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Staging Readers Reading

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Abstract
The rise-of-the-novel narrative, as perfected by Ian Watt in 1957, and extended by many other literary histories in the yearn since, is not "wrong," hut it is biased and incomplete. Why is this so? First of all, Watt's classic account places the novel within a progressive narrative, which assumes that the modern era has discovered increasingly powerful writing technologies for representing reality: he calls this "formal realism" and links it to another focus of modernist triumphant narratives, the bourgeois invention of a complex and deep self. Second, the rise-of-the-novel narrative is vitiated by the fact that its essential aim is to legitimize the novel as a form of literature. Thus the rise-of-the-novel narrative demonstrates that the technology of realism enabled prose narratives about love and adventure, which, by the second half of the seventeenth century, large numbers of readers had begun to read for entertainment, to rise into a form of literature every bit as valuable and important as the established literary types of poetry, epic, and drama. Third, and this point follows from the first two, the use of the definite article in the phrase "rise of the novel" turns novelness into a fugitive essence every particular novel strives to realize. What has been the effect of this narrative? It has ratified the project of the novel's moral and aesthetic elevation undertaken by novelists from Richardson, Fielding, Prévost, and Rousseau to Flaubert, Henry James, Joyce, and Woolf. But it has also impoverished our sense of what the novel is, first by taking novel criticism into interminable and tendentious debates about what realism really is, and second by making it our business to be guardians of the boundary between the "truly" novelistic and the "merely" fictional. We need a more historically rigorous and culturally inclusive conception of what the novel is and has been. My recent book, Licensing Entertainment (l998), aims to contribute to such a project. There, I document the development of the rise-of-the-novel narrative within a long literary-historical tradition that begins with Clara Reeve (1785) and John Dunlop (1814) and extends through many of the literary histories before Watt (including Walter Scott, William Hazlitt, Hippolyte A. Taine, and George Saintsbury). At the same time I have articulated my critical differences from Watt and many more recent critics who have sought to update or revise that narrative.

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The rise-of-the-novel narrative, as perfected by Ian Watt in 1957, and extended by many other literary histories in the years since, is not "wrong," but it is biased and incomplete. Why is this so? First of all, Watt's classic account places the novel within a progressive narrative, which assumes that the modern era has discovered increasingly powerful writing technologies for representing reality: he calls this "formal realism" and links it to another focus of modernist triumphant narratives, the bourgeois invention of a complex and deep self. Second, the rise-of-the-novel narrative is vitiated by the fact that its essential aim is to legitimize the novel as a form of literature. Thus the rise-of-the-novel narrative demonstrates that the technology of realism enabled prose narratives about love and adventure, which, by the second half of the seventeenth century, large numbers of readers had begun to read for entertainment, to rise into a form of literature every bit as valuable and important as the established literary types of poetry, epic, and drama. Third, and this point follows from the first two, the use of the definite article in the phrase "rise of *the* novel" turns novelness into a fugitive essence every particular novel strives to realize. What has been the effect of this narrative? It has ratified the project of the novel's moral and aesthetic elevation undertaken by novelists from Richardson, Fielding, Prévost, and Rousseau to Flaubert, Henry James, Joyce, and Woolf. But it has also impoverished our sense of what the novel is, first by taking novel criticism into interminable and tendentious debates about what realism really is, and second by making it our business to be guardians of the boundary between the "truly" novelistic and the "merely" fictional. We need a more historically rigorous and culturally

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inclusive conception of what the novel is and has been. My recent book, *Licensing Entertainment* (1998), aims to contribute to such a project. There, I document the development of the rise-of-the-novel narrative within a long literary-historical tradition that begins with Clara Reeve (1785) and John Dunlop (1814) and extends through many of the literary histories before Watt (including Walter Scott, William Hazlitt, Hippolyte A. Taine, and George Saintsbury). At the same time I have articulated my critical differences from Watt and many more recent critics who have sought to update or revise that narrative.[1]

To develop a more inclusive understanding of early modern novel reading and to grasp novels at their highest level of generality, it is useful to compare the novel to that other successful offspring of the cultures of print, the newspaper. A newspaper is not just an unbound folio sheet printed with advertisements and news. It evolved within a social practice of reading, drinking (usually coffee or tea), and conversation; it required the development of the idea of "the world" as a plenum of more or less remote, more or less strange phenomena—events, disasters, commodities—translated into print and worthy of our daily attention. The idea of the modern may be the effect of this media-assisted mutation in our way of taking in the world. This intricate marriage of print form and social practice has survived to this day as "reading the paper." In an analogous fashion the institution of novel reading requires a distinct mutation of both print forms and reading practices. While the printing of books devoted to prestigious cultural activities (such as religion, law, natural philosophy) began in the fifteenth century and gained momentum in the sixteenth century, it was not until the later seventeenth century that short novels helped to shift the practices of reading so that novels could become a mode of entertainment. Several factors helped promote novel reading for entertainment: lower printing costs; an infrastructure of booksellers, printers, and means of transport; a critical mass of readers of vernacular writing; and the opportunistic exploitation of the new vogue for reading novels (usually in octavo or duodecimo format) by generations of printers and booksellers. But if there was to be a rise of novel reading, it required a complex shift in reading practices. Historians of reading Robert Darnton and Roger Chartier have described these changes, changes which are never complete or unidirectional: from intensive reading of a few books such as the Bible to extensive reading of a series of similar books such as novels; from slow reading as a prod to meditation to an absorptive reading for plot; from reading aloud in groups to

1 William Beatty Warner, *Licensing Entertainment: The Elevation of Novel Reading in Britain, 1684–1750* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 1–44.

reading alone and in silence; from reading the Bible or conduct-books as a way of consolidating dominant cultural authority to reading novels as a way to link kindred spirits; from reading what is good for you to reading what you like. Like television watching in the mid-twentieth century, novel reading took France and England by storm; like television watching, reading novels engendered excitement and resistance in the societies where it first flourished.

In this essay I will interpret some of the paintings and prints of the period that depict readers reading in the hope of broadening our understanding of the first century of novel reading. In adopting this strategy, I will be doing the reverse of what early modern image-makers have done. As we shall see, early modern artists use images of readers reading to reflect upon the nature of viewing painting; in this essay, I will read these paintings to see how they reflect the crisis in early modern reading provoked by the popularity of reading novels for entertainment. Anyone surveying the Dutch and French genre paintings and prints of the seventeenth and eighteenth century—a type of image making that captures ordinary people in their everyday domestic activities—will quickly discover the currency of images of readers reading. From old men reading grand folios in solitude to young women absorbed in their novels, the paintings and prints of the period stage reading as inviting, compelling, and sometimes dangerous. They document the period's fascination with what was after all still a relatively new activity, one which, with the spread of literacy, was becoming an increasingly important part of everyday life. These images do not merely reflect a struggle around literacy happening elsewhere; instead, these images are themselves part of a critical debate that developed, over the course of the early modern period, about how reading influences readers. What started as a promotional campaign for the reading of moral and didactic books ends up as a culture war about the pleasures and dangers of novel reading. These visual texts, however, also meditate upon a cultural problem closely related to book reading, the question of how a viewer should benefit from the encounter with a painting.

I begin with several images that communicate the higher purposes of reading. Rembrandt's *Een oude vrouw, waarschijnlijk Rembrandt's moeder*, known also as *The Prophetess Anne* and as *Rembrandt's Mother* (figure 1; 1631), suggests the thoughtful solitude of a reader absorbed in her book. Several features of the composition of this painting imbue reading with hushed reverence: the old woman bends into the grand folio volume she holds; the hand with which she gently touches the page is painted in high focus; a swirl of colour and light—hood, shawl, and

page—cast her face into the shade of meditation; there is an utter absence of distracting background. This painting, in which Rembrandt used his mother as a model, stages reading as an intimate and delicious encounter with the light of truth. In a painting by Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin (figure 2; 1734), reading is imbued with a similar hush and solemnity. The various titles given to this celebrated painting, however, suggest the pivotal role of reading in the professions: *Un Chimiste dans son laboratoire*, *Le Souffleur*, *Un Philosophe occupé de sa lecture*, and *Portrait du peintre Joseph Aved*. This painting's communication of the cultural centrality of reading is made explicit in the contemporary commentary upon this image by the abbé Laugier at the Salon of 1753: "C'est un Lecteur vraiment Philosophe qui ne se contente point de lire, qui médite & approfondit, & qui paroît si bien absorbé dans sa méditation qu'il semble qu'on auroit peine à le distraire."[2] In *Absorption and Theatricality*, which presents a spectrum of French eighteenth-century genre painting, Michael Fried demonstrates what he calls "the primacy of absorption," in the subjects, who are represented reading, sleeping, playing games, or caught up in a moment of high personal drama. Fried shows how representation of figures deeply absorbed in some activity becomes a strategy for taking painting beyond the arch theatricality and superficial sensuality attributed to the rococo style by mid-century. At the same time various compositional effects are used to produce paintings that will absorb the beholder of the painting: rich painterly surfaces (Chardin), animated brush work (Jean-Honoré Fragonard), and didactic drama (Jean-Baptiste Greuze). It is no surprise, I think, that figures of readers reading play so prominent a part in this elevation of the cultural role of genre painting: by associating beholding an image with reading a book, images of reading could anchor the greater cultural significance being claimed for painting. It is as though these images are saying, "Look at this image with the same seriousness of purpose that these readers accord to reading."

In the eighteenth century, reading was not always silent and solitary; it was also oral and collective. Reading could offer a means of inculcating religious and family values. In a painting by Greuze entitled *La Lecture de la Bible* (figure 3; c.1755), reading has the power to compose a magic circle in which nearly the whole family is absorbed into the power of Scripture as it is relayed through the father's voice. Like Rembrandt and Chardin, Greuze grasps a particular moment: when the smallest child's effort to play with a dog fails to distract a family utterly absorbed by the reading. In this

2 Quoted by Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 11.

way the power of reading to move its auditors is put on visual display. How does this painting earn its claim to broad moral significance? Norman Bryson argues that Greuze's dramatic tableaux of family life represent a variety of ages and human types within a single family, so that, hermetically sealed off from the world outside the home, a general "idea of 'humanity' with its powerful emotional and didactic charge, can be generated."[3]

Figure 3. Jean-Baptiste Greuze (1705–1825), *La Lecture de la Bible*

In all three of these paintings—whether reading is oral or silent, part of solitude or of social exchange—it is supposed that one reads to improve the self. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau suggests that a particular concept of the book lies at the heart of the enlightenment educational project: "The ideology of the Enlightenment claimed that the book was capable of reforming society, that educational popularization could transform manners and customs, that an elite's products could,

3 Norman Bryson, *Word and Image: French Painting of the Ancien Régime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 128.

if they were sufficiently widespread, remodel a whole nation."[4] This enlightenment project is, according to de Certeau, structured around a certain concept of education as mimicry, with a "scriptural system" that assumes that "although the public is more or less resistant, it is moulded by (verbal or iconic) writing, that it becomes similar to what it receives, and that it is imprinted by and like the text which is imposed on it."[5] The disciplinary promise and weight of the book receive their most explicit expression in early modern education. Here are several images that express different aspects of that vast cultural project. In a painting by Joshua Reynolds entitled *Boy Reading* (figure 4; 1747), the tension between resolute body language and an abstracted gaze communicates the arduous demands of labour with books.

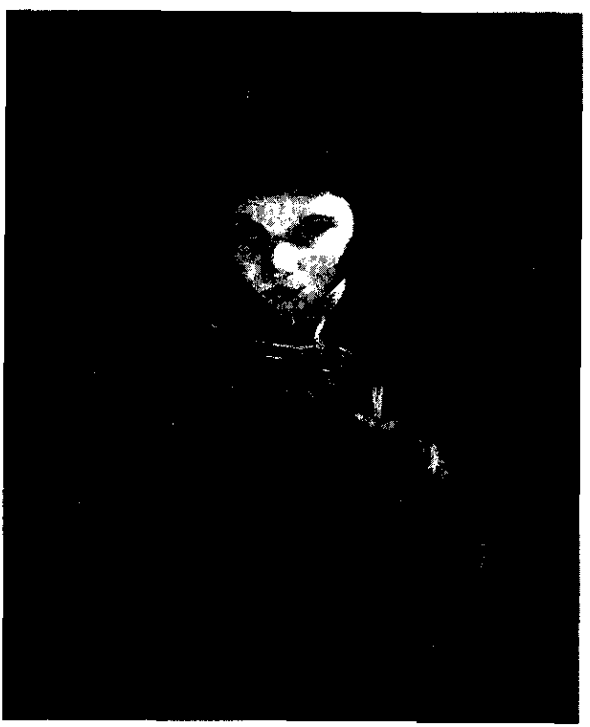

Figure 4. Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792). *Boy Reading*, private collection. Reproduced by permission of the Royal Academy of Arts, London.

4 Michel de Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 166.

5 De Certeau, p. 167.

To imprint the knowledge of the book upon one's mind requires all one's energy, as expressed, for example, in Greuze's *Un Écolier qui étudie sa leçon*, known also as *Boy with Lesson Book* (figure 5; 1757), where the posture of the student—he is poised over the book—and the high focus of the fingers crossed over the volume suggest the concentration required to memorize. This student, like Rembrandt's prophetess and Chardin's philosopher, is touched into a state of silent thought by the book he touches. In the companion piece of the same child, we can see the exhaustion this sort of intensive reading may entail: Greuze, *Un Enfant qui s'est endormi sur son livre*, known also as *Le Petit Paresseux* (figure 6; 1755).

Figure 7. Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin (1699–1779), *The Good Lesson*, reproduced by permission of The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; gift in memory of George R. Brown by his wife and children.

Finally, in a painting by Chardin, *Une Jeune Fille qui récite son évangile*, known also as *The Good Lesson* (figure 7; c. 1749–53), one grasps the expected payoff of the enlightenment pedagogical project: a young girl stands before her mother, who is holding a book, and recites what she has learned from her reading. The intimacy of this domestic space does not qualify the

solemn importance of what is transpiring. Here truth is given its ideal symbolic resonance as light: it passes from Nature (as sunlight) to the mother (her dress) to the gospels she holds, to the face and bonnet of the young girl who recites the Word she has learned. While this metaphorical substitution of light for truth has its grounds in the fourth gospel (John 1:4–5, 9), this trope was also of course adapted by secular thinkers of the eighteenth century to characterize this epoch as an "age of Enlightenment" (Kant). These four paintings describe, celebrate, and promote the proper practice of reading as a way to enlighten readers by educating them. Of course, like all representations of reading or spectatorship, these images do not really tell us what is going on when one reads. But notice the implicit corollary of the enlightenment program of reading as mimicry: by making the reader a passive receptacle for the book's meaning, this theory of reading makes the reading of the wrong kind of writing especially dangerous. By interpreting reading as automatic and uncritical, the enlightenment theory of reading produced as its logical corollary the anxiety triggered by the popularity of novels among the young.

Given the enormous cultural investment in reading for instruction, how did reading for entertainment become an important new form of reading? The market plays a pivotal role in advancing this new kind of reading. In England in the early eighteenth century, printed matter became what it is today: a commodity on the market. Rather than requiring subsidy by patrons, print received its ultimate support from that complex collaboration between producers and consumers we call "the market." Eighteenth-century observers of these changes were less sanguine and less resigned about the effects of taking culture to the market than we seem to be today. In the *Fable of the Bees* (1712, 1714), Bernard Mandeville offers an ironic celebration of the surprising effects of markets: many individual decisions produce effects in excess of any single guiding intention. But while the market in books meant increases in both production and wealth, it also entailed the publication of anything that might sell, a relaxation of "standards" and an unprecedented access to print for writers of all levels of quality, in both eighteenth-century senses of that word—value and class. Since the eighteenth century this new cultural formation—then dubbed "Grub Street," now called "Hollywood"—has been celebrated and condemned for its fecundity and filth, its compelling vulgarity. To conservative critics of the eighteenth-century print market, the trade in books seemed a system dangerously out of control precisely because no one was in control.

Improvements in the production and distribution of printed books allowed booksellers to expand the numbers, kinds, and formats of books

printed; this allowed booksellers to promote reading for entertainment. However, reading for entertainment set off a debate about the proper functions of reading. Although publishers found that many species of books (from ghost stories to travel narratives to a criminal's Newgate confessions) might gratify the desire for reading pleasure, no genre was more broadly popular than novels. We can glimpse one way novels were used in a painting by Carle Van Loo entitled *The Spanish Reading* (figure 8; c. 1754). In this idealized bucolic setting, reading aloud harmonizes a diverse group into a tableau of "the good life." Here a young beau reads to two young women, who appear entirely enraptured by what he reads. An anonymous eighteenth-century commentator interprets the painting in terms of the anti-novel discourse which developed to oppose novel reading.

Figure 8. Carle Van Loo (1705–1765), *The Spanish Reading*. Reproduced by permission of The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.

Un jeune homme vêtu à l'Espagnole lit une brochure qu'à sa vive attention & à celle de l'assemblée, on reconnoît pour quelque Roman ou il s'agit d'amour. Deux jeunes personnes l'écoutent avec un plaisir que tout peint en elles. La mère [actually their governess] qui est de l'autre coté du Lecteur, & derrière lui, suspend son ouvrage pour écouter aussi. Mais son attention est toute differente de celle de ses filles; on y lit les reflexions qu'elle fait, et le melange du plaisir que lui donne le livre, & de la crainte qu'elle a peut-etre de la dangereuse impression qu'il peut faire sur de jeunes cœurs.[6]

Print might impress itself upon the (page of an) impressionable heart. This metaphor, which uses the mechanism of printing (the press which makes identical impressions) to elucidate the practice of reading, resonates through eighteenth-century discussions of print media policy. Worry focuses upon a possible reversal of proper agency, under which a weakened subject—the susceptible reader—might come under the control of a smart object—the insinuating novel. Thus, *The Whole Duty of Woman* (1737) registers this warning to novel readers: "Those amorous Passions, which it is [the novel's] Design to paint to the utmost Life, are apt to insinuate themselves into their unwary Readers, and by an unhappy Inversion a Copy shall produce an Original."[7] In keeping with the latent misogyny of the period's anti-novel discourse, it was widely thought that novel reading could induce a restructuring of the labile emotions of the woman reader.

If collective reading of a novel carried risks, what might be the effect of novel reading upon a solitary woman reader? We can approach this question by looking at what two major French painters of the mid-eighteenth century do with the subject of the woman alone with her novel. Fragonard's painting *A Young Girl Reading* (figure 9; c. 1776) does not invest the figure with a specific legible meaning. The painting is one of fourteen paintings art historians call "Figures de Fantaisie," all men and women in "half-length portraits" of the same dimension, apparently executed very quickly, and "dressed in what were known as Spanish costumes" with "expressions ... lively, their eyes turned away ... as if they have been frozen in the middle of an action."[8] Bryson has explained the effect of these paintings of Fragonard in terms that are useful in understanding the absorptive power of novel reading, especially of the vivid "hallucination" of experiencing

6 Quoted by Fried, p. 27.

7 *The Whole Duty of Woman; or, an Infallible Guide to the Fair Sex* (London: T. Read, 1737), p. 42.

8 Jean-Pierre Cuzin, *Jean-Honoré Fragonard: Life and Work. Complete Catalogue of the Oil Paintings* (New York: Abrams, 1988), p. 102.

Richardson's characters as though they were real persons. To know a character in a novel or the woman in this painting as an "ideal presence, half transmitted by the artwork" requires "for its full existence the imaginative participation of reader or viewer."[9] There are several ways *A Young Girl Reading* teases its viewer into interpretation: the painting is incomplete (for example in the drawing of the left hand) but the brush-strokes are richly evocative; the blankness of the background withholds any context for this figure; and finally, the brilliant foreground lighting of the reader's gold and white Spanish costume gives this pretty young woman an oddly extravagant aura. She seems to be posed for our gaze, but she looks away. The delicate balance of book, hand, and head as seen in profile, and the ease of her body resting against cushion and arm rail, communicate the graceful self-completeness of the solitary reader. Although some art historians suppose that *A Young Girl Reading* is the portrait of an actual young woman,[10] the painting remains enveloped in mystery, as elusive as the thoughts and feelings of another person's reading. In this painting, reading achieves an allegorical generality.

If Fragonard's painting offers an implicit endorsement of the pleasures of a young girl's reading, Greuze's *Lady Reading the Letters of Heloise and Abelard* (figure 10; 1758–59) seeks to make visible the explicitly erotic dangers of novel reading. In contrast with the self-possession of Fragonard's reader, this solitary reader is swept with passion: there is a strong contortion to her position, her lips are open, her hands languorous. The title of this painting by Greuze gives the reason for this disorder. The tokens on her table—a billet-doux, a string of black pearls, a sheet of music, and a book entitled "The Art of Love"—are the details that allow the viewer of the painting to surmise that this reader is involved in an affair of her own. The lighting and contiguity of book, dress, and bosom invite the viewer to detect a causal relationship: it is precisely this kind of reading that leads to illicit affairs, it is this novel that has transported this lady into a state of distracted arousal. But the didacticism of the image is fraught with unintended consequences. By linking the animated white leaves of the book to the white morning dress that is slipping off the partially exposed breasts of this aroused reader, by inviting us to survey the erotic effects of novel reading upon the woman's body, the painting becomes as lush and explicit and arousing as the novel-reading it intends to warn us against.

9 Bryson, p. 104.

10 Cuzin, pp. 123–25.

The resulting confusion of erotic means and ends is one Greuze's painting will share with Richardson's novels.[11]

In his playful pair of erotic prints from 1736 entitled *Before* (figure 11) and *After* (figure 12), William Hogarth finds a very different way to encode a warning against novel reading. The heroine's succumbing to her admirer suggests that the volume of "Novels," as well as the poems of Rochester, have greater influence than another book on her night stand, "The Practice of Piety." In this pair of prints, the abrupt movement from the "before" to "after" (sex) prevents precisely the sort of absorptive identification Greuze's painting encourages.

The reader of these two prints is positioned as a bemused observer of a comic deflation in condition: in *Before*, the woman is a heroic defender of her virtue, but *After* she is a pathetic petitioner for the man's attentions; and likewise, the man goes from being the robust lover to a condition of confused, reticent, and even harassed sexual agent. While Hogarth's moral rhetoric obliquely invokes the warning of the epoch's anti-novel discourse—that is, "purify your reading if you would guard your virtue"—his more famous Progress series of prints are much closer in their narrative trajectory and entertainment value to the novels they ostensibly spurn. For most of the eighteenth century, readers accepted as a truism the proposition that novel reading did one no good, and that more serious books should attract our reading energies. (For an example of this by then antiquated opinion, one can read Jane Austen's satirical account of Mr Collins's attempted reading of Fordyce's sermons after supper on his first night with the Bennets in *Pride and Prejudice*, 1813). In one pair of paintings, John Opie (1761–1807) offers wry social commentary upon this chronic schism in the order of reading. In *A Moral Homily* (figure 13), Opie represents the likely effects of improving reading—yawns and boredom—here imposed by a solemn dame upon her comely young auditors. However, the structure the governess or teacher has imposed—auditors gathered around one reader with the book—can be adapted to other purposes.

Once the austere matriarch has left, evidently taking her heavy tomes with her, the girls can gather into a rapt circle to hear *A Tale of Romance*, (figure 14). Opie's representations of novel reading and its effects suggest a question for those who want to exploit the improving potential of books. How is an author to solve the problem of adolescent boredom with conduct discourse and fascination with narratives of love? For a writer such as Samuel Richardson, what was required was above all the development of a hybrid form of writing, one which would use stories of love to attract young

11 Warner, pp. 212–24.

readers to the higher purposes of reading, meditation. The connection between books and meditation is illustrated by the print entitled *Meditatio* (figure 15; 1758–60) from Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*. Here a middle-aged woman is separated from the crowds and bustle of the public spaces behind her. With a book on her lap, and her feet on several grand folios, Dame Meditation's reading has become a prod to deep thought. In Ripa's gloss on this iconography, Meditation's "holding up her head with her hand, denotes the gravity of her thoughts."[12]

In Joshua Reynolds's portrait, *Theophilia Palmer Reading "Clarissa Harlowe"* (figure 16; 1753), we find the same tight compositional circle of head, arms, and book we have found in other absorbed readers. But here Reynolds's use of the iconography of meditation—the touch of the hand to the forehead—gives visual expression to Richardson's program of reconciling novel reading with the *weighty* purposes of moral reflection. In his painting, Reynolds represents the woman reader Richardson intended *Clarissa* to win: one immune from erotic appropriation. Thus, Reynolds does not imbue this woman with any of the mystery of Fragonard's *A Young Girl Reading* or the labile emotions of Greuze's reader. Instead, here we have an ordinary girl, safely ensconced in her sturdy chair, directing her full attentions to *Clarissa*. But the actual readers of Richardson's novels found them rife with erotic potential.[13]

How is one to explain the special fascination of images of readers reading for painters of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries? In *On Narcissism* (1915), Freud notes the erotic attraction for the observer of isolated individuals—a beautiful woman lost in her book or a young child playing, for example—who appear utterly and pleasurably absorbed in themselves. The narcissistic contentment of these figures incites a restless desire in their observers. These images have parallels in the early English novels of Delarivier Manley and Eliza Haywood. For example, in the second part of Haywood's *Love in Excess* (1719–20), the hero D'Elmont's desire for the heroine Melliora is aroused by seeing her alone in the garden, deeply absorbed in reading. His investigation of her reading, and their debates about the effects of her reading, help to advance their love.[14] Six of

12 Peter H. Paulowicz, "Text and Image: Eighteenth-Century England," *The Consumption of Culture: 1600–1800, Image, Object, Text*, ed. Ann Birmingham and John Brewer (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 50.

13 For the remarkably erotic imagery that develops around the Pamela vogue, see James Turner, "Novel Panic: Picture and Performance in the Reception of *Pamela*," *Representations* 48 (1994), 70–96. For accounts of the dangerous effects of reading Richarson's novels, see William Beatty Warner, *Reading "Clarissa": The Struggles of Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), chap. 4; and *Licensing Entertainment*, chap.5.

14 Warner, *Licensing Entertainment*, p. 117.

the images we have surveyed deploy a distinct iconography for the reader reading: in *The Prophetess Anne*, *Un Philosophe occupé de sa lecture*, *Boy Reading*, *A Young Girl Reading*, *Lady Reading the Letters of Heloise and Abelard*, and *Theophilia Palmer Reading "Clarissa Harlowe,"* the readers are isolated from others, their gaze is averted from the viewer of the painting, and their fingers gently touch the book that has so powerfully compelled their attention. Perhaps most crucially, these half-length figures are represented in the extreme foreground of the painting.

Figure 17. François Boucher (1703–1770), *Madame Pompadour* (*Bildnis der Marquise de Pompadour*). Sammlung der Bayerischen Hypo- und Vereinsbank AG in der Alten Pinakothek, Munich. Reproduced by permission of the Alte Pinakothek Museum.

Bryson's interpretation of the "transformations of rococo space" helps explain how this iconography of the reader can be developed into highly erotic images, images that would in their aesthetic effects mime the absorption attributed to novels within the anti-novel discourse of the eighteenth century. Bryson argues that one of the chief traits of the rococo—the elimination of classical space established through Renaissance perspective—helps make the subject of the painting available to the fascinated gaze of the beholder. Within "rococo space" Bryson finds that "the erotic body is not a place of meanings and the erotic gaze does not attend to signification. Instead the painting devotes its painterly resources to "providing a setting for the spectacle ... transported to [a] space that is as close as possible to that inhabited by the viewer ... [that] of the picture plane" itself.[15] One can see the erotic effect of this sort of compositional strategy at work, in a rather sublimated form, in a glamorous portrait by François Boucher of his celebrated patron, *Mme Pompadour*, mistress of Louis XV (figure 17). This portrait catches its subject in a momentary pause in the elegant leisure activity of what is most likely novel reading. Several factors conspire to compose a shimmering surface that invites the spectator's gaze to wander: the oblique glance of Mme Pompadour releases our eyes from her face; instead the viewer's eye is free to wander over the artful arrangement of her arms and hands, over the richly detailed silk brocade of her dress, to the animated leaves of the book that lies at the centre of this composition. Here is painting that addresses its beholder outside of any informing moral purpose, and solicits a gaze that is in danger of becoming its own pleasurable end.

The anti-rococo reaction, most evident in the morally programmatic paintings of Greuze, resonates with the anti-novel discourse deployed by Richardson in his morally programmatic narratives. For critics of early modern novel reading were not just concerned about mimicry of a novel's action; they were also alarmed about the perverse displacement by which the reader, through the repetitive effects of absorptive reading for pleasure, conducted in freedom and solitude (in other words in the sort of autonomous erotic reverie the rococo encourages), might become a compulsively reading body. In a painting entitled *Reclining Nude* (figure 18; 1751), Boucher uses another of Louis XV's mistresses, Louise O'Murphy, as a model. Here, the open book to the left of the nude woman reclining on the couch suggests that the equivocal potential of reading novels for pleasure arises in part from a shift in location: one may read these

15 Bryson, pp. 91–92.

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Figure 18. François Boucher (1703–1770), *Reclining Nude*. Reproduced by permission of the Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Köln, Germany.

books in the intimate undress of the boudoir. The novel in this setting functions as a stimulant, like the tea in the samovar, which has replaced the novel in this rendering of the same model in the same pose in a painting of the same title (figure 19; 1752). With a small difference in position, and with a dark-haired model, the painting becomes more explicitly salacious, and well on the way to the pornographic image we see in *L'Odalisque* (figure 20; 1745).

1748, the year of the publication of the third and final instalment of *Clarissa*, is the same year as John Cleland's anonymous publication of *The Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, better known to us by the title *Fanny Hill*. The erotic use of novels becomes quite explicit in Pierre-Antoine Baudouin's print *Midi* (figure 21; c.1769). This image suggests that the head or heart was not the only body part that might be stimulated by reading. In his analysis of this print, Jean-Marie Goulemot notes what invites the viewer to enjoy the spectacle of this aroused young lady: the secure enclosure of a stage-like garden setting, the presence of a voyeur in

the form of a statue, and the young female body posed to maximize our view of her. The print invites us to note the crucial details: a small book has dropped from her right hand; her left hand has disappeared into her dress. In this print the outcome dreaded within the anti-novel discourse, the reader aroused to the point of orgasm, becomes an explicit compositional goal: solitary reading for entertainment is a preparative to masturbation. The reading body has become a pleasure machine.[16]

Figure 21. Pierre-Antoine Baudouin (1723–1769), *Midi*, from Eduard Fuchs, *L'Élément érotique dans la caricature: un document à l'histoire des mœurs publiques* (Vienna: C.W. Stern, 1906), fig. 92. Reproduced by permission of The Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

16 Jean-Marie Goulemot, *Ces Livres qu'on ne lit que d'une maine: Lecture et lecteurs de livres pornographiques au XVIIIe siècle* (Aix-en-Provence: Alinéa, 1991).

Given the range of these images of readers reading, one might well ask, "Is reading supposed to educate, entertain, improve, or arouse?" And given their polymorphous variety, one might ask as well, "Are paintings and prints that stage readers reading supposed to educate or entertain, improve or arouse?" My study of the verbal and visual discourses that engulfed reading, and especially reading for pleasure, suggests the answer should be "all the above." Over the arc of the period, educational and moral projects to improve reading collide with market-driven efforts to popularize reading in such a way as to expand and deepen the repertoire of reading practices. Just as the erotic immediacy of novels of amorous intrigue (written by Behn, Manley, and Haywood in England) provoked an anti-novel discourse, so too the erotic immediacy of the rococo—with naked nymphs sporting in the clouds—stimulated the didactic reaction of a sober patriarch reading the Bible to his children. But reforms of reading and viewing are never completely successful: deviantly pleasurable uses of reading and spectatorship are most blatant in the early modern rise of pornography. And this returns me to the topic of this special issue of *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, the vexed question of the novel's rise.

Our literary-historical narrative of the "rise of the novel" is limiting for the way it chooses winners. In *Licensing Entertainment* I describe the fruitful effects of the early modern struggle around reading. When the market's modernization of reading for entertainment stimulates an ethically motivated anti-novel critique, there develops a hybrid of amorous novels and conduct discourse, which subsequent English literary historians dub "the first modern novels in English." Richardson and Fielding are usually given credit for this invention. Why? Because their novels include something central to all subsequent novels: a reader's guide on how to use print media. Thus, at least since Fielding's model *Don Quixote*, the novel warns readers of the dangers of mindless emulation; the novel teaches the reader the difference between fiction and reality; and the novel interrupts the atavistic absorption of the reader by promoting an ethical reflection upon the self. In this way the early modern struggle around the proper uses of reading is resolved into thematic concerns and narrative processes within the elevated novel. But while such a project succeeds in making the novels a genre of literature, and therefore worthy of criticism, pedagogy, and advanced aesthetic creation, such a project of purification cannot prevent, it may in fact incite, the development of new practices of reading and new novelistic hybrids. By 1764, Horace Walpole pronounces himself bored with the limitations of the modern novel's reading protocols and its version

of reality. So Walpole offers his "gothic tale," *The Castle of Otranto*, as a self-consciously concocted blend of ancient and modern romance. I refer to the Gothic, with its vast and various modern proliferation in fiction (and films), so as to suggest the difficulty of any attempt to narrowly specify the nature of reading (or viewing). Alongside "the rise of the novel" as a literary type, the Gothic emerges to give readers another reason to read: to be frightened. I hope this essay has suggested ways we can honour narratives such as the "rise of the novel," which give literary studies its coherence, without underestimating the cultural strife that is constantly diversifying and complicating our practices of reading.

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