Tom Jones and Sophia Western or for "my readers," have referents within the text—they do not shift as does the referent of "you." Whether an actual reader answers to remarks directed to "my reader(s)" will depend on how much the portrait of those readers actually resembles him or her: the actual reader gets to choose whether to take such narrative interventions to heart. An engaging narrator avoids giving the actual reader a choice in the matter, and, very much like an evangelical preacher, more frequently speaks to "you."*8 In Mary Barton, for instance, the narratee is addressed as "you" in at least twenty-two passages, included in the narrative "we" in at least five passages, and seldom, if ever, referred to in the third person.

3. The degree of irony present in references to the narratee. Irony is, of course, always multivalent, and never definitively determinable. If verbal irony may be defined as a presumably self-conscious disjunction between what a speaker says and what he or she appears to mean, then two particularly ironic conventions characterize the distancing narrator’s attitude toward the narratee. Both kinds of irony occur in passages of direct address to
the narratee that are distinctly not engaging in their approach. The first of these is a distancing narrator's pretense that "you" are present on the scene of the fiction; the second is a distancing narrator's habit of inscribing flawed "readers" from whom actual readers should want to differentiate themselves. In both kinds of ironic intervention, the effect is distancing in that the strategy encourages the actual reader not to identify with the narratee being addressed.

The sarcastic pretense that "you" are present on the fictional scene is one way that a distancing narrator discourages the actual reader from identifying with the textual narratee. These are passages in which narrators play the game of "endangering the Reader's Neck" (as Fielding calls it) by pretending to locate the reader at the side of the characters or the narrator himself. A nineteenth-century example of this narrative jest would be Hawthorne's heterodiegetic narrator's intervention in chapter 28 of The House of Seven Gables, the scene which describes the room where the dead Judge Pyncheon sits alone: "You must hold your own breath, to satisfy yourself whether he breathes at all. It is quite inaudible. You hear the ticking of his watch; his breath you do not hear." In the climax of the scene, the voice places the narratee even more clearly on the narrator's diegetic level, by including the narratee in a collective "we": "Would that we were not an attendant spirit, here!"

Genette's term for this technique is metalepsis, or the practice of crossing diegetic levels to imply that figures inside and outside the fiction exist on the same plane (Narrative Discourse 236). To illustrate the term: in this example, the extradiegetic narrator (who is inside the novel, but not inside the "diegesis," or story, because he does not participate as a character) places himself in the same room, and therefore on the same plane of "reality," with the extradiegetic narratee (the person to whom the story is being told, who—like the narrator—does not exist within the story) and the character (the judge, the only one of the three figures involved in this scene who, properly speaking, belongs in the diegesis). The effect of metalepsis in distancing narrative is usually to affirm the fictionality of the story: when Hawthorne's narrator pretends, for instance, that "you" are present with him in the room with the dead judge, the fictionality of the scene becomes obvious. You, the actual reader, are not a ghostly presence in the Pyncheons' house. You are a person holding a copy of The House of Seven Gables, reading it.
Describing the use of metalepsis in Cortázar, Sterne, Diderot, Proust, and Balzac, Genette has pointed to its metafictional potential: its effect, he writes, “is either comical (when, as in Sterne or Diderot, it is presented in a joking tone) or fantastic” (Narrative Discourse 235). Genette’s account of the metaleptic effect describes very well the goal of the distancing intervention: “The most troubling thing about metalepsis indeed lies in this unacceptable and insistent hypothesis, that the extradiegetic is perhaps always diegetic, and that the narrator and his narratees—you and I—perhaps belong to some narrative” (236).

Stowe, Gaskell, and (especially) Eliot can also use metalepsis that pretends to place the reader on the scene of the fiction. A notable example would be the narrator’s introductory description of the rectory in Adam Bede. The narratee is invited into the Irwines’ dining room. “We will enter very softly,” the narrator tells “you,” “and stand still in the open doorway, without awakening [the dogs]” (98). But in Adam Bede the overall dominance of engaging interventions tends to transform the intended effect of a passage like this one. Instead of experiencing a comical or fantastic awareness of the activity of reading, the actual reader should indulge in a momentary exercise of imagination. Readers are encouraged to feel that perhaps they could be in Hayslope; perhaps the world they are reading about is as real as their own. The invitation to “enter very softly” both beckons the reader into the fictional world and emphasizes the fact that he or she is not really part of it; the implication is, though, that if the reader will participate in recreating a real world predicated on the lessons of sympathy that reading the novel imparts, perhaps the real world, as well as the actual reader, will be transformed. Indeed, the engaging narrator’s frequent appeals to the reader’s imagination, her earnest requests to the reader to draw upon personal memories to fill in gaps in the narrative, prompt the actual reader to participate in creating the fictional world itself, just as he or she should actively alter the real world after finishing the reading.

In the second type of ironic address to the reader, the distancing narrator humorously inscribes the addressee as a potentially “bad reader,” thus discouraging the receiver of the text from identifying with the person addressed. Balzac’s address to the complacent, pleasure-seeking narratee of Le Père Goriot is an example of this ironic mode. So is Fielding’s amusing directive on how to read Tom Jones, typical of Fielding in its self-conscious
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awareness of the distance the narrator encourages between the narratee, the implied reader, and the actual reader:

Reader, it is impossible we should know what Sort of Person thou wilt be: For perhaps, thou may'st be as learned in Human Nature as Shakespear himself was, and, perhaps, thou may'st be no wiser than some of his Editors. Now lest this latter should be the Case, we think proper, before we go any farther together, to give thee a few wholesome Admonitions. . . . We warn thee not too hastily to condemn any of the Incidents in this our History, as impertinent and foreign to our main Design. . . . For a little Reptile of a Critic to presume to find Fault with any of its Parts, without knowing the Manner in which the Whole is connected . . . is a most presumptuous Absurdity. (398)

Here, the narratee is not entirely foolish: Fielding's "Reader" is at least presumably capable of appreciating the contrast between the wisdom of Shakespeare and that of "some of his Editors"; the narratee is also patient and cooperative enough to attend to the "wholesome Admonitions" on how to read this book. But the same narratee has the potential to read badly, or "too hastily to condemn" the novel's parts before apprehending the whole. The "little Reptile of a Critic" is not a narratee, in that the narrator refers to him indirectly, rather than speaking to him. Still, the logic of the paragraph implies that if the narratee were to succumb to the inclination to "condemn," he or she would be imitating the reptilian critic's activity. The implied reader is someone who gets the joke and can chuckle at the expense of the hapless narratee. The actual reader, then, should hesitate to identify with the narratee, in order to avoid becoming laughably ridiculous. Similarly distancing is Thackeray's ironic reference to "some carping reader" who is incapable of enjoying the sentimental passages in Vanity Fair (147). As much as the actual reader might be amused and entertained by these interventions, he or she is to be discouraged from identifying with any "carping" "little Reptile of a Critic."

Engaging narrators, in contrast, usually assume that their narratees (not to mention their actual readers) are in perfect sympathy with them. When Gaskell's narrator in Mary Barton assures the narratee, "Your heart would have ached to have seen the man, however hardly you might have
judged his crime" (422), or when Eliot's in *Adam Bede* interrupts a love scene to remark, "That is a simple scene, reader. But it is almost certain that you, too, have been in love" (537), the narrators' earnestly confidential attitudes toward "you" encourage actual readers to see themselves reflected in that pronoun.

As these two examples show, an engaging narrator sometimes does imply imperfection in the narratee's ability to comprehend, or sympathize with, the contents of the text, even while expressing confidence that the narratee will rise to the challenge. These implications of the narratee's fallibility often come through narrative interventions that Prince calls

*surjustifications* . . . situated at the level of meta-language, meta-commentary, or meta-narration. . . . Over-justifications always provide us with interesting details about the narratee's personality, even though they often do so in an indirect way; in overcoming the narratee's defenses, in prevailing over his prejudices, in allaying his apprehensions, they reveal them. ("Introduction" 15)

Although engaging narrators tend to inscribe their narratees through overjustifying their own assertions, they usually do so in the spirit of sympathetically and earnestly attempting to convert the narratees to their own points of view. This mode of address encourages actual readers to identify with the narratees, unlike the sarcasm of distancing narrators, which attempts through irony to embarrass readers out of such identification.

The engaging narrators' overjustifications portray their narratees less as potentially bad readers than as potentially limited sympathizers. The narrators defend their characters' rights to the actual readers' sympathy by explicitly demonstrating those rights to the narratees. One of the most notorious passages of such overjustification occurs in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, interrupting the scene of Eliza's barefoot escape over the frozen river. Anticipating an incredulous response, the narrator encourages the narratee to put herself in Eliza's place: "If it were your Harry, mother, or your Willie, that were going to be torn from you by a brutal trader, tomorrow morning—if you had seen the man, and heard that the papers were signed and delivered, and you had only from twelve o'clock till morning to make good your escape,—how fast could you walk?" (105). The passage provides specific
information about the narratee: she is certainly female, and is perhaps, by
the narrator's standards, overly judgmental. But the narrator's stance, im-

plicit in her faith that the narratee can be persuaded to sympathize if actual
readers will pause to recognize similarities between Eliza's experiences and
their own, is what makes the passage engaging. The actual reader, re-
quired to draw upon memory and sympathetic imagination to fill in the
emotional details of the story, is engaged in collaborating on the creation of
the fictional world.

4. *The narrator's stance toward the characters*. A distancing narrator may

seem to delight in reminding the narratee that the characters are fictional,
entirely under the writer's control. Some of the most extreme examples
would be the references in *Vanity Fair* to the characters as puppets that come
out of a box and the famous passage in *Barchester Towers* where Trollope's
narrator reassures "the reader" that he would never let his Elinor Bold marry
the likes of Mr. Slope, thus predicting the outcome of the plot and remind-
ing the narratee that the fiction is an arbitrary creation, a game. An engag-
ing narrator avoids reminders of the characters' fictionality, insisting
instead that the characters are "real." The difference between the distancing
and engaging attitudes toward characters thus parallels the difference be-
tween metafiction and realism. In moves that parallel their attitudes toward
their narratees, both distancing and engaging narrators use metalepsis in
establishing their relation to their characters, but whereas distancing nar-
rators use it to subvert realism, engaging narrators use it to reinforce the
veracity of their stories.

A distancing narrator does indeed use metalepsis for the humorous
effect that Genette describes. Perhaps the best example of the disconcerting
effect of distancing metalepsis is the shifting presentation of the characters
in *Vanity Fair*. At the beginning and the very end of the novel they are
puppets; often they are fictional figures under the author's explicit control;
then quite suddenly, near the end of the story, they are people the narrator
met in Pumpernickel before he had heard all the details of their biogra-
phies. Their changeable status contributes to the novel's humor, as well as
to the narratee's awareness that they are creatures of fiction. An engaging
narrator, though, uses metalepsis to suggest that the characters are possibly
as "real" as the narrator and narratee, who are, in these cases, to be identi-
fied with the actual author and actual reader. Stowe's narrator simply claims
that her characters—or people exactly resembling them—exist in the real
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world (for example, that “the personal appearance of Eliza, the character ascribed to her, are sketches drawn from life. . . . The incident of the mother’s crossing the Ohio river on the ice is a well-known fact” [Uncle Tom’s Cabin 618]). Gaskell’s and Eliot’s narrators occasionally claim personal acquaintance with their characters, even though the narrators never figure as intradiegetic characters themselves.

One of the many overjustifications in Mary Barton is an example of metalepsis that places the heterodiegetic narrator and the intradiegetic characters on the same level. The narrator defends her comments about one character’s physical appearance by citing a “personal” impression of the fictional woman: “I have called her ‘the old woman’ . . . because, in truth, her appearance was so much beyond her years . . . she always gave me the idea of age” (385–386). This heterodiegetic “I” is never present in the fictional world, hence never in a position to see the character in the context of the fiction; the implication is, then, that the character must exist within the context of the narrator’s own world. Eliot makes a similar implication in one intervention that refers to a conversation between the heterodiegetic narrator and the hero: “But I gathered from Adam Bede, to whom I talked of these matters in his old age” (225). These instances of metalepsis—implying that the characters exist, as the narrators do, outside the world represented in the fiction—produce an effect that differs from the humorous discomfort that Genette had identified as the usual result of the device. Instead of distancing the actual reader from the characters by reminding the narratee that they are fictional, these metalepses are meant to reinforce the reader’s serious sense of the characters as, in some way, real.

5. The narrator’s implicit or explicit attitude toward the act of narration. The distancing narrator, directly or indirectly, often reminds the narratee that the fiction is a game and the characters pawns. Such reminders may be as direct as Vanity Fair’s references to the narrator as a stage manager or puppet master, as indirect as the mock-heroic “epic” language in the “battle scenes” of Tom Jones or Joseph Andrews, or as comparatively subtle as the type names that Fielding, Thackeray, Dickens, and Trollope assign to minor characters. In each of these examples, the distancing strategy pushes a text that in many other respects conforms to the conventions of verisimilitude in realist fiction over into the realm of metafiction. This playing with the text’s fictionality goes hand-in-hand with the irony that characterizes the distancing approach.
Henry James heads the critical tradition that has correctly assessed this whole spectrum of self-conscious artifice as a means of destroying the illusion of reality and reminding the reader that the text is, after all, only a fiction.11 Objecting to Trollope's penchant for such names as Dr. Pessimist Anticant, Mr. Neversay Die, and Mr. Stickatit, his frequent authorial hints about the probable outcome of the plot, and his narrative reminders that the novelist “could direct the course of events according to his pleasure,” James called Trollope's “pernicious trick” of narrative intervention “suicidal.” James's summary of Trollope's strategy describes the distancing narrator's attitude perfectly: “There are certain precautions in the way of producing that illusion dear to the intending novelist which Trollope not only habitually scorned to take, but really, as we may say, asking pardon for the heat of the thing, delighted wantonly to violate” (115–18).

James does not distinguish between distancing and engaging narrators, since all narrative interventions must, at some level, interfere with the illusion of reality, if in fact such an illusion could ever exist in the mind of a reader sophisticated enough to process these texts. Like any intervening narrator, the engaging narrator also intrudes into the fiction with reminders that the novel is “only a story.” The difference is that engaging narrators imply it is “only a true story,” one that represents personal and social realities virtually, if not literally. In this respect, engaging narrators differ from distancing narrators in that their purposes are seldom playful: they intrude to remind their narratees—who, in their texts, should stand for the actual readers—that the fictions reflect real-world conditions for which the readers should take active responsibility after putting aside the book. Whether the situation depicted is that of American slaves, or the working-class poor in Manchester, or middle-class rural folk in England, the engaging narrator explicitly draws on the actual reader's memory and emotion, through direct address to the narratee, to foster a commitment to improving the extradiegetic situation the fiction depicts. Engaging narrators seldom play with metafiction; rather, they earnestly assert the veracity of their stories as they attempt to inspire the readers' sympathetic action.

*Uncle Tom's Cabin* is full of direct, sermonlike exhortation to the narratee, demanding sympathy for the slaves and even action on their behalf. The passage mentioned above, addressed to “mothers of America,” specifically directs the narratees to transfer their emotional response from the characters to the actual slaves:
you who have learned, by the cradles of your own children, to love and feel for all mankind,—by the sacred love you bear your child...—I beseech you, pity the mother who had all your affections, and not one legal right to protect, guide, or educate, the child of her bosom! By the sick hour of your child; by those dying eyes, which you can never forget; by those last cries, that wrung your heart when you could neither help nor save...—I beseech you, pity those mothers that are constantly made childless by the American slave-trade! And say, mothers of America, is this a thing to be defended, sympathized with, passed over in silence? (623–624)

Here, the narrator's strategy is simply to arouse the egocentric feelings of any actual readers who can identify with the narratees, then to ask the readers to project those feelings into compassion for actual slaves. If the narratees can feel for the characters, then the actual readers the narratees represent should be able to feel for the actual persons—or classes of persons—the characters are supposed to represent.

Gaskell's narrator in *Mary Barton* pursues a similar strategy, asking the narratee to see through a character's eyes and including "you" in her implicit criticism of the character's egocentricity. In this scene, John Barton walks down a Manchester street, absorbed in his own sorrows:

He wondered if any in all the hurrying crowd, had come from such a house of mourning. But he could not, you cannot, read the lot of those who daily pass you by in the street. How do you know the wild romances of their lives; the trials, the temptations they are even now enduring, resisting, sinking under...Errands of mercy—errands of sin—did you ever think where all the thousands of people you daily meet are bound? (101–102)

Like many other narrative interventions in *Mary Barton*, the passage demonstrates the way direct address to the narratee can "realize" the fictional situation for the actual reader, that is, transform a fictive event (like John Barton's self-absorbed walk through the city) into a genuine confrontation between "you" and the figures represented in the fiction. Gaskell's strategy for inspiring actual readers to learn more actively to sympathize with people they do not know is to cajole readers into imaginatively aligning themselves with the characters inside the fiction. Having placed themselves in that
position, readers should realize how closely the fictional world resembles their own. If readers can look at strangers on real urban streets and imagine biographies for them, just as Gaskell has imagined the histories of her characters, those strangers will take on identities and fates that matter: readers will become responsible for feeling and expressing compassion for them. Even though the strategy occurs in a narrative intervention, it has the odd effect of placing the narrator in the background for the moment: deflecting attention from herself, she facilitates an imaginative moment of connection between the narratee and the characters on her Manchester street, a moment that is supposed to inspire a similar sense of community between actual readers and the people they will encounter when they have put down the book and walked out into their own worlds.

In *Adam Bede*, Eliot's narrator also asks readers to recognize affinities between their own experiences and those depicted in the novel. Her engaging strategies apply the philosophy that Eliot summarized in her earlier novel: "Sympathy is but a living again through our own past in a new form" (Scenes 358). The *Adam Bede* narrator's attitude toward the purpose of narration plays such a crucial role in the novel that it is the subject of an entire chapter, "In Which the Story Pauses a Little." This enormous intervention, interrupting the narrative after it has been unfolding for sixteen chapters, is an extraordinary instance of overjustification, defending at length the narrator's refusal to idealize the portraits of the novel's characters.

The chapter opens with a classically distancing quotation from "one of my lady readers," a prejudiced narratee with whom few would be eager to identify. The self-referential nature of the entire chapter, drawing attention to the fictional framing of Adam's story, pulls the narrative in a distancing direction that recurs in crucial passages throughout *Adam Bede*. Eliot's strategies are not purely, unconflictedly engaging: the very presence of a chapter on how the novel was written is, in itself, a profoundly distancing move. And yet the tone of this chapter is so earnest, so confiding, that it could hardly be more different from the metafictional gestures in *Vanity Fair* or *Tom Jones*. One way Eliot achieves this tone is by relying, after that opening paragraph, upon engaging direct address to an unnamed, uncharacterized "you." Every engaging address to "you" simultaneously reminds the narratee (and the actual reader) that the story is only a fiction and encourages the reader to apply to nonfictional, real life the feelings that the fiction may have inspired. In this respect, engaging strategies both under-
mine and underline the realism of texts by stressing the position they occupy in relation to the world they are meant to represent.

In a certain sense, the distancing narrator's stance also emphasizes a "real" aspect of novel reading: in constantly coming forward to confront the narratee, the distancing narrator draws attention to the reality of the novel's textuality, dismissing implications that the story is in any literal sense "true." The actual reader stands clearly and distinctly outside the text; the narrator, narratees, and characters are within. Through engaging narrative interventions, however, novelists can place actual readers in a more ambiguous position vis-à-vis the text. When an actual reader responds to the engaging narrator's call to identify with a narratee, the reader is drawn into the story while at the same time recognizing that it is most certainly a story. The lines between fiction and the world of lived experience blur; the interventions imply that the fiction's referentiality may extend beyond the covers of the book. For the purposes of didactic realism, engaging interventions can both raise readers' questions about the connections between the real and fictional worlds and gesture toward answering them.