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CRYING INTO PRINT: SENTIMENTAL READING, SPIRITUAL EXALTATION, AND TYPOGRAPHIC STANDARDIZATION

In the archive of fan mail addressed to Jean-Jacques Rousseau by avid readers of *La Nouvelle Héloïse* following its 1761 publication, Pierre Gallot's letter, dated August 5, 1764, stands out as exemplary of the traits normally assigned to this corpus. So much so, in fact, that Claude Labrosse included an excerpt from it as an epigraph to his 1985 investigation into eighteenth-century readership.[1] Effusive and impassioned, Gallot's letter is no doubt most characteristic in its claim to a remarkable intimacy with the novel's author, even though Gallot had no personal affiliation with Rousseau at all. It didn't matter; Gallot felt moved to address the perfect stranger named (as editor) on the title page of his copy as his "worthy friend" and "tender Father," writing that he had a "greater debt towards [Rousseau] than to those who gave me life."[2]

Gallot then gave free rein to a fantasy of a face-to-face encounter with the writer, where the latter would "see [him] sometime with Emile or Héloïse in hand." We might wonder what Gallot imagined Rousseau would behold. The formulation—à la main—sketches the scene vaguely. We know that Gallot would have had access to the works he names in an array of editions, all packaging the text in four to six easy-to-handle duodecimo or octavo volumes.[3] We

1. All translations are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

2. Pierre Gallot to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 5 Aug. 1764, letter 3442 in the *Electronic Enlightenment* database, ed. Robert McNamee et al., vers. 2.4, Oxford UP, 2012 <http://www.e-enlightenment.com>. This database presents the correspondence as edited and annotated by R. A. Leigh: Rousseau, *Correspondance complète*, 52 vols. (Banbury: Voltaire Foundation, 1965–98). Gallot's letter is at 21: 12–14.

3. McEachern identifies twenty editions of *La Nouvelle Héloïse* and twenty-two of *Emile* dated through 1764. Alongside authorized editions by Rey in Amsterdam, Robin

can safely say, then, that Gallot did not expect Rousseau to find him sitting at a desk before a weighty tome or standing at a lectern. Beyond that, though, Gallot says little to help us do more than speculate about how he might have interacted materially with the book or his surroundings, as his interlocutor stumbled upon the "satisfying" spectacle of his perusal. Would he be nestled in a comfortable armchair or wandering outside among the trees? Would his eyes be downturned, glued to the pages? Or would he be staring off into the distance, more akin to d'Agesci's well-known tableau of a woman reading, appropriately enough, a volume of the letters of Eloise and Abelard? Gallot's letter does not specify since the details he believed would manifest the essence of the scene for Rousseau lay, evidently, not in the mundane mechanics of holding his volume and eyeing its text, but rather in the intense emotional responses that the author's works subsequently triggered in him and in the somatic effects that rendered those responses visible to his spectator: "What focus," he writes. "I barely breathe out, I barely breathe in, it seems as if I am alone in the world, I see and hear Nothing, Tears of Tenderness Flow from my eyes, and I believe that in these instants, Ravished by the Charming Simplicity of Nature that I find in it [the book], I Taste perfect happiness."[4]

In seeking to better understand reading as a historical practice, scholarship on "Rousseau's readers," and more generally on eighteenth-century "sentimental reading," has seized on the impassioned testimonials with which fans like Gallot filled their missives. Given how comprehensive and fertile these accounts are with respect to a phenomenon for which direct evidence has always been so scant, this is hardly surprising. As a rule, readers leave few traces of their habits and experiences: "Who better than the reader can speak of reading, of *his or her* reading," writes Labrosse, "and who more than the reader refuses or neglects to do so" (11). Against such documentary paucity, the overbrimming archive of fan mail has seemed to offer enormously fruitful openings. Yet its richness has also, I believe, opened up a new set of problems that lie in the corollary assumption that the epistolary archive is not just rich but also reliable and sufficient as a source. Indeed, the work of Labrosse and others who have plumbed these letters for insights into eighteenth-century reading practices has tended to take the texts at their word, building from their depictions of reading as an exclusively spiritual or psychological experience composed of intense emotion, a deep and unproblematic feeling of connection with characters and

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in Paris, and Duchêne in Paris (under the imprint of Néaulme in Amsterdam or The Hague), counterfeits, often bearing Rey's imprint, can be traced to England, Switzerland, Holland, and Germany.

4. Gallot to Rousseau, 5 Aug. 1764, letter 3442 in *Electronic Enlightenment* and *Correspondance complète*, 21: 12–14.

authors, effusions of virtue and elevation, and bodily responses—most notably, crying—that gave transparent, reliable expression to this elevation.[5]

Less noticed has been what Gallot's letter does not say, especially insofar as it purports to describe a reading scene that can be visualized. There is, for instance, no depiction of reading as a concrete physical activity or as the customized use of an object. Yet if we define reading as the decoding of written signs inscribed onto a material platform, it is fair to ask whether what Gallot describes for Rousseau—and what "Rousseau's readers" so often identify in their letters as "reading"—should be called reading at all. In this sense, Gallot's letter is noteworthy not simply for its omissions but for the extent to which these omissions serve to advance an image of the spiritually renewed reader by pointedly detaching this figure from a range of material, sociological, commercial, and typographic realities that might ordinarily be considered essential to the activity. Gallot's account is not just an incomplete description of his actual reading but is, in key respects, in tension with it.

To fully appreciate accounts such as Gallot's as evidence of what it meant to read in the eighteenth century, I argue that they should be assessed not only in light of the images and tropes they obsessively rehearse, but also in light of what they systematically leave out, downplay, "forget," or otherwise sublimate. This includes, first and foremost, an expansive and highly commercialized book culture that, while ostensibly alien to the core principles that would define "sentimental reading"—promoting mass consumption, typographic standardization, and market values over moralistic, private spirituality—provided, in reality, the foundation on which the deep ethical investment in reading would be built. At one level, the commercial print framework ensured the accessibility of the "best-selling" works invariably at the center of this historical turn in reading habits (those of Rousseau, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, Goethe, or Richardson, as well as works that are obscure today but were successful at the time, such as those of Baculard d'Arnaud). More saliently for our purposes, this framework also established a distinct set of norms and customs for how to use books, along with a paradigm of legibility of which

5. Studies on reading based on the correspondence to Rousseau date to Daniel Mornet's work from the first half of the twentieth century; Mornet referenced the as-yet-unpublished corpus (archived in the municipal library of Neuchâtel) in the introduction to his critical edition of the *Nouvelle Héloïse* (Rousseau, *Nouvelle Héloïse* 1: 248–54). More recent studies include Darnton and Fournier. Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's fan mail has been analyzed by Goulemot and Masseau. Recent scholarship, as we'll see, has nuanced overly literal interpretations of the "naiveté" of the letters (Paige). In this perspective, however, the corpus still tends to be approached as self-contained and complete; in and of itself, sufficient as a fount of evidence for eighteenth-century reading practices, requiring only a more subtle interpretive eye.

"sentimental reading" would be one of the most characteristic expressions (though far from the only one). This model hinged on the reader's intuitive desire and instinctive ability to distinguish a text—entirely ascribable to a virtuous character or, above all, to a transcendent authorial voice—from its concrete instantiation in a commercially produced book that should, in principle, undermine the intimate, uplifting experience that the reader sought. To read, in this view, was to affirm the distinction between an abstract authorial discourse and its contingent material inscription. Thus, reading was as much about *not reading* as it was about *reading*. The condition for discovering a text's true meaning, as received directly from its author, was *not* finding its meaning in the manufactured object that conveyed this text. To read was to "forget" that the object was there (as Labrosse remarks). Our interpretations of sentimental reading and, through them, of modern reading have built from the gesture of "forgetting," of which immersive reading and crying are reflections. But if we do not tie this "forgetting" to the commercial typographic culture that fostered it, we cannot fully understand the sentimental reading styles described in the fan mail. This essay explores the links, rereading the letters in light of what they seek *not* to say, in order to argue that their silences—or half-silences—are as constitutive of modern reading as the images they conjure.

Staging Ideal Readers

Marked by sobbing and passionate transport, Gallot's account of reading does not exactly surprise. It echoes images and themes to which many readers of the period had recourse in communicating the pleasures that "sentimental" novels inspired. The emotional outpourings associated with these texts have, as a result, stood out as defining trends in eighteenth-century reading habits. Rolf Engelsing's argument for a "Reading Revolution" after 1750, for instance, highlights the role of obsessive novel-reading (viewed as a kind of illness), alongside periodical-reading, within a broad shift in literacy patterns according to which older reverent modes, fitted to a narrow corpus of primarily religious works (described by Engelsing as "intensive" reading), gave way to a new style shaped by massive expansion in the availability of books after midcentury. In place of the ritualistic rereading of a small canon of sacred works, "extensive" reading reflected a less respectful and more critical attitude toward a multitude of texts, often in conflict, that the individual devoured quickly, reading each one just once before disposing of it in favor of the next item.[6]

The novel's long roots in the fast-growing commercial book market of the early modern era might well justify its connection with this model. Yet those

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6. Wittmann; Chartier (*The Order of Books* 17).

who have questioned Engelsing's sharp temporal disjuncture between periods defined by intensive versus extensive literacy point to the fact that, as Gallot makes clear, novels hardly represented the throwaway material that periodicals and other print ephemera might have.[7] Readers of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, *Paul et Virginie*, *Clarissa*, and *The Sufferings of Young Werther* were anything but distracted and detached. They invested deeply in these works' plot twists, reacting with powerful feeling at the suffering of key characters whose virtuous struggles against vice they took to be "authentic," if not to say "true," and with which they then strongly identified. Moreover, with so much at stake, these readers never scanned the texts just once but perused them over and over: "I read with keen pleasure your Novel, I reread it with intense emotion [*avec transport*], and I will reread it again many times, even though I feel I know it by heart, such was the deep impression it made on me," writes Jacob Vernes, in an illustrative 1761 letter to Rousseau.[8] For Robert Darnton, Vernes's statement indicates that post-1750 novel-reading habits exemplified a readaptation of traditional "intensive" practices rather than a sharp break with them (249–51).

Most of all, readers attached themselves adoringly to the novelists who stood behind the works and to whom they submitted as pupils and disciples. "Yes Monsieur, your Julie, your Sᵗ Preux, have made me feel more than any moral Sermon, all the charms of virtue, and How much vice is something foreign to certain souls," writes Jean Louis Le Cointe in a 1761 letter.[9] He goes on to wonder, like Gallot, whether "men owe less to those who guide them in the path of virtue than to those who gave them a life that would be miserable without [this virtue]," transforming an already privileged didactic relationship into an even more intimate familial one. To be sure, Gallot and Le Cointe are

7. Even here, we should not be overly swayed by anachronistic images of newspapers abandoned on seats in subways trains or airports. Even late eighteenth-century periodicals, issued weekly or daily, resembled books more than they would in the next century. They were bound by readers for keeping. Daniel Mornet's study of postmortem inventories of private libraries in Paris between 1750 and 1780 records extensive collections of carefully preserved journals. Certain titles, such as the *Mercure de France* and *Journal de Trévoux*, were kept in collections of a hundred or more volumes. For instance, individuals who owned copies of the *Mercure* had on average 344 volumes of the periodical in their libraries (Mornet 478–80).
8. Jacob Vernes to Rousseau, 26 May 1761, letter 1419 in *Electronic Enlightenment* and *Correspondance complète*, 8: 332–33. For the parallel critique suggesting that "extensive" reading was common much earlier than the eighteenth century, see Ann Blair, *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age.*
9. Jean Louis Le Cointe to Rousseau, 5 Apr. 1761, letter 1387 in *Electronic Enlightenment* and *Correspondance complète*, 8: 292–95.

far from the only readers to address their favorite author as "father," and scholarship on eighteenth-century sentimental reading has certainly put much stock in the motif of an intensely personal, one-on-one exchange between friends or kin, in which the reader's trust and openness to the novel's lessons is cultivated. Studying the fan mail addressed to Bernardin de Saint-Pierre in the 1780s and 1790s, Jean Goulemot and Didier Masseau identify what they call an *intimiste* reading mode, "by which the reader establishes an individualized rapport with the novelistic voice," represented most obviously by the very act of addressing a personal letter to the author, an unprecedented gesture before this period (39). Darnton similarly characterizes the reading of his famous case study, the La Rochelle merchant and avid Rousseau reader Jean Ranson, as the opening of a "new channel of communication between two lonely beings, the writer and the reader" (231).

A full description of "sentimental reading" needs, though, to account for the fact that this intimacy plays no part in the reader's actual circumstances, existing only in his or her mind. And such an acute tension between fantasy and reality is, I would argue, more salient to the history of reading than is the fantasy of intimate communication in and of itself. Goulemot and Masseau note that Bernardin de Saint-Pierre answered the letters he received and "sometimes prolonged the exchanges" (39). That is true. Certainly, Bernardin's letters to his friend Pierre Henin in the months following the publication of *Études de la Nature* in early 1785 show how pleased he was when unsolicited mail from devoted fans began to flood in: "I am receiving private letters from people with whom I have no relation, but who exalt me too much to convey them [to you]," he writes (*Correspondance* 2: 221). But his astonished delight at his success is hardly a reciprocation of the adoring appeals of the readers who poured their souls into their letters to him. Above all, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre remained highly conscious of—and thrilled with—the expansiveness of his public, of which each individual admirer was just one small part. Yet this immersion within a large audience is precisely what each individual correspondent, in the very gesture of reaching out to him, sought to ignore or deny (though as we'll see, their denial was expressive of their latent awareness of it). Similarly, while Rousseau was obliging to some of the correspondents he knew (those in particular who moved in proximate social circles), he was decidedly less excited to hear from those unknown, socially distant readers who best exemplify the "Rousseauist reader," as attested in a February 1762 letter to his publisher, Marc-Michel Rey, in which he complains that "[a]ll the idle of France and Europe write me through the post, and what is worse, expect replies."[10]

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10. Rousseau to Rey, 4 Feb. 1762, letter 1664 in *Electronic Enlightenment* and *Correspondance complète*, 10: 83–84. In the letter, Rousseau instructs Rey to place an announcement in the *Mercure de France* asking "Messieurs les Beaux-Esprits" to cease

A reader's expressions of intimacy toward an author do not necessarily indicate an experience defined by an *actually* intimate connection between "two lonely beings." Here, indeed, they seem to speak to a reading premised on a stark disconnect between what the reader imagines in describing the experience and the real-life circumstances of the activity. In this sense, the intimacy motif advances a decidedly idealized articulation that, far from reflecting any reality, serves to detach the reader from it. The images of intimacy that dominated readers' accounts in the epistolary archive imposed over a particular and prevailing use of books—the acquisition and handling of a vendible, manufactured object as one anonymous user within an unparalleled multitude of similarly interested consumers—a contrasting myth, the function of which was, at least in part, to obfuscate key attributes of the former set of bibliographic applications. In the myth, the reader was not just another book buyer among thousands, but was singular, enjoying a privileged and unique access to the text's source, envisioned as a direct face-to-face contact with characters or, more often, with the author, whom the reader claimed to "see" or "hear." As an admirer named Degars writes in an April 1791 letter to Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, referring to the "Dialogue in which the Old Man exhorts Paul to resignation": "It seems I can sometimes see you, hear you exhort me to wisdom, encourage me to virtue and tell me: my son, my friend, fortify yourself against all the unexpected accidents of life."[11]

Moreover, while presented as an ongoing exercise in private moral improvement, the letters ultimately served, in the rhetorical system of the fan mail, to project and valorize *already established* moral excellence. That is to say, the ethical reading celebrated by this correspondence was a form of externalization. It described retreat, but in effect defined a stage from which the lofty sentiments and moral vision that already consecrated the reader as a worthy disciple could be displayed. Gallot's reverie calls overt attention to this demonstrative, performative aspect of sentimental reading. He reminds us that all those who wrote about their novel-reading experiences in this vein—in letters as well as in other kinds of autobiographical texts that have come to constitute the archive of the "reading revolution"—similarly sought to exhibit themselves in light of a repertoire of uplifting personal attributes, such as virtue, depth, sensitivity, disinterestedness, and generosity. In this perspective, "reading" was configured as a powerful device for the projection of self into the world. If sentimental reading was, *contra* its prevailing mythologies, a highly commercialized activity, it was also a carefully scripted performance of identity, a defining trait of which was its orientation of the reader outward rather than inward.

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sending him "letters of compliment . . . not being in a state . . . to answer so many [of them]." The announcement appears in the April 1762 volume at page 209.

11. Degars to Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, 1 Apr. 1791, *Inventaire des Manuscrits, Papiers & Correspondance, Classés par Monsieur Aimé Martin & achetés par la ville du Havre*, MS134, f.35v.

Externalizing Interiority and the Disappearance of the Book

The imbrications of literacy and self-fashioning have quietly but decisively shaped our most familiar notions of eighteenth-century reading, without always being so directly addressed as such. The attention, for instance, that novel-induced crying has commanded—maybe out of proportion to the role crying may have really played in the reading practices of the period—must in some measure be a function of the extent to which the unbridled effusion of post-1750 readers can strike us today as contrived and affected, in contrast, say, with the seemingly more modern, self-possessed demeanor of an informed periodical peruser keeping up with the news in a crowded Enlightenment-era café. As a result, crying tends to nudge investigations toward questions that, as far as I know, do not normally get asked of other reading practices in other places and times, no matter how strange they appear. We are not, in a reverse image of Augustine's surprise at Ambrose's silent reading, inclined to disbelief at the thought of a medieval monk audibly mumbling his lines, if that is what the sources suggest he would have done. By contrast, the sobbing reader's portrait seems invariably to elicit the question, whether spelled out or implied, of whether anyone *seriously* read like that, often via the tangential question of the sentimental reader's "naïve" propensity to believe that the characters and their letters were real (Paige).

The problem of reconciling self-representation to reality inserts itself into the heart of the matter. Did readers who said they cried *really* cry? The scholarly debates on sentimental reading have gravitated to this question. Yet it's not one that can be answered with much certainty. I suspect we can get further by posing a different question, one raised once we consider the emotional effects so tightly linked with late eighteenth-century reading to be not *real* reading practices but figures in a vocabulary of self-affirmation predicated on a certain ideal of reading and literacy; thus, not *whether* readers cried but *why*, of all the conceits they—and those describing them—had at their disposal to legitimize their activities and experiences, effusive feeling dominated their accounts. After all, Gallot might have called attention to any number of details that would, in the imagined scene he describes, have equally served to project his worthiness: the high quality of the editions he acquired; the care he took to bind and maintain them (in a time when binding was largely the responsibility of the book's owner rather than its publisher or seller); or conversely, loving wear and tear, or margins filled with notes, reflecting his devoted attention to the text's lessons.[12]

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12. Louis-Sébastien Mercier writes: "Used, dirty, torn, books in this state testify that they are the best of all." See *Tableau de Paris*, chapter CCCLXXVII, "Loueurs des Livres," 1: 1046. Rousseau himself had provided the template on note-taking, by the

Gallot chose tears, though, not because he actually cried but because crying had become, for him and his contemporaries, a self-evident and easily recognizable formula for representing the spiritually exalting and personally affirming submission to the moral vision that Rousseau's works offered him. "I shed many tears [*J'ai versé beaucoup de larmes*]," writes a Bernardin de Saint-Pierre reader named Desissarts, going on to highlight the final tragic scene of *Paul et Virginie*, in which Virginie dies after refusing, in a gesture of virtue and self-sacrifice, to cut off her clothes in order to escape a sinking ship: "I could not contain my sobbing when I saw this virtuous girl in the flower of youth ready to perish, the victim of fate and prejudice."[13] "More than once, it made me *verser des larmes*," Degars wrote in reference to the same work.[14] "Your charming Paul, your chaste Virginie, made me *verser des pleurs*," wrote yet another fan named Delarault in a letter carrying the same April 1791 date as that of Degars.[15] Juxtaposed in the "D" dossier (liasse 134), these letters convey not just the expansive nature of the phenomenon of sentimentalized reading but also how shared and rigidly prescribed the language and rhetorical tics through which it developed were.

Why did crying so effectively serve the function of conveying deep affinity with the exalting moral vision of a novel and its author? Crying was undoubtedly imported from an older vocabulary of religious awakening and theatrical catharsis, as the corporeal manifestation of intense inner experience. Thus, at one level, the trope reflects the influence of religiosity emphasized by Roger Chartier in his analysis of Diderot's *Éloge de Richardson*. Published in the January 1762 volume of the *Journal Étranger* on the occasion of the English writer's death in 1761, the *Éloge* spelled out the basic characteristics of the new "intensive" reading. Chartier notes the "quasi-religious status ascribed to [Richardson's] work" in Diderot's appreciation of it, citing the latter's use of

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inclusion of footnotes to the letters in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. Both Yannick Seité (354) and Paige (138) see the footnotes as problematic for a too-literal-minded interpretation of readers as overbrimmingly emotional and hopelessly gullible. As William Sherman shows, writing in books was widespread in the Renaissance, and, as many books of the period will attest, it was also common in the eighteenth century. It is interesting, though, that the practice is hardly mentioned at all in the letters of sentimental readers.

13. Jean-Henri Bancal Desissarts to Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, 14 Apr. 1788, *Inventaire*, MS134, f.45r, and *Electronic Enlightenment*. Under the direction of Malcolm Cook, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's letters are being edited for inclusion in the *Electronic Enlightenment* database. Some of the letters are accessible there now, including this one from Desissarts. I indicate in the footnote when they can be consulted through the *EE* database.

14. Degars to Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, 1 Apr. 1791, *Inventaire*, MS134, f.35r-v.

15. Delarault to Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, 1 Apr. 1791, *Inventaire*, MS134, f.37r.

spiritually charged language and his comparison of the works of "the divine Richardson" with "a still more sacred book."[16] "Like the Gospel," Chartier affirms, "the novel unites the pure of heart and sets them apart from those who are incapable of hearing the call of virtue and goodness" (*Inscription and Erasure* 123).

The importance of religion for understanding the reading experiences associated with eighteenth-century novels cannot be overstated. This is, moreover, not only on account of the moralist thematics and religious language that so pervade the works and the letters from readers. It is also due to the distinct ways in which various evolving frameworks of religious belief and practice in the early modern era had shaped conventional uses of books along with books themselves, as both objects of veneration and commodities. Turned out in massive print runs on a scale unlike anything else in the sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and eighteenth-century book trades, vernacular spiritual guides of diverse religious persuasions as well as Bibles, sermons, prayer books, catechisms, breviaries, and other liturgical texts spurred a radical reconfiguration of material forms in accordance with the needs and desires of rapidly growing and less traditionally "literate" publics.[17] The cheaper "Bible" paper; smaller, more portable formats; clearer layouts; and larger, more "readable" type called for by these editions activated new conceptions of legibility and new expectations regarding how, via their interactions with the codex, readers might appropriate the edifying truths and lessons they sought from its pages.[18] Certainly, the new spiritual reading practices needed to move away from older paradigms identified with lavish manuscript Books of Hours, for instance, which, viewing the book as a ritual object, were premised on the notion that physically interacting with it was as integral to the devotional reading experience as repeating and internalizing the sacred words it conveyed.

If the motif of crying imported a particular post-Reformation conception of privatized spiritual experience into the realm of leisured novel reading, it

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16. Diderot, "Éloge de Richardson" (45, 38). Cited in Chartier, *Inscription and Erasure* 123.

17. As McLeod notes, "With few exceptions, religious titles dominated the provincial publishing world. Books of Hours and catechisms were to be found everywhere in provincial France" (70–71). See Julia, "Reading and the Counter-Reformation" (259–60); Martin, *The French Book*, especially ch. 1, "The Catholic Reformation and the Book" (1–30) and "Classements et conjonctures" (1: 449).

18. On the use of cheap paper in Bibles, see Calhoun. In a March 8, 1686, letter, written from the La Rochelle region, where he was on a mission to convert Protestants after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, Fénelon asked his contact at Versailles, the Marquis de Seignelay, to send "New Testaments in profusion," adding that "a large typeface [caractère] is necessary; they won't be able to read them if it is too small" (*Correspondance* 2: 33).

was, by the same token, also well suited to the new models of legibility on which both spiritual and sentimental reading appeared to be predicated. That is, as the expression of a "satisfying" reading, crying articulated a markedly internalized or spiritualized understanding of the activity on the assumption that the appropriation of a text's meaning, the grasping of its truths and moral vision, was a wholly separate exercise from the physical handling of the book itself, which, in contrast with the tactile "reading" of the Book of Hours, no longer had a role to play in the experience. Crying externalizes and renders visible what would otherwise remain wholly internal and invisible, reflecting the expectation that no trace of the reader's profound connection with a work and its author would be perceptible in the normal uses of the book: its acquisition (through purchase), its handling, or the scanning of its printed pages.

Significantly, in the accounts of readers, crying often expresses the height of reading's personally transformative effects only at the direct cost of obstructing reading considered as a concrete activity. Writing on behalf of Jean-Vincent Capperonner de Gauffecourt to thank Rousseau for the gift of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, Jacques Pernetti tells Rousseau that Gauffecourt was so moved by the novel "that he was obliged to interrupt his reading, and to read only a few lines at a time."[19] In a similar vein, the husband of a regular correspondent of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's, Amélie Guillebon de Boisguilbert, adds a note to a letter from his wife sent soon after the appearance of the second edition of the *Études de la Nature* in 1788, describing how he tried to read *Paul et Virginie* (published for the first time in volume four of this edition) to his spouse and sister-in-law, "but both times, I could not finish, I tried in vain to master my emotions so as not to interrupt my reading."[20] Examples of this kind could be multiplied, showing how crying makes manifest the spiritual effects of reading, but only by downgrading the role of reading itself in the experience and sharply disconnecting it from the uplifting internalization of a text's lessons. The latter—"reading" as it is celebrated in the letters of Rousseau's and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's acolytes—occurs not when the individual's eyes pore over the pages of a book that he or she holds in his or her hand, but when the pages' typographic signs disappear from the reader's field of vision, as the book falls from his or her grasp in a moment of transport and the reader, in an "inverted" or "reverse *ekphrasis*" described by Lorraine Piroux ("Illegibility and Grammaphobia" 108) and Chartier (*Inscription and Erasure* 116), perceives not ink and paper but people, scenes, and above all the author: "I read your novel, and letting the book fall from my hands ten times in admiration and joy, I looked for you near me, so that I might embrace

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19. Jacques Pernetti to Rousseau, 26 Feb. 1761, letter 1328 in *Electronic Enlightenment* and *Correspondance complète* 8: 178.
20. Mme de Boisguilbert to Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, 1788, *Inventaire*, MS132: f.44v.

your knees," writes Antoine Jacques Roustan to Rousseau.[21] Articulating the reader's "intensive" connections with the novel's moral lessons and visionary author, expressions of overwhelming emotion thereby also enabled the reader's disengagement from the book as object. They helped engineer the book's "disappearance" from the reading scene; and in so doing, they "liberated" the text from its commercialized context, opening up the possibility for the reader of a feeling of singularity premised on his or her belief in a privileged association with the author.

The Typography of Intimacy and Emotional Resonance

Darnton argued that one of the specificities of eighteenth-century reading lay in its "typographic consciousness." For Rousseau's readers, he claims, "the material quality of the book mattered as much as its intellectual quality" (222–24). But this is to misframe the historical continuum on which sentimental reading should be understood. To say that prerevolutionary readers were more attentive to the look and feel of a book's material qualities than we are today is true but misleading since it ignores the fact that their attentiveness was, in reality, the vestige of an earlier book culture. No doubt, the vocabulary that eighteenth-century readers had at their disposal to express themselves as readers and book owners was one that had been forged over centuries in the world of hand-pressed tomes and linen paper. But by 1750, when an excessive preoccupation with the book as a physical object was first being diagnosed as *bibliomania*, a condition defined in opposition to *reading*, such language was becoming increasingly archaic.[22] Formulaic remarks on paper quality or format should not be considered to reflect a significant attachment to the book's material aspects and do not stand as proof of a belief that these physical attributes had anything meaningful or important to impart to the reading experience.[23] Instead, the archive of fan mail to Rousseau and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre suggests that if the book's materiality was noticed at all, it was more likely insofar as it impeded a full appreciation of the text's meaning.

What most focalized readers' attentions onto the physical artifact was the phenomenon of unauthorized printing. "You speak of a complete edition that

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21. Antoine Jacques Roustan to Rousseau, 19 Feb. 1761, letter 1305 in *Electronic Enlightenment* and *Correspondance complète* 8: 138.
22. Louis Bollioud Mermet published *De la bibliomanie* in 1761.
23. Already by the late seventeenth century, references to typeface, binding, and paper quality are chalked up by La Bruyère more as book trade stock phrases than as expressions of genuine appreciation for these material characteristics: "The job of the journalist [*nouvelliste*] is to say, 'Such and such a book is circulating, printed by Cramoisy in such and such a typeface; it is beautifully bound and printed on good quality paper; it sells for such and such a price.'" See "Des Ouvrages de l'esprit" (33), 78.

you are preparing," writes a professor of rhetoric named Trenqualye to Bernardin de Saint-Pierre in 1790; "I am impatient to see it, and hope it will be well executed. For I confess that I have struggled through [j'ai souffert] some horrible counterfeits made of the *Etudes [de la Nature]* and of the *voeux [d'un Solitaire]*."[24] Charlotte de la Taille writes Rousseau in February 1761 to tell him that, despite her desire to buy *La Nouvelle Héloïse* "in order to reread it with the attention it merits," she will wait, since she had heard he was preparing a "more ample and more correct edition" than those that had appeared. But Charlotte's "fausse Julie" did not, in the end, undermine her ability to *read* the novel, as she explains in a follow-up missive from March: "As imperfect as was the Julie that I read, it/she [elle] touched me. I cried, monsieur."[25] Similarly, tax farmer and professor of ancient languages Jean Joseph Pierre Fromaget tells Rousseau in his June 1761 letter that they had, in his town, "only one very incorrect [bien fautive] edition" of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. However, the statement is buried in a postscript following his signature. Up to that point, Fromaget had given no sign at all of a compromised experience; on the contrary, he writes in a typical vein: "It is only to gratitude, Monsieur, that I offer this testimony of the pleasure you have made me feel, of the gentle tears that St Preux, Julie, madame d'Etange drew out of me; . . . At each page, my soul melted: O, how beautiful is virtue!" (1426).[26]

Far from bearing witness to "typographic consciousness," the truth is that 1760s' acolytes of Rousseau had, as readers, probably never been so indifferent to the materiality of books. By extension, sentimental reading's real distinctiveness as a historicized practice lay in the growing adeptness and ease with which its practitioners were, in fact, able to ignore the book's physical properties in order to extricate from them a text that they then firmly believed, without any hesitation, to be the unadulterated words of the author. Indeed, only out of such indifference could readers be so invested in and won over to the authorial figure. In this respect, their reading is hardly the relic of a bygone age. It stands rather as an important articulation in a long-running trend in literacy that remains at the root of our basic conceptions today, which fully associate reading with purely cerebral appropriations of abstract texts identified *exclusively* with thoughts, ideas, information, lesson, and narratives, as distinct from the concrete objects that convey these texts. Our apprenticeship as readers teaches us that the objects can play no *positive* role in the expression

24. L'abbé de Trenqualye to Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, 30 Apr. 1790, *Inventaire*, MS140, f.46v–47r.
25. Charlotte de La Taille to Rousseau, 19 Feb. and 10 Mar. 1761, letters 1306 and 1352 in *Electronic Enlightenment* and *Correspondance complète* 8: 142–43 and 239–40.
26. Jean Joseph Pierre Fromaget to Rousseau, 5 June 1761, letter 1426 in *Electronic Enlightenment* and *Correspondance complète*, 9: 3–4.

of a text's meaning or content. One trusted edition of *La Nouvelle Héloïse* is as good as another (let alone one copy within the same edition). At their most functional, books are neutral or invisible. To the extent that they are not, and that we then focus on their materiality, they can only *hinder* reading.[27]

This trend toward increasingly dematerialized literacy stretches back into the history of writing, discernible in various primordial forms of internalized perusal, such as the silent reading of early medieval monks described by Paul Saenger. But in the eighteenth century, its real impetus lay in the evolution of commercial typography, the defining technological efficiency of which—the ability to multiply on a large scale more or less exact copies of a "same" work—rested on distinguishing a text as abstract template from its concrete instantiations in individual editions and copies, judged in light of their adherence to the ideal model. This distinction reflects a division of labor without which the sentimental author could hardly take form in the minds of readers. The physical copies are the product of print-shop toil, subject to its vagaries and venality. The text's source, by contrast, could be safely situated outside the book production process, in the dedication and outstanding virtue of an author.

In this respect, when they let their books slip from their hands so that they could gaze directly onto the individual who, they imagined, handwrote or spoke the words echoing in their minds, the readers of Rousseau or Bernardin de Saint-Pierre were ultimately guided by commercialized print and its logic of standardized reproduction. In fact, I believe the phantasm earmarks their arrival as fully typographic readers, formed entirely by a literacy born of the culture of print. This is the case at two levels. The first simply highlights an underlying awareness of the mass public that print convened and from which these readers' desire for a personal audience with the author sought to distinguish them. "In truth, Monsieur, I don't know if you will find on earth a worthier reader than me," Alexandre Loyseau de Mauléon writes in a typical turn of phrase in a 1761 letter to Rousseau.[28] Affirming on the surface a typical wish for a special relationship with the writer, Loyseau's comparative mood betrays his knowledge that he was far from the only one with access to Rousseau's words and that this access was, in reality, easy and

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27. Comparing the printing manuals of Joseph Moxon (1683) and John Smith (1755), Lisa Maruca describes an evolving view of typography in the eighteenth century as a "transparent manifestation of the Author's will," which rests on the "erasure of the printer from the scene of textual creation" (324). Piroux discusses Enlightenment ideals of print transparency in the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d'Alembert ("The Encyclopedist").

28. Alexandre Jérôme Loyseau de Mauléon to Rousseau, 18 Feb. 1761, letter 1302 in *Electronic Enlightenment* and *Correspondance complète* 8: 130–32.

open rather than private and privileged. An unidentified reader is even more conscious of the unprecedentedly large audience for this "first bestseller" in which he risked being lost: "How Virtue would be indebted to you, Monsieur, if all your readers did you and your incomparable work the same justice as I do."[29] While the claims to personal closeness with the author—addressed as "friend" or "father"—have most struck commentators, the extent to which those claims are embedded in a sheepish sense of their presumptuousness or outlandishness, reflecting awareness of the incongruity, is less noticed. Gallot had opened his letter by acknowledging, "You will perhaps first be astounded to see a Stranger [Etranger], who to his great regret has never Had any Relation with you; write You, already treat you as a friend accustomed to Charge His Feelings."[30]

By the terms of the letters themselves, then, the defining context of intimacy with an author was the mass market. There is, though, a deeper connection between print culture and "intimiste" reading. If readers were not delusional, they did *believe* in the personal nature of their exchange with the author via the book. This faith in the author rested, in turn, on a particular readerly disposition—namely, the belief that the book was a reliable conveyance of the author's words, a belief held so deeply that the readers did not even think to question it. This might be an obvious point, but as Adrian Johns has argued, this belief should not be taken for granted in the early modern era, for it developed only slowly as a function of gradual developments in the publishing world. Johns highlights a set of emerging protocols and an etiquette that helped to assuage initial doubts about the credibility and accuracy of printed books. A prince's dedication or a royal privilege offered a guarantee that the book's contents could be trusted. But in addition to such devices, this trust had also to be nurtured by the book's underlying unobtrusiveness, that is, by its neutrality and transparency as a medium that readers could ignore in favor of the content it carried, assuming, without thinking much about it, that the latter was not distorted or corrupted by the printing process. This transparency, or more exactly the belief in it, depended for its part on a series of commercial and technological developments, by which the book *as book* progressively commanded less attention and reading became easier and easier, to the point that it simply no longer imposed on the consciousness of readers as they read. Those who fervently believed, as they pored through their volumes of *La Nouvelle Héloïse* or *Paul et Virginie*, that they accessed the unmediated words and direct personal guidance of Rousseau or Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, such

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29. Unknown to Rousseau, 5 Feb. 1761, letter 1263 in *Electronic Enlightenment* and *Correspondance complète*, 8: 62–63.
30. Gallot to Rousseau, 5 Aug. 1764, letter 3442 in *Electronic Enlightenment* and *Correspondance complète*, 21: 12–14.

that they believed they could *hear* these authors speak to them, did so only
to the extent that they also believed fully and unequivocally in typographic
transparency.

Reading Printed Letters

It is illustrative in this light to reconsider the centrality of the epistolary
novel to the development of sentimental reading. Of course, as Bernardin de
Saint-Pierre's enthusiasts make clear, other kinds of writings elicited similarly
emotional reactions in readers by replicating, via alternative storytelling tech-
niques, the highly personalized textual framing that characterizes fictional let-
ters, a framing in which one reads a private discourse addressed, in principle,
to only one other person. In *Paul et Virginie*, the effect is achieved through a
series of staged one-on-one oral exchanges, reflecting another common narra-
tive choice for the time. In either case, the text's power rests on what we might
call "authenticity effects." Not that the letters and speeches were taken as the
real documents they often claimed in prefaces to be. For readers of Rousseau
or Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, such assertions of authenticity functioned more
as signals of plausibility, not that the characters really lived but that the emo-
tions and suffering they embodied, and the moral clarity their stories revealed,
were credible. This enabled the letters and speeches to "speak" to readers who
could then see their own situations in the scenes depicted and apply the lessons
and calls to virtue to their lives: "I found in my heart all the portraits that you
painted," writes Jean Louis Le Cointe to Rousseau in 1761.[31]

Thus, while readers did not necessarily buy into the reality of the letters or
of the characters who wrote them, they did buy into the authenticity of the
rhetorical framework that a compelling image of "real-life" documents set in
motion, namely that of a privileged interpersonal connection furnishing the
basis for the reader's submission to the moral authority of his or her teacher.
By substituting workshop-produced printed reproductions for a hand-scripted
private letter, commercialized typography might seem to raise visceral impedi-
ments to this belief. That is, it makes sense to imagine that, with the epistolary
novel, readers felt intimately connected to characters and, via them, to their
favorite authors, *despite* reading the letters in cheap, mass-produced volumes,
the very existence of which should threaten to burst the intimacy bubble and
undermine the reader's ability to believe that the words emanated directly
from a privileged source.[32]

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31. Jean Louis Le Cointe to Rousseau, 5 Apr. 1761, letter 1387 in *Electronic Enlight-
enment* and *Correspondance complète*, 8: 292–95. Paige's analysis of reader identifica-
tion is especially insightful on this issue.
32. See McAlpin's related analysis of the question of the "publishability" of letters.

This is the thrust of a few studies addressing the typographic presentation of the epistolary novel, which underscore efforts to counteract print's expansionary and homogenizing propensities. If most reflection on the incongruity points to the famous prefaces that explain how a collection of private letters came to be printed, some studies, more interestingly, consider novel attempts to resolve the tension by imitating, in print, the manuscript letter's features. Steven Price highlights Samuel Richardson's use of italic fonts, dashes, and slanted type lines, which were intended to "create [. . .] distinct pages marked with idiosyncrasies that define each letter writer, much as readers would find in the handwriting of 'Original Manuscripts'" (127).[33] Yannick Seité similarly describes Rousseau's insistence that his publisher, Marc-Michel Rey, have each letter in the first 1761 edition of *La Nouvelle Héloïse* begin at the top of a new page. This, Seité contends, manifests the author's desire that the book "would imitate the allure of an authentic collection of letters, would assume the appearance of a portfolio into which any eighteenth-century letter-writer would file the responses of his correspondents, indeed even copies of letters that he himself would have sent" (143–44).

In formulating their arguments, both Price and Seité take for granted that typography was a problem needing to be surmounted in order for the epistolary novel to work its magic on readers. But as evocative as Richardson's craft-printer's approach to novel production was, it ultimately represents an outlier to what I take to be a more pervasive and meaningful trend in the very opposite direction, driven by commercial growth and technological innovation in the print trade. That is, we ought to situate sentimental reading *within* the eighteenth-century ascendancy of a typographic rationality spurred by expanding book markets and increased volume, which led to simplified, more consistent, more typographically regular, and therefore more "legible" forms accessible to larger, more heterogeneous, and less specialized readerships. Roger Laufer's account of the rise and spread of a new legibility specific to the advancing technology of the modern printing press, reflecting print's singular capacities for reproducing and multiplying texts and its market-based orientation toward an ever-expanding customer base, is illustrative. He identifies a key phase beginning in the late seventeenth century, defining the textual culture of the Enlightenment era ("L'énonciation typographique," "Les espaces du livre").

Following the innovations of 1450–1550 (the triumph of roman over gothic type and the airing out and "autonomous logical organization" of the codex page, increasingly parceled into discrete and navigable units such

33. See also Maruca on the use of italics as a way of countering the effects of mass production by "soften[ing]" the text and rendering it more "personal" and authentic (333).

as paragraphs) and a period of stasis through the end of the seventeenth century,[34] typographic forms were subject to a renewed process of rational analysis and improvement starting in the 1690s with the work of the commission established by Louis XIV to create a new roman typeface for the *Imprimerie Royale*. Famously designed on a grid of 2304 tiny squares, the *romain du roi* reflected "just and natural" proportions, in the words of committee member Jacques Jaugeon, determined by geometry rather than the old craft norms of punch-cutting. As a result, the new letters were "easy to Read and very agreeable to look at" (246–47, 333). Further mathematical investigations into the ideal relations between type sizes led by the end of the eighteenth century to a uniform measure of the "point" still in use today. Meanwhile, the period witnessed a series of groundbreaking typefaces reflecting the new ethos, including the 1780s' "modern" designs of the Didot brothers (accused, in fact, of plagiarizing the *romain du roi* fonts). With their hairline, fully horizontal serifs, their stark contrasts between thick and thin strokes, and their perfectly vertical stress, these designs broke with the Garamond-influenced roman forms that had so fully dominated printing since the 1530s.[35]

In fact, these forms broke with more than Garamond. They specifically abandoned the calligraphic shapes that had defined letterforms since the first roman typefaces were forged in imitation of humanist handwriting in the late fifteenth century (Mosley, "The 'Romain du Roi'" 52). It is therefore ironic that the success of a literary genre premised on the pretense of being private, handwritten letters would be concurrent with a trend in printed books away from earlier typefaces that integrated many of the scribal characteristics of the handwritten letters they initially imitated, toward more purely geometrical forms. But given the reading styles to which it catered, the epistolary novel should be considered a product of, rather than an exception to, the ascendancy of print. For while it may be a matter of debate whether readers believed that the letters composing *La Nouvelle Héloïse* or *Clarissa* were *real*, it goes without saying that no reader opened up his or her copy of the novel expecting to find the *real* penmanship that would authenticate a *real* letter. As a result,

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34. Laufer calls the seventeenth century "the most mediocre period as concerns the quality of the book in France, which has not stopped degrading since the beginning of the seventeenth century" ("Les espaces du livre" 157). Stanley Morison describes seventeenth-century typography in similar terms (42–43). See Laufer's terrific account of the advent of "l'énonciation typographique" in the eighteenth century in "L'énonciation typographique au 18e siècle." Margreta de Grazia develops a related analysis of the triumph of "transparency" as an ideal for language and signification, though she looks slightly earlier and highlights semiotics rather than typography.

35. On the *romain du roi*, see Mosley, "French Academicians and Modern Typography" and "The 'Romain du Roi'"; Dreyfus; Johnson; and Morison. The *romain du roi* was first used in the 1702 *Médailles sur les principaux événements de la règne de Louis le Grand*.

any effort that Richardson or Rousseau might have undertaken to imitate the look of a manuscript was beside the point. More salient for understanding the experiences of Rousseau's readers was the development of a set of readerly expectations shaped by emerging typographic forms, which allowed readers to peruse the printed letters anyway, with no qualms or second thoughts, disregarding their printed-ness, *as if* they were authentic, and thus *as if* the texts enacted the highly personalized interactions that a real letter (or a one-on-one oral exchange) would, even though they knew, indubitably, that they accessed the work through a commercially manufactured book that circulated in thousands of identical copies. Their ability to ignore what was right in front of their eyes—a precondition for their belief that the text offered unmediated access to the teachings of its author—rests in a significant measure on the book's material evolution toward forms that, shaped by the principles of ease and facility articulated in Jaugeon's *Description*, more effectively effaced themselves from within the user's consciousness.

Conclusion

Epistolary novels, and ultimately all texts with strongly personalized narrative frames, might be seen to mark an outstanding moment in the process analyzed by Adrian Johns, according to which printed books acquired, in the course of the three centuries following their introduction in Europe, credibility as privileged vessels of unadulterated truth and objective knowledge. The fan mail inspired by *La Nouvelle Héloïse* and *Paul et Virginie* seems, in any case, to attest in no uncertain terms to the belief among readers that their favorite novel's "professed author [did] exist and did indeed write it" (Johns 1).

But it was not just Rousseau who inspired their feelings of intimacy. He was, as we saw, indifferent at best and hostile at worst to the idea of such a close personal bond with an anonymous admirer who happened to reach out. Readers' sense of closeness with Rousseau or Bernardin de Saint-Pierre also grew from their full and routinized participation in a modernizing publishing system, the most defining feature of which was its capacity to enable readers to "forget" their participation in it, and to read, as Diderot had described in his *Eloge*, "without noticing [one] is doing so" (39). In fact, Labrosse went on to ascribe the dearth of first-person historical accounts of reading on which we started this essay to the tendency of readers to "forget" that they are reading, which leads to "the difficulty or even impossibility of talking about [it]" (11).

What Labrosse did not suggest is the historicized nature of this forgetting as a particularly "modern" typographic reading practice, or that the rich corpus of fan mail to Rousseau, to which he turned in order to fill the vacuum, was as expressive of the forgetting as the absence of documentation he lamented. The readers of Rousseau, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, and other eighteenth-century

novelists perused manufactured books engineered to disappear from their field of perception. This allowed the commercial exchanges that put them there to be eclipsed, in their "satisfying" experiences (to cite Gallot), by a completely different interaction with the texts, one that existed only in their convictions and self-images as readers of commercial print books, and that was oriented *exclusively* by their imagined one-on-one relationship with the text's author, whose physical absence was, in reality, essential to readers' intense, emotional sense of his very close presence. As "intimiste" readers, defined by their belief that the words they read were so completely and obviously those of the author named on the title page (in an era, let's not forget, when anonymity still passed as the norm) that they could see and hear him utter them, they were thus themselves natives to the evolving commercial book trade. And more than by the prefatory instructions of a Rousseau, their expectations for personal connection were nurtured and sated by market-defined norms rooted in mass publication and typographic standardization. Rousseau's prefatory instructions, and indeed his very status as moral guide, resonated only insofar as they affirmed what the reader, inured to the bibliographic conventions of eighteenth-century print culture, had already been drawn into the commercial field to find.

While the convention of over-the-top sobbing places the sentimental readers we have been examining in a context that seems distant from ours—a "distinct historical phenomenon" reflective of a "mental world that is almost unthinkable today" (Darnton 252)—the truth is that we remain firmly attached to moralized and self-affirming reading catalyzing emotional investments in characters or authors, all taken to be real in the sense of "authentic" or "relatable" (Zimmer), even if the tropes we use to describe this reading have changed. The irony is that, among the array of reading practices we can observe today, it is this particular self-elevating affective mode, evolved to some degree from sentimental reading, that now articulates the strongest attachment to the physical form of the printed book, in a new context in which the book seems so threatened by its imminent obsolescence. There is little doubt that novels, personal memoirs, and other kinds of absorptive, edifying texts, especially ones that make pressing identificatory claims on readers and that are associated with goals of self-improvement and validation, have posed much stronger resistance to digital migration than, say, "utilitarian" or reference texts, such as phone books. The kind of lament made famous in the 1990s by Sven Birkerts associated the loss of the book with the loss of a specific reading style—"linear," "private," amenable to "rereading and to sustained attention" (122)—a style that is less generalizable than Birkerts suggested but that does evoke the paradigm of "Rousseau's readers." Does this confirm the contention that the moralistic spiritualization and "dematerialization" of reading were always dependent, in ways not adequately acknowledged, on

a particular commercial and typographic configuration of the printed book: mass-produced, portable, and so easy to read that reading ceases entirely to be considered a physical activity at all (whereas historically, reading had always been viewed in terms of corporeal exertions and contacts) to become instead a pure act of cognition or perception? No doubt as the novel finds its home in digital formats, the question of whether the e-reader represents, like Didot's modern typefaces, an inflection point in a long-term and continuing evolution in reading or something truly new will have to be revisited.

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