



# THE TURN OF THE NOVEL

The Transition to Modern Fiction

ALAN FRIEDMAN

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FOR LENORE

*—ed ancor mi distilla  
nel core il dolce che nacque da essa.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The main concern of this book is the development and transformation of the novel during the first part of the twentieth century. To understand the nature of that change, it is important to recognize that the course of fiction was altered not merely by radically new techniques, but by a new radical vision of experience. One of the purposes of this study is to explore the relation between the formal organization of experience in fiction and the ethical assumptions that guide the form.

The traditional premise about the design of experience which was profoundly, if variously, embodied in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novel, was the premise of a closed experience. That is to say, the novel traditionally rendered an expanding moral and emotional disturbance which promised all along to arrive, after its greatest climax, at an ending that would and could check that foregoing expansion. And so it did, more or less: first more, then less. But in the twentieth century a new assumption about the nature and the end of experience slowly came to dominate the form. My theme and argument in this book is the existence in the novel of a gradual historical shift from a closed form to an open form. In our century, I will show, the major tradition of the novel found energy by opposing a new premise to the old. Modern novelists turned to create experiences that promised from the outset, threatened all along,

and finally did indeed come to an end while remaining still unchecked—in extreme cases, still expanding. In the light of tradition, that turn of the novel to an open form was a formal insult, but it was more: it was a calculated assault on the “ends” of experience.

In the book that follows, I propose to trace that transition in modern English fiction; the seeds of change, however, were carried across national and literary boundaries. Gide's *The Counterfeiters*, Verga's early *The House by the Medlar Tree*, Kafka's *The Trial*, Mann's *The Magic Mountain*—any of these might serve to illustrate the formal openness of experience in fiction. The change was widespread and it was deliberate. In his *Journal of the Counterfeiters* Gide writes:

This novel will end sharply, not through exhaustion of the subject, which must give the impression of inexhaustibility, but on the contrary through its expansion and by a sort of blurring of its outline. It must not be neatly rounded off, but rather disperse, disintegrate. . . .

In *The Trial* Franz Kafka comes to

“A melancholy conclusion,” said K. “It turns lying into a universal principle.” K. said that with finality, but it was not his final judgment. He was too tired to survey all the conclusions arising from the story. . . .

K. is still wondering at the end of *The Trial*, “Where was the Judge whom he had never seen?” And at the end of *The Magic Mountain* Thomas Mann gives us Hans Castorp's disappearance on the run through the smoke of a world war, perhaps the only way, and certainly an open way, out of the novel's deliberate dialectic of recurrent impasse.

The roots of the change in the novel lie tangled deep in the modern experience. Causes in fields other than literature there doubtless were—a confluence of psychological, philosophical, scientific, social, economic, and political causes, analogues, and explanations—some, if not all of them, bearing on each novel and every novelist. I think

it probably too soon to evaluate that confluence properly. But a shift in the literary vision of the ethical ends of experience has taken place. It may not be too soon to suggest that, whatever the causes, older assumptions about character, society, and career have already given place to newer ones; that self and world, sequence and consequence, if not in life at least in fiction, have been restructured; that, in short, we have been witnessing a mutation in the form of the novel which corresponds to a mutation in the ends of culture.

For endings are also ends. And that play on words is legitimate: life, culture, and the novel are processes; their ethical goals are revealed in the process which is their form. When, in the created experience we call the novel, “The End” consistently turns out to be another opening in experience, endlessness has become an end. The new form for the novel exposes not only heroes and antiheroes but readers, too, to an essentially unlimited experience. And when it does that most uncompromisingly, it gives us our special sense that in its vision of life something is intangibly but forcefully modern.

To show clearly the character of that transformation of the novel, I will try to point to a process that lies at the basis of fiction, that is, to an implicit structure that occurs as a process. That structure is a forward motion which can be distinguished from plot and which is more organic than plot to the existence of the novel as a literary form: experience. Now I think we are all prepared to acknowledge that the novel renders experience. We read a good novel because its experience is in some sense meaningful; as critics we ask, in what sense: what *is* the meaning of this experience? But throughout this work I am going to deal with experience itself as a meaning, as a shaping force lying behind and beneath other critical “meanings,” more primitive and so more fundamental, less escapable, far more powerful in its meaningful impact on generations of readers. I am going to treat fictional experience as a process that must temporarily shape us while we are its readers. In order to talk about this primitive element in the novel, it has seemed advisable to give it a descriptive name. I call it a flux of experience. And to underline the point that

fictional experience is not merely a process, but in all novels, as I shall observe later, a process with immediate—indeed, inexorable—ethical implications, I also call that same movement a stream of conscience: that is, a flux of moral experience. As I proceed, I hope to justify this peculiar usage.

Now it is probably easy to agree that experience is in some sense the basic “stuff” of fiction, but there may very well be doubt about the advisability or virtue of regarding it—or any flow or stream—as a form. One may especially wonder whether fictional experience can be analyzed into those clear and appropriate relationships that we require of a structure. But the doubt, I think, is unwarranted. The special genius of the novel as a genre is its ability to depict not only the exterior world of action, but the interior world of character—and one crucial thing more, the relation between them. In this respect, the distinction between Fielding and Richardson, for example, between stress on the organizing motion of plot and stress on the organizing motions of the heart, is only a relative one. Dr. Johnson is said to have observed that Fielding told his story by watching the face of the clock, Richardson by examining its inner workings; but the difference is a difference in emphasis and in degree, not in kind. In the novel, even in Fielding, the clock cannot keep time without the little inner wheels; and even in Richardson the little wheels must always move the hands. Time here is of the essence. It is the narrative interaction—that is, in time, in the storyteller’s own good time—between the subjective and the objective worlds that creates what we call the novel. And it is there that I wish to focus an analysis of its organization of experience: on the interaction in time between the self and the world—not one, but *both* of which the novel as a genre, alone among literary genres, can transcribe with equal facility at precisely the forward-moving point of their intersection.

Experience, I will suggest, can be understood as a design. As long as we concentrate our attention to design only on such matters as plot and theme (the design of action and of thought: methods of imaginative organization more indigenous to the drama and the

essay respectively, I submit), we inhibit our immediate response to the force and flow of fiction. We are probably all able to feel, but we will probably remain unable to describe or account for, a tide in the last two centuries of fiction: a change in the experiences that novels have rendered and in our experience of the novel. With respect to both the resolution of action and the resolution of themes, there is a single principal tradition of form for the novel from the beginning down to the present time (though exceptions exist: *Tristram Shandy*, for example). As in the drama, the main tensions and imbalances developed and elaborated up to the final crisis in the fiction are resolved after the crisis. Some such definition of form will work about as well for modern novels as for older ones. With respect, however, to the flux of experience—to the full, expanding interaction between the inner world and the outer world—the matter is otherwise. There are two traditions; and while they do overlap, there is an unmistakable shift, and a period of transition, in their relative power for shaping the novel. To see the change requires a change in our usual way of looking at novels, a shift in the focus of discussion to focus on their basis in experience. The slow but cumulative change is of critical significance. Earlier fiction attests chiefly and eloquently to the difficult necessity, the coherence and the dignity, of achieving a closed ethical experience in the course of life. Modern fiction attests chiefly and as eloquently to the reverse: an open experience.<sup>1</sup>

A few words about terms. The principal term I employ has a certain buoyancy. Since I was obliged to invent a descriptive name for a matter both moral and literary, to elude heavy jargon I turned to light metaphor: “the stream of conscience.” This figure of speech helps me avoid such substitute, joyless jargon as “the progressive complication of ethical experience.” For “stream,” I employ whatever variety my context will allow—flux, current, swell—anything that will help keep visible this always half-vanishing but crucial fact of life in the novel: that its “structure” (as solid and stable a word as one can find) is in motion. It is always and only in motion. And that restless, energetic phenomenon can best be understood, not by deny-

ing its properties in an attempt to make it keep still for a minute, but by taking it for what it is, a flow, a journey, a process.

As for "conscience," I know of no simpler, more useful English word to describe the emotional and moral engagement of the reader in the experience of the novel. I do not think it will be difficult for readers and lovers of novels to distinguish "conscience" from "consciousness"—although the latter has become in recent years not simply a term more familiar, but a realm more familiar, to literary discourse. And indeed by my choice of words, "conscience" for "consciousness," I should like at least to suggest the reservations I feel about limiting discussions of modernity in the novel exclusively to matters of technique. Nevertheless, although after much searching of conscience I have been unable to find a better name for what I want to talk about in fiction, I frankly admit the limitations of the term.

Let me begin with limitations. By the "stream of conscience" in fiction I do not mean, for example, a flow of moral judgment, and I certainly do not intend to speak of a stream of choices between good and bad. I intend to speak of the full engagement between characters and their world, rendered for the reader as a process of their (and his) experience. By "stream of conscience" I mean to suggest *not* literally, but as clearly as I can, that the structural current of experience in a novel has, in its total organization, ethical implications. As a term, the "stream of conscience" provides a way of talking about those implications in the current of experience. It permits one to acknowledge that current as a moral form itself, a form that goes beyond (though it includes) the individual conscience of characters, a form that makes a moral statement of its own. Whereas the stream of consciousness, with rare exceptions, is used to refer to the modern novel alone, the stream of conscience evidently refers to the old novel as well as the new. Whereas the stream of consciousness in the novel is located in characters, the stream of conscience in the novel resides not exclusively in characters, but in the total experience of which they are a central part. The evolution

of moral meaning in a novel—that gradual elaboration which asks for our imagination and receives our compassion, smiles, concern—is accomplished through and by means of character, but not merely in them.

The pressure of events in fiction gives rise to an expansive movement from relative innocence to relative experience, a progress experienced within the novel by its characters, outside the novel by its readers. I hope to show that the flux of experience is the underlying structure of the novel; but I also want to show that the very same flux is its underlying ethical form. In other words, I want to deal with the novel structurally and ethically at the same time and in the same terms. Conscience in the novel is structural. I believe that it is its most important structure—that the ongoing process of conscience delineated by the arrangement of experience in any given novel is its fundamental imaginative organization. By regarding experience in both these ways at once, I hope to be able to demonstrate the existence of a progressive shift of design over the long course of the development of English fiction—design in both senses: formal pattern and ethical intention.

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# 1

## THE STREAM OF CONSCIENCE

Innocence in the novel is apt to be a slippery affair: let me quote from the most innocent fiction I know.

A tall man of 29 rose from the sofa. He was rather bent in the middle with very nice long legs fairish hair and blue eyes. Hullo Alf old boy he cried so you have got here all safe and no limbs broken.

None thankyou Bernard replied Mr Salteena shaking hands and let me introduce Miss Monticue she is very pleased to come for this visit. Oh yes gasped Ethel blushing through her red ruge. Bernard looked at her keenly and turned a dark red.

The bashful specimen comes from *The Young Visitors*, misspelled and composed by Daisy Ashford at the age of nine.<sup>1</sup> Unquestionably, the book is some sort of masterpiece: it has a brilliantly managed, complex, and unified plot, a broad and sensitively rendered social milieu, a large number of astonishingly varied and vividly realized characters, a luxuriant surface of sensuous and material details integral to the psychological moment, technically admirable suspense and a firmly controlled point of view, incisive insight and deep irony, even a final fullness of meaning—all filtered through immature spelling and punctuation, and the immature, if not altogether innocent, mind of its author. Written at about the turn of the century and preserved in manuscript—penciled notebook—until

it was published in 1919, it constitutes not only a precocious unconscious parody but also a very reasonable facsimile of the genus Novel for the first two centuries of its existence. Perhaps it deserves to be honored as the last traditional novel, the *reductio ad absurdum* which looks backward, as Joyce's looks forward. Forward or backward, nowhere else can we learn so easily what we want to know about the genre as a whole. *The Young Visitors* reveals everything: it is utterly defenseless.

Well said Mr Salteena lapping up his turtle soup you have a very sumptuous house Bernard.

His friend gave a weary smile and swallowed a few drops of sherry wine. It is fairly decent he replied with a bashful glance at Ethel after our repast I will show you over the premises.

Many thanks said Mr Salteena getting rather flustered with his forks.

You ought to give a ball remarked Ethel you have such large compartments.

Yes there is room enough sighed Bernard we might try a few steps and meanwhile I might get to know a few people.

So you might responded Ethel giving him a speaking look.

As the excerpts suggest, Daisy Ashford's novel, like all novels, is about morals, manners, marriage, and money; it gives us all of this in movement. And its movement begins in innocence.

... she ran out of the room with a very superior run throwing out her legs behind and her arms swinging in rhythm.

Well said the owner of the house she has a most idiotic run.

Mr S. skipped upstairs to Rosalind's room. Good-bye Rosalind he said I shall be back soon and I hope I shall enjoy myself.

I make no doubt of that sir said Rosalind with a blush as Mr Salteena silently put 2/6 on the dirty toilet cover.

Whose innocence? That of its tender author, age nine? Or of her creature, Miss Ethel Monticue, age seventeen—"quite a young

girl" . . . "who did not really know at all how to go on at a visit," but seems used to "staying" with apparently anyone, Mr. Salteena or Bernard. When after barely thirty-six hours Mr. Salteena departs, leaving young Ethel in Bernard's hands, our child author has him remark solicitously

I do hope Ethel will behave properly.

Oh yes I expect she will said Bernard with a sigh.

And the very next time we see Bernard and Ethel

I was thinking he said passionately what about going up to London for a week's gaiety.

Who inquired Ethel in a low tone.

Clearly *both* heroine and author know what they are up to. And when Bernard and Ethel engage adjoining rooms at London's Gaiety Hotel, lingering doubt vanishes.

The best shall be yours then said Bernard bowing gallantly and pointing to the biggest room.

Ethel blushed at his speaking look. I shall be quite lost in that huge bed she added to hide her embarrassment.

Yes I expect you will said Bernard.

If Ethel Monticue is "innocent," the concept allows for a bit of sharp practice and may require some sharp definition.

To bring matters to a sharper, not to say glaring, focus, it may be useful to consider one of the least innocent fictions and one of the earliest English novels, John Cleland's classically dirty book, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (originally published in 1749, just nine years after Richardson's first effort, *Pamela*). In the opening pages of her memoirs, Fanny Hill writes that her "foundation in virtue was no other than a total ignorance of vice, and the shy timidity general to our sex."<sup>2</sup> And although on page 125 she writes that experience "soon stripped me of all the remains of bashfulness and modesty," the intention of this sentence is clearly to remind us that even after

one hundred salacious pages she still possesses some remnant of those qualities; after 161 pages, she manages to accept "a proposal which my candor and ingenuity [ingenuousness] gave me some repugnance to"; after 204 pages, she is still protesting, "I had not, however, so thoroughly renounced all innate shame as not to suffer great confusion at the state I saw myself in." And so on.

Now although Fanny Hill's protests, like the blushes of Ethel Monticue and the endless guarantees of Pamela ("don't be frightened—for—I hope—I hope, I am honest!"—Letter XXV), are never entirely credible, all three girls somehow manage to convey *nevertheless* a most unreasonably strong sense of innocence—their pure confusion perhaps about the impure stuff of their experience. Each girl, after all, is never entirely prepared for the next page. Admittedly, Fanny's case is special. Every new scene in *The Memoirs* exposes Fanny to a new "experience." The muck thickens; and it becomes Cleland's problem as a good pornographer to keep before the reader some (slowly crumbling) impression of Fanny's inner purity for purposes of titillation. And yet if we choose our words with greater care, we can say much the same thing about *Pamela* and *The Young Visitors*. No muck, less titillation; but each girl, as her innocence crumbles, is forever innocent of what the next chapter holds in store, unready—not quite ready—to interpret it when she arrives, unsure—not quite sure—of how to respond when it happens. Her innocence, if we may call it that, is the frame of mind on which the skein of action is wound.

There are differences of course. Ethel Monticue's innocence, confidently assumed by her author, is gradually and conclusively eroded by her story. Pamela Andrews' innocence must be circumstantially protested and re-propped so that Squire B— can assault it over and over again. But in both cases, innocence is the perspective which provides the necessary tension against which the events of experience may move. And the operation of that fundamental dynamism remains unchanged and essential—if subtler in its range of effects—elsewhere in fiction. Can we say everywhere?

Every central character must, in a sense relative to his story, be *relatively* innocent at the beginning of his book: that is, he must be more innocent earlier in the story than he is later in the story. On this agreement heroes and heroines shake hands: Moll Flanders with Molly Bloom, Joseph Andrews with Joe Christmas, Uncle Toby with Hans Castorp, Becky Sharp with Jane Eyre, Pip with Nick Carroway, Natty Bumppo with Bernard Profitendieu, and, for that matter, Lady Chatterley with Alice in Wonderland. To crash the world of fiction successfully, even a murderer, pervert, con-man, or whore must agree to respect at least one convention, the convention of his own innocence—Raskolnikov, Humbert Humbert, Felix Krull, Fanny Hill. The relative innocence of central characters is a truism; what is perhaps only barely less obvious is that "innocence" is a function of the organization of events, and may therefore serve as a very useful source for a theory of the dynamism—the motivation—of narrative form. At the outset of the form, even the most sophisticated of central characters must be innocent of what is going to come at him. Innocence in fiction establishes the crucial inner perspective because it is a pressure (as it were, "outward") to interpret freshly for the reader the outer, oncoming experience. The latter, outer experience, exerts a reciprocal pressure "inward" upon innocence (whether upon a great innocence or upon a presumed sophistication which proves inadequate, not quite adequate). The result, moment by moment from the character's point of view, is a continuous stream or series of responses—in perception, in action—which constitutes his gradual rendering of himself and his world. Now the intense energizing function of innocence in fiction helps to explain in part why so many great novels have had central characters of exceptionally great purity, simplicity, or harmlessness. But with an eye on structure, we can perhaps justifiably lay less stress on any specific traits of character. We can more generally and more usefully define the central subjective energy of the novel as an inward pressure not merely to engage with experience, but to interpret experience by responding to it.

For response, whether out of simplicity or subtlety, whether in action or feeling, constitutes interpretation.

Ethel blushed at his speaking look. I shall be quite lost in that huge bed she added to hide her embarrassment.

We can, after all, imagine other responses than Ethel's blush; and other responses—if we or the author should insist on imagining them—would create other events, other characters, other stories; in short, another interpretation of experience.

I screamed out, and fainted away. . . .

When I recovered my senses, I found myself undressed and a-bed, in the arms of the sweet unrelenting murderer of my virginity. . . . (Fanny Hill)

. . . I sighed and screamed, and fainted away. . . . I knew nothing more of the matter, one fit following another, till about three hours after, as it proved to be, I found myself in bed, and Mrs. Jervis sitting upon one side . . . and no master, for the wicked wretch was gone. But I was so overjoyed, that I hardly could believe myself. . . . (Pamela)

It was only then that her still face showed the least emotion, a tear or two beginning to trickle down.

"What are you crying for?" he coldly asked.

"I was only thinking that I was born over there," murmured Tess.

Over the long course of a novel, the flux of such responses not only creates or defines character, as it obviously does, but does so through a process which we can isolate: with all the energy of their crumbling innocence, characters are obliged to interpret themselves as they interpret a changing experience.

That double interpretative process is the primary imaginative movement in the novel, a movement that is never merely cumulative, never piling experience on inexperience *merely* (as in some earlier narratives, Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller*, for example), but always moving from innocence to experience, from relative

unreadiness to relative adequacy. The stream of responses, which is a stream of interpretation, is therefore a fundamental moral process in fiction.

Now it is precisely in the moment of not-quite-readiness ("I was only thinking that I was born over there") and under the threats and opportunities of experience, that responses are made, characters are created, interpretations are formed, and fictional events occur. In that incessantly recurring moment and in its necessary momentum toward sophistication may lie a clue to the relation between ethics and events in the novel. We may be able to trace a theory of single events which will allow us to see the full trajectory of such events in the fictional experience as both narrative structure and ethical form.

Let us consider for a moment the plight of those assaulted servant girls who hold open the doors through which English fiction enters so rudely—Defoe's Moll, Richardson's Pamela, Fielding's Fanny, and Cleland's Fanny. Four very different girls chased by four very different squires: a world of ropes, ponds, hedges, purses, employment agencies, mothers, captains, and justices of the peace. The pell-mell momentum of threat and opportunity, response and interpretation, grows increasingly tense. Squire A—tempts Moll with a silk purse and silken promises; Squire B—commands lackeys to spirit Pamela away and keep her in an isolated house; Squire C—has Fanny Goodwill bound on a horse and abducted as a "rebellious" wife; Squire D—has his procuress terrorize Fanny Hill with threats of debtors' prison before he generously pays her rent. Against such harsh and subtle assaults, what sort of chance does innocence stand?

In describing the existence of the novel as a genre, Mark Schorer has spoken of "the intersection of the stream of social history and the stream of soul. The intersection . . . provides the source of those generic tensions that make [the form] possible at all."<sup>3</sup> Can we go further and say that that same intersection provides the source of tension in each individual event by which any given novel achieves its existence? If we can, then we will at least be in a position to under-

stand the remarkable resistance the soul puts up against social history, the sort of chance innocence does in fact stand against the harsh and subtle assaults of squires. But each individual squire immediately and loudly objects: by what authority, he demands, do we make a servant girl a soul and himself a fact of social history? Still, let us overrule him for a moment and side—tentatively—with the harassed girl. From her point of view, the encircling arms of the squire are embarrassingly twofold: the world of impersonal force (social, historical, physical, and natural) and the personal world of character. For squires, lackeys, and lovers, though “selves” like her own self, are from her point of view parts of her world, forces outside her soul with whom she must cope and to whom she must respond. (Our analysis is of course relative to an arbitrarily fixed center; and the moment the squire’s protests become persuasive, we can—for his soul—simply reverse our procedure.)

Now in the moment of innocence, when the susceptible squire seizes her about the waist, each girl’s responses may also be divided, conveniently, into a dilemma: how to feel about it and what to do about it. And both together inevitably constitute her “interpretation”: perception and action. Moll Flanders is often content to count her blessings; Fanny Hill and Fanny Goodwill sometimes cry and kick against the aggressors; Pamela, “sadly vexed,” usually contrives to let her affairs drift to the sexual brink. This running interpretation of the heroine’s world—the current of small outcomes all along the way—generates its energy, it is true, through a limitlessly complex and dynamic interaction of self and world: the full inner and outer experience of fiction. But if we divide that experience—abstractly—into an onrushing double response of the self (insight and deeds) to the onrushing double trouble of the world (personal and impersonal), we have at least a coherent and consistent analysis that can account for any given event in terms of the tensions between individual innocence and the onslaught of history and society: blushes and wishes; captains and employment agencies. By including within the term “world” not only society and history but every-

thing “not-self,” we can even account for the circumstantial detail of events, the physical and natural texture: ropes, ponds, and hedges.

That double onrushing confrontation constitutes the full flux of experience in a novel. In turning now to the structure of events in fiction, I want to distinguish the formal development of experience from the development of what we commonly call plot. (The word *plot* is heavily and traditionally associated with “action”—we habitually distinguish plot from character as related but separable concepts. By now the association of plot with “what happens,” and why it happens, is too strong to break.<sup>4</sup>) In what follows, I intend to place a more reasonable emphasis on the self in the experience we call the novel, and to restore focus on what in fact “happens” in fiction: interaction, rather than action.

If the fundamental unit of language is the word, and the fundamental unit of discursive prose is the assertion, it seems reasonable to suggest that the fundamental unit of fiction is the event. But what is a “single” event? We turn the page. The event isn’t over: it may seem to be finished, but it has refused to sign a treaty over boundaries, refused to stay “single,” even when the chapter closes on it. The event doesn’t close: just as it has incorporated within itself smaller events, it contains within itself potentialities for further events which inexorably incorporate it, and it is alive only in the stream. By looking at events as an onrushing confrontation of tensions (between responses generated internally in character, externally in the world), we sacrifice something—the convenience of considering events as closed “units” in a separable “construction”—but we come closer to a dynamic and true sense of structure in the novel. For it is in some such way that we do read fiction: at some moments more aware of the force and flow of the stream; at other moments more aware of the single and particular event—we pause in acknowledgment, we know that it has occurred. If we can agree that the event is the fundamental unit of fiction, then we should agree to go further and say that the stream of events is the fundamental form of fiction.

The fundamental unit of fiction, "one" event, might perhaps at this point be formally defined as the dynamic confrontation of two pressures, self and world, which issues in any clear outcome—whether in perception or action or both, whether on the part of the self, the world, or both.<sup>5</sup> Several provisos and amplifications follow.

Of course the definition obliges us in the first place to choose arbitrarily, but not injudiciously, one character as the center or focus of any event and to regard that character as the continuous inward center for the duration of any sequence of events. If we regard as inward whatever parts of the narrative pertain to the character as a self—his perception, feeling, action, and so on—then *everything* else can be considered as outward, that is to say, as *that* character's world—including, most notably, other characters. The pressures exerted upon him by the world (in this relative analysis) can then include, for example, the pressures of other characters' perceptions, feelings, words, intentions, and actions; of social institutions and conventions; of physical and natural forces—soft chairs, open doors, bad weather, snapping twigs, falling rocks.

Now in the second place, it is in the nature of fiction as a stream or a process that any inner-and-outer happening which strikes us as an outcome will normally also be, with respect to the next event, an inception. That is, any new relation of the self to the world which we *call* an outcome either becomes *part* (if new stresses are introduced) or constitutes *all* of the two new pressures of self and world which produce the outcome of the next continuous event.

Third, thanks to a definition by now rapacious (inner *and* outer), all has become grist to our mill of events: everything from the discernible ripple of a single superficial incident to the strong but indistinguishable eddying of many incidents; even such stubbornly irreducible shoals and islands in fiction's flow as long landscapes or detailed interiors, summaries of the past or character analysis, expository meditation or the stream of consciousness; all of necessity become the background, the potential energy, inward or outward, for the succession of outcomes which establishes the stream.

Looked at in this way, therefore, an event is not only "what happens"—though, heaven knows, if we call it anything else, we are obligated to show what blessings will eventually flow from our sophistication. An event is a moment in the process which creates for us the inward self, a moment in the flux by which the self consciously copes with and interprets the world—other selves, social institutions, conventions, values, sometimes nature itself. But to say *that* is to say that the novel structures the specific and essentially moral process of which the human imagination is capable, structures it in the full substance of narrative.<sup>6</sup> By its obligatory attention to the perceiving self, the flux of experience in the novel is also obliged to create (even against the novelist's will) an ethical form in process. The stream of events may therefore (but not against our will) be studied as a process or flux of the conscience: we can grasp the perceiving self's attempts to grasp—to come to grips with, in perception and action—the assaults and offers of the surrounding world. Without changing the terms of our earlier definition of an event, but concentrating on the self's responses as developing and related interpretations, we can regard that peculiarly novelistic continuum, the inner-and-outer dialectics of the novel, event by event, under the aspect of an ethical form. We have already suggested that, with respect to structure, the fundamental form of fiction is the stream of events. With respect to meaning, it seems reasonable to suggest that the fundamental form of the novel is its stream of conscience.

That is what we read novels for: to share in creating the experience of one more world of selves, and one more, and one more. This may seem hardly a process of the conscience. But the novelist arranges in advance the rules of play (style and ethics; time and pace) and the reader, with all the energy of his imagination, plays the book as his experience. Instead of a "willing suspension of disbelief" before the unreality of the theater stage, the co-operative reader submits to (the novel produces) another kind of suspension, which we regularly call identification—a suspension of dissociation before the intrusion of personality. An "other" becomes our temporary self.

More precisely, others become our temporary selves, one after another, and we experience the fiction not from orchestra or balcony but from some center of the novel's world, through the temporary peephole of character, moving from innocence to experience on the subjective wedge that opens the future of narrative motion.

In that way the stream of events in the novel, just as we have described it, becomes the experience of the reader: the self and world in the novel become our self and surrounding world, so that the experience of reading a novel comes closer than does that of any other form of literature to our personal experience in time. The fundamental form of fiction in-forms the reader's self, and as a result consistent patterns of moral and emotional response in the novels of an era can and do take on the impact and authority of mythic information.

## 2

## THE CLOSED NOVEL AND THE OPEN NOVEL

The flux of experience—a process both inward and outward—is the novel's underlying form. Once one apprehends it as the crucial imaginative organization of fiction, it is possible to observe in its development during the history of the novel two opposed patterns for the process, two diverging myths<sup>1</sup> of experience. As the nineteenth century advanced into the twentieth, the novel began to offer not merely new techniques, but new patterns of information about the process of life. In so doing, the English novel moved gradually from a closed form of experience to an open form of experience, and it is on the existence and meaning of that historical transition that I wish to focus attention. I hope, as I proceed, to define it and to illustrate it.

The shift to which I refer was gradual, but it took place, I will suggest, with greatest velocity at about the turn of this century. And I think it reasonable to suggest further that the "open" pattern of the novel came into being because it reflected and conveyed a new attitude toward the process and goals of experience in life. It was not merely plot, or characterization, or technique, or point of view, or thought, or symbolic organization that changed; it was not a matter of irreconcilable meanings, conflicting themes, or difficult problems. The change in the novel took place at a more fundamental level than any of these; it left the novel "open" in another sense and in another respect, though in a respect that inevitably touched, now here, now

there, all these other matters. The process of experience which underlay the novel was itself disrupted and reorganized. The new flux of experience insisted on a new vision of existence: it stressed an ethical vision of continual expansion and virtually unrelieved openness in the experience of life.

In this discussion of structure in the novel, a form conceived as in motion and as a process, I am going to use "closed" or "open" to refer to the full and final shaping of the flux of experience.<sup>2</sup> That flux, I suggested in the opening chapter, can be regarded ethically. I have called that ethical form—that is, the stream of moral outcomes—a stream of conscience. By a closed novel, then, I mean a novel in which that underlying ethical form, the stream of conscience, is finally contained. By an open novel I mean a novel in which the stream of conscience is finally not contained. And it is to the question of what "contained" means, and to the meaning of all these terms<sup>3</sup> as they work themselves out in the fictional organization of experience, that I now turn.

It is of course quite evident that both "flux" and "stream" of conscience are merely metaphors for the specific process by which moral experience in the novel is expanded; but they are apt metaphors. In the novel, any novel, the structural pattern of moral experience grows broader and deeper as the tale proceeds. Each central "self" moves through the process of events from a limited experience to a wider one, from relative innocence to relative sophistication, from a more-or-less contracted to a more fully expanded perception and interpretation. Tom Jones and Hans Castorp, Pip and Lord Jim, the Vicar of Wakefield, Frankenstein, and Leopold Bloom undergo much the same experience, *formally* speaking. To say that their experience grows "wider" or becomes "expanded" is to speak figuratively, of course. But by recourse to the preceding analysis of the structure of events, it becomes possible to justify those terms with some precision. We can show that Fielding takes great pains to convey the exact nature and degree of innocence with which his hero enters the novel: Jones's limited "grasp" of experience—that very

grasp which his later history will find wanting. And we can show that Mann, Dickens, Conrad, Goldsmith, Mary Shelley, and Joyce take—must take—precisely the same strategic pains: all conveyed in terms of early events.<sup>4</sup> We can show, moreover, that the pressure of events modifies and alters that earlier innocent "grasp" through a process of responses and outcomes whose permutations are never merely cumulative, but which form an ever more complex and disturbing interpretation of experience in *that* book.

In the novel, then, the flux of experience considered morally—as a flux of conscience—is by its very nature expansive. But that implicit design, seemingly invariable, does vary. If it is looked at more closely, in terms of its continuous organization and its ending, two patterns—two traditions—can be distinguished.

The major tradition of the novel—more briefly, the traditional novel—nudges out of shape the innocent perceptions and expectations of its hero; in event after event he is buffeted, confused, and bedeviled through the buzzing, blooming confusion which is his history, until he achieves in the end—whether in fun or in grief, in defeat or decision—a new relation of the inward self to the outward world, which serves to contain the most distressing or disturbing of the preceding events. To put it more analytically, the major traditional pattern, or roughly that of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, postulates as its unspoken assumption about the shape of events that the climactic moments of widest moral expansion will be regularly followed by a limiting moral situation, a final re-organization of experience which restricts, either by narrowing or by moving in an opposed direction, the specific emotional and ethical expansion undergone in the climax. Briefly, in the traditional novel, experience is closed.

That is, it is closed by final events which constrict the climactic elaboration; and that deliberately controlled tapering after the preceding expansion of conscience gives the reader his sense of a "close." The novel's underlying formal impulse—elaboration and expansion—is checked and brought to rest. Nor is the closed ending "tacked on."