Possessed: Embodiment, Circulation, & Subjectivity in *Robinson Crusoe, Roderick Random, & Rob Roy*

by
Rebecca Schneider

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Abstract approved:

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Evan M. Gottlieb

A majority of eighteenth-century novels remain in regular print over two hundred years since their inception. Yet with the possible exception of Robinson Crusoe, they have largely fallen out of popularity, rarely appearing on “The Summer’s Hottest Reading” lists or receiving celebrity endorsement. I consider Ian Watt’s foundational study, The Rise of the Novel, as well as Deidre Lynch’s new historicist revisions in The Economy of Character to qualify an assumption that today’s readers owe much of their expectations of novels to eighteenth-century British novelists. This project takes particular interest in the development of subjectivity among three self-narrating male protagonists from the beginning, middle, and end of the eighteenth century. The first chapter examines Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe, especially Crusoe’s possessive individualism inherited from John Locke and the retroactive influence of Bruno Latour’s Actor Network Theory (ANT). The second chapter considers Tobias Smollett’s Roderick Random as an example of individual subjectivity established through circulation, mirroring the credit culture rising to prominence throughout the century. The third chapter positions Sir Walter
Scott’s *Rob Roy* as a backward glance at individual subjectivity challenged and facilitated through encounters with increasingly diverse Others, especially drawing on theorists Emmanuel Levinas and Slavoj Žižek.
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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

_____________________________________________________________  
Rebecca Schneider, Author
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Dedicated to Dr. Rebecca Chalmers
Possessed: Embodiment, Circulation, & Subjectivity in *Robinson Crusoe, Roderick Random, & Rob Roy*
Introduction

I join Nancy Armstrong in arguing that “the history of the novel and the history of the modern subject are, quite literally, one and the same” (3). However, the project at hand does not aim to be a “history of the novel” due to obvious limitations of space and time. Book-length projects such as George Lukács’ *The Historical Novel* (1937) and Ian Watt’s *The Rise of the Novel* (1960) have already established key touchstones of the novel’s genesis. More recent scholarship, such as Deidre Lynch’s *The Economy of Character* (1998) and Armstrong’s *How Novels Think* (2005), has traced the development of modern Western subjectivity back, at least in part, to the effects on readers of early novels in English. What follows, then, is a study of the formation and circulation of three protagonists and their milieus, which I believe aids a diachronic look at the socio-cultural work of the eighteenth-century British novel. They are Robinson Crusoe and Roderick Random, from the eponymous novels by Daniel Defoe (1719) and Tobias Smollett (1748), and Frank Osbaldistone from Walter Scott’s *Rob Roy* (1829).

By many counts, *Robinson Crusoe* precedes the definition of “novel,” a term that would not be in standard vernacular until the end of the century (Watt 10). Contemporary readers of *Robinson Crusoe* were not even universally aware of its fictional status. They were instructed by the title page that what they had in their hands was, “Written by Himself,” *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner: Who lived Eight and Twenty Years, all alone in an un-inhabited Island on the Coast of America, near the Mouth of the Great River of Oroonoque; Having been cast on*
Shore by Shipwreck, wherein all the Men perished but himself. With An Account how he was at last as strangely deliver’d by Pyrates. In this title, we can read the commitment to realism that sets the early novel apart from other narrative genres that share its historical moment. Watt differentiates this realism from philosophical vernacular, explaining that, for novels, realism describes the “varieties of human experience” (11) as well as “truth” and “originality” (13). The literary historian’s common narrative of progressive development in novelistic characterization turns next to mid-century fiction, such as that of Tobias Smollett, exhibiting protagonists who are more self-consciously individual than their early-century predecessors. To use the eighteenth-century’s own vocabulary, we might call this group of protagonists “originals.” They were at least more “original” than what British readers had seen in earlier fictional heroes like Robinson Crusoe.

If we venture back before the eighteenth century and before the novel, we bump up against literary subgenres like the picaresque, an episodic narrative usually told from the first person point of view and whose literary form originated in sixteenth-century Spain. The name picaresque comes from the Spanish pícaro, meaning “rogue,” referring to the picaresque hero who is usually of lower-class origins but who succeeds through wit and resourcefulness (Bedford Glossary). In my selection and reading of three eighteenth-century novels, I note that we see novels giving up the episodic plot in favor of narratives that allow for more explicitly measurable character development. The subjects on the page become more fully capable of self-government that “the Lockeans could only theorize” (Armstrong 6). Lynch specifically points to mid-century novels such as
Roderick Random that combine “Locke’s model of the self-made consciousness” and “the traditions of the picaresque narrative: hence [the novels’] allegiance to a logic of parataxis that puts the narrative part before the whole” (Economy of Character 85). Lynch, Armstrong, and Aileen Douglas each posit fascinating corollaries between the rise of individualism among the reading populace and a reflected self-possessive individualism in eighteenth-century novels, as well as make connections to subjectivity and fiction in our own century.

Besides the arc from the eighteenth century to our own, I am interested in considering the arc spanning the long eighteenth century from Defoe to Scott. To give this project that allowance, I should clarify that I consider the “long eighteenth century” as running from 1700-1830. This allows my project to trace a theme beginning with Defoe’s representations of the acquisition of property and individual agency and ending with Scott’s exploration of differently complicated questions of global consumerism and imperialistic exploitation. Following this theme also allows us to analyze how methods of possession, from individual to imperial property, evolve in fiction concurrently with the evolution of new classes of property: the “intensely personal property of identity” (105), to use Lynch’s phrasing. While points of the atlas became redrawn, re-appropriated,

[O]bjects themselves came to move in new ways, as they traversed the heterogeneous spaces of uneven economic development demarcated by the globe’s new trade routes. Within this novel theater of cross-cultural to-and-fro, valuables from one zone could metamorphose into trifes in another, and vice versa. (Lynch, “Personal Effects” 77)
The “novel theater” in Lynch’s argument refers literally to the expanded networks of British trade and geo-political influence in the long eighteenth century. But for this project, the novel theater might also be taken as the increasingly popular genre of fiction, in which objects could be considered “actors” with roles to play like those of the characters populating Britain’s theatrical stage.

The conceptualization of wealth in Britain undergoes a profound shift in the eighteenth century, evidenced, Armstrong notes, in the “exponentially increasing supply of goods” (119) and “conspicuous consumption” (120) that interest Thomas Malthus in *Principles of Political Economy* (1819). The landed estates and ancient family names of the long-standing feudal tradition loom large like grotesque shadows cast in late evening while a new class of would-be gentlemen purchases social credit with funds earned through the circulation of money, on the stock market, and the production of goods, through commercial manufacture. The old wealth depends on birth, status, and therefore stasis – stagnation, even. The new wealth – to which Crusoe, Random, and Frank belong – depends on vigorous circulation of credit, commodities, and even bodies. We should consider elements of the picaresque re-deployed to facilitate the wide and widening circulation of a hero whose ultimate goal is settling down as some updated reincarnation of the country squire. To achieve this goal, our heroes are composites of rogue and gentleman, tamed scoundrels and knavish lords. John Richetti, in *The English Novel in History 1700-1780*, claims that Defoe and Smollett “domesticate the scabrous European picaresque tradition” (14), building upon John Barrell’s original argument in *English*
Literature in History 1730-80: An Equal Wide Survey. Our so-called domesticated picaresque hero-consumers, along with their consumables, are accessories to a changing class structure in which birthrights and bloodlines are eclipsed by more “liquid” assets and moveable wealth.

The self-narrated subject must certainly be an enmeshed hybrid, both human and material. If so, what can it tell us about self-possession, and about our own subjectivity? In Eighteenth-Century Fiction and the Law of Property, Wolfram Schmidgen argues that “as Defoe’s novel reveals, Locke’s possessive individualism can only assert itself by creating hybrids of persons and things, by enmeshing human and material spheres to such an extent that the very notion of individualism becomes questionable” (62). The paradox of representation is even seen in the “Written by Himself” appearing on the title page of Defoe’s novel, allegedly referring to Crusoe as author and therefore possessor of his own story. Armstrong looks to both Crusoe and Moll Flanders, suggesting that “their extraordinary adventures could have done little to make them exemplary had they not possessed the means of authoring their respective stories” (6). In this way we see the start of a trend whereby fictional characters model possession, of both material objects and embodied subjectivity alike.

There are certainly precedents for identifying a cause-and-effect relationship between individual identity formation, the developments in the novel genre, and the self-possessive self-consciousness of British consumers. For example, Catherine Gallagher discusses identity formation of literary subjects against the “self-alienation associated
with the marketplace” (116) in The Body Economic. But what’s especially relevant in my discussion of Robinson Crusoe, Roderick Random, and Rob Roy is how Crusoe, Random, and Frank become representatives of larger groups, such that a self-possessed, bounded, single “whole” stands in for motley and disparate parts. If we examine how an individual might work out his character and subjectivity, a logical next step is to examine how “character” is reflected across an entire stratum of society or nation-state. Lynch quotes Levi-Strauss on this theme: “in contrast to what happens when we try to understand a…living creature of real dimensions, knowledge of the whole precedes knowledge of the parts” (Economy of Character 88). Working within this framework, I read the three protagonists’ social and economic ascension as allegories for Britain’s rising trajectory in the global market.

One of the correlations between more complex and individuated characters and the rising middle class is that readers begin encountering characters that become much more socio-economically diverse. In mid-eighteenth-century novels, like Henry Fielding’s The History of Tom Jones: A Foundling, the foundling, the harlot, and the orphan share the page with landed gentry and aristocrats. Furthermore, proto-class consciousness significantly factors into the novel’s development as novelists and by extension their readers find themselves more sympathetic to protagonists who originate in classes beneath them, or who fluidly shift between classes. As a matter of course, a protagonist from the 1710s, such as Robinson Crusoe, might lack a complex psychological interiority, save for several extremes of despondent, repentant, zealous, and
sanguine expression; by contrast, a foundling protagonist from 1748, Random embodies a more expansive emotional spectrum and elicits readers’ sympathy through more subtle emotional reactions. Lynch explains, looking ahead in the annals of the novel’s history, readers grew to prefer so-called “round” characters more than “flat” or “stock” characters as Romantic and Victorian aesthetic tastes evolved out of eighteenth-century neoclassicism.

As Random discovers, dressing in a gentleman’s clothes – impersonating a gentleman (Lynch 105) – does not guarantee being treated as a gentleman. Or as Crusoe learns, dressing as a gentleman sometimes might backfire even if one’s gentlemanly appearance is taken at face value: “as it was always my fate to choose for the worse, so I did here; for having money in my pocket, and good clothes upon my back, I would always go on board in the habit of a gentleman; and so I neither had any business in the ship, or learn’d to do any” (15). In the eighteenth century, characters are caught between trying to define shifting cultural and economic values of the nation and simultaneously being defined, or at least confined, by them. According to Margaret Cohen, in her history of maritime fiction spanning two centuries, The Novel and the Sea (2010), “Bakhtin argued that adventure fiction subjects its protagonists to dangers to test and thereby affirm their identity – an identity that expresses a culture’s constitutive values” (3). In life as in fiction, class hierarchies remain another important resource for meaning making. Lynch also speaks to this concern, explaining that “the expanded inner life of the literary character – the psychological depth of the ‘new style of novel’” becomes visible as an
“artifact of a new form of self-culture and as the mechanism of a new mode of class awareness” (126). As much as modern audiences, myself included, would like to celebrate the growing psychological depth and diversity that eighteenth-century novels helped pave the way for, Lynch reminds us that the character-to-reader transfer was not as democratic as our fantasy imagines.

Even if becoming a gentleman is the undisputed end goal for each of our three protagonists, they and many of the other characters cycle through multiple careers. The revolving door of career moves throughout the novel speaks to the growing diversity of money-making options of Britain’s working-class citizens. A person’s trade or career is usually among the more significant details that they, and others, identify when defining and transacting their circulation throughout society. The three protagonists’ haphazard trajectory from trade to trade threatens their ultimate goals of possessing the identity of gentleman. If Crusoe, Random, or Frank were to become stuck in time and space – toiling away as a lonely goat herder, to take an example from Robinson Crusoe – they would risk losing the mobility to continue circulating. This is reminiscent again of the conventional seventeenth-century picaresque. In some places the protagonists’ movements obviously function as plot mechanisms and nothing more. Likewise, it’s important to point out that some of the career changes in the novel are independently volitional but others, such as when a press gang overtakes Random, diminish a character’s autonomy in crafting and circulating a complete and productive self. This precise historical moment in British history saw individuals’ political, religious, and
economic rights cycle through several important revisions. An unexpected ramification of this diversity, which could be naively labeled “freedom of upward mobility,” is the complicated way that individual identity formation is tangled up in a person’s vocation.

In my first chapter on Robinson Crusoe I focus on the material things that Crusoe acquires as well as the labor necessary to either fashion or collect his property. I read an important Lockean influence at work in Robinson Crusoe, particularly apparent in the way that Crusoe mixes his labor with the exterior world to improve the raw material of his appropriated island empire. Locke’s theories of political economy relate ownership with governance and provide me with a way of arguing that possessions become, for Crusoe, technologies for expansion of the borders of the self. In order to differentiate my study from the strong work that has come before, I argue that whether the man makes the things or the things make the man, Crusoe’s relationship with things means different things at different times in the novel.

Fictional physical bodies are on the move in my second chapter on Roderick Random. Random and other characters in the novel are not always circulating by their own agency but they nearly always convert their circulation into personal profit, which in turn allows for their continued circulation. The task of becoming a gentleman functions as a major plot device in this novel, which is a point I take as further support for the economically-incentivized circulation of bodies in addition to consumer goods. Also, I’m especially fascinated by how Smollett fleshes out believable, realistic characters by sometimes allowing their bodies to break down. Smollett’s characters bleed, urinate, and
vomit, yet manage a continued circulation through the novel despite – or sometimes even
due to – seemingly devastating physical injury.

In my third and final chapter, I explore Glasgow as a contact zone that exposes
cultural hybridity in *Rob Roy*. Setting a face-to-face ethical encounter in dialogue with an
encounter marked by the desire of both subject and Other opens up important insights
into the competing discourses of cultural subjectivity in the Romantic novel, especially as
conducted via commercial exchanges. I use the Lacanian concept of the Symbolic Order –
the realm of language, society, culture, etc. – as a framework to think and write about
the subject/Other relationship in Glaswegian contact zones in *Rob Roy*. My analysis is
largely indebted to Slavoj Žižek’s approach as he engages with Emmanuel Levinas both
thematically and literally. I specifically depend on Žižek’s complication of previous ways
of understanding subjectivity, fantasy, and desire within the Lacanian Symbolic Order.
Also in this chapter, I identify and attempt to answer a central question in Romantic
fiction: to what degree does the subjectivity of the self (or nation) get lost in translation
within a cultural contact zone?

Lynch challenges a teleological interpretation of the rise of the novel and the rise
of psychologically complex characters, and I also try to avoid any unwarranted claims
that imply a teleological progression. That is to say, *Rob Roy* doesn’t necessarily depend
on *Roderick Random* any more than *Roderick Random* depends on *Robinson Crusoe*.
Nevertheless, novels clearly become increasingly popular as the eighteenth century wears
on. My selection of these three self-narrating masculine protagonists highlights how their
“fidelity to human experience,” to invoke Watt, demonstrates both the physical and psychological dimensions that come to constitute representations of individual subjectivity in the British novel of the eighteenth century. Though my own reading of these novels is closer to the new historicist revisions of Lynch et al, I don’t want to diminish Watt’s important work of clearly differentiating the eighteenth-century novel’s “formal realism” as a defining characteristic. My project ultimately follows Lynch’s lead in analyzing how Crusoe, Random, and Frank circulate – or, on occasion fail to circulate – in the national public spheres represented in their respective novels. In my conclusion, I initiate productive, and at times speculative, incentives for reading the individual subjectivity of the eighteenth-century self-narrating protagonist as analogous to the subjective characteristics of the larger nation-state.
1 Managing Paradise: Locke’s Property, Latour’s Assemblage, & Self-Possession in Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*

“I thought I liv’d really very happily in all things, except that of society. I improv’d my self in this time in all the mechanic exercise which my necessities put me upon applying myself to.” Robinson Crusoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (1719)

Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* continues to be one of the most popular pieces of fiction from the eighteenth century taught today. This tale of intrepid and rugged individualism is popular outside of the classroom, too. Hundreds of versions of the book are in print, including abridged imprints and foreign language translations. Similar plot points show up in writing for film and television, including “Swiss Family Robinson,” “Castaway,” and “Lost.” There is even a smart phone app called “Robinson,” which shamelessly borrows in reverse and includes the polar bear from “Lost,” the magical tree from “Avatar,” and a bonus level with a mad scientist. Nevertheless, the game is pretty true to Defoe’s tale in other respects. It’s played from the first person point of view, Robinson’s home island is unpopulated, and the player advances levels by collecting matching sets of shipwrecked detritus during different tasks aimed at improving the raw materials of the island. With your virtual Robinson, you can clear the jungle, erect shelter, plant and harvest crops, tend livestock, and build a boat for exploratory expeditions. As far as I can tell, there’s no end to the game because the developers continue to add new tasks, new dangers, and new bonus islands. Like Defoe’s text, the game “Robinson” is also a hypothetically indefinite contest of acquiring things.
For Crusoe, things make the man. But at the same time Crusoe the man (re)makes things, refining the raw materials he begins island life with, including the unrefined condition of his psyche. I follow a popular trend in Defoe scholarship in arguing that Crusoe makes or remakes things on the island through a Lockean mixing of his labor with raw materials. We know that Defoe was aware of John Locke’s “Of Property” from *Two Treatises on Government* (1698), in which Locke argues that it is “Labour indeed that puts the difference of value on every thing” (Locke’s emphasis; see Davis 374, 376). The wave of philosophical thought that Locke rides seeks to indemnify certain property rights, particularly with regard to raw materials – of which “unoccupied” land may have been the most consequential. In *Eighteenth-Century Fiction and the Law of Property*, Wolfram Schmidgen explains that *Robinson Crusoe* positions “the notion of terra nullis in a state of deep cultural and ideological uncertainty.” To European adventurers cut from the same sail-cloth as Crusoe, “‘vacant’ land could seem like an unnatural, frightening condition from the perspective of a culture that treated possession as an unproblematic social given” (34). In order to occupy and possess the island Crusoe adds his labor, conceiving of the improved property as literally containing a part of himself. The next step in this argument is conceiving of Crusoe’s labor as a means by which he occupies, improves, and possesses his subjectivity.

It’s not an original argument to take up Crusoe’s serial possessiveness in regards to a philosophical discussion of inherent human rights. Schmidgen, Lynch, Lynn Festa, and C. B. Macpherson brilliantly connect a growing consumer culture and a concomitant
growth of individual assertiveness in society, culture, and politics. In *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*, Macpherson explains the meaning of “possessive individualism” inherited from Locke; not only does an individual come to possess property when he mixes his labor with “unimproved” material, he also comes to possess himself more fully through a healthy quota of work. Paraphrasing Locke’s *Second Treatise*, “No consent of the others is needed for this appropriation. For God commanded man to labour the earth, and so entitled him to appropriate whatever land he mixed his labour with” (Macpherson 202). Along this theme, James Thomson’s “Rule, Britannia!” (1740) offers a famous mid-eighteenth-century example of divine provenance and Britain’s mythopoetic past made popular in contemporary literary culture. Thomson, a Scottish court poet, composed the lyrics prior to Britain’s actual imperial naval dominance: “To thee belongs the rural reign; / Thy cities shall with commerce shine: / All thine shall be the subject main, / And every shore it circles thine. ‘Rule, Britannia! rule the waves:/ ‘Britons never will be slaves.”’ Besides being good for the economy, consumerism, and by extension possessive individualism, are considered divinely appointed tasks “at Heaven’s command” (Thomson).

But to differentiate my study from the strong work that has come before, I argue that whether the man makes the things or the things make the man, Crusoe’s relationship with *things* means different things at different times. In particular, I locate a shift in Crusoe’s self-possession between his time on the island and his time off of it. I analyze Crusoe’s thing-producing labor and his thing-*managing* labor – in order to assess how
Crusoe-the-manager differs from Crusoe-the-laborer. Importantly, I want to remain especially sensitive to his development of subjectivity through Lockean self-possession as it relates to his possession of two specific classes of material things: moveable and immovable property.

Perhaps one reason for *Robinson Crusoe*’s sustained cultural currency is its resonance with modern consumer culture. Over three hundred years since Locke developed his theories of property, the relationships we have with our things continue to depend on an anthropocentric logic of possession. These past several centuries, we have usually conceived of our possessive relationships depending on human agency: I possess my things; they do not possess me. In contrast, Bruno Latour would have us think of ourselves as members of complex networks in which human agency is not necessarily superior or even more dominant than the agency of other actors in the network: things, ideas, weather patterns, nation states, colors, etc. Considering the many non-human “actors” in *Robinson Crusoe* that perform influential roles, Defoe’s novel offers an ideal fictional entry point to understanding Latourian theories of the subject. Especially noteworthy actors in the novel include the deserted island, the ague which results in Crusoe’s conversion (70), and the footprint in the sand (122). Nevertheless, Crusoe’s relationship with the exterior world is consistently cast in anti-Latourian terms of human-centered possession. I will come back to this paradox after considering what’s at the root of human-centered possessive ideology.
Lockean theories are particularly apparent in *Robinson Crusoe* during scenes in which Crusoe mixes his labor with the exterior world. As he obtains and improves his possessions, Crusoe obtains and improves upon his own subjectivity. He becomes the island’s sole carpenter, fisherman, hunter, boat builder, candle maker, basket weaver, goat breeder, dairyman, plantation worker, potter, baker, tailor, etc. These facets of his identity are tied to the commodities he produces. Festa argues this point, too. She claims that “the inner world of Robinson Crusoe is manifested largely through his description of things without. Character emerges through the subjective perception of objects, rather than through the transparent depiction of inwardness” (452). I agree with Festa that in observing Crusoe interact with his possessions, we might interpret something of the depth of his character. By analyzing his understanding of his own character, we might interpret his subjectivity.

Whether Crusoe’s external material possessions, such as his several fortified dwelling spaces, serve as a buffer of safety creating literal distance between him and a hostile environment, or whether his possessions serve as a mirror refracting and multiplying his subjectivity by providing an expanded surface onto which identity formation takes place, ownership seems to affect identity spatially. That is to say, ownership becomes a technology for expansion of the borders of the self. First and foremost, property for Crusoe ensures defense against the unknown perils of island life, whether “perishing with hunger, or being devour’d by wild beasts” (39). Linking survival to property, Schmidgen suggests that there’s something essentially human at work in this
process: “Crusoe’s compulsive habit [of enclosing spaces] has a wide symbolic reference, but its most immediate meaning refers us to the origin of property. The creation of private property… is natural because it results directly from the fundamental human right to self-defense” (47-48). Again, I’m not only thinking of a defense against loss of material property, but also (and initially most important to Crusoe) a defense against loss of life.

Crusoe actively works out his survival every day; there are no vacation days in paradise. From his first day on the island forward, Crusoe gradually expands his territory. He makes “a kind of hut” (44) to sleep in during the first night and makes “a little tent with the sail and some poles” (45) for the second night. After three weeks, he locates a place secure “from any attack in the night, either from wild beast or men” and makes a cave and a tent (58), spending almost two months finishing the cave and three months working to enclose his habitation with a fence (61). With the one year anniversary of his shipwreck approaching, Crusoe finishes a preliminary scouting of the island with the intentions of locating a site on which to build a second dwelling. Happening upon a “delicious vale,” Crusoe finds himself “surveying it with a secret kind of pleasure…to think that this was all my own, that I was king and lord of all this country indefeasibly, and had a right of possession” (80). He builds his “country-house” on this site but keeps his “sea-coast-house” as his primary abode, even expanding it substantially. By taking possession of these spaces Crusoe makes them into possession(s).

Let’s now turn to a more moveable class of property which Crusoe either creates or improves through labor. Crusoe’s relationship with labor, far from being abstract, is
arguably one the easiest entry points for contemporary audiences trying to imagine how they would fare as castaways. Due to the popular revival of homesteading-type activities and the flood of do-it-yourself projects on Internet sites like Pinterest, twenty-first-century readers are particularly fascinated by low-tech, labor-intensive crafts like Crusoe’s involved process for making bread from raw grains: “fence it, secure it, mow or reap it, cure and carry it home, thrash, part it from the chaff, and save it. Then I wanted a mill to grind it, sieves to dress it, yeast and salt to make it into bread, and an oven to bake it, and yet all these things I did without” (95). Crusoe considers mills, sieves, yeast, and ovens technologically advanced compared to his actual available resources and tools. Though this is lost on most modern readers, they might easily relate to tending a low-tech garden for an occasional summertime salad and therefore might actually empathize with Crusoe’s retort: “It might be truly said, that now I work’d for my bread; ‘tis a little wonderful, and what I believe few people have thought much upon, (viz.) the strange multitude of little things necessary in the providing, producing, curing, dressing, making and finishing this one article of bread” (94). Despite lacking a “multitude of little things necessary” to make bread, Crusoe does not lack a multitude of other things.

In Capital: A Critique of Political Economy (1867), Karl Marx considers Crusoe a “favourite theme with political economists” (Davis 382), in light of the necessity of Crusoe’s labors in order for survival. Marx writes, “[Crusoe’s] stock-book contains a list of the objects of utility that belong to him, of the operations necessary for their production; and lastly, of the labour time that definite quantities of those objects have, on
average, cost him” (qtd. in Davis 383). Even when Crusoe discovers that he could amass indefinite quantities of objects – such as dried raisins or rice – he does not store up much beyond what he could possibly use up. While he is alone on the island, Crusoe’s moveable possessions retain predominantly use value, as opposed to exchange value. In the case of use value, Schmidgen identifies Crusoe’s moveable property “in contrast to his manorial fantasy, which turned on the idea of inheritance and thus on a notion of property that is independent of actual possession” (38). To be in possession of material property such as food, shelter, weapons, and tools is to be in possession of survival whether on a desert island or in York, England. To fantasize ownership of a manorial estate, then, is to fantasize the survival of one’s family line well after one’s individual life is over.

Though Crusoe calls himself a king and considers his various habitations his estates, he clearly privileges his possessions that are functional – that is to say, useable. Take, for example, Crusoe’s covetous yearning for a pipe. Finally, in the twenty-third year of his stay on the island Crusoe gets his wish. He hears guns in the night and, come daybreak, he discovers a shipwreck off the east shore. One body washes up on the beach but no survivors are apparent, to Crusoe’s bitter dismay. In the corpse’s pocket are “but two Pieces of Eight, and a tobacco pipe; the last was to me of ten times more value than the first” (149). All this time, Crusoe has been saving up the odd coins he has collected, even carrying away some of the money he finds aboard this recently shipwrecked vessel
(152). But, he has also taken several opportunities to compare his amassed wealth of coins to the sort of useful possessions he would gladly trade for them:

In a word, the nature and experience of things dictated to me upon just reflection, that all the good things of this world, are no farther good to us, than they are for our use; and that whatever we may heap up indeed to give others, we enjoy just as much as we can use, and no more… I had, as I hinted before, a parcel of money, as well gold as silver, about thirty six pounds sterling: Alas! There the nasty sorry useless stuff lay; I had no manner of business for it; and I often thought with myself, that I would have given a handful of it for a gross of tobacco-pipes… (103)

In addition to tobacco pipes, Crusoe includes his wish for a bottle of ink, vegetable seeds, and hand mill for grinding grain. And after salvaging a fraction of the total treasure from the recent shipwreck, he complains that he would have exchanged all the money he carried away for “three or four pairs of English shoes and stockings” (153).

It is interesting, and seemingly contradictory, that Crusoe squirrels away a small fortune in gold and silver during his twenty-eight year career as a castaway on the island. This seems to suggest that he never totally relinquishes hope of rescue, either by his own contrivance or aided by others. Even as Crusoe’s horde of money molders away (103) in a cave like treasure in a dragon’s lair straight out of an Old English epic (153), he longs to be able to spend his trove on consumable goods, marking the burgeoning “capitalist logic of waste and planned obsolescence,” to quote Žižek (Welcome to the Desert 7). Cast away from the world of circulating goods and exchange values, Crusoe thereby feels his outcast status even more poignantly by his inability to initiate the modern ritual of purchase. However, perhaps we’ve overlooked how Crusoe’s moveable island
possessions demonstrate a different sort of “exchange” value. That is to say, Crusoe’s identity as the manager-owner, not merely the laborer-crafter, of all his earthly possessions serves to transact and expand, or at least secure, a sense of self-possession.

This is not the exchange value of Marxist theory. Rather, I want to examine how Crusoe transacts his self-possession through management of his possessions. First, labor clearly cannot always guarantee possession; some of Crusoe’s labor ends in loss, for example, as in his first attempt at crafting a canoe which, when finished, proves impossible to move to sea level (102). In contrast, ownership all but defines possession and might also extend to define identity within variable social contexts. As Lynch observes, the process through which “ownership remakes a thing as a belonging, remakes a person as a proprietor, and binds moveable property, despite its movability, to its proprietor is culturally and historically conditioned” (“Personal Effects” 65). Lynch goes on to argue that exchange and commerce (the lack of which Crusoe mourns) might be “pitted against an ideal of integrity that is modeled when characters keep their keepsakes and so keep themselves to themselves” (“Personal Effects” 72). If the key to self-producing consumption is things’ proximity to their possessor, whether or not they were acquired through his labor or another’s, then Crusoe exchanges a life potentially “spent” in commerce for one “saved” through proprietorship.

We should now examine whether managing and keeping moveable possessions offers an adequate lesson for keeping one’s self. In addition to working out his physical survival on a day to day basis, Crusoe regularly works out the value and meaning of his
Within the first year on the island, Crusoe declares: “I now began to consider seriously my condition, and the circumstance I was reduc’d to… and as my reason began now to master my despondency, I began to comfort my self as well as I could, and to set the good against evil, that I might have something to distinguish my case from worse” (53-54). From this point on in the novel, the subjects that experience hunger or pain are usually animals such as the dying goat in the cave (141) or the starving dog from the second shipwreck (151). But Crusoe states his mental and emotional condition more frequently than his physical hardships, lamenting being “left entirely destitute of all comforts” (40) and confessing that “the thoughts of [being captured by savages] sometimes sunk my very soul within me” (138). In his fifth year, Crusoe comes to see the land as under his management: “I was lord of the whole manor; or if I pleas’d, I might call my self king, or emperor over the whole country which I had possession of. There were no rivals. I had no competitor, none to dispute sovereignty or command with me” (102-3). In addition to acquiring explicit property, he acquires significant proprietor’s confidence.

For much of the narrative, no other humans challenge Crusoe’s self-management, causing him to retain many of his previous character traits: adventure junkie, often heedless of his better judgment, and anthropocentrically entitled. Upon nearly drowning when his first “trial” sea voyage ends in wreckage, Crusoe cries, “my ill fate push’d me on now with an obstinacy that nothing could resist; and tho’ I had several times loud calls from my reason and my more composed judgment to go home, yet I had no power to do
it” (13). Eight years after this traumatizing event, Crusoe leaves his thriving South American plantation “upon a voyage to sea, attended with all its common hazards; to say nothing of the reasons I had to expect particular misfortune to myself. But I was hurried on, and obey’d blindly the dictates of my fancy rather than my reason” (34). Capitalist logic that supports necessary risk-taking in the hope of future gain is here at odds with prudential logic. Crusoe says that if his life may be an extreme example, he qualifies it by claiming his “sin” is quite representative of a general population: “I have been, in all my circumstances, a memento to those who are touch’d with the general plague of mankind, whence, for ought I know, one half of their miseries flow; I mean, that of not being satisfy’d with the station wherein God and Nature hath plac’d them” (153-4). Crusoe unintentionally locates a deadlock between a Protestant credo of accepting one’s lot in life and capitalist aims of risk and upward mobility.

Though I would suggest that Crusoe’s conceptualization of a “general” population is one that’s inherently capitalistic in nature, there’s another general character type at work. Defoe begins to flesh out a type of masculine agency emerging as dominant in the adventure novels that soon follow. In *The Novel and the Sea*, Cohen explains that “unmoored from divine authority as well as assistance, the heroes of sea fiction perform their capacity to negotiate the edges of an unknown, expanding, chaotic, violent, and occasionally beautiful sublunary realm relying on human agency alone” (3). Taking up Cohen’s metaphor, the negotiation of the beautiful sublunary seas becomes the quest after conquering “nature” through human effort. The sort of conquering that Crusoe is after,
especially on the island, has not quite reached the imperialist pitch of the fiction we see later in the century, for example the violent conflicts over political and economic control of India in Sir Walter Scott’s “The Surgeon’s Daughter” from *Chronicles of the Canongate*. Even so, *Robinson Crusoe* often has been read as “an embodiment of British imperialist values,” as the Penguin Classics edition notes on the book jacket. Crusoe’s negotiation of unknown territory allows him to act out individual agency, anticipating the national agency of colonization.

If the novel’s “lowest common denominator” is “formal realism,” a “full and authentic report of human experience” (32), as Ian Watt suggests in *The Rise of the Novel*, one should analyze the success, or lack thereof, of critical projects that examine nationalism, national agency, the nation-state, etc. in novels. Notably, Watt and others do just that. What, then, should we say of the world-producing function of empire *pre*-produced in *Robinson Crusoe*? Empire taken up in the novel becomes both subject and object, being represented while simultaneously representing. Festa expands this discussion by considering Crusoe’s attempt to make his recorded experiences fit an idealized narrative presumably decades after the events have occurred.

One might understand Crusoe’s efforts to wrest meaning from his experience and to fit seemingly random events into a Providential order as a version of this (subject- and world- producing) activity, and in this sense for Daniel Defoe, as for Lukács, the novel is generated out of a ceaseless attempt to engineer a relation of homogenous part to unified whole, to overcome the distance between what Lukács calls the “mutually alien worlds of subject and object.” (445-6)
I agree that the novel fits the purpose of engineering (idealizing) a unified world of subject and object. For most of the narrative the island is populated with things rather than humans. Nevertheless, the empire of objects filling the island works to present a unified sense of place.

When the English mutineers agree to stay on the island, and Crusoe has secured passage home to England, he sets out to give “the whole history of the place, and of my coming to it” (218). This includes a tour of the “fortifications,” a demonstration of how he makes bread, cures grapes, manages his armory (“five musquets, three fowling pieces, and three swords”), milks goats, makes butter and cheese, tends crops, and in general makes life “easy” (218). Crusoe claims that “in a word, I gave them every part of my own story” (218). However, if we are to follow the list of instructions put down in this passage, Crusoe has only given the story of how to manage the things – the possessions – that he must leave behind on the island. The “reliqués” that he carries away include “the great goat’s-skin-cap I had made, my umbrella, and my parrot” as well as all of the money he’s hoarded for almost thirty years (219). But the manor, the estate, the landed property that he both possesses and manages cannot travel away with him. Schmidgen reminds us that “the seventeenth-century manor becomes a deeply contested figure; it haunts these texts as inescapable ground, ideal state, delusive chimera, and sentimental image” (14). Crusoe has lamented not having access to consumer culture, but he now laments leaving his manorial island property.
I agree with Schmidgen’s reading, but I want to propose an additional dynamic at work. Might we begin by undermining Crusoe’s anthropocentric world view? For example, Crusoe presupposes that all material “things” have the potential to be possessed, and that the social realm dominated by humans is the predominant world-organizing function. This is what motivates Crusoe to keep a human population on the island even though he eventually leaves. But Bruno Latour’s Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) confronts the “contradiction inherent in the notion of a ‘self-production’ of society” (67). Latour’s definition of the social is in assemblages of actors: where politics meets environmentalism, or where physics meets economics, etc. In *Reassembling the Social*, Latour argues that we are mistaken in identifying society as a power or influence “spreading in time and space” (66), particularly due to how this view limits agency as a distinctively human and social phenomenon. Instead, ANT examines local networks, focusing on how the social is assembled through associations between humans and humans, humans and non-humans (for lack of a better term), and non-humans and non-humans. One of Latour’s more provocative claims in this vein is that objects themselves lend stability to unstable interactions within and between associations. The point of a given analysis, for Latour, is to focus on the unstable nature of these assemblages and to describe, as closely as possible, how they gain stability. He instructs that we might catch sight of an Actor-Network at sites of innovation, ignorance, accident, historicization, or fiction (80-82). Or, more simply, Latour encourages us to ask “Does [an agent] make a difference in the course of some other agent’s action or not?” (71).
As I hinted earlier, I think of the mysterious footprint in particular. The footprint that Crusoe finds in the sand is a prime example of a non-human agent which in turn mobilizes a whole assemblage of actors. This is not to say a Latourian reading posits that the footprint is a more powerful actor than Crusoe. Rather, in the moment that it causes terror and anxiety, the footprint proves to have formed a more powerful assemblage than Crusoe’s proprietor’s confidence that I discussed earlier. In other words, by itself, the footprint is powerless. But assembled with Crusoe’s “fluttering thoughts,” “wild ideas,” “unaccountable whimsies,” and his “mistaking every bush and tree, fancying every stump at a distance to be a man” (122), the footprint-network exerts a real oppressive force.

Even so, Latour cautions: “it’s important to notice that [ANT] has nothing to do with a ‘reconciliation’ of the famous object/subject dichotomy”; neither should we “impose a priori some spurious asymmetry among human intentional action and a material world of causal relations” (75-76). We can say, however, that ANT points out complex networks or assemblages of actors. Any given actor, whether human or not, might cause a shift in influence and power.

What then of the human-material composite which Locke distinguishes as the property we make private possession by mixing our labor with raw materials? Can the beach on which the footprint appears be both part of Crusoe’s assemblage of proprietorship and part of the assemblage of terror? Schmidgen explains, “unprotected by communal practice and agreement, Crusoe’s property is exclusive only by virtue of the fact that it bears the imprint of his extended self. When the footprint appears on the
beach, it is not only Crusoe’s property that is invaded, but a part of himself” (55). According to Lockean philosophy, as Crusoe mixes his labor with the raw materials of the island he leaves an imprint – though it may not appear as literally as the imprint of the foot. Seeing the footprint prompts an understanding for Crusoe that his influence and power is tenuous when it comes to the various, overlapping networks he has initiated and participated in. This experience connotes an anxiety-ridden loss of (the fantasy of) anthropocentric control of the Latourian “assemblage.”

We might further a discussion of Latourian material agency by re-examining one of Crusoe’s driving and defining passions: the pursuit of wealth. The novel concludes with a seemingly accidental jackpot. Crusoe’s entitlement to riches is not clearly fleshed out. It is a phantom whose haunting oppresses Crusoe and chases him halfway around the world. Reading ANT at work in *Robinson Crusoe* frames these apparitional forces with “substantial” causal agency. In this construction, the real always already exists in the ideal. Or to say it another way, the phantasmagorical haunting of Crusoe’s wealth-drive is as real as any wealth he might gain or lose. Furthermore, this material agency of an ideological specter being as real an actor as, say, a footprint supports Festa’s reading of the virtual reality of novels. Taking *Robinson Crusoe* as a case in point, Festa writes, “the novel is ‘apparitional’ in that it ‘produces a coherent linguistic version of the real that never has been, is, or will be’; it creates a virtual reality possessed of the organic wholeness that the contingency of the lived empirical world cannot possess” (466). Here, Festa borrows from John Bender to describe the realism of the novel as a “surrogate
projection,” an “illusion,” and a “nonhuman virtual perspective” of the subject (466). Michael Gavin also joins this conversation, aligning Crusoe’s “real” existence with Locke’s discussion of “the reality of Things” (318). Gavin argues

In order to count as really existing, Crusoe need only describe episodes in the life of “any such Man” while building knowledge about the “Circumstances in any Mans life.” Like Locke’s real knowledge, Crusoe does not refer directly out into the world, but this does not mean he lacks existence entirely. (319)

This line of thinking offers an obverse of my earlier argument that Robinson Crusoe as fiction offers the ideal, and not the real.

But, the ideal or real what? The Penguin Classics book jacket suggests that Robinson Crusoe is perhaps an “embodiment of British imperialist values,” if not also “a portrayal of ‘natural man’ or… a moral fable.” If imperialism comes to be taken for granted in Robinson Crusoe, perhaps it’s due to either the strong “assemblage” of post-colonial criticism that has since formed in the academy or the reality that imperialism continued to advance over the course of the eighteenth century. Crusoe eventually leaves the island populated with a motley crew of European sailors, having thereby “reserv’d to my self the Property of the whole.” When “300 Caribbees… invaded them, and ruin’d their Plantations” (240) the proof of human improvement and, therefore, proof of possession is undermined. Yet all is not lost: “at last a Storm destroyed their Enemies Cannoes, they famish’d or destroy’d almost all the rest, and renew’d and recover’d the Possession of their Plantation, and still liv’d upon the Island” (241). If Crusoe proves his rights of ownership in part by mixing himself with the island resources, he seems to think
that mixing more labor further substantiates his claim. More workers mean more work, and that means more improvement and more rights of property and government.

If we agree to take ANT as offering the means for a serious critique of empire, then the concept of empire is so effectively undermined that it ceases to exist anywhere except residually in networks of various strength and permanence. This critique gains substance as we remember Crusoe’s terror when the boundary of his island empire is threatened by imaginary invaders, as we’ve seen with the footprint. He then imagines a threat of real invaders: cannibal warriors. Finally, what can most accurately be called an “invasion” of Crusoe’s island empire results in friendship with the captain and ensures Crusoe’s passage home. To make the reading of Robinson Crusoe as a proto-imperial novel truly convincing, one would need to demonstrate that Crusoe aligns his possession of his “new colony in the island” with his native England. Instead, he lists Spaniards as his “successors” and then sends them seven women from the “Brasils.” The handful of Englishmen who remain are promised English women only “if they would apply themselves to planting” (240), which clearly positions them in the laboring rather than managerial class. Despite the Spanish management, continued possession of the island via colonization is the resolution modern readers think to expect all along. Even if empire for Crusoe largely exists within the network of his imagined hopes and fears, as I’ve suggested, empire also insists a (residual) existence within readers’ imaginations.

I certainly am not the first to draw a significant conclusion from Crusoe’s discovery of a footprint on the island. But, I hope to have shown that it is an important
moment in his transition from owner-laborer to owner-manager. For Crusoe, mixing his labor with raw materials to create things ensures the survival of one individual. Managing, then, ensures the survival of many individuals. As Locke suggests, private property becomes such because of the mixing of one person’s labor. The corollary does not stand that imperial property results from the mixing of the entire empire’s labor. Instead, it results in the shift from labor-driven possession to management-driven possession. Though I don’t think we can fairly position Robinson Crusoe as a precursor or “how-to” guide for empire, it certainly demonstrates the development – even evolution – of self-possession as it relates to the possession of property. Finally, Latour’s ANT explains that the most self-possessed individual (or nation) is not the one possessing the most power, but he who happens to be enmeshed in the strongest assemblage of “actors” – or things.
Bodies in Motion: The Circulating Logic of a Self-Made Gentleman in Tobias Smollett’s *Roderick Random*

“The contempt which my appearance naturally produced … the continual wants I was exposed to, and my own haughty disposition, impatient of affronts, involved me in a thousand troublesome adventures, by which I was at length enured to adversity, and emboldened to undertakings far above my years.”

*Roderick Random*, *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1748)

If there was ever a fitting theme for a study of Tobias Smollett’s *The Adventures of Roderick Random*, it’s circulation. Take, for example, the astounding fact that Smollett’s debut novel has never been out of print since 1748. At the time of its original reception, it launched the career and established the reputation of its twenty-seven-year-old author. Circulation within the text is also a prominent theme as it characterizes bodies on the move which circulate geographically, socially, politically, and economically. As characters experience and mediate the world through the sensations of their physical bodies, their bodies become not only ways of knowing but also ways of being known. Mid-eighteenth-century British novels offer a particularly productive entry point to this conversation because of the historical influence of Locke and Descartes, whose philosophies investigate uncertainty regarding the limits of bodies. Of the many successful eighteenth-century novelists, moreover, Smollett is the one “most celebrated and derided for the physicality of his writing” (Douglas xvii).

In *Uneasy Sensations: Smollett and the Body*, Aileen Douglas historicizes and describes how

Eighteenth-century apprehensions of physicality are also entangled, in ways historians are just beginning to understand, with the birth of a
consumer society. Knowledge, in a burgeoning print culture, is an opportunity for profit; enlightenment and advertisement are confounded. (xiii)

Specifically in Smollett’s *The Adventures of Roderick Random*, I will pay special attention to what it means to inhabit a body in two different connotations. On one hand, as Lynch and others have shown, the textual body of the novel achieved its longstanding popularity through significant shifts over the course of the eighteenth century but also through continued circulation that is itself tied up in consumer culture. On the other hand, the physical human bodies in these novels, and Smollett’s first novel in particular, act as sometimes-fragile containers prone to life-threatening ruptures and leaky orifices.

Through his dedication to rendering his characters’ physicality, Smollett shows that fleshing out believable, even realistic, characters means sometimes allowing them to bleed, urinate, and vomit. Perhaps more importantly, his characters manage a continued circulation through the novel despite – or sometimes even due to – seemingly devastating physical injury.

Smollett begins Random’s story with his birth “in the northern part of this united kingdom” (1). Random continues telling his own story, foreshadowing his life’s trajectory a few paragraphs later: “the attentive sage, after some deliberation, assured my parents, that their first-born would be a great traveler, that he would undergo many dangers and difficulties, and at last return to his native land, where he would flourish with great reputation and happiness” (1). Though this formula of “giving away the ending” at the beginning of the narrative is not especially unusual among other mid-century novels,
it does reveal that fleshing out a character with convincing physical presence demands more than simply narrating a life. The physical and psychological dimensions of the character must come to life, become embodied, and appear inhabited.

In examining Random’s performance and narration of self, we see that his performance of a bound, inhabited body is complicated by his attempted movement within closed systems such as education, government, or military. This suggests the metaphorical agency of a character’s lateral movement within seemingly closed boundaries – the boundaries of the system thereby impose boundaries to individual identity. In one early example of his general tendency for “adventures,” even as a school boy, rather than sit still and accept his limits, Random actively works out his embodiment through “troublesome adventures” (6) – that is, through a process or movement of social circulation. Other economies operate on the same logic. The definition of credit that allows purchasing power for goods and services does not depend on any value of credit itself, but instead relies on the promise that value will continue to be traded and exchanged ad infinitum into the future in return for more goods, services, and credit.

We’ve already seen an overlap in this tendency for both bodies and credit to gain “embodiment” through constant circulation in eighteenth-century novels. Nearly mirroring the growing British interest in a credit economy based on circulation of goods, Robinson Crusoe’s interest is in keeping himself in circulation – if not in the greater civilized world, then at least around his island home. Though a credit-based economy emerges more fully in nineteenth-century Britain, in Roderick Random Smollett offers
eighteenth-century examples of a credit economy in person-to-person agreements between customers and tradesmen including several tailors, a wine merchant, and a ship’s purser. Mary Poovey writes in Genres of the Credit Economy that the proliferation of paper credit introduced at the end of the seventeenth century, “first in the form of goldsmiths’ receipts and bills of exchange” (5), complicated the agreed value of a particular credit. How would one “distinguish between valid and invalid monetary forms” (5)? These agreements between characters depend on a right to free circulation of both their selves and their buying power through credit. But whether a character’s movement or circulation through the text is his or her choice, it’s revelatory to track the ways in which characters serially and retrospectively interpret their own movements.

Random faces continual bouts with unemployment and a loss of buying power that are not always self-willed. Nevertheless, he maintains a hold on his social position by recasting the change as ultimately his choice. Random’s attitude reveals a universal human tendency to disguise any apparent lack; whether in ourselves, our nation, our economy, we invest resources to support an appearance or sense of wholeness. Within some 400 pages, Roderick Random catalogues forty-nine different sorts of trades among its male and female characters (Lynch 54). Random tries out many of them, though he’s ultimately being groomed to become a gentleman by the novel’s end. Meanwhile, his continued physical circulation, literally around the globe, balances out some of the anxiety regarding losing autonomy over his identity formation. We see this same principle at work in Crusoe’s tendency to keep working, keep moving, and keep
circulating around his island mini-empire, thereby postponing a probable lapse into unemployment and homelessness. Circulation, like credit, works to delay the imagined finality deriving from a lack or deficiency.

Let’s look now to a moment of vulnerability in which Random’s embodiment and circulation actually is jeopardized through both homelessness and unemployment.

Random laments

Though I had been formerly as poor, my reputation was without blemish, and my health unimpaired till now;—but at present my good name was lost, my money gone, my friends were alienated, my body infected by a distemper contracted in the course of an amour. (114)

The symptoms of his anxiety are written on his physical body, manifested in a significant lack: absence of health or wholeness. In this episode we glimpse Random’s psychological depth, suggesting the extent to which his psychological and even physical wellbeing depend, to a degree, on his social immersion. Here, Random’s self-sufficiency is noticeably less ego-driven than the self-possessed individualism Crusoe demonstrates.

Random plays at the character of a gentleman from the beginning of the novel, and his identity as such gets challenged consistently. Rather than doubt himself and his place in the socio-symbolic order, Random decides that others misread him; he reasons that society misdiagnoses his true social status. Historically speaking, a real gentleman circulating in eighteenth-century Britain would have credit, literally and figuratively speaking. Random is trading on the credit he believes he deserves by birth, but in truth he must actively work out his gentlemanly status through circulation – actively working out
the destiny he thinks he deserves. It’s well known that Smollett proudly translated *Don Quixote*, Cervantes’ satiric picaresque. On this theme, we might identify quixotic similarities between Random and Alonso Quijano. The naiveté shared by both protagonists serves, in Random’s case, to over-determine his resilience in the face of so much abuse. I want to retrieve specific evidence of Random’s gentlemanly circulation or playacting, so to speak, by looking first at two minor characters – Jack Rattlin and Doctor Mackshane – whose boundaries are contested. They move into Random’s path, or rather his circulation brings him in contact with them.

Random’s friend aboard the *Thunder*, Jack Rattlin, demonstrates anxiety about an amputation prescribed after he breaks his leg in a fall from the ship’s rigging during a storm. Doctor Mackshane is consulted because “a splinter of the shin-bone thrust by the violence of the fall through the skin” is of “too great consequence to be treated without the authority of the doctor” (163). The scene appears within the restrictive parameters of eighteenth-century shipside medicine; Mackshane calls for amputation. However, Rattlin, “who recruiting himself with a quid of tobacco, pronounced with a woful countenance, ‘What! is there no remedy, doctor? must I be dock’d?’” (164). Rattlin’s optimism runs unchecked throughout the remainder of the scene. Seeing the tourniquet, he cries “‘Avast, avast! d—n my heart, if you clap your nippers on me, till I know wherefore!’” (164) and is persuaded to be calm only when Random promises to try to save the leg. Then, Rattlin “was so over-joyed, that shaking us both by the hands, he swore no body else should touch him, and if he died, his blood should be upon his own head” (165). The successful
cure and preservation of a body as a whole, while mollifying Rattlin, renders Mackshane “contemptible among the ship’s company” (165). Mackshane, concerned with the perceived lack in his medical authority, mercilessly seeks vengeance against Random and the Welshman, Morgan, a fellow surgeon’s mate on the *Thunder*.

Random’s (and Smollett’s) earlier training as a surgeon allows him privileged interpretive and diagnostic abilities. Foucault supplies a theory in *The Birth of The Clinic* regarding doctors’ special ability, if only culturally perceived, to see below the surface of the body. Indeed, this form of surveillance is in some ways easier for Random to assert than his status as a gentleman. Perhaps the belief in Random’s surgically interpretive power is what puts Captain Oakhum and Doctor Mackshane – doctor only in title, who is completely ineffectual and unknowledgeable in any actual medical capacity – out of humor with Random. To feel as though one’s right to privacy is being challenged, or to feel as though one’s attempt at presenting an embodied identity is being questioned, results in an unwelcome sensation of penetration. A patient’s anxiety regarding being misread by a physician is a frequently-discussed area of critical inquiry. The potential anxiety, or “dis-ease” as it’s been called, reminds the patient about the lack of wholeness the physician can discover through his powers of observation. This fear has grown into a culturally-embedded anxiety about what knowledge our bodies betray about ourselves. Aristotle introduced one of the earliest-recorded doubts about the legitimacy of “the science of the individual” (Cassell). He points out that the act of the examination makes each individual a “case,” in addition to making the individual the object of power.
Therefore, the “individuality” of the insane or the sick is an imposed social construct, not a true individualization. The diseased, as a constructed identity, is an individual who finds himself outside of a homogenized and homogenizing system.

If Smollett’s characters experience anxiety in situations where they fail to seamlessly integrate themselves into a given social context, when gaps remain between the larger social body and their individual character, they are also anxious when the boundaries and wholeness of their literal physical bodies are threatened. Doctor Mackshane’s malice regarding Random and Morgan playing him for the fool-doctor he is results in Random’s inopportune imprisonment. Random is pinioned on the poop deck just moments before a bloody sea battle breaks out (167). Captain Oakhum falsifies allegations of spying, so as to avoid further publicizing Random’s superior surgical skill. Random is consequentially exposed to the great fury of battle: “I concealed my agitation as well as I could, till the head of the officer of Marines, who stood near me, being shot off, bounced from the deck athwart my face, leaving me well-nigh blinded with brains.—I could contain myself no longer, but began to bellow with all the strength of my lungs” (167-8). Continuing on throughout this passage, Random shows visible signs of anxiety, explaining, “a drummer coming towards me, asked if I was wounded; and before I could answer, received a great shot in his belly which tore out his intrails, and he fell flat on my breast.—This accident entirely bereft me of all discretion: I redoubled my cries…and finding myself disregarded, lost all patience and became frantick,” (168).
Throughout the novel, Random relies on his medical training in his ability to survey, even diagnose, other characters. One of the expected qualities of a physician is to observe and diagnose, accurately and unerringly. Picking up some of Foucault’s theories of the body, Douglas suggests that “Smollett begins his fictional career [with Roderick Random] by suggesting the body’s induction into society is traumatic and selective” (xxiv). Though Random’s medical training suggests to readers that he knows how to interpret human symptoms, sometimes the subjects under his observation seem to become more readable only once it’s apparent to them that Random’s qualifications can be trusted. In psychoanalytic terms, Random becomes the “subject presumed to know.” The same holds true regarding Random’s status as a gentleman; he receives the appropriate deference only when his qualifications become apparent. Lynch explains this dance in terms of the social world that Smollett and his contemporary novelists created and “divided, accordingly, between those qualified to observe and those who are objects of others’ observation” (Economy of Character 82).

We can look to one of Roderick Random’s several comic recognition scenes for evidence. Random’s friend, Banter, solicits Random to chaperone a deformed but rich cousin, Miss Snapper, and her mother to Bath on holiday. Banter suggests that Random should woo and eventually wed Miss Snapper, dividing a share of her fortune with him for his matchmaking services. Random explains that as the journey “embarked before day, I had not the pleasure for some time of seeing… nor even of perceiving the number and sex of my fellow-travellers, although I guessed that the coach was full, by the
difficulty I found in seating myself” (323). When daylight breaks, Random has the “good fortune to find my mistress not quite so deformed nor disagreeable as she has been represented to me” (326). Random’s interpretive powers are fully functioning throughout the remainder of this episode and his gentlemanly honor is on full display when he saves his fellow travelers from highway robbery. The circulation and interpretation of these characters’ identities aligns with “premises about particularization and generalizability and about the relations between individual identity and bodily surfaces and written languages” (Lynch 27) occurring generally in novels from the 1740s and 1750s. In short, Lynch explains that the relations between identity, body surfaces, and fiction are no longer being taken for granted.

I would argue that similar sentiments are at work in Foucault’s major work on surveillance. Smollett’s “minor characters [are] anticipating his gentleman protagonist’s work of surveillance and representation. They ‘exhibit’ themselves, ‘dispose’ themselves into ‘groupes,’ and in effect render the gentleman’s labor redundant” (Lynch, Economy of Character 87). In his discussion of Bentham’s panopticon, Foucault addresses the hierarchy of power understood within the socio-Symbolic Order. Ubiquitous surveillance has to become a standard accepted reality within modern culture for an individual to feel as if he were under surveillance, as well as to become responsible for surveilling others in turn. It is part of what it means to be enmeshed within the socio-Symbolic fabric. Douglas also picks up this thread in her argument that “the eighteenth-century novel is much concerned with the definition, legibility, and control of the body” (xvii). If one’s
bodily surface contributes to an interpretive definition of character, it might also permit physical control. The self-narrating, self-performing subject also must effectively analyze and interpret the audience in turn.

As he circulates in society, Random learns which characteristics grant him social and economic credit. Early during his first visit to London, Random quickly learns that he has retained too much individuality.

I had dressed myself to the greatest advantage; that is, put on a clean ruffled shirt, my best thread stockings, my hair (which was of the deepest red) hung down upon my shoulders, as lank and straight as a pound of candles; and the skirts of my coat reached to the middle of my leg; my waistcoat and breeches were of the same piece, and cute in the same taste; my hat very much resembled a Barber’s bason in the shallowness of the crown and narrowness of the brims. … [I] had the misfortune to be unintelligible likewise, the carman damning us for a lousy Scotch guard, and whipping up his horses with a ‘Gee ho!’ which nettled me to the quick. (62)

These physical markers cause Random and his companion, Hugh Strap, to be easy prey for a team of swindlers who get the pair involved in a rigged game of cards after claiming to have found a coin dropped by Random (69). In Feeling British, Gottlieb argues that Random’s successful integration into a cultural scene depends on his ability to “abstract himself from material needs” and “shed the particularities that mark him as specifically Scottish” (65). Random must learn which character markers to embellish and which to mute.

Successful navigation of the city depends on a much more seamless integration of the individual into the collective. It takes Random many failed attempts to learn, but once
he gets it, he really gets it. An exemplary moment occurs when Random fits himself into the void left by Narcissa’s aunt’s former footman: “There being a very good suit of livery in the house, which had belonged to my predecessor deceased, I dressed myself in it, and found it fitted me exactly, so that there was no occasion for employing a taylor on my account” (218). It’s remarkable that the fit is so perfect, a point, I suspect, that is slightly lost on modern readers who are used to garments made ready-to-wear in a variety of standard sizes. Stepping into the footman’s uniform is like stepping into ready-to-wear credibility. He acquires immediate access to Narcissa, his immediate and enduring love interest, and her aunt, which probably wouldn’t have chanced to happen through any other means. Random complains: “how often did I curse the servile station, that placed me so infinitely beneath the regard of this idol of my adoration! and how often did I bless my fate, that enabled me to enjoy daily the sight of so much perfection!” (219). In the end, Random breaks character because, clinging to his gentleman’s status, he balks under servitude.

Miss Williams, a former prostitute, does not balk under servitude, but transacts her re-entry into polite society through servitude. In fact, Miss Williams works to embody an identity that might have been considered above the social station of the woman she once was. Earlier in the narrative, Random finds her in a garret apartment near St. Giles’s “stretched on a miserable truckle bed, without any visible signs of life” (115). Later, as Narcissa’s maid, she navigates her own social rehabilitation through a position which drives the plot forward as well as requires her circulation among society.
Miss Williams acts as a mediator in Narcissa’s and Random’s romance, meeting Random in public places to deliver notes and mementos from Narcissa. Polite society forbids Narcissa from meeting Random herself. In this view, Miss Williams’s narrative importance rivals Strap’s, not only in the way she assists the marriage plot between Random and Narcissa, but also in the way she becomes a model character for social and physical circulation.

Random’s and Narcissa’s marriage is good economics for Miss Williams, and her successful participation in their courtship ensures future financial security for herself. Even a feat as seemingly organic as “falling in love” remains enmeshed in a context of a tradesperson’s economic viability. By giving labels to phenomena such as being in love, Smollett translates subjective experiences into knowable, identifiable positions within the system – the Symbolic Order. Lynch describes this translation in terms of Lockean possessive individualism: “much mid-century fiction implements Locke’s model of the self-made consciousness, which aligns the acquisition of knowledge with the acquisition of property… Cast as a collector, the Lockean individual is the cumulative product of his private stockpile of sensations and reflections” (Economy of Character 85). If a character can label his interior mental state, he is working – or the Lockean “mixing,” of labor with raw materials – toward more complete understanding of his character and circulating position within society.

It is worth considering, then, how Miss Williams is barred from making a successful marriage match earlier in the novel. I would suggest that the mid-century
fascination with circulation of goods, as well as bodies, affects Smollett’s characterization of who can marry, and when. Her eventual marriage match with Random’s servant, Strap, must wait until Miss Williams labors to help bring about a union between her social betters. Yet, Smollett has a record of providing tidy endings to his novels through marriage plots; in fact his other significant mid-century novel, *Humphry Clinker*, offers an abundance of matrimonial pairs. Often, Smollett’s fictional marriages unite individuals from significantly different geographical areas, such as Lieutenant Lismahago from Scotland and Tabitha Bramble from Wales. The contrast and diversity in these unions highlights the individual characteristics of each member as well as suggests a future synthesis of their differences within the next generation.

Random’s impatience to show not only Narcissa’s aunt, but especially Narcissa, the education and knowledge that sets him apart from a typical footman initiates the chain of events that results in their courtship and marriage. He attempts to demonstrate his self-possession through an act that asserts his own feelings and blends them with Narcissa’s, resulting in poetic interpretation and the discovery of mutual passion. The pair of ladies requests his help interpreting “a knotty passage of Tasso’s Gierusalem,” when Random betrays the footman’s charade he’d been keeping: “I was too vain to let slip this opportunity of displaying my talents, therefore, without hesitation, read and explained the whole of that which had disconcerted them, to the utter astonishment of both” (223). Random draws a “favourable omen” from the blushes he notices creeping over Narcissa’s face and neck; the Ode which he subsequently composes reveals his belief that the
circulation of blood is a metaphor for the circulation of feeling: “For while I gaze my bosom glows, / My blood in tides impetuous flows, / Hope, fear and joy alternate roll, / And floods of transports ’whelm my soul!” (226). In this metaphor, the blood in Narcissa’s and Random’s veins moves in a closed system – the human body. The metaphor is not concerned with blood being added or taken away. Rather, significant meaning is made when blood flows or circulates, evidenced by blushing, and interpreted as passionate, almost uncontrollable or instinctual feelings growing within the individual.

Random and Narcissa are physical bodies on the move, not always through their own agency, but nearly always converting their circulation into personal profit, which in turn allows for their continued circulation. Considering Random’s contempt for the “disagreeable sauce of matrimony” (228), and the many obstacles to his union with Narcissa, their eventual marriage depends on factors outside of their control. Something must convince Random of the agreeable nature of matrimony; it must become socially and economically incentivized. Perhaps both lovers must continue their circulation until they’ve generated enough credit. In other words, circulating one’s self in society allows an individual to establish that they really are who they say they are. Even when an individual is initially barred the social status that they covet, such as in Random’s case, an effective performance of self may lead to social validation and acceptance.

Random identifies Narcissa, his “angel” (424), in characteristically chivalric terms, as the reason for perpetuating his circulation. On the verge of his and Strap’s gentlemanly impersonation scheme, Random drifts to sleep imagining “my dear Narcissa,
who seemed to smile upon my passions, and offer her hand as a reward for all my toils” (254). The homecoming chapter in which Random, his father, Don Rodriguez, and Strap return to Britain approaches excessive gallantry. The perilous journey is seemingly over when Random and his father go ashore at Portsmouth, but Random’s impatience gets the better of him. His urge to keep in circulation here depends on his separation from Narcissa. Random, “fired with all the eagerness of passion” (421) leaves Portsmouth for Narcissa’s brother’s house. In the morning, he discovers she’s been staying in London. After a discussion with Mrs. Sagely that seems to take mere minutes, he takes leave, “fired with impatience… determined to ride all night” (422) to Canterbury, and pauses only long enough to call on his friend, Morgan. Finally, Random takes post horses and “arrived at London that same night” (423-4). Having been up the whole previous night and being “besides fatigued” (424), Random sleeps for a few hours and sets out to see Narcissa the next morning. “O adorable Narcissa! (cried I) O miracle of beauty, love and truth! I at last fold thee in my arms! I at last can call the mine! …fortune hath at length recompenced me to do justice to my love” (425). Once in her presence, an extravagant joy settles upon him.

Random suffers Mackshane’s, Oakhum’s and, later, Crampley’s egregious abuse because he’s banking on the probability that his material condition will improve once society stops misrecognizing his true gentlemanly character. Arguably, this is the driving narrative of all of Random’s adventures; the present suffering seems manageable because he believes he will one day retire in the country like the gentlemen he was born. This
delusion ignores the continuous work Random spends on proving himself, and it’s a repudiation of the “pulling oneself up by his bootstraps” mentality we see in Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), “the eighteenth century’s most important description of the production of personality” (Lynch 33). Take, for example, an early school scene wherein Random and his uncle, Tom Bowling, take revenge on the village schoolmaster. A gentleman’s revenge plot – especially a British gentleman’s – should play out quite differently (Gottlieb, *Feeling British* 66). Mainly, a gentleman knows when enough is enough. He takes it on credit that tomorrow will bring new circumstances. As a principle, a gentleman shouldn’t have to chase after his own birthright, whereas the ruffian takes his chances as they come and therefore heaps up all his acts of revenge at once.

In a major way, Random appears to make up for his unrecognized or misread birthright through insistent circulation. But in some cases, his abundance of trades “fills the place of the dead. His predecessors in the posts of apothecary’s assistant (chapter 7), surgeon’s mate (chapter 24), and footman (chapter 39) are all recently deceased” (Lynch 106). Gradually, through this body doubling, Random betrays a tenuous connection to the land of the living. He effectually becomes the double for multiple dead bodies in the text, recalling Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection (*Powers of Horror*). Importantly, however, it’s simultaneously circulation that revitalizes both individual and social bodies, metaphorically bringing characters back to life. Random’s father, Don Rodriguez, is (presumed) dead until Random discovers him in “Buenos Ayres” during Random’s most
far-flung naval adventure (Smollett 413). Random is still circulating in order to chase
down a large enough fortune so that he can marry Narcissa.

As impressive and long-suffering as our hero appears, is there not something
oxymoronic about a self-made gentleman? True, Random’s discovery of his father is
nothing short of miraculous – as is his practical path to a gentlemanly inheritance. To add
further marvel to miracle, his father gets the old family estate purchased out from under
the nose of a squandering, fox-hunting relative. This last twist of fate seems to further
substantiate the circulating, self-made gentleman which perhaps becomes a distinctly
British enigma. The figure of the British gentleman, who appears divested of any specific
trade at first glance, must have a working knowledge, so to speak, of the nation’s
multitude of trades. Because of the expectation upon him to be able to circulate among
the machinery of the nation’s marketplaces without fits and starts, the gentleman’s
birthright makes up only one part of the accreditation of his character.
3 Glaswegian Face-Off: Competing Economies of Credit, Honor, Subject, & Other in Sir Walter Scott’s *Rob Roy*

“I doubtna—I doubtna—he is a very worthy gentleman, and sponsible, and wi’ some o’ my lights might do muckle business in Scotland—Weel, sir, if these assetts could be redeemed out o’ the hands o’ the Philistines, they are gude paper—they are the right stuff when they are in the right hands.” Bailie Nichol Jarvie, *Rob Roy* (1829)

Zones of cultural conflict and hybrid spaces are scattered throughout Sir Walter Scott’s oeuvre, including but not limited to his historical fiction. Considering the breadth and depth of his Waverley Novels series, Scott fills a substantial literal space in the history of the British novel. The spaces presented in his novels, in turn, offer significant cultural currency, especially regarding literary identity production within these hybrid spaces. Like all of Scott’s early-career novels, *Rob Roy* is largely set “at home” on British soil. Not only is the narrative almost completely set within the United Kingdom (other than some minor background details regarding Frank Osbaldistone’s time in France, which happens off stage), the bulk of the story occurs in rural spaces, which are less populated and therefore potentially less culturally hybridized than urban zones. These factors make the narrative’s central rising action, taking place in urban Glasgow, all the more significant within the novel. As George Drake points out, “at times, Scott historicizes space more fully in the collapsed, hybrid spaces of his urban scenes than even in his more highly varnished Scottish landscapes” (416). Exploring Glasgow as a contact zone of cultural hybridity in *Rob Roy* opens up important insights into the competing discourses of cultural subjectivity in the Romantic novel, especially as conducted via commercial exchanges.
The definition of conflicting or competing discourses I’m using in this discussion is put forward by Andrew Lincoln in “Scott and Empire: The Case of Rob Roy.” Lincoln explains that even as a narrator attempts to impose a discourse through his narrative, the discourse belonging to the “system of power” also imposes itself through the events of the narrative: “Resistance to both kinds of imposition in the novel brings into view the contemporary anxieties of empire. The process of imposition and resistance at the level of narration can be defined as a conflict of discourses” (44). Within a contact zone already influenced by hybrid historical, cultural, linguistic, political, economic, religious, and other “systems of power,” narrative imposition and resistance are certain to complicate subjectivity and identity formation. Ian Duncan asserts that “systems of meaning and value” are not guaranteed to translate between contexts or “cultural site[s]” (Introduction to Rob Roy xxii-xxiii). Duncan’s premise leads to a central question in Romantic fiction: to what degree does the subjectivity of the self (or nation) get lost in translation within a cultural contact zone?

To provide a provisional answer to this question, I want to turn to Rob Roy’s Glaswegian chapters. Scott’s narration of an historical Glasgow takes up chapters 19-26 out of 39 total chapters. Though Rob Roy’s Glasgow is far from exercising the fictional dominance of historical London as portrayed in other Waverley novels like The Fortunes of Nigel (1822), it’s worth considering some parallels. In The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century, John Brewer argues that London becomes “one of the most important characters in eighteenth-century English literature”
A large degree of this importance stems from London’s status as the commercial as well as political center of Britain. As the pending credit crisis escalates in *Rob Roy*, Glasgow likewise assumes center stage in the Scottish economic theater. Bailie Nichol Jarvie indicates, “The Hieland gentlemen, holders o’ thae bills, hae found credit in Glasgow and Edinburgh – (I might amaist say in Glasgow wholly, for it’s little the pridefu’ Edinburgh folk do in real business)” (Scott 306). Jarvie’s vantage point – connected as he is with both urban Glasgow economies and semi-feudal Highland economies – makes doubly insightful his perspective of Glasgow’s economic prominence as seen from outside the city.

In the early decades of the eighteenth century, around the time of Frank’s fictional adventures, the River Clyde begins facilitating Glasgow’s economic rise, bringing essential goods and luxuries into circulation (Scott 237). Though both people and goods are circulating from the colonies into Great Britain, the people and goods circulating in Glasgow this early in the century predominantly come from England. With the influx of more diverse commerce, the influx of diverse populations eventually follows. *Rob Roy* depicts Glasgow and suggests Edinburgh as cities that have yet to become global centers of population diversity. However, even early-eighteenth-century Glasgow technically offers a multi-national contact zone. In addition to the Scottish Lowlanders, the Glaswegian chapters include North Britons and Highlanders, who add cultural diversity to the increasingly hybrid cultural interaction and diverse economic circulation within the novel and the city of Glasgow. This evolving diversity offers unique challenges for the
subject whose identity formation is both challenged and informed through his encounters with the competing discourses of diverse cultural exchanges.

When entering a contact zone – for example, the urban Glasgow that Englishman Frank Osbaldistone steps into at the start of the eighteenth century – one might reasonably expect certain encounters that would challenge one’s subjectivity; in a contact zone, one expects to meet “an absolute stranger,” (Scott 254), otherwise referred to by critics and theorists alike as “the Other.” Once Frank learns to recognize his fantasy regarding Glaswegian and Scottish culture, especially Highland culture, his success is not only personal, but has national ramifications. The pending credit crisis hinges on Frank’s successful recovery of the bills his father financed through the house of Osbaldistone and Tresham. Therefore, Frank’s ability to navigate competing discourses is economically incentivized in Glasgow. As a cultural outsider, Frank eventually makes large personal economic gains through astute interpretations of cultural differences. All the while, a clearly defined idea of his own cultural subjectivity seems to be prerequisite to a skillful interpretation of the conflicting discourses on display throughout the city. In the framework of Žižekian subjectivity, the subject who successfully traverses – or passes through – the hybrid cultural zone of Glasgow doesn’t disavow his initial fantasy of the Other, thereby collapsing subjective difference. Instead, he accepts his fantasy of the difference of the Other in order to assume a new position relative to the Other, and concurrently, in order to reassert his own subjectivity.
Compared to traversing one’s fantasy of the Other, the Levinasian encounter might retain its own economic incentive for the subject because of its two-way creative potential. Emmanuel Levinas thinks that the subject cannot prepare in advance for this sort of encounter. The unique Levinasian ethics of meeting the Other occurs as a predominantly private, personal encounter with the face of the Other – what Levinas calls “the nakedness of a face that faces, expressing itself, interrupting order” (69). This formulation simultaneously complements and complicates any study of subjectivity and subject formation within hybrid spaces. But the ethics of this double interruption occur in an extra-societal, pre-linguistic context, wherein a conflated subjectivity between the two subjects seems preferable to any other state.

Throughout his oeuvre, Žižek critiques Levinas directly. In *The Parallax View*, Žižek argues that

> The limitation of Levinas is not simply that of a Eurocentrist who relies on too narrow a definition of what is human…. What Levinas fails to include in the scope of “human” is, rather, the *inhuman* itself, a dimension which eludes the face-to-face relationship between humans. (111)

In other words, Žižek points out the dialectical paradox that any attempt to establish “the Human as ‘absolute subject’ dehumanizes it” (111), and therefore, “what Levinas, with all his celebration of Otherness, fails to take into account is not some underlying Sameness of all humans, but the radically ‘inhuman’ Otherness itself: the Otherness of a human being reduced to inhumanity” (112). This could be seen in the way a subject
assumes that his interpretation of the Other is authentic, when instead, this interpretation always retains the residue of fantasy, of what he imagines that the Other is or might be.

In chapter 19, Frank is fresh across the English/Scottish border for the first time in his life when he begins stacking up fantasies of Scottish identity. He equates human/animal in “Highlanders, as wild, as shaggy, and sometimes as dwarfish, as the [cattle and ponies] they had in charge” (237). Ignoring the personal limits of this interpretation, Frank suggests that other observers make similar interpretive moves: “Strangers gazed with surprise on the antique and fantastic dress, and listened to the unknown and dissonant sounds of their language” (237). He even attempts to imagine how his fantastical Highlanders interpret, in turn, the sights of Glasgow, continuing to compare their presumed confusion to befuddled and primitive animals: “while the mountaineers, armed even while engaged in this peaceful occupation with musket and pistol, sword, dagger, and target, stared with astonishment on the articles of luxury of which they knew not the use” (237). Frank’s interpretations in this passage do not depend on human qualities in the Other, which returns us to Žižek idea of the inhumanness of the Other.

Žižek grounds much of his theory in Lacanian psychoanalysis. In The Sublime Object of Ideology, Žižek points out the tautology of an encounter with the Other that exposes the subject’s desire – particularly, to understand what the Other wants – itself as a defense against the Other’s desire. He explains that “the usual definition of fantasy (‘an imagined scenario representing the realization of desire’) is therefore somewhat
misleading” (132). This desire is never meant to be fulfilled or fully realized; rather, the subject learns how to constitute his identity based on learning how to desire. Because the subject’s fantasy (about the Other, etc.) works to transact his own identity formation, an interpretation of his fantasy in terms of what it says about the Other is vastly less significant than interpreting his traversal and what it says about the subject. Returning to the variety of encounters available between Frank and Otherness, the two-way interpretive experience that Levinas’ “face-to-face” encounter allows might seem fundamentally opposed to the encounter that is ultimately with the Self, allowed through Žižek’s traversal. However, the two come together in the subject’s imagination.

According to Žižek’s critique, a Levinasian “face-to-face” encounter allows for an ethical recovery of supposed inhuman elements in the Other but overlooks or denies them in the “imaginary ego” of the self – the identity the subject believes is its ideal self. When the imaginary ego encounters the Other, Žižek explains, “the subject must identify himself with the imaginary other, he must alienate himself – put his identity outside himself, so to speak, into the image of his double” (Sublime Object 116). The subject’s imaginary ego might identify a fantasmic humanity in itself and an inhumanity in the Other, but we should remember that the paradox as Žižek sees it is that any definition of “inhuman” relies on the “impenetrable ground” of a positive definition of “human” (Parallax View 111). The subject’s fantasy of the inhumanity of the Other, the Lacanian “little other” or “object petit a,” is here implicated with the subject’s fantasy of his own subjectivity. His fantasy does not originate from some place of stable subjectivity. It is
itself at least partially determined by the Lacanian Symbolic Order, to which belongs the “big Other,” the socio-political, religious, gendered, etc. difference the subject imagines exists.

In *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, Žižek further challenges the existence of an impenetrable and consistent referent in the Symbolic Order by which to denote subjectivity. The fantasy that the subject and the little Other are different – because of politics, religion, gender, etc. – covers up the fact that the big Other lacks at its core a non-relative definition of human subjectivity. Žižek suggests “we should abandon the standard metaphorics of the Real as the terrifying Thing that is impossible to confront face to face, as the ultimate Real concealed beneath the layers of imaginary and/or symbolic Veils” (*Desert* 38-39). I’m here following Gottlieb, who argues in *Walter Scott and Contemporary Theory* that Žižek thinks of the Lacanian Real as an “effect of the contradictions of the symbolic order rather than their preexisting cause” (15). Žižek continues, “this Real Thing is a fantasmatic spectre whose presence guarantees the consistency of our symbolic edifice, thus enabling us to avoid confronting its constitutive inconsistency” (39). Where Levinas’ thinking assumes that there is always already a subjective difference between the little Other and the subject, Žižek points out their essential sameness: although the little Other (“petit objet a”) appears to contain, promise, or embody that which the subject feels is missing (lacking) within herself, both lack and supplement are themselves generated by the Symbolic Order. Self and Other, that is, are both defined within the framework of the socio-Symbolic Order.
The first moment of an encounter with the Other produces both subjects’ identity formations: as an individual takes in the Other, he also allows the Other to interpret his own projected subjectivity. When identity formation is interrupted and repressed, the discourse of the subject may begin to appear or feel at odds with the discourse of the Symbolic Order. Moving forward, I think we can use this mode of thinking to consider how Frank’s fantasized position within the Symbolic Order affects his relationship with various little Others, such as Glaswegians, Rashleigh, or even Rob Roy MacGregor. Frank’s personal fantasies include: skillfully navigating the foreign spaces of Glasgow, discovering the missing bills, and returning them to the house of Osbaldistone and Tresham. As I suggested earlier, the encounters with a seemingly “absolute stranger” appear economically incentivized; they do this in the way that they disrupt Frank’s reductive fantasy and offer him an improved way interpreting the Other.

Consistently thrown upon unfamiliar territory, Frank attempts to avoid the suspicious gaze of Others he expects (including potential enemies of the house of Osbaldistone and Tresham), only to encounter a stranger he doesn’t expect, and literally doesn’t see coming. Upon arriving in Glasgow, Frank accompanies Andrew Fairservice to a religious service in a cathedral crypt and encounters several strange Others. In the cathedral crypt, Frank marks the strangers’ composed countenances with surprise: “not one of them returned any glance of intelligence to the inquisitive and startled look with which I surveyed them” (246). A seemingly disembodied and mysterious voice whispers to Frank, who turns to look at the individuals standing near him, “but a glance at their
faces satisfied me, though I could hardly say why, that none of these was the person who had spoken to me” (246). Frank appraises the strangers’ faces, expecting to find difference. Considering this encounter within the Symbolic Order requires an analysis of Frank’s fantasy of the Other and of himself.

He can’t say why, but Frank is sure that none of the strangers could claim the mysterious voice that delivers such cryptic instructions (pun intended). This betrays Frank’s fantasy that he already knows enough about the average Glaswegian in order to judge socially normative from deviant behavior. Furthermore, the ontological assumption in Frank’s reading of these strangers hints at his relationship with these northern neighbors/strangers/Others within the greater socio-Symbolic Order. These strangers are among the first Glaswegians Frank has seen in person, yet he assumes to understand the other as simply “like the self” which “amounts to a kind of subjective colonialism, where all the other’s desires are reduced to the desires of the ‘home country,’ the self” (Nealon 129). The subjective colonialism in this encounter with Otherness, then, is doubly significant in the above scene; Frank’s gaze is contaminated by his Englishness compared with the strangers’ Scottishness – a national relationship historically alluded to in colonizing language, as Janet Sorensen demonstrates in The Grammar of Empire in Eighteenth-Century British Writing.

In addition to the cathedral crypt, there are at least three other Glaswegian contact zones where Frank encounters the Other, and consequently encounters conflicting discourses affecting his own identity formation. These spaces include the medieval
bridge, the town jail, and the “wilderness” of the College yards (Duncan xxi). Evidence of the hybridity of these spaces lies in their simultaneously public and private encoding. They are by definition wholly urban, depending on city spaces for their physical existence; yet as Drake recognizes, “in Scott, simply crossing a border or walking through a city gate does not always entail a passage from barbarism to modernity” (419). In addition to creating hybrid spaces, Scott also has a proclivity for juxtaposing past and present. Lincoln repeats Duncan’s argument that “in Rob Roy Scott made ‘historical romance a medium for viewing, not the past, but the unrecognizable forms of the present’” (44). Significantly, these hybrid spaces are not rocky precipices, dark caverns, or windswept heaths; instead, they are a well-traveled bridge, crowded jail, and bustling school campus, each inscribed with an history of diverse cultural mixing, as well as opportunities for Foucauldian surveillance. (And they existed as such before Scott represented them in his historical fiction.) As such, they are sites, both material and discursive, for the endless circulation of goods, peoples, and money on which modern, urban capitalism both depends and simultaneously produces.

Turning to one of Frank’s most economically incentivized maneuvers in Glasgow betrays further fantasies of cultural difference between himself and Glaswegian others. He attempts to rescue Owen, the English head clerk of Osbaldistone and Tresham, who is in jail under a Scottish law which allows imprisonment as collateral against a debt “to a creditor, who finds his conscience at liberty to make oath that the debtor mediates departing from the realm” (263). On his way to Owen’s cell, Frank meets “a wild shock-
headed looking animal, whose profusion of red hair covered and obscured his features…
a very uncouth, wild, and ugly savage” (258). This fellow, Dougal, exclaims in some
“unknown tongue” (258) and Frank’s guide responds with “indistinct muttering in a
similar tone” (259). The climax of this scene occurs when Frank misunderstands
Dougal’s “She’s sleeping” to be in reference to a female prisoner, who Frank instantly
fantasizes to be his love interest, Diana Vernon. Combining Dougal’s rough appearance
and Frank’s misunderstanding of Highland speech (“she” is Scott’s imaginative idea of a
general-purpose English pronoun used by a native Gaelic speaker [Duncan 486]), these
two stereotypes help maintain the fantasy of difference between Frank and Dougal-as-
Other.

Frank’s encounter with Dougal does not alert Frank that a stable referent for
Scottish “Highlander” is missing from the Symbolic Order. However, one mysterious
stranger does disrupts Frank’s interpretive powers, eventually facilitating Frank’s
“traversal” of his fantasy. This traversal requires, Gottlieb explains, “identifying with
one’s fantasy (insofar as fantasy is always the articulation of a desire) so strongly and
thoroughly that one ultimately realizes its emptiness: an emptiness that in turn must be
recognized as belonging, not only to oneself, but also to the Other” (Scott and Theory
19). In addition to fantasizing about his own heroic identity, Frank fantasizes about the
ture identity of the concerned guide who leads him into the jail and who presumably
speaks to him in the crypt. When Frank realizes that this guide is none other than
“Campbell himself” (a.k.a. Rob Roy MacGregor), he remains “astonished at my own
stupidity…the light dawned on me at once” (273). This recognition scene begins to
demonstrate the emptiness of some of the fantasmic difference Frank presupposes
between himself and the Others he encounters. With practice, Frank becomes more aware
of hybrid and diverse cultural codes competing in Glasgow instead of depending on his
own fantasmatic cultural assumptions.

While Frank waits to meet an “unknown friend” in the hybrid space of the
medieval bridge, his internal discourse is helplessly conflicted. Drake explains that

In Glasgow, [Frank’s] unfamiliarity with its cultural codes leaves him
uncertain even how to walk, yet uncomfortably aware that his “mode of
sauntering” makes him stand out among people who “hurried to their
homes and resting places.” He recognizes that his spatial practice marks
him as an outsider. (417)

Frank’s understanding of cultural codes appears to be even more economically
incentivized than either honor or credit. Without a clear knowledge of the dominant local
culture, Frank’s subjectivity remains marginalized, at the mercy of the hybrid spaces of
Glasgow, while his most successful movement throughout the city is facilitated by
individuals who can better navigate both honor and credit.

Glasgow, as an epicenter of modern commerce, has an important evolution
concurrent with Rob Roy’s narrative. In 1715, the presumed time of the novel’s action,
the city sits on the eve of its post-Union economic take-off; by 1765, the time of Frank’s
retelling of the story, Glasgow is at the height of its colonial trade boom; finally, in 1817,
the time of Scott’s writing, the city is well into its industrial era (Duncan xviii). As
Duncan makes clear, the Glasgow of Rob Roy exists as a “bordertown, exhibiting a
‘transitional’ historical character” (xxii). Responding to this historical economic evolution, Lincoln identifies as its primary tension the conflicting discourses of “primitive liberty” and “civilization,” translated in real terms as, respectively, the fall of the feudal or clan culture and the rise of the modern commercial or credit culture (55). It is no coincidence, then, that while characters throughout Rob Roy employ the language of credit to describe their lives and worldviews, much of the most self-aware and conflicted discourse regarding credit appears in the Glasgow chapters where both clan and credit cultures exert competing influences.

Bailie Jarvie gives voice to one such conflicted self-awareness. Jarvie claims knowledge of the inner workings of Scottish economics:

Ye awe me money, less or mair, I’ll stand by it – But then, Mr Owen, I canna see how you, an active man that understands business, can redd out the business ye’re come down about, and clear us a’ aff – as I have gritt hope ye will – if ye’re keepit lying here in the tollbooth of Glasgow. (267)

Here, in keeping with Scottish Enlightenment theories regarding the inevitable progression of society through stages of material advancement, Jarvie clearly fantasizes a discursive alliance between economic improvement and civilized modernity. Jarvie’s characterization of the economy as something that is being held back unnaturally by outside forces exposes his personal investment in the Enlightenment shibboleth that commercial development is the correct and ethical progression of modern culture. In contrast, Jarvie also implicitly values the historical culture of “Hieland honesty” (298) and a “Hieland plea” (299). This discourse enshrines a fantasy of the primitive liberty of
a pre-industrial Scotland. Jarvie’s double-voiced discourse thus complements the hybridity of his position within the Symbolic Order. His fantasy of a discursive alliance, in terms of the Symbolic Order, highlights both a lack and a supplement among his and the Other’s desires.

Bailie Jarvie should not be considered to represent a unanimous Scottish position. At the end of the eighteenth century, many Scots were arguing outright against a British commercial policy that threatened to increase class division even as it took advantage of the newly united Anglo-Scottish polity and geography. This discourse lacks the hybridity of Jarvie’s position by wholly privileging the economy of credit above honor. Frank says “betwixt want of capital, and the national jealousy of the English, the merchants of Scotland were as yet excluded, in a great measure, from the exercise of the privileges which that memorable treaty conferred on them” (236). The well-known eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher, Adam Smith, produces in *Wealth of Nations*

…a devastating criticism of mercantilism, claiming that the system had encouraged economic activity to the benefit of the rich and powerful, while oppressing the poor…those who benefited from the trade seemed to display indifference to the welfare of those who fell under their influence or rule. (Lincoln 46)

Smith’s consideration of capital economies is not mutually exclusive to other modes of exchange, as Jarvie’s position illustrates.

We can see a mixture of modes at work in *Rob Roy*. The discourse of “honor” frequently takes the place of “credit” in a clan culture economy and sometimes honor is also privileged within a credit economy, as when Frank decides to keep his pledge to
meet the stranger (who turns out to be MacGregor himself) on the Glasgow bridge. Jarvie responds to both clan and credit economies, betraying a fantasy that those on the losing side of credit bring it upon themselves, such as “Hieland deevils [who] gang whewing and whistling about without minding Sunday or Saturday” (276). He extols Frank for honorably standing by his friends in trouble, saying “I aye did it myself, and sae did the deacon my father, rest and bless him!” (277), without acknowledging how this statement valuing a clan economy over credit might contradict his earlier statements. At other times, Jarvie discredits (pun intended) honor, as when explaining to Frank the poor choice of his fight with his cousin Rashleigh: “Honour is a homicide and a blood spiller...but Credit is a decent honest man” (Scott 297).

Jarvie’s dichotomous anthropomorphization of honor and credit in the above passage not only draws on a long-standing tradition of figuring “Lady Credit,” but also places the two discourses of transactional identity along the very axis of stadial development laid out by Smith and other Scottish Enlighteners. Scott doesn’t anticipate credit wholly replacing honor as the primary mechanism of civilized society, but rather sees the two evolving concomitantly. Jarvie assesses the antiquated honor of MacGregor’s “Hieland honesty” as being as good as any civilized credit when advising Frank of the risk of either staying in Glasgow – where he might possibly be apprehended and arrested under the authority of a dubious warrant – or absconding to the Highlands with MacGregor in an attempt to save the family business and prevent a national credit collapse. After providing further description of the lawless Scottish Highlands, Jarvie
recants, saying “‘We speak little o’ thae things, because they are familiar to oursells; and where’s the use o’ vilifying ane’s country, and bringing a discredit on ane’s kin, before southrons and strangers?’” (299). Clearly, Jarvie allies himself more closely to MacGregor than to Frank and Owen, whom he literally designates as foreign and strange. Jarvie assumes that credit is a shared valued between himself and these “strangers,” for otherwise he would not worry about discrediting – or harming the credit of – the Scottish.

An encounter with either anthropomorphized “honor” or “credit” can theoretically stand in for an encounter with the fantasmatic Other and each new encounter offers infinite interpretations that are infinitely replaceable and infinitely fantasmic. An attempt to privatize this encounter, as in a Levinasian face-to-face meeting, or imposing an ordering or regulatory function seems highly impractical, especially in the Glaswegian zone of cultural conflict and hybridity. But can ever there be longstanding orderliness to the self’s formation and projection of identity? Even without a stable referent in the Symbolic Order? Our best chance at answering these questions is to turn now to a character that is simultaneously fictionally imagined and historically authentic, the “Robin Hood of Scotland, the dread of the wealthy, but the friend of the poor, and possessed of many qualities, both of head and heart, which would have graced a less equivocal profession than that which his fate contemned him” (Scott 452), none other than Rob Roy MacGregor.

I align MacGregor, as Scott writes him, with Jarvie as figures who both operate equally well within the overlapping Symbolic Orders of credit and honor of early-
eighteenth-century Britain. Not only in the Glasgow chapters, but throughout the rest of the novel, it is MacGregor who emerges as the most successful navigator of all cultural codes in myriad hybrid spaces. Showcased above all by his seemingly miraculous ability always to pop up in the right places at the right times, the novel’s Glaswegian chapters in particular are rife with examples of Rob’s hybrid cultural mobility. After tracking Frank to the (locked!) cathedral crypt, Rob makes another clandestine appearance on the bridge, before resurfacing yet again inside the city jail. Perhaps his most impressive navigation of cultural codes and hybrid spaces, however, is his interruption of Frank’s and Rashleigh’s bloody skirmish in the College yards. Swooping down on the cousins with sword in hand, Rob begins his mediation thus

Do you, Maister Francis, opine that ye will re-establish your father’s credit by cutting your kinsman’s thrapple, or getting your ain sneckit instead thereof in the College-yards of Glasgow?—Or do you, Mr Rashleigh, think men will trust their lives and fortunes wi’ ane, that, when in point of trust and in point of confidence wi’ a great political interest, gangs about brawling like a drunken gillie? (290-1)

In this narrative moment, Rob successfully deploys two conflicting discourses, appealing to both honor and credit in his effort to separate the affronted kinsmen.

Recalling the tautology Žižek identifies in a subject’s encounter with the Other, the subject’s desire to understand the desire of the Other – what the Other wants – is a defense against the Other’s desire. By learning how to traverse his fantasy of the Other, and by learning how to desire, the subject learns to constitute his identity in a socio-Symbolic Order that lacks a stable referent for either subject or Other. In other words, the
subject learns that there is no “hard kernel” of the Real on which he should base his desire. Throughout Scott’s novel, a wide range of characters, acting as the Other to MacGregor’s self, present conflicting constructed identities of the freebooter. Rather than having a reductive effect, MacGregor’s successful traversal of desire allows his own subjectivity to become practically infinite. Thus, the subject of legend is born.

In the end, Frank recovers the bills, inherits Osbaldistone Manor, joins his father’s business, and marries the girl of his dreams – all highly economically incentivized events. If Frank, the novel’s narrator, serves a didactic function in navigating the material and discursive difference between honor and credit, then MacGregor’s support of Frank “remains illicit, covert, unaccountable” (Duncan, “Primitive Inventions” 100). MacGregor’s outlaw/marginal status contributes to his successful navigation of competing discourses of honor and credit as well as the desire of the Other, but it makes it impossible for Frank to remain in his circle of influence: “I often visited Scotland, but never again saw the bold Highlander who had such an influence on the early events of my life” (Scott 452). I follow Duncan’s interpretation of this ending; “we intuit, darkly, that the British condition of modernity does not after all consist of an internally unified, civilized nation” (100). The Žižekian framework we’ve mobilized suggests that Frank’s fantasy of MacGregor promises to embody that which Frank feels is missing within himself, but both this lack and this fantasmatic supplement are themselves generated by the Symbolic Order. At novel’s end, Frank continues to privilege his fantasy of MacGregor, revealing an arrest in the traversal of his own fantasy.
Conclusion

“Literary critics are now more curious and tolerant about economic logic than they were at any time in the twentieth century. Just in time to observe a turn toward interdisciplinarity among economists.” Catherine Gallagher, *The Body Economic* (2006)

In his 1990 edited collection, *Nation and Narration*, Homi Bhabha includes a chapter called “DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation,” which since has been anthologized in several other collections. Bhabha writes of the “narcissistic neuroses of national discourse” (300), by which he means that what we previously called national discourse – as embodied in the eighteenth-century novel, for example – should no longer be considered a singular, homogenizing force. Bhabha considers the western nation de facto a collection of multi-cultural differences, depending on narrative to tell a unified national subjectivity into existence. Bhabha asks:

How do we articulate cultural differences within this vacillation of ideology in which the national discourse also participates, sliding ambivalently from one enunciatory position to another? What comes to be represented in that unruly “time” of national culture, which Bakhtin surmounts in his reading of Goethe, Gellner associates with the rags and patches of everyday life, Said describes as “the nonsequential energy of lived historical memory and subjectivity” and Lefort re-presents again as the inexorable movement of signification that both constitutes the exorbitant image of power and deprives it of the certainty and stability of centre or closure? (Bhabha 298)

That’s not all; according to Bhabha, Foucault says the essential quality of the modern nation is actually the way in which it encourages and even reinforces individual differences. This quality allows state discipline, then, to be most effective because difference is isolating (302). Kristeva, moreover, asserts that the essential quality of the
modern nation is the way in which it registers cultural knowledge “in the strange temporality of the future perfect” (Bhabha 303), meaning that the symbolic record of a nation is a repository for both historic remembering and future pedagogy: a “double temporality.”

Is it possible to reconcile, or at least synthesize, all of these related but variant definitions of what Žižek in *The Ticklish Subject* calls “the Nation-Thing”? By way of a solution, methodological if not thematic, Bhabha suggests “interdisciplinarity, as the discursive practice of cultural difference” (314). Perhaps not coincidentally, Gayatri Spivak echoes this rallying cry in *Nationalism and the Imagination* (2010) when she champions the teaching of comparative literatures. Bhabha further elaborates that “interdisciplinarity” allows for a semi-fluid moment in time in which culture is produced “between the pedagogical and performative address” (314). As I hope to have made clear, I think of the eighteenth-century novel as being one of the more effective hybrids of pedagogy and performativity, especially for individual subject formation. More, the self-narrating subjects in *Robinson Crusoe*, *Roderick Random*, and *Rob Roy* themselves contribute to the diversity of the types of individuals represented in fiction.

In his book, *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire*, Martin Green writes “one aspect of Defoe’s work Scott did carry to completion and crown: he made the adventure tale into a foundation epic of [Britain]” (128). In this sense, the improbable fictional aspect of earlier novels is naturalized into the “narcissistic neuroses of national discourse.” Scott authenticates the fictionalized literary record of Great Britain’s
ascendance to global empire even as his many allusions to the “good old days” help him avoid some of the grosser aspects of Britain’s rise to empire. The actual history of the nation immediately leading up to Scott’s literary moment is much more gritty, chaotic, and untidy than Scott’s rewritings and re-rememberings in historical fiction. In this sense, the eighteenth-century novel, like Bhabha’s modern nation, is less of an essential historical or cultural object than it is a truly Latourian assemblage.

Perhaps we’ve put the novel on trial ungenerously for an alleged failure, on which no other genre could possibly improve. Do we expect the novel to be both historically accurate and interpretive? In Novelistic Interpretation: The Traveling Theory of Lukács’s Theory of the Novel, Eli Park Sorensen writes that “Lukács’s fallen world embodies the age of ‘transcendental homelessness’ in which the first historically significant genre appears in the form of the novel, carrying out the paradoxical task of representing an unrepresentable world” (59). Lukács’ fallen world is the very novelistic world into which Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe strides confidently at the beginning of the century, quite intent in delaying the threat of homelessness – both material and “transcendental.” Furthermore, according to Sorensen, Lukács’ novel is “the biographical life of an individual in search of his…‘inner essence’” (60). Limiting our sample size to the long eighteenth-century, we still can recognize that later novels deal more self-reflexively than earlier examples within the genre when addressing the quest for subjectivity and the absence of a stable socio-Symbolic reference. Lukács’ fallen/novel world is still the same world into which Scott’s Frank Osbaldistone stumbles sheepishly at the end of the long eighteenth-century.
The eighteenth century is of course full of writers in addition to Defoe, Smollett, and Scott, who “strove to devise modes of description able to accommodate the uncertain relation of real to ideal, concrete particular to abstract classification, incidental detail to essential trait” (Festa 449). Festa recalls us to our discussion of Latourian Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) as it applies to things in Robinson Crusoe. In addition, we might also recall the anxiety regarding physical and psychological boundedness in Roderick Random, and neither should we forget our serious interrogation of the Levinasian face-to-face encounter with the Other in Rob Roy. In some way, subscribing to the novel as a genre that subscribes in turn to complex patterns and forms is its own method of description, relation, and classification of “incidental details” and “essential traits.”

True to his empiricist reputation, Locke privileges observable details above traditionally ascribed qualities. He writes, “So uncertain are the Boundaries of Species of Animals to us, who have no other Measures, than the complex Ideas of our own collecting” (qtd. in Festa 450). We might use this point to consider a challenge to one of the usual explanations of eighteenth-century protagonists becoming more and more “round” as a symptom of the “rise of individualism.” Lynch makes exactly this move in the central chapter of The Economy of Character. She explains that, “at the turn of the nineteenth century characters became the imaginative resources on which readers drew to make themselves into individuals, to expand their own interior resources of sensibility” (126). Lynch reads “psychological depth” as “an artifact of a new form of self-culture” interested not just in becoming a self but in understanding what makes a self. An
important result of reading was practicing, so to speak, how to read people in the real
world. What was an essential trait? What was an incidental detail? Which should be
privileged? These were the types of questions that the consolidating institution of the
realistic novel helped readers ask – and answer – over the long eighteenth century.

But as Lynch herself acknowledges, there is certainly more than one way to frame
and the Law of Property* (2002), Wolfram Schmidgen writes from what feels like both a
Latourian New Materialism and a Marxist position. Schmidgen identifies “a significant
historical kinship between our freshly globalizing, late capitalist, postmodern world and
the eighteenth century” (4). Furthermore, he insists that

Such recognition has manifested itself most clearly in the now undisputed
claim that the eighteenth century marks the beginnings of our own
consumer culture, as the starting point of the massive commodification
and boundless circulation of things that we face under global capitalism.
(4)

Though I value the boldness of this claim, perhaps I value even more the way that the
“undisputed claim” depends on a vibrant discussion of “boundless circulation.” This has
greatly served my own purposes of aligning multiple concepts of circulation: the
circulation of characters within novels, the constant flux of a credit economy, and the
continued currency and viability of novels.

Erik Cassell expands upon a Lockean concept of the self as something that is
continuously changing, even constantly circulating. Cassell makes a strong case
articulating that in the same way that we can only see one aspect of a person at a time –
their front, side, back – we can only know a portion of their character; individuals are unknowable in their entirety (148). Theories like Cassell’s are potent in their application to a discussion of individual vs. type that applies back to eighteenth-century readers’ attempts to read characters, both in novels and in “real” life. On this note, I want to conclude by momentarily considering the unprecedented situation of early eighteenth-century readers. In some ways, we have them to thank for the rise of the novel, as it were. Lynch grants that “these readers had to negotiate the experience of a marketplace that was chock-full of strange new consumables and that beggared description.” But she suggests that “they believed themselves, as literate Britons, to be the beneficiaries of a symbolic environment that was founded on principles of perspicuity and accessibility and in which truths could be self-evident” (5). This reflection picks up the theme that Bhabha seriously considers regarding the narration of the nation. If an individual may be unknown in her or his entirety, how much more complex is a nation-state that we can presume to pin it down and know it in its entirety? It seems to be part of the human condition to want to try. And if novels at least succeed in teaching us to read individual characters, they may be our best chance at critically engaging with the nation-state as well.
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