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The Fiction of Bourgeois Morality and the Paradox of Individualism

Edward Waverley is a misfit. In this respect, he harks back to Robinson Crusoe and anticipates any number of later protagonists who cannot inhabit the social position into which they have been born. What else allows Elizabeth Bennet, Pip, Jane Eyre, Maggie Tulliver, Michael Henchard, Dorian Gray, and Stephen Dedalus to represent the claims of unacknowledged individuality in general, if not the fact that they are first and foremost something more than the consequently obsolete place assigned them? Literary history has indeed smiled on fiction that sets a protagonist in opposition to the prevailing field of social possibilities in a relationship that achieves synthesis when two conditions are met: (1) the protagonist acquires a position commensurate with his or her worth, and (2) the entire field of possible human identities changes to provide such a place for that individual. To be a novel, the sheer preponderance of examples suggest, a narrative must strive to produce this outcome, no matter how difficult that may turn out to be. As a result, we tend to recognize a narrative as a novel when it evaluates both a protagonist and the field of possibilities in which he or she acquires a social identity on the basis of whether they further or frustrate such a synthesis. This standard and its disciplinary rhetoric are what we generally mean by the term *bourgeois morality*.

Contrary to prevailing critical opinion, bourgeois morality is not a value in and of itself so much as a way of reading, assessing, and revising existing categories of identity and whatever cultural apparatus may authorize them—often the novel itself. From this perspective, bourgeois morality cannot possibly draw its tremendous and enduring authority from institutional religion, the Bible, or even Judeo-Christian ethics in the most general sense. Bourgeois morality appears to emanate from the very core of an individual, as that individual confronts established systems of value and finds them lacking. Often suspicious of pleasure, unconcerned with profit, and heedless of life's little necessities, bourgeois morality appears to be the assertion of pure individuality.¹ In fact, however, bourgeois morality adds something to

¹ Leonard Tennenhouse and I argue this point in "A Mind for Passion: Locke and Hutcheson on Desire," in *Politics and the Passions, 1500–1850*, ed. Daniela Coli, Victoria Kahn, and Neil Saccamano (forthcoming, Princeton University Press). In his chapter "Of Power," in *An Essay*

that individual which entitles him or her to a social position affording gratification superior to mere economic rank. In the process, bourgeois morality also authorizes as humane and good any social order that affords individuals their rightful places. I cannot call this supplement *material* in any familiar sense of the term. But I will nevertheless insist that bourgeois morality inflects the material wealth of a modern nation and its ruling elite just as powerfully as the elements of birth and rank inflected the early-modern nation and an old aristocracy. We can consequently think of bourgeois morality as our own distinctive brand of magical thinking and the novel as the most effective means of disseminating it. Let me explain why.

Whenever we refer to a society of individuals, we unwittingly pose a contradiction in terms. As the inheritors of liberal Western culture, how else do we define someone's individuality if not by virtue of his or her deviation from some social role, norm, or stereotype? How else, on the other hand, does civil society ensure the right of any one individual to express that individuality if not by limiting all individuals' right to self-expression? The premise is that one individual cannot fully realize his or her individuality except by encroaching on another's ability to do so. To cherish individuality is consequently to agree that certain constraints be placed on it. This paradox translates rather easily into the situation confronting the protagonists of our most enduring works of English fiction. In order to be good members of society, those protagonists must fit in; they must observe the same rules observed by their fellow citizens. At the same time, in order to represent the claims of unexpressed individualism, those protagonists must give expression to asocial desires, which they can do only by bending the rules that define their given places in society. They are clearly misfits. The novel takes it upon itself to solve this contradiction by creating fantastic situations in which one can become a good member of society precisely by risking exclusion from it.

The novel resolves the inherent conflict between individual interests and those of the collective in one of two ways. The social order might expand, grow more flexible, and acquire heterogeneity, as it incorporates excluded

Concerning Human Understanding, Locke contends that from our sensations of pleasure and pain arise our notions of good and evil, and reason prompts us to prefer the good. But Lockean reason, as Frances Hutcheson observed, does not explain why men subordinate their immediate desires to the greater good. To behave in this way, he argues, humans must have an internal moral sense. Even before reason goes to work ordering our sensations, Hutcheson declares, our desires "are fixed for us by the Author of our Nature, subservient to the interest of the system; so that each individual is made, previously to his own choice, a member of a *great Body*, and affected with the fortunes of the whole" (*An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* [London, 1734; reprint, Charlottesville, Va., 1986], 65).

elements of the individual. Alternatively, the protagonist might grow deeper, more complex, and internally conflicted, as he or she incorporates the norms of the culture and subordinates his or her antisocial impulses to them.² In the first instance, society becomes more flexible and inclusive as it incorporates and sublimes the excesses of individualism. In the second instance, the novel produces an antithetical effect; we end up with a morally constraining social order and with individuals who have sublimated, exhausted, or otherwise personally come to terms with their own worst desires in ways that make them seem mature and more interesting individuals. Such individuals have incorporated the contradiction between a morally authorized individualism and a morally authorized normalcy. Many a novel demonstrates the formal compatibility of these ideologically incompatible resolutions. Jane Austen's heroines especially do so; they not only come to regret acts of irreverence toward the finely gradated social hierarchy in which they live but also marry into higher positions than their money and upbringing warrant. This essay will examine the formal strategies of British fiction that sought to reproduce the social contract out of the most unlikely materials. I will be especially attentive to changes in the dialectical operations of the social contract that allowed both individualism and the British fiction that reproduced it to endure from the eighteenth century to the present day.

Franco Moretti has argued that the literary market did not distribute novels to readerships according to nation: "between 1750 and 1850 the consequence of centralization is that in most European countries the majority of novels are, quite simply, *foreign books*. Hungarian, Italian, French and English novels become *models to be imitated*."³ During the nineteenth century,

² Etienne Balibar, *Subjection and Subjectivation*, in *Supposing the Subject*, ed. Joan Copjec (London, 1994). Balibar offers perhaps the most concise description of the problematic in terms of which I will be reading British fiction and abstracting the cultural logic that we call "bourgeois morality." This logic begins and always returns to the double meaning of *subject*. As *subject* in the "neutral, impersonal notion of a *subjectum*" the term refers to "an individual substance or substratum for properties, but we also translate as *subject* the personal notion of a *subjectus*: a political and juridical term, which refers to *subjection* or *submission*, i.e., the fact that . . . a human person is *subjected* to the more or less absolute, more or less legitimate authority of a superior power" (8). At some point roughly coinciding with the wars of national independence, in Balibar's account, these two meanings came into contradiction: "the humanity of man is identified not with a *given* or an essence, but with a *practice* and a task: the task of self-emancipation from every domination and subjection" through some kind of collective effort or reform. This political redefinition of the individual had an ethical corollary: "the value of human agency arises from the fact that no one can be liberated or emancipated *by others*, although no one can liberate himself *without others*" (12); emphasis in original.

³ Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900* (London, 1998), 187; emphasis in original.

Moretti observes, the English book market could be distinguished from that of every other nation, as English publishers continued to distribute English novels internationally. With domestic sales, however, these same English booksellers grew increasingly Anglocentric. As a result, the English novel offers a privileged field in which to observe how, over the span of three centuries, individual resistance to birth and wealth regenerates the moral authority of the modern middle class. I am especially interested in identifying the formal strategies by which that class continued to authorize itself in this manner once industrial capitalism had displaced an agrarian economy. Indeed, by 1851 we find Queen Victoria herself not only opening the Crystal Palace Exhibition in London to celebrate new developments in science, industry, and trade, but also publicly observing many of the same practices that characterized households well beneath hers in station. Finally, I will explore the basis on which modernism and contemporary fiction drew authority from their opposition to a morality that they accused of stifling artistic originality and debasing alternative cultural practices.

Morality and Social Resistance

To embark on a genealogy of bourgeois morality as it informs and is produced by the novel, let me start with a well-known example of the cultural logic I will be tracking. Perhaps no other passage from British fiction reveals just how social resistance generates moral authority and succeeds in turning the tables on established wealth and position better than this scene from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Here the young Jane contests the authority of her aunt to subordinate her in the traditional family hierarchy:

"Go out of the room: return to the nursery," was her [Aunt Reed's] mandate. My look or something else must have struck her as offensive, for she spoke with extreme, though suppressed, irritation. I got up, I went to the door; I came back again: I walked to the window, across the room, then close up to her.

Speak I must: I had been trodden on severely and *must* turn: but how? What strength had I to dart retaliation at my antagonist? I gathered my energies and launched them in this blunt sentence: —

"I am not deceitful: if I were, I should say I loved *you*; but I declare I do not love you: I dislike you the worst of anybody in the world. . . .

. . . Shaking from head to foot, thrilled with ungovernable excitement, I continued: —

"I am glad you are no relation of mind: I will never call you aunt again as long as I live. I will never come to see you when I am grown up; and if any one asks me how I like you, and how you treated me, I will say the very thought of you makes me sick, and that you treated me with miserable cruelty."

"How dare you affirm that, Jane Eyre?"

"How dare I, Mrs. Reed? How dare I? Because it is the *truth*. . . ."

Ere I had finished this reply, my soul began to expand, to exult, with the strangest sense of freedom, of triumph, I ever felt. It seemed as if an invisible bond had burst, and that I had struggled out into unhopd-for liberty. Not without cause was this sentiment: Mrs. Reed looked frightened: her work had slipped from her knee; she was lifting up her hands, rocking herself to and fro, and even twisting her face as if she would cry."⁴

Why on earth would a hapless orphan risk the relative comfort of a country estate by this outrageous display of ingratitude toward her benefactor? More to the point, why would a middle-class readership allow her to condemn that benefactor as a tyrant, given that the novel offers absolutely no one there on the spot who can identify Jane as the voice of moral authority?

To answer these questions, we must read this episode as a model of the dialectical redefinition of social positioning carried out by the novel as a whole. Let us assume that a fictional individual who speaks on behalf of all those who have been unfairly held back or kept down by an unjust social order mobilizes a distinctively modern form of authority. Brontë makes such authority appear to come from within her heroine alone and manifest itself in her verbal aggression. "*Speak* I must" simultaneously performs a speech act and endows such an act with a power capable of overthrowing her adversary. Mrs. Reed has made a classificatory mistake so basic to Jane's identity that Jane would cease to be herself were she not to defy that misclassification. Mrs. Reed has placed Jane outside the family and in opposition to it. Jane begins to return to her place in the nursery, a gesture that would have confirmed that she is not a full-fledged member of the household, but something prevents her from doing so. She "turns" to claim a place as a speaker on the same level as her aunt and surrogate parent, whom she defines as her "antagonist." Performing, we might say, as the figure of antithesis itself, Jane poses the question, "What strength had I to dart retaliation at my antagonist?" She promptly answers thus: "I gathered my energies and launched them in this *blunt sentence*" (italics mine). This answer to the question

⁴ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (1847; Oxford, 1998), 37–38. Subsequent references are to this edition and have been included in the text.

"What strength had I?" overtly transforms the conflict between antagonists from the dynamic interaction of hereditary owner and dependent into a war of words. In the linguistic battle, Jane's very position as outsider gives her the daunting power of interrogation, the power, that is, to question traditional forms of domination and pass "sentence" on them.

Jane responds to her aunt's traditional imperative with an explosion of what appears to be self-expression. I stress the fact that the power of resistance only "appears" to come from Jane herself, because a *deus ex machina* is as much at work in this narrative as in those of premodern cultures. Modern readers tend to forget that Jane is the putative author as well as the outspoken protagonist of the narrative, and that she performs her act of self-assertion in protest of her cousin's having deprived her of the coveted book, *Bewick's History of British Birds*. If the act of turning against her benefactor subtly asserts the power of words over property, then the novel's representation of that act still more subtly asserts the power of the written word over the speech of this rebellious girl. Conspicuously lacking in natural charms and feminine accomplishments though she may be, Jane is sublimely literate. It is in this capacity alone that she can serve as the measure of measures against which the values maintaining class position are themselves evaluated. On Jane's ability to read those who occupy positions above and below her for the discrepancies between their outward and social behavior and their inward and individual qualities of mind depends her ability to occupy the social position from which she can convincingly author her own history. At the same time, her ability to rewrite social distinctions with a righteousness that strikes fear in the heart of her social superior is what momentarily levels the playing field on which they do battle, creating an opportunity for Jane to move forward historically. The same aunt who unjustly banishes Jane to the nursery at the beginning of the passage consequently cowers before her by the end, and Jane is packed off to Lowood School in the aftermath of this *aufhebung* at the microlevel of the narrative. Through repeated instances of this move, the novel simultaneously moralizes the practices of everyday life and grants material force to the verbal outbursts that tailor those practices to the individual's needs.

To the degree that a specific brand of literacy gives Jane the authority to tell the story of herself as a self-generated individual, the declaration, "Speak I must," cannot of course be said to come from Jane herself. Indeed, the product of this speech act is another self independent of the very institutions responsible for nurturing and educating her. As Jane declares, "ere I had finished this reply, my soul began to expand, to exult, with the strangest sense of freedom, of triumph, I ever felt" (38). In that speaking out indicates how much there is that cannot be contained by the role Jane is supposed to play,

the novel is, as Gayatri Spivak contends, a soul-making apparatus capable of endowing whole categories of individuals with sensibilities that make them into unique companions for the reader.⁵ Assuming that Jane Eyre's verbal behavior is one and the same as that of the novel, then the novel also acquires its moral authority as it pits the force of writing against what it considers the more substantial and enduring authority of family and class. By 1848, the economic and social practices of the novel's readership had succeeded in displacing those of a landed aristocracy. In view of the fact that their culture was the dominant culture, under what conditions, one must ask, could middle-class readers approve of Brontë's obstreperous heroine? Bourgeois morality had apparently become so firmly affixed to political resistance that the bond did not come unglued even after the modern middle-class came into power. To understand how resistance could garner moral authority and yet affirm rather than threaten the status quo, we must understand how morality and political resistance came to be read as interchangeable in the first place.

Contractual Morality

If Daniel Defoe can be called the first novelist and exponent of possessive individualism, it is chiefly because *Robinson Crusoe* inadvertently defined resistance as the necessary expression of certain qualities of mind, especially the tendency to be no less critical of oneself than of others, qualities worthy of written expression. I will not dwell on the self-criticism Crusoe turns on himself when he disobeys his father, comes to doubt the traditional Christian God, and so reasons his way into complete self-sufficiency. For purposes of this essay, I am far more interested in a form of authority that emerges when Crusoe discovers other men on his island. To coexist with other people, he must hold them to the same code of conduct that he brings to bear on himself, one that increasingly acknowledges its philosophical debt and narrative logic to theories of the social contract. According to John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government*, an individual does not step into his father's position but earns his citizenship as he comes to understand the law.⁶ To understand

⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," in *Race, Writing, and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (Chicago, 1985), 262–80.

⁶ John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge, 1988). When the son's "understanding be fit to take the Government of his Will," according to Locke, father and son "are equally Subjects of the same Law together, without any Dominion left in the Father over the Life, Liberty, or Estate of his Son" (2.59.26–30).

the law is to obey it and thus to fulfill the precondition for governing others. According to the political model on which that state was founded and still justifies itself, citizenship depends entirely on one's ability to harness the very aggression by means of which that individual expresses his or her own individuality, much as we have seen Jane Eyre do. In this respect, the modern state can be understood as a defensive formation, a collective dedicated to protecting not only its citizens but also their dependents, indeed all those unfit to be citizens, from any form of aggression that would encroach on their rights to property and personal autonomy. The modern state is justified, in other words, by the need to defend individualism against forms of aggression that often bear uncanny resemblance to expressions of that very same individualism. Bourgeois morality distinguishes, first, self-expression that springs straight from the heart from what the culture and circumstance may dictate. Paradoxically, however, bourgeois morality also distinguishes those passions and drives that we harness for the general good from those that disrupt the social order. Thus we consider Jane virtuous for momentarily overpowering her caretaker, while Bertha Mason is clearly a menace to those around her for doing much the same thing.

The first half of Crusoe's story reads as a striking example of the paradox of individualism. His compulsion to classify and map the natural landscape of his island exceeds the limits of his position as a stranger there and spills out onto the surrounding landscape. As he lends order to this information, he also acquires control over the unstable elements of nature, which—as he learns from a bout with tainted turtle soup—include his own body and mind. As the island subjects him to its natural order, he in turn subjects the island to rational control. It becomes his in the process. Defoe's purpose in this part of the novel is rather self-evident, and generations of commentators, including Rousseau and Marx, have provided a rich legacy of readings that testify to this fact. Less interesting to readers is the process by which Crusoe becomes governor of a peaceful cosmopolitan nation, for in so doing he no longer represents the individual's individuality so much as an aggregated citizenry that exacts a sacrifice of individuality in return for the protection of one's private property. From the perspective of such a government, an individual's willingness to stay in place makes him or her a good citizen, and those who resist the status quo act in defiance of the general good rather than the corrupt institutions of early-modern culture. We can regard the curious process by which Crusoe assumes the role of "governor" over the variegated population that happens to wash up on his island as an early product of this paradox.

The paradox of individualism, as I construe it, is one and the same as the logic of the social contract. This contract demands that the individual

willingly restrain his individuality, in the form of desire, in exchange for the state's protection of that individuality, in the form of property, against the desire of other individuals. To constrain his fellow individuals, Crusoe must not only place similar constraints on his own desire, but also remain in a defensive position. That Crusoe has never been characterized as a desiring man is owing to the fact that Defoe represents his protagonist's insatiable desire for independent prosperity, not as desire, but as the fear of losing exclusive ownership of his property. Moreover, Crusoe's rise to leadership comes to us as a series of conflicts in which he rescues other individuals from forms of first native, and then European, savagery implicitly connected to an international aristocracy and the superstitious practices that authorize its violent ways. Against overwhelming physical strength, Defoe pits Crusoe's literacy, which includes his ability to count, map, measure, classify, and disseminate fictitious accounts of the island and its inhabitants to those who lack such intellectual mastery. In the process, Crusoe distinguishes his own brand of resistance from those of prisoners and mutineers. That he considers violence both necessary to and incompatible with his new social identity becomes especially clear when Crusoe asks Friday to help out by blowing the heads off a few of their adversaries. Only by disavowing his own violence can Crusoe put reason itself on the defense against the physical superiority of the invaders. His indirect use of violence nevertheless implies that the contractual state must back up individual consent with force.

Although Crusoe is himself a latecomer to the island, his unique ability to mix his labor with the land makes that land an extension of his mind and body that it is the governor's sole purpose to defend. Although the manual labor that he eventually delegates entirely to Friday makes it possible for Crusoe to inhabit the island, his intellectual labor allows him to dominate that territory strategically. The whole purpose of the manual labor is to create the property that he proceeds to defend by means of his intellectual labor alone. At the same time, once there is neither father, nor abusive sea captains and plantation owners, nor female cats, cannibals, and mutineers against whom to defend himself, the moral energy seems to drain out of the story, despite Defoe's elaborate efforts to maintain his hero's minority status and defensive posture. Indeed, in assuming the role of the governor, Crusoe becomes the virtually invisible figure of a self-suppressed rather than a self-expressive self. However "middle-class" we might consider this ability to claim as his the labor of those whom he supervises, and no matter how English we might assume his methods of supervision to be, Crusoe proves curiously incapable of reproducing his successful rise to power upon returning to the country of his origins. Having left his assigned position within the

middling ranks, he cannot feel at home in England. Such are the wages of his success, that Crusoe ceases to be an admirably resistant hero.

Sexual Morality

In becoming a self-governing subject, Crusoe gains control over a self endangered by external forces, which he conquers, along with his fear, by means of observation, information gathering, and classification, precisely the faculties associated with Enlightenment rationality. Moll Flanders and Roxana work as industriously as Crusoe. Rather than rely on the products of labor whose steady flow can be ensured by reason, Crusoe's female counterparts trade in sexual labor. Yet they become who they are by a process instructively analogous to Crusoe's. When they gain control of their labor, they also gain control over their sexuality and, with it, the power to trade up to social positions of respectability. Where early-modern cultures would have it be their fathers', brothers', guardians', or owners' prerogative to trade them, Moll and Roxana trade themselves to men. In so doing, they not only acquire the autonomy of a modern individual but also put a name and a face on the irrationality that drives Crusoe to leave his father and a succession of employers. That is to say, in becoming mistress of her sexuality, the female picaro acquires modern sexuality, which is the specific form of irrationality that cannot be governed by reason. Only morality can govern sexual desire and make it serve the logic of the social contract. In entering the social contract, the individual agrees to exchange some disruptive form of sexual desire for what might be called reproductive desire, the will to reproduce him- or herself as a nuclear family. In other words, the protagonist must violate the prevailing rules of kinship that gives the father sole right to exchange his daughter in order that the daughter might establish new rules of kinship. According to these new rules, each and every individual finds the only individual capable of transforming desire into bourgeois love, the one expression of sexual desire compatible with bourgeois morality.

In this respect, *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* make a special contribution to the cultural logic that I am calling bourgeois morality. Robinson Crusoe's story suggests that before he can constitute something approximating the ideal society, the citizen-subject must be reconstituted from the ground up. He must be able to express himself through the acquisition of property, but he must also curtail that same acquisitive impulse and share his island with other acquisitive individuals. In assuming the position of governor, Crusoe appears to have done exactly that. Similarly, we might say, Moll and Roxana

assume positions within respectable society from which they survey and evaluate their former behavior, positions therefore indicative of their capacity for self-government. Judging by the critical response to these novels, however, one has to ask if Defoe did in fact allow his female protagonists to become full-fledged individuals whose stories consequently helped to imagine a new ruling class. Too many readers conclude that, to the contrary, his female protagonists succeed in a way that simply serves to expose the predatory nature of prevailing social relations. Rather than encourage his readers to condemn female protagonists who fornicate their way into respectable circles, Defoe made very sure that any moral disapproval we might direct at them would redound to the greater discredit of their social superiors.

The man who coerces sexual favors from a woman without agreeing to assume her father's role is flying in the face of the contract between the householder and his dependents, which had long served as a metaphor for the ideal contractual state. In place of anything resembling a Christian soul, Locke, for example, substituted the rational ethic of the social contract. In partnership with his wife, each householder ideally reproduced his own understanding of and respect for the law in each of his offspring.⁷ The individual reared in such a household would respect other households, just as they respected each and every member of their own, because such reverence for the autonomy of others was necessary to the preservation and prosperity of each. To coerce sexual favors either from a commoner like Moll or from one who has fallen in social position, as has Roxana, would be to invert this principle. Indeed, we find the corruption of the old society increasing incrementally as Defoe's heroines ascend the ladder of power and expose those on top who routinely corrupt those economically beneath them. But even those who can excuse Moll and Roxana on grounds that their seducers were the ones to overturn the social contract find it difficult to accept Moll's lack of remorse for inadvertently marrying her own brother and all but impossible to forgive Roxana for conspiring to murder her daughter. That *Roxana* in particular affords special access to the history of bourgeois morality is clear from the very start.

Despite her final words of repentance, this heroine repeatedly crosses the line distinguishing the exploited dependent from the licentious parent

⁷ John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*. To dispute any God-given right over one's children, Locke contends that "the Power, then, that Parents have over their Children, arises from that Duty which is incumbent on them, to take care of their Off-spring, during the imperfect state of Childhood. To inform the Mind, and govern the Actions of their yet ignorant Nonage, till Reason shall take its place" (2.58.105).

to become no different from those who have corrupted her. She reproduces her own licentious qualities in her maid-servant Amy, thereby reproducing the corruption of the class into which she was born. To trade up is, in that case, to exchange the self-possession required of the moral individual for a self that can be exploited by other such individuals. "Here," Roxana concludes her account, "after some few Years of flourishing, and outwardly happy Circumstances, I fell into a dreadful Course of Calamities, and *Amy* also: the very Reverse of our former Good Days; the Blast of Heaven seem'd to follow the Injury done to the poor Girl [*Roxana's* daughter], by us both; and I was brought so low again, that my Repentance seem'd to be only the consequence of my Misery, as my Misery was of my Crime."⁸

Defoe died in 1731. In 1745, a version of the novel appeared, revised by a printer, in which the disturbed, shifting, and yet tenacious relationship between Roxana, her servant Amy, and the daughter who threatened their position in the prevailing system of exchange appears to have troubled the novel's reception. The revised edition included a second volume that expanded the heroine's reversal of fortune to include a protracted account of her repentance and budding parental concern. Yet another revised edition published in 1775 proved to be equally popular with late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century readers. In this edition, according to a modern editor, "the narrator's very vocabulary becomes more respectable, and her actions, while still to be repented, are considerably less criminal. In particular, that strangest and most disturbing part of the plot, the relentless pursuit of the narrator by her discarded daughter, is entirely omitted. Instead, in lengthy additions to Defoe's text, "*Roxana*" discovers the joys of being a good wife and mother."⁹

Do these revisions by later hands indicate that Roxana was originally crafted to be morally reprehensible in a way that Crusoe, though demonstrating a similar lack of parental concern, was not? I would say no. The novel is written as if Defoe and his readers were more concerned with the economic consequences of being female than with her capacity for maternal feelings. If social status trumped gender in determining an individual's identity, then her material circumstances rather than her emotional inclinations would have determined a heroine's morality in the period prior to Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*. There is indeed little evidence to suggest that

the social contract would have asked more of Roxana as a parent than to pay a reliable couple to give her children a relatively wholesome upbringing. If there is any truth to my claim, then we must regard later revisions of the novel as efforts to bring Roxana's behavior in line with the morality of a later historical moment. Despite these attempts, as Homer Brown observes, *Roxana* occupied only a tenuous relationship to the tradition of British fiction until the period when modernists began to write in opposition to bourgeois morality.¹⁰

The contract that *Roxana* strikes up with the reader is another matter. By representing itself as the memoirs of a woman of pleasure who has little choice of profession, Defoe's female picaresque did for writing what *Jane Eyre* would do for speech. The novel defined writing as an act of resistance. It is true that both Moll and Roxana write from a position of hard-won respectability that signifies a life of unrestrained desire rather than one of contractual obligations met and exacted from others. In this respect, neither achieves the physical autonomy that embodies modern individuality. Not so, however, for their writing. Their stories are as consistently and sharply critical of the sexual practices of the old regime as any that Samuel Richardson produced. As a result, their lack of sexual self-possession is contradicted by self-possession at the level of the text, which looks ahead to the standard of personal integrity that he endorsed. In writing first *Pamela* and then *Clarissa*, Richardson indeed exploited the advantages of both the male and the female picaresque, a fact that critics seldom acknowledge. Let us but imagine Crusoe in a petticoat and using personal letter writing to fend off nearly constant sexual assaults, and we have Pamela, whose body is nothing if not her property. Further, let us imagine Moll and Roxana resisting the blandishments of their masters with the same compulsion that drives Crusoe to resist his father, God, nature, and foreigners. Then strip those women of their anonymity, and have them tell readers capable of similar indignation how they were forced to receive unwanted sexual advances on pain of losing all economic support. In thus transforming Moll along the lines of Crusoe, we end up with an a discursively aggressive protagonist rather like Clarissa. By acknowledging Richardson's debt to salacious novels often attributed to the French, we can arrive at a more accurate sense of the distance between the new morality and earlier definitions of human virtue.

⁸ Daniel Defoe, *Roxana, or The Fortunate Mistress* (1724; Oxford, 1996), 329–30.

⁹ John Mullan, "Appendix: The Textual History of *Roxana*," in *Roxana, or The Fortunate Mistress* (Oxford, 1996), 338.

¹⁰ Homer Brown, *Institutions of the English Novel: From Defoe to Scott* (Philadelphia, 1997), 171–202. Brown provides a detailed account of the centuries-long process by which various texts came to be attributed to Defoe and classified as novels.

A New Class Ethos

If there is any truth to my claim that bourgeois morality comes from and attaches itself to the logic of the social contract as the individual resists all other bases for social relationships, then the question we must ask of Richardson is why he chose to focus on the father-daughter relationship. Locke, in contrast, thought exclusively in terms of the father-son and even the parent-son relationship, when he formulated his version of the social contract and tried to figure out how it might reorganize social relations. As the novel began to imagine the logic of the social contract reproducing itself, much as Locke had suggested, at the microlevel, household by household, the daughter began to emerge as the appropriate vehicle of cultural reproduction. Long before Defoe, the dissenting tradition had argued for a government that begins at home and functions as a moral obligation. During the early eighteenth century, the novel gave the old formula a new and decisive twist. If the wayward daughter reflects poorly on her father to the point of threatening his position in the community of men, then the coercive father would reflect badly on that entire community by implying that it is unfit to care for a population of dependent individuals. The only way around this double bind, as Richardson apparently saw it, was to authorize the daughter to choose a husband for herself, a man of her class or better who valued her more for her qualities of mind and heart than for her physical charms and social position. Pamela manages to engineer this kind of marriage by means of letter writing, and she elevates her entire family in the process. But still more compelling than Richardson's first attempt at fiction was the international best seller, *Clarissa*, which put its stamp on all subsequent fiction of the European nations. Bourgeois morality, as we now know it, emerged along with modern culture by means of narratives designed to harness sexual desire for specific biocultural ends, a desire that could only be so harnessed and redirected by certain forms of writing.

Between the prolix epistolary novels of Richardson and Jane Austen's precisely wrought fiction the novel took a quantum leap, without which it is difficult to imagine Charlotte Brontë's heroine facing down her guardian. Henry Fielding's claim that Richardson's heroines used self-restraint to entrap wealthy suitors implied that the fiction that offered so many scenes of seduction and professed so many scruples was nothing more than a tease as well. Austen leaves no room for readers to imagine that her heroine's reluctance to enter into relationships with men is anything less than genuine, when her narrator follows her heroine's words and gestures back to their sources within that heroine to feelings of which she herself is unaware. The

voice of truth, in this case, describes neither the heroine's thinking nor that of the author so much as the voice of a culture telling us how heroine, author, and reader ought to think. Indeed, were it not for the fact that truth issues from a minority position in Austen's fiction, we might equate the narrator who gently and yet axiomatically declares that "a single man in possession of good fortune, must be in want of a wife" with the aggregate of good citizens who provide a model of how to read and evaluate human character.¹¹

Austen's narrator endorses only small acts of resistance to the elaborate rules governing sexual relations among an extremely narrow slice of English society, acts of rebellion performed strictly in words, yet acts that constitute sublime moments of individuality in the terms of the author's world and time. Her heroines tend to say no to offers of marriage that would mean a definitive move up the social ladder and secure their economic comfort for life. Their refusals erupt in minor scandals. Indeed, so incredible is Elizabeth Bennet's resistance to marriage with Mr. Collins—to whom the Bennet's country residence has been entailed—that Collins himself dismisses her blunt refusal as "usual with young ladies [who] reject the addresses of the man whom they secretly mean to accept, when he first applies for their favour" (72). To do away with any resemblance between her own motivations and those of a Richardsonian heroine, Elizabeth wastes no time in assuring him, "I am not one of those young ladies (if such young ladies there are) who are so daring as to risk their happiness on the chance of being asked a second time. I am perfectly serious in my refusal.—You could not make *me* happy, and I am convinced that I am the last woman in the world who could make *you* so" (72).

This signature move on the part of the Austen heroine marks the perfect realization of the paradox I am pursuing. By refusing to consent to marriage in the terms it has been proposed, she becomes a rule-breaker in the only way that can be considered truly good. Heedless of the economic security she stands to lose, she holds out for a contract based on a certain quality of feeling. This feeling arises directly from Elizabeth Bennet's resistance to the hauteur of Mr. Darcy, his class-coded displays of superiority, and the disproportionate luxury of his friends and family when compared with her family's precarious circumstances. This is resistance that can neither be overcome in a wink nor softened with money. Indeed, so intense is the antagonism between her moral values and the material values she attributes to people of his rank that her father, who would ordinarily be delighted to marry off a

¹¹ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813; New York, 1996), 3. Subsequent references are to this edition and included in the text.

daughter to a man of Darcy's position, feels compelled to ask, "what are you doing? Are you out of your senses, to be accepting this man? Have you not always hated him?" Upon hearing her recant those feelings, Mr. Bennet continues, "He is rich, to be sure, and you may have more fine clothes and fine carriages than [your sister] Jane. But will they make you happy?" (242). To ensure that readers would answer with a resounding no, Austen has already offered them the example of Charlotte Lucas, who consents to marry the odious Mr. Collins simply because he will provide her with a comfortable home. Elizabeth "had always felt that Charlotte's opinion of matrimony was not exactly like her own," the narrator informs us, "but she could not have supposed it possible that . . . she would have sacrificed every better feeling to worldly advantage. Charlotte the wife of Mr. Collins, was a most humiliating picture!" (84). In speaking Lizzie's unspoken thoughts, the novel and the very culture implicitly share her moral indignation.

If Charlotte Lucas's marriage is clearly not an example to follow, are we then to assume that *Pride and Prejudice* advocates a marriage contracted in defiance of those principles? Would the novel have us find Lizzie's marriage superior to those of her sisters simply because there was little or no resistance for them to overcome? Austen puts these questions to rest as her heroine conquers Mr. Bennet's incredulity "by repeated assurances that Mr. Darcy was really the object of her choice, by explaining the gradual change which her estimation of him had undergone, relating her absolute certainty that his affection was not the work of a day, but had stood the test of many months suspense" (242). The episode where Elizabeth stands before Darcy's portrait at Pemberley as his housekeeper sings her master's praises is the episode scholars most often identify as the moment when the heroine falls in love. Lizzie rereads the signs of the class above hers as anchored, in Darcy's case, to qualities within the man that allow her to recalculate his worth in terms of bourgeois morality. Indeed, of this encounter the narrator inquires, "What praise is more valuable than the praise of an intelligent servant? As a brother, a landlord, a master, she considered how many people's happiness were in his guardianship! . . . How much good or evil must be done by him! Every idea that had been brought forward by the housekeeper was favorable to his character, and as she stood before the canvas, on which he was represented, . . . she thought of his regard with a deeper sentiment of gratitude than it had ever raised before" (159–60).

Were this novel's purpose only to resubordinate the upstart heroine by convincing her of Darcy's superiority in her terms as well as his, *Pride and Prejudice* would never be considered the exemplary novel that it is. While it is true that Elizabeth is won over as the signs of Darcy's rank come to represent

the virtues of the responsible head of household, Austen assigns him the task of further enlightening the heroine: "As a child I was taught what was *right*, but not taught to correct my temper. I was given good principles, but left to follow them in pride and conceit. . . . Unfortunately an only son, I was spoiled by my parents, who though good in themselves . . . allowed, encouraged, almost taught me to be selfish and overbearing, to care for none beyond my own family circle, to think meanly of all the rest of the world, to *wish* at least to think meanly of their sense and worth compared with my own" (237). With this statement Darcy reinscribes the signs of rank that spoke so eloquently to Elizabeth at Pemberley within the tradition of meaning that maintained such status distinctions.

With the next statement, however, Darcy lends new moral value to traditional rank by means of an economic explanation that makes Elizabeth the source of value added: "Such I was, from eight to eight and twenty; and such I might still have been but for you, dearest, loveliest Elizabeth!" First, according to his explanation, she strips away the value of his rank: "By you, I was properly humbled. I came to you without a doubt of my reception." Then she demonstrates that this value, in and of itself, has little value: "You shewed me how insufficient were all my pretensions to please a woman worthy of being pleased." In this way, finally, she made it possible for him to acquire value of a superior kind: "What do I not owe you! You taught me a lesson, hard indeed at first, but most advantageous" (237). Thus out of the mutual antagonism of the codes they respectively embody—he to her family and rank, she to his conviction that his family and superiority of rank mean moral superiority—a subtle synthesis emerges: a new "truth" that attaches traditional signs of class to the logic of the social contract. The novel itself affords access to this truth. For it simultaneously revises the basis of class superiority and teaches the reader, much as Darcy claims Elizabeth taught him, to transform the signs of mere rank into those unselfish social principles that the novel associates with the constraint of sexual desire and thus with bourgeois morality.

Morality as Discipline

As envisioned by the eighteenth century, the social contract exacted from individuals a promise to curb their individuality. Enlightenment intellectuals—and I would include Austen under this umbrella—saw this curb on selfishness as the first and best guarantee of full citizenship. To their way of thinking, such self-restraint entailed no loss of individuality but, quite the

contrary, indicated an accretion to the self of individual rights. The Enlightenment individual was a rights-bearing subject, even if she were a woman whose only claim to such rights rested on the largesse of the man whom she married. During the decades following the French Revolution, however, English fiction launched a critique of the very individualism that earlier fiction had brought to life and disseminated in popular narrative form. Those novels for which we remember the first three decades of the nineteenth century began to question what Defoe and Richardson represented as the wholly positive exchange of aggression toward persons and property for individual rights and the sanctity of private property. Nineteenth-century intellectuals infused the irrational animosity of the savage with new value as they identified that animosity, on the one hand, with the tribal loyalty and honor code of the old aristocracy and, on the other, with the aggression that Darwin identified as the trace of our natural origin.

Victorian fiction transformed modern humankind's lack of this savage element into a loss of the primal individuality that connected individuals both to a heroic past and to their own competitive nature. Under these conditions, to enter into the contractual relationship that gained them membership in a modern social order, individuals had to renounce what was most essential to their individuality. This is no less true of Anne Elliot's quiet refusal of Captain Wentworth in Austen's *Persuasion* and Waverley's involuntary renunciation of Flora Mac-Ivor in Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley*, than it is of Jane Eyre's impassioned rejection of a bigamous marriage to Rochester. In all three cases, moreover, the kinship rules that nineteenth-century protagonists must obey at the peril of their very existence always collides with an alternative morality based on fidelity to one's own desire. By no coincidence, this turn against individualism on the part of bourgeois morality during the thirty-year period between Austen and Brontë coincides with the rise to hegemony of the novel and of the class whose interests that genre consistently served.

One can observe the unsteady shift from emergent to dominant in novels that hyperbolically extend individuality in order to mark the limits past which one cannot expand and still remain a member of the community. Thus, for all their differences in gender, ideology, national affiliation, and preferred fictional genre, both Walter Scott and Mary Shelley objectified Enlightenment individualism in ways that simultaneously gave it heroic form and drained away the desire with which earlier literature had infused it. That both Scott and Shelley had a serious problem representing individualism—its lack and its excess, respectively—stems from the fact that the medium in which they worked had given popular form to an earlier

belief that the nation should be the vehicle for individualism and vice versa. The eighteenth-century novel was simply not made to reverse the culturewide ideological gears that morally compelled any and all individuals to achieve what fulfillment they could within the limits of the prevailing social order. Such fiction can be credited for giving palpable form to vast territories within the individual that could not exist within the given social categories. By the same token, we have to blame nineteenth-century fiction for turning those exclusions into spectacular excesses of individuality that stood in the way of a stable and internally coherent community. In order to turn this important literary corner, romantic-era novelists came up with protagonists who embrace a large-scale cultural contradiction (as demonstrated by the English and Scottish sides of Waverley, for example, or by Frankenstein's attempt to be both scientist and family man). Together, authors so different as Scott and Shelley set a future course for British fiction that turned the novel itself against the very expressions of individualism likely to bring about a more inclusive social order. Both authors focused on the revolutionary energy that had infused morality into the community capable of opening to include new forms of individualism. Both, however, focused on such larger-than-life figures as Fergus and the monster with something like affection, only to denounce these figures for seeking self-fulfillment at the expense of the entire community.

Scott and Shelley had very different readerships in mind when they set their respective protagonists on the road to excess and potential exclusion. Scott has Waverley carry his English identity into the Scottish Lowlands in order to formulate an imaginary Britishness that could include both England and Scotland, but Scott also lets us know that such sleight of hand can work only if Highland culture is eliminated. Shelley, on the other hand, has her protagonist set out to exceed the limits of the human itself, allowing the reader to imagine a transnational republic capable of representing virtually any individual. In the resolution to *Waverley* we encounter a community that simultaneously expands to embrace modern Britishness and contracts to exclude what were the prevailing Scottish kinship systems. In apparent contrast, Shelley's novel transforms a pan-European community from an organically integrated whole to one made of many hostile parts that can be made to cohere only by some extraordinary act of violence. Both authors initially seem to push the individual beyond the limits of collective identity in order to expand the social contract beyond the limits of a nation, class, or race and include members of an outside group selected to challenge those boundaries. *Waverley* and *Frankenstein* open the floodgates of inclusion, however, only to establish irreducible differences between cultural material that can be

contained within the collective identity and that which would nullify any such identity. To the degree that both authors use figures of romance and epic hostile to the novel for purposes of marking this limit, Scott's Highlanders perform the same function as Shelley's "devilish race" of monsters. They set certain elements of individuality in vivid contradiction to the social role that modern individuals must assume in order to be regarded as moral. By the end of both novels, the full weight of bourgeois morality comes down on the side of the community and at the cost of an older individualism.

Scott, by his own admission, uses the Highlanders to express ageless desires that modern men and women feel but can no longer express in action.¹² In order to form a single nation, these men and women have to turn this element of their own humanity to a common purpose. Scott differs historically from Austen in that he identified the component of the individual that resisted socialization as the protagonist's most individual part. (Beginning with Catherine Moreland of *Northanger Abbey*, virtually all Austen's heroines relinquish a notion of the class above them acquired either from too much novel reading or from the gossip of resentful friends and relatives.) Shelley in turn seems to think and certainly has her double protagonist speak in philosophical abstractions, as if the limits of universal humanity were her whole concern, as if, moreover, virtually anything human belonged to a single category and could be expressed in the same language. The quasi-philosophical dialogue that makes up so much of her fiction is just that, however—speech and largely hearsay, which Frankenstein subsequently narrates for the sea-faring narrator, Walton, who in turn writes it up as a letter for his sister back in England. The reader consequently finds that the inward telescoping structure of Shelley's successively embedded plots ultimately encloses the cosmopolitan and universal character of her imagined community within a purely English envelope. Like Scott, she stretches English toleration for other people a good bit farther than it could actually have gone, thereby establishing a limit beyond which nothing can be considered compatible with Britishness. Beyond this point the novel cannot push individualism and still remain a novel.

¹² Sir Walter Scott, *Waverley; or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since* (1814; Oxford, 1986). In his opening chapter, Scott explains what he hopes to demonstrate by his venture into the past: "The wrath of our ancestors . . . was coloured *gules*; it broke forth in acts of open and sanguinary violence against the objects of its fury: our malignant feelings, which must seek gratification through more indirect channels, and undermine the obstacles they cannot openly bear down, may be rather said to be tinctured *sable*" (5).

Thus, I would suggest, Shelley shares with Scott an ambivalence toward the limitations of the very medium in which they were both working. To be sure, the monstrous potential of unleashed individuality in Shelley's novel offers us a striking contrast to the overly domesticated interior to which Scott relocates the modern individual in *Waverley*. At the same time, the two authors provide equally eloquent testimony to the aesthetic loss entailed in abandoning the heroic genres of an earlier tradition for the mundane categories of modern realism. Given that the limits of the genre are one and the same as the form of the novel's ideological imperative, fiction must develop ways of defending middle-class sexual practices against forms of desire that would endanger the reproduction of those practices. Thanks in large part to the novel, I believe, certain forms of sexual desire not only became expressions of one's individuality, but were also the means of exposing the limitations of an earlier society. Given its original mission, we should not be surprised to find the novel's relationship to bourgeois morality growing progressively vexed as Victorian novelists sought to outlaw the very forms of desire that it had once been fiction's stock and trade to promote.

During the romantic era, fiction took local cultural economies, on the one hand, and the practices of a cosmopolitan leisure class, on the other, and synthetically produced a culture at once national and novelistic. To accomplish this feat, however, the novel itself underwent a major change in narrative form and ideological mission. The novel abandoned the task of imagining an increasingly democratic nation and began to represent the nation as one that required of its citizens progressively greater feats of sublimation. Bourgeois morality was simultaneously transformed in the manner forecast when Robinson Crusoe achieved hegemonic authority over the island. Bourgeois morality was for Victorians, as for readers of the previous century, something that appeared to come from within the protagonist as he or she resisted the limits placed on individuality by one's position in society; morality had to be one's own rather than someone else's. At the same time, in the early decades of the nineteenth century, the novel grew suspicious of individualism, much as Crusoe did, and sought a means of harnessing its energy for collective purposes. Indeed, to push the analogy between the nineteenth-century novel and the closing chapters of Crusoe's story one step farther, we might say that fiction began to think of itself as the means of discipline rather than resistance. Thus Crusoe imagines a fictional "governor" and assumes that role for the mutineers who populate his island. It is crucial, as Michel Foucault has explained at some length, that this governor remain

only a fiction.¹³ As Crusoe takes on this role, we find it increasingly difficult to value him for the plucky individualism that compelled him to resist father, owner, or God, for he begins to exercise the very authority that he himself resisted in all three.

Moving to the end of the eighteenth century, the same problem disappears into the narrowing gap between the plucky heroine and the narrator whose collective wisdom she must embrace in order to become mistress of Pemberley. The narrator might be characterized as Elizabeth Bennet's best self, hovering just outside of her consciousness until the highly individuated protagonist develops her own powers of surveillance and partakes of that purely cultural form of authority. Victorian fiction transforms bourgeois morality into something on the order of Defoe's governor and Austen's narrator. Neither a function of individual desire nor a form of social authority, bourgeois morality comes to constitute a category that is separate from both and mediates between them. In his reading of Rousseau's *Contrat sociale*, Louis Althusser calls attention to the discrepancy at the heart of contractual rhetoric on which its persuasive power depended. The contract represents itself—and this, I would argue, holds true of the English version as well—as a voluntary act on the part of the presocial individual. That individual does not lose individual agency by submitting to the laws of the state, because that act of submission, like Friday's gesture of placing of his head beneath Crusoe's foot, is an act of his or her own volition. In submitting to a collective composed of individuals who have themselves similarly submitted, moreover, the presocial individual gains freedom, because she or he has submitted to no one else but her- or himself. The presupposition is that any and all individuals will not only submit but, in so doing, come to understand themselves and their interests in much the same way.

This fantasy can never be realized, as Althusser points out, without a third party to ensure that the exchange between individual and collective is in fact an exchange between an individual and an aggregate of more or less similar individuals.¹⁴ For the ideology of exchange to become both psychological

and sociopolitical reality, he insists, there has to be a cultural apparatus to determine that many different individuals imagine their relation to the real in approximately the same way. In the modern state, he observes, only education can supply this third, or mediating, component of the social contract. In theory at least, education does not impose the general will on individuals but rather shapes individuals' wills to regulate their own desires. Here, I would contend, the novel was paramount. In contrast with both domestic culture and the official institutions of education, the nineteenth-century novel provided a form of mediation that appeared to be only mediation, as it declared itself fiction rather than truth. Like Defoe's figure of the governor or Austen's narrator, however, that fiction had a peculiar power to constitute the two parties it presumed only to mediate. In speaking for the collective, Defoe's governor and Austen's narrator reshaped in some irreversible way the authors who created them, much as Rousseau's presocial individual was remade as a citizen in the act of agreeing to submit to the state. So too is the second party or aggregate of citizens changed each time another individual agrees to submit. Crusoe is not all that happy as successive waves of immigrants change the character of his collective identity, which soon after his departure becomes unstable, prone to factionalism, and manifests individual differences through violence rather than words.

No other medium then available could have reconstituted the imagined relation between individual reader and national readership quite so well as the novel. By means of the reading contract that novels established with readers, the novel not only revised the way those readers imagined both parties of the social contract but also put a moral stamp of approval on the exchange that guaranteed the normalcy if not the homogeneity of its readership. To authorize a culture that depended, as Crusoe did, on an imagined authority, bourgeois morality changed horses in midstream and began to authorize resistance, not to one's assigned role, but to desires that compelled one to occupy someone else's. According to the fiction of the Brontës, Dickens, Thackeray, Gaskell, Hardy, and Trollope, the forms of desire that had to be resisted could take any number of forms—adultery, business fraud, false identity—as long as the protagonist's act of resistance placed him or her momentarily and wrongfully in someone else's shoes. To earn the moral approval of novel readers, these protagonists had to become demonstrably more capable of governing themselves. Moreover, they had at the same time to defend the community against the leveling effects of a consumer-driven mass culture, a growing demand for full citizenship on the part of women and the working classes, and forms of violence endemic to indigenous cultures. As if to prepare its readership for an age of increasing imperial expansion, the novel put

¹³ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (1975), trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, 1979). In his well-known description of *panopticism*, Foucault lays out the spatial strategies of modern institutional power as a periphery of compartments that makes their inmates highly visible and a central tower, where "one sees without ever being seen. It is an important mechanism, for it automatizes and disindividualizes power. Power has its principle not so much in a person as in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up" (202).

¹⁴ Louis Althusser, *Montesquieu, Rousseau, Marx: Politics and History* (1959), trans. Ben Brewster (London, 1982), 113–60.

bourgeois morality on the defense against the very forces it would attempt to contain and regulate on a multinational scale.

The Moral Core

I concede Georg Lukács's point that the early-nineteenth-century novel understood its mission as representing a progressively more inclusive political system.¹⁵ I agree as well with Jürgen Habermas's explanation of the kind of culture that ideally accompanied increasing democratization and why it failed to materialize.¹⁶ But I part company with their respective arguments when they claim that the novel's betrayal of its mission and dissociation from the political publicity it had originally encouraged did not occur until the midnineteenth century. In Scott, the novelist whom Lukács portrays as the staunch defender of the novel's progressive tendency, one can already observe a structural resemblance to Shelley's gothic masterpiece. *Waverley*, like *Frankenstein*, is shaped by a reflux whereby political resistance no longer serves the good of the community so much as the will to dominate in a manner ascribed to the old aristocracy. Resistance so reconceptualized no longer creates a reproductive unit, as it did in Austen. On the contrary, such resistance ruptures the family in ways that cancel out that unit's ability to reproduce itself both biologically and socially. The novel, we must conclude, was just not made to turn against the class whose emergence it recorded and moralized, despite the criticism that fiction levels at the practices of that very class during the ages of realism and modernism.

¹⁵ Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel* (1962), trans. Hannah Mitchell and Stanley Mitchell (Lincoln, Neb., 1983). Lukács describes Sir Walter Scott as "giving perfect artistic expression to the basic progressive tendency of [his] period" (63). The threat posed by an armed and organized proletariat in 1848 inspired the bourgeoisie to turn its back upon its earlier aims and ideals, a change that "affects all spheres of bourgeois ideology," including the novel (171). In Flaubert, Lukács notes, there is consequently "no such connection between the outside world and the psychology of the principal characters" as one finds in Scott (189), and "history becomes a large, imposing scene for purely private, intimate and subjective happenings" (199).

¹⁶ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Bourgeois Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1962), trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, Mass., 1992). The idea of a public sphere, as formulated in eighteenth-century England, was to subject all government policies, procedures, and decisions to the scrutiny and criticism of public opinion. At around the same time that Lukács pinpoints the novel's betrayal of its cultural mission, Habermas identifies the erosion of the very principle of the public sphere: "The principle of the public sphere, that is, critical publicity, seemed to lose its strength in the measure that it expanded as a sphere and even undermined the private realm" (140).

Here I want to consider the novel's irreversible contraction of the imagined community in relation to the entrenchment of the modern middle class and Great Britain's geographical expansion around the globe. Only in this context, omnipresent in Victorian fiction, can the exclusions characterizing the culture of commodity capitalism find their moral justification. In discussing the fiction of Daniel Defoe, I sought to show that he found it rather easy to justify the enterprises of a social underdog. Defoe's fiction becomes morally confused, at least by nineteenth-century standards, once such a protagonist actually succeeds in occupying a position of power. As Defoe would seem to forecast, the old oppositional politics was no longer possible once the middle classes came into power, and novelists had to figure out ways around the dilemma of how to be political dominant and morally superior at once. In order for the dialectical engagement of an unacknowledged individual with the field of permissible social positions to yield the necessary synthesis, novelists had to revise the terms of the social contract. To the imperative to resolve the problem created by the cultural presuppositions of the genre itself, I am suggesting, we may attribute the most important formal innovations of later nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century fiction.

First, let us consider how Victorian fiction modifies the protagonist who had operated within an earlier agrarian society as the figure of antithesis itself. We are only one chapter past the paradigmatic encounter between Jane Eyre and her guardian aunt, when Charlotte Brontë begins to formulate alternative forms of resistance that must be cancelled out before Jane can achieve a place in the social body where she can indeed exemplify all its members. After Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's argument that Rochester's mad creole wife personifies the author's own proto-feminist anger at the constraints of a masculinist genre, it is no wonder that recent criticism has dwelled obsessively on Bertha Mason.¹⁷ There is, moreover, good reason to seize upon this same character to confirm both Edward Said's claim that the colonies are omnipresent in canonical British fiction and Gayatri Spivak's contention that the soul-making project of British fiction excludes those who

¹⁷ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven, Conn., 1979). Gilbert and Gubar famously argue that in lashing out at patriarchal authority, Bertha Mason becomes Jane Eyre's antithesis in that Bertha enacts the anger that the author could not allow her heroine to express. Brontë had to rein Jane in, according to Gilbert and Gubar, because the heroine's submission to her future husband was one and the same as the novelist's submission to the masculine genre in which she herself wrote.

resist colonization.¹⁸ What we tend to overlook in the process of appropriating Bertha for contemporary purposes is that she is not the first recalcitrant female to be offered up by the novel and then eliminated as an unacceptable expression of individualism. Like so many of Dickens's characters, Helen Burns, Jane's mortally ill classmate at the Lowood school for girls, displays a spiritual capacity to transcend her place in society, a capacity that qualifies as morality but not as resistance. *Jane Eyre* clearly refuses to throw its moral weight behind the acts of Christian sacrifice that send both Helen Burns and St. John Rivers to untimely graves. In the novel, conventional spirituality can do little if anything to transform the spectacle of punishment practiced at Lowood into the more modern practices of discipline organizing Jeremy Bentham's model prison. In Bentham's ideal world, an individual acquires moral value on the basis of how well that individual harnesses his or her desire to the demands of a social position. As George Eliot regretfully says of Dorothea Brook, the heroine of *Middlemarch*, "Her full nature, like that river of which Cyrus broke the strength, spent itself in channels which had no great name on earth. But that effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive . . . and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs."¹⁹ This passage exemplifies Eliot's lyricism, as it simultaneously memorializes and minoritizes the "far sadder sacrifices" that novels and their readers were, in the narrator's view, actively preparing for Dorotheas yet to come.²⁰ From this perspective, Bertha Mason would be more accurately construed not as the other side of Jane but of Helen Burns in that, for opposing reasons, both Bertha and Helen fail to meet the minimal requirements for consenting to the social contract. If the one is all spirituality, then the other is all resistance. By depriving both Helen and Bertha of the inner conflict essential to the making of self-governing citizens, the novel finds each deficient in terms of bourgeois morality. Their exclusion from the good society is especially important in Helen's case, because Brontë uses the heroine's girlhood companion to represent the consummate Christian soul.

Like Moll's memoirs and Clarissa's letters, Jane's claim to such morality rests entirely on the fact that her rise to a position of respectability offers a sustained critique of the very people on whom she depends for economic survival. Eighteenth-century protagonists from Moll to Clarissa tend to launch that critique from outside the dominant culture, where they are exposed to all the exclusions and oppressions which that culture unleashes on those who most depend on it. By way of contrast, the imperiled heroine of Victorian fiction speaks from a critical position that deprives the true outsider of her righteousness. By representing Bertha as culturally unfit to occupy a position within Thornfield Hall, Jane can assume Bertha's position as the one wrongfully excluded from domestic comforts and companionship. She can be a Victorian heroine and speak as an outsider only so long as she refuses to cross the moral line that would make her a true outsider; she can never gratify her sexual desire for Rochester. Nineteenth-century fiction characteristically situates one of its own, someone highly articulate, in the outsider's position, making it clear, by exquisitely testing her morality, that she is out of place in that position. By taking the ungrateful Jane to its bosom, that fiction opens up within the dominant culture positions for legitimate opposition and critique. Indeed, we might regard *Jane Eyre* as a historical record of the process by which this criticism from inside receives the benediction of bourgeois morality. Jane's claim that "this social order is bad, because it excludes me" proves perfectly compatible with the claim that "this social order is good insofar as it includes me." Where the first claim launches a critique, the second limits that critique to a demand that updates the status quo and lends it a sense of adequacy.

Bertha's purpose in relation to Jane is much the same as Orlick's relation to Pip in *Great Expectations*, Jo's relation to Esther in *Bleak House*, or Bradley Headstone's relation to Eugene Wrayburn in *Our Mutual Friend*, as well as the many ingenious examples of the so-called divided self that mark the literature of this epoch. By means of such wholly indigestible lumps of cultural traits, Victorian fiction could simultaneously embrace and exclude precisely what that fiction designated as most hostile to middle-class culture. This move becomes abundantly clear once we compare *Jane Eyre* with Brontë's later novel *Villette*. This novel relocates Lowood, the unreformed educational institution, in Belgium, a terrain where Protestant England can confront Catholic France and appear to soften its disciplinary edge. Institutional culture so-conceived promises to offer the notably repressed heroine both the possibility of marriage with the flamboyant M. Paul and the authority to educate self-governing girls. Having offered this promise and set its realization in motion, however, *Villette* will have none of it. M. Paul, charming

¹⁸ In *Culture and Imperialism* (New York, 1993), Edward Said makes the claim that "nearly everywhere in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century British and French culture we find allusions to the facts of empire, but perhaps nowhere with more regularity and frequency than in the British novel" (62). In "Three Women's Texts," Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that "Bertha's function in *Jane Eyre* is to render indeterminate the boundary between human and animal and thereby to weaken her entitlement [to a soul] under the spirit if not the letter of Law" (268).

¹⁹ George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (1871-72; New York, 1977), 578.
²⁰ *Ibid.*

and utterly socialized though he may seem within the Belgian context, ultimately fulfills the same purpose as Bertha Mason. Accordingly, he dies an equally contrived death on the voyage back from overseeing his investments in the colonies. The novel's ending ("... leave sunny imaginations hope. Let it be theirs to conceive the delight of joy born again fresh out of great terror, the rapture of escape from peril, the wondrous reprieve from dread, the fruition of return. Let them picture union and a happy succeeding life.")²¹ demonstrates that M. Paul must be exorcised from the classroom before Lucy can assume a place of authority within it.

To understand what Victorian culture did to bourgeois morality, then, it is necessary to dissociate that culture from simple-minded prudery and read these figures symptomatically. The appearance of the outsider who must be kept out in order for the protagonist to assume a place within the social order marks a major historical shift from a culture where individual identity is based on similarity (that is, "I am me, because I am like you in some essential way") to one in which identity is based on difference (that is, "I am like you to the extent that neither of us is that other thing"). This shift amounts to a shift from positive to negative identity. Where eighteenth-century protagonists become who they truly are by virtue of their difference from some assigned social position, not so with nineteenth-century protagonists. They become who they are by conquering difference and filling a rather ordinary but utterly respectable position. To do so, all those Janes and Pips must make very sure to resist their most individual impulses and drives, which are invariably criminal rather than progressive or regenerative. Yet individualistic desire is every bit as much the central player in these high Victorian dramas of contractual affiliation as it is in the work of Defoe and Richardson. From Fagin and Bertha to Dracula and Dorian, Victorian fiction is known for its criminals, madmen, prostitutes, profligate spenders, predacious children, and sexual perverts—and for good reason. These figures are as central to the later nineteenth century as Mr. Darcy was to Austen's moment, because it is in relation to them that all other behavioral options in the novel earn their respective degrees of moral value. Not only of similar magnitude to Darcy but also in polar opposition to him, these figures personify what an individual cannot become and still belong to the community of readers. On the emergence, consolidation, and excorporation of traits composing the negative category of being, or symptom, in Victorian fiction depends a decisively negative redefinition of bourgeois morality as well.

²¹ Charlotte Brontë, *Villette* (1853; New York, 1979), 596.

I have used *Jane Eyre* to demonstrate how such fiction gives its protagonists the critical stance of the outsider so that they might claim the moral center by virtue of their difference from people whose nature confines them to the periphery. But what happens to the other side of the contractual model, or imagined community, when it incorporates individuals on the basis of their negative identity? William Booth's *In Darkest England and the Way Out* enjoins the viewer to follow sinners as they ascend from the hell of poverty and crime through redemptive labor to a relatively blessed life as citizens who can enjoy the fruits of their hard-won prosperity.²² What is most significant about this modern version of medieval iconography, however, is that it does not depict the progress of a soul from one station to another but a flow of population. As Booth routes it, moreover, this flow does not in fact ascend from a lower to a more elevated moral station. He locates the center of his chart in the center of the metropolis, where—heedless of natural geography—there stands a stately lighthouse radiating beams of light and surrounded by a corona of cumulus clouds representing various institutions of social reform. Here members of the poor and criminal population linger until they acquire the twin faculties of work and self-government. Representing members of Booth's Salvation Army, figures in red coats direct the flow of indigent humanity up from the slough of depravity and out to the sea coast, where they are shipped off to the colonies. Rather than have them scale the ladder of Christian salvation, in other words, Booth transforms that hierarchical structure into a map that, in a manner more like Bentham's prison, redistributes the population of England into a normative metropolitan core and deviant colonial periphery.

In offering this map, Booth simply repeats in bold outline the fantasy of imperial nationhood implicit in every novel, journalistic account of Great Britain's colonial exploits, popular photograph, and government policy published over a period of some fifty years. This, for example, is how *Jane Eyre* represents the transformation of Rochester's estate, once a haven for the mad, profligate, illegitimate, and racially tainted, into the moral core of a regenerated middle-class England: "My Edward and I, then, are happy: and the more so, because those we love are happy likewise. Diana and Mary Rivers are both married: alternately, once every year, they come to see us, and we go to see them. Diana's husband is a captain in the navy: a gallant officer, and a good man. Mary's is a clergyman: a college friend of her brother's; and, from his attainments and principles, worthy of the connexion. Both Captain Fitzjames and Mr. Wharton love their wives, and are

²² William Booth, *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (1890; Montclair, N.J., 1975).

loved by them" (476). By a process resembling the circulation of bodies depicted on Booth's map, the novel enjoins us to imagine the imperial nation as a moral core constantly replenished when and wherever there is sufficient discipline to produce self-governing individuals. As in that map, the total of such regenerated souls is notably low, and the number of those who either remain in cultural limbo or perish is disproportionately high. As indicated by the dull-witted schoolchildren whom Jane teaches while living with her cousins at Moore House, or Adèle, her charge at Thornfield, most individuals lack the critical awareness necessary for their own reform. Their lack of the raw material for soul-making locates them permanently at the culture's moral periphery, along with poor and indigenous peoples, despite the dominant culture's best efforts to reform them.

Booth's map makes it clear that belonging to the moral core has more to do with what one does than where one is located geographically. Inclusion within a homogeneous household where identity based on sameness can prevail signals that moral redemption in Dickens on many occasions when the novel shifts the center of English society from such focal points of traditional wealth as Dedlock Hall or Miss Havisham's residence to the fragile nests of domesticity characterized by affectionate bonding—for example, Mr. Brownlow's, the second Bleak House, Biddy and Joe's, and so forth. Only in such pockets of identification, Dickens seems to be saying, can the kind of affection survive that flourishes when individuals renounce the very differences that make them individuals according to Victorian culture. Fostered neither by traditional wealth nor by new money, but mysteriously supported by either and often both, the moral core provides sanctuary for individuals capable of identifying themselves as no more nor less than a member of that group. In that most individuals are incapable of adhering to the terms of the social contract as the Victorians understood it, the moral core is always a community on the defense against predatory individualism.

What is nineteenth-century realism, from this perspective, if not a fictional encounter of a protagonist with an unaccommodating social order, in which each party reshapes the other so as to produce a new and limited means of individual gratification while leaving that order perfectly intact? The Victorian novel does not transform the way we imagine the real, in other words. What it offers more often than not is a recuperated middle-class man who has abandoned the quest to fulfill some individual desire and receives cultural compensation for so doing. Following in the tradition of Pip and Rochester is a brilliant succession of indelibly tainted men that includes Dickens's Mr. Dombey and Eugene Wrayburn, Eliot's Stephen Guest

and Silas Marner, and any number of masculine characters in the novels of Thomas Hardy and Anthony Trollope. Fiction's effort to master what Victorians had evidently come to see as inherently antisocial about individualism itself gives rise to a new category—call it culture with a capital "C." This category, in contrast to the individualism of old, behaves more like a complement, or simple addition to the social whole, than as a supplement requiring some pervasive reorganization of that whole. The issue of whether that category can and should be dominated by bourgeois morality divides literary modernism from its Victorian predecessors.

The Return of the Repressed

Together with a highly individuated style, a novel's sustained critique of the bourgeois morality at work in the popular fiction of the Victorian age classifies that novel as a work of literary modernism. Victorian novelists sought to mediate between individuals and a social body that was increasing in size, geographical expanse, and demographic heterogeneity. In contrast, their modernist counterparts set art, in the form of a carefully crafted style, against the highly legible surface that popular culture had inserted between self-enclosed individuals and the social world they had to negotiate. When it went to work in the novel, that style made the two parties of contractual exchange engage one another, much as Leopold Bloom does Dublin society, as the starkly incompatible entities that they are. To make this point, Virginia Woolf offers this memorable account of the horrors of war that the veteran, Septimus Smith, relives as he sits on a park bench in London anticipating a visit to his psychiatrist:

He sang. Evans answered from behind the tree. The dead were in Thessaly, Evans sang, among the orchids. There they waited till the war was over, and now the dead, now Evans himself. . . .

"For God's sake don't come!" Septimus cried out. For he could not look upon the dead.

But the branches parted. A man in grey was actually walking towards them. It was Evans! But no mud was on him; no wounds; he was not changed. I must tell the whole world, Septimus cried, raising his hand (as the dead man in the grey suit came nearer), raising his hand like some colossal figure who has lamented the fate of man for ages in the desert alone with his hands pressed to his forehead, furrows of despair on his cheeks, and now

sees light on the desert's edge which broadens and strikes the iron-black figure . . . , and with legions of men prostrate behind him he, the giant mourner, receives for one moment on his face the whole.²³

This passage produces an unbridgeable discrepancy between the individual's true desires and fears and the socially permissible forms of self-expression. The difference between the world that Septimus sees (his dead comrade in arms, Evans) and the world that observes him (Woolf identifies Peter Walsh as the man in the gray suit) is only an extreme instance, the novel insists, of a more general discrepancy between individuals and the social positions they must occupy, whether soldier, psychiatrist, socialite, wife, daughter, or parliamentarian.

D. H. Lawrence identifies bourgeois morality as the force that keeps such individuals in line. To free the reader from what he regards as a harmfully repressive brand of morality, Lawrence offers sexually explicit love scenes. This passage from *Lady Chatterley's Lover* strives to undo the sexual contract authorized by *Jane Eyre*, as Lawrence has his adulterous lovers translate a potentially pornographic engagement into a sophisticated parody of high romance:

"It suddenly came to me. You are the Knight of the Burning Pestle."

"Ay! And you? Are you the Lady of the Red-Hot Mortar?"

"Yes!" she said. "Yes! You're Sir Pestle and I'm Lady Mortar."

"All right, then I'm knighted. John Thomas is Sir John, to your Lady Jane."

"Yes! John Thomas is knighted! I'm my-lady-maidenhair, and you must have flowers too. Yes!"

"She threaded two pink champions in the bush of red-gold hair above his penis.

"There!" she said. "Charming! Charming! Sir John!"²⁴

Neither pornography nor romance, this passage synthesizes the two by means of language that simultaneously locates Victorian romance in the sexual organs and places potentially obscene material within a category reserved strictly for art.

²³ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925; New York, 1953), 105–6. Subsequent references are to this edition and have been included in the text.

²⁴ D. H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1932; New York, 1959), 172. Subsequent references are to this edition and have been included in the text.

In both novels, a desirous woman serves as the figure of sexuality itself and the rallying point for the modernist recuperation of those elements of humanity sacrificed in the effort to chain men and women to labor and property, respectively. This figure returns in the modernist novel to exert an uncanny power—familiar but utterly other—that harks back to Roxana's daughter.²⁵ Indeed, the case of the daughter who would not go away, despite every attempt to elude, cajole, bribe, threaten, and even murder her, anticipates the form of repression that fiction itself had to undergo in order to become "the novel" and vehicle of bourgeois morality. Not since Richardson's *Clarissa* made readers prefer a woman's death to her sexual dishonor did the British novel allow its illustrious string of protagonists to accept a sexual invitation without suffering punishment greatly in excess to the crime. The spectacular deaths of *Clarissa*, *Catherine Earnshaw*, *Lady Dedlock*, *Maggie Tulliver*, *Tess*, and *Lucy Westenra* are just a few examples of the discursive behavior that turned the desirous woman into the symptom of bourgeois morality. By repeating this move, novelists ensured that bourgeois morality achieved ideological coherence and continuity in relation to her. The individual became a member of respectable society in terms of this negative standard by harnessing her sexual desire to the single-minded purpose of reproducing the nuclear family so that it might ensure the gendered division of labor and social relations under capitalism. When, however, this figure emerges in modernist fiction, she is hardly the same. This is especially true of *Mrs. Dalloway*, where the fact of desire only shows itself in radically displaced forms. The reanimated specters of her unfulfilled relationships with Peter Walsh and Sally Seaton haunt *Clarissa's* party and influence the dynamic of the evening more powerfully than the individuals themselves.

Molly Bloom and *Clarissa Dalloway* appear to come from different social universes and live according to contrary moral standards, but fiction empowers them to reorganize modern urban life in curiously similar ways. Each serves as the center of an interpersonal flow, where submerged currents of desire meet and discharge their energy in various forms of intercourse—at once sexual and verbal—to revitalize a society enervated by

²⁵ In *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1981), Fredric Jameson urges criticism to abandon "a purely individual, or merely psychological, project of salvation" so that we might "explore the multiple paths that lead to the unmasking of cultural objects as socially symbolic acts" (20). My borrowing of the "return of the repressed" from Freudian vocabulary engages Jameson's notion of the political unconscious and, specifically, the strategies by which the novel entered into a mutually authorizing relationship with bourgeois morality that compelled many different novelists over a considerable period of time first to degrade, debase, and abject and then to resurrect and idealize a figure of female desire.

mass communication. To become the repository of authentic human nature in a world given over to the frenzied production, reproduction, and exchange of mere signs, the deidealized figure of female sexuality undergoes a curious transformation. Molly Bloom, Clarissa Dalloway, Ursula Brangwen, and many others recombine certain features of Bertha Mason, the woman whom Charlotte Brontë reduced to a beast in *Jane Eyre*, with those of Helen Burns, Bertha's disembodied spiritual counterpart. The cultural logic compelling this synthesis becomes especially apparent in Jean Rhys's revision of Brontë's narrative.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, we encounter Bertha as Antoinette, the daughter of creole plantation owners traded to Rochester in a purely economic exchange. By giving Antoinette the name of her mother, Bertha, Rochester transformed her yearning for him into the debased sexuality of a racially tainted woman. In Rhys's account, this act of classification says more about the Englishman than the woman whom he degraded. His gesture dramatizes European fear of the island's natural beauty and this creole woman's strange affinity with it. "I hated the sunsets of whatever colour," he confesses, "I hated its beauty and its magic and the secret I would never know. I hated its indifference and the cruelty which was part of its loveliness. Above all, I hated her. For she belonged to the magic and the loveliness."²⁶ As she reveals what Rochester repressed in renaming his creole wife, Rhys endows Bertha with the fullness of being that Brontë had reserved for Jane alone. That fullness identifies the limits of Rochester's classification system and demonstrates the lethal consequences of subjecting sexual desire to bourgeois morality. It is in these terms that the servant Christophine accuses Rochester of destroying her mistress: "She is Creole girl, and she have the sun in her. Tell the truth now. She don't come to your house in this place England they tell me about, she don't come to your beautiful house to beg you to marry her. No, it's you come all the long way to her house—it's you beg her to marry. And she love you and she give you all she have. Now you say you don't love her and your break her up. What you do with her money, eh?" (158).

Brontë endeavors to show that a man like Rochester would in fact prefer the plain but constrained English girl over far more sensual women. Rhys demonstrates that desire for the likes of Jane served as his means of disavowing a far more authentic desire for the natural beauty and unrestrained

²⁶ Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966; New York, 1982), 172. Subsequent references are to this edition and have been included in the text.

sexuality associated with the colonies: "She had left me thirsty and all my life would be thirst and longing for what I had lost before I found it." Terrified of going native, Rhys's Rochester has to debase the object of his desire: "I saw the hate go out of her eyes. I forced it out. And with the hate her beauty. She was only a ghost. A ghost in the grey daylight" (170). Rochester rejects Bertha as subhuman, because he believes nothing so beautiful can be moral. Is this act of aggression an act in defense of individualism? Modernism says no.

Modernism accedes to the Victorian opposition between aesthetics and morality in order to come down decisively on the side of art and argue for those elements of humanity that Victorian fiction had sacrificed on the altar of bourgeois morality. In accepting the opposition of aesthetics and morality, however, modernism also detaches art from politics. Let morality amass and regulate various elements of society as it must, modernism seems to say; we men of imagination, misfits all, will suggest alternative ways of organizing that world and deriving pleasure from it. The desirous woman, like the madman, pervert, and child, affords us the means of doing so. As a result, there is, for modernism, no final synthesis of the kind that readers came to expect in such novels as *Jane Eyre* and *Middlemarch*. Instead, modernist novels accompany every gesture toward the mutual infusion of self and society with some discursive sign of an essential lack. The conclusion of *Mrs. Dalloway* might offer the reader a sense of plenitude and wholeness achieved—"What is it that fills me with extraordinary excitement? It is Clarissa, he said. For there she was" (296)—had such presence not already been defined as a lack of presence. Clarissa was never really there, as we learn early in the novel: "She began to go slowly upstairs, with her hand on the bannisters, as if she had left a party, where now this friend now that had flashed back her face, her voice . . . There was an emptiness about the heart of life; an attic room" (45). The ending of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is perhaps too heavy-handed in making the point that social existence requires repeated acts of self-annihilation. A continent apart, the lovers await Constance's divorce, and Mellors writes: "In the end he [Sir Clifford Chatterley] will want to spew you out as the abominable thing . . . a great deal of us is together, and we can abide by it and steer our courses to meet soon. John Thomas says good-night to lady Jane, a little droopingly, but with a hopeful heart" (283). For all its criticism of the shallow materialism endorsed by Victorian realism, the modernist novel never opens up a category for the fully realized and integrated individual within the existing social order.

Indeed, modernism consigns the potentially synthesizing desires of Molly, Constance, Ursula, or Antoinette to a domain outside and apart from

the material world. Given this remove from social history, any reimagining of the social order can never amount to more than just that—imaginings that would have to be received as dream, hallucination, or art. To blur the distinctions between the psychic and the real so that desire overrides the reality principle indicates that we are under the spell of either primitive thinking or some long-repressed, infantile wish. Fiction, according to Freud, is especially good at producing uncanny effects.²⁷ What makes the unmistakable difference between Victorian depictions of the so-called buried life and modernist versions of the same phenomenon is not the fact that the repressed inevitably returns so much as the form it takes when it does so. During the eighteenth century, the desirous woman exposed the threat of excessive individualism to a nation imagined as an aggregate of self-governing individuals; she was intrepid, witty, honest, and insincerely repentant. The Victorians turned bourgeois morality to the task of debasing and abjecting her; she grew inarticulate, disgusting, often mortally ill, and always repentant. The examples I have offered from modernist novels tell us that the paradox of individualism intensified after the modern middle classes came into power. But with the advent of modernism, lo and behold, precisely what had been debased and cast out emerged in all innocence, exotic, fresh, archaic, familiar, strange, and able to work her invigorating magic within a tightly limited domain.

The Class That Is Not One

It is difficult to imagine a definition of the English middle class that does not include a reference to a morality that reproduced the nuclear family and preserved social relations under capitalism. This morality was a sexual morality. It decreed that each and every individual was inhabited by his or her own worst enemy in the form of desires that did not lead straight to monogamously heterosexual love. Individualism would certainly energize the community, provided those expressions of individualism respected the

²⁷ Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny'" (1919) in *Studies in Parapsychology* (New York, 1963), 19–62. A contemporary of Woolf, Lawrence, and Joyce, Freud obviously thinks of the uncanny in terms of the modernist aesthetic: "In the main we adopt an unvarying passive attitude towards experience and are acted upon by our physical environment. But the story-teller has a peculiarly directive influence over us; by means of the states of mind into which he can put us and the expectations he can rouse in us, he is able to guide the current of our emotions, dam it up in one direction and make it flow in another" (58).

person and property of others. But individualism would just as surely destroy the community, if individual desire ran roughshod over the social contract. Nothing threatened the formation of the nuclear family more than a desirous woman, who was therefore such an act of violence waiting to happen. Always on the lookout for precisely this threat, bourgeois morality provided the means of subduing wayward desires and turning them to the appropriate reproductive ends. In this respect, ironically, nothing ensures the reproduction of the nuclear family more than a desirous woman. Modernism constituted its antagonist as a monolithic and exclusively empowered majority—an extension of the tyrannical majority that made John Stuart Mill flee from the public sphere of political debate into autobiographical writing and poetry. To do so, novelists imagined society from the viewpoint of those excluded from the moral core—women, children, homosexuals, the Irish, or working-class people. In order to write art-quality novels, these novelists not only introduced libidinal disruptions often verging on pornography into the linear narrative of Victorian fiction but also lived bohemian lives that broke the most important rules of heterosexual monogamy. By fashioning lives in opposition to bourgeois morality, however, those intellectuals and artists who took their example from the early-twentieth-century avant-garde did not challenge the norms of Victorian fiction so much as give those norms a social tangibility that they may otherwise have lacked for twentieth-century readers.

I have allowed the term *bourgeois* to wind through this essay with very little interrogation. For this very reason, I want to conclude by asking if there ever were in fact a class of people with an ethos so unified, so focused on controlling female sexuality, as three centuries of British fiction has made the modern middle class out to be. The novels I have discussed indeed indicate that by virtue of its negative definition, bourgeois morality achieved durability over the span of time and despite changing national cultures. That is to say, these novels proliferated examples of what the Lawrentian protagonist Mellors called "the abominable thing," a woman inhabited by masculine desire. The prevalence of such a negative definition should be an indication, I would propose, that we are not being offered the kind of self-definition that comes from within the group in question and circulates among its members. If canonical fiction did in fact represent middle-class life, practices, values, limitations, desires, and hopes for the future from within and for that group, then that fiction would, I believe, be far less concerned with relaxing the boundaries around that group and making its internal categories seem capable of accommodating diverse individuals. As I have

already suggested at several points in this essay, the modernist critique of bourgeois morality does not so much overthrow as perpetuate the cultural logic played out in the fiction of Defoe. To authorize themselves as novelists and spokespeople for heretofore excluded aspects of the individual, these novelists set themselves outside and at odds with a ruling class at once lax and rigid and ever in need of supplementation from those just below or peripheral to that class in social position. From this perspective, modernist authenticity, originality, and redemptive desire can be regarded as appropriations of the function of bourgeois morality itself.

Rita Felski helps this argument by debunking the literary historical tendency to conceptualize modern social history as an opposition between, on one hand, a Bakhtinian working class that was ribald, licentious, given over to the body, and extremely irreverent of boundaries, and on the other, a ruling class that was contrastingly puritanical, industrious, and frugal.²⁸ The modern middle class indeed included and still includes more than one class position, all of which are extremely fluid and lack sharp cultural definition. According to this way of thinking, someone in Samuel Richardson's position would have to be particularly concerned with respectability precisely because his toehold on that virtue was not particularly secure. As a member of the petit bourgeoisie, he probably saw the attribution of compulsive morality to his social superiors as a way of denying his inferior rank. Such overly vigorous moralizing was an expression of shame specific to a class unique for lacking a positive self-definition. If authors and readers not quite so solidly in the middle class were responsible for attributing bourgeois morality to those just above them, then those novelists who turned against bourgeois morality during the nineteenth and twentieth century were probably more middle class than they would have us believe. In keeping with the tradition inaugurated by the very group it denigrated, modernist fiction represented bourgeois morality from a peripheral position in relation to those who exemplified that class ethos. Modernism, according to Pierre Bourdieu,

²⁸ Rita Felski, "Nothing to Declare: Identity, Shame, and the Lower Middle Class," *PMLA* 115.1 (2000): 33–45. British fiction in turn supports Felski's claim that "opposing a repressed and repressive bourgeoisie to an unruly, pleasure-driven working class leaves little room for exploring the various class fractions that fall outside this opposition. The lower middle class is one such amalgam of symbolic practices, structures of feeling, and forms of life." She characterizes this class as feeling "itself to be culturally superior to the working class . . . , while lacking the cultural capital and the earning power of the professional-managerial class" (35). Felski suggests, in other words, that the peculiar status of the petit bourgeoisie prompted them to constitute the middle class in terms with which they could, as marginal members, identify themselves.

characteristically seized, not on the upper middle class, but on the petit bourgeoisie as the object of its critique.²⁹

The point in thus stressing the negative definition of the modern middle class is twofold. First, to put it simply, the neither-nor character of the novel's definition of the class whose interests it serves strongly suggests that that class is largely held together by fiction and is, in all probability, largely a fiction itself, in much the same way that so-called normal individuals are. Anyone who must insist on his or her normalcy probably is not normal, I would contend, while those of us who would never claim to be so probably are. Second, in rethinking the British novel as a delivery system for bourgeois morality, one cannot help but notice how faithful British fiction remains to the cultural logic that first brought this kind of narrative into being and proclaimed it "the novel." So long as it thinks of whom it represents in relation to bourgeois morality, the novel remains true to its original mission, which was to open a space within the field of social positions for previously unacknowledged forms of individualism. This principle holds true from Defoe to Brontë, from Dickens to Woolf, and from James Joyce to Angela Carter and Salman Rushdie. Furthermore, the rhetoric of progressive inclusion proves a miraculously effective strategy for ensuring that things remain exactly the same. Indeed, the novel invariably marks the contours of any new social classification system as science fiction or gothic romance and usually a nightmare at that. As successive waves of immigration entered Great Britain and tried to fit in, the novel acknowledged the presence of various subcultures as a subterranean flow of ethnic practices that appealed to the reader's well-honed touristic sensibility. Indeed, one could easily rewrite the novel's relationship to bourgeois morality as the history of the "impurities" that fiction either assimilated to bourgeois morality or else cast out of its imagined community.

It would appear that those on the periphery of the class they themselves defined as united around an obsession with the sexual purity of its women have paid consistent lip service to bourgeois morality. But those in a peripheral relationship to the imaginary middle class were hardly a stable group in themselves. This group is perhaps more fluid than any other. While the

²⁹ In "Nothing to Declare," Felski draws on Pierre Bourdieu's notion of "distinction" (*Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* [Cambridge, 1984], 327) to contend that the "division between the lower middle classes and the intelligensia arises from a difference of styles rather than of objects of consumption. . . . But the fundamental distinctions between these class groupings," she continues, "irony versus earnestness, cultural knowledge versus cultural ignorance—remain constant" (41).

novel envisioned no thoroughgoing structural transformation once the middle-class hegemony was in place, a combination of ethnic infusions into the petit bourgeoisie, on the one hand, and into the intellectual avant-garde on the other, radically transformed the demographic content of both. As that content changed, so too changed the ways in which those who occupied those social categories could express individualities that eluded the gatekeeper of bourgeois morality. Although the British novel remained ever true to the cultural logic that brought it into being, we are left with the fact that it, perhaps more than any other genre, remains ever responsive to historical change.

A. S. BYATT

The Death of Lucien de Rubempré

"One of the greatest tragedies of my life," wrote Oscar Wilde, "is the death of Lucien de Rubempré. It is a grief from which I have never been able completely to rid myself. It haunts me in my moments of pleasure. I remember it when I laugh."¹ The last phrase might suggest ambivalence. Proust in *Contre Sainte-Beuve* is interested in the way Wilde's "attendrissement" in the days of his brilliance prefigured his own imprisonment and fall. Proust assumed that "he felt moved by Lucien's death, like all readers, by seeing it from Vautrin's point of view, which is Balzac's own."²

I was surprised when I first read the scene to find tears rising in my eyes, partly at least because until that moment I had intensely disliked Lucien, in a way I dislike few fictional characters. Indeed, as Lucien writes his self-satisfied farewell messages, he remains small-minded, self-regarding, and distasteful. What is moving is the one moment of selflessness he experiences as he prepares to hang himself and sees from his window the unexpected revelation of the "primitive beauty" of the medieval architecture of the Palais de Justice. "Making his preparations for death, he asked himself how this marvel could exist, unknown, in Paris." He sees the colonnade, "slender, young, fresh." They are unexpected adjectives for architecture, adjectives that would serve just as well to describe a beautiful woman. Seeing the "demeure de St. Louis" with its Babylonian proportions and its oriental fantasies, Lucien becomes two Luciens—"one Lucien, a poet walking about under the arches and the turrets of St. Louis, and one Lucien preparing his suicide."³ He moves into the eternal present of art and history; this is the last we see of him or his consciousness.

¹ Oscar Wilde, "Intentions," in *The Artist as Critic*, ed. Richard Ellmann (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 299. N.B. Wilde used this sentence in several contexts. I have cited the one I had at hand.

² "il s'attendrissait sur elle [la mort de Lucien] comme tous les lecteurs, en se plaçant au point de vue de Vautrin, qui est le point de vue de Balzac. . . ." Marcel Proust, "Sainte-Beuve et Balzac," in *Contre Sainte-Beuve* (Paris: Pléiade, 1971), 273n. Throughout, all translations of French quotations are my own.

³ "En prenant ses mesures pour mourir, il se demandait comment cette merveille existait inconnue dans Paris." "svelte, jeune, fraîche." "un Lucien poète en promenade dans le Moyen Age, sous les arcades et les tourelles de St Louis, et un Lucien apprêtant son suicide." *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1977), 794. All subsequent references to this text are from this edition.