The Novel and the Police

D. A. Miller

pp 1-3, 16-19, 27-32

University of California Press
BERKELEY LOS ANGELES
LONDON

ONE

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I

The frequent appearance of policemen in novels is too evident to need detecting. Yet oddly enough, the ostensive thematic of regulation thereby engendered has never impugned our belief that "of all literary genres, the novel remains the most free, the most *lawless*."[1] Though the phrase comes from Gide, the notion it expresses has dominated nearly every conception of the form. If a certain puritanical tradition, for instance, is profoundly suspicious of the novel, this is because the novel is felt to celebrate and encourage misconduct, rather than censure and repress it. A libertarian criticism may revalue this misconduct as human freedom, but it otherwise produces a remarkably similar version of the novel, which, in league with rebel forces, would bespeak and inspire various projects of insurrection. This evasive or escapist novel persists even in formalist accounts of the genre as constantly needing to subvert and make strange its inherited prescriptions. All these views commonly imply what Roger Caillois has called "the contradiction between the idea of the police and the nature of the novel."[2] For when the novel is conceived of as a

1. André Gide, *Les faux-monnayeurs*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. L. Martin-Chauffier, 15 vols. (Paris: Nouvelle Revue Française, 1932–39), 12:268. "De tous les genres littéraires . . . le roman reste le plus libre, le plus *lawless*."
2. Roger Caillois, *Puissances du roman* (Marseilles: Sagittaire, 1942), p. 140.

successful act of truancy, no other role for the police is possible than that of a patrol which ineptly stands guard over a border fated to be transgressed. In what follows, I shall be considering what such views necessarily dismiss: the possibility of a radical *entanglement* between the nature of the novel and the practice of the police. In particular, I shall want to address two questions deriving from this entanglement. How do the police systematically function as a topic in the "world" of the novel? And how does the novel—as a set of representational techniques—systematically participate in a general economy of policing power? Registering the emergence of the modern police as well as modern disciplinary power in general, the novel of the nineteenth century seemed to me a good field in which these questions might first be posed. Practically, the "nineteenth-century novel" here will mean these names: Dickens, Collins, Trollope, Eliot, Balzac, Stendhal, Zola; and these traditions: Newgate fiction, sensation fiction, detective fiction, realist fiction. Theoretically, it will derive its ultimate coherence from the strategies of the "policing function" that my intention is to trace.

II

One reason for mistrusting the view that contraposes the notions of novel and police is that the novel itself does most to promote such a view. Crucially, the novel organizes its world in a way that already restricts the pertinence of the police. Regularly including the topic of the police, the novel no less regularly sets it against other topics of surpassing interest—so that the centrality of what it puts at the center is established by holding the police to their place on the periphery. At times, the limitations placed by the novel on the power of the police are coolly taken for granted, as in the long tradition of portraying the police as incompetent or powerless. At others, more tellingly, the marginality is dramatized as a gradual process of

marginalization, in which police work becomes less and less relevant to what the novel is "really" about.

Even in the special case of detective fiction, where police detectives often hold center stage, the police never quite emerge from the ghetto in which the novel generally confines them. I don't simply refer to the fact that the work of detection is frequently transferred from the police to a private or amateur agent. Whether the investigation is conducted by police or private detectives, its sheer intrusiveness posits a world whose normality has been hitherto defined as a matter of *not needing* the police or policelike detectives. The investigation repairs this normality, not only by solving the crime, but also, far more important, by withdrawing from what had been, for an aberrant moment, its "scene." Along with the criminal, criminology itself is deported elsewhere.

In the economy of the "mainstream" novel, a more obviously circumscribed police apparatus functions somewhat analogously to define the field that exceeds its range. Its very limitations bear witness to the existence of other domains, formally lawless, outside and beyond its powers of supervision and detection. Characteristically locating its story in an everyday middle-class world, the novel takes frequent and explicit notice that this is an area that for the most part the law does not cover or supervise. Yet when the law falls short in the novel, the world is never reduced to anarchy as a result. In the same move whereby the police are contained in a marginal pocket of the representation, the work of the police is superseded by the operations of another, informal, and extralegal principle of organization and control.

Central among the ideological effects that such a pattern produces is the notion of *delinquency*. For the official police share their ghetto with an official criminality: the population of petty, repeated offenders, whose conspicuousness licenses it to enact, together with the police, a normative scenario of crime

defending the privacy of private life from its invasion by policelike practices of surveillance. Yet there is a curious gratuitousness in Fawn's principled refusal to hear Gowran. Though Gowran never makes his full disclosure to Fawn, the latter can hardly be in any doubt about its content. That he already knows what Gowran has to tell is precisely the *reason* for his shamed unwillingness to hear it. Octave Mannoni, following Freud, would speak here of a mechanism of *disavowal* (*Verleugnung*): "Je sais bien, mais quand même . . ."—"Of course I know, but still. . . ."[5] By means of disavowal, one can make an admission while remaining comfortably blind to its consequences. The mechanism allows Fawn to preserve his knowledge about Lizzie together with the fantasy of his distance from the process of securing it. In more general terms, the discretion of social discipline in the Novel seems to rely on a strategy of *disavowing the police*: acknowledging its affinity with police practices by way of insisting on the fantasy of its otherness. Rendered discreet by disavowal, discipline is also thereby rendered more effective—including among its effects that "freedom" or "lawlessness" for which critics of the Novel (perpetuating the ruse) have often mistaken it. Inobtrusively supplying the place of the police in places where the police cannot be, the mechanisms of discipline seem to entail a relative *relaxation* of policing power. No doubt this manner of passing off the regulation of everyday life is the best manner of passing it on.

IV

What has been standing at the back of my argument up to now, and what I hope will allow me to carry it some steps further, is the general history of the rise of disciplinary power,

5. See Octave Mannoni, "Je sais bien, mais quand même . . . ," in his *Clefs pour l'imaginaire* (Paris: Seuil, 1969), pp. 9–33.

such as provided by Michel Foucault in *Surveiller et punir*.[6] There Foucault documents and describes the new type of power that begins to permeate Western societies from the end of the eighteenth century. This new type of power ("new" perhaps only in its newly dominant role) cannot be identified with an institution or a state apparatus, though these may certainly employ or underwrite it. The efficacy of discipline lies precisely in the fact that it is only a *mode* of power, "comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets" (215). The mobility it enjoys as a technology allows precisely for its wide diffusion, which extends from obviously disciplinary institutions (such as the prison) to institutions officially determined by "other" functions (such as the school) down to the tiniest practices of everyday social life. This mobile power is also a modest one. Maintained well below the level of emergence of "the great apparatuses and the great political struggles" (223), its modalities are humble, its procedures minor. It is most characteristically exercised on "little things." While it thus harkens back to an earlier theology of the detail, the detail is now significant "not so much for the meaning that it conceals within it as for the hold it provides for the power that wishes to seize it" (140). The sheer pettiness of discipline's coercions tends to keep them from scrutiny, and the diffusion of discipline's operations precludes locating them in an attackable center. Disciplinary power constitutively mobilizes a tactic of tact: it is the policing power that never passes for such, but is either invisible or visible only under cover of other, nobler or simply blander intentionalities (to educate, to cure, to produce, to defend). Traditional power founded its authority in the spectacle of its force, and those on whom this power was exercised could, conversely, remain in the shade. By contrast, disciplin-

6. Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975). Foucault will be cited in the English translation of Alan Sheridan, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Pantheon, 1977).

ary power tends to remain invisible, while imposing on those whom it subjects "a principle of compulsory visibility" (187). As in Jeremy Bentham's plan for the Panopticon, a circular prison disposed about a central watchtower, surveillance is exercised on fully visible "prisoners" by unseen "guards." What this machinery of surveillance is set up to monitor is the elaborate regulation (timetables, exercises, and so on) that discipline simultaneously deploys to occupy its subjects. The aim of such regulation is to enforce not so much a norm as the normality of normativeness itself. Rather than in rendering all its subjects uniformly "normal," discipline is interested in putting in place a perceptual grid in which a division between the normal and the deviant inherently imposes itself. Concomitantly, discipline attenuates the role of actual supervisors by enlisting the consciousness of its subjects in the work of supervision. The Panopticon, where it matters less that the inmates may at any moment be watched than that they know this, only begins to suggest the extent to which disciplinary order relies on a subjectivity that, through a rich array of spiritual management techniques, it compels to endless self-examination. Throughout the nineteenth century, discipline, on the plan of hierarchical surveillance, normalization, and the development of a subjectivity supportive of both, progressively "reforms" the major institutions of society: prison, school, factory, barracks, hospital.

And the novel? May we not pose the question of the novel—whose literary hegemony is achieved precisely in the nineteenth century—in the context of the age of discipline? I have been implying, of course, that discipline provides the novel with its essential "content." A case might be made, moreover, drawing on a more somber tradition than the one exemplified in the fundamentally "comic" novels thus far considered, that this content is by no means always discreet. The novel frequently places its protagonists under a social surveillance whose explicit co- civeness has nothing to do with the euphoria of Oliver Twist

holiday in the country or the genteel understatement of Trollope's "world." In Stendhal's *Le rouge et le noir* (1830), for instance, the seminary Julien Sorel attends at Besançon is openly shown to encompass a full range of disciplinary practices. Constant supervision is secured either by Abbé Castanède's secret police or through Abbé Pirard's "moyens de surveillance."[7] Exercises such as saying the rosary, singing canticles to the Sacred Heart, "etc., etc.," are regulated according to a timetable punctuated by the monastic bell. Normalizing sanctions extend from examinations to the most trivial bodily movements, such as eating a hard-boiled egg. Part of what makes Julien's career so depressing is that he never really finds his way out of the seminary. The Hôtel de la Mole only reduplicates its machinery in less obvious ways: as Julien is obliged to note, "Tout se sait, ici comme au séminaire!" (Everything gets known, here just as much as in the seminary; 465). And the notorious drawback of being in prison is that the prisoner may not close the door on the multilateral disciplinary attempts to interpret and appropriate his crime. One scarcely needs to put great pressure on the text to see all this. The mechanisms of discipline are as indiscreet in Stendhal's presentation as his disapproval of them is explicit.

Something like that disapproval is the hallmark of all the novels which, abandoning the strategy of treating discipline with discretion, make discipline a conspicuous practice. If such novels typically tell the story of how their heroes come to be destroyed by the forces of social regulation and standardization, they inevitably tell it *with regret*. Just as Stendhal's sympathies are with Julien rather than with the directors of the seminary or the surgeons' jury that condemns him, characters like Dorothea Brooke and Tertius Lydgate seem far more admirable to George Eliot than the citizens of *Middlemarch* (1873) who en-

[7] Stendhal, *Le rouge et le noir*, in *Romans et nouvelles*, ed. Henri Martineau, [illegible] (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1952–55), 1:406.

to confirm itself, however, is most basically offered by the narrative itself. For the "birth of narrative" marks an apparent *gap* in the novel's system of knowledge. The thoroughness with which *Père Goriot* (1834) masters every inch of space belonging to the Pension Vauquer, for example, lapses abruptly when it comes to the pensioners themselves. Instead of making assertions, the narration now poses questions, and in place of exhaustive catalogues, it provides us with teasingly elliptical portraits. Exactly at the point of interrogation, the exposition ceases and the narrative proper—what Balzac calls the drama—begins. Yet the "origin" of narrative in a cognitive gap also indicates to what end narrative will be directed. Substituting a temporal mode of mastery for a spatial one, Balzac's "drama" will achieve the same full knowledge of character that has already been acquired of habitat.

The feat is possible because nineteenth-century narrative is generally conceived as a *genesis*: a linear, cumulative time of evolution. Such a genesis secures duration against the dispersive tendencies that are literally "brought into line" by it. Once on this line, character or event may be successively placed and coherently evaluated. It should be recalled that, in *Oliver Twist*, both the police and Mr. Brownlow sought to construct for Oliver a story organized in just this way. The ideal of genetic time prevails in nineteenth-century fiction even where it appears to be discredited. A novel like *Middlemarch* forcefully dismisses the notion of a "key" which would align "all the mythical systems and erratic mythical fragments in the world" with "a tradition originally revealed,"[14] but when it comes to its own will-to-power, the novel presents its characters in a similar genetic scheme. The moral lesson George Eliot seeks to impose depends on our ability to correlate the end of a character's career with what was there in germ at the beginning—in Lydgate's "spots of commonness," for instance, or in Bulstrode's past.

14. George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1965), p. 46.

Structured as a genesis, the narrative that seems to resist a novel's control thereby becomes a technique for achieving it. As it forwards a story of social discipline, the narrative also advances the novel's omniscient word. It is frequently hard to distinguish the omniscience from the social control it parallels, since the latter too is often a matter of "mere" knowledge. Lizzie Eustace poses a threat to Trollopian society precisely because she is unknown. Lord Fawn "knew nothing about her, and had not taken the slightest trouble to make inquiry" (1:78). "You don't know her, mama," Mrs. Hittaway tells Lady Fawn (1:81). "Of the manner in which the diamonds had been placed in [Lizzie's] hands, no one knew more than she chose to tell" (1:15). What mainly happens in *The Eustace Diamonds* is that the world comes to know Lizzie better. Paradoxically, what gives both the world and the narration that idealizes its powers a hold on Lizzie is her own undisciplined desires. These generate the narrative by which she is brought under control. Leo Bersani has argued that the realist novel exhibits a "fear" of desire, whose primal disruptiveness it anxiously represses.[15] Yet power can scarcely be exercised *except* on what resists it, and—shifting Bersani's emphasis somewhat—one might claim that the novel rather than fearing desire *solicits* it. Through the very intensity of the counterpressure it mounts, desire brings the desiring subject into a maximally close "fit" with the power he or she means to resist. Thus, Lizzie's desires are at once the effect of the power she withstands and the cause of its intensified operation.

Insistently, the novel shows disciplinary power to inhere in the very resistance to it. At the macroscopic level, the demonstration is carried in the attempt of the protagonist to break away from the social control that thereby reclaims him. At the microscopic level, it is carried in the trifling detail that

15. Leo Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1976). Bersani's stimulating case is made in chapter 2, entitled "Realism and the Fear of Desire."

is suddenly invested with immense significance. Based on an egregious disproportion between its assumed banality and the weight of revelation it comes to bear, the "significant trifle" is typically meant to surprise, even frighten. For in the same process where the detail is charged with meaning, it is invested with a power already capitalizing on that meaning. Power has taken hold where hold seemed least given: in the irrelevant. The process finds its most programmatic embodiment in detective fiction, where the detail literally incriminates. "I made a private inquiry last week," says Sergeant Cuff in *The Moonstone* (1868); "At one end of the inquiry there was a murder, and at the other end there was a spot of ink on a tablecloth that nobody could account for. In all my experience along the dirtiest ways of this dirty little world, I have never met with such a thing as a trifle yet."[16] The inquiries of Sherlock Holmes rely similarly upon trivia, as he repeatedly reminds us. "You know my method. It is based on the observation of trifles." "There is nothing so important as trifles." "My suspicions depend on small points, which might seem trivial to another."[17]

If the mainstream novel proves ultimately to be another instance of such detection, this is because, both in its story and in its method of rendering it, it dramatizes a power continually able to appropriate the most trivial detail. What makes Corentin a better agent than Peyrade in *Une ténébreuse affaire* is his ability to see such details and seize them as clues. While Peyrade, for instance, is fatuously "charmed" by Michu's wife Marthe, Corentin more acutely discerns "traces of anxiety" in her. "Ces deux natures se peignaient toutes entières dans cette petite chose si grande" (Their two characters were perfectly depicted in this so large little difference; 39). *Cette petite chose si grande*: if the incident that registers the contrast is thus *minor*, then the narration can cite Corentin's power only by sharing in it. We have already seen how Balzacian narration bases its interpretative mastery on minutiae (for example, Peyrade's breeches) that it elaborates into "telling" details. A semiological criticism might be tempted to take the conspicuous legibility of these details for a "readerly" assurance.[18] But its effects seem more disturbing than that, if only because such legibility is generally thematized as the achievement of a sinister power such as Corentin's. As in the detective story, meaningfulness may not always be comforting when what it appropriates are objects and events whose "natural" banality and irrelevance had been taken for granted. "Rien dans la vie n'exige plus d'attention que les choses qui paraissent naturelles" (Nothing in life requires more attention than the things that appear to be natural).[19] This remark from *La rabouilleuse* (1842) defines exactly the unsettling *parti pris* of Balzacian narration: what had seemed natural and commonplace comes all at once under a malicious inspection, and what could be taken for granted now requires an explanation, even an alibi. Balzac's fiction characteristically inspires a sense that the world is thoroughly traversed by techniques of power to which everything, anything gives hold. This world is not so much totally intelligible as it

16. Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1966), p. 136.
17. Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Complete Sherlock Holmes* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1930), pp. 214, 238, and 259. The quotations are respectively from "The Boscombe Valley Mystery," "The Man with the Twisted Lip," and "The Adventure of the Speckled Band."

18. Cf. Jonathan Culler, *Flaubert: The Uses of Uncertainty* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1974), pp. 82–84 and 94–100; and Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris: Seuil, 1970), pp. 79–80 ("La maîtrise du sens").
19. Honoré de Balzac, *La rabouilleuse* (Paris: Garnier, 1959), p. 15. The passage suggestively continues: "On se défie toujours assez de l'extraordinaire; aussi voyez-vous les hommes de l'expérience: les avoués, les juges, les médecins, les prêtres, attachant une énorme importance aux affaires simples; on les trouve méticuleux" (Everybody is sufficiently armed against what is out of the ordinary; but men of experience—lawyers, judges, doctors, priests—know to attach an enormous importance to the simplest matters as well—and people call them fussy!).

is totally suspicious. Even private life partakes of that extreme state of affairs in *Les chouans* (1829) once the war has begun: "Chaque champ était alors une forteresse, chaque arbre méditait un piège, chaque vieux tronc de saule creux gardait un stratagème. Le lieu du combat était partout. . . . Tout dans le pays devenait-il dangereux: le bruit comme le silence, la grâce comme la terreur, le foyer domestique comme le grand chemin" (Each field was now a fortress and each tree concealed an ambush; every old willow stump harbored a deadly contrivance in its hollow. The battleground had no boundaries. . . . Everything in the region had become dangerous: noise and silence alike, kindness as well as terror, the domestic hearth no less than the open road).[20]

What we spoke of as the "genetic" organization of narrative allows the significant trifle to be elaborated *temporally*: in minute networks of causality that inexorably connect one such trifle to another. One thinks most immediately of the spectacularly intricate plotting of sensation novelists like Collins and Braddon or *feuilletonistes* like Eugène Sue and Ponson du Terrail. But the "high" novel of the nineteenth century displays an analogous pride in the fineness of its causal connections. Maupassant argues in the preface to *Pierre et Jean* (1887) that, whereas an earlier generation of novelists relied on a single "ficelle" called the plot, the *romancier moderne* deploys a whole network of thin, secret, almost invisible "fils."[21] Inevitably, so threadlike a causal organization favors stories of entrapment, such as we are given in *Madame Bovary* (1857) or several times in *Middlemarch*. Lydgate unwittingly prophesies the disaster of his own career when he says that "it's uncommonly difficult to

20. Honoré de Balzac, *Les chouans* (Paris: Garnier, 1957), pp. 26–27.
21. Guy de Maupassant, "Préface à *Pierre et Jean*," collected in *Anthologie des préfaces de romans français du XIX^e siècle*, ed. Herbert S. Gershman and Kerman B. Whitworth, Jr. (Paris: Union Générale d'Editions, 1971), p. 369.

make the right thing work: there are so many strings pulling at once" (536); and Bulstrode is undone because "the train of causes in which he had locked himself went on" (665), to unforeseeable destinations. Much like Balzac's use of the significant trifle, George Eliot's insistence on causal ramification is meant to inspire wariness. "One fears to pull the wrong thread in the tangled scheme of things." Once a power of social control has been virtually raised to the status of an ontology, action becomes so intimidating that it is effectively discouraged.

Though power thus encompasses everything in the world of the novel, it is never embraced by the novel itself. On the contrary, the novel systematically gives power an unfavorable press. What more than power, for instance, serves to distinguish bad characters from good? Oliver Twist can represent "the principle of Good" (33, Dickens's preface) because he is uncontaminated by the aggression of his exploiters; and the supreme goodness of Lucy Morris in *The Eustace Diamonds* and Victorine Taillefer in *Père Goriot* depends similarly on their passivity vis-à-vis the power plays going on around them. Conversely, the characters who openly solicit power are regularly corrupted by it: the moral failings of a Rastignac or a Bulstrode are simply gradual, nuanced versions of the evil that arises more melodramatically in a Machiavellian like Corentin or a "poème infernal" like Vautrin. If they are to remain good, good characters may only assume power when—like Oliver's benefactors—they are seeking to neutralize the negative effects of a "prior" instance of it. The same "ideology of power" is implied by the form of the novel itself, which, as we have seen, fastidiously separates its "powerless" discourse from a fully empowered world.

Yet to the extent that power is not simply made over to the world, but made over *into* the world, literally "secularized" as its ontology, the novel inspires less a distaste for power than a fear of it. What ultimate effects the fear is calculated to produce may be suggested if we turn to a master of fear, who, though

not a novelist and living in the seventeenth century, articulated the vision of power which the nineteenth-century novel would so effectively renovate.

Le moindre mouvement importe à toute la nature; la mer entière change pour une pierre. Ainsi, dans la grâce, la moindre action importe par ses suites à tout. Donc tout est important.

En chaque action, il faut regarder, outre l'action, notre état présent, passé, futur, et des autres à quoi elle importe, et voir les liaisons de toutes ces choses.

(The slightest physical movement bears on all of nature; the entire sea is altered by a single stone. Similarly, in the spiritual realm, the least action entails consequences for everything else; everything therefore is important.

In every action, our scrutiny must pass beyond the action itself to examine our present, past, and future states, the others it will affect, and how all these things are interconnected.)[22]

In his first paragraph, Pascal evokes the world of significant trifles related to one another in a minute causal network: the world to which the nineteenth-century novel gives solidity of specification. In his second, he points to what it entails to act wisely in this world: the nineteenth-century virtues of caution and prudence. And finally, in his last sentence, which I have not yet given because it will also be my own, he discloses the natural consequences of thus living in a world thus constructed: "Et lors on sera bien retenu." The novelistic Panopticon exists to remind us that we too inhabit it. "And then we shall indeed be put under restraint."

22. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1969), p. 1296 [no. 656].

TWO

From *roman policier* to *roman-police*: Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*

I

The classical detective story disposes of an interestingly paradoxical economy, at once prodigal and parsimonious. On one hand, the form is based on the hypothesis that *everything might count*: every character might be the culprit, and every action or speech might be belying its apparent banality or literalism by making surreptitious reference to an incriminating Truth. From the layout of the country house (frequently given in all the exactitude of a diagram) to the cigar ash found on the floor at the scene of the crime, no detail can be dismissed a priori. Yet on the other hand, even though the criterion of total relevance is continually invoked by the text, it turns out to have a highly restricted applicability in the end. At the moment of truth, the text winnows grain from chaff, separating the relevant signifiers from the much larger number of irrelevant ones, which are now revealed to be as trivial as we originally were encouraged to suspect they might *not* be. Sinister objects recover their banality, just as secret subjects resume their inconsequence. That quarrel overheard in the night, for example, between Mr. and Mrs. Greene proves to be an ordinary marital row. That cigar ash—unmistakably pointing, say, to Colonel Mustard's brand—is shown to have been deposited on the parquet *before* the crime took place. Of the elaborate house-plan, only this door or that window enters into the solution, and of