Warning Concerning Copyright Restrictions

The Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted materials. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research. If electronic transmission of reserve material is used for purposes in excess of what constitutes "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement.
8. TWO EXTRAORDINATE TEACHINGS

For many years, students entering Cornell have been handed a pamphlet, prepared by the English department, entitled "A Writer's Responsibilities." The plural is slightly misleading: the pamphlet addresses itself to only one "responsibility," the student's "responsibility always to demonstrate the extent to which he is master of what he is learning." And, lest this seem too massive, too unbearable a charge, the next sentences go on to specify it somewhat: "He must make clear what is his and what is someone else's. His teacher must know whose words he is reading or listening to." The pamphlet, in other words, is about plagiarism, and it contains the usual mixture of sensible advice (about paraphrasing, quoting, footnoting, etc.) and ill-assured moral exhortation. For our purposes its interest lies in its ill-assurance, in a rhetoric that wavers in its address to student-readers in a predictable and symptomatic fashion. Here, for example, are the pamphlet's opening words:

Education at its best, whether conducted in seminar, laboratory, or lecture hall, is essentially a dialogue between teacher and pupil in which questions and answers can be explored, arguments can be posed and resolved, data can be sought and evaluated. From the time of Socrates and his disciples to that of the nightly discussion on the corridor, this dialogue has been the mark and delight of the intellectual life.

The allusion of Socrates may not be obligatory, but it is characteristic of this earnest moment in teachers' imaginings of themselves, their students, and what passes between them. Equally characteristic of the complementary cynical moment is the note of tight-lipped institutional fussiness struck on the pamphlet's last page:

The Policy of the English Department

For the first instance of plagiarism or of any other kind of academic dishonesty or irresponsibility, the student will immediately receive a failing grade in the course and be reported to the appropriate department, division or college for whatever further action may be in order.

The lineaments of an American Scene of Instruction are sketched in these passages. The student might be Alcibiades, but then again he might be Al Capone; his teacher is either a master of instructive dialogue or a disciplinarian, and the whole operation can feel like "the intellectual life" one moment, the next like a low budget cops-and-robbers routine. Or so it would appear from language of this sort: I don't think I'm describing higher education in America so much as calling attention to some common teacherly fantasies about it, fantasies largely ignored by serious writers engaging the sociology or the economics of universities, or else alluded to obliquely under some more general rubric, like professorial "conservatism." Yet the fantasies I propose to dwell on seem pervasive, sluggishly unresponsive to changes in the system of higher education, and distributed across generational and political lines. You don't have to be over thirty or a bourgeois humanist, for example, to find yourself beside yourself about a paper you suspect was plagiarized.

I have picked two documents which embody such fantasies, characterizations of the relations between teachers and students that take the form of images or, sometimes, of tendentious implicit narratives. Each seems to have been elaborated by a teacher in response to a perceived threat. I shall be arguing that in each case that threat has been misperceived, that indeed the function of the characterization would seem to be first to misrepresent a threat and then to respond, more or less aggressively, to that misrepresenta-
The pamphlet "A Writer's Responsibilities" is not wholly the work of the Cornell English department. About half of it is excerpted (with appropriate acknowledgment) from what was, in the 1960s, a popular freshman textbook, Izrold C. Martin's *The Logic and Rhetoric of Exposition.* In these pages, entitled "A Definition of Plagiarism," Martin leads his readers through the variety of forms—some bald-faced, some more subtle and devious, some conscious, some inadvertent—of what he calls, in ironic quotation marks, "borrowing," then ends his discussion with these unusually intense sentences:

Since one of the principal aims of a college education is the development of intellectual honesty, it is obvious that plagiarism is a particularly serious offense and the punishment for it is commensurately severe. What a penalized student suffers can never really be known by anyone but himself; what the student who plagiarizes and "gets away with it" suffers is less public and probably less acute, but the corruptness of his act, the disloyalty and baseness it entails, must inevitably leave an ineradicable mark upon him as well as on the institution of which he is privileged to be a member.

A strange passage, urgent in its wish to stigmatize the crime it knows can't be sure won't be committed, can't be sure won't go undetected, no matter what one says. Hence the rising rhythms of the last sentence ("the corruptness of his act, the disloyalty and baseness it entails"), the echoing absolutes ("inevitably," "ineradicable"), the huff and puff of its concluding phrase. And what are we to make of "gets away with it" in quotation marks? Does that mean "he only thinks he gets away with it—we know better"? Or is it perhaps mimicking student diction and presenting the difference between the vulnerable institution and its disloyal member as if it were also a difference in verbal refinement: we are polysyllabic, they are slobs?

More intriguing are the passage's speculations about the consequences of plagiarism, not its explicit consequences but its ideal or imagined ones, some odd combination of interior suffering (which "can never really be known by anyone but the sufferer) and an ineradicable mark which, if not literally exterior, must at least be conceived as somehow legible, if only to the eye of God. For this is pure fantasy, compensatory to its function and moral-theological in its form. The inevitable, ineradicable mark is a lineal descendant of the mark of Cain, like the Scarlet Letter or the inscription on the body of the criminal in Kafka's penal colony. It is "inevitable" in this brief fiction because it is anything but inevitable in fact: plagiarists do, we all know, get away with it. And they get away with it because it is always possible for profiteers of difference to take advantage of the distance between legitimate authors and the sheets of paper on which their words are registered and distributed. The fantasy, then, is constructed so as to produce the sense of satisfaction that comes with contemplating a punishment so aptly fitted to its crime: the "author" of this mark, at least, will be inseparable from it; here, for once—so the wish would have it—mark, paper, and author will be fused. For this is, among other things, a fantasy of integration, of the overcoming of difference.

We may still wonder why the passage dwells on the student's "suffering"; is it because a soupçon of sadism clings to all such dreams of punishment? Perhaps; but notice that this is at once a dream of punishment and a dream of interpretation: what is at issue is not just suffering but the extent to which it can be known, and by whom. The passage moves from the apparent unknowability of the penalized student's suffering to the wished-for legibility of the ineradicable mark. Private pain is conjured up not to be gloated over but rather because it indicates a region where it may be thought to exist, an interior space about whose contents we outsiders may make some guesses—gravely weighing the pains, deciding that one is "probably less acute" than another—but about which we "can never really know" as much as the sufferer himself.

Here again we can see the teacher's fantasy blending the student and his paper, or rather substituting the student for his paper as an object of interpretation. And, of course, that is what usually goes
TWO EXTRAVAGANT TEACHINGS

on in "cases" of plagiarism. Recall the scenario: you have either found yourself caught up in the process or listened as some colleague eagerly recited the details of his own involvement. There is, first, the moment of suspicion, reading along in a student's paper; then the verification of the hunch, the tracking down of the theft, most exhilarating when it involves a search through the library stacks; then the moment of "confrontation" when the accusation is made and it is no longer the student's paper but his face which is read for signs of guilt, moral anguish, contrition, whatever. The most telling account of such a moment comes from George Orwell's recollection of school days in England:

Another boy, Beacham, whom I have mentioned already, was similarly overwhelmed with shame by the accusation that he "had black rings round his eyes."

"Have you looked in the glass lately, Beacham?" said Bingo. "Aren't you ashamed to go about with a face like that? Do you think everyone doesn't know what it means when a boy has black rings round his eyes?"

Once again the load of guilt and fear seemed to settle down upon me. Had I got black rings round my eyes? A couple of years later I realized that these were supposed to be a symptom by which masturbators could be detected. But already, without knowing this, I accepted the black rings as a sure sign of depravity. And many times, even before I grasped the supposed meaning, I have gazed anxiously into the glass, looking for the first hint of that dreaded stigma, the confession which the secret sinner writes upon his own face.2

Which is more dismaying to the secret sinner: to have sinned or to have written out his confession on his own face? Which is more rewarding to his judge: to have saved a boy from masturbation or to have accurately read the signs of his depravity? These are not rhetorical questions to the extent that neither sinner nor judge can be sure of the answers to them. Indeed, the aim of such fantasies of moral legibility, whether they are elaborated by sinners or judges, is precisely that exciting confusion of ethical and hermeneutical motifs; for fantasies are compromise-formations, they seek to have things both ways. Our text about plagiarism offers just such a compromise: the ineradicable mark is there to satisfy the interpreter's wish to read stable and undeceptive signs, while the unknowable suffering is there to satisfy the teacher's wish to be something other than a reader—it serves as an acknowledgment of an interiority opaque enough to baffle his hermeneutical skills, a residual je-ne-sais-quoi that is there to remind him of (and, particularly, to confirm him in) his own private humanity.

So much for the terms of the fantasy; what of its motivation? We might attribute it to justifiable moral indignation, the righteous contempt of the honest for the dishonest, but that wouldn't quite account for either the intensity of this rhetoric or its peculiar figuration—or for the strong fascination that student plagiarism generally seems to hold for academics. Here again the passage from Orwell may be of some help: just as the masturbation of children can serve to focus the anxieties of their elders about sexuality in general, so the plagiarizing of students can focus their teachers' anxieties about writing in general, more particularly about the kind of "writing" involved in teaching—the inscription of a culture's heritage on the minds of its young. A teacher's uncertainty about (to quote the pamphlet again) "whose words he is reading or listening to" begins, in the classroom, with his own words—and this would be true not merely for those colleagues we think of complacently as less original than ourselves. The recurrent touting of originality—in letters of recommendation, reports of ad hoc committees, etc.—is no doubt a sign of the same uneasiness that produces the ritual condemnation of student plagiarists when they are unlucky enough to be caught. The paragraph we have been considering is an imagined version of such a scapegoating. Its structure is that of projection. An interior difference—the sense of self-division implicit in all linguistic activity, sometimes more pronounced, sometimes less so, depending on the social context in which speech or writing is produced—that difference is exteriorized as the difference between the offended institution and its delinquent member. And, in one of those nicely economical turns that characterize powerful fantasies, the delinquent member is himself made to unwillingly represent an emblem of integrity, of the binding of the self and its signs.
What can be made of the gestures by which a teacher places himself somewhere between his subject and his students? I have a very specific gesture in mind—Earl Wasserman, conducting a seminar on *The Rape of the Lock*, leaning forward across the table and asking his audience, a group of young men and women, graduate students and junior faculty, in a tone that was at once pugnacious and coy, "How far can I go?" I recall it as a nicely appropriate question, not just because it seemed obscurely in touch with all the erotic aggression and coquetry in Pope's poem, but because it was so much the interpreter's question par excellence, whether you took it straight or rhetorically. If it called for an answer, that answer would bear on the theoretical limits of interpretation—was it a terminable or an interminable activity? If instead the question was rhetorical, it could be heard as a sort of teasing cry for help, like those phone calls police stations receive from time to time: "Stop me before I strike again! I can't help it!", and then the phone goes dead, the Mad Rapist having hung up without giving his name or address. There is something obsessive about interpretation; there is something flirtatious about teaching: both impulses seemed at work in Wasserman's questions in ways that invited one to reflect on the relation between them.

The material of the seminar was later published in a paper called "The Limits of Allusion in *The Rape of the Lock*," so it was possible to review its argument in detail, and to notice another scene framing Wasserman's interpretive gestures, this one not of instruction but of professional polemic. Though he had mentioned no names at the seminar, and included no footnotes in its published version to anything more recent than *Tristram Shandy*, it was clear that Wasserman was out to counter what had become, by the 1960s, the current informed reading of *The Rape of the Lock*. It was also clear that a quarrel about how to read the poem was part of a larger argument, that between interpreters associated more or less closely with the New Criticism and those who accused the New Critics of ignoring literary and intellectual history. During the 1930s critics like Empson and Leavis and Tillotson had redirected attention to Pope's remarkable verbal control and a series of acute and tactful readings had appeared praising Pope for his acuteness and tact. When these critics turned to *The Rape of the Lock* what they found was a poem which, if not the high point of Pope's art, was at least the epitome of his talents, a poem to which words like tact, balance, or control could be easily applied.

But what exactly was it that Pope was so tactfully balancing? For critics like Tillotson, Brooks, Wimsatt, or Brower, one answer was "his attitudes toward poetry." The particular finesse with which Pope wrote mock heroic couplets could be read as simultaneously parodying the language and apparatus of major epic, invoking epic values to sustain a satiric attack on a decidedly unheroic contemporary scene, and, still further, conferring poignancy and charm on that same scene. More intriguing was the fact that, within the poem itself, that balancing act was doubled by another: the presentation of Pope's heroine, Belinda, who was rendered—and this was the point of Brooks' essay in *The Well-Wrought Urn*—as both a goddess and a "frivolous tease." These two balancings were easily analogized: Belinda became, in the discourse of these critics, a synecdoche for the poem—for, as the phrase went, "the poem itself." Both were objects of fascination, diminutive, perhaps trivial, but highly desirable; like frail china, bound to be handled but requiring of their admirers a lightness of touch mimicking that of their creator. The metaphor of tacit balancing easily slid into one of controlled erotic involvement. Tillotson could say:

"The poem provides a picture, rather than a criticism; or, rather, the poem is so elaborate, shifting, constellated, that the intellect is baffled and demoralized by the emotions. One is left looking at the face of the poem, as at Belinda's."

And Wimsatt could add:

"The sophistication of the poem lies in its being no less affectionate than critical... The critic's difficulty with *The Rape of the Lock* is to find words not too heavy to praise the intricacies of its radiant sense."
Earl Wasserman's arrival on this scene of admiration—of critics admiring Pope who is himself admiring Belinda who is, of course, admiring herself—is something like the arrival of the bull at the china shop. He argues carefully but he is not excessively tactful and, though he admires Pope, he does not admire Belinda, does not think Pope really does either, and is, in general, all for disrupting what he refers to as "the sheltered Petit Trianon world of conventionalized manners that the . . . poem constructs" (p. 427).

Wasserman's strategy is twofold: he attacks the insularity implicit in a New Critical reading of the poem by insisting on the range and importance of Pope's allusions to traditional motifs and topoi, and (it is, structurally, the same move) he attacks Belinda as a "narcissistic coquette" (p. 430), or, more accurately, he takes Pope to be himself elaborating and criticizing "the prideful image of Belinda as an independent world and female society as a self-sufficient scheme." (p. 434). I shall trace these lines of attack one at a time, then consider the links between them and suggest how they bear on the relations of poems, teachers, and students.

Wasserman begins by posing the question of what he calls the limits of allusion: granting the steady allusiveness of Pope's verse—to Dryden and Milton and Shakespeare, but more especially to Virgil and Homer and the Bible—how did these allusions function? How far was one entitled to go on interpreting them? If a phrase of Pope's turned out to be a literal translation of a phrase in the Aeneid, how much of the context of that fragment of Virgil's poem was drawn along with it into Pope's? As one might guess, the answer to the theoretical question of the limits of allusion is that no theoretical limits can be set at all: Pope's interpreter is entitled, Wasserman argues—and not only entitled but positively encouraged by Pope—to go as far as he can, he is, Wasserman concludes, "actively invited by [the allusions] to exercise, within poetic reason, his own invention by contemplating the relevances of the entire allusive context and its received interpretation" (p. 443). It would seem that some principles of limitation are "implicit in expressions like "within poetic reason" or "received interpretation," but what is principally interesting about them is their vagueness. They gesture in the direction of the reader who would adequately embody them, for the question of how far an interpreter should go is obviously inseparable from the question of the interpreter's own erudition: one needs to know the texts Pope was alluding to in order to spot an allusion in the first place, and one needs to know enough about neoclassical practice to know when to stop interpreting. Both the occasion that initiates an interpretative process and the restraints regulating it are functions of one's learning. And Wasserman makes it clear that while we might—with an effort, perhaps a lifetime's effort—familiarize ourselves with the range of Pope's reading, we could never possess that knowledge with the same degree of easy authenticity as did Pope or his ideal contemporary reader:

The mind that composed The Rape of the Lock was less an English one hearkening back to the classics for witty reference than one applying itself to an English social situation from the viewpoint of a deeply ingrained classicism. Classical literature and its manners, together with Scripture and its exegetical tradition, are not merely Pope's acquired learning, they shaped the character and processes of his thought. Correspondingly, his poems consistently ask for a reader who is equally native to the whole classical-Scriptural world, a Christian Greco-Roman scrutinizing eighteenth-century English culture. [pp. 426–27]

Confronted with a statement of this sort, one might want to say, "Of course Wasserman is being hyperbolical, but you know what he means." Suppose, instead, one were to reverse the weightings of that response and say, "Of course we know what he means, but why should he put it so hyperbolically?" Why this fiction of a transhistorical meeting of minds—the "mind that composed The Rape of the Lock" and that of his perfect reader, someone "equally native to the whole classical-Scriptural world?" Is this merely a heuristic fiction, an ideal totalization posited to urge us on to some serious, if only approximating, interpretative activity? Perhaps; but it is also a figure of perfect communication, suitable for framing and display in the classroom, where it might function rather like an allusion to the conversations of Socrates and his disciples.

Now Wasserman also suggests a related figure for what goes on in the classroom, not that of a closed circuit of ideal communication, but rather that of a controlled linearity, a graded series: at the
head of the line is “the mind that composed The Rape of the Lock,” a mind whose learning is not something acquired but rather “deeply ingrained” or—as he says elsewhere—“deeply embedded.” Next in line, in a middleman’s position, is the teacher, whose knowledge is acquired. Finally there are the students, presumably there to acquire the erudition that their teacher already possesses in part. This is a familiar enough account of academic lineage, and it might be that at moments literary education comes to feel like that. But more often what happens is that—by a trick of the mind, call it a deeply embedded inclination to convert series into binary oppositions—the teacher’s position is experienced (by the teacher as well as by his class) not as a middle ground somewhere between his author and his students but as a dramatic occupation, more or less earned, of the position of authority itself. The series becomes a proportion: Wasserman is to his seminar as Pope is to Wasserman. When that happens the teacher-interpreter’s mind stands in for “the mind that composed The Rape of the Lock” and the distinction between knowledge that is deeply ingrained and knowledge that is merely acquired starts to fade. One sentence of Wasserman’s article begins “Disinherited as we are from (Pope’s) referential systems . . . ” (p. 425): the classroom becomes the place where the teacher-scholar, at least, can appear to reclaim his inheritance.

I offer this not as a description of classroom teaching so much as a readily available possible mystification, a common and reassuring way of bringing the activity of reading into touch with that of teaching. The relation of teacher to student, figured as a descent, a lineage, reinforces the fiction of the perfect play between the mind of the poet and that of the ideal reader. Both figures—that of lineage and that of the closed circuit—depend for their intelligibility on a radical reduction of what is in fact plural (a certain number of students in a class, many of them unresponsive; a still greater number of texts in the tradition, many of them at odds with one another, many of them unread, even by Wasserman, even by Pope)—a reduction of plurals to an imagined interplay of paired elements: poet and tradition, poet and reader, teacher and student. The power such figures exert over readers is in proportion to the reduction they promise to perform.

Turning to Belinda, Wasserman rejects the notion that Pope’s attitude toward her was “no less affectionate than critical” and instead proposes another way of dealing with the subtleties of her presentation: he would see Pope superficially praising his heroine but systematically undercutting that praise with ironic allusions to Christian and classical texts. Pope, in this reading, mobilizes his allusions to break the fragile construct Wasserman calls “the beau monde, made of conventional signs, decorative and playful, that substitute for flesh-and-blood reality.” And “flesh-and-blood reality,” as Wasserman’s analysis makes clear, is primarily sexual. Citing the words Belinda’s guardian sylph whispers in her ear as the poem begins (“Hear and believe! Thy own importance know, / Nor bound thy narrow views to things below” 1.35–36), Wasserman writes

As Plutarch wrote in one of the major loci of the doctrine, to “know thyself” means to “use one’s self for that one thing for which Nature has fitted one”; and exactly what Belinda is most fitted for and what is radical for Pope in the carnal world that Belinda ought to accept is intimated by “Things below,” a term we may let Swift explicate for us. [p. 432]

The passage Wasserman takes from Swift is his retelling of the old tale of the philosopher Thales, who, while looking at the stars, found himself “seduced by his lower parts into a Ditch.” Wasserman remarks:

No one who had read at least his Juvenal—to say nothing of the Priapeia—would have failed to understand the real meaning of fossa, or ditch, any more than he would have failed to understand Pope’s “Things below.” [p. 432]

And, lest we fail to understand, a footnote delicately spells it out:

For this sense of res, see Martial, XI, 44. In his “Sober Advice from Horace,” Pope translated Horace’s “magno prognatum deposco consule CUNNUM” as “A Thing descended from the Conqueror.” [p. 432 n. 16]

Disinherited though he may be, Wasserman’s acquired learning seems to have put him in a position to know “exactly what Belinda
is most fitted for": what this girl needs is a good Judeo-Christian Greco-Roman husband.

Wasserman's _paideia_ seems to be advancing under a banner with a familiar enough device: "I'll teach you a thing or two" is the motto. But it would be a mistake to assume that the aggressive misogyny here is all the critic's, that he is simply seeing things in an innocuous text. The bawdry and misogyny are there—in Swift most obviously but in Pope as well. Wasserman's assertive proclamation of this element in the poem can be taken as corrective of the rhetoric of delicacy and tact preferred by the New Critics, a readjustment that has the virtue of reminding us that _The Rape of the Lock_ is not least of all about a struggle for power. Moreover, Wasserman's own rhetoric—its stridency and its implicit thematic linkings—can give us a better idea of what the elements of that struggle might be. For it is not simply a struggle between men and women, any more than Western misogyny is the simple antagonism of one group of people to another. If we follow Wasserman's polemic we shall see that what he is attacking in Belinda is what he takes to be her imaginary relation to herself, her narcissism, which Wasserman treats as a perverse upsetting of the proper hierarchical relation of "conventional signs" to "flesh-and-blood reality" (p. 429). Tracing the motif of the shearing of the lock back to Appolonius and, along with him, to "Euripides, Herodotus, Callimachus, Valerius Flaccus, Pausanias, and Lucian, among others" (pp. 423-29), Wasserman reminds us of the tradition of offering up a lock of a maiden's hair as a nuptial rite. "What the Baron has raped," he comments, is not Belinda's virginity but . . . the ritualistic sign of it." And Belinda's distress is a function of her commitment to a world of signs, "in which a rouged cheek surpasses a real blush, . . . a card game takes the place of the contest of the sexes, China jars stand for virginity, and a mirror reflection transcends the viewer" (p. 429). Wasserman's misogyny here is hard to distinguish from what seems like a more general semiotic uneasiness: what troubles him about Belinda is not that, being a woman, she is different, but that, being a woman, she has somehow been beguiled by "conventional signs" into a confusing self-alienation. She is both different and self-divided: hence the prurient allusions to flaws, cracks, ditches, etc. It isn't clear from Wasserman's account why this confusion should be limited to Belinda—or to women; we know that some distinguished formalist critics (all male) have been equally beguiled by the delicacy and glitter of Belinda's world of signs. What is clear, however, is that Wasserman would like so to limit it, to focus his uneasiness on one form of the relation of signs and reality, the beautiful woman's fascination with her reflected image. Our earlier glance at Orwell might lead us to expect—in this region where semiotic and sexual questions seem to be converging—some further fine tuning of the notion of narcissism in the form of a denunciation of autoerotic behavior, and indeed in Wasserman's account that is one of the forms Belinda's self-sufficiency is made to take: we are told that "she is wedded to and sexually gratified by her own virginity" (p. 430).

But just as we watched Harold Martin simultaneously stigmatize the plagiarist and confer on him a poignantly unknowable interior life, so we can follow a movement in some ways similar in Wasserman's dealings with Belinda. There are depths behind all that surface, it turns out. And the last pages of Wasserman's paper are devoted to the discovery, within those depths, of the heterosexual desire that Belinda cannot consciously acknowledge, a secret passion for the Baron, a wish to marry, to perform what Wasserman describes as "the heroic sacrifice that makes female life meaningful and glorious" (p. 436). Teasing out the signs of that desire involves Wasserman in his most elaborate effort at documenting and interpreting Pope's allusions to the classics, and it produces a strong case for their importance in the poem. At a series of points Wasserman can show that when Belinda is heard complaining about the loss of her lock, her language—or the poet's language about her—echoes passages in Virgil, in Catullus, and in Martial which, read in context, bear a meaning at cross-purposes to Belinda's: "Pope's words and their allusive context contradict each other," Wasserman comments, "and if we take the contradiction as the conflict between Belinda's conscious and subconscious mind, it only confirms Pope's psychoanalysis of her elsewhere." There is after all, as Pope had made explicit earlier in the poem, "an Earthly Lover lurking at her Heart" (pp. 440-41).
But it's worth noting that Pope had made that explicit earlier in the poem, just as he had placed in the mouth of one of his characters, Belinda's sensible friend Clarissa, a long speech advising her to marry. Wasserman's tracing of Pope's allusions in order to explore Belinda's unconscious desires discovers nothing that he didn't already know; in fact it is because of what he already knew from the more explicit passages in the poem that he could decide how much of the original context of each allusion was pertinent. Wasserman isn't mistaken about either the presence or the meaning of these allusions, but he has organized his account of them so as to introduce an element of hermeneutic suspense that is absent from the poem. What Pope offers is a variety of forms—explicit statement, hint, coded allusion—in the course of a narrative which unfolds in accordance with its own plotting, Wasserman presents as an inquest: he marshals his evidence sequentially, as if preparing for the moment when he can confront Belinda with the unacknowledged signs of her desire: "Perhaps this will refresh your memory!" What comes through in the tone of his article—and was conspicuous in the seminar as I recall it—is the intellectual energy and muted glee of a particularly zealous juge d'instruction. It is not unlike the tone of the teacher confronting the plagiarist, nor is it entirely out of touch with the tone of a teacher teasing his seminar: "How far can I go? Tell me when to stop!"

What is sought in each case is an end to an ongoing interpretive process, and what makes the end feel like an end in each case is not that the interpreter runs out of signs to interpret but that he achieves a state of equilibrium with another person. When the teacher gets the plagiarist to admit that he copied something from one book, he doesn't have to return to the stacks to see how many other books his student cribbed: the process comes to an end with the acknowledgment of guilt. When Wasserman can produce enough evidence so that he can say that "despite the conscious social artfulness of her mind, Belinda is flesh and blood," he can put aside his Virgil, his Catullus, his Martial, his Juvenal, his Euripides, his Herodotus, his Callimachus . . . . ad (no longer) infinitum: his hermeneutical task is done.

The instances I just cited suggest that it may be worth distin-

guishing two different aspects of this achieved equilibrium. When the tracking down of a plagiarist is over, we can say it is over because we know the rules of such procedures: a more or less explicit code governs criminal investigations and stipulates what counts as a satisfactory conclusion—for example, a confession. But there is also an element of fantasy that frequently enters into the structure of such moments: I suggested as much in discussing Martin's language about the plagiarist, where the concern with unknowable suffering is there, oddly enough, to establish a rapport between the teacher and the guilty student. They meet—so the fantasy would have it—as fellow possessors of distinct but resonantly analogous interior lives. This is even more obvious in the case of Wasserman's tracking down of Belinda's secret desire: it is what allows him to use the phrase "flesh and blood" to describe what he has discovered her to be. She has crossed over from her position under the sign of "conventional signs" to join Wasserman where he has all along imagined himself to stand, in the world of "flesh-and-blood reality." It is as if he had bullied and wooed her into acknowledging that she, just like himself, is heterosexual.

In both Martin's text and Wasserman's it is that establishment of a fancied consubstantiality with the offending party—the student plagiarist, the female narcissist—that allows the gesture of scapegoating to take place. Anxiety about the relation of authors to their words, anxiety about the relation of flesh-and-blood reality to conventional signs—these may be exorcised if they can be laid on the head of a figure not wholly unlike the fantasist. We can see this most clearly when we think of the most benign encounter of the ones we've been considering, the humorous gesture of a scholar to a room full of graduate students, asking "How far can I go?" In that gentle parody of anxiety, the obsessive interpreter becomes the flirtatious teacher, entering into a mildly erotic intersubjective relation, fully within his control (for who around that table, after all, could have told Earl Wasserman how far he could or couldn't go?), an equilibrium that replaces the scholar's prior set of dealings with a long list of texts, each made up of many conventional signs.