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*The Edible Woman:
Eating and Breast-Feeding in the
Novels of Samuel Richardson*

LAURA FASICK

WRITING TO HIS COMPANION Lovelace about the disgusting appearance of strumpets “unprepared for being seen,” the reformed Belford of Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa* declares

If thou *hadst* [seen them], I believe thou wouldst hate a profligate woman, as one of Swift’s Yahoos, . . . hate them as much as I do; and as much as I admire, and next to adore, a truly virtuous and elegant woman: for to me it is evident, that as a neat and clean woman must be an angel of a creature, so a sluttish one is the impurest animal in nature. (4: 381)¹

Belford draws here upon an established “rhetorical stance” of eighteenth-century antifeminine satire, in which a disorderly woman “comes to embody all that is offensive to the larger society” (Nussbaum 4). Belford’s elegant angel is the “ideal woman, . . . who is to establish order in the domestic sphere,” which in turn will “bring stability to the larger society.” The strumpets (and the women of the satires), however, are “inherently giddy and unstable” and thus potentially “a threat to the patriarchal order” (Nussbaum 4-5). Yet both categories of femininity are imagined in physical terms; indeed, both pure and tainted women *must* have bodies so that their bodily condition can proclaim their virtue or vice.

More than grooming is involved, however: the body’s processes are at issue. If one blends Belford’s terms with those employed by Julia Kristeva in her discussion of masculine ideas about women,

Belford's angel might be associated with Kristeva's guardian of the subject's "own and clean body" (53) while his "animal" is compounded of those excretions that, Kristeva suggests, traditionally stand "for the desirable and terrifying, nourishing and murderous, fascinating and abject inside of the maternal body" (54). The social implications of this concept of the female body emerge because "it is . . . not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order" (4). Like the female object of eighteenth-century satire, Kristeva's maternal figure is potentially disruptive to society simply because her body is uncontrolled.

In addition to physical constraints, however, another way to render the body socially manageable is to control how it is understood. For this purpose, actual bodily substances do not matter as much as the schema that explains them, as Mary Douglas notes in her examination of attitudes toward the "matter" from "dangerous" "bodily margins" (121). The female body has been particularly subject to reorganization into terms the (usually male) observer can control. Belford, for instance, by recognizing that "the persons of [profligate women] in their retirements are as filthy as their minds" (4: 381), can free himself from infatuation with them and turn to the "elegant" woman who will maintain his household.

Thus through apparently personal instincts of revulsion and attraction, Belford moves from the libertine's aristocratic code to the middle-class morality that Nancy Armstrong finds personified in the domestic woman. In the emergent bourgeois society, gendered relations governed by feminine affective morality ostensibly replaced categories of political power: the ideal domestic woman substituted spiritual for material presence. Armstrong argues that Pamela's triumph is to refocus Mr. B.'s attention from her "erotic body" to her "body of sentiments having no reality other than words"; yet Mr. B.'s interpretation of Pamela's "material body" (120), although considerably revised during the novel's two volumes, is crucial to his continued power.

Because male definitions of female physicality come to define women's selfhood, those definitions, in turn, were accepted as "natural." The definition, then, of such biological functions as eating and breast-feeding shaped cultural roles as well.

During Richardson's lifetime (1689 to 1761) breast-feeding among the upper classes, Lawrence Stone notes, was rare (271-72). The contemporary debate on breast-feeding, however, was part of the shift that Armstrong traces from privileging "the aristocratic woman" to exalting "the new [female] domestic ideal" (113). Suckling was a class-specific activity when "throughout the period [1570-1720] and

beyond it those rich women who breastfed their infants remained rare examples" (McLaren 28). To promote breast-feeding as a universal female activity helped remove women from the "political terms" within which "the male is . . . defined" (Armstrong 113). Richardson's advocacy of the practice in each of his novels is thus another link between his fictions and the conduct-book instructions that Armstrong shows as inculcating a new model of internalized "personal" morality.²

But the contemporary debate was unclear in assigning women's duties. Doctors and moralists argued that the health and well-being of the child required maternal feeding. However, since breast-feeding mothers were expected to abstain from sexual activity, the practice went against the wishes of husbands who feared interference with their sexual pleasures (Stone, *Family, Sex, and Marriage* 270). In this conflict, the needs of the child are pitted against the desires of the father: "[B]elieving . . . that the conjugal debt had priority above the welfare of the infant, the church had condoned wet-nursing" (McLaren 27). At roughly the same time, the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, John Tillotson, allowed that "the interposition of the father's authority" was sufficient "excuse" from what he elsewhere called women's "natural duty." Although he included maternal suckling among those natural duties "of a more necessary and indispensable obligation than any positive precept of revealed religion" (141), Tillotson conceded a husband's right to release his wife from such an obligation. Breast-feeding might now be a marker of "natural" gendered identity rather than of social class, but male authority continued to define the value of the "natural." We see this in Richardson's fictional treatments, in which straightforward sexual exploitation of the female body proves a relatively feeble instrument of control compared to the ability to impose an interpretation of the body's significance.³

1

This pattern of defining women by defining the meaning of their bodily functions first appears in Pamela's movement from resistance and self-definition to subordination. Although Pamela justifies her feistiness by adherence to patriarchal norms of female chastity, throughout the first half of her story she defies all immediate embodiments of masculine authority, in particular the male head of the household in which she is a servant.⁴ Mr. B., perceiving Pamela as an object of consumption, has been waiting for her to "ripen" for him like a fruit (2: 110). Pamela, however, refuses to become the sexual equivalent of food, a dish, like his "boiled chicken with butter and parsley" (1: 163),

to be ordered and consumed. Pamela's rebellion shows in her having "little stomach" (1: 112). During her imprisonment, when all her actions are subject to Mrs. Jewkes's lewd misreadings, Pamela's reluctance to eat demonstrates that she will not participate in the cycle of consumption her captors want to establish.

Pamela does eat when she accepts her wooer as her husband and acquiesces in his attempts to feed her (1: 305). But Mr. B., who signals his affection by his new concern with Pamela's food and drink (1: 305, 370), thereby internalizes within Pamela the control she previously had resisted. By taking her as his domestic rather than merely his sexual partner, Mr. B. gains the power to determine when she should eat and drink, sleep and rise (1: 338), and how she should array and compose herself (1: 337-38, 341-42). That well-arranged body is to be at his domestic service in a submission as complete and unilateral as Pamela had perceived a mistress's sexual submission to be.

Mr. B. likewise triumphs over his headstrong sister, Lady Davers, when she finally gives in to his urging that she eat, a request that she initially perceives as an "insult" (1: 396). Mr. B. insists he must "prevail on [her] to drink this glass of wine" (1: 397) so that having drunk, she will "perhaps eat something" (1: 396). But Mr. B. expects to prevail in forcing his sister also to accept his new marriage and to renounce her own "passion" against him (1: 397). Although Lady Davers insists she has good reason for her fury, Mr. B. treats it as a physical disorder that nourishment will cure (1: 396). Only by submitting her body to his direction will she regain the decorum that befits a woman. Lady Davers accepts this diagnosis and his authority by calming down as she begins to "[help] herself with some little freedom" to food, and "[s]he called for a glass of the same wine she drank before" at Mr. B.'s behest. She declares that she is "soothed" by her brother's gentle force-feeding; having taken in what he has given her, she cannot immediately let out words like "wench" or "creature" against his wife (1: 397).

Lady Davers's humbling foreshadows Mr. B.'s domination of the nutritive process in the novel's second volume, in which he refuses Pamela permission to breast-feed.⁵ To Mr. B., such an act is incompatible with "personal graces" (2: 233). He objects to "the carelessness into which [he has] seen very nice ladies sink, when they became nurses" (2: 233). His revulsion here is essentially the same with which Belford confronts the unkempt inmates of Mrs. Sinclair's brothel. Having become Pamela's protector rather than her would-be seducer, Mr. B. now feels free to protect her from a degradation that is implicit in her own body rather than in others' designs upon it. This degradation, however, is not illicit sexuality, but rather Pamela's

decision to define herself in terms other than those of Mr. B.'s ideal wife. For Mr. B., his child is his rival, competing with him for Pamela's company and consideration. If Pamela breast-feeds, Mr. B. says, she "must take with her her infant and her nursery-maid wherever she goes; and I shall either have very fine company (shall I not?) or be obliged to deny myself yours" (2: 234-35). Thus, either the husband or the child, but not both, can take pleasure in the woman's presence. At night the suckling infant will invade the conjugal bed and demand an act that will disfigure Pamela's "easy, genteel form," in which Mr. B. takes "laudable, and . . . honest pleasure" (2: 233). Yet the use to which Mr. B. puts his undisturbed bed manifests itself in the perpetual distension of Pamela's form by pregnancy. The difference between Pamela's swelling belly and her swelling, milk-laden breasts is apparently that one implies the husband's use of the woman's body, the other the child's use. To be identified as a mother rather than as a wife is to reject the patriarchal authority on which Mr. B. insists.

Conflating the physical with the psychological as he does earlier in handling his sister, Mr. B. sees a threat to his emotional as well as physical primacy in his wife's life should she devote her body to anyone other than himself, even nonsexually. "[W]hen I am at home," Mr. B. pronounces, "even a son and heir, so jealous am I of your affections, shall not be my rival in them . . ." (2: 234). The body's processes in a sense *are* the woman's emotional life. Maternal nursing of an infant is therefore incompatible with wifely nurturing of a husband. Earlier, Mr. B. had praised the "innocent pleasures that [he] now hourly taste[s]" through contact with Pamela's virtue (2: 2). Now, angry that Pamela persists in wanting to suckle her child, Mr. B. warns her not to "*wean* me from that love *to* you, and admiration of you, which hitherto has been rather increasing than otherwise as your merit, and regard for me have increased" (2: 235; original italics).

For Pamela, however, nursing is "the *natural*" and therefore "*divine duty*" of a mother (2: 233; original italics). In this argument, a woman's body is the vehicle of duties and responsibilities beyond wifely submission. Mr. B. rejoins that even if "a wife thinks a thing her duty to do, which her husband does not approve, he can dispense with her performing it, and no sin shall lie at her door" (2: 206). This calls into question not only Pamela's moral superiority but her moral existence itself. As Pamela asks, "[H]ow can a husband have power to discharge a divine duty? As great as a wife's obligation to obey her husband, . . . it ought not to interfere with what one takes to be a superior duty" (2: 233). During Mr. B.'s protracted attempts to seduce Pamela, the servant girl had opposed his class-based authority on

religious grounds. But a husband's powers excel even a master's; his domestic authority overrides what Pamela believes to be a biblical injunction. This shift neatly illustrates Armstrong's thesis that affective personal relationships and a domestic code of morality possess an internal coercive power beyond even the political power of rank and wealth.

Although he dismisses the reality of Pamela's spiritual life and refuses to listen to her arguments supporting her own point of view, Mr. B. claims that he forbids nursing largely because his "chief delight in [Pamela] is for the beauties of [her] mind" (2: 233). He expects her to be his "instructress" in "virtue and piety," just as she is his "scholar" in "French and Latin" (2: 233-34). Yet by forcing Pamela to accept his own moral precepts, as he does in the nursing issue, Mr. B. can expect Pamela's moral monitorship to be a regurgitation of his own ideas. After all, Mr. B. instructs Pamela (2: 235, 422), supplies her with her reading materials (2: 378), and later directs her to record her own responses to one of these readings, Locke's *Treatise on Education*. She does so in a book with one blank page for each written one, the blanks being reserved for Mr. B.'s "alterations and corrections" of her tentative opinions (2: 240).⁶

Accepting her mental as well as her physical food from Mr. B. leads Pamela increasingly to assimilate Mr. B.'s initially distasteful view of the female body. Her own comments on nursing eventually show a disgust similar to his. It is "the greatest mischief" when a nurse "cram[s] and stuff[s] [a baby's] little bowels, till ready to burst." This is antinourishment: the nurse wakes a child from "nourishing sleep" and forces upon it a "breast" that turns "its nutriment . . . to repletion, and bad humours!" (2: 382). Although these attacks on unqualified nurses might imply a preference for maternal breast-feeding, mothers are superior to nurses not because they are more skilled, but because they are less physical than nurses. Pamela's last lament over Mr. B.'s veto of her suckling comes when her son falls ill with smallpox. She suspects that "the nurse's constitution is too hale and rich for the dear baby" (2: 340) and thus may have rendered him susceptible to disease. Pamela, meanwhile, can defy even smallpox because she is "living very low, and ha[s] taken proper precautions by bleeding" (2: 340). The chastened and straitened female body apparently can provide safety and nurture, while the abundantly fecund female body cannot.

Reserving Pamela's body for himself, Mr. B. tries to placate Pamela by substituting her "direction and superintendence" of the nursery (2: 234) for physical nurturance of her children. Her direction, however, originates with him. When she believes that Mr. B.'s involvement

with another woman may threaten her marriage, Pamela pleads for the "indulgence" of being allowed to keep Mr. B.'s children by vowing that she will "digest" "all the books of education" (2: 320)—books that Mr. B. himself had given her. His authorities will become hers, and her authority will subsist only at his discretion. Once the marriage has been reestablished, we are given Pamela's ruminations in a series of interpolated texts: the response to Locke that she writes at Mr. B.'s request, an exemplary story that she unfolds for an audience of young ladies, and two didactic "nursery tales" representative of those by which she teaches Mr. B.'s children. In each case these texts recapitulate Mr. B.'s formulae for patriarchal authority.

Thus, although the latter part of the volume consists largely of Pamela's narrations and commentaries, Pamela loses her independent voice, becoming instead a mouthpiece for Mr. B. and an apologist for women's circumscribed roles. Earlier Mr. B. has dictated a series of marital instructions designed to reinforce Pamela's "humility . . . [and] submission" as wife and his own "pride" as husband (2: 44). Pamela continues the same gender division of attributes when she identifies her son's self-assertive "spirit" with his resemblance to "papa" and the child's tears of self-reproachful submission with his resemblance to "mamma" (2: 412). Declaring that only the father should decree corporal punishment for his children, Pamela protests that no child could "dispute his authority to punish, from whom he receives and expects all the good things of his life" (2: 410), the same rationale that justifies wifely compliance. But while Mr. B.'s sons must endure the subordination of childhood, they can grow into the powerful role that their father models for them. Daughters, on the other hand, must move from the "true dignity" of maidenhood to the "state of humiliation" that is women's "married state" (2: 476), a state whose only adult alternative appears to be the grisly dooms meted out to erring women in one of Pamela's allegorical narratives. Pamela's expression of these sentiments is ironic, for the teaching of such abstractions is precisely what Mr. B. has offered her as a compensation for being forbidden breast-feeding. Yet Pamela's voice actually weakens as she assumes the position of instructress and monitor that Mr. B. had recommended for her nursery role. From controlling Pamela's nutritive processes, Mr. B. has moved to controlling her sense of the possibilities for female selfhood.

2

Clarissa provides a more forceful example of the breast-feeding motif. Lovelace drugs and rapes *Clarissa* not so much for orgasmic

satisfaction, but because he believes that physical subjugation will transform her into the creature of his sexual daydreams. This creature is doubly a source of nourishment, of milk for his (male) children and of emotional fodder for his own voracious ego. Thus Lovelace imagines Clarissa with

a twin Lovelace at each charming breast, drawing from it his first sustenance; the pious task, for physical reasons, continued for one month and no more!

I now, methinks, behold this most charming of women in this sweet office: her conscious eye now dropped on one, now on the other, with a sigh of maternal tenderness; and then raised up to my delighted eye, full of wishes, for the sake of the pretty varlets, and for her own sake, that I would deign to legitimate; that I would condescend to put on the nuptial fetters. (2: 477)

Lovelace delights in the same vision that had disgusted Mr. B., because the same bodily function that had signified Pamela's rebellion to Mr. B. represents, to Lovelace, Clarissa's emotional dependence as well as her sexual servitude. Lovelace's solipsism makes him unable to distinguish his imagined sons from himself, so that their suckling becomes his possession of Clarissa's body. In fact, this fantasy directly follows an encounter in which Lovelace, uncovering Clarissa's bosom, had attempted to "[press] with [his] burning lips the charmingest breast that ever [his] ravished eyes beheld" (2: 476). The infantile feeding on Clarissa's milk represents, for Lovelace, another version of his own sexual appetite for Clarissa's body, and both types of feeding have as their ultimate target what Lovelace defines as Clarissa's culpable "pride" (2: 477).⁷ Incensed that Clarissa has rebuffed his mouthing of her breasts, Lovelace asks, "[O]ught not that pride to be punished?" (2: 477). His immediate reference is to his own plans to deflower her, but breast-feeding here is also punitive. This association of both sexual intercourse and suckling with women's degradation is inevitable since Lovelace treats sexual experience as a humiliation of women and yet believes that almost every physical experience they have is in some way sexual.⁸

Lovelace sees Clarissa as proud because she considers her body made for herself (and ultimately for God). As will be seen below, he reads women's natural functions as proof that women's ultimate purpose is to serve men's desires. Eating, digesting (or not digesting), suckling—even falling ill: these are not processes of an autonomous

body, but indications of sexual dependence. Lovelace thinks his cousin Charlotte complains of "a stomach disorder" because she's "a single woman" and therefore "dreary" and "desolate" (2: 403). But no "vapours . . . would be known" if Lovelace's scheme of annual marriages assured all women (as well as men) perpetual sexual excitement and satisfaction (3: 182). Even the appetite for food is important because it represents the process of sexual appetite. A "captivated lady . . . will even refuse her sustenance for some time, *especially if . . . she thinks she gives you concern by her refusal*. But then the stomach of the dear sullen one will soon return"; she "comes to eat and drink, to oblige you: . . . her exclamations will, in the next place, be turned into blandishments . . . She will draw you to her, instead of pushing you from her" (2: 246; my italics). Masculine attention here becomes women's real nourishment, the only reason for which they engage in the parallel process of physical sustenance.

Understanding this metaphor helps to explain the self-starvation with which Clarissa responds to Lovelace's violence. After all, the rape whereby Lovelace hopes to establish Clarissa's sexual desire is facilitated by an earlier appeal to a more basic physical urge: thirst. The decisive moment in Clarissa's violation comes when she is "made to drink two dishes [of tea] with milk" (3: 368). The "London milk" (3: 368) that gives Mrs. Sinclair's tea its suspicious flavor is actually the soporific that leaves Clarissa "in a manner dead" (4: 416), a suitable piece of meat for the "hungry maw" of the tigerish Lovelace (3: 206). Later, Clarissa "refuses to repeat that physical act which . . . led to violation" (Castle, *Clarissa's Ciphers* 125) and hence starves herself to death in paradoxical self-defense. Whereas Lovelace had denied autonomy to women on the grounds of their supposed domination by bodily appetites, Clarissa uses her dying body both to signal her transcendence of appetite and to achieve unprecedented self-definition. The problem remains, however, that she cannot imagine a way to incorporate natural functions into this self-definition.

Surviving rape only subjects Clarissa to concerted pressure to marry her rapist, pressure which she rejects as misplaced because her certainty of her impending death makes any thought of marriage, much less marriage to Lovelace, inappropriate. Yet although "emaciated" (4: 332) and, according to the doctor, needing nourishment more than medicine, Clarissa denies the guilt of suicide (4: 13). Her behavior, she claims, is inevitable in a world that cannot sustain her: "Nothing you call nourishing will stay on my stomach" (4: 13). Her refusal to feed herself counters Lovelace's belief that even the worst-treated women always eventually will eat in order that they themselves

may serve as sexual "food." Clarissa, however, will not be food in any sense. This is true even literally, since during starvation breast milk dries up. (If one accepts Linda Kauffman's surmise that Clarissa may be pregnant at the time of her death [150], the ironic disjuncture from Lovelace's vision intensifies.)

Raymond Hilliard argues that Clarissa's anorexic death is a socially sanctioned sacrifice, in which Clarissa shows "avid complicity" (1092) in patriarchal repression and female self-sacrifice. "In starving herself," Hilliard explains, "Clarissa is identifying both with the patriarchal aggressors and with her mother" (1093), the downtrodden servant of masculine authority. Yet during the long process of her dying, Clarissa turns away from various roles a male-dominated society attempts to prescribe for her. Although "an angel" (4: 138), Clarissa rejects the ministering role by refusing to marry Lovelace even after he appeals to her charity (4: 90-91). In fact, she refuses to marry at all, even when an unexceptionable suitor offers himself (4: 204-05), and puts off—thereby, as she well knows, refusing—an exile as a penitent Magdalene, the role that her family wishes to impose on her (4: 190). "I am nobody's," she writes in her will (4: 416), and while the statement is partially an admission of tragic isolation (nobody is obligated to provide for her), it is also a declaration of radical independence (there is nobody whose claims upon her she is undeniably obligated to fulfill). Clarissa's declaration defies Lovelace's earlier assertion that independence is an impossibility for women (3: 24). In her self-declared freedom, Clarissa rejects even the claims of affection that are supposed to be paramount with domestic women. When friends, from Belford to Anna Howe, plead with Clarissa to live for *their* sakes (4: 287), Clarissa warns that she must now be loved "with a weaning love" (3: 479). Clarissa can urge this only because she has achieved detachment herself. One of the funerary symbols with which she decorates her coffin illustrates this detachment in both its self-sufficiency and its connection with mortality. The decoration is that of a serpent with its tail in its mouth: an emblem of the self-consuming—but therefore also the self-nourishing—individual (4: 257).

Clarissa will not seek her satisfaction through others nor will she be the source of others' satisfaction; rather she will generate a book to establish the reality of her personhood against Lovelace's reductionist distortions. William Beatty Warner does not read Clarissa's "clarity of meaning" as positively as I do, but he nonetheless justly emphasizes the importance of Clarissa's originating "the book that will guarantee her triumph" (76). That triumph is not only over Lovelace's greed for her flesh, but over all attempts to seize her spirit. Her "dying words,"

as Margaret Doody reminds us, are "a declaration of independence from society" (179). For Clarissa, breaking free from social definitions of womanhood means insisting that she is what she says she is, not what people believe to be inherent in the female body. In a sense, then, this is a triumph over Lovelace's attempt to naturalize women's contingency. Yet Clarissa recognizes the artifice behind Lovelace's "nature" only to realize that his conception of the natural is shared in less flamboyant fashion by the entire culture. Well before falling into Lovelace's hands, Clarissa had declared her preference for the single life, perhaps the closest that a woman could come at that time to living for herself. Yet as Ellen Pollak points out, the eighteenth century so condemned spinsterhood that it "represented the antithesis of both perfection and virtue" (58). Even physically, the spinster "was an embodiment of deformity and decay" (58). No longer virginal, determined not to marry, deprived of the financial and emotional supports that might have made a single life viable, Clarissa cannot successfully oppose society as a whole. She dies, one might say, because there is nothing else for her to do with her body in a world that denies it a place.

3

In *Sir Charles Grandison*, the breast-feeding motif appears once again, perhaps introduced this time in an attempt to resolve male-female tensions left vibrating in earlier books. This most cheerful of Richardson's novels celebrates the "natural passion" of heterosexual love (1: 303) as a means of reconciliation rather than opposition. Yet the peaceful family life that serves as this book's model of earthly paradise is obtainable only when all parties adopt their "natural" roles—no matter how uncongenial they may find them. Thus the witty Charlotte Grandison almost shatters the general idyll by refusing to be Lord G.'s deferential helpmeet, even after marrying him. Charlotte believes that her cleverness exempts her from the domestic role while justifying her self-gratification. Sitting down to eat while her companions are practicing protocol, she declares, "Hang ceremony, . . . let slower souls compliment: And taking some muffin, 'I'll have breakfasted before these *Pray madams*, and *Pray my dears* are seated'" (1: 203). She wishes to maintain this same self-definition in marriage, telling her bridegroom on the way to the altar, "You don't know what you are about, man. I expect to have all my way: Remember that's one of my articles before marriage" (2: 340).

Lord G., however, is not content to allow Charlotte "all [her] way," even though he is helpless before her raillery. He only gains a sense of mastery when he finds a way to disregard her conception of herself

and to formulate his own, based entirely on her physical act of breast-feeding their infant.⁹ Charlotte, unlike Pamela, decides to breast-feed without even consulting her husband, thus continuing to bypass patriarchal authority. Lord G., however, having surprised Charlotte in the act (3: 402), immediately announces his new sense that his wife is now as accessible to him as she is to their infant. No longer overawed by the woman who previously had repelled physical encroachments, he "devour[s] first one of [her] hands, then the other" (3: 403) with kisses. This husband responds with delight rather than with Lovelace's sadistic sense of mastery or with Mr. B.'s disgusted jealousy, yet he resembles the other men in interpreting the physical function as defining the woman's entire self in terms of his desire for her. To him, the physical act of breast-feeding in itself means that Charlotte is a loving and a feminine (i.e., submissive and domestic) woman. He thus provides one example of an attitude that persists into the twentieth century. Like one modern writer on suckling, he sees "the flowing of the milk [as] a wholistic bodily metaphor for maternal *caritas*" (Demetrakopoulos 432) through which the female body demonstrates that "the feminine principle" is "the giving of love" (441).¹⁰ For Lord G., "understanding" that Charlotte is a nurturing woman means negating her intimidating qualities. Vowing his gratitude, Lord G. declares, "Never, never more shall it be in your *power* to make me so far forget myself, as to be angry!" (3: 403; original italics).

His declaration is ambiguous, since Charlotte's ability to provoke through her sauciness has always been an essential part of her identity. A Charlotte without this power is a different woman, proof indeed that once married there is "no such person as Charlotte Grandison" (2: 391). She acquiesces in Lord G.'s reading of her identity when she accepts his assumption that breast-feeding of itself banishes her "roguery" and reveals how "dear" Lord G. is to her (3: 403-04). Her words will no longer matter: "[E]very thing [she] say[s] . . . will [Lord G.] take for a favour" (3: 403), now that her body has shown her to be a true domestic woman.

Charlotte attains domestic femininity, however, through instruction not only in what her sentiments should be, but in how her body itself contains and reveals those sentiments. In her case, as in Pamela's and Clarissa's, biology becomes destiny as the body becomes the vehicle of a meaning that defines the entire self.

Although the spread of domestic fiction and its ideal of womanhood established new criteria for judging "the household as a purely relational system . . . that binds people together by forms of affection," the body does not disappear from view along with "labor . . .

[and the] need for economic survival" (Armstrong 88). Rather, the view of the body is among those conceptual constructions that naturalize preexisting social structures. In this process, refusing to read the female body as erotic no more erases that body than does seeing—and treating—it as exclusively sexual, although both readings simplify corporality by disregarding at least one of its possibilities. In either reading, the body remains subject to interpretations applied to the entire woman—and to all women. By thus essentializing womanhood, these interpretations help "explain" why social power remains with some rather than with others—including, of course, those others inhabiting actual female bodies.

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NOTES

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¹Page references are to the Everyman's Library editions of *Pamela* and *Clarissa* and the World's Classics-Oxford edition of *Sir Charles Grandison*. For the sake of simplicity, consistency, and readability, single, or extra, quotation marks are not used where there is no change of speaker within a quoted passage.

²Richardson's reliance on the doctrines of conduct-book authors has been noted frequently and documented carefully in Katherine Hornbeak's and Sylvia Kasey Marks's studies.

³Despite the eighteenth-century interest in breast-feeding, modern critics have not devoted much attention to this issue even when dealing with related topics. Dolores Peters's valuable study of Pamela's experience of pregnancy and Robert Erickson's examination of midwifery in Richardson do not include suckling in their treatments. Perhaps the topic is gaining favor, however: Ruth Perry's excellent "Colonizing the Breast: Sexuality and Maternity in Eighteenth-Century England" appeared while this essay was being prepared for press. Drawing upon conduct-books, medical tracts, and novels, Perry argues forcefully that the eighteenth-century glorification of maternal suckling was a way to deny women's sexuality and a "colonization of the female body for domestic life" (208).

⁴Judith Laurence-Anderson, in examining the conditions of servant life in the eighteenth century, forcibly reminds us how extraordinary such defiance is.

⁵The issue of mastery explains the apparent inconsistency of both Lovelace and Mr. B.—otherwise quite different in their attitudes to the idea of breast-feeding—allowing one month of the practice. In Mr. B.'s case, the insignificant concession emphasizes the firmness with which he vetoes sustained maternal nurture; in Lovelace's case, the time limit suggests his own sexual hunger for Clarissa, a hunger stimulated by the idea of breast-feeding. The two men, far apart in their rhetorical treatments of the issue, are ironically close in their concentration on their own wills.

⁶Lois Chaber argues that Pamela (probably as well as Richardson) misreads Locke in commenting on him. Sheryl O'Donnell adds another layer of interest to Richardson's use of Locke through her examination of the way in which Locke's "empiricism

blurred, but did not erase, patriarchal notions of women as highly venerated inferior beings" (152).

⁷Obviously, this incident—in fact, *Clarissa* in its entirety—is ripe for psychoanalytic readings. Raymond Hilliard explores the novel's Freudian riches, while Katherine Cummings offers a Lacanian approach. Terry Castle discusses Pamela's story as one of Freudian adaptation to female "castration" in "P/B: Pamela as Sexual Fiction." Gerald Levin and Maurice Funke apply less rigorous models in their respective books.

⁸There is another aspect to this image of the female body as nutritive source: Raymond Hilliard has documented Lovelace's association with cannibalism. But while cannibalism assumes a human victim, Lovelace himself consistently discusses women as animal flesh: food that people traditionally feel free to eat without experiencing guilt. He imagines women, in fact, not only as food (2: 147, 337; *passim*) but as food that *desires* consumption (2: 209). Lovelace even reverses accepted human/animal roles by wishing to exempt animals from the demands of human hunger, at the same time that he legitimizes women's sexual victimization as just punishment of them for their cook's function. By distinguishing between the gourmet's cruel and ignoble appetites and his own valorized sexual desires (2: 248), Lovelace suggests that an appetite that requires female suffering for its satisfaction is *more* innocent than one that necessitates animal pain. Eira Patnaik's "The Succulent Gender: Eat Her Softly" provides a capsule history of images of the female body as eager-to-be-eaten food.

⁹Elaine Moon notes the importance of child-bearing for the "diminution" of spirit not only in Charlotte, but also Pamela, Mrs. Harlowe, and (potentially) in Anna Howe (32).

¹⁰This attitude toward breast-feeding has its own history and provides one of the few instances when the female body has been granted a profound and positive moral significance, as Marina Warner, Marjorie Stone, and Stephanie Demetrakopoulos show in their different studies. Problems arise, of course, when the spiritual implications of this image are assigned exclusively to women, operating as an essentializing metaphor to define female selfhood, rather than applying across gender categories.

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