PREFACE

Only the practitioner can speak with final authority about the problems of his art. In this book I have gathered together discussions about the nature and craft of fiction by novelists, believing that these are the most likely people to clear up the confusions of novel criticism. In reading what they have to say, with due allowance made for variations of temperament and historical background, their general agreement on essential issues is striking. In a sense, then, their commentaries can be said to contribute to a recognized ‘working’ aesthetic of the novel. I should, of course, have liked to represent the views of many more English and foreign novelists, especially contemporaries, but my selections are limited by space and matters of copyright. I have included one writer, Mrs. Anna Barbauld, who is not a novelist, for her admirable and too much neglected editorial work in her series, British Novelists, which appeared in 1810. In arranging my materials and in the editorial introductions to the three parts of the book—The Nature of Prose Fiction, The Genesis of a Novel and The Craft of Fiction—I have aimed at a chronological order, hoping that readers will feel as I do the interest of following from the beginning the gradual evolution of a literary form.

I must not end without expressing my gratitude to everyone who has helped me to prepare this book for the press. I should like especially to thank Professor Kenneth Muir of the Department of English Literature at Liverpool University for various helpful suggestions and for reading the book in proof; my mother for advice in translating from the French; and my husband who has done his best to see that my text is accurate and my prose readable, and who has helped me all along in more ways than can be easily acknowledged here. I must also thank warmly Miss Eda Whelan of the Harold Cohen Library (University of Liverpool) for going to so much trouble to obtain books for me, and Miss Margaret Burton, Departmental Secretary, who typed parts of the manuscript.

M. A.

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