

A Short History of Deception Theory
Chapter 1 of Negative Poetics
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Edward Jayne

Solon, the ancient Athenian statesman, is told of having attended one of Thespis' tragedies to see for himself why this new type of spectacle had gained such wide popular appeal. Shocked by its factual liberties, he asked Thespis after the performance if he were not ashamed to tell so many lies before such large crowds of people. In his defense Thespis argued that no harm had been done, whereupon Solon angrily struck his staff against the ground, declaring, "If we honour and commend such play as this, we shall find it some day in our business."¹ This first known instance of theater criticism has been widely cited for its naiveté, but it accurately foretold the almost inextricable blend of truth and fiction taken for granted today in all walks of life. Who, after all, can deny Oscar Wilde's iconoclastic view that life imitates art and that our understanding of nature is necessarily the product of our education by art?² If Solon could visit the modern world, he might be offended by Wilde's perverse delight in this outcome, but hardly by the validity of his judgment. It almost seems as if Thespis's aesthetic liberties both anticipated and set in motion the creation of modern civilization. Whether we like it or not, literary distortion has become indispensable to human experience, valid because it confirms non-literary modes and trends that it itself has so effectively encouraged. Poetic license has escaped Pandora's box, and many of our best and most useful insights, as well as our most dangerous, may be traced to its literary wellspring.

Much in the spirit of Solon's warning was Plato's argument in the tenth chapter of *The Republic*, almost two centuries later, that poetry should be banned from the ideal republic because its depiction of experience is necessarily twice removed from the truth of ideal forms. The poet's description of a chair, for example, only partially replicates the artisan's handiwork, and this in turn only partially replicates the ideal concept of a chair. First its concept gains concrete realization when the artisan constructs his version of the chair, after which poets and artists may depict the artisan's product within the context of literary expression. This sequence took place, for example, when Thoreau boasted, "I had three chairs in my house: one for solitude, two for friendship, three for society," and when F. Scott Fitzgerald beckoned, "Draw your chair up close to the edge of the precipice and I'll tell you a story." Both authors proposed versions of a chair twice removed from its essence and purest conceptualization in order to express their respective views of privacy and the magic of story telling. The chairs they described fell short of its ideal conception, and their description compounded this departure from the truth in a manner acceptable to literary convention. In similar fashion all poetry doubles signification, thus giving free rein to bias and emotional manipulation at the expense of factual accuracy. Therefore, Plato argued, poetry should be excluded from the perfect society that encourages an uncompromising dedication to both honesty and emotional health.

Plato's notion of aesthetic deception would probably have borne a far more oppressive influence if Aristotle had not reversed his arguments by focussing his metaphysics of ideal forms upon tragic action as the purest literary ideal. According to Aristotle, tragedy is more true to life than either history or philosophy--the former because it is too particular, the latter because it is too

general. Through its refined use of mimesis, Aristotle suggested, tragedy tells the truth by imitating a single action, the fall and self-discovery of a flawed protagonist that produce an appropriate dose of catharsis in a sympathetic audience. In effect, this controlled use of mimesis duplicates a specific instance of behavior in order to produce emotional release. Through identification playgoers experience an appropriate mixture of pity for the protagonist (objective) and fear for themselves (subjective).³ The principle of mimesis accordingly expands from the simple congruence between an event and its aesthetic representation to a dynamic interaction between staged and subjective self-discovery.

However, Aristotle's model of literary experience sacrificed thoroughgoing mimesis (the *trompe l'oeil*, slice of life, etc.) to the extreme selectivity needed to evoke catharsis. As Emerson proposed in "Circles," Aristotle himself Platonized, in the case of tragedy by featuring the destruction of characters because of their deviation from established norms and conventions. Moreover, not just any behavior could be imitated, but the approved stories of kings and mythic personages whose destinies exemplified a reversal from high estate tarnished by ignorance to low estate redeemed by defeat and self-recognition. Aristotle claimed, in fact, that it is this radical selectivity that makes fiction superior to history. Probability takes precedence over actuality, he argued, because events are described as they ought to happen, not as they do, cluttered by accident and random circumstances. This normative obligation bore obvious Platonic implications contrary to Aristotle's mimetic prescriptions explained elsewhere in *Poetics*. Aristotle also emphasized plot's relatively abstract reversal dynamics at the expense of both idea and characterization, and he limited the scope of tragedy to its achievement of *dénouement* through ritualized self-destruction. He thus minimized the full complexity of human experience by stressing the importance of formal purity. Tragic form as a unity of action provided the aesthetic realization of Platonic ideals, since plot (or *muthos*) led from genuine deficiency (i.e. *hamartia*) to purification through self-discovery (*anagnorisis*).

Unfortunately, Aristotle did not explore the contradictions implicit in this model. He judged tragedy for both its mimetic accuracy and the transcendent purity of its form as if these two virtues are necessarily harmonious with each other. He also fell prey to the pleasant assumption that tragic recognition epitomizes human understanding, which it does not. Something else usually happens in life, and its radical distortion by tragedy necessarily diminishes tragic form's accuracy relevant to normal human experience.

A second theoretical effort to salvage poetry from Plato's indictment came with the advent of Neoplatonism in the third century, A.D. Like Aristotle, Neoplatonists turned Plato on his head, in their case by ascribing "truth" to ideal beauty as defined by Plato himself in *The Symposium*. Here Plato had explained love as the urge to perpetuate or reproduce ideal beauty, and Plotinus took the obvious additional step of featuring Plato's concept of ideal beauty as irradiated symmetry expressive of the Ideal Good. During the Renaissance, Neoplatonists took the final necessary step of treating poetry as the best medium for the depiction of ideal beauty. According to the Italian aesthetician, Girolamo Fracastoro, the poet plays a special role as one "who is moved by the true beauty of things--by their simple and essential beauties, not merely apparent ones."⁴ Poetic inspiration supposedly discloses the truth by capturing the essential beauty of the universe as ruled by God. Poets could therefore be confident they were telling the truth as long as they restricted their discourse to the appreciation of beauty. Plato's concept of poetry as a twofold departure

from absolute truth was accordingly reversed to establish aesthetic expression as the primary means of regaining this truth. If the artisan's handiwork necessarily falls short of the idealized chair, the poet's inspiration purifies the chair of its imperfections, restoring its idealization through the vision and language of poetry. As a result, the poet's worship of beauty becomes our primary access to higher truth, not its final and most unavailing abandonment. This Neoplatonic reversal took on enormous importance through the seventeenth century and vestiges have persisted into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. At first poetry could be defended for expressing the poet's dedication to Platonic love (e.g., in the poetry of Petrarch and Sidney), but later for expressing the poet's comparable dedication as a prophet of nature (in Wordsworth), of society (in Whitman), and of daily experience (in William Carlos Williams) and civilization's decline (in T.S. Eliot).

Christian doctrine perpetuated Plato's original rejection of literary deception despite its amelioration by Aristotelian and Neoplatonic theory. In *The Confessions*, St. Augustine expressed his regret for "poetic fictions" as the "choice spectacle of his vanity" during his youth. In comparable fashion, secular literary experience was rejected by later Christian polemicists such as Salvianus, Stephen Gosson, William Prynne, and Jeremy Collier, all of whom excoriated both the theater and literature in general as temptations to sinfulness.⁵ If scriptures alone embody Christian truth, they argued, literary experience necessarily diminishes this truth, especially when classical gods and heroes are venerated by secular poets who should instead try to elevate their creativity to the same plane as scriptural revelation. In effect, these polemicists adopted Plato's disapproval of literature to the equally stringent standards of orthodox Christianity.

Only with the advent of the Renaissance did it become possible to make a virtue of artistic license as the best means of teaching morality. Perhaps the first such defense of aesthetic distortion was offered by Francesco Robortelli, a translator and relatively minor critic of the mid-sixteenth century who more directly took his inspiration from Aristotelian doctrine that the subject of poetry "deals with things as they ought to be, rather than as they are."⁶ The primary objective of poetry, Robortelli suggested, should not be mimetic accuracy, but the encouragement of virtue by proposing improvements upon the real world. In "An Apologie for Poetrie," written in 1583 and published in 1595, Sir Philip Sidney similarly praised poetry for "making things either better then Nature bringeth forth, or, quite a newe, formes such as never were in Nature. . . ." According to Sidney, poetry's unique achievement was its "divine consideration of what may be, and should be," apparently with the aim of elevating *praxis* (action) over *gnossus* (knowledge) through the encouragement of "vertuous action" in readers.⁷ In 1658, the French critic, Guez de Balzac, also praised literary deception as a pedagogical device for conveying valuable lessons through duplicity: "O la bonne trahison que celle-la!"⁸ This ethical defense of literary deception has persisted over the centuries. Essentially the same argument, for example, has been made in the twentieth century by Thornton Wilder: "It [the theater] lives by conventions: a convention is an agreed upon falsehood, a permitted lie." In Wilder's opinion, the whole purpose of literary misrepresentation is the lesson it teaches:

The myth, the parable, the fable are the fountainhead of all fiction and in them is seen most clearly the didactic, moralizing employment of a story. Modern taste shrinks from emphasizing the central idea that hides behind the fiction, but it exists there nevertheless, supplying the unity to fantasizing, and offering a justification to what otherwise we would repudiate as mere arbitrary contrivance, pretentious lying, or individualistic emotional

association spinning.⁹

In other words, literary deception imposes standards of behavior superior to those observed in the real world--Aristotle's opinion but exactly opposite Plato's. As my twelfth grade English teacher fervently argued fifty-three years ago, we must first simulate virtues in order to acquire them. Fiction accordingly suggests behavioral improvements by its example, and readers benefit from observing, then absorbing them. The obvious hypocrite merely fails to complete this transition from pretense to full actualization.

By the eighteenth century the Baron von Bielfeld, a Prussian encyclopedist, was able to shift from ethics to the psychological value of literary deception with his striking declaration, "L'art de'exprimer les pense'es par la fiction." By means of aesthetic distortion, ideas could be the most effectively expressed. Bielfeld's pronouncement was later quoted by Edgar Allen Poe to challenge the obtrusive didacticism of Longfellow's poetry.¹⁰ The essence of literature is hardly truth, Poe argued, but the artistic effort of the poet to manipulate the reader's feelings. As a craftsman, the poet must reorganize experience to produce the necessary aesthetic effect, thus giving precedence to creativity over the raw experience used for this purpose. By implication, the writer must distort the truth in order to mold the reader's psychological response in the context of literary form. Whereas Robortelli, Sidney, Balzac, and Wilder were willing to manipulate the truth in order to encourage morality, Bielfeld and Poe preferred doing this to produce aesthetic experience for its own sake.

The German metaphysician Friedrich Schlegel also acknowledged the central role of literary deception, in his case by emphasizing its value as autobiographical evasiveness. Schlegel proposed that fiction necessarily conceals truths important to the author and that critics must therefore "spy on what he [the author] wanted to hide from our sight or at least did not want to show himself at first: on the author's secret intentions, which he pursues in silence and of which we can never assume too many in a genius."¹¹ The task of critics was to recognize these intentions despite the various distractions used by poets to defend themselves. This romantic vision of artistic mystery anticipated the psychoanalytic theory of literary displacement in the twentieth century, if without suggesting the extent to which the latent content of a text can be submitted to systematic examination.

Platonism seems to have been revived in the eighteenth century both to praise and reject aesthetic expression for its departure from mimetic accuracy. In his 1758 anti-theatrical essay, *Letter to d'Alembert Concerning Spectacles*, Rousseau challenged the construction of a public theater in Geneva by mingling complaints against acting as false representation with a variety of arguments to demonstrate the immorality of public entertainment. On the other hand, the English painter Sir Joshua Reynolds offered perhaps the simplest and most pragmatic version of Neoplatonism as the elimination of superficial imperfections through artistic craftsmanship:

Upon the whole, it seems to me, that the object and intention of all the arts is to supply the natural imperfection of things, and often to gratify the mind by realizing and embodying what never existed but in the imagination.¹²

No mystery was involved in this simplified defense of Platonic ideals, merely the effort of a

portrait painter (or poet) to exclude unsightly blemishes from the representation of ideal beauty. By glossing over such detail--the redundant streaks of the tulip decried by Johnson--the artist is supposedly better able to capture this perfection in his portraits.

From a metaphysical standpoint, the German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel emphasized the distinction between illusion and reality by arguing that uncompromising artistic honesty becomes a lie if judged in light of our substantive interests in life. He claimed aesthetic truth is limited to our highest cognitive faculties, so it necessarily conflicts with the world of appearance associated with our practical needs:

Art liberates the true content of phenomena from the pure appearance and deception of this bad, transitory world, and gives them a higher actuality, born of the spirit. Thus far from being mere pure appearance, a higher reality and truer existence is to be ascribed to the phenomena of art in comparison with those of ordinary reality.¹³

Nevertheless, Hegel found that artistic beauty also depends upon appearance, necessitating the use of deception to give expression to transcendent reality:

If, finally, art is regarded as a means, then there always remains in the form of the means a disadvantageous aspect, namely that even if art subordinates itself to more serious aims in fact, and produces more serious effects, the means that it uses for this purpose is deception.¹⁴

Like earlier Platonists, Hegel stressed the truth of ideal form by describing serious art as the equivalent to religion and philosophy in its representation of "the highest ideas in sensuous form." But he also acknowledged the appeal of concrete immediacy and established a dialectic tension between the two which once again drew upon Plato's assumptions. As opposed to Plato, Hegel approved of art's drawing upon the world of appearances to express the countervailing "reality" of eternal truth, but, in what seems a compromise between Plato and Neoplatonists, he proposed how art's elevation of ideal form over tangible immediacy meant that each challenges the integrity of the other. Like the Neoplatonists, he felt the pursuit of transcendence through immediacy was worthy, but like Plato he recognized the insurmountable differences involved. The truth of ordinary life falls short of art, while art inescapably deviates from ordinary life by letting higher truths be felt as sensible experience.

As early as the seventeenth century, scientific methodology began to take precedence over classical philosophy in explaining the physical universe, but most empiricists were willing to permit literary and scientific truth to coexist as separate disciplines, each valid on its own terms. The nineteenth century utilitarian philosopher, Jeremy Bentham, was the first secular empiricist willing to attack fiction as a frivolous exploration of the make-believe that was unworthy of serious consideration:

Between poetry and truth there is a natural opposition . . . The poet always stands in need of something false. When he pretends to lay his foundations in truth, the ornaments of his superstructure are fictions; his business consists in stimulating our passions, and exciting our prejudices. Truth, exactitude of every kind, is fatal to poetry. The poet must see

everything through coloured media, and strive to make everyone else to do the same. It is true, there have been noble spirits, to whom poetry and philosophy have been equally indebted; but these exceptions do not counteract the mischiefs which have resulted from this magic art.¹⁵

Bentham advocated scientific methodology as the single most valid means of judging the human condition, and he rejected literary experience as a distraction qualitatively no different from children's games: "If poetry and music deserve to be preferred before a game of push-pin, it must be because they are calculated to gratify those individuals who are most difficult to be pleased." Bentham's purist demands resembled Plato's except for the important distinction that he substituted scientific fact for ideal forms.

A couple generations later, the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche also used science as his point of departure, but from an entirely different vantage. Influenced by the current debate over evolution, Nietzsche proposed a post-Darwinian concept of blind purposefulness that restored literary deception to its central role in culture. Literary deception is beneficial, he insisted, because it helps the public to cope with matters otherwise beyond its grasp. As he maintained in one particularly disarming pronouncement, "We possess art lest we perish of the truth."¹⁶ [*italics in the translation*]. In effect, art provides salvation precisely because it deviates from the truth; and, vice versa, the truth produces extinction except to the extent that art distracts us from its destructive impact. In *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche went so far as to emphasize the necessity of deception as a non-literary principle more essential to the perpetuation of life than ethics itself--thus providing the title of his book:

. . . and we are fundamentally inclined to maintain that the falsest opinions (to which the synthetic judgments a priori belong), are the most indispensable to us; that without a recognition of logical fictions, without a comparison of reality with the purely imagined world by means of numbers, man cannot live--that the renunciation of false opinions would be a renunciation of life, a negation of life. To recognize untruths as a condition of life: that is certainly to impugn the traditional ideas of value in a dangerous manner, and a philosophy which ventures to do so has thereby alone placed itself beyond good and evil.¹⁷

The revolutionary importance of Nietzsche's ethical inversion should not be underestimated. Neoplatonists and Hegel had salvaged art from Plato's hostile aesthetics by promoting ideal form as a literary "truth," but Nietzsche reversed priorities by expanding Plato's theory of aesthetic deception to embrace all human experience, including ethics, artistic creativity, and the metaphysics of ideal forms. If Plato's concept of a higher truth could be adopted to supersede his theory of aesthetic deception, as argued by Neoplatonists, his concept of aesthetic deception could just as easily take precedence by reducing every dimension of human attainment to the artistic lie:

Life ought to inspire confidence": the task thus imposed is tremendous. To solve it, man must be a liar by nature, he must be above all an artist. And he is one: metaphysics, religion, morality, science--all of them only products of his will to art, to life, to flight from "truth," to negation of truth. This ability itself, thanks to which he violates reality by means of lies, this artistic ability of man par excellence--he has it in common with everything that

is. He himself is after all a piece of reality, truth, nature: how should he not also be a piece of genius in lying!¹⁸

Nietzsche accordingly extolled the mimetic arts for their paradoxical honesty in articulating the dishonesty that inescapably dominates human affairs. All conscious behavior is deceptive, he insisted, and by far the most deceptive, even more than philosophy, is art, so art becomes quintessential in its distortion of everything we know. Like Plato, Nietzsche treated falsehood as the matrix of art, but, unlike Plato, he therefore praised art for its transcendent value as an expression of human fallibility. If the whole world, every shred of human experience, is dishonest, then art, which is fully transparent in its dishonesty, affords a better and more accessible correspondence to this reality than any other mode of discourse. Similar tributes to aesthetic dishonesty enjoyed iconoclastic vogue among Nietzsche's contemporaries, as illustrated by Wilde's radical aestheticism, Mallarmé's enthusiasm for "ces glorieux mensonges," and Henry James's bland assurance that fiction is "after all only a 'make believe.'"¹⁹ But it was primarily Nietzsche who took pains to restore misrepresentation to its theoretical pinnacle. From the ashes of numerous intermediate philosophical systems emerged the phoenix once again, Solon and Plato's recognition of the possibility that literary fiction epitomizes the lure of misrepresentation in human intercourse.

In a brief essay, "Hymn to Truth," published just a few decades later, H. L. Mencken, the American journalist and author of *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche*, explained Nietzsche's principles of literary misrepresentation with pungent iconoclastic vivacity, if without mentioning Nietzsche by name:

The two elements, of untruth, and of beauty, are both important, and perhaps equally. It is not sufficient that the thing said in poetry be untrue: it must also be said with a certain grace--it must soothe the ear while it debauches the mind.²⁰

Most poets and authors defend literary truth, Mencken conceded, but only to encourage the acceptance of their lies:

[Poets] argue that they actually deal in the truth, and that their brand of truth is of a peculiarly profound and esoteric quality--in other words, that their compositions add to the sum of human wisdom. It is sufficient answer to them to say that the chiropractors make precisely the same claim, and with exactly the same plausibility. Both actually deal in fictions. Those fictions are not truths; they are not even truths in decay. They are simply better-than-truths. They make life more comfortable and happy. They turn and dull the sharp edge of reality.²¹

Mencken identified the love of poetry as one of the most primitive of human traits, "the love of the agreeably not-so," but he also claimed the same quest for pleasurable fictions occurs at all levels--in the college professor's appreciation of Browning's poetry as well as the Kiwanian's pleasure with Edgar Guest's poetry. How can this universal appeal of literary disingenuousness be accounted for? Mencken quickly answered by reminding us of human nature:

No normal human being wants to hear the truth. It is the passion of a small and aberrant

minority of men, most of them pathological. They are hated for telling it while they live, and when they die they are swiftly forgotten. What remains to the world, in the field of wisdom, is a series of long-tested and solidly agreeable lies. It is out of such lies that most of the so-called knowledge of humanity flows. What begins as poetry ends as fact, and is embalmed in the history books.²²

Published 1927, this brief article provides a model for the expression of Nietzsche's viewpoint to an American audience in American idiom.

In *Abbey's Road*, published roughly fifty years later, the American author and naturalist, Edward Abbey, similarly explains his role as a writer absorbed with deceiving both himself and his audience:

The writer puts the best of himself, not the whole, into the work; the author as seen in the pages of his own book is largely a fictional creation. Often the author's best creation. The Edward Abbey of my own books, for example, bears only the dimmest resemblance to the shy, timid, reclusive, rather dapper little gentleman who, always correctly attired for his labors in coat and tie and starched detachable cuffs, sits down each night for precisely four hours to type out the further adventures of that arrogant blustering macho fraud who counterfeits his name. You can bet on it: No writer is ever willing--even if able--to portray himself as seen by others or as he really is. Writers are shameless liars. In fact, we pride ourselves on the subtlety and grandeur of our lies. Salome had only seven veils; the author has a thousand.²³

With comparable flair, Ursula K. Le Guin, the daughter of the anthropologist, A. L. Kroeber, argues more or less the same case in her Introduction to her science fiction novel, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, but with due respects paid to the social need for literary deception:

Fiction writers, at least in their braver moments, do desire the truth: to know it, speak it, serve it. But they go about it in a peculiar and devious way, which consists in inventing persons, places, and events which never did and never will exist or occur, and telling about these fictions in detail and at length and with a great deal of emotion, and then when they are done writing down this pack of lies, they say, There! That's the truth! They may use all kinds of facts to support their tissue of lies. They may describe the Marshalsea Prison, which was a real place, or the battle of Borodino, which really was fought, or the process of cloning, which really takes place in laboratories, or the deterioration of a personality, which is described in real textbooks of psychology; and so on. This weight of verifiable place-event-phenomenon-behavior makes the reader forget that he is reading a pure invention, a history that never took place anywhere but in that unlocalizable region, the author's mind. In fact, while we read a novel, we are insane--bonkers. We believe in the existence of people who aren't there, we hear their voices, we watch the battle of Borodino with them, we may even become Napoleon. Sanity returns (in most cases) when the book is closed. Is it any wonder that no truly respectable society has ever trusted its artists? But our society, being troubled and bewildered, seeking guidance, sometimes puts an entirely mistaken trust in its artists, using them as prophets and futurologists.²⁴

Le Guin's argument here seems even more despairing than Nietzsche's explanation of literary deception as a coping mechanism to maintain collective sanity. Without rejecting Nietzsche's assessment, her final words emphasize literary deception's status as a symptom of chronic social malaise, whether or not there is any possibility of relieving the disorder.

In *What is Art*, published in 1898, Leo Tolstoy drew upon essentially the same assumptions about literature, but from an substantially different viewpoint.²⁵ Instead of using the evidence of literary deception to challenge the adequacy of the average mind, he used it to advocate the wholesale rejection of literary experience as the best means of salvaging the average mind. In effect, he merged the perspective of Plato and early Christian polemicists with contemporary standards of artistic deception implicit in the pronouncements of Nietzsche, Wilde, and Mallarmé, but with the view of resurrecting religion as a substitute for literary temptation. He advanced the fundamentalist notion that fiction should serve the ends of revealed Christianity through both its sincerity and accessibility to the average reader. Valid art, he claimed, is limited to that which promotes Christian values in the simplest stories of human sympathy. Few works of fiction met his stringent specifications--the rest he rejected, including his own major novels.

In the twentieth century, literary deception has become a source of speculation in a wide variety of fields, and only the most significant innovations can be explored here. No clustering, no line of descent, no effort to systematize and interconnect various approaches has occurred to justify the title "deceptology" or "deceptionism," and, as Mencken predicted, most contributions have rather quickly fallen into obscurity. Hans Vaihinger's neo-Kantian theory of "as if," for example, deserves mention, as well as Gustav LeBon's theory of the group mind, Vilfredo Pareto's sociological distinction between residues and derivations, and Jean-Paul Sartre's existential concept of "bad faith."²⁶ Only the latter, however, has been successfully diluted for popular consumption, and it seems taken for granted that they were arguing separate cases, as if there is no meaningful convergence in their shared vision of civilization's universal dependence on lies and misinformation. Ignored as a movement, their doctrine could be dispensed with as a matter of individual eccentricity.

The same problem has affected twentieth century literary criticism. Any suggestion that dishonesty might be an intrinsic feature of literature has been vigorously attacked for its wrong-headedness, then ignored. I. A. Richards tested possibilities when he proposed his theory of literary "pseudo-statement" in *Science and Poetry*, then quickly redeemed himself with his complementary theory of "sincerity" in *Practical Criticism*.²⁷ In the first of these books, first published in 1926, Richards argued that pseudo-statement reduces the truth of fiction to a willing suspension of disbelief; in the second, published in 1929, he proposed that literary value ultimately depends upon the author's sincerity. Richards left unexplored the basic contradiction between these two perspectives, but if he had tried to integrate them, he would probably have been obliged to admit that the final standard of poetic merit he was proposing depended on the poet's "sincere" capacity to believe in his own fabrications. Other examples of timid fascination with literary deception include Christopher Ricks' self-conscious refinement of the "lie" as a literary figure and Lionel Trilling's cryptic final words in *Beyond Culture* lamenting modern fiction's recreation of Bacon's idols "in its own contrivance." Trilling's ambivalence was even more pronounced in *Sincerity and Authenticity*, in which he sought to expose the pathological extremes of "authenticity" that he despised in the protest movement of the sixties.²⁸

Undoubtedly, the twentieth century's most influential contribution to the concept of literary deception has been Sigmund Freud's theory of repression and unconscious displacement. In *Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud proposed that dream formation provides the most fertile (or "overdetermined") vehicle of unconscious displacement, but he also suggested that all consciousness resembles dream formation because of its frequent dependence upon unconscious displacements to satisfy particular needs:

Thought is after all nothing but a substitute for a hallucinatory wish; and it is self-evident that dreams must be wish-fulfillment, since nothing but a wish can set our mental apparatus at work.²⁹

Just as our residue of recent experience is reorganized by dream work, our daytime consciousness sifts and reorganizes perception in the service of desirable ends--either as concrete effort to achieve these ends or as the fantasy that such an effort has been successful. In other words, we conceptualize substitutes to improve upon our material circumstance, the most effectively by formulating a specific plan of action and putting it in action, but almost as often by entertaining harmless illusions that satisfy our hopes without really fulfilling them. William James proposed a similar motivational (or conative) model of cognition in *Principles of Psychology*, published a decade before *Interpretation of Dreams*:

Every actually existing consciousness seems to itself at any rate to be a fighter for ends, of which many, but for its presence, would not be ends at all. Its powers of cognition are mainly subservient to these ends, discerning which facts further them and which do not . . . The brain is an instrument of possibilities, not of certainties.³⁰

Here thinking was shown to occur as a preliminary exploration of alternatives that might later be imposed, with differences tentatively explored in the separate realm commonly described as consciousness in order to choose the appropriate behavior for making changes. But as both the curse and joy of the human mind, if and when these changes cannot be made for one reason or another, they may nevertheless be entertained in consciousness as a realm of hypothetical conjecture, and with beneficial results anyway. Merely an instrument of praxis at its most primitive level, consciousness becomes in and of itself a version of praxis through the dynamics of wish fulfillment produced by fantasy.

Freud surpassed James's volitional emphasis by elevating instincts (or drives--which he described as *Triebe*) to the status of Plato's eternal forms--if from below (or within) instead of above. Like Nietzsche, Freud treated survival as the final most important issue, but he also emphasized minimizing anxieties through the effective gratification of drives. He consequently expanded the theory of mental behavior to embrace a more inclusive division between our conscious-perceptual apparatus at one pole, the Ego, and, at its opposite, the volitional demands composing the Id. According to Freud, these two vectors merge and interact in all behavior, so the misguided pursuit of either at the expense of the other is potentially harmful to emotional adjustment. Freud preferred the Ego, but without diminishing the tentative harmony between the two in fantasy, for example as organized by literary experience.

Apropos of literary fantasy, Freud argued in his brief essay, "The Relation of the Poet to Day-dreaming," that fiction appeals to readers precisely because of fantasy content's departure from real-life expectations:

Now the writer does the same as the child at play; he creates a world of phantasy which he takes very seriously; that is, he invests it with a great deal of affect, while separating it sharply from reality . . .31

Formal adequacy is primarily important to fiction, Freud maintained, because it grants wish fulfillment as an outcome both aesthetic and seemingly true to life:

The writer softens the egotistical character of the day-dream by changes and disguises, and he bribes us by the offer of a purely formal, that is, aesthetic, pleasure in the presentation of his phantasies.³²

In other words, both form and descriptive accuracy are subservient to affective needs. They provide literature with the same benefits as the dream or daydream by giving credibility to illusions that yield emotional satisfaction:

I am of the opinion that . . . the true enjoyment of literature proceeds from the release of tensions in our minds. Perhaps much that brings about this result consists in the writer's putting us into a position in which we can enjoy our own day-dreams without reproach or shame.³³

The author's willingness to believe in his day-dreams reinforces our own, helping us cope with our baggage of normal anxieties. Freud attributed the universal appeal of fiction to this stimulation of pleasure through fantasy as a substitute gratification of needs.

Unfortunately, ego psychologists and literary response theoreticians such as Norman Holland and David Bleich have tried to minimize the importance of this conscious/unconscious dialectic emphasized by Freud. Norman O. Brown has also criticized the Freudian model for "having the basic dynamic of a flight from reality," and for "reducing art to "an opiate of the people, an escape into an unreal world of fantasy indistinguishable from a full-blown neurosis."³⁴ In part this concern seems justified (to Freud's credit in my opinion), but it should also be acknowledged that fiction loses its appeal if the dynamics of repression (and thus the unrecognized lie) are totally eliminated from literary expression. By emphasizing relatively simple patterns of response (each reader matching a text's truths with his own), response theoreticians neglect how an author's misrepresentations built into a text help readers to be satisfied with misrepresentations more relevant to their individual circumstances--often by so completely stretching the truth that even the text itself goes unrecognized as a vehicle of substitute experience. It may nevertheless be proposed as a basic principle that the reader's personal response to a text seems best explained by his collaborative willingness to share in its fantasy content. His primary task--which he is capable of performing with great ingenuity--is to appropriate its distortions of the truth to help justify his own.

Contemporary Marxist doctrine offers fewer possibilities than psychoanalysis as an

explanation of literary deception. Ignoring Matthew Arnold's definition of literature as "spilt religion," too many Marxists fall victim to the glaring contradiction of on one hand dismissing religion as an opiate of the people, but on the other praising literature, presumably its derivative, for its unique and transcendent honesty. For example, in *What is Literature?* Jean Paul Sartre emphasized the crusade of all authors except lyric poets to confront their readers with the "truth," specifically consisting of a progressive vision of historical necessity in the victory of socialism. Christopher Caudwell and Georg Thomson likewise emphasized tragedy's secularization of primitive ritual without concerning themselves with Solon's objections to its veracity. But how, exactly, can religion embody a lie or "opiate of the masses" while its secular adaptation in literary experience remains totally purified of this deficiency?

Only Marxists of the Frankfurt School devoted any attention to the issue of literary deception, but they have had some impact in recent years. Among their more prominent theoreticians, Herbert Marcuse first dealt with literary deception in *Eros and Civilization*, his early treatment of Freudian doctrine, and later in *One-Dimensional Man* and *Counter-Revolution and Revolt*, in which he drew upon psychoanalytic distinctions to support Marxist conclusions. According to Marcuse, fiction draws upon an extra dimension of consciousness to expose and challenge the capitalist irrationality that dominates our society:

Like technology, art creates another universe of thought and practice against and within the existing one. But in contrast to the technical universe, the artistic universe is organized by the images of a life without fear--in mask and silence because art is without power to bring about this life, and even without power to represent it adequately. Still, the powerless, illusory truth of art (which has never been more powerless and more illusory than today, when it has become an omnipresent ingredient of the administered society) testifies to the validity of its images. The more blatantly irrational the society becomes, the greater the rationality of the artistic universe.³⁵

Like Hegel, Marcuse praised literature as an entry into a second and improved realm, but he joined in the Marxist effort to put Hegelian doctrine on its head by envisaging this realm as an idealized socialist future rather than a prelapsarian garden or the timeless domain of Platonic forms. To promote such a future, valid art actually doubles alienation, thus exposing its stranglehold upon bourgeois society today:

[A]rt retains that alienation from the established reality which is at the origin of art. It is a second alienation, by virtue of which the artist dissociates himself methodically from the alienated society and creates the unreal, "illusory" universe in which art alone has, and communicates, its truth.³⁶

As an alienation from the experience of alienation, a freakish version of the Marxist principle of *Negationsnegierung*, fiction totally rejects existing values and institutions by advocating obviously superior alternatives in the realm of fantasy. Its referential content concedes the status quo, but its "style" suggests a world more worthy of our aspirations:

By becoming components of aesthetic form, words, sounds, shapes, and colors are insulated against their familiar, ordinary use and function; thus they are freed for a new

dimension of existence. This is the achievement of the style, which is the poem, the novel, the painting, the composition. The style, embodiment of the aesthetic form, in subjecting reality to another order, subjects it to the "laws of beauty."³⁷

The meaning of words draws upon one dimension, the world as we know it, but their stylistic use imposes as a second dimension a world of fantasy that suggests an improved alternative. As a vehicle for this extra dimension, fiction conveys truths at odds with received opinion because they conflict with the world as we know it. Perhaps fiction deceives because of its celebration of unrealized ideals, but just as deceptive is the non-literary one-dimensional belief that our ideals cannot be fulfilled in a better future. These ideals can indeed be attained, Marcuse claimed, through a permanent commitment to revolution as encouraged by fiction.

A less militant deceptionist model is suggested in Fredric Jameson's study of the Frankfurt School, *Marxism and Form*, in which there is passing reference to dialectical reversal, alternative structural realizations, and the "secret dynamics" of the subject-object relationship.³⁸ Jameson praises literary form as the working out of content in the realm of the superstructure, and his discussion of the intrinsic-extrinsic integration of a text and the compensatory interaction between overdeveloped and underdeveloped elements bears useful implications. Contrary to deceptionist priorities, he maintains that the truth is the source of "determinate negation," but he also warns of a resistance (or *mauvaise foi*) to socio-economic truths that might become strong enough to usurp these truths in the context of literary form. Unfortunately, he rejects the importance of plot. He mentions its foregrounding, but claims it is "mere hypostasis" that stands out in relief from the work as a whole.³⁹ This failure to recognize plot's dialectic value as an agent of deception affords perhaps the most important difference between his approach and the model of negative poetics I will later be proposing. However, Jameson does praise Humboldt's concept of "inner form" (obtained from Plotinus and Goethe) as a "negative and anxiety-ridden type of work [based on] a positive fantasy."⁴⁰ According to Jameson, "Art which can no longer in good conscience put up with this deception . . . has already dissolved the only element in which it can realize itself."⁴¹ To exist as art, he suggests, fiction depends on the dialectic by which fantasy misrepresents the truth.

Substantially at odds with both Marcuse and Jameson's revolutionary perspective has been Roland Barthes's conservative, even reactionary, vision of literary deception. Hostile to radical politics since the very beginning of his career in the mid-forties, Barthes found the rejection of deceptive motivation to be a key flaw in the Marxist insistence upon political engagement. He enthusiastically praised Brecht's aesthetics of alienation (*Verfremdungseffekt*), but he also criticized socialist realism for its insufficient commitment to literary deception:

All literature knows that like Orpheus, it cannot, on pain of death, turn around to look at what is behind it: it is condemned to mediation--that is, in a sense, to lying . . . it is because socialist realism, in its very project, rejects any mediation that (at least in our Western countries) it asphyxiates itself and dies: it dies of being immediate, it dies of rejecting that something which hides reality in order to make it more real, and which is literature.⁴²

From this elaborate sentence may be extracted the simple equation, "literature hides reality in

order to make it more real," a strictly Platonic assumption. Using Hegelian nomenclature, Barthes also attacked the immediacy of socialist realism that prevents writers from freely modifying (or mediating) their truths with aesthetic liberties. Because of its flat depictive style, he claimed, socialist realism loses its deceptiveness, hence its value as art. By way of contrast, Barthes gave special status to Kafka because his fiction exposes the lie as an ethical issue at the root of self-expression:

That is Kafka's paradox: art depends on truth, but truth, being indivisible, cannot know itself: to tell the truth is to lie. Thus the writer is the truth, and yet when he speaks he lies: a work's authority is never situated at the level of its esthetic, but only at the level of the moral experience which makes it an assumed lie . . .43

If the truth consists of indivisible experience, any selection of this experience deceives by diminishing this totality. Good fiction therefore lies because of its selectivity, and writers can be admired because they accept the moral burden of making the necessarily distortive selection of experience they consider important. They must try to take into account the full truth, but they must also recognize that their effort is doomed to failure. Authors capable of this transcendent ambivalence, including Kafka, Brecht, and Robbe-Grillet, retain their integrity by acknowledging in their fiction its unavoidably dishonesty.

Probably Barthes's most intriguing contribution to deceptology is his explanation of language as a linear and propositional mode of symbolic representation which necessarily compounds literary deception. Fiction deceives as imaginative representation, as explained by Freud, but, even more manifestly, it deceives as a combination of words:

[In] relation to objects themselves, literature is fundamentally, constitutively unrealistic; literature is unreality itself; or more exactly, far from being an analogical copy of reality, literature is on the contrary the very consciousness of the unreality of language: the "truest" literature is the one which knows itself as the most unreal, to the degree that it knows itself as essentially language . . .44

With this semiotic twist Barthes attributed to the language of fiction a radical selectivity that necessarily reinforces the compositional distortions of literary form. Thinking biases factual accuracy, language biases thinking, and fiction takes this departure from the truth to its extreme by its "intentional misuse of language which can only convey the truth through recognition of its failure to do so." In effect, Plato's two stages of departure from reality are revised and expanded to three, with verbal distortions sandwiched between those of conceptualization and literary expression.

The inevitability of verbal deception as a function of language was already suggested by Emerson in "Nominalist and Realist": "No sentence will hold the whole truth, and the only way in which we can be just, is by giving ourselves the lie."⁴⁵ In the same vein the contemporary novelist, John Barth, lets Jacob Horner, his protagonist in *The End of the Road*, disparage the truth value of language: "To turn experience into speech--that is, to classify, to categorize, to conceptualize, to grammatize, to syntactify it--is always a betrayal of experience, a falsification of it; but only so betrayed can it be dealt with at all."⁴⁶ And for George Steiner in *After Babel*, this

limitation affords an ethics, in fact a theory of civilization that gives renewed importance to verbal deception as an agent of survival and social harmony. The brain's supposition of an alternative world as proposed by both Freud and William James is described by Steiner as a feature of language that lets us deal with our problems on a hypothetical basis:

Language is the main instrument of man's refusal to accept the world as it is. Without that refusal, without the increasing generation by the mind of "counter-worlds" --a generation which cannot be divorced from the grammar of counter-factual and optative forms--we would turn forever on the treadmill of the present. Reality would be (to use Wittgenstein's phrase in an illicit sense), "all that is the case" and nothing more. Ours is the ability, the need, to gainsay or "unsay" the world, to image and speak it otherwise . . . It is not, perhaps, "a theory of information" that will serve us best in trying to clarify the nature of language, but a "theory of misinformation."⁴⁷ (*italics in the original*)

Steiner goes on to describe misinformation as perfectly normal behavior in the choice of words and syntactic constructions:

We communicate motivated images, local frameworks of feeling. All descriptions are partial. We speak less than the truth, we fragment in order to reconstruct desired alternatives, we select and elide. It is not "the things which are" that we say, but those which might be, which we would bring about, which the eye and remembrance compose. . . . Information does not come naked except in the schemata of computer languages or the lexicon. It comes attenuated, flexed, coloured, alloyed by intent and milieux in which the utterance occurs . . .⁴⁸

According to Steiner, our very survival skills depend upon our ability to use language as an instrument of deception:

It is unlikely that man, as we know him, would have survived without the fictive, counter-factual, antideterminist means of language, without the semantic capacity, generated and stored in the "superfluous" zones of the cortex, to conceive of, to articulate possibilities beyond the treadmill of organic decay and death.⁴⁹

Again, two pages later:

The relevant framework is not one of morality but of survival. At every level, from brute camouflage to poetic vision, the linguistic capacity to conceal, misinform, leave ambiguous, hypothesize, invent is indispensable to the equilibrium of human consciousness and to the development of man in society. Only a small portion of human discourse is nakedly veracious or informative in any monovalent, unqualified sense.⁵⁰

The value of poetry, then, comes from its unique intensity in expressing this dishonest potential of human intelligence in the context of language:

A poem concentrates, it deploys with least regard to routine or conventional transparency, those energies of covertness and of invention which are the crux of human speech. A poem

is maximal speech.⁵¹

By "maximal" Steiner refers to the extremes to which verbal deception can and should be brought in the context of fiction. Here Steiner entirely agrees with Nietzsche and Barthes' inversion that makes the pursuit of illusion the single most important mode of human behavior. Solon and Plato's warnings are conceded, but literary deception is shown to epitomize civilization. Without deception, human institutions--literature included--could never have evolved beyond the most rudimentary levels of tribal cooperation.

In his Atlantic Monthly article, "Lies, Lies, Lies," Anthony Brand effectively summarizes Steiner's argument pertaining to verbal deception in and of itself, independent of the cultural implications featured by Steiner:

George Steiner observes that "our outward speech has 'behind it' a concurrent flow of articulate consciousness"; there is our outward talk, and there is the flow of words in our minds, our talking to ourselves, our "thinking." Between them, Steiner goes on, there is never anything more than partial congruence. But behind that, behind the thinking, the articulate consciousness, there is the flow of feeling, while behind that there is still more feeling, deep, abiding patterns of feeling; and the more layers we peel away the more difficult it becomes to see how to put into words all that is going on inside, how to be anything but dishonest no matter what we say. Anything we say is a selection from the flow of consciousness; it is a construct, something we build up from certain elements and not others; it is a consistency chosen from among numerous apparent inconsistencies, from the general mess of imprecision of feeling; in short it is, or at least it follows the same principle of selectivity as, a work of art.⁵² (*italics in the original*)

Brandt concludes, "When we must speak to others we speak ironically, holding truth and falsehood in balance, knowing that nothing we say is strictly true, that the best we can hope for is a vague approximation, and that no matter what we say, seeming true or seeming false, the ones inevitably most deceived by it will be ourselves."⁵³

* * * * *

The variety of deceptionist theories listed here is formidable, and many seem to contradict others. Oscar Wilde rejoiced in the genius of literary deception, whereas his contemporary, Tolstoy, found it a source of despair. Like Tolstoy, Plato attacked literature because of its immorality in misleading the public, whereas Thornton Wilder, like Sidney, praised it for exactly the opposite reason, that it teaches the public morality by misleading it. Bentham deplored the uselessness of literary deception, while Nietzsche emphasized its universal necessity. Hegel stressed its value in expressing higher truths, Mencken redefined "higher" as a better-than-truth, and Freud located the source of this better-than-truth in fantasy and wish fulfillment. Bielfeld, Steiner, and others have shown deception to be functional at an even more basic level, embedded in both language and consciousness. More specifically, Schlegel saw literary deception as the sharing of unacknowledged secrets, Barthes as verbal paradox, Poe as the key to literary craftsmanship, I. A. Richards as a useful substitute for belief, and Marcuse as an agent of political subversiveness. How, then, does one classify the many critics listed here? Four relatively distinct

categories may be proposed to combine the binary distinctions between theories emphasizing fiction's honesty and dishonesty and between theories emphasizing fiction's resemblance and deviation from objective discourse:

	Fiction the opposite of ordinary discourse	Fiction the same as ordinary discourse
Fiction is honest	2	1
Fiction tells lies	3	4

These four categories may then be listed in the following vertical sequence:

<u>Quadrant</u>	<u>Ordinary Discourse</u>	<u>Fiction</u>
1. Aristotle and most orthodox approaches to criticism:	. . . is capable of telling the truth.	. . . epitomizes the truth.
2. Plotinus, Hegel, and Marcuse:	. . . usually falls short of the truth.	. . . epitomizes the truth.
3. Solon, Plato, Augustine, and Freud:	. . . is capable of telling the truth.	. . . epitomizes the lie (or fantasy).
4. Wilde, Nietzsche, Barthes, and Steiner:	. . . usually falls short of the truth.	. . . epitomizes the lie.

Categories I and II characterize objectivist theories that treat fiction as the vehicle and highest exemplification of the truth, while categories III and IV characterize all deceptionist theories that treat fiction as a departure from the truth. Together, the second and third categories differentiate fiction from objective discourse based on their conflicting truth value, but with opposite priorities. In the first instance--with Plotinus, Hegel, and Marcuse--literature is found to be more honest than objective discourse; in the second--with Plato and Freud--this distinction is inverted by finding greater honesty in such non-literary expression as dialectic inquiry and diagnostic thoroughness, as

respectively illustrated by the arguments of Plato and Freud. Of course both Plato and Freud paid their respects to literary inspiration (Plato in the *Ion*), but the truths they themselves sought lay elsewhere. In contrast to the middle two categories, the first and fourth enjoy the benefits of consistency, in the former instance by insisting that fiction epitomizes the honesty typical of objective discourse, in the latter--with Nietzsche, Barthes, and Steiner--by insisting that fiction instead epitomizes its rampant dishonesty.

What is the relative popularity of each of these four categories? Arguments of the first category, based on the assumption that both fiction and objective discourse tell the truth, have been dominant in published literary criticism, while arguments of the second, based on the notion of fiction's higher truth, take up most of the exceptions. Orthodox critics who despair of hypocrisy and venality in our normal daily affairs revere fiction for its comparative honesty in subordinating fantasy to universal truth. Nevertheless, a few critics may be found whose views fall into the third and fourth categories. Category III, embracing the view that fiction is less honest than objective discourse, primarily includes theories of fiction as fantasy gratification, while Category IV, committed to the view that both fiction and non-fiction are mired in deception, is limited to a handful of hard-core deceptionists including Nietzsche, Wilde, Barthes, and Steiner. Among this tiny minority, fiction is appreciated for its unique, indeed transcendent, achievement in epitomizing the myths and illusions that are crucial to our pleasure, self-respect, and perhaps our very survival.

Some critics escape all four of these categories by arguing that fiction tells lies in order to convey more fundamental truths. Authors are said to resort to aesthetic misrepresentation to expose readers to the valid insights at the heart of their stories that would otherwise be inaccessible to readers. The final product of this effort, they suggest, is a consummate honesty, as emphasized by D. H. Lawrence in his *Introduction to Studies in Classical American Literature*:

The curious thing about art speech is that it prevaricates so terribly, I mean it tells such lies. I suppose because we always all the time tell ourselves lies. And out of a pattern of lies art weaves the truth.⁵⁴

A similar view has been expressed by Norman Mailer in his "Appeal to Lillian Hellman and Mary McCarthy," in which he tried to defuse the controversy arising from Mary McCarthy's remarks, ". . . that every word she [Lillian Hellman] writes is a lie, including 'and' and 'the.'" Insists Mailer:

To say that Lillian Hellman is dishonest is blarney. No writer worthy of serious consideration is ever honest except for those rare moments--for which we keep writing--when we become, bless us, not dishonest for an instant. Of course Lillian Hellman is dishonest. So is Mary McCarthy, Norman Mailer, Saul Bellow, John Updike, John Cheever, Cynthia Ozick--name 500 of us, Willa Cather, Edith Wharton, Henry James--we are all dishonest, we exaggerate, distort, we use our tricks, we invent.⁵⁵

Similarly, Grace Paley has explained in a recent interview, "The story is a big lie. And in the middle of this big lie, you're telling the truth. If you lie [in the middle too], things go wrong. You become sentimental, opaque, bombastic, you withhold information."⁵⁶ [brackets added] Like

Lawrence and Mailer, Paley argues that authors extract basic truths from relatively superficial lies. This truth-untruth paradox is of course in conflict with the holistic deceptionist insights already quoted by Edward Abbey and Ursula le Guin, who reverse the argument by claiming that fiction might utilize the truth here and there, but only to convey more basic lies. Similarly, such entrenched deceptionists as Nietzsche and Mencken emphasized that the use of superficial lies to tell basic truths usually conveys even more basic lies--those by which authors fool even themselves. They resort to the "surface" appeal of literary verisimilitude in order to confirm other, more impelling fictions they continue to accept (literary deception's "deep structure"), and they can best do this if they remain at least partially unaware of their strategy. Fiction seems sentimental, opaque, bombastic, and uninformative exactly when authors become consciously or unconsciously ashamed of the self-deception at the heart of their stories. When the central lie begins to crumble, embarrassed insincerity follows.

Lawrence, Mailer, and Paley also overlook the important distinction that any truth becomes a misrepresentation if and when it is featured excessively, as authors are prone to do. Salt is good, too much salt bad; restraint is good, too much restraint bad, etc. Sir Francis Bacon accordingly used his *Idol of the Den* to describe any idea one's mind "seizes and dwells upon with peculiar satisfaction," and he argued that this idea is to be held in suspicion for precisely this reason.⁵⁷ Similarly, in his essay, "Intellect," Emerson explained, "If a man fasten his attention on a single aspect of truth, and apply himself to that alone for a long time, the truth becomes distorted and not itself, but falsehood."⁵⁸ Almost by definition, the intended "truths" of fiction fit this description, since authors usually need to fasten upon them with enough "peculiar satisfaction" to impose a sense of reality for material that is in large part fictional. As urged by both Bacon and Emerson, such truths must necessarily be held in suspicion. Moreover, if aesthetic liberties are needed to tell the real truth, the use of these liberties probably conceals misrepresentation that authors themselves might not be able to recognize on the assumption that fiction does not tell lies in order to express more basic truths. The honesty at the core of a text sought by Lawrence, Mailer, and Paley might be more valid than the conventions used to express it, but it very likely diverts both the author and reader's attention from even deeper truths the author cannot directly acknowledge--truths rooted in whatever inadequacy gives fiction its compensatory value. The more threatening these underlying truths become, the more energetic everybody's insistence on the text's integrity, and the more energetic this insistence, very probably the bigger the lie. Totally ignored by this approach is the possibility that lies are not told to convey more basic truths, but, quite the opposite, that truths are put on display in great abundance in order to convey more basic lies.

An alternative strategy for rejecting the inevitability of literary deception has featured exactly the opposite argument that fiction makes no effort to tell the truth, so it cannot be accused of lying. This approach avoids defending the truth value of literature, but in doing so it also undermines the notion of literary deception. Sir Philip Sidney was perhaps the most succinct in articulating this noncommittal aesthetics when he declared, "Now for the poet, he nothing affirms, and therefore never lyeth."⁵⁹ Coleridge loosely concurred by proposing the author's and reader's dependence on a willing suspension of disbelief.⁶⁰ And, as earlier indicated, the concept was revitalized by I. A. Richards when he proposed in *Science and Poetry* that fiction appeals to readers as "pseudo-statement" which can neither be proven nor disproved and whose value primarily depends on its conscious effect rather than its truth content:

A pseudo-statement is a form of words which is justified entirely by its effect in releasing or organizing our impulses and attitudes. . . . a statement, on the other hand, is justified by its truth, i.e., its correspondence, in a highly technical sense with the fact to which it points.⁶¹

Richard borrowed the distinction between statement and pseudo-statement from logical empiricism and expanded its meaning to explain fiction's temporary reinforcement of traditional beliefs among readers demoralized by the empirical skepticism of the twentieth century. Readers must depend on fiction for a renewed commitment to tradition, religion, and social custom, Richards suggested, since these have otherwise lost their credibility in face of hard scientific evidence. If divine retribution, for example, no longer seems inevitable in the conduct of our affairs, fiction's capacity as pseudo-statement lets us trust in its power at least within the artificial world of a novel or poem. Having ceased to be true to life, poetic justice remains true to fiction and consequently immune to scientific verification. Fiction tells us what we want to think, and it does so without the excessive intrusion of verifiable truths. As a result, it escapes the lie, technically speaking. Nothing is scientifically or historically affirmed, so the poet's honesty is not at stake.

Richards's concept of literary pseudo-statement was at first angrily challenged by critics and aestheticians, and he responded by backing off from the more radical implications of his argument. But then New Criticism gradually absorbed and granted respectability to his assumptions. William Empson and Cleanth Brooks proposed theories of irony and ambiguity that subordinated the conventional truth value of literary texts to the author's right--indeed, his obligation--to load his words with significance in excess of their denotative meaning. Yvor Winters likewise proposed the Fallacy of Imitative Form as the misguided exaggeration of factual accuracy for its own sake. Later Rene Wellek offered a formalist explanation of this principle when he declared in *Theory of Literature*: "Art imposes some kind of framework which takes the statement of the work out of the world of reality."⁶² Likewise, Northrop Frye reduced fiction's raw truth content to a category of "experience" necessarily subordinate to that of "innocence" in his hierarchy of literary archetypes. Only satire and "low-mimetic" naturalism totally featured experience (i.e. the truth) to violate the dominant role of innocence, so these could be relegated to what seems an inferior status among literary genres.⁶³ Proponents of New Criticism continued to reject the pejorative implications of the expression "pseudo-statement," but the idea of fiction's special validity independent of its objective truth gained popularity once a more suitable wording could be found.

Nowadays the concept of pseudo-statement, cleansed of logical positivism and rehabilitated as "indeterminacy," is commonplace among post-modernists, deconstructionists, and loosely identifiable post-structuralists. Jonathan Culler, for example, emphasizes the myths and formal devices that give shape to fiction without necessarily communicating ideas; John Ellis stresses that literature consists of fiction not to be acted on; Barbara Herrnstein Smith emphasizes fiction's "absence of truth claims" as its defining convention; Raymond Federman claims fiction's production of meaning abolishes both reality and the notion that reality is truth; and Paul de Man proposes a "paradoxical" language for fiction (as opposed to "steno-language") which deconstructs itself by calling attention to its own fictiveness.⁶⁴ In each instance poetry has been

absolved of verification. Its informational content is seen to be superfluous, and its propositional content is deemed empty except pertaining to the context of fiction itself. What results, in the words of Gerald Graff, is a "radical unaccountability" of literary meaning in its reference to real experience. Fiction does not tell the truth, these critics concede, but then again it does not lie either, because it does not claim to tell the truth. Consequently, both deceptive and objective theories of fictive meaning can be rejected for being irrelevant to fiction.

In *Literature Against Itself*, Graff challenges this notion of literary unaccountability by claiming that the propositional and informational functions of language are just as applicable to fiction as to any other mode of communication. He insists that fiction's sentences inevitably express subject-predicate equations conveying information whose validity must sooner or later be tested against the real world. He acknowledges that fiction can be largely hypothetical, but argues that its value as fiction nevertheless depends upon its "convincing understanding of the world." Its reorganization of experience may be creative, but it must also be true to the world as we know it. As perhaps to be expected, the committed deceptionist finds no problem in agreeing with Graff's emphasis on the truth value of fiction, but with the caveat that fiction's most basic propositional content must accordingly be treated as false, not true. Fiction does indeed tell a great variety of truths, but these truths are almost always used to justify its more fundamental distortions. Fiction provides a convincing understanding of the world, as Graff maintains, but it is untruth, not truth, which dominates fiction's most inclusive organization of experience, thus reducing verisimilitude to the use of both truths and untruths to confirm a text's more basic fabrication. For example, when a happy ending is totally unrealistic, the accumulation of accurate detail and genuine human insight used to confirm its vision of experience is no less fictitious than the ending itself if the work is to be considered an aesthetic whole. No matter how accurate particular words, images and sentences might seem, these remain part of the whole, and if the whole consists of a lie, so, too, do these portions of it to the extent that they give it believability.

This basic and unshakable role of literary deception seems confirmed by formal logic's so-called material implication which provides that no matter how true the premise is, a logical implication becomes invalid if its conclusion is false. If true information supports true conclusions, then the material implication is valid in logical discourse. An implication is equally valid if false information supports false conclusions, for example by declaring absurdities that bear absolutely no claim of verisimilitude. Even if false information supports true conclusions, the implication remains valid according to the laws of deduction. But if true information is used to couch, justify, and give immediacy to false conclusions--for example by telling "realistic" stories of pure love and total selflessness--then the implication is invalid. The literary application of this simple logical distinction seems plain. No matter how accurately a work of fiction depicts the life and times of its characters, its supportive informational content imposes a false deduction if its primary appeal is based on the falsehoods implicit in the conventions of form, theme, and narrative closure. When truths are put on display, for example, to legitimize a happy (or "appropriate") ending, every detail, no matter how accurate, becomes just as fictive as the fantasy content it reinforces. In all such cases, literary truths become untruths if and when they are used to make other untruths come true. Factual authenticity has been absorbed by its fictional context to confirm its value as an attractive alternative to our normal expectations in life.

Graff praises fiction for exposing readers to straightforward, uncompromising honesty.

Literary truth, he insists, encourages similar behavior in its readers:

One of the most useful functions that literature and the humanities could serve right now would be to shore up the sense of reality, to preserve the distinction between the real and the fictive, and to help us resist those influences, both material and intellectual, that would turn lying into a universal principle.⁶⁵

Here, paradoxically, Graff calls upon fiction to help us eliminate literary misrepresentation from our thinking. He thereby ignores both the etymology of the word fiction (*fictio* as a making, or fabrication) and the current pervasiveness of deception in language, social intercourse, and indeed consciousness itself, to say nothing of our public myths and simplistic theories of collective achievement. How much of our shared sense of history amounts to anything more than historic romance? How many of our personal insights derive from fictional conventions? To what extent do we simplify, exaggerate, and foreshorten? And to what extent does our sense of individual and group destiny depend upon a confidence in benign outcome--the happy and appropriate resolution--that derives from fiction's conventional sense of an ending? As Solon might have predicted and Oscar Wilde indeed boasted, the basic choice confronting us in almost every sphere of human endeavor is not between truth and myth, but between competing myths, some of which are more useful than others.

If fiction helps us to adjust to life, it is not by teaching us to abide by stringent tenets of veracity.⁶⁶ Instead, fiction plays the more useful role of helping us to adopt the best and most convenient distortions of the truth--the most credible euphemisms and simplifications for glossing over what really matters, what really happens in life. The primary benefit of literary distortions (as opposed to the non-literary variety) has been to help buttress our sense of personal worth without producing harmful consequences. Too often the raw truth, as experienced, for example, by Plato's cave dweller when he reaches the outside world, exceeds our tolerance except in small and manageable doses. Literary deception can be admired because it diminishes this threat and thus contributes to our survival as individuals, as a society. A new and more fundamental truth thereupon emerges with the recognition that most truths are best utilized if, in the words of George Steiner, they are "attenuated, flexed, coloured, alloyed by intent and milieu." The value of better-than-truths was Nietzsche's discovery as a philosopher and Pareto's as a sociologist--it seems just as valid in the field of literary criticism.

* * * * *

Perhaps the most basic assumption at the root of all these deceptionist approaches is that fiction primarily serves human need by usefully distorting the story it tells. If there is any "truth" in literary experience important to authors, it is more or less pragmatic as explained by William James in his two books, *Pragmatism* and *The Meaning of Truth*.⁶⁷ James proposed that the truth is "only the expedient in the way of our thinking" and that its necessarily emphasizes the attainment of beneficial consequences. Here the application to literary experience seems obvious, for fiction also encourages an expedient manner of thinking with an emphasis on beneficial consequences in narrative closure. James also argued that the truth is not absolute but happens to an idea and is made "true" by events, and again the same may be said of fiction, which is made true by the single most important event in the reading experience, one's response to the text both *in medias res* and

as a final outcome. James also explained that truths "emerge from facts," then "dip forward into facts again and add to them." Once again the same principle applies to fiction, whose verisimilitude depends on an ongoing interplay between apparent factual accuracy and the liberties needed to produce acceptable results. James praised truths that lead to "consistency, stability and flowing human intercourse," and that "lead away from eccentricity and isolation, from foiled and barren thinking." Again, the same may be said of fiction, which absorbs and tolerates eccentricity, but more often than not to give final precedence to conventional truths. James also took personal need into account by explaining that the truth for each individual consists of what he "'troweth' at that moment with the maximum of satisfaction to himself." Here, too, the parallel seems obvious, since the art of fiction as human behavior lets authors and readers indulge themselves in literary experience to their own satisfaction. And finally, and perhaps most cynically, James explained that "our obligation to seek truth is part of our general obligation to do what pays." How incredibly American this seems in retrospect, letting James subvert the notion of an objective truth by arguing, "the payments truths bring are the sole why of our duty to follow them." This principle is even more relevant to fiction, whose "payoff" almost entirely depends upon misrepresentation. All in all, most of the assumptions important to James's pragmatic definition of truth are equally valid, *mutatis mutandis*, in judging the merits of fiction. Honesty abounds, but its truth value depends on the author's confidence (or "belief") in those of his ideas that cannot, and should not, be exposed to uncompromising skeptical investigation.

However, as indicated in the Introduction, the pragmatic "truth" of fiction in its formal context cannot be altogether isolated from the countervailing truths it helps to eliminate from consideration. Relative to all the other truths with which it cohabits in both fiction and whatever personal associations the reader brings to bear in enjoying it, the "truth" of fiction is indeed true. But relative to the real world, and relative to the alternatives intentionally excluded from this literary context, this "truth" is very likely false, the product of denial, negation, and reaction formation--all of the Freudian displacements that give literary wish fulfillment its appeal to the reader. In this sense the pragmatic "usefulness" of literary truth primarily derives from its not being true, at least not in the most inclusive sense. It comforts as truth precisely because it denies other, less comfortable truths whose elimination provides the *raison d'etre* of literary experience. At one level literary truth is on a pragmatic "float," but on another level this float may be judged untrue relative to the psychological benefits it provides. If denial is at work, as more often than not seems the case with literary experience, the affirmative value of whatever truths afford denial must be judged relative to the benefits.

My second basic assumption, then, divides the act of deception into two complementary aspects, the rejection of one viewpoint by promoting another which serves as its opposite. Every lie, every distortion and misrepresentation, may be divided in this fashion into two propositions, true and false. When the everyday liar falsely declares, "I mailed my rent this morning; the check is in the mail," he resorts to this kind of substitution, and the truth he obscures may be deduced as a contrary proposition, "In fact, I have not paid my rent yet." An unpleasantness is thus denied by affirming whatever effectively substitutes for it. The exclusionary impact of this displacement was explained by Chief Justice Marshall in his celebrated *Marbury v. Madison* opinion: "Affirmative words are often, in their operation, negative of other objects than those affirmed; and in this case, a negative or exclusive sense must be given to them or they have no operation at all."⁶⁸ In other words, to affirm anything is necessarily to deny whatever in fact provides its opposite. Often the

choice as to what might be affirmed as an act of denial seems random, but its usefulness depends on the implicit contrast between what it declares and what is thereby denied. This dialectic occurs even when subtler modes of indirection are employed to diffuse the implied contrast between the two. "The money is on its way," the tenant might insist, neglecting to mention that he plans to send it later. Or he might resort to mock equivocation: "What do you mean have I paid my rent? Haven't I always been a good tenant?" Here the truth is denied by an enthymemic construction whose minor premise deserves to be rejected (that the liar has not have been a good tenant at least to the extent that he has neglected to pay his rent). In all instances, whatever evasiveness is brought to bear by the delinquent tenant, proposition X denies proposition Y in order to obscure the fact that he has not yet made his payment. Literary evasiveness, I think, possesses comparable value as denial, for example, as explained by Freud, when the image or epiphany of a silent and beautiful young woman denies one's fear of death.⁶⁹ Other, more obvious examples include stories of bravery that deny timidity, stories of romance that deny frustration, etc. Inevitably, deception is rooted in substitution (useful truths supplant real truths), and just as inevitably substitution expresses denial. Denial is thus very likely the most basic ingredient of literary expression if, in fact, this expression appeals to readers for its value as wish fulfillment. Unless denial plays a central role, I would conclude, a text ceases to be literary.

It is my thesis here that all literary distortions, no matter how they are diluted by partial truths, can be reduced in this fashion to denial, the simplest of the Freudian displacement mechanisms. One version of experience is rejected by fastening onto another that provides a more comfortable explanation of events. No obviously schematic opposition is needed between these alternatives. Any X may be affirmed so long as its acceptance permits the conscious or unconscious denial of Y. Blatant lies may be concocted, as in westerns, horror tales, and the like, but for sophisticated readers partial truths may be even more effective in crowding from consideration the relevance of less pleasant truths (e.g. the sensitive young woman unable to find her unique purpose in life). In all instances, the more truths used to convey the lie, the better. There is felt necessity to give credence to X as justified on a fully informational basis, reducing the role of Y to the status of repressed experience. Otherwise, authors enjoy wide latitude in their choice of literary truths, and readers enjoy comparable latitude in substituting these truths for the real truths they wish to avoid--often truths substantially different from those avoided by the authors they read.

This principle of substitutive free play applies at every level of consciousness. Just as any lie may be divided into two alternatives, one supplanting the other, any psychological displacement that originates in denial may be identified as an exercise in self-deception based on the substitution of one idea or frame of mind for another. Freud, for example, explained paranoia as a projective strategy that lets the individual deny his problems by blaming them on others (not my fault, but his), and Robert Waelder has expanded Freud's theory by claiming that all neurotic behavior originates in denial.⁷⁰ One step further, I claim that all literary fiction likewise depends upon denial--not because it is neurotic, but because it plays a comparable but healthy psychological role, providing a manageable dose of catharsis and self-justification in a relatively harmless medium. Denied (or repressed) ideas are not entirely isolated in a recessive zone reified as the unconscious. Instead, fiction provides a unique arena for their interplay with the ideas that finally prevail. As in dream formation, the literary text becomes a medium for putting affirmed truths and rejected truths into a closer, more engaged relationship with each other. Dominant form

(or plot) gives credence to a desirable truths, but a countervailing texture of implications via metaphor, irony, and ambiguity expresses subversive truths. Censorship occurs in the sense that dominant form ultimately prevails, but not without first giving vent to this figurative subversiveness. The conflict between these competing truths may be enjoyed without being understood, but it also discloses itself to readers who, like Schlegel, are willing to seek out the author's secret intentions--so secret, in fact, that the author himself very likely overlooks the fullest implications of what he is saying.

My third basic assumption emphasizes the deceptive function of literary form as an advancement from one plateau of experience to its opposite--in other words from X to not X, from an undesirable circumstance to its denial through narrative closure. I fully agree with Barthes and Steiner that both thought and language offer ample opportunity for literary self-deception, but I also emphasize plot (or narrative form) as its primary vehicle. Aristotle's notion that plot's essential function consists of its linear advancement from beginning to end may be expanded, I think, to accommodate the principle that this transition produces gratification (or catharsis) by denying an original state of affairs. In effect, the sequence is a metonymic transition from maybe X to Y as not X, shifting from tension to relief, from need to gratification, from perceived difficulties to their effective elimination. Stanley Fish argues that criticism itself marks out beginnings, middles and ends, but here he exaggerates the responsibility and accomplishment of the critic.⁷¹ As Sartre maintains, it is the telling about life that necessarily imposes beginnings which imply their own ends.⁷² Moreover, as Gotthold Lessing insisted, fiction is inescapably linear, and, beyond Lessing's insight, its affirmative outcome must be recognized to fulfill and consolidate the denial displacement, completing the unity of action by making its transition from beginning through middle to end. By means of narrative reversal plot advances from the potential confession of dissatisfying truths to the substitution of better-than-truths that declare a satisfactory alternative.⁷³ The text's resolution actually denies (or "designifies") the original state of affairs stated or implied at its beginning. This principle also applies to the simplest anecdote, but it is literary form which invests the denial displacement with its full global sufficiency relative to human need.

Once linear narrative achievement is recognized as the primary vehicle of literary deception, it becomes possible to resume Fracastoro's effort to integrate the aesthetics of Plato and Aristotle, but on an entirely new basis. Both the author's imagination and his necessarily distorted use of words, as explained by Barthes and Steiner, may be recognized to compose Plato's first stage of removal from the truth of human affairs (due to the limitations of human consciousness), while plot's built-in reversal dynamics (the product of the authors skills as an artisan) may be recognized to comprise the second stage by telling a lie *in medias res*, preceding its final impact through closure . As the initial level of misrepresentation, the author's experience as signified by particular words necessarily distorts the truth, but plot, at the second level, becomes even more vitally distortive in bringing about the achievement here and now of an appropriate ending that denies a mood or state of affairs implicit in its origins. Misrepresentation is doubled by fiction so whatever unacceptable truths survive conscious and verbal selectivity can be altogether vanquished by means of plot. As a cumulative sequence of depicted events, plot terminates the circumstances that give rise to its appeal. In this sense, plot advances from a signified original state of affairs to its designification produced by narrative closure. Of course the summary retelling of already formulated misinformation is just as common in fiction as in other modes of discourse. However, readers take greater pleasure when actively participating in the quest for

those alternative "truths" they want to believe in. The lie must happen. It must also be earned if the reader is to be lured to share in making it happen. There must be a sense of attainment, of producing benign results, and this is the most basic purpose of plot (or *muthos*) for both the author and his readers.

I also want to stress that the truth and its misrepresentation must actively coexist in struggle against each other within a serious work of fiction. For Homer, Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, and other major authors, plot acts out the denial displacement as a conflict of moral and intellectual precariousness from beginning to end. Its affirmative resolution can only be tentatively earned at the expense of genuine self-perception. Its value as denial is necessarily achieved, not told, and this means that the experience denied must be included in the recipe as a danger worthy of elimination. Only then does aesthetic form gain credible linear realization, disavowing one vision of life, which is accurate but unpleasant, through the energetic affirmation of another that is pleasantly inaccurate. Hard truths nevertheless fester on the brink of disclosure and oblige continuing effort to confirm their rejection. The entire text thus becomes a moral battlefield, hard truths pitted against surface truths that encourage self-respect and ethical simplicity. A reaching out for credible misrepresentation dominates plot development, and the eventual victory of such an effort can only be partial. Anything more decisive seems unlikely, even undesirable. To understand texts organized by this dialectic, critics must seek out their unpleasant truths that make the affirmation of their superficial truths attractive to both the author and his readers. Only then, paradoxically, does the final truth become accessible, at least, that a lie has been told and why it might be gratifying. When formally structured, this truth becomes fiction's defining feature, its most irreducible ingredient.

My fourth basic assumption comes from my willingness to speculate on the sources of anxiety denied within the context of fiction. It is one thing to declare that we are all liars, but quite another to explore with any thoroughness what we might be lying about. Like the gifted dissembler, fiction reserves its misrepresentation for only the most important issues. As an act of denial, it does not entail empty avoidance, but expresses aversions that pose a genuine threat to our sense of personal worth. What fiction helps us to deny in ourselves must be sufficiently dangerous to justify the extra investment of psychic energy required by misrepresenting the truth. As a shared act of self-deception, it exacts a price which we are reluctant to pay unless this investment is exceeded by its benefits. This means that the matters we deceive ourselves about are almost inevitably embarrassing, even humiliating, and that our felt surge of gratification once they are denied expresses our resistance to thinking about them. For this reason, it is usually distasteful to confess that lying has been hypothetically possible. In defense of our benighted innocence, we therefore try to convince ourselves that we are exclusively dealing with honest approximations of the truth--hence our compensatory insistence upon the honesty of fiction. The more vital the lie, the more vigorously we defend it--especially when the literature we venerate for its insight is called into question. As Nietzsche recognized, fiction's universal appeal derives from epitomizing, and thus conceding, those lies we depend on lest we perish of the truth. This is fiction's final obligation that is so difficult to acknowledge by authors, critics, and readers.

Footnotes

1. Plutarch's Lives, trans. John Dryden and rev. A. H. Clough, vol 1 (Boston: Little, Brown & Col, 1910), pp. 198-99.
2. Oscar Wilde, "The Decay of Lying," in *The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Richard Ellmann (New York: Random House, 1969), pp. 290-320.
3. Aristotle's words, "through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation [i.e., catharsis] of these emotions" [italics added] do not identify pity and fear as catharsis but as its agents. First come pity and fear, then catharsis as their purgation. This distinction helps to integrate the therapeutic explanation of catharsis offered by Jacob Bernays with Else's model of tragic structure as a transition from hamartia to anagnorisis (p. 385). See the discussion of Bernay's theory in S. H. Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art with a Critical Text and Translation of the Poetics* (New York: Dover, 1951), pp. 345-49. Also see Gerald Else's assumption explained in *Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 229.
4. This paraphrase of the view of Italian critic Girolama Fracastoro is from J.E. Spingarn's *A History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1924), p. 34. Fracastoro's effort to synthesize Plato and Aristotle in *Naugerius, sive de Poetica Dialogus* (1555) is discussed by Spingarn, p. 31-34.
5. Saint Augustine, *The Confessions*, in *The Confessions, the City of God, On Christian Doctrine, The Great Books* (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952), p. 6. The later history of this movement is thoroughly traced in *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*, by Jonas Barish (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).
6. Francesco Robortelli, in *Liberum Aristelis de Arte Poetica Explicationes* (Florentiae, 1548), p. 86, cited by Spingarn, p. 30.
7. Sir Philip Sidney, "An Apologie for Poetrie," in *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. Gregory Smith, vol. 1 (1904; repr, London: Oxford University Press, 1937), pp. 159, 161, and 171.
8. Guez de Balzac, "Response a deux questions, ou du caractere et de l'instruction de la comedie," in *Oevres Diverses* (Paris, 1658), pp. 73-96, cited by Barish, p. 204.
9. Thornton Wilder, "On Drama and the Theater," in *American Characteristics and Other Essays*, ed. Donald Gallup (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1979), pp. 118, 122.
10. Bielfeld was cited by Edgar Allan Poe in "Ballads and Other Poems. By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow," *Graham's Magazine* (April 1842), in *Edgar Allan Poe: Essays and Reviews*, ed. G. R. Thompson (New York: Library of America, 1985), p. 687. In the same context Poe equated literary invention with the use of "novel combinations" to achieve a "supernal beauty . . . which, perhaps no possible combination of the forms would fully produce" (pp. 211-12). For this reason he praised the German words *Dichtkunst* (the art of poetry) and *dichten* (to feign) for their shared deceptionist implications.

11. In Friedrich Schlegel 1794-1802: Seine Prosaichen Jugendschnitten, ed. Jakob Minor, vol. 2 (Vienna, 1882), p. 170, cited by Rene Welleck in *A History of Modern Criticism, 1750-1950*. vol. 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), pp. 8-9.
12. Sir Joshua Reynolds, "Discourse XIII" (based on the 1797 edition), in *Discourses on Art*, ed. Robert R. Wark (San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 1959), p. 244.
13. G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox, vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 9.
14. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, p. 4. Schopenhauer later applied this notion to all inspirational discourse: "[T]he most important, the most lofty, the most sacred truths can make their appearance only in combination with a lie, can even borrow strength from the lie as from something that works more powerfully on mankind; and as revelation must be ushered in by the lie." Arthur Schopenhauer, "Religion: A dialogue, etc.), in *The Essays of Arthur Schopenhauer*, trans. T. Bailey Saunders (New York: Willey Book Co., n.d.), pp. 17-18.
15. C. K. Ogden cites this and the following quotation in *Bentham's Theory of Fictions* (London: Kegan Paul, Treuch, Trubner & Co., 1932), p. xciii.
16. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hallingdale (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 435.
17. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* (New York, Macmilan Co., 1924), p. 9. 18. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, pp. 451-52.
18. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, pp. 451-52.
19. Mallarme's words are included in his letter to Henri Cazilis in April, 1866; see *Correspondance: 1862-1871* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), p. 208. Henry James is quoted from "The Art of Fiction," in *Essays: American and English Writers*, ed. Leon Edel (New York: Library of America, 1984), p. 45.
20. H. L. Mencken, *Prejudices: Sixth Series* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), p. 245. Also see H.L. Mencken, *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche* (Boston: Luce & Co., 1913).
21. Mencken, *Prejudices: Sixth Series*, p. 245.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 245-47.
23. Edward Abbey, *Abbey's Road* (New York: Dutton, 1979), p. xv.
24. Ursula Le Guin, "Introduction," *The Left Hand of Darkness* (New York: Ace Books, 1987).
25. Leo Tolstoy, *What is Art?* (London, 1898), in *What is Art and Essays on Art*, trans. Aylmer

Maude (London: Oxford University Press, 1930). Also see I. A. Richards, "Tolstoy's Infection Theory," *Principles of Literary Criticism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1955), pp. 186-89.

26. All are excluded from consideration by Sissela Bok in her book *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978). Bok's appeal for greater public integrity is mostly based on classical and scholastic philosophy, and she quotes such modern figures as Nietzsche and George Steiner without acknowledging their view of deception as an unavoidable universal tendency. The other indicated texts include Hans Vaihinger, *The Philosophy of "As if,"* trans. C.K. Ogden (1911; New York: Barnes & Noble, 1966); Gustav LeBon, *The Crowd* (1895; New York: Macmillan Co., 1960); Vilfredo Pareto, *The Mind and Society*, 4 vols. (1916, 1923), trans. Arthur Livingston and Andrew Bongiorno (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1935); and Jean-Paul Sartre, "Bad Faith," *Being and Nothing*, trans. Hazel Barnes (1943; London: Methuen, 1957).

27. Richards, *Science and Poetry* (1926), repr. as *Poetries and Sciences* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1970); *Practical Criticism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1929), pp. 280-91.

28. Christopher Ricks, "Lies," *Critical Inquiry* 2, no. 1 (Autumn 1975): 121-42; Lionel Trilling, *Beyond Culture* (New York: Harcourt Brace Janovich 1965), pp. 201-2; Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971, 1972).

29. Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey, vol. 5 (London: Hogarth Press, 1958), p. 567.

30. William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (New York: H. Holt & Co., 1890), p. 141.

31. Sigmund Freud, "The Relation of the Poet to Day-Dreaming," *Collected Papers*, ed. Ernest Jones and trans. Joan Riviere, vol. 4 (New York: Basic Books, 1949), p. 174.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 183.

33. *Ibid.*

34. Norman O. Brown, *Life against Death* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1959), p. 56.

35. Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), pp. 238-39.

36. Herbert Marcuse, *Counter-Revolution and Revolt* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), pp. 238-39.

37. *Counter-Revolution and Revolt*, pp. 98-99.

38. Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 309, 319, and 327. Subsequent topics are discussed on pp. 329-30, 338, 360, and 374. I am generally

impressed with Jameson's analysis of literary deception despite his neglect of the dialectic implications of Aristotelian form (p. 328), and despite his relatively artificial distinction between class ideology and idealism as a psychological disposition (p. 368). I also disagree with his conventional use of deviationism based on the notion that art forces the reader into abrupt self-consciousness (p. 375), and I am bothered by some of his rhetorical excesses, for example when he declares that the novel regenerates itself out of its impossibility (p. 352). However, many of Jameson's arguments suggest a theoretical model substantially in accord with the principles of negative poetics I am proposing.

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 397-98.

40. *Ibid.*, pp. 401-2, 406.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 408.

42. Roland Barthes, *Critical Essays* (1964; Evanston Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1972), p. 126. It may be added that Brecht's overriding emphasis on the necessity of conveying a revolutionary truth finally and definitively excludes his theory of epic theater from the canon of deceptology. He emphasizes exposing the lie, not telling or sharing it.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 137.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

45. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nominalist and Realist," in *Emerson: Essays and Lectures*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: Library of America, 1983), p. 585.

46. John Barth, *The End of the Road* (1967; New York: Bantam Books, 1969), p. 119.

47. George Steiner, *After Babel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 217-18.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 220.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 227.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 233.

52. Anthony Brand, "Lies, Lies, Lies," *Atlantic Monthly* 240 (November, 1977): 62.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

54. D. H. Lawrence, "Studies in Classic American Literature," in *The Shock of Recognition*, ed. Edmund Wilson (New York: Modern Library, 1955), p. 908.

55. Norman Mailer, "Appeal to Lilian Hellman and Mary McCarthy," *New York Times Book Review*, 11 May 1980, p. 3.

56. Nina Danton, "Taking Risks: The Writer as Effective Teacher," *New York Times*, 13 April 1986, sec. 12.

57. Sir Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*, in *Advancement of Learning, Novum Organum*, *New Atlantis*, vol. 18 of *The Great Books* (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952), pp. 109-13.

58. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Intellect," in *Emerson: Essays and Lectures*, p. 424.

59. Sidney, "An Apologie for Poetrie," p. 184.

60. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. J. Shawcross, vol. 2 (1907; reprint, London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 6.

61. Richards, *Science and Poetry*, p. 60.

62. Rene Wellek, *Theory of Literature* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1949), p. 14.

63. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 33-35, 162, 223-39.

64. Gerald Graff treats these and other critics with similar beliefs in "How Not to Talk about Fiction," chap. 6 of his *Literature against Itself: Literary Ideas in Modern Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979). In his paper "Determinacy/Indeterminacy" (in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 163-76, Graff seems to take an entirely different tack, and without addressing the difference.

65. Graff, *Literature against Itself*, p. 12.

66. Few are more exposed to the truths of fiction than English professors, yet we are hardly paragons of candor and integrity. Those who claim otherwise are particularly susceptible to the tendency

67. William James's *Pragmatism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975) was first published in 1907; *The Meaning of Truth* (Harvard University Press, 1975) was first published in 1909. The cited passages from *Pragmatism* occur on pp. 3, 4, 38, and 54, and from *The Meaning of Truth* on pp. 103, 108, and 110. James represents a peculiar convergence of continental and American traditions. He basically agrees with Nietzsche's moral and intellectual relativism, but avoids Nietzsche's nihilistic indignation by accepting expediency as a matter of course in human affairs, if with the confidence that scientific truth will ultimately prevail. As for his American background, James extends Emerson's transcendentalism revision of Puritan ideology one step further by making a virtue of belief itself, whatever it entails. Deception theory extends this perspective to literature by emphasizing the experience of belief in fiction as the product of narrative reversal.

68. Chief Justice John Marshall, *Marbury v. Madison*, 1 Cranch, 137 (1803), quoted in *Documents of American History*, ed. Henry Steele Commager (New York:

Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1948), p. 193.

69. The most extreme of these displacements, the worship of virgin purity in order to deny death, was usefully explored by Freud in "The Theme of the Three Caskets," in *Collected Papers*, vol. 4, pp. 244-56. Among his sources was August Weissman's biological hypothesis that sexual reproduction perpetuates the "immortality principle" of unicellular organisms, setting the stage for the interdependence between sex and death in more advanced species. Contrary to our normal expectations, however, it is our physical existence that serves to perpetuate that of germ cells, not the other way around. We reproduce so our germ cells might persist--hence the need for romantic love; but we can also die once our capacity for reproduction ends--hence, according to Freud, our obsession with romantic love to deny this inevitability.

70. Sigmund Freud, *Psycho-analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)*, in *Standard Edition*, vo. 12, pp. 59-79. Also consult Robert Waelder, "The Structure of Paranoid Ideas," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 32 (1951): 167-77.

71. Stanley Fish, "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics," in *Reader Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, ed. Jane Tompkins (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 83.

72. Jean Paul Sartre, *Nausea* (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions Paperback, 1959), pp. 57-58. Here Sartre stresses the importance of closure in the linear advancement from beginnings to ends: "Nothing happens while you live. The Scenery changes, people come in and go out, that's all. There are no beginnings. Days are tacked on to days without rhyme or reason, an interminable, monotonous addition. . . . Neither is there any end. . . . But everything changes when you talk about life [*italics added*]; it's a change no one notices: the proof is that people talk about true stories. As if there could possibly be true stories . . . you seem to start at a beginning. . . . And in reality you have started at the end. It was there, invisible and present, it is the one which gives to words the pomp and value of a beginning." [*italics added*]

73. Sometimes this comfortable alternative meaning seems demonstrably uncomfortable, for example, in novels and movies of horror, sadism, and grim failure. My assumption would be that these excesses nevertheless produce satisfaction by denying even less gratifying experiences such as fear, anxiety, and feelings of inadequacy in interpersonal relationships. The relative health of any society seems to be indicated by the extent to which the popular arts feature bizarre viciousness to cope with the public's repressed sense of helplessness. The more violent a society's use of fiction, one suspects, the bigger and more widespread the problems eventually to be confronted, for example when teenagers weaned on violent TV, movies, and video games are finally sent to war.

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