# I KNOW THAT YOU KNOW THAT I KNOW

## Narrating Subjects from *Moll Flanders* to *Marnie*

GEORGE BUTTE

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Columbus

Copyright © 2004 by The Ohio State University.
All rights reserved.

Butte, George, 1947-
I know that you know that I know : narrating subjects from Moll Flanders to Marnie / George Butte.
p. cm. — (The theory and interpretation of narrative series) Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-8142-0945-9 (hardcover : alk. paper) — 0-8142-9027-2 (CD-ROM)
1. Psychological fiction, English-History and criticism. 2. Psychological fiction, American—History and criticism. 3. Intersubjectivity in literature. 4. Consciousness in literature. 5. Motion pictures—History. 6. Narration (Rhetoric) 7. Intersubjectivity. I. Title. II. Series.
PR830.P75 B87 2004
823'.08309—dc22
2003018678

Cover design by Dan O'Dair.
Type set in Adobe Apollo.
Printed by Thomson-Shore, Inc.

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of the American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials. ANSI Z39.48-1992.

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

SRLF
YRL
PR
830
P75B87
2004

# Contents

Preface vii

*Part One: Theory*

1. STARTING OVER: INTERSUBJECTIVITY AND NARRATIVE 3
   - Starting Over 3
   - The Disappearance of the Transparent Word 8
   - The Subject: Performance or Embodiment? 17
   - The New Intersubjectivity: Espousal, Shame, and the Quarrel between Merleau-Ponty and Sartre 24

2. REPRESENTING DEEP INTERSUBJECTIVITY: NARRATIVE PRACTICES 39
   - The Subject Encounters the Other: *Moll Flanders* and *Great Expectations* 39
   - The Intersubjective Subject: *Pamela* and *The Turn of the Screw* 63
   - Others Encounter Others: Intersubjective Omniscience: *Tom Jones* and *Middlemarch* 81

*Part Two: Case Studies: Deep Intersubjectivity and Genre*

3. COMEDY, FILM, AND FILM COMEDY 105
   - Austen, the Intersubjectivity of Anxiety, and *Emma* 108
   - Film, Film Comedy, and Deep Intersubjectivity 122
   - Hitchcock's Cary Grant Films: Theatricality, Gender, and the Intersubjective Gaze 130
   - Woody Allen's *Broadway Danny Rose:* The Fool and the Mutual Gaze 151

of its agency, intentionality, and enworldedness in culture and discourse *precede* and are already the ground for our work with narrative.

The subject is furthermore already subjects. That is, subjectivity is fundamentally intersubjective. Embodied experience, with its kind of presence and fullness, takes its shape in primordial ways by contact with others. As Merleau-Ponty phrases it, "For we must consider the relation with others *not only as one of the contents of our experience but as an actual structure in its own right*" (*Primacy* 140; original emphasis). Sobchack's summation emphasizes again the contrast with Lacan: "Merleau-Ponty's system accounts for *subjectivity as intersubjectivity,* whereas Lacan's schema accounts for *subjectivity as objectified*" (123). And so the question of origins has taken us, tangoing sideways, from subjectivity to intersubjectivity. There is no clean line to separate the subject and the intersubjective, their origins or consequences, in narratives in fiction and film, or in narratives about the production of these narratives, that is, in stories about writers, audiences, and film studios. In this project our primary "knowledge" about origins will be narratives about origins, whether Lacan's or Freud's or Henry James's. These narratives become more and more intersubjective in a particular and complex way. My subject then is the embedded and embodied consciousnesses of modern narrative—modern, that is, since about 1700—and how their representations have fundamentally and profoundly changed.

## THE NEW INTERSUBJECTIVITY: ESPOUSAL, SHAME, AND THE QUARREL BETWEEN MERLEAU-PONTY AND SARTRE

> *I . . . feel myself moved by my appearance in the gaze of others and . . . I in turn reflect an image of them that can affect them, so that there is woven between us an "exchange," a "chiasm between two 'destinies'" . . . in which there are never quite two of us, and yet one is never alone.*
>
> —MERLEAU-PONTY, In Praise of Philosophy

> *And though there was no second glance to disturb her, though [Henry's] object seemed then to be only quietly agreeable, she could not get the better of her embarrassment, heightened as it was by the idea of his perceiving it.*
>
> —AUSTEN, Mansfield Park

When Fanny becomes the target of the gaze in *Mansfield Park,* as the victim of Henry's generosity, she experiences a special kind of invasion.



When Henry looks at Fanny, he endangers her in an extraordinary way: "[S]he saw his eye glancing for a moment at her necklace [his gift]—with a smile—she thought there was a smile—which made her blush and feel wretched" (II, 10; 274). The danger is not only the smile and the arrogance of anticipated possession it probably implies. It is also the residue of that look that Austen traces to decipher a more complex threat in a series of exchanged gestures—exchanged regardless of whether Fanny wants to be part of that commerce. Fanny cannot regain her composure because her embarrassment is extended in the mirror of Henry's eye "by the idea of his perceiving it." Glances are exchanged in the heated air of the ballroom, but they are also exchanged in the interior theater of subjects who embody each other, even against their will or the will of one. Fanny's image of herself is deeply implicated in Henry's first look at her and also in his *second* look, which absorbs and acknowledges her response—her blush—to the first look. The mere idea that Henry continues to observe her response to him paralyzes Fanny, so that she is rescued only when Henry turns away "to someone else" to concentrate on another human subject. The astonishing power of this scene lies partly in Austen's ability to articulate the frightening interiority of the intersubjective. The form of this articulation is extraordinarily significant because it reshapes our narrative of experience.

A sea change in the representation of consciousnesses in narratives in English becomes visible in the time of Jane Austen. It is a change so subtle and fundamental that it has been difficult to conceive and describe. It is a structural change in what we take for granted, like the new articulation of consciousness that Eric Havelock argues for in Plato's language. One aspect of the change has received careful attention in recent years: the move into the interior of the self. Critics as diverse as Erich Kahler, Dorrit Cohn, Elizabeth Ermarth, and, more recently, Carol Rifelj have recounted the strategies by which novels have turned "inward," yet through conventions of what Cohn calls "transparency" simultaneously to triumph over the solipsism that had seemed to separate self and other, a triumph enabled especially by the newly powerful omniscient narrator, and to generate a sort of consensus about the world. The other has still remained in some ways another country, especially when difference is filtered by gender, class, or ethnicity. Nonetheless, it has been possible to imagine the language and story that the other constructs within and to translate that experience as imagined for the privileged reader.

The new conventions of transparency have allowed narrators to calibrate different subtleties of distance and nearness, as narratives mod-

ulate their focus from first to third person and chart a range of otherness, close or far from the reader, more or less obscured. Even monstrosity yields to this translation of the interior, as when the novel takes us inside Victor Frankenstein's creation as he learns to read, or inside Dickens's Bradley Headstone as he relives the attempted murder of Wrayburn. What Tristram Shandy yearned for and yet feared, Momus's window onto the soul set like a piece of glass into the body of the other, appears in his century like a dream made real in the body of the novel.

Yearning and fear—these are two of the key responses to the effects of the new complex intersubjectivity. They represent the fundamental disagreement between Jean-Paul Sartre and his contemporary Maurice Merleau-Ponty over the nature of the intersubjective. Because both Sartre and Merleau-Ponty were deeply interested in the phenomenology of the other, this difference suggests, for them and this study, profound implications for the politics and aesthetics of intersubjectivity in narrative. For Sartre, the other is primarily a cause for a deep suspicion, even terror; for Merleau-Ponty, the other is primarily an occasion for companionship, "espousal," in a world people occupy together, however separately. This quarrel over the effects of the intersubjective recurs in many of the narratives in this study.

However, something else deepens the exemplary moments extracted from *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion* earlier in this chapter. It is a fundamentally different representation not only of consciousness, but also of consciousnesses, of a newly framed intersubjectivity, which Jane Austen's novels are among the first in English to speak of clearly in this new language within a language.[10] Some further theorizing of intersubjectivity would be helpful at this point. A good place to begin is J. Hillis Miller's description of what he claimed was a new rendering of human experience in nineteenth-century novels:

> In Victorian novels, for the most part, the characters are aware of themselves in terms of their relations to others. . . . The protagonist comes to know himself and to fulfill himself by way of other people. A characteristic personage in a Victorian novel could not say, "I think, therefore I am," but rather, if he could ever be imagined to express himself so abstractly, "I am related to others, therefore I am," or, "I am conscious of myself as conscious of others." . . . A Victorian novel may most inclusively be defined as a structure of interpenetrating minds. (5)

What exactly does it mean to say that the representation of human consciousness had become intersubjective? According to some criticisms of



Hillis Miller's book, its formulations were so general as to apply to virtually all novels.[11] Intersubjectivity does not seem to be a useful formal principle for understanding narrative if it deteriorates into the unremarkable notion that characters and even narrators perceive themselves by way of others. Miller himself admits that intersubjectivity is the stuff of all fiction and argues (only) that there is more of it in nineteenth-century novels, in a form altered by certain forces: the sense of the disappearance of God and the omniscient narrator, to name the two most important (11, 31–34, e.g.). Miller is correct about changed intellectual and formal conditions, but not only the conditions have changed. The fundamental paradigm, the inner matrices and microorganizations of intersubjectivity (to borrow Foucauldian language), have shifted.

Representations and understandings of intersubjectivity are not new. Bakhtin for example offers finely nuanced readings of the ways characters take the word of the other, carrying the traces of the other, and make use of that language themselves: For Bakhtin, the word is never virginal.[12] All language is communal and exchanged. The recent interest in the politics of the body traces in many forms how body or culture as text writes other bodies in another kind of exchange of languages: Frances Burney describing the female body cannibalizing itself at court to follow a demanding script; Jane Eyre's conviction of her own monstrosity.[13]

The new conventions of narration that coalesce into our new paradigm in Jane Austen's time avoid the stark choice between the self of Descartes or Lacan: between the fullness amidst isolation of the former or the absences filled with glittering mirages of the latter. Complex intersubjectivity posits Merleau-Ponty's separated but initiating and embodied subjects, for whom "this circle which I do not form, which forms me, this coiling over of the visible upon the visible, can traverse, animate other bodies as well as my own," so that "the field open[s] for another Narcissus, for an 'intercorporeity' " (*Visible* 140–41). Even a Narcissus can touch another Narcissus in the circle of espousal, and so Merleau-Ponty's gentle irony rebukes both Descartes and Lacan.

The new complex intersubjectivity places groups of these selves, Narcissus and Narcissus (or Narcissa and Narcissa), these centers of perceiving identity, into motion. That motion articulates a new dance of subjects. We can usefully describe the fundamental components of this intersubjectivity as the body and the gaze of one subject and of the Other(s), and then the consequent appropriations negotiated among these consciousnesses and intentionalities, appropriations that the gaze, the body, and their discourses enact. This process of negotiation

hers were as well. Frank of course is closer to the truth than Emma was: He is right that Emma is not in love with him, but he is wrong that she sees his flirtation as simply "attentions" that were "her due." But now the readings of readings get aired in another series of readings of readings, and the result is a degree of clarity, at least for Emma and Knightley, that for example eludes all the characters in Henry James's *The Awkward Age*.

The deepest point of the labyrinth in volume III, chapter 15, occurs when Knightley reads aloud, for Emma's further comment, Frank's account of Jane's account of her wish to break off their engagement, given the "misery" of their masquerade before the Eltons, the Westons, Emma, and all the others. Knightley's remark reconstructs exactly as Merleau-Ponty would have wished the landscape of Jane's life as she must have experienced it: "What a view this gives of her sense of his behavior!" (III, 15; 406) In this brief moment, the near miraculous, in a world that includes the Eltons, has occurred: Compassion and attentiveness to the other's gestures of feeling have triumphed.

The warmth of Knightley's exclamation lights up the cold corners of Hartfield. His ability to track people's perceptions and their perceptions of how others perceive them is indeed the core of Knightley's wisdom in *Emma* and helps him help Emma—to understand what the Box Hill episode meant for Miss Bates, for example, and here to grasp, as he did in the episode we discussed earlier of Perry's carriage, the implications of Jane's embeddedness in a web of perceptions and misperceptions about which, given her dependencies, she can do little except block the occasional invading gaze. Knightley's compassion is intricate, deeply intersubjective, and warmly embodied (whatever Mark Twain and D. H. Lawrence had to say about Austen's inability to live the body). And so, too, now is Emma's.

The web of gazes and perceptions leads to many errors, and anxiety still remains. But Emma and Knightley speak for an idea of community in which words and gestures respond to other words and gestures, not perfectly, but as if one is putting a brick in a niche in our wall left by the other. Knightley even defines a piece of his ideal when he tells Emma, as he sits down to read Frank's letter, "It will be natural for me . . . to speak my opinion aloud as I read. By doing it I shall feel that I am near you" (III, 15; 404). Here Knightley's notion moves in a significantly different direction from his more famous line about language, from the proposal scene, when he says, "If I loved you less, I might be able to talk about it more" (III, 13; 390). But language *is* important in the interworld of human understandings and is even *natural*, says



Knightley, when he finds himself between texts, Frank's letter on one side, Emma on the other; they are joined in a deeper network as he reads Frank aloud, responding to his words and Emma's as she reads his reading of Frank and herself, those deeply intersubjective embodiments extending throughout this little world, "two Inches wide," of Hart-field.[5]

Human disclosure, as a famous paragraph in *Emma* observes, is always limited because of the nature of its process, working as it does from incarnated gesture and language:

> Seldom, very seldom, does complete truth belong to any human disclosure; seldom can it happen that something is not a little disguised, or a little mistaken; but where, as in this case, though the conduct is mistaken, the feelings are not, it may not be very material.—Mr. Knightley could not impute to Emma a more relenting heart than she possessed, or a heart more disposed to accept of his. (III, 13; 431–32)

"Impute" is the key word here: There is no glass onto the soul, as Tristram Shandy once dreamed there might be. Merleau-Ponty's deep intersubjectivity always works by indirection. One reads, or, if others stand in the way of our gaze, fails to read the body, gesture, and the eye's word, as well as the tongue's word. But the network of exchanged indirections and embodied signs is not hopelessly solipsistic. In Austen this network of readings results in some kind of genuine community on rare occasions. We know they are rare because measuring the genuine requires, for Austen, complex representations of the more common and misleading imitations, even forgeries, of community.

That Emma successfully revises her sense of self in the midst of this deeply intersubjective field of consciousnesses and languages is not clear to all readers of her novel. At least we can probably agree that readers are able so thoughtfully to disagree because of the intricacy of Austen's phenomenology of anxiety and misperceptions (and perceptions). But other issues in the controversies over Emma's self-knowledge remain. For me the comic strain in Austenian deep intersubjectivity predominates, despite her emphasis upon the imperfection of discourse and disclosure. Emma and Knightley, and Frank and Jane together place stones in that wall, in the niche left by the other, not so that any of them achieves full presence to the other, but so that, in Merleau-Ponty's words, there is woven "an 'exchange,' a 'chiasm between two destinies . . . ' in which there are never quite two of us, and yet one is never alone."