Story and History

Narrative Authority and Social Identity in the Eighteenth-Century French and English Novel

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Preface

This study did not start out as a general reconsideration of the French and English novel in the eighteenth century. It began, in fact, with a relatively benign observation that the relationship between personal story and public account, between the social act of relating one's perceptions or events to some listener and the collective narrative or history that framed such acts, seemed to form an essential component of the thematic structures and even plots of several novels of the period. As I expanded my investigation, I was struck by the pervasiveness of this theme and its clear affiliation with the emergence of a decidedly metaliterary tendency in the later works. Inevitably I was led to try to account for this pattern in terms of the function which critics and theoreticians of the period assign to narration and narratives – and to fiction in particular – and to see if the pattern applied to the major works in both the French and English traditions. The result is a set of readings and speculations which themselves form a story, namely that of the eighteenth-century French and English novels' evolving conceptualization of narration and narratives, as they relate to selfhood, identity, society, and culture through the structures of authority subtending such categories. These questions are explicitly treated in the novels in question; indeed, I will argue that many of the individual works express microcosmically in their plots and thematic structure the patterns of development which I perceive in the genre's collective evolution. But these themes are not *all* the novels contain, and the reader should be forewarned that my interpretations are of necessity partial, in both senses of the word. They do not attempt to provide comprehensive views of the works in question, and, unfortunately, they cannot take into consideration the enormous amount of fine scholarship that each of the novels has provoked. These shortcomings are the unhappy consequence of the study's scope and format.

The conviction that my arguments could only be useful, and my analytic perspective validated, if they could be shown to pertain to most of the major works of the period, led me to re-examine a substantial portion of the canon; my ambition to enclose within a single account two national tradi-

tions expanded still further the list of works I felt obliged to treat. At the same time, the nature of my thesis required me to consider the works in their entirety: I could not demonstrate that the relationship of narration to authority was fundamental to the thematic structure of a work without providing a free-standing reading of that work. These considerations, along with my desire to produce a work useful to readers interested primarily in only one or two authors or novels, compelled me to choose a rather unimaginative format but one which I hope avoids the extremes of coercive synthesis or disconnected exegetic fragments. Following an introductory chapter which, like the ubiquitous "Author's preface" or narrative frame so popular in the eighteenth century, sets down the terms in which I wish my publication to be read, I treat each of the major works in (roughly) chronological order, recapitulating and developing the conceptual framework and the historical argument at the beginning of each chapter and in two short interchapters designed to clarify the theoretical notions and patterns of development that emerge from those readings, taken collectively.

Many of the issues I touch upon merit more attention than I can give them in this study, and the conclusions I draw should be understood as self-consciously provisional. My goal has not been to elaborate a comprehensive account of the eighteenth-century novel, but rather to explore some questions about how fiction relates to reality that seem to me fundamental to the genre's evolution during that period. Similarly, it was a conscious decision to seek a theory of narration and the novel within the stories the novels themselves tell about narration. There are many theoretical texts in the eighteenth century concerned with language, discourse, social hierarchies, political organization, or law, but nowhere does the practical use of narration to alter social identity and shared reality receive more sustained attention than in the novel – and nowhere is this attention more pertinent than in the very genre which, as a developing model of social reality, derives its own increasing authority over culture from its progressive refinement of narrative representation.

Accordingly, I have extrapolated my theoretical arguments primarily from the plots of the works themselves, and from other literary discussions concerned with fiction, rather than evaluating the novels against theories imported from other disciplines. Different portraits of the way the eighteenth century thought about fiction, history, and individual identity can no doubt be drawn on the basis of different documents and methodologies, and it is futile to argue the superiority of disciplinary biases. I would say only that my decision to use novels as evidence is based on the observation that there is no more logical place to learn about the status of fiction, history, and narrative than in the texts where those notions converge most explicitly. In the best of all possible cases, those who cannot bring themselves to

accept the analysis of fictional texts as a firm ground for theoretical and historical generalizations will at least find in this book a series of interesting speculations they can explore subsequently with the investigative conventions of their choice.

Because I am dealing with two national traditions, thus including novels which may be unfamiliar to some readers, I have taken little for granted in my analyses and structured my exposition so that even the uninitiated reader should be able to follow the argument. I have also drawn my citations from readily accessible editions of the novels. Similarly, I have provided translations of the voluminous citations in French, taken in several cases from the contemporary translations with which an eighteenth-century English reader would have been familiar. I would hope that the length of the resulting volume is at least partially offset by the conceptual unity of the readings, which, if nothing else, have the merit of bringing together within a single interpretive framework two traditions that in my opinion have been artificially separated by the critical canon, in spite of fundamentally similar preoccupations and strategies.

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Introduction

The Muses wove, in the loom of Pallas, a loose and changeable robe, like that in which Falsehood captivated her admirers; with this they invested Truth, and named her Fiction.

Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler*

In the mid- to late eighteenth century there occurred in both France and England a remarkable reassessment of the function and truth value of fictional narratives. Increasingly relegated since the Renaissance to a position of mere amusement in comparison to factual accounts – "le Roman ne pense qu'à plaire, & l'Histoire ne pense qu'à instruire"[1] (the novel seeks only to please and history seeks only to instruct) – fiction suddenly emerges in the critical discourse as the primary vehicle for representing contemporary social reality, and even shaping that reality. As part of this reassessment, the commonplace that fiction exercised an influence on the morals of its readers received substantial re-examination and refinement, at the hands of the novel's proponents and detractors alike. One of genre's most rabid opponents in France implicitly concedes that social usage is determined by contemporary fiction – "où les jeunes gens en apprendront-ils les usages, si ce n'est dans la lecture des bons romans?"[2] (where will young people learn usages, if not in good novels?). The same writer attributes to the genre a pernicious, almost subliminal effect on personal beliefs and feelings which is equal to that of social intercourse:

> Les livres & les sociétés font les hommes . . . l'impression qu'ils font, même malgré nous, sur notre esprit & sur notre cœur, y porte toujours un germe de justesse ou de fausseté, de vertu ou de vice, quoique dans le moment de la lecture que nous en faisons, nous ne nous sentions que très-médiocrement affectés.[3]
>
> People are shaped by books and by the company they keep . . . the impression they [books] make on our minds and hearts inevitably plants, even in spite of

> us, a seed of propriety or falseness, virtue or vice, even though at the time of our reading we may feel only moderately affected.

Similar ideas can be found in English essays of the time. Lord Kames, for instance, attributes to narrative an evocative force equivalent to that of actual perception: "A lively and accurate description . . . raises in me ideas no less distinct than if I had been originally an eye-witness."[4] Such ideas form what Kames calls "ideal presence" and he goes on to explain that "even genuine history has no command over our passions but by ideal presence only; and consequently . . . it stands upon the same footing with fable."[5] In fact, since the effect of both fictional and historical narratives "depends on the vivacity of the ideas they raise: . . . fable is generally more successful than history."[6] Kames' analysis further specifies that narrative representation does not merely affect one's feelings or passions; it also shapes our beliefs, since "when events are related in a lively manner, and every circumstance appears as passing before us, we suffer not patiently the truth of the facts to be questioned."[7]

Fiction, in other words, not only has an affective impact superior to that of factual accounts, it has the very capacity to generate "truth" and "facts" – provided, at least, the description it provides is "accurate." As Dr Johnson specifies, the single distinguishing feature about the new fiction, and the trait upon which all of its privileges are founded, is its representational accuracy with respect to contemporary social reality: "the works of fiction, with which the present generation seems more particularly delighted, are such as exhibit life in its true state, diversified only by accidents that daily happen in the world, and influenced by passions and qualities which are really to be found in conversing with mankind."[8] Johnson assumes that fiction reflects actual social interactions, and his further delineation of the author's task makes clear that the portrait of life presented by the novel must have a certain degree of historical specificity:

> The task of our present writers . . . requires, together with that learning which is to be gained from books, that experience which can never be attained by solitary diligence, but must arise from general converse and accurate observation of the living world.
>
> The chief advantage which these fictions have over real life is, that their authors are at liberty, though not to invent, yet to select objects, and to cull from the mass of mankind those individuals upon which the attention ought most to be employed.[9]

Writing thirty-five years later, Clara Reeve will insist more aggressively on the novel's historical referentiality, noting at one point that "the Novel is

a picture of real life and manners, and of the times in which it is written,"[10] and later citing one of her contemporaries: "if you wish in a Novel to inculcate some moral truth . . . there should always be a reference to the manners and the time in which it is written."[11] The French author Baculard d'Arnaud puts it more bluntly: "la vérité débarrassée de l'alliage imposteur est du nombre de ces phénoménes qui n'ont point encore été visibles à nos yeux: notre meilleure histoire, j'excepte nos livres sacrés, est le roman le moins grossier & le plus vraisemblable"[12] (unadulterated truth figures among those phenomena which have never yet been visible to our eyes: our best history, leaving aside the sacred scriptures, is the least crude and most realistic novel).

Arnaud overstates the case perhaps, but his assumption that truth is always mediated by some motivation or agenda, and hence beyond perception in a pure state, is representative of the skepticism that pervaded the age. The notion of the simple fact, and the simple narrative of such facts, had been under attack since the seventeenth century, as part of the reaction to what Michael McKeon has characterized as "naive empiricism,"[13] and its theoretical debunking reached a high point in the early eighteenth century as part of the critique of history. The foundations for this critique had been articulated by René Rapin in 1677, when he stipulated that "ce n'est pas écrire l'Histoire que de conter les actions des hommes, sans parler de leurs motifs; c'est faire le Gazetier, qui se contente de dire les évenemens des choses, sans remonter à leur source"[14] (it is not writing history to relate human actions without discussing their motives; it is emulating the news reporter, who is content to report the occurrence of things without tracing them back to their source). Rapin's insistence that causal explanation is a precondition for capturing the reader's interest and assuring the moral benefits of history will persist throughout the eighteenth century. Lenglet Du Fresnoy, for instance, will reaffirm that "l'histoire ne doit pas être seulement un narré fidèle des choses arrivées pour nous servir d'instruction, elle doit encore découvrir les causes & les motifs secrets des grands évenements, les ressorts & les intrigues que l'on a mis en œuvre pour y réüssir"[15] (to provide us instruction, history must not be simply an accurate account of things that have happened, it must also reveal the causes and secret motives of great events, the mechanisms and intrigues which were put into play in order to make them succeed). When Bolingbroke produces his analysis of the discipline of history, he correlates not only the ethical benefits but also the epistemological status of historical accounts to their contextualization and motivation: "Naked facts, without the causes that produced them and the circumstances that accompanied them, are not sufficient to characterize actions or counsels."[16] Rousseau states the case even more strongly:

> Mais qu'entend-on par ce mot de faits? . . . Croit-on que la véritable connaissance des événements soit séparable de celle de leurs causes, de celle de leurs effets, et que l'historique tienne si peu au moral qu'on puisse connaître l'un sans l'autre? Si vous ne voyez dans les actions des hommes que les mouvements extérieurs et purement physiques, qu'apprenez-vous dans l'histoire? Absolument rien . . .[17]
>
> But what do people mean by this word "facts"? . . . Do they believe that the genuine knowledge of events is separable from that of their causes, from that of their effects, and that the historical is so unrelated to the moral that one could know one without the other? If you see in human action only external, purely physical movements, what are you learning in history? Absolutely nothing . . .

The interrogation of historical writing reveals an implicit assumption in the second half of the century that the human partitioning of reality which we call "events" can only be grasped in the form of a complex economy of intentions, causes, and moral contexts. In its broadest sense as a cultural matrix, such a contextual framework accounts for the specific patterns of behavior that characterize a given society and color its construals of the world. The eighteenth century's interest in such notions is attested to by numerous theoretical essays on culture, as well as by works such as Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes*, Argens' *Lettres juives*, or Johnson's *Rasselas*. By depicting the mores of their epoch and nation from the "outside," as they might be seen by someone from another land, and juxtaposing these mores to those of other civilized nations, these works put into question the assumption that human events are simply "given"; they reflect a growing fascination with the idea that much of what people take for granted as "normal" or true is merely the reflection of shared cultural biases – prejudices that are inherited through tradition, reinforced by structures of authority, and inculcated through habit. A similar notion of cultural relativism pervades the theories of history of the period in the form of those inherited prejudices which vitiate the historian's objectivity. As Bolingbroke puts it, "the accidental and other causes, which give rise and growth to opinions, both in speculation and practice, are of infinite variety; and where ever these opinions are once confirmed by custom and propagated by education, various, inconsistent, contradictory as they are, they all pretend (and all their pretences are backed up by pride, by passion, and by interest) to have reason, or revelation, or both on their side."[18]

I would argue that the novel's promotion as a representational vehicle is linked to the increasing conviction that both individual and social truths are rooted in continually evolving codes of behavior, contexts of belief, religious biases, and ethical assumptions, most of which are beyond the scope of traditional historical accounts. For the eighteenth century, classical history's fascination with military and political upheavals and the careers of

great figures that shape the human record, blinded it to the crucial dimension of cultural determination, the subtle codes which evolve over time under the pressure of re-expression and reinterpretation, changing what counts as facts for their society and historical epoch. As Voltaire laments,

> après avoir lu trois ou quatre mille descriptions de batailles, et la teneur de quelques centaines de traités, j'ai trouvé que je n'étais guère plus instruit au fond. Je n'apprenais là que des événements. Je ne connais pas plus les Français et les Sarrasins par la bataille de Charles Martel, que je ne connais les Tartares et les Turcs par la victoire que Tamerlan remporta sur Bajazet. . . . quiconque veut lire l'histoire en citoyen et en philosophe. . . recherchera quel a été le vice radical et la vertu dominante d'une nation . . . les changements dans les mœurs et dans les lois seront enfin son grand objet. On saurait ainsi l'histoire des hommes, au lieu de savoir une faible partie de l'histoire des rois et des cours[19]

> after having read three or four thousand descriptions of battles, and the equivalent of a few hundred treatises, I found that basically, I was scarcely more knowledgeable. I was only learning events there. The battle of Charles Martel teaches me no more about the French and the Sarrasins than Tamerlan's victory over Bajazet tells me about the Tartars and the Turks . . . . whoever wants to read history as a citizen and a philosopher will try to learn what the fundamental vice and dominant virtue of a nation have been . . . changes in behavior and in the laws will ultimately be his primary object. In this way one could know the history of mankind, instead of knowing a small part of the history of the kings and courts.

However, the very idea of an informing cultural matrix puts into question the historian's claim of factuality. The narration of the remote past necessarily expresses and rationalizes the collectively validated usages and conventions of the history writer's own epoch, but cannot be assured of perceiving those of the "target" society or period.

It is just such collectively maintained assumptions which the realistic fiction of the period undertakes to represent on two fronts, by focusing its attention on the social practices *of which it is itself an expression.*[20] Freed from the limitations of factual fidelity, assured of representing the biases of the culture it depicts by virtue of its own enclosure within that culture, the novel can formulate, analyse, and illustrate general paradigms of social interaction explicitly through its plot structure, at the same time that it exemplifies in its gesture of narration the conventions of communication and representation underlying such interactions. In other words, the eighteenth-century novel instantiates or stands for the culture it depicts; in this sense the novel can claim to "be" history: it represents the system it represents.[21]

One might argue that all modes of mimesis more or less explicitly partake of this double sense of representation, in which the ordering gesture's

exemplification of norms overlays or seconds the order represented. But the eighteenth-century novel makes the double mode of representation a self-conscious practice, deliberately aligning its own narrational practice with the one it depicts – and vice versa. The great works which were instrumental in the genre's consecration as social record do not casually, or merely theoretically, express the cultural model that infuses them with their authority; they explicitly and insistently portray social reality as driven by a cultural engine that functions as the novel itself functions, specifying and coordinating private and collective experience through narrative mechanisms. The plot structure, thematic fabric, and mode of presentation of eighteenth-century fiction all work together to assimilate the idea of truth, its human correlate identity, and the instrumental conjunction of the two – authority – to the narrative processes which that fiction deploys in its structuring and re-presentation of social reality.

Most accessible at the level of plot and theme, this "narrativation" of reality becomes increasingly apparent as the century progresses. It pervades the early novels of individualism in the form of the accounts of personal experience which the protagonists use to combat or internalize the systems of authority and social hierarchy limiting their mobility. In later works the merger of private and collective reality, and frequently the manipulation or structuring of the community by the individual, form the backbone of more ambitious agendas of narrative organization. All of these novels foreground the way in which the narration or relating of experience legislates through representation, by imposing an order on reality and an identity on the narrator(s). But while the early novels focus primarily on the use of narration as a means of self-assertion and the local, provisional subversion of authority systems, subsequent works dramatize how the narratives which result from such acts of narration can shape collective behavior by literally becoming part of shared history. Assimilated to the public discourse of the community in the form of circulated stories, narratives of exemplary conduct redefine the social hierarchy and modify the script of acceptable behavior to which the exercise of authority looks for its rationalization. Eventually, the novel comes to acknowledge its own exemplification of this process of circulation and dissemination – and even its function as an authoritative expression of, and template for, the contemporary world. However, this acknowledgment occurs only within the context of a dialectical reformulation which forecloses on the possibility of cultural domination by any single narrative or author.

My alternating reliance here on metaphors of imitation and instrumentality is meant to convey my own intention that the novel's representative function be neither reduced to mere reflection of a pre-existing state of affairs, nor inflated to a role of direct legislation. Studies of the eighteenth-

century novel have frequently assumed that the imitation of complex social reality is a natural objective, in the pursuit of which the novel developed its strategies of "realistic" narration; and one can naturally conceptualize the tendencies I trace in the following readings as mere responses to evolving attitudes about reality. However, given the novel's phenomenal popularity in the period, and the amount of ink devoted in the eighteenth century to analysing its effect on the moral and intellectual fibre of both France and England, it seems naive to assume that realistic fiction did not itself contribute to those evolving attitudes. In fact, the case for mere imitation collapses, if taken literally, since the world the novel portrays, and the model of narrative transaction it promotes (both of which must be assumed to be essentially accurate, within the logic of the imitation argument) come to postulate a dialectical relationship of mutual determination between individual construal and shared construct. Read as successive emplotments of a larger trend, the period's most influential works demonstrate, albeit with local variations, that personal initiatives, and *a fortiori* narration, are both framed by and react to, a cultural matrix of scripts, codes, and conventions from which they draw their authority, but which they in turn reconfigure, however slightly, if only through their own innovations of usage. Within the context of such a model, which will be dramatized repeatedly and graphically within the plots of the period, the novel is neither simply the product nor the producer of the patterns it depicts and exemplifies, but both at all moments.

Michael McKeon's monumental study of the origins of the English novel provides a useful framework for understanding the double function of representation which I attribute to the novel, and which I think informs its evolution. McKeon postulates that " 'the novel' must be understood as what Marx calls a 'simple abstraction,' a deceptively monolithic category that encloses a complex historical process. It attains its modern, 'institutional' stability and coherence at this time because of its unrivaled power both to formulate, and to explain, a set of problems that are central to early modern experience. These may be understood as problems of categorical instability, which the novel, originating to resolve, also inevitably reflects."[22] The categorical instabilities which concern McKeon involve shifts during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in attitudes about how to signify or tell truth and how to signify virtue, and his thesis, to oversimplity it, is that the novel ultimately attained pre-eminence and generic coherence because of its ability to mediate (express, render intelligible, and hence in some measure reconcile within a broadly accommodating form) the conflicting narrative strategies and ideologies which succeeded one another during the period of transition from romance idealism and aristocratic ideology to the modern era.

One of the ways of "signifying the truth" with which McKeon deals in depth is the "claim to historicity" which becomes widespread in the seventeenth century and which functions in his argument as romance's response to the early modern historicist revolution (*Origins*, p. 53). By claiming to be factual, early prose fiction, like the various news sheets, official gazettes, travel accounts, exotic biographies, and pseudo-historical genres which proliferated during the period, attempts to capitalize on the naive empiricist assumption that history can be separated from romance in narrative – that fact can be distinguished from fable. As McKeon sees it, this claim to historicity competes during the early modern period with the Aristotelian notion of verisimilitude, and while he casts their competition in terms of a provisional domination by the claim to historicity during the seventeenth century and an eventual victory by verisimilitude "as the reformulated doctrine of 'realism,'" his overall theory of fictional mediation specifies that both could co-exist within the genre of the novel conceived as an abstract category.[23] The moment and phenomenon which interest me in the present study can be conceptualized in somewhat similar terms as the novel's coming to terms with its incompatible identities as fiction and truth – private construct and public structure – by formulating a dialectic of personal narration and narrative truth that grounds each in the other.

In the terms of my discussion above, the claim to historicity, which persists in an increasingly vestigial form in the prefaces of the novels which I will be studying, predicates a merely "imitative" form of narrative as a simple reflection of reality – a narrative which, to the extent it purports to be unadulterated by personal motive, denies the history of its own production in an interested act of narration. Fable, conversely, is a narrative postulated to have no referent other than its narration: it produces a simulacrum of reality behind which there is no historical reality. History is a story *produced by* reality, fable a story *productive of* reality, and both are presumed to stand *outside of* reality. Such pure forms are of course reciprocal delusions, limiting cases of theoretical value which, if implemented, would lead to self-cancelling excesses. The historicist delusion is that there can be an account *of* human reality that is not mediated by an act situated *in* human reality and vitiated by the biases of that situation – that there can be a narrative produced directly by reality that is immune to the processes of change it chronicles. The converse delusion is that there could be a narrative having no origins in reality, but capable of modifying – or, as is generally the charge, corrupting – reality. Like the radical claim to historicity, the radical charge of fictionality denies the framing of the text (and its producer) *in* reality or history, and the consequent "representative" nature of that narrator's postulates.[24]

Both of these excessive conceptualizations resist what we might call the historical situation of history and historians, narration and narratives, au-

thoritative orders and gestures of ordering; and it is the varieties of such resistance, and the consequences to which it leads, which the eighteenth-century novel systematically explores, then ultimately rejects, in its ongoing interrogation of how individual story relates to collective history. One of the implicit theses of the readings making up this book is that the thematic evolution of the eighteenth-century French and English novel can be understood as a gradual coming to terms with the complexities of a genuine historical consciousness, one which conceives of the identity of individuals and societies, and the orders of authority that modulate their behavior, in terms of a continual process of recounting and rearticulation that is regulated by, and derives its authority from, the accumulating context of its own past narratives. Within such a model, (reconfiguring) narration and (grounding) narrative, story and history, are but different faces/phases of the same equation, as are, from the perspective of the social economy underwritten by that equation, individual behavior and collective norm. To that extent, the gradual emergence of historical consciousness entails a concomitant reassessment of personal freedom and collective authority.

At first glance the French and English novels of the eighteenth century seem rather different: the rarified atmosphere of stylized posturing, marivaudage, *esprit*, social codes, and worldliness that is typically associated with the French novel, and which prompted Ian Watt to dismiss the entire tradition from *La Princesse de Clèves* to *Les Liaisons dangereuses* as being peripheral to the mainstream development of the realistic novel, seems to have as little in common with the matter-of-fact coupling and commercial maneuvering of Moll Flanders and Roxana, or Richardson's dramas of tyrannical authority and struggling virtue, as with Fielding's earthy comic epics.[25] This apparent discordance is reflected in the critical tradition as well. While critics of the English novels have by and large approached them thematically, focusing on their moral and psychological dimensions, their treatment of selfhood, and the interpersonal relationships of the characters within the plot, students of the French tradition have, as often as not, been drawn to purely technical questions of formal affiliation, technique, and style.[26] And, until recently, few studies of one tradition seemed to take the other into consideration.[27]

Such partiality is all the more remarkable in light of the intense fascination which the French and English exercised for each other during the eighteenth century, each functioning as the essential "Other" against which national achievements or generalizations were elaborated. Beyond their political and religious differences, they seemed to exemplify for each other alternative paradigms of honor, citizenship, and national character, and different ways of envisioning the individual's relationship to the collective. Comparisons between the two nations – which tellingly incline to a favor-

able judgment of the rival in almost every case – abound in the critical and moral literature of the period, from Voltaire's remarks on the English in the *Lettres philosophiques* or d'Argens' extended comparison of the two cultures in the *Lettres juives*, to John Brown's tirade against the effeminization of the English character and praise of the French sense of honor, in *An Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times*, or even Sterne's accounts of his French journeys in *Tristram Shandy* and *Sentimental Journey*.[28] As concerns the novel's development, there is ample evidence that if the novelists of the two countries were not as well acquainted with each other personally as were the historians and philosophers, they were nonetheless acutely aware, and appreciative, of their counterparts across the channel. All of the works I will be covering in this study were translated into the other language, some appearing almost simultaneously.[29] Many enjoyed a success across the channel equal to their influence at home. English authors of the period regularly refer to the work of their French contemporaries, and the latter acknowledge the influence of the English not only in their theoretical essays, but also in their own novels, several of which openly borrow techniques and themes from British precedents.[30]

However I have no intention of formulating any theories of influence in this study. My consideration of French and English works within a single argument is based solely on the observation that whatever their formal differences, the most popular and influential novels of both countries share a common insistence on the act of narrative representation broadly construed. In both traditions the *relating* of acts and facts – the organization, articulation, and reconciliation of private experience and shared reality within a narrative structure – provides a mainspring for similar agendas of individualism and a paradigm for the emerging notion of a shared cultural script. Narration and narratives are not the only things these novels talk about, nor even in most cases the central theme of the plot. Moreover, as the century progresses, the practice of representation is linked to different projects, varying from the internalization of divine authority to the creation of elaborate masks and plots to destroy one's social rivals. But all of the novels explicitly thematize the extent to which social existence and the social order are regulated by acts of relating and ordering, accounting and recounting, as well as by the narratives which circulate in society as a result of such acts. Whatever else they may be, these novels are stories about stories, representations of representation; and they all implicitly argue that reality – the assumptions, rules, and beliefs which are shared by all members of a society – is elaborated through constant narration and sustained as a shared narrative. The consistency of this emphasis, and the fact that in both countries the genre evolves toward narrative self-consciousness and explicitly metanarrative works which put into question the mechanism

of fiction itself as an exemplary form of narrative, seems to suggest a far stronger affinity than the critical tradition has heretofore acknowledged.

In the readings that follow, I shall try to show that taken collectively the novels can be seen as episodes in the larger story of an evolving relationship in the eighteenth century between individual acts of representation and the systems of authority that frame them – parental, Divine, political, economic, and increasingly, I shall argue, historical-cultural. As the genre of the novel matures, it tends to portray authority in more explicitly consensual and narrative terms, as an interaction between the postulates of identifiable acts of narration – personal relations which impose a structure on experience – and the evolving horizon, or composite narrative of reality regulating social values and framing such individual instances of narration. This shared narrative will develop in scope and formality from the gossip of a small social cohort, which delimits shared experience at some junction in time, to the all-encompassing script of usages, beliefs, and origins which defines the society as a whole and frames its members' expressions of experience within a network of competing meanings and construals of reality. Eventually, after testing several scenarios of domination of one side of the narrative equation by the other, the novel will reconcile them in an unstable dialectic, which, as intimated above, can be grasped as the tension between history's two identities: an ordering of events and an order of reality; an ongoing act of narration linking individual to collective in a mutual construal of reality, and a shared narrative structure of experience that both results from and enables that construal.[31]

Recently critics have begun to enlarge the definition of narration to include the fundamental ordering activity of consciousness, as it makes sense out of the world and asserts its identity.[32] One can make a similar case for narration as the indispensable complement of analysis or reflection: the act by which, whatever the genre of our discourse – scientific, philosophical, artistic, historical, or moral – we posit the entities to be analyzed. This is a notion which emerges in the theoretical literature of the eighteenth century. L'Abbé Trublet, for instance, points out in 1735 that analysis and narration are complementary phases of the conceptualization of reality; all logical analysis builds on *related* events, every account of the past implies an analysis of reality:

> on peut rapporter tout ce qui se dit dans la conversation à ces deux chefs, conter & raisonner. On raisonne sur les affaires, sur les sciences, sur les moyens de venir à bout de quelque chose: on conte des nouvelles; on fait le récit d'une aventure arrivée à soi-même, ou à un autre; on cite un trait d'histoire. Ces deux manières de converser se mêlent et se succedent: on raisonne sur un fait, sur une nouvelle, & on appuye un raisonnement d'un fait, d'un exemple.[33]