

## Providence in the Early Novel, or Accident If You Please

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Let's start with a puzzle.

In the opening pages of William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794), we encounter the following peculiar passage, in which Caleb names his boyhood obsessions:

The spring of action which, perhaps more than any other, characterised the whole train of my life, was curiosity. It was this that gave me my mechanical turn; I was desirous of tracing the variety of effects which might be produced from given causes. It was this that made me a sort of natural philosopher; I could not rest till I had acquainted myself with the solutions that had been invented for the phenomena of the universe. In fine, this produced in me an invincible attachment to books of narrative and romance.<sup>1</sup>

Now you might ask why I have singled out these sentences as strange. It is not as though they read oddly. The language is unruffled, inconspicuous. Just try, however, to paraphrase the train of association here, and the oddness of the thing should become apparent. Here is my version: Caleb states that, because of his inbred curiosity, he had a bent for tinkering, a scientist's mind, and a love of novels. It is hardly intuitive that the third term should follow so trippingly upon the other two. But notice the breezy manner with which Caleb makes his case: *In fine*, I loved novels, I loved narrative. In that very terseness lies a riddle for the

<sup>1</sup> William Godwin, *Things As They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams*, ed. Maurice Hindle (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988), 6.

literary historian: how, in the final years of the eighteenth century, is it possible for a writer to claim that a knack for *mechanics* makes one a novel reader? It would be convenient to pigeonhole *Caleb Williams* as one of the 1790s' new Romantic novels or as the high-water mark of the political gothic, but then how would we account for these remarks, which make the early novel sound like some eighteenth-century Erector Set?

We could try to resolve the matter by turning to some familiar eighteenth-century debates on the novel, but this would probably make Godwin's formulation seem all the more eccentric. After all, his description ascribes to narrative, to romance even, a kind of rigor or boyish solemnity. But that, too, seems all wrong. Doesn't the eighteenth-century novel conventionally offer itself as a form of *sentimental* education, a fastidious program in fine judgment and sociability? And isn't the century's stock polemic against the novel that it renders its readers slack and effeminate, that it is an exercise in mawkishness and wanton fancy, a universal solvent on the nation's mental faculties and moral fiber? This is, in fact, the path that we might have expected "curiosity" to take in the passage at hand. It is easy enough to think of curiosity as incubating a love of novels, *if by curiosity we mean prurience and by novels we mean strange and extravagant literary entertainments*. But Godwin's is obviously not this wanton curiosity; his is something like a researcher's inquisitiveness. Curiosity here nourishes an interest in causality, not caprice. It is as though Godwin had in mind some hypothetical genre we would have to dub "the Newtonian novel"—dreary affair that this would be, billiard-ball characters careening through the narrative along precise and linear vectors, resolutions falling at story's end like apples, heavy, on our heads. If we work under the charitable assumption that this is *not* how eighteenth-century novels read, then we are stuck with the problem: curiosity, causality, the novel. Our task here is to account for that strange concatenation.

So how do we get from a "mechanical turn" to "an invincible attachment to books"? The answer, I would claim, is Machiavelli—to which one might reasonably respond: What was the question again? My sug-

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gestion is that if, taking our cue from Godwin, we want to understand the eighteenth-century novel as in some important way taking up issues of causality, then we need not a Newtonian language, or not simply a Newtonian language, but a Machiavellian language as well. For there is a Machiavellian vocabulary that persists in eighteenth-century narrative as one of its most conspicuous features but that will have largely vanished by the time the Victorian novel hits the scene: I am thinking of the terms *fortune*, *virtue*, *prudence*, and the like.<sup>2</sup> It is that first word that interests me most, and I will cite just one example, chosen more or less at random from the century's texts. In John Cleland's *Fanny Hill; or, Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1748–49), the protagonist's first love, Mr. Charles, disappears early in the narrative, consigning her to a life of continued prostitution. She discovers that he has been sent away from England because "it was indispensably necessary to secure a considerable inheritance, that devolv'd to him by the death of a rich merchant (his own brother) at one of the factories in the South-Seas, of which he had lately receiv'd advice together with a copy of the Will." This, Fanny says, is what "fortune" had in store for her.<sup>3</sup> What is striking about this passage, then, is that the turn of fortune's wheel names not merely circumstance or the chance conjuncture of events but something more precise: the commercial imperatives of colonial trade. Fanny uses the term *fortune* to describe the mechanism by which a nascent global economy comes, disastrously, to disrupt her life. The word *fortune* announces the outer limits of the individual's ability to conceptualize the seemingly infinite social space around her; it marks the point where the subject's ability to make sense of the social sphere breaks down, rendering her unable to penetrate further into the distant institutions that govern her. It thus resembles what the late century will call the sublime, but it does so in a nearly sociopolitical (rather than

<sup>2</sup> J. G. A. Pocock's work on English Machiavellianism is so good that it almost makes intellectual history seem respectable. See *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975); and *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). See also Victoria Kahn, *Machiavellian Rhetoric: From the Counter-Reformation to Milton* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> John Cleland, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, ed. Peter Sabor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 55, 58.

an aesthetic) register. When eighteenth-century characters cannot name causes, or when they mean to emphasize the implacable complexity of those causes, they invoke fortune. Fortune substitutes for causality.

But why should the Machiavellian word *fortune* be suited to this purpose? Perhaps it is not too much to say that the Machiavellian prince is the prototypical modern, scrambling to maintain his autonomy in willful disregard of custom's strictures.<sup>4</sup> If this statement seems to hover on the verge of anachronism, I will happily reverse the formulation. The moderns, the middle-class, the bourgeoisie—call them what you will—are, collectively, the children of fortune, the successors of Machiavelli's prince and the inheritors of his most pressing questions: how do we act, how do we understand actions, when we cannot count on their appearing legitimate to others? Action becomes unsettled and unpredictable in modernity first of all because modern practices, by which I chiefly mean market practices, lack the authority of custom or collective social sanction. So if *The Prince* is about the new legislator undertaking actions not endorsed by tradition, then this formulation lends itself to eighteenth-century renovation in something like the following form: how, in a period of putative calm, after a century of revolution and economic upheaval, does one make sense of the new practices of the market and managerial politics, which likewise lack the legitimacy of usage, as though the experiences of the new prince had been generalized throughout the social arena? The Machiavellian word *fortune*, in this sense, comes late in its history to name not merely the "intangibles" in a situation of action with no obvious precedent, as Machiavelli would have it, but the unmasterable complexities of the social sphere. *Fortune* names the lack of transparency in the city and the colonial world market. In modernity every man is a prince, every woman perhaps a princess, but the paradox of this seductive slogan is that it registers simultaneously the modern subject's claim to autonomy *and* everything that under the name of fortune lashes out to compromise that independence.

<sup>4</sup> Franco Moretti makes a similar argument with regard to the figure of the absolute monarch in English tragedy (*Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms*, trans. Susan Fischer, David Forgacs, and David Miller [London: NLB, 1983], 43).

Eighteenth-century English fictions, I suggest, are formally innovative, and I think that we need to work harder to account for these formal experiments in terms of the transformation of the British economy, which, in these years, occupied a new position of centrality in a (haphazard but powerful) mercantile world system. Or, to make the same argument in reverse, we need to look for finance, credit, and other forms of capitalist innovation not just in the early novel's themes or representations but in its narrative strategies, in the storytelling's governing concepts and characteristic turns. We have to proceed carefully here. By 1700 the English social order had already been utterly transformed by capitalism: commercial agriculture controlled the English countryside and had done so since at least 1600; rural class relations had already polarized as smallholders lost their land in an increasingly liquid property market; landowners and merchants had already found new ways to press the rural poor and loot the globe; the joint-stock companies were already at sea; the Atlantic economy was already flush. Of course, the eighteenth-century elites introduced commercial innovations of their own: the endless tussle over colonies east and west, a permanent wartime economy funded by new forms of public credit, a new national bank, a new stock market, a new consumer culture of colonial goods, a newly visible class of "monied men," wildfire urbanization, monetary innovations, the slow smothering of the precapitalist economy (whether the moral economy of customary rights or the provincial barter economy), the building of a unified national market. But where the official culture of the seventeenth century still tended to represent itself as agrarian and deferential, in however brittle and declamatory a fashion, eighteenth-century English prose embarks on a project of cultural renovation. If you steep yourself in the courtly, aristocratic, and religious genres that dominate early Stuart writing, eighteenth-century letters will read, by contrast, like one long meditation on "commerce"—though this last, let it be said, is a compact term, a bit of shorthand that condenses together Britain's many different economic transformations—so that even a pastoral like Pope's "Windsor Forest" turns out, in its final lines, to be a poem not of the land but of the *water*, of global trade and colonial conquest, of rivers and seas and the oaks that cheerily fell themselves to be shaved into England's ships ("Thy Trees, fair

*Windsor!* now shall leave their Woods, / And half thy Forests rush into my Floods").<sup>5</sup> Eighteenth-century English writing learns, in other words, to tell new kinds of stories, about new events and practices and things.

Yet the more important point is that the period also tells its stories differently, representing action as unsettled and open-ended in a manner that is particularly striking when set against the methods common to highly conventionalized, providential narratives of the seventeenth century. For an illustration, we need look no farther than the most typical of eighteenth-century plots: an individual, usually a woman, comes from the country to the city and is initiated into the treacherous intricacies of market society. (This summary works, at least as a first description, for *Fanny Hill*, Defoe's *Roxana*, Fielding's *Tom Jones*, Burney's *Evelina*, Lennox's *Female Quixote*—we could extend the list at will.) Perhaps the following will stand as a working hypothesis: If action becomes unstuck in the early novel, if action no longer seems to carry fixed providential meanings, it is because the modern agent must undertake action not in a traditionally oriented community, and not in a humanist commonwealth of shared political ends, but precisely in "society," a complex articulation of contending groups and practices, organized around the new phenomena of finance, trade, the state, the public sphere, the advanced division of labor. The question facing early modern social actors, therefore—the question, too, facing early modern *narrative*—is, how does one conceive of action within such diffuse practices and institutions, and how does one gauge its effects?

Some may be disturbed by what they see as too easy a reliance here on the hackneyed distinction between urban society and traditional communities, the old *Gesellschaft-und-Gemeinschaft* shtick. But I hope, in fact, that turning to Machiavelli will jimmy open that dichotomy. I am not claiming that premodern communities are undifferentiated or that premodern politics are not complex. I am claiming, however, that premodern politics are complex *for the political classes*. If premodern social formations are differentiated, then one prominent differentiation is between the fairly narrow urban and courtly classes that experience complexity and the preponderance of the population whose routines are too strictly regimented to merit that word. To set complexity as the

<sup>5</sup> Alexander Pope, "Windsor Forest," ll. 383–84.

standard of historical experience is to generalize this class perspective anachronistically. My key argument regarding the early novel, just to repeat it with this elaboration in mind, is that the early novel helps mark the advance of social differentiation, the de facto generalization of this formerly elite experience of complexity, as new groups come into the city and the market.

In one sense, all I'm doing here is rehearsing one of Fredric Jameson's lines. For it is Jameson who has argued most forcefully that narratives of fortune are to be expected in periods of systemic transition:

This is the stage Marx describes as exchange on the frontiers between two modes of production, which have not yet been subsumed under a single standard of value; so great fortunes can be made and lost overnight, ships sink or against all expectation appear in the harbor, heroic travelers reappear with cheap goods whose scarcity in the home society lends them extraordinary worth. This is therefore an experience of money which marks the form rather than the content of narratives; these last may include rudimentary commodities and coins incidentally, but nascent Value organizes them around a conception of the Event which is formed by categories of Fortune and Providence, the wheel that turns, bringing great good luck and then dashing it, the sense of what is not yet an invisible hand guiding human destinies and endowing them with what is not yet "success" or "failure," but rather the irreversibility of an unprecedented fate, which makes its bearer into the protagonist of a unique and "memorable" story.<sup>6</sup>

But if my theme is Jamesonian, I wish to improvise a few variations on it. For Jameson does not realize that he is talking about the early novel. The "stage" Jameson has in mind is late feudalism—or, more precisely, the first flourishing of medieval merchant capital in European cities, which is something of an anomaly within feudalism but is not yet modern capitalism, either—and the stories he is thinking of are premodern art tales, such as Boccaccio's, which he sees as by-products of this urban trade: feudal tales of fortune are inconceivable outside that system's towns, its struggling islands of commerce. This observation is surely right as far as it goes, but it stops well short of the mark, for the pattern that Jameson identifies is only sharpened in the early novel as

<sup>6</sup> Fredric Jameson, "Ideology of the Text," in *Situations of Theory*, vol. 1 of *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays, 1971–1986* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 52.

the cities swell and markets spill beyond their borders, as commodity relations lay claim to the entire social order and fortune flourishes in their wake.<sup>7</sup> The novel, in this sense, is the medieval art tale writ large.

What is more, Jameson compresses together fortune and providence, but they are, in fact, radically distinct categories; we miss something crucial about eighteenth-century narrative if we let them bleed into one another. I tend to think here of the odd, inconclusive anti-romances by earlier women writers—Aphra Behn, Jane Barker, Eliza Haywood—as so many attempts to shut down providential forms of storytelling, to rehearse narrative patterns in which events merely happen and nothing ever concludes: the stories just stop. For something has to happen before fortune can come to the fore as a narrative mode: providence has to leave the scene. For an event to take on the full character of an event, it must be able to appear in narrative as something other than an index of divine will, and it is one of the signature projects of eighteenth-century narrative to purge itself of its inherited providential conventions. This is nowhere more apparent than in Behn's "Unfortunate Happy Lady," in which the narrator chalks up a certain stroke of misfortune—the type of misfortune endemic in eighteenth-century narrative (in this case, a batch of letters gone astray)—to "providence, or accident if you please."<sup>8</sup> What emerges with special clarity in this phrase is the coexistence of two fundamentally different modes of storytelling. Behn's is representative of much eighteenth-century writing to come, but her formulation is remarkable for the offhand air with which it reduces providence to the status of an option—a mode of reading, in effect, rather than a mode of narration itself, a supplementary code to be invoked at the reader's discretion. Walter Benjamin's great "Storyteller" essay discovers in the *Erzählung* or customary yarn a simple

<sup>7</sup> But see also the alternate chronology that Jameson provides in "Metacommentary," in *The Ideologies of Theory*, 3–16, where he distinguishes not between the art tale and the novel but between the early novel of action or the event and the psychological novel of the nineteenth century.

<sup>8</sup> Aphra Behn, "The Unfortunate Happy Lady," in *An Anthology of Seventeenth-Century Fiction*, ed. Paul Salzman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 546. See also Jane Barker's *Love's Intrigues* (1713), in which the heroine greets an unhappy event with the following sentence: "Now whether this Affliction was laid on me by the immediate Hand of Providence, or that Fate, or my Constellations produced it by secondary Causes, I knew not" (in *Popular Fiction by Women, 1660–1730: An Anthology*, ed. Paula R. Backscheider and John J. Richetti [Oxford: Clarendon, 1996], 98).



refusal to explain, a reliance on sheer mysterious sequence, entirely without the novel's expository and clarifying impulses, its overload of information.<sup>9</sup> In the work of Behn and her fellows we see early modern narrative temporarily reverting to the condition of the tale, emptied of explanation.

The antiromance, it is worth pointing out, is fully a political project. This is already clear in Machiavelli, who must, in this light, be regarded as a great prose innovator, as having helped found a new genre or mode of writing. His fundamental innovation is to reject what we might call political romance, the ideological finery of classical political manuals, in favor of a brisk, analytic narrative of political action: "Because I want to write what will be useful to anyone who understands, it seems to me better to concentrate on what really happens rather than on theories or speculations. For many have imagined republics and principalities that have never been seen or known to exist. . . . I shall set aside fantasies about rulers, then, and consider what happens in fact."<sup>10</sup> There is some general sense, then, in which Machiavelli's political materialism stands in the same relation to humanist political theory that the novel eventually will to the romance: it is the acid bath of realism, coolly pointing to a permanent gap between the political order and the concepts or images of itself that this order generates. Machiavelli means to narrate political action in strict disregard of its ideals or ideologies.

Of course, the point is better put the other way around, not that Machiavelli is novelistic or antiromantic but that early-eighteenth-century fiction remains profoundly, corrosively Machiavellian. The stories of a Behn or a Barker work by taking Machiavelli's vocabulary and preoccupations and translating them out of what the period defines as the public and political sphere of men and into the intimate and erotic sphere of women. These stories, then, are antiromances in a narrower sense, full of rapes, aborted amours, marriages that end in murder. They are love stories that never get off the ground, as though to say that *many have imagined gallants and ladyloves that have never been seen or known to exist. . . . We shall set aside fantasies about women, then, and consider what*

<sup>9</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968), 83–109.

<sup>10</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ed. Quentin Skinner, trans. Russell Price (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 55.

*happens in fact.* They are the death rattles of an aristocratic culture of courtly love.

The antiromance, in this last sense, helps mark a specific moment in the history of English class relations; it opens onto a culture that one might hesitate to call “bourgeois” or “capitalist” but that is emphatically, polemically “postaristocratic.” The antiromance is a hinge form, an aesthetic purgative, the genre in which a newly commercial culture flushes away its inherited aristocratic conventions. Such, then, is the achievement of Defoe’s great *Roxana*: it presses the conventions of antiromance (the sham marriages, the scheming sex, the dry-eyed judgments on “this Thing call’d a Husband”) into a systematic exploration of the commercial lifeworld.<sup>11</sup> The first point that needs to be made about *Roxana* is that its narrator is a striking example of what the Lukácsians call the problematic individual. She is a figure, in other words, in which the distinctive quandaries of modernity become legible, precisely because she is not fully integrated into the social order. We might think of the matter this way: Defoe’s first bit of narrative business in *Roxana* is to establish how his narrator is out of joint. A diaspora Huguenot living in England, she has a passing familiarity with two national communities but no secure claim to or deep history in either. To compound matters, she has no recourse to a family that might stand as a bulwark against the foreign territory around her; her intimates are all dead, in prison, or denounced as unreliable mere pages after the novel begins. Nor does Roxana possess the inherited wealth with which to buck her orphaned state; this fact, too, is lost in a matter of paragraphs, the casualty of some speculative bubble. Here again one notes fortune’s primary guise in the early novel: if the early novel displays a preoccupation with chance, contingency, and reversal, then this is in large part narrative’s attempt to register the shock waves of capital throughout a society unaccustomed to its tremors. In the opening pages of *Roxana* (and in a manner typical of the early novel), we are invited to trace in the dilemma of a single subject the faltering of distant, poorly grasped markets. At no other point in the history of English narrative are Fortune and fortune so close.

<sup>11</sup> Daniel Defoe, *Roxana, the Fortunate Mistress; or, A History of the Life and Vast Variety of Fortunes of Mademoiselle de Beleau*, ed. John Mullan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 8.

The effect of Roxana's multiple divestitures (no nation, no family, no inheritance) is clear: they produce a creature who dwells entirely in the market, a kind of pure commercial subject, with no residual attachments to anything or anyone outside the commodity sphere. This point needs to be emphasized, because formally, if seen from sufficient distance, *Roxana* might seem like one of the first great rags-to-riches stories in English: the heroine, if that is the word for Roxana, does proceed from indigence to affluence. Yet a moment's inspection reveals that the novel delivers none of Horatio Alger's satisfactions. The Alger tales, it goes without saying, are precisely capitalist *romances*, but Defoe simply is not interested in window dressing of this kind: Roxana amasses her fortune by abandoning her children, whoring her away across three countries, and rigging up a series of assumed identities, like a con artist. The titillation for which Defoe's novels are so famous, then, actually articulates a specific historical problem. Late in the first volume of *Capital* Marx makes an antiromantic argument of his own: How did capitalism even get started if there wasn't always capitalism? That is, how did some people accumulate capital in a social order that was not itself capitalist? The conventional view—a "legend" that owes more to "the promised land of modern romantic novels" than to "actual history"—is that some people simply worked harder and spent less.<sup>12</sup> Marx's reply to this myth is predictably tart: it was not diligence and discipline that gave rise to capitalism, but theft and corruption, a coordinated assault on the globe's various customary economies, the expropriation of Europe's peasants and the colonies' recently subjugated peoples. *Roxana*, in this sense, is a case study in primitive accumulation, which Marx identifies as the peculiarly capitalist form of antiromance—it's just that Defoe narrates at the level of the lifeworld what Marx identifies only at the level of historical structure: the wholesale abandonment of a customary Christian or aristocratic ethics in the service of new economic practices. *Roxana*, then, is one of those rare novels that are content never to let their action leave the market; indeed, it is remarkable for the fearlessness with which it expunges from its narrative nearly everything that is not already in the cash nexus. It depicts a social order that has handed itself over entirely to the commodity, in which every

<sup>12</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital*, trans. Ben Fowkes, vol. 1 (New York: Vintage, 1977), 873, 890, 874.

object—every candlestick, every roast beef—announces its price, compulsively, so that guineas and pistoles appear in the text with the regularity of commas. Defoe's Europe is already the world imagined by Adorno (and by *New Yorker* cartoons), in which there is no relationship outside the market, in which a new husband is the occasion for a business contract, a dead husband merely a chance to balance the books. *Roxana* is notable because it provides, within its own pages, a social and historical account of the antiromantic conventions that Behn and Haywood deploy without such explanation: antiromance thrives because romance asphyxiates in the commodity world.

Consider, in this light, the place of providence in *Roxana*. Defoe's narrative strategies are, in fact, a single-minded onslaught on providence. This may not be immediately apparent, because the language of providence is all over the novel. Yet a careful reading shows that the status of providence has entirely changed. The following passage is typical: "*In a word, it never Lightn'd or Thunder'd, but I expected the next Flash wou'd penetrate my Vitals, and melt the Sword in the Scabbord of Flesh; it never blew a Storm of Wind, but I expected the Fall of some Stack of Chimneys, or some Part of the House wou'd bury me in its Ruins; and so of other things*" (260). The point is clear: older, providential forms of narration do linger on in *Roxana*, but in severely truncated form. Roxana announces here that, whatever the flat, causal train of her narrative, she has been reading the events of her life providentially all along—or rather, has been prepared to read them providentially—or has worried that they might offer themselves up to a providential reading. She is anxious, in other words, that her life will take on a providential cast, that the next summer storm or thud of falling bricks will herald God's judgment on her wickedness. She is waiting for what we might more prosaically call her comeuppance. The crucial point, however, is that the novel never follows through on such a reading—which, in fact, would be impossible as the narrative is configured, since providence itself never puts in an appearance. The events in Roxana's life never become legible in that way: they never allow themselves to be plumbed for some significance greater than the immediate gain to be derived from them. Roxana, in short, never gets what's coming to her, and it is crucial that we understand this as something more than a vagary of the plot. For if Defoe's readers cannot discern in his story

some pattern of—call it what you will—justice or order or form unfolding in events, then when the narrative invokes providence, it does so only to signal its *absence*. When Roxana mentions that she was tempted to read her own life providentially, she does so only to demonstrate that these traditional narrative forms do *not* bear themselves out in her life. Sometimes, it turns out, a thunderclap is just a thunderclap, and if we are to measure the achievement of the early novel, then we must acknowledge how difficult such a seemingly banal sentence would be to utter to an audience for whom providential interpretation has become reflexive—an audience, that is, for which a thunderclap is rarely just a thunderclap. *Roxana* gives us a clear idea of the work that early, novelistic narrative had to do to forestall its readers' easy recourse to allegory.

The matter is more complicated, however, because *Roxana* is also an antiromance in a second, nearly antithetical sense. A fuller description of the novel's structure will make the point clear: The narrative falls into three distinct stages. Its long first section details the process of primitive accumulation, Roxana's accrual of capital by what are not technically capitalist means (i.e., sex and fraud). The novel's brief second section shows Roxana making the transition from accumulative passion to a kind of capitalist rationality. She resolves to learn "how to secure my Wealth" (106) or "how to be a Miser" (168)—how, in short, to manage her estate. This is the moment of narrative money laundering, when Roxana transforms the wealth she has amassed outside the legitimate economy—wealth clearly associated with *fortuna*, with risk, adventure, a sort of erotic piracy—into the roughly predictable forms of investment.

No sooner is this transition effected than the novel's third section begins:

Really I began to be sick of the Vice; and as I had good Leisure now to divert and enjoy myself in the World, as much as it was possible for any Woman to do, that ever liv'd in it; so I found that my Judgment began to prevail upon me to fix my Delight upon nobler Objects than I had formerly done. . . . it came so very strong upon my Mind one Morning, when I had been lying awake some time in my Bed, as if somebody had ask'd me the Question, *What was I a Whore for now?*" (200–201)

This is one of the novel's crucial passages. I am particularly interested in that last word, *now*. What period does it designate? The distinction

drawn here is between the period of capital accumulation and the period of achieved wealth within the full capital circuit, and noting as much allows us to answer a question we may not have realized was important: once we have observed that the text largely suppresses providential modes of narration, and that providence reemerges only as a residual form, it seems right to wonder at what point, exactly, providence returns. Where, within capital's narrative—which is in some sense the only narrative that remains—does this residual form make itself felt? The answer is, of course, *after* the initial process of capital accumulation, when Roxana makes the effort to climb back out of capital's narrative—to return, if you like, to providence.

The crucial point is that this effort fails. We can describe its failure first in ideological terms. The novel shifts from one driving question, Can customary forms of virtue survive the transition to capitalism?—to which the answer is clearly no—to a second driving question, Can the new market subject escape her own corruption? To this second question, the novel attempts three answers. First, it has Roxana disguise herself as a Quaker—behind plain gray cloth and a twittering of *thees* and *thous*—so that the primitive accumulator might redeem herself by association with distinctively middle-class forms of piety. Then it holds out the possibility of her marrying a prince, which would make for money laundering on a higher order, a new class alliance between finance and the precapitalist elite. Finally, it has her marry a Dutch financier, who simply buys her a noble title or two, which means that customary forms of status have themselves come on the market, been commodified, so that the monied interest, rather than ally itself with the aristocracy, can simply usurp its place. In its final pages *Roxana* achieves its distinctive ideological character by systematically allowing each of these strategies to disappoint: Far from being made pious by them, Roxana corrupts the Quakers; the prince spurns her in a fit of Christian righteousness; even her newly acquired nobility cannot prevent her discovery by the daughter she has abandoned, who threatens to tie her back to her whoredom and thus deprive her of her purchased respectability. These narrative turns present the reader with a well-defined ideological predicament: the novel increasingly represents primitive accumulation as trauma; it cannot imagine a situation in which the sordid history of primitive accumulation could be successfully repressed, which means that the novel solicits the commercial classes' fantasies of respectabil-

ity only to deflate them. This is what it means, then, to say that *Roxana* actually consists of antiromance in two distinct forms: the narrative of primitive accumulation requires the evacuation of aristocratic and Christian providence, which makes of it a capitalist antiromance, but then the novel will not permit itself to script a new capitalist romance in providence's stead. Defoe (in this book, at least) is hostile to such ideological jury-rigging—hostile, in other words, to the century's more familiar forms of commercial apologetics. *Roxana* cannot pull off (or preemptively undoes) the genre's characteristic ideological projects, its roster of mixed marriages and tableaux of virtue triumphant, which do not come to the fore until the 1740s, when the novel, in the process of becoming “the novel,” programmatically begins to readmit romance to its pages.

This is not yet to say enough, however, because the novel's ideological failure points to a narrative failure of a different order. For even Roxana's disappointments do not allow themselves to be figured as providentially ordained. One could at least imagine a novel in which Roxana's very failures took on a providential cast, but Defoe's efforts in this direction are conspicuously halfhearted. The novel, having gone to such lengths to eliminate providence, has trouble reinstating it. The sketchy final paragraph proclaims that providence has exacted its tax on Roxana, for she is spending her old age poor and repentant. But the paragraph does so lackadaisically, with an utter lack of narrative detail.<sup>13</sup> Providence here can only be announced. It cannot be recounted. What is more, the near absence of providence divides Defoe's narration into two levels or formal orders. First, the narrative works in simple causal terms. Consider the following paragraph, in which Roxana reflects on her good fortune in having gotten away with her servant during one of their schemes:

And now Amy and I were at Leisure to look upon the Mischiefs that we had escap'd; and had I had any Religion, or any Sence of a Supreme Power managing, directing, and governing on both Causes and Events

<sup>13</sup> “After some few Years of flourishing, and outwardly happy Circumstances, I fell into a dreadful Course of Calamities, and *Amy* [Roxana's servant] also; the very Reverse of our former Good Days; the Blast of Heaven seem'd to follow the Injury done the poor Girl; and I was brought so low again, that my Repentance seem'd to be only the Consequence of my Misery, as my Misery was of my Crime [prostitution]” (329–30).

in this World, such a Case as this wou'd have given any-body room to have been very thankful to the Power who had not only put such a Treasure into my Hand, but given me such an Escape from the Ruin that threaten'd me; but I had none of those things about me; I had indeed, a grateful Sence upon my Mind of the generous Friendship of my Deliverer, the Dutch Merchant; by whom I was so faithfully serv'd, and by whom, as far as relates to second Causes, I was preserv'd from Destruction. (160)

The narrative issues that govern Defoe's texts emerge with special clarity in this passage. Namely, it shows us that, for the purposes of narration, second causes have become primary. The providential account of Roxana's rescue—"a Supreme Power managing, directing, and governing"—is spelled out only to be discounted, and not even argued against, but merely brushed aside. Defoe, one is tempted to conclude, is teaching his readership how to read a story in merely causal ways. Instead of a conventionally patterned story of divinely ordered purposes, he gives us a story of worldly events unfolding in temporal sequence.

This shift away from providential narrative has some curious effects. It does *not*, for a start, prevent *Roxana* from issuing judgments on its own events. The novel, in fact, is awash in ethical language, Roxana's periodic denunciations of her own wantonness. The problem is that providence's absence leaves the novel's ethical register abstract, without any compelling relationship to the events narrated, a retrospective intrusion or psychological tic rather than a principle of the narrative itself. The novel does not, in Machiavellian fashion, expose or mock these ethical considerations as much as it renders them incompatible with its own narrative, so that Roxana typically urges her women readers not to be "ruined" by "great men" and then recounts how some dotting lover or other, far from destroying her, merely contributed to her swelling kitty. Such, then, is the peculiar experience of reading Defoe: we watch helplessly as practices wholly dissociate themselves from the normative language meant to describe them. Ethics is the gum left behind when providence seeps away. It is providence reformulated as private anxiety—as psychology or smarting conscience—rather than as narrative code.

An important qualification is necessary at this point: *Roxana* may be the bitch mother of all antiromances, but this line of argument should also give us a new way of thinking about the relationship between



the novel and the romance as traditionally conceived. If we think of just the stalest distinctions between the two genres, one of the first that comes to mind is the romance's emphasis on extraordinary or fantastical events, which stands in stark contrast to the novel's obsession with the quotidian. But why does eighteenth-century narrative discover the everyday or the ordinary? We may conjecture that, in trying to describe the newly complex space of the modern, the novel describes the everyday *as though it were extraordinary*. It generates the suspense or the unfamiliarity of "romance" narrative out of proximate materials, testifying to an estrangement of the plain or the commonplace. Thus we begin with a cliché about the novel and the romance, but in the end we can further blur the boundary between them: novels such as *Roxana* turn to "ordinary life" because ordinary life has come to approximate the condition of romance itself, at least in one of its key features, the treacherous territory of the mundane.<sup>14</sup>

If we follow this Machiavellian line—if we think of early novels as, in effect, Machiavellian romances of the marketplace—then we can also account in new ways for what is often referred to as the novel's empiricism: its descriptive bent; its fine, itemizing texture; its emphasis on detail within the environs of the everyday. The rather abstract and archaic Machiavellian terminology that lives on in the early novel is actually of a piece with its circumstantial precision. In the hopes of returning some agency to the decontextualized or nakedly autonomous modern subject, the novel's minutiae serve as notice to readers that the early modern sphere of action demands a degree of attention that the seemingly chthonic routines of the premodern never did—and that the bureaucratized routines of the fully modern may never do again—that they must therefore watch over their deeds in some new way, with an eye toward their contingency or their proximate detail and in a pose of perpetual vigilance.

Such, then, is one version of what we might call the novel's epistemology: it trains the reader to treat no-longer-ordinary life as an object of knowledge. But there is a second way we might account for the novel's empiricism, and it will take us back to the question of causality

<sup>14</sup> Aphra Behn laments having to tell stories "in a World where he [the reader] finds Diversions for every Minute, new and strange," at the beginning of *Oroonoko; or, The Royal Slave*, ed. Lore Metzger (New York: Norton, 1973), 1.

with which we started. We might say that the novel's empiricism attunes the reader to the problem of fortune, which I have suggested is really the problem of social complexity in the metropolis and the new world system, but we might equally say that it attempts to win narrative back *from* the realm of fortune, to refuse the narrative crutch of fortune, to find concrete, social and causal explanations for the vicissitudes traditionally (and lamely) chalked up to fortune. The term *fortune* designates a distinctive mode of storytelling that forsakes any attempt to spell out the deep causality of the episodes that it records. But the novel's descriptive precision may also establish new and elaborate chains of causality. The beginning of Fielding's *Amelia* is representative in this regard. Fielding begins with a question: will fortune govern his narrative, or will his story unfold in the more methodical register of causality? The events to be recounted were so "extraordinary," in Fielding's words, "that they seemed to require . . . the utmost Invention which Superstition hath ever attributed to Fortune: Tho' whether any such Being interfered in the case, or, indeed, whether there be any such Being in the Universe, is a Matter which I by no Means presume to determine in the Affirmative."<sup>15</sup> For the time being, Fielding is content to leave this question open, but the answer arrives in the form of the novel itself: *Amelia* is an extravagant story of suffering, remarkable in its largely unprecedented attempts to name, with as much specificity as possible, the social mechanisms, the multiple causes, of such suffering. The novel is in fact an attack on the concept of fortune, which emerges as a breach of narrative and ethical responsibility. The storyteller and the moral agent have the common obligation to track causality down.<sup>16</sup> With this observation, Godwin's notion of the causal or mechanical novel begins to make a kind of sense. The causal novel is an instrument for charting the new intricacies of modern social space.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Henry Fielding, *Amelia*, ed. Martin C. Battestin (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), 17.

<sup>16</sup> The early novel has its collaborators: see, e.g., David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), 130: "What the vulgar call chance is nothing but a secret and conceal'd cause."

<sup>17</sup> From fortune to causality—one wonders, perhaps, what a Nietzschean account of this transition would look like. To judge by Thomas M. Kavanagh, *Enlightenment and the Shadows of Chance: The Novel and the Culture of Gambling in Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), it would look gripping and lunatic at once. I say *gripping* because Kavanagh assembles his narrative

Here, then, are the first, rough outlines of some shared project. We can say that at least three modes of storytelling vie for priority in the eighteenth century, often in the same pages: providence, fortune, and causality. We can speak, at the broadest level, of a historical shift from providential narrative to causal narrative, from stories that promise knowledge of God's design to narratives that promise knowledge of the material and social world existing in time. Fortune, in this scheme, is a skeptical term. It suggests that the forms of knowledge generally thought proper to narrative are not, in fact, obtainable.

But how do we evaluate this shift? We have some choices to make. We could treat it as an autonomous cultural revolution, presumably called "secularization" and requiring no explanation in terms other than its own.<sup>18</sup> Alternately, we could work to correlate this shift with contemporary social and economic transformations, in which case the renovation of narrative would appear as a political project of a special

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with real sweep; he possesses a keen and dramatic sense of historical transformation. Early modern history, he argues, proceeded in three stages. First, there was a precapitalist culture of aristocratic individuality and risk, full of venturesome nobles who embraced the battlefield and the bet and the duel without submitting their every action to niggling bourgeois calculation. Then there came the first great experiments in capitalist finance, such as the South Sea Company or Law's system, which seemed poised to generalize the aristocratic culture of chance, perhaps even to democratize it, to yank the entire social order into the realm of risk. Such a capitalism—this capitalism that never happened, modernity's missed opportunity—would have fostered the noble ethos of hazard, not stifled it. But those experiments failed, and capitalism was left instead with a cringing Enlightenment bourgeoisie bent on "domesticating" or "emasculating" chance, feminizing it with the estrogen of "probability" and "normalcy" and "averages." The eighteenth century, then, presents us with a choice, between texts that expunge chance and set a drab world of causality and social averages in its place, on the one hand, and texts that keep faith with the aristocratic experience of chance, on the other. The early novel, in this scenario, is the villain, enemy of chance, agent of constriction. I say *lunatic* because Kavanagh's account is possible only if you daydream your way into a certain class delusion. A novelistic culture, Kavanagh writes, demands a "real renunciation of our individuality and our freedom" (251). But he himself has already made it clear that in a precapitalist social order the nobility are the only ones who even count as individuals. So this particular "our"—"our individuality and our freedom"—works only if we imagine ourselves, inexplicably, as ancien régime aristocrats.

<sup>18</sup> This is the line followed by Leopold Damrosch Jr., *God's Plot and Man's Stories: Studies in the Fictional Imagination from Milton to Fielding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

kind. It is possible to specify with some precision the character of this project, but to do so, we need to think hard about credit, perhaps the eighteenth century's decisive capitalist innovation. The first, familiar point to be made about credit is that it is fortune's double or sister. Eighteenth-century writing speaks often of credit and does so in terms clearly borrowed from older figurations of fortune: Fortune metamorphoses from a metaphysical quandary into a social and historical problem, Lady Credit, who stands in distant and capricious command over human affairs. Credit, it is important to keep in mind, refers not just to money lent or payment deferred but to paper instruments of all kinds, nearly all of them new or newly central to the eighteenth-century economy: banknotes, bills of exchange, stock, government debt, and eventually paper currency itself, which, like all credit, is not itself a valuable thing but only the promise of a valuable thing. Credit, then, lures the economy out of the realm of the concrete, away from land and tangible, tradable goods—spices to sniff, cloth you can rub between thumb and forefinger—and into a realm of fluid and disembodied value. It bestows effective and transformative force on beliefs and ideas and expectations and hunches. The word *credit*, then, names no single thing; it designates that series of practices and institutions that give authority to paper. For an eighteenth-century writer to cast credit in fortune's guise is, therefore, to articulate an anxiety, the fear that Britain has been handed over to a phantasm, an apparition, a thing that is not a thing, an incorporeal force able to upend secular events with all the unpredictability, the fickle contingency, of a speculative bubble or market crash.<sup>19</sup> What is more, fortune and credit are joined here by a third term—the figure of rhetoric. The same conventions that surround the fear of fortune and credit also pervade an older fear of public speech. Richard Fanshawe writes in the 1640s that “words are wind . . . the world's firmest glory,” and Defoe writes half a century later against the “Air-Money” that is credit.<sup>20</sup> So credit is money transmuted into breath

<sup>19</sup> See Pocock in *The Machiavellian Moment*: “Credit typifies the instability of secular things, brought about by the interactions of particular human wills, appetites and passions.” It is “not simply the wheel of fortune running eccentrically about its unmoving axis. . . . it is part of a huge new force in human affairs, creating new modes of war and prosperity, a new balance of power in Europe, a new conquest of the planet” (453–54).

<sup>20</sup> Richard Fanshawe, “The Praise of the Wind,” in *Poetry and Revolution: An Anthology of British and Irish Verse, 1625–1660*, ed. Peter Davidson (Oxford: Oxford

or argument, and behind both of these atmospheric figures there murmurs the insistence that the social order should not lie at the ether's whim, that opinion, image, and dispute should not raise the meanest born to the highest place, should not corrupt with mere words or show a political culture of virtue, military service, and plowable, paceable acres. There emerges in early modern writing, then, a conceptual constellation: fortune, credit, rhetoric. These are the string pullers, the life-world's deep movers, the causes that can barely be named, rendering the social system progressively more immaterial, abstract, inscrutable.

There is a temptation here that needs to be warded off. This constellation—fortune, credit, rhetoric—holds only for a specific moment in the history of the English-speaking world, the period that sees both the financial revolution and the rise of the public sphere or print marketplace: that distinctive phase, in other words, in which both credit and rhetoric find the institutions proper to them and from which they attempt to generalize themselves throughout the social order. Most of the writing currently available on credit and writing in the eighteenth century, however, looks over this situation—an increasingly complex social order governed by the hyperreality of the media and high finance—and discovers in it what we might call the “long postmodern.” As a genre, it has been argued, the novel took shape in a society governed more and more by fictions. The novel is that type of fiction characteristic of a society itself constituted by fiction, that is, by credit and print. The novel, in short, has always been postmodern.<sup>21</sup>

There is one sense in which this argument is crucial. It is—tacitly, unpolemically—a rebuff to the prevailing cliché that the English eighteenth century was an age of lab-coated Enlightenment, imposing its unyielding and claustrophobic epistemologies, deploying scientists and philosophers on every street corner. The new economic criticism has demonstrated that the eighteenth century was characterized equally

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University Press, 1998), 341; Daniel Defoe, quoted in Sandra Sherman, *Finance and Fictionality in the Early Eighteenth Century: Accounting for Defoe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1.

<sup>21</sup> See Sandra Sherman, *Finance and Fictionality in the Early Eighteenth Century: Accounting for Defoe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Catherine Ingrassia, *Authorship, Commerce, and Gender in Early Eighteenth-Century England: A Culture of Paper Credit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and Patrick Brantlinger, *Fictions of State: Culture and Credit in Britain, 1694–1994* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996).

and antithetically by an epistemological unmooring, that finance and fiction, far from bolstering customary claims to know the world, powerfully undid such claims. In this argument we can catch a pleasing glimmer of historical process or the *longue durée*, a history of the present, of the market's expanding dominion and the intensifying abstraction of social life, that is, its atomization into isolated but exchangeable subsystems, each ultimately ungrounded and therefore experienced as fictional.

But we catch only a glimmer, because a sense of historical process is what most of this criticism actually forestalls. Most economic criticism of the early novel relies on New Historicist homologies. The simile is its chief argumentative figure: "Finance is *like* fiction. . . . *Like* the buying of stock, the reading of novels was. . . . Human faces are *like* imprinted coins are *like* typeface on a page."<sup>22</sup> The problem is this: once you say that fiction is "like" credit, once you simply set the two in a relation of equivalence, you absolve yourself of determining what these two distinct social spheres, culture and the economy, have to do with one another. Such arguments by analogy rely on intuitive correspondences, as though puns were the motor of history; they never seriously consider the social order's multiple sites, the history of their divergence or their continued and mutual determination.<sup>23</sup> And if fiction and finance are linked not by historical process but by some permanent analogical axle, then the long postmodern is in danger of becoming the perpetual postmodern, in which case the new economic criticism is not so much giving a history of the present as merely rediscovering the present in some Augustan mirror, casting the eighteenth century in its own image.

So there is a second choice that needs making. Either we can resign ourselves to an *eternitas postmoderna*, to an endless horizon of spectacle and speculation, or we can learn to distinguish eighteenth-century credit from postmodern credit. We can learn, in other words, to dis-

<sup>22</sup> The first quotation is from Sherman's abstract page; the second is from Ingrassia (6); the third is no quotation but a paraphrase of one of Deidre Lynch's central arguments in *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

<sup>23</sup> For a crucial exception see James Thompson's excellent *Models of Value: Eighteenth-Century Political Economy and the Novel* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996).

tinguish between (1) finance capital as an *emergent* structure, which was in contest with residual forms—the peasant economy of traditional rights and privileges, the half-feudal physiocracy of the landed classes, a burgher mercantilism that still believed in solid things; which was in the service of primitive accumulation; which was in league with agrarian capitalism’s ideology of “improvement” and a modest global trade in artisanal luxuries; and which made possible a state of permanent war, settler colonialism, capitalist slavery, and economic nationalism; and (2) finance capitalism as a *dominant* structure, late capitalism’s linchpin, coordinating a worldwide industrial apparatus, itself premised on the complete penetration of the precapitalist world, now mechanized and commodified through and through, generating both a ubiquitous global trade in necessities and media that mean to colonize the unconscious or dictate desire. These two forms of finance capital surely belong to the same history. They partake, no doubt, of similar logics. They can usefully be superimposed on top of one another. But they are not the same thing. And if we do not learn to make this distinction, then bandying about terms like *credit* and *finance capital* will sap rather than strengthen our sense of capital’s historicity.<sup>24</sup>

At the very least, then, we can say that what is distinctive about eighteenth-century Britain is how it takes itself to have solved its post-modern problems. How, in eighteenth-century terms, does one conquer the fear of credit and its fictions? Economic histories of the eighteenth century place great stress on the following observation: you cannot have sophisticated mechanisms of credit unless you have institutions that more or less guarantee credit’s repayment. We can phrase this point in a few different ways. Max Weber notes that capitalism demands what he calls guarantees of calculability: “Capitalism must be able to count on the continuity, trustworthiness and objectivity of the legal order, and on the rational predictable function of legal and administrative agencies.”<sup>25</sup> Jür-

<sup>24</sup> This need is particularly felt in the face of Ingrassia’s work, with its outright celebration of finance and commercial culture, which it portrays as a middle-class carnival of subversion, emancipating elite women and the bourgeoisie from a civic humanism that is “highly nostalgic” and thus does not merit serious consideration (20). See also Sherman, who writes off any opposition to credit as a “Puritan distaste” (17) and applauds the market for unsettling discourse.

<sup>25</sup> Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, trans. Ephraim Fischhoff et al., vol. 2 (Berkeley: University of California, 1978), 1095.

gen Habermas suggests in a similar vein that early “state interventions without empowerment by law were blameworthy primarily not because they violated principles of justice laid down by natural right but simply because they were unpredictable and thus would preclude exactly the kind and measure of rationality that was in the interest of private persons functioning in a capitalist fashion.” Classical political economy, he writes, was the discourse that set the standard for such predictive rationality: “It conceived of a system whose immanent laws afforded the individual a sure foundation for calculating his economic activity rationally according to the standard for profit maximization.”<sup>26</sup> Bruce G. Carruthers, finally, notes that what the stock market requires is “accessible information and routine procedures.”<sup>27</sup> He suggests that when we speak of the financial revolution, we are speaking, in effect, of the introduction of such regular operations in the form of professional brokers, the financial press, a centralized exchange, standardized contracts, and so on. The solution to the problem of Lady Credit, then, was to tame her, to remove credit from the realm of risk, to sunder credit from fortune as one might separate conjoined twins. Credit’s taming required new institutions, new forms of rationalization: government statistics; new techniques for administering commerce; actuarial tables and new discourses of probability; more sophisticated forms of commercial empiricism, such as double-entry bookkeeping; the new field of political economy, designed to discover regularities in what had once been Fortune’s marketplace. “Goods had to be reified,” notes J. G. A. Pocock in one of his most commanding observations, “and the laws of the market discovered or invented, in order to restore reality and rationality to an otherwise purely speculative universe” (*Virtue*, 69).

Taken together, these observations should allow me, at last, to drive my point home: the early novel is an extension of these projects. If credit removes economic actors from a world of real and tangible things and inserts them instead into networks of speculation and belief, then the novel thrives because of its ability to narrate such social com-

<sup>26</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger, with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), 86.

<sup>27</sup> Bruce G. Carruthers, *City of Capital: Politics and Markets in the English Financial Revolution* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 170.



plexity, its knack for depicting individuals in circuits or social webs. The early novel is cognitive mapping for the new commercial classes. The first financial institutions of Britain's commercial revolution forced a degree of predictability onto a social sphere that would otherwise have been governed by fortune. "There is a real sense," continues Pocock, "in which the sense of a secular future is the child of capitalist investment." A society founded on credit survives "by men's expectations of one another's capacity for future action and performance" (*Virtue*, 69). The institutions of credit, like the predictive rationality that they require, are in large part, then, an issue of narrative. You cannot have credit unless you can narrate causally and prudentially, in a way that seems to set up strong links in a sequence of abstract and linear temporality—past, present, future—and this is precisely what novels like *Roxana* teach their readers to do. They teach them to tell a biographical narrative in causal terms, a narrative that can make sense of the past and project itself cautiously into the future, within the framework of credit and the money economy and outside the frameworks of providence and fortune. In one sense we can say that the new institutions of finance made such narratives possible: the eighteenth-century state and eighteenth-century capital set about to construct a planar, homogeneous space in which a narrative empiricism of this kind could function, in which its procedures would have efficacy—in which Fortune would not always barge in or muck up the game. But perhaps the more compelling insight is the converse of this one, an argument that, admittedly, bursts the confines of the present essay: the new forms of novelistic narrative themselves made the new institutions of finance possible. Finance capital actually required these new narrative models. So here is one way, at least, of solving the puzzle with which we began: curiosity, causality, the novel. There can be no credit without subjects who can narrate their lives in novelistic terms. Causal narrative is the guarantee of calculability. It is the minimum condition of a good investment.