

Letter Writing and the Rise of the Novel:
The Epistolary Literacy of Jane Johnson and Samuel Richardson

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In his widely known study of the novel, first published in 1957, Ian Watt linked the rise of the genre to the emergence of a middling-sort reading public.¹ This new audience lacked formal education but had time and money to devote to literary activities. Women played a prominent role as consumers of printed texts, especially in urban settings. Watt's new readers were just one element of a larger thesis that relied on social and economic factors and the rise of individualism to account for a realistic type of writing that originated in England during the first half of the eighteenth century. Watt's arguments have been challenged over the last fifty years by writers who have revitalized approaches to the novel, including Catherine Gallagher, J. Paul Hunter, Paula McDowell, Michael McKeon, John Richetti, Patricia Meyer Spacks, Janet Todd, and William Warner.² Watt's ideas, they maintain, were too Anglo-centric, dismissive of writings by women and minor authors, neglectful of links to earlier types of literature, and too rigid in their stress on realism. Yet Hunter called Watt's "then defiant act of attributing creative power to readers...his most important and...enduring contribution."³

It is to Watt's notion of a creative reader that this chapter now turns. We will see how an untrained provincial woman read, wrote, and interacted with eighteenth-century texts. I examine "the rise of the novel" in light of a cultural category that I call "epistolary literacy,"— a dynamic set of practices that involves letter writing, reading, interpretation, and response by networks of individuals with shared conventions and norms. Messages are received and sent regularly by writers, who are at ease with handling a quill pen. Epistolary literacy provides a narrative template to lay over random events and gives order and meaning to a writer's life. A stage in a broad spectrum of literacy, it lies midway between mere name signing and the Latin epistles of males trained in the classics.⁴

Consideration of this set of practices provokes several questions: How did new readers and writers develop literary expertise? How did they respond to and affect the mainstream world of letters, and for what ends? Can we identify patterns, issues, and strategies that helped them to

develop a culture based on reading novels and other secular material? Answers to these questions are suggested by analyzing the epistolary practices of a provincial reader, Jane Johnson (1706–1759), the wife of Woolsey Johnson (1696–1756), vicar of Olney, Buckinghamshire,⁵ in relationship to the epistolary writings of Samuel Richardson (1689–1761). Though we know that provincial readers were increasingly connected to the London book market, they rarely occupy center stage.⁶ Johnson’s story is therefore particularly important. The recent discovery of the Johnson’s family papers makes this detailed study possible.⁷

In this article I integrate Johnson’s personal writings with historical sources. Since both reading and writing records survive, full-text searchable databases can be used to uncover how she incorporated extracts from her reading into her writing.⁸ Analyzing these records and referring to these databases, I show how Johnson interacts with the wider world of letters, especially the works of Richardson. We will see how a woman without formal education constructs a distinctive literary world that lies midway between popular and elite culture. Ironically, she strives for salvation and right conduct by reading, and copying fragments from secular texts.⁹ When we consider Johnson’s sources, we start to understand the influence of London’s booming commercial marketplace. Grub Street’s translations of classics, miscellanies, and other literary shortcuts are all part of her library.¹⁰

Johnson is able to construct her literary world because she possesses epistolary literacy – a skill that Samuel Richardson will manipulate to his advantage. Once functional needs are met, letter writing helps writers like Johnson fulfill cultural aspirations. Her epistolary skills thus bring her to a higher form of literacy, in which letters are constructed in an imaginative, or literary, way. Critics accustomed to examining works of high culture may question the “literariness” of Johnson’s work, for it is as mundane in some respects as the epistolary literacy that underpins it. Yet her writings reveal the practices of untrained readers, which are usually hidden from view.

Epistolary literacy provides a new way to measure reading and writing skills.¹¹ I suggest that its possession is a key criterion for inclusion in the “middling sort”-- a group usually defined by wealth, status, occupation, or values by social and economic historians.] Jane’s tale is only one of many “middling-sort” narratives, for the term may refer to a range of people from wealthy merchants to artisans with little time for reading and writing.¹² Yet Johnson is representative of upper middling-sort women, who are below the level of gentry and are either self-taught or educated in the home. These provincial women are united by their possession of reading and writing skills, access to printed materials, and enjoyment of poetry and prose. As they learn new

skills and adapt to intellectual stimuli, their literary aspirations grow. Johnson's case, I believe, is a telling one that sheds light on cultural practices and values. In addition, a substantial body of recent work on women writers confirms many of the patterns and strategies found in this study.¹³

Epistolary literacy is, of course, linked to larger social, economic, and cultural changes: the expansion of publishing, libraries, readers, and leisure; the emergence of women as authors; shifts in the commercial print marketplace; and the changing relationship between popular and elite culture. I have argued elsewhere that by the late seventeenth century a culture of literacy was developing in England through the practice of letter writing—a development overlooked in most modern scholarship. At this time, the letter assumed new functions, and solitary meditations began to be replaced with writing based on personal exchange. Once the Civil War ended, the Post Office could at last develop and a boom in mail service led to a shift in the way people communicated with each other. Moreover after the Restoration, higher levels of literacy and wealth created a vast nation of letter writers¹⁴ We can track the rise of epistolary literacy quantitatively in expanding postal services and statistics, and in the presence of letters in every genre. In addition, massive collections of unpublished letters in local record offices show that letter writing had become indispensable to non-elite writers, from merchants to paupers.¹⁵ Qualitative progress can be observed in family correspondence, as we see untrained writers struggling to write, improving visibly, then passing their skill to the next generation, usually at a higher level.

The joy reaped from the possession of epistolary literacy is evident in the Johnson papers. Johnson and her correspondents yearn for more time to indulge in epistolary pursuits. "I could write forever," notes Ann Ingram, "on the subject of my friendship for you."¹⁶ Because letter writing was so important, some writers kept monthly records of letters sent and received.¹⁷ Little epistolary events are noted with pleasure. Anne Smythe, for example, creates original poetry as she falls asleep, and tries to reconstruct it in the morning so that she can send it to Johnson in a letter. Johnson and her friends can hardly wait to discuss the reading and writing that has become thrillingly central to their lives.¹⁸ They glean models from novels, travel writings, periodicals, and printed collections, as well as letters sent and received. Sad events also shape epistolary discourse. A close friend writes a farewell sonnet in a letter at the time of his death. Of course the Johnsons learn about both the death and the sonnet in yet another letter.

The ordinary act of letter writing underpins Johnson's literary pursuits. In fact her epistolary way of thinking shapes all of her poetry and prose. She uses her writing to examine the meaning of her life and to confront its problems. But letter writing is also a crucial training ground for entering the mainstream world of letters—a world in which Samuel Richardson is a central figure.

Richardson, meanwhile, is aware of his readers' epistolary literacy and shares Johnson's belief in its importance. In his novels he describes people like her, busily exchanging letters. His stories are written "to the moment" in an epistolary format, a technique with a long history used in a wide range of genres.¹⁹ Of course, epistolary writing had already flooded the market in periodicals, newspapers, pamphlets, and especially romances, often from France.²⁰ Richardson's adoption of the epistolary format is hardly exceptional, but we must look closely at exactly how he used it and why he chose it at this specific historical moment.

Richardson's middle-class background and early life offer some clues. The son of a joiner, he became a printer. As a tradesman, he was therefore an outsider on the fringe of the polite society he described.²¹ Like Johnson, he was largely self-taught, with little formal education—merely a smattering of classics in translation and scant time for reading.²² Yet he had unique advantages. He was an insider and an expert on the London print marketplace, where writers, booksellers, and his fellow printers were striving to make a profit. He observed what people were writing, reading, and, most importantly, buying. He noticed that the letter was increasingly becoming the most common vehicle for expressing everyday thoughts. All around him, people were telling little stories about their lives by writing letters. Unsurprisingly, one of his early publishing ventures was a collection of letters by Sir Thomas Roe.²³

After he achieved fame, he was keen to stress that his childhood was marked by epistolary activities. He claimed to have written love letters for illiterate school friends and sent letters of advice.²⁴ An early work, The Apprentice's Vade Mecum (1733), is an expansion of a letter to his nephew.²⁵ In 1739, two astute commercial booksellers, John Osborn Sr. and Charles Rivington, commissioned him to write an epistolary manual. He sensed that people would buy and enjoy a guide to letter writing – a commonplace yet exciting activity for those newly literate. He also knew from his own experience that many middle-class readers needed to know how to write properly. His goal, however, will be broader than mere instruction: "Will it be any Harm," he asked his publishers, "in a Piece you want to be written so low, if we should instruct them how they should think and act in common cases, as well as indite?"²⁶ He was positioning himself as an

author with an eye to the market—one who was intensely aware of moral debates about the dangers of non-elite reading.

Drawing on John Hill's The Young Secretary's Guide (1734), Richardson composed model letters for his Letters Written to and for Particular Friends, on the Most Important Occasions (1741). They are written in the form of mini-narratives about ordinary events. One is from a young servant girl in danger of amorous advances from her master. This letter gave Richardson an idea for a book, and he unexpectedly created Pamela within two months, writing at a furious pace.²⁷ Richardson, I argue, observed the central place of letter writing in the way people communicated at that moment. To meet the needs of a widespread and expanding audience, he used the familiar methodology of epistolary writing. His earnest moralizing, however, distanced his work from dangerous romances. This would, he believed, reduce anxiety about the deleterious effects of reading for pious women like Jane Johnson.²⁸

As is well known, Richardson's novels center around the experience of letter writing. His heroines in Pamela (1741) and Clarissa (1748) tell epistolary tales of female virtue in distress.²⁹ Pamela, a household servant, staunchly defends her chastity and is rewarded by marrying her master. Clarissa, on the other hand, is raped by her lover and abandoned by her family. Rather than sacrifice her virtue, she chooses death, a conclusion that caused heartbreak to some readers. Pamela created a media sensation. "[A]t Ranelagh," notes the editor of Richardson's correspondence, "it was usual for ladies to hold up the volumes of Pamela to one another, to shew they had got the book that every one was talking of."³⁰ The storm of response to Clarissa was even greater, with international impact.

One explanation for this extraordinary furor, I suggest, lies in Richardson's awareness, encouragement, and manipulation of his readers' epistolary literacy. Unlike previous writers of epistolary fiction, Richardson consciously encouraged readers to engage with him in a dialogue about his work. This invitation is in keeping with the way he structured his texts. His epistolary method offers multiple points of view and latitude for varied interpretations, with little sense of closure. Moreover, the serial format and his use of "cliffhangers" gave Richardson time to respond to his readers. As his novels rolled off the press in edition after edition, he asked readers for comments, material for prefaces, alternate versions of plots, and original letters appropriate to his fictional characters. Many willingly complied, especially women,³¹ yet only readers with epistolary literacy could participate in this dialogue. Though he said that he depended on readers for inspiration, however, few of their suggestions were incorporated. In fact, he constantly invited,

though rarely responded to, their suggested revisions.³² This technique drew his audience into networks of interpretation. At the same time Richardson maintained strict control over his texts. He hoped he would eventually convince readers to read in ways that he chose—ways that would lead to moral regeneration.

The desire to reform reading was accompanied by an energetic struggle to sell books in a competitive market. Richardson was self-conscious about both motives, and they existed in tandem. To sell his books, he employed techniques that resemble modern-day marketing strategies—for example, Pamela was available for purchase along with fans and other memorabilia. Rival authors quickly lept into the fray with anti-Richardson fiction, as well as plays, an opera, and public endorsements or criticisms. Richardson responded with sequels, dedications, letters of advertisement, and postscripts.³³ The media blitz was even more intense with the publication of Clarissa and its many editions, separate spin-offs, and commentary, both pro and con. Into his ever-changing texts he integrated extratextual material such as tables, indexes, and abstracts of letters, revisions, restored passages marked by tiny dots, and indexed collections of moral sentiments and meditations.³⁴ His intention, he noted, was to avoid misreadings and to assure every reader's "[u]nderstanding of it, in the Way I chose to have it understood."³⁵ Richardson required an audience with epistolary literacy, cultural aspirations, and literary skills, both to interpret his texts and to buy each sequel. Yet his motives were not just commercial; they also embraced a moral project. While he borrowed and profited from earlier romance narratives, he carefully distinguished his own work from this tradition. In fact his goal was not only to reform reading practices, but to reform lives as well.. In doing so, Richardson appealed to the creative power of the reader and, as we shall see, Johnson took the bait. Studying her epistolary archive shows that he achieved both goals: she read his books, created her own Clarissa story, and questioned her society's morality as she did so.

As we shall see, the relationship between reader and novelist was a two-way street. Johnson and others like her did not just absorb novels: they had their own important impact on a literary culture that extended deep into the provincial world. As we analyze Johnson's epistolary literacy, we will observe the ties that bind Johnson to the novelist in both directions—Richardson's influences on her work and her influence on his.

The Johnson archive in the Bodleian Library tells the story of a clerical family in Buckinghamshire, Lincolnshire, the Midlands, London, and Bath, over a two-hundred-year period. Here I focus on Jane

Johnson, the wife Woolsey Johnson, who was the vicar of Olney from 1735 to 1753. In addition to written records, some material artifacts miraculously survive. In the 1740s, Johnson created a homemade nursery library, which she used to teach her children how to read. It may be found in its original box in the Lilly Library at the University of Indiana. Historians of education have exhibited and analyzed her teaching kit, which contains 438 pieces: 78 word chips; two hand-lettered books, some with published illustrations; and various card series that teach the alphabet, syllable combinations, and the construction of sentences. The cards draw on everyday experience and traditional genres such as fables, street cries, and nursery rhymes.³⁶

In addition, delicate paper cutouts of flowers, the sun, and snowflakes come tumbling out of the archive. Two of the nicest of these cutouts are folded up in a note marked, “For My son George William Johnson When I am Dead, Jane Johnson.”³⁷ Birth records in pen and ink are carefully shaped into intertwined four-leaf clovers, while a handmade family pedigree graces two wooden boards.³⁸ The Bodleian Library has published a recently discovered work by Johnson, which she called “A very pretty story to tell Children when they are about five or six years of age” (1744). It is now considered the first fairytale written in English for children.³⁹ Since she wrote it in the aftermath of the publication of Pamela, we are not surprised to find similarities between it and Pamela’s “Specimen of Nursery Tales and Stories.”⁴⁰

The reading kit, artifacts, and fairytale offer evidence of the creative role played by mothers who were teaching reading and writing in the home. Morag Styles, who was instrumental in bringing the archive to light, and Evelyn Arizpe have shown how Jane educated her children. Their research suggests that other mothers were absorbed in practices of domestic literacy.⁴¹ Here I focus on Johnson’s adult reading and writing and her epistolary literacy, which has not received attention. Her manuscript notebook contains fair copies of what she considers to be her best work, including original prose, poetry, excerpts from books, and inspirational prayers. Another book, containing meditations, gave Johnson room to express her religious views, while her commonplace book reveals the way she read, copied, and quoted extracts from a broad range of reading. She inserted her own comments between these extracts, telling us how to distinguish her copied abstracts from her original thoughts: “All the Paragraphs marked thus + are my own.”⁴² The fact that Johnson dated and signed her name to every piece of work is important, since her female contemporaries were just starting to sign and publish their writings. In private papers, Johnson was able to assert authorship over a body of literary work.⁴³

Unfortunately, we know little about her early education.⁴⁴ She and her sister Lucy (d. 1731) were daughters of Richard Russell of Warwick (d. 1720) and Lucy Rainsford (d. 1752). Her mother came from a respectable London family, but little is known about her because she is not mentioned in family letters. Russell had started life as a “menial estate servant,” but he managed to buy land in Warwickshire, which the sisters eventually sold.⁴⁵ The Russells probably lived in London, where Jane’s future husband, Woolsey Johnson (1696–1756), a graduate of Clare College, Cambridge, served as curate of St. Andrew’s Holborn in the 1720s. Woolsey and Jane married in 1735. In the same year he was presented as vicar at Olney, where his father, William Johnson (1665–1736) owned the rectory tithes and advowson, but not the manor.⁴⁶

Jane and Woolsey lived comfortably in this market town and raised four children: Barbara (1738–1825), George William (1740–1814), Robert Augustus (1745–1799), and Charles Woolsey (1748–1828).⁴⁷ Olney lies in the northern corner of Buckinghamshire, fifty miles from the capital and close to the London Road.⁴⁸ Though William Legge, second Earl of Dartmouth (1731–1801), owned much of the land, most houses in town were freehold properties of artisans and small tradesmen.⁴⁹ Olney was noted for its bone lace and impoverished workers. The poet William Cowper called it “a . . . place inhabited chiefly by the half-starved and ragged of the earth.”⁵⁰ Johnson can see the lace dealers coming in and out of the slums of Olney, “deep in the abyss of Silver End,” behind a corner of the market place. There in closely packed thatched cottages, poverty-stricken women and children worked ten to twelve hours a day producing lace.⁵¹ Most of them, noted John Newton, from the “lowness of diet, the confinement of lace-making, and the want of exercise and fresh air, were nervous in different degrees, which gave a melancholy cast to their whole religious experience.”⁵²

Olney was also a center for English dissent and had been so since the sixteenth century.⁵³ By the time Woolsey became vicar, Philip Doddridge in Northampton and John Drake in nearby Yardley Hastings had already inspired Olney’s independent congregations.⁵⁴ Johnson must have been shocked when five hundred people, “including a great number of churchmen,” turned out to hear Drake and other dissenters.⁵⁵ Drake’s wife, Elizabeth, a presence to be reckoned with, helped her husband in his long career at Olney.⁵⁶ At the same time, there were early stirrings of Evangelicalism and Methodism in and around the town. In 1739, Woolsey denied the pulpit to George Whitefield (1714–1770), who was preaching in a field to about two thousand people. That night, Whitefield noted in

his journal: “Great numbers were assembled together. . . All, I really believe, felt, as well as heard, the Word, and one was so pricked to the heart, and convinced of sin, that I scarce saw the like instance.”⁵⁷

In 1753, Woolsey resigned his living in Olney. He planned to move to an estate that he had inherited at Witham-on the Hill in Lincolnshire.⁵⁸ This change of residence may have been prompted, in part, by intense competition from other ministers.⁵⁹ Church of England “incumbents were aware of, and regretted, the strength of dissent in the town,” notes D. Bruce Hindmarsh. “Johnson himself opposed local evangelical and dissenting activity vigorously.”⁶⁰ Woolsey certainly was not leaving on the winds of success. The Earl of Dartmouth supported an evangelical, Moses Browne (1704–1787), to succeed Johnson.⁶¹ In 1753, Woolsey inducted Browne as vicar at a salary of 60 pounds.⁶²

Browne, a former pen-cutter, became “one of the leading preachers of the Evangelical Party.”⁶³ His own successor, John Newton, remembered, with apparent bias, the rancor that greeted Browne: “The gentleman [Johnson] who gave Mr. Browne the living resided in the parish, and soon became his open enemy. . . Mr. Browne went through a great deal—was often abused to his face—put in the spiritual court.”⁶⁴ Before the family was able to leave, however, Woolsey suddenly died. Jane had “great disputes and squabbles” with Browne after her husband’s death.⁶⁵ As his wife, and then widow, she was in an untenable position. A comment in her commonplace book alludes to her unhappiness as she departed from Olney: “I made a strong proof of my Courage, made a Bold Stand against Vice, but my forces were weak & the Enemy soon got the better & drove me out of the Field. May Virtue for the future have a more powerful, & more successful Advocate.”⁶⁶ It is not surprising that she expresses these thoughts in writing. Like Richardson’s heroines and the real women around her, Johnson finds comfort by revealing her interior world on paper.

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Johnson modestly says little about her personal qualities, but her letters reveal an artistic, imaginative woman with a lively sense of humor who delighted in working with her hands. Three intense passions fill her life with joy. The first is her love of family and her delight in motherhood. She offers her children a domestic world filled with storytelling, poetry, and devoted affection. Second is her deep commitment to her Anglican faith, which is confirmed through the act of letter

writing. Jane's prominent position as the vicar's wife heightens her need to be exemplary. She tries to lead a virtuous life on earth and is concerned about her salvation. In contrast to some sterner Calvinist tenets, her religious views as expressed in her letters are cheerful and rational.⁶⁷

Johnson's third passion is her enjoyment of reading and writing. Her letters reveal a developing ability to use everyday language in constructed and allusive ways. In contrast to somber seventeenth-century diary writers, Johnson employs an animated conversational mode. But genteel letter writing is not a spontaneous art; it is achieved only by dedicated practice. As Johnson tells personal stories, she develops narrative skills. Then she transfers the narrative mode of letters into more difficult forms of writing.

Johnson used letter writing for two fundamental purposes. First, it was an entry point into a larger world of print culture that was spreading to the countryside. Though Johnson had access to a clergyman's library, she lacked academic training. Through letter writing she developed techniques needed for more complex forms of expression, such as the short story and poetry that relied on more sophisticated sources and conventions. Johnson's second motive for writing letters was to work out problems that she faced as a parent, wife, friend, and servant of God—that is, problems of hierarchy, authority, and obedience. The evidence for this claim lies in a group of themes that continually surface in her writing. In all of her work, Johnson asks the same questions—which are also at the center of Richardson's novels: How can a woman attain goodness in this world and salvation in the next? How can a woman work out her religious beliefs, encircled by nonconformists in a world riddled with inequality? How can a woman best express her values to family and friends? As she writes, Johnson constructs a moral perspective that she passes on in letters, initially to her children, then to other women, who provide a sympathetic network of listeners.

Before we turn to Johnson's letters, however, we must consider her reading. Innovative studies have provided a theoretical framework for investigating the history of reading. Case studies, however, have generally been concerned with elite rather than ordinary readers. In addition, the search for one overarching model has produced narratives of shifts from script to print, intensive to extensive reading, or state control to personal freedom.⁶⁸ Steven Zwicker has recently proposed another eighteenth-century model: a shift from the polemical humanist reader expressing himself actively in the margins of texts to the lonely, leisured, and passive reader. Yet this model does not seem to reflect a time of active practices, when people read aloud in family

circles. Nor does it describe a period when access to newspapers, periodicals, bookshops, and circulating libraries enhanced the social dimension of literary life.⁶⁹

Johnson's writing was informed by constant reading, through which she found both literary models and ideas for moral guidance. First she copied out passages and paraphrased them in her own words. Later she integrated them into poetry and prose.⁷⁰ A great deal of what Johnson read was in the form of letters, including those found in her favorite thriller, the eight-volume Turkish Spy. Other collections she read include Alexander Pope's Letters, Letters of the English Nation by a Jesuit, Persian Letters, and of course the fictional letters in Samuel Richardson's Clarissa, which I discuss in detail below.⁷¹ Like the novelist, Johnson was not well versed in classical languages. We see her taking shortcuts into history and literature by gleaning information from translations and more popular books, including facts and maxims that she copies from the Turkish Spy. Because of the book's popularity, William Warburton suggested that Richardson make Pamela "a plebian Turkish Spy," or Indian, who satirizes all the "follies and extravagances of high life."⁷²

The Turkish Spy is supposedly based on "real" letters, a device that Richardson also uses. Its readers enjoy the adventures of its Muslim hero and examine the hypocrisy of European states and their religions along the way.⁷³ Johnson used it to comment on her own world as she copied a quotation that begins, "This Western World lies drown'd in Wickedness." Then she notes in the margin: "This is the exact picture of Great Britain at this present time Anno Domini 1755. Pray God Grant my sons may escape the contagion, & live Virtuous in a nation flowing with...wicked practices. Amen."⁷⁴ This is one of many examples of Johnson's use of secular nonfiction to address moral problems.

Yet the primary purpose of her reading is to know God. "When I read, O Lord," she prays, "strengthen my memory, that I may always retain those Things that may well contribute to my increase in the Knowledge and Love of Thee."⁷⁵ The Psalms comfort her and apochryphal books provide stories. She consults The Psalm-Singer's Pocket Companion and makes copies of her favorite hymns.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, the most remarkable characteristic of Johnson's reading is the diversity and breadth of secular material. Though the extracts are heavily didactic, there is also room for bawdy jokes.⁷⁷ Still her favorite authors, which she helpfully lists, are entirely respectable:

The Books that are to be Read by All that would be Eloquent, Polite, Genteel & agreeable; Wise in this world, & Happy in the next; are the Bible, Homer, Milton, the Guardians, Spectators & Tatlers. These should be Read over & over again, & short Extracts Learn'd by Heart...these are the only Books necessary to be read for improvement, all others only for Diversion. Whoever follows this rule will think justly, & write & talk eloquently +.⁷⁸

Johnson's comment shows that she read for entertainment as well as moral instruction.⁷⁹ It also indicates that her desire for polite learning shaped her choice of reading. The marketplace provided her with abridged translations of the classics, which she used in her writing. Thus she knew Homer through the words of Pope. "Can any man of sense be tired with reading Homer?" she asks on two different occasions. Then she repeats the quotation that starts with this sentence in an original poem, but varies the fourth line.⁸⁰ Like the Spectator numbers she read, Johnson also quotes lengthy extracts from Milton,⁸¹ Horace,⁸² and Juvenal's satires,⁸³ which she then paraphrases in her own words.⁸⁴ Classical texts provide maxims about the battle between virtue and corruption.⁸⁵ Johnson's extract from Plutarch's Lives cites Aristotle, Plato, Demosthenes, and Theophrastus.⁸⁶ Like Richardson, Johnson probably did not read their works in the original languages, but she knew their place in literature, through works that "modernized" ancient authors.⁸⁷ Still, she also relishes more popular fare such as editions of Arabian Nights Entertainments and Aesop's Fables. Richardson would have approved of the latter, for he published his own edition of the Fables early in his career.⁸⁸

After The Turkish Spy, Johnson's most frequently consulted sources are the London periodicals—the Spectator, Guardian, and Tatler. By providing models of letters to and by the editors, they acknowledged and encouraged their readers' epistolary literacy. Letters, which comprise over half of the Spectator's 555 numbers, are an integral element -- one that invited reader participation.⁸⁹ This practice of course dates back to the 1690s in the pages of John Dunton's Athenian Mercury. His call for readers' questions to be answered by a club of "Athenians" cleverly sold issues, while it satisfied readers' aspirations to appear in print.⁹⁰ Yet the Spectator took this marketing tool to a higher plane. As it published readers' letters, it also discussed the process of letter writing, the distinctions and quality of submissions, and whether they were authentic or fictitious editorial creations. In the process, the Spectator created an

ongoing epistolary style manual. It also provided a venue for the publication of letters. These epistles had commercial value, for some that were submitted but never printed were published later.⁹¹ Early periodicals thus encouraged epistolary literacy, a technique that Richardson will adopt later.

Johnson's extracts from these periodicals and other commercial sources sit jumbled together on the pages of her notebook. They are likewise intermixed in her mind. As she composes her letters she is able to draw on a rich store of ideas. We are observing a literary development that yokes both popular and elite culture to epistolary literacy.

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Turning to Johnson's correspondence, we find lengthy epistles, some continued for as much as six leaves.⁹² A few are written in an easily legible hand, with the individual letters detached. Others, breathlessly dashed off in a careless manner, cover every bit of paper. Johnson's letters to her school-age children are creatively constructed to delight a child of a particular age and literacy. They demonstrate a threefold epistolary strategy: to teach letter-writing skills; to entertain; and to give moral and religious guidance—a strategy also addressed to adults in Richardson's novels, as we shall see. Sometimes she concentrates on writing techniques; other times she tells stories or includes original poems. To aid the moral development of her son Robert,⁹³ Johnson tells the story of King Solomon, who listens to his mother's advice and is made wise and rich.⁹⁴ Then she adds an original poem about happiness. Its last two lines also appear in a poem by Phineas Fletcher (1582–1650). Simple verses that can be remembered become an integral part of her letter. "Learn this by heart before you come home," she admonishes, and adds, "Oh! Robert Live for Ever." The latter exclamation is paraphrased from *Spectator* 537.⁹⁵ Her letters may appear to be spontaneous, but they are carefully constructed literary texts based on models found in her reading.

Johnson's epistolary literacy develops further when she writes to her female friends. She composes these letters not just to keep in touch, but also to solve problems that they face in common. Johnson's correspondence is propelled by questions about virtue and morality—questions that also absorb Richardson's heroines. As she works out answers, she sends them to friends in letters of advice.⁹⁶ They offer a gendered view of life, woman to woman. "Female

Virtues are of a Domestick turn,” she writes. “The Family is the proper province for private women to shine in.”⁹⁷ This idea is also prominent in Clarissa and Pamela.

There is good reason for making connections between Johnson’s letters to women and those that Richardson exchanged with intimate female friends. Though both Richardson and Johnson requested spontaneous epistolary outpourings from their correspondents, their own letters are constructed works marked by careful artifice.⁹⁸ Like Johnson, many of Richardson’s correspondents came from clerical families. Some of them, like Sarah Westcomb, Frances Grainger, and Margaret Dutton, were relatively untutored and without pretense to intellectual accomplishment, but they were eager to correspond. Others, such as Sarah Fielding, Jane Collier, Elizabeth Carter, and Hester Chapone, were themselves authors. Many of them were motivated by a deep piety.⁹⁹ Their letters provide insights into the epistolary literacy of the women that Richardson describes in his novels.

Once he became famous, his epistolary circle expanded to include more prominent women from the upper levels of the middling sort, such as Mary Delany, her sister Anne Dewes, and their friends. With their aristocratic connections, they served as cultural bridges between middling and elite circles.¹⁰⁰ Two sisters, Lady Dorothy Bradshaigh and Lady Elizabeth Echlin, corrected Richardson’s social blunders and suggested alternative endings to Clarissa.¹⁰¹ These women were not just consumers of literature but also providers of information about manners. Mrs. Delany was aware of what Richardson needed to hear from someone of her class. His “genteel characters,” she remarks, are “not so really polished as he thinks them to be.” Delany and her group have their own “pretensions to being part of ‘Society,’ though a society perhaps more intellectual than fashionable.”¹⁰² Like Johnson, they are anxious to participate in the grand project of interpreting novels. Their epistolary literacy makes this reciprocal interaction possible.

In different ways, both Richardson and Johnson depended on a circle of women correspondents. These exchanges offered the opportunity to work out common problems. Yet Johnson, like Richardson, was experimenting with the epistolary mode not just to give moral advice but also to tell stories. This format allowed Johnson to develop characters, experiment with descriptive language, and invoke pastoral and satirical modes of writing—in short, to develop literary expertise.

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The style and content of three epistolary examples that I consider in this section show Johnson confronting problems that she faces in *Olney*. They also reveal how she turns her letters into literary texts. In each composition, Jane is writing her life story, through real characters as well as imaginary ones, like those she finds in Richardson's epistolary novels. As she identifies with his heroines she engages with his texts in a way that Richardson has encouraged. At the start of this literary journey lies the ordinary letter. At the end, we see Johnson's presentation of her ideal self.

A letter to Mrs. Brompton of 1756 contains a satire about the court and its immoral attitudes to marriage. Johnson describes the process of letter writing by likening herself to a spider at the center of an epistolary network. "I Dreamed last night (Arachne like)," that "I was metamorphosed into a spider as big as the full moon, & sat upon a Throne in the Center of a Web of my own spinning, as Large as Lincolns-Inn-Fields." Johnson knows that in Greek myth, Arachne's pride in weaving led to her fall. Through imagery, she wittily inflates the size of the spider and its throne. The reader is left with a mental picture of a huge royal insect reigning over central London. This dream was a portent, she explains, that "I must this day spin out of my own Brains a Long Letter...w'ch w'n wrote & Read will be no more worth than a monstrous Spider's Web." A dream of a silkworm would have been "a far more fortunate prognostick" that I would make "this sheet of paper the better instead of the worse."¹⁰³ Johnson uses classical imagery in an imaginative way by juxtaposing the mean country spider with the elite silkworm.

In the second part of the letter, Johnson again employs this imagery, but in a different context. God's world is full of natural beauty, though, she insists modestly, she lacks the skill to describe it.

The very Frost & snow, have their distinguish'd pleasures & Beauties to me. What can be more Beautiful than a Hoar frost! that shows every Fibre & String in a Spiders Web...What makes the Ice so hard? The snow so soft & white & Light as Air? The Winds so strong & yet Invisible to Mortal Eye? The Snow-drop, bowing down its Drooping Head as if it mourn'd being produced in such an inclement season.¹⁰⁴

The spider now graces a winter world, but it is the moon that most concerns Johnson here. "Nothing pleases me so much as the moon, & all the Gems of Heaven Glitt'ring round her," she

writes. “This is to me a far more delightful sight, than Mrs. Spencer encircled with jewels, when she was presented to his Majesty.”¹⁰⁵ A satire follows about the secret marriage of John, first Earl Spencer (1734–1783),¹⁰⁶ that contrasts the values of court and country. Johnson describes the wholesome garden spiders and the corrupt elite silkworms that exist in each of these worlds. But her real topic is the sanctity of marriage ordained by God, a subject that also absorbs Richardson. “Promoting matrimony,” she insists, “is...obeying the will of God whose First injunction...was increase & multiply.”¹⁰⁷ The Spencers’ covert nuptials stand in contrast to a church wedding blessed by the Lord. Johnson’s letter is not a simple piece of writing; it integrates language and ideas from Scripture, myth, pastoral odes, and classical satire.

For a second example, we turn to a group of letters to a friend, Mrs. Garth.¹⁰⁸ They are actually religious essays, in which Johnson draws on Newton, reason, and the Bible to explain her beliefs. She notes that “religion” is her “subject”¹⁰⁹ and sets out rhetorical arguments as if writing a sermon. Johnson chooses biblical passages that reflect her own positive experience with family life and connects them to her moral argument. In a similar manner, Richardson publishes a collection, Meditations, and links the material in the volume to the events in Clarissa’s life.¹¹⁰

“What I propose then,” Johnson tells Mrs. Garth, “is to consider God as set forth in scripture to be our Father.”¹¹¹ This approach, she is sure, will make sense to any woman who has nurtured a family. If God loves, pities, and forgives his children like “an Earthly parent,” she reasons, this must “disperse all gloomy, & melancholy thoughts, all uneasy fears & apprehensions of incurring his displeasure.” Johnson’s cheerful argument and her belief in reason aligns her with doctrines associated with latitudinarianism.¹¹² In her letters, Johnson works out her relationship to God and advises friends who have similar concerns. Richardson and his female characters employ similar networks of epistolary advice.

Johnson also confronts the question of how to conduct herself while surrounded by rival sects. Indeed, her case for rational faith is built up by discrediting evangelical approaches. We “loose the innocent injoyments of life,” she insists, “by spending too much time in Praying Reading, Fasting, and Self Examination.” In Johnson’s view, these practices were not supported by the Bible. “A good Man or Woman is as easily known by their works,” Johnson maintains, “as when I gather a Bunch of Grapes, I know that that tree that bore them is a vine, & not a Bramble Bush.” In this passage, then, she shows a concern with how good deeds are viewed by the community. She also mixes biblical ideas

with domestic symbols and common sense in a way that Locke would have appreciated. “Open your Eyes,” she instructs Mrs. Garth, “&...be guided by that Share of Reason & Good Sense with which God has Bless’d you.”¹¹³

Yet Johnson’s confident tone changes when she turns to the nagging question of marriage. She knows it is a wife’s “Principal Duty, to do as her Husband commands her, according to St. Paul.” Yet there are limits to this rule. “You can’t think that I mean any more than St. Paul did,” she insists, “that we are to obey them, if they command us, to do a wicked action...In that case, we ought rather to obey God, than man.”¹¹⁴ Perhaps she was concerned about Woolsey’s control over her acts of charity. “I think a married Woman has but little to do with them,” she writes, “for as she is really possess’d of nothing that is her own, she can have nothing to give, except by her Husband’s orders or permission. So that in alms, deeds, as well as in MOST other things,” a woman must bow to her husband’s authority.¹¹⁵ This statement makes us wonder if Johnson’s charitable acts have been restrained by her husband. As we shall see, Johnson has become dissatisfied with her church’s ability to relieve the poor. Through letters, she defines right conduct and fulfils the Christian duty to spread the word to friends. Both Johnson and Richardson address the problems that a patriarchal society imposes on married women.

The duty to help her friends is most clearly manifest in a letter to Mrs. Brompton of 1749. The letter opens with advice about the role of women. Yet Johnson searches for a new medium as she struggles to express her thoughts. She hopes that her reader will have “goodness enough to pardon the Liberty I am going to take. Without further apology [I] begin with a story which...has its foundations in truth,” a phrase used by Richardson on Pamela’s title page.¹¹⁶ In a stunning shift in genre, the reader suddenly sees an indented title to a narrative called “The History of Miss Clarissa of Buckinghamshire.”¹¹⁷ The use of the term “history” suggests fact, not fiction, and the same term is used by Richardson in Clarissa’s full title.¹¹⁸ A close reading of Johnson’s “history” shows that Johnson reads and employs Clarissa in a way that Richardson has encouraged.

Johnson’s Clarissa story is crammed onto both sides of three large sheets. Like Richardson’s novel, it examines the life of a woman who is at odds with conventional norms.¹¹⁹ Though she never admits it, her narrative also tells a story about the problems she faces as a vicar’s wife. Johnson constructs a character with virtues and flaws who provides answers to her larger question: how can a woman live a moral life in an unjust world? What is striking, however, is the way that Johnson’s “novel” was slipped into a letter to a friend. She begins, “There is a Lady in this

neighbourhood (& because I take pleasure in the name [she] shall be call'd Clarissa,) who began to take much pride & pleasure in obliging her friends with the works of her hands... She spent all the time she could spare... in making Purses, Flowers... & many other pretty things." Artistic Jane is recognizable in the character of Clarissa, and there are also parallels to the story of proud Arachne, described above. Like Johnson, her Clarissa marries "a Gentleman of... easy fortune", but she suddenly falls ill and is expected to die: "Death & Judgment appear'd to her with all their terrors... She cou'd not help being doubtful whether at the day of judgment she shou'd be set on the right hand or the left." She wishes that "instead of obliging her friends with unnecessary Trifles... she had employ'd every moment... in performing such works that she cou'd with pleasure have reflected upon to all Eternity." Clarissa pleads with God to "prolong her life for fifteen years, as he once had done for good King Hezekiah." Here Johnson has recalled a letter from Mrs. Norton in Richardson's Clarissa. With prayer, writes Mrs. Norton, "Altho' your days may seem to have been numbered, who knows, but that, with the good King Hezekiah, you may have them prolonged."¹²⁰ Like Richardson, Johnson privileges this story in her own Clarissa narrative. The story that Johnson tells is her own, but it is given greater literary depth by its relationship to Richardson's work.

After a conversion, Johnson's Clarissa undergoes a reformation. Unlike Richardson, however, Johnson spares her converted Clarissa, who now lives a life of good works – an ending preferred by Richardson's friend Lady Bradshaigh.¹²¹ "Whenever she [Clarissa] hears of any poor body sick in the Parish she goes to them... At first, visiting the... poor was to her a most... disagreeable task... She was afraid of being call'd a Methodist, asham'd to enter their Houses, at a loss to know what to say." But resolution and duty overcome these problems. Now she "goes chearfully in, sits down, or stands according as the house is clean or dirty,"... and asks questions about "how they come to be so very poor, Ragged & dirty."¹²² From their answers she "makes a judgment of their merits" and gives them linen, not money, for they are not wise enough to use it properly.

This conventional conversion story, stimulated by reading Clarissa, also derives from Johnson's Olney, with its poverty-stricken lace makers and evangelical clergy. Though not a word is said about the parish where she lives, Johnson's picture of the poor is too real to have been invented. Johnson's Clarissa "sometimes finds a man & his wife & five or six small children in a house little better than a Hogsty, with a small room above & a couple of beds in it, four of which

family lye in each of them, eaten up with vermin, for want of change of Linnen.” Again, Johnson comes close to Richardson’s language and ideas. His *Clarissa* bewails the fact that she can no longer visit “the cots of my poor neighbours, to leave lessons to the boys, and cautions to the elder girls.”¹²³ Richardson’s heroine also restricts her charity to “the lame, the blind, the sick, and the industrious poor.”¹²⁴ Johnson’s *Clarissa* story, however, ends with virtue rewarded—as Richardson’s *Pamela* does.

Johnson’s position as a cleric’s wife evidently created feelings of remorse. In her writing she confronts her guilt about the difference between her own life and the poverty she found in Olney’s Silver End. The reference to being “call’d a Methodist,” for example, reveals a breach between Anglicans like Woolsey and evangelicals, who preached to the poor. Because some Methodists permitted women to lead Bible study, testify to the Gospel, and engage in pastoral activity, this reference suggests that Johnson was examining the question of women’s charity. John Wesley’s early ideas give women a prominent role, especially concerning good works. “You, as well as men,” he insists, “are rational creatures... Whenever you have opportunity, do all the good you can, particularly to your sick neighbour.”¹²⁵ At the time of Woolsey’s death, furthermore, local evangelicals led by John Thornton were trying to reinvigorate the Church of England. To accomplish this end, Woolsey’s successors Moses Browne and John Newton were active in ministering to Olney’s poor.¹²⁶

When these facts are considered, Johnson’s concerns about women’s charity take on new meaning, and her *Clarissa* story must be viewed in light of a contemporary debate about the value of good works. In Johnson’s view, morality must include charitable actions. This is clear, for example, in her notebook entry: “Knowledge of good without a suitable Practice (or Faith without Works) is like a Bell without a Clapper+.”¹²⁷ On another page she notes: “Read the 459 Spectator about Faith & Works & 465, & Tatler 257. EXCELLENT!”

¹²⁸ These articles support Johnson’s personal views about the importance of good deeds.

Thus Johnson’s *Clarissa* story both draws on her reading and helps her develop answers to the moral problems of her day. Her story captures the plight of a pious Anglican who is fearful of rival groups, yet acknowledges and regrets her church’s inability to improve economic conditions. It would have been unseemly for her to question the church publicly, but in private letters, Johnson can hide behind a story, albeit one with “a

foundation in truth”. [See fn 116. Add a footnote here?] Letters give her an opportunity to reflect on the causes of inequality and to develop a reasoned argument aimed at improving the lot of the poor. To better present her views, Johnson switches to an analytical mode. Though she pleads ignorance, she is actually well informed about economic conditions, poor relief, and social welfare policy. Her Clarissa now discusses poverty and its causes:

On seeing the miserys of others, she often laments that there shou’d be any such objects in such a nation as this.... There must certainly be some great fault somewhere, either in the Laws, or in the actions of Individuals... since God does every year send vastly more Corn, Meat, Wool, Flax, & Hemp than it is possible for all the Inhabitants of the Land to consume... Therefore the fault is not in Providence, but in men... She thinks that cloathing the naked... might be so order’d as to promote Trade, encourage the English manufactory, make all our people Happy at home & the nation Great & Terrible to Her Enemys abroad... She allows that many good Laws have been made for the Relief of the Poor, but she thinks many better might be made, were the Hearts of Both Houses of Parliament as good as their Heads.

Johnson’s Clarissa blames men “who have Power, or Riches” and offers them a warning: “At the Day of Final Distribution of rewards & punishments, all the Rich and Polite World may... be sent amongst the Goats on the Left [hand of God], for having withheld the Wool of the sheep from the Backs of their fellow creatures, & sufferd them... to shake with cold.”¹²⁹ In her Clarissa story, Johnson shows us how a provincial woman without formal education can use a story to develop ideas about power, class, gender, and political economy. Her tale is shaped by the rise of local dissent, a desire for personal and social reform, and a longing for a place on the right side of God. Yet she returns to her letter format as abruptly as she departed from it. Now she scorns the “fine taste” of a Miss Hackshaw, who “does not approve of Miss Clarissa Harlow” of the novel. “I believe she is the only person of fine Taste & judgment upon Earth that does not approve of it,” writes Johnson. “For my part I think it will do great things towards reforming the World.”¹³⁰

Johnson’s story and Richardson’s Clarissa both reveal the wish to improve the world. Both of their Clarissas struggle to become virtuous women in an imperfect society. Both wrestle with issues of authority and obedience. Both write about an ideal woman in the context of

constraints of gender and class. Each writer tries to construct a model of “how to think and act” in the light of both reason and religion.¹³¹ Though there are many ways to disseminate these ideas, both embrace the domestic letter as the most effective means at hand. Richardson understands the importance of his readers’ epistolary literacy. Indeed, Johnson uses it to engage with his work in the way that he has encouraged. As she writes her letters, Johnson looks both outward and inward. She observes her husband, family, church, and life in Olney, and writes her *Clarissa* story, abruptly, in the middle of a letter. Johnson’s surge of creativity is a response to reading Richardson’s *Clarissa*. She distinguishes it from scandalous romance, identifies with its heroine, and uses it to examine her own moral values.

Of course Johnson is only one of many readers, who responded to *Clarissa*. Letters written by individuals of both sexes are filled with references to Richardson’s work and reflect responses to it.¹³² Catherine Talbot records reading *Clarissa* “en famille, at set hours, and all the rest of the day we talked of it.”¹³³ Sarah Chapone’s daughter Sally “is accustomed to meeting any unusual situation by asking what *Clarissa* would do.” Sally’s father, we are told, is even “helped to die by the example of *Clarissa*.”¹³⁴ Because the Johnson archive contains dense and continuous sources, it is possible to place Johnson in both her historical and literary contexts and to uncover the complexities of her hidden story. We can analyze what she read, what she wrote, and how Richardson inspired her to write her own *Clarissa* story. We may also observe how Johnson used *Clarissa* to think about her methods of writing. She sees how Richardson inserts letters into the structure of his story and realizes that she too can combine a letter with a moral tale. Proceeding in reverse order, she puts a story into a letter, instead of a letter into a story, as Richardson chooses to do. Mixing genres seems natural to Johnson, because the boundaries between fact and fiction are blurred in her world.¹³⁵

Clearly, Johnson and Richardson are experimenting with the epistolary mode to tell stories and develop narratives. With different degrees of skill, each transforms letters into literary texts, creating literature out of letters. This is not a new activity for Johnson, but an easy and comfortable habit, formed long before she encountered *Clarissa*. When she reads Richardson, she recognizes her own world with particular vividness, a world in which writing is at the center of human pleasure. In *Clarissa*, Richardson’s characters are forever “at writing-desks, struggling to fix their experiences adequately in prose and so define and assert their own conflicting senses,

psychologically, epistemologically, and above all morally, of what is happening in their world.”¹³⁶
This is very much like Johnson’s world, where epistolary literacy is prized.

Of course people see themselves reflected in novels, and in Johnson’s case this is emphatically true. But I also want to argue that Richardson imagines his novel by observing real women like Johnson writing letters. The juxtaposition of epistolary fiction and letter writers in real life reveals influence and feedback in both directions. Johnson’s shadow falls gently upon the pages of Richardson’s novels in regard to both content and method. The letters that he receives from women similar to Johnson strengthen this link and offer influential models. Epistolary literacy like Johnson’s is therefore a primary theme of Clarissa and Pamela. Because she and women like her regularly assert their identity in epistolary prose, Richardson can imagine his own Clarissa doing the same thing. In his novels, he immortalizes what Johnson does every day—the act of writing a life through letters. That is why we find her own “novel” tucked into intimate correspondence. Johnson can find no better home for her “Clarissa” than in the sheltered space of a letter to a female friend.

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This last section suggests how Johnson combines the moral themes found in Richardson’s novels with scientific inquiry and reason in a more complex genre—poetry. It also shows how her varied readings elevate the literary quality of her writing. “A conversation between Stella & her guardian Angel, One Star Light Night, in the Garden at----” is a six-page poem about another ideal woman. Like Johnson’s Clarissa, Stella learns how to think and act in the light of rational religion. But Johnson now uses a wider range of sources to create a higher form of literature. Johnson, we have seen, had easy access to translations of Latin verse.¹³⁷ As Hunter notes, “All those who could do more than just read a few words under necessity or duress regularly read at least some poetry as a matter of course.”¹³⁸ Johnson reads modern and classical poems, copies out extracts, and then composes her verses.¹³⁹

Johnson’s poem “Stella” exists in two formats: an early draft and a fair copy. The second version imitates the format of a published book in minute detail, with an indented title, introductory quotation, decorative lined borders, numbered pages, and even a footnote. This format indicates that she thinks of herself as an author.¹⁴⁰ Changes reflected in the fair copy show efforts to make the text more poetic. Words are substituted and contracted to create a sensuous mood, and lines are moved to produce a more logical structure. Johnson is familiar with poetic conventions. She uses

couplets, employs antiquated words such as “yon,” and reverses the order of verbs and nouns to create rhymes. The vocabulary is simple but evocative of a luminous nightscape: orbs dazzle, stars shine, and angels shimmer.

The poem is preceded by a quotation from Psalms: “The Heavens declare the Glory of God, & the Firmament showeth his handy work.” Here Johnson is clearly imitating number 465 of the Spectator, a periodical whose pages are filled with readers’ original poetry as well as letters.¹⁴¹ In number 465, Addison uses the same quotation before his own ode about God’s universe.¹⁴² Johnson’s poem, however, is not just an imitation. It arises from her experience and appears to depict her ideal self. The poem opens in a garden as Stella contemplates the skies. She contrasts the heavens with ephemeral man-made pleasures and yearns for answers to eternal truths.

How Happy says she shall I be when I Die!
By Angels conducted to Tread yon Blue Sky!
To visit each Star! & see all that’s done there!
What pleasures on Earth with these can compare?
To View the Expanse! the Vast Universe scan!
And be certain what Distance each star is from man!
To know if those worlds that now Dazzle my eyes
Are Peopl’d like This, or with others more wise!
How far the *great Newton with Truth does agree,
And be in an instant much Wiser than He!¹⁴³

Johnson’s references to Newton and the planets recall those in John Hughes Ode to Ecstasy (1720). In this ode, Hughes calls out to the ghost of Newton, who suddenly appears:

’Tis he—as I approach more near
The great Columbus of the skies I know.
’Tis Newton’s soul! That daily travels here.
O stay, thou happy Spirit! Stay
And lead me throu’ all the unbeaten wilds of day
Here let me, thy companion, stray,

From orb to orb, and now behold
Unnumber'd suns, all seas of molten gold,
And trace each comet's wand'ring way.¹⁴⁴

In Johnson's poem a stranger also appears suddenly and leads Stella from orb to orb. He is the Angel Raphael, who travels with Tobias in the apocryphal Book of Tobit. Hughes admits in his preface that both he and the poet Cowley have imitated a Latin ode by Casimire.¹⁴⁵ Yet Hughes insists that his passage about Newton is "entirely original." We find similar language in William Stevenson's poem Stella. His Stella also yearns "to soar with Newton to the Skies." Like Johnson's angelic heroine, this Stella spurns social pleasures. Her only looking glass is a telescope with which she surveys "planets, stars, and comets."¹⁴⁶ We recognize a combination of references found elsewhere in Johnson's writing: Newton, telescopes, God's universe, and criticism of man-made works. Casimire, Hughes, Cowley, Stevenson, Addison, and Johnson are linked together in their focus upon the figure of "Stella" and their wish to probe the heavens.

Moses Browne, the new vicar of Olney, also writes verses to Stella and An Essay on the Universe.¹⁴⁷ Despite her quarrels with Browne, Johnson copies extracts from his works,¹⁴⁸ as well as those of his mentor, the evangelist James Hervey, who composed Contemplations on the Starry Heavens.¹⁴⁹ Though both Browne and Hervey are evangelicals, Johnson picks and chooses what she wants from their work. Johnson's "Stella" is truly a hybrid work nourished by a variety of texts. The chain of authorial emulation cited above shows the many way-stations in a complex journey that starts with a Latin ode and ends with Johnson's poem.

After Johnson's introduction, the mood of her poem changes with the arrival of the angel Raphael.¹⁵⁰ As he shines in glory, Stella trembles in fear. Then, without warning, Johnson inserts a new literary format—the dialogue—into the poem. She puts the words "Stella" and "Angel" in boldface to indicate that they are speakers and uses quotation marks to show their dialogue. Stella glorifies God in the poem, but she also questions the nature of the universe. Johnson's search for truth, or what we might call scientific inquiry, is evident in her poetry. She is acknowledging the impact of Newton and Locke and their concept of an ordered universe. But though God has made the cosmos, humans must find their way. As Stella notes: "All for man He has done that their

maker could Do, Only left their Will Free, which way to Pursue.” Challenging strict predestination, Johnson calls for a more rational religion than her dissenting neighbors.¹⁵¹

Johnson’s writings show how an untrained provincial reader attempts to resolve tensions between religious, scientific, and humanist ideas. As she does so, she incorporates language and thoughts from the works of others. The varied texts that inform her “Stella” show that a common store of literature from London’s marketplace was now available to provincial readers. Libraries and commonplace books of Johnson’s contemporaries show a similar wide-ranging pattern of reading that relies on secular as well as biblical sources.¹⁵² Poetry claims an important place in reading that extends far beyond the novel. Provincial readers are constructing a literary culture that is derived from and fits into the wider world of letters.

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To understand this literary culture, we must return to the concept of epistolary literacy. Letter writing offers Johnson a training ground for composing other types of literature. In letters, she develops writing skills and accomplishes a number of personal goals. She examines her role as a clergyman’s wife, teaches her children, advises her friends, defines her religious beliefs, and considers how to be virtuous in this world and the next. She also expresses and fulfills intellectual aspirations. This study cautions us to look for women’s education in makeshift methods and informal places and to recognize the importance of domestic literacy. The practice Johnson gains by writing letters and the information that she absorbs by copying extracts are strategies used by other women to enter the world of literature. Outside of London, furthermore, unlicensed schools and village brokers give instruction, even though they do not appear in published lists of schools.¹⁵³ When Johnson combines epistolary literacy with a range of improving reading, she moves along the spectrum and becomes more “educated” in the broad sense of the word. This road to a higher literacy is a self-generated and cumulative process. It alters intellectual expectations and produces pride in writing. Thus Johnson signs and dates each poem and story. Thus she keeps a journal of her reading, but distinguishes her own thoughts by adding a plus sign (+).

Johnson’s extracts provide a map of her reading, whose guiding principles are freedom of choice and active engagement. She reads both print and manuscript materials for both instruction and entertainment. Sources are not limited to those advocated by the established church. In fact,

most of her sources are secular in nature. Though there is a strong didactic dimension to Johnson's texts and comments, neither heavy religious matter nor novels dominate.¹⁵⁴ There is no trace of Zwicker's passive reader. This social aspect of reading will become even more intense in the last half of the century, as novels of Richardson and Rousseau are read aloud among weeping friends. An analysis of the reading of Johnson's children in Chapter Six confirms that in a later age more engaged with sensibility, they interact with books even more passionately than she did.¹⁵⁵

The book wheel of the humanist scholar may no longer be present, but its ghost still presides over fragments in Johnson's commonplace book. She read extensively, like a magpie plucking whatever she needed to cope with everyday problems. Yet the maxims she copied are united by the broad moral themes that mark both Richardson's novels and every genre of her own writing. The literary marketplace in which she reveled was decidedly commercial, designed for a wide range of middling-sort consumers. It is the same one in which Richardson was thoroughly immersed.

Richardson knew that epistolary literacy was crucial to the audience for which his novels were created. We think of him as an innovative author with literary skills, but he was also an astute observer of historical trends: the rise of literacy, the growing wealth of the middling-sort, the uses of print culture, and the cultural aspirations of women like Johnson. His epistolary format is based on knowledge of the market and of many a "plain writer," like himself.¹⁵⁶ He sees the symbiotic relationship between real and fictional letters and thrives on the porous boundaries between them. Of course epistolary fiction and romantic stories long predate the 1740s, both in England and on the Continent. But by the second half of the century, there is an epistolary moment when real letters and fiction are most closely intertwined. Their relationship is clearly a two-way street:¹⁵⁷ if readers imitate epistolary models, they also affect the epistolary novel.

Their influence is, in part, a result of Richardson's desire for dialogue and his respect for his readers' needs and judgments. Though he rarely adopted their specific suggestions, his audience still shaped the way he composed and sold his works. He needed to know how readers were reacting to his work while it was still in progress. Some of them merely provided insights into manners, yet their more subtle fears about his view of the human condition prodded him to make endless revisions. This reciprocal interchange was important to Richardson, because he believed that writing could change people's attitudes.¹⁵⁸

Buoyed by notoriety and commercial success, he assumed he could control his readers. Yet this was not possible. Once he had authorized his readers to write their own stories, they were free to express their own gendered views in spaces outside of his influence.¹⁵⁹ Johnson's case uncovers the way this worked for a previously untapped reservoir of non-elite women writing at home. Her *Clarissa* story allowed her to think independently and write critically about the social, economic, and religious inequalities of her patriarchal world. As she wrote, Johnson provided Richardson with a perfect subject. Though they never actually met, his novels acknowledge their literary interaction. At the moment when their writings intersect, the letter is moving "from the periphery to the center of the literary system."¹⁶⁰ At the same time, Jane is becoming a woman writer. It is not until the advent of a broad-based epistolary literacy that *Pamela* and *Clarissa* can achieve the wide audience that Richardson anticipated. His readers identify with his characters in many ways. But, surely, the epistolary literacy of *Pamela* and *Clarissa* will strike them as closest to their own lives.

Richardson knows all of this by heart, for he has witnessed a shift in the way people communicate with each other. In the light of this historical framework, his innovations take on new colors. They may appear more muted for their portrayal of such an ordinary activity, but to acknowledge the importance of such a mundane act is breathtakingly audacious. When we connect Richardson's historical insights to Johnson's epistolary literacy, the study of the novel is enriched.

ABSTRACT

This chapter reconsiders "the rise of the novel" in light of a new cultural category "epistolary literacy" – a set of practices that involves letter writing, reading, interpretation, and response. The epistolary practices of a provincial reader, Jane Johnson, are examined in relation to the writings of Samuel Richardson. Johnson offers a rare view of how a woman without formal education constructed a provincial literary world that lay midway between popular and elite culture. Her epistolary literacy, along with a wide range of books from London, helped her to create original poetry and prose. Richardson, I suggest, was well aware of the epistolary literacy of Jane and other readers. Moreover, he both encouraged and manipulated it to his advantage. He is presented as an astute observer of historical trends: the rise of literacy, the growing wealth of the middling-sort, the uses of print culture, and the literary aspirations of women like Johnson. She responded to Richardson's fiction in ways that he encouraged. Yet her epistolary literacy also influenced the way he wrote and marketed his novels. Their relationship was clearly a two-way street. The study of the novel, I suggest, can benefit by linking Johnson's epistolary literacy to Richardson's historical insights.

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¹⁴ Whyman, “‘Paper Visits’: The Post-Restoration Letter As Seen Through the Verney Archive,” in Rebecca Earle, ed., Epistolary Selves: Letters and Letter Writers, 1600–1945, (Aldershot, U.K., 1999), 15–36.

¹⁵ The National Archives Website/Global Search searches catalogues and finding aids in many local record offices.

¹⁶ Bodleian Library, MS. Don. c.192, fols. 20–21 Ann Ingram/Barbara Johnson, 5 May 1762.

¹⁷ MS. Don. 198 contains two columns of letters sent and received by day and month of the year on the back cover of the journal.

¹⁸ MS. Don. c.192, fol. 60, Ann Smyth/Barbara Johnson, 26 April 1764; c.191, fol. 61r, Harriet Johnson/Barbara Johnson, 22 February n.y; c.191, fols. 18–19, Robert Johnson/Barbara Johnson, 31 July 1788; c.192, fol. 73, W. Smyth/Barbara Johnson, 27 February 1804.

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²³ The Negotiations of Sir Thomas Roe (1740); Sale, TITLE 6–9; E&K 81–83.

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²⁵ The Apprentice’s Vade Mecum or, Young Man’s Pocket Companion (1733); E&K 50–51.

²⁶ [Richardson], Letters Written to and for Particular Friends, on the Most Important Occasions (1741), preface, A2v; Barbauld, 1:lii; E&K, 93.

²⁷ John Hill, The Young Secretary's Guide, 22d ed. (1734) was printed for Richardson's brother-in-law, Allington Wilde; E&K, 90, 92–93. [Samuel Richardson], Pamela: or, Virtue Rewarded, 4 vols. (1741–42).

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³⁴ Samuel Richardson's Published Commentary on Clarissa, 1747–65, 3 vols. (1998), vol. 1, Prefaces, Postscripts, and Related Writing, vol. 2, Letters and Passages Restored from the Original MSS... 1751, vol. 3, A Collection of the Moral and Instructive Sentiments, Maxims, Cautions, and Reflections... 1755; Meditations Collected from the Sacred Books 1750 (reprint, 1976). Richardsoniana (1974) includes Three Criticism of Richardson's Fiction 1749–54; The Paths of Virtue Delineated; or, the History in Miniature (1756) and other works.

³⁵ Samuel Richardson/Aaron Hill, 12 July 1754; Carroll, 126; Pawlowicz, TITLE, 48.

³⁶ After discovery of the nursery library, Shirley Brice Heath, Morag Styles, Victor Watson, and others held a conference, “Scrapbooks and Chapbooks: Reading, Writing, and Childhood 1700–1850,” at Homerton College, University of Cambridge, on 4–5 April 1995. It was linked to an exhibition, “Handmade Readings: Jane Johnson's Nursery Library (circa 1738–48)” at the Fitzwilliam Museum. The contents of the shoebox in the Lilly Library, MSS. Johnson 1740–59, Indiana University, Bloomington have been digitized. They may be found at <http://www.dlib.indiana.edu/collections/janejohnson>. I thank Elizabeth L. Johnson for her help.

³⁷ MS Don. c.190, fols. 5–6

³⁸ MS Don. c.190 fols. 34, 35. The two wooden boards are found after f.118.

³⁹ The story was found in 1995. See MS Don d.198, ff.19-44 and Gillian Avery, A Very Pretty Story: A Facsimilie of the MS held in the Bodleian Library (Oxford, 2001), ff.19-42. Jane's tale was written in the same year that John Newbery published A Pretty Little Pocket-Book. See the 1767 facsimilie edited by M.F. Thwaite (1966) and Iona and Robert Opie and Brian Alderson, The Treasures of Childhood: Books, Toys, and Games from the Opie Collection (1989). I thank Clive Hurst for help in using the Bodleian's Opie Collection. See Victor Watson, "Jane Johnson: A Very Pretty Story to Tell Children," in Mary Hilton, Morag Styles, and Victor Watson, Opening the Nursery Door: Reading Writing and Childhood, 1600–1900 (1997), 31–46; Ruth Boettigheimer, "An Important System of Its Own: Defining Children's Literature," Princeton University Library Chronicle 4 (1998): 191–210; Early Children's Books in the Bodleian Library: An Exhibition, 25 September 1995–20 January 1996 (Oxford, 1995).

⁴⁰ [Samuel Richardson], Pamela: or Virtue Rewarded... In her Exalted Condition... in Genteel Life (1742), 4:451, Letter 64. See Watson TITLE for further links to Johnson, Richardson, and John Locke. Compare also with Marie Catherine La Mothe, Baronne d'Aulnoy, Diverting Works, 2d ed. (1715) and The History of the Tales of the Fairies Newly Done from the French (1716), 1–23; Charles Perrault, Histories, or Tales of Passed Times, 3d ed. (1741).

⁴¹ Evelyn Arizpe and Morag Styles, Reading Lessons from the Eighteenth Century: Mothers, Children & Texts (2006) and "'Love to Learn your Book': Children's Experiences of Text in the Eighteenth Century", History of Education, 33(2004), 337-52. See also Kenneth Charlton, Women, Religion, and Education in Early Modern England (1999).

⁴² MS Don. c.190, ff. 1-118, with comments on f.72v.

⁴³ For another modest woman author see Whyman, 'The Correspondence of Esther Masham and John Locke: A Study in Epistolary Silences', Huntington Library Quarterly, 66 (2003), 275-305.

⁴⁴ See MS Don. c.190, ff. 64-9 for her marriage licence, 1735 and will PROB 11/844/97, 1758.

⁴⁵ Sir William Dugdale, The Antiquities of Warwickshire, 2 vols. (1730), ii.784; L. F. Salzman, ed., The Victoria History of the County of Warwick (949), ii.131. Jane's mother was Lucy Rainsford. MS Don. c.192, ff.180-9. For detailed information on the Johnson family and Jane's father and mother, see Arizpe and Styles, Reading Lessons, viii-xxiii, 17-24.

⁴⁶ For Woolsey see Pedigree of Johnson of Wytham-on-the-Hill, Miscellanea Genealogica et Heraldica, Vol 2, New Series, 1877, 123; PCC Will of Woolsey Johnson, 13 May 1756, P.R.O. image ref. 503; MS Don. b.40/1-2. The nineteenth-century pedigree contains some errors; The Clergyman's Intelligencer (1745), 106; Centre of Buckinghamshire Studies (CBS), Johnson family papers, D-X827/1-2; Staffordshire Record Office (Staffs RO) D742/9/1-3; D742/G/9/1, Dartmouth Survey of Olney, 1676; Lincolnshire Record Office 3ANC1/15; 3ANC7/1-2. Woolsey was at Clare College, B.A. 1717, MA 1721. He was appointed Deacon at Peterborough, 1720, Rector of Wilby, Northants (1729-56), Deacon in the Bishopric of London (1728), and Curate of St Andrew's Holborn (1724-27?). Natalie Rothstein, ed., Barbara Johnson's Album of Fashions and Fabrics (1987), 9. I thank Arthur Burns and Mary Clayton for help tracing clergymen.

⁴⁷ Oliver Ratcliff, The Register of the Parish of Olney, Co. Bucks. 1665-1812 (Bucks Parish Register Society, n.d.), 275, 284, 292, 297, 305; MS.Don. b.40/1.

⁴⁸ Thomas Wright, The Town of Cowper (1886); D. Bruce Hindmarsh, John Newton and the English Evangelical Tradition between the Conversions of Wesley and Wilberforce (Oxford, 1996), 170; James Storer, The Rural Walks of Cowper (1835); Oliver Ratcliff and N. Brown, Olney Past and Present (Olney, 1893).

⁴⁹ Hindmarsh, 171.

⁵⁰ William Cowper, The Correspondence of William Cowper, ed., Thomas Wright, 4 vols.(1904), ii, 18 Nov 1782, letter to Rev. William Unwin; Elizabeth Knight, William Cowper's Olney (Olney, n.d.); Cowper and Newton Museum (CNM) 1390, Olney Parish Account Book, 1744-1760; Elizabeth Knight and the Olney History Workshop, 'Olney Feoffee Charity', n.d.; CNM 786/1-2, Olney Workhouse Books, 1746-82; Staffs RO D742/G/2/1-3, Poor Rate Assessments 1713, 1735, 1742.

⁵¹ CBS, D-X827/1, Johnson family correspondence items 38, 40, and 46 mention lace buyers carrying letters and money from Olney to London. Jim Styles, Let's Talk about Olney's Amazing Curate (Olney, 1983), 16; Donald Demaray, The Innovation of John Newton, 1725-1807 (Lewiston, N.Y, 1988), 124; Michael Haykin, One Heart and One Soul: John Sutcliffe of Olney, His Friends and His Times (Darlington, 1994), 100; Olney and The Lace Makers (Bethnal Green, 1864).

⁵² Bernard Martin, John Newton: A Biography (1950), 211; Thomas Wright, The Romance of the Lace Pillow (Olney, 1919).

⁵³ Dissenting ministers in the area included John Gibbs 1627-99, Newport Pagnell; Richard Davis d.1714, Rothwell and Wellingborough; Matthias Maurice 1684-1738. John Drake, an Independent of Yardley Hastings, preached every Sunday in Olney from 1738 and lived there 1759-1775. William Walker, a Baptist, d.1793, preached in Olney 1735-75. John Wesley and George Whitfield also preached in the area. See CNM booklets.

⁵⁴ The History of the Congregational Church at Olney (Olney, 1929).

⁵⁵ Geoffrey Nuttall, 'Baptists and Independents in Olney to the Time of John Newton', The Baptist Quarterly 30 (1983), 26-36; Hindmarsh, 179.

⁵⁶ Obituary of Mrs. Drake, 'this venerable woman', Evangelical Magazine (1799), 466; CNM MS, Day Book of Dr. Samuel Teedon, 14 May 1759.

⁵⁷ George Whitefield, The Two First Parts of his Life, with his Journals, revised (1756), 187-9. On 23 May 1739 he notes that Johnson turned him away: 'Being denied the pulpit, I preached this morning in a field near the town, to about two thousand people'.

⁵⁸ Woolsey built a house and enclosed the land in 1752. Arizpe and Styles, Reading Lessons, 21.

⁵⁹ Ratcliff, Parish Register, v-vi; Hindmarsh, 170-84; Nuttall, 'Baptists and Independents'.

⁶⁰ Hindmarsh, 177.

⁶¹ Staffs RO D742/G/3, Order for induction of Moses Browne as Vicar of Olney; B.S. Schlenther, Queen of the Methodists: The Countess of Huntingdon and the Eighteenth-Century Crisis of Faith and Society (Durham, 1997). Legge was a protege of the patroness Selena, Countess of Huntingdon (1707-91).

⁶² For Browne in Olney see Ratcliff, Parish Register, 365; CNM 1391, Workhouse Book, 24 November 1753; CNM 1390, Parish Account Book 21 Jan 1757/8.

⁶³ Moses Browne, The Nativity and Humiliation of Jesus Christ practically Consider'd. A Sermon preached on Christmas-Day in the Parish Church of Olney (1754); Wright, The Town of Cowper, 34-7; Hindmarsh, 183; Demaray, 124; Nuttall, 33.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Marylynn Rouse, ed., The Life of John Newton by Richard Cecil (Fearn, 2000), 265-6. from a letter to Robert Jones. Browne tries to hinder the sale of the vicarage to the future Countess of Dartmouth. Staffs RO D742/G/9/3, letter from Moses Browne, 14 Nov 1754; D(W)1778/V/711, 1759, Copy Case and Answers, Churchwardens of Olney v Vicar of Olney and his Bonds (1753).

⁶⁵ George Lipscomb, ed., The History and Antiquities of the County of Buckingham 4 vols. (1847), iv.131-2. Staffs RO, D742/B/22/1-5, D742/B/7/1-23, D742/9/1/1, D742/B/22-1-5, and

D742/B/7/17-23 confirm Jane's sale of her house and land to Lord Dartmouth despite Browne's interference.

⁶⁶ MS. Don. c.190, f.72, note in commonplace book, 6 March 1756.

⁶⁷ MS. Don. c.190, ff. 11-24, letters to Mrs. Brompton and Mrs. Garth, 1739–55.

⁶⁸ See the work of Robert Darnton, Kevin Sharpe and Steven Zwicker, especially Sharpe's Reading Revolutions: The Politics of Reading in Early Modern England (New Haven, Conn., 2000). The enormous literature on the history of reading includes Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier, eds., A History of Reading in the West, trans., Lydia G. Cochrane (Oxford, 1999); Alberto Manguel, A History of Reading (CITY, 1997); and Wolfgang Iser, The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Becket (Baltimore, 1974).

⁶⁹ Kevin Sharpe and Steven Zwicker, Reading, Society, and Politics in Early Modern England, (Cambridge, 2003), 23.

⁷⁰ Searches on LION and ECCO databases show this process.

⁷¹ MS. Don. c.190, fol.72, see Giovanni Marana, The Eight Volumes of Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy, 13th ed. (1753–54) and 24th ed. (Dublin, 1754); fol. 93, see Letters of Mr. Alexander Pope and Several of his Friends (1737); fol. 96, see John Shebbeare, Letters on the English Nation: by Batista Angeloni, a Jesuit (1755); fol. 91, see Persian Letters...from Selim at London, to Mirza at Ispahan, 3rd ed., (1736); Samuel Richardson, Clarissa. Or, the History of a Young Lady (1748).

⁷² Barbauld. 1:133–35, W. Warburton/Samuel Richardson, 28 December 1742; Richardson, Published Commentary, 1:25; E&K, 148; 568.

⁷³ Jane made thirty-eight extracts. For example, from Marana, 24th ed., see fol. 97v and vol. 4:125; fol. 101r, see vol. 5:63–64. William Mc Burney, "The Authorship of the Turkish Spy, PMLA 52 (1957): 915–35. I thank Ros Ballaster for letting me see her unpublished manuscript.

⁷⁴ MS. Don. c.190, fol. 89r.

⁷⁵ MS. Don. e.193, fol. 2v.

⁷⁶ MS. Don.e.198, fols. 12–13, An Hymn for Good Friday. See The Psalm-Singer's Pocket Companion, 2d ed. (1758), 144.

⁷⁷ MS. Don. c. 190, fol. 88r.

⁷⁸ MS Don. c.190, fol. 70r. Barbara edits Jane's notebook, calling it "Extracts by my Mother from different Authors." On fol. 95r she adds '+Bab: Johnson' in the margin next to Jane's list of favourite authors. Apparently, Jane wrote the list and Barbara added her name to confirm its value. Since their handwriting is similar, it is sometimes hard to determine authorship. Barbara's writing is generally more angular than Jane's rounder hand, but when Jane writes hastily the hands are alike. For Laetitia Pilkington's similar list of favourites see Pearson, 127.

⁷⁹ See especially Warner, Licensing Entertainment.

⁸⁰ MS Don..c.190, fol. 75v. 'Read Homer once & you need read no more/ For all things else appear so mean & Poor/ Verse will seem prose, yet often on him look/ You will hardly need another book. Jane's quotation is almost like one by the Duke of Buckingham (1648-1720) in From an Essay on Poetry (1682), 20. For extracts from Pope's translations see MS Don. c.190, f.83: 'All this page out of Pope's Homer's Odyssey', f.84v: 'All this page from Pope's Homer's Iliad'. Extracts from f.83 are found in Alexander Pope, The Odyssey of Homer (1725-6), Vol. ii, book 7, 115, lines 95-6, and in Vol. iii, book 11, line 454. More quotations from Pope on f.73v, appear in his 'On the Monument of the Hon. Robert Digby', Epistles and Satires, 1736, ii.157.

⁸¹ MS Don. c.190, f.83r, 87r, 90r. References are to Milton's Paradise Lost and Il Penseroso.

⁸² MS Don. c.190, f.84r, 87v, 92r.

⁸³ MS Don. c.190, f.79r, 84v, 92r, 93v. The Quotation on f.79r is from Juvenal's 5th Satire, line 48.

⁸⁴ MS Don. c.190, f.93v is about a black swan.

⁸⁵ Jane's maxims bear remarkable likeness to Richardson's A Collection of the Moral and Instructive Sentiments, Maxims, Cautions, and Reflections (1755) that is appended to the 3rd edition of Clarissa. His awareness of the needs of readers like Jane is apparent.

⁸⁶ MS Don. c.190. f.92r; See Plutarch's Lives in Six Volumes (1758), v.435.

⁸⁷ Henry Fielding's Miscellanies in Three Volumes, 2nd ed. (1743) is a typical example. Jane may have used it to satirize the black swan in Fielding's 'Part of Juvenal's 'Sixth Satire, Modernized in Burlesque Verse', i.97.

⁸⁸ MS Don. c.190, f.40r, 88r.

⁸⁹ Donald F. Bond, ed., The Spectator, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1965), introduction, especially xxxviii; Richmond P. Bond, The Tatler: The Making of a Literary Journal (Cambridge, Mass, 1971) and New Letters to the Tatler and Spectator (Austin, 1959).

⁹⁰ Gilbert D. McEwen, The Oracle of the Coffee House: John Dunton's Athenian Mercury (San Marino, 1972); Helen Berry, 'An Early Coffee House Periodical and Its Readers: the *Athenian Mercury*, 1691-1697', London Journal 25:1(2000), 14-33; Natasha Glaisyer, 'Readers, Correspondents, and Communities: John Houghton's A Collection for Improvement of Husbandry and Trade (1692-1703) in Alexandra Shepard and Phil Withington, eds., Communities in Early Modern England (Manchester, 2000), 235-51; Kathryn Shevelov Women and Print Culture: The Construction of Femininity in the Early Periodical (1989).

⁹¹ Eve Bannet, 'Epistolary Commerce in The Spectator' in Donald J. Newman, ed., The Spectator: Emerging Discourses (Newark, Delaware, 2005), 219-47; Original and Genuine Letters Sent to the Tatler and Spectator...None of Which have been Before Printed, 2 vols. (1725).

⁹² MS Don.c.190, ff. 11-14, 17-20.

⁹³ MS Don. c.190, ff.7-8, Jane Johnson/Robert Johnson, 15 Nov 1753. See also Lincolnshire Record Office Johnson/1/1-2 for additional letters to her children.

⁹⁴ See similar sentiments in Richardson, Meditations, nos. 27, 30 (reprint 1976), 59, 65-6.

⁹⁵ MS Don. c.190, f.9v and f.86r. The last two lines of Jane's poem can be found in Frederick Boas, ed., Giles and Phineas Fletcher. Poetical Works (Cambridge, 1909). See 'The Purple Island or the Isle of Man', ii.76, canto vi. 34 and again in 'Upon the Contemplations of B. of Excester', ii.247, lines 26-7.

⁹⁶ MS Don. c.190 ff.11-25.

⁹⁷ MS Don. c.190, f. 81.

⁹⁸ Samuel Richardson/Sarah Westcomb, 15 Sept 1746; Carroll, 67-9. For Richardson's correspondence see Carroll, Selected Letters; Barbould, Correspondence; Peter Sabor, 'Publishing Richardson's Correspondence: "The Necessary Office of Selection"', in Doody, Tercentenary Essays, 237-50; MSS; Beinecke Library, Yale University: Gen MSS MISC 1335/F1-6; Chauncey Brewster Tinker Gen MSS 310, Box 4/F; Gen MSS MISC Group 541/F; OSB MSS File R, F.12574-7, 135550; Princeton University Library MSS RTC01, Robert H Taylor Collection; 'Original Letters of Miss E. Carter and Mr. Samuel Richardson', Monthly Magazine, #228, vol. 33,6 (1 July 1812), 533-543.

⁹⁹ See correspondence above and E&K, 11, 198-204, 342-8; Rivero, TITLE, 142.

¹⁰⁰ E&K, 349-54.

- ¹⁰¹ Princeton University Library, MSS Robert H. Taylor Collection 18th-446, Lady Bradshaigh's annotated copy of Clarissa, 1748, with answers from Richardson; E&K 447-50; Lady Elizabeth Echlin, An Alternative Ending to Richardson's Clarissa, ed., D. Daphinoff (Bern, 1981).
- ¹⁰² E&K, 343, 365; Carroll, 24; Ingrid Tieken-boon van Ostade, 'Samuel Richardson's Role as Linguistic Innovator: A Sociolinguistic Analysis' in Matts Ryden, Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade, and Merja Kyto. A Reader in Early Modern English (Frankfurt, 1998), 407-19.
- ¹⁰³ MS Don. c.190, ff.13-14, Jane Johnson/Mrs. Brompton, 28 Feb 1756; Pamela Espeland, The Story of Arachne (Minneapolis, 1980).
- ¹⁰⁴ MS Don. c.190, ff.13-14. For the hoar frost see Richardson, Meditations, no. 32, page 69.
- ¹⁰⁵ MS Don. c.190, f.14, 28 Feb 1756; (Margaret) Georgiana Spencer (1737-1814), ODNB, 39/39563.
- ¹⁰⁶ G.E.C, The Complete Peerage, vol. 12, part 1 (1953), 153-4; George Baker, The History and Antiquities of the County of Northampton, 2 vols. (1822-41), i.108-12; John First Earl Spencer (1734-83), ODNB., 38/38713.
- ¹⁰⁷ MS Don. c.190, f.14, 28 Feb 1756.
- ¹⁰⁸ MS Don. c.190, ff. 17-20, Jane Johnson/Mrs. Garth, 3 June 1742 and ff.21-22, 8 July 1742. Mrs Garth was the wife of John Garth, M.P. for Devizes, Wiltshire and first cousin to Jane. See R. Sedgwick, ed., The House of Commons 1715-54, 2 vols. (1970), ii:59.
- ¹⁰⁹ MS Don. c.190, f.21, Jane Johnson/Mrs. Garth, 8 July 1742.
- ¹¹⁰ Richardson, Meditations; Thomas Keymer 'Richardson's Meditations' in Doody and Sabor, Tercentenary Essays), 89-109.
- ¹¹¹ MS Don. c.190, f.21r. Jane's underlining
- ¹¹² MS Don. c.190, f.21r-v. I thank Betsy Brown and Anne Stott for ideas about Jane's religion.
- ¹¹³ MS Don. c.190, ff.18, Jane Johnson/Mrs. Garth, [1742] continued on ff.19-20, 3 June 1742; MS Don. c.190, f.83 and Spectator, no. 626, viii:231, 29 Nov 1714; MS. Don. c.190, f.92 and Spectator no. 75, i: 284-7, 26 May 1711.
- ¹¹⁴ MS Don. c.190, f.19.
- ¹¹⁵ MS Don c.190, ff..17-18, Jane Johnson/Mrs Garth, [1742]. See Gallagher, Nobody's Story for analysis of the effects of women's dispossession of property.
- ¹¹⁶ Samuel Richardson, Pamela: or Virtue Rewarded...A Narrative which has its Foundation in Truth and Nature, 3rd edn., 2 vols. (London, C. Rivington, 1741), i.title page; E&K, 206.
- ¹¹⁷ MS Don. c.190, f.11-12, Jane Johnson/Mrs. Brompton, 17 Oct 1749.
- ¹¹⁸ Samuel Richardson, Clarissa. Or, the History of a Young Lady (1748). In MS.Don. c.190, f.85, Jane makes extracts from Richardson's The History of Sir Charles Grandison, 7 vols.(1754).
- ¹¹⁹ John Peck and Martin Coyle, Literary Terms and Criticism, 3rd edn. (Basingstoke, 2002), 114.
- ¹²⁰ MS Don. c.190, f.11; Richardson, Clarissa (1748), vol. 7, letter XL, Mrs Norton/Miss Clarissa Harlowe, 165.
- ¹²¹ Lady Bradshaigh's annotated copy of Clarissa, 1748.
- ¹²² MS Don. c.190, fols. 11v-12.
- ¹²³ Richardson, Clarissa (1748), vol. 6, letter 66, Miss Clarissa Harlowe/Miss Howe, 240; Ian Watt, "Richardson as Novelist: Clarissa," in Harold Bloom, ed., Samuel Richardson (1987), 9.
- ¹²⁴ Richardson, Clarissa (1748), vol. 4, letter 28, Miss Clarissa Harlowe/Mr Lovelace, 165; Christopher Hill, "Clarissa Harlowe and Her Times," in Puritanism and Revolution (1958), 102-23.
- ¹²⁵ Quoted in Dale A. Johnson, comp., Women in English Religion, 1700-1925 (1983), 61-64, 70-71, from Wesley's "On Visiting the Sick,"

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- ¹²⁶ Schlenther, 1-2, 163.
- ¹²⁷ MS Don. c.190, fol.88r.
- ¹²⁸ MS Don. c.190, fol. 86r.
- ¹²⁹ MS Don. c.190, fol. 12r.
- ¹³⁰ MS Don. c.190, fol. 12v.
- ¹³¹ Richardson, Letters Written to and for Particular Friends, preface, A2v:
- ¹³² Flynn and Copeland, TITLE; Warner, Reading Clarissa: The Struggles of Interpretations (1979). Volume 16 of the Clarissa Project will record reactions of both men and women to the novel throughout the eighteenth century. Other volumes will include responses, from the nineteenth century to the present day. There is already a vast literature about Richardson's effect on British and Continental novelists and novels. For example, see Thomas O. Beebee, Clarissa on the Continent: Translation and Seduction (University Park, Pa., 1990).
- ¹³³ Keymer, Richardson and His Eighteenth-Century Readers, 96; Ruth Perry, "Clarissa's Daughters; Or, The History of Innocence Betrayed. How Women Writers Rewrote Richardson," in Flynn and Copeland, TITLE, 121.
- ¹³⁴ E&K 351-52, 287 quoting a letter of 20 June 1759.
- ¹³⁵ Shari Benstock, "From Letters to Literature: La Carte Postale in the Epistolary Genre," Genre 18 (1985): 257-95.
- ¹³⁶ Keymer, Richardson's "Clarissa" and the Eighteenth-Century Reader, 48.
- ¹³⁷ Johnson did know enough Latin to teach her son to read it. See Penelope Wilson, "Classical Poetry and the Eighteenth-Century Reader," in Isabel Rivers, ed., Books and Their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England (Leicester, 1982), 69-96. Lincolnshire Record Office, Johnson/1/2 and 3, p. 182, note by Johnson, 7 May 1756.
- ¹³⁸ J. Paul Hunter, "Couplets and Conversation," in John E. Sitter, ed., The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry (Cambridge, 2001), 15; Kennedy, TITLE, 89.
- ¹³⁹ In MS. Don. c.190, fol. 95 see, for example, extracts from "Tompsons Poems."
- ¹⁴⁰ MS. Don. c.190, fols. 26-28 and d.198, fols. 1-2.
- ¹⁴¹ A General Index to the Spectators, Tatlers, and Guardians (1757) may be searched online for references to poetry.
- ¹⁴² MS. Don. e 198, fol. 1; Psalms, xix:1; Spectator no. 465, 6:253-54, 23 August 1712.
- ¹⁴³ MS. Don. e.198, fols. 1-2. The asterisk is Johnson's.
- ¹⁴⁴ John Hughes, The Ecstasy, An Ode (1720) and The Poetical Works, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1779), 1:92-100 at 99.
- ¹⁴⁵ Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski, The Odes of Casimire, trans. G. Hils (1646; reprint ed., 1953), Ode 5. Lib. 2, 16-25.
- ¹⁴⁶ William Stevenson, Original Poems on Several Subjects (Edinburgh, 1765), 2:126, 128.
- ¹⁴⁷ Moses Browne, Sunday Thoughts (1753); and "To Stella," in Poems on Various Subjects, (1739), 260.
- ¹⁴⁸ In MS. Don. c.190, fol. 95, Johnson copies a description of heaven from Sunday Thoughts.
- ¹⁴⁹ MS. Don e.198, fol. 17 contains extracts from Hervey's "On Reading the Inscription on Mrs. Stonhouses's Monument," Meditations and Contemplations, 11th ed., 2 vols. (1753), 1:36. His "Contemplations on the Starry Heavens" is found at 2:89-91.
- ¹⁵⁰ MS Don. e.198, fol. 2; c.190, fol. 26; James Bridie, Tobias and the Angel (1961), xxi. Tobias is found in the book of Tobit in the Apocrypha. The angel Raphael accompanied him on his travels.
- ¹⁵¹ MS. Don. e.198, fol. 5; Gordon Phelps, A Short History of English Literature (1962), 74-75, 82.

¹⁵² See Reeves, Pursuing the Muses, 21–22, about Elizabeth Rowe’s reading; Fergus, “Provincial Servants,” 213; Kennedy, TITLE, 78–98; and Felicity Nussbaum, “Eighteenth-Century Women’s Autobiographical Commonplaces,” in Shari Benstock, ed., The Private Self (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1988), 147–71 and titles in n. 13, above.

¹⁵³ The Perdita Project for the study of early modern women’s manuscript compilations is now at the University of Warwick. For a recent overview see Susan Staves, A Literary History of Women’s Writing in Britain, 1660–1789 (Cambridge, 2006).

¹⁵⁴ Fergus (in Provincial Readers) argues convincingly that booksellers’ records do not confirm the stereotype of the woman novel reader.

¹⁵⁵ The Critical Review 533 (September 1761): 203–11, compares the impact of the novels of Richardson and Rousseau. See also Bodleian Library, MS. Edwards 1011, fol. 94, Thomas Edwards/D. Wray Esq., 16 January 1748; Janet Todd, Sensibility: An Introduction (1986), 4. On reading letters aloud see Barbauld, TITLE, 1:clxxxvii; and O. M. Brack, “Bibliographical Essay: Clarissa’s Bibliography: Problems and Challenges,” in Richardson’s Published Commentary (1998), 2:313.

¹⁵⁶ E&K, 199, Samuel Richardson/Sarah Westcomb, [1746], Carroll, TITLE, 64–67.

¹⁵⁷ I thank Margaret Reeves for her insights in “Telling the Tale of The Rise of the Novel,” CLIO 30:1 (2000): 25–49. See also Tom Keymer and Jon Mee, The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1740–1830 (Cambridge, 2004), xi, for a recent reaffirmation of Richardson’s crucial place; and Clare Brant, “Eighteenth-Century Letters: Aspects of the Genre” (D.Phil. thesis, Oxford, 1984).

¹⁵⁸ Clarissa, The Clarissa Project (1751, reprint ed., N.Y., 1990), 37.

¹⁵⁹ Pawlowicz, TITLE, 46.

¹⁶⁰ Bernard Scholz, “Self-Fashioning by Mail: The Letters of a Renaissance Misfit,” in Amanda Gilroy and W. M. Verhoeven, eds., Prose Studies 19:2 (1996), “Correspondences: A Special Issue on Letters,” 140.