

SPECTACLE, BINDING

On Character

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I

The concept of character is perhaps the most problematic and the most undertheorized of the basic categories of narrative theory. It is also perhaps the most widely-used of all critical tools, at all levels of analysis; and its sheer obviousness disguises the conceptual difficulties it presents. These can be summarized as follows. First, the concept is not specific to the discourse of literary theory but is necessarily dependent upon cultural schemata defining the nature of the self. Critical (and indeed informal) use of the concept tends to be a reproduction of these schemata rather than thematizing the relationship between the two conceptual sets. Second, and consequently, the concept is both ontologically and methodologically ambivalent; and any attempt to resolve this ambivalence by thinking character either as merely the analogue of a person or as merely a textual function avoids coming to terms with the full complexity of the problem.

The ambivalence, and the lack of methodological specificity, are already inscribed in the semantic network the term covers. The entry in the OED defines character both as a moral and a fictional entity, and sets up a scale running through "person," "personality," and "personage" in order to discriminate its range of applicability. It also distinguishes this "figurative" level from a "literal" level. Etymologically the lexeme derives from the Greek *kharattein*, "to make sharp, cut furrows in, engrave," and it yields two primary "literal" senses in English: that of mark or stamp, and more specifically that of a significant mark: for example, "a graphic symbol standing for a sound, syllable, or notion, used in writing or in printing; one of the simple elements of a written language; e.g. a letter of the alphabet." The opposition of the literal to the figurative is based on doubtful assumptions about origins and causality, but it suggests the possibility of thinking character (both fictional *and* moral) in terms of effects of

readability produced by conventional systems of signification, rather than in terms of nonconventional structures of human nature (which in practice turn out to be the universalizing projection of a set of historical conventions: those of bourgeois individualism). The dictionary can be of no further help in this task, but it does provide two quotations which nicely define the assumptions of the humanist tradition within which the concept is still largely thought. The first is from Mill's *On Liberty* (1859): "A person whose desires and impulses are his own — are the expression of his own nature, as it has been developed and modified by his own culture — is said to have a character. One whose desires and impulses are not his own, has no character, no more than a steam-engine has a character." Notice here that character is made dependent upon a property relation; and that this is negatively correlated with unconscious desires. After Freud, we might say, there can no longer be character. The other quotation is from Pope's second "Epistle to a Lady":

"Most Women have no characters at all."

II

The preconceptions of Mill and Pope underlie the humanist understanding of literary character as the representation of autonomous, unified and self-identical subjects. The theoretical challenge it responds to is that of establishing a set of analytic categories which will have explanatory validity both in terms of the constitution of moral subjects and in terms of the effects of unity which are the precondition of literary character. The price paid for the continuity between character and person is that both must be thought in terms of presence rather than in terms of textuality. Thus one of the standard texts, Harvey's *Character and the Novel* (1965), locates the unity of character in the givenness of "experience," which is ordered by the more or less stable grid formed by the four "constitutive categories" of time, identity, causality, and freedom. These categories provide the basis for the experiential recognition of character in the novel and for judgements about mimetic adequacy (p. 22). The schema makes no claim to work at the level of writing: its categories are concretizations at a secondary level. Moreover, if they are to be effective, they must be of long historical duration. But as John Goode points out, the category of time may, at least for twentieth century texts, be in conflict with identity, as may causality with freedom (1966:12). More importantly, perhaps, the categories that Harvey chooses as his analytic base are *not* those of gender, desire, class struggle, possession, domination — all of which are arguably closer to the thematics of the European novel. A more recent theorist, Seymour Chatman, is aware of the structuralist challenge to the equation of "character" with "person." In seeking to elaborate a non-reductionist, "open" conception of narrative character, however, he borrows from American ego-psychology a definition of the self in

terms of the "uniqueness and persistence through changes . . . by virtue of which any person calls himself I and leading to the distinction among selves" (1978:120). The linguistic shifter "I" is detached from the language system to become the index of a given, prelinguistic entity; and we move from there back to square one: to praise of Bradley for reading character-traits independently of the "exquisite stylistic surface" of the Shakespearean texts (p. 136), and to a declaration that "we cannot help wondering what will become of them, these dear creatures who have joined our fantasy world" (p. 134).

The other main assumption of humanist theory is that of the excess of character over the formal means of its representation. This is the concept of that "immense residue" that Culler finds left over in the structuralist analysis of narrative roles (1975:232), and it is the source of Rimmon-Kenan's question as to whether changing notions of character "can . . . be seen as nevertheless leaving some constitutive characteristics recognizable" (1983:31). The effect of supplementarity is theorized by Barthes in *S/Z*, where it is identified precisely as an ideology of the person, one which allows the whole to be perceived as greater than its parts: "what gives the illusion that the sum [of attributes] is supplemented by a precious remainder (something like *individuality*, in that, qualitative and ineffable, it may escape the vulgar bookkeeping of compositional characters) is the Proper Name, the difference completed by what is *proper* to it. The proper name enables the person to exist outside the semes, whose sum nonetheless constitutes it entirely" (1974:191). Chatman, who quotes this passage, misses its critical point completely, taking the effect of the proper name to be "the identity or quintessence of selfhood property" (sic), "a kind of ultimate residence of personality" (Chatman, p. 131). In this he repeats a certain mysticism of the self which is characteristic of humanist theory and which is precisely spelled out by Surmelian: "Characterization is a complex and elusive art and cannot be reduced to exact rules or to a comprehensive statement. The more we talk about it, the more we feel has been left out, and this is necessarily so because the human personality remains a mystery, subject to obscure forces; it is a universe in itself and we are strangers even to ourselves . . ." (1968:139).

The expressive conception of literary character underpinning humanist theory nevertheless leaves the question of the writtenness of character as its major problem. On the one hand Rawdon Wilson (1979) will praise Bradley's, Leavis's and Bayley's habit "of treating characters as if they were actual persons, and thereby, of course, directing critical intelligence to moral rather than narrowly aesthetic questions" (p. 736) (where "narrowly" abruptly dismisses the semantic and political import of formal structure). But on the other hand there is an insistent awareness of character's conventionality. Thus Price, working with a pictorial analogy, draws upon Clark's distinction between nudity and nakedness even as he stresses the (organic) body as the

source of perceptions of “the wholeness of the self” (1968:281). And L.C. Knights’s “How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth,” with its admonition that “in the mass of Shakespeare criticism there is not a hint that ‘character’ — is like ‘plot’, ‘rhythm’, ‘construction’ and all our other critical counters — is merely an abstraction from the total response in the mind of the reader or spectator, brought into being by written or spoken words; that the critic therefore — however far he may ultimately range — begins with the words of which a play is composed” (1951:4), remains an important essay in its argument against the de-textualization of character (even where “text” is conceived in terms of organic wholeness). This tradition in New Critical theory works as a kind of bridge to structuralist accounts of character.

III

The dominant tone of structuralism is caught in Grivel’s thesis that “le personnage (comme le nom l’indique) ne’est personne” (1973:113): character is no-one/is not a person. Grivel’s Aristotelian reduction of character to a function of plot generates a demystificatory rhetoric in which the role of the character form is to introduce compositional non-conformity or disturbance, but also to enable the restoration of compositional order. In the same vein, Coste militantly claims that the hero “can be defined independently of transformations explored by narrative grammar and almost arithmetically as the anthropomorphic bearer of the largest number of words in the text (1979:1176–1177). It might be remarked, however, that the insistence upon the textuality of character and the denial of any continuity between character and person rests upon an assumption that the two are quite different: the person or subject cannot itself be thought in textual terms. One of the major strands of structuralist analysis derives from Propp’s analysis of the fusion of roles and actions in the *motif* and from the Russian Formalists’ concept of the motivation of the device (e.g. Boris Tomashersky’s “Thematics”) (1965:61–95). This tradition gives rise to Souriau’s typology of the roles from which characters are generated and to Greimas’s concept of *actant*: that is, the slot or character-class defined by a permanent group of functions and qualities and by their distribution through a narrative (e.g. Greimas 1966:172–191). A second, linked strand of analysis works with syntactic models for the (metaphoric) construction of a grammar of narrative. Thus Todorov in the *Grammar of the Decameron* defines character in terms of the proper name, which is initially “blank” and is then filled with semes or predications (1969:28). Later versions of this model have tended to deal either with the anaphoric or coreferential function of proper names and pronouns (e.g. Corblin 1983:199–211) or with the propositional logic of predication and attribution (e.g. Garvey 1978:63–78).

The fullest synthetic account of a structuralist theory of fictional character is to be found in Philippe Hamon’s “Pour un statut sémiolo-

gique du personnage" (1977).¹ Hamon's starting point is an argument against the confusion of *personne* with *personnage* and against the neglect of the verbal conditions of existence of character; this neglect is the reason why a banal psychologism is to be found even in otherwise sophisticated analyses. Insofar as character "is as much the reader's reconstruction as a textual construct" (p. 119), Hamon proposes that the object of analysis should be the "textual character-effect" (p. 120). A first definition of this is offered in terms of three modes of existence of character corresponding to referential, deictic, and anaphoric forms of signification. But a more interesting model is that of the relation of the phoneme to distinctive features, in terms of which character is conceived as "a *bundle of relations* of similarity, opposition, hierarchy and disposition (its distribution) which it enters into, on the plane of the signifier and the signified, successively and/or simultaneously, with other characters and elements of the work," and either intra- or intertextually (p. 125). The signified of character, its "value," is constituted not only by repetition, accumulation, and transformation, but also by its oppositional relation to other characters (p. 128). This definition — purely formal as it is — sets up the possibility of establishing a calculus of the features, the "characteristics" which represent the basic components of character. To this end Hamon constructs a number of tables which yield a differential analysis of qualities, functions, and modes of determination of character. As I do not propose to give an exhaustive account of the different analytic categories Hamon proposes, let me paraphrase his summary. A character can be defined:

- (a) by the way it relates to the functions it fulfills;
- (b) by its simple or complex integration in classes of character-types, or *actants*;
- (c) as an *actant*, by the way it relates to other *actants* within well-defined types of sequences and figures (for example, "quest" or "contract");
- (d) by its relation to a series of modalities ("wanting," "knowing");
- (e) by its distribution within the whole narrative;
- (f) by the bundle of qualities and thematic "roles" which it supports.

The theoretical consequence of this definition is that, insofar as character is "a recurrent element, a permanent support of distinctive features and narrative transformations, it combines both the factors which are indispensable to the *coherence* and *readability* of any text, and the factors which are indispensable to its stylistic *interest*" (pp. 141–142). This then leads to a final definition of character: as "a system of rule-governed equivalences intended to ensure the readability of the text" (p. 144); and the question of the system of values which make a text readable is dealt with through a definition of the

1. Quotations from this and all other non-English editions are my own translation.

hero as the bearer of restrictions and combinations at the stylistic and cultural levels (p. 151).

In fact, this remains a purely formal definition. The proliferation of combinatories in Hamon's text indicates that the theory is additive rather than analytic, and this lack of economy is one reason why it does not in fact account for the way character works to ensure the readability of texts. In short, the theory does not account for the textual conditions of existence of characters as quasi-subjects, and for the activity of the reader in the constitution of these represented subjects; it fails to explain the affective force of the imaginary unities of character. Culler makes a similar criticism: that structuralist theorists view the usual primacy given to character as an ideological prejudice, rather than trying to *account* for it (1975:230).

An exception to this criticism must be made for the Barthes of *S/Z*. It is true that in this book as in the earlier article on the structural analysis of narrative, character is explained in terms of the combination of semes within the field of force of the proper name; but now this combination is conceived not as a property of the text but as that "process of nomination" by which the reader seeks to reconstruct an imaginary nucleus of thematic meaning; "character" is this retreat from name to name, and activity of "unnesting" ("le débâtement nominal") which can only arbitrarily be arrested (1974:191). It is perhaps important to add that Barthes does not dismiss the residue-effect, the illusion of plenitude conveyed by the proper name, but rather seeks to explain the quasi-autonomy of fictional subjects in terms of the codes which constitute it and the texts which traverse it.

IV

Barthes's mentions of character are, however, no more than suggestive; they are not in themselves capable of breaking the tied dichotomy of humanist plenitude and structuralist reduction. Two further bodies of theory offer possible alternatives. The first would be a description of character as an effect of historically specific and systematic operations of reading; it would analyze how forms of literary character have drawn upon and fed back into folk psychologies and characterologies (the doctrine of humors, of the ruling passion, of the racial or psychological or historical "type"), and how they are linked to techniques of formation of moral "character" located within particular institutions. One form of this theory is supplied all too easily by a historicist aesthetics. In the work of Lukács, a neo-Hegelian conception of the literary type is related to the development of the commodity form and of reification; in Adorno and Horkheimer it is related to the dialectic of capitalist rationality. In both cases a realm of historico-philosophical "forms" or "spirit" allows a character-typology to be read off from the state of development of the historical process; in neither case is there much

room for contradiction, for uneven development, for archaism, or for a nonteleological account of historical development.

A different but equally teleological historicism can be found in Northrop Frye's five-fold classification of fiction in terms of the hero's power of action (1957:33). Frye's descending scale is, roughly, a classification by rank and power, and it is unclear how far this corresponds to real class history, or indeed whether it is intended as a historical or as a structural description. Frye argues that in European literature the center of gravity has shifted progressively down the scale (p. 34); but this is true only in the most sweeping perspective, and furthermore most of the five modes are available in any one historical period. This model has been reworked by Jauss in terms of "a scale of functions for the social efficacy of art" (1974:296) — that is, a scale of norms of reception which are cast in synchronic form but which clearly reflect historically distinct régimes of identification. Indeed, Jauss's model would have no power without this diachronic dimension, but it does, like Frye's, oscillate between the diachronic and the synchronic, as well as between a descriptive and a normative engagement. The classification of "interactional patterns of aesthetic identification with the hero" (p. 298) is again five-fold, and it ranges between the extremes of cultic participation and aesthetic reflection. The first level, that of "associative identification," is structured upon the interactions of the game or ceremony. It suspends the opposition between actor and spectator, and it is realized in religious cults and in various forms of literary game-playing. The second level, that of "admiring identification," puts into play the category of the exemplary and various techniques of emulation: for example those by which the collective memory of the Christian Middle Ages or of the Communist state are constituted. The third level, "sympathetic identification," corresponds to Frye's low mimetic mode. It relies on the category of pity, and it works through either moral interest or sentimentality. It is realized in such bourgeois genres as the eighteenth-century domestic novel and domestic drama. The fourth level is that of "cathartic identification," and it is said to "place the spectator in the position of the suffering or hard-pressed hero in order, by means of tragic emotional upheaval or comic release, to bring about for him an inner liberation which is supposed to facilitate the free use of his judgement rather than the adoption of specific patterns of activity" (p. 297). Cathartic identification corresponds to the patterns of classical French tragedy and comedy. The fifth level, that of "ironic identification," is roughly equivalent to Brecht's conception of the alienation-effect, but it is here polemically subsumed within the category of "identification" itself, and its privileged examples are *Don Quixote*, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, and in general the poetics of modernism.

A footnote indicates that in an earlier version of the paper cathartic identification had preceded sympathetic identification — just as, in *The*

Anatomy of Criticism, the high memetic precedes the low mimetic mode (p. 297, n. 25). The effect of the later change is two-fold: it obscures the extent to which the model is diachronic, and it obscures the extent to which the model is based on rank. The rationale for the change is clearly the need to assign a privileged status to catharsis. This concept functions as a normative rather than a descriptive category, and it is used as a weapon against Brecht (who is, however, only mentioned in passing; Adorno is the explicit target). Against Adorno's claim that catharsis is "a cleansing action against the emotions, in league with oppression, and always aims at preservation of the interests of the ruling classes" (Adorno *Asthetische Theorie*, quoted by Jauss, p. 285). Jauss argues that catharsis is in fact capable of achieving aesthetic distance, by which he means, however, not distance from text and character but distance from the immediacy of the everyday world. Catharsis "presupposes a negation of the immediate interests of his [the spectator's] everyday life; he must divest himself of all such interests in the process of identification with the paradigmatic fate of the hero before he can obtain cathartic liberation. The classical model of catharsis includes the primary achievement of aesthetic experience: the liberation of the spectator from the objective world by means of the imaginary, which in turn constitutes the common ground of our delight in beauty and our delight in the tragic or comic" (p. 286).

This is remarkably unsuspecting of the "imaginary," and shows remarkable faith in the possibility of shedding ideological interests; but this of course is precisely the ideological work done by the concept: to represent the possibility of movement to a domain beyond ideology. It is cathartic identification alone which makes possible the attainment of, in Schiller's phrase, an "inner freedom" which is brought about by a separation of the aesthetic from the moral but which then in turn enables a free and disinterested choice of moral or political action: because "in fact, the inner freedom arrived at by catharsis is a precondition for the spectator's becoming able to follow his new insight, not in response to didactic pressure but out of free reflection" (p. 311). Catharsis, that is to say, is that form of reading by means of which literary discourse transcends ideology; and in his use of the concept Jauss is able to displace historical categories into a quasi-universal norm of reception.

Where Jauss both suggests and blurs the historical relation between a dominant psychology and fictional characterization, Ian Hunter's "Reading Character" takes as its object just this "interface between literary conceptions of character and the formation of moral character" (1983:226). By contrasting two readings of *Hamlet* by Stubbes (1736) and Bradley (1904) Hunter seeks to analyze the emergence of "character" in the nineteenth century as "a new literary-moral object." In the eighteenth-century text character is "primarily a rhetorical object rather than a moral one, and appears in a space opened by a

rhetoric of dramatic representation," whereas in a nineteenth-century régime character appears rather "as a projection or correlate of the reader's moral self personality" (p. 230), and is linked to quite different practices of reading. These would include, for example, "supplementing the text with a moral discourse on character-type"; the derivation of universal moral imperatives from the text; and the novelistic construction of character interiorities through techniques of "character appreciation" (p. 231). This shift in the formation of "character" "is not a change in the reader's consciousness of the object 'character'." Instead, we are dealing with a change in the practical deployment of a public apparatus of reading, in which what is to count as character is determined" (p. 232). This change has specific institutional conditions of possibility, in particular the "process of secularization of techniques of moral interrogation and confession." These techniques are embedded in a variety of institutions and practices, but Hunter suggests that "the emergence of an apparatus of popular education in the nineteenth century is what finally establishes the technical connection between the rhetorical analysis of characterization and the machinery for the construction of moral selves or good personal character" (p. 233).

V

These approaches seem to me useful to the extent that they suggest a correlation between historically specific interpretive norms and practices — whether those of Christian *aemulatio*, those of puritan self-scrutiny or those governing the construction of psychological interiorities — and specific regimes of characterization. But they do still leave open the question of the particular forms of desire which determine or are evoked by these operations of reading, and this is clearly crucial to any consideration of the effectivity of character. In order to try to formulate this question more adequately, we may turn to a second alternative to the dichotomy of humanist and structuralist conceptions of character: to the psychoanalytic dissolution of the concept into the fluidity of libidinal forces in play in the text. In the case of Hélène Cixous's "The Character of Character" this dissolution is accompanied by a programmatic argument for literary modernism. Character is identified with the norms of the realist text, and "through 'character' is established the identification circuit with the reader: the more 'character' fulfills the norms, the better the reader recognizes it and recognizes himself" (1974:385). Like the imaginary unity of the Ego, character is based in and is a restriction of the Imaginary. The circuit of specular recognition set up between reader and character works through the overlapping processes of identification and interpretation, and these in turn depend upon an ideology "of an 'I' who is a *whole* subject (that of the 'character' as well as that of the author), conscious, knowable; and the enunciatory 'I' *expresses himself* in the text, just as the world is

represented complementarily in the text in a form equivalent to pictorial representation, as a simulacrum" (p. 385). Cixous's attack on the expression/representation couple depends upon a conception of the Ego as a repressive instance; and what it produces through repression is the unconscious, conceived as "unanalyzable, uncharacterizable" (p. 387). To the "repression of subjectivity" on the one hand is opposed, on the other, the ability of what Cixous calls the "imperishable text" to "evade the prevailing attempts at reappropriating meaning" (p. 384). The text is "imperishable" because literary discourse has the unchanging, universal function of subverting the illusory unity of the Ego. Thus the German romantics are said to have attacked "logocentrism, idealism, theologism, all the props of society, the scaffolding of political and subjective economy, the pillars of property. The machine of repression has always had the same accomplices; homogenizing, reductive, unifying reason has always allied itself to the Master, to the single, stable, socializable subject, represented by its types or characters: and it is there, at the base, that Literature has already struck . . ." (p. 389). Social revolution is a struggle against a monolithic spiritual principle; the battle never changes, the story is always the same. By contrast, Leo Bersani's *A Future for Astyanax* (1976) is much more cautious about the political stakes and effects involved in the scattering of the self, and is much more aware of the historicity of subjectivity. Using a mimetic and historicist methodology, the book charts the stages of the dismantling of images of the self in modern literature across a polarity of structured/fragmented desire, where by "structured desire" is meant "desiring impulses sublimated into emotional 'faculties' or passions and thereby providing the basis for the notion of a distinct and coherently unified personality." The "coherent self" is constituted by "the disguised repetitions of inhibited desires" (p. 5), and character can accordingly be defined as "the illusion created by *centralizing* of a partial self" which has "the factitious coherence of all obsessions" (p. 313).

Traditional psychological descriptions of fictional character are based on typological abstractions ("vanity," "altruism"), so that "personality" tends to work as a kind of allegorical myth. This is quite explicit in mediaeval allegory with its monoplanar objectifications of psychological or moral faculties; and it is the *grouping* of such features that constitutes "personality" in more complex genres like the novel. Behavior and action in the novel *exemplify* moral and psychological qualities which it is then the reader's task to retrieve (to put a name to, finding what was there to be found, p. 18). These allegorical typifications are both drawn from and fed back into the social text — Bersani's example is the classroom analysis of the Racinian monologue, which "provides useful training in the more or less official psychological language of our culture" (p. 20). And it is this expressive function (the relation of a narrative surface to a typological deep structure) that

maintains the structuredness of desire in the classic realist novel, where "the most casual word, the most trifling gesture, the most tangential episode all submit easily to the discipline of being *revealing* words, gestures and episodes" (pp. 52–53).

Psychoanalysis is in part complicit with conceptions of significant, coherently structured character, but in part also demystifies them insofar as it incorporates a theory of the solidification of character structures. Bersani's analysis is concerned with the possibility of alternative conceptions of character: for example in Baroque poetry, where the self can be performed "as fragmented perceptions and desires," or in the eighteenth-century novel, where character is largely a pretext holding together dispersed moments of plot, anecdote and digressive reflection (p. 58). But it is more importantly concerned with moments of contradiction *within* the genres of "classical realism." In the nineteenth-century novel desire is formulated by analogy with the formal organization of narrative: disruptive desire is thematized as a "disease of disconnectedness" (p. 66) and is suppressed insofar as it threatens both the social and the novelistic order. It is ambivalently centered, as either a negative or a positive energy, in the character of the hero: on the one hand he figures as an intruder into a significantly structured world where he may be glamorized as a scapegoat embodying guilty impulses, but where he is admitted only that he may be submitted to a ceremony of expulsions (p. 67); on the other hand the hero or heroine appears as a vague, featureless lack of desire, a "heroic stillness" (p. 70): Fanny in *Mansfield Park*, for example, works as a kind of negative fixity in relation to the fluidity of being of the Crawfords (p. 76).

In other nineteenth-century texts — *Wuthering Heights*, *Les Chants de Maldoror* — Bersani finds a radical dispersal of desire and of moral identity effected through an exploitation of "the *destructuring* possibilities of language" (p. 195). But here a key ambivalence in Bersani's thinking becomes manifest. It concerns the relation of desire to language, and in particular the argument that "the potential for discontinuity in verbal sequences invites us to explore our potential for ontological discontinuities; the subversion of linguistic structures of meaning is a model for the subversion of structures of being (p. 224). Later I shall argue just the opposite of this: that it is linguistic discontinuity, and the field of presupposition it opens up, that constitute the condition of inscription of the reader as *unified* subject of reading. Bersani's case quickly reaches its limits in his analysis of the way Rimbaud's hallucinatory poetry of surfaces seeks to escape system, interpretation, and centering. The argument now is that "language is of course a structured system, and as such — even without being explicitly psychological — it is inherently antagonistic to mental life as discontinuous, hallucinated and random identifications with the external world. The poetic illumination must pass through or 'cross' language, but it must also dismiss a medium which both serves it and subverts its

value" (p. 247). Here language as structure is opposed to the unstructuredness of desire: desire, or the dispersion of the boundaries of the ego, is postulated as transcendental, and as such it is continuous with the most idealist tropes of traditional criticism — for example, with those invoked in Bersani's Preface, where desire is seen as a synonym for the concept of "vision" or for "the idea of freedom and images of the frontier in American literature:" that is, for concepts which "suggest an area of human projection going beyond the limits of a centered, socially defined, time-bound self, and also beyond the recognized resources of language and the confines of literary form" (p. ix). Perhaps the most revealing example of the effects of this opposition of language as structure to unstructured desire is in the description of the "logic of Artaud's mistrust of verbal language," a mistrust grounded in the perception that "words articulate the self, they substitute a system of spaced repetitions and differences for pure presence" (p. 267). The relevant opposition is no longer that between structure and non-structure (or consciousness, or vision), but rather that between difference and a fantasy of presence and self-containment. Artaud, with his terror of defecation as Being separating from itself, desires not a scattering of the self but its total unification; and this is precisely a fantasy: outside of language there is neither self nor desire.

VI

This is the end of my critical exposition. My aim now is not to salvage the bits and pieces left after this critique, not to produce a critical "synthesis," but to try to define the appropriate parameters for a more rigorous theorization of the concept of the character. I would identify three relevant stages of the problem. The first can be expressed in a very elementary question as to what kind of entity character is: and Hamon's answer, that character is a textual effect, makes it possible to think the specificity of character as a function of determinate textual practices. The second stage questions the status of these practices, inquiring into the social and historical conditions of representability of character. Here again I think adequate answers have been suggested: namely, that literary character is historically differentiated according to institutionally sanctioned versions of what the self is or should be, and historically specific practices of "character" formation. The third stage then poses the question of how character works to construct the "interest" of a story, of its affective hold; this is the question of the relation between the construction of character and the construction of the reader as reading subject. Here the answers are more difficult to formulate. What is at issue is character as an effect of desire, understood not as "someone's" desire but as a structure forming the imaginary unity of subjects in their relation to the imaginary unity of objects. To say this is to argue that there can be no separation between an objective textual construct and something (desire) brought to it by a

reader; rather, "character" is an effect of the self-"recognition" of a subject which is not preconstituted but which assumes a specific identity in the identification of and, hence, identification with the identity of a character.

In posing the problem in this way I shall be concerned only with certain very preliminary questions concerning the function of character in the reading process; and I shall approach them through two concepts derived from film theory (and from a particular, semiotically oriented version of psychoanalysis). The first of these is the theorization of different forms of cinematic identification in relation to visual pleasure. The argument here is that, in our culture, looking is codified along gender lines in such a way that the bearer of the look is normatively male and the object of the look is normatively female. Cinematic identification thus takes place either with a subject position or an object position, coded respectively as masculine and feminine. Mulvey (1975) argues that this distinction can be thought through an opposition between scopophilia, which involves identification at the level of enunciation with the controlling gaze of the inscribed spectator, and narcissism, which involves identification at the level of utterance with the spectacle, the object of the gaze (p. 10). It is further possible to argue that scopophilia, the normatively masculine form of the gaze, involves either voyeuristic or fetishistic modes of identification; and that these give rise to distinct forms of narrativization (a voyeuristic regime will tend to be distanced, analytic, and sadistic, and to generate articulated and linear narratives; a fetishistic regime will attempt to abolish narrative distance and is therefore "only capable of producing an attenuated narration, a constant repetition of scenarios of desire, where the repetition around certain neuralgic points outweighs any resolution of a narrative enigma, any discovery or reordering of facts" Ellis 1980:99; cf. Mulvey, pp. 13-14). These distinctions, which I have outlined only cursorily, produce a minimal structure of possible positions of identification differentiated according to the sociosexual codification of the gaze. But it is then important to add that this is no more than the description of a normative structure, and that in practice both masculine and feminine positions can be occupied by either men or women; that identification is with positions before it is with characters, and that a range of intermediate positions can be projected; that identification may be either positive or negative, "with" or "against" (and usually the one implies the other); and that identifications may shift during the course of a reading — that is, that the investment of libidinal energy in watching a film or reading a written text is typically diffuse rather than monolithic.

The second concept I want to examine is that of *suture*, which was first formulated by Lacan's disciple Jacques-Alain Miller. The metaphor can be thought of as performing two analytically distinct functions. First, in drawing upon the image of stitching, it theorizes the

syntagm — its model of language — as a chain of relations of presence and absence (the syntagmatic binding-together of actual linguistic units drawn from virtual paradigmatic sets). This is of course a commonplace of structural linguistics. The second task performed by the metaphor is to theorize the formation of the subject through its relation to the play of absence and presence in the Symbolic Order, exemplified by language; the subject is constituted as such through its stitching-in to the enunciation of the chain of discrete signifiers. For Lacanian psychoanalysis it is precisely in this process of interrelation between signifiers that the effect of consciousness called the subject is formed (the subject “slides in the chain of signifiers”). Lacan’s formula, which stresses the *writtenness* of subjectivity, is that “the signifier is what represents the subject for another signifier” (Lacan 1977:316): the lack which defines this relationality is the mode of existence of the subject. And Miller, describing the constitution of the subject as an inscription in and an effect of the signifying chain, writes that “suture names the relation of the subject to the chain of its discourse; we shall see that it figures there as the element which is lacking in the form of a stand-in” (Miller 1977–1978:25–26).

In Jean-Pierre Oudart’s transference of the concept to film theory suture refers to a form of cinematic cutting — the “stitching together” of the film. The argument is, in Heath’s summary, that “the articulation of the signifying chain of images, of the chain of images as signifying, works not from image to image but from image to image through the absence that the subject constitutes. Cinema as discourse is the production of a subject and the subject is the point of that production, constantly missing in and moving along the flow of images . . .” (Heath 1977–1978:58). For both Oudart and Daniel Dayan, however, suture is to be equated not with the editing process in general but with one specific form exemplified in point of view cutting: for example the shot/reverse shot, where shot two retrospectively identifies shot one as the perspective of a character within the diegesis; or the eyeline match, where a line of vision indicated in shot one matches up with an image in shot two. These forms of cutting correspond to forms of represented or second-order discourse in literary texts: that is, to language assigned to figures concretized in a first order of narrative discourse. Oudart describes them in terms of a sequence in which an initial, apparently “frameless” shot, enunciated by an “Absent One” or invisible narrator, is followed by a perceptible frame and a foregrounded act of enunciation (Oudart 1977–1978:37). In the shot/reverse shot, Dayan writes, “the absent-one of shot one is an element of the code that is attracted into the message by means of shot two. When shot two replaces shot one, the absent-one is transferred from the level of enunciation to the level of the fiction” (Dayan 1976:448).

In this sense the concept of suture refers simultaneously to a style of cinematic cutting, to the relation between an impersonal point of view

and the point of view of particular characters within the film, and to the placing of the viewing subject within this system of relations. But it thereby becomes open to Stern's criticism that "the term point of view implies presence, possession, origin. It implies subjectivity and a self-conscious subject as origin of vision," and to her question: "why is it then that a certain tendency which insists on the subject as site of contradiction and transformation has tenaciously pursued point of view as an issue?" (Stern 1979:215). It is clear, I think, that there has been a too-rapid concretization of the unity of "character" in the conception of filmic point of view (as indeed of narrative point of view in general). Furthermore, the equation of suture with point of view cutting is problematic insofar as it collapses a general conception of enunciative relations into the single figure of the absent one: Heath makes this point persuasively, and contends that "the realization of cinema as discourse is the production at every moment through the film of a subject address, the specification of the play of incompleteness-completion. What suture can serve to name is this specification, variously articulated but always a function of representation (the play for a subject, its taking place)" (Heath 1977-1978:63-64).

A more general criticism of the way the concept has been formulated is that Lacan and his followers work with an atomistic notion of the sign and are unable to think in terms of systematic discursive codifications, including the codification of positions of enunciation, above the level of the sentence. It is at least arguable, however, that linguistic discontinuity is to be located not at the level of the sentence (which is precisely *syntagmatically* bound) but as a function of the relation of the text to the field of presuppositions and rules of production which constitute its coherence and its conditions of readability. A further difficulty with the concept of signifying chain is that for Lacan the privileged model of the signifier often seems to be the shifter — for example, the personal pronoun. It is surely this that "represents the subject for another signifier," in the sense that the pronoun "I" defines my essential identity, my selfness, only insofar as it also identifies every other self for every other speaker, defining me in the place of the Other. The shifter inserts me into the Symbolic, constitutes me as a subject, precisely to the extent that it endows me with a purely linguistic and positional identity. It is a question then of subject positions which are normatively encoded into specific discursive formations and which are the condition of production of enunciation. It is in this sense that suture can be defined as the "join of the subject as unity of the recognition of sense" (Heath 1978:8). The binding-in of the reading or viewing or speaking subject occurs above all in its slotting into these "appropriate" positions which constitute it as a subject in the very process of making sense and being made sense of. And conversely "sense" is "made" within "a textual circuit articulating 'positions' of masculinity and femininity through processes of identification, the

maintenance of these positions being the work effected by us as subjects each time we understand the meaning of a sentence, each time we 'get' the joke, each time we 'make' the film make sense" (Pajaczkowska 1981:83).

VII

Together the concepts of pleasure in looking and suture give an account of the unity of desire and meaning in the text-governed constitution of the subject of signification. Both, I believe, throw some light on the mechanisms of identification; but how will they help with a more rigorous conceptualization of character? The importance of the concept of identification — which has traditionally been central to theories of character — lies in its ability to mediate between character as a formal textual structure and the reader's structured investment in it. But there is a more specific problem here: whereas pleasure in looking involves two possibilities of identification (with a subject position in voyeuristic and fetishistic scopophilia, and with an object position in narcissistic scopophilia), the concept of suture, by contrast, describes identification only with a subject position. What this might suggest is that a more extended account of suture — of the binding-in of the reader to the text — might need to take account of the dialectical mirroring of subject and object positions in discourse; and that fictional character might be seen as involving primarily the narcissistic dimension of identification.

The concepts of narcissism and identification are closely linked in Freud's work, and I want briefly to investigate the relation between them. Narcissism is in fact one of Freud's major explanatory categories, and he takes it to constitute the real basis of every object-choice: that is, in every choice of a love-object "the libidinal energy is always borrowed from the ego, and always ready to return to it" (Laplanche 1976:77), because "narcissistic or ego-libido seems to be the great reservoir from which the object-cathexes are sent out and into which they are withdrawn once more; the narcissistic libidinal cathexis of the ego is the original state of things, realized in early childhood, and is merely covered by the later extrusions of the libido, but in essentials persists behind them" (Freud 1953 Vol 7:218).

What is striking and innovative in Freud's thought is not the postulation of a love of self, which in itself is a commonplace, but the fact that this is understood as occurring through the taking of the ego as a possible love-object; and the fact that the actual positions of subject and object may be less important than the fantasized positions (which may indeed both be internal to the ego). This involves a radical rethinking of the concept of identification: let me give two examples.

The first is that of male homosexuality, in which "the young man does not abandon his mother, but identifies himself with her; he transforms himself into her . . . A striking thing about this identification is its ample scale; it remoulds the ego in one of its important features — in

its sexual character — upon the model of what has hitherto been the object” (Laplanche and Pontalis 1980:137). Laplanche adds to this that “these positions are by no means stable, but, on the contrary, are caught up in a seesawlike movement which, at the slightest shift of the mirror, can cause an exchange of positions” (1976:75). It might in fact be more correct to say that *two* positions — a subject position and an object position — are occupied simultaneously, and that there is an unsteady balance between primary and secondary position. The second example is that of melancholia. In analyzing this neurosis Freud comes to the conclusion that the self-reproaches characteristic of melancholia are really “reproaches against a loved object which have been shifted away from it on to the patient’s own ego” (1953 Vol 14:248). This situation arises because of a withdrawal of libido from the object; but the emotional energy is not then transferred to another object, but is rather withdrawn into the ego. This causes a splitting of the ego, such that one part identifies itself with the abandoned object and is in turn judged and condemned by another part. The ego becomes the object of its own repudiation (p. 249). This model becomes the basis for Freud’s later theorization of the splitting-off of parts of the ego (into ideal ego, ego-ideal, and super-ego). It is to this dispersal of ego-identifications that I wish to liken the function of fictional character. The “recognition” or “identification” of character would be the specular obverse of the primary identifications involved in suture; that is, it would involve a mirroring of the semantic and libidinal processes of “self” construction in an imaginary construction of “other,” quasi-unified selves.

This process of the narcissistic dissemination of ego-libido, which I take to be the basis of all historically specific regimes of identification, is identified by Freud as characteristic of the language of dreams. The passage is worth quoting in full:

It is my experience, and one to which I have found no exception, that every dream deals with the dreamer himself. Dreams are completely egoistic. Whenever my ego does not appear in the content of the dream, but only some extraneous person, I may safely assume that my own ego lies concealed, by identification, behind this other person; I can insert my ego into the context. On other occasions, when my own ego *does* appear in the dream, the situation in which it occurs may teach me that some other person lies concealed, by identification, behind my ego. In that case the dream should warn me to transfer on to myself, when I am interpreting the dream, the concealed common element attached to this other person. There are also dreams in which my ego appears along with other people, who, when the identification is resolved, are revealed once again as my ego. These identifications should then make it possible for me to bring into contact with my ego certain ideas whose acceptance has been forbidden by the censorship. Thus my ego may be represented in a dream several times over, now directly and now through identification with extraneous persons. By means of a number of such identifications it becomes possible to condense an extraordinary amount of thought-material. The fact that the dreamer’s own ego appears several times, or in several forms, in a dream is at bottom no more remarkable than that the ego should be contained in a conscious thought several

times or in different places or connections — e.g. in the sentence “when I think what a healthy child I was” (1953 Vol 4:322–323).

Despite this disclaimer, this sentence is really a quite remarkable example: first, because it demonstrates the dream-work’s dispersal and displacement of the ego by appealing to the *grammatical* disjunction between the *sujet de l’énonciation* and the *sujet de l’énoncé*, the repetition and splitting of the grammatical subject; and second, because it is itself a product of repression, laying bare and denying in the same oddly naïve movement the whole problematic of infantile sexuality and of the “perverse” foundations of normality. The dispersal of the “I” thus occurs not only at the level of grammar but at the level of rhetoric. Here the relevant trope is that of negation, but Freud’s work is rich in rhetorical transformations — for example the analysis of the shifting subject positions in “A Child is Being Beaten,” where the title sentence is transformed back through “my father is beating the child” and “my father is beating the child whom I hate” to “I am being beaten by my father” (with a corresponding shift from a sadistic to a masochistic position of enunciation, 1953 Vol 17:179).

VIII

The *fixity* of character is given in the “mimetic” correspondence (a problematic and difficult equation) between the unity of the body and the unity of the proper name. The *plasticity* of character is given, we could say, in the noncorrespondence between the proper name and the system of pronouns, which shift the one “person” between three grammatical “persons.” These three forms of the pronoun are not, however, mere empty spaces waiting to be filled with a positive presence. Rather, they are the site of a discontinuity between the subject of enunciation and the subject of the enounced. Paraphrasing Irigaray, MacCabe argues that the entry of the child into language is operated by the realization

that the “you” with which he or she is addressed can be permuted with a “he” or “she,” which is the possibility that the proper name is articulated in a set of differences — and that the child is only a signifier constantly defined and redefined by a set of substitution relations. The binary I/you is transformed from two terms into a relational structure by the passage through the empty place of the “he” or “she” (1979:204–205).

This passage is something like a journey through nonbeing, a constitution of the subject in the experience of absence. But the shift between a position in enunciation and a position in the enounced cannot be mapped onto Benveniste’s distinction between the “personal” and “nonpersonal” forms of the pronoun (first and second person versus third person), since *every* form of the pronoun can be split in this way (“when I think what a healthy child I was”). The pronoun system guarantees identity and the dispersal of identity in the same articulation.

It is therefore only in the first instance that identification, the binding-in of the reader or spectator to a fictional discourse, takes place in relation to what Bersani calls "that incessant *voice* which, in poetry, prose fiction and the essay, never stops implying the presence of a stable and structured self as the center to which the world always returns and from which it receives its own reassuringly stable designs" (1976:258), and which in drama and film corresponds to the position of the absent one, the unrepresented frame. As Freud's examples make clear, no subject position can ever be single and univocal, particularly in the temporal extension of language. Further, the apparently "unrepresented" discourse of the absent narrator is always in a sense a character-position like any other (cf. Barthes 1974:179); and characters, as objects of this narrative discourse, tend also to be subjects of discourse in their own right: "rather than being strong, true, handsome, rich or touching, the hero must first of all talk . . ." (Coste 1979:1176). Hence the possibility for the reader of sliding to an identification with represented subject positions; and hence the contamination of authorial discourse by other voices: by inflections of represented discourse.

The classic example of this mixing of voices is the "dual voice" of free indirect discourse, in which representations of "spoken" discourse blend with forms of narrative authority. McHale (1978) mounts a strong argument that free indirect discourse cannot be formally accounted for in terms of grammatical categories; its perceptibility depends upon the reader's sense of the intervention of the voice of concretized character. This means that free indirect discourse "is not so much the syntactical frame which 'permits' the appearance of otherwise inadmissible mimetic material, as it is formal or, more problematically, semantic materials which evoke a 'voice' or presence other than the narrator's" (p. 289). This is not, however, a concession to Bakhtin's psychologistic assumption of the pre-giveness of voices and positions in the text. As McHale argues, this is problematic insofar as "the reader, far from having *a priori* mastery of the voices in a text, must be gradually 'schooled' by the novel itself to organize its semantic continuum into the appropriate voices, whether these are fictional speakers or non-personified 'interpretative positions' or 'linguistic ideologies.' Thus, if semantic content is indeed the primary determiner of the presence of "other voices" in the text, this is not by a straightforward mapping of interpretative positions given in advance onto the semantic continuum, but by a complex contextualizing operation" (p. 273).

It is here that we can perhaps catch a glimpse of the way in which fictional character produces the effect of belonging simultaneously to discourse and to representation, and the reason why the analysis of character tends to shift into irreconcilable linguistic and mimetic domains. To be a character is to be both an object of speech and a subject of speech (cf. my earlier formulation of this problem in Frow 1981:263); that is, in the production of character, language produces

fictional representations which in turn produce more language. Free indirect discourse — the point of convergence of narrative and figural discourse — involves a second-order assignment of speech to a figure concretized at a first order of narrative discourse (but this “representation” of the origin of voice is to be taken as a discursive effect of the first order, not as a *transcendence* of discourse). Character is thus produced as a complex effect of the layering of levels of language and representation; and an adequate conceptualization of it might require a similar dialectical layering of textual and mimetic theories.

Two exemplary readings of *Emma* will elucidate some of the problems involved in theorizing character in terms of discourse and discursive effects. The first, Joel Weinsheimer’s “Theory of Character: Emma” (1979), constitutes an extreme reduction of character to text. The article begins by criticizing mimetic criticism for the fact that, in reading the words “Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich . . .” it accepts the ontological illusion carried in the unstated predication of existence, and reproduces it in a language which “appears natural, almost an extension of the novels themselves” (1979:186). To this Weinsheimer contrasts the language of semiotic criticism, for which “Emma Woodhouse is not a woman nor need to be described as if it were” (p. 187), where the “it” polemically stresses the textuality of character: “Emma” becomes a text within *Emma*. It is the closure of fictional texts, Weinsheimer argues, that allows us to read characters as fictive entities, and semiotic criticism is that metalanguage which *imposes* a closure on the text. Its goal is then to refuse the concretizations that produce the illusory fullness of a novelistic world; instead, it aims at a “reduced articulation” whereby “the hard, clear lines which in mimetic criticism differentiate one character from another tend to dissolve. Their temperaments, too, shade off toward continuity like the colors of a rainbow. Imputedly unique character — an identity distinctly one’s own — becomes communalized among all the characters; it is distributed throughout the novel rather than limited to one unitary text-segment, a particular character” (p. 194, note how close this is to much psychoanalytic criticism, as well as to Lawrence’s “allotropic” conception of character). In a semiotic criticism characters are read as “patterns of recurrence, motifs which are continually recontextualized in other motifs. In semiotic criticism, characters dissolve” (p. 195) — dissolve, that is, into text.

This dissolution of character in *Emma* takes place along four planes on which representational differentiation is broken down into textual continuity. These are the planes of “the continuity of proper names with writing on the one hand and characteristics on the other; the continuity of familial and social strata; the continuity of voiced and unvoiced utterance; and, finally, the continuity of character independent from other characters” (p. 195). Let me mention only one of these, the continuity of voiced and unvoiced utterance. The argument is

simple: any attempt to discriminate the provenance of voices (for example, to distinguish between narrative discourse and the speech of characters, between "the 'said Emma' and the speech attached to it") obscures "the essential unbroken continuity between exposition and direct discourse." From a purely linguistic point of view "there is no speech in the novel," and we must recognize that "the presence of speech in a novel is in fact a supposition; it is an enabling supposition of mimetic criticism, to be sure, but wholly dispensable in the kind of criticism I have been calling semiotic. For semiotic criticism, novels contain not speech, only text" (p. 203). But at this point Weinsheimer recognizes that this is "an untenable conclusion," and the article reveals itself to have been a brilliant exercise in self-destruction. It now becomes clear that any merely demystificatory critique of mimeticism dismisses the very problem it was trying to solve. And the article finishes by reinstating the argument to ontological and methodological ambivalence: "without text we cannot, without world we need not perform literary criticism because it would be pointless. What we require is a Janus-faced critic who can do justice to both texts and persons: to the textualized persons, personified texts that are characters" (p. 208).

My second exemplary reading of *Emma*, Graham Hough's "Narrative and Dialogue in Jane Austen" (1970), starts with that problem of ontological indeterminacy which is Weinsheimer's point of arrival. The genre of the novel is the prime example of Plato's "mixed style," comprising both narrative and dramatic modes of utterance, in which the latter, the discourse of characters, is embedded within the former. The problem raised by this style is not simply that of the coexistence of different voices; this is equally the case in drama, but there the voices all exist on the same plane: "the conflict is a conflict between epistemological equals, and a consistent texture, though composed of diverse elements, is fairly easy to achieve." In the novel, by contrast, the problem "is partly that of different voices, but far more acutely that different parts of the work occupy different ontological and epistemological levels, one for which the narrator makes himself directly responsible, and the other in which he disappears and the words of the characters are simply reproduced" (p. 201).

Hough identifies five kinds of discourse in *Emma*. Excluding what he calls, I think mistakenly, "authorial voice" (which is manifested only in a few gnomic utterances) there is an effective range between the poles of "objective narrative" (that is, a language which is *conventionally* "objective" and which is in *Emma* "general, abstract, evaluative and formally correct," p. 208) and direct discourse. The most interesting forms, however, are the two intermediate ones: what Hough calls "colored" narrative, and free indirect style. "Colored" narrative is "narrative or reflection or observation more or less deeply colored by a particular character's point of view" (p. 204). In linguistic terms — and

this definition goes part of the way towards avoiding the psychologism of the concept of point of view — it is a “virtual quotation” of the interior monologue or imputed inner speech of a character (p. 205; cf. Bickerton 1967:229–239). Hough’s example is this passage from chapter 4:

The longer she considered it the greater was her sense of its expediency. Mr. Elton’s situation was most suitable, quite the gentleman himself, and without low connections; at the same time, not of any family that could fairly object to the doubtful birth of Harriet. He had a comfortable home for her, and Emma imagined a very sufficient income; for though the vicarage of Highbury was not large, he was known to have some independent property; and she thought very highly of him as a good-humoured, well-meaning, respectable young man, without any deficiency of useful understanding or knowledge of the world (Hough, p. 204).

This moves between impersonal narration and phrases — “quite the gentleman himself, and without low connections; at the same time, not of any family . . .” — which approximate to free indirect discourse. It is the play of this style and of free indirect discourse proper, the “continual slight shifts in the point of view” (p. 210), that produces the peculiar pleasure-effects of *Emma*. These shifts are linguistically operated, and the pleasure they produce surely involves the sliding of desire between representational and represented discourse, between enunciative stability and the threat of its interruption or scattering. In its emphasis on differentiation Hough’s analysis is quite the reverse of Weinsheimer’s movement towards a radical indifferentiation; but at the same time it avoids sacrificing a textual explanation to a mimetic conception of character.

IX

Let me conclude by defining the limits of what I have attempted to do in this paper. I have assumed that character is a necessary formal condition for the binding-in of the reader to narrative or dramatic fiction, and I envisage no possibility of a nonanthropomorphic fiction, or of the separation of pleasure from identification. In a sense I concede a core of truth to traditional theories of identification; but Brecht’s critique (1967:240 ff), as well as the psychoanalytic critique of ego-psychology, would rob them of their normative and prescriptive force. Insofar as any account of character must inevitably rely upon a systematic preconception of the structure of the self, I have consciously used a psychoanalytic and semiotic rather than a behaviorist, humanist, or sociological model: not because psychoanalysis represents the “truth” of the subject, but because it is best able to explain the effect of unity which is constitutive of character. In developing the semiotic component of the psychoanalytic model, I argue that character is textually constructed in the play between positions of enunciation and positions in the enounced, and that these positions are cumulatively

and complexly filled during the course of a narrative. Effects of identification are organized by this play as it channels narcissistic libido in the discursive Imaginary. And I assume that the binding-in of the reader is an effect of historically specific regimes of identification. I have not attempted to define the structure of these regimes, nor to tackle the problem of conflict between regimes or of the passage of a text from one regime to another. I have not examined extraliterary effects of identification, for example in religion or politics or sport, nor have I examined organized apparatuses of identification such as the star- and fan-system or religious cults. And finally, I have not attempted to establish a general historical typology of regimes of identification, because I am suspicious of any such general and unified history. In this sense this paper is purely a prolegomenon. But my unwillingness to engage in historical generalization should not mean that this analysis is unproductive of a different practice of reading. Rather, it is intended to encourage the identification of the abstract systems of rules which constitute any particular character-effect, without specifying in advance what these systems might be.

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