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Abstract
One of the principal ways that Ian Watt set the terms for exploring the appearance and growing importance of the novel in England in the long eighteenth century was to argue that the novel was made possible by a great shift in the socio-cultural field of early modem Britain, a shift Watt described as an alteration in "the centre of gravity of the reading public sufficient ... to place the middle class as a whole in a dominating position for the first time." Watt's argument was not new, and it has, in one sense or another, been repeated in much of the scholarship on the novel in the years since he published his study. As early as 1860, a writer in Fraser's Magazine argued that Samuel Richardson's Pamela was aimed at "the class to which its heroine belonged," and Ernest A. Baker, in his History of the English Novel, pointed out that Thomas Deloney (like Daniel Defoe after him) "knew the people whom he portrayed [weavers and clothiers] ... had shared their lot, and was, in fact, writing for them to read." Recently, J. Paul Hunter, examining Watt's "'triple rise' thesis," accepted the latter's "fundamental assumptions about literary origins" and set out to demonstrate "that the newly literate took their needs and desires to other reading materials before there were novels to address them."

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Did You Say Middle Class? The Question of Taste and the Rise of the Novel

Robert Mayer

> The different ways of relating to realities and fictions, of believing in fictions and the realities they simulate, with more or less distance and detachment, are very closely linked to the different possible positions in social space and, consequently, bound up with the systems of dispositions ... characteristic of the different classes and class fractions. Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier.[1]
>
> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*

One of the principal ways that Ian Watt set the terms for exploring the appearance and growing importance of the novel in England in the long eighteenth century was to argue that the novel was made possible by a great shift in the socio-cultural field of early modern Britain, a shift Watt described as an alteration in "the centre of gravity of the reading public sufficient ... to place the middle class as a whole in a dominating position for the first time."[2] Watt's argument was not new, and it has, in one

1 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (France, 1979; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. 5–6. References are to this edition. The title of this essay was suggested by the appendix to Bourdieu, "Price Formation and the Anticipation of Profits," *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. John B. Thompson, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 90–102.

2 Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957), p. 48.

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sense or another, been repeated in much of the scholarship on the novel in the years since he published his study. As early as 1860, a writer in *Fraser's Magazine* argued that Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* was aimed at "the class to which its heroine belonged," and Ernest A. Baker, in his *History of the English Novel*, pointed out that Thomas Deloney (like Daniel Defoe after him) "knew the people whom he portrayed [weavers and clothiers] ... had shared their lot, and was, in fact, writing for them to read." Recently, J. Paul Hunter, examining Watt's "'triple rise' thesis," accepted the latter's "fundamental assumptions about literary origins" and set out to demonstrate "that the newly literate took their needs and desires to other reading materials before there were novels to address them."[3]

Yet although the idea that the novel is a form engendered by the rise of the middle class to prominence and power in England and one that responded to middle-class taste has long been one of the grounding assumptions of discussions of eighteenth-century English fiction, all scholars of the novel have recognized that such assertions raise more questions than they answer. What does it mean to invoke the concept of the middle class in the context of early modern Britain? How does one discern and describe the elusive phenomenon that is "taste"? Are there such things as "class tastes" and how does one specify a class taste?[4] Watt dealt with the last two sets of questions through content analysis and thereby set a pattern that most scholars have followed. He found in the works of Defoe and Richardson in particular the crucial values and beliefs of the newly risen middle class: individualism, capitalism, Puritanism, and a new view of love, sexuality, and gender roles. Hunter continues this tradition with his analyses of "what was new about the novel" and of "what was on the minds of potential readers" in the eighteenth century.[5] These discussions and others like them are of

3 W.F.P., "British Novelists—Richardson, Miss Austen, Scott," *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country* 61 (Jan.–June 1860), 26; Ernest A. Baker, *The History of the English Novel*, 10 vols (1936; New York: Barnes and Noble, 1960), 2:171; for a similar assertion about Defoe, see 3:227. J. Paul Hunter, *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* (New York: Norton, 1990), pp. 66, 68; the "triple rise thesis" is that "the rise of middle class led to the rise of the reading public, which in turn led to the rise of the novel."

4 "Taste" is used here mainly as "discrimination" or "judgment," with an acknowledgment that a certain kind of taste—"legitimate taste" (see below)—is seen as a "polite attribute"; see Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 313–15.

5 Watt, p. 49, and chaps 3, 5–7; Hunter, chaps 1–5, but see especially pp. 23–25, 89–90. In a study that makes this essay possible, Michael McKeon reintroduces consideration of "aristocracy" and "romance" into the debate over the rise of the novel and at the same time gives credence to Watt's basic argument; *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), pp. 1–4 and chap. 4.

great value, but they often seem somewhat ad hoc, lacking as they do a theorized account of how one describes and accounts for class tastes.[6] This essay explores the question of taste with respect to the history of the early English novel by drawing on the theorization of this issue found in the work of Pierre Bourdieu, specifically in his *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. The present essay focuses on the presentation and reception of texts in the eighteenth century as "position-takings" within a socio-cultural field in which, as Bourdieu asserts, "the work of art is the objectification of a relationship of distinction" and "every appropriatiou of a work of art which is [also] the embodiment of a relation of distinctiou is itself a social relation" (p. 227).[7]

Bourdieu's *Distinction* is very much of a certain time and place (France after 1968, the France of Giscard d'Estaing), and no student of eighteenth-century culture can hope to acquire the kind of data Bourdieu possessed when he wrote his study.[8] Bourdieu's work also focuses, however, on the question of how we apprehend and explain any complex political-social-economic-cultural field, and he asserts that his work is "valid beyond the particular French case," useful for investigating "every stratified society, even if the system of distinctive features ... varies considerably from one period, and one society, to another" (p. xii). The value of Bourdieu's work arises in important part from the fact that he not only sees all cultural productions as well as choices or judgments in matters of culture as embodiments of social relations but also sees such events as shaping social reality. Cultural transactions are events by means of which individuals and classes state aesthetic positions, and they are also vehicles for the definition of the self and the group as actors in a particular social space. In the last decade or so, scholars of the novel have tended to see novelistic discourse in relation to, or as part of, larger discursive formations and as a result have reminded us that novels not only respond to socio-cultural transformations but also effect those changes. William Beatty Warner, for example, argues that we need to see the "elevation" of the novel during and since

6 Hunter points out that the term "middle class ... has become so inclusive, so loaded, and (lately) so distrusted" that its use entails "interpretive risks" (p. 66).

7 For Bourdieu's theory of "field," see *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 9–10 and chap.1; Bourdieu discusses "a *field* of position-takings," pp. 34–35.

8 Bourdieu's work is based on the responses of 1,217 subjects (citizens of Paris, Lille, and "a small provincial town") to a questionnaire eliciting demographic and economic information and asking about "life-style" as well as an observation of each subject's home, dress, hair, and speech (pp. 13–16, 503–18). Bourdieu's original research was done in 1963 and in 1967–68.

the early modern period in England "as a project directed not at instituting a new type of literature ('the' novel), but instead as a reform of reading practices."[9] This essay seeks to show that we must understand both discussions of the novel and attempts to shape reading practices in terms of a clash of class tastes that not only produced the definition of a new literary type but also helped to reconfigure the socio-cultural field in which that clash unfolded.

The argument of *Distinction* seeks to undermine the Kantian, idealist conception of taste that, according to Bourdieu, entails "a sort of deliberate amnesia" and a "denial of the social" (pp. 485, 11). By contrast, Bourdieu insists that taste is "a sort of social orientation," an activity that marks the agent's place within a given social reality while also functioning as a means of apprehending, defining, and delineating the social reality itself, the agent's place in it, and the agent's *sense* of his or her place within it (p. 466). Crucial to understanding how Bourdieu conceptualizes taste or the "sense of distinction" is his idea of the "habitus," which, among other things, is an internalization of one's experience that acts in turn as a set of "schemes of perception"—"a disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions" (pp. 373, 170).[10] Bourdieu explains:

> The habitus is not only a structuring structure, which organizes practices and the perception of practices, but also a structured structure: the principle of division into logical classes which organizes the perception of the social world is itself the product of the internalization of the division into social classes. (p. 171)

An aesthetic judgment is a choice made in a specific cultural setting and it is also a more comprehensive social act:

> The classificatory system as a principle of logical and political division only exists and functions because it reproduces, in a transfigured form, in the symbolic logic

9 William Beatty Warner, *Licensing Entertainment: The Elevation of Novel Reading in Britain, 1684–1750* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. xiii. The scholarship referred to also includes McKeon; Lennard J. Davis, *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); and John Bender, *Imagining the Penitentiary: Fiction and the Architecture of Mind in Eighteenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

10 For discussions of Bourdieu's view of "habitus" and the relationship between "field" and "habitus," see *Field*, pp. 4–6, 65–73.

of differential gaps, i.e., of discontinuity, the generally gradual and continuous differences which structure the established order, but it makes its own, that is, specifically symbolic contribution to the maintenance of that order only because it has the specifically symbolic power to make people see and believe which is given by the imposition of mental structures. (p. 480)

Bourdieu argues, in short, that taste has the power of "making its own contribution"—shaping social reality by imparting to individuals the disposition to admire or detest, praise or blame given cultural objects and phenomena.[11]

In pursuing his analysis, Bourdieu employs the traditional class divisions of Marxist theory, but he also develops a concept of class "fraction," a distinct group within an individual class with a different "habitus." Both classes and class fractions are constituted not only by relations of production but also by the cultural choices through which social relations are manifested and recognized. Thus for Bourdieu class is to some extent a matter of socio-economic status, but it is also a matter of taste: "taste classifies ... the classifier." The "life-styles" associated with classes or class fractions are "the systematic products of habitus" and are also major vehicles for delineating the boundaries and significations of class. "Life-style" and all the choices, judgments, practices, and experiences that the word entails make an individual's place in the socio-cultural scheme of things manifest and also impress that place upon the individual. Bourdieu, finally, understands all such social phenomena in terms of struggle, and although he often employs scientific or quasi-scientific language as if he were describing "objective relations," he reminds his readers that "the social positions" he identifies "are also strategic emplacements, fortresses to be defended and captured, in a field of struggles" (p. 244). Thus Bourdieu insists there is nothing innocent or disinterested about the "sense of distinction"; it acts by way of negation, rejecting that which another group favours, and when the judgments of the "accomplished man" are asserted "the legitimate titles to the exercise of domination are at stake" (p. 93).

In order to use Bourdieu to examine class taste in eighteenth-century Britain, I must first indicate how he conceives of class tastes and suggest how his model can be transposed to a social setting markedly different from the

11 Bourdieu assumes that the cultural field possesses a "relative autonomy," and he breaks with "reflection theories" which assume a too easy homology between "works and the world view of ... a specific class." Nevertheless, he does not suggest that the cultural field is free of what he calls the "field of power" and the "field of class relation." Rather, as Randal Johnson suggests, Bourdieu argues that the cultural "field's structure *refracts* ... external determinants in terms of its own logic"; *Field*, pp. 13–15, 37–39.

modern one that prompted his analysis. Bourdieu identifies three "zones of taste" in contemporary French society: "legitimate taste," "middle-brow taste," and "popular taste" (p. 16). The "aesthetic disposition" is associated with the first zone; it assumes a "pure gaze" on the part of the consumer of art, a gaze rooted in disinterestedness and distance, in a belief that the work of art exists at a remove from "*ordinary* existence." The aesthetic disposition also assumes a "sort of moral agnosticism," a conviction, that is, that the work of art need not serve an ethical or moral purpose (p. 47). Bourdieu identifies this "legitimate taste" as a "pure disposition," a product of a "cultural competence," that corresponds to high levels of what he calls "cultural capital" (a capacity for making sense of cultural artifacts and cultural relations that is associated with high levels of economic or "educational capital" or both). "Legitimate taste" constitutes "the aristocracy of culture," identified with the wealthy (particularly those who have inherited wealth as opposed to parvenus), the professions, artistic producers, and teachers of higher education. Aristocratic standing for Bourdieu is marked by a sense of distinction, which transcends class understood in socio-economic terms, although it is more likely to be found in the upper reaches of society than elsewhere. "Middle-brow taste" is associated with the middle class, especially below the level of the professional and highly educated members of that class, and especially with the "petite bourgeosie." Middle-class taste is distinguished by a preference for "the minor forms of legitimate culture," lesser examples of "the major arts" (the *Hungarian Rhapsody* as opposed to the music of Bach, paintings by Utrillo or Renoir rather than Brueghel or Goya) or the major works of the minor arts, such as popular song or cinema. For Bourdieu, this middle group is most clearly marked not by "its 'nature,'" but by its cultural uncertainty, its medial position: "divided between the tastes they incline to and the tastes they aspire to" (pp. 16, 326–27). Finally, the "popular aesthetic" is largely that of "working-class people, who expect every image to fulfill a function" and "refer, often explicitly, to norms of morality or agreeableness in all their judgements." Bourdieu cites the examples of the photograph of a dead soldier producing "responses to the reality of the thing represented" (war, Algeria, Vietnam) and not to the photograph as a work of art, and "the image of a beautiful thing" eliciting assessments of the beauty of the thing itself rather than of the image as an image. Popular taste is an "anti-Kantian 'aesthetic'" which affirms "the continuity between art and life" (pp. 41, 28). A working-class aesthetic is, however, a "dominated" aesthetic, compelled to grant the validity of the views of those who espouse the "pure aesthetic" and at the same time compelled to acknowledge that such views and choices are not and cannot be the judgments of

those who embrace "popular taste" (p. 41). Note that Bourdieu analyses class taste by examining various phenomena: an agent's socio-cultural position as measured in terms of amounts of capital; the choices an agent makes; aesthetic assumptions (the "pure gaze" as opposed to the "functionalist" approach); the relationship of class or class fraction to other agents in the socio-cultural field; and the degree of authority one brings to the aesthetic arena.

John Guillory observes that for Bourdieu there are in fact only two aesthetics: legitimate taste and the popular aesthetic. The first is "legitimate" because its association with large amounts of cultural capital allows it to dictate "the judgment not only of certified works of art but of all cultural productions."[12] The second opposes itself to the first—posits a genuinely distinct view of art—but is inevitably a dominated position. Middle-brow or middle-class taste is not identified with a set of views or values or choices of its own but is instead defined by being caught in between the "legitimate" and the "popular." In what follows I shall adopt this view of Bourdieu; as I shall show, the debate over the novel in early modern Britain reveals a clash between legitimate taste and popular taste in which middle-class or middling-sort taste is the field of that struggle, the conflicted ground upon which both the form of the novel and the relative importance of different aesthetic positions tied to different social positions are delineated.

One cannot define the socio-cultural field in which fictional texts were produced and received in Britain in the eighteenth century employing exactly the same terms as those used by Bourdieu. The principles associated with the aesthetic disposition in the twentieth century are post-Kantian categories at odds with an earlier aesthetic that almost universally stipulated that the two ends of poetry should be pleasure *and* instruction.[13] While English society in the early modern period, moreover, is susceptible to a tripartite analysis, the three groups identified by social historians are different from post-Marxist "classes." England featured a small class of "aristocrats and gentlemen," a "middling sort," and a very large group, the "working and pauper classes," at the bottom. The second group was very diverse

12 John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 332.

13 The "pure disposition" that Bourdieu identifies with legitimate taste is associated with modern writers such as Flaubert and Mallarmé (p. 254); see also *Field*, pp. 72, 202–11. Guillory points out that the representatives of the aesthetic disposition cited in *Distinction* often seem to have "at least a passing familiarity with Kant" (p. 333). On eighteenth-century views of art and poetry, see M.H. Abrams, "From Addison to Kant: Modern Aesthetics and the Exemplary Art," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century British Art and Aesthetics*, ed. Ralph Cohen (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 17.

and included lesser professionals, lower clergy, innkeepers, manufacturers, government officials and military officers, craftsmen, farmers, and lesser merchants. The lowest class composed more than half of the population, and, according to one contemporary estimate, at least sixty per cent of that group were "common soldiers," "cottagers and paupers," and "vagrants," largely illiterate and outside that part of print culture where the novel was being defined.[14] On the other hand, the last group also included a substantial subset of servants and apprentices, many of whom were more akin to the middling sort than to the pauper classes.[15]

The individuals who produced and presented texts and about whose reading of texts we have knowledge were mostly members of the middling sort. The following discussion will make this point clear, but it is necessary at the outset to recall that much of the debate over the novel takes place among members of this single social group. When one analyses class taste in such a situation, one is, therefore, identifying the views and preferences of class fractions within that larger group. Bourdieu points out that "explicit aesthetic choices are ... often constituted in opposition to the choices of the groups closest in social space," and this assertion is borne out by the early modern British example (p. 60). What one finds is that middling-sort writers and readers frequently sound like advocates of a popular aesthetic, although a few key figures can be seen as exhibiting the views and values of an "aristocracy of culture." Middling-sort taste, then, is the site of conflicting views of the new fiction and of the nature of art.[16] In this essay I will show that the discussion of fiction conducted through the production and reception of texts from the late sixteenth

14 Douglas Hay and Nicholas Rogers, *Eighteenth-Century English Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 16–31; see also Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), chap. 2. Hay and Rogers show that in the eighteenth century "dyadic views of society gradually gave way ... to more complex formulations" (p. 25); the contemporary report is by Gregory King (1688).

15 "Custom gave servants many perks," many of them based on the need for the servant to be fit company for the employer (Porter, pp. 104–5). On the acculturating aspects of apprenticeship, see Hay and Rogers, p. 127.

16 Evidence for the argument of this essay derives primarily from the presentation of texts in prefaces, epistles, title-pages, and the like, as well as from the larger texts themselves and from what information we have about the reception of those texts. The reader, in short, should recognize, as the author must acknowledge, that this analysis of class tastes rests largely, at least at this stage, upon textual evidence and necessarily lacks the kind of historical-sociological investigation that would duplicate Bourdieu's efforts and that clearly lies beyond the limits of this essay. John Richetti has called into question the character of "paratextual" indicators of form, method, and content, arguing that, for example, statements by Delarivier Manley in her fiction are "not so much literary criticism as market analysis." Yet are literary criticism and market analysis really so different? Bourdieu argues that "consumption is ... a stage in a process of communication" (p. 2), and the same thing might be asserted of any means used to present a text to readers, whether it be authorial remarks, aimed at making it clear that a text is designed to meet certain readerly expectations

to the late eighteenth century took the form of a clash of class tastes unfolding in a series of "position-takings." These positions included a rejection of romance in favour of "little histories," whose popularity signalled the formation of an audience for fiction espousing the popular aesthetic; a return to romance under the guise of "anti-romance," generally "amatory fiction," a form linked to an aristocratic zone of taste; an assault upon amatory fiction that entailed both a renewed repudiation of romance and an assertive insistence upon the practical, moral utility of fiction, linked fundamentally to the popular aesthetic; and, finally, a rejection of this functional view of fiction in favour of a new aristocratic posture that attempted to reassert the primacy of "invention" and entertainment. It must be kept in mind that the terms "aristocratic" and "popular" do not simply refer to socio-economic status. Rather, they refer to the taste that "classifies the classifier" as belonging to a particular socio-cultural group. As Bourdieu found for twentieth-century France, aristocratic taste was more frequently than not associated with the well-born and the well-to-do, and the popular aesthetic was more characteristic of persons in the middling sort and below. Yet this way of theorizing taste does not assume a base-superstructure model in which class position automatically determines taste. Rather it insists that taste-formation is itself a crucial element of the constitution of class and, reciprocally, of the class character of cultural products (p. 107). The debate over the fictional form that becomes the novel, I shall conclude, entailed the embrace by legitimate taste of key tenets of the popular aesthetic, at least in respect to the new fiction, especially "the continuity between art and life" and the tendency to expect art "to explicitly perform a function," and, as a result, the elaboration of a theory of the novel that would remain in important ways at odds with the view of art generally associated with the aristocratic sense of distinction (pp. 4, 5).

The rejection of romance unfolds in a series of texts appearing in England from the late sixteenth century down to the middle of the eighteenth century. Typical of the "anti-romances" is Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* (1688), in which the author declares: "I do not pretend ... to entertain my reader with adventures of a feigned hero, whose life and fortunes fancy may manage at

as to content, style, and even length ("market analysis"), or "genuine" literary criticism. John J. Richetti, *Popular Fiction before Richardson: Narrative Patterns, 1730–1739* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 126. A recent study of such extratextual features is Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin, foreword by Richard Macksey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

the poet's pleasure." Behn explains that "anything that seems Romantic" in the text is traceable to the "unconceivable wonders" of the places she describes (Africa, Surinam) and not, she implies, to the narrative form she essays. Similarly, Delarivier Manley famously distinguishes between "romances in France [that] have for a long time been the diversion and amusement of the whole world" and the "histories" of the sort she presents to her readers in *The Secret History of Queen Zarah, and the Zarazians* (1705), "little pieces ... much more agreeable to the brisk and impetuous humour of the English." These claims are echoed in other well-known prefaces by William Congreve (*Incognita*, 1713), Defoe (*Moll Flanders*, 1722), and Richardson (*Pamela*, 1740), and as late as 1778 Frances Burney warns readers of *Evelina* not to "entertain the gentle expectation of being transported to the fantastic regions of Romance."[17] A frequent corollary to the rejection of romance is the claim that these "anti-romances" or "histories" are, in fact, true. Behn informs her reader that the truth of her *History of the Nun* (1689) can be verified by consulting "the records of the town where it was transacted." Eliza Haywood asserts of *The British Recluse* (1722): "I can affirm [it] for Truth, having it from the Mouths of those Chiefly concerned in it."[18]

These claims originated in a particular zone of taste. The rejection of romance was a repudiation by middling-sort writers of a self-consciously aristocratic form, written by and for such writers and readers as Sir Philip Sidney, his sister, the Countess of Pembroke, Lady Mary Wroth, and Sir Percy Herbert. Michael McKeon shows that from the twelfth to the seventeenth century romance was a vehicle for directly embodying or otherwise mediating "aristocratic ideology." Manley's identification of romance with France, furthermore, underlines the aristocratic character of that form. France was the place to which the Court had repaired during the interregnum, a place associated with Bourbon absolutism and the decadence of Stuart kings, and a place, in Restoration comedy, much beloved, as Sir Fopling Flutter declares in *The Man of Mode*, by the "*belles as-*

17 Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko and Other Writings*, ed. Paul Salzman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 6, 5; Paula A. Backscheider and John J. Richetti, eds. *Popular Fiction by Women, 1660–1730* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 46–47; Frances Burney, *Evelina*, ed. Edward A. Bloom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 8. John L. Sutton, Jr, has demonstrated that Manley's preface to *Queen Zarah* is a translation of an essay on fiction in a French courtesy book, but its attachment to Manley's work nevertheless makes it part of the presentation of that work to the reader. See "The Source of Mrs. Manley's Preface to *Queen Zarah*," *Modern Philology* 82 (1984–85), 167–72. McKeon discusses romance and *Incognita* (p. 62).

18 Behn, pp. 6, 139; Backscheider and Richetti, p. 155; Haywood's claim is similar to that made by the "editor" of *Moll Flanders* (also 1722).

semblées."[19] That early modern writers and readers in rejecting romance self-consciously rejected an aristocratic form and its values is also suggested by a number of other claims in texts that assaulted romance. First, there is the widespread reminder that such texts are short; Deloney presents his *Jack of Newberie* (1597) by affirming that he has "briefely written" of his eponymous hero's "life and love." Behn and Haywood recommend *The Fair Jilt* (1688) and *The British Recluse* as "little histories," and as late as 1740, Jean Baptiste de Freval, in a letter to "the editor" of *Pamela*, praises that text as a "little Book" that provides "the hitherto much-wanted Standard or Pattern for this Kind of Writing." Size did matter, and Manley explains why in *Queen Zarah*: "little histories of this kind have taken place of romances, whose prodigious number of volumes were sufficient to tire and satiate such whose heads were most filled with those notions."[20] Length was associated with aristocratic luxury; brevity was more suitable to the humbler zone of taste from which little histories issued and at which they aimed.

The emergence of that distinct zone is signalled by similar remarks about length found in popular histories by Nathaniel Crouch appearing in London in the 1680s and 1690s. Those texts, repeatedly recommended as "little Books" and "short Manuals," were aimed at humble readers: "those who cannot purchase a greater, and yet would willingly be informed of the remarkable Transactions ... in these Kingdoms, in this last Age."[21] Roger Chartier has demonstrated that new printed forms indicate the appearance of new readers and also that new "publishing formulas" inform readers that texts, whether old or new, are available for their specific use.[22] Crouch's emphasis on length was an appeal to readers of the middling sort and below

19 McKeon, pp. 141–44, 213–14; see also the discussion of romance and the novel in Davis, pp. 25–41. Wroth wrote *Urania* because of financial need, but, although she got into political trouble for that text, there is no evidence that she was socially marginalized because of it; see Paul Salzman, *English Prose Fiction, 1558–1700: A Critical History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 138–44. Scott McMillin, ed., *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Comedy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1997), p. 109.

20 *Shorter Novels*, 2 vols, ed. George Saintsbury and Philip Henderson (London: Dent, 1972), 1:3; Behn, p. 74; Backscheider and Richetti, pp. 155, 47; Samuel Richardson, *Pamela*, ed. T.C. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1971), p. 4.

21 [Nathaniel Crouch], *Martyrs in Flames: or, The History of Popery*, 3rd ed. (London, 1729), A3v; *Historical Remarques and Observations* (London, 1681), A2v; *The Wars in England, Scotland, and Ireland* (London, 1697), p. 3.

22 Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and the Eighteenth Centuries* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 6 and chap. 1 *passim*; see also "Culture as Appropriation: Popular Cultural Uses in Early Modern France," *Understanding Popular Culture from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Steven Kaplan and David Hall (Berlin: Mouton, 1984), pp. 229–53.

and also an affirmation that a new class of readers was forming and was prepared to make its own distinctions.[23] The appearance in early modern Britain of fictional texts recommended for their brevity also signalled a new audience and an emerging taste specific to that audience.[24]

Other claims made on behalf of the anti-romances underscored the import of the claims about length. Style was another key issue. Deloney informs his readers that *Jack of Newberie* is written "in a plaine and humble manner"; Defoe's *Roxana* is offered as a text that will benefit a "Virtuous Reader," no matter how "meanly told" it is; readers praise *Pamela* for its "agreeable Simplicity." An introduction to the *Histories and Novels* of Penelope Aubin (1739) lauds her "unaffected Style."[25] The kind of material treated in these texts, furthermore, also made it clear that a new class of readers was sought. Deloney writes of clothiers and yeomen; Behn of an African slave, albeit a princely one; Defoe of merchants, thieves, and whores; Richardson of a serving girl. Defoe celebrated "the middle Station of Life," and, as Richard Gooding shows, Richardson's first novel contains a "politically progressive" argument that insists upon "spiritual egalitarianism and the primacy of conscience" and a "criticism of hereditary honour" so troubling to his contemporaries that both Pamelists and anti-Pamelists rewrote the work so as to neutralize its political and social force. Francis Coventry, finally, argues that Fielding's humour was appro-

23 See my "Nathaniel Crouch, Bookseller and Historian: Popular Historiography and Cultural Power in Late Seventeenth-Century England," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 27 (1993–94), 391–419; and Hunter, pp. 210–15.

24 The argument that certain books were aimed at new, relatively humble readers raises the issue of book prices. Warner concludes that Watt was correct when he argued that eighteenth-century novels were "costly by modern standards." But some books by Crouch, Haywood, Jane Barker, and Manley cost only 1s.—three times the cost, according to Roy Porter, of a loaf of bread—and other books by Haywood, Mary Davys, and Penelope Aubin cost 1s. 6d. These prices suggest that middling-sort readers could afford many "little histories" since, again according to Porter, "most of the petty bourgeosie would have incomes of between £50 and £100 a year." Furthermore, discussing "access to women's fiction," Cheryl Turner points out that some servants earned £20 to £30 per year and since they did not have to supply themselves with many essentials provided by their employers, would have been in a position to buy some new books. Warner, p. 133n3; Porter, p. 13; Cheryl Turner, *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 143–45.

25 *Shorter Novels*, 1:3; Defoe, *Roxana*, ed. John Mullan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 3; Richardson, pp. 4, 6; for the introduction to Aubin's fiction, see Wolfgang Zach, "Mrs. Aubin and Richardson's Earliest Literary Manifesto (1739)," *English Studies* 62 (1981), 271–85, where it is reprinted. Both Zach and Warner attribute this essay to Richardson; Warner, p. 185. See [Francis Coventry], *An Essay on the New Species of Writing Founded by Mr. Fielding* (London: W. Owen, 1751), pp. 14, 19, on the rules Fielding implicitly laid down for style in the new fiction.

priate to his treatment of "homely Cots and ambling Nags" rather than the "chrystal Palaces and winged Horses" of romance.[26]

In a variety of ways, furthermore, these texts indicated that their authors were themselves of the middling sort. Deloney dedicates his "rude worke" to the clothiers of England in "brotherly affection." The voices encountered in Defoe's narratives—whether merchants, pirates, serving girls, or simply "editors"—are all humble figures. Furthermore, the women writers who declined at the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century to write romance and wrote instead "little Books" were quite clearly writing for profit, and were therefore working women, far removed in social terms from aristocratic women such as Mary Wroth and Margaret Cavendish. Laurie Finke argues that Behn broke with the tradition embraced by the "classically educated seventeenth-century [male] critic" which asserted that "the Nature the poet imitated was the ideal, not the real" because "as both a woman and ... a socially marginal professional writer," Behn would have seen the embrace of this principle as a sign of "membership in a ruling elite." Finke thus links a critical position associated with the anti-romances to one writer's socially marginal position. Theoretical positions suggest class affiliations; membership in classes or class fractions shapes aesthetic views and choices.[27]

Perhaps the most important sense in which the little histories can be seen as opening up a new zone of taste is in the linked assertion of the historicity of those texts and their practical utility. Bourdieu sees the insistence upon a link between world and work as a keystone of the popular aesthetic. Responses to representational works by working-class consumers are "always responses to the reality of the thing represented" (p. 41). One finds in many of the little histories a mild version of the popular aesthetic's emphasis on functionality, an argument, often implicit, that that which is most real, most "historical," is also most useful. In *Queen Zarah*, Manley associates her practice with that of the "acute historian" and declares of "historical novels": "if we find in them some instructions, it proceeds rather from their descriptions than their precepts." Joseph Bartolomeo shows that although Haywood does not comment extensively on her

26 *Shorter Novels*, 1:3; Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, ed. Michael Shinagel (New York: Norton, 1975), p. 6; Richard Gooding, "*Pamela*, *Shamela*, and the Politics of the *Pamela* Vogue," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 7 (1995), 112, 114, 122; Coventry, p. 16.

27 Laurie Finke, "Aphra Behn and the Ideological Construction of Restoration Literary Theory," *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory, and Criticism*, ed. Heidi Hutner (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), p. 35. Writers such as Behn, Aubin, Barker, and Haywood produced a large number of works in the 1720s and were highly commercial writers; see Turner, *passim*; and William McBurney, "Edmund Curll, Mrs. Jane Barker, and the English Novel," *Philological Quarterly* 37 (1958), 385–99. On Wroth, see note 8.

practice, when she does so, she focuses on "moral utility, literal truth, or a combination of the two."[28] Claims about utility, then, followed from claims about truthfulness. Romance was also rooted in a belief that art should serve a moral end; Sidney defined mimesis as the imitation of "the unconceivable excellencies of God" and "the divine consideration of what may be and should be." But in the new fiction moral utility required that the "unnatural Flights and hyperbolical Flourishes" of romance must be left behind in favour of "little histories" which readers could rely upon as "reality, and matter of fact."[29] This is a practical, literal-minded aesthetic, and scholars have pointed out that many short works aimed at humble, relatively unsophisticated readers promised "speedy methods of instruction and usable compendiums of fact."[30] Once again, Crouch, the Restoration popular historian, is an apposite case. John Dunton observes of Crouch: "I think I have given you the very soul of his character when I have told you that his talent lies at *Collection*," and Crouch's compendiums, promising "Curiosities rarities and Wonders" as well as "remarkable Transactions, and Observable Passages from the history of England," were recommended to readers as "so many particulars both for Instruction and Discourse."[31]

Thus early modern texts and commentary signalled that anti-romances or little histories were works by and for the middling sort. In doing so they not only helped form a new class of readers but also articulated a new sense of distinction. The little histories negated the long, fanciful romances associated with France and with aristocratic writers and readers; they also suggested what was to be valued: brevity, matters of fact (or at least the appearance of such), and practical utility. Of course, such texts were also supposed to "delight" or "divert" readers. *Jack of Newberie* is labelled a "pleasant historie"; Thomas Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594) offers "some reasonable conveyance of historie, and varietie of mirth"; *Pamela* promises "a Narrative ... that ... agreeably entertains." Several prefaces, furthermore, suggested the particular method of delighting the reader associated with these texts. Congreve's *Incognita*, for example,

28 Backscheider and Richetti, p. 51; Joseph F. Bartolomeo, *A New Species of Criticism: Eighteenth-Century Discourse on the Novel* (Newark: University of Delaware Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1994), p. 33.

29 Sir Philip Sidney, *A Defence of Poetry*, ed. J.A. Van Dorsten (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 25, 26; Zach, p. 283 (quoting Aubin); Behn, p. 74.

30 Louis B. Wright, *Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1935), pp. 121–22; see also Hunter, pp. 82–84.

31 *The Life and Errors of John Dunton*, 2 vols (London: J. Nichols, 1818), 1:206; [Crouch], *Admirable Curiosities Rarities and Wonders in England, Scotland and Ireland*, 7th ed. (London, 1710), t.p.; *England's Monarchs* (London, 1685), t.p. and A2r.

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asserts that "Novels ... delight with Accidents and odd Events, but not such as are wholly unusual or unpresidented," and Behn's *The Fair Jilt* pledges "a truth that entertains you with ... many accidents diverting and moving." *Robinson Crusoe* is presented as an account of "Strange Surprising Adventures" which the editor declares is "a just History of Fact," just as Crouch earlier suggested that his histories were in fact entertaining *because* they were informative: "very diverting since at so small a price, any Person may be accommodated with so many useful particulars."[32] Many of the little "histories," then, aimed to delight and yet promised to do so with "matters of fact."

Not all of the texts under discussion here, however, adhered to this formula. Although the fiction that rejected romance in this period can be seen as the product of a popular aesthetic, the works in question suggest a more complicated sociocultural position than the one presented up to now in this essay. Writers who argued for the historicity of their texts and for the functional character of fiction often undercut such declarations with counterclaims that reasserted the value of romance. This was true particularly, but not exclusively, in the amatory fiction of Behn, Manley, and Haywood. Haywood presents her readers with anti-romances, brief works claiming that the stories told in them are literally true, but she does so in texts that seem more like romances than their prefatorial claims might have led readers to expect. Bartolomeo observes: "Some writers offered detailed, earnest-sounding discussions of purpose and technique that seem to bear no relationship to the ... narratives that follow." Thus Behn attempts to explain away all "romantick Parts" of *Oroonoko* by making reference to the historical reality represented in the text, but then draws heavily upon the tradition of romance (and also of epic) in her characterization of the hero and heroine, Oroonoko and Imoinda. Haywood, in *Love in Excess*, tells a series of stories focused on Count D'elmont "who had acquired a more than ordinary reputation" as a soldier in the service of Louis XIV, and whose "beauty" and "gaity" along with "the unequalled charms of his conversation, made him the admiration of both sexes."[33] Haywood's popular fiction was clearly indebted to the tradition of romance, and Ros Ballaster, focusing on Haywood, locates "a return to romance proper" in the 1720s. One also sees this development in the works of Jane Barker, who makes

32 *Shorter Novels*, 1:1, 263, 2:241; Behn, p. 6; Richardson, p. 1; Defoe, *Crusoe*, p. 3; [Crouch], *Monarchs*, A2r.

33 Bartolomeo, p. 20; Eliza Haywood, *Love in Excess; or, The Fatal Enquiry*, ed. David Oakleaf (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 1994), pp. 39–40. On the "doubleness" of much fiction of this period, see McKeon, pp. 55–58.

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a case for romance in *Love Intrigues* (1713) and *Exilius* (1715), which, although they qualify in important ways as "little histories," nevertheless established a formula—"short romances, advertised as novels, reminiscent of seventeenth-century fiction"—that the bookseller Edmund Curll used for several decades.[34] Some middling-sort writers, then, wrote "little histories" that rehabilitated the romance and seemingly derived from an aristocratic aesthetic. This position is characteristic of the middle group as described in Bourdieu's model: the taste of the middling sort is caught between two opposing aesthetic dispositions. But it is necessary to consider the complicated character of this position in some detail in order to grasp what it reveals about the clash of class tastes in respect to the new fiction of this period.

Ballaster shows that amatory fiction emerged from a "feminocentric" tradition elaborated in France, specifically from such French forms as the heroic romance and shorter works which, like the English works patterned upon them, simultaneously repudiated and reappropriated romance. The use of romance in amatory fiction and also in the work of writers such as Barker can be explained as what Neil McKendrick calls "emulative behavior," a case of middling-sort writers and readers aping their betters.[35] Barker presents *Exilius* "for the Instruction of some Young Ladies of Quality." Other texts declared that they were designed by and for the idle and aimed to do little more than amuse. In *The Reform'd Coquet* (1724) Mary Davys announces that "IDLENESS ... produced the following sheets," and in *Love Intrigues*, Barker, dedicating her work to the Countess of Exeter, claims that she has "no other Pretensions, than to be Half an Hours Amusement to Your Ladyship." The dedication of *Love in Excess* to the actress Anne Oldfield states: "I shall think myself very happy if I could have it to say the reading of these following lines had filled up the casma [chasm] of one of your vacant hours." Thus although Haywood and Davys, at least, wrote from what Swift, speaking of Davys, called "mere want," and Barker was a highly commercial writer associated with the scandalous figure of Curll, texts by all three are presented as mere *jeux d'esprits*,

34 Ros Ballaster, *Seductive Forms: Women's Amatory Fiction from 1684–1740* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 155; Bartolomeo, p. 30.

35 Ballaster, pp. 41–66; examples of shorter works discussed by Ballaster include the *nouvelle* or *petite histoire* and the *chronique scandaleuse*. Neil McKendrick, "The Consumer Revolution of Eighteenth-Century England," McKendrick, John Brewer, and J.H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 20.

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conceived by, and provided for the amusement of, idle ladies.[36] Here we see little histories that provide producers and consumers with the *cachet* of an aristocratic form and mode of existence.

As works that partook of an aristocratic sense of distinction, moreover, many of these texts also had a clearly contestative function. Amatory fiction constituted an embrace of an erotics of writing and reading at odds with the pious intent of other writers such as Barker, Aubin, and, ultimately, Richardson. Amatory fiction asserted that the end of fiction should be pleasure and invited the reader to luxuriate in the scandalous escapades reported in the text. A poem by Richard Savage at the beginning of the second part of *Love in Excess* celebrates Haywood's erotic power:

> Thy prose in sweeter harmony refines,
> Than numbers flowing thro' the Muses lines;
> What beauty ne'er could melt, thy touches fire,
> And raise a musick that can love inspire;
> Soul-thrilling accents all our senses wound,
> And strike with softness, whilst they charm with sound!
>
> ...
>
> For such descriptions thus at once can prove
> The force of language, and the sweets of love.

In the autobiographical *Adventures of Rivella* (1714), similarly, Manley has one speaker in a dialogue exclaim that the author of *The New Atalantis* (1709) "has carried Passion farther than could be readily conceived," promising that readers will "taste sublime and transporting Joys."[37] Thus, amatory fiction revelled in its erotic character and in doing so established a kinship with other Restoration forms, especially drama. The plays, notorious by the end of the seventeenth century for their charged eroticism, were works often written by and for an aristocratic coterie, and they were seen as embodying the deplorable values and opinions of that sociocultural élite. At the same time, amatory fiction implicitly broke with pious fiction by "mechanick preachers" or London citizens such as *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) and *Robinson Crusoe*; consider for example the contrast

36 McBurney, p. 388; Backscheider and Richetti, pp. 253, 82, 251; Haywood, p. 38. One finds similar claims in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, but in the case of Bunyan, his demurral is traceable to the Puritans' mistrust of all "feigned" narratives; finally, however, Bunyan suggests that his "little book" will help one to "know whether thou art blest." See *The Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. Roger Sharrock (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), pp. 31, 33, 37.

37 Haywood, p. 88; Manley, cited in Bartolomeo, pp. 27-28.

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between Bunyan's most famous work and Behn's *Love-Letters between a Nobleman and his Sister* (1684–87) as models for the new fiction.[38]

Finke argues that "at the heart of Behn's sexualization of her writing is her embracing of royalist politics and the fashionable pose of sexual libertinism." Many commentators have asserted that the authors of amatory fiction "associated kingly power with ... greater female autonomy," and thus have argued that writers such as Behn, Manley, and Haywood "found a specific and progressive form of individualism in Tory myth and ideology." The "licensing" of "a form of private entertainment that incites desire," which Warner identifies with amatory fiction, has a clear association with an aristocratic position and style of life.[39] Associated with the cosmopolitanism and easy morals of "the town" in Restoration comedy, these texts functioned as a challenge to and a repudiation of the values and views of the social group associated with "the city" in those plays: the middling sort, dissenters, *arrivistes*. The author of "The Life and Memoirs of Mrs. Behn" in that writer's *Histories and Novels* (1696) identifies Behn as an embodiment of upper-class mores by declaring that upon returning to England after her adventures in Surinam and Holland, she dedicated "the Rest of her Life ... to Pleasure and Poetry." The writer of the "Memoirs" defends Behn's libertinism:

> She was a Woman of sense, and by Consequence a lover of Pleasure, as indeed all, both Women and Men, are; but only some wou'd be thought to be above the Conditions of Humanity, and place their chief Pleasure in a proud, vain Hypocrisie.[40]

This argument is an unmistakable statement of the libertine position associated with earlier Stuart courts and Restoration comedy. The erotic aspect of amatory fiction linked its producers to an aristocratic sense of distinction, one that was at odds with the critique of manners and morals reflected,

38 Amatory fiction in particular and many other "little histories" from the period were gendered female. Texts by Behn and Haywood, for example, were both written by and dedicated to women, and Mary Davys dedicated her *The Reform'd Coquet* to "the Ladies of Great Britain." Bourdieu argues that "the dominant fractions always tend to conceive their relationship to the dominated fractions in terms of the opposition between the male and the female, the serious and the frivolous, the responsible and the irresponsible, the useful and the futile, the realistic and the unrealistic" (p. 93). Asserting the importance of class—however understood—does not elevate that category over gender as a meaningful term of analysis; rather this argument seeks to use a definition of class that allows one to be mindful of gender without attempting in this essay to deal with that issue systematically.

39 Finke, p. 27; Janet Todd, *The Sign of Angellica: Women, Writing and Fiction, 1660–1800* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p. 16; Ballaster, p. 79. See also Judith Kegan Gardiner, "Aphra Behn: Sexuality and Self-Respect," *Women's Studies* 7 (1980), 69. Warner, p. 93.

40 *The Histories and Novels of the Late Ingenious Mrs. Behn* (London, 1696), b6v, b7r–v

for example, in the attack on the theatre by Jeremy Collier in 1698. Bourdieu shows that in the twentieth century the "pure gaze" associated with legitimate taste involves renunciation of ordinary pleasure in favour of aesthetic pleasure, the exercise of the sense of distinction, whereas "barbarous taste" takes ordinary pleasure as a criterion of judgment (pp. 30–32).[41] In this sense, the sexualization of writing in amatory fiction puts that writing at odds with legitimate taste. But Bourdieu also shows that legitimate taste rejects "the ethical disposition which subordinates art to the values of the art of living," and in this sense amatory fiction embodies and refers to a late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century aristocratic or legitimate taste when it repudiates the pious in favour of the merely pleasurable (p. 47).

Nevertheless, many examples of amatory fiction also featured claims as to their historicity and utility. The two sets of claims and the distinct views of the nature and function of fiction are clearly at odds with one another. The contradictory character of these texts, once again, makes them exemplary of what Bourdieu calls "middle-brow" taste—caught "between the tastes they incline to and the tastes they aspire to." On the one hand these texts authorize an eroticized, luxurious form of writing and reading, and on the other hand they assert their brevity, simplicity, and utility. One sees this in claims made by Haywood on behalf of texts such as *Love in Excess*, and also in Barker's fiction, where she unabashedly offers her readers romances and yet also recommends her books as short works that serve a number of pragmatic ends. Barker promises that her fiction will "open the Understanding of young readers to distinguish between real Worth and superficial Appearance" and also that "young Readers may ... reap Handfuls of good Morality, and likewise gather some Gleanings of History and Acquaintance with the Ancient Poets." She declares of *Exilius*: "I think I may say of Romances ... that a pleasant Story may find him, who flies a serious Lecture." These are the claims of a self-consciously middling-sort writer, offering short works, written in an easy-to-read style, that aim above all else at the instruction of the reader, and yet this writer essays an aristocratic form.[42]

What is more, Barker's fiction is even more clearly contested ground than we have yet seen because although it occupies to some extent the same aristocratic terrain as amatory fiction, it also participates in the revenge of the popular aesthetic upon the writers of amatory fiction, a reaction that

41 Guillory, p. 332.

42 Bisset by Dig McBoney pp. 390–91; Barker, 2000, p. 30.

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embodies yet another key position in the clash of class tastes in this period. Starting during the careers of Manley and Haywood—with the fiction of Aubin and Defoe—there is a sharp attack on amatory fiction which takes the form of ever more authoritative assertions that the end of fiction must be not pleasure, but instruction. Defoe declares in *Serious Reflections ... of Robinson Crusoe* (1720) that "the Fable is always made for the Moral, not the Moral for the Fable," and, taken together, Defoe's narratives function as an argument, if an occasionally ambivalent one, for the view that fiction's capacity to work for the moral improvement of the reader is its most important aspect. Aubin, similarly, presents *The Strange Adventures of the Count de Vinevil and His Family* (1721) with the declaration that "the few that honor virtue and wish well to our nation ought to study to reclaim our giddy youth." She presents her readers with "a story where Divine Providence manifests itself in every transaction." That hers is a theory of fiction rooted in an agonistic sense of class is made clear when she argues that her efforts are necessitated by the fact that "serious things are in a manner altogether neglected by what we call the gay and fashionable part of mankind." Aubin, by contrast, offers fiction that will "encourage Virtue and expose Vice." This declaration is almost identical to Collier's breathtaking contribution to early modern criticism: "The business of plays is to recommend virtue, and discountenance vice."[43] Such views do not merely reflect the values and distinctions of a particular class fraction within the sprawling middling sort; they serve to delineate newly forming boundaries between zones of taste. The views of Defoe, Aubin, and, later, Richardson thus constitute, simultaneously, the definition of an aesthetic position, the delineation of a genre, and the assertion of a social identity.

The attack on amatory fiction reaches its climax with the publication of *Pamela*, a text that is preceded by a commendatory letter from an Anglican vicar and that ends with a pious list of the "many Applications, of its most material Incidents, to the Minds of the Youth of both Sexes." The instrumental view of fiction found in *Robinson Crusoe*, *Count de Vinevil*, and *Pamela* is the strong version of the argument about utility found in the earlier little histories, a view Bourdieu identifies with the popular aesthetic. Richardson's editor makes the aims of *Pamela* clear: "to Instruct and improve the Minds of the YOUTH," "to inculcate Religion and

43 Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, p. 259; Backscheider and Richetti, p. 114; Bartolomeo, p. 31; McMillin, p. 493. Warner treats *Roxana* as an instance of Defoe's "rewriting the novels of amorous intrigue" and shows how equivocal Defoe's critique of amatory fiction was (pp. 149–54). But *Roxana* and the similarly ambivalent *Moll Flanders*, along with *Crusoe* and *Journal of the Plague Year*, demonstrate that overall Defoe made a forceful case for "history" as a vehicle for improvement of the reader.

Morality," "to teach the Man of Fortune how to use it," and "to give Practical examples, worthy to be followed ... by the modest virgin, the chaste bride, and the obliging Wife." Although the editor also indicates that the text aims "to divert and entertain," the emphasis is clearly on moral instruction, designed to influence how readers live their lives in the world around them. Both Nancy Armstrong and John Bender have shown that the novel in the eighteenth century was a vehicle for shaping individual subjectivity and social institutions, and indeed helped create a kind of monitory function—whether within the modern self or within the modern prison—by means of which behaviour could be managed and controlled.[44] One can see this function coming into being in the rhetoric of Defoe, Aubin, and particularly Richardson; novels establish their value, according to this view, by insisting upon their capacity to instruct and inculcate virtue. This monitory function is a product of the popular aesthetic mobilized in respect to the new fiction.

Pamela, furthermore, not only elaborates an instrumental view of fiction but also asserts that the text's beauty and utility are inseparable and indeed that its beauty derives from its functional character. Aaron Hill's introduction to *Pamela* in its second edition makes this clear:

> I admire, in it, the strong distinguish'd Variety, and picturesque glowing Likeness to *Life*, of the Characters. I know, hear, see, and live among 'em All: and, if I cou'd paint, cou'd return you their *Faces*. I admire, in it, the noble Simplicity, Force, Aptness, and Truth, of so many modest, oeconomical, moral, prudential, religious, satirical, and cautionary, *Lessons*; which are introduc'd with such seasonable Dexterity, and with so polish'd and exquisite a Delicacy, of Expression and Sentiment.

Hill begins by praising the book for the way it imitates nature, and his commentary seems to be squarely within the realm of aesthetics. But in the third sentence quoted here he moves, seamlessly, from considering *Pamela*'s success in terms of the rules of art—"Simplicity, Force, Aptness"—to emphasizing its abundant "oeconomical, moral, and cautionary *Lessons*." Thus, Hill judges it an admirable work of art largely because of its lessons: "who could have dreamt, he should find, under the modest disguise of a *Novel* all the *Soul* of Religion, Good-breeding, Discretion, Good-nature, Wit, Fancy, Fine Thought, and Morality?"[45] With this question Hill elevates the novel, but, more particularly, Richardson's version of the novel, to the level of high art and he does so precisely by eliding

44 Richardson, pp. 409, 3; Armstrong, pp. 8–9; Bender, pp. 34–35.

45 Hill was presented to readers as "a Gentleman of the most distinguish'd Taste and Abilities"; Richardson, pp. 10–9.

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the distinction between ethics and aesthetics. Such a position, Bourdieu argues, is a form of aesthetic "barbarism" that opposes an "ethical disposition" to a true sense of distinction (pp. 44, 47). While most critics in this period accepted the idea that art has a didactic aspect, important aesthetic pronouncements suggest contemporary criticism privileged aesthetics over ethics. M.H. Abrams argues that "variable stress was ... given to the Horatian *utile*," and "the excellence of a work ... was theoretically to be measured by the kind and degree of its emotional and pleasurable effectiveness." Richardson's *Pamela*, on the other hand, suggests that moral considerations are, and must be, primary. The sensation of *Pamela*—Warner dubs it a "media event"—is to a large degree the sensation of a text advancing this view of art that receives praise not only from bishops but also from Pope.[46]

Pamela, of course, engendered its own reaction, most famously in the work of Fielding, who was offended by the self-presentation of *Pamela* as a work of fiction so self-consciously aiming at the improvement of the reader that it could not only be alluded to in a sermon but could itself function as one. While Fielding accepted the idea that fiction should have a moral aim, an instructive aspect, he suggested that fiction performed this function best, particularly when it focused on "Persons of inferiour Rank," by revealing "the Ridiculous" in human life—in short, through humour, not pious moralizing. In *Tom Jones* Fielding declares that he "employed all the wit and humour of which I am master ... to laugh mankind out of their follies and vices." Not surprisingly, therefore, in both *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews* Fielding took aim at what seemed to him the ridiculous features of *Pamela*—its self-congratulation and its dubious "improving Morality" which seemed to teach "Servant-Maids ... [to] look out for their Masters as sharp as they can. The consequences of which will be ... that if the Master

46 Abrams, p. 17; Warner, p. xv. The question, of course, is why? Why did Defoe, Aubin, Richardson, and others fashion such a form? The question cannot be answered here but the elaboration of the form must be seen in the context of, among other developments, Collier's attack on the theatre, and the continuation of his critique and the "reform" of theatrical practice as seen in, for example, Richard Steele's essay in the *Spectator*, no. 65 (1711) and "improving" plays of the eighteenth century, including Steele's *The Conscious Lovers* (1722) and George Lillo's *The London Merchant* (1731). These developments are often linked to other efforts at reform, including the founding of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (1698) and the Society for the Reformation of Manners (1699) and the "civilizing" aims of the periodical essayists. Finally, all this is linked to the "culture of sensibility," which has been tied by G.J. Barker-Benfield to consumerism, reform, and "the public 'awakening' of a critical mass of Englishwomen," all developments associated with the middling sort; see *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 68–69, 215, xviii.

is not a Fool, they will be debauched by him; and if he is a Fool, they will marry him."[47]

Fielding's and Richardson's distinct views have been linked with different class positions. Ioan Williams associates Richardson (and also Defoe) with dissenters and "the trading classes," but describes Fielding as "a representative of neo-classsic values ... [using] wit and humour as a means of maintaining cultural standards." Richardson himself lamented "the very great Advantage of an Academical Education [which] I have wanted."[48] Fielding, by contrast, possessed a background, education, and professional status that bespoke high levels of cultural capital. All this is implicitly on display in his dismissive burlesque of *Pamela*, his preface to *Joseph Andrews* with its classical allusions and confident contributions to literary theory that associate his own work with that of Aristotle and "Lord *Shaftesbury*," and his witty narrators in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*.[49] Commentators on Fielding and Richardson highlighted the gaping social distance between the two writers. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu dismissed Richardson as a vulgarian: "this Author was never admitted into higher Company, and should Confine his Pen to the Amours of Housemaids and the conversation at the Steward's Table." She criticized as "coarse" and "low" characters such as Anna Howe and Charlotte Grandison, whom Richardson presented, she scornfully pointed out, "as Patterns of charming Pleasantry." In a negative way, one of Fielding's detractors similarly categorized him; Richard Hurd, critic and bishop, dismissed the author of *Tom Jones* as a "worn-out rake," thus linking him to the old, corrupt Stuart coterie. Even Anna Laetitia Barbauld, a champion of Richardson, noted in her prefaces to the works of Richardson and Fielding that the former lacked "a knowledge of the classics" and "was acquainted with no language but his own, not even French" whereas Fielding was "a good classical scholar"

47 Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews and Shamela*, ed. Douglas Brooks-Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 4, 324; *Tom Jones*, ed. John Bender (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 6.

48 Ioan Williams, *The Idea of the Novel in Europe, 1600–1800* (New York: New York University Press, 1979), pp. 146–47, 175, 186; *Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson*, ed. John Carroll (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), p. 85.

49 *Joseph Andrews*, pp. 3–5. Bender observes that Fielding came from "a genteel, even obliquely aristocratic, family"; *Tom Jones*, p. xi; Fielding was educated at Eton and Leyden, and was both a lawyer from a family of lawyers and a writer who associated himself with the Augustan satirists in, for example, *The Tragedy of Tragedies* (1730).

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and the writer of works in which "the *author*'s learning, the *author*'s wit appear continually."[50]

Thus although himself a middling-sort writer, Fielding evinced a taste strikingly different from Aubin's and Richardson's, one that is closely akin to the sense of distinction corresponding to "the aristocracy of culture" in Bourdieu's scheme.[51] His distinctions stand in clear opposition to those made by Richardson. *Pamela* is presented as "a Series of Familiar letters" in which an editor speaks but not an author, and as such it is a text very much in the spirit of earlier "little histories" such as those of Behn, Manley, and Defoe. Fielding presents *Joseph Andrews* as a work "Written in Imitation of The *Manner* of *Cervantes*, Author of *Don Quixote*," and associates his work with an elevated tradition that was the locus of legitimate taste. In the context of the 1740s, both Richardson's and Fielding's novels were anti-romances. But whereas Defoe and Richardson justified their work by associating it "with other forms ... usually factual or pseudo-factual, modes of narrative," Fielding "established [the novel] separately and authoritatively as a distinctive literary form of intrinsic interest and worth."[52] Revelling in his creative power, Fielding declared: "The excellence of the mental entertainment consists less in the subject than in the author's skill in well dressing it up." This elevation of the text's artfulness over its subject matter is a striking assertion of the aesthetic disposition.[53] Fielding was, furthermore, celebrated as a supremely imaginative writer by some early readers. Lord Lyttelton, who along with Pitt worked to secure a good reception for *Tom Jones*, praised the book for its "strong and lively painting of characters, and a very copious and happy invention in the conduct of the story." In a similar vein, Coventry identified Fielding as the progenitor of a "new Species of Writing," which he asserted was "a formidable Rival to the *amazing* Class of Writers; since it was not a mere

50 McKeon, p. 413; Frederic T. Blanchard, *Fielding the Novelist: A Study in Historical Criticism* (1926; New York: Russell and Russell, 1966), pp. 126, 75; Anna Laetitia Barbauld, ed., *The British Novelists*, 50 vols (London: Rivington, et al., 1820), 1:iii–iv; 18:i, iv–v.

51 Bender points out that Fielding's "important connections yielded few assets apart from schooling" and stresses his "proximity to the Grub Street milieu." Fielding, *Tom Jones*, p. xi.

52 Beasley points out, however, that the early novelists "did not totally renounce romance" (Beasley, pp. 1–2; cf. McKeon, p. 34; Bender, p. 185). Romance plots, mainly in the sense of idealized characters and happy endings, have been identified in novels by Defoe, Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, and Burney; but the novels of the 1740s and after are different from amatory fiction and other works imitative of romance in the 1720s in that the later novels abandoned most of the trappings and many of the key features of romance and sought to present, as Beasley asserts, "convincing portraits of contemporary experience." See McKeon, pp. 363–64, 371, 406, for elements of romance in *Pamela* and *Joseph Andrews*.

53 Fielding, *Tom Jones*, pp. 30–31.

dry Narrative, but a Lively representative of real Life," in which Fielding opened "a new vein of Humour" and indulged "himself in ... Liberties of Stile" when the story required enlivening.[54]

Fielding, in short, was celebrated as a writer of unusual inventiveness and liveliness. Richardson was also seen as a great innovator, but his breakthrough was generally discussed in terms of his talent as a moralist and a psychologist. Johnson described Richardson as a writer who "enlarged the knowledge of the human heart and taught the passions to move at the command of virtue," and Diderot famously echoed at least the first part of Johnson's appraisal in his *Éloge de Richardson*.[55] Fielding, by contrast, derided work that was overly earnest in moral terms and vulgar in its conception of art. In a very different way from the writers of amatory fiction, Fielding adopted an aristocratic posture, by rejecting the moralizing popular aesthetic embodied in *Pamela* and other texts and also by invoking the aesthetic disposition, insisting upon the primacy of pleasure and the imagination without, however, reappropriating romance as his narrative form.

Both Ronald Paulson and Martin Battestin highlight the importance of Fielding's characterization of *Tom Jones* as his "great Creation." Battestin claims that the label identifies the work as a "summarizing expression of an entire world view," making it Fielding's contribution to "the age of Newton and of Pope." Paulson suggests that the phrase alludes to Shaftesbury, who celebrated the "moral artist who can ... imitate the creator." In either case the phrase is suggestive of Fielding's vaulting ambition and his high sense of art and the artist. Paulson also reminds us that the Shaftesburian ideal embraced by Fielding assumes that the great work of art is "intended primarily for an élite, whom Fielding ... designate[d] in *Tom Jones* as his 'sagacious Readers.'"[56] Fielding then advances a view of art and of the artist and his audience radically at odds with the case made in the "little books" of Defoe, Aubin, and Richardson, and his stance is an unmistakable rejection of the Richardsonian model for the "new species of writing" from the standpoint of legitimate taste.

54 Coventry, pp. 15–16, 20.

55 *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, 15 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958-85), 4:153; for Diderot's appreciation, see Watt, p. 235.

56 Paulson, in his discussion of the rise of aesthetics in the long eighteenth century, argues for the importance of Shaftesbury to Fielding and declares that Fielding "never deviated from an image of himself as an aristocrat." Ronald Paulson, *The Beautiful, Novel, and Strange: Aesthetics and Heterodoxy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. xviii, 118–120, 106; Martin C. Battestin, with Ruthe R. Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A life* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 452.

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What one might expect, given Bourdieu's model, is a firm rejection of Richardson's version of the new fiction by those critics and readers possessing a sense of distinction. But Fielding did not win his argument with Richardson, at least not in the eyes of their contemporaries. Frederic Blanchard shows that while *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* were widely read books, critical reaction to them was generally lukewarm at best. According to Blanchard, one repeatedly finds in eighteenth-century commentary on Fielding declarations that he was "a foe to virtue, a scoffer at the clergy, and a dissolute painter of low life." Whereas Richardson "enjoyed the favor of a veritable host of influential supporters," commentary on Fielding from the period is

> strangely lacking in those illustrious names which exert a great influence upon an author's reputation. Pope, Gray, Young, Walpole, Johnson, Hurd, Chesterfield, have either ill words for him or practically none.

Richardson, we know, actively worked against the popular enthusiasm for *Tom Jones*. Writing to Hill's daughters, who had expressed some enthusiasm for that book, Richardson provided the young women with "a pious lecture on their presumption." He decries the book's coarseness, and suggests that "the Author intended ... to whiten a vicious Character, and to make Morality bend to his Practices." And while Hill's daughters basically stood their ground, even though they expressed their awe of Richardson, another of Richardson's correspondents, Lady Bradshaigh, essentially apologized to the author of *Pamela* for having momentarily thought well of *Tom Jones*.[57]

The reception of these two writers, furthermore, demonstrates that Richardson's view of the novel, together with his critique of Fielding, was *the* assertion about the nature of fiction that held sway in the middle of the century. Fielding's relatively low standing with his contemporaries suggests that at the moment he was writing his great novels, key elements of the popular aesthetic were incorporated into "legitimate taste"—as created by influential readers and critics—in England. William Shenstone, poet, landscape gardener, and celebrated man of taste, observes that *Joseph Andrews* "has some advocates; but ... those [are] not such as I ever esteemed tasters." The vulgar might enjoy Fielding's novel, Shenstone implies, but "tasters" largely thought it not only "unnatural" but also "unhumorous." Aubin, Richardson, and others managed, at least for a time, to make *déclassée* not only Behn, Manley, and Haywood but also, to a remarkable degree,

57 Blanchard, pp. 23, 127, 63, 65, 67.

Fielding. Blanchard shows that while "there can be no question about the enthusiasm with which *Tom Jones* was received by the public ... it is equally true—and this is a surprising literary fact which needs to be emphasized—that Fielding had not yet succeeded in winning the plaudits of what was then considered the 'polite world.'" This writer, who made common cause with the Augustan satirists and connected his "comic Epic-Poem in Prose" with a tradition extending back to Homer and Aristotle, was seen, by "persons of quality and ... those distinguished in literature," as a writer who "worked in a lesser genre" and whose works seemed "ill laid and without invention" and "tedious." Such judgments signal the triumph of the view of the "new species of writing" elaborated in Richardson's work; Blanchard observes that, in comparison with Richardson, Fielding "had not the same reputation for moral purpose and profundity of thought."[58] The relative assessment of these two writers signals the achievement of a surprising cultural legitimacy of key tenets of the popular aesthetic in mid-eighteenth-century Britain. Richardson's advancing a case for his work as high art might well be seen as typical of a middling-sort artist, who embraces a popular aesthetic but claims that his work is sanctioned by legitimate taste. Richardson's work, however, actually achieved legitimacy because it was endorsed by the "tasters" that Shenstone names and the "polite world" that Blanchard describes, endorsed, that is, by the aristocracy of culture.

Theoretically, Bourdieu's scheme in *Distinction* does not allow for such a reversal in the relative standing of the two aesthetic dispositions, the legitimate or aristocratic and the popular. The sense of distinction that we have associated with both Fielding and, in a very different way, with the writers of amatory fiction and certain other advocates of romance from the 1720s is, by definition, dominant, and the popular aesthetic a dominated taste. Yet Bourdieu's view of the whole question is grounded in an empirical description of class taste and allows for revolutions in taste, and his system also allows that as a dominant aesthetic the sense of distinction can be construed in any way that the "tasters" in a socio-cultural field choose (p. 255). In the eighteenth century, at least momentarily, what happens is that a form of fiction written by tradesmen, writing and preaching women, and printers, embodying a popular aesthetic—functionalist, moralizing—is endorsed by the aristocrats of culture. Samuel Johnson sides with Richardson and implicitly rejects Fielding when in *Rambler* no. 4 he asserts in respect to the new fiction:

58 Blanchard, pp. 70, 5, 128, 126. The two unattributed criticisms of Fielding are by Thomas Gray and Shenstone. Paulson and Thomas Lockwood, *Henry Fielding: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul; New York: Barnes and Noble, 1969), endorse Blanchard's description of Fielding's critical fortunes (p. xi).

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The purpose of these writings is surely not only to show mankind, but to provide that they may be seen hereafter with less hazard; to teach the means of avoiding snares which are laid by Treachery for Innocence ... to give the power of counteracting fraud without the temptation to practice it; to initiate youth by mock encounters in the art of necessary defense, and to increase prudence without impairing virtue.[59]

This is an unequivocal endorsement of not only the principle that poetry should both teach and delight but also the idea that the new fiction must function, in a practical sense, as a guide to living, a fictional version of a conduct-book, a manual for the would-be moralist. At a key moment in the history of the elaboration of the novel form, then, a baldly functionalist definition of the novel became the view accepted by readers in a position to stipulate what de Freval called the "Standard or Pattern for this Kind of Writing."

Thus the debate over the new fiction in early modern Britain eventuated in a sanctioning of key tenets of the popular aesthetic by legitimate taste; this result, from a strict view of Bourdieu's argument, is anomalous. But the subsequent history of the reception of the writers of amatory fiction as well as Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding makes it clear that readers and writers of British fiction were able to sanction Richardson's version of the novel and still canonize Fielding. Some twentieth-century commentary upon the novel, furthermore, suggests that the anomalous character of the reception of Fielding and Richardson needs to be seen in fact as a key to a crucial feature of the novel form. In concluding this essay, I want to explore what the continuation of the debate over the emerging novel into the later eighteenth and the early nineteenth century reveals about the clash between legitimate and popular taste and also what that debate along with certain twentieth-century views suggests about the theory of the novel.

Fielding was only momentarily relegated to secondary status in respect to Richardson. By the 1820s Coleridge railed against "the cant which can recommend Pamela and Clarissa Harlowe as strictly moral, though they poison the imagination of the young," and contrasted the "cheerful, sun-shiny, breezy spirit that prevails" in Fielding's work with "the close, hot, day-dreamy continuity" of Richardson. Coleridge later influentially celebrated Fielding as a "master of composition" and argued that *Tom*

59 *Tale Eighteen of ... Johnson*, 3:22-23.

Jones is one of "the three most perfect plots ever planned." Such comments set the pattern for the nineteenth century when Fielding tended to be touted as a great artist and Richardson was often seen as a writer with a "vile" imagination. Blanchard shows that the relative positions of the two writers get reversed after the eighteenth century, and he argues that that situation endures down to the time of his writing in 1926.[60] This is what Bourdieu's model would predict: the canonization of Fielding because of his advocacy of a fictional practice consonant with legitimate taste and also a rejection of Richardson's practice because of the latter's embrace of the popular aesthetic.

It must be said, however, that the means by which this reversal takes place is in important part the repeated assertion that Fielding was just as committed a moralist as Richardson. In *The Progress of Romance* (1785), Clara Reeve makes just this point. She praises Richardson's works as "all ... of capital merit," but acknowledges that for many Fielding's "writings are as much inferior to Richardson's in morals and exemplary characters, as they are superior in wit and learning." At the same time, she classifies wit as only "a secondary merit." In the end, however, although she gives Fielding his due, she does so by asserting that "in all Fielding's works, virtue has always the superiority she ought to have." Similarly, Barbauld, writing in 1820, compares Richardson and Fielding and declares that "each may be admired as an original writer without any interference with the other," and then takes exception to arguments that Fielding was wanting in respect to "morals" and "delicacy," declaring that "in *Joseph Andrews* the interest is constantly and uniformly on the side of virtue." Even Coleridge is at pains to declare that "every immoral act, of Tom Jones ... is so instantly punished by embarrassment and unanticipated evil consequences of his folly, that the reader's mind is not left for a moment to dwell or run riot on the criminal indulgence itself."[61]

Thus, paradoxically, Fielding's rehabilitation is made possible by assimilating his practice to the requirements of fiction stipulated by Richardson. One sees this quite clearly in Burney's reception of both Richardson and Fielding in her novel *Evelina*. Very much in the spirit of Fielding in *Joseph*

60 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Collected Works*, vol. 12, part 2, ed. George Whalley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 693; T.C. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel, *Samuel Richardson: A Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 1; Blanchard, p. 133. Scott, too, contrasted the "free, bold, and true sketches" of Fielding to the "minutely laboured" works of Richardson, which he saw as possessed of a certain "heaviness." Walter Scott, *Lives of the Novelists*, introd. Austin Dobson (London: Oxford University Press, 1906), p. 250.

61 Clara Reeve, *The Progress of Romance and The History of Charoba, Queen of Aegypt*, 2 vols in 1 (New York: Facsimile Text Society, 1930), 2:119–20; Barbauld, 18:xvi; Coleridge, p. 693.

Andrews, Burney delineates a tradition for herself that includes both Fielding and Richardson, identifying each as belonging among "those few of our predecessors, to whom this species of writing is indebted for being saved from contempt." She also acknowledges that she was "softened by the pathetic passions of Richardson, and exhilarated by the wit of Fielding." Drawing upon both for her portrait in the novel of a young woman "of obscure birth" who makes "her first appearance upon the great and busy stage of life," Burney aims, Susan Staves has argued, to show "how difficult it is to be a young lady" and to represent "the special helplessness of young women to determine their fates." Burney thus writes a book very much in the vein of Richardson, but makes use of the comedy associated with Fielding; she reconciles Fielding's method to Richardson's aim. Barbauld signals Burney's importance, observing in 1820 that "scarcely any name ... stands higher in the list of novel writers," and celebrating her for observing "human nature, both in high and low life." Barbauld also argues that Burney is "equally happy in seizing the ridiculous, and in entering into the finer feelings," making Burney seem a student of both Fielding and Richardson. But Barbauld also observes of Burney's works: "the highest value is given to them by the moral feelings they exercise, and the excellent principles they inculcate."[62] Thus Barbauld, who devotes the first fifteen of the fifty volumes of her collection of *British Novelists* to the works of Richardson, canonizes Burney as arguably the greatest of English novelists by arguing that her claim to that title is linked to her fundamental kinship with Richardson in presenting the novel as a vehicle for the "inculcation" of virtue. Burney's reception of Fielding and Richardson and Barbauld's reception of Burney sanction the process begun in the 1740s by means of which popular taste becomes the aesthetic position from which the novel is defined and from which the canon of novels is created.[63]

What is more, views as to the utility and the historicity of novels suggest that the elevation of the popular aesthetic to cultural legitimacy at least in respect to the novel is a judgment that has never entirely been reversed. Richard Ohman shows that readers of the twentieth-century novel want

62 Burney, pp. 7–9; Susan Staves, "*Evelina*; or, Female Difficulties," *Modern Philology* 73 (1975–76), 380; Barbauld, 38:i, x.

63 This may explain why Fielding is successfully rehabilitated but Behn, Manley, and Haywood are not. Jane Spencer argues that "the terms of acceptance" of eighteenth-century women writers included the requirement that their work unmistakably display "the 'feminine' qualities of delicacy and propriety." The history of the reception of Fielding suggests that the same claims were made on behalf of his work. Jane Spencer, *The Rise of the Woman Novelist: From Aphra Behn to Jane Austen* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 75.

fiction to function as "some kind of map to the moral landscape," and Janice Radway shows that readers think of fiction as "a tool," useful for moving about "more effectively in the world to which it refers." The readers discussed by Ohman and Radway are, of course, espousing a view of fiction rooted in the popular aesthetic, but it is important to see that that view is authorized in respect to the reading of novels by the approval by eighteenth-century "tasters" of the view of fiction put forward by Aubin and Richardson among others. That view of fiction may also explain Linda Hutcheon's observation that, unlike poetry, "which was rescued from the myth of the instrumentality of language by the Symbolists," the novel "has had ... difficulty in escaping from naïve referential theories." Indeed Hutcheon acknowledges that although "criticism today accepts that the novel is not a copy of the real world ... the novel is, in fact, related to life experience in a very real way *for the reader*," and also laments the fact that even metafiction, with its "self-reflexive ... critical commentary" has only managed "to make explicit what is a truism of *all* fiction [i.e., novels]: the overdetermination of novelistic reference."[64] Thus, some residue of belief in the referential power, and also the utility, of imaginative discourse clings to the novel, despite the Symbolists, despite modernism and postmodernism, despite metafiction. This essay has shown that this belief has its roots in the clash of class tastes in the eighteenth century that canonized the novel as a form of literature aimed above all else at the inculcation of virtue. Watt, then, was in important ways correct when he argued for a momentous shift in matters of taste in eighteenth-century Britain. But the story that Watt alluded to was perhaps more complicated than he imagined. It is still a story we are learning to tell.[65]

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64 Richard Ohman, "The Shaping of a Canon: U.S. Fiction, 1960–1975," *Critical Inquiry* 10 (1983–84), 201; Janice Radway, "The Book-of-the Month Club and the General Reader: On the Uses of 'Serious' Fiction," *Critical Inquiry* 14 (1987–88), 537; Linda Hutcheon, "Metafictional Implications for Novelistic Reference," *On Referring in Literature*, ed. Anna Whiteside and Michael Isscharoff (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 1.

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