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Examples, Samples, Signs:

An Artifactual View of Fictionality in the French Novel, 1681-1830

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It has been just over a hundred years since a commentator identified "a peculiar phase" of the novel's history, a more or less eighteenth-century phase during which many novelists in both France and England pretended their novels were literally true.[1] Peculiar would seem the right word. The assertions, after all, rarely added up to an attempt to perpetrate an actual hoax; from what we can tell from the sketchy reception evidence, readers didn't seem to believe claims of truth; and hadn't Aristotle already taught that the essence of poetry is the possible rather than the true? Why did the novelists bother? And why did they at some point stop pretending, apparently feeling that it was of no import that novels be literally true? Behind this lurks a larger question that surely must be intriguing for anyone interested in literature: does fictionality itself, and not just the novel, have a history?

These questions have already been asked — and answered — by literary historians, including myself. But the answers proposed are invariably ill-informed, because we usually don't know what we are talking about. "Many novelists pretended," I just said, with typical literary-historical hedging. How many? And how many didn't? "At some point" they stopped: when, exactly? and all at once, gradually …? We don't know, and much worse, we don't realize that we don't know, because historians of the novel are content to argue by example — usually the few examples furnished by the literary canon, occasionally marginalized or forgotten examples, but examples whose representativity is never questioned. There are some classic methodological

pitfalls here: confirmation bias, for starters, since examples are chosen — "cherry picked" — to fit a narrative one already believes in; or the potential circularity of the demonstration, given that a general theory is developed from the observation of a few particulars which then become the evidence for the theory's soundness. Granted, these dangers plague research generally, but most disciplines at least pay them some heed. Why don't literary historians worry more about the validity of what Alan Liu has called their "usual anecdotal, faux-empirical, or unique-case observations"?[2]

A glance at the available accounts of the "fictionalization" of the novel can lead us to one answer. The scholarly context from which such accounts developed, starting in the 1980s, was the dominance of rise-of-realism narratives in the wake of Ian Watt. Watt had accustomed us to thinking of the novel's evolution as an unfolding alignment with empirical reality; in an equally famous argument, Roland Barthes went further [direction] , proposing that the nineteenth-century novel aimed at provoking in readers a duplicitous hallucination of experience he called the reality effect.[3] Scholars of fiction turned all this on its head by pointing out that what may be most notable about realist novels of the nineteenth century is that they do *not* pretend to be true stories but are frankly admitted as the inventions of an author. The novel, they suggested, moves from being a kind of ersatz history — Barbara Foley called this the "pseudofactual" novel[4] — to occupying a privileged and productive in-between space, not real but able to describe and even shape the real. This is the space called fiction. Fiction was not always there, but had to be invented; and the familiar eighteenth-century truth pretense — this is a true story, these are genuine letters — was a step in the process.

What, exactly, is evolving in such accounts? The novel, yes; but the novel's evolution is yoked to a much more diffuse change of a distinctly conceptual order. The first critic to rewrite

Watt's rise of realism as a rise of fiction was Lennard Davis, in 1983. Davis thought of the rise as a dialectical process: once, there was fanciful romance, which readers rejected with a demand for truth, for *news*, really; but the "claim that a work was true became harder to substantiate" and "the possibility arose that a work could be purely fictional."[5] In 1987, Michael McKeon, critical of Davis, nonetheless advanced a very similar account. Without foregrounding the term fiction per se, he nonetheless seemed to see it as a middle way between naïve empiricism and extreme skepticism: little by little, "modern culture becomes sufficiently tolerant of artful fictions to pass beyond the bare recognition of their incredibility and to conceive of the possibility for their validation in other terms."[6] Subsequently, starting in the mid 1990s, Catherine Gallagher offered several separate and influential accounts of the rise of fictionality. Gallagher, speaking the language more of Foucauldian discursive rupture than of historical dialectics, describes "a massive reorientation of textual referentiality"; prior to "the English novel's discovery of fiction," people lacked this particular "conceptual category," and so they needed to be "trained to read novels as stories about thoroughly imaginary (if representative) people."[7] So, people learn, they recognize, they discover; they conceive of something that was in fact there all along but that they couldn't see. In a word, at some point in the eighteenth century, they *get it*: they get fiction, which is also to say they come to understand what Coleridge (finally!) formulated as "the willing suspension of disbelief."[8] And we can see them getting it in the works of Defoe, Richardson, Fielding, whomever: our examples.

It's here one realizes that these aren't examples at all. If they were examples, we would be asking questions like: how representative is Richardson's decision to present the letters of *Clarissa* as a real correspondence? Did a following generation of writers make a different choice? Witness instead Gallagher's key formulation of her landmark thesis: "In England,

between the time when Defoe insisted that Robinson Crusoe was a real individual (1720) and the time when Henry Fielding [in *Joseph Andrews*] urged just as strenuously that his characters were not representations of actual specific people (1742), a discourse of fictionality appeared in and around the novel."[9] Gallagher goes on to suppose, on the basis of Lafayette's *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678) and Diderot's *La Religieuse* (pub. 1796) that the "transformation might have begun earlier and been completed later in France." What exactly is this discursive transformation, this new discourse of fictionality? It's readily apparent that it's not actually a change in the way people wrote novels or expressed their beliefs about literature. If that were the claim, a passing degree of convincingness would require many more examples. But *Joseph Andrews* and *La Princesse de Clèves* are not examples — representatives of a larger set or population. Gallagher's discursive transformation is epistemic: it is going on "below" the novels, which are taken for epiphenomena produced by a changing conceptual substrate. The problem isn't, therefore, an overreliance on canonical texts. More seriously, we are content with a few texts because those texts are *magical*. Magical reading accords causative power to an invisible entity lying behind the manifest world of texts. Call that entity Culture, which is not simply the sum of what people do and think, but rather the explanatory something that causes them to do and think in certain ways. So it's obvious enough why no one stops to ask if our examples have been gathered correctly or whether we need more of them: magical reading takes whatever is at hand and converts it into *signs*.[10]

The novels of Defoe, Richardson, Fielding: are they exemplary? of what? The only way to answer such questions is to stop looking for signs and to learn what their predecessors, competitors, and followers are up to. And for this, it's not enough to multiply our examples by reading more and footnoting accordingly: more examples are no better than a few examples if

they are still bad examples. What we really need are *samples*, taken methodically: only they will

allow us to understand if this or that book is truly a good example of what other people are doing

at the same moment, of what they will be doing shortly, or of what only a few belated stragglers

are still bothering with.

My aim, however, is not merely to come along and put some hard figures where before

we had only a few titles. To be sure, we need a better description of the archive, but only because

we want a better explanation of what is happening. Data-poor observations produce

unconstrained explanations: you can say pretty much what you want if you only have to correlate

a few data points. Better data, by contrast, constrains our explanations, which in turn makes them

more convincing.[11] I have made it clear that previous rise-of-fiction accounts seem to me dubious

because they commit us to taking literary works as signs. Other cases against them could

certainly be prosecuted: bald teleology and chauvinism, for starters.[12] Sampling, we will see,

further erodes the plausibility of predicating the fictionalization of the novel on a conceptual

mutation: the record wouldn't look as it does if that were what was going on. But at the same

time, the record revealed by sampling also suggests new possibilities. To anticipate, I will argue

that literary evolution can be understood roughly in the way that Science and Technology Studies

understands the evolution of technological artifacts. A notable effect of this argument will be the

dedramatization of the history of the novel, which has long proved difficult to separate from the

history of modernity itself. No longer taken for ciphers of the mysterious, world-historical

process of becoming modern, novels are free to be simple literary artifacts: objects invented by

humans to do things humans value. Those inventions sometimes catch on and sometimes don't;

but when they do, they get modified, refined, stabilized — until of course they are scrapped or

repurposed by people with different values. A ceaseless and banal process, probably not much

different — mutatis mutandis — from the one that brought us the smartphone and the flush toilet. Is it better to be banal and plausible, or momentous and magical? The reader will have to decide.

So: an impressionistic survey of mostly well-known works suggests that in the eighteenth century literal truth had an import it lost in the nineteenth. If this is right, how dominant was truth pretense during the Enlightenment? Did all authors use it? Only some, or only if they were writing a certain type of book? When did it lose this dominance? There are some basic questions to start out with, and questions that suggest some descriptive categories or "tags": we can go through the production of novels, tagging for this or that feature, and then use this metadata to trace diachronic variations, decade by decade. And there is no need to tag every single novel published — an onerous task, especially once production grows much beyond 20 novels a year, and really an unnecessary one. Everyone wants "more data," but gathering data costs money and sweat and time. Thus, as I've mentioned, the figures in this study are based on a sample of each decade's production. (Details on sampling procedure can be found in the Annex.)

Then, we need tags. Two obvious ones would be: FACTUAL and FICTIONAL. These won't do, however. One complication is that many novels contain no paratextual indications as to their fictional status. The more serious problem, however, is figuring out what we mean when we say "factual" and "fictional." From the very beginning of scholarly interest in this "peculiar phase," claims of truth have been difficult to pin down. Are we talking about purported editors like Richardson, presenting texts said to be by other people? about authors claiming to relate true stories — gossip or "human interest" narratives about unknown contemporaries? about writers who trumpet their use of source material for narratives about well-known figures from history? And "fiction" is a particularly treacherous term, even putting aside the objection that Aristotle

already distinguished the historian from the poet on the issue of adherence to the facts. After all, if the truth pretense was not intended to be taken literally — and anecdotally this would seem to be the case — why wouldn't such novels be "fictional"? For that matter, wouldn't a bona fide hoax be nevertheless a fiction, since someone made it up? The danger, of course, is that if we wait for consensus on a definition of fiction and fact, if we have to resolve the hefty philosophical and even cognitive issues behind their use, then we will never get started.[14]

Let's get started, then, by agreeing that describing the archive — and ultimately resolving the historical mystery of pseudofactual claims — does not require that we know what fiction "is." Instead of talking about how novels at one moment or another are or aren't fictional, I will proceed by establishing formal categories capable of accommodating all the novels of the period studied. Novels accompanied by a truth pretense such as that of *Clarissa*, for example, will share a particular tag. There are, however, many more tags, and I ask the reader's patience for the time required to lay out, up front, the most basic of them. This time is all the more necessary because my categories are, for better or for worse, mine alone: they don't correspond to period nomenclature, and they only partially echo classifications used by previous scholars. Crucially, however, my categories do correspond to distinctions in period *practice*: writers and readers of the time didn't call their novels by the names I will be using, but they did overwhelmingly recognize the distinctions I'm making — distinctions which I make only because it's their practice that has led me to make them.

To bring some order to the many ways historical "truth" may be invoked, I will start with a distinction between *somebody* novels and *nobody* novels.[15]

The characters of the former are somebodies in the sense of being important people — people known to readers who pick up the novel, indeed people whose renown is such that writers

can expect readers to *want* to pick up their novel. In some cases these somebodies are simply famous (or infamous) contemporaries, but in the main they are from the past: they have survived the winnowing of time and forgetfulness by dint of having their memorable actions set down in previous books. Somebody novels, then, build their plots around contemporary celebrities and known historical or legendary figures. For this reason, I will also call them by the more resonant name of *Aristotelian* novels — "Aristotelian," because they correspond to a widespread understanding of the *Poetics* and poetic invention, according to which the best literary characters were people of renown who had done important things — heroes, in other words. (Indeed, the venerable rhetorical term *inventio* referred not to the invention of a storyworld out of whole cloth, but rather to the poet's collecting or selection of his or her materials.) The job of the Aristotelian novelist was to choose among the coordinates furnished by tradition while fabricating ex nihilo other elements — including supporting characters — that would add up to a compelling plot. The point was not that Achilles or Cyrus "really" existed or that the novel was empirically "accurate," but that such well-known, sanctioned subjects were, by definition, superior to plots about people no readers had ever heard of before picking up the book. Thus, the Aristotelianism of a novel depends on subject matter alone, not on the level of historical faithfulness brought to bear on it. Certain authors of Aristotelian novels may well want to stress that they are using all the best sources on Elizabeth I or Julius Caesar. But for my classifications, these truth affirmations are superfluous: a novelist whose subject has extra-textual sanction is writing an Aristotelian novel; I stop well short of trying to gauge the historical bona fides of the finished work.

    Nobody novels, by contrast, concern run-of-the-mill private individuals of whatever social rank unknown to readers before they open the book. The presence or absence of truth

pretense makes sense only regarding these: authors of Aristotelian novels do not attempt to convince readers that their protagonists exist for the simple reason that readers already know who those protagonists are. When nobody novels are affirmed as true, we have the *pseudofactual* novel. The classic case is the editorial posture of Richardson and his French counterpart Rousseau. *Clarissa* and *Julie* are *document* novels — accounts purportedly composed by the protagonists themselves, and typically taking the first-person form of letters and memoirs. Not all pseudofactual novels take the form of documents, however — far from it. The second type of pseudofactual novel is the *true story*, in which author-narrators narrate an event they have heard of or witnessed. These are usually third-person works — or, if one prefers narratological terminology, works with heterodiegetic narrators.[16] I hasten to underline that pseudofactuality is a *posture* — which is there or not in the novels' paratextual apparatus — as opposed to a textual quality: I have not attempted to assess how "believable" assertions, or the novels they accompany, may be.

Other nobody novels, by contrast, are freely advanced as the creations of an author. Such works may be advertised as "true" in the sense that they help readers grasp moral truths, or in the sense that they tell us how society really works and how people really behave, or even in the sense that their characters are based on observation of an ethnographic or sociological nature. Nonetheless, when it comes to the historical existence of the characters, authors of this type of nobody novel admit invention. As such, I will call these works *invented* novels, with the proviso that I'm referring specifically to the explicit invention of protagonists as opposed to the crafting of plot.

Some nobody novels affirm truth, others affirm invention — but others still offer no information whatsoever on the literal existence of their characters. Are these not labeled because

the truth claim is implicit? Or because, on the contrary, it is assumed that the author made everything up? Such questions — good ones which will be taken up presently — need to be distinguished from another, which is: are these novels really pseudofactual or really invented? This question has no answer, because postures alone are being tracked. A novel that says nothing about its truth status can only be an *indeterminate* novel, and not a "hidden" pseudofactual or invented novel.

Thus far I have isolated four main categories of novels: Aristotelian, pseudofactual (including both documents and true stories), invented, and indeterminate, with the last three categories united by their subject matter — the doings of nobodies, as opposed to the deeds of somebodies. But all four are united on a deeper level still: they concern what I will call the "real world," that is, a world which has a basic if variable contiguity with respect to the world of the reader. Compare these with alternate-world novels — in the main, novels whose contents would have been qualified at the time as "marvelous." These include narratives in which nonhuman actors speak, imaginary voyages, and above all the full Enlightenment panoply of "tales" — fairy, oriental, and philosophical. I also include in the category of alternate-world novels allegories in which characters personify abstract qualities, though these are rare. With such subject matter, concerns about historical truth and invention are misplaced. Those concerns are relevant only to real-world novels.

It is thus my assertion that all novels in the period under study can be apportioned to one of five main categories, which can be laid out schematically as follows. (*In the period under study*, I emphasize: many of these distinctions would be treacherous or irrelevant in much literature from 1850 forward, as well as for literature from before 1600.)

Real-world				Alternate-world
Somebody (or Aristotelian)	Nobody			
	Pseudofactual	Indeterminate	Invented	

Fig. 1: Categories and subcategories of novels

Further discriminations are possible, but not necessary for the present inquiry. And it goes without saying that the archive contains cases that do not slip easily into these boxes. Their numbers, however, are so comparatively small that tagging them differently would have no impact on my findings.

For the period 1681 to 1830, samples indicate the following proportions of real- and alternate-world novels.
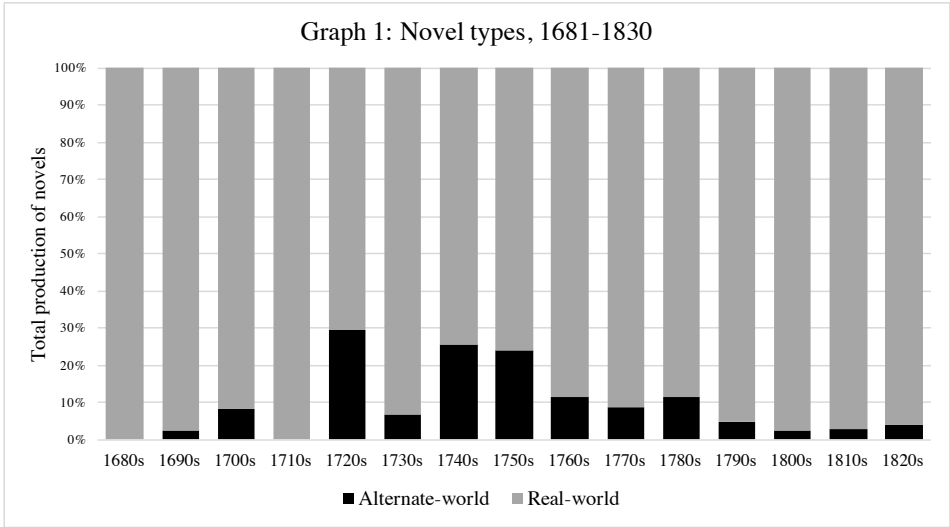

Graph 1: Novel types, 1681-1830

Alternate-world novels are a small component of the overall production — less than 10 percent, on average. Some decades show much stronger representation: notably, the totals for the 1740s, and 50s reflect the popularity of philosophical tales in Enlightenment discourse. In the balance of

this article, I am going to remove this category from all calculations. My decision — which admittedly may appear to be a form of mimetic bias[18] — is motivated by a number of factors. First, their popularity is brief: only for a few decades do they make up a significant portion of the production. Second, it is really only in those decades that something like a "typical" alternate-world novel exists — essentially, the philosophical tale.[19] Most of the production for other years is made up of a hodge-podge of different items that don't constitute anything like a tradition or genre, simply because there are too few of each. Third, and most important, the formal arrangements of alternate-world novels do not mirror those of their real-world counterparts. Of notable importance for this study is the fact that their pseudofactual apparatus can only be parodic, and that those parodic affirmations occur less often than do standard truth affirmations in nobody novels.[20] Because of this, and their unequal chronological distribution, their inclusion would have the result of muting evolutions occurring within real-world novels. Returning them to the calculations, however, would not fundamentally alter any of my findings.

Within the category of real-world novels, we can observe a clear evolution.
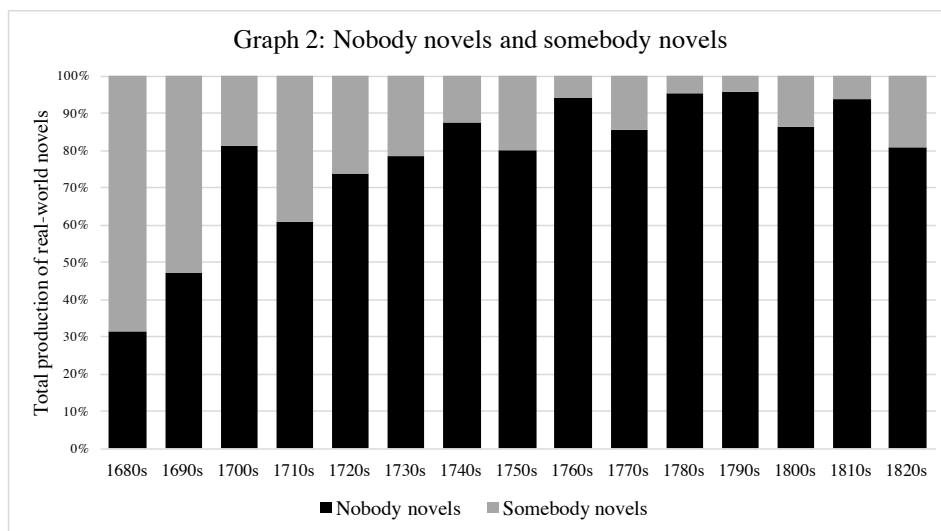
Graph 2: Nobody novels and somebody novels

We witness here the "nobodification" of the novel. At the beginning of this period, most novels take as their subjects known people — somebodies from history, legend, or current events. The dominance of this Aristotelian mode — and it extends back well before the 1680s — erodes over about half a century: by the 1730s, it represents at best 20 percent of the production and appears to retreat still further in the 1760s and after. Given this, it should be obvious that the enduring scholarly impression that early novelists were quite concerned with the literal truth of their works has an empirical basis: it derives not only from pseudofactual affirmations ("These are real letters," and so on), but also from the frequency with which writers before a certain point took known people as their subjects.

And those pseudofactual affirmations were also frequent — though there doesn't appear to be any specific moment in the eighteenth century after which they are not.
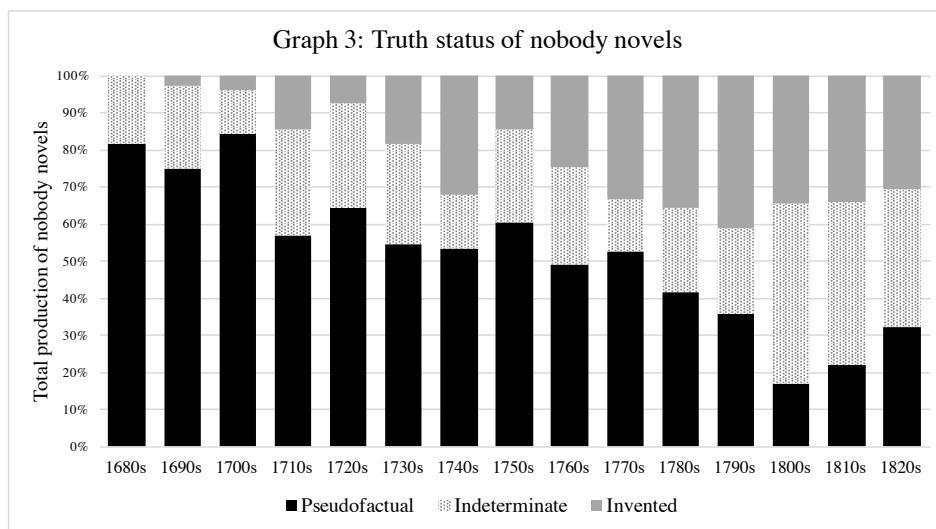
Graph 3: Truth status of nobody novels

Here too there is obvious change, though perhaps surprisingly slow change: only with the turn of the eighteenth century does pseudofactuality register a clear retreat. Nobody novels that advertise their invention are uncommon before the 1740s, when, rather suddenly, they come to represent roughly a third of the overall category. Intriguingly, this spike is fleeting: levels of invented novels then subside before registering a more even and sustained advance over the balance of the century. There is, however, an upper limit to the proportion of novels classified as invented: they never get much beyond 40 percent, and indeed plateau a little under that figure during the opening decades of the eighteenth century. The category of indeterminate nobody novels takes up the slack. This may not be surprising, since it stands to reason that by these years the assumption of invention on the part of writers and readers makes its overt declaration less important. Similarly, one might suppose that in the earlier part of this whole span, some novels were left without truth markers because of the converse assumption that nobody novels were supposed to be true. For the bulk of the span, however, no clear "horizon of expectations" can be deduced: though pseudofactual novels outnumber invented ones, they don't enjoy a clear hegemony. We can't know, then, why authors leave them unmarked (and it's a good bet that they have various reasons for doing so).

Taking Aristotelianism and pseudofactuality together, it is clear that eighteenth-century novelists were indeed very concerned about presenting their works as true — either true because it took known people as its subjects, or true because it was telling a true story about unknown people.
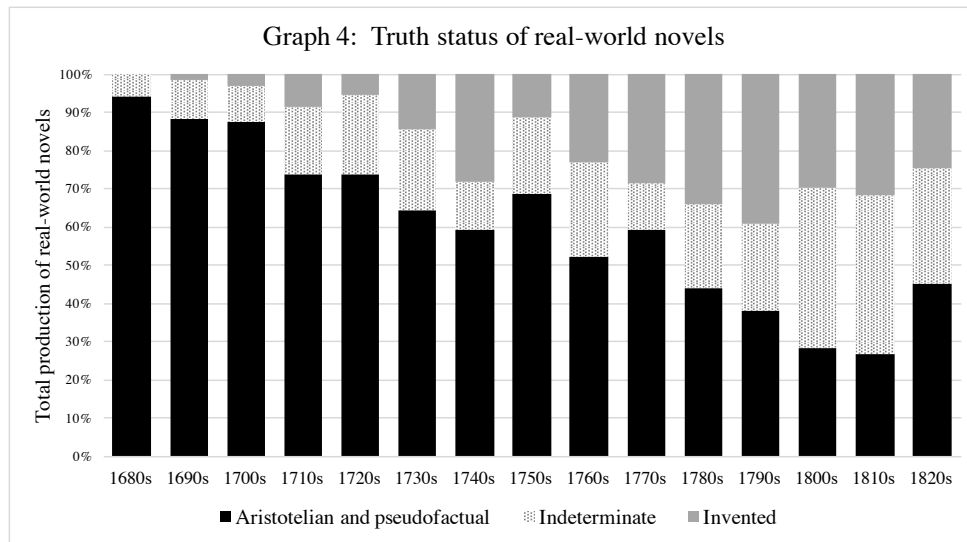
Graph 4: Truth status of real-world novels

Literal truth of one sort or another is a near inevitable feature of the novel over the first three decades of the span. Nonetheless, this new measure makes it clear that novels remain in the truth camp for seven decades more: though the Aristotelian novel is in clear retreat over the course of the eighteenth century, its residual production is nonetheless enough to enhance and extend the dominance of we might want to call the "referential" — or even "nonfictional" — mode. Even at the opening of the nineteenth century, novelists appear much more concerned with truth than many accounts have suggested. Thus, we have so far both a confirmation and an undermining of most accounts of the arrival of "fictionality": yes, novels at one point were overwhelmingly indexed to literal truth; but no, this predilection does not appear to have disappeared, only receded to minority status — and quite slowly at that.

One difficulty with these graphs is that each sort of bar is made up of items that are not necessarily identical; that is, a graph measures one particular attribute, but any novel has manifold attributes (only some of which, obviously, I have tracked). As a result, one can easily come away from Graph 4 with the impression of a steady erosion of truth claims over the

century, whereas Graphs 2 and 3 help us see that this apparently steady erosion is only the cumulative result of two separate changes. The pseudofactual posture of nobody novels appears to have essentially plateaued for seven decades (1711-1780); Graph 4's suggestion of a steady downward trend is an effect of the addition of the totals for Aristotelian novels, which are a different animal. And by the same token, that plateau itself may not be what it appears: it may hide changes going on within pseudofactual novels and nobody novels more generally.

Nobody novels, it turns out, are by and large novels with contemporary settings; Aristotelian protagonists, by contrast, are most often plucked from history. The result is that the nobodification of the novel is also a presentification. Tracking proportions of nobody novels and proportions of contemporary novels shows the correlation between the two.
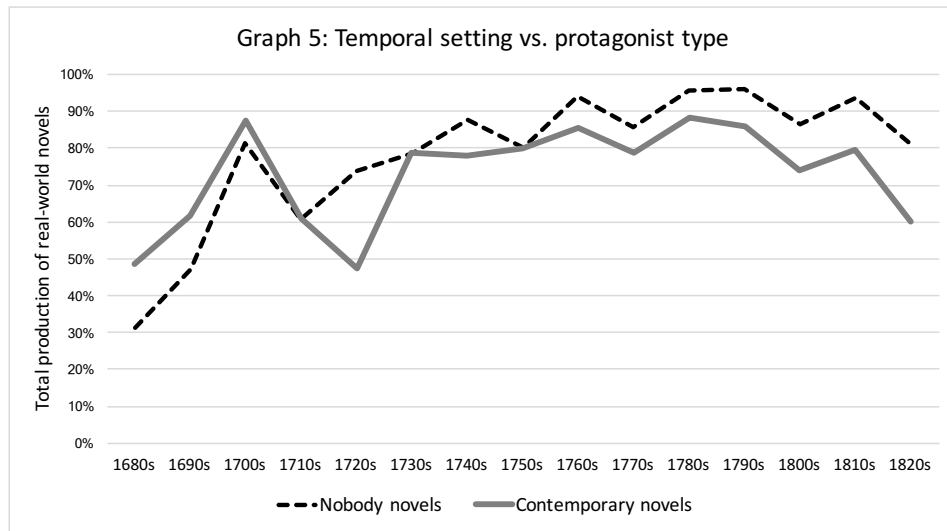

Graph 5: Temporal setting vs. protagonist type

The upward trend of both features as we move into the middle of the century is obscured somewhat by anomalous readings from the 1700s (already visible in Graph 2); but the most important lesson is the correlation itself. Of course, the correlation does not mean that novels

with contemporary settings are *invariably* nobody novels. Some nobody novels do have historical settings, especially from around the turn of the nineteenth century (this is the "historical novel" associated with Scott, which explains the increasing divergence from the 1800s on); and some Aristotelian novels take as their subjects contemporary somebodies (that is, celebrities of the day), especially before 1701. On the whole, however, these variants cancel themselves out. In practice, the nobody novel is also a contemporary novel, while the Aristotelian novel is historical.

Since this observation holds over the entire period, it doesn't directly help us understand what nonetheless appears to be changing within nobody novels — that is, both the growth of invented novels, which becomes very obvious by the 1740s, and the plateaued level of pseudofactual ones. Factoring in the nobody novel's truth claims, however, reveals a specific moment of change. Pseudofactual nobody novels are also contemporary novels, and vice versa — for a time.
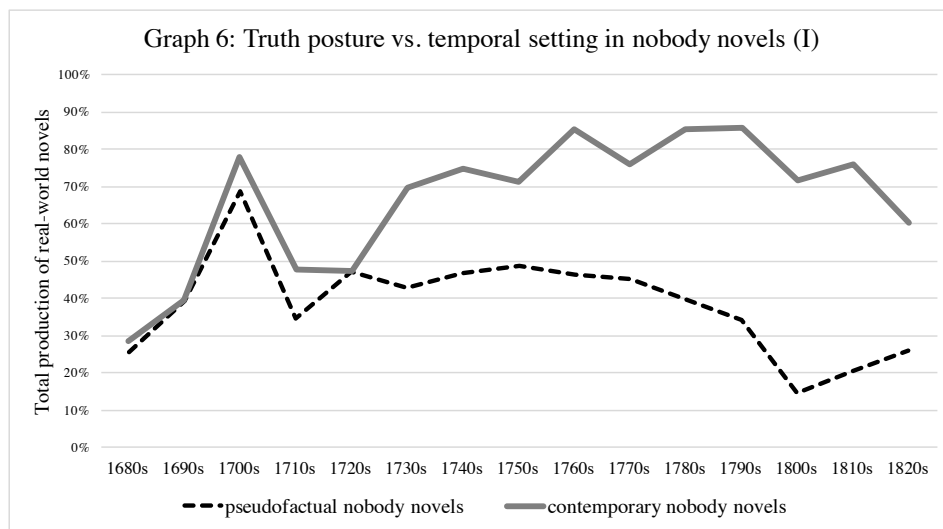
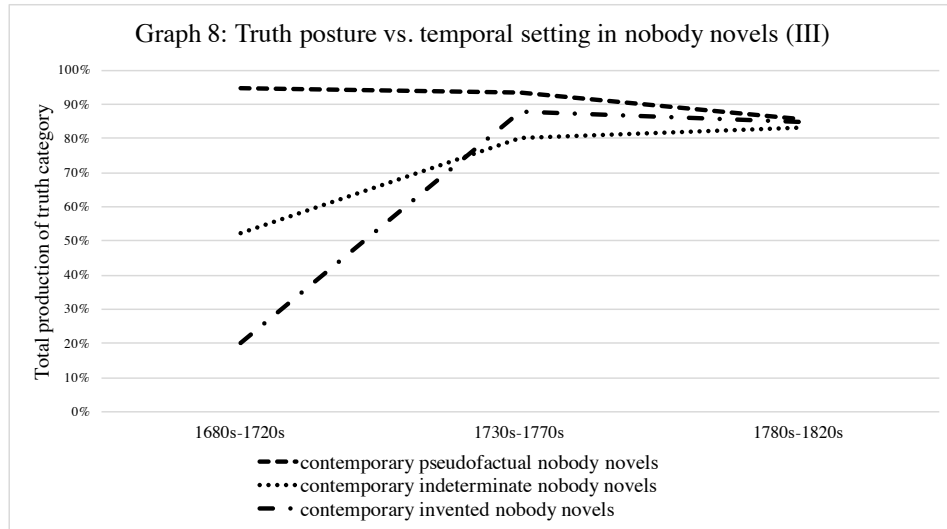Graph 6: Truth posture vs. temporal setting in nobody novels (I)

Pseudofactuality is tightly correlated with contemporaneity for the first half-century of this span (as it is before 1681 as well, though it obviously does not figure on this graph). This correlation breaks down in the 1730s, after which contemporaneity and pseudofactuality pursue very different destinies. Conversely, indeterminacy and invention are correlated with non-contemporary settings — in the main, historical settings, but also unspecified settings whose temporality is impossible to pin down. And that correlation, while not as sharp as the previous one, breaks down at the same moment.
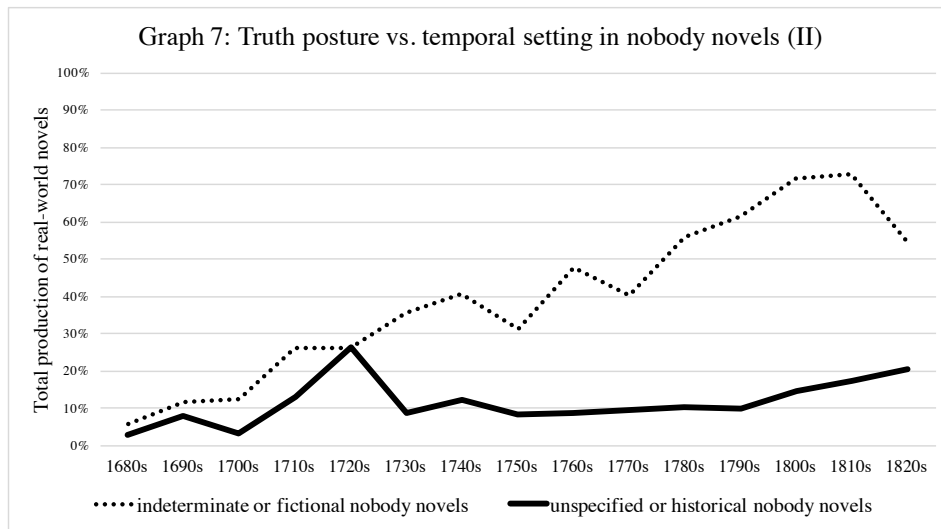
Graph 7: Truth posture vs. temporal setting in nobody novels (II)

Without this being apparent in overall tabulations of truth posture (i.e., Graphs 3 and 4), the 1730s jumps out as a moment of change. At this point, truth posture and temporal setting operate independently. The change is confirmed if we plot the percentage of each of the three nobody novel truth postures that have contemporary settings. Since the numbers of indeterminate and especially invented nobody novels are small prior to the 1730s, and since small populations lead

to dramatic chance variations, it helps to group the span by five-decade intervals. And again the

production of the five decades prior to 1731 stands out.

Graph 8: Truth posture vs. temporal setting in nobody novels (III)

At the turn of the nineteenth century, truth postures are completely independent of temporal

setting: pseudofactual, indeterminate, and invented novels have contemporary settings the same

amount of the time (84 percent of the time, roughly). But that independence, which holds as well

for the middle half century of the span, was not there prior to the 1730s. Before then, while

pseudofactual novels almost always had contemporary settings, invented novels had them only

20 percent of the time; indeterminate novels were in the middle, at around 50 percent.

Thus, while pseudofactuality steadily declines over 150 years, the thing that is declining

is, from the beginning to the end, roughly the same thing, at least by the criterion of temporality.

But this is not the case with indeterminacy and invention: the change in the 1730s suggests that

novels tagged invented and indeterminate before this date do not look quite like similarly tagged

novels from later. In other words, even if Graph 3 gives the impression of a steady growth of

invented nobody novels from the 1680s (first zero, then a few, then a few more, and so on), some sort of a break is in fact hidden — until temporal setting is taken into account. This implies that invented pre-1731 invented novels are not simply pseudofactual novels with a different preface, because the former rarely have the contemporary settings that the latter almost always do.

Temporal setting, however, is not the only variable to consider. Narration type — meaning first- and third-person forms — is also changing.
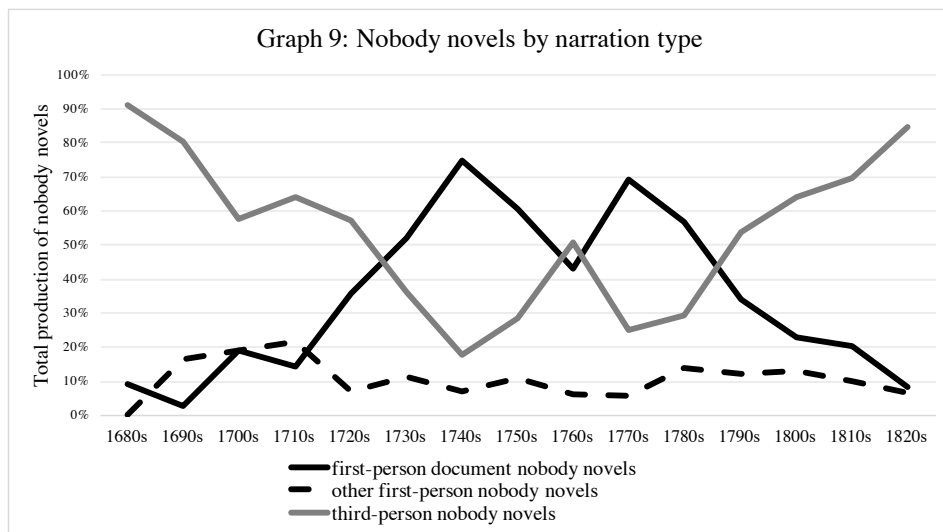
Graph 9: Nobody novels by form of narration

Here we see the proportion of third-person novels, along with two kinds of first-person novels. One — the major player — is what I call the document novel: these works take the form of a memoirs and letter collections. The other category of first-person novels is a grab-bag of minor variants — frame narratives, travel narratives, observational narratives, and narratives that focus not on a life (as does the memoir) but on a single episode. While the presence of the latter category is a kind of background noise, the first-person document novel rises and falls with symmetry; it also has an intriguing double peak, first in the 1740s and then again in the 1770s.[22]

The third-person novel is more or less a mirror image of the document novel, falling away before returning at the end of the span. And the first meeting point of the two major categories is the 1730s. Thus, the tight correlation between truth posture and temporal setting (Graphs 6-8) ends at about the same moment that the first-person document novel is ascending to hegemony.

These other measures suggest that the first fifty years of the span are relatively homogenous, despite what appears in Graph 3 to be an initial retreat of pseudofactuality in the 1710s. In fact, looking at Graphs 3 and 9 in tandem, we might discern three broad periods. The first, lasting from 1681 to 1730, is characterized by third-person novels set in the present said to be true stories; the second, from 1731 to 80, is dominated by first-person document novels, still set in the present but with much more varied truth postures; the third, from 1781 on, sees an erosion of pseudofactuality along with first-person forms, while indeterminacy expands markedly. Breaks between these spans are not radical: the document novel, for example, starts its rise in the 1720s and fall off noticeably only in the 1790s; pseudofactuality is already less dominant from the 1710s, and falls off gradually after the 1770s. Nonetheless, and again despite the general impression from Graph 3 of "more and more" invention and "less and less" pseudofactuality, the heart of the eighteenth century would seem to be something of a plateau — a stalemate between pseudofactuality (dominant at around 50 percent of the production) and invention (a minority choice, at an average of around 25 percent).

The stalemate endures precisely as long as first-person document novels prosper. This is no accident, since first-person novels are considerably more likely to be claimed true than third-person novels — at least over the middle half-century of the span.

Graph 10: Truth posture rates by narration type
(two-decade moving average)

Truth posture rates by narration type chart. Y-axis: Total production of narration type, from 0% to 100%. X-axis: decades from 1680s to 1820s.

Legend:
— Pseudofactual first-person nobody novels
— Pseudofactual third-person nobody novels
- - Invented first-person nobody novels
- - Invented third-person nobody novels
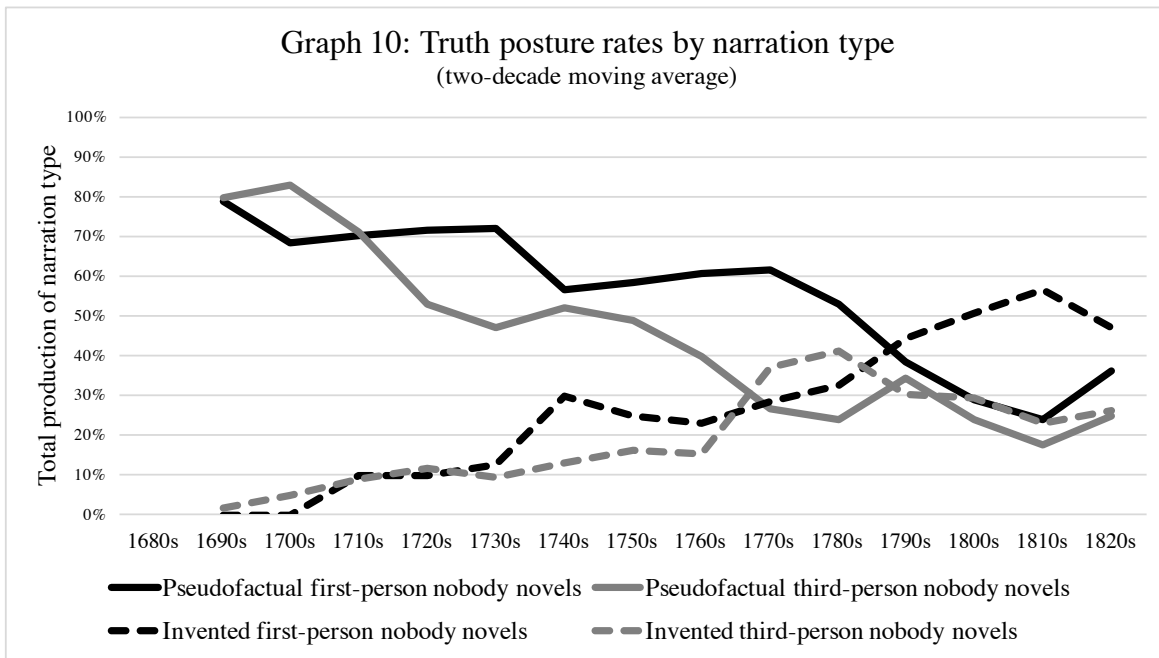
Graph 10: Truth posture rates by narration type

Because these calculations are subject to more decade-to-decade volatility than others, this graph uses a two-decade moving average to smooth out variations. This has the secondary effect of shifting transformations by a decade: the two moments of pseduofactuality's falling off — in the 1710s and again in the 1780s — now appear in the 1720s and 1790s, but in fact the information is the same. What becomes clear, however, is that pseudofactuality's decline would have been considerably more precipitate without the vogue for first-person document novels. The latter are more likely to be claimed as true, and it's those specific truth claims that plateau; third-person novels, by contrast, display a steadier erosion, especially from the 1750s. Rates of invention, meanwhile, diverge less and show a steadier increase. Interestingly, for a good amount of the middle span, first-person novels are simultaneously more likely to be invented *and* to be claimed as true than their third-person counterparts. This is possible because of the many indeterminate novels, which are disproportionally third-person. However, the increased likelihood of claims of

invention in first-person works comes from my tagging protocol itself: though *all* novels accompanied by an explicit admission of invention are classified as such, *first-person* novels can also be so classified when the name (or gender) of the author named on the title page does not match the name (or gender) of the protagonists; when these "mismatches" are removed, and classed as indeterminate, narration type has no effect on invention rates.

It would appear, therefore, that the plateau of pseudofactuality is partially an effect of the enduring vogue for first-person novels, which for the 1730s-1770s are quite a bit more likely than third-person works — just over one and a half times more likely — to be advanced as true documents. The rate differential, however, is not a permanent characteristic of narration type. For the first five decades (1680s-1720s), pseudofactuality is an equal opportunity phenomenon: then, third-person novels are claimed as true 75 percent of the time, and first-person novels 72 percent of the time. And later there is another key moment of divergence, around the 1780s-1790s. At this point, the chances of first-person novels being claimed true fall to levels much closer to those of third-person works. Equally remarkable, however, is an unprecedented divergence in the likelihood that the two narration types be presented as inventions. As seen in Graph 10, rates of invention in third-person novels actually go down starting in the 1780s, while those of first-person novels continue their steady ascent. Once again, the explanation lies in the indeterminates: at this point in time, the proportion of third-person novels published without remarks on their truth status starts to swell. And we would see a similar phenomenon in first-person novels as well if it were not for the "mismatches" I've just referred to — texts classified as invented only because the author's name doesn't match that of a character. When we pull those out — thus eliminating the asymmetricality in the tagging of the two narration types — invention rates of both types stagnate at around 30 percent.

The end of the eighteenth century sees therefore three simultaneous changes. First-person works commence a steep decline from which they do not — at least before 1830 — recover. The longstanding tendency of first-person works to be advanced as true erodes. And the steady increase in the proportion of works admitted as invention, evident throughout the century, stops; indeterminate works in fact become the most important category of nobody novels. Add to these changes one more — length.
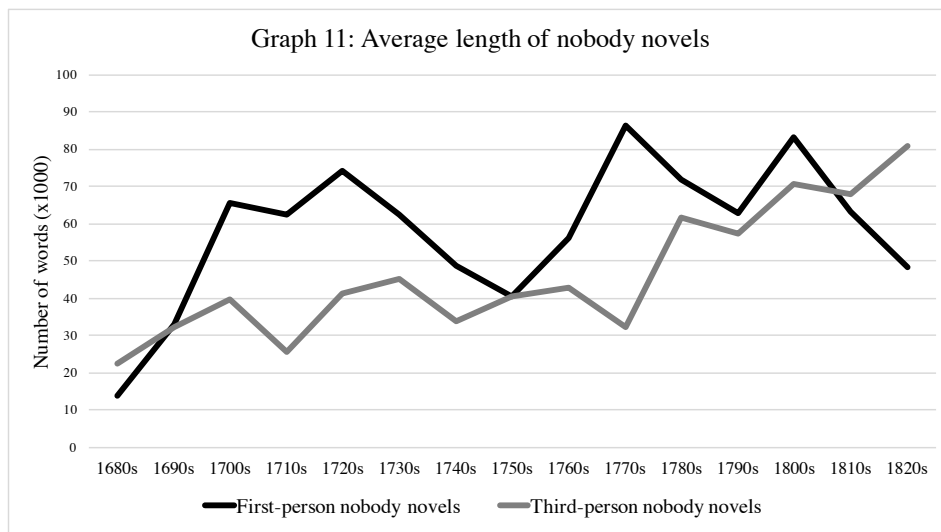
Graph 11: Average length of nobody novels

Initially, when first-person novels are still rare, all nobody novels are short. But already by the 1700s, when first-person novels make up 40 percent of the production of the nobody category (see Graph 9), they are have acquired a characteristic they will hold on to for a century or more: they are much longer than third-person novels. The latter, while lengthening marginally with respect to the opening of the span, plateau during the heart of the eighteenth century, from the 1720s to the 1770s. Then, starting in the 1780s, third-person novels lengthen noticeably,

becoming nearly as long as novels in the first person. Length, then, is one of a cluster of formal traits that change in the nobody novel around the 1780s.

"Historians of the novel have shown that, as the [eighteenth] century advanced and readers learned to accept the norms of literary realism, novelists tended to drop claims to reality or factuality," writes Dorrit Cohn, summarizing the scholarly consensus on the disappearance of pseudofactual claims.[23] But were claims of factuality truly "dropped" over the eighteenth century? An initial cause of doubt was that stubborn plateau of pseudofactuality, lasting from the 1710s to the 1770s. No doubt there are all sorts of cultural phenomena that are well described as being learned or accepted over time, and no doubt that learning isn't always perfectly linear. It is difficult, however, to imagine people taking some seventy years to accept that their novels don't need to be true and to drop claims that few if any took literally. For seventy years they made no progress: we can't even appeal to the idea of a generation stuck in its ways. So "dropped" seems the wrong word. More important, it's wrong in another sense: truth postures are in fact inseparable from other issues — temporal setting, narration type, and length being the ones examined here. (I have left others aside, for instance, the appearance of a "chapterized" novel.)

The invented nobody novel — what historians of fictionality would no doubt call the fictional novel — is not simply a pseudofactual novel that has lost its truth assertions; the new form is not the old form minus the fussy prefatory remarks by editors and eye-witnesses. The new form has, rather, a morphological specificity. It is in the third person; but it is no longer exactly the third person that had dominated at an earlier moment. These third-person novels are now much longer and are more likely to have no information on truth status than to be claimed as true or even invented. The mid-eighteenth century, meanwhile, is characterized by first-person novels that were usually advanced as bona fide documents — usually, but far from always. This

is also to say that once that the first-person document novel comes into heavy use starting in the 1730s, the form is already pressed into "fictional" service; that is, some authors freely sign their own name to some nobody's memoirs or letters. Yet the proportion of authors who do so changes little until the 1790s. Thus, those truth claims were indeed sometimes "dropped," but they were dropped starting in the 1730s, and the frequency of the dropping never changed from the level it had already attained by the 1740s. Never, that is, until the 1790s, when the production of first-person novels crashes. At that point, the new third-person novel, whose literal truth is mostly a subject of indifference, appears to reorient expectations in a way that causes changes within the few first-person novels left, as pseudofactuality ceases to be their default posture. Another way of putting this is to say that the first-person document novel, often asserted as true, never "becomes" the third-person novel, rarely asserted as true. Rather, the latter replaces the former.

Knowing all this, one can now go back and choose some examples that illustrate different aspects of the changing situation just described. But the chances are that examples are not particularly necessary once samples have provided a better idea of what the population looks like. Examples were really fun when they were *bad* examples — examples functioning not as representatives of a population, but as signs of something momentous and otherwise invisible going on. In such a view, the "context" of Richardson, Rousseau, or Radcliff isn't other novels written around the same time, it's other domains of human activity that may appear quite removed from literature and from one another but that all operate in synchrony and interdependence. The worry, of course, is that we humans — and a fortiori humans trained as hermeneuts — are very adept at spotting congruence and resemblance. Put a few disparate cultural artifacts together: each will color the way we see its neighbors and before long they will

appear "linked" to one another. Cherry-pick those artifacts, and you have the makings of a great story. No wonder, then, that scholars have tied fiction's rise to an array of other modern developments — to the aesthetic, to experimental science, to the economy of credit, to a culture of doubt, to contractual notions of personhood.[24] If we restrict ourselves to the most zoomed-out view, how can such phenomena not tantalize with their apparent relatedness?

Once we zoom in, however, these resemblances start to appear more extravagant than exciting. For it turns out that we probably don't need to explain anything as grand as the "rise of fiction." Or, for that matter, even the "rise of the novel." Such turns of phrase make it clear that our model for thinking diachronic change is that of the coming or the advent of one thing. First there was something else entirely, then something new arrived. Thus, it matters little what one's favored "rise" is really of, since it's always the same movement: the Archaic is replaced by the Modern, Then becomes Now, They become Us. Sampling, however, reveals something much more complicated and at the same time much more banal: "the" novel is merely the name we give to a series of competing forms that come and go. The issue, then, is not whether the shift from before to after is sudden — on the order of a Foucaldian rupture — or — probably the safer bet — gradual. The issue is that there is no before and after. Though we can spot some spans of relative stability, they shouldn't be mistaken for paradigms, epistemes, regimes, or even, really, plain old periods — all those ways we have of saying that the culture of this or that moment is of a piece, a big text to be deciphered by the critic. If what we know about the novel is limited to a few works, the latter make great signs: through resemblance and congruence, they show us that everything is connected, and that Culture makes sense. We can therefore speak of the rise of fiction, and then, quite naturally, correlate that rise with others that have been established through a similarly ad hoc process, and finally tie them all to the huge socio-subjective swerve of

Modernity itself. But just as the world of material artifacts is constantly changing — with no one disputing the fact that some changes are more far-reaching than others — so is the world of literary artifacts. The many historical forms of the novel are just doing what all human artifacts do, which is evolve.

The evolution of artifacts: these are the terms, I think, that can help make better sense of the literary archive. Of course scholars have long used the term evolution in the context of literature, usually casually, to mean "development"; more recently some have taken the term more seriously by opening a dialogue with various branches of evolutionary biology. Franco Moretti has made a well-known attempt to use biological evolution as an analogy for literary evolution, but his hypothesis, which involves imagining that books have randomly occurring "genes" (traits) selected by the humans that love them, has not been particularly well-received and appears to have been dropped by Moretti himself.[25] Other scholars, sometimes grouped under the banner of literary Darwinists, have argued that the human genes for literary activity itself — generally meaning the disposition to narrative — were selected in the Pleistocene era because they enhanced human fitness.[26] Irrespective of the merits of such a hypothesis, its sheer sweep renders illegible the very local ebbs and flows I have been tracing. Indeed, for literary Darwinists, what is evolving is human beings, not the objects they create: as in the field of cultural evolutionary theory more generally, interest falls on cultural changes as they enhance the fitness of human populations, not in the adaptive fitness of cultural objects themselves within the human environment.[27]

But if novels are human-produced artifacts, changing in form from one moment to the next, then the obvious place to look for an understanding of such change isn't evolutionary biology but Science and Technology Studies (STS): the novel evolves not like a bird or a

hominoid but like windmills, engines, and lightbulbs — that is, categories of related yet discrete artifacts. In the view of STS, we owe these inventions not to the March of Progress or the Genius of the Inventor or the Better Mousetrap Principle — commonsensical narratives that had characterized an earlier history of technology — but to a continuous and contingent process of social interaction and modification of extant artifacts. In this view, successful artifacts don't simply "work better" than previous ones, as if "working" were an abstract property of things, independent of context: they work better for someone, in a given situation.[28] Nor can innovation be explained as "pushed" by the fulfillment of fundamental biological needs, or "pulled" by the hoped-for achievement of one clear goal. People invent for all sorts of reasons, and often their inventions get hijacked for purposes they never envisioned: at every step of the way, the *values* of inventors and adopters drive and constrain invention and adoption. Finally, in addition to axiological constraints, the production of artifacts is also *materially* constrained by existing artifacts available for modification. "Whenever we encounter an artifact, no matter what its age or provenance, we can be certain that it was modeled on one or more preexisting artifacts," writes the historian of technology George Basalla, who dubs this change-within-continuity "the stream of made things."[29] The new, then, is always a deformation of the old — which of course is why it makes sense to speak of evolution and not just change.

The preceding graphs do not amount to anything close to the kind of finely grained case study favored by STS: I do not seek to illuminate, for example, the precise values — both very local and more widely shared — of the historical actors behind the pseudofactual preface. Such an account may well be possible, though due to the decentered and temporally dilated nature of literary production, it probably wouldn't look much the studies we have of Boyle's air pump or General Electric, which drill down into the culture of specific institutions and constituencies.[30] In

lieu of the typical STS case study, I would imagine that we could simply follow the types of competing justifications writers and readers offer when they advance their works as true or invented, when they comment on the advantages of using somebodies as opposed to nobodies, and so on. We could also start asking questions about which actors tend to make which choices: for example, are nascent artifacts practiced more by those who occupy the cultural center or who operate from the periphery? are failing forms churned out by provincial presses? do women hang onto pseudofactual pretense longer than men? is the growth of the first-person novel driven by the increasing participation of bourgeois writers? do aristocratic writers show a preference for somebody novels?

There are many more good questions where these came from, and answering them would obviously require another study. But even without fuller inquiry into what people said they wanted out of their novels and who those people actually were, we should already be in a position to view the "rise of fiction" anew — no longer as an epochal conceptual mutation but as an effect of the never-ending play of values and forms. One clear change involves subject matter: the novel becomes a genre of the present, as it breaks with a long literary preference for somebodies. The older preference was not a mindset: Aristotle himself admitted that poets could use invented nobodies, and to good effect; but they should (as a practical matter) and did (as a matter of record) prefer somebodies.[31] But what is a literature of the present going to look like? Well, it will look like different and contingent things. The first preferred form in France is that of the short third-person report of current goings-on. This is slowly displaced by the document novel, which proves a better competitor for the Aristotelian novel than the report, surely in large part because it makes space for the first person — an age-old conduit for identification and emotion, and a nice, timely fit for the bourgeois, Lockean-empiricist subject to boot. Meanwhile,

if both these major forms are pseudofactual, this is because the valuation of the present has not displaced the longstanding preference for real heroes. And why should it, necessarily? Given a literary culture axiologically committed to heroes of renown, is it particularly odd that the deference to literal truth would carry over into experiments with present-day subject matter? For us, the presence of truth claims is mysterious because it does not correspond to our view, which to be sure is neither homogenous nor static, but which nonetheless might be approximated as: what difference does it make that our protagonists be real people, since the novel is already a fictional world unto itself? This view, however, is not a worldview, not the result of conceptual rewiring — no more than the pseudofactual novel is the sign of an earlier, post-Aristotelian rewiring.

The deference to literal truth will pass. But not quickly, and not because some brave souls will have shown the way. The fact is that at any one moment, people see matters differently. This is why pseudofactual preference was hardly universal: for some six or seven decades a considerable number of nobody novels were admitted as fabrications. One can imagine that pseudofactuality had its drawbacks. The first was the awkwardness of insisting on truth without actually demanding readers' belief, well captured in a famous letter in which Richardson explains to William Warburton that he wished to keep up the "air of genuineness" about Clarissa's letters without actually having his readers think them genuine.[32] Second, and probably crucially, the pseudofactual first-person document novel had the built-in disadvantage of conflicting with recognition of authorship: it reduced people who might aspire to the role of professional author to playing, unconvincingly, the role of editor. Thus, one can sympathize with the frustration of the author of a number of first-person document novels, the Marquis d'Argens, who in 1739 complained about the obligation of asserting that novels were about real

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individuals: "The author of a romance or a novel [*un roman ou une nouvelle*] has had enough genius to imagine a plot [*un sujet*], to decorate it with the circumstances that captivate and move the soul of the reader. So why can't he invent names? What prevents him?"[33] It's a perfectly commonsensical observation, to which one can only respond "nothing." Nothing prevented people from writing novels with admittedly invented protagonists, and they did, from the 1730s on. But not nearly as many people as chose to write novels with protagonists advanced as real. That is, until roughly the 1790s. The Marquis d'Argens didn't "understand" anything about fiction, he just had an opinion about a better way to write novels — and it didn't sway most people, who had other investments. Eventually, they were swayed, though not because of arguments. Only the invention of a new type of third-person novel — a longer novel no longer modeled on the report of current goings-on — would decisively changes novelists' habits regarding the assertion of truth. The record, then, suggests that the pseudofactual posture does not disappear because people believe in it less and less, for the document novel does not become progressively less pseudofactual. Rather, people switch to a new competitor form free of built-in truth suggestions because it is not a "natural" discursive form repurposed by novelists.

But why all that around the 1790s, precisely? Why did this new artifact — or any of the other dominant artifacts before it — spread when it did? I doubt there is any answer to the question — or at least the kind of cognitively satisfying just-so story we get when we link such phenomena to other neighboring ones on the basis of a logical resemblance of one sort or another. Then, everything appears necessary. Yet the literary record doesn't have to look the way it does; things could have happened differently, or earlier, or later. Indeed, my preliminary research suggests that in England the third-person invented novel does take off a couple of decades earlier. I've found one sort of explanation for this: for whatever reason, the memoir

novel specifically has much less staying power than in France, meaning that England abandons more quickly not so much the truth posture per se as the form of which the truth posture was such a persistent part. Pointedly, however, this is not a "deep" explanation. The claim is not that England had more affinity with fictionality because of, say, its middle-class market culture, or that for other cultural reasons the English were more prepared than the French to grasp the aesthetics of suspended disbelief. And the exact date does not matter much, because things are always changing. When Mary Wollstonecraft, in 1788, gives her novel *Mary* the subtitle *A Fiction*, the gesture can be contextualized, and thereby made to function as a good example of a class of artifacts. But *Mary, A Fiction* is not a sign of something momentous happening, of a new Zeitgeist, paradigm, or conceptual order finally arrived. The competition of artifacts is a race with no finish line; if at any one moment we see winners, losers, and also-rans, keep watching and time will make losers of them all because no one wins forever.

Annex

Lists of novels were compiled from the standard bibliographies: Maurice Lever, *La Fiction narrative en prose au dix-septième siècle* (Paris: CNRS, 1976); Silas Paul Jones, *A List of French Prose Fiction from 1700-1750, with a Brief Introduction* (New York: H.W. Wilson, 1939); and Angus Martin, Vivienne Mylne, and Richard Frautschi, *Bibliographie du genre romanesque français, 1751-1800* (London: Mansell, 1977). For the 1800s, lacking a critical modern bibliography, I have used the original annual index, *La Bibliographie de la France, ou journal général de l'imprimerie et de la librairie*, an official weekly account of all books published in France whose annual index included the generic rubric "Romans et contes" (novels and tales). In addition to translations and collections of more than two narratives, I have

excluded from consideration works belonging to identifiable extra-novelistic genres (e.g., biography, travel narratives, historical memoirs, periodicals); non-narrative items that bibliographers inventoried because they contained narrative sections (say, parables or exemplary tales); other works I have judged insufficiently narrative (such as allegorical tableaus, or conversations on one or more topics); and items under 10,000 words (an arbitrary cut-off, put into place because extremely short novels are often formal oddities from a variety of perspectives apart from their length).

The sample for each decade is made up of the novels published in a given set of years in that decade. Where novel production is relatively limited, the number of year per decade sample is five; with rising production, the sample set shrinks to four, three, two, and (in the nineteenth century) one year(s) per decade. (The total number of novels sampled is 898.) I've consulted only novels available either digitally or in the libraries of the Bibliothèque nationale de France (Tolbiac and Arsenal), the Bibliothèque du château d'Oron in Switzerland, and my home institution. The labor and expense of tracking down other works would be wasted, since their number (3.1 percent of novels sampled) could have no impact on my findings. An additional 4.4 percent of the novels inventoried by bibliographers are unavailable in any library indexed by WorldCat. Finally, since these are samples, the figures given are estimates of the actual composition of a decade. (Margin of error, at a 90 percent confidence interval, averages 9.2 percent, depending on the decade.)

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[1] This interest may start with Arthur Jerrold Tieje, "A Peculiar Phase of the Theory of Realism in Pre-Richardsonian Fiction," *PMLA* 28.2 (1913): 313-52.

[2] Alan Liu, "The Meaning of the Digital Humanities," *PMLA* 128.2 (2013): 409-23, at 414.

[3] Ian P. Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957); Roland Barthes, "L'Effet de réel" (1968), in *Le Bruissement de la langue: Essais critiques IV* (Paris: Seuil, 1984), 167-74.

[4] Barbara Foley, *Telling the Truth: The Theory and Practice of Documentary Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986).

[5] Lennard J. Davis, *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 156.

[6] Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 128.

[7] "Massive reorganization": Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670-1820* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), xvi; other quotes: "The Rise of Fictionality," in *The Novel*, ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 1:336-63, at 340 and 344. Gallagher's accounts are more difficult to pin down than the others, mostly because her positions have changed somewhat over time.

[8] Coleridge lurks as an endpoint for both McKeon (*Origins*, 128 and 297) and Gallagher ("Rise," 347-49).

[9] Gallagher, "Rise," 344.

[10] On the desire of cultural critics to "enchant" their objects of study, see Mark A. Schneider, *Culture and Enchantment (*Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), esp. chap 2: "[cultural critics] are not unambiguously attracted to explanations, since their essence is in the end a sort of poverty" (40). The enchantment characterizing New Historicism specifically is explored in Alan Liu, "The Power of Formalism: The New Historicism," *ELH* 56.4 (1989): 721–71. Bruno Latour maintains that a similar belief in deep interrelatedness characterizes research in the social sciences: "When sociologists of the social pronounce the words 'society,' 'power,' 'structure,' and 'context,' they often jump straight ahead to connect vast arrays of life and history, to mobilize gigantic forces, to detect dramatic patterns emerging out of confusing interactions, … to reveal behind the scenes some dark powers pulling the strings" (Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 22). Finally, my criticism of magical reading obviously aligns at least in some respects with the attack on "symptomatic" reading made in Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, "Surface Reading: An Introduction," *Representations* 108.1 (2009): 1-21.

[11] This is not polemic on behalf of the "digital" per se, since data need not be quantitative. If a scholar wants to explain a feature of *Middlemarch*, data might be the entire text itself, its tradition of critical commentary, other books that George Eliot read, and so on. A data-poor explanation would be one that read the novel selectively and ignored scholarship, in all likelihood with unconvincing results.

[12] I have made such criticisms in *Before Fiction: The Ancien Régime of the Novel* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), esp. 18-25. The major study of specifically French pseudofactuality, elaborated without reference to the scholars mentioned here, shares many of the same problems; see Jan Herman, Mladen Kozul, and Nathalie Kremer, *Le Roman véritable: Stratégies préfacielles au XVIIIe siècle* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2008).

[14] The bibliography on fiction is extensive. Some recent contributions, critically synthetic, include Richard Walsh, *The Rhetoric of Fictionality: Narrative Theory and the Idea of Fiction* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2007) and Françoise Lavocat, *Fait et fiction: Pour une frontière* (Paris: Seuil, 2016).

[15] I am appropriating this distinction from Gallagher (*Nobody's Story*). However, in Gallagher's original use, the distinction is simply another way of framing the ontological difference between real beings and imagined ones. The use I develop below is different.

[16] See Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1972; repr., Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980). I bypass this terminology, which has the notable disadvantage of being designed without eighteenth-century "editorial" pretense in mind.

[18] As Graph 1 shows, mimetic bias is inscribed in the history (and not just historiography) of the novel itself. Thus, it's not that modern scholars such as myself obsessively focus on one type of novel when contemporaries made much more capacious use of the art form; in fact, our focus merely reproduces theirs. I am not swayed, then, by the objection that exclusive attention to the real-world "chronotope" skews our conception of the novel, a point made for the eighteenth century by Srinivas Aravamudan, *Enlightenment Orientalism: Resisting the Rise of the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

[19] Though fairy and oriental tales also exist as genres (and very popular ones), they usually do not appear in the samples because as a rule they are published in collections, which I do not tag.

[20] Over the entire span, 23 percent of alternate-world novels contain parodic affirmations, while 36 percent of real-world novels contain standard pseudofactual affirmations.

[22] Much more could be said about this double peak, which is caused by the asynchronous development of two distinct types of first-person document novels — the memoir novel (which peaks first) and the epistolary novel (which peaks second).

[23] Dorrit Cohn, *The Distinction of Fiction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 3.

[24] See respectively, McKeon, *Origins*; John Bender, "Enlightenment Fiction and the Scientific Hypothesis" (1998) and "Novel Knowledge: Judgment, Experience, Experiment" (2010), in *Ends of Enlightenment* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2012), 38-56 and 21-37; Mary Poovey, *Genres of the Credit Economy: Mediating Value in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, "The Novel and Other Discourses of Suspended Belief," in *Practicing New Historicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000),163-210; and Jonathan Lamb, *The Things Things Say* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 151-72.

[25] See Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* (London: Verso, 2005). Moretti defended himself against a critique by Christopher Prendergast, partially with the idea that it was just an hypothesis, but he his subsequent work has not pursued the approach. See Christopher Prendergast, "Evolution and Literary History: A Response to Franco Moretti," *New Left Review* 34 (2005): 40–62 and Franco Moretti, "The End of the Beginning: A Reply to Christopher Prendergast," *New Left Review* 41 (2006): 71–86.

[26] See especially Brian Boyd, *On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition, Fiction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009). For a critical appraisal of such arguments, see Jonathan Kramnick, "Against Literary Darwinism," *Critical Inquiry* 37.2 (2011): 315-47.

[27] For an overview of the field, which includes meme theory, see Tim Lewens, "Cultural Evolution: Integration and Skepticism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Social Science*, ed. Harold Kincaid (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 458-80. Moretti himself sets out in this direction, but only in reaction to Prendergast's critique of his initially geneticist approach ("End of the Beginning," 79-81).

[28] "The 'working' and 'nonworking' of an artifact," writes one STS scholar, "are socially constructed assessments, rather than intrinsic properties of the artifact" (Wiebe E. Bijker, *Of Bicycles, Bakelites, and Bulbs: Toward a Theory of Sociotechnical Change* (Cambridge (MA): MIT Press, 1995), 75). This is a commonplace of modern histories of technology (as are the other contentions outlined in this paragraph). "Progress in technology must be determined within very restricted technological, temporal, and cultural boundaries and according to a narrowly

specified goal" (George Basalla, *The Evolution of Technology* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988], 216); "Studies of choice of technology show that alternatives often exist, and the fact that one technology supercedes another is not even evidence of superiority at all, since other factors are involved" (David Edgerton, "From Innovation to Use: Ten Eclectic Theses on the Historiography of Technology," *History and Technology* 16, no. 2 [1999]: 123).
[29] Basalla, *Evolution*, 209.
[30] See Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985) and W. Bernard Carlson, *Innovation as a Social Process: Elihu Thomson and the Rise of General Electric, 1870-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
[31] "[Tragic poets] stick to the actual names [of particular people]; this is because it is what is possible that arouses conviction, and while we do not without more ado believe that what never happened is possible, what did happen is clearly possible, since it would not have happened if it were not" (*Poetics* 1451b, in D. A. Russell and M. Winterbottom, *Ancient Literary Criticism: The Principal Texts in New Translations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 102-03).
[32] For a reading of this letter, from 1748, see Paige, *Before Fiction*, 9-11.
[33] Jean-Baptiste de Boyer, Marquis d'Argens, *Lectures amusantes, ou les délassements de l'esprit, avec un discours sur les nouvelles*, 2 vols. (The Hague: Adrien Moetjens, 1739), 1:52-53.