

duration of the maternal nursing period.

My intention in the two notes was to conjecture or to stimulate conjecture. In the body of my essay I am careful to say that Richardson “imagines” a cultural system characterized by oral aggression and ritual cannibalism. I hope to show eventually that the ritual pattern in *Clarissa*—sacrificial violence with cannibalistic overtones—is to be found at the heart of works by several other eighteenth-century novelists, including Fielding, Burney, Radcliffe, Godwin, and M. G. Lewis. The violence is always ultimately aimed at a female scapegoat, usually a mother figure. The persistence of this pattern indicates that something more is at work than the peculiarities of one or another writer’s imagination. In other words, the central role of communal oral aggression in the various narratives inevitably raises questions about the social context that gave rise to them, though perhaps the answers to such questions must be at least partially conjectural. At any rate, to my thinking, only the theory I apply in my article offers an adequately comprehensive interpretation of the ritual pattern in question.

No doubt because I find the combination of psychoanalytic, anthropological, and feminist theory compelling, I am made less uncomfortable than Stevenson by what the characters in *Clarissa* and in volume 2 of *Pamela* say about the length of the maternal nursing period. In note 10 I refer to the risk of not seeing the forest for the trees if we are too literal in taking a psychoanalytic approach. In *Clarissa* Richardson shows great intuitive understanding of the psychological implications of nursing and weaning, but one can hardly expect him to be like modern social scientists in connecting his intuitions to precise lengths of time. In other words, what Richardson and his characters say about the duration of the nursing period probably matters very little in relation to the general imaginative thrust of *Clarissa*, with its emphasis on maternal dependency and on a link between weaning and feelings of separation and of death. Stevenson himself implies parenthetically that when Richardson or his characters allude to the contemporary debate on breast feeding, we are probably getting a dose of Richardson the self-conscious didact. My position here is a variation on D. H. Lawrence’s dictum that we should trust the tale and not the teller.

RAYMOND F. HILLIARD
University of Richmond

Canonicity and Chronology

To the Editor:

Notes from my personal and necessarily selective critical canon—canons₃, ₅, and ₆ cited by Wendell V. Harris in his clearly delineated “Canonicity” (106 [1991]: 110–21)—suggest that Harris could have supported his concept of literary canons as entries into a “culture’s critical colloquy” by turning, as I often do, to E. M. Forster’s *Aspects of the Novel*, a work accessible as canon₂ is and in other ways.

The colloquy as “a corner” of Harris’s and Burke’s “unending conversation” (112) seems to have its immediate roots in the first of Forster’s 1927 Clark lectures at Cambridge. In this introductory lecture, Forster exorcises the “demon of chronology” by visualizing all novelists as writing in one room. He pairs them off through snatches of harmonious conversation made up of quotations from their work: Samuel Richardson and Henry James, H. G. Wells and Charles Dickens, Laurence Sterne and Virginia Woolf engage in delightful and untime-bound conversations for the benefit of generations of readers.

Harris’s straightforward article gives this generation usable tools to continue our own unending (and untime-bound) canons_{1–10} conversation on a more rational basis.

AUDREY A. P. LAVIN
Canton, OH

Putting Post- in the Masthead

To the Editor:

If we are truly, as John W. Kronik suggests (Editor’s Column, 106 [1991]: 200–04), on the verge of post-postmodernism, surely it is time—before the lettuce at his “enlightened hometown” restaurant wilts—to change the name of the journal to *Publications of the Postmodern Language Association of America*.

ROBERT MIKLITSCH
Ohio University