

**Levels of Deception in works of  
Austen, Dickens, Conrad, and Gertrude Stein**

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In her 1971 manifesto, "When We Dead Awaken," Adrienne Rich insists that good poetry demands an energetic pursuit of meaningful differences, thus suggesting the necessity of poetic licence. Passive fantasy alone falls short of adequacy, she claims, since effective writing depends on the active pursuit of alternative experience:

Most, if not all, human lives are full of fantasy--passive daydreaming which need not be acted on. But to write poetry or fiction, or even to think well, is not to fantasize, or to put fantasies on paper. For a poem to coalesce, for a character or an action to take shape, there has to be an imaginative transformation of reality which is no way passive. And a certain freedom of the mind is needed--freedom to press on, to enter the currents of your thought like a glider pilot, knowing that your motion can be sustained, that the buoyancy of your attention will not be suddenly snatched away. Moreover, if the imagination is to transcend and transform experience, it has to question, to challenge, to conceive of alternatives, perhaps to the very life you are living at that moment. You have to be free to play around with the notion that day might be night, love might be hate; nothing can be too sacred for the imagination to turn into its opposite or to call experimentally by another name. For writing is renaming.<sup>1</sup>

There is little to disagree with in this passage except the tentative use of the word *perhaps* to indicate the importance of seeking substitutes--better and more interesting versions of experience than the life one is living at the moment. Unavoidably, personal circumstances dictate the renaming of one's experience. The use of opposites revises the world one knows, and to persist in exploring opposites means at least provisionally rejecting part, or all, of this particular world. A certain amount of personal dissatisfaction is probably integral to the effort to call day "night" and love "hate." An intense rejection of the status quo accordingly seems beneficial to the effort to reinterpret and thereby rename the most sacred experience (parenthood, one's marriage, confidential experiences with others, etc.) in the context of literary form.

Of course this quest for alternatives is not adequate in and of itself as a formula for good writing. It must also be given credibility by style and literary form. Differences provide the raw material of art, but they must be sorted out and subordinated to an aesthetic whole acceptable to authors and their readers. The formal benefit of this more elaborate strategy is explained by Denise Levertov in her brief 1979 manifesto, "On the Function of the Line," in which she praises the use of deletions to bring the poet's inner feelings into the context of literary form:

Excess of subjectivity (and hence incommunicability) in the making of structural decisions in open forms is a problem only when the writer has an inadequate form sense. When the

written score precisely notates perceptions, a whole--an inscape or gestalt--begins to emerge; and the gifted writer is not so submerged in the parts that the sum goes unseen. The sum is objective--relatively, at least; it has presence, character, and--as it develops--needs. The parts of the poem are instinctively adjusted in some degree to serve the needs of the whole. And as this adjustment takes place, excess subjectivity is avoided. Details of a private, as distinct from personal, nature may be deleted, for example, in the interests of a fuller, clearer, more communicable whole.<sup>2</sup>

Paradoxically, literary form's intrinsic evasiveness depends upon the combination of Rich and Levertov's prescriptions for good poetry. Rich's pursuit of alternatives obliges selectivity, while Levertov's emphasis on formal integrity necessitates a use of exclusions that is best achieved by narrative form. Undue subjectivity is thus avoided, and, more inclusively, structure itself becomes the vehicle for imposing alternatives. By means of linear organization, specific events and identities can be deleted in order to dispense with those concessions and complications the poet prefers to ignore. The experience may be actively renamed, as Adrienne Rich recommends, or it can simply be left out, as Denise Levertov recommends. Some experience may be deleted to keep it from the reader, other experience because the poet wants to avoid confronting it too. Inevitably, certain private feelings are more expendable than others, and their deletion may be justified entirely in the interest of formal adequacy. Other feelings might be too embarrassing to acknowledge, and their deletion (tantamount to denial) might oblige the full resources of literary form.

Both deletions and the active pursuit of alternatives are rooted in denial, and both may be found throughout the history of literature from epic to the sonnet, from seventeenth century prose characters to the *Bildungsroman*, from spy escapades to the Harlequin romance. If the truth is almost totally sacrificed, the result is empty fantasy. On the other hand, if deletions and reversals are minimized, the result is a tedious documentation of the habits and incessant distractions that clutter our daily behavior. Truth and literary form therefore depend on each other in the construction of fiction. Alone, each lacks appeal, but once combined and brought into suitable equipoise they vitalize literary expression. A basic dialectic thus emerges that features both honesty wherever possible and the substitution of a more satisfactory point of view produced by narrative momentum toward an acceptable outcome. The universal expectation of readers that useful truths will ultimately prevail at the expense of unpleasant and apparently meaningless truths (no less unpleasant) gives fiction its vitality, its inspiration, even its formal structure as a seemingly honest act of denial "plotted" from beginning to end.

A work of fiction loses its audience whenever its particular combination of selectivity and renaming ceases to be useful to readers. Few of us find pleasure today, for example, in works of early nineteenth century romantic self-pity, unmitigated Victorian innocence, or the pretentious audacity of *fin-de-siècle* unconventionality. Likewise, the simplistic radical enthusiasm of thirties strike novels, the vulgar propagandistic stereotypes of World War II, and the canned existentialism of the fifties have all faded by now into deserved obscurity. Works of fiction uncompromisingly committed to these once fashionable truths (and "truths" they were) are no longer relevant to human need, so they have predictably sunk into oblivion. In order to write permanent fiction for a permanent audience, writers need to make better and more lasting omissions reinforced by better and more lasting renamings. Those classics in which this balance is achieved effectively resonate in the minds of their readers for decades, sometimes centuries.

Specific distortions of the truth abound in fiction, but perhaps the most obvious example is the use of exaggerated motivation to deny the bland monotony of our daily routine. Our reduced sense of accomplishment may be revitalized by sharing in the undiminished energy of literary figures who pursue important goals with an almost guaranteed predictability of achieving them. In real life, everyday habit blunts our expectations; in fiction deletions and renamings support the illusion of unusual attainment. Also deceptive is fiction's exaggerated ethical righteousness which denies the pragmatic flexibility typical of normal relationships. Contrary to our daily experience, fiction sets virtue against evil based on a simplistic distinction between "good guys" and "bad guys," or, with slightly more sophistication, between good intentions and the tarnished goals of less admirable figures--faithless lovers, grasping relatives, meddling old ladies, etc. Again, this kind of Manichaeic exaggeration denies the boring, if intricate, balance of strengths and weaknesses found in the "real" people we know. Only in fiction does one meet individuals who are uncompromisingly malicious or generous. Only in fiction are people rigidly stereotypical in every choice they make. Even when characters seem endowed with unusual complexity, for example Saul Bellow's Herzog in his novel *Herzog*, their stories hinge upon relatively simple-minded discoveries, in Herzog's case his belated recognition that he should avoid throwing himself at the first woman who comes along. We are expected to believe that he at last abandons his romantic impetuosity and learns to be more realistic in his pursuit of female companionship. This happens in Herzog's late forties, when such a basic reform seems unlikely, therefore necessitating at least a modest suspension of disbelief when he ends the novel committed to maintaining his bachelor status.<sup>3</sup> Even when fiction challenges conventional morality by sympathetically exploring grand ethical transgressions, for example in the works of Sophocles, Goethe, and Dostoevsky, it distorts reality by representing these transgressions as the epitome of human achievement. Odysseus, Faust, and Raskolnikov possess extraordinary values quite beyond the purview of the average citizen, so their stories evoke the sense of a cosmic breakthrough which can only flatter and befuddle the ordinary mind.

Most of all, it is the verbal competence of writers that distorts the truth. With almost inexhaustible sufficiency, fiction's flow of vocabulary generates problems, then surmounts them simply by talking them out. Experience accessible to words becomes organized, then resolved by words, since language altogether dominates behavior in the context of story. There is no stuttering, no redundancy, no failed expression which drifts into stuttering and half-hearted reformulation. Only in poems and novels can language fully declare subjective feelings, or dissolve behavior into intangible effects presumably transcending the words that describe them. Only in poems and novels can the thoughts and utterances of characters be supplemented by an authorial "omniscience" that probes the feelings they express. Only in poems and novels can there be uncompromising authorial license in imposing whatever deletions and renamings seem useful for reconstructing interior consciousness. In these and dozens of other ways--the excitement that denies boredom, the confidence that denies embarrassment, the romantic vitality that denies impotence and frigidity, and the presumed capacity for ambivalence that denies simplistic authoritarianism--literary experience serves up one kind of truth, both attractive and compelling, in order to reject other truths which come closer to what we know about ourselves, our family, and our friends and acquaintances.

The dialectic between truth and fiction's active pursuit of alternatives may be examined in

the works of such admired novelists as Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, and Joseph Conrad, all of whom used literary insight to revise the worlds they lived in. Three of their most successful novels, respectively *Pride and Prejudice*, *David Copperfield*, and *Heart of Darkness*, were written more or less at fifty-year intervals, providing a measure of historical continuity to the analysis of their respective misrepresentations. But the same strategy may also be found in the briefest of lyrics, for example "a rose is a rose is a rose is a rose," by Gertrude Stein, a tour de force in ambiguity which can be treated as an exception to prove the rule. For each of these four texts, including Stein's poem, I want to discuss the use of deletions and reversals to emphasize literary truths at the expense of more threatening truths. I also want to speculate on why these substitutions were made, how they occurred, and the extent to which rejected truths continue to play a subversive role.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, there is remarkable insightfulness by both the heroine, Elizabeth Bennet, and the implied narrator, whose perspective seems a close approximation to the feelings of Jane Austen herself. As a result, the reader quickly grants credibility to the novel's depiction of provincial family life and the ironic treatment of most of the characters. By not more than a couple dozen pages into the novel, we share Elizabeth's embarrassment with the ignorance and fallibility of her mother and younger sisters, her impatience with the gossipy pretensions of her neighbors, her acceptance of the eccentricities of her father, and her fascinated indignation with the brittle rectitude of Darcy, whom she finally marries. Also realistic is the complex interaction among these characters that finally leads Elizabeth, a young woman of the middle class, to surmount her pride in winning an advantageous match. What is the most valid "truth" of this perceptive novel? Probably the sustained interplay of feeling, behavior, and language that is worked out with such precision that we find ourselves caught up in the courtship strategies of late eighteenth century rural gentility. Likewise important are the standards of politeness observed by this class in its daily behavior. The novel can be treated, in fact, as a textbook in rural etiquette that documents the personal lives of a rural middle-class family from day to day through the cycle of a single year.

A different and more inclusive vision of the truth prevails in *David Copperfield*, written fifty years later, in which society is viewed on a grander scale and with a social conscience more appropriate to the mid-nineteenth century. London has become even more dominant as the hub of England, and Dickens' novel appropriately traces the centripetal activities of individuals drawn into this center. The story of young David's being buffeted from one household to the next illustrates the restless migration in and around London during this period of social dislocation. We watch David's character grow as he surmounts his handicap as an orphan, works his way into the world, and at last establishes himself as a novelist, perhaps the author of his own story. Vivid is the depiction of all the crises and challenges that provide the milestones for his slow but inexorable education through early life. The shadow-side of mid-century British culture is also explored in depth as a realm David must put in better perspective as he makes his ascent to become the master of his own destiny. Portraying a broad range of characters from thieves and opportunists to honest simpletons unable to cope with social demands, the novel provides a vivid depiction of Britain's social malaise at mid-century than may be found in most, if not all, textbooks of economics and social history. If *Das Kapital*, by Karl Marx, furnishes the statistics and historic evidence of urban despair, *David Copperfield* fleshes it out by bringing to life the visible misery of believable characters. Marx's data affords "truth" for the scholar willing to endure his exhaustive treatment of the topic, but far more vivid is Dickens's "truth" for those willing to subject

themselves to his exuberant dependence on poetic license.

With Joseph Conrad's vision of human degradation in *Heart of Darkness*, published fifty years after *David Copperfield*, we encounter a new and more complex vision of honesty based on the skeptic's stoic acceptance of primordial forces at the root of civilization. We are first confronted with the violence of European colonization in Africa, then with its historic necessity as the source of affluence among presumably civilized nations. Imperialism works, we learn, though it might have borne ugly consequences for the exploited African people during the final decades of the nineteenth century. Early in the novel, Marlow, the narrator-protagonist, declares his aversion to hypocrisy:

You know I hate, detest, and can't bear a lie, not because I am straighter than the rest of us, but simply because it appalls me. There is a taint of death, a flavour of mortality in lies--which is exactly what I hate and detest in the world--what I want to forget. It makes me miserable and sick, like biting something rotten would do. Temperament, I suppose.<sup>4</sup>

His allegiance to the truth as an abstract principle is supposedly in harmony with his faith in liberal values. However, he soon discovers more important truths, first in the actual behavior of Kurtz, a legendary ivory hunter in the Belgian Congo, then in the need to lie to Kurtz's bereaved fiancée, who continues to admire Kurtz for what she believes is his altruistic sacrifice to benefit the natives. Marlow decides it would be too great a shock to reveal to her Kurtz's final dying words, since Kurtz had only been able to utter, "The horror!" presumably referring to his genocidal practices as an ivory hunter. His final truth thus consists of the recognition, like that of Plato's cave dweller, that the truth is too harsh for most to endure.

The novel's central irony arises from Marlow's blurting out the lie to Kurtz's fiancée that Kurtz's final utterance was to name her, inadvertently identifying her as the real "horror" at last recognized by Kurtz. "The horror," he said, and, indeed, he was referring to her--to her ignorance of his crimes and her liberal reasons for justifying them without recognizing their necessity for protecting her standard of living. Reinforcing this irony, the word "horror" can be easily slurred into "whore," an insult that suggests her dependence on imperialistic profits in exchange for her misplaced faith in his idealism--her service for the pay he offers. By stumbling on this unspeakable equation, Marlow delivers the novel to its culminating vision of truth, the price of Victorian respectability in the exploitative violence that must be committed abroad. Conrad accordingly exposes the disparity between late nineteenth century colonial atrocities, almost entirely committed by the male gender, and the blind progressivism of European liberals who encouraged them, epitomized by delusions of the female gender whose genteel lifestyle finally depended on these atrocities.

Conrad's ironic message seems to have been that imperialism was "worthy of its hire" (to borrow the words of Marlow's aunt), since it brought enough wealth to Europe to justify overlooking the raw brutality at the root of all human behavior. Vice versa, Victorian purity was no less worthy of its hire as the inspiration for Victorian imperialism. If murder and exploitation were inevitable, it was better that these crimes were committed to sustain the genteel innocence of Europeans rather than letting them happen randomly and with comparable brutality, as they would have both in Africa and Europe if Europeans had not invaded Africa, but without any benefit to

civilization. If idealists recoiled from this insight because of their misguided humanitarianism (strictly a byproduct of their affluence), these gentle souls needed to be kept in ignorance of the system that supported them. Violence in the service of blind idealism was consequently the key to progress--this was Kurtz's discovery that he finally shared with Marlow, and of course their rationalization persists even today among some self-styled conservatives. Most critics have tried to defend *Heart of Darkness* as a humanistic testament that effectively transcends this cynicism. However, we cannot overlook its obvious and probably most basic "message," the reactionary conviction (consistent with Lenin's theory of imperialism) that if colonialism was a nasty business, it nevertheless remained indispensable as the principal source of Europe's surplus wealth, thus guaranteeing bourgeois stability over the several decades preceding World War I.

In one way or another, each of these three novels declares a particular vision of the truth based upon the experience and judgment of its author. And of course this is the case for all fiction. No matter how rigid, chaotic, big, small, or devoid of intelligible organization a scrap of creativity might seem, it affirms a truth (if not exactly the truth) about human experience quite aside from its aesthetic liberties. Essentially the same dynamics are at work in the tiniest lyric as in the epic novel. With just as much conviction, for example, Gertrude Stein's epic fragment, "a rose is a rose is a rose," offers a tautological affirmation of Keats' truth, "That is all ye know and all ye need to know." The noun "rose" is incessantly repeated, for, according to Gertrude Stein, "You can love a name and if you love a name then saying that name any number of times only makes you love it more, more violently more persistently more tormentedly." She thus drums the flower's verbal representation into our consciousness well enough to be able to boast, ". . . I think that in that line the rose is red for the first time in English poetry for a hundred years."<sup>5</sup> In effect, Stein reduces to its simplest formulation Emerson's argument in "Self-Reliance" that roses make "no reference to former roses or to better ones," that "they are for what they are," and that "there is no time for them. There is simply the rose; it is perfect in every moment of its existence."<sup>6</sup> Stein also short-circuits Friedrich Engels' use of an empty double negative (or *Negationsnegierung*) which he incidentally bases on the example of the rose:

Or I negate the sentence, "The rose is a rose," when I say: "The rose is not a rose"; and what do I get if I then negate the negation and say, "After all, the rose is a rose?"<sup>7</sup>

On the contrary, Stein claims, the rose cannot be diminished in this fashion. It is not "not not" a rose; it is simply a rose is a rose. Just as relevant, therefore, is the line's significance as a rejoinder to Juliet's famous romantic outcry, "What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other word would smell as sweet." In other words, "I love this man no matter what he is called, even Romeo Montague." To which Gertrude Stein replies that Romeo's name, or any name, for that matter, is nevertheless a legitimate object of adoration that fully appropriates to itself the appeal of what it represents. If Rose is intended as a female name, as was the case for several of Gertrude Stein's fictional heroines over the span of her career, then the incantation of her name reinforces her memory. In either case, the poem proposes its vision of truth comparable to that of fiction, if on a briefer and more compulsively insistent note.

As already indicated, literary "truth" also tells untruths based upon the negative equation, X = not Y. Authors such as D. H. Lawrence, Norman Mailer, and Grace Paley have argued that writers necessarily accept an overbalance of dishonesty as the price they must pay for unexpected

illumination expressive of the truth.<sup>8</sup> However, this ephemeral manifestation often excuses a sustained disingenuousness almost out of control. There is little relief from the compulsive effort to document fiction with factual information. Intensive research in history, biography, clothes styles, or weapons design might help to authenticate the author's distortions, but the dialectic persists between truth and untruth regardless of the proportions of their mixture. Only a modest dose of accuracy is needed to permit the deletion and renaming of experience crucial to literary experience. Then again, excessive accuracy can be more than offset by the tiniest lie if in fact this lie is directly relevant to the outcome and implied message of the story being told.

For example, Gertrude Stein's insistent equation, "a rose is a rose is a rose is a rose," deceives by its tautological repetition which emphasizes the sound of rose at the expense of its connotations. Unavoidably, one version of the rose, primarily auditory, crowds from consideration all the rest. Driven from consciousness are associations pertaining to gardening (blight, aphids, Japanese beetles, etc.) as well as the full range of implications this variety of flower has acquired throughout the history of western civilization--its ancient symbolism as the flower of Aphrodite, its use as the basic ingredient for thirty-two medical remedies listed by Pliny, and so on. A rose is only a rose, and none of these other identities, Stein implies. Also crowded from thought are its dirt-rootedness, its hybrid cultivation, its frequent use in poetry, and its relevance to the War of Roses that decimated English chivalry. Also rejected as literary convention are Blake's vision of a rose destroyed by the invisible worm that flies by night and Friar Lawrence's prediction of roses in lips and cheeks fading to wanny ashes.

More specifically, if "rose" bears any reference to Rose Johnson, the object of lesbian desire in *Three Lives*, by Gertrude Stein, Miss Johnson's complex appeal as an individual human being is denied by the diminutive repetition of her name--"my little flower is my little flower is my little flower, etc." Or, more disparagingly yet, "an attractive companion is just an attractive companion, is just an attractive companion." And quite so, according to the law of identity: "X is X and exclusively X, even if it refers to a lover or a beautiful flower." Fortunately, life is more complex than the law of identity, lending credibility to the inclusive negative proposition, "a rose is more than a rose, is more than a rose." An individual is more than a flower, sex is more than sex, and the wealth of additional implications attached to the symbolism of the rose is almost impossible to ignore.

In Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, a judicious use of surface truths obscures the unlikely fiction that Elizabeth Bennet's quick wits win her the region's most advantageous match despite her narrow background, her lack of dowry, and her prudishness that prevents even a kiss throughout the entire course of the novel. Not that Darcy ever tries to force the occasion. True to her high standards of morality, Elizabeth marries Darcy untouched, the virgin proprietress-to-be of one of the largest estates in England. Far more typical of human affairs, however, is the indifference of wealthy bachelors to plain and financially modest middle-class women with an excessively critical temperament, no matter how intelligent and vivacious they might seem at parties and dances. The sexual adventurousness of Lydia, Elizabeth's foolish younger sister, might have gained temporary accessibility to the wealthier classes, but seldom, if ever, did marriage with one of the nation's most eligible bachelors come to the likes of Elizabeth Bennet.

The very title "Pride and Prejudice" both reverses and domesticates the conventional

notion of pride, worst of the seven deadly sins. Pride is obviously attributed to Darcy and prejudice against Darcy to Elizabeth, of course because she resents his pride. Yet contemporary opinion would have reversed this judgment. Any young woman who aspired to marry beyond her social position would have been accused of pride, and she could expect to evoke prejudice against herself from those of the class she tried to join. This attitude was prevalent among the country gentry known to both Elizabeth and Jane Austen. Of course, Elizabeth is depicted as making no conscious effort to arouse Darcy's matrimonial inclinations, but it is hard to overlook the romantic possibilities that result from her repeated attendance at social gatherings, her prolonged visit to Bingley's house, her several provocative conversations with Darcy, and her accidental visit to his estate. The best way for a young woman to avoid entanglements with an arrogant young man she thinks she despises is to stay away from him, but this Elizabeth seems unable to do. Miss Bingley is vilified because of her jealousy of Elizabeth, but her suspicions seem fully justified, despite Elizabeth's frequent protestations to the contrary. For who is fooling whom? It is Elizabeth who wins Darcy, not Miss Bingley, and the latter cannot be faulted for her more accurate anticipation of romantic developments--intended by Jane Austen, if not by Elizabeth herself.

Also to be noted is the novel's selective loading of villainy onto characters who express or embody the prohibition against marrying beyond one's class. Miss Bingley and Lady de Bourgh are afforded heavy-handed characterization precisely because of their snobbishness, while the "dark" males, Reverend Collins and Wickham, are viciously personified to discredit the two worst alternatives this taboo might suggest among eighteenth century English gentry. In Collins is invoked the unpleasant prospect of conventional union with a pompous fool from similar middle-class circumstances; in Wickham is invoked the threat of disgrace and the loss of social position through seduction (i.e. falling in love). Both these possibilities are vilified by the characterization of those whose respective destinies they represent, clearing the path for Elizabeth's remarkable success, undisturbed by second thoughts about her accidental good fortune. Total victory--she wins the social position she deserves, and without sacrificing her middle class righteousness, a feat of enormous vicarious appeal to readers at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

A slightly different kind of lie may be found in *David Copperfield*, where Dickens's unforgettable portrayal of human behavior overshadows the contrary insight that real people usually exceed in complexity the simplistic caricature of Dickens's novels. Real-life flesh-and-blood parents, for example, are usually complex enough to oblige combining the generous love bestowed by Peggotty and her family with the fallibility of Micawber, the eccentric rectitude of Betsy Trotwood, and the hatefully punitive authority of the Murdstones. Readers need to merge and integrate these guardian identities to gain a composite portrait approaching the full complexity of the parental role. Or take David himself, by the end of the novel a successful and well-adjusted self-made man. Surprisingly, he survives his childhood ordeal a balanced individual who is surrounded by a variety of freaks and obsessive-compulsive eccentrics. Common sense would suggest an entirely different outcome, that David's worldly success might be accompanied by comparable emotional instability as the byproduct of his compensatory ambition. In all likelihood, he himself would be maladjusted, and others around him would be trying to cope with his idiosyncrasies resulting from his desperate struggle to escape his origins. It would be David, not Uriah Heep, who cultivates the art of obsequious flattery for maneuvering himself into job advancements. Likewise, it would be David, not Steerforth, who transgresses social propriety, for example by discarding Dora, his frail and childish first wife, in order to gain a more advantageous

marriage with Agnes. Instead, both Uriah Heep and Steerforth are depicted as being steeped in evil, while David, pure of heart, rises in society by a magic principle of levitation which is never fully explained. Through authorial complicity, Dora is permitted to die (in effect murdered by her unsympathetic novelist), but David remains faithful until the end, after which he is free to turn his attention to Agnes, who provides a far more desirable match.

Contrary to real life, David therefore eats his cake and has it too. He wins everything he might ever have wanted against almost insurmountable odds, and there is no scar tissue, no debt to be paid, no psychic damage of any consequence resulting from his compensatory victory over his situation. This portrait is misleading, especially as implied autobiography, since Dickens himself was reputed to be intensely ambitious and to have aggressively sought out the sequence of advancements David could take for granted. Like David, Dickens rose to success from an impoverished family background, but the strenuous effort to improve his circumstances also seems to have produced an irritability significantly different from David's sweetness of temper. Moreover, Dickens, like David, was dissatisfied with his first wife (Catherine Hogarth), but she was a real woman who could not be consigned to an early death by authorial license. Instead, eight years after the publication of *David Copperfield*, Dickens obtained a formal separation from her to devote his attentions to Ellen Ternan, an attractive eighteen-year-old actress who joined him in his public readings. In other words, he finally eliminated his wife, just as he had eliminated David's, but, like Steerforth, he could only achieve this end by transgressing social propriety--in his case by resorting to abandonment. The exaggerated distinction between virtue and evil in David's story consequently distorts reality based on a self-exculpatory success story in which blame is both heightened and diverted to an appropriate scapegoat. David Copperfield wins the day in fiction, but Steerforth's rejected alternative finally prevails in real life. The ethical struggle takes on the proportions of a morality play, and internal ambivalence is reorganized so that the hero is clearly differentiated from a "problem" character who is equally expressive of one or more of Dickens' personality traits. By the Freudian principle of splitting, Steerforth absorbs and focuses the waywardness found socially unacceptable, while David, the lucky widower, benefits from this waywardness without paying any price for it.

My last example, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, offers the typical protestations of late nineteenth century jingoists that, whether vicious or not, colonialism had become an unavoidable economic necessity. Enormous profits at least temporarily accrued to Europe from its colonial practices in Africa, and these profits supported its economic stability as well as incidentally aggravating the precarious balance of power between England and Germany. Moreover, as Marlow insists, the progress of civilization since the beginning of time has depended upon such wholesale exploitation, even during the Roman occupation of Great Britain centuries earlier. Consequently, it might have seemed better to come to terms with this historic necessity, accepting the hypocrisy it entails, than to commit oneself to the foolishness of trying to bring about radical change. However, this defense of imperialism implicit in Conrad's novels has been overtaken by historic developments in the eighty-six years that have elapsed since *Heart of Darkness*'s publication. Many changes have occurred in third-world nations such as the Belgian Congo, now Zaire, site of the novel, and European overt domination has been reduced if not altogether eliminated. In part this reduction has resulted from humanitarianism, in part from the flexibility of governments and multinational corporations, the latter now able to maximize profits without incurring unnecessary administrative costs. It turns out both that African natural resources

may be utilized without resorting to colonial administration and that these resources are far less important to civilization than once thought. Of course, African nations are still beset with serious problems, but their leadership is presently indigenous and the genocidal exploitation typical of the closing two decades of the nineteenth century has been brought to a close.<sup>9</sup> Significantly, modest progress began with the reaction of European public opinion against the excesses of King Leopold's administration after the publication of Conrad's novel. This was not because of Conrad's influence, but because of the effort of such figures as H. R. Fox-Bourne, John Holt, Herbert Samuel, E. D. Morel, and Roger Casement. Once friendly with Conrad, Casement unsuccessfully tried to enlist him to their cause. Less willing than Conrad to accept the grotesque discrepancy between Europe's delusions of the white man's burden and its brutal mercenary tactics in Africa, Casement and his associates attacked public misconceptions with enough effectiveness to force King Leopold and the British government to liberalize their colonial administrations. The European economy survived, as did its standard of living, without totally subjecting the African people to indentured servitude. Liberalization occurred, and this has been better for western civilization, contrary to the final "message" of *Heart of Darkness*.

Why is there a basic contradiction in these four works between asserted truths and those which are concealed? Why does each tell a story both true and false? One may resort to psychohistory for an explanation, but the author's biographies are not necessary to shed light on their use of misinformation to organize their fiction. Their personal circumstances remain secondary to their strategy, leaving room enough for whatever deletions and renamings readers want to make in meeting their own needs. Authors pursue alternatives, but so do readers, and often with just as much license. Authors deny, but so do readers, and usually by bringing to literary form their own denial strategies akin to, but somewhat different from, those intended by authors. Self-deception becomes a subjective choice, letting each reader allay his anxieties by means of denial, the simplest and most independent coping mechanism available. No matter what authors themselves try to reject, those readers able to benefit from their authorial license possess the flexibility to fit it to their own circumstances. If Jane Austen, for example, tells a story of successful courtship to create a happy alternative to her own courtship disappointments, married women may find satisfaction because of nostalgia, romantic illusion, or fantasies of Platonic romance. Men, too, may experience rapport in the vicarious pleasure of being "trapped" by a sensitive and talented young woman. The same vicarious satisfaction may be experienced with *David Copperfield* and even with *Heart of Darkness*. If Joseph Conrad tells a tale of abandoning liberal values for the "real" truth about human fallibility, the reader may empathize for the purpose of escapism, mystery questing, existential dissatisfaction, or liberal indignation potentially in conflict with Conrad's intentions in writing his novel. Each, or any combination, of these motives may be involved, and our flexibility as readers in merging and focussing our sympathies increases the possibility of satisfaction. We disguise our own sense of need by projecting our attention upon imagined accomplishment which indirectly disposes of problems we cannot otherwise confront. X = not Y (the author's aversion), but also not A, not B, not C, etc. This gives universality to such authors as Austen, Dickens, and Conrad, and it helps to explain the unique appeal of Gertrude Stein's laconic fascination with tautology.

As already indicated, fiction does more than declare one set of truths in order to deny another. It also shapes and organizes the linear transition between the two, an advancement from insufficiency and confessed anxiety to the affirmation presented as its opposite. Hence the

progress of any story from challenge to victory, from uncertainty to apparent clarification, from a tacit acknowledgement of awkward and unpleasant compromise to the gratifying fulfillment of aspirations involving love, marriage, financial gain, self-discovery, aesthetic transcendence, the defeat of enemies, and so on. High truth may also be affirmed in this manner, for example when Conrad's final vision of tragic irony prevails that turns out to be irrelevant to future trends in Africa. The experience of closure, or finality, which we gain at a story's conclusion is evidence that narrative transition has been effective, that denial has been satisfactorily attained. If we come away from reading fiction with a sense of fulfillment (i.e. of feeling good), we know that the act of misrepresentation has been communicated, that literary truths have glossed over more unpleasant truths best left unexamined. And we judge plot to be compelling the more resoundingly it carries out this Aristotelian sequence from beginning to end, from problems to their pseudo-solution. Plot's linear forcefulness gratifies because it drives from thought distasteful alternatives, telling a success story even if its success might paradoxically involve ambivalence, absurdist despair, or martyrdom to a transcendent cause typical of tragedy. There is movement from partial acknowledgement of the reality principle (the intrusion of unacceptable experience) to its rejection by literary accomplishment supportive of the pleasure principle (the desirable outcome anticipated by readers). At the beginning obstructive elements are likely to dominate, but by the story's conclusion these have been convincingly eliminated.

In Jane Austen's novel, the plot begins cluttered with irritating domestic circumstances and a variety of social lapses that impede the innocent pursuit of eligible bachelors. Three hundred pages later the resolution is pure fantasy: Cinderella fits the glass slipper, our plain but resourceful young heroine wins the bachelor catch of the nation. Entirely in the spirit of free enterprise, if reduced to courtship maneuvers, Elizabeth's match with Darcy confirms the *laissez faire* values of the world she lives in, stable and impervious to disruption except for Elizabeth's upward mobility resulting from her natural superiority. A similar optimistic transition occurs in David Copperfield, in which David's nightmarish entrapment by family, education, marriage, and job situation is successfully overcome by a happy turn of circumstances owing to death, coincidental reunion, and the opportune disclosure of villainy. In like fashion, Conrad's novel begins with Marlow's astonishment at Europe's willful ignorance of its murderous policies in the Congo, but then concludes with his acceptance of the inscrutable wisdom that this problem is inevitable, in fact the paradox at the root of all civilization. In each of these novels a problematic beginning is brought to its appropriate resolution, and the transition from one to the other is produced or mediated by plot. Change has been produced that affirms one truth at the expense of another.

Even Gertrude Stein's fragment offers this kind of linear transition, since it begins with the simple equation, "a rose is a rose," thereby suggesting the importance of the rose in and of itself as compared to its various extraneous associations. However, this equation is twice repeated, flattened to a minimalist tautology that deprives the rose of its referential impact. The sequence involves a buried incremental repetition:

a rose is a rose  $\diamond$  a rose is a rose is a rose, etc.

Or, as a mathematical equation:

$$\text{a rose} = (\text{a rose} = [\text{a rose} = \text{a rose}])$$

By doubling, then tripling the law of identity, Gertrude Stein suggests both the necessity of reexamining the truth she first seems to acknowledge and her confidence that to do so obliges an entirely different conclusion:

this is this (maybe symbolic) is exclusively this (not symbolic)

Paradoxically, she resorts to potentially endless repetition to produce closure that desymbolizes the rose. Her line's initial declaration ("a rose is a rose") also suggests that a rose might be more than a rose, but its further repetition imposes a perpetual tautology to insist that a rose is words in a row, not even a rose. In trying to explain her inspiration for her poem, Gertrude Stein claimed that she repeated the word *rose* to achieve a "continuous present" comparable to Cezanne and Picasso's art in their liberation from end-stopped linear constraints, but of course this effect can only be illusory in the context of language. Repeating words necessarily produces succession, thus transition, and this transition is resolved when finally brought to its end. First explained by Gotthold Lessing, this temporal limitation applies to any sequence of words in the normal use of language, necessarily creating a "before" and "after" as well as linear advancement from one to the other. Here in Stein's poem, with minimalist extravagance, exactly three words are used: *a*, *rose*, and *is*. The question thus becomes how to prevent any concession whatsoever to the closure dynamics emphasized by Aristotelian poetics. The perpetual cycle used by Stein would seem to do this as long as its sequence is kept up, but once it is brought to a close the transition from a tautological expression of identity to its cessation constitutes the advancement from "this now" to "this forever." Closure can be postponed indefinitely, but only to express itself at a new level of meaning (again, "this forever"), and this itself constitutes a kind of closure even though it goes on forever. As a result, the trace of plot emerges, letting Gertrude Stein deny those feelings that really concern her despite her best efforts otherwise. As with other, more obvious works of fiction, her brief poem thereby diminishes the truth, as Plato insisted poetry inevitably does, but by means of linear organization emphasized by Aristotle and his many followers, this author included. This negative principle is therefore just as relevant to the briefest poem as of the novels of Austen, Dickens, and Conrad. It typifies all fiction, both high and low, that possesses any sustained audience appeal.

Last but not least, an undercurrent of denied feelings persists throughout serious works of fiction. As a subversive influence, it expresses alternatives authors feel compelled to acknowledge, if without being able to explain their importance. The less these feelings are recognized, the more effectively they undermine the story's overt interpretation. Once fully understood, deletions undelete themselves helter skelter, renamings unmask themselves, and the linear momentum of narrative form almost comes unhinged. Always at the edge of such disclosure, plot's momentum toward satisfactory closure is persistently challenged by tone, metaphor, nuance of characterization, and unnecessary narrative detours, all of which betrays complicated motivation. Works of fiction in which this resistance almost, but not quite, predominates include some of the most revered classics of our western literary tradition, from Gilgamesh to the novels of Dostoevsky, D. H. Lawrence, and Vladimir Nabokov. Their adequate interpretation is only possible if this ongoing struggle is fully taken into account.

Countervailing subversiveness may be detected, for example, in Jane Austen's obsessive

and perhaps unconscious dependence upon commercial vocabulary--such words as fortune, property, possessions, terms, means, etc.--when she is presumably concerning herself with the romantic impasse between Elizabeth and Darcy.<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth may think that she is strictly responding to Darcy's moral and intellectual worth as a gentleman, but pecuniary intrusions in both dialogue and narrative style confess a more calculating objective which might justify the apprehensions of a wealthy suitor. Also subversive is the heightened vilification of Ensign Wickham and Reverend Collins which prejudices the reader against both the capitulation to physical love and the necessity of marrying into a moderate income. Wickham's seduction of Lydia is entirely incongruous, since an unscrupulous social climber would not bother with a young woman as resourceless as Lydia. Only later, after they have run away together, does he learn that he might profit from his adventure with her. The sin implied is therefore not fortune hunting, but its opposite, the abandonment of fortune in favor of physical love. Collins, on the other hand, is led to write a foolishly pompous letter advising Elizabeth not to marry Darcy, though a prudent individual in his position would hedge his bet, restrained by family ties as well as loyalty to his patroness. Moreover, it seems obvious that Collins would benefit more by persuading Lady Catherine de Bourgh to accept Elizabeth's marriage with Darcy, since it would establish an indirect family connection reinforced by Elizabeth's close friendship with his wife Charlotte. His worst possible course of action would be to antagonize Elizabeth by opposing her marriage with Darcy and then to fail in his efforts--exactly the choice Jane Austen imposes upon him. That Collins is depicted as being rash enough to make this mistake, and without agonizing over it, unnecessarily stunts his characterization, then penalizes him for being depicted in this fashion. As earlier indicated, the vilification of both Wickham and Collins apparently discloses the two transgressions the most offensive to Jane Austen--sexual passion and a modest income. Elizabeth escapes both of these by means of her marriage with Darcy. As a matrimonial catch, Darcy provides the *deus ex machina* that releases Elizabeth from social, economic, and biological coercion, and, happy coincidence, the high virtues that attract his advances can now be cultivated in her enviable role as mistress of a wealthy household.

Half-confessed subversiveness likewise provides counterpoint to David Copperfield's story of emotional growth by restricting the personality traits found totally unacceptable to identifiable villains. The Murdstones, for example, reduce parental rejection to something almost totally evil. As in the case of Wyckham, Steerforth's romantic destructiveness expresses a potentially harmful freedom from ethical constraints, and Uriah Heep's grasping duplicity expresses a dependence on manipulative behavior by those who want to rise in the business world. The almost exuberant vilification of these four figures (including both of the Murdstones) imposes a labyrinth of threatening byways through which David Copperfield must pilot his career toward ultimate success--just as Christian makes his way to Heaven in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Each epitomizes a flaw to be avoided in David's struggle to improve his circumstances in life--a childhood defenselessness, reckless extravagance and prudence verging on greed. Paradoxically, however, Dickens' use of vilification (at times far heavier than Austen's) suggests a lack of emotional integration--in narrative point of view, if not in David's personality. The emphatic projection of blame upon others is somewhat at odds with the story of David's putative emotional growth, as if the novelist (at least his chosen narrator) benefits a good deal less from emotional maturity than David himself. A better distribution of strengths and weaknesses would be shared by Dickens' characters if the novel's overall point-of-view were proportionate to David's presumed attainment of maturity. Superior balance in the interpretation of personality may be observed, for

example, in *The Way of All Flesh*, by Samuel Butler, and *Sons and Lovers*, by D. H. Lawrence, both of which are comparable as *Bildungsroman* recounting the youth of their authors. With similar objectivity, positive virtues could be more graciously acknowledged in David's enemies, and, vice versa, David himself could be shown to possess a few of the negative qualities so generously bestowed upon these others. There would be no clearly defined heroes or villains *per se* in a mature world inhabited by a mature David Copperfield. The unctuous irony of Uriah Heep's final declaration that others besides himself might likewise benefit from serving prison terms could be recognized to contain more than a grain of truth, and the virtues of love and undying loyalty attributed to David and his friends and benefactors could be acknowledged as at least an incipient tendency in the personalities of Uriah Heep and the Murdstones. Manichaeic vividness would give way to the equitable judgment of a healthy and generous author, his style and characterization serving to confirm the outcome of his story.

More complex is the subversiveness that undermines Conrad's defense of European colonial excesses in *Heart of Darkness*. His theme of universal corruption is challenged by his use of women to symbolize the blind liberalism of Europeans. In general, women bear the brunt of Conrad's cynicism, as illustrated by his depiction of Kurtz's fiancée and of Marlow's aunt, who praises imperialists for "weaning these ignorant millions of their horrid ways." Appropriately, Kurtz's allegorical painting is of Justice as a blindfolded woman swaddled in darkness, and the two crones knitting black wool in the outer office where Marlow is first hired are apparently envisaged as Fates (or *moirai*) who weave the destiny of all men entering the portals of Africa. By limiting women to the role of ignorant liberals who support imperialism, Conrad implies that to be liberal is to be female, or effeminate, the ignorant beneficiary of extreme delusions. In turn, masculinity is shown to be stupidly methodical in its pursuit of imperialistic gains, for example in the station chief and subordinate administrators Marlow first encounters in Africa. Only the few men who possess superior minds, for example Kurtz and Marlow himself, are shown able to accept the savage contradictions that have presumably supported civilization since the beginning of time. Reluctantly, these geniuses sacrifice themselves--and more so their integrity--in order to benefit the idealists with a standard of living they deserve. These brave and bold soldiers of civilization presumably do the dirty work that provides women the leisure to find "good" reasons to justify their effort, producing a symbiosis essential to civilization based on the otherwise unbridgeable discrepancy between the sexes. True honesty is possible, but only among these superior warriors abroad who are justifiably frustrated by their obligation to serve womanhood, but who share a profound empathy in their silent recognition of this obligation.

However, problems of sexual identity somewhat diffuse the sexist logic implied by Conrad with this thematic division of the sexes. The shared secret which Marlow establishes with Kurtz takes precedence over heterosexual rapport, and with enough insistence to suggest latent homosexual affinity (buddies abroad), a role confusion that calls to mind exactly the feminine qualities to be denied, including the eager dedication to liberal causes.<sup>11</sup> It is therefore no surprise that Conrad cannot entirely escape the sentimental generosity he attributes to women, as demonstrated by his novel's disproportionate outrage against colonial practices at the expense of its intended final message, the defense of these practices as the "cost" of civilization. There is enough emphasis on Conrad's initial repugnance against colonial brutality that most readers overlook his acceptance of colonialism as the price that must be paid to guarantee Europe's high standard of living. By linking political vision with the issue of sexual roles, Conrad transfers his

ambivalence from one domain to the other, undermining his final acceptance of imperialistic necessity and thereby suggesting a modest loss of control in his narrative. If mild homophilia subverts Conrad's vision of complementary roles, it is no accident, given his logic, that his sense of revulsion about Congo atrocities is powerful enough to obscure his novel's final vision of unmitigated skepticism.

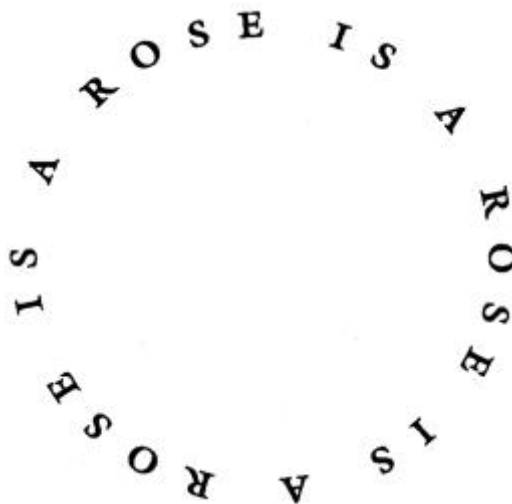
Among the meaningful encounters scattered throughout *Heart of Darkness*, two in particular confirm this sexual disorientation: Kurtz and Marlow's marriage of minds in a Congo steamer's cabin just before Kurtz dies, and, balanced against this, Marlow's uncomfortable visit to the apartment of Kurtz's fiancée at the novel's conclusion. Both meetings are shrouded in darkness, just as Marlow himself is shrouded in darkness aboard the *Nellie* while he tells his tale in the final scene. At the novel's end, there is a convergence in the representation of darkness among these three episodes, but there are also important differences in their respective uses of darkness for symbolic purposes. As already indicated, the darkness of the riverboat cabin at Kurtz and Marlow's last meeting symbolizes their shared despair confronted with the moral obligation to serve civilization by uncivilized means. Alas, they must conspire in deluding women, who primarily benefit the arrangement. This inner truth produces the novel's key insight, "the horror," Kurtz's ambiguous remark later understood by Marlow to capture the paradox at the root of civilization. In the second meeting, with Kurtz's fiancée, darkness symbolizes the collective ignorance that imposes this horror. Marlow's encounter with the fiancée thus becomes the final and most harrowing ordeal in his quest for ultimate truth. Having barely survived the jungle, he finds himself in a lair of archetypal temptation (a modern Den of Error) which at last exposes his reluctant debt to feminine ignorance. And he bows to this inescapable heterosexual necessity--the most compelling of truths, that the truth cannot be told. Like Kurtz, he finally recognizes the necessity of gender differentiation to guarantee high civilization, but he does so without sacrificing either his disgust with Congo atrocities or his fascination with the transgression he shares with Kurtz. *Heart of Darkness* is thematically complex enough to have enabled Conrad to explore these contradictions important to himself, but in doing so he necessarily cast doubt upon his novel's intended message of aversion compounded by stoic acquiescence to imperialistic brutality.

Interestingly, *Heart of Darkness* documents its own composition, and even here its distortions suggest the denial displacement at work. The rapport between Marlow and Kurtz exhibits a curious parallel to the relationship between Conrad and Ford Madox Ford when they collaborated in writing the novel in the winter of 1898-99. They sequestered themselves in the library at Pent Farm to work up an acceptable final draft while their wives and children kept to other parts of the household, obviously with a sense that they had a stake in the project but without otherwise participating in it.<sup>12</sup> The close working relationship between Conrad and Ford in a project they hoped and expected might help to support their families seems to have resembled the sense of shared genius between Kurtz and Marlow, while the exile of Conrad and Ford's families to other parts of Pent Farm resembled the role of women in the novel as ignorant beneficiaries eager to applaud strenuous effort they could not even begin to understand. A decade later, Conrad used comparable symbolism in his short story, "The Secret Sharer," to dramatize his uncomfortable temporary breakdown in his working relationship with Ford. Once again Conrad's plot tells of two men who experience intense rapport, one of them a fugitive murderer, the other a neophyte captain who must prove himself with his crew who symbolize society at large. As in *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad plays the mariner and gives Ford the role of reluctant killer. By making

a dangerous nautical maneuver, the captain proves his worth as a seaman (i.e. novelist) and simultaneously lets his double escape into the world again, presumably to make his own nautical maneuvers (i.e. to write his own novels).

Even so brief a poem as "a rose is a rose is a rose is a rose" bears subversive implications that cast doubt upon its deceptively simplistic pretensions, and with far more threatening implications for the homophobic readers than in Conrad's novel. In a casual reading the poem seems entirely innocent, but its obsessive repetition of "a rose is a rose" suggests a variety of puns with lesbian connotations that become evident in later versions published by Stein. For example, in "Sacred Emily," published in 1913, the line begins with *rose* capitalized as a name and with the first indefinite article omitted: "Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose." This is an entirely different story. Here a woman, Rose, is obviously identified with the flower whose identity with the same name is its most definable feature. Gertrude Stein added a second female persona when she revised the line as a provocative question in "Objects on a Table," published in 1922: "Do we suppose that all she knows is a rose is a rose is a rose is a rose." Here the reader is expected to ask why such a tautology is important enough to be noticed by a particular woman, perhaps (but not necessarily) the woman called Rose. We are asked whether Rose is aware of her true identity ("a rose is a rose") in the mind of the poet, but we are also exposed to the probability that the poet never posed the question to her herself.

One must also ask what led Gertrude Stein herself to be constantly playing with variations on the rose motif. Most provocative is the circular organization of the line that seems to have obsessed her. In at least three instances--Gertrude Stein's stationery, the design upon her dishes, and the cover of her autobiography, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*--she put the words in a linked circle to suggest the shape of the rose, but also the permanence of spatial form and also perhaps the closed circle of feminine identity:



More threatening connotations dominate the line's almost unrecognizable variation in *Tender Buttons*, published in 1914:

a charm a single charm is doubtful. If the red is a rose and there is a gate surrounding it, if

inside is let in and there places change then certainly something is upright. It is earnest.

The passage is deliberately cryptic, but with symbolism having oneiric sexual implications. By implication, unswerving commitment to heterosexual love is necessarily limited to a "single charm," but alternatives can be sought "if inside is let in," through what is presumably a gate (i.e. an opening that might be closed to those who want to enter) as represented by the rose's vulviform configuration of petals. But once this gate is entered, "places change," (i.e. roles are reversed) since "upright" denotes both something equivalent to an erection combined with earnestness (i.e. serious love). "Earnest" might also be a pun for "her nest," further reinforcing the suggestion of penetration by a woman rather than a man.

In her children's novel, *The World is Round*, published in 1938, Stein once again uses the motto "a rose is a rose" in a linked circle. She also tells the story of a young heroine, Rose, who seeks her destiny in a dream-like landscape with obvious symbolism. On the first day of Rose's journey, she enters a cave behind a waterfall (obviously feminine) to find glowing on its walls the words, "Devil Devil Devil." The triple graffiti reinforces the heterosexual threat implied by the identity of Satan, whose name is inscribed under the waterfall. The devil is rejected the next day when Rose carves, "Rose is a Rose is a Rose is a Rose," on a tree trunk. The explanation for her choice soon follows, when Rose discovers an entirely new and comically disgusting variation of the poem carved on a tree nearby, "Rose and under Rose was Willie and under Willie was Billie." Willie turns out to be her harmless male companion and Billie a lion. Their pileup reduces to clownishness the bestiality of heterosexual love (man, woman, and meaningless animal experience), but, significantly, it is described with the preterite, was, not is. Also, Rose is located at the top of the heap and Billie at the bottom, with Willie defenselessly trapped in the middle. As to be expected, Rose decides that she prefers whatever is signified by her name's repetition to the heterosexual pileup she would share with Willie and Billie.

The rose-arose pun also introduces a grammatical distinction that seems to have been important to Gertrude Stein's creative intentions while writing the poem. In "Lectures in America," she proposed that nouns are the proper medium of poetry. As she explained, the singular appeal of her poem resulted from its obsessive repetition of one particular noun: "I made poetry and what did I do I caressed completely caressed and addressed a noun."<sup>13</sup> Emphasized as a noun, the word *rose*, the obsessive sound pattern defies interpretation:

a ROSE

izza ROSE

izza ROSE

izza ROSE

However, the potential redivision of the noun and its article into two verbs, "arose" and "is," challenges this nominal and supposedly poetic expression. The jarring of tenses between "arose" (in the past tense) and "is" (in the present tense) undermines the line's supposed insistence upon the pure vision of a rose devoid of additional connotations. From the harmless rose emerges an

alternative possibility of arousal that reduces aestheticism to an exercise in sexual provocation:

arose IS

arose IS

arose IS

arose

Uttered four (or more) in a row with descending cadence, the line's tense-oxymoronic sequence belabors the triumph of postponed gratification, and the final verb imposes closure with a coda that exclusively features the verb in its past tense. What seems suggested, if anything, is the aftermath of arousal, the memory of desire already consummated. This sequence can also be reversed in at least one version of the poem to depict Rose as the woman who has been aroused:

a ROSE is arose is arose is arose

Here the use of "arose" to signify "aroused" produces "tense tension" its combination with "is," perhaps suggesting black dialect to recall Rose Johnson's lesbian appeal in *Three Lives*. In any case, the standoff between these two variant interpretations rooted in grammar defies resolution, since each is only partially effective in offsetting the other. Like the DNA molecule, they intertwine.

At its simplest level of interpretation, the "rose is a rose" line is decisively affirmative in its triple insistence upon the flower's identity to the exclusion of everything else. At other levels very probably overlooked by the reader (and perhaps Gertrude Stein herself), its meaning expands, forcing a standoff between this decisiveness and the combination of radical aestheticism and androgynous desire that both expresses and disguises the latter. For the homo-aversive middle-class reader, Stein can be taken at her word that a rose is a rose and only a rose, but for Stein herself as well as her acolytes a rose can also be *arouse*, the ecstasy of forbidden pleasure.

The issue of sexual compatibility was important to Austen and Dickens, but they dealt with it on a conventional heterosexual basis, each by rewarding true virtue with marriage. Austen used romantic love as the needed machinery to guarantee happiness and financial security for Elizabeth, while Dickens reversed this process by affording David enough success in life to be able to join the woman he truly loves. Whether Elizabeth knows it or not, aristocratic status is her goal, while David's is the pursuit of ideal companionship. Their objectives are linked with "normal" heterosexual ends despite their differences--social climbing versus the conjugal restlessness of a self-made man. Both accept the literary conventions that mix marriage and social advancement, but with opposite priorities.

The problem of sexual adjustment is more effectively obscured in the works of Conrad and Stein. However, it remains just as essential to their appeal, if not more so. If conventional goals cannot be won after overcoming a variety of obstacles, at least unconventional alternatives can be implied, and this in itself is an accomplishment of no little importance. In one instance this

subversiveness might involve the symbolism of a flower unsullied by alien morality, in the other we recognize an anti-epithalamion of a man and woman unable to communicate, rapidly sinking into darkness isolated from each other. Conrad paid his due to heterosexual demands, but Gertrude Stein more daringly befuddled bourgeois judgment--her intentions perhaps fully as defiant as might be suggested by her portrayal in Picasso's celebrated painting. Both Conrad and Stein employed symbolic displacements, one featuring an inward journey into the heart of Africa and the other the outward aesthetic imminence of a common flower. In each instance socially unacceptable implications were smuggled into the story with the purpose, conscious or not, of not being recognized. For both, the homophobic taboo necessitated heavy disguise, further strengthening the dialectic between declared intentions and an implicit rejection of conventional standards.

All four writers seem to have been troubled by role limitations too unpleasant to be directly acknowledged. By means of fiction, Jane Austen expressed her aversion to middle-class spinsterhood, Charles Dickens his aversion to both failure and entrapment in an inferior marriage, Joseph Conrad his anxious conservatism rooted in severe identity crisis, and Gertrude Stein her rejection of orthodox heterosexual standards. All of these authors featured socially acceptable truths in their works, but these truths took on additional significance as the denial of countervailing truths that were just as relevant to their lives. This was integral to the success of their fiction, giving it the energy needed to let readers adapt its avoidances for their own particular needs. Conflicting motives were organized into intense dialectic tension that could only be resolved by imposing pseudo-solutions with obvious conventional appeal. In Austen and Dickens' novels, closure came with the age-tested Menandrine formula of marriage; in Conrad's novel, it came with Marlow's final acceptance of the fallibility of the human condition, and in Stein's poem with a seemingly endless cycle of sheer aestheticism asserted at the expense of anything it might imply. In each instance a surface vision of the "truth" was presented in the best possible light, but its selective reversal brought antithetical implications that continued to challenge its sufficiency. Literary form provided the medium for this confrontation resolved at least tentatively by a conventional sense of an ending.

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## FOOTNOTES

1. Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken," in *Claims for Poetry*, ed. by Donald Hall (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1982), p. 355.
2. Denise Levertov, "On the Function of the Line," in *Claims for Poetry*, p. 271.
3. Some readers can be gratified that Bellow suggests at least the possibility of Herzog avoiding any precipitous commitment in his future relationship with Ramona. Herzog seems to have learned enough to avoid a repetition of the problems he has already endured at the hands of his first two wives, both having penalized him for his romantic impetuosity. However, Herzog's final diffidence while waiting for Ramona to come for dinner--giving the novel its conclusion--should more obviously set the stage for another botched seduction effort, since his ingrained romantic extravagance precludes any dramatic improvement in self-control. A more "honest" denouement--or a more obviously ironic one--would show his virtuous resolve already disintegrating as he toys with fantasies of salvation in the arms of a new woman.
4. Joseph Conrad, "Heart of Darkness," in *Youth and Two Other Stories* (New York: Doubleday, Page, & Company, 1923), p. 82.
5. Gertrude Stein, *Four in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947)--quoted by Thornton Wilder in his Introduction, p. vi.
6. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance," in *Emerson: Essays and Lectures* (New York: Library of America, 1983), p. 270.
7. Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, trans. by Emile Burns (New York: International Publishers, 1939), chap. 13, p. 155.
8. The quasi-deceptionist stance of these three authors has ready been discussed in my earlier paper upon deception theory.
9. Contemporary reports out of Zaire are hardly encouraging, since as many as two to three million killings are reported to have taken place since its independence in 1960. Nevertheless, this is an improvement as compared to the five million or so inhabitants who were killed during the twenty years of King Leopold's personal rule.
10. This mercantile quality in Jane Austen's prose is extensively discussed by Mark Schorer in "Fiction and the 'Analogical Matrix,'" in *Critiques and Essays on Modern Fiction*, ed. by John Aldridge (New York: Ronald Press, 1952), pp. 83-98, and by Dorothy Van Ghent in *The English Novel: Form and Function* (New York: Rinehart, 1953, 1961), p. 102.
11. There is a curious parallel to Conrad's treatment of sex in the fiction of V.S. Naipaul, who has expressed his indebtedness to Conrad's influence. Like Conrad, Naipaul has organized his

stories of the third-world experience so as to identify women as liberals dangerously misguided by the values of the white world. In *Guerrillas* (New York: Knopf, 1975), Jane rejects Roche, her timid white liberal boyfriend, for Jimmy, a sado-masochistic black nationalist revolutionary, only to be killed by Jimmy as a sacrifice to his homosexual relationship with Bryant, a boy staying with him on his run-down plantation. A comparable triangle occurs in *A Bend in the River* (New York, Knopf, 1979), located in Kisangani (once Stanleyville), incidentally near the site where Marlow first meets Kurtz. Unfaithful to her husband, Raymond, Yvette tries to prove herself by having an affair with Salim, hero of the novel, but she is violently rejected, since he prefers peace of mind living in his bachelor quarters with Metty, his ex-slave. In both of these novels heterosexual love is punished, and the physical humiliation of a woman initiates the hero's escape, chastened but liberated, from primitive madness to London civilization. For Marlow the situation is reversed, since his jungle adventure affords temporary escape from the liberal women who await him in Europe, but except for these differences, the novels of Naipaul resemble *Heart of Darkness* in their combination of misogynistic assumptions and third-world self-discovery.

12. Ford Madox Hueffer (Ford) emphasizes his close collaboration with Conrad in his paper, "Heart of Darkness," *Portraits from Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1936, 1937), and in "Working with Conrad," *Yale Review* 75, no. 1 (February, 1986): 13-18. Their relationship at the time *Heart of Darkness* was written is also discussed by Olivia Coolidge in *The Three Lives of Joseph Conrad* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972), pp. 151-55, and by Bernard C. Meyer in *Joseph Conrad: A Psychoanalytic Biography* (Princeton: Princeton, N. J., 1967), p. 154. Curiously, most of Conrad's biographers acknowledge both Conrad and Hueffer's collaboration and the composition of *Heart of Darkness*, but they do not attempt to sort out their respective contributions in writing this novel.
13. Gertrude Stein, *Lectures in America* (1935; New York: Random House, Vintage, 1975), p. 231.