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SAMUEL RICHARDSON

Clarissa

or

The History of a Young Lady

RIVERSIDE EDITIONS

UNDER THE GENERAL EDITORSHIP OF

Gordon N. Ray

ABRIDGED AND EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

GEORGE SHERBURN

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INTRODUCTION

by

GEORGE SHERBURN

Much of this "large still book," as Tennyson affectionately called it, was written in the pleasant garden house at North End, on the edge of Hammersmith, where the author, Samuel Richardson (1689-1761), made his home. He was a middle-aged printer, who without much formal education had in his faithfully acquired prosperity, partly by accident, become a novelist. Two booksellers, evidently aware of Richardson's devotion to letter-writing, had asked him to prepare a manual of specimen or model letters as aid to "country readers who were unable to indite for themselves." As a confirmed moralist Richardson devised this volume, Familiar Letters (1741), so that his models might convey moral instruction; and it presently occurred to him that such instruction could be even better enforced in letters that told a story — and from childhood he had loved storytelling. His consequent first novel, Pamela, written in about ten weeks and published at the end of 1740, was received with resounding acclaim — and with scattered critical laughter. Fielding and Horace agreed docti indoctique scribimus, and a printer was not normally considered as among the learned. The moral teaching of Pamela was suspect in that, having escaped rather surprisingly from the dangers of rape, the heroine consented to reward her conscious virtue by marrying her amorous admirer. But the reception of the novel in general was enthusiastic.

Hardly was the second part of Pamela in print (it raised the servant girl to respectable "high life") before Richardson began work on his real masterpiece, Clarissa. A detailed précis of the plot was offered to the scrutiny of friends as early as 1744, and the period from 1745 to 1747 was used for revisions and particularly (we are told) for condensation. The novel was published in three sections: Volumes I and II appeared in December, 1747; III and IV came out in April, 1748. Then, after several months, Volumes V, VI, and VII were published in December, 1748. The earlier sections had whetted readers' appetites, and this last long pause kept them in suspense as to Cla-
risa's ultimate fate, and thus attracted attention to the story. Later editions printed by Richardson filled eight volumes.

Richardson's early biographer, Mrs. Barbauld, remarked that he dwelt "in a flower garden of ladies," and his excessive but decorous preference for female society irked even his good friend Dr. Johnson. As critics these ladies doubtless were of some assistance, but his more influential advisers in perfecting the novel in the period of revision were an ill-assorted group of male friends: Aaron Hill, a third-rate poet, dramatist and critic; Colley Cibber, a leading actor and manager, notoriously unchaste in morals; the Rev. Edward Young (whom Richardson once called his "favourite author," and who was then at work on his popular and pious Night Thoughts) — and doubtless others. He had many distinguished male friends, who did not frequent his "flower garden." All told, Richardson remained fairly independent of advisers or critics.

His field was "high life" or a limited aspect of such life, and he was naturally criticized as ignorant in this field. "Obscurely situated," as he calls himself, and "naturally shy and sheepish," he frankly asked his admirer Lady Bradshaigh, "How shall such a man pretend to describe and enter into the characters in upper life?" (Had he chiefly witnessed their tense emotions as seen on the theatrical stage?) All his major characters, with the exception of Pamela, are from the upper classes; but rather than the surfaces of their lives, the tensions arising from their moral problems are his central interest: he was a specialist in the emotional variations of the delicate and troubled heart. He thus augmented a trend, new in English, which was to become dominant later in his century — especially in the building up of a distress (almost a technical term in fiction of the time); in the dramatization of the release of pent-up emotions, which possibly tend to be similar in all classes.

Preoccupied with the depiction of psychological or moral reactions, Richardson neglected surface details of daily life. There is, however, more than one sees at first sight. We learn of the astonishingly early morning hours — busy at one's pen by 5 A.M.; breakfast (a real meal) at nine or later; dinner in the early or middle afternoon, and so on. Strange "props" such as Lovelace's costume of disguise at Hampstead, the arms on the fictitious dowager's coach, or the inscriptions on Clarissa's "house" are given in minute detail. Lovelace, sleepless in London as the silent dawn approaches, hears in the darkness the "rattling chariot wheels at a street's distance." We get glimpses of reality, but the "look" of the life of the time is not a major concern. The fit and the unfit in the behavior dominate all interest.

In treating the emotional difficulties of his persons Richardson presents an array of problems. The original title page specifies one such as "the distresses that may attend the misconduct both of par-

ts and children in relation to marriage," and this is obviously a central theme. It may at once warn the twentieth-century reader that he must call strongly upon his historical imagination in order to achieve a sympathetic reading of the book. According to the mores of 1750 it was tyrannical, but not impossible, for parents to force a daughter to marry a man she greatly disliked. It was intolerable, however, for a daughter to marry one whom her father disliked. Clarissa is thought to wish to marry the hated Lovelace. In his early volumes Richardson lets Clarissa, unaware, hesitate about a possible love for Lovelace; but later the total incompatibility of these two is developed and dramatized.

Allied with such problems is the economic aspect of marriage. The Harloives are "too rich to be happy," but they have an insatiable thirst for more, and, being worldly, rich, and selfish, they wish their daughter to marry so as to enhance their status as a rising family. Personal animosities lead them here to act inconsistently in preferring Solmes to Lovelace, who might well survive Lord M. and so perhaps succeed to an earldom. Clarissa stands apart from the family in that she always prefers happiness to fortune. The Harloives think like ambitious landed gentry (though their wealth seems excessive for most of that class), and in their eye Solmes's lands complement sweetly the present family holdings.

Richardson and Clarissa prefer less selfish, softer qualities than do the inflexible, callous Harloives; but Clarissa herself is inflexible in her devotion to virtue and decorum. To some readers in the twentieth century decorum seems almost an indecent word; but again historical imagination, if nothing else, should rescue them from such depreciation. Decorum is not primarily a stodgy middle-class idol. Richardson adores it because he yearns for true aristocratic quality; but he is no more devoted to decorum than was his contemporary, the arbiter elegantiarum, Lord Chesterfield.

For Clarissa herself, decorum is almost a religion: indeed, if religion is defined as conservation of value, decorum is certainly her religion. Her obsessive desire to avoid the unfit and to cultivate the fit is seen everywhere. And Richardson's chief study, even in the first part of Pamela and in Clarissa (where story is important), seems to be similar: the true problem always is how one ought to cope with a given delicate situation. The ultimate bewilderment of Lovelace when he asks, "Can Education have a stronger force in a woman's heart than Nature?" suggests how far in his eyes decorum, habit, training, have led the divine Clarissa. The rigid social code of the day seems to dominate her completely; but she lives by high ideals and in the end will sacrifice nothing for "appearances."

The sense of the fit is supported by orthodox religious beliefs. The relation to destiny is coupled with the doctrine of rewards and punish-
ments in another world (a central theme in the story) and coupled also with the doctrine of divine grace. In her last days (September 7) Clarissa writes, "God Almighty would not let me depend for comfort upon any but Himself," and the weighty sentence is for emphasis printed in capitals. She is convinced that only the miracle of divine grace could change the heart of Lovelace. Her invocation of grace is perhaps frequent enough to annoy Henry Fielding, who, though he admired Clarissa, had plumped for "good works," and as a latitudinarian disliked appeals to the doctrine of grace. Decorum is in close alliance with religion: it almost swallows the concept of virtue—which in turn may seem wrongly at times to equate with mere chastity. The moral nature of Clarissa is not puritan: it is idealistic, and its absolutes make no concessions to circumstance.

This attitude becomes inevitably tragic. Probably no novelist has ever been under more pressure from friends than Richardson was from readers who wished Clarissa to have a happy ending. Firmly, Richardson held that Clarissa could not be merely a second Pamela with her virtue here rewarded: her sufferings, he held, could only be rewarded in another life. For present-day readers the necessity of a tragic ending will be felt further through the complete essential incompatibility of Clarissa and Lovelace. In 1748 readers with facile emotions did not perceive this incompatibility, which in his later volumes of the story Richardson made quite apparent. The two might have married, but without a most extreme miracle of divine grace their married life would have been hell for Clarissa: it would merely have delayed painfully her heavenly reward.

Lesser problems that Richardson touches upon are of some influence in shaping the novel: Do reformed rakes make good husbands? Does the fair sex (when not heroic) need counsel more than do men? How far is the arrogance of "men of honour" to be tolerated? This last question creeps repeatedly into Richardson's thinking. His friend Edward Young was then creating his Lorenzo in Night Thoughts and was to embody criticism in his less known Centaur not Fabulous (1754). The man of mode was fast becoming not merely a beast but rather an arrogant beast. Lovelace, though kind to his tenants, can be crudely arrogant, as he is to the Smiths in their own house. In general Lovelace is unaware that real politeness involves disinterested considerateness for the distress of another.

As a depiction of family life the story is fascinating, if not always convincing. The Harlowes, supposed to be landed gentry, are psychologically citizens, bourgeois—too rich for their own good, too little seen moving graciously among their county neighbors. Clarissa apparently has never visited London; at home, aged eighteen, she is surprisingly allowed to have a parlour of her own in which to receive her visitors—young ladies only, doubtless. For her age she has un-

usual liberty in the management of her dairy and even of Harlowe Place itself, where she performs the offices of a superior housekeeper. She keeps the accounts of her dairy and dutifully turns over the proceeds to her father, though legally they are her own. Her clothes seem enormously costly for a girl of her age, especially if they are to be worn only in the country. She is a great reader apparently, and has written a "little book upon the principal acting plays." (Possibly only a notebook is intended.)

The chief personalities of the story lead a reader to conclude that characters they are less titillating than are the situations in which they commonly find themselves. Clarissa's plight is from the very beginning evocative and gripping, but Clarissa herself is too good for human use: the epithet most commonly applied to her is divine, closely followed by angelic. Realizing that perfection is inhuman, Richardson protests that he did not intend to make her perfect. Some possible flaws are occasionally seen glimmering, but they are obscured by conventional virtues. What is likely to stay in the reader's mind are her frustrating distresses and her complete and inflexible devotion to decorum and virtue. As one early critic complained, she is methodically virtuous.

This trait has frequently seemed to exceed common sense, and to make Clarissa almost as rigorous a tyrant in propriety as her father was in regard to filial duties. At more than one crisis decorum blocks the road to happiness. Some readers have been inclined to agree with Miss Howe, who always tends to be sensible and practical, that Clarissa should have married Lovelace at St. Albans. What stops her here, however, is largely her preference for a reconciliation with her family: she already suspects Lovelace of trickery. She is elsewhere represented as a resourceful, clear-headed young businesswoman, unable, to be sure, to devise ready ways of escape from Mrs. Sinclair's establishment. That house, however, was notorious, and to throw up the front window and cry for help was, and would naturally be, unsuccessful. When she does escape, it has been suggested that she should have gone, not to Hampstead, but to Justice Henry Fielding, who might have given protection. There were only the beginnings of a police force in London in 1750, and the status of women was then such that all Fielding could legally or actually have done would be to return the eighteen-year-old damsel to her family—who, considering her suspect condition would almost certainly have refused to receive her. Richardson has most ingeniously hemmed her in—completely!

It is difficult to predicate convincing human traits in connection with spotless near-perfection. Cordelia and Desdemona succeed; but only Shakespeare has the secret. Clarissa wins us rather more by her
distresses, externally produced, than by natural personal traits. To Lady Bradshaigh, Richardson wrote (6 Oct. 1748):

I had to shew, for example sake, a young lady struggling nobly with the greatest difficulties, and triumphing from the best motives, in the course of distresses, the tenth part of which would have sunk even manly hearts; yet tenderly educated, born to affluence, naturally meek, altho' when an exertion of spirit was necessary, manifesting herself to be a true heroine.

Although Clarissa's plight must arouse and move readers overwhemingly, the sympathy may be somewhat lessened by the dazzlingly mixed character of Lovelace, who, whether kindly regarded or viewed with horror, steals the show. The Rosebud episode at first tips the scale for some in his favor. Later his unfeeling and brutal sexual plots, not merely against Clarissa but also against the ladies of Hampstead, and against Anna Howe and her mother, should make him either despicable or absurd. His plot against the Howes, inserted first in 1751, is here omitted as an improbable fantasy designed crudely to make Lovelace blacken himself—to show that to him rape is just good fun. Clarissa often accuses him of lacking kindliness or generosity; and he himself in a passage of self-analysis tells us, "I have three passions that sway me by turns; all imperial ones. Love, revenge, ambition, or a desire of conquest." He constantly sees himself as an imperial personage.

In general, of course, he was an inveterate plotter whose early tricks succeeded to his liking. At the end Clarissa triumphs, though wronged, and his plots become somewhat childish and futile. His hardness led an early critic to say to Richardson:

You have not been able to describe an agreeable, artful, and accomplish'd seducer, who, without raising fears and terrors could melt, surprise, or reason a woman out of her virtue.

Lovelace is artful, excessively so, and accomplished; but he certainly depends on fears and terrors. In all three of his novels Richardson is far more obsessed by the idea of rape than by that of persuasive seduction.

The extremes in Lovelace's character have been thought inconsistent, but if one can imagine that his confirmed addiction to plots is here stimulated in part by his curious and passionate love of Clarissa, in part by his hatred of all other Harlowes, and in part by his imperial love of revenge, his actions seem to vary within a consistent pattern. His love of Clarissa must be set against the background of his sworn aim to avenge his wrongs upon the sex. He does not believe any woman impregnably virtuous, and so enters upon his relentless psychological and physical experiment with Clarissa: how could he know, he asks, that she is as virtuous as she seems unless he tries...? The coldness of the experiment and the depth of his genuine passion for Clarissa, can be reconciled by his subconscious separation of her chastity from her "self"—the one the object of his experiment, the other (her complete and proven "self") the object of his love and esteem. Lovelace and Clarissa lived in totally different psychological worlds: any real marriage for these two was unthinkable. As Clarissa remarks, "Mr. Lovelace's mind and mine are vastly different, different in essentials." A Victorian critic found Lovelace's dislike of marriage "unintelligible": to the eighteenth-century reader such an attitude on the part of a rake would be easily understood. In the song, such men were chanting, "I sipped each flower / I changed every hour." The attitude is morally shameful, but no less understandable than the aversions of Clarissa and Miss Howe to the subordinate state of wife. Clarissa surprises Lovelace more than once by telling him that he is deficient in politeness, good manners. Again it is a voice from without, and above, the blasé world of fashion: she is telling him that he is essentially ungenerous, that he lacks kindliness and all unselfish benevolence. With regard to Lovelace Dr. Johnson shrewdly remarked, "It was in the power of Richardson alone to teach at once esteem and detestation; to make virtuous resentment overpower all the benevolence which wit, elegance, and courage naturally excite; and to lose, at last, the hero in the villain."

If we consider the means by which Richardson accomplished his aims, we are face to face with his celebrated epistolary method, and we are at last forced to conclude that the method, while apt in producing a good moral book (we all get good moral counsel in letters!), is likely to be repetitious and slow in telling a story. So Dr. Johnson pontificated that one must not read Richardson for the story but for the "sentiment." The remark may not have convinced readers that "sentiments" are not tedious, but it truly described Richardson's emphasis: not events but psychological and moral reactions to and observations on events are his chief concern. The fact in part justifies his use of letters as a vehicle. He plays realistically with techniques of correspondence. As one of the best of modern Richardsonians, Alan McKillop, has remarked: "The writing of the letters is only the beginning; they are copied, sent, received, shown about, discussed, answered, even perhaps hidden, intercepted, stolen, altered or forged." They are also by the "editor" (Richardson) cross-referenced in foot-

2 Critical Remarks on Sir Charles Grandison, Clarissa, and Pamela (1754), p. 37. The pamphlet has been reproduced by A. D. McKillop for the Augustan Reprint Society.

3 Samuel Richardson, Printer and Novelist (Chapel Hill, 1936), p. 36.
notes, when a writer alludes to something written earlier. These methods are ingenious, but letters tend to dilate reactions rather than to forward the story. Richardson himself before the novel was published realized one obvious difficulty. He wrote to Aaron Hill (20 Jan. 1745/6): “length is my principal Disgust, at present... The fixing of Dates has been a Task to me. I am afraid I make the Writers do too much in the Time.”

The varying tones of letters are admirably kept. Richardson told one lady, “Styles differ, too, as much as faces, and are indicative, generally beyond the power of disguise, of the mind of the writer.” So he endeavors and usually succeeds in individualizing his correspondents by differing styles. In this way he gives distinctive character to all his persons, major or minor as they may be. His methods are more subtle and less obvious than those of another master of fictional letters, the author of Humphry Clinker.

It is not to be thought that Richardson is lacking in narrative skill. The famous pen-knife scene (almost on the lofty level of grand opera, without music to carry it off) and the contrived return of Clarissa to Mrs. Sinclair’s from Hampstead are examples of his best narrative passages. The tea-drinking episode (May 22) is a typical example of his sense of presence.

Upon first publication Richardson’s dramatic technique of “writing to the moment” was at once recognized and acclaimed. There is no emotion recollected: it is captured as it arises; and although the lack of any lapse between the moment and the recording of the moment is improbable, the vividness is always effective. Fielding laughed at the improbability of the method by making his Shamela exclaim (with a lewd adjectival pun on the final noun), “You see I write in the present tense.”

This “writing to the moment” is certainly a large part of Richardson’s contribution to novelistic technique — far more important than his use of the epistolary form. His letters are normally too long and too vividly detailed to seem like letters: they readily become journals rather than letters — most obviously in the long series written by Clarissa to Miss Howe or by Lovelace to Belford. Length aids in the development of an important added element: “big scenes” that may run for many pages and that are marked by long conversations used either to develop the story or to show the tense emotions of the characters. With these added elements of big scenes and lively conversations (much more fully developed than ever before in the novel) “writing to the moment” constitutes Richardson’s very notable method that was to dominate the novel for a long time.

4 Within the period from 6 A.M. to midnight of June 10, Lovelace along with normal activities of the day is supposed to write something like 14,000 words.

He rightly spoke of his use of “dramatic narrative,” and he owes more to his acquaintance with the theater than has sometimes been recognized. He printed, so we are told, plays for a dozen or more dramatists, and he printed relatively little fiction. Lovelace has been thought to be a high-finished portrait indebted to Rowe’s Lothario (in The Fair Penitent), and the whole plot of the novel resembles that of Charles Johnson’s Caelia (1733). Richardson is capable of giving very long scenes in dialogue with the text falling into the typographical form of a play. Words or phrases like stage directions are inserted at times to indicate the speaker’s tone of voice. At the end of his early Prefaces the characters are listed as dramatis personae. In Clarissa the whole movement of rising and falling action is like a tragedy focused and followed from beginning to end. Lastly, it may be suggested that, like a good playwright, Richardson composes his conversation for the ear rather than for the eye. The sound captured is a large part of his writing to the moment. His divergent traditions, then, include that of the theater and that of moral discourse, the courtesy book, rather than that of earlier romances, though to them he does have some debts. His final achievement is that of completely capturing the reader, who though straining at a leash is yet held by the tension of the narrative situation. In 1762 Diderot summed it up by remarking that when you read a bit of Clarissa, you lose studious aloofness, and are a part of the story.

This is true in spite of the fact that like most novelists Richardson is more interested in substance than in expression. Hazlitt thought that Richardson “had the strongest matter of fact imagination that ever existed, and wrote the oddest mixture of poetry and prose.” At times the true language of passionate emotion is captured, at other times the language is as unreal and lofty as that of operatic scenes. His early editor Mangin (1811) thought a curious informality appropriate in personal letters: “Minute flippances of expression, colloquial phrases, new-coined words, and involved periods, which would be intolerable in serious history, are not merely pardonable, but perhaps expected in letter-writing.” All such locutions are certainly present in Richardson’s writing. It is power of conception, the strong matter-of-fact imagination, rather than power of expression that really captures the reader.

The reputation of Clarissa in the later eighteenth century was superlative both at home and on the Continent. Rousseau’s Nouvelle Héloïse was simply the most famous of innumerable imitations, and symbolizes the fact that above all Richardson was a moral novelist. In the nineteenth century Alfred de Musset thought it “le premier
roman du monde," and in the twentieth century the American novelist, Ellen Glasgow, was proud to aver that annually she read through the complete Clarissa. It was from the first calculated for readers at leisure; for busy people, unconcerned with the life of ideals, it has to remain, what it has always been, a "large still book." For the man of "solitude and tranquillity" (Diderot's description of Clarissa's best reader) the novel must always be overwhelming; and such a reader on closing the book may say with Diderot, and with reverence, "I felt I had acquired experience."

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

In Richardson's own printings of the novel (1748–59) the title-page does not carry the name of Harlowe. The heading on the opening page of the text, however, gives the family name (The History of Clarissa Harlowe), as does the divided running-head throughout: The History of on left-hand pages, and Miss Clarissa Harlowe on right-hand pages, with the Miss omitted in the edition of 1759.

In its complete form Clarissa runs to well over a million words. The various editions seem never to have been completely scrutinized or collated. A partial collation makes it probable that no two editions, either from Richardson's time or later, are textually identical. The first edition omitted many passages that are restored in the octavo of 1751, and the 1759 text (not printed with scrupulous care) makes perhaps final revisions and additions.

Most editions eclectically conflate passages from different texts printed by the author. Richardson's more complicated sentences seem at times to have influenced even the pressman to attempt clarification by verbal changes. The present text follows this tradition of conflation: it is based on the faulty text given in Everyman's Library, which has been collated with that of 1759, which in turn, chiefly for misprints, omissions of essential words, etc., has been compared with the texts of 1748 and 1751.

All insertions (clarifications or summaries) made here in the abridgment by the present editor, are placed in square brackets. For Richardson's own frequent use of these brackets or "hooks," parentheses are here substituted, according to modern usage. Footnotes not placed in brackets are by Richardson himself.

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G.S.