A Nineteenth-Century Correction

To the Editor:

I enjoyed Andrew Miller's engaging Marxist rereading of Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* ("*Vanity Fair* through Plate Glass," 105 [1990]: 1042–54), but one sentence of his piece gave me pause. Miller compares Thackeray's treatment of objects in fiction with Henry Mayhew's nonfiction account of the Newcut market, and he leads into this analogy by saying that Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* was "published in 1861–62, after *Vanity Fair* finished its serial run" (1046). *Vanity Fair* was published serially in 1847–48; Mayhew's book, composed of articles he had written for the *Morning Chronicle* in the late 1840s, appeared in 1851, not 1861.

SUSAN BALEE
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Reply:

I'm grateful to Susan Balée for correcting my slip: *London Labour* was published in book form in 1851 and not 1861 as I stated. As she notes, the serial numbers of Thackeray's novel were published in 1847–48; the relevant essays for the *Chronicle* began in late 1849.

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Maternal Nursing and Oral Aggression in Richardson's England

To the Editor:

Raymond F. Hilliard's "*Clarissa* and Ritual Cannibalism" (105 [1990]: 1083–97) offers a fascinating perspective on the rituals of oral aggression in Richardson's masterpiece, but I am left a bit uncomfortable by the way that Hilliard has shaped some of his evidence, both from Richardson and from the eighteenth-century historical record.

My problem with the essay centers not on cannibalism but on breast feeding, a matter of some moment given the article's governing assumption that oral aggression can ultimately be traced to traumas associated with nursing and weaning. Hilliard quotes Lovelace's fantasy of a maternal Clarissa, as the rake imagines "seeing a twin Lovelace at each charming breast, drawing from it his first sustenance." Curiously, Hilliard does not quote the rest of Lovelace's remark: "the pious task [nursing], for physical reasons, continued for one month and no more!" (2: 477). In the Everyman edition of the novel, which both Hilliard and I cite, there is a footnote to the phrase "for physical reasons," added by Richardson himself, which reads, "In *Pamela*, Vol. II, letter xlv, these reasons are given, and are worthy of every parent's consideration, as is the whole letter, which contains the debate between Mr. B. and his Pamela, on the important subject of mothers being nurses to their children." That debate, which spills over into the next two letters (and which reminds us how dreary Richardson can be when he returns to his roots as a writer of conduct books), is resolved—again curiously for Hilliard's argument—in favor of Pamela's *not* nursing her children. Pamela, like Lovelace, insists on the piousness of the task, but Mr. B. claims that it will ruin her "easy, genteel form," take her away from her French and Latin lessons, and turn his "son and heir" into a "rival" for her affections (2: 229). Pamela's parents agree with their son-in-law, and Pamela concedes to the weight of their authority. In view of the importance that Hilliard gives to prolonged maternal nursing as a root cause of both oral trauma and subsequent oral aggression, these seem like significant omissions.

I am also worried by the way that Hilliard has represented Lawrence Stone's comments on the subject (Stone is the only authority he cites on eighteenth-century practice). While it is true that Stone maintains, as Hilliard states, that "between 1660 and 1800 mercenary wet nursing gave way to maternal breast feeding in the squirearchy and upper bourgeoisie" (1095n6), Stone's full discussion of this transition is considerably more qualified and complicated than Hilliard acknowledges. For one thing, and here we begin to have some insight into Lovelace's odd one-month statute of limitations, Galen's ancient insistence that sexual relations spoiled a mother's milk still enjoyed considerable currency, especially in the first half of the eighteenth century (*Clarissa* was published first in 1748–49). As Stone puts it in *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500–1800*, "But [Galen's] idea died hard, and there can be little doubt that wealthy fathers insisted on sending their children out to a wet nurse so that they would not be deprived of the regular sexual services of their wives for months or years on end" (427). There was apparently a growing body of propaganda in favor of maternal nursing, but there was also considerable opposition to it, especially among the wealthy. Stone goes on to say, "It was not until the second half of the eighteenth century that practice at last began to conform to propaganda and wet nursing quite rapidly went out of fashion" (430).

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In other words, if we look at the evidence either of Richardson's novels or of Stone's interpretation of the historical record, it becomes more difficult to assert that eighteenth-century England was necessarily a culture in which the oral trauma of separation from a powerful preoedipal mother shaped either the artistic or the unconscious vision of Samuel Richardson or anyone else. It is not, of course, impossible that Richardson was so shaped, but the argument would be more convincing, to me anyway, if it acknowledged that England in the time of Richardson seems not to have been dominated by any one practice of breast feeding, especially among the wealthy classes Richardson typically represents, and that indeed an active debate on the subject was still in progress.

The larger issue at stake here, of course, is theoretical. Is it possible to write literary criticism that is both genuinely historical and psychoanalytic? The way in which Hilliard has blurred the historical evidence suggests to me that his deepest critical allegiances are with Freud and the Freudians, not with history. Stone himself says, "What [the historical record] does is cast very great doubt upon the assumption that the particular kinds of infantile traumas upon which Freud laid so much stress have been suffered by the whole of the human race at all times and in all places" (161). Stone, needless to say, is no demigod bearing unassailable truths, but his remark reminds us how very difficult it is to serve two critical masters.

JOHN ALLEN STEVENSON
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Reply:

Lawrence Stone's book itself exemplifies the difficulty of combining history and psychoanalysis, but despite the qualifications usefully mentioned by John Allen Stevenson, Stone does not find the two incompatible. In the rather short section of his bibliography headed "Theory," Stone includes at least seven writers—Philip Slater, for instance—whose social theorizing is more or less strongly influenced by psychoanalysis. Though Stone does say that the historical record casts "very grave doubt upon the assumption that the particular kinds of infantile traumas upon which Freud laid so much stress have been suffered by the whole of the human race *at all times and in all places*" (161; my italics), a number of passages in his book imply that widespread psychological patterns (as described by psychoanalysis) can be explained by the circumstances of *particular* times and places. This is a view or approach shared by prominent contemporary sociologists and anthropologists who draw on object-relations theory to interpret past and present patriarchal cultures in various parts of the globe. I mention Eli Sagan and Nancy Chodorow in my article. Similar work is on display in *Rituals of Manhood*, a collection edited by Gilbert H. Herdt and Roger M. Keesing (U of California P, 1982), and in David D. Gilmore's *Manhood in the Making* (Yale UP, 1990). In his own book Stone postulates that "a majority of the individuals" in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English society "found it difficult to establish close emotional ties to any other person" because they had been "deprived of a single mothering and nurturing figure to whom they could relate during the first eighteen months or two years of life" (99). He argues further that early modern children who had a single wet nurse during the nursing period, rather than several in succession, experienced a "trauma of final separation" when returned to their natural mothers (106, 101). If the wet nurse of such a child lived in the parents' home and stayed close to the child after weaning, the child would retain a "deep attachment" to her. (Judging by what we learn of Mrs. Norton in *Clarissa*, this may be the situation assumed by Richardson.) On the more general subject of maternal dependency in the upper class, Stone approvingly cites an essay in which Jean Hagstrum invokes psychoanalytic concepts to explain the focus on maternal dependency in much of the literature of the Age of Sensibility (448–49). I cite only a couple of the passages where Stone makes broad generalizations about possible links between social practices and psychological tendencies. Given the emphasis in *Clarissa* on nursing, weaning, and other forms of orality, I thought it reasonable to suggest in notes 6 and 10 that there may be a connection between Richardson's novel and the trend toward maternal dependency (including a gradual transition to maternal breast feeding) in the eighteenth-century upper class as described by Stone. The broader issue is maternal dependency, which Stone unqualifiedly sees as becoming characteristic of upper-class men at least as early as the 1730s. Like Richardson, some modern expounders of the preoedipal phase (e.g., Melanie Klein, who views the first weeks and months of the infant's life as critical for its relationship with the mother) emphasize nursing and weaning; others (e.g., Margaret Mahler) pay little attention to these stages when discussing separation-individuation. For Chodorow and others the important factor is not breast feeding per se but "mother-monopolized child-rearing." Like some anthropologists, I was deliberately eclectic in my references to object-relations theorists precisely to avoid being unnecessarily literal about such matters as the

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