CATHERINE GALLAGHER

The Rise of Fictionality

No feature of the novel seems to be more obvious and yet more easily ignored than its fictionality. Like *prose, fictional* is one of those definitive terms ("a novel is a long, fictional prose narrative") that most historians of the form have tacitly agreed to leave unexamined; we tend to let it lie dormant in our critical analyses as well. And yet we all know that it is active and determining in our culture, for we cannot walk into a bookstore or read the Sunday papers without noticing that the primary categorical division in our textual universe is between "fiction" and "nonfiction." Perhaps we imagine that a distinction so pervasive and secure can get along without our help, that it would be redundant to define such a self-evident trait. Or, perhaps we find that the theories of fictionality debated by philosophers and narratologists finally tell us too little about either the history or the specific properties of the novel to repay the difficulty of mastering them. Moreover, since none of the theories has become dominant among the initiated, perhaps most of us think the exercise is futile and are consequently content simply to know fiction when we see it. Troubling this contentment, but perhaps also augmenting the sense of analytical futility, has been the aggressive extension of the term by poststructural theorists to cover all forms of narration, even all forms of meaning-production. Neglected by scholars and critics of the novel and highjacked by philosophers and postmodernists, fictionality as a specific feature of the genre certainly needs recovery. And yet, other reasons for its neglect, reasons truly intrinsic to the form, also need analyzing.

This essay will try not only to retrieve novelistic fictionality for analysis but also to explain why we have difficulty keeping it at the forefront of our attention, why it incessantly slips behind other features or disappears into terms like *narrative* and *signification*. As a historian of the form's British variety, I tend to approach the issue through the evidence provided by the mideighteenth-century novel in English, in which an explicit and ongoing discourse of fictionality developed. By entering the subject in this way, I am following the Anglo-American practice of viewing the novel and the romance as separate genres, and I hope to show that the nature of fictionality changed so dramatically in these mideighteenth-century British narratives that they do constitute a new form. Moreover, the kind of fictionality they claim for themselves became the norm throughout Europe and America in the nineteenth century, and we still anticipate encountering it when we pick up a new novel today. Undoubtedly the fictionality of the eighteenth-century British novel was atypical, but its atypicality established our expectations. In these works we can hear what the novel had to say about fictionality in its infancy, when it had the greatest need to differentiate itself from competing genres.

And what it had to say, both explicitly in its many metafictional digressions and implicitly in its practice, was by no means univocal. From the outset, novelistic fictionality has been unique and paradoxical. The novel is not just one kind of fictional narrative among others; it is the kind in which and through which fictionality became manifest, explicit, widely understood, and accepted. The historical connection between the terms *novel* and *fiction* is intimate; they were mutually constitutive. And yet the novel has also been widely regarded as a form that tried, for at least two centuries, to hide its fictionality behind verisimilitude or realism, insisting on certain kinds of referentiality and even making extensive truth claims. If a genre can be thought of as having an attitude, the novel has seemed ambivalent toward its fictionality—at once inventing it as an ontological ground and placing severe constraints upon it. Novelists apparently liberated fictionality, for eighteenth-century practitioners abandoned earlier writers' serious attempts to convince readers that their invented tales were literally true or were at least about actual people. Candidly and explicitly differentiating their works from the kinds of referentiality proffered by neighboring genres, these writers coaxed their readers to accept the imaginative status of their characters. And yet the same eighteenth-century novelists also seem to have imprisoned and concealed fictionality by locking it inside the confines of the credible. The novel, in short, is said both to have discovered and to have obscured fiction. Mutually contradictory as they may seem, both assertions are valid, and I hope to show that revealing and concealing fiction in the novel are one and the same process.

There is mounting historical evidence for the first, more unusual, proposition—that the novel discovered fiction. It used to be assumed that fictions form a part of every culture's life, and if evidence for the assumption were needed, one could point to the seemingly universal existence of stories that apparently do not make referential truth claims, such as fables and fairy tales. It seemed to follow that something resembling the modern acceptance of the word *fiction* must be universally comprehended and the phenomenon at least tacitly sanctioned. A general human capacity to recognize discourses that, in Sir Philip Sidney's words, "nothing affirmeth, and therefore never lieth" (Sidney 1962: 29), made the term appear unproblematically applicable to narratives from all times and places. Recent scholarship has shown, though, that this modern *concept* of narrative fiction developed slowly in early-modern Europe, a development reflected in the changing uses of the word in English. From its common use to denote, "that which is fashioned or framed; a device, a fabric, . . . whether for the purpose of deception or otherwise" (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. "fiction") or "something that is imaginatively invented," a new usage came into existence at the turn of the seventeenth century: "The species of literature which is concerned with the narration of imaginary events and the portraiture of imaginary characters; fictitious composition." As this sense of the word gained greater currency, mainly in the eighteenth century, an earlier frequent meaning of "deceit, dissimulation, pretense" became obsolete. Although consistently contrasted with the veridical, fictional narration ceased to be a subcategory of dissimulation as it became a literary phenomenon. If the etymology of the word tells us anything, fiction seems to have been discovered as a discursive mode in its own right as readers developed the ability to tell it apart from both fact and (this is the key) deception.

In one guise, but only one, this categorical discrimination was probably always widely practiced: earlier fictions could be distinguished from lies if they were manifestly improbable. Honest fictions, that is, were expected to distinguish *themselves* by their incredibility. If a narration did not even solicit belief, it met Sir Philip Sidney's criterion for "poesy": affirming "nothing," it could not lie. When the obvious nonexistence of its reference separated it from both truth and falsehood, even the most naive readers could recognize fiction. Sir Philip Sidney was far from naive, but even he defended "poesie" on the grounds that its "golden" creations would not be mistaken for our brazen, commonplace world.

Because of their blatant incredibility, therefore, numerous preeighteenth-century genres would meet the test set by almost all modern theorists of fictionality. Whether they conceive of fictions in terms of possible worlds, pretended illocutionary acts, gestalts, or language games, our theorists now start from Sidney's premise about "poesie": fiction somehow suspends, deflects, or otherwise disables normal referential truth claims about the world of ordinary experience. Romances, fables, allegories, fairy stories, narrative poems—all premodern genres that were not taken to be the literal truth but that obviously had no intention to deceive—may be described in modern terms as drastically modifying or altogether suspending "the 'referentialability' of assertions or claims" (Schmidt 1996: 36). They may, therefore, be retroactively and, we should notice, *anachronistically* proclaimed fictional, even though they were not so described at the time or grouped together under any single category, even that of Sidney's "poesie."

Fictionality that operates only in this one way, however, cannot be said to stand on its own as a separate concept from fantasy. Plausible stories are thus the real test for the progress of fictional sophistication in a culture, and in the early eighteenth century, a likely fiction was still considered a lie by the common reader. While the only reliable "operator" of fictionality was mere incredibility, believability was tantamount to a truth claim. As long as they did not contain talking animals, flying carpets, or human characters who are much better or much worse than the norm, narratives seemed referential in their particulars and were hence routinely accused of either fraud or slander. Most, moreover, were guilty as charged. The majority of seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century credible prose narratives—including those we now call fictions—were meant to be read either as factual accounts or as "allegorical" reflections on contemporary people and events. When Daniel Defoe published *Robinson Crusoe* in 1719, for example, he certainly intended to deceive the public, and he succeeded. A year later, in the preface to a sequel, Defoe, under pressure to admit that he had lied, still insisted on the historical accuracy of his tale but then, inconsistently alleged that each incident in the "imaginary" story alluded to an episode in a "real Story" (Defoe 1903: xi). He accordingly clung to particularity of reference, even as he shifted the grounds of his claim from literal truth to allegorical allusion.

To take an example of the opposite form of deception, the literary field at the time was crowded with scandalmongers; one, Delarivier Manley, declared that she had published a mere work of the imagination when she was prosecuted for libeling prominent aristocrats in 1709 (Morgan 1986: 146–51). Her book had all the usual marks of libelous allegory: an imaginary kingdom populated by nobles who are monstrous but nevertheless recognizable exaggerations of well-known government ministers and ladies of the court. The "allegory" lent some legitimacy to Manley's alibi of fiction, but her work was popular mainly because readers believed that it revealed the secrets of the powerful, that it referred to contemporary individuals. A third example of the referential imperative can be found in the form that Manley parodied: romance. Personal allegory was also the mainstay of this genre, which is most often thought of as the novel's immediate fictional precursor. Despite their later associations with unbridled fantasy, the seventeenth-century French romances, on which the English modeled theirs, were originally written and read as disguised "reflections" on the great. The romances exalted particular courtly lords and ladies, turning them into exemplars of the virtues, whereas the *chroniques scandeleuses*, as the later libelous satires à la Manley were called, mocked the romance conventions and reversed their judgments. Neither form, however, sought to dispense with referential truth claims about specific individuals. Stories that were both plausible and received as narratives about purely imaginary individuals—a category with which all nineteenth-century European publics would be thoroughly comfortable and familiar—were still exceedingly rare in the first quarter of the eighteenth century.

Two things were lacking: (1) a *conceptual category* of fiction, and (2) believable stories that did not solicit belief. Novels supplied both of these simultaneously, which explains their paradoxical relation to fiction. Fictionality only became visible when it became credible, because it only needed conceptualizing as the difference between fictions and lies became less obvious, as the operators of fictionality became multiple and incredibility lost its uniqueness. It gained a discourse of its own as it became less blatant, less likely to discover itself: the less overt it seemed, the more it had to emerge into conceptual prominence. Because the novel defined itself against the scandalous libel, it used fiction as the diacritical mark of its differentiation, requiring that the concept of fiction take on greater clarity and definition. However, since the definition included plausibility, the history of *fiction* seems simultaneously to trace a movement from greater to lesser visibility. As the novel distinguished itself through fictionality, its fictionality also differentiated itself from previous incredible forms. Hence we have another way of imagining the paradox: the novel slowly opens the conceptual space of fictionality in the process of seeming to narrow its practice.

The discursive shifts leading up to the English novel's discovery of fiction through probable narration have received considerable scholarly attention in recent decades, so we now have multiple explanations for what used to be called "the rise of the novel." Whereas an older generation of literary critics had taken fiction for granted as a transhistorical constant and viewed the novel's achievement as the addition of realism, more recent scholars have correlated the simultaneous appearance of fictionality and the novel. Lennard Davis, for example, argues that the novel developed out of what he calls the "news-novel matrix"—a tangled mass of journalism, scandal, and political and religious controversy. He points out that in order to avoid prosecution, writers like Delarivier Manley turned increasingly to the alibi of fiction, bringing the idea into sharper focus and greater respectability (Davis 1983). Despite their own bad faith in appealing to the category, they nevertheless helped install it as an innocent alternative to libelous referential stories. Even the scandalous impulses of such allegories propelled them toward increasingly more elaborate and credible settings and narratives, which could be enjoyed for their own sakes without reference to the persons satirized. No matter how insincerely invoked, therefore, the fiction alibi was connected to the vivacity and detailed complexity of the story world (Gallagher 1994). Michael McKeon, to take another example, studies a development internal to the genre of romance that eventually expanded the idea of truth to include verisimilitude. The movement from romance to novel, he demonstrates, is part of a larger epistemological shift from a narrow construction of truth as historical accuracy to a more capacious understanding that could include truth conceived as mimetic simulation. The widespread acceptance of verisimilitude as a form of truth, rather than a form of lying, founded the novel as a genre (McKeon 2002). It also created the category of fiction.

Before looking at the wider social forces surrounding these discursive processes, we should pause here to notice how limited and specific the *nonreferentiality* of credible fiction was imagined to be at this stage. The global suspension of truth claims touted by Sir Philip Sidney that would make lying impossible was not yet a licensed move in the language game of the novel. Some idea of truth seems to have ruled this discourse of credible fiction, leading historians to see the eighteenth-century novel as still partially shackled by outmoded criteria. To get a clear view of the early novel's contradictory relation to fiction, we have to know exactly what form of reference it renounced and what corollary sort it embraced. Then we can see how the ban on one type of reference made another type necessary and how probability itself was rediscovered as a sign of the fictional.

The key mode of nonreferentiality in the novel was, and still is, that of proper names. Different as their tactics were, Daniel Defoe, Delarivier Manley, and even the idealizing romancers of the seventeenth century were all making moves in a previous language game that assumed a correspondence between a proper name in a believable narrative and an embodied individual in the world. Hence Defoe asserted the existence of such an individual, whether actually named "Robinson Crusoe" or allegorically referred to by that name, and Manley's style covertly made the same assertion. A cluster of midcentury novels, however, articulated a new assumption for a new form: novels are about nobody in particular. That is, the proper names do not take specific individuals as their referents, and hence none of the specific assertions made about them can be verified or falsified.

Henry Fielding's narrator in *Joseph Andrews* (1742) explicates the superiority of the new dispensation and its virtues, remonstrating that he describes "not men, but manners; not an individual, but a species." His characterizations are not intended "to expose one pitiful wretch to the small and contemptible circle of his acquaintance; but to hold the glass to thousands in their closets that they may contemplate their deformity, and endeavor to reduce it, and thus by suffering private mortification may avoid public shame. This places the boundary between, and distinguishes the satirist from the libeler: for the former privately corrects faults for the benefit of the person, like a parent; the latter publicly exposes the person himself, as an example to others, like an executioner" (Fielding 1967: 189). Making it clear that the new form (Fielding called it "the comic epic in prose") must be distinguished from what had previously been called the novel (scandalous productions like Delarivier Manley's), this narrator insists that the distinction is based on the renunciation of "malicious application" or personal reference. At stake, as he notes, is the charge of libel, but he doesn't simply declare the immunity of his own work from prosecution. He goes on to proclaim the greater humanity and ambition of this new form: it can refer to a whole class of people in general (as well as in private) because its proper names do not refer to persons in particular.

The founding claim of the form, therefore, was a nonreferentiality that could be seen as a greater referentiality. What distinguished the new writers from libelers was the insistence that the human referent of the text was a generalization about and not an extratextual, embodied instance of a "species." Certainly the novel provided imaginary instances, but it renounced reference to individual examples in the world. The fictionality defining the novel inhered in the *creation* of instances, rather than their mere selection, to illustrate a class of persons. Because a general referent was indicated through a particular, but explicitly nonreferential, fictional individual, the novel could be judged generally true even though all of its particulars are merely imaginary. The claims to truth and fiction were not in contradiction with each other; practitioners understood that the novel's general applicability depended on the overt fictitiousness of its particulars, since taking examples from among real people would only confuse the issue of reference. Because they had dispensed with the individual referents, the novelists' characterizations could only have referential value by pointing to what Fielding calls a "species."

Fielding and his peers rarely stressed the novelty of this mode of reference. Instead, they pointed to Manley and her ilk as degenerate moderns and harked back to Aristotle as the classical founding theorist of their own practice. Invoking the *Poetics* gave them not only a thoroughly respectable pedigree but also a ready-made equation between the probable and the fictive:

> From what has been said it is clear too that the poet's job is not to tell what has happened but the kind of things that *can* happen, i.e., the kind of events

> that are possible according to probability or necessity. For the difference between the historian and the poet is not in their presenting accounts that are versified or not versified . . . ; rather, the difference is this: the one tells what has happened, the other the kind of things that can happen. And in fact that is why the writing of poetry is a more philosophical activity, and one to be taken more seriously, than the writing of history. For poetry tells us rather the universals, history the particulars. "Universal" means what kinds of thing a certain kind of person will say or do in accordance with probability or necessity, which is what poetic composition aims at, tacking on names afterward. (*Poetics*, ch. 9 [Else 1967: 301–2])

Aristotle also explicitly links the probability of the fable to the nonreferentiality of its proper names in one of his scattered remarks about comedy. Claiming that the nonparticularity of comic imitation is "obvious," he explains, "Now in the case of comedy this has become clear; for they construct the plot with the use of probabilities, then (and not until then) assign whatever names occur to them, rather than composing their work about a particular individual as the 'iambic' poets do" (*Poetics*, ch. 9). Reasserting Aristotle's point, midcentury novelists stressed that probability was a sign of fictionality as well as a mode of reference; it was designed to switch off the personal reference of proper names.

Of course, the elaboration of this theory ran into immediate difficulties. To begin with, novelistic personae, even when invented on purpose to exemplify classes of persons, quickly proved too specific to cover all the cases in a "species." The excessive and irrelevant detail of any individualized instance tended to obscure the view of its supposed class, and consequently mideighteenth-century authors entered into numerous disputes over how typical a character's behavior needed to be before it could be judged "probable." Samuel Richardson, replying to the Swiss writer Albrecht von Haller, for example, defended his character Lovelace against charges of improbably detestable behavior by giving details from the novel about the specific circumstances in which Lovelace operated. The exchange between von Haller and Richardson reveals what Robert Newsom calls the "antinomy of fictional probability":

> von Haller drew evidence from the real world, and Richardson responded with evidence from the novel; the evidence of the real world functions to determine the probabilities associated with the set of young men to which Lovelace belongs . . . while Richardson's evidence particularizes the individual case and so defines precisely which set Lovelace belongs to. . . .

> Inevitably the set of "real" young men becomes a set with only one member and the question ultimately posed is the circular one: How probable is it that a young man exactly like Lovelace would behave exactly like Lovelace? (Newsom 1994: 92–93)

Richardson, that is, preserves Lovelace's probability by reducing his referential scope to almost nothing. The problem of individuation continued to complicate the claims of fictionality, as we will see when we take up the issue of proper names in greater detail. Let us note for now that novelists signaled the nonparticular referential status of their characters in a seemingly converse way: by naming them "in exactly the same way as particular individuals are named in ordinary life" (Watt 1971: 18). Given that, to quote Thomas Hobbes, "a Proper Name bringeth to mind one thing only; Universals recall anyone of many" (Hobbes 1964: 16), ascribing ordinary English proper names, such as "Tom Jones" or "Pamela Andrews," is a topsy-turvy way of referring to a type. But these paradoxes only made it all the more necessary for novelists to explain and defend what they were up to.

In England, between the time when Defoe insisted that Robinson Crusoe was a real individual (1720) and the time when Henry Fielding urged just as strenuously that his characters were not representations of actual specific people (1742), a discourse of fictionality appeared in and around the novel, specifying new rules for its identification and new modes of nonreference. And it is on the basis of this overt and articulated understanding that the novel may be said to have discovered fiction. What Fielding had that Defoe lacked was not an excuse for fictionality but a use for it as a special way of shaping knowledge through the fabrication of particulars. Later in the century, disclaimers like Fielding's were no longer necessary, for the public had been trained to read novels as stories about thoroughly imaginary (if representative) people, names without singular, specific referents in the world. The transformation might have begun earlier and been completed later in France, which had a lengthy and highly sophisticated discourse of the *vraisemblable* to explain the manner of reference found in courtly romances but only slowly developed a comparable conceptualization of the commonplace and quotidian fictions found in novels. Madame de Lafayette has been credited with the presentation of characters intended and received as fully fictional in *La princesse de Clèves* (1678), and yet Diderot's friend, the Marquis de Croismare, found it difficult to conceive of the nature of *La Religieuse* (1796) not only because he was being purposely deceived but also because the story seemed too plausible and realistically rendered to have been invented. In his world of discourse, probability was not yet an indicator of fiction. Fictionality seems to have been but faintly understood in the infant United States at the end of the eighteenth century, for the work that is often identified as the first American novel, *The Power of Sympathy* (1789), is actually an instance of the earlier *chronique scandeleuse* form. In Spain, Cervantes pioneered the art of writing about nobody in the seventeenth century, but the form of the novel did not undergo a continuous development there.

As the example of *Don Quixote* demonstrates, there were novels before the eighteenth century, and as the citations of Aristotle and Sir Philip Sidney indicate, the components for an understanding of fictionality were also available. And yet, these did not gel into either a common knowledge of the concept or a sustained and durable novelistic practice until they coincided in the eighteenth-century English novel. All the elements, we might say, were present in several other times and places, but apparently no strong need prompted their assembly. What was it about England in the early eighteenth century that provided that cultural imperative? England's early secularism, scientific enlightenment, empiricism, capitalism, materialism, national consolidation, and the rise of the middle class have all been named as constituents of the general background against which the novel emerged. These have, though, usually been associated with what Ian Watt called "formal realism." England, the story goes, developed a middle-class readership earlier than other countries, and the middle class wanted to read about itself, to have the world described in elaborate circumstantial detail, as well as to imagine the simultaneous existence of others in far-flung parts of the nation (Anderson 1991: 22–36). As practical and materialistic readers, it continues, they rejected fantasy for probability and preferred the familiar to the exotic. This story thus explains, not the discovery of fiction, but its subordination to the reality principle, assuming that fiction was already an established and recognized thing that only needed to be brought down to earth by middle-class cultural hegemony.

We have just been observing, though, that early novels stressed their departure from plausible narratives with referential assumptions, not from improbable fantasies. In their competition for discursive space, they emphasized not their realism but their fictionality, so we seek some indication of what it was about early modernity in the first capitalist nation that propagated not just *realist* fiction but realist *fiction*. What is the modernity-fictionality connection? Answering this question should also help us to specify more clearly the *disposition* of novelistic fictionality, to explore what it means to read a narrative as credible while thinking it affirms nothing.

Modernity is fiction-friendly because it encourages disbelief, speculation, and credit. The early novel's thematic emphases on gullibility, innocence deceived, rash promises extracted, and impetuous emotional and financial investments of all kinds point to the habit of mind it discourages: faith. The reckless wholeheartedness of its heroes and heroines, their guileless vulnerability, solicits our affectionate concern and thereby activates our skepticism on their behalf. Hence, while sympathizing with innocent credulity, the reader is trained in an attitude of disbelief, which is flattered as superior discernment. The readers of these early novels were encouraged to anticipate problems, make suppositional predictions, and see possible outcomes and alternative interpretations. In short, the reader, unlike the character, occupies the lofty position of one who speculates on the action, entertaining various hypotheses about it. These thematically triggered reactions coincide with and magnify the more abstract formal demand that early fiction writers placed on their readers: asking them to take the reality of the story itself as a kind of suppositional speculation. They did not, to be sure, expect their readers to preface each sentence mentally with the illocutionary reservation, "the reader will suppose that. . . ," but by explaining that his characters are not to be taken for specific individuals, Fielding, for example, dispenses with the requirement that readers believe the story. In fact, he actively discourages it. Belief is replaced with what one theorist calls "ironic credulity" (Martinez-Bonati 1981: 35). Novels seek to suspend the reader's disbelief, as an element is suspended in a solution that it thoroughly permeates. Disbelief is thus the condition of fictionality, prompting judgments, not about the story's reality, but about its *believability*, its plausibility.

Novels promoted a disposition of ironic credulity enabled by optimistic incredulity; one is dissuaded from believing the literal truth of a representation so that one can instead admire its likelihood and extend enough credit to buy into the game. Such flexible mental states were the sine qua non of modern subjectivity. Everyone seemed to benefit from them. For example, they may have eased the way into the modern affective family. Since marriageable young people were given somewhat greater freedom of choice starting in the eighteenth century, and were also expected to have a genuine emotional attachment to their spouses, some form of affective speculation became necessary. Women especially would need to be able to imagine what it would be like to love a particular man without committing themselves, for loving a man before he had proposed was still considered highly improper. As in courtship, so also in commerce. One thinks immediately of merchants and insurers calculating risks, or of investors extending credit on small collateral and reasoning that the greater the risk the higher the profit, but no enterprise could prosper without some degree of imaginative play. The same suspension of literal truth claims helped even common people to accept paper money: too wise to believe that the treasury held enough specie to cover all of their paper at once, they instead understood that the credit they advanced collectively obviated the need to hoard precious metals privately. So the government, too, relied on the imaginative sophistication of its people and financed a vast military and imperial enterprise by selling national debt bonds. The spirit of "ironic" assent thus became a universal requirement. Indeed, almost all of the developments we associate with modernity—from greater religious toleration to scientific discovery—required the kind of cognitive provisionality one practices in reading fiction, a competence in investing contingent and temporary credit. One telling acknowledgment of the benefits of such mental states was the increasing use of the word *fiction* to mean, "a supposition known to be at variance with fact, but conventionally accepted for some reason of practical convenience, conformity with traditional usage, decorum, or the like," as in "legal fiction."

Expedient "fictionality" of this sort thus suffused itself throughout daily life in eighteenth-century England. But this is not to claim that the novel was just one suppositional exercise among many, for novelistic fiction had a special relation to provisionality. Whereas other forms of speculation were supposed to have practical ends—smoother economic circulation or happier marriages—novelistic fiction had no commonly agreed-upon aim, except pleasure. The other kinds of provisionality were necessary to social life; the novel seemed a voluntary luxury. There were no apparent stakes in reading a novel; one did not risk one's own heart or fortune in sympathizing with the adventures of purely imaginary beings. And when one closed the book, the emotions it generated were thought to be dispelled. In short, the novel provided its readers a seemingly free space in which to temporarily indulge imaginative play. As Coleridge would put it at the beginning of the nineteenth century, fiction solicits a *willing* suspension of disbelief, and this sensation of individual control over disbelief set novel reading apart from those mandatory suppositional acts that required the constant maintenance of active skepticism. Detaching incredulity from the guarded wariness that normally accompanies it, one could use it as an protective enclosure that would cordon off imaginary yielding from any dangerous consequences.

To be sure, the enjoyment originally willed might eventually overpower the reader and override the sense of control that the form seemed to promise. Indeed, eighteenth-century commentators and satirists routinely accused the genre of seducing its readers into imaginary experiences that were remarkably hard to exit. Coleridge, following on the heels of these critics and turning much of their censure into praise, addresses this presumed interference with volition:

> It is laxly said that during sleep we take our dreams for realities, but this is irreconcilable with the nature of sleep, which consists in a suspension of the voluntary and, therefore, of the comparative power. The fact is that we pass no judgment either way: we simply do not judge them to be real, in consequence of which the images act on our minds, as far as they act at all, by their own force as images. Our state while we are dreaming differs from that in which we are in the perusal of a deeply interesting novel in the degree rather than in the kind. (Coleridge 1960: 116)

Coleridge acknowledges that absorption in a novel is inimical to the very thing he had elsewhere aligned with fiction: willing. The will, which would allow a comparison of illusion and reality, is here said to be suspended, just as disbelief is said to be willingly suspended in the more famous formulation. We might infer that will, like disbelief, is still present under erasure, but even if we forgo this interpretation, we must note that the impairment of control has not, in Coleridge's view, led to a confusion of ontological levels. He is explicitly refuting the opinion that aesthetic receptivity encourages mistaken beliefs by arguing that the more engrossed we are in a novel, the more impossible it is to *believe* it, since we have lost the very capacity to believe anything. Belief, for Coleridge, is a judgment, and judgments cannot be made without will, so all that can be said about the cognitive status of a novel's representations when they are at their most powerful is, "we simply do not judge them to be real." Lack of belief thus always surrounds the novelistic experience, even when the suspension of disbelief can no longer be said to be willing. The element of will, meanwhile, although disabled at the psychological level, persists in the ontological status of the experience; reading a novel, like sleeping, is a controlled situation within which one needn't exercise control.

Pleasure, on this account, would partly arise from the ability to choose a state—suspended disbelief—that could then be experienced in a passive mode without risk. The volition in the initial act eliminates the traces of suspicion or calculation that would normally attach to "disbelief," causing a state of heightened receptivity to the images. This self-induced susceptibility in turn permits a more intense engagement with the fiction. Knowingly reading a novel, therefore, does not involve the continuous activity of negating its objective correspondence to reality. Quite the opposite: the knowingness conducts the reader to a greater responsiveness and more vivid perception, until one becomes, at moments of keenest involvement, too interested to care about the status of the experienced beings. Willingly entering the language game of fiction, as some theorists would now say, consequently enables a psychological state of ontological indifference, a temporary disregard for the fictional conditions of the pleasurable sensation.

Coleridge's remarks thus allow us to see how pleasure was thought to color the fictional disposition of the novel reader, who not only supposed but also supposed in a manner so intense and lively that she was no longer supposing but rather fictionally experiencing. She had the enjoyment of deep immersion in illusion *because* she was protected from delusion by the voluntary framework of disbelief. This enjoyment, moreover, disposed her to renew the fictional encounter when the next opportunity arose, even though there was no tangible profit or practical advantage in the activity.

Coleridge's observation takes us back to our opening paradox. The novel gives us explicit fiction and simultaneously seems to occlude it; the novel reader opens what she knows is a fiction because it is a fiction and soon finds that enabling knowledge to be the subtlest of the experience's elements. Just as it declares itself, it becomes that which goes without saying. Having traced the historical appearance of this paradox in order to see that it *is* a paradox and not just a flat contradiction or a pair of irreconcilable statements, I want now to probe more deeply into its workings in what I have already said is the novel's main form of nonreferentiality: the lack of individual, specific and embodied referents for the characters' proper names.

Fictional characters have had a bad reputation ever since Nietzsche blamed them for the decline of myth and dionysiac music in Greek drama: "Character [from Sophocles onward] must no longer be broadened so as to become a permanent type, but must be so finely individualized, by means of shading and nuances and the strict delineation of every trait, that the spectator ceases to be aware of myth at all and comes to focus on the amazing lifelikeness of the characters and the artist's power of imitation. Here, once again, we see the victory of the particular over the general." (Nietzsche 1956: 106). Walter Benjamin, following in Nietzsche's footsteps, also assailed the individuation of character, although he placed it, to be sure, in a much later period and genre, the nineteenth-century bourgeois novel. Indeed, modernists of all sorts, but especially novelists themselves, expressed a similar distaste for the carefully differentiated and minutely rendered characters of realism, devoting considerable formal ingenuity to overcoming the insufferable impression of personality that such characters are prone to make. From an altogether different perspective, Bertrand Russell, as we will see, famously claimed that all statements about them must be false and thereby touched off a long philosophical debate on the referential status of propositions about fictional entities. So when certain structuralist narratologists later began minimalizing the importance of characters and exposing their ideological import ("the 'character-person' reigns in the bourgeois novel," Roland Barthes hisses in *S/Z* (Barthes 1974: 456)), they were joining an already long tradition.

On the other side of this abuse, of course, lies the imagined cathexis: the reader's involvement in the dominant modern form of fiction has generally been thought to come about through some sort of psychic investment in, or even identification with, the characters. The fact has no doubt been taken for granted and endorsed by most critics, readers, and novelists, leading other commentators to claim that the novel encourages naive essentialism. Hence their embarrassment and the zeal in putting down the error of confusing fictional characters with persons. "The character," writes Barthes disapprovingly, "became an individual, a 'person,' in short a fully constituted 'being,' even should he do nothing and of course even before acting. Characters stopped being subordinate to the action, embodied immediately psychological essences" (Barthes 1977: 104–5). The abhorrence of essentialism was twinned with a suspicion that novel readers confuse fictional characters with real persons. Correlatively, such critics have implied that our knowledge of ontological lack would interfere with this mistaken process of identification, so structuralist demystifiers have been eager to state the obvious: "le personnage . . . n'est personne" (Grivel 1973: 113).

But far from being news, the idea that "le personnage . . . n'est *personne*" is endemic to the form of the novel. As Deidre Lynch, for example, has shown, the eighteenth-century British novel—which first established the frank fictionality that would later become normal in other literatures as well—played with the absurdity of narrating the adventures of nonexistent persons, often facetiously indicating the origins of the character-person in the "character" as a printed letter (Lynch 1998: 80–122). And, in order to distinguish themselves from romances, early novels gave us numerous Quixotic characters to laugh at for confusing textual with actual people. Early novels thus simultaneously mocked their predecessors and thumbed their noses at the many eighteenth-century critics, who, like modern ones, frequently imagined that to care for fictional personae was to mistake them for real persons. Authors sometimes did regret their readers' extraordinary readiness to sympathize with characters and warned that they might not have sufficient emotional energy to care for their actual fellow creatures if they spent it all on "the imaginary distress[es] of . . . heroine[s]," as one eighteenth-century critic put it (Taylor 1943: 53); some of them even attempted to diminish the affective response by periodically interrupting the narrative (Gallagher 1994: 273–88). But as the eighteenth century wore on and fictionality became commonly understood, writers no longer thought that sentimental readers were confused about the ontological status of characters, as earlier naive readers might have been. Instead, they tended to notice that the characters' very fictiveness had a strong emotional appeal.

That apparent paradox—that readers attach themselves to characters because of, not despite, their fictionality—was acknowledged and discussed by eighteenth-century writers. As I have already mentioned, they noticed that the fictional framework established a protected affective enclosure that encouraged risk-free emotional investment. Fictional characters, moreover, were thought to be easier to sympathize or identify with than most real people. Although readers were often called to be privileged and superior witnesses of protagonists' follies, they were also expected to imagine themselves as the characters. "All joy or sorrow for the happiness or calamities of others," Samuel Johnson explained, "is produced by an act of the imagination, that realizes the event however fictitious . . . by placing us, for a time, in the condition of him whose fortune we contemplate" (Johnson 1750). What seemed to make novelistic "others" outstanding candidates for such realizations was the fact that, especially in contradistinction to the figures who pointedly referred to actual individuals, they were enticingly unoccupied. Because they were haunted by no shadow of another person who might take priority over the reader as a "real" referent, anyone might appropriate them. No reader would have to grapple with the knowledge of some real-world double or contract an accidental feeling about any actual person by making the temporary identification. Moreover, unlike the personae of tragedy or legend, novelistic characters tended to be commoners, who would fall beneath the notice of history proper, and so they tended to carry little extratextual baggage. As we have noticed, they did carry the burden of the type, what Henry Fielding called the "species," which he thought was a turntable for aiming reference back at the reader; a fictional "he" or "she" should really be taken to mean "you." But in the case of many novel characters, even the "type" was generally minimized by the requirement that the character escape from the categorical in the process of individuation. The fact that "le personnage . . . n'est personne" was thought to be precisely what made him or her magnetic.

Some recent critics are reviving this understanding and venturing to propose that we, like our eighteenth-century predecessors, feel things for characters not *despite* our awareness of their fictionality but *because of* it. Consequently, we cannot be dissuaded from identifying with them by reminders of their nonexistence. We have plenty of those, and they configure our emotional responses in ways unique to fiction, but they do not diminish our feeling. We already know, moreover, that all of our fictional emotions are by their nature excessive because they are emotions about nobody, and yet the knowledge does not reform us. Our imagination of characters is, in this sense, absurd and (perhaps) legitimately embarrassing, but it is also constitutive of the genre, and it requires more explanation than the eighteenth-century commentators were able to provide.

Consequently, I will turn now to the twentieth-century theories that might take us beyond identification as a source of emotional response. Paradoxically, given their general hostility to the "ideology" of character, structuralist and poststructuralist writers have provided important clues to the persistence of emotional response. Although their corrective reductions of characters to actants and their discoveries of mere textuality may now seem naive in their own way, they also usefully focused attention on characters as textual effects and thereby yielded many of our most detailed accounts of the techniques of novelistic characterization. Even the more recent new historicist work (Hunter 1983; Lynch 1998) is indebted to these studies, for by repeatedly lifting the veil on the fictional apparatus, they have given us a much clearer view of the machinery.

To them we owe, for example, a long-running discussion of the structure and function of the proper name in the novel. The modern novel, it is widely acknowledged, begins with the ascription of names that conform to the "morphophonology" of those in the everyday social world (Nicole 1983: 239). As opposed to the outlandish names of characters in romances, "Tom Jones," "Clarissa Harlow," and "Pamela Andrews" sound like contemporary English names. This phonological normality is a convention alerting the reader to the fact that the name refers to nobody in particular, to a fictional entity, for individual reference at the time was normally signaled either through initials and blanks ("H——l——x" for Halifax, or "S——le" for Steele) or by pseudonyms that often referred to the moral qualities of persons. The connotations of such pseudonyms distinguished them from the usual semantics of proper names, which, as John Stuart Mill pointed out, suppress connotation in their function of denoting individuals. To be sure, names also carry quite a bit of information in social life; they are associated with region, gender, ethnic group, class status, even (in the case of given names) social ambitions, as well as family history; they generally, that is, contain the social coordinates of individual identity, but we still do not decipher them as emblems of inner essence. This is consistent with their largely denotative function, and novelistic names tend to follow the same pattern. "Tom Jones," for example, is an assertively plebeian English name that is otherwise remarkable for the very small amount of background information it provides. *Don Quixote* begins when the protagonist resolves to escape his mundane identity by rechristening himself, exchanging his family name, about which the narrator is humorously uncertain, for "Don Quixote," which is a bumbling attempt to indicate his knighthood. Cervantes thus introduces the difference between the novel, with its fictional nobodies, and the romance, with its exemplary individuals, as, first of all, a matter of names.

But unlike natural names, novelistic ones also seem motivated, when first encountered, by the author's intention to produce characters; names are at first promises of characters, and their anaphoric repetition marks the primary textual sites where we expect personages to emerge (Nicole 1983: 236). As Roland Barthes puts it, "When identical semes traverse the same proper name several times and appear to settle upon it, a character is created" (Barthes 1974: 67). In most realist novels, these repetitions organize the syntax of the entire work, as subjects organize the syntax of sentences, and thus seem to be employed as if they referred to prior entities. But because we are novel readers, we understand that the givenness of the character is a convention and that the text's proper names only refer to what they (with the active participation of the knowing reader) are simultaneously creating. We do, therefore, put more interpretive pressure on proper names in novels than we do in life, for we take them as intentional cues to different modes of reading. In Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*, for example, the character named "Rogue Riderhood" generates no expectation of incipient quasi-subjectivity; we take its bearer to be a mere functionary of the plot because his name already reveals everything about his "character." In contrast, although there is considerable plot business surrounding the name of the initially anonymous protagonist of the same novel, the promise of subjectivity is carried by the conspicuously bland pseudonym he adopts, "John Rokesmith." And although the "real" name that finally carries his destiny—"John Harmon"—resonates with multiple associations, we never read it as his summation. Because we are conscious of their fictionality, novelistic names not only help us to sort characters into major and minor, round and flat, serious and comic but also prompt us to begin—or not to begin—the intense imaginative activity of reading character.

Before speculating further on the nature of that activity and its peculiar emotional effects, I want to turn to another discourse about fictional character: British analytical philosophy. If structuralists wanted to expose the ideology of character by specifying the literary techniques of its construction, analytical philosophers at first approached the issue as a problem for referential theories of language. Devoid of any interest in the novel for its own sake, their analyses focused on "the well known paradoxes involved in the notion of a nonreal or nonexistent object" of discourse (Martinez-Bonati 1981: 153). Early in the century, Bertrand Russell, trying to make language safe for science, declared propositions about fictional entities to be false; he therefore implicitly denied Sir Philip Sidney's defense of imaginative texts, which "nothing affirmeth, and therefore never lieth." Russell, in contradistinction, maintained that such sentences as "Mr. Pickwick is wise," could be exposed as false by translating them into their logical structure: "There exists one and only one entity such that the entity is Mr. Pickwick and whatever is Mr. Pickwick is wise." Since the first part of the conjunction, which asserts the existence of Mr. Pickwick, is false, the entire statement is, and this analysis could, of course, be repeated for every proposition about Mr. Pickwick and, cumulatively, for *The Pickwick Papers* (Pavel 1986: 14). Other analytical philosophers, who were less comfortable with the attribution of truth values to propositions about fictional entities, disagreed: P. F. Strawson maintained that such statements are spurious (illegitimate) rather than false, and Gilbert Ryle argued that the proper name "Mr. Pickwick" is a pseudo-designation, not a real one: "When Dickens says 'Mr. Pickwick wore knee-breeches,' the proper name seems to designate someone; but if no one was called 'Mr. Pickwick,' then the proposition can't be true or false of the man called Mr. Pickwick. For there was no one so called. And then the proposition is not really about someone" (Ryle 1933: 35). Although far less elegantly put, Ryle's opinion echoes Sidney's, returning us to the time-honored distinction between fictions and falsehoods without contributing anything new.

But analytical philosophers had not yet finished with fictional character. One branch of their inquiry grew out of work on modal semantics, involving counterfactuals and possible worlds, which seemed to solve some of the logical problems entailed in referring to nonexistent entities. Saul Kripke's statement that "Sherlock Holmes doesn't exist, but in other states of affairs he would have existed" (Pavel 1986: 45) helped launch a vigorous debate about the ways in which fictional characters might resemble the inhabitants of logically possible worlds. Theorists who elaborated the similarities between fictional and possible worlds sometimes also linked their ideas to Aristotle's notion of probability (Pavel 1986: 45; Wollsterstorff 1980: 134–58), but generally the concept of possibility in this tradition of thought referred only to logical possibility. Elaborating a possible-worlds approach to fiction, Thomas Pavel claimed that, like the names of beings in counterfactual statements, characters' names are rigid designators specifying only one entity who retains his or her essential qualities (parentage for Kripke) across all possible worlds in which he or she exists, although his or her accidental features may vary greatly. Although theoretically convenient for a philosophical tradition bent on reference, such creatures and their worlds proved less useful to practicing critics, and the possible-worlds account of fictionality has now been superseded. I mention it here mainly because discussions of the dissimilarities between possible and fictional worlds underscore certain features of characters that can help us understand their emotional appeal.

In the first place, analytical philosophers needed to be reminded of the very feature that was the starting point for many narratologists and poststructuralists: textuality. Characters are not ontologically different because they inhabit possible, rather than actual, worlds to which novels merely refer; they are different because they are "constructs of textual activity" (Dolozel 1988: 488). Such reminders nudged even those working inside the analytical tradition closer to the formal and stylistic concerns that had preoccupied narratologists. Moreover, the explanation of fictionality that is now dominant among analytical philosophers had a similar effect. John Searle's speech-act account marked a departure for analytical philosophy by focusing attention on "the linguistic attitude of the speaker" (Pavel 1986: 20). Instead of making what Searle calls a "serious" illocutionary act of assertion, the writer of a fiction merely pretends to perform such acts (Searle 1979: 65). Thus Dickens would only be pretending to make statements about Mr. Pickwick, who would be not an entity in a possible world or a bundle of features selected by Dickens from the set of possible features (Wollsterstorff 1980) but instead the imaginary product of these pretended assertions: "by pretending to refer to people and to recount events about them, the author creates fictional characters and events" (Searle 1979: 73). Proper names, Searle notes, are "paradigm referring expression[s]," so in using them, he maintains, novelists must be miming the speech act of referring. Various conventional markers lead communities of readers to recognize the pretended nature of these references, the serious import of which is the textual *creation* of a character. Searle thus helped move the discussion from the problem of reference ("One of the conditions of the successful performance of the speech act of reference is that there must exist an object that the speaker is referring to" [71]) to the more promising literary-critical concern of "how far the horizontal conventions of fiction break the vertical connections of serious speech" (73).

Certainly Searle's formulations have been vulnerable to a host of objections: his contentions that fictional uses of language are, in J. L. Austin's word, "parasitic" on serious uses (Derrida 1982); that the author is "pretending" to do something other than write a novel (Martinez-Bonati 1980); that proper names are necessarily "referring expressions" (Rorty 1983); and that "there is no textual property, syntactic or semantic, that will identify a text as a work of fiction" (Cohn 1999; Banfield 1982) have all been met by formidable challenges. Searle's approach has, however, brought analytical philosophers within talking distance of narratologists (Genette 1990), and has stimulated (or provoked) further specification of the distinctive textual indexes of fictionality. Some of these bear directly on our inquiry into the affective appeal of the novelistic nonentity.

In third-person narratives, according to several theorists, the distinctive sign of fictionality appears when the narrator depicts the subjectivity, or consciousness, of a character. Narratorial omniscience, indirect discourse about the mental states of characters, and representations of interior monologues, for example, all portray the "intimate subjective experiences of . . . characters, the here and now of their lives to which no real observer could ever accede in real life" (Cohn 1999: 24). These modes of access to the inner life are recognizable signs that an imaginary persona is in the making (Cohn 1990, 1999; Banfield 1982; Hamburger 1973; McCormick 1988). Unlike represented persons in autobiography, biography, or history, novelistic characters seem already penetrated in the very act of their construal. *Pace* Searle, several influential theorists maintain that the maximal interpenetration of the narrator's discourse with the character's subjective experience in the free indirect style displays grammatical (not just representational) characteristics unique to fiction (Cohn 1990, 1999; Banfield 1982; Hamburger 1973). Ann Banfield's work, in particular, supports the thesis that the novel discloses rather than conceals fictionality when she demonstrates that the grammatical markers signifying writtenness and fictionality appear only with the rise of the European novel (225–53). In other words, competent readers understand that the seemingly intimate revelations of the character's depths are also revelations of its textual nature.

Characters' peculiar affective force, I propose, is generated by the mutual implication of their unreal knowability and their apparent depth, the link between their real nonexistence and the reader's experience of them as deeply and impossibly familiar. Because we know their accessibility means fictionality, we are inclined to surrender to the other side of their double impact: their seductive familiarity, immediacy, and intimacy. Their permeability intensifies the sense of unprecedented representational thoroughness that creates what has been called the "character-effect" (Bal 1997), the impression, understood as illusion, of a preexisting creature with multiple levels of existence, a surface and recesses, an exterior and interior. We seem to encounter something with the layers of a person but without the usual epistemological constraints on our knowledge. The character is thus what Jeremy Bentham, in "A Fragment on Ontology," called an "imaginary nonentity," for its *nonexistence* sustains its effect on reality, that is to say, its effect on the reader. If such a person did exist, the usual boundary of personhood would be in place, and the reality created by the fiction would disintegrate. Then there would be no inviting openness, which is always, to some extent, pathetic, and we would not be able to enter represented subjectivity while subliminally understanding that we are, as readers, its actualizers, its conditions of being, the only minds who undergo these experiences.

In short, the attraction grows less out of a sense of identification than out of the ontological contrast the character provides. The character's very knowability, as D. A. Miller has remarked, produces a subtle sense of relief when we reflect on our own comparative unfathomability (Miller 1988: 200–220). The character's appeal, we might say, thus resembles that of Freud's fetish, because the efficacy of both resides in their imaginary status, in the powerful combination of their contrast with and their similarity to other entities. Both the character and the fetish reassure their knowing users that those other things are real.

All of this pertains most fully, but not exclusively, to novels with third-person omniscient narrators in the realist mode. Novels with first-person narrators reveal their fictionality primarily through the techniques that indicate the difference between the narrator and an implied author, their manifestation of what Dorrit Cohn calls "the duplicate vocal origin of fiction" (Cohn 1999: 125). Homodiegetic and intradiegetic narrators, however, must sustain the illusion of the opacity of the characters surrounding them, and such narrators are consequently excellent vehicles for the epistemological uncertainty that modernists were anxious to produce (Bal 1997: 117). Proust's narrator can never really know Albertine; Marlowe can never penetrate Kurtz. In these cases, sharing the narrator-character's doomed hermeneutic struggle, often read as an allegory of reading, gives rise to an even more intense sense of the fictionality of such intimacy as well as a melancholy recognition of its discontents. For the technique contrasting the insistent display of subjectivity in the narrator and its occlusion in the character who is the object of desire ensures that the reader's desire, too, is always directed beyond identification.

The differential accessibility or knowability of character is only one feature inviting cathexis with ontological difference. Another, seemingly paradoxical, pair of features is closely related and shared by all novel characters regardless of the mode of narration: they are at once utterly finished and also necessarily incomplete. Philosopher Peter McCormick describes the first of these: “fictional characters are surprisingly exhaustible as objects of knowledge since, unlike material objects, they lack the infinity of ever receding perceptual horizons and, unlike self-conscious entities, they lack the inexorable privacy of ever changing varieties of mental states” (McCormick 1988: 240). McCormick’s description of the ease and utter regularity with which characters are decoded from texts marks his description as philosophical rather than literary-critical, but the general claim remains helpful. Despite representational tactics that give the impression of layers and plenitude, characters are “peculiarly delimited” as textual beings. Persons, even dead persons, can more accurately be said to be inexhaustible. No matter how many times we reread *Anna Karenina*, there will never be more to learn about, say, the childhoods of the heroine and her brother. The proper name “Anna Karenina” is made up of a finite set of sentences no matter how much more insightful, mature, or knowledgeable our reading becomes, no matter how much more skillfully we analyze that text or how much more ruthlessly we deconstruct it. The text may be hermeneutically inexhaustible and labile; it may be indeterminate and inconstant, but this only means that a variety of “Anna”s can be produced from it, none of whom will have a more fully described childhood. We may discover that previously misattributed portions of the text should be newly laid to Anna’s character code, but then she would just be finished differently.

The corollary of this delimitation is the character’s incompleteness. In philosopher Ruth Ronen’s formulation, “This notion of incompleteness relates to the logico-semantic status of fictional entities. The absence of a complete referent entails indeterminate areas and an impossibility to verify properties of the fictional entity not attributed to it by the fictional text itself. . . . Incompleteness is thus the reflection of the logical difference between an extraliterary real object and a fictional construct” (Ronen 1988: 497). A literary critic would probably not say that it is “impossible to verify” qualities of the character not specified by the text, since there are no such qualities, and we can, of course, object that persons, too, are incomplete if by that we mean it would be futile to try to specify and verify every detail of their existence. It is reasonable, however, to note that *in principle* we can determine, for example, the exact date on which Charles Stokes, a real-life renegade missionary to Africa, first set foot in the Congo, whereas there is no such information to be obtained about the Kurtz of *Heart of Darkness*. By definition, and not by the chance scarcity of documentation, we have no recourse to sources outside the fiction for supplementary information on characters. Various novelistic techniques can either emphasize or diminish this incompleteness. In nineteenth-century European realistic fiction, for example, we generally encounter an assumption of what Erving Goffman calls the "sufficiency" of the characterization to the needs of the narrative; for example, the text does not prompt us to wonder about what little Anna and her brother Stiva did in the nursery. Again, modernism and postmodernism tend to jettison this rule, asking us to contemplate the character's constitutional lack. The enigma of Kurtz, never to be resolved, is a case in point: our desire to know what is not stated (what Kurtz really did) can be read as a metaphor for an encounter with hollowness (the modernist emphasis) or as a reminder of textuality (the postmodernist emphasis).

Whether foregrounded or backgrounded, however, incompleteness, like uncanny accessibility and finish, invites the reader's emotional investment in the lack itself. I do not mean just that we fill in the blanks when we read novels, so that characters are partly readers' creations, as Hans Robert Jauss contends. Nor do I mean that reading requires imaginative realization, so that while we are reading we cannot tell the difference between ourselves and the protagonist, as Samuel Johnson maintained. I have in mind something closer to the position maintained by John Frow, who proceeds from psychoanalytic and semiotic considerations. "It is linguistic discontinuity [he maintains] and the field of presupposition it opens up, that constitute the condition of inscription of the reader as *unified* subject of reading" (Frow 1986: 237). Frow uses the Lacanian concept of "suture" as applied in film theory to analyze a discursive feature of characterization that we have already examined from a different angle: the movement from discourse about a character to the character as fictional producer of language. Emphasizing that the technique reveals a "discontinuity between the subject of enunciation and the subject of the enounced" Frow echoes the point made by several other critics, including Banfield: "There is . . . something essential to fiction in its representation of consciousness. The linguistic cotemporality of PAST and NOW and the coreference of SELF and the third person supplied a language for representing what can only be imagined or surmised—the thought of the other. By separating SELF from SPEAKER, this style reveals the essential fictionality of any representation of consciousness" (Banfield 1982: 260). Since the fictional character is imagined solely on the basis of these discontinuous pieces of language, readers must concentrate more intensely on their internal dynamic relations than they do when reading nonfictional genres that sometimes use similar techniques to make conjectures about the unexpressed thoughts of persons. Moreover, on those rare occasions when biographers, for example, represent consciousness, the subject position of representer and represented tend to be grammatically stabler than they are in fictional discourse (Cohn 1999: 18–37). In novels with third-person omniscient narrators, especially those using the free indirect style, the accessibility of the fictional character's mental life intensifies the uncanny separation of, to use Banfield's terms, "self" (character's mind) from "speaker" (narrator), exacerbating the instability of the subject position. The reader, to continue with Frow's theory, becomes "bound" into the text as she tries to satisfy the presupposition of unity created by the character's proper name, and yet finds herself "sliding . . . between enunciative stability and the threat of its interruption or scattering" (Frow 1986: 248). The sliding may be said to be pleasurable insofar as it stimulates and partially satisfies a reader's desire to be at once a subject of the text and independent of its various, discontinuous subjectivities. Instead of finding her own ego fragmented by such an experience, the reader of the novel is propelled by the desire to create herself as a flexible, durable subject with multiple enunciative capacities.

This account both complicates and corrects Roland Barthes's contention in *S/Z* that "what gives the illusion that the sum [of the semes connoting a character] is supplemented by a precious remainder (something like *individuality*, in that, qualitative and ineffable, it may escape the vulgar bookkeeping of compositional character) is the Proper Name. . . . The proper name enables the person to exist outside the semes, whose sum nonetheless constitutes it entirely" (Barthes 1974: 191). For Barthes, naming a character automatically imports the supplement of personhood, the ideological assumption that the character is everything attributed to it by the text, and everything else that is needed to make up a human being. Where it is not purposely prevented from doing so (as in the *nouvel roman*) the proper name draws together and unifies all the semantic material, and we have, according to Barthes, the ideologically suspect pleasure of sensing a person on the other side of the text. Incompletion, he maintains, moves ineluctably toward a desired completion through the agency of the name. However, it would be more accurate to say that the name introduces a presupposition of unity, which constitutionally cannot succeed in subduing the incompleteness and discontinuity of the changing textual perspectives. The presupposition of unity merely permits the reader's imaginative play between enunciative positions. We might add that if the embarrassing presupposition of unity, the supplement of a person-effect, were nonexistent, the reader's play would be directionless. And if, on the contrary, it actually created an impression of totality so strong that the incompleteness and disjunctions disappeared, there would be no inviting gaps for the reader to slip through, no subjective blanks to be overcome by her own idealized ego.

In addition to the gaps between shifting textual perspectives and the separation between subjectivity and speaker, we should also mention those between attempted reference and realization or typification and individuation, which hark back to Henry Fielding's Aristotelian view of fictional character as that which instances the type and therefore finds its referent in the reader. What Fielding was not quite willing to acknowledge, though, is that between type and instance, a gulf necessarily opens up, especially in the realist novel, with its double imperative to taxonomize the social body and to individualize the character. A thematic emphasis on protagonists who cannot become genuine or authentic (Stendhal's Julien Sorel, for example, or Flaubert's Emma Bovary), or who seem debarred from ordinary existence (Tolstoy's Anna Karenina or George Eliot's Dorothea Brooke) rehearses this formal difficulty, which we noted earlier, of arriving at the semblance of a unique being under the generic constraint of referential typicality. The implicit contrast between the reader, with her independent embodied selfhood that pretends to need no alibi of reference in order to achieve significance, and the character, with her notable lack of quiddity, who is therefore forever tethered to the abstraction of type, can even be played upon to produce a vicarious desire, as the imagined desire of the character, for the immanence the reader possesses. The fictional character's incompleteness can, in other words, not only create a sense of the reader's material "reality" as ontologically plentiful by helping us reenvision our embodied immanence through the condition of its possible absence, but also allows us to experience an uncanny desire to be that which we already are.

What we seek in and through characters, therefore, are not surrogate selves but the contradictory sensations of *not being a character*. On the one hand, we experience an ideal version of self-continuity, graced by enunciative mastery, mobility, and powers of almost instantaneous detachment and attachment. We experience, that is, the elation of a unitary unboundedness. On the other hand, we are also allowed to love an equally idealized immanence, an ability to be, we imagine, without textuality, meaningfulness, or any other excuse for existing.

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