

**The Richardsonian Republic\***

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**Best Paper in Politics and Literature, APSA 2000.**

### **Abstract**

We explore the seminal role of the novels of Samuel Richardson in catalyzing the modern, representative, public sphere through their peculiar literary character as "dramatic novels." Richardson's work, we argue, is worthy of the attention of political scientists and political philosophers not only for its impact but also for its content: Richardson's *Clarissa* is the most profound literary exploration of the conflict between the modern notion of freedom in civil society as the maximal reconciliation of arbitrary preferences, and the Aristotelian notion of happiness founded in the actualization of the most estimable natural human potentials.

Die Werke der großen Meister sind Sonnen, die um uns her auf- und untergehen. So wird die Zeit für jedes große Werk wiederkommen, das jetzt untergegangen ist.

“The works of great masters are suns which rise and set around us. The time will come for every great work which is now in the descendent to rise again”

-- **Ludwig Wittgenstein**

The great question of modern politics is to find a place for the individual will in the public sphere. The freedom of the will must be reconciled with the ruling and being ruled that characterizes politics. The will is both individual and private, but the multitude of individual wills must somehow be fit into the public sphere, the realm of action. Granting the autonomy of the individual, political theorists since Hobbes have sought to ground the community's right to make laws that bind the individual. These modern theories start with an account of the will and move toward theories of political obligation -- of what ought to oblige the rational will -- based on that account. The alternative would be to derive an articulation of will based on our experience of it in political life, and then construct our explanation of the individual will accordingly. Yet to clear the way for such an approach we must interrogate modern accounts of the will. One mode of interrogation is to trace the history of these accounts of the will in order to understand how we came to believe in the freedom of the will.

The aspects of will with which we are concerned belong on the margins of the republican tradition. This paper discusses the place of the feminine will, which the republic tries to marginalize, and the private crimes that result from the struggle between male and female wills, which the republic hopes to contain. Richardson's *Clarissa* examines this tension between intent and action or appearance through a lengthy appropriation of the myth of Lucretia, the founding myth of the Roman republic.<sup>1</sup>

Since *Clarissa* is more widely known than read, at least by political theorists, we must first summarize the plot. Clarissa Harlowe is the young and beautiful daughter of James and Lady Charlotte Harlowe. Clarissa is possessed of an estate, settled on her by her grandfather, and the Harlowes hope to marry their daughter while ensuring the reversion of her estate to them. Robert Lovelace, a man of high birth and talents, was introduced to the Harlowe family as a possible suitor for Arabella, Clarissa's elder sister, but he soon became infatuated with the beauty and fine character of the younger sister. Lovelace, through his uncle Lord M., asks for Clarissa's hand, but the Harlowes ask that their answer await the return of their son, James from his travels. During this time of waiting, Clarissa and Lovelace begin corresponding and, though she has no high opinion of his morals, Clarissa becomes attracted to the handsome and free-spirited man.

When James returns, he refuses his consent to any marriage between Lovelace and Clarissa on the grounds that, having known Lovelace at college, he disapproves of his character. Arabella, having been scorned by Lovelace, joins in James' condemnation, and Clarissa herself is ambivalent about Lovelace's proposal. James and Lovelace engage in a duel in which James is injured, and Clarissa is forbidden to see Lovelace again. To further prevent Lovelace from marrying Clarissa, the Harlowes find another suitor for Clarissa -- the ugly and unpleasant Mr. Solmes. When Clarissa refuses Solmes' proposal, her father angrily tells her that her duty and the honor of her family demand that she accept Solmes. Clarissa, for her part, claims to want only to remain single.

Clarissa's family cloisters her in their home and forbid her to receive any visitors until she accepts Solmes. She may not even send and receive letters, but she and her friend Anna manage a clandestine correspondence, and Anna perceives that some of Clarissa's reluctance to accept Solmes is due to the feelings she has -- and denies -- for Lovelace. Clarissa meanwhile has continued to correspond secretly with Lovelace.

Because Clarissa refuses to accept Solmes, the Harlowes confine her to her room, and spy on her activities. Clarissa becomes a prisoner in her own home. She sends appeals to her uncles, who tell her she

must obey her father. She even writes to Solmes himself, asking him to give up his suit, but to no avail. Lovelace, sneaking into the Harlowe's garden at night, offers Clarissa the protection of his aunt, Lady Betty Lawrance, but Clarissa refuses yet to consider this step.

The Harlowes next threaten to send Clarissa to her uncle's house, which contains a chapel for ease of marrying Solmes and is surrounded by a moat for difficulty of escaping. At that point Clarissa receives a letter from Lovelace asking her to meet him by the garden door. Clarissa refuses twice to meet him. But after a particularly distressing interview with Solmes, Clarissa receives another invitation from Lovelace, and in desperation she begins to consider his offer of lodgings in London near to his aunt. She tells him by letter that she will go with him, but then, changing her mind, goes out to the garden to tell him she will stay. Lovelace tricks her into believing they have been discovered together and, in the feigned commotion, hurries her away from the garden and into his waiting carriage.

Lovelace contrives to have Clarissa choose to go to London, where he knows a kind "widow" and her "nieces" with whom Clarissa may stay. The widow and her nieces are in fact prostitutes of Lovelace's acquaintance, and Clarissa unwittingly agrees to live with them. Clarissa is kept inside the house on the pretext that her brother is searching for her. With Clarissa as his captive, Lovelace cannot decide whether he wants to marry her or merely to ruin her. He vacillates at length in his letters to his friend, Belford, alternating between a desperate desire to have Clarissa at any cost -- even marriage -- and a temptation to attempt to seduce her and then be done with her. Maddened by Clarissa's virtue and her distant air, Lovelace contrives to win her heart or her hand. The more he presses Clarissa, the more she pulls away from him, until Lovelace's ardor so frightens Clarissa that she remains locked in her room. And then Clarissa escapes from the house and flees to Hampstead.

There, Clarissa takes up lodging with two gentlewomen, Miss Rawlins and Mrs. Moore. Lovelace, disguising himself as an elderly and ill lawyer, takes up lodging in the same house. Clarissa recognizes him and collapses in fright. Lovelace tells the women Clarissa is his wife, and then brings in a friend of his,

disguised as an acquaintance of Clarissa's uncle, to convince her to marry Lovelace. He further brings in another two friends of his disguised as his aunt, Lady Betty, and his cousin, Miss Montague. Clarissa returns with them to London and once more becomes a prisoner of Lovelace.

Lovelace drugs Clarissa and then rapes her. After the rape, Clarissa remains trapped in Lovelace's house, at first deranged by anguish at her fate. Lovelace had predicted that, once she lost her honour, she would become his mistress or even his wife, but he was mistaken. Clarissa wants nothing to do with him and after repeated attempts, escapes from the house. She takes up lodging with a kindly glove-maker and his wife and writes letters to her friends of her unhappy fate.

Lovelace's family, hearing Clarissa's story, beg him to marry her. Instead, Lovelace's prostitute accomplices have Clarissa arrested on the pretence of owing rent for her lodging. Lovelace sends his friend Belford to arrange for her release, and Belford, in pity and admiration for Clarissa, declares himself her protector from Lovelace's plots. Belford takes the ill Clarissa back to her lodgings and arranges to keep Lovelace away from her. Clarissa, growing more and more ill, resigns herself to death. But still Lovelace cannot give up his pursuit of Clarissa. Clarissa, meanwhile, orders her own coffin and signs and seals her will, making Belford her literary executor. Her cousin Morden arrives finally but too late from the Continent and begs her family to forgive her, but they stand firm in their condemnation of her behavior. As Clarissa's life slowly ebbs away, she offers her forgiveness to them all: to her family, her captors, and Lovelace. At the age of nineteen, less than a year after she left her father's house, Clarissa dies.

Just after her death and thus too late for her to know of it, Clarissa's family send word of their forgiveness. She has left letters for each of her family and friends, and even for Lovelace. Lovelace becomes mad at the news of her death and demands that her body be embalmed so he can keep it forever. Clarissa, however, is buried in her family plot in the countryside, her funeral attended by her grieving relations. Lovelace, slowly recovering from his madness, makes plans to travel on the Continent. But outside Trent, in a duel with Clarissa's cousin Morden, he too dies.

As the volumes of *Clarissa* came out *in seriatim*, readers wondered and speculated as to her eventual fate. Richardson had foreshadowed that fate, even before the rape, clearly enough: Clarissa is to die, to die of her family's plots and persecutions, of the after-effects of Lovelace's drug, and perhaps of the shame of the rape and even an impregnation at which last Richardson only hints. The readers revolted, demanding that Clarissa live, that Lovelace repent, that all live happily ever after. They argued in salons and coffee-shops, and wrote unnumbered letters to Richardson himself.<sup>2</sup> But Richardson was unrelenting, and so Clarissa Harlowe died.

Samuel Richardson will never receive a prominent place in histories of political thought, though his influence on the great figures of the Enlightenment was enormous and perhaps incalculable. Through his impact on Diderot and especially Rousseau, Richardson was the primary influence on the sentimental aspect of Enlightenment thought: if Rousseau is the father of Romanticism, then Richardson is its grandfather. His character, Lovelace, is the archetype of the Sadean modern subject, that antihero whose exploits both haunt and exemplify the philosophy of freedom from Rousseau and Kant to Sartre, Adorno, Horkheimer, and Foucault.

Richardson devoted most of his life to his printing business, rising to become printer of the Journals of the House of Commons and Master of the Stationers' Company. In his youth, he was deeply involved in politics as a printer of antigovernment, or anti-Walpole, propaganda. Many of his colleagues were jailed for transactions in which Richardson took part, and he had strong connections to Jacobites such as the Duke of Wharton.<sup>3</sup> Judging by his early acquaintances, it appears that Richardson was a committed opponent of Walpole, and his personal views likely fell somewhere between the High Tories and the country party.

Yet all this political involvement ended years before he began writing novels, and in his novels *Pamela*, *Clarissa*, and *Sir Charles Grandison* Richardson was not a political writer in the conventional sense.<sup>4</sup> Richardson certainly understood his novels as vehicles for moral instruction: In his view, fiction could hope to purify morals where sermons and instructive discourses of all kinds had failed, once the unpleasant

chastisements were clothed in the pleasing garb of a novel.<sup>5</sup> What Richardson wrote of his intention in *Pamela* can fairly be applied to *Clarissa* as well:

I am endeavoring to write a Story, which shall catch young and airy Minds, and when Passions run high in them, to shew how they may be directed to laudable Meanings and Purposes, in order to decry such Novels and Romances, as have a tendency to inflame and corrupt: And if I were to be too spiritual, I doubt I should catch none but Grandmothers; for the Granddaughters would put my Girl indeed in better Company, such as that of the grave Writers, and there they would leave her; but would still pursue those Stories, that pleased their Imaginations without informing their Judgments.<sup>6</sup>

Richardson's novels are thus anti-novel novels, novels intend to counteract the corruption of morals accomplished in part by Richardson's predecessors and competitors, most notoriously, Henry Fielding. In that revolt against the novel his novels are paradoxically most faithful to the anti-romance tradition in modern literature that began with *Don Quixote*.<sup>7</sup>

Though Richardson presented no distinctive political message or teaching, he was a *public* writer: that is to say, his imaginary world is an imagined part of the public world, and his novels turn on the fundamental public things (*re publica*): reputation and appearance.<sup>8</sup> Richardson's novels provided examples of private acts offered for public discussion, and they also gave a fictional version of such discussions. As Mark Kinkead-Weekes writes of *Pamela*, "The living example and the public discussion of virtue awaken the latent good nature and moral sensibility of all who meet them. All are 'improved'; and in joining the concord of praise all find their true selves, and the true sense of fellowship binding them to their neighbors."<sup>9</sup> Of Richardson's three novels, *Clarissa* is the most public and, perhaps not by coincidence, the best, for in that work the issues of reputation that are central to all of his novels are most manifest.<sup>10</sup> *Clarissa* and her seducer and undoer Lovelace use the language of politics to talk about a private, indeed, the most private affair. Richardson's writing is political insofar as the relations between the sexes can be viewed as political.<sup>11</sup> Lovelace's very plots hinge on creating around *Clarissa* a false public in which ladies are played by whores and half-pay officers by confidence men, in which false public the sovereign opinion is



that Clarissa and Lovelace are already man and wife.<sup>12</sup> Yet Lovelace's engagement with the public world can only be with its fraudulent replica, for his relations with other human beings are in fact strictly relations of violence. Some women are for him enemies to be despoiled; all other human beings are potential allies of convenience in his campaign of global rape. Against the Lovelaces of the modern world, and it is the aspirations of Lovelace that characterize the modern world, *Clarissa* is an effective if often oppressively sanctimonious manifesto.

### ***Clarissa*, Theatricality, and Republicanism**

*Clarissa* is a novel, the first modern novel according to some, and among the first and most influential according to all. But it belongs more truly to, as one scholar put it, the genre of a "dramatic novel," whose most important sources lie in the theater rather than in earlier books.<sup>13</sup> Lovelace himself resembles the villains of Stuart and Restoration drama, and he frequently both comments on these plays and arranges his actions and those of others in explicit imitation of a dramaturge. *Clarissa's* plot belongs to one of the categories that Richardson himself had despised in his 1735 pamphlet against the theater, illustrating "How the People in *high Life* confound all distinctions of Right and Wrong; How the Men of *Taste* intrigue and form Plots upon the Virtue of the Wives and Daughters of the *honest Citizens*."<sup>14</sup> One could say that the letters of *Clarissa* represent the literary remains of the *Tragedy of Clarissa Harlowe*, written and produced by Robert Lovelace and played by Herself, so much is the movement of the novel produced and directed by Lovelace. Yet the audience for Lovelace's play is fictional and even doubly fictional, an audience imagined within the fiction itself. The real audience to the passion of Clarissa are the work's readers: this audience is also imagined within the novel, though as readers and recipients of a veracious rather than fictional correspondence.

Theatricality is exaggerated and hyperbolic, and its characters are larger than life. But, as one can learn from Rousseau's *Letter to D'Alembert*, republican mores are not theatrical -- notwithstanding the fact that western drama originated in the Theater of Dionysus, which was the central cultural institution of democratic Athens. Republican mores are an Aristotelian mean, but theatrical mores exist at the extreme. The tragic virtues are those of the prince and not of the citizen.

Yet the tragic hero can be instructive to the republican. Athenian tragedy itself was central to political education, wherein civic identity affirmed itself through the presentation of its princely and tyrannical opposites. So too D'Alembert believed that the theater of republican Geneva could be republican theater. Insofar as republics foster the institution of the theater, Rousseau responded to D'Alembert, these republics are corrupt; they are degenerate, like Athens, rather than vigorous and healthy, like Sparta and early republican Rome.<sup>15</sup>

Richardson does not deny the improving potential of the stage, nor does he deny the does he deny the corrupting reality. He writes in a pamphlet attacking the contemporary theater: "And tho' the Stage, under a proper Regulation, might be made a rational and instructing Entertainment, yet, as it is *now* manag'd, and generally *has been* order'd, we cannot help thinking it a very improper Diversion to be planted among the Working Class of People, particularly..." (*Seasonable Examination*, p. 17). Richardson's whole *oeuvre* aimed to spread the virtues of the commercial classes among their betters, while protecting all classes from the vices of "High Life." To this project, the theater of the era was but an obstacle, though unlike Rousseau, Richardson did not exclude the possibility that suitably inspired authors could purge the stage "of that Dross and Corruption which have been brought upon it" (*Seasonable Examination*, p. 23) .

Richardson's principal response to the moral issues the theater raised was his development of a new literary genre – the dramatic novel. All of Richardson's novels are, in some sense, theatrical: his *Pamela* is a comedy of female virtue rewarded; *Grandison* is a comedy of male virtue rewarded; and *Clarissa*, our focus here, is a history (or passion) of female virtue made to suffer. It is "A HISTORY OF A YOUNG LADY,"

as Richardson writes in his editorial persona on the title page, "COMPREHENDING THE MOST IMPORTANT CONCERNS OF PRIVATE LIFE." (33) Richardson describes *Clarissa* as a history, and not a novel or a romance, in part because it does not belong to the "world of romance" but to what one might call a fictional part of the actual world.

Richardson's principal reason for denying to *Clarissa* the name of tragedy is that he ends the novel with Clarissa's ascension to a better life in a future state after death. When he drops the editor's mask to defend his work as its author, he renounces the dramatic canon of "poetic justice" in favor of "a religious plan" that the present life is a state of probation, of intermingled good and evil. For the believing Christian, Clarissa's end is a triumph and not a tragedy: Clarissa remains steadfast in her own convictions, despite her sufferings. As Richardson writes, "And who that are in earnest in their profession of Christianity but will rather envy than regret the triumphant death of CLARISSA" (1498).

Whether we post-Christian readers view Clarissa's own death as enviable or as tragic, there is little doubt that *Clarissa* in many ways adheres to the form of classic tragedy. Richardson's novel is formulaically tragic in that it adheres to the authentically Aristotelian canon of the unity of action: the entire book, as noted, is about one action, Lovelace's rape of Clarissa. The novel obeys the neoclassicist canon of the unity of time in its own unique way, since all of the action is set within a single twelvemonth, from January to December, roughly matching in length the period of the successive publication of the first edition.<sup>16</sup> The novel reflects a neoclassicist understanding of tragedy not just in these formal aspects but also in its plot. Richardson shows us that his otherwise virtuous heroine has a tragic flaw that was her undoing: she was willing to correspond with the corrupted rake, Lovelace, because she was attracted to his person and accomplishments (1060 L333, 1261 L433).<sup>17</sup>

In the drama of *Clarissa*, Richardson uses his ensemble cast to provide his principals with a chorus. Like the chorus in Greek tragedy, Lovelace's friend, Belford, and Clarissa's friend, Anna, serve to show us how to react to the principal events of the main characters. They teach us how to read the letters of Clarissa

and Lovelace, and their own letters are a commentary on the actions of the two main players. Yet Richardson has also made Anna and Belford into members of the cast, actual acquaintances that interact with Lovelace and Clarissa. Having spurned the dramatic conventions that usually constitute a chorus, Richardson has to go to great and sometimes implausible lengths to keep his chorus out of the action, to show the real reader why the choral characters did not intercede to help their friends, why they did nothing to affect the course of events to which they are witness. Anne is prevented, supposedly, from helping Clarissa by complications in her relationship with her own mother. Yet it is best friend, no matter what the parental difficulties involved, would stand by while the estimable Clarissa suffered such ignominy? What really prevents Anna from acting to help Clarissa is Anna's choral role; it is not her function to intercede because her place in the novel is to inform and instruct the reader of the novel's moral message. Thus, like the wavering choruses of Greek tragedy, Anna accepts no responsibility for Clarissa's fate: "I am afraid of giving you my advice at all, or of telling you what I should do in you case ... lest any evil follow it; in which case, I should never forgive myself" (354 L87).

The reading of novel is both a solitary enterprise and an engagement with public issues and opinions. The novel is suitable for modern conditions in a way that theater is not. Rousseau had argued in the *Social Contract* that only the representatives in fact govern in a representative government; those who supposedly elect the representatives, Rousseau had claimed, do not rule. Yet in the new public sphere that emerges coevally with the rise of the novel in eighteenth-century England and America, the people did in effect govern. Through public opinion concerning their representatives and the public affairs that their representatives manage, the people governed their representatives, just as they were governed by them.

In precisely the same way that an elected representative mediates between public judgment and the details of public affairs, so too Richardson mediates between us, his readers, and Clarissa, the object of our judgment in reading the book. The novel is the art form of representative government, in that the many participate, through reading, in a single activity, and the public at large arrives, by proxy, at a consensus

opinion about the work. The novel, in this unique way, made possible the revival of the public sphere.<sup>18</sup> The novel, as conceived by Richardson, thus answers Rousseau's objections to representative government by manifesting a new kind of connection between the populace and public things.

Paul Johnson claims in *The Birth of the Modern* that the first event in English history that was the subject of public opinion, the first event on which literally everyone had an opinion, was the Queen Caroline affair of 1818-20. Every charwoman -- as much as every peer -- had an opinion about whether King George IV should be granted a divorce from his estranged wife Caroline. Yet it was the public reception of Richardson's writings, especially of his *Pamela*, that created for the first time this form of public opinion. Richardson's books became the subject of popular conversation, and the literate public at large ("everyone who read at all," as Habermas describes *Pamela's* audience)<sup>19</sup> to speculate and comment upon his stories. Even more significantly, beginning with the publication of *Pamela*, the people began to query whether Richardson had got the story right. The people were no longer simply the passive recipients of a performance put on for their pleasure and edification; they became active critics, debating the merits of the stories and critiquing their outcomes. With the publication of *Clarissa*, with the heroine's unhappy demise, the public began to express an opinion about what the ending should have been. The people, in essence, considered themselves as participants in the authoring of *Clarissa's* tale, invested in her well-being. They demanded (albeit unsuccessfully) that the story conform to their demands.

What makes possible such a public response is, of course, a new technological medium. Print and the post, the two technologies necessary for representative government, come together in the epistolary novel, and together make possible the extensive correspondence that Richardson carried on with his readers. Print and the post allow the public to extend itself in space, beyond the limits of the forum. The notion of a public discourse with no specific locus is peculiar to modernity and its technological advances. Athenian citizens of the classical democracy did not communicate in writing, and their public sphere was a physically defined space.<sup>20</sup> It is printing that makes possible a community larger than what can be heard.

Everyone knows the famous line that representation is necessary because the room will not hold all, but representation is possible because there is a virtual room constituted by public opinion that does hold all. Only in that way can the people judge their representatives and their representatives' actions.

Richardson's writings became a subject for such public opinion and judgment, with Richardson's story subject to public review. Richardson published *Clarissa* serially, and so the people had an opportunity to offer their opinion on how the story should end – whether Clarissa should marry Lovelace, whether she should live or die. The public had no control over *Clarissa's* outcome, but they did have the ability, each by reading the book individually, to have a common experience and to come together in forming a public judgment of the book's merits.<sup>21</sup> By speaking to each reader, Richardson spoke to all of them, and with many voices, they spoke back.

### **Reading, Reality, and Reputation**

The public character of Richardson's novel is expressed primarily in its use of letters to present the story and its characters. *Clarissa* lacks a privileged narrator with access to its characters' thoughts; we know the characters only from their own statements and actions. The novel lacks any all-seeing authorial voice to provide its readers with a "true" judgment of the characters' motivations and desires.<sup>22</sup> The reader views the characters as they present themselves in their letters. The reader relates to the characters as one relates to real people, whom one knows only by what they write, say, and do and not by their inner thoughts. In forming a judgment of any of the characters, the reader knows no more than the other characters. The reader may conclude, as Lovelace does, that Anna Howe's letters are "impudent," or judge, as Clarissa does, that Lovelace's letters are mere "libertine froth" (1077 L339). But the reader lacks any private, privileged perspective, and the novel's reality consists only in the appearance presented by its characters.

The characters' letters are sometimes deceptive, either of themselves or of others, and the reader can arrive at an appraisal of the characters only by sifting through their deceptions. Clarissa may deny that she loves Lovelace, but the reader is not likely to believe her; Lovelace may aver that he will marry Clarissa, but the credulous reader will be disappointed when he does not keep his promises. This possibility of deception is one of the crucial elements of the novel's public character, in that the act of reading becomes interactive: the reader experiences the action of the novel as it happens, with no greater knowledge than any of its characters. We, like they, believe perhaps and are deceived; we, like they, learn their hearts only through their words and actions. The writing is opaque in that the reader knows a character's thoughts only as they are expressed in epistolary form.<sup>23</sup>

This opacity in the writing highlights the opacity of our own interactions and communications. Clarissa herself laments the limits of words to express her feelings: "O that my friends but knew my heart! – would but think of it as they used to do – for once more, I say, if it deceive me not, it is not altered, although theirs are!" But it is an illusion to think that thoughts can ever be communicated directly except in communications—as Hannah Arendt writes, my very being as a thinking thing "never appears at all unless its *cogitationes* are made manifest in sounding-out or written-down speech, which is already meant for and presupposes auditors and readers as its recipients."<sup>24</sup> Whether orally or in writing, what is communicated is the communication itself. We perceive, and sometimes infer, another's thoughts from his or her communications. These inferences are often accurate, but when the communication is deceptive, so can our perceptions or inferences be led astray.

Yet even when the communication is deceptive, the inference drawn therefrom may be revealing. Clarissa denies vociferously that she loves Lovelace, but her best friend Anna knows Clarissa's heart better than Clarissa knows herself. The reader infers Clarissa's love for Lovelace by her unwillingness to stop corresponding with him, by her hopes for his reform, and by her revulsion at the prospect of marriage to another: When Anna exclaims, after Clarissa elopes with Lovelace, that "Alas my dear, I knew you loved

him!” (750 L229), the reader must assent. The reader has become the listener, the best friend, the recipient of Clarissa’s letters. In so doing, the reader feels qualified to infer what Clarissa really wants and to judge what is best for her. The reader has come to an opinion about the “reality” of Clarissa in the same way that he comes to opinions about those he or she meets in the world outside the page.<sup>25</sup>

Richardson’s novel, then, teaches us to differentiate between what is communicated and what is inferred. The modern aspiration is to know secret thoughts, but Richardson teaches that we can derive knowledge only from what is or can be publicly available. Even when we are privy to private correspondence, the supposed “secret thoughts” do not show themselves. What we conclude about others can come only from the words and actions they make appear. Richardson’s work de-emphasizes hidden secrets in favor of appearances, implying that our understanding of what really is comes from what is or can be publicly known.

To that end Richardson strips away the devices that make a fictional world different from the public world. The novel lacks any omniscient narrator, any single voice that is somehow truer or more real. The public world does not have a hidden truth that underlies appearances: there are simply truer and more false appearances. What is public or common is what is most manifest, and therefore “what is private has to become public before it is fully itself.”<sup>26</sup> Thoughts actualize their possibilities when they manifest themselves in worldly actions and communications. When Clarissa cannot communicate, her very existence is threatened.<sup>27</sup>

Communications therefore might be described as “thoughts as they have moved outward into the world,”<sup>28</sup> but communications are more than simply transcriptions of internal thoughts. The difference between thoughts and communications is an ontological difference, a difference in the existential possibilities of each and the use to which each can be put. Communications are speech-acts themselves, and they can be manipulated through deception, irony, and parody. Thus, communications themselves are not always true, but we arrive at the truth by judging communications. Through communication we infer



what others think and what they are. This process of inference – of judging what is real based on what is said and done – forms the basis of *Clarissa*, as the reader judges each character from his or her appearance, in word and in deed. The reader judges fictional persons based on fictional acts and statements in the same way that he or she would judge real persons on their real acts and words. The reader knows about Clarissa and the others only what he knows about his acquaintances, whom he also judges on the basis of their appearances. The reader of *Clarissa* is thus offered a set of exercises in interpretation to prepare him or her for the snares of life without being corrupted by real experiences.<sup>29</sup>

Richardson, through Clarissa herself, articulates this process of judging even oneself by appearances. She writes: “Should it not be our aim to judge of ourselves, and of everything that affects us, as we may reasonably imagine other people would judge of us and of our actions?” (134 L28) Clarissa invokes an imaginary, impartial, spectator who reasons from appearances, and she implies that this is the true (or perhaps the only) standard of judging. This imagined judgment by which one judges oneself takes priority over the actual judgment of oneself by common opinion. Clarissa claims that a good reputation is worthless if it is the product of deception, if the internal person does not match the reputation. But such a circumstance is not hers. Instead, Clarissa is one whose reputation is less worthy than her actions merit; in her case, one judged by public reputation might conclude incorrectly that she is not a person of virtue. One of the central questions of *Clarissa* is whether, and to what extent, the virtuous woman should or must manage her appearance, so that the actual public judgment of her words and deeds matches the imagined judgment of the spectator who knew all the relevant facts.

The claim of the virtuous is that the imagined and ideal judgment by appearances is the right way to judge, even though they do not believe that actual judgments by appearances are correct. The virtuous do not believe, as Lovelace’s sententious uncle Lord M states, that “what everyone says must be true” (606 L190). Yet they have regard for the actual judgments of society, flawed though such judgments may be. Clarissa dismisses the alternative of escape with Lovelace, while she is still facing her familial persecution, in

these words: “Have I ... a desire to *double* and *treble* my own fault, in the eye of the world? In the eye of that world which, cruelly as I am used (not knowing all) would not acquit me?” (360 L89)

For Clarissa, the world’s ignorance is a reason for taking extra precautions with one’s reputation. She criticizes her suitor, Solmes, for his foolishness in having a reputation for miserliness when a fame for generosity could be so easily and cheaply had. (101 L17) And her friend Anna shares her regard for reputation; Anna, who knows the truth about Clarissa’s situation, recognizes that others cannot know this truth and, not knowing, will judge Clarissa harshly: “One must be concerned for a censuring world,” Anna says, “that knows not what I know about the circumstances of your flight.” (407 L100) The world’s ignorance is not a justification for ignoring its judgment, as one might suppose, but rather a reason to excuse such flawed judgments. As her death approaches, Clarissa writes of her parents: “Now they are cleared from every imputation of unforgiveness; for while I appeared to them in the character of a vile hypocrite, pretending to true penitence, yet giving myself up to profligate courses, how could I expect either their pardon or their blessing?” (1298 L446).

Clarissa claims “However desirous I was of a fair fame, yet I never thought it right to give more than a second place to the world’s opinion.” (1138 L368) After her elopement and rape, Clarissa’s actual reputation can only be mended posthumously, in the presentation to readers both fictional and actual of the narrative of her death and apotheosis. Clarissa's sole worldly consolation comes from her imaginary anticipation of the judgment of the posthumous readers of the correspondence that relates her "History." She elevates this imagined judgment over any possible public opinion or any appearance: “I have lost my reputation, and what advantage would it be, were it retrievable, and were I to live long, if I could not acquit myself to myself” (1139 L368).

The virtuous do not judge themselves by the world’s opinion, but they respect that opinion and have due regard for its weight. Recognizing that the world will judge, the virtuous attempt to justify themselves before the tribunal of public opinion; yet their standard of behavior is an idealization of public opinion: one

should behave in a way that would be approved by another who knew all the relevant circumstance (see e.g. 360 L89).

The vicious profess to despise public opinion, invoking a philosophic critique of the public's inferiority that goes back to Plato's Socrates. Lovelace expresses disdain for "the hypocritical screen of reputation." (419 L106, and see 862 L252) Lovelace understands this disdain as a form of manliness (1302 L449), while to coax "the stupid misjudging world" is womanish and weak (1302 L449). He prides himself on his sincerity, as if being unabashed about his vice were a form of truth: "We rakes are the farthest thing from hypocrites, since we don't take the care some do to conceal our lapses" (450-51 L118). He claims he is "not such a hypocrite as to wish the world to think me other or better than I am" (142-43 L31). For Lovelace, the way we truly are is the way we are when we are alone (691-92 L216). Lovelace would deny that any other individual, whether actual or imagined, is the arbiter of his actions, and he would deny that the public sphere has any influence on himself.

Yet at the same time Lovelace writes to persuade himself that the world judges him as leniently as he judges himself; to that end, he erects his own conscience in place of the world's judgment (1143 L370). The virtuous, in contrast, seek merely to persuade the great tribunal of common opinion to judge matters as they really are, rather than simply as they appear to be. Thus, Clarissa boasts to Lovelace's creature, the pretended "Captain Tomlinson", at Hampstead:

You may say all that you please to say before these gentlewomen. Mr Lovelace may have secrets. I have none. You seem to think me faulty: I should be glad that all the world knew my heart. Let my enemies sit in judgment upon my actions: fairly scanned, I fear not the result. Let them even ask me my most secret thoughts, and whether they make for me or against me, I will reveal them (822 L243).

Elsewhere, she writes, "My story is a dismal story. It has circumstances that would engage pity, and possibly a judgment not altogether unfavorable, were those circumstances known," (976 L297). In her posthumous letter to her aunt, she writes that "when my story comes to be fully known, [my parents] will have the comfort to know that my suffering will redound more to my honour than to my disgrace" (1376 L492).

But for the virtuous to appear as they are, they must manage their appearance, or their reputation. This seems to us problematic: with Lovelace, we are prone to see it as a form of lying or hypocrisy. Certainly Clarissa purports to be far above either, claiming “I am not capable of arts so low” (347 L85), and praying, “Forbid it, Heaven! that Clarissa Harlowe should have it in her thought to *serve*, or even to *save*, herself at the expense of her sincerity and by a *studied* deceit!” (336 L83). But managing one’s reputation is not deceiving others into believing one is better than one is. Rather, it is ensuring that others think one is as good as one actually is. It would be deceptive to allow others to have a mistakenly unfavorable impression, and thus managing one’s reputation is an aspect of virtue. This form of virtue is something Clarissa comes to master only in the course of her travails: One manages one’s reputation to create coherence between reality and opinion, so that opinion reflects the truth of one’s virtue.

To achieve this coherence, one’s appearance must be managed so as to disclose as much as possible. Virtue becomes allied with openness, and clandestinity is vicious, or at least disingenuous. Virtue consists in making public that which is private, and in conducting one’s private life in such a way that it can be made public.<sup>30</sup> Virtue demands that Clarissa publish her letters and make known her situation. Rather than attempting to hide her rape as something shameful, Clarissa tells all of what she suffered, believing that if her story is known, her conduct will be approved. Her regret is not in having her private life made public; rather, she regrets any aspect of her private life that was not public. Thus, she laments, “For my own part, I am very uneasy to think how I have been drawn on the one hand, and driven on the other, into a clandestine, in short, into a mere lover-like correspondence, which my heart condemns” (117 L22). Clarissa condemns her correspondence with Lovelace, not only because she believes it to have been wrong, but because it had one of the clear marks of wrongfulness, clandestinity. In the very act of hiding, Clarissa finds a lack of virtue. For her, true virtue consists of both being and behaving in such a way that all one’s thoughts and actions can be made known without censure.

Correspondingly, Clarissa's initial disapproval of Lovelace comes from the fact that he affects to care not what reputation he has. As Clarissa's friend Anna writes, even if Lovelace is not in fact vicious, his lack of regard for his reputation is itself improper: if Lovelace "be better than his enemies say he is (and if worse, he is bad indeed), he is guilty of an inexcusable fault in being so careless as he is of his reputation" (75 L12). Anna knows that a concern for reputation is a guarantee of virtue: what a man is not ashamed to have imputed to him, he will not scruple to be guilty of whenever he has the opportunity (75). And Clarissa herself ultimately determines that, despite her love for him, Lovelace is unworthy of her because "what hope can a woman have of a man who values not his reputation?" (439 L114) But Lovelace cannot understand the coherence between opinion and virtue. Insofar as he cares for his reputation, he does not wish to improve himself so as to improve his reputation. Rather, he wishes he had managed his reputation so as to deceive others into thinking him better than he is: "I ought to have been a little more attentive to character than I have been ... (impolitic that I have been, and am!) To be so careless of mine!" (862 L252) Yet for Lovelace, the only good to be achieved by a good reputation is the ability to use that reputation with impunity to further one's vicious ends.

Clarissa's alliance of reputation with virtue responds to a basic republican difficulty: because one must have a public reputation, that reputation must be managed to ensure one's success. A woman, in particular, must guard her reputation because her individual well-being depends completely on the aid and support of others. The issue is most clearly presented in the dilemma faced by a single woman like Clarissa: while it is dangerous for a woman to have any reputation, even a good one, a woman must have a reputation to gain suitors (480 L133). Because a woman's role is defined only with reference to her public place in society, she must manage her reputation. Clarissa prides herself on her republican exposure to chastisement from those who know her, on her not putting herself into "the inconvenient situation of royalty; that is to say, out of ever being told of my faults" (358 L89). Clarissa is a good citizen insofar as she recognizes the power of opinion and wishes to live within its sway.

Lovelace tells his relations after the rape that he has but one objection to marrying Clarissa: "that she is everywhere pursuing that maxim, peculiar to *herself (and let me tell you, so it ought to be)* that what she cannot conceal from herself, she will publish to all the world."<sup>31</sup> By spreading the story, Lovelace complains, Clarissa will put it out of power to redress these wrongs with any tolerable reputation to either of us (1095 L346). In her determination to live in the public eye Clarissa compares herself to the greatest Romans. She cites example of "the great Scipio" refusing to condescend to answer a mean charge brought against him (531 L157). That is to say, with Clarissa, that "there are points so delicate, that it is a degree of dishonor to have a vindication of one's self from them appear to be *necessary*" (991 L309).

Yet Clarissa's public reputation is both her glory and her downfall. Having gained a great reputation for virtue and beauty, she had, she admits, insufficient prudence and discretion to protect that reputation (860 L252). As a result, Clarissa could only safeguard both her reputation and her virtue by reenacting the myth of Lucretia, in which a woman suffers for her reputation for virtue in a way that she could not suffer if she did not genuinely have the virtue that is hers by repute. Clarissa's fate shows us that for a woman virtue and reputation are somehow inconsistent, that it is impossible for her both to be extraordinarily good and to be famous for extraordinary goodness. A more ordinary woman (or a more ordinary citizen) might have been able to manage her survival – either by being less good or by being satisfied with a lesser reputation. Clarissa, however, insisted on retaining her virtue and on making that virtue publicly understood, and society had no place for such a woman.

Thus Clarissa's story, like Lucretia's, ultimately becomes the story of her apotheosis from woman into archetypal warning to other women. Clarissa stands as a warning of the incompatibility of excessive virtue and excessive reputation with the ordinary life of the citizen, and so she writes after her rape, "I am glad if I may be a warning, since I cannot be an example: which once (very vain, and very conceited as I was!) I proposed myself to be!" (L306 985) That she may serve as the most manifest warning, that her example and

her warning are made permanent (see 1017 L317), Clarissa performs her final extraordinary act: her management of the publication of *Clarissa*.

Publication, it should be noted, is the last thing that Lovelace wants for his letters (1185 L395, 1209 L415, 1461 L526). But for Clarissa, whose greatest concern is to secure a reputation that matches her virtue, publication is the decisive way to achieve such a result. (see 989 L308, 1199 L409, and 995 L311). Thus Clarissa arranges for posthumous publication of her letters, asking Lovelace's sometime friend and constant correspondent Belford to be her executor. (1176-77 L389-90) Clarissa's will commands that two copies be made of the "compilement of all that relates to my sad story," (1418 L507) one for Anna Howe and one for Belford himself: thus the double chorus is preserved in both form and distribution. *Clarissa* becomes Clarissa's final and perpetual appearance before the public.

### **The Enlightened Modern Prince**

O that I could not say, that I have met with more Admirers of Lovelace than of Clarissa.<sup>32</sup>

In Lovelace Richardson gave his pen to a character whose identity remains and resonates, for Lovelace is the authentically modern man, liberated from traditional restraints and dedicated to no end but the limitless exercise of his own will.<sup>33</sup> Lovelace acts on the modern repudiation of natural teleology, thereby rejecting the notion of interest, even in the sense of worldly interest or money. (1313 L455) In reading one of Anna's letters to Clarissa, Lovelace writes in exclamation to his friend, Belford: "She tells her, it is in my interest to be honest – INTEREST, fools! – I thought these girls knew that my interest was ever subservient to my pleasure." (634 L198) But Lovelace is not a hedonist, for by "pleasure" he means, not physical pleasure, but the pleasure of having things according to his own will.

For Lovelace, this pleasure of exercising his will lies in the pursuit rather than the fulfillment. When Belford asks him whether the end that Lovelace proposes to himself is answerable to the means (556 L169), Lovelace replies that the chase is the thing: "What is the enjoyment of the finest woman in the world, to the contrivance, the bustle, the surprises, and at last the happy conclusion of the well-laid plot." (557-58 L170) As Lovelace writes earlier, "*Preparation and expectation* are, in a manner, everything: *reflection*, indeed may be something, if the mind be hardened above feeling the guilt of a past trespass: but the *fruition*, what is there in that? And yet, that being the end, nature will not be satisfied without it." (163 L34) The end is not worth the trouble we take for it, Lovelace admits, but he claims this is true of "all world delights," and he pursues his goals for the pleasure of the pursuit.

In his disregard for these "world delights," Lovelace is a world-despiser, who lives out in a peculiar fashion a mock-Christian critique of worldly things. Richardson and Richardson's creature Clarissa have a worldliness according to which a measure of happiness worth the trouble we take for it is the proper end of our worldly strivings. Lovelace is a man "that might have been happy if he would," as Clarissa says (829 L243), but chooses not to be happy out of motives that even the subsequent ingenuity of Kant and Sade together do not succeed in exhausting.<sup>34</sup>

Lovelace wishes to exercise his powers to the fullest, and his destructive power, like that of mankind generally, exceeds teleological justification. Belford notes that man is dependent on all the other creatures, and yet despite this dependence denies his likeness to them, who act within their "natural and original appointments" (L365 1125). It is because of what Belford here calls man's eccentricity that man will "kick, and cuff, and elbow out every worthier creature: and when he has none of the animal creation to hunt down and abuse, will make use of his power, his strength, or his wealth, to oppress the less powerful and weaker of his species" (L365 1126). Lovelace takes his pleasure in the willful exercise of that destructive power to which nature has put no bounds.<sup>35</sup>



Lovelace treats love as war (see e.g. 636 L198): he treats that human relationship whose natural end is most apparent as if it were that whose natural end is most obscure. Lovelace claims to be better than Hannibal because his form of warfare is less destructive (718 L223). Success with Clarissa is not satisfaction, Lovelace writes, "Victory or conquest is the more proper name" (691 L216). Lovelace admits that this is not necessarily amorous warfare either (L99 401).<sup>36</sup>

As Belford and Lovelace both acknowledge, the life of the rake is not the way to happiness: it is a life lived in rejection of nature.<sup>37</sup> By contrast, nature is Clarissa's guide in everything (L399 1190). Lovelace repudiates nature in favor of the quest for mastery of nature through knowledge. He puts nature, in the form of Clarissa, to the torture in order to interrogate her virtue. Such an interrogation is imperative, he claims, especially since she, as he puts it, as apparently compromised it by running away with him (L110). The purpose of this investigation is supposedly to learn whether she is worthy to be a wife to Lovelace, that is to say, capable of resisting even a Lovelace (428 L110; see also 519 L152). In vain does Belford point out the uselessness of such a test (500 L143).<sup>38</sup>

Lovelace aims to reveal the reality of Clarissa that underlies the visible superficialities of her reputation. Yet he also believes that "the charmingest woman on earth, were she an empress, can excel the meanest, in the customary visibles only" (493 L138).<sup>39</sup> Lovelace rapes Clarissa to prove his power, he claims, even as he refrained from molesting Rosebud, where his power was unquestioned. He admits that he wishes to seduce Clarissa because of her virtue (657): "Her virtue, her resistance, which are her merit, are my stimulatives," he writes (716 L223), and speaks of her virtuous opposition as "a resistance irresistible." (727 L225) And yet Lovelace regrets attempting Clarissa, since all that distinguishes her from any other female body is her virtue (885 L259) or the romantic value she sets on what women call their honor-- but that is so little as to be hardly worth regarding or sparing Clarissa from the fate of "a thousand others of her sex." Clarissa should be attempted, claims Lovelace, because of her extraordinary virtue, but that virtue is such a trifle that it does not set her apart enough to spare her. It is as though Lovelace simply wishes to

replicate repeatedly his experimental proof and over and over again that there is nothing to female virtue. His metaphysical assumptions are such that there is nothing his ravishing of Clarissa can reveal to him.<sup>40</sup>

What Lovelace is after is the knowledge that Clarissa can be raped. Lovelace proposes to honor Clarissa's virtue by forcing a breach in the fortress-- that is, by raping her, and then he will give her the honors of war for defending her virtue (401 L99), the honors that are due only to a garrison that makes terms after a breach has been forced. Once raped, he thinks, Clarissa will be forever *his*, and not merely forever *his victim*. As he writes to Belford in justifying his designs: "If she be a woman, and love me, I shall surely catch her once tripping: for love was ever a traitor to its harbourer; and Love within, and I without, she'll surely be more than women, so the poet says, or I less than man, if I succeed not" (431 L110). After proving that Clarissa can be raped and possessed through rape, Lovelace can conclude the series of experiments on Clarissa and move on to another research project: "Until by matrimonial or equal intimacies I have found her less than angel, it is impossible to think of any other" (147 L31). Lovelace, according to his own profession, can love Clarissa only as long as he does not know her to be human. Since she is human, as he knows from the start, his love cannot possibly be abiding.

Lovelace values knowledge of Clarissa's virtue over his own happiness, when he seeks a kind of knowledge that does not contribute to his own happiness. That is to say, the kind of knowledge he wants is the knowledge that Clarissa can be raped. Yet any woman can be raped, he realizes after the deed, if one is willing to use the means that Lovelace uses on Clarissa.

The modern view is that knowledge is power, that is to say potential, rather than actualization. Knowledge determines what one can do rather than what one is for having done. The pursuit of knowledge in the modern sense is of questionable relation to happiness because the pursuit of power conflicts with the actualization that happiness purports to be. Because the knowledge Lovelace seeks is unrelated to happiness, there is no way to relate the different pieces of this knowledge to anything of human value. All of it is equally true, and none of it is better than any other. The knowledge that Clarissa can be raped can

do no one any good, not least because it is trivial. The Lovelacian concept of the (non-)value of the knowledge that he destroys all to attain is thoroughly modern.

In his revolt against nature, Lovelace shows himself to be a creature of *modern* conventions. It is true that "behind Lovelace's mask is another mask,"<sup>41</sup> but each of these masks is but a superficial, thoroughly conventional, persona—Lovelace is inauthentic all the way down.. To apply a suitable sentiment of Samuel Johnson's, Lovelace "has apparently kindled in himself desires which he never received from nature, and acts upon principles established only by the authority of custom."<sup>42</sup> Of course, the custom that Lovelace follows is the understanding of the imperatives of power as described by Machiavelli, Bacon, and Hobbes, and as depicted in the flashy *personae* of the rakes of the century of English drama from Ben Jonson to Nicholas Rowe. Thus Lovelace substitutes for the gentle promptings of nature the unconditional imperative of what he calls "the rake's creed;" he is a fictional character who confuses the stage with the world.<sup>43</sup> Clarissa has at least the consolation that her notions of propriety are sustained by Aristotelian teleology and Christian theodicy. Lovelace's rake's creed is the legislation of human will alone, and Lovelace's assent to this legislation is itself but a bare act of will. It is of course, nihilistic, and perhaps no writer since has given a better example of Arendt's dictum that "nihilism is but the other side of conventionalism; its creed consists of negations of the current so called positive values, to which it remains bound."<sup>44</sup> Yet just as modern political tyrannies hold special charm for intellectuals, Lovelace's erotic tyranny has special power over "reasoning ladies": "they employ all their reasoning power to *excuse* rather than to *blame* the conduct of the *doubted* lover."<sup>45</sup>

Lovelace is a modern in his policy, as well as his method. Not only is it better to be feared than loved, he thinks, one can come to be loved by means of being feared. As he writes to Belford: "Any woman, do I think, I could make good, because I could make any woman fear as well as love me" (847 L246). Mrs. Greme, Lord M's housekeeper, gives as a character of Lovelace that "it was hard to say whether the servants of her lord's family loved [Lovelace] or feared him most" (397 L98).

Unsurprisingly, Lovelace is firmly in support of modern corruptions, except for his shallowly held condemnations of the parliamentary corruption that characterized Walpole's system.<sup>46</sup> Lovelace justifies his attacks on Clarissa as having desirable consequences, since these attacks warn other girls that "honest prowling fellows" are indeed "about." "At worst, I am entirely within my worthy friend Mandeville's rule, *that private vices are public benefits*" (847 L246; cf. 961 L289). That is, Lovelace himself is a public benefit in the example he provides to warn other women and their parents.

Lovelace can express aristocratic republican resentment, Whiggish resentment, of real-world royalty. Lovelace writes that Harlowe Place, "like Versailles, is sprung up from a dunghill within every elderly person's remembrance" (161 L34). He and his family are at least no "Courtiers" in the narrow sense of English politics (cf. 666 L206): He endorses annual parliaments, as well as annual marriages (874 L255). These are not serious political views, but they are the political style of the opposition to Walpole.

In his republican guise Lovelace poses as the man who will liberate women, Clarissa and her mother, from patriarchal prerogative.<sup>47</sup> Clarissa describes a private encounter with Lovelace thus to Anna:

He appealed to me whether I ever knew my papa recede from any resolution he had once fixed, especially if he thought either his prerogative, or his authority, concerned in the question. His acquaintance with our family, he said, enabled him to give several instances (but they would be too grating to me) of an arbitrariness that had few examples even in the family of princes: an arbitrariness which the most excellent of women, my mamma, too severely experienced. (168 L36)

Yet only if women could rule, even rule themselves, could Lovelace's offer be more than the beguiling of a tyrant. Lovelace claims to Clarissa "that his whole view at present is to free me from my imprisonment; and to restore me to my own free will, in a point so absolutely necessary to my future happiness" (349 L85). Lovelace claims to be on the side of freeing Clarissa to do her will, that he wants to help her realize the independence she has a right to will (326 L80). You promised "entire submission to my will," Clarissa reminds him (377 L94). In the Harlowes' garden immediately before the elopement Lovelace portrays

himself to Clarissa as "a man on his knees imploring you-- to be your own mistress" (378 L94). He states after they have eloped "that you are your own mistress, through my means, is my boast" (392 L98).

Lovelace shares in the anti-legitimism of the true republican, though he sees women the way the tyrant sees the people, as longing to be dominated (607 L207), and as worthy only of being dominated.<sup>48</sup> Lovelace aims to flatter Clarissa by speaking of her freedom, as tyrants always attempt to seduce the people by speaking of their freedom and their rights. In fact at the same time that he expresses these splendidly liberal sentiments to Clarissa, Lovelace asks Belford rhetorically, and repeatedly, "is she not IN MY POWER" (401-2 L99)." Like other modern princes such as Louis XIV, Lovelace envies the absolute and uncontested power of the Sultan, over his subjects, and especially over the inmates of his harem. It is in this Oriental style that he imagines humbling both Anna and Clarissa:

How sweetly pretty to see the two lovely friends, when humbled and tame,  
both sitting in the darkest corner of a room, arm in arm, weeping and  
sobbing for each other!-- And I their emperor, their then acknowledged  
emperor, reclined on a sophee, in the same room, Grand Signor-like,  
uncertain to which I should first throw out my handkerchief (637 L198)

Lovelace has no temper for the republican rule of a husband over a single wife. He wants a wife "who will be a Lady Easy to all my pleasures, and valuing those most, who most contributed to them; only sighing in private, that it was not herself at the time-- Thus of old did the contending wives of the honest patriarchs..." (669-70 L207). Lovelace endorses patriarchy, but without the religion of these fathers. Lovelace loves Clarissa, Anna writes, "with such a love as Herod loved his Marianne" (749 L229).

Even the form of Lovelace's letters thus illustrates what their content clarifies about his soul. He writes to Belford: "Be pleased then, I command thee to be please... And so in the royal style (for am I not to be thy king and thy emperor, in the great affair before us?), I bid thee very heartily Farewell" (148 L32). In refusing to sign his letters "Your servant" Lovelace shows his royalist, imperial, or tyrannical ambitions.: "I have three passions that sway me by turns;" he writes, "all imperial ones. Love, revenge, ambition, or a desire of conquest" (719 L223). He wishes to be not Clarissa's husband but her sovereign emperor: "If once

thy emperor decrees thy fall, thou shalt greatly fall" he pronounces concerning her to his courtier Belford (401 L99, cf. 493 L138, 669 L207, 916 L268).

Lovelace was educated to empire at Versailles. Clarissa writes of Lovelace's plots within against the Harlowe household: "This is not an honorable way of proceeding in Mr. Lovelace-- did he learn this infamous practice of corrupting the servants of other families at the French Court, where he resided a good while?" (261 L62). "In the great correspondence by letters which he holds, he is as secret and careful as if it were of a treasonable nature-- yet troubles not his head with politics, though nobody knows the interests of prince and courts better than he." And Lovelace gives us a courtier's maxim: "Free-livers, like ministers of state, never part with a power put into their hands, without an equivalent of twice the value" (934 L276). Lovelace compares himself to the Princes of the world, since both can buy any assistance they need in their views "be their purposes ever so wicked" (923 L271). Of course, Lovelace forgoes political power for the sake of despotic power, principally over women. He has no fatherland, no country, he acknowledges (753 L229). Lovelace is supreme emperor and font of all honor in his solipsistic principality.

Lovelace could almost be a model for Napoleon, the revolutionary Emperor.<sup>49</sup> Napoleon "on meeting a young English officer named Lovelace at his levee, remarked 'I perceive your name, Sir, is the same as that of the hero of Richardson's romance.'"<sup>50</sup> Richardson's Lovelace certainly has no trouble imagining himself as a world-conqueror:

To be sure I should have made a most noble prince! I should have led up a military dance equal to that of the great Macedonian. I should have added kingdom to kingdom, and robbed all my neighbor sovereigns in order to have obtained the name of Robert the Great. And I would have gone to war with the Great Turk, and the Persian, and the Mogul, for their seraglios; for not one of those Eastern monarchs should have had a pretty woman to bless himself with, till I had done with her (762 L232)

Lovelace's thirst for conquest, the female conquests he actually accomplishes, is certainly insatiable. At Hampstead to retrieve Clarissa after she has fled "Mrs. Sinclair's" Lovelace writes to Belford that he is plotting "not a high" project, to do the three ladies from Hampstead. His only regret, before the rape, is

that he has but one Clarissa to conquer (559 L172).<sup>51</sup> Yet Clarissa may herself be so difficult to conquer, he reflects after the rape, that scenes with Clarissa may absorb all his powers, and thus she may save the ladies from Hampstead, as she has already saved scores (897-8 L261). Clarissa can never be completely subdued, and he who would govern her would never need new worlds to conquer.<sup>52</sup>

### **Conclusion: Richardson's Eudaemonistic Critique of Modernity**

As Brian Downs pointed out more than seventy years ago, the "true ethical significance" of Clarissa is not to be found in her sufferings but in her final rejection of Lovelace.<sup>53</sup> Clarissa does not marry Lovelace because she is certain that she cannot be happy with him, not in the next life but especially not in this one: "After what I had suffered by thee, it would be criminal in me to bind my soul in covenant to a man so nearly allied to perdition" (902 L263; see also 589 L184). "My whole heart rejects him, I say with determination, but not with passion" (1101 L348). Her heart, her sensibilities, can never be satisfied with Lovelace. Yet this is a rational, prudent, decision, based on a deeper knowledge of Lovelace than any other character manages to attain.

It is not that she has other possibilities left for satisfying her worthy desires either: "My prospects of happiness are extremely contracted" (653 L202), she reflects after leaving her father's house. After the rape these prospects are not contracted but vanished: "All my prospects are shut in," she correctly notes to Lovelace after the rape (901 L263), and in consequence "I have forfeited my temporal hopes," she writes to Anna (1141 L369). All she can do is live, she knows, but she has no hope of living well (1128 L365). It is in that sense she is ruined in her own eyes, not by some mysterious defilement incurred by unlawful fornication (909 L266).

As a result, for Clarissa, her loss of reputation is a small thing, because she no longer can enjoy any goods. If even so integral a good as her own health (1018 L318) has lost its value, all the more so have the

good normally concomitant with a worthy reputation now but ashes and dust. Clarissa was willing to marry Lovelace when she thought she could be happy with him, or at least that she could have made him happy (1341-2 L467). It is these prospects for happiness both his and hers, that made it possible for her to love him (1341 L467). With the extinction of these possibilities of happiness vanish even the faintest glimmerings of love.

Clarissa refuses Lovelace for the same reason that she refuses Solmes (507 L145, 305 L78): better wretched without Lovelace than wretcheder with him.<sup>54</sup> Since neither match offers the possibility of a worthy life, there is no reason for a serious woman like Clarissa to marry either. Because Lovelace himself thinks happiness is a delusion, he cannot readily understand Clarissa's motives for refusing after the rape (see e.g. 1030-1 L323). Nor can he understand why she is unconcerned for the consequences for her reputation of publishing the rape, unless it is out of spite, "the Harlowe sin," as he calls it (1038 L325, 1095 L346). Lovelace comes to some glimpse of this truth, but, of course, too late (1482 L535).

With her mind undamaged, Clarissa can maintain her dignity and gravity to refuse what little of genuine worth Lovelace can offer her: she is not sunk so low as to marry Lovelace (1116 L359). "I have much more pleasure in thinking of death," she says, "than [in thinking] of such a husband" (1115 L359). With that realization Clarissa triumphs over her enemy Lovelace, triumphs utterly, completely, and uselessly: "I have long been greatly above you," she writes in her posthumous letter to Lovelace (1427 L510). It is a victory without relish.

Lovelace joins in the repudiation of the ancient notion of the achievement of happiness by repudiating the idea of achievement itself, not by substituting an alternative idea of achievement. In the modern thinkers who both brought about and meditated on the rise of civil society, the old notion of the end of human life as the *summum bonum*, to be found in pleasure, in political success, or in philosophic comprehension, is replaced with the multiplicity of ends the members of civil society actually pursue. Yet in a sense each of the multiple alternatives is inauthentic to our true selves, according to the modern account,



since the human being is in fact a complex of naturally limitless desires and a will which itself has no place in nature.

### Notes

\* This paper was presented at a panel on "Civil Society and the Politics of the Novel" at the 2000 Meeting of the American Political Science Association, and received the Best Paper Award for 2000 from the Politics and Literature Section. We would like to thank Jim Read and Anna Kochin for their comments. Michael's research was supported by a Social Science and Humanities Research Council (Canada) Postdoctoral Fellowship, and an Alon Fellowship from the Council on Higher Education (Israel).

<sup>1</sup>Lucretia was a Roman matron who killed herself after being raped by her husband's royal cousin, the son of King Tarquinius Superbus. Swearing revenge over her bleeding form, Brutus, another cousin of the royal family, Collatinus, Lucretia's husband, and her father Lucretius organized a conspiracy against the Tarquins, expelled them, and established elected consuls in place of kings to rule in Rome. References to *Clarissa*, unless otherwise noted, are to the generally available paperback text of the first edition: *Clarissa or the History of a Young Lady*, ed. Angus Ross (London and New York: Penguin, 1985).

<sup>2</sup>Samuel Richardson to Aaron Hill, 10 May 1748; *Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson*, ed. John Carroll (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 87.

<sup>3</sup>Alan Dugald McKillop, *Samuel Richardson: Printer and Novelist* (University of North Carolina Press, 1936; Reprint, The Shoe String Press, 1960), pp. 296-7; T. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel, *Samuel Richardson: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 19-36; Margaret Doody, *A Natural Passion: A Study of the Novels of Samuel Richardson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 3, n. 5.

<sup>4</sup>It is strange to learn from Richardson's letters that hearing the debates of Parliament was "a favorite diversion," given the little discussion of politics to be found in his principal works (Eaves and Kimpel, p. 528). Richardson had the franchise as a master printer and freeman of the City of London.

<sup>5</sup>Richardson gives this apology for his novels repeatedly in his correspondence, e.g. to Lady Bradshaigh 26 October 1748 (*Selected Letters* p. 92): "If my work must be supposed of the Novel kind, I was willing to try if a Religious Novel would

do good." See also the Postscript to the third edition of *Clarissa* (Shakespeare Head ed., vol. VIII, p. 308). The image used in the text is taken from Samuel Johnson, *Rambler* 96 (16 February 1751), in *Works* 4:152. This number of *The Rambler* immediately precedes *Rambler* 97, written by Richardson himself.

<sup>6</sup>Samuel Richardson to George Cheyne, 31 August 1741; *Selected Letters*, pp. 46-7.

<sup>7</sup>See Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel 1600-1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

<sup>8</sup>We therefore depart from those critics who understand Richardson's great contribution to be the exploration of subjectivity, sentiment, or the inner life; the most important of those critics for contemporary views of Richardson is doubtless Margaret Doody; see e.g. *A Natural Passion*, p. 11. Subjectivity is thematic in *Clarissa* only in so far as Richardson uses the modern subjectivist Lovelace to show the impact of subjectivism on the public world.

<sup>9</sup>Mark Kinkead-Weekes, "Introduction," in Samuel Richardson, *Pamela*, 2 vols. (London: J. M. Dent, 1962), 1:x-xi.

<sup>10</sup>As Thomas O. Beebe writes, "*Clarissa* had had such a lasting impact because it is a novel which contains a number of viewpoints on many subjects, any one of which the reader may identify with in vigorously rejecting the others.

Paradoxically, this perspectivism has assured *Clarissa* not only of long life but also of continual misreading"; *Clarissa on the Continent: Translation and Seduction* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1990); p. viii.

<sup>11</sup>See Aristotle, *Politics*, 1259b.

<sup>12</sup>Maurice Golden, *Richardson's Characters* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963), pp. 166, 169.

<sup>13</sup>See Kinkead-Weekes; Kempel and Eaves, p. 102.

<sup>14</sup>Samuel Richardson, *A Seasonable Examination of the Pleas and Pretensions of the Proprietors of, and Subscribers to, Playhouses, Erected in Defiance of the Royal License, with Some Brief Observations on the Printed Case of the Players belonging to Drury Lane and Covent Garden Theaters* (London, 1735); Reprinted in Samuel Richardson, *The Apprentice's Vade Mecum, 1734, and A Seasonable Examination of Playhouses* (New York: Garland, 1974).

<sup>15</sup>Rousseau thereby took the side of the philosophers in the quarrel between philosophy and poetry. Yet Rousseau himself had written much for the theater, and he gave up writing plays for novels only after reading the French translation of Richardson's *Pamela*. Of Rousseau's two novels – *Emile* and *Julie* – *Julie* is the more clearly Richardsonian, centered as it is around a love affair that transgresses class boundaries and including an English lordling among its principal characters. Once one views *Emile* as a novel, all of Rousseau's writings, and especially his most political works

such as the *Social Contract* or the *Government of Poland* begin to appear novelistic as Zeev Emmerich has pointed out.

Rousseau's political writings all have an "as if" character, making truth claims more akin to those of a likely fiction than those of a conventional veristic exposition.

<sup>16</sup>Johannes Stinistra, "Preface" to vols. I-II of the Dutch tr. of *Clarissa*, tr. in *The Richardson-Stinistra Correspondence and Stinistra's Prefaces to Clarissa*, ed. William C. Slattery (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), p. 118; Harris, "Introduction", p. lxxv; Keymer, p. 201.

<sup>17</sup>Jocelyn Harris notes that Richardson reveals a profound understanding of the neo-Aristotelian notion of tragic error in his editorial additions to *Clarissa*; see e.g. his appeal to Aristotle in defending his portrayal of Clarissa's sufferings in the postscript to the first edition (1495-98); Jocelyn Harris, "Introduction" In *Samuel Richardson's Published Commentary on Clarissa, 1747-1765*, vol. I (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1998), pp. lii-lv.

<sup>18</sup>On the role of Richardson's novels in expanding the market for books of all kinds see Downs p. 197.

<sup>19</sup>Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, tr. Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), p. 174.

<sup>20</sup>See Jeremy Trevett, "Did Demosthenes Publish his Deliberative Speeches?", *Hermes* 124, no.4 (1996): 425-441, 434.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 29: "Inasmuch as culture became a commodity... it was claimed as the ready topic of a discussion through which a publicly oriented subjectivity communicated with itself" (tr. slightly altered).

Habermas understands Richardson as opening up a "new terrain of subjectivity" (p. 50)—but as we shall show, Richardson present a critique of the new subjectivity in the figure of Lovelace. On Richardson's novels as catalysts of the English public sphere see also Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism* (London: Verso, 1984), 29, 116.

<sup>22</sup>Richardson intrudes occasionally in the guise of the "Editor", and the intrusions become oppressive in *Clarissa's* third edition, but as the Editor he has no better access to the character's inner life than does any other reader.

<sup>23</sup>The best account of the opacity of *Clarissa's* constituent letters is in Tom Keymer, *Richardson's Clarissa and the Eighteenth-Century Reader* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>24</sup>Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981), 1:20.

<sup>25</sup>Richardson expounds the importance of allowing Anna and the reader to infer Clarissa's love for Lovelace in his letter of 29 October 1746 to Aaron Hill; *Selected Letters*, pp. 72-73.

<sup>26</sup>Doody, "Introduction," p.20.

<sup>27</sup>As Cynthia Griffin Wolf writes, there is a connection in the novel "between being prevented from writing and dying"; *Samuel Richardson and the Eighteenth Century Puritan Character* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1972), pp. 128-130.

<sup>28</sup>Doody, "Introduction," p.10.

<sup>29</sup>Keymer, pp. 77-84.

<sup>30</sup>As Harriet Byron, the heroine in *Grandison*, boasts in a letter to her cousin Lucy: "You and I, my dear, write for all to see what we write"; *Sir Charles Grandison*, ed. Jocelyn Harris, 3 parts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), vol. I, L36, Part 1, p. 178. On the virtues of having nothing to hide see also Michael S. Kochin, "Individual Narrative and Political Character," *The Review of Metaphysics*, forthcoming.

<sup>31</sup>*Clarissa* 1035 L324, and cf. L336 1072-3.

<sup>32</sup>Samuel Richardson to Frances Grainger, 21 December 1749; *Selected Letters*, p. 141. Cf. Richardson to Lady Bradshaigh 14 February 1754 (*Selected Letters*, p. 289): "It is inconceivable how much advantage, in my proud heart, is given me, of peeping into the hearts of my readers, sometimes into their heads, by their approbation, and disapprobation, of the conduct of the different persons in my Drama."

<sup>33</sup>Cf. Terry Castle's instructive comparison between Lovelace and Fanon's agents of colonialism "who speak the language of pure force"; Terry Castle, *Clarissa's Ciphers: Meaning and Disruption in Richardson's "Clarissa"* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 26.

<sup>34</sup>Pushkin emphasizes that the capacity of the male for happiness is the crux of the matter in his own revision of the garden scene from *Clarissa*; see *Eugene Onegin*, chapter IV, esp. IV.xiv.

<sup>35</sup>Mr. B. in *Pamela*, similarly, lives for the unbounded exercise of his destructive will. His creature, Mrs. Jewkes, contrasts Pamela's desires with Mr. B.'s will, thus stressing the naturalness of the one and the *naturlos* character of the other: "If your desire and his will clash, I will do as he bids me, let it be what it will (*Pamela* 92-3). Mr. B. is never used to control (*Pamela* 215), she acknowledges. Pamela has only desire, it is her master that has will.

<sup>36</sup>Richardson gives Clarissa the last word on this comparison between love and war in her posthumous letter to Bedford (1367-68 L486). If worldly victories and military honors in the original sense are rendered insignificant by our common mortality, what of those who pride themselves on "conquering" and "subduing" only the weak and innocent.

<sup>37</sup>Consider the contrast between nature and learning made by Miss Howe in comparing the writing of men and women (1467-8 L529).

<sup>38</sup>On Lovelace's experimentalism see Ann Jessie Van Sant, *Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), chapter 4, pp. 60-82.

<sup>39</sup>Cf. Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Conor Cruise O'Brien (New York: Penguin, 1986), p. 171.

<sup>40</sup>Lovelace seems to live out Kant's noumenal/phenomenal distinction, since he discovers that the noumenal reality of Clarissa eludes his merely phenomenal instruments of drugs, captivity, forged correspondence, and bribed servants.

<sup>41</sup>Beebe, *Clarissa on the Continent*, p. 99.

<sup>42</sup>Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler* 49 (4 September 1750), in *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, vol. III, ed. W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), p. 265.

<sup>43</sup>See John Traugott, "Clarissa's Richardson: An Essay to find the Reader" in *English Literature in the Age of Disguise*, ed. Maximilian E. Novak (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), pp. 204. Nancy Miller comments that in expecting that even after attempting rape he could have Clarissa in marriage, "Lovelace makes a mistake of genre: he fails to perceive that Clarissa is not made for comedy"; Nancy K. Miller, *The Heroine's Text: Readings in the French and English Novel 1722-1782* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 89.

<sup>44</sup>*Life of the Mind* 1:176.

<sup>45</sup>*Clarissa* (Shakespeare Head ed.) II.214; cited by Jocelyn Harris, *Samuel Richardson* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 75.

<sup>46</sup>Lovelace expresses these fashionable opinions simply because he swayed by their fashionability.

<sup>47</sup>On Lovelace's other republican guise, as a member of the male fraternity that holds all women regardless of rank in common subjection, see Tassie Gwilliam, *Samuel Richardson's Fictions of Gender* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), pp. 69-70.

<sup>48</sup>One should note that the philosopher's critique of tyranny was in part that the people are not worth tyrannizing (see Plato, *Gorgias*, *Republic* IX; Xenophon, *Hiero*).

<sup>49</sup>Some of Richardson's contemporaries understood Lovelace after the example of that earlier "new Prince," the Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell; Keymer, p. 119.

<sup>50</sup>Eaves and Kimpel, p. 254, citing Hazlitt, *Complete Works* 12:227-8n.

<sup>51</sup>See Lovelace's self-portrait in the guise of a description of Anna Howe (L252 866): he is, via indirection, comparing his sentiments with the gloom Caesar and Pompey felt having arrived at the height of their ambitions.

<sup>52</sup>Is this the virtue of liberalism as seen by the potential tyrant: that the people are too vigorous, too virtuous, ever to be subdued? This kind of popular virtue cannot be extraordinary, it must be a passion for honor, for self-governance, but available to all because it is bound up with a demotic Christianity.

<sup>53</sup>Brian W. Downs, *Richardson* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1928; Reprint, London: Frank Cass, 1969), pp. 76-77.

<sup>54</sup>Clarissa's motive for refusing Lovelace is thus not the newfangled, Rousseauan concern for integrity, as R. F. Brissenden contends (*Virtue in Distress: Studies in the Novel of Sentiment from Richardson to Sade* [London: Macmillan, 1974], pp. 121, 129), but the old-fashioned Aristotelian concern for her own well-being (*eudaimonia*).