WHAT IS IT about “you” that literary critics and theorists find so embarrassing? Commentators on texts can manifest embarrassment in diverse ways: we can express irritation or impatience, make apologies and excuses, or rise above the source of our discomfort by denying it, ignoring it, or imagining it to be something other than the thing we find so problematic. Earnest direct address has been both vilified and defended in commentaries on particular realist novels, but in theories of literature and theories of reading it has, for the most part, been suppressed.

To examine in detail all of the reasons for each literary theory’s means of avoiding this trope would require writing another book. In this concluding chapter, then, I simply sketch out some possible sources for the critical discomfort over earnest direct address in literary texts. I situate the problem at the intersection of three locations of anxiety. The first source of anxiety centers on literary-theoretical disagreements about whether “literary” and “nonliterary” language must necessarily occupy separate realms. The second producer of anxiety is the discomfort critics and theorists seem to experience when they are confronted with texts that gesture toward moments of intensified presence. And finally, I look at the way these anxieties are aggravated when that presence is coded as feminine.
"IT SHOULD DO NOTHING":
MODERN PROBLEMS WITH VICTORIAN ART

The problem of "you" begins, I think, with the tradition of distinguishing between literary and nonliterary language. The differentiation of two distinct kinds of language, functioning independently and uniquely, propels twentieth-century critical practices as diverse as Russian formalism, New Criticism, and narratology. Most modern literary criticism operates on the assumption that the two kinds of language, poetic and nonpoetic, are distinct from each other in terms of their "truth-status"; the two categories are supposed to function differently in that nonpoetic, nonliterary language presents itself as referential—claiming to be related to the real world—whereas poetic, literary language makes no such claims. According to this line of thinking, literary writing does aspire to a "higher" truth, transcending the mundane limits of the nonpoetic.

Stanley Fish has ingeniously exploded the opposition between literary and nonliterary language by arguing that there is nothing ordinary about "ordinary language" at all. Distinguishing literary language from ordinary language defies reason, he points out, since "ordinary" (that is, "literal," "scientific," "propositional," "logical," "denotative," "neutral," "mathematical," "serious [as opposed to fictional]," "metaphorical," "representational," "message-bearing," "referential," "descriptive," or "objective") language does not exist (97). No use of language enjoys the direct, unproblematically representational relation to reality that nonliterary language has been presumed to have: "There is no such thing as ordinary language, at least in the naive sense often intended by that term" (106).

Fish rightly points out that literature is not distinguished by intrinsic formal or linguistic properties. On the contrary, "literature" is always that subset of writing which the dominant culture agrees to call "literature"—and nothing more. "The one disadvantage in all of this," Fish observes, "is that literature is no longer granted a special status, but since that special status has always been implicitly degrading, this disadvantage is finally literature's greatest gain" (108).

Literature, then, stands to gain from its reintegration into the realm of ordinary language; surely we cannot harm literature by broadening our understanding of the ways that literary texts can work. For the literary/
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nonliterary opposition necessarily breaks down in specific applications to certain fictional genres that gesture toward (limited) referentiality, such as the realist novel. Under the modernist rubric, any text that is "referential," "ordinary," or "serious" in its use of language must be nonliterary: it must not be literature. But surely, when some aspects of a realist novel are presented as referential (such as place names, for instance, or dates, which may be rendered in full or "disguised," as in "the city of L——-, in the year 183—") the critic cannot in good faith approach every detail of the novel as though it could not be referential, as though it were absolutely without connections to the "real world." One possibility for such a connection in realist fiction is the implication that the pronoun "you" might sometimes be as referential—as "serious," in John Searle's sense of the word, as "London" or "1836." Of course, as Fish reminds us, the word's referentiality is problematic, like that of any word: its relation to "the world" is not as simple as Searle's system would make it out to be. Nevertheless, in engaging texts, the pronoun's relation to the world—its claim for reference—is different from that of the distancing "you," or of such signifiers as "Dorothea Brooke" and "Yoknapatawpha County."

The possibility that a fictive text might be seriously addressed to an audience it calls "you" raises another difficulty, closely related to anxieties over the poetic or nonpoetic functions of language. Many theories of literature take for granted a split between genuine "literature" and "rhetoric"—the first being language that functions entirely for art's sake, the second being language with designs upon the extratextual world. In earlier periods, when formal distinctions between literature and rhetoric were less strictly drawn than they have been since the early nineteenth century, an address from within a text could be taken for granted as one of the many means a writer could use to gain access to an audience's emotional or intellectual response. For the past two centuries, however, idealist literary theory has been devising ways to separate authorial address to readers from actual communication.

How has this happened? Lionel Gossman hypothesizes that the divorce between literature and rhetoric can be traced to the mystification of poetry that began during "the final phase of neoclassicism" in the eighteenth century:

The term "literature" gradually became more closely associated with poetry, or at least with poetic and figurative writing, and,
especially among the Romantics and their successors, took on the meaning of a corpus of privileged or sacred texts, a treasury in which value, truth, and beauty had been piously stored, and which could be opposed to the world of historical reality. (5—6)

According to Gossman, “literature thus ceased to be thought of as an art by which ideas could be conveyed effectively and elegantly, and which could be pursued with varying degrees of skill and success by all people” (6). This “fetishizing” (as Gossman calls it) of the literary work entails a belief that a poem should never accomplish ulterior goals, because it must exist as art for its own sake. Culminating in the late Victorian and fin de siècle emphasis upon the uniquely “real” quality of the work of art, this idealist, aestheticist line of thinking suppresses the manipulative, transactional, or rhetorical potential inherent in “literary” writing, as in all writing. Jane Tompkins has amplified the implications of this attitude for contemporary criticism: “The imputation that a poem might break out of its self-containment and perform a service would disqualify it immediately from consideration as a work of art. The first requirement of a work of art in the twentieth century is that it should do nothing” (Reader-Response Criticism 210). Tompkins suggests that recent critics have perpetuated this assumption by treating literary texts as repositories of meaning waiting for interpretation, rather than viewing them as authors’ instruments for provoking real-world action.

If the split between literature and rhetoric originated with Coleridge and Kant, then Victorian novelists were working in a post-“divorce” era; still, as we have seen, they tended to view their activity as an act of communication between themselves and a living, breathing audience. Novelists who relied heavily upon the engaging narrator to persuade audiences on matters of morality and politics would have been horrified at the thought that a novel should “do nothing” in order to aspire to the status of art. The renewed emphasis on “art for art’s sake” at the beginning of the modern period is, to some extent, a reaction against the eagerness of earnest Victorians to promote a remarriage between literature and rhetoric. Accordingly, modern criticism of Victorian fiction has frequently operated to suppress, denigrate, or deflect the properties of the novels that try to do something, including exhortative passages of direct address.

One way to express discomfort with Victorian novels’ attempts to “do something” has been simply to object, as did the majority of British and American nineteenth-century reviewers, to the didactic, preachy, or conde-
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scending tone of a narrator's accosting a reader as "you." Another way has been to assume—with Percy Lubbock, his Impressionist contemporaries, and his New Critical heirs—that authorial "intrusions" are flaws in the fabric of the fictional illusion, and hence are offensive on aesthetic grounds. In defense of the Victorian novels they unblushingly admire, more rhetorically-minded Anglo-American critics such as W. J. Harvey, Barbara Hardy, and Wayne Booth have rehabilitated authorial intervention as essential to certain novelists' "art," but they, too, treat authorial address as something the novelist must regulate, something that can hurt a text if it is allowed to get out of control. Each of these generations of critics has turned its collective back upon the implied presence of actual readers in authorial intrusions. They all presumably consider such a presence inappropriate in a text that could be upheld as belonging to the category of literature.

From the point of view of the literary critic eager to defend a work's position in the canon, direct address bears a damaged reputation, attributable to the rhetorical company it keeps: the trope has been tainted by its wide use in advertising, television, and journalism. Commentators anxious to maintain distinctions between "legitimate art" and other, more overtly manipulative or rhetorical forms of discourse tend to view direct address with exaggerated suspicion. Barbara Kruger, writing in *Artforum*, decries television's dominance of the American consciousness in the 1980s, declaring that "television, perching in our living rooms like a babbling, over-controlling guest, is deeply embroiled in the authoritative declarations and confessionals of direct address." Particularly conscious of its use in advertising and in "nonfiction" broadcast genres such as news and talk shows, Kruger maintains that "direct address dominates and lets the viewers think they know who's doing the talking and to whom" (7). Direct address on television is misleading, she implies, because the talking head belonging to the news anchor does not originate the words that issue from his or her mouth; when distraught people tell the "hidden camera" their troubles with headache, dandruff, or fabric softener, the individual viewer finds him- or herself fictively placed in the position of addressee. Viewers less astute than Kruger are presumably fooled into accepting a mock communication as a genuine one.

Bruce Morrissette, the only critic who has attempted to survey the modes of "narrative you," is even more insistent that direct address can be misleading or harmful in nonliterary applications. After quoting advertis-
ing copy that relies heavily on personal pronouns, Morrissette warns "that 'you' . . . can be a dangerous pronoun that advertising and journalism may corrupt so badly as to render it virtually useless to 'literature'" (112). Making no distinction between lyric poetry's uses of "you" in apostrophe and in direct address, Morrissette is much stricter in his definition of appropriate prose examples for his analysis: "Obviously, we must eliminate all uses of 'you' in oratory or elsewhere that are addressed frankly to an audience" (115). This restriction passes without further remark, showing Morrissette to be among the critics who separate literary and rhetorical writing in the way that Gossman has identified.

What evidently distinguishes the "you" in advertising and oratory from the literary use of "narrative you" is that the more manipulative mode of direct address requires the addressee to take the pronoun personally. When a McDonald's ad says "you deserve a break today," when a public broadcasting auctioneer pleads, "you must call and make your pledge if you value the quality programming we are bringing you," when a preacher warns "you will go to hell if you disobey the word of God," each listener is meant to apply the statement to his or her own situation. When an utterance is "addressed frankly to an audience," the referent of its second-person pronoun is both plural and singular: "you" stands for the group and for each member of the group who could conceivably take the utterance to heart. Some advertisements inscribe their "you" more narrowly than others: an ad for a "gentle laxative" begins, "As a woman, you do so much for so many people. You don't have time for irregularity." Many viewers (female and male) will fail to see themselves in that "you," but any woman who is prompted, consciously or unconsciously, by that ad to buy that product will have at least momentarily identified that "you" as herself. A statement containing "you" that really means you has the potential power to make something happen. And if "legitimate art" must be kept separate from discourse that attempts to spark action—advertisement, oratory, propaganda, or preaching—one way to maintain that separation is to insist that the "you" in truly literary texts has no extra-literary referent.

By transforming the reader who is hailed in literature into a fictional construct, something whose existence is strictly circumscribed within art, reader-centered critics and structuralists—from Booth to Iser to Genette to Riffaterre—have developed sophisticated ways of talking about the "you" in texts by deflecting any implication that the pronoun might ever be a
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signifier for real persons. The race of “readers” they have spawned serve as models for the way actual people might read, but in the critical discourse where they are born, they do not represent actual readers. The textual reader may be conceived as an Implied Reader (Booth and Iser), a Model Reader (Eco), an Average Reader/Superreader (Riffaterre), an Informed Reader (Fish), a Competent Reader (Culler), a Strong Reader/Mis-Reader (Bloom), a Perverse Reader (Barthes), a Deconstructive Reader (Derrida), a Feasting Reader (Hartman), a Resisting Reader (Fetterley), a Created Reader (Preston), a Determined Reader (Peterson), or, as Robert Rogers (whose witty list of “readers” I have incorporated into this catalogue) calls it, the Amazing Reader. Whatever the term (and whatever its longevity—theorists are nearly as prone to disavowing their “readers” as to creating them), it never stands for the person who holds the book and reads.

A notable exception is Peter J. Rabinowitz’s essay, “Truth in Fiction: A Re-Examination of Audiences,” which moves beyond theories that posit a single “reader” to propose four separate roles that readers play. Rabinowitz suggests that when we read novels we must position ourselves in relation to four figures: the Actual Audience (real people who buy and read the book, in any era); the authorial audience (the group the author presumably had in mind while writing); the narrative audience (a conglomeration of characteristics to be inferred from the narrator’s assumptions about the readers’ knowledge and attitudes); and the ideal narrative audience (an entity defined by its willingness to accept the author’s evident intentions). The first three correspond to narratologists’ distinctions among “the actual reader” (see Suleiman, Of Readers and Narratees), the “addressee,” and the “narratee” (see Prince, “The Narratee Revisited”), respectively. Narratology has no term for the “ideal narrative audience,” probably because, like the implied reader or the virtual reader, its existence depends entirely upon an act of interpretation that cannot always appeal to “empirical textual evidence” among the words on a page.

According to Rabinowitz, “the narrative and authorial audiences are closer together in some novels than in others” and “the distance between these audiences is a major element in any novel’s structure” (131). He points out that “the wider the gap, the greater the effort required to bridge it” (131–132); a great effort leads to emotional distance from the fiction. Rabinowitz’s theory can help elucidate the distinction between Victorian realist texts with engaging and distancing narrators. Both kinds of novel
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share the same actual and authorial audiences. Their narrative audiences diverge: whereas the engaging narrator's "you" is in complete sympathy with the characters and the narrator's assertions about them, the distancing narrator's "you" (like Jones at the Club) demurs. Both narrators' ideal narrative audiences are the same: they sympathize unstintingly with the characters. The difference is one of irony. The distancing narrator distinguishes between the narrative audience and the ideal narrative audience, but for the engaging narrator, the two groups are identical.

It seems to me that all of these critics (with the exception of Rabinowitz) share an implicit answer to a question they do not raise in any explicit form. That question is: "What is the referent of 'you' in a literary text?" They have raised and answered the question about the literary "I," concluding through various lines of reasoning that it stands for the textual construct known as the narrator or the narrative voice. In novels where homodiegetic narrators speak to narratees who share their level of diegesis, the referents of "I" and "you" are hardly problematic. The "I" is the character-narrator and the "you" is a figure who is more or less explicitly inscribed in the text. (Wolfgang Müller has taken significant steps toward outlining the possible identities for the "unbestimmtes Du"—the "unspecified you"—in such texts.) In texts with heterodiegetic narrators, as we have seen, the questions of reference become more complex. The speaker is a creature in and of the text. No "real person" speaks in such a literary transaction; in a serious sense, it is the text itself which speaks. But unless a real person picks the text up and reads it, no interaction can occur. Indeed, the texts themselves do not even minimally dramatize an interaction in the way that Müller's study examples do. To assign every occurrence of the literary "you" a parallel function to that of the literary "I," to assume that every "you" is simply a textualized narratee just as every "I" is a narrator, is to overlook the complex differences between the two kinds of nineteenth-century novels, those with intradiegetic situations of narration and those with heterodiegetic situations. Novels with engaging narrators point to a difference between two possible and distinct referents for "you": the "you" that is utterly the product of the text's internal structures, and that other "you," the one that is inextricably tied to systems of signification outside the text, to real persons who find their social beings engaged by the narrator's address.

As Emile Benveniste has painstakingly demonstrated, the personal
pronouns “I” and “you” are peculiar in their relationship to their referents. As “shifters,” they have no fixed referents; they can be assigned meaning only in the context of the “present instance of discourse” (253). Unlike “he/she/it,” which substitute for entities and items existing outside the situation in which an utterance is being made, the first- and second-person pronouns refer only to a “reality of discourse.” It is the act of speaking that assigns the value “speaker” to “I,” and the value “addressee” to “you” (252–253). In each individual instance of literary discourse, the “I” stands for the addressor, the narrator, a function of the language on the page, a figure which may or may not correspond to the real-world author. (In the early novels of Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot, as we have seen, the narrator’s “I” evokes a strongly personal presence who closely resembles the author’s expressed idea of her own best self.) But as the discursive event in certain novels requires the presence of an actual reader, the referent of “you” may change according to the circumstances of the “present instance of discourse.” In some literary cases—notably, the case of the engaging narrator—the “reality of discourse” determines that the referent of “you” is the actual reader him- or herself.

Indeed, I do not mean to undermine the importance of the rich and diverse reader-centered theories of the past two decades. Demonstrating theories of reading fiction always requires the theorist to create fictions of reading. The “reader” becomes the hero of their fictions: for example, Iser’s implied reader, who bravely adjusts his idea of the “real” as he reads, or Fish’s reader, who is continually experiencing the adventure of surprise when he encounters patterns that disrupt his experience of literary conventions or his sense of “self.” In narrating possible ways to receive narratives, these theorists self-consciously focus attention on the circularity of the theoretical enterprise, as well as on the subjective nature of the reading experience. And, too, for nineteenth-century novels with distancing narrators, the various constructions of Readers have proven to be useful tools for describing fictional conventions, as well as for theorizing the process of literary reception. But they are not particularly helpful in accounting for the one convention of nineteenth-century realism with which I am most concerned: the engaging narrator’s use of “you” to stand for the actual reader. In the presence of earnest direct address, contemporary theorists avert their eyes, as though to avoid the sign of something shameful.
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APOSTROPE, EMBARRASSMENT, AND DIRECT ADDRESS

When I call the engaging use of “you” embarrassing, I borrow the adjective from Jonathan Culler's investigation into apostrophe in lyric poetry. Culler asserts—and Barbara Johnson concurs—that critics of lyric poetry are typically made so uncomfortable by apostrophe that they either ignore it or treat it in their criticism as though it were a mode of description (Pursuit of Signs 136). Although Johnson locates apostrophe’s discomfiting power in its self-contradictory claims to be able to breathe life, through poetry, into inanimate entities, Culler concentrates instead on the “moment of apostrophe” as an event. When a lyric poet invokes an abstract, inanimate, or absent figure, the poet invests that figure with being by naming it “you.” As Johnson emphasizes, the subjectivity of the apostrophized being in romantic poetry is only an illusion, a product of the poem. But I think Culler is right to trace critical discomfort with the trope to doubts over “the power of poetry to make something happen” (140).

As Culler explains, apostrophe differs from other rhetorical moves in that it “makes its point by troping not on the meaning of a word but on the circuit or situation of communication itself” (135). Apostrophe shifts the address of a text in such a way that the speaker stops talking to the reader/listener, and turns to speak to an absent third party. To evoke and animate that other entity is to make something happen. What’s more, that “something” happens in “real time” (as a computer scientist would call it), the time of writing and/or reading, Benveniste’s “reality of discourse,” rather than the lyric time or narrative time depicted in the text. Culler borrows the terms of narratology to explain the “now” that apostrophe brings to life: “This is the time of discourse rather than story” (149). He sums up the disconcerting power of the trope: “Apostrophe is not the representation of an event; if it works, it produces a fictive, discursive event” (153).

The recent critical interest in apostrophe provides a useful context for looking into reasons why literary critics have so persistently evaded and avoided the related but different trope, direct address. First, this attention to apostrophe—as opposed to earnest, direct address—suggests that the new practitioners of poetics are still most comfortable concentrating on the literary, created figures in texts, rather than on the actual “circuit of communication” an author might try to establish with a reader. Second, earnest
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direct address exactly parallels apostrophe in its status as an event, a trope that "makes something happen" in real time. And finally, the issues of presence and absence that Culler identifies as the source of embarrassment over apostrophe are even more crucial in considerations of direct address, complicated as they are by the addressee's literal presence in the act of reading.

Even though both Culler and Johnson attend carefully to the potential impact of apostrophe upon a "reader," each of them concentrates on the trope's evocation of a third party whose existence depends entirely upon the text. The stress in Culler's formulation of apostrophe as "a fictive, discursive event" is on the "fictive." Johnson overtly distinguishes apostrophe from direct address: "Apostrophe is both direct and indirect: based etymologically on the notion of turning aside, of digressing from straight speech, it manipulates the I/Thou structure of direct address in an indirect, fictionalized way" (30). True enough: this is precisely why I have placed apostrophe under the matrix of the distancing narrator. Apostrophe is a "fictive," "fictionalized" manipulation of address. The "you" to whom it speaks, whether the West Wind, the Muse, a deceased and honored poet, or the hero of Yeast, is indisputably a literary construct.

But what about the other "you," the "you" that need not be named in situations of apostrophe but that must be present in any act of reading, the "you" that really means "you, reader"? In the disarming but revealing introduction to his essay, Culler plays with an example of apostrophe:

If we posit for this essay, "Apostrophe," a communicative process linking an "authorial voice" and the readers of The Pursuit of Signs, an apostrophe seems to mark a deflection of the message: O mysterious apostrophe, teach us to understand your workings! Show us your varied talents here!

Such apostrophes may complicate or disrupt the circuit of communication, raising questions about who is the addressee, but above all they are embarrassing: embarrassing to me and to you. (135)

Here Culler illustrates his point about apostrophe's discomfits beautifully, but he raises one more question "about who is the addressee" than he answers. His essay questions the status of the apostrophe's addressee, but remains silent about the identity of the second of those two pronouns, "to me and to you." If we simply plug into these variables the values (in the
algebraic sense) he supplies, that phrase would read, "embarrassing to [an authorial voice] and to [the readers of The Pursuit of Signs]."

Such a statement would be within the etiquette prescribed by structuralist and semiotic analysis, but does it really make any sense? Can an authorial voice experience embarrassment? Must I really conceive of myself as an anonymous member of a group of readers while I am working my way through Culler's essay? Or do the "me" and the "you" actually serve here as the personal pronouns they appear to be? I read the phrase, "embarrassing to me, [Jonathan Culler] and [I presume] to you, [Robyn Warhol or whoever you may be]." Since an expository essay is primarily an act of communication, there can be no grounds for shame over the text's attempt to "do something," in this case, to convey ideas persuasively. And yet, even here, the critic hesitates to acknowledge that the text represents his personal attempt to persuade individual readers to his position.

When it is used earnestly and engagingly in fiction, direct address is, like apostrophe, "not the representation of an event." It "produces" an event, but the event is a genuine one, not a fictive one. When the distancing narrator sets up conversations between himself and "Miss Bullock," or when he addresses a narratee while taking pains to ensure that the actual reader will resist identifying with that narratee, he is representing a fictive event, an act of communication between one persona and another. When the engaging narrator speaks to a "you" that stands for the actual reader, however, the text produces a real event, an exchange of ideas that the novelist hopes will result in real consequences.

In this respect, earnest, engaging direct address differs from apostrophe: the verbal exchange it instigates is "real," because the receiver of the message, the actual reader, is present at the moment of reading, not absent, as is the addressee of apostrophe. Culler points to the ways in which apostrophe is particularly appropriate to a lyric mode that operates outside of empirical time: "Apostrophe resists narrative because its now is not a moment in a temporal sequence but a now of discourse, of writing" (152). Apostrophe plays with the opposition of presence and absence by shifting the two terms away from the time of story and into the time of discourse; the dead poet invoked in an elegy, the abstraction apostrophized in an epic poem are "not there" on the level of story, but they achieve existence in the discourse. Hence, according to Culler, apostrophe represents "the attempt to produce in fiction an event by replacing a temporal presence and absence
with an apostrophic presence and absence": the poem "knows its apostrophic time and the indirectly invoked presence to be a fiction and says so but enforces it as event" (153–154).

Culler's point is that apostrophe may be experienced as disruptive to narrative, since it produces a fictive, discursive event that competes with the fictive events depicted in a story. Direct address, like apostrophe, shifts a text's emphasis from the time of story to the time of discourse, if only momentarily. For the duration of a narrator's address to "you," be it a single phrase or several paragraphs long, the actual reader's attention is necessarily drawn away from the fictive events being narrated and toward the real situation of narration. To be reminded that a given story is embedded in discourse is to be reminded that it is "only a story." What engaging direct address attempts to do that neither distancing address nor apostrophe can do is to insist that it is "only a (true) story" by alluding to the presence of the actual reader in the engaging "you," a presence that is literally real as long as someone is perusing the passage of address and receiving the message. As I have suggested in Chapter 7, the engaging narrator is also working to promote a sense of the author's own presence in the text, through the earnest "I" that parallels the engaged "you." And as my reading of *Mary Barton*, for example, demonstrates, the engaging narrator can use the author's and reader's discursive "presence" to reinforce the narrative's claim to being realistic, by implying or even asserting that author, reader, and characters are all present simultaneously on the same diegetic plane.

Perhaps this is one source for our embarrassment about earnest, direct address: the engaging narrator's claim that the story is as real—not only as "realistic"—as the discourse that conveys it. The claim is absurd, naive, patently untrue, as Stowe's and Eliot's narrators emphasize when they complicate their engaging methods with distancing ones. And yet, as actual readers' emotional reactions to *Uncle Tom*, for instance, attest, the strategy can nevertheless be an effective means of stirring up readerly sentiments. It works. The strategy's very effectiveness points to another potential source for embarrassment similar to one Culler proposes for apostrophe. If achieving powerful effects depends on something as mechanical and easily manipulated as addresses to "you," then the effects must be cheap ones—and can they have anything to do with legitimate art? Up to now, even the most progressive theorists and critics have replied, no.
THE INTRUSION OF THE FEMININE

Another, and perhaps more profound, source for embarrassment about earnest direct address in literature is its association (for the nineteenth-century novel, at least) with femininity. Indeed, the implicit assumption that it is a woman’s strategy, to be applied at moments when a reader’s emotional receptivity should be most sensitive, and to be avoided by practitioners of self-referential “high art,” must be at least partly responsible for critics’ assumption that direct address is somehow an illegitimate technique. Direct address is “sensational,” lacks “genuineness,” “holds a strong implication of judgment, of moral or didactic” aims, according to Morrissette’s summary of twentieth-century critics’ attitudes toward the trope (124, 132). In the hands of nineteenth-century female novelists who use it to emphasize a feminine presence behind the narrative “I” and to exert female influence over the moral condition of the reading audience, direct address does operate upon the sensations toward didactic ends. And if, in 1929, Clifton Fadiman felt that rewriting a novel addressed to “you” into “the straightforward pattern of a direct third-person narrative” would help it “gain in genuineness” (Morrissette 124), who is to say whether or not his anxiety over the perceived deviousness of direct address could be traced to a distrust for feminine wiles?

Throughout this study, I have tried to show that earnest, direct address came to function in Victorian novels as a sign of feminine presence and as a gesture of connection between the worlds inside and outside the text. If playing with presence and absence through rhetorical tropes inspires discomfort in the first place, that discomfort must only be aggravated for androcentric or more extremely misogynist critics when the authorial presence is coded as feminine. I think that this is one way to account for the traditional critical hesitation over whether George Eliot is really in control of her art, for the long-standing dismissal of Uncle Tom’s Cabin as propaganda too popular and too manipulative to be called art, for the placement of Gaskell on the margins of a canon she occupies more comfortably later in her career, when her techniques rely less heavily on direct address. It can account, too, for objections to signs of the feminine that surface in moments of direct address in men’s texts: the oratorical sentimentality of Dickens and Thackeray, the “intrusive” chattiness of Kingsley and
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Trollope. For each of the texts in this study, direct address has been a feature for critics to condemn, to ignore, to defend, or to apologize for. What attracts the critics' opprobrium—and what draws my own interest to the trope—is the resonance of gender that it evokes.

Perhaps direct address in nineteenth-century novels is a subtle case of the phenomenon that Joanna Russ has outlined in *How to Suppress Women's Writing*: when it is not possible to deny a woman's agency behind a literary text, critics have simply devalued the features that the woman's text displays. Since a primary feature of Victorian novels by women is the urgent need for the novel to do something, to break the barrier between literature and rhetoric, to become a platform from which the woman could speak, women's novels may have been one inspiration for the perpetuation of the "divorce" Gossman and Tompkins describe. To use a Victorian novel as a vehicle for public speech is to write as a woman, and to write as a woman is—as Russ has so ably illustrated—to write substandard "art." Therefore, to rely on direct address is to produce illegitimate novels. The twentieth-century appropriation of direct address by the media has only aggravated a bias that became entrenched before anyone had even imagined a television commercial.