

“Novels are . . . the most dangerous kind of reading”:¹ Metafictional Discourse in Early American Literature

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I would like to point out in this paper² (though not the first to do so) that metafictional self-reflexiveness is not restricted to postmodern literature. If we define metafiction as a self-conscious narrative, as “fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative . . . identity,”³ then initial stages of such a discourse can be found much earlier. In English literature *Tristram Shandy* (1760-1769) is most frequently quoted as prototype, though, of course, it is preceded by Clarissa’s comments on her own epistolary self-expression as well as the omniscient, but self-conscious narrator in Fielding’s *Tom Jones*. The earliest *American* texts frequently mentioned in this connection are the romances of Hawthorne and especially Melville.⁴ I want to argue that even some texts by Charles Brockden Brown and Washington Irving are told by self-conscious narrators who reflect upon the fictional status of their narratives and provide comments on the relationship between fact and fiction. Therefore it seems tempting to regard them in the light of metafictional discourse. This, again, brings into play the social, philosophical and ideological contexts conducive to metafictional writing. Critics have emphasized that narrative self-reflexiveness is caused by a sense of crisis, as it is proclaimed in such works as John Barth’s “The Literature of Exhaustion”⁵ or Ronald Sukenick’s “The Death of the Novel.”⁶ Furthermore, the metafictional discourse about the unstable relationship between reality and fiction is coincidental with a discourse about human perception. Consequently, if I want to read some early American texts as self-conscious narratives which arise out of the epistemological crisis of their age, I will first have to outline the cultural matrix of these texts.

Prospective writers of fiction in America faced severe difficulties until far into the nineteenth century. They not only had to fight the deep-seated prejudice that the cultural products of Europe were decidedly preferable, but, what is even more important in this context, they also had to face strong critical opposition to any product of the imagination. Imagination I here define as the creative mental "faculty by means of which we explore the order of possibility."⁷ Joseph Addison gives a good illustration of this power of the imagination: "by this faculty a man in a dungeon is capable of entertaining himself with scenes and landscapes more beautiful than any that can be found in the whole compass of nature."⁸ In the moralizing critical debate of eighteenth-century America the imagination was stigmatized as a non-conformist and potentially dangerous mental power because it was considered to be capable of producing images without direct reference to reality. The fictional text, being a manifestation of the latently subversive imagination, was held to be a threat both to Puritan morality and to the main tenets of the age of Enlightenment.

There were, of course, various reasons for this deep-seated mistrust of the imagination and the concomitant opposition to its textual products, especially novels.⁹ Since I have to be brief here, I would like to select the two outstanding ones: the female reading public and the strong influence of the Scottish Common Sense philosophy.

Firstly, novels were predominantly read by women, whose social experience was primarily restricted to the house; men were afraid that such works of the imagination might give women a false idea about reality (perhaps even about their not very heroic or chivalrous husbands or lovers).¹⁰ John Winthrop, to quote one of the earliest examples, wrote in his journal in 1645:

Mr Hopkins, the governor of Hartford upon Connecticut, came to Boston, and brought his wife with him, . . . who was fallen into a sad infirmity, the loss of her understanding and reason, which had been growing upon her divers years, by occasion of her giving herself wholly to reading and writing, and had written many books. . . . if she had attended her household affairs and such things as belong to women, and not gone out of her way and calling to meddle in such things as are proper for men, whose minds are stronger, . . . she had kept her wits and might have improved them usefully and honorably in the place God had set her.¹¹

The controversy, especially in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, between male writers, who in an almost endless sequence of articles about "female education" argued against any kind of fiction, and women who were voracious readers of novels was a struggle for the preservation of a hierarchy transmitted through Puritan (and "puritanic") dogma. It was not only clergymen who warned women against the reading of fiction, but also educators, lawyers, and politicians, in short, men who were active in the restructuring of American society in an era of political re-orientation. When he outlined a "plan of female education," Thomas Jefferson, for instance, wrote:

A great obstacle to good education is the inordinate passion prevalent for novels When this poison infects the mind, it destroys its tone and revolts it against wholesome reading. Reason and fact, plain and unadorned, are rejected. . . . The result is a bloated imagination, sickly judgment, and disgust towards all the real businesses of life.

However, he granted that in the case of *some* novels the reading might be salutary:

This mash of trash . . . is not without some distinction; some few modelling their narratives, although fictitious, on the incidents of real life, have been able to make them interesting and useful vehicles of a sound morality.¹²

Thus, novel reading was permitted if it helped forming the minds of female readers along the lines of a morality defined by men. In such a cultural climate the reading of fiction was a kind of rebellion against, and escape from, a highly restrictive society. One is reminded of Addison's prisoner in the passage quoted above. Wallace Stevens once described the imagination as "the power of the mind over the possibilities of things" or as "the liberty of the mind,"¹³ and women of the eighteenth century were eager to use this liberty. Accordingly John Davis, in his novel *The Wanderings of William* (1801), calls upon his female reader:

Avail yourself of the moment that offers to indulge in the perusal of this book. Take it, read it; there is nothing to fear. Your governess is gone out, and your mama is not yet risen.¹⁴

The aversion of critics to potentially subversive novels was, of course, not a typically American phenomenon. The English opposition to the novel has been analyzed and documented extensively.¹⁵ However, despite the parallels between the situation in England and America, the hostility to fiction was apparently much more widespread and lasted much longer in the United States, and the social motivations seem to have been slightly different, too. Richard Altick's analysis of the situation of the English common reader,¹⁶ for instance, suggests that in England it was rather a class issue, less, as in America, a gender issue. He concludes that English critics of novel reading feared that the lower classes would encounter a new and better life (in the novels) and thus grow dissatisfied with their existence in poverty and privation. In England, as in America, however, quite a number of critics voiced the opinion that novel reading was a threat to the social order.

A second and equally important reason for the anti-fiction climate in early America was the Scottish school of Common Sense philosophy, which was widely taught at American colleges.¹⁷ It can be seen as an eighteenth-century conservative reaction to the revolutionary discoveries of natural sciences since the Renaissance, which not only shattered the concept of a hierarchically ordered universe, but seemed to prove, moreover, that knowledge was not stable but constantly to be revised by new findings. The possibility of a profound relativity of human knowledge and judgment gave rise, paradoxically enough, to an empiricist epistemology which argued in favor of a certainty of human perception and knowledge; it maintained that "the testimonies of the senses [were] true" and that they required "no outside, additional evidence."¹⁸ According to the Scottish philosophers an experience of a merely possible or imaginary kind is to be suspected because in these cases our perceptions are distorted by the intervention of our imagination. Such a mistrust of the imagination led to a rejection of any of its products, first and foremost the novel. This was a target worth the joint efforts of both the empirical and the puritanical type of critic. They argued that novels were socially and morally destructive because they tended to render a picture of the world more perfect than it actually was and thus novel-reading would lead to dissatisfaction with everyday reality, i.e. with God's creation. Consequently they recommended rather

the reading of histories, biographies, or diaries. The generally conservative intellectuals at the orthodox churches and colleges in America eagerly adopted the arguments of the Scottish philosophy represented by such men as Thomas Reid, Dugald Stewart, James Beattie, and Thomas Brown, because here they believed to have found a rational and philosophically consistent affirmation of their orthodoxy.

That the Common Sense epistemology was widespread among intellectuals and literary critics in America and that most American writers of fiction regarded it as a serious limitation is testified by many essays and prefaces. A graphic example can be found at the beginning of William Cullen Bryant's short story "A Pennsylvanian Legend" (1825), where he asks:

Is the world to become altogether philosophical and rational? Are we to believe nothing that we cannot account for from natural causes? . . . There are people who have found out that to imagine any other modes of being than those of which our experience tells us, is extremely ridiculous. Alas! we shall soon learn to believe that the material world is the only world, and that the things which are the objects of our external senses are the only things which have an existence. Recollect, gentlemen, that you may carry your philosophy too far.¹⁹

The reaction of early American writers to the condemnation of fiction was, by and large, twofold. Firstly, most authors tried to appease anti-fiction critics by downgrading the creative work of the imagination and emphasizing the educational utility of their narratives. They framed their novels with apologetic prefaces or didactic footnotes, called them histories, added authenticating evidence, or inserted moralizing passages. In some novels the moralizing was so obtrusive that Amelia Parr in Hannah Foster's *The Boarding School* (1798) prefers English novels because "[an] American novel is such a moral, sentimental thing, that it is enough to give any body the vapours to read one."²⁰ The moral pragmatism in fiction turned self-destructive when some novels stressed the dangers of reading novels. This had become such a mannerism by the end of the eighteenth century that Hugh Henry Brackenridge mocked it by calling his *Modern Chivalry* (1792) "a book without thought, or the smallest degree of sense"; he thought his novel "useful" because it would give his readers "something to read without the trouble of thinking."²¹

Washington Irving similarly debunked the moralizing tendency of the period when he assured his readers in the preface to *Tales of a Traveller* (1824) that every story contained a "sound moral" which, however, he had hidden extremely well, "but the reader will be sure to find it out in the end."²² Mark Twain, sixty years later, could still burlesque this tradition: in *Huckleberry Finn* (1884) he threatens: "persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished."²³

Some novelists, however, preferred a more subtle strategy. In their works the discourse about the problems of writing fiction in spite of anti-fictional criticism is no longer confined to prefaces, epilogues, or footnotes, but has become an integral part of the fictional text itself. In these novels the narrator stresses the creative faculties of the imagination and consciously blurs the borders between fact and fiction. In some instances a character is introduced who holds up the empiricist cause and asks the narrator for factual evidence; the narrator, however, flatly denies the validity of such a demand and either withdraws from the narrative pretending to have nothing to do with it or replies that he is emotionally too much involved to be objective. Thus, this kind of narrator is unreliable and evasive, because he is unwilling or unable to distinguish between fact and fiction, reality and imagination. Rather he starts a discourse about the impossibility of such a distinction and the imaginative nature of a narrator's status.

One of the earliest narrators to involve the reader in such a metafictional discourse is Clara in Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland; Or The Transformation* (1798). The story tells the events in the Wieland family, where Carwin, a fiendish imitator of voices, drives Clara's brother Theodore into religious insanity. To prove his unconditional obedience to his God he kills his wife and four children as a sacrifice and finally commits suicide. Carwin's duplicity also plays havoc with Clara's emotional life and forestalls an amorous affair with her brother-in-law. In the end all the mysterious events find causal explanations (Carwin was the devil in disguise), but only after Clara has had a couple of nervous breakdowns. When, as the first person narrator and eyewitness of most of the events, she tries to record the occurrences, the emotional turmoil again seizes her. She finds it increasingly difficult to chronicle

the events, sometimes she even has to interrupt her writing to regain her emotional stability.

At the beginning of her narrative Clara is still a relatively objective, matter-of-fact historian, and she frequently emphasizes the factuality of her account, for, as she writes, "[if] my testimony were without corroborations, you would reject it as incredible" (6).²⁴ Gradually, however, she realizes "the difficulty of the task" (49) which she has undertaken because her subjective reactions to the events begin to interfere with her rational report: the historian and eyewitness doubts the accuracy of her own perception of reality, and she admits:

My narrative may be invaded by inaccuracy and confusion; but if I live no longer, I will, at least, live to complete it. What but ambiguities, abruptnesses, and dark transitions, can be expected from the historian who is, at the same time, the sufferer of these disasters? (147)

Historiography turns into psychography, history turns into his, or in this case, her story.²⁵ This seems a very modern concept and reminds us of Ronald Sukenick's definition of reality: "Reality is . . . our experience, and objectivity is . . . an illusion."²⁶ Brown not only wants "to shock the reader by successive revelations of the limits of rational knowledge,"²⁷ but he clearly questions the conception that history and autobiography are objective renderings of reality beyond the interference of a subjective imagination. His narrator's name, Clara, turns into a mocking comment on the seemingly reliable and objective narrators of the period who succumbed to the mistrust of the imagination and disguised their stories as histories. By demonstrating the unreliability of sense impressions and experience, the novel refutes the epistemology of empiricism current at that time. Clara, "the first case of an 'unreliable narrator' in American literature,"²⁸ learns in the process of her narrative that "ideas exist in our minds that can be accounted for by no established laws" (87). Even the rationalist Pleyel, Clara's brother-in-law, is deceived by his senses. Time and again Clara is in doubt about her interpretation of her sense impressions and she asks herself and the reader: "How was I to interpret this circumstance?" (99). Or: "Should I confide in the testimony of my ears?" (102). Clara's problem is an unstable relationship between signifier and signified; the discrepancy can only be resolved

within the individual frame of mind. Clara's often incorrect conjectures are countered by Theodore's and Carwin's interpretations (and partly misinterpretations) of the same events, so that the reader gets three different readings of the same "text." Paradoxically enough, Clara's unreliability as a narrator renders her account more authentic, because it proves her involvement in the events. It is only logical that she gradually forsakes her role as authenticating historian and is no longer interested in the question of truth, but only in the appropriateness of her conclusions and conjectures. Consequently, at the end of Carwin's account she concludes: "Such is his tale, concerning the truth of which I care not." (233)

What makes us think of *Wieland* in terms of metafiction is, of course, not the epistemological scepticism, i.e. the subjectivist premise "that the appearances of things vary according to the perceiver," nor the ensuing "suspension of judgement about the true nature of external reality,"²⁹ but it is the consequence of this "systematic questioning of some fundamental tenets of the Enlightenment"³⁰ for the status of the narrator. Time and again Clara directly addresses the reader and self-consciously comments on the difficulties of her narrative task, which are twofold: firstly, language is deficient in expressing what she wants to communicate; she speaks of "the imperfection of my language" (148) and forbears from telling some scenes because "my narrative would be imperfect" (157). Secondly, she has to create a coherent narrative in a context of fragmentation which includes the world that seemed so familiar as well as her mental sanity. This fragmentation is reflected in the structural discontinuity of the novel: sometimes she has to bridle her narrative creativity, for instance when she interrupts herself: "But the task I have set myself let me perform with steadiness" (21), or she comes to a halt in order to regain her "composure" (49): "I have taken a few turns in my chamber, and have gathered strength enough to proceed. Yet have I not projected a task beyond my power to execute?" (49) But she is determined to fulfill her appointed task: "though I may at times pause and hesitate, I will not be finally diverted from it." (49) Clara's narrative indecision results from the eighteenth-century opposition of fiction and history, for she is torn between writing her story and writing history, she is aware that as soon as she starts to draw

conclusions from the facts, she starts to write fiction. She reaches the climax of her self-reflexive, metafictional discourse when she states: "my existence will terminate with my tale" (221). If turned around (my tale will terminate with my existence) the sentence would express the narrative design of history (when the historiographer dies, he cannot continue with his history); however, in Clara's case, the narrator's life ends with the tale, i.e. the narrator, Clara, is part of the narrative make-up; she is determined: "I will die, but then only when my tale is at an end" (228), i.e. the narrator can define his/her own date of extinction. Clara's identity is twofold: she is the eyewitness of factual events and the narrator of fiction. Therefore she states: "I stand aside . . . from myself" (222). As the narrator of the novel Clara indeed dies at the end, "and now my repose is coming—my work is done" (233), but she survives as a narrator of history, and so in the last chapter, after her recovery from her nervous breakdowns, she gathers the minor plots of the preceding tale and gives brief historical round-ups. This narrative inconsistency has generally been criticized. However, in my context, the change from a subjective narrative point of view to an omniscient narrator within a work of fiction may not be a flaw, but highly significant; it could perhaps be compared to Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* where, as critics have pointed out, the objective conclusion mocks the "customary demand for a conventional novel."³¹ Both texts implicitly argue against a too simple epistemology and in their structure reflect this narrative evasiveness.

The novel's thesis that history and fiction are much closer to each other than contemporary critics would concede is also propounded by Brown's essay "The Difference between History and Romance" (1800), where he writes:

The observer . . . who carefully watches, and faithfully enumerates the appearances which occur, may claim the appellation of historian. He who adorns these appearances with cause and effect . . . performs a different part. He is a dealer, not in certainties, but probabilities, and is therefore, a romancer.³²

Brown's objective is to increase the esteem of the novel in the eyes of disparaging critics of fiction by defining the novel as an interpretation

of facts, i.e. as a kind of historical writing more valuable than history because the novel gives causalities and motivations.³³ What makes *Wieland* an early form of metafiction is its amalgamation of fact and fiction in the very sensibility of the narrator and its articulation of this discourse on the level of narration.

Looking for parallels in early American fiction one immediately thinks of some tales by Washington Irving where the self-conscious narrator refuses to testify to the truth of the mysterious events in the narrative. Rather than prove their actuality, the narrator refers to the testimony of others from whom he has heard about the events or he assumes the attitude of an editor who may even withdraw from his fiction and build up an ironic distance to it, if the events narrated are in extreme conflict with the collective consensus of experience.

Rip Van Winkle's story about his twenty-year-long sleep is a perfect example. One afternoon Rip, a negligent loafer in a Dutch settlement, turns his back on his irascible and wrangling wife and goes hunting in the Catskill Mountains. When, after a twenty-year absence, he finally returns to his native village, now governed by post-revolutionary Yankee republicanism, he tells the incredible story that in the mountains he met and frolicked with the legendary Hendrick Hudson and his men, and, overpowered by their drink, fell into a long sleep. Every time he tells his story, he is observed "to vary on some points" (783).³⁴ Gradually a definite version develops and becomes part of the local lore; if some locals express incredulity, they only pretend "to doubt the reality" (784) of Rip's story, since it has been corroborated by the local historian. The final version is then written down by Diedrich Knickerbocker, who goes so far as to provide a note again testifying to the authenticity of the story: not only has he talked with Rip Van Winkle himself, but he has even seen "a certificate on the subject taken before a country justice and signed with a cross in the justice's own hand writing" (784). The note concludes: "The story therefore is beyond the possibility of doubt." (784) However, this ironic debunking of the common-sense approach of his contemporary critics was not enough for Washington Irving. He makes Knickerbocker's story as well as the appended note parts of *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* and frames them with an introductory biographical note on Knickerbocker as well as with a postscript. The biographical note

maintains that the tale was posthumously found among Knickerbocker's papers and that it is beyond the possibility of doubt because Knickerbocker's previously published *History of New York* also proved to be a work of "scrupulous accuracy" and "unquestionable authority" (767). The postscript prints "travelling notes from a memorandum book of Mr. Knickerbocker" (784) which show Rip's story to be related to ancient Indian legends. That the problem of "truth" is the real theme of the story is also highlighted by the ambiguous epigraph taken from William Cartwright's play *The Ordinary* (1651): "Truth is a thing that ever I will keep / Unto thylke day in which I creep into / My sepulchre—" (769). Thus, Irving's story is constructed from a variety of texts which use different narrative perspectives: an introductory biographical note on Knickerbocker by Crayon, a poetic epigraph from Cartwright, Rip's story as recorded by Knickerbocker, Knickerbocker's corroborating note, introduced and edited by Crayon, and Crayon's postscript, which contains an Indian legend as recorded in Knickerbocker's "memorandum book" (784). (Unfortunately, in most anthologies only Rip's story is reprinted, not the additional texts that in the context of this paper make this story so interesting.) The perspectives of these textual components are those of the collective narrators of Indian folklore, Rip as the childishly naive eye-witness and narrator of incredible events, Knickerbocker as the authenticating and compiling anthropologist, and Crayon as the editor and ironic commentator. This multiplicity of genres and narrators foreshadows the complexity of narrative technique in some twentieth-century texts. On every one of the three personalized levels of the narrative the key issue is the relationship between fact and fiction, i.e. the epistemology of the common-sense school: those narrators whose texts were recommended to readers of early America because of their direct reference to reality, namely the historian (Knickerbocker) and the biographer and eyewitness (Rip) are here discredited because of their epistemological naiveté and their superficial credulity. In this way Irving clearly mocks those contemporary critics who demanded that literary texts had to be founded on facts. He involves his readers in a metafictional discourse about the fictional momentum of historiography and argues that even a historian cannot but use his imagination when he starts to work on the historical facts.³⁵ Demands for authenticity

as made by Knickerbocker, as well as Irving's contemporary critics, are downright ridiculous. As the gradual acceptance of Rip's essentially unbelievable story by the villagers shows, truth is not defined normatively and *a priori*, but performatively, i.e. as a discursive process toward consensus which eventually makes it part of the "collective consciousness."³⁶

In the postscript to "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" this metafictional discourse about the legitimization of fiction is renewed: the story is told at a meeting "at which were present many of [the] sagest and most illustrious burghers."³⁷ Among these, one might presume, are the representatives of common-sense criticism, "who never laugh but upon good grounds—when they have reason and the law on their side." One of them asks "what was the moral of the story, and what it went to prove" (1087). When he is given a rather unsatisfactory answer, he expresses his doubts concerning the factuality of the events, whereupon the storyteller admits: "I don't believe one half of it myself" (1088). The replies render the common-sense questions of the critic completely irrelevant. The issue of authenticity is inappropriate in the case of story-telling, Irving maintains. His literary alter ego Geoffrey Crayon makes the same point in the introduction to *Tales of a Traveller* when he, as a self-conscious narrator, confesses: ". . . when I attempt to draw forth a fact, I cannot determine whether I have read, heard, or dreamt it; and I am always at a loss to know how much to believe of my own stories."³⁸ Here already Irving ridicules the kind of unimaginative reader who would later read Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun* (1860) as a travel guide to Rome and Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851) as a guide to the biology of the whale and the New England whale industry.

Brown and Irving were among the first American writers to pave the way toward twentieth-century metafictional narrative. Their self-reflective narrators "do not imitate the world, [they] construct versions of it"; they have realized that "[there] is no mimesis, only poesis. No recording. Only constructing."³⁹ Therefore, they involve the reader in a discourse about the fictionalization of reality. They refuse to define the line between reality and imagination and evasively leave the question of truth open for the reader to decide. The narrative center is no longer occupied by an organizing, detached, omniscient, and reliable narrator, but, in

Wieland, by a self-consciously uncertain fabulist who uses the freedom of her creative imagination or, in "Rip Van Winkle," by a narrator who wears the mask of an editor and who leaves it to the reader to construct a reading of the several texts he has collected. The aim is not the instruction of the reader according to the social and critical norms, but antinomian disorientation of the reader and the deconstruction of the myths of contemporary criticism. In the texts I have analyzed, the writing of fiction turns into playing with the concept of fiction, turns into a playful discourse about truth. Of course, there is still a big difference between, for example, John Barth and Washington Irving, but nonetheless, the reader of the different texts that make up "Rip Van Winkle" is almost as much lost in the funhouse of fictional multiplicity as the reader of Barth's work. And there are other striking similarities. The following analysis of the situation of the postmodern writer by Ronald Sukenick in "The Death of the Novel" could equally well characterize Irving's situation in early nineteenth-century America as manifested in "Rip Van Winkle":

The contemporary writer—the writer who is acutely in touch with the life of which he is part—is forced to start from scratch: Reality doesn't exist [on his return, Rip, Irving's alter ego,⁴⁰ finds everything changed, metamorphosed, and strange], time doesn't exist [Rip's afternoon nap lasts twenty years], personality doesn't exist [Rip "doubted his own identity" (781); and he complains: "I'm not myself. —I'm somebody else . . . and every thing's changed—and I'm changed—and I can't tell what's my name, or who I am!" (781)]. God was the omniscient author, but he died; now no one knows the plot [Rip changes some points of his story whenever he tells it, and even the historian and anthropologist Knickerbocker does not know what happened], and since our reality lacks the sanction of a creator, there's no guarantee as to the authenticity of the received version [the guarantee Knickerbocker offers is unacceptable, as Crayon makes clear]. . . . Reality is, simply, our experience, and objectivity is, of course, an illusion.⁴¹

This is what Brown and Irving, and later Poe, Hawthorne, Melville and others wanted to communicate through some of their writings in a climate dominated by, as James Fenimore Cooper termed it, "that despot—common sense."⁴² Thus, female readers and some imaginative writers in early America seem to have had a common goal: for them reading and writing were subversive acts of liberation from this despot

who tried (but failed) to convince the American reading public that novels were the most dangerous kind of reading.

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NOTES

¹Hannah Foster, *The Boarding School; Or, Lessons of a Preceptress to Her Pupils* (Boston, 1798) 18.

²This article is the revised version of a paper presented at the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster in May 1994.

³Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (London: Methuen, 1980) 1.

⁴See Bernd Engler, *Fiktion und Wirklichkeit: Zur narrativen Vermittlung erkenntnis-skeptischer Positionen bei Hawthorne und Melville* (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1991), Michael T. Gilmore, *American Romanticism and the Marketplace* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1985), Dennis Pahl, *Architects of the Abyss: The Indeterminate Fiction of Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville* (Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1989), Christiane Paul, *Die Antizipation der amerikanischen Postmoderne im Romanwerk H. Melvilles* (Idstein: Schulz-Kirchner, 1988). Important studies on the history of metafiction are: Robert Alter, *Partial Magic: The Novel as Self-Conscious Genre* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1975), and esp. Michael D. Bell, *The Development of American Romance: The Sacrifice of Relation* (Chicago, U of Chicago P, 1980), and Daniel Green, "Metafiction and Romance," *SAF* 19 (1991): 229-42. See also Christian Berthold, *Fiktion und Vieldeutigkeit: Zur Entstehung moderner Kulturtechniken des Lesens im 18. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1993), Wayne C. Booth, "The Self-Conscious Narrator in Comic Fiction before *Tristram Shandy*," *PMLA* 67 (1952): 163-85, Werner Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion und Illusionsdurchbrechung in der Erzählkunst: Theorie und Geschichte mit Schwerpunkt auf englischem illusionsstörendem Erzählen* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1993).

⁵John Barth, "The Literature of Exhaustion" [1967], *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Nonfiction* (New York: Putnam, 1984) 62-76.

⁶Ronald Sukenick, *The Death of the Novel and Other Stories* (New York: Dial, 1969).

⁷Terence Martin, *The Instructed Vision: Scottish Common Sense Philosophy and the Origins of American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1961) viii.

⁸Joseph Addison, "Taste and the Pleasures of the Imagination," *The Spectator* (June 21, 1712) rpt. in *Critical Essays from The Spectator by Joseph Addison*, ed. Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970) 176.

⁹For the sake of brevity I always use the term novel to denote all forms of narrative fiction.

¹⁰The author of "Character and Effects of Modern Novels" in *The Universal Asylum and Columbian Magazine* (Philadelphia) 9 (Oct. 1792): 225, warns: "Novels not only

pollute the imaginations of young women, but also give them false ideas of life, which too often make them act improperly. . . . They read of characters which never existed, and never can exist."

¹¹The *Journal of John Winthrop*, entry for April 13, 1645, quoted in *Anthology of American Literature*, 2 vols., ed. George McMichael, 2nd ed., vol. 1: *Colonial Through Romantic* (New York: Macmillan, 1980) 70. In the Philadelphia journal *The Eye*, 1.4 (28 Jan. 1808): 42, an anonymous writer maintains: "To novels may be attributed the ignorance of our females." In *The Stranger* (Albany) 1.12 (20 Nov. 1813): 162, a writer who identifies himself as "A Married Man" complains: "experience has proved that a wife who is fond of literature is seldom a good cook."

¹²Thomas Jefferson, Letter to Nathaniel Burwell, March 14, 1818, rpt. in *Crusade Against Innocence: Thomas Jefferson on Education*, ed. Gordon C. Lee (New York: Teachers College P, 1961) 153, 154.

¹³Wallace Stevens, "Imagination as Value" [1948] in: *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination* (New York: Random House, [1980]) 136, 138.

¹⁴John Davis, *The Wanderings of William* (Philadelphia, 1801) "Dedication."

¹⁵E.g. John T. Taylor, *Early Opposition to the English Novel: The Popular Reaction from 1760 to 1830* (New York: King's Crown P, 1943).

¹⁶Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public 1800-1900* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1957).

¹⁷For a detailed study of the influence of this philosophy in America see Martin. See also: Selwyn A. Grave, *The Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense* (1960, rpt. Westport: Greenwood, 1977), and Andrew Hook, *Scotland and America: A Study of Cultural Relations, 1750-1835* (Glasgow: Blackie, 1975). A useful survey is also provided by William Charvat, *The Origins of American Critical Thought 1810-1835* (1936, rpt. New York: Barnes, 1961), esp. "Sources in Scottish Philosophy, Aesthetics and Culture" 27-58. For an analysis of the Scottish philosophy see Torngny T. Segerstedt, *The Problem of Knowledge in Scottish Philosophy* (Lund: Gleerup, 1935).

¹⁸Martin 14.

¹⁹William Cullen Bryant, "A Pennsylvanian Legend," *New York Review and Atheneum Magazine* 2 (Dec. 1825): 49.

²⁰Foster 156-57.

²¹Hugh Henry Brackenridge, *Modern Chivalry*, ed. Lewis Leary (New Haven: College and University P, 1965) 26-27.

²²Washington Irving, *Representative Selections*, ed. Henry A. Pochmann (New York: American Book Company, 1934) 206.

²³Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, ed. Scully Bradley et al., Norton Critical Edition, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1977) 2.

²⁴Quotations from *Wieland* are from the bicentennial edition (Kent: Kent State UP, 1977).

²⁵See Klaus Martens, *Die antinomische Imagination: Studien zu einer amerikanischen literarischen Tradition* (Charles Brockden Brown, Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville) (Frankfurt: Lang, 1986) 51: "Indem . . . der fiktive Erzähler zugleich littérateur wird, wird die Fiktionalität des Textes herausgestellt und ein mimetischer Anspruch des Textes auf Realitätsnähe . . . nicht mehr erhoben."

²⁶Sukenick 41.

²⁷Pamela Clemit, *The Godwinian Novel: The Rational Fictions of Godwin, Brockden Brown, Mary Shelley* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993) 113.

²⁸Roland Hagenbüchle, "American Literature and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis in Epistemology: The Example of Charles Brockden Brown," *EAL* 23 (1988): 121-51, 133.

²⁹Eve Tavor, *Scepticism, Society and the 18th-Century Novel* (London: Macmillan, 1987) 225.

³⁰Donald A. Ringe, *Charles Brockden Brown* (New York: Twayne, 1966) 42.

³¹John T. Matthews, *The Play of Faulkner's Language* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1982), excerpts rpt. in William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, ed. David Minter, Norton Critical Edition, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1994) 392.

³²Charles Brockden Brown, "The Difference between History and Romance," rpt. in Brown, *Literary Essays and Reviews*, ed. Alfred Weber (Frankfurt: Lang, 1992) 83. See also: Wolfgang Schäfer, *Charles Brockden Brown als Literaturkritiker* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1991) 97-101.

³³A few decades later Ralph Waldo Emerson similarly emphasized the value of the imagination for our understanding of the world: "The imagination may be defined to be, the use which the Reason makes of the material world." *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 1: *Nature, Addresses, and Lectures*, ed. Robert E. Spiller and Alfred R. Ferguson (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1971) 31. Hagenbüchle 138 summarizes Brown's point: "Fiction assumes a value of its own and thus appears as the only means of creating significance in a world empty of substance."

³⁴Quotations from "Rip Van Winkle" are from Washington Irving, *History, Tales, and Sketches*, ed. James W. Tuttleton, Library of America (New York: Viking, 1983).

³⁵This had already been his point in *A History of New York*, which "ridicules the possibility of acquiring certain or reliable knowledge." William L. Hedges, *Washington Irving: An American Study* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1965) 72.

³⁶Jeffrey Rubin-Dorsky, *Adrift in the Old World: The Psychological Pilgrimage of Washington Irving* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988) 113.

³⁷Quotations from "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" are from Washington Irving, *History, Tales, and Sketches*, ed. James W. Tuttleton, Library of America (New York: Viking, 1983).

³⁸Irving, *Representative Selections* 207.

³⁹Robert Scholes, *Structural Fabulation: An Essay on Fiction of the Future* (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1975) 7.

⁴⁰For the parallels between Rip and Washington Irving see Rubin-Dorsky 110 ff.

⁴¹Sukenick 41. Similarly, William L. Hedges, "The Knickerbocker History as Knickerbocker's 'History,'" *The Old and New World Romanticism of Washington Irving*, ed. Stanley Brodwin (Westport: Greenwood, 1986) 153-66, 164, sees Irving's *A History of New York* as "a very modern text" because of its "flirtation with the irrational." The continuity from the American romance to postmodern literature is analyzed by Bell.

⁴²James Fenimore Cooper, *Notions of the Americans*, ed. Robert E. Spiller, 2 vols. (New York: Ungar, 1963) 2: 114.