The Reliability of Alfred Morrison's Transcriptions

To the Editor:

The recent reappearance of an important letter from Samuel Richardson to Frances Grainger, one of Richardson's numerous correspondents in the years following the spectacular success of *Pamela* (1741) and *Clarissa* (1746–48), occasions the need to question seriously the reliability of Alfred Morrison's transcriptions of many autographs and historical documents.

The letter, dated 29 March 1750 and more than 2,800 words long, deals with, among other things, questions of parental authority, filial obedience, and husband-wife relations. Something of a feminist nearly 250 years ago, Grainger had raised these issues in previous correspondence with Richardson, and the letter makes clear that Richardson could not control this twenty-four-year-old woman as easily as he had manipulated Pamela or Clarissa: "O my Miss Grainger, you have advanced strange Notions, written strange things, on the Subject before us. And as far as I can see, are not at all changed in your Sentiments for All that has been answered tho convinced of the Reasonableness of the Answers. This is very discouraging in our Correspondence." This remarkable letter also contains an evaluation by Richardson of William Whitehead's drama *Roman Father* and a disguised reference to Henry Fielding, Richardson's contemporary.

Duncan Eaves and Ben Kimpel cite from or refer to the letter fourteen times in their definitive biography of Richardson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971). Their source for the letter was the transcription by Alfred Morrison published in volume 5 of his *Catalogue of the Collection of Autograph Letters and Historical Documents Formed between 1865 and 1882* (London: Strangeways, 1891). The only other extant version of the letter, a word-for-word copy of Morrison's, is contained in John Carroll's *Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964). Morrison's impressive six-volume collection, only two hundred copies of which were published, for private circulation, has become a rare and important repository for many historical documents. It is occasionally viewed as a primary source for a number of autographs and historical documents that have disappeared since 1891. Richardson's letter to Grainger was one such original presumed lost or destroyed when Eaves and Kimpel were doing their research.

Now that Richardson's original letter has reappeared in an American collection whose owners, while requesting anonymity, have deposited a copy at the British Library, it is evident that Morrison's version contains more than 250 errors, inaccuracies, additions, and omissions. The required emendations fall into several categories.

First, there are the alterations of punctuation, sentence structure, and paragraphing that Morrison introduced without any consistency. Though these do not substantially distort meaning, they noticeably obscure Richardson's epistolary style. Few are likely to fault Morrison for such modernizations of Richardson's spelling as "knowledge" for "knowlege," "choose" for "chuse," "show" for "shew," "screen" for "skreen," "though" for "tho," "entitle" for "intitle," and so on. Research purists, however, might object to Morrison's failure to follow Richardson's practice of capitalizing nearly all nouns. There are also some careless distortions of the text. When Richardson wished to emphasize a word or idea, he underlined it, and Morrison indicates this stress with italics. But there are at least a half-dozen cases where Morrison either does not italicize an underlined word or italicizes a word that Richardson did not underline.

More important are the misreadings. Almost anyone would have trouble deciphering Richardson's small, cramped eighteenth-century script, and Morrison sometimes guessed what Richardson had written. Morrison misread Richardson's "sung" as "merry," "known" as "plain," "lies" as "was," and "brawlers" as "burglars." Some of Morrison's renditions alter the meaning—for instance, his rendering of Richardson's "conversable" as "conversible," "I read" as "tread" (which makes no sense in the context), and "resolved" as "decided."

The most serious omission occurs in Richardson's critique of Whitehead's *Roman Father*, a significant portion of the letter. Morrison omits a key word, without which the sentence is meaningless. Here is Morrison's rendition followed by Richardson's original:

> and called upon the celestial register to record their vows above, and all the souls in the playhouse might then have fanned away and sighed and sobbed and murmured respectively to *their* sighs, sobs, and murmurs, till the whole female audience had joined in one amorous.

> and called upon the Celestial Register to record their Vows above. — And all the lost Souls in the Playhouse might then have fanned away, and sighed and sobbed and murmured respectively to their Sighs, Sobs and Murmurs till the whole Female Audience had joined in one amorous Singultus.

The missing word is "Singultus"—a speech broken by sobs—which Richardson obviously presumed was part of Grainger's vocabulary.

Finally, at least once Morrison deliberately distorts the text. He transcribes Richardson's plainly written "Sex" as "self" in reference to Queen Elizabeth I. Richardson's

original reads, "These are Remedies wished for against the Brute of a Husband; and good Queen Elizabeth is called in Question for not having had Compassion enough to her own Sex ["self" in Morrison], to prevail upon her Lords and Commons."

This is only a partial litany of Morrison's tamperings with the text. There must be other researchers who now have reason to wonder about the reliability of Morrison documents they have used in their work.

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Chaos in *Paradise Lost*

To the Editor:

John Rumrich's "Milton's God and the Matter of Chaos" (110 [1995]: 1035–46) confirms his role as the spokesperson for the beneficence of Chaos in *Paradise Lost*. However, Rumrich's selective use of textual evidence often obscures the problems with a positive reading of Chaos.

While he protests rigid readings of *Paradise Lost* and urges readers to recognize Milton's "ironic indeterminacy," Rumrich constructs his own narrow reading, describing conflicting viewpoints as unjustifiable (1036). Rumrich writes, "The most memorable edifices in Milton's works—the bridge across chaos, Pandemonium, and Nimrod's tower—are monolithic and tyrannical in aspect and at least implicitly targets of heaven's scorn" (1040–41), and to make this reading consistent, he overlooks another memorable edifice: the wall of heaven (3.503 ff.). Designed to protect and demarcate heaven, this monolithic edifice is surely not a target of heaven's scorn.

In turning heaven against itself, Rumrich creates a more serious problem: downplaying the significance of boundaries and of transgressions, which are central to *Paradise Lost*, as they were to Milton's world. Nevertheless, Rumrich uses postmodern chaos theory to argue that in heaven "ordinary limits are meant to be overcome with ease" and that the "inspired authorial voice of *Paradise Lost* expresses the desire to cross boundaries." Even in Eden, he writes, "Milton traces the dichotomy of clean and unclean . . . to a postlapsarian point of origin, not to the original order" (1038). But "unclean" transgressions of boundaries occur throughout the work. Well before the Fall, Satan "in contempt / At one slight bound high overleaped all bound" (4.180–81) to enter Eden, "as when a prowling wolf / . . . leaps o'er the fence with ease into the fold" (4.183, 4.187). Gabriel, for one, does not see

Satan's arrival in prelapsarian Eden as "productive and dynamic" (1038) or as an intended transgression:

> Why hast thou, Satan, broke the bound prescribed
> To thy transgressions, and disturbed the charge
> Of others, who approve not to transgress
> By thy example, but have power and right
> To question thy bold entrance on this place.   (4.878–82)

Indeed, the notion of the Fall, be it Satan's or humanity's, forces the reader to acknowledge the dire consequences of failing to observe boundaries.

Rumrich assures us that "[e]ven if Milton had not called chaos a womb, its generative capacity would be apparent . . ." (1042). Yet how is chaos generative? Throughout *Paradise Lost*, God is the source of generative energy. In this instance, God merely uses chaos as his raw material. Noting that God forms "good" creation from the particles found in chaos, Rumrich forgets that God follows the same pattern in forming "goodliest" Adam from particles of dust (5.516). Are we then meant to praise the goodness of dust? Simply because matter can be used to construct a good object does not prove the matter's inherent goodness. In fact, the point of God's creation is that ambivalent matter is with his "vital virtue infused" (7.236). Rumrich again quotes selectively: chaos is not just "womb of nature" but also "perhaps her grave" (2.911), just as dust is both alpha and omega of humankind separated from God's generative goodness. "For dust thou art, and shalt to dust return" (10.208).

Rumrich's failure to recognize the significance of boundaries leads to problems in other stages of his argument. Citing 7.168–73 to support his claims, Rumrich contends that since chaos (the place) is "infinite, eternal, and boundless," Chaos (the character) must be the "infinite material dimension of God" (1043). This one passage, however, is problematized by numerous others (2.958–59, 2.1035–40, 10.366–71). More disturbing is Rumrich's quick move from the "infinite, eternal" chaos to "infinite, eternal" Chaos. Milton takes care to describe Night, not Chaos, as "eldest of things" (2.962). If Night is eldest, Chaos must be younger—there having been a time when Night existed and Chaos did not. As for the idea of infinite Chaos, the character sees his realm shrinking from his "Frontiers" (2.998) and mourns "that little which is so left to defend, / Encroached on" (2.1000–01) by hell "beneath" and Earth "o'er my Realm" (2.1005). Furthermore, Satan voyages *through* the realm of Chaos to where its "gloomy bounds / confine with heav'n" (2.976–77). Satan and Chaos both recognize boundaries, frontiers, and places above and below Chaos's realm. Whether or not chaos (the place) is boundless is ambiguous. Chaos