

## **The Double Bind of Metafiction: Implicating Narrative in *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Travesty***

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Both Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) and John Hawkes' *Travesty* (1976) employ unconventional and unsettling narrative strategies: unconventional in that these works deliberately flout the traditions of the conventional canonical novel, and unsettling as a result of techniques consciously and deliberately adopted by the narrator of each work. The unconventionality and the deliberate assault on the reader's expectations are both characteristic of metafiction--those self-conscious texts which demand that the reader react intensely to the world of the text while simultaneously acknowledging its fictionality. As Linda Hutcheon observes, metafiction is characterized by paradox:

[W]hile he reads, the reader lives in a world which he is forced to acknowledge as fictional. However, paradoxically, the text also demands that he participate, that he engage himself intellectually, imaginatively, and affectively in its co-creation. This two-way pull is the paradox of the reader. The text's own paradox is that it is both narcissistically self-reflexive and yet focused outward, oriented toward the reader. (7)

But the Pynchon and Hawkes texts manifest the metafictional paradox in significantly different ways. In *The Crying of Lot 49*, the unstable narratorial voice oscillates between two contradictory modes, necessitating at least two ways of reading the text and foregrounding the discrepancy inherent in any narrative between story (events) and discourse (the telling of those events).<sup>1</sup> The instability of the narratorial voice necessarily affects the reader's response to the text, producing an unsettling oscillation between acceptance and rejection of the novel's fictional world. In *Travesty*, the narrator's drive for omniscience is paradoxically combined with his awareness of the limitations of his own knowledge and power. By trying to imagine the unthinkable, the would-be omniscient narrator reveals his own position to be a mere convention of fiction, a construction founded on an impossibility. At the same time, he exerts a powerful and inescapable force over the mesmerized but resisting reader. The paradoxes that inform these two novels illustrate the range and variety of resources available to contemporary metafiction in its attempt to engage the reader's intellect and emotions while exploring the limits of its own existence.

The narrator of *The Crying of Lot 49* exhibits a disorienting doubleness of voice, combining an overdetermination of events with an unsettling and unexpected ignorance about the story he is recounting. In remarks like "As things developed, [Oedipa] was to have all manner of revelations" (20), and "It was to be the first of many demurs" (90), the narrator reveals an explicitly structuring persona worthy of the most obtrusive of nineteenth-century narrators. At the same time, however, the omniscience the reader expects of such an actively-shaping persona is revealed to be strangely limited by the narrator's uncertainty about the events of the story. Admissions of ignorance like "She may have fallen asleep once or twice" (42), and "perhaps [they] did not see her at all" (121) are difficult to reconcile with his domineering interjections elsewhere.

The two narratorial voices in *Lot 49* necessarily produce two different modes of reading the work. At certain points, the reader is encouraged to accept the narrator's apparent omniscience and to remain the passive recipient of an overtly controlled narrative. However, the narrator's inconsistency precludes the reader's complete adoption of this role, and forces her to acknowledge the limits of the storyteller's knowledge and power. Whenever the narrator admits his uncertainty, a "gap" opens up in which the reader can exercise her own imagination in considering the range of possible alternatives for the development of the story. For instance, by saying that Oedipa "may have dozed off" (130) during her nocturnal quest in San Francisco, the narrator alerts the reader to two possibilities: either she did doze off, or she did not. Such indeterminacies in the narrator's commentary are vital to the reader's experience of a text, as Wolfgang Iser explains:

[E]ach individual reader will fill in the gaps in his own way, thereby excluding the various other possibilities; as he reads, he will make his own decision as to how the gap is to be filled. In this very act the dynamics of reading are revealed. By making his decision he implicitly acknowledges the inexhaustibility of the text; at the same time it is this very inexhaustibility that forces him to make his decision. (285)

"Without the elements of indeterminacy, the gaps in the text," Iser summarizes, "we should not be able to use our imagination" (288). By foregrounding the story's moments of uncertainty, the narrator makes the reader an active participant in the unfolding of the narrative by inviting her to imagine alternative possibilities for its development. Further, these moments of uncertainty are emblematic of the interpretive plurality which characterizes any text. The freedom the reader enjoys in deciding between the alternatives presented by the *Lot 49* narrator is an element in the reading of any literary work.

Comprehension in reading results from the combined effort of author and reader, from "the meeting between the written text and the individual mind of the reader with its own particular history of experience, its own consciousness, its own outlook" (Iser 289).

The *Lot 49* narrator's dual stance foregrounds the discrepancy between story and discourse that pervades all narrative. Even the most naturalistic text is not a perfect *tranche de vie*, but is governed by principles of selection and arrangement. In Pynchon's novel, the narrator's control of the story material is overtly emphasized. By admitting his uncertainty about some of the events he is recounting, this narrator defamiliarizes the act of narration and emphasizes the conscious shaping role he is playing. In stressing his fallibility, the narrator alerts us to the possibility of a discrepancy between the events of the story and his discourse. Purposely unreliable, this narrator emphasizes the limits of his knowledge to signal the artifice inherent in all narrative, even that which claims reliability in the reporting of events.

The disjunction between story and discourse becomes most evident at *Lot 49's* enigmatic ending. As critics have pointed out, Pynchon's novel may be read as a subversion of the traditional quest narrative: having followed Oedipa's progress toward her goal, we are denied a view of its achievement. Indefinite closure might seem to preclude reading this novel as a quest; yet "*Lot 49* . . . is no less a quest narrative because its goal, or grail, never puts in an appearance. On the contrary, it both epitomizes and parodies the genre of quest narrative by virtue of the fact that it withholds its object from view" (Hite 72-73). However, more is going on at the end of this novel than parody, for the parody exists at only one level of the narrative, the level of discourse. This text never tells the reader its ending, and it is this gap in the discourse that subverts the quest narrative, traditionally structured toward the attainment and disclosure of a specific goal. In Pynchon's text, though, the lack of an ending is restricted to the level of discourse; at the level of the story there is no explicit subversion but simply a fundamental uncertainty. Apparently, Oedipa is about to learn the secret of the Tristero empire; everything in her experience has driven or pulled her toward this end. She has been engaged in a traditional, teleologically-structured quest; nothing on the level of the story denies this interpretation of her experience. As she awaits "the crying of lot 49," Oedipa is on the brink of resolving her uncertainty about the existence and meaning of the Tristero. But this in itself is not subversion or parody; it is one segment in the conventional quest. Subversion is introduced by the narrator *at the level of the discourse* through his premature termination of the narrative, an act which

replaces disclosure with closure and definitively conveys the *story's* uncertainty.

The ending of *Lot 49*, then, presents a paradigm of the narrative situation. The text foregrounds the inevitable discrepancy between story and discourse as it exposes the arbitrariness of narrative construction and the unavoidable gap between what *happens* and what we are *told* happens. What effect does this foregrounding of convention have on the reader's experience? Iser describes the experience of reading as an alternation between involvement with the world of the text and detached observation of it: "as we read, we oscillate to a greater or lesser degree between the building and the breaking of illusions. In a process of trial and error, we organize and reorganize the various data offered us by the text" (293). Again, *Lot 49's* narrative structure makes this convention explicit. As long as the narrator remains in his omniscient mode, we can sink into the world of the text without difficulty, succumbing to its illusions and suspending our disbelief. This is, in fact, the mode of reading presupposed by most conventional fiction. In *Lot 49*, however, the conventions are bared, with the result that the reader's suspension of disbelief is abruptly terminated by the narrator's uncertainty about the story and by his corrective comments on the reading of the text. The narrator's admission on certain occasions that he does not know exactly "what happened" tears apart the fabric of the reader's belief in the story-world as a real alternate universe. What is more, on at least one occasion the narrator steps out of the level of the discourse to address the reader directly. Anticipating our interpretation of the acronym "CIA," the narrator offers a mild reproof: "Standing not for the agency you think, but . . ." (119). This abrupt shift from the diegetic to the extradiegetic forces the reader to acknowledge the fictionality of the text, exposing the artifice underlying the diegetic world and destroying any illusions of its reality.<sup>2</sup> *Lot 49* incorporates the reader's oscillation between "the building and the breaking of illusions" into its narrative structure, foregrounding the processes of reading which normally occur unconsciously and unnoticed.

In *Travesty* as well the narration places the reader in an unusual position midway between the external world and the world of the text. Here the unstable narrative voice of *Lot 49* is replaced by a narration founded on an unstable premise: a consciously contrived, incomplete, and uncompletable narrative. *Travesty* is a story with an ending which *cannot* be told, told by a narrator who paradoxically combines a will to omniscience with an acknowledged inability to "tell all." "What happens" in *Travesty* is simply that a man tells a story. We read the transcript of an oral narrative, a story that is a man's telling of a story.

The narrator is obsessed with omniscience. Like the narrators of some traditional nineteenth-century novels, he attempts complete control over his characters' actions and thoughts as well as his reader's responses. His bid for total control extends so far as to determine even the mode and moment of his listeners' deaths.

Paradoxically, however, this narrator is thwarted in his desire for omniscience by the very structure he himself has contrived for his narrative: one's own death is the event that *cannot* be told--it is outside individual experience. This, of course, is precisely its appeal for *Travesty's* narrator, concerned as he is with imagining the unimaginable: "the unseen vision is not to be improved upon" (58). This narrative situation may be paradoxical, but it is not unpremeditated, for the narrator's bid for omniscience includes even an awareness of the limits of his knowledge. In fact, in defending his actions, the narrator himself acknowledges this paradox. His friend Henri's unrecorded protest--apparently an invention--focuses on precisely this crux: "What, you ask, is he not satisfied with things as they are . . . but what he must inflate himself still further and so must invent in his own eyes, arrange within his own head, even that context of circumstances in which the three of us will no longer exist?" (56). The narrator's response to this (invented) challenge is simply to concede its validity while maintaining that he has in fact foreseen that very objection:

[E]ven if you did reply to me with some such dubious form of logic, my own reply . . . would convince even you that it is this idea precisely that lies at the dead center of our night together: that nothing is more important than the existence of what does not exist . . . There you have it, the theory to which I hold as does the wasp to his dart. (56-57)

The narrator's theory--his attempt at omniscience--extends even to the point of perceiving its own limitations. "My theory tells us that ours is the power to invent the very world we are quitting. Yes, the power to invent the very world we are quitting," the narrator stresses--but immediately acknowledges the limits of that power: "And yet I must say it. I regret the fire. Here even I am helpless. My theory does not apply to exploding gasoline" (57). This admission, which would be funny if it were not so horrific, illustrates the principle underlying the narrative strategy of *Travesty*. What we are faced with in this text is a narrator who aggressively seeks omniscience in the best canonical nineteenth-century manner, and yet who brazenly acknowledges the limitations of even the murderous and terrifying power he achieves. By stressing the limits encompassing even the most extreme efforts to know and control all, *Travesty* exposes and undermines one of the major conventions of the novelistic tradition, the construct of the

omniscient narrator. In addition, the narrator's attempt to tell an impossible, untellable story only stresses the artificiality of all fiction. Since all stories are products of the imagination, why *not* imagine something realistically impossible? In the words of another Pynchon character, "What difference does it make?"

Not only does the narrator try to imagine and to tell the impossible, but the reader must share this effort while she reads. It becomes apparent here that the untellable story is not necessarily the unreadable one. Conventional methods of reading prove inadequate, however, for the experience of such an aggressively self-conscious text as *Travesty*. The narrator himself adopts strategies designed to draw the reader into the world of the text, implicating her in its development, a strategy common in contemporary metafiction:

Metafictions . . . bare the conventions, disrupt the codes that now *have* to be acknowledged. The reader must accept responsibility for the act of decoding, the act of reading. Disturbed, defied, forced out of his complacency, he must self-consciously establish new codes in order to come to terms with new literary phenomena. . . . The novel no longer seeks just to provide an order and meaning to be recognized by the reader. It now demands that he be conscious of the work, the actual construction, that he too is undertaking. (Hutcheon 39)

The narrator of *Travesty* attempts to make the reader aware of her responsibility for the text's unfolding through the device of addressing the reader as "you" throughout the narration. This simple stratagem traps the reader, making it impossible for her to evade implication in the events of the story. As we read, we are pulled in to the world of the text by the narrator's "you," and almost every sentence reiterates that command--or is it an appeal? And yet, at the same time, *Travesty* induces a revulsion or resistance in the reader which counteracts the narrator's insistence on her complicity. This detachment arises from our knowledge of the narrator's intentions--knowledge arising from information given us in the opening paragraph of the novel, and which we find so reprehensible we resist being completely dragged into the world of the narrator's fictions. It is appropriate at this point to recall Peter Brooks' description of the reader's response to Camus's *La Chute*--an influential precursor of *Travesty*:

The reader, as a secondary narratee or eavesdropper, necessarily becomes complicit in the formation of this [narrative] message, and may carry away from it a sense of taint, a residual contamination, almost a sense of violation. . . . Having listened, it is too late for us to say that we don't want to hear. (55)

The difference between Camus's text and Hawkes' is that in *Travesty* the reader is forced into the position of the *first* narratee by the narrator's direct addresses.<sup>3</sup> By conflating the listeners in the car with

the reader of the text--"I understand your frustration"(17)--*Travesty's* narrator implicates the reader in his murderous intentions: we feel contaminated by being forced to imagine the horrific acts he proposes. At the same time, the narrator attempts to fuse the diegetic and extradiegetic levels of narration. In resisting the narrator's incessant "you," we are trying desperately to maintain our detached role of conventional reader and our position *outside* the doomed car.

The implication the reader feels in the unfolding drama of *Travesty* is not simply a matter of identification with either the narrator or the listeners in the car. As Hutcheon argues, in metafiction the reader is prevented from identifying with any character and forced to take on a more active and responsible role in the development of the text itself: "[I]t is no longer a matter of the reader's having to identify with a character in order to be involved in the work; the act of reading itself is the real, dynamic function to which the text draws [her] attention" (149). *Travesty* is so disturbing, not because we identify with its characters, but because we share their fate. We are written right into the discourse. Our complicity is taken for granted by the narrator, and our responses are anticipated and answered as a part of his unfolding narrative.

How does the self-consciousness of the narrative in *Travesty* differ from that in *Lot 49*? While *Travesty's* narrator never explicitly addresses the reader, building his implication of the reader on a conflation of diegetic and extradiegetic narrative levels, the *Lot 49* narrator addresses the reader directly on at least one occasion. In *Lot 49*, then, narrative world and reader's world are held apart, while in *Travesty* a fusion of the two levels is contrived. But the reader's involvement in the imaginative construction of these works during the reading process extends beyond the experience of unconventional narrative techniques. The strategies of closure which distinguish these novels also challenge the reader's expectations and demand a high degree of creative involvement with the text. In both *Travesty* and *Lot 49*, the text's ending represents a crucial gap in the narration--the ultimate gap, in fact. Iser observes that gaps in narrative are what stimulate the reader's imagination, thereby inducing her to take an active role in the development of the text. We will therefore explore the role played by the gaps/endings of these two texts.

The concept of ending-as-gap is supported by D. A. Miller's discussion of narrative closure, which opposes what is "narratable" to the movement of closure itself. The narratable is what we read in a novel, while the "non-narratable," of which closure is a part and a sign, exists before and after the novel we read. As part of the non-narratable external world, closure represents an interruption of the

narratable, an intrusion of the "other" into the narratable world. Closure can thus be seen as a gap or rupture in the narratable fabric of the text. This final gap--the gap which finally suspends the continuation of the narratable--should then be the point at which the reader's imagination is most intensely stimulated. It may seem paradoxical that the ending of a work should be where the reader is most drawn into an imaginative construction of the text. Yet, if we consider Miller's further argument that closure is imposed on a continuing narrative to provide shape and meaning, it is supremely logical to invoke the reader's aid at this point in the narrative. Metafictional texts, which so privilege the reader's participation in their creation, would be particularly likely to contrive the reader's involvement at this crucial juncture. In *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Travesty*, closure extends the perplexing and challenging strategies of each narrative up to and beyond the termination of the text.

In *Lot 49*, closure is imposed at the point of greatest narrative suspense. By terminating the discourse at the story's climax, the *Lot 49* narrator manages to have a form of closure and to evade it too: although the discourse ends, the possibility for more "story" remains open, very much as in a serial novel.<sup>4</sup> In this way, the benefits of closure are obtained--meaning can be assigned to the text (it is a subversion of the quest, it is an allegory of man's search for knowledge, etc.)--while simultaneously the reader can be induced to imagine further possibilities for the narrative's development by the very strategy of truncating the narration at that point. The narrator's uncertainties, which have forced the reader to consider alternative possibilities for development of the plot at various points throughout *Lot 49*, reach their zenith at the novel's abrupt ending. Stimulated by a gap at this crucial point in the narrative, and trained to imagine alternatives by the narrator's periodic refusal to commit himself definitely about the events he is recounting, the reader attains the height of imagination and participation. Not only does she consider what might happen next in the book, but, spurred on by the moments of uncertainty in the recounting of the events of the story, the reader reaches a crescendo of imaginative involvement in the text at its end, an explosion of interpretive energy which rebounds from the puzzling conclusion back over the unfolding of the entire text.

The reader's function in *Travesty* is somewhat different, for while the *Lot 49* reader preserves her position as reader, as an inhabitant of the world external to the text, *Travesty's* reader must fight to maintain autonomy from the textual world. In fact, while Pynchon's text seems designed to involve the reader as intensely as possible, *Travesty* has taken a further step, writing the reader into the text itself through the

use of the accusatory "you." As a result of this device, the world of the text and the world of the reader are superimposed. The implications for the reader's function in this situation are intriguing. Since *Travesty* presents a story with an ending which cannot be told, the burden of imagining that ending devolves upon the reader; yet, if the reader is drawn into the text, as the narrator's use of "you" implies, she will be "killed off" and unable to complete the text by virtue of succumbing to it. (Distinctions between literal and metaphorical interpretations of the narrator's intentions are blurred in *Travesty*, since the reader's metaphorical fate is superimposed on that of the characters who are to die a literal death.) *Travesty's* reader is caught in a double bind: she *must* imagine an ending, but cannot.<sup>6</sup> The text of this novel both compels the reader to end it and denies the possibility of her doing so.

Miller describes the tension between "desire (desire for narrative) and the law (the law of closure)" (272) which informs narrative structure in the traditional nineteenth-century novel. A similar tension operates in *Travesty*, producing the double bind in which the reader is inextricably trapped. Closure, as the law imposed on a text, simultaneously bestows meaning--by stimulating the reader to imagine an ending and intensely involving her in the production of the narrative--and denies any possibility of meaning--by "killing off" the reader. In effect, *Travesty* presents the reader with an ultimatum: "try to make sense of this text, and I'll kill you." The double bind experienced by the reader parallels that paradoxical conflation of opposites esteemed by the "privileged man," the narrator: "a nearly phobic yearning for the truest paradox . . . a form of ecstasy, this utter harmony between design and debris" (17). Unable to reconcile the two states in his narrative, he is able to do so only in the text's unwritable ending. Like Roland Barthes's "scriptible" text, the reconciliation of "design and debris" and the ending of the story told in *Travesty* exist only in the reader's imagination. As the narrator observes, "ours is the power to invent the very world we are quitting" (57)--an apt summary of the reader's function in the text. The collaboration of narrator and reader is indicated here by the pronoun "ours," much as the use of "you" both implicates and involves the reader in the narrator's murderous plans. Because the ending of *Travesty* is not told, the reader *must* imagine it, even while abandoning the world of the text and finishing the book. This comment thus signals the simultaneous immersion *in* and detachment *from* the textual world which the reader must reconcile.

In both *Lot 49* and *Travesty*, the ending constitutes the point of maximum reader involvement with the narrative. Paradoxically, these

texts are most entirely themselves at their endings. The movement of closure bestows meaning yet at the same time represents the law which restricts and finally terminates desire, the desire of the narrative to "keep going," in Miller's phrase. Thus the same double movement of fulfillment and negation, of narrative continuation and narrative closure, characterizes the movement toward closure in the abstract, theoretical sense and its illustration in the actual workings of these texts. Here another paradox enters, however, for closure can be desired in and for itself, not merely the termination of a desire for narrative. If closure is itself the object of desire in the text, then what is desired represents both the fulfillment and the destruction (through termination) of the text: the reader, in desiring closure of the text, desires its destruction. In this situation, the reader is indeed caught in a double bind, being forced to obey the injunctions of two contradictory authorities, the authority of narrative, of continuation, and the authority of closure. Both cannot be obeyed simultaneously, and yet both demand allegiance. In fact, as the narrative strategies of *Lot 49* and *Travesty* demonstrate, metafictional texts consistently make contradictory demands on the reader, placing her in a double bind. In Pynchon's novel, the reader must negotiate a reading path between an overdetermining narrative voice and an under-informed one, positions which demand contradictory reading responses. Similarly, in *Travesty*, the reader's implication in the telling of an impossible tale entangles her in a situation which demands resolution while stressing its impossibility. Reading such texts would seem to require an element of schizophrenia.

Barthes postulates a "split subject" able to experience and accommodate both classical texts of pleasure (*plaisir*) and modern texts of bliss (*jouissance*)--categories which are irreconcilable "parallel forces" (Pleasure 20). Pleasure and bliss "cannot meet . . . between them there is more than a struggle: an *incommunication*" (20). The necessity of reconciling these literary movements demands a reading subject who "is never anything but a 'living contradiction': a split subject, who simultaneously enjoys, through the text, the consistency of his selfhood and its collapse, its fall" (21). Metafictions like *Lot 49* and *Travesty* demand a reader analogous to Barthes's split subject, a subject capable of holding in the mind two contradictory textual states, narrative and closure.

By elevating closure to such a degree of importance that it becomes the site of maximum reader involvement in the text while remaining the locus of the text's destruction, such works demand unprecedented efforts of their readers. However, these texts are not entirely heedless of the reader's plight. Another narrative strategy

appears specifically designed to help the reader reconcile the opposing claims of narratability and closure. That strategy is suspense. *Lot 49* and *Travesty* each use narrative suspense in ways that both continue to challenge the reader of contemporary metafiction and assist her in coming to terms with the new medium.

The basic model for narrative suspense consists in the reader's impeded progression from an uncertainty or question about some aspect of the narrative to a resolution of that uncertainty; the longer the delay in resolving the reader's uncertainties--limited, of course, by the possibility of boredom--the greater the suspense. This model derives from Barthes's description of the hermeneutic code, which governs the answering of questions and the resolving of enigmas in narrative (S/Z 19). Barthes describes suspense as a gamble with the structure of narrative, a move that both risks and glorifies that structure by threatening *not* to resolve it (Structural Analysis 267-68). The suspenseful text, then, will try to defer its ending as long as possible, gambling with its own structure and with the reader's response, trying to walk the line between interest (the open, unresolved text) and boredom (the too impenetrable, bafflingly obscure text). In *Lot 49* and *Travesty*, suspense constitutes the fulcrum between the narratable and closure, helping the reader reconcile the conflicting demands of narrative continuation and termination.

In breaking off the narrative discourse at the moment of the story's climax, *Lot 49* defers its ending altogether. This strategy prolongs the suspense that has characterized the reader's experience of Oedipa's tortuous quest. Throughout the novel, suspense has been assiduously cultivated in the reader until, in the final pages of the book, it becomes scarcely containable. The termination of the discourse at the crucial moment constitutes, not resolution, but anticlimax for this encounter between reader and text. *Lot 49* employs suspense in an attempt to have both the pleasure of the ending and the pleasure of continuation--of anticipating the ending. Anticlimax in this instance is a parodic alternative to resolution, and, like all parody, it contains an element of humor. The reader of *Lot 49* is prevented from taking either herself or the text too seriously by an ending which thwarts any expectation of a conventional resolution and openly abandons itself to pleasure: the pleasure of the reader's active imagination, the formal pleasure of a narrative given shape (even if an unconventional or open structure), and the pleasure of meaning bestowed. These aspects of *Lot 49's* ending combine with the pleasure of the text's unfolding to challenge the reader in unprecedented ways while doubly rewarding her.

From the perspective of the pleasure of the text, *Travesty* assumes a very different aspect from *The Crying of Lot 49*. While *Lot 49* tries, through its suspenseful closural strategy, to reconcile the demands of narrative and ending, *Travesty* appears to deny the possibility of having it all in narrative. The model of suspense operating here is somewhat different from that found in *Lot 49*. While Pynchon's text tries to prolong the pleasure of anticipation, *Travesty* confronts the reader with her approaching "death" in the very first paragraph and keeps the reader's fate constantly on the surface of the narration. Since the reader knows what the narrator of *Travesty* intends to do, a foreshadowing model of suspense comes into play, a model much more suited to dread than to anticipatory pleasure. Seymour Chatman, developer of the foreshadowing model, suggests that this kind of suspense is related to tragic irony: since we know what is going to happen to the characters in a novel while they are ignorant of their fate, we may feel anxiety on their behalf. *Travesty's mise en abyme* structure, which superimposes reader and character, calls for a modification of Chatman's model: the reader feels anxiety not for the characters but on *her own* behalf. There appears to be no pleasure associated with this text, but only dread.

Involving the reader in the literary work is not new, but demanding the reader's complicity in her own self-destruction marks a radical change in the narrative contract. This assault on the reader perhaps explains the discomfort and "sense of taint" experienced by the reader of *Travesty*. Likewise, the contradictory demands on the *Lot 49* reader prove extremely unsettling even though the reader's bewilderment may be mitigated by the text's efforts to restore the suspenseful pleasure of reading. Texts like these don't play fair. Instead, they demand impossible things of the reader, confronting her with contradictory narratorial postures and inconclusive closural strategies. Lewis Carroll's Alice perfectly expresses the frustration of the reader confronted by the paradoxes of these works: "'There's no use trying . . . one *can't* believe impossible things.'" And the White Queen's answer to Alice's complaint? "'I daresay you haven't had much practice. . . . Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast'" (251). With a little help from the text, in the form of suspense, readers of metafiction may be encouraged to venture into "impossible" realms, assuming creative responsibility for their own reading pleasure. Viewed in this light, the paradox of metafiction becomes not threatening but liberating.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> "Structuralist theory argues that each narrative has two parts: a story (*histoire*), the content or chain of events . . . and a discourse (*discours*), that is, the expression, the means by which the content is communicated. In simple terms, the story is the *what* in a narrative that is depicted, discourse the *how*" (Chatman 19). The two terms roughly correspond to the Russian Formalists' *fabula* and *sjuzet*.

<sup>2</sup> "Diegesis"--hence "diegetic"--refers to "the universe of the first narrative" (Genette 228n.); thus "extradiegetic" refers to the universe outside that of the narrative, or, in other words, to the "real" world of the reader.

<sup>3</sup> The "narratee" (Prince) is the designated intra-textual recipient of the narrative, the one to whom the narrative is directed. In texts like *La Chute* and *Travesty*, nothing mediates between the reader and the intra-textual narratees, thus allowing the reader to assume the position of a "secondary" or extratextual narratee.

<sup>4</sup> "In the serialized novel . . . the reader works to imagine what happens next, since suspense determines the cut. Dickens, for this reason, saw his reader as a co-author" (Hutcheon 141-42).

<sup>5</sup> The victim of a double bind or "no-win" situation is confronted with two conflicting injunctions imposed by an authority figure: "the individual is caught in a situation in which the other person in the relationship is expressing two orders of message and one of these denies the other" (Bateson 208). The development or exacerbation of schizophrenia is often related to the presence of a double bind. Similarities exist between the double bind of pathopsychology and the double logic which characterizes deconstruction, a resemblance noted by Gayatri Spivak in the preface to her translation of Derrida's *Of Grammatology*: "We are in a bind, in a double (read abyssal) bind, Derrida's newest nickname for the schizophrenia of the 'sous rature.' We must do a thing *and* its opposite" (lxxviii).

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