

The Fragmentation of Originals and *Clarissa*

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In eighteenth-century Britain the idea of originality is tied to a number of related principles, such as the importance of primitive simplicity, the irregularity of the national temperament, the creative power of genius, and the priority of sublimity over all other categories of art and experience. These principles help to emphasize the value of things and people that are detached from over-elaborate and usually foreign influences, and to isolate that peculiar quality of self-subsistence—of being like yourself or of being like the thing itself—which it is the province of the sublime to represent. The debate about originality allows an easy passage therefore between these related principles. Tillotson's celebrated sermon on sincerity, where he reprobates the imitation of French manners and phrases and mourns the loss of old English plainness,¹ sits quite comfortably beside Edward Young's recipe for an original national literature: "Something new may be expected from *Britons* particularly; who seem not to be more sever'd from the rest of mankind by the surrounding sea, than by the current in their veins; and of whom little more appears to be required, in order to give us *Originals*, than a consistency of character and making their compositions of a piece with their lives."² The terms of Young's argument comprehend *Spectator* No. 160, where Addison applauds the splendor of art derived from nothing but "the mere Strength of natural Parts," and No. 350, where Steele has Captain Sentry draw a neat parallel between sublime writing and the modest bearing of the best sort of Englishman.

Close to the center of this discourse of originality, and well aware of its ramifications, is Samuel Richardson. He is an accurate, if rather niggardly critic of the practice ("Pray, sir, may it not be hinted

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... that Addison was sometimes *original* . . . in his Sir Roger?³); he also prompts and exemplifies Young's discussion of the theory. Although the *Conjectures* is addressed to the "Author of *Sir Charles Grandison*," there is good reason for suggesting that *Clarissa* is at once the most impressive and flawed monument to Richardson's speculations and achievements in the sphere of originality. It is a novel that assimilates every conflict between Lovelace and Clarissa—sexual, political, aesthetic, linguistic—to a struggle between a man whose instincts are imitative and a woman who believes it is possible to deliver herself as she is. The skill—the genius—of Richardson's dramatization of this struggle is evident in the consonance of recent interpretations of *Clarissa* with his own. When Terry Castle maintains that all interpretations of the novel are repetitions of the hermeneutic violence committed by Lovelace upon Clarissa's papers; or when Terry Eagleton assaults William Beatty Warner's *Reading Clarissa* with devastating sarcasms ("It seems logical, then, that a contemporary deconstructionist should find Lovelace the hero and Clarissa the villain, without allowing a little matter like rape to modify his judgement"), it is as if in the twentieth, even more than in the eighteenth century, critics are ready to sacrifice their ingenuity in a good cause.⁴ Like so many Peter Walshes, they account for their terror and ecstasy with the bare assertion, "It is Clarissa."

In an era when readers have been instructed in the importance of their role, when books are understood to be in endless dialogue with other books, when doubt has fallen on the status of origins and originality, Richardson is lucky to have won such a consensus. It has been made possible by the association of readerly disobedience with the palliation of a rapist's stratagems, as Eagleton shows. The violence always falls to the side of exegesis—that is, to the production of multiple meanings from constellated texts—never to the side of the original text, consubstantial with the self-evidence of its message. In this paper I am going to set up a colloquy between *Clarissa* and six other books in order to estimate the damage caused by the pursuit of this sort of originality, as distinct from the damage caused by a rapist with a talent for reading, writing, and quotation. Two of these are prior to *Clarissa* and are quoted in it: Montaigne's essay "Upon Some Verses of Virgil" and the book of Job. The remaining four appear in the half century after the publication of *Clarissa*; but all are part of the same constellation and glance at, or talk to, one another. These are Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* and *The Wrongs of Woman*; Rousseau's *Émile*; and Sterne's *Journal to Eliza*.

Because his gaze is widest and he talks to everyone, it seems right to start with Montaigne. He appears several times in *Clarissa* as an authority for libertine behavior and skeptical judgment, along with

Mandeville, Swift, and Rochester. On the charms of difficulty, the allurements of modesty, the importance of lies in courtship, the advantages of bashfulness, and the resemblance between rape and necrophilia Montaigne and Lovelace have opinions in common. They are especially fascinated by the excitements of obscurity and obliquity, what Wordsworth calls "a low hankering after the double entendre in vice."⁵ Therefore "Ladies cover their Necks with Network, as . . . Painters shadow their pictures to give them greater Lustre"; so whoever "has no Fruition but in Fruition, who wins nothing unless he sweeps the stakes; and who takes no pleasure in the Chase, but in the Quarry, ought not to introduce himself into our School."⁶ Shortly after the elopement Lovelace shows himself a connoisseur of this sort of *chiaroscuro*: "A white handkerchief, wrought by the same inimitable fingers, concealed—O Belford! what still more inimitable beauties did it not conceal! And I saw . . . the bounding heart . . . dancing beneath the charming umbrage."⁷ He announces himself a collegian of Montaigne's school of erotic indirection when he tells Belford, "Always of Montaigne's taste thou knowest—thought it a glory to subdue a girl of family. More truly delightful to me the seduction progress than the crowning act" (2:371).⁸

After pondering his friend's addiction to fantastic obliquity, Belford comes up with a solution borrowed (presumably unconsciously) from the very essay which has sponsored it. It is his *soul*, expressing itself as nicety of appetite and awe of virtue, which has turned him to stratagems that are always "preparative."

The very appetite is *body*; and when we ourselves are most fools, and crazed, then are we most eager in these pursuits. See what fools this passion makes the wisest men! . . . Do not even chaste lovers choose to be alone in their courtship preparations, ashamed to have even a child to witness their foolish actions, and more foolish expressions? Is this deified passion, in its greatest altitudes, fitted to stand the day: Do not the lovers, when mutual consent awaits their wills, retire to coverts and to darkness, to complete their wishes. And shall such a sneaking passion as this, which can be so easily gratified by viler objects, be permitted to debase the noblest?
(2:487-88)

Belford is paraphrasing that portion of Montaigne's essay where he impersonates sexual self-disgust, and complains as follows:

It is in Mockery, that Nature has order'd the most troublesome of Actions to be the most common, by that to make us

equal, and to parallel Fools and wise Men, Beasts and us. . . . In every thing else a Man may keep some Decorum, all other Operations submit to the Rules of Decency; this cannot so much as in Imagination appear other than vicious or ridiculous. . . . 'Tis a Man's Duty to withdraw himself from the light to do it.

(*Essays*, 3:126)

Twenty years later, in the last chapter of *Tristram Shandy*, Walter Shandy will paraphrase the same portion of the essay for the same mistaken purpose as Belford; they both try, as Montaigne puts it, "to honour their Nature by denaturing themselves [and to] value themselves upon their Contempt of themselves" (*Essays*, 3:129). One imagines that Richardson was rather pleased to think he had caught Montaigne out in the admission that a revolted palate keeps him from his fruit; and not simply because it confirmed him in his opinion that all intelligent libertines *know* at heart their delights are grievous, but also because it helped explain the worthy outset of that particular essay.

For someone as committed to the idealization of the familiar letter as Richardson, Montaigne's opening gestures must have been instantly recognizable. Alone in his study he tries to wean his mind from his body by taking pen in hand to recollect past pleasures: "Let Infancy look forward, and Age backward. . . . Seeing it is the privilege of the Mind to rescue it self from old Age, I advise mine to it with all the power I have, let it . . . flourish if it can like Misseltoe on a dead Tree" (*Essays*, 3:73, 77). The success of the exercise depends upon absolute candor: "I dare to say all that I dare to do." He even imagines that his readers will be women, who will read his confessions in the privacy of their closets. Writing to a woman whose closet he called a paradise, Richardson explains how the pen ought to "engross the writer's whole self"—*engross* in the compound sense of *absorb* and *retail*, so that every impulse of the heart is "*embody'd*" in letters. He asks the same correspondent if she can resist the converse of a pen that so exquisitely and innocently transforms desire into satisfaction: "The pen that makes distance, presence; and brings back to sweet remembrance all the delights of presence; which makes even presence but body, while absence becomes the soul" (*Letters*, pp. 64-68).

The strategic arrangements of privacy, writing, the self and pleasure are remarkably similar; and Edward Young helps show why. The British are isolated by the ocean, individualized by the blood in their veins, and provided they write like themselves they will prove original. Richardson simply scales down island to closet,

and substitutes a female correspondent for the true-born Briton; otherwise his recipe for originality is the same. Montaigne's contribution to this cult of British originality is far larger than Tillotson would have liked. When Pope strikes attitudes of Anglo-Saxon sincerity, confiding how much he loves "to pour out all myself, as plain / As downright Shippen, or as old Montagne," when Addison laughs at the egotism of "this lively old Gascon [who] has woven all his bodily Infirmities into his Works," and when Tristram Shandy begins to decant himself into print with a quotation from Montaigne's essay on Virgil, they confront the exotic element in the peculiarities of the British.⁹ To Richardson, Montaigne and his pupil Lovelace represent a perversion of originality, an engrossment of the self by the pen for purposes alien to the cultivation of a moral genius; but he recognizes in their oddly forthright accounts of their indirections an ambivalence, even a comicality, that belongs to the originality he favors.

Before her story properly begins, Clarissa has intervened in a quarrel between Mrs. Drayton and her daughter by writing a letter in the character of an elderly woman. Her theme is Montaigne's: that youth looks forward, and age backward. Although old folk have no other consolation than the memory of past ardors, they know how imperfectly the "fruits" of life answer expectation; young folk, on the other hand, have no notion that the only "fruit" awaiting them is the wisdom of understanding this (1:295). In one sense Clarissa's advice chimes with Richardson's eulogy of the pen as an instrument delightfully situated between the extremes of privation and possession; in another she seems to be echoing Lovelace's earliest recitation of Montaigne's libertine creed: "*Preparation* and *expectation* are in a manner everything; *reflection* may be something . . . but the *fruition*, what is there in that?" (1:172). If absence and distance are necessary to the keenest intuitions of presence, and if the mind ministers to the body's desires by denying them, who is to say whether asceticism or hedonism has the upper hand? This indeterminacy prompts the mock piety of Lovelace's praise of writing ("Not the heart only, the *soul* was in it. Nothing of body . . . the mind impelling sovereignly the vassal fingers" [2:431]), and Belford's misreading of Montaigne. Once Clarissa's "conditional liking" for Lovelace puts her at the mercy of her family and her lover, she is forced into an endless series of conjectures. Her writing can never engross her because it is devoted to establishing hypotheses about the past and the future. So rarely is she out of the subjunctive mood that Mrs. Howe is more acute than she knows when she says of Clarissa, "That *if* is everything" (1:298). These hypotheses are just like Lovelace's lies:

fictions inserted between an absent ideal and a present imperfection, preparations and reflections that defer the fruit.

Even if Clarissa were to pour herself out plain, and to make her writing of a piece with her life, her originality would not be free of troublesome ambiguities. Richardson himself was aware that singular moral grandeur can be made visible to the world's eye sometimes only through the medium of the ludicrous. "We are condemned," he wrote to Aaron Hill, "to live in such a trifling Age, that to make Wisdom looked upon as worth regarding, we must shew her with a Monkey's Grin" (*Letters*, p. 129). Willy-nilly he has to develop Clarissa as an *original* in the sense already being used by Smollett: that is, as an example of singularity so extreme that it must strike others as eccentric. Richardson aims to give a tragic luster to oddities of behavior which verge upon the humorous. Towards the end of her story Clarissa is being referred to frequently as a "dear extravagant" and a "sweet oddity" (4:41). The coffin in her bedroom is called a "whimsical choice," a "shocking whimsy" (4:442, 271); and it causes Belford to reflect that "great minds cannot avoid doing extraordinary things" (4:256). In short, her coffin becomes a macabre hobbyhorse on which she means, in Sterne's phrase, "to canter it away from the cares and solitudes of life." On the road to this dismal originality Richardson has posted the signs of unborrowed excellence. With her inimitable fingers Clarissa gives, but never copies fashions (1:512); she refuses to be lent what she does not own, and she despises compositions which are no more than "*notes and comments upon other people's texts*" (4:495). Inimitable and non-imitative, "*Nature was her art . . . her art was nature*" (4:500). That is why so skilled a forger as Lovelace cannot reproduce the cut of her letters, and why on one occasion he is unable even to transcribe a piece of her writing because "the original is too much an original" (3:204).

All comic originals in the eighteenth-century novel fulfill a double function related to the double meaning of the word. As *original* implies a source and derivation as well as a self-generative uniqueness, so they represent mythic national virtues while behaving in unaccountable ways. The straddling of representative and non-representative roles is symptomatic of a tension between public duty and private whim that is never resolved in the career of an original. As far as they are concerned there is a perfect coincidence of public utility and private virtue. Sir Roger de Coverley lays it down for a rule, "That the whole Man is to move together, that every Action of any Importance is to have a prospect of publick Good" (*Spectator* No. 6). But precisely because his extravagances are "particularly *his*" (*Spectator* No. 106) their representative or public value is missed. It

takes an observer with a foot in both camps to appreciate the centrality of marginalized virtue and to hear in the language of a private memorandum sentiments fit for a public bulletin. Tristram Shandy tests his audience for this sort of receptivity when he *confides* his intention of *publishing* to the world at large a map of his miniature “world” (*Tristram Shandy*, p. 36). Lovelace has begun to understand something of this paradox when he defines Clarissa’s originality as a unique copy: “Miss Clarissa Harlowe, indeed, is the only woman in the world, I believe, that can say in the words of her favourite Job (for I can quote a text as well as she): *But it is not so with me*” (4:135).¹⁰

Whether inventing, subsisting in, observing, or trying to express originality, difficulties are generated for those who expect it to be unequivocally present to itself. Richardson’s belief in the coincidence of literary and moral genius puts beyond any doubt the exemplary quality of Clarissa’s tragedy, as far as he is concerned. But when Clarissa, anticipating originals like Matthew Bramble and Walter Shandy, cries out, “I am quite sick of life; and of the earth in which innocent and benevolent spirits are sure to be considered as *aliens*” (3:383), it seems as if the world she confronts is beyond the reach of example and therefore cannot be the same as the one Richardson writes for. Or are we to assume that Richardson no sooner sets the world the example of Clarissa, than he removes her on account of her inimitability and its insensibility to virtue? Even if an adequate idiom is sustained between the world and the virtuous original, it is probable that the one will understand the other (as Lovelace does Clarissa) in terms of the imitation of models. He sees her as Job in her dying, Belford compares her with Socrates, and it seems likely that Richardson privately compared her death with Addison’s. Publicly he justified it by quoting from *Spectators* Nos. 40 and 548. The familiar letter compounds these difficulties by its substitutive play of absence and presence. On all fronts originality seems to define itself, or be defined, in terms of the loss or displacement of what ought to belong to it: presence is distributed over distances in time and place; virtue is either invisible or eccentric; integrity is known by the fragments it is left lying in; and inimitability is calculated in terms of its imitative potential. While Richardson is content to interpret a comic original like Sir Roger as one who moves “in his intire and proper Motion” (*Spectator* No. 6), and whose appearance of oddity is owing to the world’s exorbitance, the comic novelists are fascinated by quixotic disintegrations which arise from a radical instability in the identity of the original. A scene typifying these rival views takes place between Yorick and the Count de B**** in *A Sentimental Journey*, when Yorick identifies himself

by pointing to a page in *Hamlet*. The count is sure that there is only one Yorick; and to Yorick's urgent demonstrations that there are in fact two, he imperturbably responds, "'Tis all one."¹¹

We left Montaigne as he was about to exploit these paradoxes. He does so first of all by revising his aim of a mind-oriented candor and cultivating instead that sentimental pliancy Anna Howe calls "*consentaneousness* of corporal and animal faculties" (1:202). By studying their resemblances he starts to relish what is missing from his body and from the best love poetry: that is, the means and the representation of fruition. "One poor inch of pitiful Vigour," and kidney stones whose voiding he compares to pissing out his life piecemeal, comprehend the facts of his genital condition. His impotence is figured in the erotic poetry of Ovid and Virgil, which hides its fire under modest, uncertain, and incomplete gestures that rehearse his loss. After quoting a line of Ovid he exclaims "Methinks I am *eunuch'd* by the Expression" (*Essays*, 3:130). The metaphor keeps in play the substitutive relation of privation, tact, and delight: the fragment of his cock and the fragments it yields are consolingly mocked by verses which are fragments because they are quoted and because they say less than everything. No longer does Montaigne admire those who dare to say all they dare to do.

Richardson does everything he can to avoid such an obscene compromise. He erects a vast dualist structure designed to sink Lovelace and his consentaneous equivocality to the lower level of "sensual dream," and to buoy Clarissa up towards her native skies by ridding her of all carnal ballast. It is clear from his next novel, where Sir Charles is variously characterized as a man who lives to himself, who is present to himself, like himself and "the man of men,"¹² that Richardson had abated none of his belief in the self-identity of the original hero. Clarissa's rape and death should be construed as two plenary literalizations of his remarks about the familiar letter. The first is intended to clear away all real ambiguity from Lovelace's behavior and our judgment of it, as it shows him reducing presence to mere body in an act of shattering brutality. The second shows the soul liberated from the clinging body in an absence that is final and eternal.

Helping Richardson towards these successive literalizations is an Addisonian notion of the upper limit of originality allied with an aesthetics of the sublime supplied by Anthony Blackwall. The three levels of singularity, in Addison's opinion, comprise pointless eccentricity at the bottom; the lovable oddities of Sir Roger in the middle; and at the top the Catonic stoicism he imitated on his deathbed: "Singularity in Concerns of this Kind is to be looked upon as heroick Bravery, in which a Man leaves the Species only as he soars

above it" (*Spectator*, No. 576). As Thomas Tickell was witness to Addison's singular piety in the moment of his death, so Belford is improved by the Christian composure with which Clarissa prepares for hers. Helping him to appreciate what he sees and hears is Blackwall's *The Sacred Classics Defended* (1727). It is a book, he tells Lovelace, that has taught him to prize the natural art of the Bible above all ancient pagan writers (4:8). Belford has just transcribed one of Clarissa's meditations, verses culled from Job and psalms which Richardson subsequently collected, printed, and privately circulated, and which he thought of entitling *Simplicity the True Sublime* (*Letters*, p. 222). To read Blackwall with this title in mind is to get an inkling of how Richardson associated soaring singularity with the illocutionary force of the sublime. Originality speaks in a tongue of primordial simplicity—"an original and essential language, that borrows of none, but lends to all"—operating in rare proximity both to the feelings of the speaker ("their noble and animated sentiments fill'd out their expressions") and to the object of the speech, "the infinite greatness and dignity of the thing."¹³ When original language knits a sensibility that is like itself to a thing that is itself, the result is speech so powerful it fuses the nature of word and deed, description and action: "What a man endeavours to do, or commands to be done by this strong and comprehensive way of expression, he is said to do . . . what he offers, to give; and what he promises, to perform" (Blackwall, p. 120). Addison's and Clarissa's deaths authenticate everything they have ever written because their last words are just such original coalitions of tongue, sentiment, and act. Like the very best familiar letter, they exhibit nothing but "*Soul and Meaning*" (*Letters*, p. 68). Such sublime simplicity satisfies Richardson's high hankering after the univocal in virtue.

Wollstonecraft and Rousseau embody between them the qualities of Clarissa and Lovelace and help shed further light on the fragility of originals. Wollstonecraft is a fine example of how the British original evolves into the British radical. In her work the pursuit of sincerity and a contempt for social and sexual arts are allied to a distinctly republican idea of how private and public virtue ought to intersect. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* she argues for the political as well as the moral utility of shedding double meanings from female discourse and consentaneousness from the female sensibility. However, the ultimate point of this simplicity is Clarissalike: the acquirement of those spiritual garments that are "to clothe the soul when it leaves the body."¹⁴ This is why she is particularly hostile to Rousseau's misreading of Sophy's clothes in *Émile*, when he interprets their "charming umbrage" in a sense not at all spiritual: "Her dress is extremely modest in appearance, and yet very

coquettish in fact: she does not make a display of her charms, she conceals them; but in concealing them, she knows how to affect your imagination" (*Vindication*, p. 97). Rousseau justifies this sexualization of a young woman's appearance in terms drawn directly from Montaigne's academy: "The imagination, which decks the object of our desires, is lost in fruition."

On the wings of this imagination Rousseau skilfully places all sorts of fruition at a distance. His "original pleasure" is at its most intense when he entertains the *prospect* of reading his *reflection* upon it shortly before he dies.¹⁵ As Derrida has exhaustively demonstrated, it is not the thing itself but its iterations and copies that please Rousseau; and these in a context of present distress (exile, persecution) whose bitterness dying will intensify. His strategy is very similar to Montaigne's: it is to confront present ruin with fragments of himself in written form.

After her separation from Gilbert Imlay ("a sort of separation of the soul . . . something torn from [myself]"¹⁶) Wollstonecraft deploys her imagination in the same way. The novel written in the aftermath of that unhappy love affair is about "Maria who, locked in a madhouse, uses writing (like Rousseau) as the focus of forward and backward glances. Backward, "Maria lived again in the revived emotions of youth"; forward she consoles herself with the thought that her daughter will learn to avoid such ruin by reading about it.¹⁷ The correspondence between Maria and her fellow prisoner Darnford—initiated by means of a note passed in a copy of Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Heloise*—blossoms into an avowal of love after he reads this memoir. Despite the literary fragments she gets from him and this written record of ruin he gets from her, the novel never escapes the horrid limitation of the subtitle: *Maria, a Fragment*. Her final disintegration is delivered in broken form: "Her lover unfaithful—Pregnancy—Miscarriage—Suicide" (p. 202). Clearly the story covers the same emotional terrain traversed by Wollstonecraft between Imlay's infidelity and her attempted suicide, and it performs the same consoling function as Maria's autobiographical fragment. Darnford's literary love even mimics Godwin's, who fell in love with the author of the *Letters from Sweden* before he met her. What utterly disrupts the comforting accumulation of these "fragments" upon fragments is Wollstonecraft's death, *post partum*: a dreadful literalization of the metaphor of fragmentation with which Wollstonecraft commenced her travels two years earlier. That literalization is not ameliorated by Godwin's preface, where he writes, "There are few, to whom her writings could in any case have given pleasure, that would have wished this fragment should have been suppressed, because it is a fragment. There is . . . a melancholy delight in contemplating these

unfinished productions of genius" (p. 71). Pleonasm (fragment on fragment) is replaced by tautology (fragment as fragment) in order to emphasize the originality—the creative self-identity—of the missing author. It is no wonder that Mary Shelley, the human fragment left in the wake of this absence, should write a story about a creature composed of fragments which are literally bits of dead bodies.

The difference between the pleonasm and the tautology is critical to this discussion. As long as one can quote a fragment at one's own disintegration, the substitutive play of writing is kept up and the missing element of originality makes room for imitation. But as soon as that originality is interpreted as the essence or agent of an uncompounded self-sufficiency, damage will occur; or (much the same thing) the consoling mockery of ruin—pieces on pieces—will be reduced to ruin itself—pieces as pieces. That is why Montaigne avoids those who tautologize fruition ("who have no Fruition but in Fruition"), and why Lovelace is irritated by Belford's pious circularities ("So awkwardness is a perfection in the awkward!" [4:34]). It is also why Wollstonecraft was horrified by the embalmed corpses in the church at Tonsberg: the antithesis of "noble ruins" they were "something worse than natural decay," a macabre artifice transforming the death of death into death itself, not unlike the fragments in which Godwin commemorated her departed genius (*Letters from Sweden*, p. 71).

Armed with this distinction, the reader ought to be able to make some independent sense of the two great literalizations of *Clarissa*: the sinking into body and the rising into soul. Both involve the ruin of a body and the disturbance of a mind, and both are followed by scenarios of fragmentation. Ten disjointed meditations are written by Clarissa on torn and crumpled scraps of paper after she has been raped; and after her death Lovelace forms the ghastly plan of opening and embalming her corpse. Are these scenarios literalizing tautologies or figuring pleonasm? Nine of Clarissa's written fragments are continuous with destruction, fragments as fragments; but the tenth, consisting of ten fragments of poetry, makes fragments of fragments by matching each bit of wreckage with a quotation. In this way she saves herself from the measureless and inimitable agony suffered when "the original is too much an original" (3:204). Lovelace seems too sunk in the project of dividing Clarissa's body to make this restorative turn: "Her *heart*. . . I *will* have. I will keep it in spirits" (4:376). He even seems unconscious of the pun. But when he gets further in his anatomy, he shows how ingeniously he is managing his words: "Her bowels, if her friends are very solicitous about them, and very humble and sorrowful (and they have none of their own), shall be sent down to them." Punning, John Hollander

explains, is a form of quotation;¹⁸ and here each pun, like each of Clarissa's fragments, is quoted against a disastrous originality, that "original dust" which embalmers and certain literary executors only thicken.

Sterne's *Journal to Eliza*, a series of rapid alternations between reckless nostalgia and fantastic expectation, ought to belong with Montaigne's, Rousseau's, and Wollstonecraft's literary self-consolations. In fact Yorick takes the same route as Richardson towards the originalization of a woman, simplifying and spiritualizing as he goes. When Eliza Draper sailed out of his life, "Yorick" experienced the "Separation of Soul & Body"—the same self-tearing heartache suffered by Wollstonecraft when she set off for Scandinavia—with the addition of a severe lung hemorrhage. Figure gruesomely coincided with fact as his broken heart bled copiously into his handkerchief.¹⁹ His written response to this joint fragmentation is an elaborate strategy of spiritualization, designed at first to expel the literal and physical elements of heartbreak from what he wishes to interpret as a figurative death, in whose aftermath he lingers a "gawsy" spirit, a shadow, a pale ghost. Death is redeemed from the letter, however, only to serve the purpose of a sublime literalization, in which Yorick and Eliza, two spirit beings, will be reunited forever in a sort of pastoral-theatrical heaven. To get there Yorick arranges himself as shadow in front of Eliza's "sweet Shadow," the miniature she had painted shortly before she left. The trick is to transform the copy into the original; so he talks to the picture, takes it out to dinner, kisses it, declares it has a soul, until the tautology is complete: "Yr picture is Yrself" (*Journal*, p. 357). The labored pretence that the *Journal* is translated from the original French manuscript (p. 322)—that is, that the original is a copy—develops a reverse symmetry with the further pretence that the copy of an absent body is the original of spiritual presence.

Yorick suffers a series of comic disasters as a consequence of turning the representation of Eliza into an original. Unless it was dying while trying to correct Lady Bradshaigh's opinion of Clarissa, Richardson suffered none for doing the same thing to his heroine. He published her meditations; he added a volume of letters to the third edition under the heading, "Restored from the Original MSS"; he had Joseph Highmore paint two portraits of her; and all the time he was thinking about originality. It is Clarissa who complains of the "author of her ruin" in words borrowed from Job, "How long will he vex my soul, and break me in pieces with words!" (4:120). But the author himself is immune to such equivokes: he has been so perfectly original about her originality that her story, especially at its consummation, bears itself out, explains itself, resists all interpre-

tations not conformable to the frame he has placed her in and to the self-evident doctrines it proclaims. Richardson would have endorsed a suitable translation of Eagleton's account of Clarissa's death: "She achieves that pure transparency of signifier to signified which she seeks in the integrity of her script. Such transparency—the baffling enigma of that which is merely itself—is bound to appear socially opaque, a worthless tautology or resounding silence" (*The Rape of Clarissa*, p. 75). It is, however, linguistically and dramatically necessary that Clarissa be divided ("Self, then, be banished from *self*" [3:321]) if she is to be tautologized; for as Wittgenstein points out, the tautology of identity requires that the self be split so that the two halves may be compared and asserted of one another.²⁰ That is why Roland Barthes takes such a dim view of it, calling tautology a murderous magic governing a world that is dead and motionless.²¹

Richardson could invoke authorities for what he had done. Longinus was sublime about the sublime, Tillotson was sincere about sincerity (*Spectator*, No. 103). It was a point of honor among theorists of genius to be novel on the topic, because "in an ESSAY on ORIGINAL GENIUS, Originality of Sentiment will naturally be expected."²² Practitioners of the simple sublime assume that this collapsing of a representation into what it represents is always the last proof of the intense unity of the sublime phenomenon. But what happens when an imperfection is doubled up—when, for example, Longinus is pusillanimous about pusillanimity?²³ Neil Hertz suggests that the Longinian sublime more often than not turns upon the representation of what is imperfect or violent, and that the force of destruction is appropriated by the creative impulse which, in figuring it, removes the threat. This "movement of disintegration and figurative reconstitution" is complicated by the way Longinus quotes, or cuts, sublime texts into his own: by means of this further mimicry of the disintegration represented in them, an extra reconstitutive flourish is given to "the sublime turn."²⁴ It isn't difficult to see the resemblance between these pleonasms of reconstitution and Montaigne's transformation of impotence into the castrating pleasure of reading bits of Ovid. In both texts damage is controlled by setting up an oscillation between its literal and figurative manifestations. That control is lost when figurative difference is pared away to leave the "tautegorical" expression of identity.²⁵

The status of this oscillation in the books I have been talking about may be measured by the role played by books within them, especially when the books act as mediators between lovers. Montaigne makes an emblem of his reconstitutive turns out of Socrates, who remembers falling in love (like Dante's Paolo) over a book (*Essays*, 3:147). Rousseau's *Émile* and Sophie exchange books before they exchange

vows: she gives him Fénelon's *Telemachus* and he gives her the *Spectator*. His *Heloise* brings Darnford and Maria at least temporarily together in *The Wrongs of Woman*. But in the *Vindication*, where Wollstonecraft is aiming for the fullness of original sentiments, books—"the reveries of the stupid novelists" (*Vindication*, p. 203)—are put aside. In Yorick's *Journal* the transformation of Eliza's shadow into Eliza's self will be thoroughly accomplished when she comes ashore with her half of the book he has been writing; then the *Journal* will be like itself. This is like Pamela's surrender of her journal-girdle to Mr. B, like Harriet's reading of Sir Charles's letters to Dr Bartlett, and like Sir Charles's perusal of Clementina's celebrated paper. The only book of any importance to these characters is the book they are in: they write and read only themselves because their compositions are entirely of a piece with their lives. Ann Radcliffe, as ardent an exponent of the simple sublime as Richardson, deserves to be mentioned as a writer partly aware of the consequences of pursuing it. She knows that descriptions of uncompounded sublimity demand repetitions which "must appear tautologous"; and when Emily St. Aubert crosses the frontier dividing sublime spectacle from implication in the violence and terror of the thing itself, the transition is clearly marked: she laments "the irresistible force of circumstances over the taste and powers of the mind" which prevents her from being able to concentrate on a book.²⁶

Clarissa has a choice. When Belford hands over extracts of the letters he has had from Lovelace, her story is complete; and if it were as full of soul and meaning as Richardson supposes, she would have no more trouble in reading it than Pamela or Yorick have reading their journals. As it happens, she finds it a dismal story, one she is unable to read with patience because it is a chronicle of sufferings she doesn't understand (4:74). In this state of unexemplary perplexity she turns to the book of Job, where her feelings of self-division, doubt, and impatience are most aptly represented. Job describes the agony of being turned into a public symbol, ripe with meaning for everyone but himself: "He hath broken me asunder . . . and set me up for his mark. . . . He hath made me also a byword of the people" (Job 16: 12; 17:6). When Clarissa quotes this complaint at her own ruin (4:101), it is hard not to think that she has her creator in mind, between whom and Job's intriguing parallels may be run. They both risk their favorite creatures in a bet with their antitypes (Satan and Lovelace), and when questions are asked they quote their creation at itself. God quotes leviathan and the war-horse as the self-evidence of the creative will's coincidence with power and meaning; rather milder but of the same order are Richardson's directions, "In page 95 of this volume

the reader will see . . .” Neither loses faith in his creature’s capacity to survive the upward collapse into pure symbolization, and neither understands that a tested mark, a tried byword, can no longer plentifully declare the thing as it is.

With this book Clarissa is able to reproduce the sublime turn of her tenth paper. Finding in Job a complaint that matches her fragmented condition, she quotes (cuts) it into “fragments” on fragments. The pleonasm offers the same figurative refuge from tautology that Montaigne finds in quoting Ovid, or that Longinus gets from cutting up Demosthenes. Lovelace understands what she is doing because he has always understood the difference between fruit and pursuit, and between deadening tautegoricity and figurative oscillation. That is why, in the joke he plays on Hickman, he tries desperately to allegorize Death out of his exclusively deathly function (3:495). Richardson’s failure to understand this difference, or his desire to obscure it, suggests that he is not quite guiltless of the violence Lovelace and the hermeneuts are generally blamed for.

NOTES

¹“Of sincerity toward God and Man,” in *The Works of the Most Reverend Dr. John Tillotson, Late Lord Archbishop of Canterbury*, 2 vols. (London: Ralph Barker, 1712), 1:7. Excerpted in *Spectator* Nos. 103, 352, 557.

²Edward Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition* (London, 1759; rpt. Leeds: The Scolar Press, 1966), p. 76.

³Samuel Richardson, *Selected Letters*, ed. John Carroll (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964), p. 335.

⁴See Terry Castle, *Clarissa’s Ciphers* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1979); Terry Eagleton, *The Rape of Clarissa* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), p. 66. Warner seems to have taken a much bigger risk in floating this hypothesis in the twentieth century than Joseph Priestley in the eighteenth. Nobody called him heartless for suggesting that “Even the prudent and virtuous Mr. Richarson hath interested his reader so much in the character of *Lovelace* . . . that, I believe, there are few of his readers who would be displeas’d with the success of his base designs upon any other woman than Clarissa herself”: *A Course of Lectures on Oratory and Criticism* (London, 1777; rpt. Menston: Scolar Press, 1968), p. 129. To the objection that Priestley’s and Warner’s readings are typical of males, it needs to be said that the authorized reading insisted upon by Richardson (who was notorious for rejecting all readerly advice and for sharply correcting heretical readings), and then endorsed by Eagleton, are male interpretations too. It is significant that Priestley concedes the impossibility of free interpretation faced with “Clarissa herself.”

⁵Preface to *The Borderers, Wordsworth’s Poetry and Prose*, ed. W.M. Merchant (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1955), p. 105.

⁶“Upon Some Verses of Virgil,” *Essays of Michael Seigneur of Montaigne*, trans. Charles Cotton, 3 vols. (London, 1711), 3:130-31. I have used Cotton’s translation because it was popular in the eighteenth century. There are no clear

echoes to indicate that it was this translation Richardson used; perhaps, like Sterne, he caught the flavor of Montaigne's essay secondhand from Charron's compilation *Charron on Wisdom*, "englished by Dr. Stanhope" (1729).

⁷Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa: or, the History of a Young Lady*, 4 vols. (London: Dent's Everyman's Library, 1932; rpt. 1976), 1:512.

⁸He seems to associate two ideas with Montaigne here—upper class women and postponement. In the latest edition of the novel Angus Ross identifies the source of the first as the essay "Of Three Commerces"—*Clarissa* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 1517. But Lovelace's preference for deferred delights and a winding game—one he never tires of declaring—belongs to "Upon Some Verses of Virgil."

⁹Alexander Pope, "The First Satire in the Second Book of Horace," in *Imitations of Horace*, ed. John Butt (London: Methuen, 1939), lines 51-52; Joseph Addison, *Spectator* No. 562; Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, ed. James A. Work (New York: Odyssey Press, 1940), p. 7.

¹⁰For more extensive discussions of what Thomas McFarland has named "the originality paradox" see Thomas McFarland, *Originality and Imagination* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1985); David Quint, *Origin and Originality in Renaissance Literature* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1983); Robert L. Chibka, "The Stranger within Young's Conjectures," *ELH* 53, 3 (1986): 541-65.

¹¹Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy by Mr. Yorick*, ed. Gardner D. Stout (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1967), p. 223.

¹²*Sir Charles Grandison*, ed. Jocelyn Harris, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1972), 2:78, 189; 3:75.

¹³Anthony Blackwall, *The Sacred Classics Defended* (London, 1727; rpt. New York: Garland, 1970), pp. 10, 334, 332. Blackwall writes conscious of Addison on the force and translatability of primitive languages, particularly Hebrew and English. See p. 324 and *Spectator*, No. 405.

¹⁴Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London: J. M. Dent, 1929), p. 60.

¹⁵Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, trans. Peter France (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 32.

¹⁶Mary Wollstonecraft, *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark*, ed. Carol H. Poston (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1976), p. 176.

¹⁷Mary Wollstonecraft, *The Wrongs of Woman*, ed. Gary Kelly (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1976), p. 82.

¹⁸John Hollander, *The Figure of the Echo* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1981), p. 63.

¹⁹Laurence Sterne, *The Journal to Eliza in Letters of Laurence Sterne*, ed. Lewis Perry Curtis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), pp. 374, 366.

²⁰Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968), paragraphs 84e, 216.

²¹Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London: Granada Publishing, 1973), p. 152. Studying the self-reflexive imagery in the poetry of Andrew Marvell and Seamus Heaney, Christopher Ricks comes to the interesting conclusion that tautological conceits are especially prevalent in times of civil war: *The Force of Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), pp. 34-59.

²²William Duff, *An Essay on Original Genius* (London, 1767; rpt. Gainesville: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1964), p. x.

²³Of Longinus's remarks about the loss of political liberty and the decay of the sublime, Gibbon observes, "Here, too, we may say of Longinus, 'His own example strengthens all his laws.' Instead of proposing his sentiments with a manly boldness, he insinuates them with the most guarded caution, puts them into the mouth of a friend, and . . . makes a show of refuting them." Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. Dero A. Saunders (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), p. 84, n. 10.

²⁴Neil Hertz, "A Reading of Longinus," *Critl* 9 (March 1983): 585, 591.

²⁵The neologism is invented by Coleridge in *Aids to Reflection* to name the shift from "expressing a different subject but with a resemblance" to "expressing the same subject but with a difference"—that is, from allegory to tautology. The passage is cited by Stephen Knapp in a remarkable chapter, "Coleridge on Allegory and Violence," in *Personification and the Sublime* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1985), pp. 7-50.

²⁶Ann Radcliffe, *A Journey made in the Summer of 1794* (London, 1795), p. 419; *The Mysteries of Udolpho* in *The Novels of Ann Radcliffe* (London: Hurst, Robinson, 1824), p. 396.