

Unparalleled

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“High on a Throne of Royal State, which far
Outshone the wealth of ORMUS and of IND[iana],

...

Satan exalted sat, by merit rais'd
To that bad eminence...”

With these lines, Milton began the second book of his epic poem, introducing his readers to Hellish counsel, and the world at large to “pandemonium.” I am not the first to follow his example.

We have for our final panel before the wrap-up session the opportunity to discuss two papers. My job is to remind you briefly of some of what you noticed while reading them earlier; to raise a couple of quick comments or questions that can be quickly turned aside; to grant each speaker a few minutes in which to dismiss my questions and correct my errors; and then to get busy with the serious work of presiding over pandemonium, in the form of trying to keep the queue somewhat organized.

Our two papers in this panel are “The Crowning Example: the Unparalleled Exemplarity of Louis XIV,” by Hall Bjørnstad, who teaches here at Indiana in the Department of French and Italian; and “The Breakdown of Apparitional Exemplarity from Defoe to Richardson” by Daniel Johnson who joins us from Princeton where he is pursuing a doctorate in English. So we are dealing, on the one hand—the left, or sinister, hand (at least, from one perspective)—with absolute monarchy in the context of seventeenth-century France; and on the other hand—the right hand (but whose right hand?)—with the “spiritual realm,” or at least, “the invisible realm,” “in early English novels.” Nothing, it seemed to me, could so well suture these two essays as Milton’s depiction of devilish absolutism, with its echoes of the recent coronation of Charles II, returned to power from exile in the court of “Louis Le Grand,” dramatizing as it does, in all too familiar ways, the physical speech and actions of immaterial beings.

Both papers present us with forms of “exemplarity” (which is presumably why we let them in): one unparalleled, the other apparitional. That which is unparalleled is, not surprisingly, a culmination, a “crowning example” of royal authority; while that which is apparitional, is not only invisible, but is also breaking down. The former describes an absolutist royal authority perched precariously (rather like the Son of God in *Paradise Regained*) atop the highest pinnacle, poised in suspension that seeks to, as John Lyons put it, subordinate temporality “to a higher, more powerful order.”¹ The latter, maps an entropic progress “from Defoe to Richardson” that reveals that “both authors stamp approval on the potential influence of the invisible realm, both also treat it with uncertainty, but only Richardson puts the invisible realm into significant retreat.”

One temptation here is obvious, and so I will grab it: how can we—or should we?—attend to these two papers jointly in relation to a secularization hypothesis? Daniel’s paper does not ex-

¹ John D. Lyons, *Exemplum: The Rhetoric of Example in Early Modern France and Italy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), 12.

plicitly invoke that term, but seems everywhere compatible with it; Hall's paper, on the other hand, explicitly names this possibility as a temptation to be resisted: "It would be tempting to link this crisis of royal exemplarity (coextensive with the crisis of kingship, *tout court*) with a process of secularization. However, I want to suggest that this crisis is rather the paradoxical result of a resacralization, a re-enchantment of kingship, through which the elevation of the royal exemplar is accentuated, to the breaking point, if not well beyond."

Rightly or wrongly, I think I detect here not only different attitudes towards secularization, but also towards temporality: Daniel's essay is structured by a discussion of historical progress (from A to B), but could have been structured by a commonality: "Defoe and Richardson demonstrate similar beliefs about the invisible realm." Hall's paper is structured less by historical questions than by formal ones: "The logic of exemplarity itself is dependent on a similar structural elevation or exception, and, as I will suggest below, in a certain sense, all exemplarity is royal, and the logic of exemplarity itself stands in [solidarity with] that of kingship." As mentioned above, that is a choice that could have been made the other way; and a question that arises for me here is how our decisions about temporality and historical change affect our thinking about exemplarity.

I thought Hall cited Gelley to good effect in distinguishing a "horizontal" exemplarity (example as sample) from a "vertical" exemplarity (example as an exemplary instance of an elevated singular); and that becomes an important distinction in his analysis of Louis *Le Grand* as absolutist authority in its most vertical sense.² So I wanted to export that framework, and apply it via some crude data mining to the subject of Daniel's paper. And I find both *Robinson Crusoe* and *Clarissa* interesting from this perspective, so I am going to offer Daniel my findings and let him ruminate on them or ignore them as he sees fit. In *Robinson Crusoe*, the word "example" appears eight times—both when and how seem interesting to me. As one might expect, five of the eight instances are of the most mundane horizontal variety imaginable: "for example, etc." Two of those five are even about the same boring plank that he has to cut down a tree to produce. Of the remaining three more vertical uses, two claim that he could produce "many examples" of what he has just asserted and each of these is of the kind of external secret knowledge communicated from the other world (which interests Daniel in his paper), for instance: "Upon these and many like reflections I afterwards made it a certain rule with me, that whenever I found those secret hints or pressings of mind to doing or not doing anything that presented, or going this way or that way, I never failed to obey the secret dictate; though I knew no other reason for it than such a pressure or such a hint hung upon my mind. I could give many examples." The last of the eight occurrences is, in the progression of the novel's plot, the first: that is to say, before Crusoe ever leaves home, his father warns him against it, and holds up his ill-fated brother "as an example" whose conduct not to emulate. The warning is, of course, ignored. (Perhaps we might have thought more collectively than we did this week about the importance of the failure of negative exemplarity for the eighteenth century.) The other observation that may or may not be worth noting is that all seven instances following that initial negative example, occur while Crusoe is both stranded and alone, the last one occurring only several paragraphs before the rescue of Friday. Once Friday arrives, examples end. What (if anything) that may mean, I will not hazard to guess.

² Alexander Gelley, "Introduction," in Alexander Gelley, ed., *Unruly Examples: On the Rhetoric of Exemplarity* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1995), 12.

I am sure you now want to know precisely how many times the word “example” appears in the unabridged *Clarissa*. I believe it is 113, but don’t quote me. I can guarantee you that it appears with numbing frequency in the novel’s interminable approach to a conclusion. And that, I believe, may be grounds for qualifying at least one statement in Daniel’s paper. He writes: “Without a retrospective *Clarissa* to interpret past experience, any didactic message for the reader about the invisible realm must come through ‘to the moment’ example rather than example strengthened by precept.” Perhaps in some sense this may be true about “the invisible realm,” but it seems to me to suggest that a kind of substitution may be at work during that portion of the novel in which *Clarissa* is, as at it were, translating herself into that realm (there is a noticeable uptick in the frequency of angelic terminology, as well); and in consequence becoming, herself, the example of that realm.

This seems very much to have been in Richardson’s mind in writing the novel, and in the minds of the most generous of his contemporary readers. In his hints for prefaces and a postscript, Richardson wrote (somewhat cryptically, perhaps): “*Clarissa* an Example *to* the Reader: The Example not to be taken *from* the Reader.” Philip Skelton wrote in admiration: “Is *Clarissa* a mere Novel? Whoever considers it as such, does not understand it. It is a System of religious and moral Precepts and Examples, planned on an entertaining Story, which stands or goes forward, as the excellent Design of the Author requires;” and earlier, he had explicitly applauded Richardson for turning upside down the vertical exemplarity of absolute monarchy that Hall has illustrated: “They who read Romances and Novels, being accustomed to a Variety of Intrigues and Adventures, thro’ which they are hurried to the Catastrophe; when they take up *Clarissa*, not considering that it is another kind of Work, or rather a new Species of Novel, are apt to think it tedious, towards the Beginning especially, because they have not the same Palate for natural Incidents, as for imaginary Adventures; for the Workings of private and domestic Passions, as for those of Kings, Heroes, Heroines; for a Story English as to its Scenes, Names, Manners, as for one that is foreign.”

Clarissa, then, “the new species of novel,” in this piously enthusiastic contemporary reading, is accorded a status of moral authority remarkably similar to the political authority accorded *Louis Le Grand* by his enthusiast, Vertron: “because only he is similar to himself, and the Great *par excellence*; in one word [actually two], the incomparable.” What are we looking at? Are we looking at change, across temporal and cultural difference? Or are we looking at forms of authority which exceed the contingencies of temporal and cultural change, and by virtue of their own excellence, assert themselves as exemplary across variations in category?

I began with Milton. Before unleashing pandemonium, let me close with two words of somewhat digressive import, on Pope and parody. Be not afraid that I will turn to:

“Still Duncce the second reigns like Duncce the first;”

At least, not with reference to these two fine papers. But what of these lines:

“High on a gorgeous seat, that far out-shone
Henley’s gilt tub, or Flecknoe’s Irish [Nash’s Hoosier] throne,
...
Great Cibber sate:...”

These lines may follow the example of Milton's lines, but they follow down the path of parody. What is the relationship of parody to example? This is a question *not* asked by either paper, but one that I think may be asked. Milton's image, after all, is itself a parody of a coronation that sought quite explicitly to follow the example that Hall has so ably articulated as manifest at the court of Louis *Le Grand*. Hall, working through Vertron, led us to an articulation of "unparalleled exemplarity"; and Daniel, at least when hijacked by my emendations via Skelton, offers a somewhat similar figure in his angelic exemplar in his "new species of novel." But that "incomparable" line from Vertron, "it can only resemble itself" becomes almost immediately parodied in England as "None but himself could be his parallel," the touchstone of Pope's *Peri Bathos*, the signature line of the first hero of *The Dunciad*, Lewis Theobald, who by claiming to hear Shakespeare in the (exemplary) line, "none but itself could be its parallel," assigned to Shakespeare authorship of the splendidly named *Double Falsehood*, for which Theobald pocketed the third-night receipts. As Pope rightly (and wryly) observed, whether or not Shakespeare wrote such a line, Theobald shows him to have written as bad; and who cannot, in such cases, "write like Shakespeare"?

In working through the complexities of how exemplarity—particularly unparalleled exemplarity—works in this period I think it might be helpful to consider parody—not just Pope, but Defoe as well, and his time in the pillory, and his pre-emptive reversal of that exemplary punishment, through his parodic hymn to the pillory. And more generally, perhaps, to raise the possibility that something happening to exemplarity, particularly as a pedagogic mode in this period may be directly linked to the flourishing of modes of parody and satire. Bathos, sinking, is ultimately all about the short step and deep plunge from the sublime to the ridiculous. I'd like to suggest in closing that we might return to Milton's figure in *Paradise Regained* as appropriate to unparalleled exemplarity. In that moment atop the highest pinnacle, when Satan challenges the Son of God to stand, noting that to stand "will ask thee skill"; in the instant before action, when we know that one of these immaterial beings will stand and one will fall, the question becomes whether example or parody will stand.

So, those are my questions and those are my comments. Let me grant first Hall, and then Daniel, just a few brief comments to try to get us back on course as they intended originally; and then we will open the floor to entertain your questions and receive your counsel.