selves arguing with outsiders. Even Robertsonians engage in polemic with the modern world, whose understanding of medieval literature they claim to find irrelevant, and deconstructionists defend themselves against the sting of Marxist dismissals. It is less surprising that self-consciously open-ended enterprises like neopragmatism and dialogics should provoke each other, but it is important to insist that their dialogue is possible only on the twin conditions that they neither exaggerate their differences nor lose sight of them.

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Engaging Narrators

To the Editor:

In "Toward a Theory of the Engaging Narrator: Earnest Interventions in Gaskell, Stowe, and Eliot" (101 [1986]: 811–18), Robyn Warhol makes an important contribution to narrative theory by distinguishing between "distancing" and "engaging" narrators. She applies the concept to the works of female novelists of the nineteenth century; however, in her conclusion she asks, "If we add the engaging narrator to the paradigm of possible ways a narrator can relate to a narratee, will we find eventually that the technique has in fact been more widely used by male novelists than this study suggests?" (817). Several examples from the works of nineteenth-century male novelists will serve to illustrate this wider use of the technique.

Nathaniel Hawthorne uses the engaging narrator in *The House of the Seven Gables*. In chapter 18, the narrator addresses the narratee as "you" in describing the hushed atmosphere of the room where Judge Pyncheon sits: "You must hold your own breath, to satisfy yourself whether he breathes at all. It is quite inaudible. You hear the ticking of his watch; his breath you do not hear." Later in the chapter, the narrator and narratee are fused into a first-person plural pronoun and described in ghost-like terms that match the haunted setting: "Would that we were not an attendant spirit, here!"

In Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*, the narrator addresses a listener who might be a little girl like Alice. As Alice is falling through the rabbit hole and practicing what she will say to the inhabitants of the other side of the world, the narrator adds parenthetically, "(and she tried to curtsey as she spoke—fancy *curtseying* as you're falling through the air! Do you think you could manage it?)." *Through the Looking-Glass* ends with a similar aside. As Alice is asking Kitty whether the Red King was in Alice's dream or she in his, the narrator turns to the narratee and asks, "Which do *you* think it was?"

A number of Charles Dickens's works also make use of the engaging narrator. *A Christmas Carol*, *The Chimes*, and *The Cricket on the Hearth* are all addressed to a "you" who is asked to share the sentiments of the narrator.

In each of these cases, the effect of using the second person instead of the third person to address the reader is to create a more intimate connection between the narrator and the narratee. Such intimacy makes the fictional narrative imitate more closely a real-life narrative situation. (The engaging narrator may have been especially important in the nineteenth century, when it was common for novels to be read aloud.) Whereas Warhol implies that the imitation of the natural narrative occurs only where the narrative situation is placed within the text or where the narrator is a character within the narrative (817n2), I would suggest that the imitation of natural narrative is enhanced also by the technique of the engaging narrator. The engaging narrator is more likely than the distancing narrator to be perceived as a *teller*; the reader becomes more of an *auditor*. Dickens suggests awareness of this transformation near the conclusion of *The Chimes* when he has the narrator refer to himself as "the teller of this tale" and to the narratee as a "listener." The engaging narrator serves to create an intimacy between narrator and narratee that causes the fictional narrative situation more closely to resemble a natural narrative situation.

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Reply:

I am grateful to Cynthia Bernstein for taking up the question I raised in my essay, especially since the question was not a rhetorical one but one posed at least as much in earnest as anything an engaging narrator might say. In the year or so since I completed that article I have been toiling ever further "toward a theory" of engaging strategies. In particular I have been trying to formulate more distinctly the differences between distancing and engaging narrators and to understand the influence of gender on narrative interventions in nineteenth-century realist novels. Bernstein's choice of examples indicates that two points my essay makes may not have been clear. The first point is that a distancing narrator is even more emphatically a "teller" than an engaging narrator, especially in texts where the distancing narrator functions to promote metafiction; the second point is that engaging narrators, though they may occur in novels written by men, represent writing strategies that are "gendered" female.

First, to take up the example of Hawthorne: the voice in chapter 18 of *The House of the Seven Gables* has always struck me as the epitome of the distancing narrator, in spite of its use of direct address. Two of the crucial features that distinguish engaging narrators from distanc-

ing ones are that (1) engaging narrators address a "you" with whom the actual reader is supposed to identify and (2) engaging narrators, in their stance toward the characters and toward the act of narration itself, avoid drawing attention to the fictional frame, preferring instead to insist that the story is "real." In both respects, the engaging narrator does imitate the "natural narrative situation," that is, a scene in which two persons existing on the same plane of "reality" take part in a communicative act in which one tells and the other listens. When Hawthorne's narrator pretends, by contrast, that "you" are present with him in the room where the dead judge sits and that you are able to hear the ticking of the judge's watch the fictionality of the scene is obvious. *You*, the actual reader, are not a ghostly presence in the Pyncheons' house. You are a person holding a copy of *The House of the Seven Gables*, reading it. When a distancing narrator plays with metalepsis, as Hawthorne's does here, the effect is to underline the fictionality of the novel rather than to efface it, as an engaging narrator would try to do. An engaging narrator might explicitly ask the reader to imagine himself or herself in situations like those of the characters (as in several of the examples my article cites in Gaskell and Stowe). But when a narrator pursues the fiction that "you" are present on the scene of the story, the effect is distinctly metafictional and, therefore, distancing. The effect can occur, of course, in novels where the engaging narrator predominates. In *Adam Bede*, for instance, Eliot's narrator places the reader at the Hall Farm, with an address very similar to Hawthorne's: "Put your face to one of the glass panes in the right-hand window: what do you see?" In Hawthorne's novel, however, the narrator does not rely on engaging strategies in other interventions to counterbalance this metafictional effect, as Eliot's narrator does.

I agree with Bernstein that the interventions she quotes from Lewis Carroll and Dickens are engaging. If the reader of *Alice* is willing to identify with the child implied by the narrator's address, the effect of an intervention like "which do *you* think it was?" is certainly engaging. I find it significant that these examples of engaging intervention in texts signed by men occur in contexts that implicitly address children. To be sure, a Victorian man could write fiction for children or—as Bernstein mentions—read novels aloud to his family. But children's literature was, then as now, a field dominated by women writers, and in middle-class nineteenth-century British and American households, mothers had the job of discoursing with their children while fathers were busy functioning in the outside world. It is not at all surprising that a man writing for a "family" audience might use a feminine-gendered strategy like engaging direct address.

In raising the issue of gender's relation to narrative strategies, I do not mean to imply that inevitable, essential differences exist between women's writing and men's. If "gender" is a socially determined set of behaviors that are associated, within a given culture, with one sex or the other, then narrative strategies (just like dress, gestures, and vocal inflection) could be seen as part of the social construct of gender. I think that engaging direct address in realist fiction—the nineteenth-century woman's alternative to socially unacceptable public speaking—is an example of such a "gendered narrative strategy." I would even go so far as to say that male novelists who use the feminine-gendered engaging strategies (not to mention female writers who use distancing interventions) are, for the moment, "cross-dressing." Investigating the rhetorical purposes for these shifts in gendered strategies can contribute to a poetics of the novel that would be more inclusive than the existing formalist and narratological models based on texts that are, for the most part, written by men. My own answer to the question my essay raises, then, is not that "only women writers used engaging narrators in nineteenth-century novels" or even that "earnest, direct address is always a female strategy" but rather this: that in nineteenth-century realism, the engaging narrator is especially associated with women writers; earnest interventions are one example, therefore, of the existence of "gendered" narrative techniques that arise for specific rhetorical reasons in certain historical contexts. I thank Bernstein for the chance to explain this development in my "theory," which I will be elaborating in future work.

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