

*Realism and the Novel Form*

THESE are still no wholly satisfactory answers to many of the general questions which anyone interested in the early eighteenth-century novelists and their works is likely to ask: Is the novel a new literary form? And if we assume, as is commonly done, that it is, and that it was begun by Defoe, Richardson and Fielding, how does it differ from the prose fiction of the past, from that of Greece, for example, or that of the Middle Ages, or of seventeenth-century France? And is there any reason why these differences appeared when and where they did?

Such large questions are never easy to approach, much less to answer, and they are particularly difficult in this case because Defoe, Richardson and Fielding do not in the usual sense constitute a literary school. Indeed their works show so little sign of mutual influence and are so different in nature that at first sight it appears that our curiosity about the rise of the novel is unlikely to find any satisfaction other than the meagre one afforded by the terms 'genius' and 'accident', the twin faces on the Janus of the dead ends of literary history. We cannot, of course, do without them: on the other hand there is not much we can do with them. The present inquiry therefore takes another direction: assuming that the appearance of our first three novelists within a single generation was probably not sheer accident, and that their geniuses could not have created the new form unless the conditions of the time had also been favourable, it attempts to discover what these favourable conditions in the literary and social situation were, and in what ways Defoe, Richardson and Fielding were its beneficiaries.

For this investigation our first need is a working definition of the characteristics of the novel—a definition sufficiently narrow to exclude previous types of narrative and yet broad enough to apply to whatever is usually put in the novel category. The novelists themselves do not help us very much here. It is true that both Richardson and Fielding saw themselves as founders of a new kind of writing, and that both viewed their work as

involving a break with the old-fashioned romances; but neither they nor their contemporaries provide us with the kind of characterisation of the new genre that we need; indeed they did not even canonise the changed nature of their fiction by a change in nomenclature—our usage of the term 'novel' was not fully established until the end of the eighteenth century.

With the help of their larger perspective the historians of the novel have been able to do much more to determine the idiosyncratic features of the new form. Briefly, they have seen 'realism' as the defining characteristic which differentiates the work of the early eighteenth-century novelists from previous fiction. With their picture—that of writers otherwise different but alike in this quality of 'realism'—one's initial reservation must surely be that the term itself needs further explanation, if only because to use it without qualification as a defining characteristic of the novel might otherwise carry the invidious suggestion that all previous writers and literary forms pursued the unreal.

The main critical associations of the term 'realism' are with the French school of Realists. 'Réalisme' was apparently first used as an aesthetic description in 1835 to denote the 'vérité humaine' of Rembrandt as opposed to the 'idéauté poétique' of neo-classical painting; it was later consecrated as a specifically literary term by the foundation in 1856 of *Réalisme*, a journal edited by Duranty.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately much of the usefulness of the word was soon lost in the bitter controversies over the 'low' subjects and allegedly immoral tendencies of Flaubert and his successors. As a result, 'realism' came to be used primarily as the antonym of 'idealism', and this sense, which is actually a reflection of the position taken by the enemies of the French Realists, has in fact coloured much critical and historical writing about the novel. The prehistory of the form has commonly been envisaged as a matter of tracing the continuity between all earlier fiction which portrayed low life: the story of the Ephesian matron is 'realistic' because it shows that sexual appetite is stronger than wifely sorrow; and the fabliau or the picaresque tale are 'realistic' because economic or carnal motives are given pride of place in their presentation of human behaviour. By the same implicit

<sup>1</sup> See Bernard Weinberg, *French Realism: the Critical Reaction 1830-1870* (London, 1937), p. 114.

premise, the English eighteenth-century novelists, together with Furetière, Scarron and Lesage in France, are regarded as the eventual climax of this tradition: the 'realism' of the novels of Defoe, Richardson and Fielding is closely associated with the fact that Moll Flanders is a thief, Pamela a hypocrite, and Tom Jones a fornicator.

This use of 'realism', however, has the grave defect of obscuring what is probably the most original feature of the novel form. If the novel were realistic merely because it saw life from the seamy side, it would only be an inverted romance; but in fact it surely attempts to portray all the varieties of human experience, and not merely those suited to one particular literary perspective: the novel's realism does not reside in the kind of life it presents, but in the way it presents it.

This, of course, is very close to the position of the French Realists themselves, who asserted that if their novels tended to differ from the more flattering pictures of humanity presented by many established ethical, social, and literary codes, it was merely because they were the product of a more dispassionate and scientific scrutiny of life than had ever been attempted before. It is far from clear that this ideal of scientific objectivity is desirable, and it certainly cannot be realised in practice: nevertheless it is very significant that, in the first sustained effort of the new genre to become critically aware of its aims and methods, the French Realists should have drawn attention to an issue which the novel raises more sharply than any other literary form—the problem of the correspondence between the literary work and the reality which it imitates. This is essentially an epistemological problem, and it therefore seems likely that the nature of the novel's realism, whether in the early eighteenth century or later, can best be clarified by the help of those professionally concerned with the analysis of concepts, the philosophers.

## I

By a paradox that will surprise only the neophyte, the term 'realism' in philosophy is most strictly applied to a view of reality diametrically opposed to that of common usage—to the view held by the scholastic Realists of the Middle Ages that it is universals, classes or abstractions, and not the particular, concrete objects of sense-perception, which are the true 'realities'.

Not  
subject  
but  
form

This, at first sight, appears unhelpful, since in the novel, more than in any other genre, general truths only exist *post res*; but the very unfamiliarity of the point of view of scholastic Realism at least serves to draw attention to a characteristic of the novel which is analogous to the changed philosophical meaning of 'realism' today: the novel arose in the modern period, a period whose general intellectual orientation was most decisively separated from its classical and mediaeval heritage by its rejection—or at least its attempted rejection—of universals.<sup>1</sup>

Modern realism, of course, begins from the position that truth can be discovered by the individual through his senses: it has its origins in Descartes and Locke, and received its first full formulation by Thomas Reid in the middle of the eighteenth century.<sup>2</sup> But the view that the external world is real, and that our senses give us a true report of it, obviously does not in itself throw much light on literary realism; since almost everyone, in all ages, has in one way or another been forced to some such conclusion about the external world by his own experience, literature has always been to some extent exposed to the same epistemological naïveté. Further, the distinctive tenets of realist epistemology, and the controversies associated with them, are for the most part much too specialised in nature to have much bearing on literature. What is important to the novel in philosophical realism is much less specific; it is rather the general temper of realist thought, the methods of investigation it has used, and the kinds of problems it has raised.

The general temper of philosophical realism has been critical, anti-traditional and innovating; its method has been the study of the particulars of experience by the individual investigator, who, ideally at least, is free from the body of past assumptions and traditional beliefs; and it has given a peculiar importance to semantics, to the problem of the nature of the correspondence between words and reality. All of these features of philosophical realism have analogies to distinctive features of the novel form, analogies which draw attention to the characteristic kind of correspondence between life and literature which has obtained in prose fiction since the novels of Defoe and Richardson.

<sup>1</sup> See R. I. Aaron, *The Theory of Universals* (Oxford, 1952), pp. 18-41.

<sup>2</sup> See S. Z. Hasan, *Realism* (Cambridge, 1928), chs. 1 and 2.

(a)

The greatness of Descartes was primarily one of method, of the thoroughness of his determination to accept nothing on trust; and his *Discourse on Method* (1637) and his *Meditations* did much to bring about the modern assumption whereby the pursuit of truth is conceived of as a wholly individual matter, logically independent of the tradition of past thought, and indeed as more likely to be arrived at by a departure from it.

The novel is the form of literature which most fully reflects this individualist and innovating reorientation. Previous literary forms had reflected the general tendency of their cultures to make conformity to traditional practice the major test of truth: the plots of classical and renaissance epic, for example, were based on past history or fable, and the merits of the author's treatment were judged largely according to a view of literary decorum derived from the accepted models in the genre. This literary traditionalism was first and most fully challenged by the novel, whose primary criterion was truth to individual experience—individual experience which is always unique and therefore new. The novel is thus the logical literary vehicle of a culture which, in the last few centuries, has set an unprecedented value on originality, on the novel; and it is therefore well named.

This emphasis on the new accounts for some of the critical difficulties which the novel is widely agreed to present. When we judge a work in another genre, a recognition of its literary models is often important and sometimes essential; our evaluation depends to a large extent on our analysis of the author's skill in handling the appropriate formal conventions. On the other hand, it is surely very damaging for a novel to be in any sense an imitation of another literary work: and the reason for this seems to be that since the novelist's primary task is to convey the impression of fidelity to human experience, attention to any pre-established formal conventions can only endanger his success. What is often felt as the formlessness of the novel, as compared, say, with tragedy or the ode, probably follows from this: the poverty of the novel's formal conventions would seem to be the price it must pay for its realism.

But the absence of formal conventions in the novel is unimportant compared to its rejection of traditional plots. Plot, of

course, is not a simple matter, and the degree of its originality or otherwise is never easy to determine; nevertheless a broad and necessarily summary comparison between the novel and previous literary forms reveals an important difference: Defoe and Richardson are the first great writers in our literature who did not take their plots from mythology, history, legend or previous literature. In this they differ from Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton, for instance, who, like the writers of Greece and Rome, habitually used traditional plots; and who did so, in the last analysis, because they accepted the general premise of their times that, since Nature is essentially complete and unchanging, its records, whether scriptural, legendary or historical, constitute a definitive repertoire of human experience.

This point of view continued to be expressed until the nineteenth century; the opponents of Balzac, for example, used it to deride his preoccupation with contemporary and, in their view, ephemeral reality. But at the same time, from the Renaissance onwards, there was a growing tendency for individual experience to replace collective tradition as the ultimate arbiter of reality; and this transition would seem to constitute an important part of the general cultural background of the rise of the novel.

It is significant that the trend in favour of originality found its first powerful expression in England, and in the eighteenth century; the very word 'original' took on its modern meaning at this time, by a semantic reversal which is a parallel to the change in the meaning of 'realism'. We have seen that, from the mediaeval belief in the reality of universals, 'realism' had come to denote a belief in the individual apprehension of reality through the senses: similarly the term 'original' which in the Middle Ages had meant 'having existed from the first' came to mean 'underived, independent, first-hand'; and by the time that Edward Young in his epoch-making *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759) hailed Richardson as 'a genius as well moral as original',<sup>1</sup> the word could be used as a term of praise meaning 'novel or fresh in character or style'.

The novel's use of non-traditional plots is an early and probably independent manifestation of this emphasis. When Defoe,

<sup>1</sup> *Works* (1773), V, 125; see also Max Scheler, *Versuche zu einer Soziologie des Wissens* (München and Leipzig, 1924), pp. 104 ff.; Elizabeth L. Mann, 'The Problem of Originality in English Literary Criticism, 1750-1800', *PQ*, XVIII (1939), 97-118.

for example, began to write fiction he took little notice of the dominant critical theory of the day, which still inclined towards the use of traditional plots; instead, he merely allowed his narrative order to flow spontaneously from his own sense of what his protagonists might plausibly do next. In so doing Defoe initiated an important new tendency in fiction: his total subordination of the plot to the pattern of the autobiographical memoir is as defiant an assertion of the primacy of individual experience in the novel as Descartes's *cogito ergo sum* was in philosophy.

After Defoe, Richardson and Fielding in their very different ways continued what was to become the novel's usual practice, the use of non-traditional plots, either wholly invented or based in part on a contemporary incident. It cannot be claimed that either of them completely achieved that interpenetration of plot, character and emergent moral theme which is found in the highest examples of the art of the novel. But it must be remembered that the task was not an easy one, particularly at a time when the established literary outlet for the creative imagination lay in eliciting an individual pattern and a contemporary significance from a plot that was not itself novel.

(b)

Much else besides the plot had to be changed in the tradition of fiction before the novel could embody the individual apprehension of reality as freely as the method of Descartes and Locke allowed their thought to spring from the immediate facts of consciousness. To begin with, the actors in the plot and the scene of their actions had to be placed in a new literary perspective: the plot had to be acted out by particular people in particular circumstances, rather than, as had been common in the past, by general human types against a background primarily determined by the appropriate literary convention.

This literary change was analogous to the rejection of universals and the emphasis on particulars which characterises philosophic realism. Aristotle might have agreed with Locke's primary assumption, that it was the senses which 'at first let in particular ideas, and furnish the empty cabinet' of the mind.<sup>1</sup> But he would have gone on to insist that the scrutiny of particular cases was of little value in itself; the proper intellectual task

<sup>1</sup> *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), Bk. I, ch. 2, sect. xv.

of man was to rally against the meaningless flux of sensation, and achieve a knowledge of the universals which alone constituted the ultimate and immutable reality.<sup>1</sup> It is this generalising emphasis which gives most Western thought until the seventeenth century a strong enough family resemblance to outweigh all its other multifarious differences: similarly when in 1713 Berkeley's Philonous affirmed that 'it is an universally received maxim, that *everything which exists is particular*',<sup>2</sup> he was stating the opposite modern tendency which in turn gives modern thought since Descartes a certain unity of outlook and method.

Here, again, both the new trends in philosophy and the related formal characteristics of the novel were contrary to the dominant literary outlook. For the critical tradition in the early eighteenth century was still governed by the strong classical preference for the general and universal: the proper object of literature remained *quod semper quod ubique ab omnibus creditum est*. This preference was particularly pronounced in the neo-Platonist tendency, which had always been strong in the romance, and which was becoming of increasing importance in literary criticism and aesthetics generally. Shaftesbury, for instance, in his *Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour* (1709), expressed the distaste of this school of thought for particularity in literature and art very emphatically: 'The variety of Nature is such, as to distinguish every thing she forms, by a *peculiar* original character; which, if strictly observed, will make the subject appear unlike to anything extant in the world besides. But this effect the good poet and painter seek industriously to prevent. They hate *minuteness*, and are afraid of *singularity*.'<sup>3</sup> He continued: 'The mere Face-Painter, indeed, has little in common with the Poet; but, like the mere Historian, copies what he sees, and minutely traces every feature, and odd mark'; and concluded confidently that 'Tis otherwise with men of invention and design'.

Despite Shaftesbury's engaging finality, however, a contrary aesthetic tendency in favour of particularity soon began to assert itself, largely as a result of the application to literary problems of the psychological approach of Hobbes and Locke. Lord Kames was perhaps the most forthright early spokesman of this tendency. In his *Elements of Criticism* (1762) he declared

<sup>1</sup> See *Posterior Analytics*, Bk. I, ch. 24; Bk. II, ch. 19.

<sup>2</sup> First *Dialogue between Hylas and Philonous*, 1713 (Berkeley, *Works*, ed. Luce and Jessop (London, 1949), II, 192).

<sup>3</sup> Pt. IV, sect. 3.

that 'abstract or general terms have no good effect in any composition for amusement; because it is only of particular objects that images can be formed'; and Kames went on to claim that, contrary to general opinion, Shakespeare's appeal lay in the fact that 'every article in his descriptions is particular, as in nature'.

In this matter, as in that of originality, Defoe and Richardson established the characteristic literary direction of the novel form long before it could count on any support from critical theory. Not all will agree with Kames that 'every article' in Shakespeare's descriptions is particular; but particularity of description has always been considered typical of the narrative manner of *Robinson Crusoe* and *Pamela*. Richardson's first biographer, indeed, Mrs. Barbauld, described his genius in terms of an analogy which has continually figured in the controversy between neo-classical generality and realistic particularity. Sir Joshua Reynolds, for example, expressed his neo-classical orthodoxy by preferring the 'great and general ideas' of Italian painting to the 'literal truth and . . . minute exactness in the detail of nature modified by accident' of the Dutch school;<sup>2</sup> whereas the French Realists, it will be remembered, had followed the '*vérité humaine*' of Rembrandt, rather than the '*idéalité poétique*' of the classical school. Mrs. Barbauld accurately indicated Richardson's position in this conflict when she wrote that he had 'the accuracy of finish of a Dutch painter . . . content to produce effects by the patient labour of minuteness'.<sup>3</sup> Both he and Defoe, in fact, were heedless of Shaftesbury's scorn, and like Rembrandt were content to be 'mere face-painters and historians'.

The concept of realistic particularity in literature is itself somewhat too general to be capable of concrete demonstration: for such demonstration to be possible the relationship of realistic particularity to some specific aspects of narrative technique must first be established. Two such aspects suggest themselves as of especial importance in the novel—characterisation, and presentation of background: the novel is surely distinguished from

<sup>1</sup> 1763 ed., III, 198-199.

<sup>2</sup> *Idler*, No. 79 (1759). See also Scott Elledge, 'The Background and Development in English Criticism of the Theories of Generality and Particularity', *PMLA*, LX (1945), 161-174.

<sup>3</sup> *Correspondence of Samuel Richardson*, 1804, I, cxxxvii. For similar comments by contemporary French readers, see Joseph Texte, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Cosmopolitan Spirit in Literature* (London, 1899), pp. 174-175.

other genres and from previous forms of fiction by the amount of attention it habitually accords both to the individualisation of its characters and to the detailed presentation of their environment.

(c) *Individual + particular*

Philosophically the particularising approach to character resolves itself into the problem of defining the individual person. Once Descartes had given the thought processes within the individual's consciousness supreme importance, the philosophical problems connected with personal identity naturally attracted a great deal of attention. In England, for example, Locke, Bishop Butler, Berkeley, Hume and Reid all debated the issue, and the controversy even reached the pages of the *Spectator*.<sup>1</sup>

The parallel here between the tradition of realist thought and the formal innovations of the early novelists is obvious: both philosophers and novelists paid greater attention to the particular individual than had been common before. But the great attention paid in the novel to the particularisation of character is itself such a large question that we will consider only one of its more manageable aspects: the way that the novelist typically indicates his intention of presenting a character as a particular individual by naming him in exactly the same way as particular individuals are named in ordinary life.

Logically the problem of individual identity is closely related to the epistemological status of proper names; for, in the words of Hobbes, 'Proper names bring to mind one thing only; universals recall any one of many'.<sup>2</sup> Proper names have exactly the same function in social life: they are the verbal expression of the particular identity of each individual person. In literature, however, this function of proper names was first fully established in the novel.

Characters in previous forms of literature, of course, were usually given proper names; but the kind of names actually used showed that the author was not trying to establish his characters as completely individualised entities. The precepts of classical and renaissance criticism agreed with the practice of their literature in preferring either historical names or type names. In either case, the names set the characters in the context of a large body of expectations primarily formed from past

<sup>1</sup> No. 578 (1714).

<sup>2</sup> *Leviathan* (1651), Pt. I, ch. 4.

literature, rather than from the context of contemporary life. Even in comedy, where characters were not usually historical but invented, the names were supposed to be 'characteristic', as Aristotle tells us,<sup>1</sup> and they tended to remain so until long after the rise of the novel.

Earlier types of prose fiction had also tended to use proper names that were characteristic, or non-particular and unrealistic in some other way; names that either, like those of Rabelais, Sidney or Bunyan, denoted particular qualities, or like those of Lyly, Aphra Behn or Mrs. Manley, carried foreign, archaic or literary connotations which excluded any suggestion of real and contemporary life. The primarily literary and conventional orientation of these proper names was further attested by the fact that there was usually only one of them—Mr. Badman or Euphues; unlike people in ordinary life, the characters of fiction did not have both given name and surname.

The early novelists, however, made an extremely significant break with tradition, and named their characters in such a way as to suggest that they were to be regarded as particular individuals in the contemporary social environment. Defoe's use of proper names is casual and sometimes contradictory; but he very rarely gives names that are conventional or fanciful—one possible exception, Roxana, is a pseudonym which is fully explained; and most of the main characters such as Robinson Crusoe or Moll Flanders have complete and realistic names or aliases. Richardson continued this practice, but was much more careful and gave all of his major characters, and even most of his minor ones, both a given name and a surname. He also faced a minor but not unimportant problem in novel writing, that of giving names that are subtly appropriate and suggestive, yet sound like ordinary realistic ones. Thus the romance-connotations of Pamela are controlled by the commonplace family name of Andrews; both Clarissa Harlowe and Robert Lovelace are in many ways appropriately named; and indeed nearly all Richardson's proper names, from Mrs. Sinclair to Sir Charles Grandison, sound authentic and are yet suited to the personalities of the bearers.

Fielding, as an anonymous contemporary critic pointed out, christened his characters 'not with fantastic high-sounding Names, but such as, tho' they sometimes had some reference to

<sup>1</sup> *Poetics*, ch. 9.

the Character, had a more modern termination'.<sup>1</sup> Such names as Heartfree, Allworthy and Square are certainly modernised versions of the type name, although they are just credible; even Western or Tom Jones suggest very strongly that Fielding had his eye as much on the general type as on the particular individual. This, however, does not controvert the present argument, for it will surely be generally agreed that Fielding's practice in the naming, and indeed in the whole portrayal of his characters, is a departure from the usual treatment of these matters in the novel. Not, as we have seen in Richardson's case, that there is no place in the novel for proper names that are in some way appropriate to the character concerned: but that this appropriateness must not be such as to impair the primary function of the name, which is to symbolise the fact that the character is to be regarded as though he were a particular person and not a type.

Fielding, indeed, seems to have realised this by the time he came to write his last novel, *Amelia*: there his neo-classical preference for type-names finds expression only in such minor characters as Justice Thrasher and Bondum the bailiff; and all the main characters—the Booths, Miss Matthews, Dr. Harrison, Colonel James, Sergeant Atkinson, Captain Trent and Mrs. Bennet, for example—have ordinary and contemporary names. There is, indeed, some evidence that Fielding, like some modern novelists, took these names somewhat at random from a printed list of contemporary persons—all the surnames given above are in the list of subscribers to the 1724 folio edition of Gilbert Burnet's *History of His Own Time*, an edition which Fielding is known to have owned.<sup>2</sup>

Whether this is so or not, it is certain that Fielding made considerable and increasing concessions to the custom initiated by Defoe and Richardson of using ordinary contemporary proper names for their characters. Although this custom was not always followed by some of the later eighteenth-century novelists, such as Smollett and Sterne, it was later established as part of the tradition of the form; and, as Henry James pointed out with respect to Trollope's fecund cleric Mr. Quiverful,<sup>3</sup> the

<sup>1</sup> *Essay on the New Species of Writing Founded by Mr. Fielding*, 1751, p. 18. This whole question is treated more fully in my 'The Naming of Characters in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding', *RES*, XXV (1949), 322-338.

<sup>2</sup> See Wilbur L. Cross, *History of Henry Fielding* (New Haven, 1918), I, 342-343.

<sup>3</sup> *Partial Portraits* (London, 1888), p. 118.

novelist can only break with the tradition at the cost of destroying the reader's belief in the literal reality of the character concerned.

(d)

Locke had defined personal identity as an identity of consciousness through duration in time; the individual was in touch with his own continuing identity through memory of his past thoughts and actions.<sup>1</sup> This location of the source of personal identity in the repertoire of its memories was continued by Hume: 'Had we no memory, we never should have any notion of causation, nor consequently of that chain of causes and effects, which constitute our self or person'.<sup>2</sup> Such a point of view is characteristic of the novel; many novelists, from Sterne to Proust, have made their subject the exploration of the personality as it is defined in the interpenetration of its past and present self-awareness.

Time is an essential category in another related but more external approach to the problem of defining the individuality of any object. The 'principle of individuation' accepted by Locke was that of existence at a particular locus in space and time: since, as he wrote, 'ideas become general by separating from them the circumstances of time and place',<sup>3</sup> so they become particular only when both these circumstances are specified. In the same way the characters of the novel can only be individualised if they are set in a background of particularised time and place.

Both the philosophy and the literature of Greece and Rome were deeply influenced by Plato's view that the Forms or Ideas were the ultimate realities behind the concrete objects of the temporal world. These forms were conceived as timeless and unchanging,<sup>4</sup> and thus reflected the basic premise of their civilisation in general that nothing happened or could happen whose fundamental meaning was not independent of the flux of time. This premise is diametrically opposed to the outlook which has established itself since the Renaissance, and which views time,

<sup>1</sup> *Human Understanding*, Bk. II, ch. 27, sects. ix, x.

<sup>2</sup> *Treatise of Human Nature*, Bk. I, pt. 4, sect. vi.

<sup>3</sup> *Human Understanding*, Bk. III, ch. 3, sect. vi.

<sup>4</sup> Plato does not specifically state that the Ideas are timeless, but the notion, which dates from Aristotle (*Metaphysics*, Bk. XII, ch. 6), underlies the whole system of thought with which they are associated.

not only as a crucial dimension of the physical world, but as the shaping force of man's individual and collective history.

The novel is in nothing so characteristic of our culture as in the way that it reflects this characteristic orientation of modern thought. E. M. Forster sees the portrayal of 'life by time' as the distinctive role which the novel has added to literature's more ancient preoccupation with portraying 'life by values';<sup>1</sup> Spengler's perspective for the rise of the novel is the need of 'ultrahistorical' modern man for a literary form capable of dealing with 'the whole of life';<sup>2</sup> while more recently Northrop Frye has seen the 'alliance of time and Western man' as the defining characteristic of the novel compared with other genres.<sup>3</sup>

We have already considered one aspect of the importance which the novel allots the time dimension: its break with the earlier literary tradition of using timeless stories to mirror the unchanging moral verities. The novel's plot is also distinguished from most previous fiction by its use of past experience as the cause of present action: a causal connection operating through time replaces the reliance of earlier narratives on disguises and coincidences, and this tends to give the novel a much more cohesive structure. Even more important, perhaps, is the effect upon characterisation of the novel's insistence on the time process. The most obvious and extreme example of this is the stream of consciousness novel which purports to present a direct quotation of what occurs in the individual mind under the impact of the temporal flux; but the novel in general has interested itself much more than any other literary form in the development of its characters in the course of time. Finally, the novel's detailed depiction of the concerns of everyday life also depends upon its power over the time dimension: T. H. Green pointed out that much of man's life had tended to be almost unavailable to literary representation merely as a result of its slowness;<sup>4</sup> the novel's closeness to the texture of daily experience directly depends upon its employment of a much more minutely discriminated time-scale than had previously been employed in narrative.

The role of time in ancient, mediaeval and renaissance

<sup>1</sup> *Aspects of the Novel* (London, 1949), pp. 29-31.

<sup>2</sup> *Decline of the West*, trans. Atkinson (London, 1928), I, 130-131.

<sup>3</sup> 'The Four Forms of Fiction', *Hudson Review*, II (1950), 596.

<sup>4</sup> 'Estimate of the Value and Influence of Works of Fiction in Modern Times' (1862), *Works*, ed. Nettleship (London, 1888), III, 36.

literature is certainly very different from that in the novel. The restriction of the action of tragedy to twenty-four hours, for example, the celebrated unity of time, is really a denial of the importance of the temporal dimension in human life; for, in accord with the classical world's view of reality as subsisting in timeless universals, it implies that the truth about existence can be as fully unfolded in the space of a day as in the space of a lifetime. The equally celebrated personifications of time as the winged chariot or the grim reaper reveal an essentially similar outlook. They focus attention, not on the temporal flux, but on the supremely timeless fact of death; their role is to overwhelm our awareness of daily life so that we shall be prepared to face eternity. Both these personifications, in fact, resemble the doctrine of the unity of time in that they are fundamentally a-historical, and are therefore equally typical of the very minor importance accorded to the temporal dimension in most literature previous to the novel.

Shakespeare's sense of the historical past, for example, is very different from the modern one. Troy and Rome, the Plantagenets and the Tudors, none of them are far enough back to be very different from the present or from each other. In this Shakespeare reflects the view of his age: he had been dead for thirty years before the word 'anachronism' first appeared in English,<sup>1</sup> and he was still very close to the mediaeval conception of history by which, whatever the period, the wheel of time churns out the same eternally applicable *exempla*.

This a-historical outlook is associated with a striking lack of interest in the minute-by-minute and day-to-day temporal setting, a lack of interest which has caused the time scheme of so many plays both by Shakespeare and by most of his predecessors from Aeschylus onwards, to baffle later editors and critics. The attitude to time in early fiction is very similar; the sequence of events is set in a very abstract continuum of time and space, and allows very little importance to time as a factor in human relationships. Coleridge noted the 'marvellous independence and true imaginative absence of all particular space or time in the "Faerie Queene"';<sup>2</sup> and the temporal dimension of Bunyan's allegories or the heroic romances is equally vague and unparticularised.

<sup>1</sup> See Herman J. Ebeling, 'The Word Anachronism', *MLN*, LII (1937), 120-121.

<sup>2</sup> *Selected Works*, ed. Potter (London, 1933), p. 333.



Soon, however, the modern sense of time began to permeate many areas of thought. The late seventeenth century witnessed the rise of a more objective study of history and therefore of a deeper sense of the difference between the past and the present.<sup>1</sup> At the same time Newton and Locke presented a new analysis of the temporal process;<sup>2</sup> it became a slower and more mechanical sense of duration which was minutely enough discriminated to measure the falling of objects or the succession of thoughts in the mind.

These new emphases are reflected in the novels of Defoe. His fiction is the first which presents us with a picture both of the individual life in its larger perspective as a historical process, and in its closer view which shows the process being acted out against the background of the most ephemeral thoughts and actions. It is true that the time scales of his novels are sometimes both contradictory in themselves, and inconsistent with their pretended historical setting, but the mere fact that such objections arise is surely a tribute to the way the characters are felt by the reader to be rooted in the temporal dimension. We obviously could not think of making such objections seriously to Sidney's *Arcadia* or *The Pilgrim's Progress*; there is not enough evidence of the reality of time for any sense of discrepancies to be possible. Defoe does give us such evidence. At his best, he convinces us completely that his narrative is occurring at a particular place and at a particular time, and our memory of his novels consists largely of these vividly realised moments in the lives of his characters, moments which are loosely strung together to form a convincing biographical perspective. We have a sense of personal identity subsisting through duration and yet being changed by the flow of experience.

This impression is much more strongly and completely realised in Richardson. He was very careful to locate all his events of his narrative in an unprecedentedly detailed time-scheme: the superscription of each letter gives us the day of the week, and often the time of the day; and this in turn acts as an objective framework for the even greater temporal detail of the letters themselves—we are told, for example, that Clarissa died

<sup>1</sup> See G. N. Clark, *The Later Stuarts, 1660-1714* (Oxford, 1934), pp. 362-366; René Wellek, *The Rise of English Literary History* (Chapel Hill, 1941), ch. 2.

<sup>2</sup> See especially Ernst Cassirer, 'Raum und Zeit', *Das Erkenntnisproblem* . . . (Berlin, 1922-23), II, 339-374.

at 6.40 P.M. on Thursday, 7th September. Richardson's use of the letter form also induced in the reader a continual sense of actual participation in the action which was until then unparalleled in its completeness and intensity. He knew, as he wrote in the 'Preface' to *Clarissa*, that it was 'Critical situations . . . with what may be called *instantaneous* descriptions and reflections' that engaged the attention best; and in many scenes the pace of the narrative was slowed down by minute description to something very near that of actual experience. In these scenes Richardson achieved for the novel what D. W. Griffith's technique of the 'close-up' did for the film: added a new dimension to the representation of reality.

Fielding approached the problem of time in his novels from a more external and traditional point of view. In *Shamela* he poured scorn on Richardson's use of the present tense: 'Mrs. Jervis and I are just in bed, and the door unlocked; if my master should come—Ods-bobs! I hear him just coming in at the door. You see I write in the present tense, as Parson William says. Well, he is in bed between us . . .'<sup>1</sup> In *Tom Jones* he indicated his intention of being much more selective than Richardson in his handling of the time dimension: 'We intend . . . rather to pursue the method of those writers who profess to disclose the revolutions of countries, than to imitate the painful and voluminous historian, who, to preserve the regularity of his series, thinks himself obliged to fill up as much paper with the detail of months and years in which nothing remarkable happened, as he employs upon those notable eras when the greatest scenes have been transacted on the human stage'.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, however, *Tom Jones* introduced one interesting innovation in the fictional treatment of time. Fielding seems to have used an almanac, that symbol of the diffusion of an objective sense of time by the printing press: with slight exceptions, nearly all the events of his novel are chronologically consistent, not only in relation to each other, and to the time that each stage of the journey of the various characters from the West Country to London would actually have taken, but also in relation to such external considerations as the proper phases of the moon and the time-table of the Jacobite rebellion in 1745, the supposed year of the action.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Letter 6.

<sup>2</sup> Bk. II, ch. 1.

<sup>3</sup> As was shown by F. S. Dickson (Cross, *Henry Fielding*, II, 189-193).

(e)

In the present context, as in many others, space is the necessary correlative of time. Logically the individual, particular case is defined by reference to two co-ordinates, space and time. Psychologically, as Coleridge pointed out, our idea of time is 'always blended with the idea of space'.<sup>1</sup> The two dimensions, indeed, are for many practical purposes inseparable, as is suggested by the fact that the words 'present' and 'minute' can refer to either dimension; while introspection shows that we cannot easily visualise any particular moment of existence without setting it in its spatial context also.

Place was traditionally almost as general and vague as time in tragedy, comedy and romance. Shakespeare, as Johnson tells us, 'had no regard to distinction of time or place';<sup>2</sup> and Sidney's *Arcadia* was as unlocalized as the Bohemian limbos of the Elizabethan stage. In the picaresque novel, it is true, and in Bunyan, there are many passages of vivid and particularised physical description; but they are incidental and fragmentary. Defoe would seem to be the first of our writers who visualised the whole of his narrative as though it occurred in an actual physical environment. His attention to the description of milieu is still intermittent; but occasional vivid details supplement the continual implication of his narrative and make us attach Robinson Crusoe and Moll Flanders much more completely to their environments than is the case with previous fictional characters. Characteristically, this solidity of setting is particularly noticeable in Defoe's treatment of movable objects in the physical world: in *Moll Flanders* there is much linen and gold to be counted, while Robinson Crusoe's island is full of memorable pieces of clothing and hardware.

Richardson, once again occupying the central place in the development of the technique of narrative realism, carried the process much further. There is little description of natural scenery, but considerable attention is paid to interiors throughout his novels. Pamela's residences in Lincolnshire and Bedfordshire are real enough prisons; we are given a highly detailed description of Grandison Hall; and some of the descriptions in

<sup>1</sup> *Biographia Literaria*, ed. Shawcross (London, 1907), I, 87.

<sup>2</sup> 'Preface' (1765), *Johnson on Shakespeare*, ed. Ralfeigh (London, 1908), pp. 21-22.

*Clarissa* anticipate Balzac's skill in making the setting of the novel a pervasive operating force—the Harlowe mansion becomes a terrifyingly real physical and moral environment.

Here, too, Fielding is some way from Richardson's particularity. He gives us no full interiors, and his frequent landscape descriptions are very conventionalised. Nevertheless *Tom Jones* features the first Gothic mansion in the history of the novel;<sup>1</sup> and Fielding is as careful about the topography of his action as he is about its chronology; many of the places on Tom Jones's route to London are given by name, and the exact location of the others is implied by various other kinds of evidence.

In general, then, although there is nothing in the eighteenth-century novel which equals the opening chapters of *Le Rouge et le noir* or *Le Père Goriot*, chapters which at once indicate the importance which Stendhal and Balzac attach to the environment in their total picture of life, there is no doubt that the pursuit of verisimilitude led Defoe, Richardson and Fielding to initiate that power of 'putting man wholly into his physical setting' which constitutes for Allen Tate the distinctive capacity of the novel form;<sup>2</sup> and the considerable extent to which they succeeded is not the least of the factors which differentiate them from previous writers of fiction and which explain their importance in the tradition of the new form.

(f)

The various technical characteristics of the novel described above all seem to contribute to the furthering of an aim which the novelist shares with the philosopher—the production of what purports to be an authentic account of the actual experiences of individuals. This aim involved many other departures from the traditions of fiction besides those already mentioned. What is perhaps the most important of them, the adaptation of prose style to give an air of complete authenticity, is also closely related to one of the distinctive methodological emphases of philosophical realism.

Just as it was the Nominalist scepticism about language

<sup>1</sup> See Warren Hunting Smith, *Architecture in English Fiction* (New Haven, 1934), p. 65.

<sup>2</sup> 'Techniques of Fiction', in *Critiques and Essays on Modern Fiction, 1920-1951*, ed. Aldridge (New York, 1952), p. 41.

which began to undermine the attitude to universals held by the scholastic Realists, so modern realism soon found itself faced with the semantic problem. Words did not all stand for real objects, or did not stand for them in the same way, and philosophy was therefore faced with the problem of discovering their rationale. Locke's chapters at the end of the third Book of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* are probably the most important evidence of this trend in the seventeenth century. Much of what is said there about the proper use of words would exclude the great bulk of literature, since, as Locke sadly discovers, 'eloquence, like the fair sex', involves a pleasurable deceit.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, it is interesting to note that although some of the 'abuses of language' which Locke specifies, such as figurative language, had been a regular feature of the romances, they are much rarer in the prose of Defoe and Richardson than in that of any previous writer of fiction.

The previous stylistic tradition for fiction was not primarily concerned with the correspondence of words to things, but rather with the extrinsic beauties which could be bestowed upon description and action by the use of rhetoric. Heliodorus's *Aethiopica* had established the tradition of linguistic ornateness in the Greek romances and the tradition had been continued in the Euphuism of John Lyly and Sidney, and in the elaborate conceits, or 'phébus', of La Calprenède and Madeleine de Scudéry. So even if the new writers of fiction had rejected the old tradition of mixing poetry with their prose, a tradition which had been followed even in narratives as completely devoted to the portrayal of low life as Petronius's *Satyricon*, there would still have remained a strong literary expectation that they would use language as a source of interest in its own right, rather than as a purely referential medium.

In any case, of course, the classical critical tradition in general had no use for the unadorned realistic description which such a use of language would imply. When the 9th *Taller* (1709) introduced Swift's 'Description of the Morning' as a work where the author had 'run into a way perfectly new, and described things as they happen', it was being ironical. The implicit assumption of educated writers and critics was that an author's skill was shown, not in the closeness with which he made his

<sup>1</sup> Bk. III, ch. 10, sects. xxxiii-xxxiv.

words correspond to their objects, but in the literary sensitivity with which his style reflected the linguistic decorum appropriate to its subject. It is natural, therefore, that it is to writers outside the circle of wit that we should have to turn for our earliest examples of fictional narrative written in a prose which restricts itself almost entirely to a descriptive and denotative use of language. Natural, too, that both Defoe and Richardson should have been attacked by many of the better educated writers of the day for their clumsy and often inaccurate way of writing.

Their basically realistic intentions, of course, required something very different from the accepted modes of literary prose. It is true that the movement towards clear and easy prose in the late seventeenth century had done much to produce a mode of expression much better adapted to the realistic novel than had been available before; while the Lockean view of language was beginning to be reflected in literary theory—John Dennis, for example, proscribed imagery in certain circumstances on the ground that it was unrealistic: 'No sort of imagery can ever be the language of grief. If a man complains in simile, I either laugh or sleep.'<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless the prose norm of the Augustan period remained much too literary to be the natural voice of Moll Flanders or Pamela Andrews: and although the prose of Addison, for example, or Swift, is simple and direct enough, its ordered economy tends to suggest an acute summary rather than a full report of what it describes.

It is therefore likely that we must regard the break which Defoe and Richardson made with the accepted canons of prose style, not an incidental blemish, but rather as the price they had to pay for achieving the immediacy and closeness of the text to what is being described. With Defoe this closeness is mainly physical, with Richardson mainly emotional, but in both we feel that the writer's exclusive aim is to make the words bring his object home to us in all its concrete particularity, whatever the cost in repetition or parenthesis or verbosity. Fielding, of course, did not break with the traditions of Augustan prose style or outlook. But it can be argued that this detracts from the authenticity of his narratives. Reading *Tom Jones* we do not imagine that we are eavesdropping on a new exploration of

<sup>1</sup> Preface, *The Passion of Byblis*, *Critical Works*, ed. Hooker (Baltimore, 1939-43), I, 2.

reality; the prose immediately informs us that exploratory operations have long since been accomplished, that we are to be spared that labour, and presented instead with a sifted and clarified report of the findings.

There is a curious antinomy here. On the one hand, Defoe and Richardson make an uncompromising application of the realist point of view in language and prose structure, and thereby forfeit other literary values. On the other hand, Fielding's stylistic virtues tend to interfere with his technique as a novelist, because a patent selectiveness of vision destroys our belief in the reality of report, or at least diverts our attention from the content of the report to the skill of the reporter. There would seem to be some inherent contradiction between the ancient and abiding literary values and the distinctive narrative technique of the novel.

That this may be so is suggested by a parallel with French fiction. In France, the classical critical outlook, with its emphasis on elegance and concision, was not fully challenged until the coming of Romanticism. It is perhaps partly for this reason that French fiction from *La Princesse de Clèves* to *Les Liaisons dangereuses* stands outside the main tradition of the novel. For all its psychological penetration and literary skill, we feel it is too stylish to be authentic. In this Madame de La Fayette and Choderlos de Laclos are the polar opposites of Defoe and Richardson, whose very diffuseness tends to act as a guarantee of the authenticity of their report, whose prose aims exclusively at what Locke defined as the proper purpose of language, 'to convey the knowledge of things',<sup>1</sup> and whose novels as a whole pretend to be no more than a transcription of real life—in Flaubert's words, 'le réel écrit'.

It would appear, then, that the function of language is much more largely referential in the novel than in other literary forms; that the genre itself works by exhaustive presentation rather than by elegant concentration. This fact would no doubt explain both why the novel is the most translatable of the genres; why many undoubtedly great novelists, from Richardson and Balzac to Hardy and Dostoevsky, often write gracelessly, and sometimes with downright vulgarity; and why the novel has less need of historical and literary commentary than other genres—its formal convention forces it to supply its own footnotes.

<sup>1</sup> *Human Understanding*, Bk. III, ch. 10, sect. xxiii.

## II

So much for the main analogies between realism in philosophy and literature. They are not proposed as exact; philosophy is one thing and literature is another. Nor do the analogies depend in any way on the presumption that the realist tradition in philosophy was a cause of the realism of the novel. That there was some influence is very likely, especially through Locke, whose thought everywhere pervades the eighteenth-century climate of opinion. But if a causal relationship of any importance exists it is probably much less direct: both the philosophical and the literary innovations must be seen as parallel manifestations of larger change—that vast transformation of Western civilisation since the Renaissance which has replaced the unified world picture of the Middle Ages with another very different one—one which presents us, essentially, with a developing but unplanned aggregate of particular individuals having particular experiences at particular times and at particular places.

Here, however, we are concerned with a much more limited conception, with the extent to which the analogy with philosophical realism helps to isolate and define the distinctive narrative mode of the novel. This, it has been suggested, is the sum of literary techniques whereby the novel's imitation of human life follows the procedures adopted by philosophical realism in its attempt to ascertain and report the truth. These procedures are by no means confined to philosophy; they tend, in fact, to be followed whenever the relation to reality of any report of an event is being investigated. The novel's mode of imitating reality may therefore be equally well summarised in terms of the procedures of another group of specialists in epistemology, the jury in a court of law. Their expectations, and those of the novel reader coincide in many ways: both want to know 'all the particulars' of a given case—the time and place of the occurrence; both must be satisfied as to the identities of the parties concerned, and will refuse to accept evidence about anyone called Sir Toby Belch or Mr. Badman—still less about a Chloe who has no surname and is 'common as the air'; and they also expect the witnesses to tell the story 'in his own words'. The jury, in fact, takes the 'circumstantial view of life', which T. H. Green<sup>1</sup> found to be the characteristic outlook of the novel.

<sup>1</sup> 'Estimate', *Works*, III, 37.

Language  
too  
revised:

modern  
life

The narrative method whereby the novel embodies this circumstantial view of life may be called its formal realism; formal, because the term realism does not here refer to any special literary doctrine or purpose, but only to a set of narrative procedures which are so commonly found together in the novel, and so rarely in other literary genres, that they may be regarded as typical of the form itself. Formal realism, in fact, is the narrative embodiment of a premise that Defoe and Richardson accepted very literally, but which is implicit in the novel form in general: the premise, or primary convention, that the novel is "a full and authentic report of human experience, and is therefore under an obligation to satisfy its reader with such details of the story as the individuality of the actors concerned, the particulars of the times and places of their actions, details which are presented through a more largely referential use of language than is common in other literary forms.

definition

Formal realism is, of course, like the rules of evidence, only a convention; and there is no reason why the report on human life which is presented by it should be in fact any truer than those presented through the very different conventions of other literary genres. The novel's air of total authenticity, indeed, does tend to authorise confusion on this point: and the tendency of some Realists and Naturalists to forget that the accurate transcription of actuality does not necessarily produce a work of any real truth or enduring literary value is no doubt partly responsible for the rather widespread distaste for Realism and all its works which is current today. This distaste, however, may also promote critical confusion by leading us into the opposite error; we must not allow an awareness of certain shortcomings in the aims of the Realist school to obscure the very considerable extent to which the novel in general, as much in Joyce as in Zola, employs the literary means here called formal realism. Nor must we forget that, although formal realism is only a convention, it has, like all literary conventions, its own peculiar advantages. There are important differences in the degree to which different literary forms imitate reality; and the formal realism of the novel allows a more immediate imitation of individual experience set in its temporal and spatial environment than do other literary forms. Consequently the novel's conventions make much smaller demands on the audience than do most literary conventions; and this surely explains why the

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majority of readers in the last two hundred years have found in the novel the literary form which most closely satisfies their wishes for a close correspondence between life and art. Nor are the advantages of the close and detailed correspondence to real life offered by formal realism limited to assisting the novel's popularity; they are also related to its most distinctive literary qualities, as we shall see.

In the strictest sense, of course, formal realism was not discovered by Defoe and Richardson; they only applied it much more completely than had been done before. Homer, for example, as Carlyle pointed out,<sup>1</sup> shared with them that outstanding 'clearness of sight' which is manifested in the 'detailed, ample and lovingly exact' descriptions that abound in their works; and there are many passages in later fiction, from *The Golden Ass* to *Aucassin and Nicolette*, from Chaucer to Bunyan, where the characters, their actions and their environment are presented with a particularity as authentic as that in any eighteenth-century novel. But there is an important difference: in Homer and in earlier prose fiction these passages are relatively rare, and tend to stand out from the surrounding narrative; the total literary structure was not consistently oriented in the direction of formal realism, and the plot especially, which was usually traditional and often highly improbable, was in direct conflict with its premises. Even when previous writers had overtly professed a wholly realistic aim, as did many seventeenth-century writers, they did not pursue it wholeheartedly. La Calprenède, Richard Head, Grimmelshausen, Bunyan, Aphra Behn, Furetière,<sup>2</sup> to mention only a few, had all asserted that their fictions were literally true; but their prefatory asseverations are no more convincing than the very similar ones to be found in most works of mediaeval hagiography. The aim of verisimilitude had not been deeply enough assimilated in either case to bring about the full rejection of all the non-realistic conventions that governed the genre.

For reasons to be considered in the next chapter, Defoe and Richardson were unprecedentedly independent of the literary conventions which might have interfered with their primary intentions, and they accepted the requirements of literal truth

early realism is not systematically grounded

<sup>1</sup> 'Burns', *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays* (New York, 1899), I, 276-277.  
<sup>2</sup> See A. J. Tiejc, 'A Peculiar Phase of the Theory of Realism in Pre-Richardsonian Prose-Fiction', *PMLA*, XXVII (1913), 213-252.

much more comprehensively. Of no fiction before Defoe's could Lamb have written, in terms very similar to those which Hazlitt used of Richardson,<sup>1</sup> 'It is like reading evidence in a court of Justice'.<sup>2</sup> Whether that is in itself a good thing is open to question; Defoe and Richardson would hardly deserve their reputation unless they had other and better claims on our attention. Nevertheless there can be little doubt that the development of a narrative method capable of creating such an impression is the most conspicuous manifestation of that mutation of prose fiction which we call the novel; the historical importance of Defoe and Richardson therefore primarily depends on the suddenness and completeness with which they brought into being what may be regarded as the lowest common denominator of the novel genre as a whole, its formal realism.

<sup>1</sup> 'He sets about describing every object and transaction, as if the whole had been given in on evidence by an eye-witness' (*Lectures on the English Comic Writers* (New York, 1845), p. 138).

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Walter Wilson, Dec. 16, 1822, printed in the latter's *Memoirs of the Life and Times of Daniel de Foe* (London, 1830, III, 428).

generic model

Individual particularized +

Time +

Place +

Language

Formal Realism as  
the Character of Novel

[as distinguished  
from Epic, Drama, Lyric, ...]

*The Reading Public and the  
Rise of the Novel*

Walt  
as  
pioneer  
here

THE novel's formal realism, we have seen, involved a many-sided break with the current literary tradition. Among the many reasons which made it possible for that break to occur earlier and more thoroughly in England than elsewhere, considerable importance must certainly be attached to changes in the eighteenth-century reading public. In his *English Literature and Society in the Eighteenth Century*, for example, Leslie Stephen long ago suggested that 'the gradual extension of the reading class affected the development of the literature addressed to them',<sup>1</sup> and he pointed to the rise of the novel, together with that of journalism, as prime examples of the effect of changes in the audience for literature. The nature of the evidence is such, however, that a reasonably full analysis would be inordinately long and yet fall far short of completeness in some important matters where information is scanty and difficult to interpret: what is offered here, therefore, is only a brief and tentative treatment of a few of the possible connections between changes in the nature and organisation of the reading public, and the emergence of the novel.

Q

Do you know who he is?

I Rise of Reading

Many eighteenth-century observers thought that their age was one of remarkable and increasing popular interest in reading. On the other hand, it is probable that although the reading public was large by comparison with previous periods, it was still very far from the mass reading public of today. The most convincing evidence of this is statistical, although it must, of course, be remembered that all the numerical estimates available are, to varying but always considerable degrees, both untrustworthy in themselves and problematic in their application.

<sup>1</sup> London, 1904, p. 26. See also Helen Sard Hughes, 'The Middle Class Reader and the English Novel', *JEGP*, XXV (1926), 362-378.

The only contemporary estimate of the size of the reading public was made very late in the century: Burke estimated it at 80,000 in the nineties.<sup>1</sup> This is small indeed, out of a population of at least six millions, and would probably imply an even smaller figure for the earlier part of the century with which we are most concerned. Such is certainly the implication of the most reliable evidence available on the circulation of newspapers and periodicals: one figure, that of 43,800 copies sold weekly in 1704,<sup>2</sup> implies less than one newspaper buyer per hundred persons per week; and another later figure, of 23,673 copies sold daily in 1753,<sup>3</sup> suggests that although the newspaper-buying public tripled in the first half of the century, it remained a very small percentage of the total population. Even if we accept the highest contemporary estimate of the number of readers per copy, that of twenty made by Addison in the *Spectator*,<sup>4</sup> we are left with a maximum newspaper-reading public of less than half a million—at most one in eleven of the total population; and since the estimate of twenty readers per copy seems a wild (and not disinterested) exaggeration, the real proportion was probably no more than half of this, or less than one in twenty.

The sale of the most popular books in the period suggests a book-buying public that is still numbered only in tens of thousands. Most of the very few secular works with sales of over ten thousand were topical pamphlets, such as Swift's *Conduct of the Allies* (1711), with a sale of 11,000 copies,<sup>5</sup> and Price's *Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty* (1776), with a sale of 60,000 in a few months.<sup>6</sup> The highest figure recorded for a single work, that of 105,000, for Bishop Sherlock's 1750 *Letter from the Lord Bishop of London to the Clergy and People of London on the Occasion of the Late Earthquakes . . .*,<sup>7</sup> was for a somewhat sensational religious pamphlet, many of which were distributed free for evangelical purposes. Sales of full-length, and therefore more expensive, works were much smaller, especially when they were of a secular nature.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. A. S. Collins, *The Profession of Letters* (London, 1928), p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> J. Sutherland, 'The Circulation of Newspapers and Literary Periodicals, 1700-1730', *Library*, 4th ser., XV (1934), 111-113.

<sup>3</sup> A. S. Collins, *Authorship in the Days of Johnson* (London, 1927), p. 255.

<sup>4</sup> No. 10 (1711). <sup>5</sup> Swift, *Journal to Stella*, Jan. 28, 1712.

<sup>6</sup> Collins, *Profession of Letters*, p. 21.

<sup>7</sup> E. Carpenter, *Thomas Sherlock* (London, 1936), pp. 286-287.

Figures showing the growth of the reading public are an even more unreliable guide than those indicating its size; but two of the least dubious suggest that a very considerable increase occurred during the period. In 1724 Samuel Negus, a printer, complained that the number of printing presses in London had increased to 70;<sup>1</sup> but by 1757 another printer, Strahan, estimated that there were between 150 and 200 'constantly employed'.<sup>2</sup> A modern estimate of the average annual publication of new books, excluding pamphlets, suggests that an almost fourfold increase occurred during the century; annual output from 1666 to 1756 averaging less than 100, and that from 1792 to 1802, 372.<sup>3</sup>

It is likely, therefore, that when, in 1781, Johnson spoke of a 'nation of readers',<sup>4</sup> he had in mind a situation which had to a large extent arisen after 1750, and that, even so, his phrase must not be taken literally: the increase in the reading public may have been sufficiently marked to justify hyperbole, but it was still on a very limited scale.

A brief survey of the factors which affected the composition of the reading public will show why it remained so small by modern standards.

The first and most obvious of these factors was the very limited distribution of literacy; not literacy in its eighteenth-century sense—knowledge of the classical languages and literatures, especially Latin—but literacy in the modern sense of a bare capacity to read and write the mother-tongue. Even this was far from universal in eighteenth-century England. James Lackington, for example, towards the end of the century reported that 'in giving away religious tracts I found that some of the farmers and their children, and also three-fourths of the poor could not read';<sup>5</sup> and there is much evidence to suggest that in the country many small farmers, their families, and the majority of labourers, were quite illiterate, while even in the towns certain sections of the poor—especially soldiers, sailors and the rabble of the streets—could not read.

<sup>1</sup> Collins, *Authorship*, p. 236.

<sup>2</sup> R. A. Austen-Leigh, 'William Strahan and His Ledgers', *Library*, 4th ser., III (1923), 272.

<sup>3</sup> Marjorie Plant, *The English Book Trade* (London, 1939), p. 445.

<sup>4</sup> *Lives of the Poets*, ed. Hill (Oxford, 1905), III, 19.

<sup>5</sup> *Confessions* (London, 1804), p. 175.

In the towns, however, it is likely that semi-literacy was much commoner than total illiteracy. In London especially: the general spread of shop names instead of signs, which struck a Swiss visitor, Carl Philipp Moritz, as unusual, in 1782,<sup>1</sup> surely implies that it was being increasingly assumed that written communications would be understood by a large enough proportion even of the denizens of Gin Lane to be worth addressing to them.

Opportunities for learning to read seem to have been fairly widely available, although the evidence strongly suggests that popular schooling was at best casual and intermittent. An educational system as such hardly existed; but a miscellaneous network of old endowed grammar schools and English schools, charity schools and non-endowed schools of various kinds, notably dame schools, covered the country, with the exception of some outlying rural areas and some of the new industrial towns of the north. In 1788, the first year for which adequate figures are available, about a quarter of the parishes of England had no school at all, and nearly a half had no endowed schools.<sup>2</sup> The coverage earlier in the century was probably a little, but not much, greater.

Attendance at these schools was usually too short and irregular to give the poor anything but the rudiments of reading. Children of the lower classes often left school at the age of six or seven, and if they continued, it was only for a few months in the year when there was no work in the fields or the factories. The fees of 2d. to 6d. a week charged at the commonest type of elementary school, the dame schools, would be a considerable drain on many incomes, and completely beyond the normal range of the million or more persons who were regularly on poor relief throughout the century.<sup>3</sup> For some of these, especially in London and the larger towns, Charity Schools provided free educational facilities: but their main emphasis was on religious education and social discipline; the teaching of reading, writing and arithmetic—the 'three R's'—was a secondary aim and it was rarely pursued with much expectation of success:<sup>4</sup> for this and other reasons it is very unlikely that the Charity School movement made any considerable contribution to the effective

<sup>1</sup> *Travels*, ed. Matheson (London, 1924), p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> M. G. Jones, *The Charity School Movement* . . . (Cambridge, 1938), p. 332.

<sup>3</sup> Dorothy Marshall, *The English Poor in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1926), pp. 27-29, 76-77.

<sup>4</sup> Jones, *Charity School Movement*, pp. 80, 304.

literacy of the poor, much less to the growth of the reading public.

There was in any case no general agreement that this would be desirable. Throughout the eighteenth century utilitarian and mercantilist objections to giving the poor a literate education increased. The current attitude was expressed by Bernard Mandeville with his usual forthrightness in his *Essay on Charity and Charity Schools* (1723): 'Reading, writing and arithmetic, are . . . very pernicious to the Poor . . . Men who are to remain and end their days in a laborious, tiresome and painful station of life, the sooner they are put upon it at first, the more patiently they'll submit to it for ever after.'<sup>1</sup>

This point of view was widely held, not only by employers and economic theorists, but by many of the poor themselves, both in the town and the country. Stephen Duck, the thresher poet, for example, was taken away from school at the age of fourteen by his mother 'lest he become too fine a gentleman for the family that produced him';<sup>2</sup> and many other children of the country poor attended school only when they were not needed for work in the fields. In the towns there was one factor at least which was even more hostile to popular education: the increasing employment of children from the age of five onwards to offset the shortage of industrial labour. Factory work was not as subject to seasonal factors, and the long hours left little or no time for schooling; and as a result it is likely that in some textile and other manufacturing areas the level of popular literacy tended to fall throughout the eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

There were, then, as is shown by the lives of the uneducated poets and self-made men, such as Duck, James Lackington, William Hutton and John Clare, many serious obstacles in the way of those members of the labouring classes who wanted to be able to read and write; while the most pervasive factor of all in restricting literacy was probably the lack of positive inducement to learn. Being able to read was a necessary accomplishment only for those destined to the middle-class occupations—commerce, administration and the professions; and since reading

<sup>1</sup> 'Essay on Charity and Charity Schools', *The Fable of the Bees*, ed. Kaye (Oxford, 1924), I, 288.

<sup>2</sup> *Poems on Several Occasions: Written by Stephen Duck* . . ., 1730, p. iv.

<sup>3</sup> Jones, *Charity School Movement*, p. 332; J. L. and Barbara Hammond, *The Town Labourer, 1760-1832* (London, 1919), pp. 54-55, 144-147.



is inherently a difficult psychological process and one which requires continual practice, it is likely that only a small proportion of the labouring classes who were technically literate developed into active members of the reading public, and further, that the majority of these were concentrated in those employments where reading and writing was a vocational necessity.

Many other factors tended to restrict the reading public. Perhaps the most significant of them from the writer's point of view was the economic one.

Two of the most reliable estimates of the average incomes of the main social groups, those of Gregory King in 1696<sup>1</sup> and of Defoe in 1709,<sup>2</sup> show that more than half of the population was short of the bare necessities of life. King specifies that some 2,825,000 people out of a total population of 5,550,500, constituted an 'unprofitable majority' who were 'decreasing the wealth of the kingdom'. This majority of the population was mainly composed of cottagers, paupers, labouring people and outservants; and King estimated that their average incomes ranged from £6 to £20 per annum per family. All these groups, it is clear, lived so close to subsistence level that they can have had little to spare for such luxuries as books and newspapers.

Both King and Defoe speak of an intermediate class, between the poor and the well-to-do. King lists 1,990,000 people with family incomes of between £38 and £60 per annum. They comprised: 1,410,000 'freeholders of the lesser sort, and farmers' with annual incomes of £55 and £42:10s.; 225,000 'shopkeepers and tradesmen', at £45 per annum; and 240,000 'artisans and handicrafts', with average incomes of £38 a year. None of these incomes would allow a large surplus for book-buying, especially when one considers that the income given is for a whole family; but some money would be available among the richer farmers, shopkeepers and tradesmen; and it is probable that changes within this intermediate class account for the main increases in the eighteenth-century reading public.

This increase was probably most marked in the towns, for the number of small yeoman farmers is thought to have diminished

<sup>1</sup> In *Natural and Political Observations and Conclusions upon the State and Condition of England*, 1696.

<sup>2</sup> *Review*, VI (1709), No. 36.

during the period, and their incomes probably either stayed stationary or decreased,<sup>1</sup> whereas there was a marked rise in the numbers and wealth of shopkeepers, independent tradesmen and administrative and clerical employees throughout the eighteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Their increasing affluence probably brought them within the orbit of the middle-class culture, previously the reserve of a smaller number of well-to-do merchants, shopkeepers and important tradesmen. It is probably from them that the most substantial additions to the book-buying public were drawn, rather than from the impoverished majority of the population.

The high cost of books in the eighteenth century emphasises the severity of economic factors in restricting the reading public. Prices were roughly comparable with those today, whereas average incomes were something like one-tenth of their present monetary value, with 10s. a week an average labourer's wage, and £1 a week a decent income for skilled journeymen or small shopkeepers.<sup>3</sup> Charles Gildon sneered that 'there's not an old woman that can go to the price of it, but buys *Robinson Crusoe*'<sup>4</sup> there can surely have been few poor women who were buyers of the original edition at five shillings a copy.

Just as there was a much greater contrast than today between the incomes of different classes, so there was a much greater range between the prices of different types of books. Magnificent folios for the libraries of the gentry and the rich merchants would cost a guinea a volume or more, whereas a duodecimo, with perhaps the same amount of reading, ranged from one to three shillings. Pope's *Iliad*, at six guineas the set, was far beyond the reach of many members of the book-buying public; but very soon a pirated Dutch duodecimo and other cheaper versions were provided 'for the gratification of those who were impatient to read what they could not yet afford to buy'.<sup>5</sup>

These less affluent readers would not have been able to afford the French heroic romances, usually published in expensive folios. But—significantly—novels were in the medium price

<sup>1</sup> H. J. Habakkuk, 'English Land Ownership, 1680-1740', *Economic History Review*, X (1940), 2-17.

<sup>2</sup> M. D. George, *London Life in the 18th Century* (London, 1926), p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> On this difficult subject, see E. W. Gilboy, *Wages in 18th Century England* (Cambridge, Mass., 1934), pp. 144 ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Robinson Crusoe Examined and Criticized*, ed. Dottin (London and Paris, 1923), pp. 71-72.

<sup>5</sup> Johnson, 'Pope', *Lives of the Poets*, ed. Hill, III, 111.

range. They gradually came to be published in two or more small duodecimo volumes, usually at 3s. bound, and 2s. 3d. in sheets. Thus *Clarissa* appeared in seven and later eight volumes, *Tom Jones* in six. The prices of novels, then, though moderate compared to larger works, were still far beyond the means of any except the comfortably off: *Tom Jones*, for example, cost more than a labourer's average weekly wage. It is certain, therefore, that the novel's audience was not drawn from such a wide cross-section of society as, for example, that of the Elizabethan drama. All but the destitute had been able to afford a penny occasionally to stand in the pit of the Globe; it was no more than the price of a quart of ale. The price of a novel, on the other hand, would feed a family for a week or two. This is important. The novel in the eighteenth century was closer to the economic capacity of the middle-class additions to the reading public than were many of the established and respectable forms of literature and scholarship, but it was not, strictly speaking, a popular literary form.

For those on the lower economic fringes of the book-buying public there were, of course, many cheaper forms of printed entertainment; ballads at a halfpenny or a penny; chapbooks containing abbreviated chivalric romances, new stories of criminals, or accounts of extraordinary events, at prices ranging from a penny to sixpence; pamphlets at threepence to a shilling; and, above all, newspapers at the price of one penny until a tax was imposed in 1712, rising to three-halfpence or twopence until 1757, and eventually to threepence after 1776. Many of these newspapers contained short stories, or novels in serialised form—*Robinson Crusoe*, for example, was thus reprinted in the *Original London Post*, a thrice-weekly journal, as well as in cheap duodecimos and chapbooks. For our particular purposes, however, this poorer public is not very important; the novelists with whom we are concerned did not have this form of publication in mind, and the printers and publishers who specialised in it normally used works that had already been published in more expensive form, often without payment.

The extent to which economic factors retarded the expansion of the reading public, and especially that for the novel, is suggested by the rapid success of the non-proprietary or circulating libraries, as they were called after 1742 when the term

was invented.<sup>1</sup> A few such libraries are recorded earlier, especially after 1725, but the rapid spread of the movement came after 1740, when the first circulating library was established in London, to be followed by at least seven others within a decade. Subscriptions were moderate: the usual charge was between half a guinea and a guinea a year, and there were often facilities for borrowing books at the rate of a penny a volume or threepence for the usual three-volume novel.

Most circulating libraries stocked all types of literature, but novels were widely regarded as their main attraction: and there can be little doubt that they led to the most notable increase in the reading public for fiction which occurred during the century. They certainly provoked the greatest volume of contemporary comment about the spread of reading to the lower orders. These 'slop-shops in literature'<sup>2</sup> were said to have debauched the minds of schoolboys, ploughboys, 'servant women of the better sort',<sup>3</sup> and even of 'every butcher and baker, cobbler and tinker, throughout the three kingdoms'.<sup>4</sup> It is likely, therefore, that until 1740 a substantial marginal section of the reading public was held back from a full participation in the literary scene by the high price of books; and further, that this marginal section was largely composed of potential novel readers, many of them women.

The distribution of leisure in the period supports and amplifies the picture already given of the composition of the reading public; and it also supplies the best evidence available to explain the increasing part in it played by women readers. For, while many of the nobility and gentry continued their cultural regress from the Elizabethan courtier to Arnold's 'Barbarians', there was a parallel tendency for literature to become a primarily feminine pursuit.

As so often, Addison is an early spokesman of a new trend. He wrote in the *Guardian* (1713): 'There are some reasons why learning is more adapted to the female world than to the male. As in the first place, because they have more spare time on their hands, and lead a more sedentary life. . . . There is another

<sup>1</sup> See especially Hilda M. Hamlyn, 'Eighteenth Century Circulating Libraries in England', *Library*, 5th ser., I (1946), 197.

<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Griffith, *Lady Barton*, 1771, Preface.

<sup>3</sup> Cit. John Tinnon Taylor, *Early Opposition to the English Novel* (New York, 1943), p. 25.

<sup>4</sup> Fanny Burney, *Diary*, March 26, 1778.

reason why those especially who are women of quality, should apply themselves to letters, namely, because their husbands are generally strangers to them.<sup>1</sup> For the most part quite unashamed strangers, if we can judge by Goldsmith's busy man of affairs, Mr. Lofty, in *The Good Natur'd Man* (1768), who proclaims that 'poetry is a pretty thing enough for our wives and daughters; but not for us'.<sup>2</sup>

Women of the upper and middle classes could partake in few of the activities of their menfolk, whether of business or pleasure. It was not usual for them to engage in politics, business or the administration of their estates, while the main masculine leisure pursuits such as hunting and drinking were also barred. Such women, therefore, had a great deal of leisure, and this leisure was often occupied by omnivorous reading.

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, for example, was an avid novel reader, asking her daughter to send a list of novels copied down from newspaper advertisements, and adding: 'I doubt not that at least the greater part of these are trash, lumber, etc. However, they will serve to pass away the idle time. . .'.<sup>3</sup> Later, and at a definitely lower social level, Mrs. Thrale recounted that by her husband's orders she 'was not to *think of the kitchen*' and explained that it was as a result of this enforced leisure that she was 'driven . . . on literature as [her] sole resource'.<sup>4</sup>

Many of the less well-to-do women also had much more leisure than previously. B. L. de Muralt had already found in 1694 that 'even among the common people the husbands seldom make their wives work';<sup>5</sup> and another foreign visitor to England, César de Saussure, observed in 1727 that tradesmen's wives were 'rather lazy, and few do any needlework'.<sup>6</sup> These reports reflect the great increase in feminine leisure which had been made possible by an important economic change. The old household duties of spinning and weaving, making bread, beer, candles and soap, and many others, were no longer necessary, since most necessities were now manufactured and could be bought at shops and markets. This connection between increased feminine leisure and the development of economic specialisation

<sup>1</sup> No. 155.

<sup>2</sup> Act II.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters and Works*, ed. Thomas (London, 1861), I, 203; II, 225-226, 305.

<sup>4</sup> *A Sketch of Her Life* . . . , ed. Seeley (London, 1908), p. 22.

<sup>5</sup> *Letters Describing the Character and Customs of the English and French Nations*, 1726, p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> *A Foreign View of England*, trans. Van Muyden (London, 1902), p. 206.

was noted in 1748 by the Swedish traveller, Pehr Kalm, who was surprised to find that in England 'one hardly ever sees a woman here trouble herself in the least about outdoor duties'; even indoors, he discovered, 'weaving and spinning is also in most houses a rare thing, because their many manufactures save them from the necessity of such'.<sup>1</sup>

Kalm probably conveys a somewhat exaggerated impression of the change, and he is in any case speaking only of the home counties. In rural areas further from London the economy changed much more slowly, and most women certainly continued to devote themselves almost entirely to the multifarious duties of a household that was still largely self-supporting. Nevertheless a great increase in feminine leisure certainly occurred in the early eighteenth century, although it was probably mainly restricted to London, its environs and the larger provincial towns.

How much of this increased leisure was devoted to reading is difficult to determine. In the towns, and especially in London, innumerable competing entertainments offered themselves: during the season there were plays, operas, masquerades, *ridottos*, assemblies, drums, while the new watering-places and resort towns catered for the summer months of the idle fair. However, even the most ardent devotees of the pleasures of the town must have had some time left for reading; and the many women who did not wish to partake of them, or could not afford to, must have had much more. For those with puritan backgrounds, especially, reading would be a much more unobjectionable resource. Isaac Watts, a very influential early eighteenth-century Dissenter, dwelt luridly on 'all the painful and dismal consequences of lost and wasted time',<sup>2</sup> but he encouraged his charges, very largely feminine, to pass their leisure hours in reading and literary discussions.<sup>3</sup>

There is in the early eighteenth century a good deal of outraged comment about how the labouring classes were bringing ruin upon themselves and the country by aspiring to the leisure pursuits of their betters. The implications of these jeremiads, however, must be largely discounted. Not only because genteel

<sup>1</sup> *Kalm's Account of His Visit to England* . . . , trans. Lucas (London, 1892), p. 326.

<sup>2</sup> 'The End of Time', *Life and Choice Works of Isaac Watts*, ed. Harsha (New York, 1857), p. 322.

<sup>3</sup> *Improvement of the Mind* (New York, 1885), pp. 51, 82.

dress and fashionable entertainments were much more expensive in relation to the standard of living than they are today, but because a very slight increase in the leisure of a few fortunate or improvident members of the populace would have been enough to arouse alarm and hostility of a kind we find difficult to understand today. The traditional view was that class distinctions were the basis of social order, and that consequently leisure pursuits were only proper for the leisure classes; and this outlook was strongly reinforced by the economic theory of the day which opposed anything which might keep the labouring classes away from their tasks. There was therefore considerable agreement among the spokesmen both of mercantilism and of traditional religious and social thought that even reading constituted a dangerous distraction from the proper pursuits of those who worked with their hands. Robert Bolton, Dean of Carlisle, for instance, in his *Essays on the Employment of Time* (1750), mentions the possibility of reading as a pastime for the peasant and mechanic, only to reject it summarily: 'No, the advice to him is, Observe what passes'.<sup>1</sup>

The opportunities of the poor for any extensive impropriety in this direction were in any case very small. Hours of work for labourers in the country included all the hours of daylight, and even in London they were from six in the morning to eight or nine at night. The usual holidays were only four—Christmas, Easter, Whitsun and Michaelmas, with the addition, in London, of the eight hanging days at Tyburn. It is true that labourers in favoured occupations, especially in London, could and did absent themselves from work fairly freely. But in the main conditions of work were not such as to give appreciable leisure except on Sundays; and then six days of *labor ipse voluptas* usually led to the seventh's being devoted to activities more extrovert than reading. Francis Place thought that drink was almost the only working-class recreation during the eighteenth century;<sup>2</sup> and it must be remembered that cheap gin made drunkenness available for less than the cost of a newspaper.

For those few who might have liked to read there were other difficulties besides lack of leisure and the cost of books. There was little privacy, as, in London especially, housing was appallingly overcrowded; and there was often not enough light to read by, even by day. The window tax imposed at the end of the

<sup>1</sup> P. 29.

<sup>2</sup> George, *London Life*, p. 289.

seventeenth century had reduced windows to a minimum, and those that remained were usually deepset, and covered with horn, paper or green glass. At night lighting was a serious problem, since candles, even farthing dips, were considered a luxury. Richardson was proud of the fact that as an apprentice he bought them for himself,<sup>1</sup> but others could not, or were not allowed to. James Lackington, for example, was forbidden to have light in his room by his employer, a baker, and claims to have read by the light of the moon!<sup>2</sup>

There were, however, two large and important groups of relatively poor people who probably did have time and opportunity to read—apprentices and household servants, especially the latter. They would normally have leisure and light to read by; there would often be books in the house; if there were not, since they did not have to pay for their food and lodging, their wages and vails could be devoted to buying them if they chose; and they were, as ever, peculiarly liable to be contaminated by the example of their betters.

It is certainly remarkable how many contemporary declamations against the increased leisure, luxury and literary pretensions of the lower orders specifically refer to apprentices and domestic servants, especially footmen and waiting-maids. In assessing the literary importance of this latter group it must be remembered that they constituted a very large and conspicuous class, which in the eighteenth century probably constituted the largest single occupational group in the country, as was the case, indeed, until within living memory. Pamela, then, may be regarded as the culture-heroine of a very powerful sisterhood of literate and leisured waiting-maids. We note that her main stipulation for the new post she envisaged taking up after leaving Mr. B. was that it should allow her 'a little Time for Reading'.<sup>3</sup> This emphasis prefigured her triumph when, following a way of life rare in the class of the poor in general but less so in her particular vocation, she stormed the barriers of society and of literature alike by her skilful employment of what may be called conspicuous literacy, itself an eloquent tribute to the extent of her leisure.

Evidence on the availability and use of leisure thus confirms

<sup>1</sup> A. D. McKillop, *Samuel Richardson: Printer and Novelist* (Chapel Hill, 1936), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Memoirs*, 1830, p. 65.

<sup>3</sup> *Pamela*, Everyman Edition, I, 65.

the previous picture given of the composition of the reading public in the early eighteenth century. Despite a considerable expansion it still did not normally extend much further down the social scale than to tradesmen and shopkeepers, with the important exception of the more favoured apprentices and indoor servants. Still, there had been additions, and they had been mainly recruited from among the increasingly prosperous and numerous social groups concerned with commerce and manufacture. This is important, for it is probable that this particular change alone, even if it was of comparatively minor proportions, may have altered the centre of gravity of the reading public sufficiently to place the middle class as a whole in a dominating position for the first time.

In looking for the effects of this change upon literature, no very direct or dramatic manifestations of middle-class tastes and capacities are to be expected, for the dominance of the middle class in the reading public had in any case been long preparing. One general effect of some interest for the rise of the novel, however, seems to follow from the change in the centre of gravity of the reading public. The fact that literature in the eighteenth century was addressed to an ever-widening audience must have weakened the relative importance of those readers with enough education and leisure to take a professional or semi-professional interest in classical and modern letters; and in return it must have increased the relative importance of those who desired an easier form of literary entertainment, even if it had little prestige among the literati.

People have always, presumably, read for pleasure and relaxation, among other things; but there seems to have arisen in the eighteenth century a tendency to pursue these ends more exclusively than before. Such, at least, was Steele's view, put forward in the *Guardian* (1713); he attacked the prevalence of:

. . . this unsettled way of reading . . . which naturally seduces us into as undetermined a manner of thinking. . . . That assemblage of words which is called a style becomes utterly annihilated. . . . The common defence of these people is, that they have no design in reading but for pleasure, which I think should rather arise from reflection and remembrance of what one had read, than from the transient satisfaction of what one does, and we should be pleased proportionately as we are profited.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> No. 60.

'The transient satisfaction of what one does' seems a peculiarly appropriate description of the quality of the reading which was called for by most examples of those two new eighteenth-century literary forms, the newspaper and the novel—both obviously encourage a rapid, inattentive, almost unconscious kind of reading habit. The effortlessness of the satisfaction afforded by fiction, indeed, had been urged in a passage from Huet's *Of the Origin of Romances* which prefaced Samuel Croxall's *Select Collection of Novels and Histories* (1720):

. . . those discoveries which engage and possess [the mind] most effectually are such as are obtained with the least labour, wherein the imagination has the greatest share, and where the subject is such as is obvious to our senses . . . And of this sort are *romances*; which are to be comprehended without any great labour of the mind, or the exercise of our rational faculty, and where a strong fancy will be sufficient, with little or no burthen to the memory.<sup>1</sup>

The new literary balance of power, then, probably tended to favour ease of entertainment at the expense of obedience to traditional critical standards, and it is certain that this change of emphasis was an essential permissive factor for the achievements of Defoe and Richardson. That these achievements were also related to other and more positive features of the tastes and attitudes of the main accessions to the reading public during the period also seems likely: the outlook of the trading class, for instance, was much influenced by the economic individualism and the somewhat secularised puritanism which finds expression in the novels of Defoe; and the increasingly important feminine component of the public found many of its interests expressed by Richardson. Consideration of these relationships, however, must be deferred until we have concluded the present survey of the reading public with an account of some of the other changes in its taste and organisation.

## II

By far the greatest single category of books published in the eighteenth century, as in previous centuries, was that composed of religious works. An average of over two hundred such works

<sup>1</sup> 1729 ed., I, xiv.

was published annually throughout the century. *The Pilgrim's Progress*—although little noted by polite authors, and then usually with derision—went through one hundred and sixty editions by 1792;<sup>1</sup> while at least ten devotional manuals had sales of over thirty editions during the eighteenth century, and many other religious and didactic works were equally popular.<sup>2</sup>

These enormous sales, however, do not refute the view that eighteenth-century readers had increasingly secular tastes. To begin with, the number of religious publications does not seem to have increased in proportion either to the growth of the population or to the sales of other types of reading matter.<sup>3</sup> Further, the public for religious reading seems to have been rather independent of that for secular literature. 'Nobody reads sermons but Methodists and Dissenters', says Smollett's Henry Davis, the London bookseller in *Humphrey Clinker* (1771),<sup>4</sup> and his view is partly supported by the paucity of references to popular works of piety in the polite letters of the period.

On the other hand, many readers, especially those from the less educated strata of society, began with religious reading and passed on to wider literary interests. Defoe and Richardson are representative figures in this trend. Their forebears, and those of many of their readers, would in the seventeenth century have indulged in little but devotional reading; but they themselves combined religious and secular interests. Defoe, of course, wrote both novels and works of piety such as his *Family Instructor*; while Richardson was conspicuously successful in carrying his moral and religious aims into the fashionable and predominantly secular field of fiction. This compromise, between the wits and the less educated, between the belles-lettres and religious instruction, is perhaps the most important trend in eighteenth-century literature, and finds earlier expression in the most famous literary innovations of the century, the establishment of the *Tatler* in 1709 and of the *Spectator* in 1711.

These periodicals, which appeared thrice-weekly and daily

<sup>1</sup> Frank Mott Harrison, 'Editions of *Pilgrim's Progress*', *Library*, 4th ser., XXII (1941), 73.

<sup>2</sup> I am indebted for these figures to Ivor W. J. Machin's unpublished doctoral dissertation, 'Popular Religious Works of the Eighteenth Century: Their Vogue and Influence' (1939, University of London, pp. 14-15, 196-218).

<sup>3</sup> Machin, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> Introductory Letter, 'To the Rev. Mr. Jonathan Dustwich'.

respectively, contained essays on topics of general interest which reflected the aim advocated by Steele in *The Christian Hero* (1701): they tried to make the polite religious and the religious polite, and their 'wholesome project of making wit useful'<sup>1</sup> succeeded completely, not only with the wits, but with other parts of the reading public. The *Spectator* and the *Tatler* were much admired in Dissenting Academies<sup>2</sup> and among other groups where most other secular literature was frowned on: and they were often the first pieces of secular literature encountered by uneducated provincial aspirants to letters.

The periodical essay did much in forming a taste that the novel, too, could cater for. Macaulay thought that if Addison had written a novel it would have been 'superior to any that we possess';<sup>3</sup> while T. H. Green, alluding to this, describes the *Spectator* as 'the first and best representative of that special style of literature—the only really popular literature of our time—which consists in talking to the public about itself. Humanity is taken as reflected in the ordinary life of men . . . and . . . copied with the most minute fidelity.'<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the transition from the de Coverley Papers to the novel was by no means an immediate one, mainly because succeeding journalists were uninspired and failed to create a gallery of equally interesting characters; and this particular fictional direction was not continued in the second great journalistic innovation in eighteenth-century publishing—the foundation of the *Gentleman's Magazine* by Edward Cave, a journalist and bookseller, in 1731.

This substantial monthly periodical combined the functions of political journalism with the provision of more varied literary fare, ranging from 'An Impartial View of Various Weekly Essays' to 'Select Pieces of Poetry'. Cave tried to appeal to tastes even more various than those which the *Spectator* had catered for; in addition to much solid information he provided highly miscellaneous fare that ranged from cooking recipes to conundrums. He, too, was amazingly successful; Dr. Johnson estimated the total circulation of the *Magazine* at ten thousand and stated that it had twenty imitators; while Cave himself asserted in 1741 that it was 'read as far as the English language

<sup>1</sup> *Tatler*, No. 64 (1709).

<sup>2</sup> *Diary and Correspondence of Philip Doddridge* (London, 1829), I, 152.

<sup>3</sup> *Literary Essays* (London, 1923), p. 651.

<sup>4</sup> 'Estimate of the Value and Influence of Works of Fiction in Modern Times', *Works*, ed. Nettleship, III, 27.

Religious  
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earlier  
writing

10 K !

extends, and . . . reprinted from several presses in Great Britain, Ireland and the Plantations'.<sup>1</sup>

Two of the characteristic features of the *Gentleman's Magazine*—practical information about domestic life and a combination of improvement with entertainment—were later to be embodied in the novel. Further, the transition from the *Spectator* to the *Gentleman's Magazine* demonstrates that a reading public had arisen which was largely independent of traditional literary standards, and which was therefore a potential public for a literary form unsanctified by established critical canons; the newspaper itself, as the *Grub Street Journal* remarked in a satirical obituary of Defoe, was 'an amusement altogether unknown in the age of Augustus'.<sup>2</sup> But, although journalism had brought many new recruits for secular literature into the reading public, that public's taste for informative, improving, entertaining and easy reading had not as yet found an appropriate fictional form.

## III

The *Gentleman's Magazine* also symbolises an important change in the organisation of the reading public. The *Spectator* had been produced by the best writers of the day; it catered to middle-class taste, but by a sort of literary philanthropy; Steele and Addison were for the middle-class way of life but they were not exactly of it. Less than a generation later, however, the *Gentleman's Magazine* showed a very different social orientation: it was directed by an enterprising but ill-educated journalist and bookseller, and its contributions were mainly provided by hacks and amateurs. This change suggests a development of which Richardson—printer and brother-in-law of James Leake, a bookseller and circulating library proprietor—is himself an important representative: the new prominence in the literary scene of those engaged in the trades of manufacturing and selling the products of the printing press. The main reason for this prominence is clear: the decline of literary patronage by the court and the nobility had tended to create a vacuum between the author and his readers; and this vacuum had been quickly filled by the middlemen of the literary market-place, the publishers, or, as they were then usually called, the booksellers, who

<sup>1</sup> Lennart Carlson, *The First Magazines* (Providence, R.I., 1938), pp. 62-63, 77, 81.

<sup>2</sup> No. 90 (1731).

occupied a strategic position between author and printer, and between both of these and the public.

By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the booksellers, especially those in London, had achieved a financial standing, a social prominence, and a literary importance considerably greater than that of either their forebears or of their counterparts abroad. They had among their number several knights (Sir James Hodges, Sir Francis Gosling, Sir Charles Corbett), High Sheriffs (Henry Lintot) and Members of Parliament (William Strahan); and many of them, such as the Tonsons, Bernard Lintot, Robert Dodsley and Andrew Millar, consorted with the great figures of London life. Together with some of the printers they owned or controlled all the main channels of opinion, newspapers, magazines and critical reviews, and were thus well placed to secure advertising and favourable reviewing for their wares.<sup>1</sup> This virtual monopoly of the channels of opinion also brought with it a monopoly of writers. For, despite the efforts to allow independent access of authors to the public made by the Society for the Encouragement of Learning, 'The Trade' remained the only fruitful form of publication for the author.

The power of the booksellers to influence authors and audience was undoubtedly very great, and it is therefore necessary to inquire whether this power was in any way connected with the rise of the novel.

Contemporary opinion was certainly much concerned with the new influence of the booksellers, and there were frequent assertions that it had had the effect of turning literature itself into a mere market commodity. This view was expressed most succinctly by Defoe, in 1725: 'Writing . . . is become a very considerable Branch of the English Commerce. The Booksellers are the Master Manufacturers or Employers. The several Writers, Authors, Copyers, Sub-writers, and all other Operators with Pen and Ink are the workmen employed by the said Master Manufacturers.'<sup>2</sup> Defoe did not condemn this commercialisation, but most of the spokesmen of traditional literary standards did so in emphatic terms. Goldsmith, for example, often deplored 'that fatal revolution whereby writing is

<sup>1</sup> See Stanley Morison, *The English Newspaper* (Cambridge, 1932), pp. 73-75, 115, 143-146; B. C. Nangle, *The Monthly Review, 1st Series, 1749-1789* (Oxford, 1934), p. 156.

<sup>2</sup> *Appleeby's Journal*, July 31, 1725, cit. William Lee, *Life and Writings of Daniel Defoe* (London, 1869), III, 410.

converted to a mechanic trade; and booksellers, instead of the great, become the patrons and paymasters of men of genius'.<sup>1</sup> Fielding went further, and explicitly connected this 'fatal revolution' with a disastrous decline in literary standards: he asserted that the 'paper merchants, commonly called booksellers', habitually employed 'journeymen of the trade' without 'the qualifications of any genius or learning', and suggested that their products had driven out good writing by the operation of a kind of Gresham's Law, forcing the public to 'drink cider water . . . because they can produce no other liquor'.<sup>2</sup>

Grub Street was but another name for this 'fatal revolution'. Saintsbury,<sup>3</sup> and many others, have no difficulty in showing that 'Grub Street' is, in one sense, a myth; the booksellers actually supported more authors more generously than ever patronage had. But in another sense Grub Street did exist, and for the first time: what Pope and his friends were really alarmed about was the subjection of literature to the economic laws of *laissez-faire*, a subjection which meant that the booksellers, whatever their own tastes, were forced, in a phrase which George Cheyne used in a letter to Richardson, to be 'Curls by Profession';<sup>4</sup> they had to procure from the Grub Street Dunces whatever the public might wish to buy.

The novel was widely regarded as a typical example of the debased kind of writing by which the booksellers pandered to the reading public. Fielding's friend and collaborator, for example, James Ralph, wrote in *The Case of Authors* (1758):

Book-making is the manufacture the bookseller must thrive by: The Rules of Trade oblige him to buy as cheap and sell as dear as possible. . . . knowing best what Assortment of Wares will best suit the Market, he gives out his Orders accordingly; and is as absolute in prescribing the Time of Publication, as in proportioning the Pay.

This will account in a good Degree for the Paroxysms of the press: The sagacious Bookseller feels the Pulse of the Times, and according to the stroke, prescribes not to cure, but flatter the Disease: As long as the Patient continues to swallow, he continues

<sup>1</sup> 'The Distresses of a Hired Writer', 1761, in *New Essays*, ed. Crane (Chicago, 1927), p. 135.

<sup>2</sup> *True Patriot*, No. 1, 1745.

<sup>3</sup> 'Literature', *Social England*, ed. H. D. Traill and J. S. Mann (London, 1904), V, 334-338.

<sup>4</sup> *Letters of Doctor George Cheyne to Richardson*, 1733-1743, ed. Mullett (Columbia, Missouri, 1943), pp. 48, 51-52.

to administer; and on the first Symptom of a Nausea, he changes the Dose. Hence the Cessation of all Political Carminatives, and the Introduction of Cantharides, in the shape of Tales, Novels, Romances, etc.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, however, it is very unlikely that the process was as conscious and direct as Ralph suggests. He was writing at a time when, after the great success of the novels of Richardson and Fielding, and the subsequent spread of circulating libraries, the Grub Street hacks had been set to writing novels and translating French ones on a considerable scale by such booksellers and circulating library proprietors as Francis and John Noble. Until then, however, there is very little evidence that the booksellers played a direct part in stimulating the writing of novels; on the contrary, if we examine the works which the booksellers are known to have actively promoted, we find that their bias was primarily for large works of information such as Ephraim Chambers's *Cyclopaedia* (1728), Johnson's *Dictionary* (1755) and his *Lives of the Poets* (1779-1781), and many other historical and scientific compilations, which they commissioned on a lavish scale.

It is true that it was two booksellers, Charles Rivington and John Osborne, who asked Richardson to produce a popular guide to familiar letter-writing, and thus supplied the initial impetus to the writing of *Pamela*. But *Pamela* itself was something of an accident; Richardson, closely in touch with literary demand as he was, expressed his surprise at its 'strange success' and sold two-thirds of the copyright for twenty pounds, although he was wiser with his two later novels.<sup>2</sup> Nor is it likely that Fielding's crucial experiment, *Joseph Andrews*, was in any way the result of encouragement from the booksellers. The tradition that Fielding was amazed when the bookseller Millar offered him two hundred pounds for the manuscript, and some shorter pieces,<sup>3</sup> certainly suggests that, although Millar, after the great success of *Pamela*, anticipated large sales for Fielding's first novel, neither he nor anyone else had previously encouraged Fielding to take this new literary direction by suggesting that it was likely to be lucrative.

But if the booksellers did little or nothing to promote the rise of the novel directly, there are some indications that, as an indirect result of their role in removing literature from the

<sup>1</sup> P. 21.

<sup>2</sup> See McKillop, *Richardson*, pp. 16, 27, 293-294.

<sup>3</sup> Cross, *Fielding*, I, 315-316.



control of patronage and bringing it under the control of the laws of the market-place, they both assisted the development of one of the characteristic technical innovations of the new form—its copious particularity of description and explanation—and made possible the remarkable independence of Defoe and Richardson from the classical critical tradition which was an indispensable condition of their literary achievement.

Once the writer's primary aim was no longer to satisfy the standards of patrons and the literary élite, other considerations took on a new importance. Two of them, at least, were likely to encourage the author to prolixity: first, to write very explicitly and even tautologically might help his less educated readers to understand him easily; and secondly, since it was the bookseller, not the patron who rewarded him, speed and copiousness tended to become the supreme economic virtues.

This second tendency was pointed out by Goldsmith when he considered the relationship between the bookseller and the author in his *Enquiry into the Present State of Learning* (1759): 'There cannot perhaps be imagined a combination more prejudicial to taste than this. It is the interest of the one to allow as little for writing, and of the other to write as much, as possible.'<sup>1</sup> Goldsmith's view here finds some confirmation in the fact that the specific accusation that an author wrote diffusely for economic reasons became fairly common in the early eighteenth century; John Wesley, for example, suggested somewhat uncharitably that Isaac Watts's long-windedness was 'to get money'.<sup>2</sup> The possibility that this tendency may also have influenced the rise of the novel finds some support in the fact that somewhat similar charges were also levelled at both Defoe and Richardson.

The most obvious result of the application of primarily economic criteria to the production of literature was to favour prose as against verse. In *Amelia* (1751) Fielding's hackney author makes this connection very clear: 'A sheet is a sheet with the booksellers; and, whether it be in prose or verse, they make no difference'.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, finding that rhymes 'are stubborn things', the denizen of Grub Street turns away from writing poetry for the magazines and engages in the production of novels. For two reasons: because 'romance writing is the only

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, ed. Cunningham (New York, 1908), vi, 72-73.

<sup>2</sup> A. P. Davis, *Isaac Watts* (New York, 1943), p. 221.

<sup>3</sup> Bk. VIII, ch. 5.

branch of our business that is worth following'; and because 'it is certainly the easiest work in the world; you may write it almost as fast as you can set pen to paper'.

Defoe's own career had long before followed this course; after using the current medium of verse satire in his early career he turned to an almost exclusive use of prose. This prose, of course, was easy, copious, unpremeditated—the very qualities that were most consonant both with the narrative manner of his novels and with the maximum economic reward for his labours with the pen. Verbal grace, complication of structure, concentration of effect, all these take time and are likely to require a good deal of revision, whereas Defoe seems to have taken the economic implications of the writer's situation to an unexampled extreme by considering revision as something to be undertaken only if extra remuneration was offered. Such, at least, was the assertion of the anonymous editor of the 1738 edition of Defoe's *Complete English Tradesman*, who wrote of Defoe's writings that they were 'generally speaking . . . too verbose and circumlocutory', and added that 'to have a complete work come off his hands, it was necessary to give him so much per sheet to write it in his own way; and half as much afterwards to lop off its excrescences, or abstract it. . . .'<sup>1</sup>

There is somewhat similar evidence in the case of Richardson, although the economic motive was probably much less pressing. In 1739 his friend Dr. George Cheyne reproved him for thinking in terms of the booksellers' practice of valuing 'the Price to the Author by the Number of Sheets'.<sup>2</sup> Later, Shenstone wrote of *Clarissa* that Richardson had 'needlessly spun out his Book to an extravagant Prolixity . . . which he could scarce have done had he not been a *Printer* as well as an *Author*'; then—with an unconscious tribute to Richardson's formal realism—he continued: 'Nothing but *Fact* could authorize so much particularity, and indeed not that: but in a court of Justice'.<sup>3</sup>

Defoe and Richardson, of course, did not break with classical literary criteria merely in the matter of prose style; they did so in nearly every aspect of their vision of life, and of the techniques by which it was embodied. Here, too, they are the expression of the profound changes in the social context of literature,

<sup>1</sup> 4th ed.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters to Richardson*, ed. Mullett, p. 53.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters*, ed. Mallam (Minneapolis, 1939), p. 199.

changes which further weakened the prestige of established critical standards.

The mid-eighteenth century was well aware of how the new balance of power had revolutionised the recruitment both of critics and authors. According to Fielding the whole world of letters was becoming 'a democracy, or rather a downright anarchy'; and there was no one to enforce the old laws, since, as he wrote in the *Covent Garden Journal* (1752), even the 'offices of criticism' had been taken over by 'a large body of irregulars' who had been admitted 'into the realm of criticism without knowing one word of the ancient laws'.<sup>1</sup> A year later Dr. Johnson suggested in the *Adventurer* that the irregulars were equally powerfully established in the field of authorship: 'The present age', he wrote, 'may be styled, with great propriety, the Age of Authors; for, perhaps, there never was a time in which men of all degrees of ability, of every kind of education, of every profession and employment, were posting with ardour so general to the press'. Then, emphasising the contrast with the past, he added: 'The province of writing was formerly left to those who, by study or appearance of study, were supposed to have gained knowledge unattainable by the busy part of mankind'.<sup>2</sup>

Among the writers who could hardly have become so under the old dispensation, and who knew little or nothing of the 'ancient laws' of literature, we must certainly number those representative specimens of the busy part of eighteenth-century mankind, Defoe and Richardson. Their ideas and training were such that they could hardly have hoped to appeal to the old arbiters of literary destiny; but when we recall how adverse the classical viewpoint was to the requirements of formal realism, it becomes apparent that their very different allegiances were probably an essential condition for their literary innovations. Mrs. Chapone, indeed, drew this conclusion in Richardson's case: 'It is only from the ignorant that we can now have anything original; every master copies from those that are of established authority, and does not look at the natural object'.<sup>3</sup> Defoe and Richardson were certainly freer to present 'the natural object' in whatever way they wished than were writers in France, for example, where literary culture was still primarily oriented to the Court; and it is probably for this reason that it was in England that the novel was able to make an earlier and

<sup>1</sup> Nos. 23, 1.

<sup>2</sup> No. 115.

<sup>3</sup> *Posthumous Works* . . ., 1807, I, 176.

more complete break with the matter and manner of previous fiction.

Ultimately, however, the supersession of patronage by the booksellers, and the consequent independence of Defoe and Richardson from the literary past, are merely reflections of a larger and even more important feature of the life of their time — the great power and self-confidence of the middle class as a whole. By virtue of their multifarious contacts with printing, bookselling and journalism, Defoe and Richardson were in very direct contact with the new interests and capacities of the reading public; but it is even more important that they themselves were wholly representative of the new centre of gravity of that public. As middle-class London tradesmen they had only to consult their own standards of form and content to be sure that what they wrote would appeal to a large audience. This is probably the supremely important effect of the changed composition of the reading public and the new dominance of the booksellers upon the rise of the novel; not so much that Defoe and Richardson responded to the new needs of their audience, but that they were able to express those needs from the inside much more freely than would previously have been possible.

NOVEL  
... has brought back to a  
... stage. Defoe fortunately,  
... writer has done, and  
... him to a step which was  
... his blind and almost pur-  
... his heroes and heroines,  
... mingling of their thoughts  
... which they both exist,  
... motives and themes which  
... the tradition of the novel  
... such as economic egoism  
... as the conflicts between  
... manifested in daily life.  
... Defoe did both. In his  
... making his matter seem  
... he did not see. But what  
... is so memorably and

## CHAPTER V

### *Love and the Novel: 'Pamela'*

THE importance of Richardson's position in the tradition of the novel was largely due to his success in dealing with several of the major formal problems which Defoe had left unsolved. The most important of them was probably that of plot, and here Richardson's solution was remarkably simple: he avoided an episodic plot by basing his novels on a single action, a courtship. It is no doubt odd that so fateful a literary revolution should have been brought about with so ancient a literary weapon; but—and this is the theme of the present chapter—in Richardson's hands it revealed new powers.

#### I

Madame de Staël linked the fact that the Ancients had no novels with the fact that, largely as a result of the inferior social position of women, the classical world attached relatively little importance to the emotional relationships between men and women.<sup>1</sup> It is certainly true that classical Greece and Rome knew little of romantic love in our sense, and the erotic life in general was not given anything like the importance and approbation it has received in modern life and literature. Even in Euripides sexual passion is clearly considered as a violation of the human norm; while not exactly a vice, it is certainly not a virtue; and, for the man especially, to allow it much scope is an indication of weakness rather than strength. As for Latin literature, its similarly derogatory attitude is suggested by a passage in the commentary of Servius on the *Aeneid*: he explains that Dido's love was not a serious enough subject for epic dignity, but that Virgil had redeemed himself by treating it in an almost comic style—*paene comicus stilus est: nec mirum, ubi de amore tractatur*.<sup>2</sup>

The idea that love between the sexes is to be regarded as the supreme value of life on earth is generally agreed to have had its

<sup>1</sup> *De la littérature, considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales*, in *Œuvres complètes* (Paris, 1820), IV, 215-217.

<sup>2</sup> Bk. IV, n. 1.

origin in the rise of *amour courtois* in eleventh-century Provence. Courtly love is in essence the result of the transfer of an attitude of religious adoration from a divine to a secular object—from the Virgin Mary to the lady worshipped by the troubadour. Like modern individualism, therefore, the rise of romantic love has deep roots in the Christian tradition, and so it is very appropriate that it should be the basis of the ideal pattern of sexual behaviour in our society. The most universal religion of the West, according to Vilfredo Pareto,<sup>1</sup> at least, is the sex religion; the novel supplies it with its doctrine and its rituals, just as the mediaeval romances had done for courtly love.

Courtly love, however, could not itself provide the kind of connective or structural theme which the novel required. It was primarily a leisure fantasy invented to gratify the noble lady whose actual social and economic future had already been decided by her marriage to a feudal lord; it belonged to an a-moral world, a social vacuum where only the individual existed and where the external world, with its drastic legal and religious sanctions against adultery,<sup>2</sup> was completely forgotten. Consequently the forms of mediaeval literature which dealt with everyday life paid no attention to courtly love, and presented womankind as a species characterised by an insatiate fleshly cupidity; while, on the other hand, the verse and prose romances which dealt with courtly love presented their heroines as angelic beings, and this idealisation was usually extended to the psychology, the background and the language of the story. Not only so: from the point of view of plot, heroic chastity is subject to exactly the same literary defects as inveterate promiscuity; both are poor in the qualities of development and surprise. In the romances, therefore, while courtly love provided the conventional beginning and end, the main interest of the narrative lay in the adventures which the knight achieved for his lady, and not in the development of the love relationship itself.

Gradually, however, the code of romantic love began to accommodate itself to religious, social and psychological reality, notably to marriage and the family. This process seems to have occurred particularly early in England, and the new ideology

<sup>1</sup> *The Mind and Society*, trans. Livingstone (New York, 1935), II, 1129; but see translator's note 1 to p. 1396.

<sup>2</sup> See F. Carl Riedel, *Crime and Punishment in the Old French Romances* (New York, 1938), pp. 42, 101.

which eventually came into being there does much to explain both the rise of the novel and the distinctive difference between the English and French traditions in fiction. Denis de Rougemont, in his study of the development of romantic love, writes of the French novel that 'to judge by its literature, adultery would seem to be one of the most characteristic occupations of Western man'.<sup>1</sup> Not so in England, where the break with the originally adulterous character of courtly love was so complete that George Moore was almost justified in claiming to have 'invented adultery, which didn't exist in the English novel till I began writing'.<sup>2</sup>

There are signs of the reconciliation between courtly love and the institution of marriage at least as early as Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale*, and it is very evident in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. Later the Puritanism that is already strong in Spenser finds its supreme expression in *Paradise Lost* which is, among other things, the greatest and indeed the only epic of married life. In the next two centuries the Puritan conception of marriage and sexual relations generally became the accepted code of Anglo-Saxon society to a degree unknown elsewhere; in the words of Frieda Lawrence, who must be allowed considerable *expertise* in the matter, 'only the English have this special brand of marriage . . . the God-given unity of marriage . . . that is part of Puritanism'.<sup>3</sup>

Richardson played an important part in establishing this new code. He wrote at a time when a variety of economic and social changes, some of them temporary and local, but most of them characteristic of modern English and American civilisation, were combining to make marriage much more important for women than before, and at the same time much more difficult to achieve. These changes gave Richardson the enormous advantage over the writers of romance that, without recourse to any extraneous elements of complication, he could reflect the actual life of his time and yet be able to expand a single intrigue into the proportions of a novel considerably longer than any by Defoe. In *Pamela* the relationship of the lovers has all the absolute quality of romantic love; and yet it can realistically be made to involve many of the basic problems

<sup>1</sup> *L'Amour et l'Occident* (Paris, 1939), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Cit.* Joseph Hone, *Life of George Moore* (London, 1936), p. 373.

<sup>3</sup> 'Foreword', *The First Lady Chatterley* (New York, 1944).

of everyday life—conflicts between social classes and their different outlooks, for example, and conflicts between the sexual instinct and the moral code. The relationship between Pamela and Mr. B., in fact, can carry the whole weight of the literary structure in a way that was impossible in the romances.

## II

The values of courtly love could not be combined with those of marriage until marriage was primarily the result of a free choice by the individuals concerned. This freedom of choice has until recently been the exception rather than the rule in the history of human society, especially as far as women have been concerned. The rise of the novel, then, would seem to be connected with the much greater freedom of women in modern society, a freedom which, especially as regards marriage, was achieved earlier and more completely in England than elsewhere.

In eighteenth-century France, for example, daughters were customarily secluded from young men until their parents had arranged a marriage for them. The extent of women's freedom in England was very striking in comparison, as Montesquieu<sup>1</sup> and many other contemporaries pointed out. In Germany the position of women was considered to be even more disadvantageous,<sup>2</sup> while Lady Mary Wortley Montagu criticised *Sir Charles Grandison* on the grounds that Richardson should have known enough about the restrictions on feminine rights in Italy to realise that his hero could never have begun his amour with Clementina in her father's house.<sup>3</sup>

The relatively great freedom of women in England had existed at least as far back as the Elizabethan period, but it was reinforced in the eighteenth century by some aspects of the rise of individualism. Economic individualism, we have seen, tended to weaken the ties between parents and children: and its spread was associated with the development of a new kind of family system which has since become the standard one in most modern societies.

<sup>1</sup> *L'Esprit des lois*, Bk. XXIII, ch. 8. I am much indebted to the late Daniel Mornet for allowing me to read his notes towards a study of 'Le Mariage au 17<sup>e</sup> et 18<sup>e</sup> siècle'.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Salmon, *Critical Essay Concerning Marriage*, 1724, p. 263.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters and Works*, II, 285.

This system can be described as the 'elementary' family, to use A. R. Radcliffe-Brown's term,<sup>1</sup> or as the 'conjugal' family, to use Émile Durkheim's.<sup>2</sup> In nearly all countries, of course, the family unit includes the 'elementary' or 'conjugal' group consisting of husband, wife and their children, but it also includes a whole complex of other less closely related kinsfolk: the use of the terms here, therefore, has a real defining force because it indicates that this elementary or conjugal group alone is what constitutes the family in our society; it is an entity formed by the voluntary union of two individuals.

This kind of family, for which we will here use Durkheim's term 'conjugal' as somewhat more descriptive and perhaps less invidious than Radcliffe-Brown's term 'elementary', is different from those of other societies and other periods in many respects, among which may be mentioned the following: on marriage the couple immediately sets up as a new family, wholly separate from their own parents and often far away from them; there is no established priority between the male and female lines of descent as regards property or authority, but instead both lineages are of equal relative unimportance; extended kinship ties in general, to grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, etc., have no compelling significance; and once set up, the conjugal family typically becomes an autonomous unit in economic as well as in social affairs.

These arrangements seem obvious enough to us today, but they are in fact historically new, and they all increase the importance of the marriage choice. This choice is especially fateful for the woman, because, as a result of masculine dominance in the economic field, and of the social, residential and occupational mobility brought about by capitalism, it determines, not only her most important personal relationship, but also her social, economic and even geographical future. It is natural, therefore, that modern sociologists should see romantic love as a necessary correlative of the conjugal family system;<sup>3</sup> a strengthening of the intrinsic bonds between man and wife being absolutely necessary to replace the greater security and continuity of the woman's lot afforded by more cohesive and

<sup>1</sup> 'Introduction', *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*, ed. Radcliffe-Brown and Forde (London, 1950), pp. 4-5, 43-46, 60-63.

<sup>2</sup> 'La Famille conjugale', *Revue philosophique*, XCI (1921), 1-14.

<sup>3</sup> See Talcott Parsons, 'The Kinship System of the United States', *Essays in Sociological Theory Pure and Applied* (Glencoe, 1949), p. 241.

extended family systems, and to provide the isolated conjugal unit, and especially the wife, with a strong supporting ideology.

How thoroughly and how extensively the conjugal family system was established in early eighteenth-century England is difficult to say—systematised information on the subject is very hard to come by. It certainly seems likely that in the seventeenth century the traditional and patriarchal family pattern was by far the commonest. The term family, in Gregory King as in Shakespeare, refers to a whole household and often includes grandparents, cousins and even remoter kin, as well as servants and other employees, as the modern term has it. The family in this larger sense was the primary legal, religious and economic unit, under control of the paterfamilias. In economic affairs, for example, much of the food and clothing was manufactured in the home, and even the goods produced for the market were mainly produced by domestic industry; consequently it was the income of the family group as a whole which mattered, and not personal cash wages.

Economically, then, the patriarchal family stood in the way of individualism, and it is probably for this reason that the conjugal family system has established itself most strongly in individualist and Protestant societies, and that it is essentially urban and middle class in nature.

One of the earliest indications of the transition from the patriarchal family and domestic industry is the Jacobean outcry against the decay of 'housekeeping',<sup>1</sup> a decay which contemporaries attributed to the rise in power and numbers of the trading and commercial classes. It is fairly generally agreed that this section of the community first showed its strength in the Civil War, and it is significant, therefore, that Sir Robert Filmer, the chief theorist on the Royalist side, should have showed in his *Patriarcha*, published posthumously in 1680, that for him at least the new political and social movement challenged nothing less than the time-honoured basis of society and religion, the authority of the father over his family which was the emblem of every other kind of authority and order.<sup>2</sup> It is equally significant that

<sup>1</sup> See L. C. Knights, *Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson* (London, 1937), pp. 112-117.

<sup>2</sup> See T. P. R. Laslett's Introduction to Filmer's *Patriarcha* (Oxford, 1949), especially pp. 24-28, 38-41; I also owe much to personal discussions with him on these issues.

Locke, the philosopher of Whig individualism, opposed all forms of paternalism, including some aspects of the patriarchal family. His political and economic theory led him to regard the family as primarily a secular and contractual institution existing for the rational function of looking after children until they could do so for themselves. Once they could do so, he believed, 'the bonds of subjection' should 'drop quite off, and leave a man at his own free disposal'.<sup>1</sup> Locke is thus in one important respect a theoretician of the conjugal family.

On the whole, however, the picture of the family in the early eighteenth century is still one of slow and confused transition. Such, certainly, is the suggestion of the works of Defoe and Richardson, who, as middle-class Londoners, belonged to the social milieu where the transition was likely to be most advanced. They themselves are strongly on the traditional side as regards the authority of the father and the vital importance of the family group as a moral and religious entity; on the other hand, the tendency of their novels seems to be towards the assertion of individual freedom from family ties.

This assertion, however, was very difficult for the heroines of Defoe and Richardson to achieve, for a variety of reasons.

To begin with, the legal position of women in the eighteenth century was very largely governed by the patriarchal concepts of Roman law. The only person in the household who was *sui juris*, who was a legal entity, was its head, usually the father. A woman's property, for instance, became her husband's absolutely on marriage, although it was customary to arrange a jointure for her when the marriage articles were drawn up; the children were in law the husband's; only the husband could sue for divorce; and he had the right to punish his wife by beating or imprisoning her.

It is true that this legal position was not thought by contemporaries to represent the realities of the situation. The 1729 edition of *Magna Britanniae Notitia*, conceding that married women 'with all their movable goods . . . are wholly *in potestate viri*', continued that 'notwithstanding all which, their condition *de facto* is the best of the world'.<sup>2</sup> The legal position, however, certainly emphasised the need for women to make the

<sup>1</sup> *Two Treatises of Government*, (1690), 'Essay concerning Civil Government,' sect. 55.

<sup>2</sup> P. 174.

right marriage and thus ensure that 'their condition *de facto*' should not be merely the expression of their abject legal status.

The opposition between patriarchal and individualist attitudes is shown very clearly by the fact that the patriarchal legal situation of married women made it impossible for them to realise the aims of economic individualism. As we should expect, Defoe saw this side of the question very clearly, and dramatised the gravity of the problem in the morally desperate expedient which Roxana is forced to adopt to overcome the legal disabilities of women. As a 'she-merchant' she realises that the pursuit of money cannot be combined with marriage, since 'the very nature of the marriage contract was . . . nothing but giving up liberty, estate, authority, and everything to the man, and the woman was indeed a mere woman ever after—that is to say, a slave'. So she refuses marriage, even with a nobleman, because 'I was as well without the titles as long as I had the estate, and while I had £2,000 a year of my own I was happier than I could be in being prisoner of state to a nobleman, for I took the ladies of that rank to be little better'.<sup>1</sup> Indeed Defoe's economic enthusiasm takes him perilously close to proving that, given a knowledge of banking and investment, Roxana's scandalous specialty could be developed into the most lucrative career then open to women.

To those without Roxana's peculiar combination of qualities, however, the achievement of economic independence outside marriage was becoming increasingly difficult in the eighteenth century. The decay of domestic industry affected women very adversely. A large surplus of women was created in the labour market, and this had the result of bringing down their wages to an average of something like 2s. 6d. a week, about a quarter of the average wage for men.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time women found it much more difficult to find a husband unless they could bring him a dowry. There is much evidence to suggest that marriage became a much more commercial matter in the eighteenth century than had previously been the case. Newspapers carried on marriage marts, with advertisements offering or demanding specified dowries and jointures; and young girls were driven into flagrantly unsuitable

<sup>1</sup> *Roxana*, ed. Aitken (London, 1902), I, 167-168, 58, 189.

<sup>2</sup> Alice Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1919), pp. 235, 296.

marriages on grounds of economic advantage: Mrs. Delany, for instance, was married at the age of seventeen to a man nearly sixty years old, while Sterne's beloved Eliza became the wife of a middle-aged husband when she was only fourteen. According to Sir William Temple, writing at the end of the seventeenth century, the custom of making marriages 'just like other common bargains and sales, by the mere consideration of interest or gain, without any of love or esteem' was 'of no ancient date'.<sup>1</sup> Economic factors, of course, had in fact always been important in arranging marriages; but it is likely that the traditional power of the paterfamilias was exercised with less attention to non-material considerations as the old family system became subject to the pressures of economic individualism.

At lower social levels there is also ample evidence to support the view of Moll Flanders that the marriage market had become 'unfavourable to our sex'.<sup>2</sup> The hardships of poorer women were most dramatically expressed by the sale of wives, at prices ranging, apparently, from sixpence to three and a half guineas.<sup>3</sup> They are suggested in another way by the increase in illicit relations as more males adopted the philosophy of Bunyan's Mr. Badman—'Who would keep a cow of their own that can have a quart of milk for a penny?';<sup>4</sup> the extent of this increase is shown by the fact that provision for illegitimate children became one of the main problems for those concerned with poor-relief.<sup>5</sup> Women were also adversely affected by an increasing masculine tendency towards marrying late on economic grounds. Defoe, for example, in the *Complete English Tradesman* (1726) urged the maxim 'Do not wed till you have sped';<sup>6</sup> and the considerable effects of this attitude are suggested by the fact that the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge was led to oppose the trend because it fostered sexual immorality.<sup>7</sup>

The outlook for servant girls was particularly bad. There were, it is true, some glorious catches, although none of them provide an exact parallel to the supreme one made by Pamela. But the normal fate of domestic servants was much less happy: they were usually bound to stay with their employers either

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, 1770, I, 268. See also *Tatler*, No. 199 (1710), and H. J. Habakkuk, 'Marriage Settlements in the Eighteenth Century', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 4th ser., XXXII (1950), 15-30.

<sup>2</sup> I, 65.

<sup>3</sup> J. H. Whiteley, *Wesley's England* (London, 1938), p. 300.

<sup>4</sup> Everyman Edition, p. 279.

<sup>5</sup> See Marshall, *English Poor*, pp. 207-224.

<sup>6</sup> Ch. 12. <sup>7</sup> See Lowther Clarke, *Eighteenth Century Piety* (London, 1944), p. 16.

until they were twenty-one, or until they married; many employers forbade their servants to marry under any circumstances;<sup>1</sup> and in fact the number of unmarried servants in London was said to be 10,000 out of a total of 25,000 in 1760.<sup>2</sup> Pamela's only chance of escaping servitude until her majority might well therefore have been the marriage to her employer which she actually made, an employer, incidentally, whose marriage was a supreme act of individual choice which set at naught the traditions of his family and his class.

## III

How large a proportion of the population was affected by the crisis in marriage is obviously impossible to say. For our purposes, however, it is probably sufficient to know that the matter excited great and increasing public concern: whether statisticians would have confirmed them or not, many people certainly believed that the situation was grave, and called for drastic measures.

The development which most clearly reveals how widely the crisis affected public attitudes is the change in the status of unmarried women. The idea that the 'old maid' was a ridiculous if not obnoxious type seems to have arisen in the late seventeenth century. In 1673 Richard Allestree stated in *The Ladies' Calling* that 'an old maid is now thought such a curse as no poetic Fury can exceed . . . [and as] the most calamitous creature in Nature'.<sup>3</sup> Later, Defoe talked a good deal about the 'set of despicable creatures, called Old Maids',<sup>4</sup> and there are innumerable literary caricatures of the type in eighteenth-century literature, from Mistress Tipkin in Steele's *The Tender Husband* (1705) to Fielding's Bridget Allworthy in *Tom Jones* and Smollett's Tabitha Bramble in *Humphrey Clinker*. 'Tabby', incidentally, was apparently a dyslogistic type-name for an old maid before it was applied to a humble species of cat.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See David Hume, 'On the Populousness of Ancient Nations', *Essays and Treatises* (Edinburgh, 1817), I, 381.

<sup>2</sup> John H. Hutchins, *Jonas Hanway* (London, 1940), p. 150.

<sup>3</sup> Cit. Myra Reynolds, *The Learned Lady in England, 1650-1760* (Boston, 1920), p. 318.

<sup>4</sup> See Lee, *Defoe*, II, 115-117, 143-144; III, 125-128, 323-325.

<sup>5</sup> See R. P. Utter and G. B. Needham, *Pamela's Daughters* (London, 1937), p. 217. I am much indebted to this work, and to G. B. Needham's doctoral dissertation, 'The Old Maid in the Life and Fiction of Eighteenth-Century England', Berkeley, 1938.

The major cause of the decline in status of unmarried women is suggested by the word 'spinster'. The first usage of the term recorded by the *Oxford English Dictionary* with the sense of 'an unmarried woman beyond the usual age for marriage' is dated 1719, and occurs in the first number of a newspaper called *The Spinster*. There Steele, under the name of Rachel Woolpack, recalls that the word was not originally opprobrious, but referred to the laudable 'industry of female manufacturers'. In the eighteenth century, however, unmarried women were no longer positive economic assets to the household because there was less need for their labour in spinning, weaving and other economic tasks; as a result many unmarried women were faced with the unpleasant choice between working for very low wages, or becoming largely superfluous dependents on someone else.

The second alternative was the only one as far as those of gentle birth were concerned; for, as Jane Collier, dependent of Fielding and friend of Richardson, wrote: 'There are many methods for young men . . . to acquire a genteel maintenance; but for a girl I know not one way of support that does not by the esteem of the world, throw her below the rank of gentlewoman'.<sup>1</sup> A few unmarried women, it is true, such as Mistress Elizabeth Carter, to whom William Hayley dedicated his *Philosophical, Historical and Moral Essay on Old Maids* (1785), or Jane Austen a generation later, were able to pursue successful literary careers; and many other spinsters followed less conspicuously in their train and provided novels for the circulating libraries. But there is no recorded case in the century of a woman who supported herself entirely by her pen, and in any case the career of authorship could be open only to a very small minority.

What was most needed, it was generally thought, was a substitute for the convents which had offered a haven and a vocation for gentlewomen until they were closed at the Reformation, and which still performed the service in Catholic countries. Mary Astell, in *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (1694), had urged the establishment of a 'monastery or religious retirement'; Defoe had put forward a similar idea in his *Essay upon Projects* (1697); while in 1739 the *Gentleman's Magazine* was very explicit in proposing a 'New Method of making women as useful and as capable of maintaining themselves as men are, and consequently preventing their becoming old maids or taking ill

<sup>1</sup> *Essay on the Art of Ingeniously Tormenting*, 1753, p. 38.



courses'.<sup>1</sup> Richardson had the idea much at heart; Clarissa laments the fact that she cannot take shelter in a nunnery,<sup>2</sup> while Sir Charles Grandison strongly advocates 'Protestant Nunneries' where 'numbers of young women, joining their small fortunes, might . . . maintain themselves genteelly on their own income; though each singly in the world would be distressed'.<sup>3</sup> His proposal, incidentally, was the only part of the book which Lady Mary Wortley Montagu found to praise.<sup>4</sup>

None of these plans were carried out, however, and the tragic dependence of unmarried gentlewomen continued. It is noticeable that many of the literary figures of the period were surrounded by a voluble cluster of spinsters—Swift, Pope, Richardson, Fielding, Johnson, Horace Walpole, for example. Many of these were total or partial dependents; not, as they might have been earlier, economically useful members of a large family household by right of birth, but recipients of voluntary individual charity.

Bachelors did not excite so much commiseration as did spinsters, but the increase of their number was widely regarded as socially deplorable and morally dangerous. At the end of the seventeenth century such political economists as Petty, Davenant and Grew had suggested that bachelors should be taxed more heavily than married men; Petty, for example, argued that whoever refused to procreate ought to 'repair unto the state the misse of another pair of hands'.<sup>5</sup> There were also strong moral objections to bachelorhood, especially among the Puritans: in New England celibates were not allowed to live alone.<sup>6</sup> Richardson manifests the same distrust in his novels, although his chief concern, however, was not so much for the morals of the bachelors as for the interests of their potential spouses, as we can see from Harriet Byron's lament that 'there are more bachelors now in England, by many thousands, than there were a few years ago: and, probably, the numbers of them (and of single women, of course) will every year increase'.<sup>7</sup>

Miss Byron's alarm was probably well grounded. The proportion of bachelors among the literary men of the period is

<sup>1</sup> *Cit. Pamela's Daughters*, p. 229.

<sup>2</sup> *Clarissa*, Everyman Edition, I, 62.

<sup>3</sup> *Grandison* (London, 1812), IV, 155.

<sup>4</sup> *Letters and Works*, II, 291.

<sup>5</sup> See E. A. J. Johnson, *Predecessors of Adam Smith* (London, 1937), p. 253.

<sup>6</sup> Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Family* (Boston, 1944), p. 86.

<sup>7</sup> *Grandison*, II, 11.

certainly very high: Pope, Swift, Isaac Watts, James Thomson, Horace Walpole, Shenstone, Hume, Gray and Cowper, for example, remained unmarried; and there seems in general to have been an unprecedented topicality in a burlesque poem of the period, *The Bachelor's Soliloquy* (1744), which began, 'To wed or not to wed, that is the question'.

Richardson's solution was apparently that of Grandison's forthright 'I am for having everybody marry'.<sup>1</sup> Actually, even if all the men had complied, the problem of marriage for women would still have remained fairly grave, since the large surplus of women in England, and especially in London, which was revealed by the 1801 census<sup>2</sup> was very probably in existence during the whole of the century; such certainly was the common belief.<sup>3</sup> The only solution, therefore, would have been polygyny, or polygamy, to use the usual eighteenth-century term; and the fact that there was indeed a good deal of interest in the topic during the period suggests how serious and widespread the crisis in marriage was thought to be.

The details of the controversy about polygamy do not concern us here, since it cannot be said that plurality of wives is common in the English novel,<sup>4</sup> except possibly in the decorous variant practised in Thomas Amory's *John Bunce* (1756), where the old love is hurriedly dispatched to the grave before the new is donned. Briefly, polygamy, whose legitimacy had been argued by some extreme Protestant bibliolators in the seventeenth century, attracted both the Deists,<sup>5</sup> who could attack the orthodox Christian view of marriage by pointing out that polygamy was approved by the Mosaic Law, and the political economists, from Isaac Vossius to David Hume,<sup>6</sup> who saw in polygamy a possible solution of the problem of depopulation, which they assumed (quite wrongly) to be menacing society as a result of increasing celibacy.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Grandison*, II, 330.

<sup>2</sup> J. B. Botsford, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* . . . (New York, 1924), p. 280.

<sup>3</sup> See Goldsmith, 'Essay on Female Warriors' (*Miscellaneous Works*, ed. Prior, New York, 1857, I, 254).

<sup>4</sup> Although see A. O. Aldridge, 'Polygamy in Early Fiction . . .', *PMLA*, LXV (1950), 464-472.

<sup>5</sup> See A. O. Aldridge, 'Polygamy and Deism', *JEGP*, XLVIII (1949), 343-360.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, David Hume's essay 'Of Polygamy and Divorces'.

<sup>7</sup> See James Bonar, *Theories of Population from Raleigh to Arthur Young* (New York, 1931), p. 77.

Orthodox Christians and moralists, of course, attacked the proponents of polygamy vigorously. Richardson's friend, Dr. Patrick Delany, for example, wrote a treatise, *Reflections upon Polygamy*, whose somewhat hysterical tone suggests a deep alarm. He feared that although 'Polygamy is indeed at present abolished . . . how long it may continue so, under the present increase of infidelity and licentiousness, is not easy to pronounce'.<sup>1</sup> His book, which Richardson printed in 1737, probably supplied the material for the discussion of polygamy in the second part of *Pamela*, where Mr. B. appropriately makes use of the arguments of the licentious Deists, although his bride eventually makes him renounce 'that foolish topic'.<sup>2</sup> Lovelace, however, continues in Mr. B.'s evil ways and proposes an ingenious and characteristic variant—an Act of Parliament for annual marriages: such a practice, he argues, would stop polygamy being 'panted after'; it would end the prevalence of 'the spleen or vapours'; and it would ensure that there would no longer remain a single 'old maid in Great Britain and all its territories'.<sup>3</sup>

There is, then, a considerable variety of evidence to support the view that the transition to an individualist social and economic order brought with it a crisis in marriage which bore particularly hard upon the feminine part of the population. Their future depended much more completely than before on their being able to marry and on the kind of marriage they made, while at the same time it was more and more difficult for them to find a husband.

The acuteness of this problem surely goes far to explain the enormous contemporary success of *Pamela*. Servant girls, as we have seen, constituted a fairly important part of the reading public, and they found it particularly difficult to marry: no wonder, then, that Lady Mary Wortley Montagu thought that Pamela's matrimonial triumph had made her 'the joy of the chambermaids of all nations'.<sup>4</sup> More generally, it is likely that Richardson's heroine symbolised the aspirations of all the women in the reading public who were subject to the difficulties recounted above. Not only so. Somewhat similar difficulties have since become standard in modern society as a result of the combined effects of economic individualism and the conjugal family; and this would seem to explain why the great majority

<sup>1</sup> 2nd ed., 1739, p. viii.

<sup>3</sup> *Clarissa*, III, 180-184.

<sup>2</sup> Everyman Edition, II, 296-339.

<sup>4</sup> *Letters and Works*, II, 200.

of novels written since *Pamela* have continued its basic pattern, and concentrated their main interest upon a courtship leading to marriage.

*Pamela*, it is true, departs from the usual pattern in one important respect: even if we exclude Richardson's ill-advised continuation, the narrative does not end with the marriage, but continues for some two hundred pages while every detail of the marriage ceremony and the resulting new conjugal pattern is worked out according to Richardson's exemplary specifications. This particular emphasis is odd to us, and suggests a lack of formal proportion in the novel. Actually, it is probably a good pointer to Richardson's real intentions: in 1740 the middle-class concept of marriage was not yet completely established, and Richardson must have felt that his aim of producing a new model of conduct for the relations between men and women involved paying attention to many matters which we take for granted but on which there was not yet complete public agreement when he wrote.

One historical parallel to Richardson's earnest redefinition of marriage is to be found in the sphere of law. In 1753 the Marriage Bill, which laid the legal basis of modern practice, and which, in the words of a Victorian historian, did much to improve 'the conjugal relations of the people of England, high and low',<sup>1</sup> was introduced by Hardwick, the Lord Chancellor. Its main purpose was to end the confusion about what constituted a legal marriage, and to effect this it laid down in unequivocal terms that a valid marriage, except under certain specified and very exceptional circumstances, could only be performed by a minister of the Church of England in the parish church after public reading of banns on three consecutive Sundays, and with an official licence.<sup>2</sup>

This practice was already common; but, as the law had stood, marriages of mutual consent by word of mouth were also legal; and—more important—so were secret marriages performed by an ordained minister. This had led to many clandestine marriages, especially those performed by disreputable clergymen within the liberties of the Fleet Prison, and to other abuses, such

<sup>1</sup> Charles Knight, *Popular History of England* (London, 1856-1862), VI, 194.

<sup>2</sup> See Philip C. Yorke, *Life and Correspondence of Philip Yorke, Earl of Hardwick* (Chicago, 1913), II, 58 ff., 72 ff., 134 ff., 418 ff., 469 ff.

as the false marriage ceremonies which are often portrayed in Restoration comedy, and which reappear in Mr. B.'s efforts to delude Pamela with a mock marriage.<sup>1</sup>

The Marriage Bill aroused very strong Tory opposition, on the grounds that the civil authority had no competence in the matter, and that since the clergy were now officiating merely as agents of the state, the Whigs were subverting the orthodox sacramental view of marriage.<sup>2</sup> In fact, although such was certainly no important part of the intention of the bill, which was really a compromise between the needs of the law and common religious practice, the measure did assist the displacement of Filmer's traditional and religious attitude towards the family: for it incorporated the essential feature of Locke's view of the family by making marriage a civil contract between individuals—a view, incidentally, which Locke shared with the Puritans,<sup>3</sup> whose eighteenth-century successors, the Dissenters, supported the bill even though it meant they had to be married in Anglican churches.<sup>4</sup>

At the time there was considerable criticism of the elaborateness and the publicity that was now attached to the marriage ceremony. This was the view of Goldsmith,<sup>5</sup> for example, and of Shebbeare in his novel, *The Marriage Act* (1754), which must surely be the first work of fiction arising out of a piece of legislation; while Horace Walpole complained that 'every Strephon and Chloe . . . would have as many impediments and formalities to undergo as a Treaty of Peace'.<sup>6</sup>

Essentially, however, the act was, in the words of Richardson's friend Sir Thomas Robinson, what 'every good man ha[d] long wished for'.<sup>7</sup> It expressed in legal terms the air of pondered contractual protocol which Richardson had already given marriage in *Pamela*, whose heroine insists on a public ceremony.<sup>8</sup> *Sir*

<sup>1</sup> See Alan D. McKillop, 'The Mock-Marriage Device in *Pamela*', *PQ*, XXVI (1947), 285-288.

<sup>2</sup> See M. M. Merrick, *Marriage a Divine Institution*, 1754, and references given in notes 57, 60, 62.

<sup>3</sup> Chilton Latham Powell, *English Domestic Relations, 1487-1653* (New York, 1917), pp. 44-51.

<sup>4</sup> See Cobbett, *Parliamentary History* (London, 1803), XV, 24-31.

<sup>5</sup> *Citizen of the World*, Letters 72, 114.

<sup>6</sup> *Letters*, ed. Toynbee, III, 160 (May 24, 1753).

<sup>7</sup> From a letter to Hardwick, June 6, 1753 (B.M. Add. MSS. 35592, ff. 65-66).

For Robinson's relations with Richardson, see Austin Dobson, *Samuel Richardson* (London, 1902), p. 170.

<sup>8</sup> Everyman Edition, I, 253.

*Charles Grandison* appeared in the same year as the Marriage Bill was eventually passed into law; and its hero intrepidly supports the view that 'chamber-marriages' are neither 'decent' nor 'godly' by proclaiming that he would take 'glory in receiving' his wife's hand 'before ten thousand witnesses',<sup>1</sup> and he does in fact face a somewhat smaller congregation at his church wedding. Indeed Richardson's insistence in his novels on a properly ceremonial attitude to marriage was such that Lady Mary Wortley Montagu ironically suggested that their author must be 'some parish curate, whose chief profit depends on weddings and christenings'.<sup>2</sup>

## IV

*Pamela's* success, it has been suggested, was largely due to its appeal to the interests of women readers: and before proceeding any further it is perhaps necessary to consider briefly the grounds for believing, not only that women constituted a sufficiently large proportion of the novel reading public to make this success possible, but also that Richardson himself was in a position to express their distinctive literary interests.

We have already seen that many women, especially those in the middle ranks of life who lived in towns, had much more leisure than previously, and that they used a good deal of it in literary and other cultural pursuits. This is reflected in the increasing tendency of booksellers and writers to address special appeals to the feminine audience. John Dunton founded the first periodical avowedly addressed to women, the *Ladies' Mercury*, in 1693: and there were many other similar efforts, such as *The Female Tatler* in 1709 and Eliza Haywood's *Female Spectator* in 1744. Addison, too, had set himself out to please the ladies, and Steele had compiled *The Ladies' Library* in 1714, to give them something more edifying than the frivolous material to which they were so often alleged to restrict themselves.

That most women read only romances and novels, as was endlessly asserted, is not likely. Many were certainly devoted to religious literature. But, at least as far as secular reading is concerned, it is likely that their lower educational standards made classical and learned literature out of the question for the great majority, and that they therefore tended to devote much of

<sup>1</sup> VI, 307-308, 354-365.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters and Works*, II, 289.

their leisure to whatever lighter reading was available. The fact that 'the novel-reading girl' became an established comic type early in the century,<sup>1</sup> with Biddy Tipkins in Steele's *The Tender Husband* (1705), certainly suggests that fiction was the main reading of younger girls; but it is more likely that she was an extreme case, and that most women read both fiction and more serious matter. This mixture of tastes is suggested at one social level by Shamela's library which included various religious works such as *The Whole Duty of Man*, as well as scabrous novels like *Venus in the Cloister; or the Nun in Her Smock*.<sup>2</sup> At a higher social level we have the representative feminine types Matilda and Flavia in William Law's *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (1729), whose shelves are well stocked both with piety and wit; and many of the women in Richardson's own circle combined these tastes. It is very likely, therefore, that one of the reasons for the success of *Pamela* was the way that it enabled readers to enjoy the attractions both of fiction and of devotional literature at the same time and in the same work.

It would be very difficult to determine whether Richardson had any conscious intention of appealing to these two elements in feminine literary taste. His correspondence about his own writings certainly shows a great and indeed almost obsessive interest in the public's reaction to them; and one of his replies to Cheyne's objection to the 'fondling and gallantry' in *Pamela* seems to cover the present point at issue: 'if I were to be too spiritual, I doubt I should catch none but the grandmothers; for the granddaughters would put my Girl indeed in better company, such as that of the graver writers, and there they would leave her'.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, there is no need to assume that the profound interest in women's problems which Richardson manifests in his novels is an attempt to please feminine taste, for everything we know about his own personality and way of life shows that he shared these tastes to a very remarkable degree.

He was always happiest in feminine society, believing, as he once confided to Miss Highmore after the tedium of three meetings with his friend 'the good Dr. Heberden', that 'there is nothing either improving or delightful out of the company of intelligent women'.<sup>4</sup> He was very proud both of the fact that

<sup>1</sup> See Reynolds, *Learned Lady*, pp. 400-419.

<sup>2</sup> Letter 12.

<sup>3</sup> Cit. McKillop, *Richardson*, p. 62.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 189.

'the tendency' of his works 'was to exalt the sex', and of the abundant homage with which he had been repaid; 'no man', he wrote, 'has been so honoured by the fine spirits of the sex as I have been'.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, there is much in his letters to suggest that he had a deep personal identification with the opposite sex which went far beyond social preference or cultural rapport. Such, certainly, is the implication of the fact that he was afraid of mice, or at least confessed to the future Mrs. Chapone, that he had 'ever had a kind of natural aversion to that species of animal'.<sup>2</sup>

One reflection of Richardson's closeness to the feminine point of view is to be found in the wealth of minutely described domestic detail in *Pamela*. Many contemporary readers apparently objected to the 'heap of trivial circumstances' in the novel; a gentleman in a coffee-house ironically 'wondered the Author had not told us the exact number of pins *Pamela* had about her when she set out for Lincolnshire, and how many rows of those pins she bought for a penny';<sup>3</sup> while Fielding parodied Richardson's explicitness about the least detail in matters of dress by making Shamela pack 'one Clog and almost another' when she leaves Squire Booby.<sup>4</sup> But if the men mocked, there can be little doubt that many feminine readers enjoyed these details for their own sake; Madame Du Deffand, for example, particularly praised 'tous les détails domestiques'<sup>5</sup> and preferred Richardson's novels to the French romances on their account.

The taste for domestic detail on the part of Richardson's feminine audience probably made an appreciable contribution to the narrative's air of everyday reality; romance-heroines, for instance, had made journeys often enough, but none before *Pamela*'s had been so real as to confront them with the varied perplexities of assembling a suitable travelling wardrobe. In another respect, however, Richardson's closeness to the feminine point of view involved him in a very significant departure from the ordinary course of human life. *Pamela*'s marriage to one so much above her economically and socially is an unprecedented victory for her sex; and although Mr. B. accepts his fate with a good grace the outcome cannot be regarded as bringing him equally great satisfaction; the direction of the plot, in fact, out-

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondence*, IV, 233; V, 265.

<sup>2</sup> Cit. C. L. Thomson, *Samuel Richardson* (London, 1900), p. 93.

<sup>3</sup> Cit. McKillop, *Richardson*, p. 67.

<sup>4</sup> Letter 12.

<sup>5</sup> Cit. McKillop, p. 277.

rageously flatters the imagination of the readers of one sex and severely disciplines that of the other.

Here, too, *Pamela* initiated a fairly constant feature in the tradition of the novel. The marriage of the protagonists usually leads to a rise in the social and economic status of the bride, not the bridegroom. Hypergamy, though not a convention of modern society, is a fairly constant convention of the novel; and its ultimate cause is surely the preponderance of women in the novel-reading public, a preponderance which this crucial detail of its matrimonial mystique directly reflects.

## V

Richardson's *Pamela*, then, made a particular appeal to the feminine part of his audience; and we can now return to our main theme, and see how their marriage problems were such as to provide rich literary resources. We have already seen that numerous forces in the social history of Richardson's time were tending to heighten interest in Pamela's struggle to secure a mate: these forces were also closely related to very significant changes in the accepted attitude towards the moral and psychological roles of the sexes, changes which provide the fundamental basis for Richardson's presentation of his heroine's character and mode of action. It is because of these changes that in *Pamela* the courtship, if that is not too risible a euphemism for Mr. B.'s tactics, involves a struggle, not only between two individuals, but between two opposed conceptions of sex and marriage held by two different social classes, and between two conceptions of the masculine and feminine roles which make their interplay in courtship even more complex and problematic than it had previously been.

To determine what exactly these conceptions were is not easy. It is one of the general difficulties in applying social history to the interpretation of literature that, uncertain as our knowledge of any particular social change may be, our knowledge of its subjective aspects, the way it affected the thoughts and feelings of the individuals concerned, is even more insecure and hypothetical. Yet the problem cannot altogether be avoided; however important the external facts about the complexities of the social situation of women may have been, they presented themselves to Richardson in the form of the largely unconscious

presuppositions of the people around him; and it was presumably these social and psychological orientations which dictated the way that his readers understood the thoughts and actions of the characters in *Pamela*. It is necessary, therefore, to attempt to discover what were the dominant considerations which formed the attitudes towards sex and marriage which are portrayed there.

One of these attitudes we have already noted—the tremendous fascination of marriage and every detail connected with it for the heroine; but this emphasis is complemented by another—an equally striking horror of any sexual advance or reference until the conjugal knot is tied. Both these tendencies are typical of Puritanism.

The assimilation of the values of romantic love to marriage, it was argued above, occurred particularly early in England, and was closely connected with the Puritan movement. Not, of course, that Puritanism approved of romantic love, but that its individualist and anti-ecclesiastical type of religion caused it to attribute supreme spiritual importance to the relation of man and wife, as is suggested by the title of Defoe's *Religious Courtship: Being Historical Discourses on the Necessity of Marrying Religious Husbands and Wives Only* (1722). This emphasis on the need for spiritual harmony between man and wife was often transferred to the intrinsic qualities of the relationship itself: the Hallers have described how Milton, for example, proceeded from 'magnifying the religious significance of marriage' to magnifying 'the emotional, romantic, and idealistic aspects of the marriage relation'.<sup>1</sup>

The two attitudes, of course, may well be combined; and it must be added that—whether they are combined or held separately—they are in no sense exclusively Puritan, and are found among many other Protestant sects. The idealisation of marriage is, however, distinctively Protestant, since in Roman Catholicism the highest religious values are connected with celibacy; and given the characteristic strength of Puritanism in applying its theory to every detail of social organisation and individual psychology, it is likely that it was the strongest single force in developing the new emphasis on the spiritual values of the marriage relationship, an emphasis which may be regarded

<sup>1</sup> William and Malleville Haller, 'The Puritan Art of Love', *HLQ*, V (1942), 265.

as the modern counterpart of the originally religious basis of courtly love.

Puritanism was certainly particularly vigorous in enforcing the complementary attitude—the sinfulness of all sexual activities outside marriage. Wherever it achieved political power, in Geneva, in Scotland, in New England, in England during the Commonwealth period, it made rigorous inquiry into the sexual behaviour of individuals, arraigned offenders, forced them to confess their sins publicly, and punished them severely. The climax of this movement is probably the Act passed in England in 1650 which made adultery punishable by death.<sup>1</sup>

In this, as in many other matters, Puritanism was merely placing a particularly heavy emphasis on ideas which are not themselves peculiar to it, and which reach back to the Pauline and Augustinian elements in the Christian tradition. Man's physical nature and its desires were viewed as radically evil, the *damnosa hereditas* of the Fall: consequently virtue itself tended to become a matter of suppressing the natural instincts. This—in Puritanism as in St. Paul—was at first regarded merely as a negative step: to overcome the flesh might give the law of the spirit a better chance to operate. Later, however, as secularisation increased, there arose a widespread tendency to ethical rigorism for its own sake, a tendency which is Puritan only in the sense that Victorian morality was Puritan: resistance to the desires of the body became the major aim of secular morality; and chastity, instead of being only one virtue among many, tended to become the supreme one, and applied to men as well as to women.

It is interesting to notice that this particular ethical tendency is peculiarly suited to an individualist society. Aristotle's ethics are largely social; potential moral eminence varies according to the individual's capacity for outstanding qualities of citizenship. Such a code, however, accords ill with a civilisation whose members are primarily oriented towards achieving their own individual purposes in the economic, social and religious spheres; and it is particularly unsuitable for the feminine sex, who had little more opportunity in eighteenth-century England than in fourth-century Athens to realise the virtues of the

<sup>1</sup> G. May, *The Social Control of Sex Expression* (London, 1930), p. 152. See also L. L. Schücking, *Die Familie im Puritanismus* (Leipzig and Berlin, 1929), pp. 39-44, 137-153.

citizen, the warrior or the philosopher. On the other hand, what are often called the Puritan virtues, with their emphasis on sexual continence, are wholly suited to an individualist social order, and offer women as large possibilities of achievement as men.

It is, at all events, very evident that the eighteenth century witnessed a tremendous narrowing of the ethical scale, a redefinition of virtue in primarily sexual terms. Dr. Johnson, for example, held that 'man's chief merit consisted in resisting the impulses of nature';<sup>1</sup> and these impulses, significantly, were increasingly identified with 'the passion of love'.<sup>2</sup> Such, certainly, was Richardson's view. Sir Charles Grandison's mentor, Dr. Bartlett, 'said that the life of a good man was a continual warfare with his passions',<sup>3</sup> and Richardson's novels suggest that these passions are very largely sexual ones. The same tendency can be seen at work on the ethical vocabulary itself: words such as virtue, propriety, decency, modesty, delicacy, purity, came to have the almost exclusively sexual connotation which they have since very largely retained.

One aspect of this moral transformation which is particularly important for *Pamela* is the eighteenth-century attack on the double standard. Many women writers protested against the injustice it did their sex: Mrs. Manley, for example, attacked it in *The New Atalantis* (1709);<sup>4</sup> and in 1748 another erring matron, Laetitia Pilkington, asked, 'Is it not monstrous that our seducers should be our accusers?'<sup>5</sup> Most of the masculine reformers of the age also campaigned against the still fashionable assumption that sexual purity was not so important for men as for women. In 1713 the *Guardian* 'ventured to recommend to its readers Chastity as the noblest male virtue';<sup>6</sup> and in the mid-century Richardson, to the incredulous laughter of Colly Cibber, and the even more scandalous consternation of some of the ladies, made the principle quite explicit by insisting that his ideal man, Sir Charles Grandison, was a virgin until marriage.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 'Recollections' of Miss Reynolds, *Johnsonian Miscellanies*, ed. Hill, II, 285.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Mrs. Manley, *Power of Love* . . ., 1720, p. 353; Anon, *Reasons against Coition*, 1732, p. 7; Ned Ward, *The London Spy* (1698-1709; London, 1927 ed.), p. 92.

<sup>3</sup> III, 251.

<sup>4</sup> *Memoirs* (1748; London, 1928 ed.), p. 103.

<sup>5</sup> II, 190-191.

<sup>6</sup> No. 45.

<sup>7</sup> See the anonymous pamphlet, possibly by Francis Plumer, *A Candid Examination of the History of Sir Charles Grandison*, 1754, p. 48.

In the matter of the double standard, as in many other aspects of the eighteenth-century concern with the reform of sexual morality, there were marked differences of attitude between classes, and it was, of course, the middle class which displayed the greatest zeal.

For many reasons. In the history of mankind strictness in sexual relations tends to coincide with the increasing importance of private property—the bride must be chaste so that her husband can be sure that it is his son who will inherit. This consideration must have been particularly important to those whose values were primarily those of trade and commerce; and its effect was reinforced by at least two other features of middle-class life. There is, first of all, the opposition between economic and sexual goals which was well explained by William Law when he remarked of his typical man of business, *Negotius*: 'If you ask me what it is that has secured *Negotius* from all scandalous vices, it is the same thing that has kept him from all strictness of devotion, it is his great business'.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, the merchant or tradesman is likely to feel resentment and mistrust against those whose way of life is not mainly directed towards economic ends, and who therefore have both the leisure and the leisure attributes which enable them to pursue the wives and daughters of the citizenry successfully, as the gallants of the court and the polite end of the town so notoriously did.

For these and many other reasons, which must certainly include a long history of political and religious conflict, sexual prowess and sexual licence both tended to be linked with the aristocracy and the gentry in middle-class belief. Defoe, for example, placed the responsibility for the immorality of the times squarely on the upper classes: 'Twas the Kings and the Gentry which first . . . degenerated from that strict observation of moral virtues, and from thence carried vice on to that degree it now appears in. . . . We the poor Commons . . . have really been debauched into vice by their examples.'<sup>2</sup>

The quotation is from *The Poor Man's Plea* (1698), one of Defoe's main contributions to the various moral crusades begun in the reign of William and Mary by the new Societies for the Reformation of Manners. The most significant literary aspect of the work of these societies was that whose most notable expression is Jeremy Collier's *Short View of the Profaneness and Immorality*

<sup>1</sup> *Serious Call, Works* (Brookenhurst, 1892-1893), IV, 121-122.

<sup>2</sup> P. 6.

of the *English Stage*, also published in 1698.<sup>1</sup> It was natural that dislike of upper-class licence should extend to the literature which expressed it, and one result of this attitude was of particular importance to the development of the middle-class sexual code. Many writers felt that the public should be warned not only against the flagrant immorality of the kind that Collier attacked, but against the equally dangerous romantic concepts that underlay the sentiments of Restoration drama in general, and that were used with sophisticated duplicity by the courtly enemies of feminine virtue. Steele, for instance, pointed out that 'Notions of Gallantry' had latterly been 'turned topsie-turvey, and the knight errantry of this profligate age is destroying as many women as they can',<sup>2</sup> while in his *Critical Essay Concerning Marriage* (1724) Thomas Salmon emphasised the dangers occasioned by the ambiguities in the use of such words as 'honour and gallantry' in common speech.<sup>3</sup> Defoe, of course, persistently puts before us the realities of sexual intrigue, stripped of their conventional verbal decorations, and he mocks romantic professions of love wherever they occur. This trend was continued by Richardson, who included in his *Familiar Letters on Important Occasions* letters 'ridiculing a romantic Rhapsody in Courtship',<sup>4</sup> and who warned in *Pamela* that 'Platonic Love is Platonic Nonsense'.<sup>5</sup>

If virtuous daughters were to be forced to see the sordid aims that were concealed behind what Eliza Haywood's Alderman Saving called 'the romantic idle notions of the other end of the town',<sup>6</sup> even the word 'love' was dangerous and its meaning had to be clarified. Here Richardson made a characteristic contribution, in the Postscript to *Clarissa*: 'What is too generally called *love* ought (perhaps as generally) to be called by another name', he wrote, and biting suggested as substitute '*Cupidity* or a *Paphian stimulus* . . . however grating they may be to delicate ears'.

The need to outlaw the 'Paphian stimulus' involved a redefinition of the relations between men and women which excluded the sexual passion, and which stressed making a sensible marriage choice with rational friendship as its eventual

<sup>1</sup> See J. W. Krutch, *Comedy and Conscience after the Restoration* (New York, 1924), p. 169.

<sup>2</sup> *The Lover*, No. 2 (1714).

<sup>3</sup> *Critical Essay Concerning Marriage*, p. 40.

<sup>4</sup> Letters 89, 96, 97, 98.

<sup>5</sup> II, 338.

<sup>6</sup> *Betsy Thoughtless*, 1751, I, 50.

aim. Swift, for example, in his *Letter to a Very Young Lady on Her Marriage* (1727) warned against expecting 'any mixture of that ridiculous passion which has no being but in playbooks and romances', and instead advocated a 'match of prudence and common good liking'.<sup>1</sup> This view was widely held in Richardson's circle. His friend Dr. Delany, for example, wrote to his future wife in 1743 that 'perfect friendship is nowhere to be found but in marriage',<sup>2</sup> while Richardson himself, believing that 'friendship . . . is the perfection of love',<sup>3</sup> defined marriage as 'the highest state of friendship that mortals can know'. The climax of this trend must surely be the scene in *Sir Charles Grandison* where Richardson celebrates the triumph of spiritual ties over those of the flesh, and even of marriage, by making Sir Charles and the two rivals for his affections swear allegiance to a triangle of eternal friendship, and solemnly dedicate a temple in honour of their compact.<sup>4</sup>

Sir Charles, unfortunately, was something of an exception as far as the male sex was concerned, and as a result the campaign against sexuality was forced to a peculiar compromise. As far as Mr. B. and his like were concerned, the best that could be hoped for was a social disciplining of the unregenerate Adam within by making marriage the only permitted means of sexual expression: Pamela and her sex, however, with the exception of a few wholly abandoned females, were reserved for higher things; the new ideology granted them a total immunity from sexual feelings, and if they married it was not because they had any need of *medicina libidinis*, but because the pieties of marriage and the family were safe only in their hands.

This particular biological discrimination is really something of a historical novelty. It is, for example, in complete contradiction both to the patriarchal outlook and to the classic tradition of the portrayal of love in our literature, from Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Even more striking, it is directly opposed to the earlier attitudes of Puritanism itself, where such figures as Calvin, John Knox and Milton were notoriously prone to lay more emphasis on the concupiscence of women than of men.

A different point of view, however, was already widely

<sup>1</sup> *Prose Works* (London, 1907), XI, 119.

<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Delany, *Autobiography and Correspondence*, ed. Woolsey (Boston, 1879), I, 246.

<sup>3</sup> *Correspondence*, III, 188.

<sup>4</sup> *Grandison*, I, 283; VII, 315.

established in the early eighteenth century. Defoe's novels, for example, tend to support his stated view in *The Review* (1706) that 'in our general Pursuit of the Sex, the Devil generally acts the Man, not the Woman'.<sup>1</sup> Exactly why the serpent's invidious connection with Eve should have been forgotten is not clear; one can only surmise that, by a devious process not unknown to the psychologist, the very difficulties in the situation of women at this time brought about a new concept of the feminine role which masked their actual dependence on sexual attractiveness to the male much more completely than before, and strengthened their tactical position in courtship by making their acceptance of a suitor a matter, not of joint personal satisfaction, but of *noblesse oblige*.

The question of the origins of this new sexual ideology is obviously very problematic: but there is at least very little doubt that the appearance of *Pamela* marks a very notable epiphany in the history of our culture: the emergence of a new, fully developed and immensely influential stereotype of the feminine role. The nature and later sway of this ideal of womanhood is the subject of an excellent study, *Pamela's Daughters* (1937), by R. P. Utter and G. B. Needham. Briefly, they show how the model heroine must be very young, very inexperienced, and so delicate in physical and mental constitution that she faints at any sexual advance; essentially passive, she is devoid of any feelings towards her admirer until the marriage knot is tied—such is Pamela and such are most of the heroines of fiction until the end of the Victorian period. No!

The nature of this new stereotype, incidentally, reflects many of the social and economic trends described earlier. Even Pamela's tendency to faint, for example, may be regarded as an expression of the changing economic basis of marriage: for, since middle-class wives tended to be increasingly regarded as leisure exhibits engaging in no heavier economic tasks than the more delicate and supervisory operations of housewifery, a conspicuously weak constitution was both an assertion of a delicately nurtured past and a presumptive claim to a similar future. It is true that Pamela's humble birth hardly entitles her to this trait; but in fact her full possession of it only shows that her total being has been so deeply shaped by ideas above her station that even her body exhibits—to invoke the assistance of

<sup>1</sup> *Review*, III (1706), No. 132.

I don't  
agree that  
sexual  
pleasure  
can't be  
just  
a woman's  
goal.



a neologism for which there is in any case a regrettable need—a not uncommon form of what can only be called sociosomatic snobbery.

The conception of the feminine role represented in *Pamela* is an essential feature of our civilisation over the past two hundred years. Margaret Mead writes in *Sex and Temperament* that this civilisation has largely 'relied for the creation of rich and contrasted values upon many artificial distinctions, the most striking of which is sex'.<sup>1</sup> I have no wish to suggest that this particular distinction had previously escaped notice, nor even that it is wholly artificial; but it is surely true that the conception of sex we find in Richardson embodies a more complete and comprehensive separation between the male and female roles than had previously existed.

The difference between the two roles is emphasised in almost every aspect of speech and manners. Richardson's friend, Dr. Johnson, was of 'opinion that the delicacy of the sex shou'd always be inviolably preserved, in eating, in exercise, in dress, in everything';<sup>2</sup> while Richardson himself—who in *Pamela* was responsible for the first use of the word 'indelicacy'<sup>3</sup>—was an avowed reformer in this sphere: 'I would fain reduce delicacy to a standard', he wrote to Miss Highmore, but quickly corrected himself: 'Reduce did I say? Should not *exalt* be the word?'<sup>4</sup> Some further indication of his attitude is provided early in *Pamela* when Mr. B. gives the heroine some of her dead mistress's clothes: she is acutely embarrassed, and when he says, 'Don't blush, Pamela, dost think I don't know pretty maids should wear shoes and stockings', she reports that 'I was so confounded at these words, you might have beat me down with a feather'. Later, when her parents hear of Mr. B.'s 'free expressions about the stockings' they at once fear the worst.<sup>5</sup>

This linguistic sensitivity seems to be a rather new phenomenon. To some extent, no doubt, the language of women and of mixed company has always tended to be somewhat different from that of men, but these differences had not been so obvious before. In the late seventeenth century, however, Jeremy Collier had made much of the fact that 'the Poets make *women*

<sup>1</sup> London, 1935, p. 322.

<sup>2</sup> *Thraliana*, I, 172.

<sup>3</sup> *Pamela's Daughters*, p. 44.

<sup>4</sup> *Cit. McKillop*, p. 197.

<sup>5</sup> I, 8-9.

speak smuttily',<sup>1</sup> and in his *The She-Gallants* (1695) George Granville had even ironically indicated that a movement to reform this verbal indecency was afoot: he spoke of 'a dictionary that's preparing . . . to suit our language to the fair sex, and to castrate the immodest syllables in such words as begin and end obscenely'.<sup>2</sup>

Only a generation later the taboo on biological references seems to have been fully established: Mandeville noted that 'among well-bred people it is counted highly criminal to mention before company anything in plain words that is relating to this Mystery of Succession';<sup>3</sup> while among the shocking attributes that Edward Young had bestowed upon the unfeminine Thalestris in his satire 'On Women' (1728) was that 'What nature dares to *give* she dares to *name*'.<sup>4</sup> The movement proceeded apace, until by the end of the century even the *Tatler* and *Spectator* were found unsuited to women readers: Coleridge, at least, thought that they contained words 'which might, in our day, offend the delicacy of female ears and shock feminine susceptibility',<sup>5</sup> and his distress was echoed by Jane Austen in *Northanger Abbey*.<sup>6</sup>

Richardson played an important part in the adjustment of language to the new feminine code. His rewriting of L'Estrange's version of Aesop reveals him as one of our earliest bowdlerisers,<sup>7</sup> and his novels show a considerable concern for the proprieties of the feminine linguistic code. When Pamela becomes pregnant, for instance, she is shocked to find that Lady Davers 'in her quality way'<sup>8</sup> takes public note of the fact: but then Lady Davers, of course, is one of those 'termagant, hermaphrodite minds' attacked in the 'Introduction to the Second Edition';<sup>9</sup> and she is also a symbol of the notorious impurity of 'the quality'.

What may be called the decarnalisation of the public feminine role provides a further explanation of the fact that in *Pamela* as in most novels the courtship leads to a rise in the social status

<sup>1</sup> *Short View*, 3rd ed., 1698, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Cit. John Harrington Smith, The Gay Couple in Restoration Comedy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1948), p. 165, n.15.

<sup>3</sup> *Fable of the Bees*, ed. Kaye, I, 143.

<sup>4</sup> *Love of Fame*, V, l. 424.

<sup>5</sup> *Lectures and Notes on Shakespeare* (London, 1885), p. 37.

<sup>6</sup> Oxford, 1948, p. 35.

<sup>7</sup> See Katherine Hornbeak, 'Richardson's Aesop', *Smith College Studies in Modern Languages*, XIX (1938), 38.

<sup>8</sup> As is pointed out in *Pamela's Daughters*, p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> 1741, I, XXIV.

not of the hero but of the heroine. Male readers would presumably prefer to see the hero win the hand of some noble lady; but a moment's reflection shows that such a gratification could not be afforded without forcing upon the heroine a grave breach of feminine decorum.

This point is raised in a discussion between Lady Davers and Mr. B. He argues that his mesalliance is in no sense as shocking as it would be if the roles were reversed, since 'a woman, tho' ever so nobly born, debases herself by a mean marriage'.<sup>1</sup> This was the accepted view; so humane a man as Dr. Johnson, for instance, regarded it as a 'perversion' for a woman to marry beneath her.<sup>2</sup> The reason for this is clear. Mr. B. can properly follow his fancy and marry beneath his station because it is undeniable and irremediable fact that men are subject to the sexual passion; but for a woman to do so would amount to an admission that she had lost her immunity from sexual feeling, an immunity which is one of the peculiar constants in the heroines of English fiction from *Pamela* until recently, and whose sudden collapse was such a startling feature of the twentieth-century novel.

## VI

During Richardson's lifetime, then, many important and complex changes in the ways that the sexes oriented themselves to their roles were already far advanced. These changes are of considerable intrinsic interest, since they herald the establishment of what is substantially the concept of courtship, marriage and the feminine role that has obtained most widely in the last two centuries. The reason for our interest in them here, however, is of a more directly literary nature: it derives from the fact that these social and psychological changes go far to explain two of the major qualities posed by *Pamela*: its formal unity, and its peculiar combination of moral purity and impurity.

Dr. Johnson, with the *novella* in mind, defined a 'novel' as a 'small tale, generally of love'. When *Pamela* appeared it was called a 'dilated novel',<sup>3</sup> because its subject was essentially the single amorous episode which previous short novels had usually

<sup>1</sup> I, 389.

<sup>2</sup> Boswell, *Life*, ed. Hill-Powell, II, 328-329.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. George Sherburn, 'The Restoration and Eighteenth Century', *A Literary History of England*, ed. Baugh (New York, 1948), p. 803.

been concerned with, but its treatment was on a scale much closer to that of a romance.

The direct connection between this change of scale and the tremendous importance which Richardson allotted to sexual morality is made clear by the contrast with Defoe. In Defoe's novels sexual encounters, marital or otherwise, are treated as minor episodes within the larger context of the pursuit of economic security. Moll Flanders is 'tricked once by that cheat called love',<sup>1</sup> but it is a beginning, not an end; while Colonel Jacque comments on his faithful wife Moggy's 'slip in her younger days' that 'it was of small consequence to me one way or another'.<sup>2</sup>

In the world of *Pamela* such off-handedness is inconceivable, for there, in the words of Henry Brooke,

The woman no redemption knows  
The wounds of honour never close.<sup>3</sup>

Mr. B., of course, regards Pamela's acceptance of such a view as evidence that her 'head is turned by romances and such idle stuff', but he is wrong. The ideal chastity of the romance heroines had been very completely incorporated into the general moral outlook; it was in much more humdrum literary sources that Pamela had 'read that many a man has been ashamed of his wicked attempts, when he has been repulsed', and chanced 'a night or two before' upon the crucial slogan which she announces in appropriate circumstances—'May I never survive, one moment, that fatal one in which I shall forfeit my innocence!' It was also, presumably, from some conduct book, although this time no literary indebtedness is acknowledged, that Pamela learned that 'Millions of gold will not purchase one happy moment of reflection on a past mis-spent life'.<sup>4</sup>

Defoe's heroines, of course, would not have thought twice, even for rewards much less than Mr. B.'s five hundred guineas: the novel is born because Pamela makes her epic resistance to a 'fate worse than death', that significantly euphemistic hyperbole which loomed so large in the later history of fiction.

There is, of course, nothing inherently new in making a fictional heroine regard her chastity as a supreme value; what

<sup>1</sup> I, 57.

<sup>2</sup> Ed. Aitken (London, 1902), II, 90.

<sup>3</sup> *Collection of Pieces*, 1778, II, 45.

<sup>4</sup> I, 78, 31, 20, 169.

was new was that Richardson attributed such motives to a servant-girl: for whereas romance had usually exalted feminine chastity, the other forms of fiction which dealt with characters of humbler social origins had tended to take an opposite view of feminine psychology. It is this historical and literary perspective which makes clear the importance of *Pamela*: Richardson's novel represents the first complete confluence of two previously opposed traditions in fiction; it combines 'high' and 'low' motives, and, even more important, it portrays the conflict between the two.

Richardson thus initiated the novel's radical departure from the *Stiltrennung* in the crucial area of sexual relations. Not only so: he also broke down the separation of 'high' and 'low life'—the class aspect of the *Stiltrennung*, and for the same reason. The movement for moral reform, we have seen, tended to be mainly supported by the middle class, who fortified their outlook as a group with the assumption that their social superiors were their moral inferiors. This, of course, is the situation in *Pamela*—the rakish squire versus the humble but virtuous maid—and it lends the story a much larger significance than the purely individual matters at issue between the protagonists.

This use of the conflict between social classes is typical of the novel in general; its literary mode is radically particular, but it achieves a universality of meaning by making its individual actions and characters represent larger social issues. Defoe's plots are not such as to allow the relationships between his characters to go very far in developing this type of significance, whereas the much greater simplicity of the action of *Pamela* makes it far easier for the struggles of Pamela and Mr. B. to mirror larger contemporary conflicts between two classes and their way of life.

The enactment of the triumph of the middle-class code in sexual ethics brings with it, not only Mr. B.'s offer of marriage, but his complete re-education in the proper attitudes to sex and marriage. These, of course, are mainly a matter of subjective personal values, and their adjustment involves a progressive revelation throughout the novel of the inner lives of the protagonists which continues until the hero's conversion is so complete that he becomes a 'Puritan'<sup>1</sup> as far as Lady Davers is concerned.

<sup>1</sup> I, 391.

The relationship between Pamela and Mr. B. is therefore able to develop a much richer psychological and moral content than that between the traditional lovers in romance. The barriers between them that have to be broken down are not external and contrived but internal and real; and for this reason, combined with the fact that these barriers are based on the differences in their respective class outlooks, the dialogue between the lovers is not, as it is in romance, a conventional exercise in rhetoric, but an exploration of the forces that have made them what they are.

There is one final and very important contribution to the structure of *Pamela* which is directly related both to the middle-class Puritan sexual code, and to the major difference between that code and the tradition of courtly love.

Courtly love separated the sexual roles in a similar way—the carnal male adored the godlike purity of the female, and the contradiction between the two roles was absolute. In theory, at least; for if the lady yielded to her lover's suit it meant a total breakdown of the convention. Puritanism, however, by providing marriage with a large spiritual and social meaning, provided a possible bridge between the spirit and the flesh, between the convention and social reality. The bridge was not an easy one, because, as Richardson had explained in his popular contribution to the *Rambler* in 1751, the feminine role in courtship made it immoral as well as impolitic for a girl to allow herself to feel love for a suitor until he had actually asked for her hand in marriage.<sup>1</sup> The very difficulty, however, and the sudden reversal of the lady's attitude which was implied, supplied Richardson with a vital plot resource, since it made it possible for Richardson to withhold from us any idea of Pamela's real feelings towards Mr. B. until the crisis in the action.

When Pamela leaves him to return to her parents it appears certain that all is over between them; actually a counter-movement at once begins. On the one hand, she is surprised to discover 'something so strange . . . so unexpected' in her feelings that she is forced to wonder whether she is not in fact sorry to be leaving;<sup>2</sup> on the other hand, Mr. B.'s deepest feelings, as revealed in his parting letter, show that he is not merely the

<sup>1</sup> No. 97. It was the most popular of the *Ramblers*, according to Walter Graham (*English Literary Periodicals*, New York, 1930, p. 120).

<sup>2</sup> I, 222.

stereotype of the licentious squire but a man whose intentions may become honest, and who may quite possibly be a fit mate for Pamela. These sudden revelations of the disparity between the conventional and the actual attitudes of the lovers thus enabled Richardson to work out their relationship in a plot of the type which Aristotle considered to be the best, a complex action in which the peripety and the recognition coincide. The dramatic resolution of the plot of *Pamela*, in fact, was made possible by the actual moral and social attitudes of the time, which had produced an unprecedented disparity between the conventional roles of the sexes and the actual tenor of the oracles of the heart.

This conflict between public and private attitudes is one with which the novel in general has been much concerned, and which it is indeed peculiarly fitted to portray. There is, however, considerable doubt as to how far Richardson was aware of the duplicities involved in the feminine role, or as to how we should interpret the narrative which embodies them.

As is well known, *Pamela* has always been subject to very contradictory interpretations. Soon after its first publication one anonymous pamphleteer reported that there were, 'particularly among the ladies, two different parties, *Pamelists* and *Antipamelists*', who disagreed as to 'whether the young virgin was an example for ladies to follow . . . or . . . a hypocritical crafty girl . . . who understands the art of bringing a man to her lure'.<sup>1</sup> The most famous work in the controversy, of course, is *Shamela*, where, as his title implies, Fielding interpreted Richardson's heroine as a hypocrite whose masterly deployment of the resources of the feminine role enabled her to entrap a rich booby into marriage, although her purity did not in fact go beyond the conventional public pretence suggested by Mrs. Lucretia Jarvis when she speaks of the need to avoid 'what we women call rude, when done in the presence of others'.<sup>2</sup>

Fielding's pamphlet certainly draws attention to an important ambiguity in *Pamela*, but when later critics suggest that we must choose between Fielding's interpretation or Richardson's they are surely overlooking the possibility that the ambiguity need not spring from conscious duplicity on Pamela's part, since it is implicit in the feminine code by which she acts. It seems evident,

<sup>1</sup> *The Tablet, or Picture of Real Life*, 1762, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Letter VII.

for example, that the code's tremendous emphasis on the differentiation of the sexes in behaviour and dress is open to a very similar criticism to that which Fielding made of *Pamela*. 'Decency', as Bernard Shaw has reminded us, 'is indecency's conspiracy of silence', and the concern of the eighteenth-century moralists with feminine purity suggests imaginations only too ready to colour everything with impure sexual significances.

Sarah Fielding speaks in *Ophelia* (1760) of how Mrs. Darkins thought a 'girl ought not to set eyes on a baby that was not of the feminine gender';<sup>1</sup> the corrupt assumptions of this attitude are made clear when we remember that it is the lecherous Lady Wishfort in Congreve's *Way of the World* who prided herself on not allowing her infant daughter to play with little boys.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, we can interpret Addison's campaign against naked bosoms in the *Guardian*<sup>3</sup> by recalling that Tartuffe's unhealthy prurience is revealed by his throwing a handkerchief over Dorine's breasts,<sup>4</sup> and Bridget Allworthy's by her scandalised outcry against the revelatory Sunday finery of the farmers' daughters.<sup>5</sup> Richardson's own mind was certainly obsessed with sex in a similar way, as we can see in some of his own pronouncements on sexual modesty. In the *Familiar Letters*, for example, writing in the guise of an uncle, he chides his niece's 'manly air' in these terms: 'I have been particularly offended . . . at your *new riding-habit*; which is made so extravagantly in the mode, that one cannot easily distinguish your sex by it. For you look neither like a *modest girl* in it, nor an *agreeable boy*.'<sup>6</sup>

The ambivalent implications of a conspicuous concern for feminine modesty suggest themselves with equal force in the case of Richardson's heroine. It is certainly tempting to explain her continual concern with decency of dress, for example, by reference to the views of Dr. Gregory, an influential exponent of the new feminine code: in his *Father's Legacy to His Daughters* (1774) he concluded his warnings against 'denudation' with the Machiavellian parenthesis—'The finest bosom in nature is not so fine as what imagination forms'.<sup>7</sup> Be that as it may, there is at least no doubt that Mr. B. finds Pamela's virtuous

<sup>1</sup> II, 42.

<sup>2</sup> Act V, sc. v.

<sup>3</sup> No. 116 (1713).

<sup>4</sup> *Tartuffe*, Act III, sc. ii.

<sup>5</sup> *Tom Jones*, Bk. I, ch. 8.

<sup>6</sup> Letter 90.

<sup>7</sup> 1822 ed., p. 47.

resistance infinitely more provocative than any compliance could have been, and thus provides an involuntary tribute to the efficacy of the new feminine role in encompassing its ultimate aim.

That, however, does not justify us in assuming, as the Fielding interpretation suggests, that Pamela is only modest because she wants to entrap Mr. B. It is surely better to regard her as a real person whose actions are the result of the complexities of her situation and of the effects, both conscious and unconscious, of the feminine code. Steele pointed out that prude and coquette are alike in that they have 'the distinction of sex in all their thoughts, words and actions':<sup>1</sup> the code that commanded the allegiance of Pamela and her author is itself open to either interpretation. Similarly, although Pamela's acceptance of Mr. B. as a husband suggests that she regards his early advances as less heinous than she could publicly admit at the time, the inconsistency can be fully explained as the result of the falsity of the public code, rather than of her own character. Certainly if we condemn Pamela for such departures from absolute openness and sincerity in courtship, we must not forget how widely the charge could be brought against others in similar circumstances, both in her age and in ours.

Richardson's own attitude is difficult to determine. Like his heroine, he is alternately fascinated and repelled by Mr. B.'s licentious attempts, and his moral protestations are not wholly convincing. As an artist, however, Richardson seems to have been more aware of both points of view with respect to Pamela's sexual ethics than has been generally recognised, although he implicitly disavows the opposite position by making the odious Mrs. Jewkes its most vocal representative. When Pamela, for example, remarks that 'to rob a person of her virtue is worse than cutting her throat' she answers with an incomprehension which, though lamentable, is not without illustrious precedent: 'Why now, how strangely you talk! Are not the two sexes made for one another? Is it not natural for a gentleman to love a pretty woman? And suppose he can obtain his desires, is that so bad as cutting her throat?' The remark would not be out of place in *Shamela*; nor would Mrs. Jewkes's contemptuous retort when Pamela begs her not to let the master in lest she be undone—'Mighty piece of undone!'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Cit. Pamela's Daughters*, p. 64.

<sup>2</sup> *Pamela*, I, 95-96, 174.

As a novelist, then, Richardson is capable of considerable objectivity; but it is clear that as a conscious moralist he is completely on the side of Pamela, and it is here that the most serious objections to his novel arise. His sub-title, 'Virtue Rewarded', draws attention to the immitigable vulgarity of the book's moral texture; it is surely evident that Pamela is in any case chaste only in a very technical sense which is of scant interest to the morally perceptive, and that Fielding hit upon the major moral defect of the story when he made *Shamela* remark: 'I thought once of making a little fortune by my person. I now intend to make a great one by my virtue.'<sup>1</sup> As to Mr. B.'s vaunted reformation it is difficult to see that it amounts to any more than a promise, in Mandeville's words, 'never to be a deer-stealer, upon condition that he shall have venison of his own'.<sup>2</sup>

Mandeville, of course, was the self-appointed *agent provocateur* of the bourgeois unconscious, determined to draw attention to all the perplexities in public morality which Addison and Richardson were determined to ignore; and his cynical analogy brings us back to the very considerable extent to which the problems raised by Richardson's treatment of marriage are typical of modern Western culture as a whole. If we continue our comparison of *Pamela* with Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* or Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* it is surely apparent that although Richardson is much purer in his language and his overt attitudes, his work nevertheless concentrates much more exclusively on the sexual relationship itself. This combination has had a very wide currency in fiction since then and has even spread to the cinema. In the Hollywood film, as in the type of popular fiction which Richardson initiated, we have an unprecedentedly drastic and detailed Puritan censorship in conjunction with a form of art which is historically unique in its concentration on arousing sexual interests: while in it marriage figures as the moral *deus ex machina* which, as James Fordyce said of marriage in comedy, 'is converted into a sponge, to wipe out in a single stroke the stain of guilt'.<sup>3</sup>

The cause of this duality—in Richardson's time as in ours—is presumably that the tabooed object is always an indication of the deepest interest of the society that forbids. All the forces that combined to intensify the prohibitions against sexual activity

<sup>1</sup> *Shamela*, Letter 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Fable of the Bees*, I, 161.

<sup>3</sup> *Sermons to Young Women*, 1766, I, 156.

outside marriage, tended in practice to increase the importance of sex in the total picture of human life. That they did so in Richardson was suggested by one of his contemporary critics, the anonymous 'Lover of Virtue' who produced some *Critical Remarks on Sir Charles Grandison, Clarissa and Pamela* (1754). He coupled the fact that 'Love, eternal Love, is the subject, the burthen of all your writings' with Richardson's tremendous accentuation of what he called the 'political chastity' about which 'you and your heroines make such a rout and a pother', a chastity which in his opinion compared very unfavourably with that of the women of ancient Greece. Even so, the writer was at a loss to understand why so many 'public-spirited penmen' thought it necessary to employ 'all their art and eloquence to keep people in remembrance, that they were composed of different sexes' when 'provident nature' unassisted could be trusted to 'prevent the world from coming to an end'.<sup>1</sup> The explanation, of course, was that the repression of the instincts of 'provident nature', combined with the increasing concealment of what our culture, with eloquent indirection, calls 'the facts of life', produced needs in the public which had to be gratified. One of the main functions of the novel since Richardson, it may be suggested, has been to serve a fictional initiation rite into the most fundamental mystery of its society.

Only by some such hypothesis can we explain the later course of the novel, or the remarkable paradox that Richardson, a leader in the crusade for sexual reform, and an avowed enemy of love both in its romantic and fleshly aspects, should have signalised his entry into the history of literature by a work which gave a more detailed account of a single amorous intrigue than had ever been produced before. It would seem that the opposite qualities in Richardson's outlook, his Puritanism and his prurience, are the result of the same forces, and this no doubt explains why their effects are so intricately connected. The complexities of the forces juxtaposed are largely responsible for the unique literary qualities which *Pamela* brought into fiction: they make possible a detailed presentation of a personal relationship enriched by a series of developing contrasts between the ideal and the real, the apparent and the actual, the spiritual and the physical, the conscious and the unconscious. But if the latent ambiguities of the sexual code helped Richardson

<sup>1</sup> Pp. 38, 35, 27-30, 39.

to produce the first true novel, they at the same time conspired to create something that was new and prophetic in quite another sense: a work that could be praised from the pulpit and yet attacked as pornography, a work that gratified the reading public with the combined attractions of a sermon and a striptease.