

Telling Stories: Perspectives on Literary History The Narrative Genres in Eighteenth-Century France

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Perhaps I should start with my title. My colleagues have been saying to me that it looks long enough to be a lecture on its own. It is true that it was intended to suggest reasonably fully the range of what I hope to discuss.

First of all: *telling stories*. In other words, it will be about the literary genres that present a narrative; and about different ways in which narratives have been—and can be—presented through language. I shall be leaving aside—both for convenience and to remain within the confines of a single lecture—the relationship between what is conventionally seen as narrative fiction on the one hand and dramatic or theatrical forms of narrative on the other.

In the second place my title refers to: *perspectives on literary history*. My other major emphasis will thus be on attempting to present my topic from a number of different points of view, on trying to build up in this way an impression in the round.

My sub-title aims to suggest the particular types of narrative which I have been most concerned with in my own research and which I shall make the focus of my discussion here. I find it hard to believe that I have been occupying myself for over thirty years with what is conventionally labelled as the eighteenth-century French novel. I have in my time turned the pages of literally thousands of examples of the genre, as—together with my research colleagues—I attempted to survey exhaustively this type of writing at this period in the past. Not that I wish to express any sense of weariness or regret—my surprise comes rather from the fact that the subject still seems, to me at least, so fresh and challenging.

So in this discussion I should like to try to outline what I see my

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field of research as being. What was narrative fiction in eighteenth-century France, and in what context did it exist? How were stories told? How were they produced and how were they consumed?

My topic will thus be largely concerned with the concept of genre: the notion that there will be a range of conventional and more or less rigid forms into which all discourse will be moulded. My subject will be the narrative genres, but my mode of communication, I am acutely aware, will be another genre with which I am much less familiar—the inaugural lecture.

Let me use the tried-and-tested educational principle of beginning with the familiar. The three items of eighteenth-century narrative fiction best known in the Anglo-Saxon world have found their widest audience through adaptations in other media.

The abbé Prévost's *Histoire du chevalier Des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut*¹ is familiar to opera-goers through the music of Massenet's *Manon* and Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*. (Auber's version is far less commonly performed, although there was a revival in Paris a couple of years ago at the Opéra comique.) These operas are based on a section of a long novel entitled *Les Mémoires et aventures d'un homme de qualité*, published volume by volume over the years 1728 to 1731. I say a section of a novel, for the work which today is constantly reprinted in paperback editions as an item in its own right was originally tacked on, as a separate episode, to a long recounting of the travels and adventures of a French nobleman. The hero of the novel proper tells his story in the first person, in the form of his memoirs. This principal narrator is not the hero of the story of *Manon Lescaut* but rather a listener to Manon's lover's tale. The situation is supposed to be that the man of quality, in the last volume of the novel, is reproducing Des Grieux's story just as the young man told it to him when they met in their travels many years before.

Manon Lescaut, as an example of eighteenth-century French fiction, illustrates many facets of the genre as it was conceived in the early part of that century. As you will have gathered, even from my brief presentation, the structure of the *Mémoires et aventures d'un homme de qualité*, is in modern terms somewhat rough and ready. It is based on the time-honoured technique for long fiction of stringing together a series of adventures that gain their unity from the identity of the hero and the peregrinations that this hero carries

out. This structural principle in Western literature goes back of course to Homer's *Odyssey*. It was espoused enthusiastically in the Greek novels of the first centuries A.D. and given new currency in the heroic romances of the seventeenth century. Whilst Prévost, for his part, attempts to give a recognisable picture of contemporary life, rather than the royal or pastoral adventures of mythical or historical figures, he is still using what was soon to become an increasingly old-fashioned way of telling a long story: namely to accumulate a series of what remain essentially short narratives.

Where Prévost is not old-fashioned is in his use of first person narrative. Like many of his contemporaries he is acutely aware of the way in which a story where the main character tells his or her own tale has the effect of breaking down the distance that can separate the reader or listener from the action being related. On the one hand, there is an automatic aura of truth surrounding the memoir form; on the other, there is the simple fact that the traditional narrator, the story-teller, has been supplanted, done away with.

These narrative effects, directed towards involving the reader more closely with the events of the story, are illustrated in what may be seen as their extreme form in the next example I should like to remind you that you know.

I refer to Laclos's *Liaisons dangereuses*,² first published in 1782 and popularised in recent years through a stage adaptation and in fact two new film versions. These transpositions, however, eliminate entirely the basic narrative technique of the novel, for the story is told through the letters supposedly exchanged by the characters. The *Liaisons dangereuses* is an epistolary novel, a sub-genre only infrequently exploited in our own day. Here the traditional story-teller has been eliminated as in first person narrative, but we have gone further. There is now no principal narrator at all, and each of the personages takes his or her turn to present his or her point of view. And these personages are supposedly not writing for a single unchanging reader, but are conceived as being caught in a variety of acts of communication with a variety of individual recipients of their messages.

It is particularly on the level of the overall construction of the novel that a very considerable change in technique is evident when we pass from *Manon Lescaut* to the *Liaisons dangereuses*. The only

journeys now are from salon to salon, from boudoir to boudoir, from city residence to country house. The time scale here is of months rather than a life-time. A handful of symmetrically chosen characters works out a tightly managed plot—the kind of plot that in earlier days would have been the subject of an interpolated story within a larger work. Laclos, like his contemporaries, in the latter part of the eighteenth-century, is able to write a long narrative based on a relatively simple set of events because he knows how to slow down his narrative pace.

This trick was, it may be added as a parenthesis, what made Samuel Richardson, with *Pamela*, *Clarissa Harlowe* and *Grandison*, the publishing sensation he was in his day. Whilst modern students of the English novelist may feel that he overdoes the detail, his contemporaries were swept off their feet by the impression he gave them that they were ‘living along’ with their fictional heroes and heroines. Perhaps the nearest modern equivalent is the pleasure of the television serial, which is going strictly nowhere, but which delights in imitating the rhythms and the minutiae of everyday life.

The two French examples I have chosen have, I hope, allowed me to give some inkling of what I see as the great technical achievements of the later eighteenth-century novel. On the one hand, practitioners of the genre learned to break with the past and to use simple and well-constructed (rather than purely episodic) plots for long works of fiction, and this was something entirely new. On the other hand, they did this by slowing down the pace of narration and attempting to imitate the individual’s perception of the passing of time and of the moment-by-moment experience of living. The great novelty for the public was to be led by such techniques into feeling a new involvement with the events of the fiction that was being read. The narrator’s job was now less to tell a story than to help his audience to experience that story.

This was an ambition that the nineteenth-century novel continued to pursue and to develop, and popular fiction goes on doing so—as exemplified in those large paperbacks that proliferate in airport bookstalls for buyers who obviously feel the need to be transported in imagination away from the discomfort of the 747. Innovative fiction in the twentieth century has increasingly abandoned such techniques, however, and attempted to break rather than create the

illusion of participation. Is it because other media have exploited audience-involvement through techniques that became more effective if only because of their novelty? I am thinking of the nineteenth-century theatre and its descendant the silent cinema. But even more of the children of those genres: the wide-screen, Technicolor, stereophonic sound cinema presentation—and the constant and multiple flow of moving, colour, talking images that flit across countless television screens, blurring fiction and reality into an indistinguishable experience.

My first two examples have served to illustrate what seems to me an essential originality of the eighteenth-century novel in France. My third familiar illustration will serve to show that this can be only a partial view of what is, by its nature, a far more complex phenomenon.

Voltaire's *Candide*,³ in purely quantitative terms, is probably best known in the Anglo-Saxon world through an American musical version. I cannot comment on this adaptation as I have never been tempted to follow it up. Just as I feel decidedly unenthusiastic at the idea of any kind of version in other media of Proust's great novel, I am not really tempted by any form of *Candide* which loses that sly, disabused, witty, vulgar, uproarious and at the same time terrible, narratorial voice that presents the innocent hero's misfortunes to us. Here we have the exact opposite of the kind of reader-identification which does away with the traditional story-teller. It is true that we have a biting parody of the old structural principles of the romance: Voltaire's tale relentlessly mocks the long narrative that is based on a journey, and relies on extraordinary coincidences, deaths that turn out not to have been fatal, and a happy ending that makes everything all right after all. It is also true that Voltaire is using fiction to get across a message, and that the eighteenth-century novel—at least in its later manifestations—very frequently laid great stress on the moral implications of the stories told and indeed on the moral effects they could expect to exert upon their readers. In no way, however, can it seriously be argued that Voltaire is attempting to involve his reader emotionally and pragmatically in his narrative: the engagement remains intellectual, ironic, analytical.

One reason for this, clearly, is that Voltaire does not see himself, in generic terms, as a novelist, but rather as a writer of short fiction.

His collected tales may be entitled *Romans et contes* (novels and short stories), but they are effectively all *contes* (short stories). In other words Voltaire writes brief, not long, fiction. There is no attempt to slow down narrative pace; indeed speed and brevity are of the essence. Voltaire maintains the traditional third-person narrative voice of the short tale, an efficient and effective way of cutting corners, directing the reader, and pointing a moral. What is typical of the Enlightenment is on the one hand the way in which such a humble and accessible type of narrative is given such a noble mission, and on the other hand the manner in which the techniques of short narrative are, as it were, exaggerated in the search for a more taut and efficient story-telling formula.

Voltaire's work can serve to remind us of the way in which at this period the modern distinction between short and long fiction is beginning to develop. We have noted that before the eighteenth-century length in narrative was achieved by placing end to end (or by interweaving) what were in fact a number of individual short narrations. As the novel learned to slow down its narrative pace and to make use in more leisurely fashion of the space at its disposal, the short story typically moved in the opposite direction, exploiting its brevity in ever more typical ways.

The history of short fiction brings me to one of the French eighteenth-century writers who intrigues me most: Jean-François Marmontel.⁴ To date I have spared you obscure examples, but here I must change tactic. But be reassured, Marmontel is not a household name to the French today either. And yet he was one of the most eminent literary men of his generation. His fame—not quite of the order of that of Voltaire and Rousseau, but certainly ahead of Diderot—was Europe-wide, and largely as a result of his collections of short stories.

He was in fact an early proponent (both in theory and practice) of the 'well-made' brief narrative, with a single focus, and an extreme stress on technical and thematic unity, accurate plotting and vigorous narrative energy. He is mentioned far too little in histories of the genre, which tend not to look further back than the early years of the nineteenth century. (And yet Edgar Allan Poe must have known Marmontel's work ...)

The case of Marmontel reminds us that the story of eighteenth-

century French fiction is more complex than was first suggested here, if only because outlines of literary history sternly pull the shades on the mass of forgotten writers who had brief or long periods of fame in their own day, or who, indeed, exploited the genre ingloriously or anonymously. Specialist histories of the novel in France will not fail to mention such people as Lesage and Marivaux or Bernardin de Saint-Pierre and the marquis de Sade—or even Fénelon, Hamilton, Robert Chasles, Crébillon, and Rétif de la Bretonne. But how often does one find a reference to Madame de Gomez, Baculard d'Arnaud, Gueullette, Duclos, madame de Tencin, Louvet de Couvray, to name but a handful of the cohort. All these men and women contributed to the development of prose fiction in eighteenth-century France. The work of some of them is today seen as extremely original and influential (one thinks of Marivaux for instance or of Diderot), even though their work was either seen as eccentric or known in the most fragmentary form in their lifetime.

If it is difficult to account for the whole army of writers of fiction who may be numbered in hundreds, how is one going to deal with the thousands of novels (let alone short stories) that poured from the presses. A major part of my research work has been in surveying the total production of prose narrative in the French language between 1700 and 1820.⁵ Something over 3,000 new works originally written in French appeared in the century from 1701 to 1800. To these can be added another 700 or 800 translations from other languages. It is a sobering thought to realise that of these only a dozen or so are still commonly read and studied, even by specialists. *Sic transit gloria litterarum.*

Once one starts to look at the production of works of fiction, one is led to consider the circuits of production, distribution and consumption that supported what was clearly a substantial branch of the publishing industry. It should be added that only gradually did prose fiction become a major branch of literature—and only really in the latter part of the century—competing as it did with religious works on the one hand and the 'official' literary genres, such as verse and drama, on the other.

Novels were produced by booksellers, mostly clustered in Paris, but to some extent in the provinces. Their businesses were closely regulated by government ordinances, as were those of the printers

who actually produced the volumes. The content of novels, as of all printed books, was subject to a system of censorship and the purchase of permission to publish, which weakened gradually as the century progressed and which was abolished by the Revolution—before being reinstated in other guises by Napoleon.

Booksellers kept shops (and held onto stocks for what seem to modern eyes extraordinary lengths of time—ten to twenty years on occasions), and they did business with correspondents in the provinces and outside of France through the postal system. Books published in this way were an expensive item, available only to the aristocracy and the prosperous middle classes. In the latter wpart of the century, the English fashion of the lending library was imported into Paris and many booksellers began to rent out their volumes (especially novels) as well as sell them. Many of us here tonight can remember the last days of the local lending library in this country; and of course the system has been reinvented to distribute video cassettes—perhaps the true successors of the eighteenth-century novel—for all the reasons I outlined when I spoke of the immediacy of television, plus the flexibility in choice of title and time of use.

Readers of novels—or at least purchasers of novels—necessarily belonged to the wealthier classes of society, as books of any substance and intended for entertainment were normally beyond the reach of artisans and those even less well off. There are many references to servants reading their masters' books and their novels in particular, and indeed purloining them, but the lifestyle of domestics was unusually ambiguous in an age that normally kept social classes in their place. A major bar to universal consumption of novels, apart from the financial prohibition, was the extremely low level of literacy that persisted—whilst improving slowly—throughout the century. Novels were, of course, considered at the time to be particularly attractive to a female audience. This was not only because of the prevalence of love stories, but also because women, lacking the formal education that gave access to official literature, were supposed to have found access to an untraditional and all-involving genre more readily within their grasp. In the latter part of the eighteenth century in France, the juvenile market for fiction also began to be exploited in earnest, thanks to the success of the

moralistic but talented Arnaud Berquin—one of the great pioneers of children's literature.

One particular type of reader of novels—then as now—was the literary critic, the literary theorist or commentator. In general terms, the critical establishment in France during most of the eighteenth century remained disdainful towards novels, or else actively hostile. Four major objections to the genre surfaced constantly. Firstly, that Aristotle had never heard of it and prescribed the verse epic as the proper form of long narrative. Secondly that writing fiction (especially when there was a pretence of truth) was the same as lying—that other colloquial sense of 'telling stories'. Thirdly that the constant theme of love led to immorality. (Rousseau, in a preface to the *Nouvelle Héloïse*, got around this one by claiming that his novel could not corrupt young girls, for if any young girl even opened it she was already corrupted.) And lastly that reading novels was a waste of time that should be spent on pious works and the search for salvation. It has been claimed that hostility to prose fiction reached such heights in France in the 1730s that the genre was officially outlawed. In spite of all of these fulminations, the public for novels grew constantly; and increasing currency was accorded the counter-claim from more favourably disposed theorists: that reading fiction offered a useful simulacrum of life experiences and a practical course in morality by examples.

So far we have considered, in this sketch of eighteenth-century French fiction, the texts themselves, the writers, the distributors and the consumers. There are of course other viewpoints from which one can observe this complex phenomenon, and I should like to develop just one of them.

The production of narratives in eighteenth-century France can be considered from the perspective of the media used to communicate these narratives. We have talked in terms of the novels and short stories published as books, but it is worth remembering that stories were also told in many other ways. Even within the parameters of the official book trade, of course, many other traditional narrative genres competed for attention with the new forms of story-telling. Mediaeval forms, such as the *fabliau*, lived on for instance in the vast production of jokebooks. And saints' lives and moral exempla were still produced in enormous numbers for the devout. Classical

genres were assiduously cultivated, from the mythological tales derived from Ovid, to verse and prose fables, dialogues, allegories, dreams, character sketches, pastorals, and—the jewel in the generic hierarchy—the verse epic. Early modern models of prose fiction were constantly reprinted: Boccaccio, the Spanish picaresque novelists, the pastoral tradition of Montemayor, of Sidney and d'Urfé, the heroic romances of mademoiselle de Scudéry and her peers, the comic parodies of Cervantes and Scarron ...

The booktrade had already gone beyond the traditional production of individual titles and had invented and exploited the formula of the serial publication. The production of periodicals—weekly and monthly magazines—was already highly developed in the pre-Revolutionary period. In literary periodicals, the short story found a new context, a new popularity and a new set of formal conditions that had important consequences for the manner in which the genre developed. The great Marmontel first published his *Contes moraux* in the major journal of his day, the *Mercure de France*, and they were quickly pirated by other journalists all over Europe.

Printed books, however, as produced from the presses for booksellers and journalists, were not the only medium for narrative. We have already noted that the reading public was relatively small because of the low levels of literacy. This meant that traditions of oral story-telling remained alive, particularly in the French countryside, well into the nineteenth century. Peasant communities would gather on feast days or on winter evenings to listen to one of their number retell traditional tales, partly through recitation, partly through improvisation. (The convention lingers on among parents who tell rather than read traditional tales to their offspring.) And in aristocratic salons oral presentation of stories in prose or in verse was a time-honoured tradition, embodied in the narrative structure of many printed collections of stories that go back at least to Boccaccio's *Decameron*. (Perhaps it could be argued that the public lecture is one of the last artisanal vestiges of this kind of oral literature prepared for and shared by a small community.)

Manuscript as a medium of distribution of literary productions still persisted in eighteenth-century France, in spite of the dominance print had already achieved. Friends still exchanged their attempts at writing verse and prose, often as part of the still strong habit of

extensive letter-writing. Authors of subversive works, unable to risk having them printed, resorted likewise to multiple manuscript copies. There is also the celebrated case of a literary periodical, the *Correspondance littéraire*, from 1753, that was prepared for a number of royal and princely subscribers and sent all over Europe in manuscript copies. (Some of Diderot's prose fiction, of course, first appeared therein.)

Related to the official booktrade by its use of printing, but separate from that trade by the nature of its product and the means of distribution of that product was the popular press, producing cheap little brochures of only a few pages for the new literate elements of the poorer social classes. In French these publications, which the English called 'chapbooks' or 'cheapbooks', went under the general label of the *bibliothèque bleue*, because of the cheap blue-grey recycled card used typically for their covers. The content of the *bibliothèque bleue*, reproduced on low-quality paper with poor type and wood-cuts, was made up of works of piety, practical manuals, games and jokes, but also fairy stories, tales of chivalry and moral exempla. Their content is never new, always borrowed, always simplified, abridged, adapted to an uneducated public. The market for these cheap brochures appears to have been enormous and certainly in the quantity of units sold it went well beyond the turnover of the book-trade proper. They were not available in normal bookshops, but were carried through the countryside on the backs of peddlers along with their stock of cottons and ribbons, of household requisites and cheap novelties.

When one looks at the variety of media for fiction, one is easily tempted to see correspondences between the modes of transmission and the formal qualities of the kinds of stories told through them. The magazine story will be brief and to the point if only because of exigencies of space. The tale in the *bibliothèque bleue* will be told simply, albeit with much redundancy, with illustrations, with short and easily-managed divisions, so that new readers (and those that will be expected to read aloud to the illiterate) will not find themselves out of their depth. The oral tale will continue to treat traditional subjects, to formalise the role of the narrator, and to fulfil a didactic or warning function for the adult uneducated and the young.

It may be argued that the distinct formal qualities of the

eighteenth-century novel can be traced back to the medium in which it was created. The modern novel may be seen in this perspective as the first genre uniquely created for and in print. Whereas earlier written and printed forms of narrative were in a sense transpositions of earlier oral models, the novel as the eighteenth century created the concept and as we understand the term today was always intended for extended individual reading. Hence the effect of intimacy and of personal experience. As we read, the novelist attempts to mimic our own perceptual experiences: observing places and actions, listening to sounds and speech, thinking and planning and reflecting. The notion I developed earlier, that the eighteenth-century novelists learned to slow down the speed of narration and to involve their readers in the action of their story sits well with the hypothesis that it is the medium of print and the processes of silent reading that allow them to develop these techniques.

I have tried to sketch, in what we have discussed to date, some varying perspectives on the development of prose fiction in eighteenth-century France. I have suggested something of the complexity of the topic as we observed it from a variety of vantage points. I have also tried to demonstrate how aspects of the development of narrative observed at one particular level and from one particular perspective can have relevance to other or similar characteristics of the genre that are highlighted by other levels and perspectives of analysis. My principal example of this phenomenon was the way in which the innovatory techniques of reader-involvement observed at the level of the text can be related to the use of the print medium in a new way for a new kind of public.

It is a most exciting commentary on the progress of the discipline of literary history that an appreciation of such interrelationships is coming to be a central preoccupation of our discipline. And I devote my brief conclusion to my experience of varying concepts of a historical approach to literature that have held sway over the years I have been working on the early French novel. The changes I have seen can be characterised as a move from a naive to a self-conscious view of literary practice and of historiography, together with a shift from an analytical to a synthesising methodology.

When I worked on my doctoral thesis in the late 1950s, current methods remained those of the Lansonian school: the examination

of non-literary documentation as a background to the literary text. My thesis on the depiction of Parisian reality in the novels of the then relatively obscure writer Rétif de la Bretonne involved the comparison of the 'literary' evidence with a mass of documentation conceived of as the 'historical' evidence. In those days in the more traditional departments of the French universities there was no theoretical discussion of what characteristics might conceivably distinguish the two types of text. It was a matter of labels: some forms of writing were put in the category of literature and others in the category of documentary evidence. And so I proceeded to compare what Rétif had written in his novels with whatever anybody else may have written in what were intuitively categorised as non-literary texts.

Of course, even then, new approaches to the historical disciplines had been developing and had already influenced the parameters of literary history. The sociological analysis of the records of the past that had been espoused by the *Annales* school found its first parallel in types of research into the literary past that looked beyond the canon of great names and attempted to investigate and indeed to measure statistically the work of minor and forgotten writers. Out of this kind of study of the past grew the particularly successful branch that became known as the history of the book, studying the material context of publication in early modern times and on into the nineteenth century. The kind of bibliographical work I began in the early 1960s (and I suppose my original choice of the then less-than-celebrated Rétif de la Bretonne for my thesis) were related to such attempts to study earlier centuries in the detail of their more humdrum characteristics.

Marxist history and Marxist analyses of literature, of course, also saw historical and literary developments as part of an essentially political process, of a struggle for power between different social groups. Such approaches—strictly Marxist or not—had a strong influence on concepts of prose fiction, which came to be seen as a genre belonging particularly to the rising middle classes. These methodologies directly or indirectly inspired studies of censorship, and of the influence the official context of the novel may have had upon its evolution.

Whilst historiography did not stand still, its more traditional

tenets increasingly came under attack, with the rise of structuralism in the 1960s. In particular, the accumulation of data now tended to be seen as a misguided endeavour unless a theory or a structural concept could enable the researcher to make sense of those data. Intellectual history now began to be seen as a series of constructs that were first and foremost examined as they were seen to function within a given era, but then compared as a series of paradigms in sequence.

Structuralist literary studies retreated from history into the analysis of the text itself. Inspired by structuralist linguistics (and to some extent by generative linguistics), the work of literature was conceived on the model of the sentence, with its own elements and its own rules of combination. New interest was aroused in the way in which early novels functioned and, through a wide variety of structuralist studies or merely studies with a formalist emphasis, a great deal of progress was achieved in our understanding of what was called in a celebrated phrase 'the rhetoric of fiction'.

This divorce of history and literature has, however, largely been reconciled in the last ten to fifteen years. Both linguistics and literary studies have developed theoretical models that have made it possible to link again the text and its context. A major influence has been the growth of schools of pragmatic and systemic linguistics which attempt to take into account not only the form of the message but the input of the speaker and the listener as well as the situation in which the speech act occurs. There has been a return to a view of language and of literature as a total system, the parts of which are interrelated in complex but analysable ways. The availability of computerised methods of manipulating and analysing data have, of course, made many of these developments possible.

At the same time, traditional labels for various forms of discourse have been broken down, and today the so-called 'historical' document can be seen as a construct obeying its own rules and constraints, in the same way as the so-called 'literary' document is the product of another set of rhetorical and generic parameters. Today, more than thirty years on, my thesis on Rétif de la Bretonne's picture of Paris in his novels would be based not on an essentially haphazard accumulation of evidence (which did not, I say in my defence, necessarily lead to conclusions that were absolutely off the mark),

but rather on a notion of the essential unity of all forms of discourse.

Literary history has thus become a study that seeks to understand the workings not only of a textual system but of a complex cultural system. There is today in this discipline the constant ambition to interrelate the levels of communication, from the material to the actual and to the conceptual. I have tried to show how connections can be made between the form of eighteenth-century narrative fiction and the context of its production, its distribution and its consumption. I have attempted also to relate the variety of media that transmitted narrative to the forms it took on. By examining this generic system from the past in its detailed configuration, perhaps it will be possible to make some small progress in understanding further aspects of the processes of human communication.

One of the essential features of the story, of course, is that it must come to a close, it must leave us with some sense of an ending. And lectures obey the same rule of finality. I should like to revert to forms of first person narrative as I conclude, and to evoke for you something of my own personal experience.

I should like firstly to express my thanks to my former Head of Department, who over more than twenty-five years offered me constant support and encouragement, not to mention his untiring patience. I refer to Professor Keith Goesch, of Macquarie University, who has demonstrated a long commitment that is deeply appreciated. From the start he set me a model as a researcher and a publisher.

And again, I cannot close without paying tribute to my late colleague, the English scholar, Professor Vivienne Mylne, with whom I worked for three decades on the historical bibliography of the eighteenth-century novel. It was in many ways a unique collaboration: it took place at a distance, it lasted an unusually long period of time, it was for all concerned an enriching experience from every point of view. Vivienne died suddenly last June and, with our friend and collaborator, Professor Richard Frautschi of the Pennsylvania State University, I still find it hard to accept that we shall not hear Vivienne's laugh again nor see the spark in those oh-so-enquiring eyes. A great academic career has ended, which enriched our knowledge of the French eighteenth century, always remaining aware of those myriad links between text and context that have been our subject here tonight.

I have now told my stories—stories of eighteenth-century fiction, stories of the some of the frames in which research takes place, both intellectual and personal. In my career, I may add in closing, there has been a certain narrative symmetry: here at the University of Sydney I am back where I started as a student and as a young academic, but neither the institution nor I are quite the same. And is that not the essence of narrative—a journey through time and space, a process of change and transformation, a rite of passage? And dare I hope that this particular conclusion, as in the best of stories—and as Scheherazade for one understood so very well—is but another beginning?

Notes

1. The most accessible edition in English is probably the translation by L. W. Tancock in the Penguin Classics series, Harmondsworth, 1949.
2. Translated by P. W. K. Stone in the Penguin Classics series, Harmondsworth, 1961.
3. Translated by J. Butt in the Penguin Classics series, Harmondsworth, 1966.
4. No modern editions of Marmontel's *contes* are currently available in French or in English—a measure of this author's spectacular fall from literary grace.
5. Angus Martin, Vivienne Mylne, Richard Frautschi, *Bibliographie du roman français, 1751-1800*, London & Paris, 1977. This bibliography is currently under revision to cover the full century, from 1700, and a further study of the novel under Napoleon will take the data to 1815.