

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.

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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).