



Serious Reflections on "The Rise of the Novel"

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Second Thoughts Series

Serious Reflections on The Rise of the Novel

IAN WATT

Having, long ago, grimly refrained from posting sundry devastating retorts to a few of the original reviewers of *The Rise of the Novel*, I didn't at first find the attractions of contributing to the present series sufficient to warrant discomposing my posture of heroic abnegation. It wasn't as though, stumbling gamely along towards my centenary, I couldn't any longer risk passing up one final opportunity to provoke incredulous outrage among those still elbowing their way up the professorial ladder: " 'Sblood! Not buried yet?" Nor, certainly, had I any rankling sense that *The Rise of the Novel* had received less than its due—quite the contrary. However, I finally decided that a few rather miscellaneous reflections about the composition, the reception, and the shortcomings of the book, which had dimly glimmered in my mind from time to time, might have enough general interest to justify exposing myself to the charge of self-important anecdote.

Retracing the stages of composition of *The Rise of the Novel* makes me realize how my operative, though largely unformulated, premises were intricately connected with the way the book was eventually received; and it also illustrates how academic writing, in its small way, is also subject to the processes of history.

Work on *The Rise of the Novel* began in 1938, when I held a Strathcona Research Fellowship at St. John's College, Cambridge. The war diverted me to other studies from 1939 to 1946; but when peace broke out I went back to work and finished a first draft early in 1947. I then laid the subject aside, and began various other more or less abortive projects; in 1951, however, I went back to the eighteenth-century novel, and the sixth revised draft was finally accepted for publication in 1956.

The main direction of the interminable and painful process of revision, forcibly stimulated in the last two years by the comments of various readers, stipendiary and otherwise, was towards making the book much shorter. This drastic reduction of scale primarily affected the beginning and the end.

Originally there was a long methodological first chapter. Having struggled through a good deal of Vaihinger, Wittgenstein, Carnap, Neurath, and other philosophers, I wanted not only to show it, but also to theorize about how literary history and criticism ought to be combined through what I then called the hypothetico-deductive method. Briefly, it seemed that the natural and social sciences had the advantage of beginning with objectively-demonstrable data; and the equivalents of these data in literature—the written records—could also be made the starting point of inductive study along the lines of traditional biographical and bibliographical scholarship. But in the larger critical and historical area which interested

me the case was quite different. Here my procedure would have to be largely deductive; and so the nearest I could get to objectivity would be to start from a hypothesis that was based, not on my own opinion, but on that of the majority of qualified observers.

That was the gist of my original thirty-five page heavily-footnoted methodological introduction. Successive revisions eventually boiled it down to one word: the "if" in the opening paragraph which introduces the clauses "if we assume, as is commonly done, [that the novel is a new literary form], and that it was begun by Defoe, Richardson and Fielding, how does it differ from the prose fiction of the past . . . and is there any reason why these differences appeared when and where they did?"

There is, I have since discovered, nothing exceptional about such drastic cutting; indeed it seems to be the rule rather than the exception that introductions begin by being infinitely expandable and end by proving equally expendable. But I probably wouldn't have cut quite so drastically for economy alone. Another reason was certainly a growing disenchantment with all theory, even with my own. The decisive factor, however, was probably my slow-dawning realization that all those messy sheets of paper were in process of turning into that improbable object, a printed book. At once the question of my likely audience—even of my possible reviewers—became much more real; and this introduced all kinds of new considerations. One of them was the lurking (and unworthy) notion that it would be impolitic to affront the known prejudices of my main audience—students and teachers of literature—by flaunting the stigmata of my long fraternization with logical positivists and social scientists.

The deletion of the first chapter certainly made the book more palatable to publishers and readers; but it had an unexpected result—the whole of my cherished hypothetico-deductive method, which for me had continued to be immanent in that initial "if," passed quite unnoticed, and laid the book open to two general criticisms.

First, that its basic thesis was not original.¹ This, of course, was true; but originality would have been completely contrary to my chosen procedure.

Secondly, I was branded as a monocular modern, blind to the greatness of the ancients, and impervious to the legitimacy of other previous forms of fiction.² Here again, though the charge may be true, my methodological assumption had precluded any autonomous treatment of any forms of fiction other than those of early eighteenth-century England. The words "the rise of the novel," no doubt, looked as though I were making the much more unqualified assertion—that the only prose fiction which mattered began with Defoe; but such a supposition, I thought, was undercut not only by that initial "if," but also by my more modest and casual subtitle: "Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding."

What conclusions can be drawn from all this I'm not sure. Perhaps that one's

¹ E.g., "Professor Watt *manages* [my italics] to challenge received opinion surprisingly little." J. Paul Hunter, *The Reluctant Pilgrim* (Baltimore, 1966), p. viii.

² E.g., "Ian Watt on the Novel Form," Appendix of E. M. W. Tillyard's *The Epic Strain in the English Novel* (London, 1958).

methodological assumptions have to be repeated very frequently if they are to remain active in the minds of readers; perhaps that some form of typographical emphasis—a *Ulysses*-like giant “IF” occupying the whole first page—would have mediated my message better.

The second main cut during the process of revision was even larger in scale. It came at the end. There were originally three final chapters—a further one on *Tom Jones*, and one each on Smollett and Sterne. I cut out these chapters merely because they would have made the book much too long; but although the omission helped me to see how to give what remained a much firmer organization, it also damaged the original proportions of the book. I had planned a structure in which the emphasis on “realism of presentation” in chapters two to eight was counterpoised by that on “realism of assessment” in the last five chapters. When this original structure was abandoned, the treatment of “realism of assessment” became so brief that, perhaps inevitably, the book was read as rather more simple-minded in its advocacy of “realism of presentation”³ than it might have been otherwise. As a result I have had to grow accustomed to figuring in some minds as a permanent picketer for the Union Novel (International President H. James), carrying a sign which reads “Cervantes Go Home” on one side, and “Fielding is a Fink”⁴ on the other.

Rereading *The Rise of the Novel* I can certainly detect a good many unhappy relics of earlier drafts. Some are merely stylistic. The most masochistic reviser, I imagine, finds it difficult not to succumb to the enchantment of his own prose, especially when it comes to him with the Mosaic authority acquired when the tablets have been expensively retyped; much time, and a special frame of mind, and sometimes, alas, only the belated clarity of vision that comes when the words have been set up in type, are needed before one finally recognizes all those ancient anal succubi, and blushes with shame to think that one was so long pleased by such graceless imbecilities. There are also residues of a more programmatic adhesion to my initial design than was wholly consistent with my final critical position. One of these can be seen in the chaptering. As the years passed I had chafed more and more under the restrictions of a positivist historical analysis of the elements of “newness” in the novel form. This finally led me to decompose the original chapters on Defoe and Richardson so that the social and historical approaches were separated from a more autonomous literary treatment of particular works. Thus, although *Robinson Crusoe* and *Pamela* were used mainly for thematic and illustrative purposes, *Moll Flanders* and *Clarissa* were given independent critical essays.

As far as I can now guess at it, my guiding impulse when I worked on the later drafts was essentially rather simple—to write a book such as I myself would like to read. Such a book would certainly have what are usually called the scholarly virtues. I had long ago picked up the notion (I must not now speculate how or where) that one should be serious at least about what one had freely decided to do:

³ E.g., “Watt’s all-pervasive assumption is that ‘realism of presentation’ is a good thing in itself.” Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago, 1961), p. 41.

⁴ E.g., “Fielding is graduated without honors.” *MLQ*, XXI (1960), 374. Here, and wherever else the need for brevity made it impossible to present a critic’s adverse judgment fairly, I have thought it more equitable to give the barest reference, omitting names.

in Conrad's terms, one should be concerned about the cut of one's clothes even in a community of blind men. My experience in the graduate schools of U.C.L.A. and Harvard had opened my eyes to what responsible professional research should be; and I had attempted to incorporate these standards in the substance of the manuscript. But now the main emphasis changed. I came to see more clearly that my aim also implied various difficult, and to some extent conflicting, compositional imperatives. As regards scale, it involved not treating any topic at exhaustive length. As regards prose, it involved a much more rapid pace, and even more important, a whole style of writing that was responsive to two other unformulated premises: that writing about literature should somehow convey its awareness of that honor; and that it should also embody, though without buttonholing intimacy, the notion that it is the product neither of a card index nor of a divine oracle, but of a putative human-being communicating with other putative human-beings.

I must hurry on past these peculiarly delicate pretensions, pausing only at one paradox they suggest: that in their extreme forms scholarly and literary considerations are diametrically opposed.

At the scholarly pole we have a study which is in effect an organized collection of evidence, a meticulous concordance or catalogue of categorized citations, a corpus of texts with explanatory commentary. On some topics—as in Part III of H. T. Swedenberg's *The Theory of the Epic in England, 1650–1800* (1944), for example—this form can triumphantly justify itself; but for most subjects, quotations do not in fact speak for themselves; and if they are left to do so for very long, very few people keep on listening.

On the other hand, the more one departs from the exhaustive detailing of primary evidence, the more one is inevitably imposing one's own views and voice. For example, the literary need for prose of a reasonable pace requires much omission (a bore is a man who tells you everything) and, in particular, a severe pruning of quotations and qualifications. In addition, stylistic genuflections towards the literary nature of the subject-matter, and towards the presumably exhaustible attention-span of the reader, obviously demand various kinds of departure from plain declarative statement to more multi-vocal, or in other respects more complex, kinds of prose.

At the scholarly extreme, then, one discourages readers; at the other, one risks discouragement from the scholars. Omissions dictated by the need for pace, for example, will run up against the all-but-universal presumption that if you don't mention a book, you haven't read it.⁵ As regards prose style, every departure from plain declarative statement increases the chances of being misunderstood. Ironical modes of statement, for example, can be made to look very silly when they are

⁵ “. . . to assure . . . readers . . . that Defoe was being consciously ironic [in *Moll Flanders*] . . . the critic must have read a good part of the five hundred and forty-seven items . . . in Professor John Robert Moore's *Checklist of the Writings of Daniel Defoe* . . . but this is precisely what none of the critics appear to have done.” (Maximilian E. Novak, “Conscious Irony in *Moll Flanders*: Facts and Problems,” *College English*, XXVI [1964], 199.) *Quippe peccavi*; but a good many footnotes and references were dropped during my revisions; and later the publishers asked for further drastic cuts. This horrified me at the time, but the cuts helped bring about what I now regard as a satisfactory balance between text and notes.

quoted as though they were meant literally;⁶ fortunately one can always accuse the critic of having missed one's irony.

In any case, whatever the undoubted difficulties involved in trying to strike the right balance, and write both for the specialist and for what must pass nowadays for the general reader, I am still persuaded that there was—and is—nothing wrong with my basic compositional aim: trying to increase the exceptions to the rule that “scholarly” usually means “unreadable” and “readable” usually means “wrong.”

II

As far as the author is concerned, the reception of his book seems even slower and more painful than its gestation. First the elephantine parturition in publishing offices and printing houses. Next the onset of labor pains, usually announced by peremptory demands for corrected galleys or the index not later than last Monday. After many more months that seem like years, a few advance copies eventually arrive. The first thing one sees is a misprint. With sinking feelings one puts the book away, and waits. With luck a friend writes a review for one of the weeklies, and it comes out only a few weeks after the official date of publication. Then a long deafening silence, only interrupted by a press-cutting agency that sends funny little yellow paste-ups enshrining what the compositors of the *Brooklyn Daily* or the *Pomona Progress-Bulletin*⁷ have made of the dust jacket, or of the notice sent out by Virginia Kirkus's Service. Finally, the numbing conviction that the grave will gape long before the learned journals allow themselves a majestically deliberate turn in your direction.

Whatever the delay, preparation for the majestic turn should begin much earlier than it usually does. If, for example, I had been advised to change my name at an early stage of authorship, and to adopt an intimidatingly sonorous *nom-de-plume*, it might have prevented my deep chagrin when the paronomastic insults to which my surname is so susceptible, and which had haunted me ever since first grade, relentlessly pursued my authorial reincarnation: the first printed notice of my work ended, with numbing irony, “. . . and now Watt.”⁸

The century with which I co-exist has instructed me that the only way to handle such traumatic experiences is to convince oneself that they are universal. It is with this therapeutic orientation that I now offer a brief analysis—from which other authors may incidentally benefit—of the institution of reviewing.

Reviewing belongs to the large class of benevolent-aggressive dyadic relationships which are characterized, like dentistry, by an extreme asymmetry of roles.

⁶ Thus George Starr's objection (*Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography* [Princeton, 1965], p. 120) to my writing, about the Friday-Crusoe relationship: “A functional silence, broken only by an occasional ‘No, Friday,’ or an abject ‘Yes, Master,’ is the golden music of Crusoe's *île joyeuse*,” seems to me valid only if my statement is interpreted literally; and I had tried to write the sentence in such a way that it wouldn't be.

⁷ “The novel has flourished in America since the growth of the lending library and the emancipation of women according to a study recently published by the University of California Press.” (August 12, 1957.) The *Lodi News-Sentinel* echoed this laconic interpretation *verbatim* the next day.

⁸ PQ, XXXI (1952), 266.

The transitive agent, the reviewer, is secure in the knowledge that his sitting duck can neither fly off nor hit back; despite this great freedom, however, reviewers seem to operate under a highly conventional set of institutionalized imperatives, all naturally directed towards producing the most pain with the least effort.

This expertise is highly valued whether it serves merely to maximize the personal pleasure of the reviewer, or, as more commonly, more to equip him for the effective discharge of his primary professional obligation—to teach the universe some of the discipline it so sadly lacks. The first principle of reviewing, then, is the law of Maximal Offense; and its main applications can conveniently be memorized under the rubric of the three “P’s”: *Sprezzatura*; Unacknowledged Paraphrase; and Benevolent Patronage.

No review, of course, is complete without pointing out at least one error, but decorum requires that it be done with glancing casualness—the mandatory strategy is to suggest “I really don’t have the time to go through more than one or two pages in search of this kind of thing.” Quotation or misquotation follows. Note that too copious or specific a listing spoils the effect of habitual but careless contempt which is the hallmark of true *sprezzatura*. For instance, the comment “three of Defoe’s titles are incorrectly given”⁹ would lose much of its force if the errors were illustrated; and the whole effect would certainly be ruined if the reviewer should add “and there is a dangling participle on p. 201.”

So much for tone. As regards content, Unacknowledged Paraphrase is the standard pattern. It begins with something to the effect that “What poor Professor W * * * seems to have been trying to say,” or “would have observed, had his maker endowed him with the wit, is . . .”—and there follows the required number of words in the form of a précis of the main point of the book with “immediacy of presentation,” say, replacing the terms actually employed by the author—in this case “authenticity” or “realism of presentation.”

The Unacknowledging Paraphrast usually employs Benevolent Patronage as his backstop. He is then in permanent possession of the useful option of being able to retort: “Why ever is that poor reviewee getting so bothered? After all I went out of my way to make the handsome concession that ‘I imagine the book will be of considerable value to undergraduates’ and may even ‘remind [the specialist] of things he has forgotten.’”¹⁰

So much for Maximal Offense. The second law of reviewing is modeled on the Enclosure Acts, and is usually called the “One Man One Field Principle.” The reviewer’s pastoral role is, quite simply, to shoo writers back where they belong, if so dismal a pasture can be located. A simple example would be “If Mr. Watt had not attempted to combine literary history with criticism, his discussion . . . might have been of lasting value. . . . Unfortunately he has chosen a historico-philosophical approach, for which he seems less well equipped.”¹¹ This is the egalitarian form of the law—“My Field—Keep Out”; but even after all fields have been equally al-

⁹ *MLQ*, XXI (1960), 374.

¹⁰ *Essays in Criticism*, VIII (1958), 433–437, 429, 437–438.

¹¹ *Birmingham Post*, Feb. 26, 1957.

lotted they must still be protected from dangerous pests; hence, the reviewer's pastoral role occasionally obliges him to put up a public notice for the protection of innocent wayfarers. One simple example of this "Beware the Dangerous Dog" posting is the reflection, "It seems to me that Mr. Watt gets a little 'Freudian' at the end."¹² "Seems," be it noted parenthetically, seems to be the reviewer's major lexical resource, possibly on legal grounds.

Some of the other established rituals of reviewing might at first seem to deserve the status of autonomous laws: the Law of Mandatory Regret (some always are); the "Quest for All-the-Earmarks-of Law" (on which see the latest brand-book of dissertations, or search the author's acknowledgments for any signs of telltale indebtedness to not-in influences); even the "Virtually Useless Index Law" (optional if there is no index). But further examination discloses that nearly all these are merely particular applications of the third basic principle of reviewing—the Law of Inevitable Disproportion. It can be put very simply: "If Not Too Many Then Too Few" (e.g., footnotes, quotations, jokes, ideas, friends, enemies, etc.).

Strictly speaking there is only one law for the intransitive agent, the reviewee: Forget it.

Unfortunately this law shares with most other forms of wisdom the sad truth that it is impossible to practice. It may, therefore, be useful to steel the patient for his ordeal by informing him of the main operative procedures as they affect the reviewee. They also are three in number.

First, there is the Law of Absolute Irrelevance. There is nothing which may not be introduced into public comment on any book. The author of a work on eighteenth-century fiction, for example, must never imagine himself safe from such no-doubt well-founded, if not transparently apposite, accusations as "Mr. Watt shows himself to be unaware of the work of philosophers like Augustine, Anselm, and Bonaventura."¹³

Secondly, there is the Law of Inverse Qualification, which states that the boiling point of malediction is inversely proportional to the age and professional status of the reviewer. It is really a special case of the universal law which states that the last acquired of Minerva's arts is charity.

Finally we have the Law of Mistaken Identity. No reviewee can ever recognize himself or his handiwork in the object which appears to have come under the reviewer's purview. This is true, unfortunately, even of laudatory reviews, for which the universally valid principle of Authorial Insatiability must be invoked. One might expect a reviewee to be satisfied, for instance, if he is placed on a footing with Gibbon and Hume:¹⁴ actually he merely reads on, reflecting bitterly "Hm. He might at least have taken the trouble to *elaborate* his only valuable insight"; and exits muttering "*Not a word* about that witty thrust in footnote 397. Criminal."

Lest any skeptical reader find this analysis lacking in objectivity, and be led to

¹² *Essays in Criticism*, VIII (1958), 438.

¹³ *Essays in Criticism*, IX (1959), 206. Oddly enough there were in fact two references to the first, over-reverently indexed under St. Augustine.

¹⁴ See Louis Kampf, "Review Essay" in *History and Theory*, VI (1967), 88.

surmise that I may be motivated by personal bias, I must also add that none of the above principles and practices actually produces the galloping *anomie* in the Republic of Academic Letters which might be expected: for they are all subject to the ultimate truth about reviewing, the Statute of Amnesic Limitation. The reviewee will probably never meet anyone who has read and remembers both the review and his book; and the wounds received from reviews heal unimaginably rapidly at the touch of time. The amnesia is equally functional for the reviewer: perhaps fortunately, since if any of his blows proved as deadly as they seem, they might sap his zest for battle.

III

But I can no longer decently put off the only thing which may have been sustaining the interest of remaining readers—the always gratifying spectacle of public penitence. No prizes are offered for observing that a change of method and tone is called for. Anyone not utterly impervious to the possibilities of imitative form will be prepared for the logic which dictates that a first section which followed (admittedly at a great distance) Defoe's autobiographical mode, and a second which attempted to prove the writer not wholly deaf to Fielding's way of suggesting general principles by an ironic acceptance of their violation, should be succeeded by a third section which explores error and guilt in Richardson's copious manner.

What crows then shall I eat? How many have already been crammed down my recalcitrant gullet?

Professor J. C. Maxwell pointed out in charitable privacy a mistranslation of Aristotle on page 19 for which I can still find no explanation. As to the reviewers, some succeeded in convincing me that various confusions between British and American publishing styles had defaced the text with sundry reprehensible inconsistencies, while others demonstrated how I had misunderstood *Moll Flanders*.¹⁵ But it seems better to use what space remains to confront, not my critics, but my own present sense of where my general intentions were mistaken, and how seriously my execution fell short of them.

The initial intention of the book is not, of course, unchallengeable. "Did the novel really rise?" To me, this question has the same kind of refrigerating generality as its much-mooted variant, "Is it now declining?"¹⁶ Refrigerating because its meaning depends entirely on one's definition of the term "novel," and on the implications of the definite article which precedes it. My own title was really based on the current assumption in literary history, not on any personal or evaluative definition of "the novel"; and I take some modest comfort from the fact that the most widely-accepted view today about the development of prose narrative forms still seems to be the one I began to investigate, impossible as it now seems, nearly

¹⁵ I have discussed this elsewhere in an article, "The Recent Critical Fortunes of *Moll Flanders*," published in a new journal, *Eighteenth-Century Studies: A Journal of Literature and the Arts*, I (1967), 109–126.

¹⁶ I except Alan Friedman's excellent *The Turn of the Novel* (New York, 1966) from this generalization, since its title is, I suppose, obliquely ironical as well as allusive; and its subject is a specific historical change.

thirty years ago, and at a time when special permission was needed before one could take works of English fiction out of the Cambridge University Library.

Granted the premise, then, that in some qualified sense what are usually called novels first began to be written on a considerable scale in England and in the early eighteenth century, there seems no pressing reason to believe that my basic intentions were mistaken. I am certainly more convinced than ever of the value of what I suppose were the more original emphases in my treatment of the problem—roughly the sociological and the philosophic. It still seems to me that the whole question of the historical, institutional and social context of literature is very widely ignored, to the great detriment not only of much scholarly and critical writing, but of the general understanding of literature at every educational level. Secondly, though I can see more clearly now some of the inadequacies of logic and knowledge in the way I related philosophical ideas to the rise of the novel, the effort still seems to be preferable to the contrary, and still prevalent, tendency to write as though both ideas and novels existed independently of each other.

On the other hand I can see many ways in which my execution fell short of my intentions; and two of them, at least, seem worth considering in a little detail.

I've already alluded to the first—the truncation of my treatment of "realism of assessment." The omitted chapters on Fielding, Smollett and Sterne had attempted to show the various ways in which these later novelists got beyond "the tedious asseveration of literal authenticity" which characterized the formal realism of Defoe and Richardson, in order to bring the novel "into contact with the whole tradition of civilized values" (p. 288), which I took to be the ultimate aim of "realism of assessment." Something of the general range of these chapters can be surmised from the present concluding note (pp. 290–301): but many problems about the two realisms would have remained even if there had been no cuts.

To some extent the trouble was inherent in my method. I took over the commonest descriptive term applied to the novel—"realism"—and tried to clarify the issue by showing how the word was used to mean very different things. Nevertheless it seems clear to me now that I fell into the trap which awaits whoever employs the commonest of all Receipts to make an Academick Book—"Get yourself a couple of poles and turn 'em loose."

There was, to begin with, an unavoidable asymmetry in the terms: for one thing "realism of assessment" implied an evaluative—and implicitly approbative—moral judgment by its user, whereas "realism of presentation" referred to narrower and more technical matters; and for another, "realism of presentation" was specifically related to my subject, the novel, whereas "realism of assessment" was obviously a concept which was equally applicable to all forms of literature. Quite apart from this, however, my treatment assumed it was somehow possible to separate the two kinds of realism in a novel's structural elements—from the single word to the plot as a whole: and though this separation may be legitimate as an analytic construct, it is much more problematic than I realized.

As regards the smallest units—words and phrases—there is always a tension between the literal meaning, the bare denotation, on the one hand, and the conno-

tations of the word on the other, to say nothing of its larger reference to the narration and to the whole pattern of the reader's expectations. This is true of the simplest word, and even, unfortunately enough, of the word "real." Thus when Tolstoy writes that, while Prince Vassily was telling the rich Princess Marya that he had always loved her as a daughter, "a real tear appeared in his eye" (III, iv), it is not just a question of the lachrymal-gland product as opposed to glycerine. A whole host of larger distinctions and assessments crowd in. Most obviously, Tolstoy is reminding us of the emotional falsity of the whole Kuragin clan at the very moment Vassily seems to be expressing his first disinterested sentiment: we expected false tears. Yet if we ruminate further, we see that Tolstoy is checking an absolute judgment—the Kuragins are also, and alas, human.

But if Tolstoy is the supreme master of the total and natural simultaneity of realism of presentation and of evaluation, some form of evaluation is always inextricably connected with any writer's presentation. Reading even the barest of Defoe's sentences in *Moll Flanders* we quite naturally go on from considering what is said to considering what is not said, and then to ask ourselves whether these conspicuous omissions are part of the picture of Moll's world or of Defoe's, or of both. That is, the reader finally concerns himself with Defoe's assessment of reality as it is implicit in words and phrases and sentences just as much as he does with Fielding. The difference is only that Fielding's words and phrases intentionally invoke not only the actual narrative event, but the whole literary, historical, and philosophical perspective in which character or action should be placed by the reader.

There is also a similar continual interplay of presentation and assessment—explicit or tacit—in the larger compositional elements of all narrative. This interplay can be briefly considered in relation to two of the larger compositional elements—the narrative episode and the plot as a whole.

The reader's impulse to make some kind of larger interpretation is quite independent of the author's wishes: it is a habit we have picked up from life. In every episode of *Moll Flanders* we develop our continuing judgment of the heroine as a criminal, as a woman, as a penitent, as an individual. Defoe, it is true, makes no very consistent effort to guide us as to what norms he intends us to use; but this merely makes the problem more difficult. There is a similar difficulty as regards Defoe's plot: we observe various elements of randomness and contradiction; and these finally become part of our final estimate of Defoe's view of life—we may decide, for instance, that the plot as a whole means something like: "If there is a pattern in human life it must be based on the single constant of individual biography and nothing else."

Here again Fielding is at the opposite pole; he really tells us that *Tom Jones* means what we can deduce from it: "This is the way I judge youth and goodness in general to be: and the general direction of life is towards the ordering of social groups, which are the supreme constants of the world as I see it." So with each of Fielding's narrative episodes: they are clearly responsible for whatever we can intelligently deduce from them.

My treatment did not go very far in this kind of analysis, perhaps because of my conceptual scheme. One major aspect of this problem has since been resolutely

faced by Sheldon Sacks in his *Fiction and the Shape of Belief* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1964). But there are others: and a treatment of two of them, it now seems to me, might have clarified some of the larger connections of my subject.

"Realism of presentation" implies a narrative surface that is more or less identical with its meaning. But Fielding's novelistic technique is not primarily expressive in this sense. In his day the word "artificial" was still an approbative term though it was becoming obsolete (= "skilfully made"—1738; = "according to the rules of art"—1753. *OED*); and the elements of repetition, parallelism, and antithesis in Fielding's narrative pattern are intended to have an autonomous aesthetic appeal for their own sake—an appeal which is in its way similar to that of the combination of repetition and variation in sonata form, or to the sort of baroque narrative artifice which Casaldauero has described in *Don Quixote*.¹⁷

Obtrusive patterning of this kind may do violence to the criteria of formal realism; but it is one way of solving another perennial problem for the novelist—that of detachment. Just as overtly as his generalized names or the multiple references of his diction, Fielding's plot invites the reader to detachment, and thence to conscious assessment.

In this and in many other ways, then, the relationship between the two realisms is more complicated than I thought. It was easy to show how realism of assessment, achieved through explicit authorial commentary, militated against realism of presentation; it was equally true, although less obvious, that emphasis on authenticity in itself makes it more difficult both for the reader and the author to achieve the aesthetic distance which encourages realism of assessment.

The second of the problems arising from the relationship between the two kinds of realism involves a rather different issue. If one goes a little further into the relationship between individual lives and actions and the social and moral norms by which they are judged, the relation between one aspect of eighteenth-century fiction and the later tradition of the novel becomes much clearer. Richardson and Fielding are alike in the sense that—in *Pamela* as in *Tom Jones*—the as-yet-undifferentiated ego of the protagonist is brought into contact with the various psychological, moral, and social norms of the author and his period. The very form of their basic plots enacts their normative assessment: and this helps one to see why the *Bildungsroman* has been one of the classic patterns in the tradition of the novel: the reader watches the individual being introduced to the general.

The insistence of Fielding and Richardson on normative standards was something they shared with their age. And it now seems to me that my failure to focus on evaluative fictional procedures which bore no direct relationship to later technical developments in the genre, was connected with my grossest substantive failure of execution. Briefly, through diffuse implication and assumption, rather than through explicit statement, I presented the "rise of the novel" as though it had been achieved in collusion with various changes in philosophical, moral and psychological outlook, and with something called the rising middle class (that restless

¹⁷ Joaquín Casaldauero, "The Composition of *Don Quixote*," *Cervantes Across the Centuries*, ed. Angel Flores and M. J. Bernadete (New York, 1947), pp. 56–93. See also my "Afterword" to *Joseph Andrews* (New York: Harper and Row, "Perennial Classics," 1966).

bunch). In so doing I tended to make it look as though the novel had emerged in consistent, though largely unconscious, opposition to the traditional social and literary establishment of the time.

Insofar as the main literary tendencies of the eighteenth century in England are labeled neo-classical, the contradiction is largely real: there was no convenient or prestigious place for prose fiction in the critical tradition that stemmed from Aristotle, Horace, and the Italian Renaissance critics; and most neo-classical critical theory was inimical to the particularizing, vernacular, and domestic kind of writing characteristic of the novel.

But for the writers of the time this contradiction was probably theoretical rather than operative; and in my concentration on "new" factors to account for a "new" form, I overlooked another set of common tendencies and traditions in eighteenth-century English life and literature, much more powerful than neo-classical theory, and only uneasily connected with it. These tendencies, which were reflected in many, though not all, of the features of the fiction of the period, are those which, for want of a better name, we call Augustan.

The term is admittedly vague, and can be misleading.¹⁸ I use "Augustan" to denote the very substantial measure of general cultural continuity in England from 1660 to 1800, a continuity which seems to me to outweigh the period's admittedly enormous division of opinion. In this sense Augustan, like Georgian, is virtually a synonym for an elite outlook based on the defense of a civilized social order; and, quite as much as the card-carrying Augustans, all the major eighteenth-century novelists seem to me to belong to this movement, as did their successors, Jane Austen and Scott. They made stringent and wide-ranging criticisms of their age, but in ways and with accents which suggest that the Augustan norms seemed to them to have universal validity;¹⁹ and these norms surely encouraged some of the special literary features which their novels had in common.

The political and religious settlements of 1660, 1689, and 1714 had brought about a very drastic reduction of the spectrum of literary attention: kings and courts, the military and heroic virtues, the intervention of God in human affairs—all these traditional components of classical literature, and especially of its chief narrative form, the epic, disappeared or at least occupied a much less prominent place. In *The Rise of the Novel* I related these changes to various aspects of individualism; but I should have added that much of the literary climate of the Augustan Age was determined by this drastic and pervasive reduction in the scale of human concerns. One result was to leave English literature free for a more intensive

¹⁸ See James William Johnson, in his valuable article "The Meaning of Augustan": "it is the first four decades of the eighteenth century which are properly called 'Augustan,'" *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XIX (1958), 507-522; and Paul Fussell, *The Rhetorical World of Augustan Humanism: Ethics and Imagery from Swift to Burke* (Oxford, 1965).

¹⁹ The fairly common view that Defoe and Fielding were in some sense radical dissenters from the class system of their day is only now being dispelled by such studies as Malvin R. Zirker's excellent *Fielding's Social Pamphlets* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1966). It is surely a move in the right direction to look at the similarities between the works of Richardson and Fielding, as William Park has recently done in his "Fielding and Richardson," *PMLA*, LXXVI (1966), 381-388.

and undisturbed cultivation of what was left—the social, personal and domestic life, and the application to it of what remained of traditional norms.

Of course we think of Augustan as denoting a primarily public demeanor; but the importance which the Augustans attached to private and social interests is actually very striking in contrast with France, where religious, political and intellectual divisions were so much more acute and imperative; and the assumption that the private life is man's major concern, which seems to me to be a characteristic Augustan attitude, in Temple and Congreve and Addison as well as in Pope, Johnson and Hume, points directly to the subject-matter of the novel.

In two main ways: to the novel's relatively detailed description of domestic life; and to the novel's interest in individual self-definition.

Minuteness of description was in some respects contrary to the neo-classical emphasis on generality and *la belle nature*. But although Swift and Johnson, for instance, mock detailed verisimilitude, and protest against numbering the streaks of the tulip, their own practice shows them to have been continually and successfully interested in the detailed presentation of the domestic scene. They did this mainly, it is true, in such peripheral literary forms as the journal and the private letter; but these are agreed to be modes of writing in which the Augustans were supreme. One could, indeed, reasonably argue that in the eighteenth century the most minute—and the most triumphant—descriptions of individual character in action against a fully presented environment are to be found, not in fiction, but in the various miscellaneous modes of the literature of experience. Thus Fanny Burney's novels hardly match the vividness of Horace Walpole's letters about social visits or parties of pleasure to Vauxhall, although her diaries almost do. Nor, I think, does even Richardson take us quite as close to the flux and reflux of consciousness as Boswell often does in his journals.

The question of individual self-definition is somewhat more difficult, since it is less characteristic of the English eighteenth-century novelists than it was to become later in France and Germany with Rousseau, Goethe and their successors. Still, one can certainly find the concern in many of the English novels of the period, from Defoe to Sterne, and it is central in Richardson. The identity crisis of Pamela,²⁰ for example, to say nothing of Clarissa's or Lovelace's, surely belongs to the same spiritual and psychological world as James Boswell's hectic pursuit of James Boswell.

There are, however, two general features of the Augustan attitude which seem to me to have been considerably less favorable to the emergence of what was later to be characteristic of the novel: the Augustan stresses on masculine and adult values. The two are, of course, functionally related; as when Chesterfield told his son that "Women . . . are only children of a larger growth" (September 5th, 1748). The pervasive importance of the Augustan attitude in the eighteenth-century novel suggests why it characteristically places much less emphasis on adolescent and feminine values than did later fiction.

²⁰ For one treatment of this, see my "Samuel Richardson," *The Listener*, Feb. 4, 1965, reprinted in *The Novelist as Innovator*, ed. Walter Allen (London, 1965).

When John Barth speaks of *Roderick Random* as a “healthy, hard-nosed counteragent to the cult of Love,”²¹ his engaging truculence, supported by the example of his own later fiction, helps us to see how alien to Smollett is the novel’s standard assumption that its moral and social norms can be generated purely out of the presentation of personal relationships. That particular assumption, of course, belongs to a very limited phase of historical development. It is primarily middle-class, leisured, and secular; it is also mainly adolescent and feminine; and one need not argue that Smollett’s contemptuous mysogyny is typically Augustan to see the emphasis on feminine sensibility in Richardson, and later in Fanny Burney and the women novelists, as contrary to the predominant Augustan emphasis.

Of course the opposition isn’t absolute. If we venture so far as the second part of *Pamela*, for instance, the novel’s Augustan quality becomes much more obtrusive: it is an important part of Richardson’s general ideological commitment that his servant girl should eventually develop into someone who speaks with the voice of a man, and a very grown-up one at that—an Addison or even a Locke.

The contradiction between Augustan values on the one hand, and feminine and youthful attitudes on the other, comes to the fore most revealingly in Jane Austen. As has often been observed, her young heroines finally marry older men—comprehensive epitomes of the Augustan norms such as Mr. Darcy and Mr. Knightley. Her novels in fact dramatize the process whereby feminine and adolescent values are painfully educated in the norms of the mature, rational and educated male world.

Here, no doubt, is the essence of some contemporary objections to the Augustan attitude and to eighteenth-century fiction: that it’s conformist, cautious, cold; too much superego and too little id. Perhaps that’s why today the most popular eighteenth-century novel is the one which is least committed to disciplined and adult values. *Fanny Hill* is the delicious exception that proves the rule; if there’s anything more anomalous than a young Augustan, it’s surely an ancient Venus.

²¹ “Afterword,” *Roderick Random* (New York: Signet Classics, 1964).