



THE DEATH OF CLARISSA

Richardson's Clarissa and the Critics

by

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A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of English Language and Literature
University of Adelaide
January 1988

Awarded: May 13, 1988

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SUMMARY

As a work which has long been a subject of critical controversies, Richardson's Clarissa would appear to raise peculiar problems both of interpretation and of evaluation. While this is the case with many literary works, Clarissa is extraordinary, perhaps unique among novels, in coming to us with such detailed instructions on how it is to be read: Richardson was constantly stating his intentions, which were in essence to produce a great work of Christian apologetics to promote the spread of 'virtue and religion'. To critics who see the significance of Clarissa rather in its supposed revelation of its author's perversities, however, or in buried themes of class conflict, psychology, or semiotics, naturally the novelist's didactic aims appear tedious, effete, and irrelevant to his real achievement. Despite the efforts of some recent commentators to direct attention back towards a concern with authorial intentions and what one might call 'historical sympathy', the persistence of others in wanting to do away with such things remains remarkable. In the face of this phenomenon, the purpose of this thesis is twofold: to trace the chequered critical history of Clarissa, from the eighteenth century to the present day; and, in doing so, to suggest that one should seek to understand the novel not through yet another radical re-reading, but rather by attending to the work itself, its author, and the times in which he lived.

The thesis is structured as follows. In Chapter 1, Richardson's intentions in writing Clarissa are discussed, and it is argued that these were rather more interesting than is often acknowledged. Chapters 2 and 3 chart the course of Richardson's reputation, looking at early critical responses to Clarissa; Richardson's early fame and the causes of its decline; and the significance here of attitudes to Richardson the man. Subsequent chapters offer a critique of modern 'anti-intentionalist' readings of Clarissa. Chapter 4 concerns Richardson's psychoanalytic critics; Chapter 5 his 'sociological' and 'myth' critics; and Chapter 6 the deconstructionists. In a final chapter, the persistence and prevalence of these critical methods is considered, and the thesis concludes with some general reflections on present tendencies in literary criticism.

DECLARATION

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any University, and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text or notes.

D. C. RAIN

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

During my work on this project I have received valuable assistance and encouragement from a number of people. Dr. Michael Tolley introduced me to Clarissa and has supervised my work from its inception. I have benefited much from his patience, belief in my abilities, and sensible advice. Luke Hudson took a keen interest in my work from its early stages and shared with me on many occasions his knowledge, critical intelligence, and sophisticated literary sensibility. Whatever is good in these pages owes much to his example. Julia Veitch discussed with me at length the issues raised in my work, made detailed remarks on drafts of the early chapters, referred me to a number of very useful books, and allowed me to read her excellent English Honours thesis on deconstructionist criticism. Fiona Mark offered invaluable advice on points of language and style, and read and commented on a draft of one of the later chapters. I am grateful to Antony Heaven for reading or listening to numerous drafts of my work, and patiently correcting my typescripts.

PREFACE

For the student of literature, it is an instructive experience to contemplate at times the critical opinions of the past.

There is much there that may seem to us strange: in drama, the doctrine of the classical unities; the pronouncement, authoritative in tone, that Shakespeare is to be valued most for his comedies; the Victorian anthology, purportedly of the best songs and lyric verse in the English language, which contains nothing by Donne or Blake; the view that Thackeray was clearly the superior of Dickens; the fame of Francis Thompson, author of The Hound of Heaven; the chorus of critics who praised the talents of Masefield and Rupert Brooke - but turned, stiffly disapproving, from the likes of Hopkins and T. S. Eliot.

Some might choose merely to laugh at such things. If this seems an inadequate response, it is not because there can be no talk of right and wrong in literary matters. It may be that there are no ultimate standards of correctness; there are relative standards, however, and some views can be shown to be more right, or more wrong, than others. In many cases, it seems reasonable to say, our critical forebears were very wrong indeed. But perhaps their follies should teach us humility before they inspire our ridicule. Doubtless there are ways in which the present generation is as limited in outlook as those which came before; it is merely limited

in different ways.

Yet to think of our predecessors simply in terms of their prejudices and perversities would be unwise. After all, one of our limitations may be an inability to appreciate those now-unfashionable views which, as it happens, have much to recommend them. Our ancestors, it could be, were not inevitably misguided: sometimes, they may have been right.

This I believe to be true in the case of Clarissa. In the eighteenth century, Richardson's great novel was not only widely read, but very highly praised: its author, it was said, was surely one of the greatest of all English authors. In subsequent years, Richardson's reputation fell into a long and disastrous decline. To many readers in the Victorian period, even his greatest novel appeared intolerably tedious; its one-time fame was incomprehensible.

It is now increasingly agreed that Clarissa is indeed the masterpiece it was first thought to be. Yet if Clarissa has long been a source of critical controversy, this is owing not only to the question of its merits, but to the peculiar problems of interpretation it appears to raise.

Clarissa is perhaps unique among novels in coming to us with such detailed instructions, as it were, on how it is to be read: in the story itself, in the explicitness with which Richardson makes clear his meaning; in his Preface, Postscript, and footnotes to the text; as well as in his many remarks about the novel in his correspondence. So far as its author was concerned, Clarissa is the story of a young woman of astonishing excellence, an 'exemplar to her sex' and Christian heroine. Victimized by her family, abducted and raped by a libertine, she remains firm in her faith, like Job, and triumphs finally in her saintly death. The purpose of her story is to assert the need for this

sustaining faith which not only ensures moral conduct during life, but alone makes bearable the harsh facts of injustice, suffering, and death.

Critics have often seen matters rather differently. Some have maintained that Richardson's didactic aims were merely a veneer, concealing a covert prurience. If all have not thought him actively insincere, he has widely been regarded as self-deluding. To those who see the significance of Clarissa in themes assimilable to a secular humanism - its declaration of the sanctity of the individual; its intuition of psychological truths; its sociological implications - naturally the novelist's interest in the promulgation of 'virtue and religion' appears tedious, effete, and irrelevant to his real achievement.

In recent years, the excellent work of critics such as Mark Kinkead-Weekes, Margaret Doody, and Elizabeth Brophy has done much to challenge such misrepresentations of Richardson's work. It seems ironic, then, that Richardson has of late become the subject of renewed critical controversies of a type which could hardly have been foreseen earlier. With the rise of new critical schools and methods, academic writing on Richardson has again turned away from any concern with authorial intentions and from what one might call 'historical sympathy'.

It is the persistence of Richardson's critics in wanting to do away with such things which has prompted the present study. Its purpose is twofold: to trace the chequered critical history of Richardson's great novel, from the eighteenth century to the present day; and, in doing so, to suggest that Richardson's own view of the novel, and the views of certain of his early readers, are much to be preferred to the opinions of many of his later critics. We should seek to understand Clarissa, I argue, not through yet another radical

re-reading, but rather by attending to the work itself, its author, and the times in which he lived.

The first qualification for judging anything, as C. S. Lewis said, is to know what it is that one is judging. Yet many of those who have dismissed Richardson's authorial intentions have not much bothered, it seems, about what those intentions were. In my first chapter, therefore, I examine in some detail Richardson's declared aims in writing Clarissa, arguing that these were rather more complex, and certainly more worthy of our attention, than critics have often been prepared to admit. The composition of the novel, its early reception, and Richardson's revisions in the second and third editions will be considered. Critical arguments against taking authorial intentions into account will be entertained, but it will be suggested that these are unconvincing.

In my second and third chapters, I discuss the history of Richardson's reputation. In Chapter 2 I look at Richardson's early fame, as well as at several early critical discussions of Clarissa, in which can be seen the nature and significance of the novel as perceived by some of its better readers in the eighteenth century. From here I go on to detail the later critical fortunes of Clarissa and its author, examining the causes for the decline of their fame.

At this point it becomes necessary to deal with the question of Richardson's character. It is apparent that our notions of an author's character can influence our attitudes towards his work; this process has been particularly marked in Richardson's case. The view of Richardson as an essentially 'unconscious' author, unaware of what he was 'really doing', and secretly driven by perverse obsessions, is directly attributable to certain ideas about him which gained currency in the nineteenth century. In Chapter 3 I analyse the

growth of this popular, unflattering view of Richardson's character, and look at the claims which come to be made about him, and subsequently about the nature of his work, in the twentieth century.

In the following chapters I turn to the modern critics of Clarissa. It need hardly be said that no attempt has been made to discuss every critical account of the novel which has appeared, say, in the last forty years - a scarcely practicable undertaking. Rather, I deal in detail with a number of the more famous, influential, or controversial books or essays, written from a clearly anti-intentionalist point of view. In Chapter 4 I discuss those interpreters who have looked at the novel in the light of Freudian psychoanalysis. Particular attention will be paid to Ian Watt's well-known chapter on Clarissa in The Rise of the Novel (1957). In Chapter 5 I discuss those 'sociological' readings in which are stressed the ways in which Richardson reflects, or appears to reflect, the assumptions, values, and contradictions of the society in which he lived. I look at the work of Arnold Kettle, William M. Sale, Jr., Christopher Hill, Dorothy Van Ghent, and Leslie Fiedler. In Chapter 6 I examine the controversial accounts of Clarissa by the deconstructionist critics, William Beatty Warner and Terry Castle. Finally, in Chapter 7 I assess the persistence and prevalence of the types of criticism I have been dealing with, commenting in particular on the renewed vogue of psychoanalytic and sociological approaches in the work of feminist critics. I conclude with some general reflections on the present state of literary criticism.

It will be seen that the tendency of this study is very much opposed to certain methods and emphases now pervasive in the academic study of literature. If the pages which follow can be said to have a general implication, it is perhaps that we would do well to

pay more attention to literature itself than to many of the commentaries on it. It should not be thought that this aspires to be a work of literary theory, laying down abstract rules about how 'critical practice' should proceed. My concern is with one novel, Clarissa: not with all novels, or all literature. One does not deny that some books may profitably be read from a psychological, say, or a sociological point of view. But not all methods are equally appropriate to all books; and any method, after all, is only as good as the use that is made of it. If there is anything that is in the nature of literature, as it were, it is surely that it is a profoundly 'untheoretical' sort of thing: one must approach it empirically if one is to approach it at all. (This may sound like a theory; but it is only the theory of no-theory.)

I have had cause to cite few general discussions of criticism or critical method in the course of this study. Mention must be made here, however, of several which I have found extremely helpful: Helen Gardner's The Business of Criticism (1959) and In Defence of the Imagination (1982); George Watson's The Discipline of English (1978); Gerald Graff's Literature Against Itself (1979); Iain McGilchrist's Against Criticism (1982); and Randall Jarrell's classic essay 'The Age of Criticism', in Poetry and the Age (1953).

My research was greatly stimulated in its early stages by several previous discussions of Richardson's critics: by Diana Spearman in The Novel and Society (1966); by John Carroll in his Introduction to the 'Twentieth Century Views' volume on Richardson (1969); by Mark Kinkead-Weekes in Samuel Richardson: Dramatic Novelist (1973); and by Terry Eagleton in The Rape of Clarissa (1982).

Like all students of Richardson, I am indebted

to the splendid scholarly work of A. D. McKillop and Eaves and Kimpel, without which a study such as this could probably not have been contemplated. I should also point out that I am very much aware of my debts to many of those critics who come under fire in the following pages. If I must question aspects of the work of Ian Watt, Arnold Kettle, Christopher Hill, Leslie Fiedler, et al., this by no means diminishes my sense of the value of other aspects of their work, nor of the benefits and enjoyment I have derived from reading and at times disagreeing with it.

A NOTE ON REFERENCES

Page references to most books and articles are given in the Notes in the normal way. In cases of sequential citations from a single source, where there can be no ambiguity as to which source is being cited, references subsequent to the first are given parenthetically in the text.

References to a number of important works are given in the text throughout. The following abbreviations have been used:

- Cl. Clarissa, 4 vols., Everyman's Library (London: Dent, 1932);
- Cl.R? M. Kinkead-Weekes, 'Clarissa Restored?', Review of English Studies, NS 10 (1959), 156-71;
- Corr. The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson, ed. Anna Laetitia Barbauld, 6 vols. (London: Richard Phillips, 1804);
- EK T. C. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel, Samuel Richardson: A Biography (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971);
- EK/C _____, 'The Composition of Clarissa and its Revision Before Publication', PMLA, 83 (1968), 416-28;
- LJ James Boswell, Life of Johnson, ed. R. W. Chapman and J. D. Fleeman, World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980);
- McK A. D. McKillop, Samuel Richardson: Printer and Novelist (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1936);
- SL Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson, ed. John Carroll (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964).

Letters are quoted from the Correspondence only when

they do not appear in the more easily accessible Selected Letters. In quotations from the latter, I have omitted the words or phrases deleted by Richardson, which are given in angle brackets in Carroll's text, and removed the symbols surrounding Richardson's substitutions.

In all quotations, emphases are those of the original writer unless it is made apparent in the text that this is not the case.



SAMUEL RICHARDSON: DIDACTIC NOVELIST

In the history of English fiction, Samuel Richardson is valued essentially as the first great psychological realist. Scrutinizing the complexities of the human heart through his famous technique of 'writing to the moment', he is often seen as a precursor of James,¹ and even, at times, of Proust, Lawrence, Joyce and Woolf.²

Yet much as Richardson is commended as an artistic innovator, simultaneously he is censured for blemishing his works with a didacticism so crude as to be barely excusable. 'To mend the heart and improve the understanding was the principal end he had in view,' A. E. Carter writes. '[T]his preoccupation led him into some of the most unpleasant errors that have ever plagued a major novelist.'³ For Ian Watt, probably the most well-known of Richardson's modern commentators, the 'flat didacticism' of the novelist's 'critical preconceptions' may be swiftly brushed aside, it seems: in Clarissa, his greatest work, it is the 'dramatic pattern' which is most important, an 'infinite formal and psychological complexity' perceived as redolent with 'terrifying ambiguity'.⁴

Watt's priorities would have caused Richardson some distress. 'Instruction is my main End,' he remarked shortly after the publication of Pamela (SL, p. 53); as the title page of that novel boldly declared, he sought to 'cultivate the Principles of

Virtue and Religion' in the minds of his readers. This could be seen as the merely conventional sop to the conscience offered by almost every novelist in an age when the reading of fiction was often regarded, publicly at least, as not only frivolous but sinful. That it was a genuine intention is indicated by Richardson's extreme anxiety, in private correspondence as well as in print, to stress the didactic purposes of his works.

It is worth recalling how Richardson began his career as a novelist. The story is well known: he had been commissioned by the booksellers Rivington and Osborne to produce a collection of model letters 'on such Subjects as might be of Use to those Country Readers who were unable to indite for themselves'. It occurred to Richardson that such a book could teach more than just the art of familiar letters:

Will it be any Harm said I, in a Piece you want to be written so low, if we should instruct them how they should think & act in common Cases, as well as indite? They were the more urgent with me to begin the little Volume, for this Hint.

During his work on this collection, Richardson found himself 'writing two or three Letters to instruct handsome Girls, who were obliged to go out to Service ... how to avoid the Snares that might be laid against their Virtue'. It was then that he remembered (or so he claims) a story he had once heard - the story, of course, on which his first novel was to be based. So it was that the Familiar Letters were temporarily abandoned, 'And hence sprung Pamela' (SL, p. 232).

The initial version of the novel was written with great rapidity. 'I began it Nov. 10 1739,' Richardson reported, 'and finished it Jan. 10 1739-40.' We may be tempted to imagine him composing Pamela in a rush of purely literary inspiration, quite different in kind

from the moral interest which motivated his work on the Familiar Letters. It is doubtful that Richardson would have countenanced such a view:

[W]hen I began to recollect what had, so many years before, been told me by my friend, I thought the story, if written in an easy and natural manner, suitably to the simplicity of it, might possibly introduce a new species of writing, that might possibly turn young people into a course of reading different from the pomp and parade of romance-writing, and dismissing the improbable and marvellous, with which novels generally abound, might tend to promote the cause of religion and virtue. I therefore gave way to enlargement: and so Pamela became as you see her (SL, p. 41).

'To promote the cause of religion and virtue': from Richardson's point of view, if we are not to question his veracity, there appears to have been no fundamental difference between the impulse behind the novel, and that which motivated his work on the model letters. It was simply that Pamela promised to be a more morally efficacious work.⁵

We can see, then, that Pamela, in more than any merely superficial sense, may indeed be said to have 'sprung' from the Familiar Letters.⁶ The same may be said of Richardson's subsequent fiction. Familiar Letters, it is true, was written for a 'low' class of readers; it was originally intended as a model letter-writer; and its moral instruction was concerned with how to 'think & act in common Cases'. Richardson's novels were not specifically aimed at the lower orders,⁷ and they did not assume their epistolary form out of any consideration for 'Readers who were unable to indite for themselves'; it could be said, too, that many of the 'Cases' with which the novels deal are rather more uncommon than 'common'. Nevertheless it would seem true to say that, as far as its author was concerned, Familiar Letters - the collection of fictional correspondence which became, in effect, a conduct

book - was forever his paradigmatic work.

This suggests some important observations. As Terry Eagleton remarks, 'Richardson was no Henry James, bland in the midst of ambiguities.'⁸ Obvious as it may seem it is not, I think, redundant to stress that Pamela, Clarissa and Sir Charles Grandison are the work of a very eighteenth-century writer: Richardson's moral concerns, however, unlike those of Defoe, cannot successfully be read as ironic, nor can they simply be ignored.⁹ Thus it may be that an understanding of Richardson must begin with an effort of historical imagination.

Historical imagination is precisely what is lacking in many attempts to consider Richardson as a didactic writer. It need hardly be said that didacticism is not a property prized by modern literary criticism, or indeed by post-Romantic aesthetic thought as a whole. The assumptions which necessarily lie behind a didactic work are out of step with long-prevailing notions not only of literary decorum, but of the very nature of literary art. In a didactic work, if one is to respond to it in the manner prescribed by its author, there can be no place - certainly, no central place - for the disinterested contemplation of the beauty of aesthetic form (the 'decadent' view of art), let alone for that 'free play of the signifier' demanded by today's deconstructionists.

Yet more than this, beyond its clash with such obviously avant-garde thought, didacticism offends against the long-prevailing and seemingly-standard 'humanist' conception of literature, with its stress on felt life, the textures of lived experience, the sublimity of 'showing' as against the shoddy and embarrassing banality of 'telling'. So it is that, in turning to critical accounts of Richardson's work,

one is likely to find his means elevated at the expense of his ends.

A. D. McKillop develops a dichotomy typical of modern criticism. When Richardson writes his novels, McKillop claims, 'His moral purpose sets the process going, and comes in at the end with an edifying tag, but sandwiched in is true artistic creation, for which didacticism was a necessary but not a sufficient condition' (McK, p. 130). That which is didactic, it seems, is clearly excluded from the realm of the truly artistic. This cannot be seen as a merely neutral or disinterested discrimination of types. McKillop implies that the elements of 'true artistic creation' in Richardson's works have a value which far transcends that of their obviously didactic aspects.

We may set this against Ian Watt's opposition between the 'flat didacticism' of Richardson's 'critical preconceptions', and the 'infinite formal and psychological complexity' of Clarissa. Now clearly both McKillop and Watt would have been aware that Richardson's 'critical preconceptions' extended to the domain of 'form' as well as that of 'content' (in the sense of any detachable and abstract 'edifying tag'). In the artistic manifesto that can be constructed from Richardson's numerous writings-about-his-writings, every aspect of his work would appear to be sheltered under the didactic canopy. If Richardson's novels are filled with felt life, the textures of lived experience, and sublime 'showing', not to mention formal and psychological complexity, this is to a large extent the result of deliberate strategy.¹⁰

The critics would not dispute this. What is claimed is that Richardson's novels, and Clarissa in particular, evince also something somehow in excess of what the author thought was there: 'terrifying ambiguity', we have seen, was not one of the effects he was trying

to achieve.

It follows that Richardson could not have been as in command of the world of his fiction as he apparently believed himself to be. 'Despite the deliberation with which Richardson undertook his work and the endless discussions he carried on about it,' writes McKillop, 'his practice outran his theory - he was not always fully aware of what he was doing' (McK, p. 121f). McKillop's is only a mild statement of this view. As far as many other critics are concerned, Richardson hardly seems to have been 'aware of what he was doing' at all.

At this point it is necessary to consider some pressing critical problems. When it is said that Richardson was not always fully aware of what he was doing, a possible response would be to ask to what extent any author is 'fully aware' of just what is happening when he writes, of what sort of work is really developing. Richardson was naive, some readers might argue, to assume an exact correspondence between what he had written and what he had originally planned. And some might ask why we should be bothered with his intentions at all: how are an author's intentions relevant to the literary critic?

Here we are touching on several different, but in many ways related, critical presuppositions. If it is proposed to investigate Richardson's intentions, one school of thought would have it that these are not really, or at least not reliably, to be discerned in any of his recorded pronouncements on or within his works. It is not a matter of Richardson having told deliberate lies. Rather, in a post-Freudian age, it has become attractive to many readers to see an author's real or most fundamental intentions as existing on a level inaccessible to conscious thought. The comments

which an author himself made about the meaning of his works may therefore be regarded as of little value - even, perhaps, as a barrier to understanding - and the way cleared for the critic to plunge beneath the surface into the psychological depths.

This approach at least assumes that the author, albeit not the author of everyday waking life, remains in some sense as a source of meaning above, or below, or behind the literary work. The critic rejects the author's stated aims, but postulates instead concealed, unstated aims, and attempts to read the work in the light of these. There is, however, a considerable body of modern critical theory which rejects 'intentionalism' altogether as a criterion of literary interpretation. The most extreme formulation of this view occurs, of course, in poststructuralist theory, in which to speak of an author's 'intentions' would be anomalous indeed, when any conception of an 'author' as a 'unified subject', capable of imposing coherent meaning on the 'text' he writes, has been banished. This is a contentious view, to say the least, and one to which I shall return.

Less contentious, and rather more widely accepted, is the attitude to authorial intentions articulated by Wimsatt and Beardsley in their famous essay, 'The Intentional Fallacy' (1946). In essence their position is D. H. Lawrence's: 'Never trust the artist. Trust the tale.'¹¹ The argument that the critic must attend to the realized work of art, rejecting as a criterion of interpretation the presumed or stated intentions of its creator, appears convincing: but some qualifications are needed. If one's attention must ultimately be directed towards the work itself, there is no logical reason for excluding information from outside the text whilst one is in the initial stages of interpretation, as it were. Indeed, it is not simply a matter of there being 'no logical reason' not to do so: it is easy enough

to agree that it is the realized work that is the business of the critic, but it is doubtful whether adequate exegeses can always be achieved through concentration only on the 'words on the page'. If one is reading a non-contemporary work, for example, and encounters an unfamiliar or archaic usage of a particular word, it would seem only sensible to try and find out what the author would probably have taken that word to mean. Just as it would be ludicrous, if one did not read French, to attempt to read a French book while making up one's own arbitrary meanings for the words, so it is obviously absurd to ignore what the words in any literary work would have meant or could have meant at the time at which it was written. To concede this is to concede that the work exists not in some free-floating ahistorical space, but is crucially located in a particular historical situation.

But not only was the work written at a particular time; it was, after all, the work of a particular person. In 'The Intentional Fallacy', it is asserted that the literary work, or 'the poem', as Wimsatt and Beardsley put it, 'is not the critic's own and not the author's (it is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it)'.¹² This is true enough, but it does not alter the fact that the author is the point of origin of the work, as Wimsatt and Beardsley concede. In saying this, one of course defies the new poststructuralist orthodoxy on the subject of the subject.

Whether 'subjectivity' is the arbitrary creation of floating signifiers criss-crossing the mind, or emanates from some mysterious immanent centre, is hardly a question that can be resolved here. Once one's selfhood is constituted, however, it seems to be the case that it is very much one's own, and that which issues from it one's own responsibility. It has been observed more

than once that even the most radical poststructuralist theorists persist in putting their names to their works, and presumably reap the benefits of copyright. Their disciples eagerly argue the rightness of their teachings, and rush to correct those who would misrepresent them.

Roland Barthes maintained that an author is simply a mixer of writings, his text 'a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture'.¹³ If this is to say that an author does not create ex nihilo but is influenced by his forebears, contemporaries, and the constraints of language and literary form, of course it is true, indeed obvious. But to claim therefore that 'it is language which speaks, not the author' is hardly a meaningful proposition.¹⁴ Why does one mixer of writings become a James Joyce, and another a Jeffrey Archer? Barthes offers no explanation of the unique creativity everywhere evident in the works of great writers, and cannot account for the existence of genius. He provides no convincing reason why one cannot regard an author's words as, precisely, an author's words. To say this is to say that what an author meant, or most probably meant, is more important for the purposes of exegesis than what I, or any other reader, might happen to think he meant, or wish he meant, or any random associations his words might suggest.

It is true that there is nothing to prevent a reader from reading a work in any way he likes. Certainly it is possible that latterday readers may find deeper or different implications in a work than those which were apparent to its author or its original audience. But some sense of probability or propriety must be maintained if our readings are not to become entirely gratuitous. A reading which could not possibly have been intended by the author, even if not explicitly, or had some resonance, at some level, with his contemporary readers, stands a good chance of being frivolous,

ignorant, or irresponsible. When we engage in criticism, the author, situated firmly in his historical milieu, provides a centre of authority to which our perceptions of the work may be referred. Even if we decide that the work cannot adequately be contained, or best discussed, within the framework provided by its author's apparent aims, it seems reasonable to suggest that we first attempt to approach it on what are often called its 'own terms'. If an author's intentions are in any way available for inspection, it would therefore be invidious not to take them into account. What must be remembered is that there may be a significant gap between these intentions and their realization in the work.

In Clarissa, we have seen, there is generally thought to be a very large gap indeed between intention and realization: the realized text is regarded as a lot better than the aims behind it. Of course we may at first feel justified in claiming that Richardson's view of the nature of his own work was naive. This is especially so if his 'conscious' concerns are taken to consist, as they so often are, of an endlessly trifling obsession with the niceties of social behaviour, coupled with a slavish devotion to a repressive and hypocritical Puritan code.¹⁵ I would suggest, however, that Richardson appears to have had a more sophisticated conception of the purpose of his fiction than has generally been acknowledged. It has long been recognized that he must have 'known what he was doing' at least on a technical level,¹⁶ and his letters abundantly attest that this was so. But Richardson's abilities in the realm of composition are not something to be separated from his moral understanding of the implications of his work. In saying this, I echo Leavis on Jane Austen:

her interest in 'composition' is not something to be put over against her interest in life; nor does she offer an

'aesthetic' value that is separable from moral significance.... Without her intense moral preoccupation she wouldn't have been a great novelist.¹⁷

Though Richardson - the Richardson, at least, of Clarissa - seems unlike Jane Austen in many ways, he is at one with her, and with all great novelists, in this.

It should not be thought here that I crudely equate didactic aims of the Richardsonian kind with the moral awareness that Leavis discerns in the novelists of his 'great tradition': what I suggest is that Richardson's didacticism arises from an 'intense moral preoccupation' comparable with that of Jane Austen or George Eliot, and that this didacticism is crucially linked with the astonishing formal achievement which (it must be stressed) proceeds from the same source.

But what, really, were Richardson's 'conscious' intentions? It will be illuminating to explore in detail his stated aims in writing Clarissa.

Among the most important of Richardson's many correspondents was the poet and dramatist Aaron Hill (1685-1750). If today Hill is best remembered for his cameo role in The Dunciad, still we should not underestimate the worth of his acquaintance for Richardson. As Eaves and Kimpel point out, Hill was not only a well-connected professional author, but was in many ways an intelligent and generous man, and Richardson valued and may well have learned much from their friendship (EK, p. 41). If there was one occasion on which Richardson himself was tempted to place Hill among the dunces, however, it may have been towards the end of 1746, about a year before the publication of the first instalment of Clarissa.

Richardson had sought Hill's assistance in the revision of his enormous manuscript, and among the issues

of concern at this time was the question of a title. There was the obvious choice, Clarissa; but perhaps this was inappropriate, Hill suggested. His reason? Readers would assume that an eponymous heroine was meant to be seen as a good example, like Pamela.

Richardson responded to this merely with a row of exclamation marks in the margin of Hill's letter, indicative perhaps of confusion (EK/C, p. 421). But he was moved to alarmed protest when Hill, in a subsequent letter, revealed why it was that he could not regard Clarissa as a suitable exemplar: it seemed he thought her guilty of a rash elopement with Lovelace, of running away of her own choosing with a man who was worse than Solmes.

Richardson's response is characteristic: he is 'greatly mortified' by this misunderstanding of what he has 'so much laboured [to make] manifest'. Hill, 'such a clear Discerner', has failed disastrously to discern 'the most material Point of all, respecting my Heroine's Character'. It is true that Clarissa promises to 'go off' with Lovelace, but the circumstances must be considered. Clarissa, imprisoned in her own home, tormented by her brother and sister, threatened with imminent marriage to a man she despises, certainly has 'sufficient Provocations to throw herself into Lovelace's Protection' - especially given her then inadequate knowledge of his character. But more importantly, she repents of her decision to do so,

resolving not to go off, only to meet him, in order to let him know as much; and to re-assure him personally (for fear of Mischief), that, altho' she wou'd stay, she would die rather than be compelled to be the Man's Wife she hated ...

It is at this meeting that Clarissa is 'tricked off' by the 'Contriver' Lovelace. For Richardson, there can be no question of a 'rash elopement': his heroine

is indeed intended as an 'example', 'and that in the most trying and arduous Cases, or I would not have set Pen to Paper'. He had hoped, he goes on, to make Clarissa 'a much nobler and more useful Story than that of Pamela'; now, finding his 'principal Design and End so liable to be misapprehended', Richardson goes so far as to declare that the novel will remain unpublished (SL, pp. 82-4). Of course he changed his mind about this; it seems, however, that Aaron Hill was not consulted on Clarissa again until after the first volumes had appeared in print (EK/C, p. 425).

This may well make Richardson appear somewhat petulant: Hill was only trying to be helpful, after all, and his opinions were not unsolicited. Yet it was not really unreasonable of Richardson, in this case at least, to expect his intentions to be understood. In an earlier letter to Hill, Richardson had in fact offered a detailed account of the intended meanings of his novel.

This account, while admittedly not the most lucid piece of writing, should nevertheless have made it apparent to Hill that his later remarks would not be appreciated. My concern is not to join Richardson in accusing Hill of inattention; rather, I point to this letter, and shall examine it more closely than Hill appears to have done, for what it reveals about Richardson's authorial aims. These can be deduced from numerous other sources, it is true; however, as the relevant passage of this letter is one of Richardson's earliest statements of the purposes of Clarissa; is in effect a Preface to Clarissa; and offers, in fact, a fuller account of his purposes than that which appears in the Preface to the first edition, it seems a good place from which to begin considering in detail his conception of the novel as a didactic work. Indeed, given his declared dislike of formal Preface-writing

(SL, p. 159), it may be that Richardson reveals more of significance about his authorial precepts and practices in this passage from an informal letter, than he does in his more laboriously-composed official statements about his work.

The letter, written in October 1746, is mainly concerned with Hill's proposed revisions to the novel, and with the reactions of other readers to the evolving text. Richardson writes:

As to Clarissa's being in downright Love, I must acknowledge, that I rather chose to have it imputed to her, (his too well-known Character consider'd) by her penetrating Friend, (and then a Reader will be ready enough to believe it, the more ready, for her not owning it, or being blind to it herself) than to think her self that she is. This gives occasion for much natural Reluctance to believe her self to be in Love, on her Part, and much Raillery (the Talent of Miss Howe) on her Part; And as I think the Passion, unless ye Object be undoubtedly worthy, and generous, ought to be subdued, and it is a Part of my Instruction from her Example, that Prudence may prevail over it, and should; and as it is one of my Two principal Views, to admonish Parents agt. forcing their Children's Inclinations, in an Article so essential to their Happiness, as Marriage; I was very desirous, that it should appear to a Reader, that had so excellent a Creature been left to her self, well as she might have liked him had he been a moral Man, she would have overcome her Liking to him; and despised him: And then I was willing to explode, that pernicious Notion, that a Reformed Rake (one of her now chief, and generous Motives) makes the best Husband. - And this Foundation laid, I conceived it more natural, and of consequence, more exemplary, that so noble a Creature, when she had been outrag'd by such a Man (by this Time her Preference of him being more Self-apparent and avowed) should be able to refuse him, against the Advice of her best Friend, and rather refuge her self in ye Arms of Death, than in his.

I had further intended to make her so faultless, that a Reader should find no way to account for the Calamities she met with, and to justify Moral Equity but by looking up to a future Reward; another of my principal Doctrines; and one of my principal Views to inculcate in this Piece. I had not indeed, sat down to scribble on this Subject, but with this View. Going off with a man is, moreover, the Thing I wanted most to make inexcusable; and I thought I ought not to make a Clarissa, give a Sanction to such an highly undutiful and disreputable Procedure, from any common Motives (SL, pp. 72-3).

Richardson, we can see, discussing his heroine's early affection for Lovelace, suggests that the passion of love should be 'subdued' unless it is directed towards an object 'undoubtedly worthy'. Clarissa's example is intended to show that 'Prudence may prevail over [Passion], and should'. If Clarissa is to be noted for her prudence, it must appear, then, that under normal circumstances she would never have fallen into Lovelace's hands: rather, 'she would have overcome her Liking to him; and despised him'.

This relates to the first of what Richardson here calls his 'Two principal Views' in the story: 'to admonish Parents agt. forcing their Children's Inclinations, in an Article so essential to their Happiness, as Marriage'. The reader must perceive the extent to which Clarissa's parents, in acquiescing in the plot to have her married off to Solmes, impel her, in effect, towards Lovelace. For the reader who happens also to be a parent, to recognize this, it is implied, is consequently to take admonition to oneself: the function of the Harlowes is to show parents how not to behave, just as Clarissa serves as an example to children, especially to female children, of how they should conduct themselves.

In stressing that Clarissa, if 'left to her self', would have grown to despise Lovelace, Richardson also touches on the second of his 'principal Views': 'And then I was willing to explode, that pernicious Notion, that a Reformed Rake (one of her now chief, and generous Motives) makes the best Husband'. Lovelace must appear to be anything but a desirable match, for Clarissa, or for the reader. Like the Harlowes, he is to be perceived as exemplifying vice, and to regard him in this way is also, Richardson believes, to make a corresponding assessment of the 'rakes' or profligate men who exist in the real world. We can see why it is vital to Richardson that his readers judge correctly his characters

and their conduct.

Of course this is all very simple: it is meant to be simple. But this is a simplicity wrested from complexities. Consider that parenthesis, 'one of her now chief, and generous Motives'. Note that it is 'Motives', plural: we know that any desire Clarissa may have to reform a rake is hardly the only factor which conditions her behaviour.

There are also the actions of the Harlowes. As Richardson has implied, Clarissa's family virtually push her into Lovelace's hands. In the early part of the novel, it is hardly surprising that the handsome young rake should appear to the heroine as 'a man to be preferred to Mr. Solmes' (Cl., I.47). Clarissa also claims that whatever 'preferable favour' she may have for Lovelace 'is owing more to the usage he has received, and for my sake borne, than to any personal consideration' (I.39). But is this true? If Clarissa does not wish to admit to any deeper regard for Lovelace, nevertheless the reader glimpses another of her 'Motives': her heavily veiled, or 'unconscious', affection for the rake. Now clearly this is linked with, and presumably is the condition of, her desire to 'reform' him; later she is to castigate herself for having believed that she could do this, seeing, in such an aspiration, evidence of a sinful pride. Richardson, however, speaks here only of 'generous Motives'. Had Clarissa been left to herself, he has said, 'she would have overcome her Liking' for Lovelace, 'well as she might have liked him had he been a moral Man'.

Surely, one feels, there is some confusion here, a contradictory clash between 'she might have liked him' on the one hand; 'she would have overcome her Liking' on the other. Quite apparently, Clarissa does harbour a 'Liking' for a man she knows to be of immoral character, for all that she is not yet aware of just how immoral

he is. And there is another curious feature of Richardson's phrasing here: in the course of a paragraph, he has slipped from writing of 'Love' and 'Passion' (he uses these terms synonymously) to writing only of 'Liking' - not another synonym, as is apparent if we think of Clarissa's 'conditional kind of liking' (Cl., I.135).

Yet all this is not as confused as it may seem. Early in the novel, it will be remembered, Anna Howe offers her opinion of Clarissa's 'preferable favour' for Lovelace: 'on inquiry,' Anna predicts, 'it will come out to be LOVE' (I.46). Clarissa, considering Lovelace's haughtiness, vanity, and reported 'immoralities', declares that she 'would not be in love with him, as it is called, for the world' (I.47). Certainly Clarissa, in revealing what Richardson has called her 'natural Reluctance to believe her self to be in Love', is to be seen as self-deceiving. One must also observe, however, that she simply does not wish to contemplate being in love with such a man. There is a distinction to be made here between kinds of love, or 'Liking': between that which is merely felt, and that which is expressed in word or deed. Clarissa's virtue is not simply a matter of prudence, let alone of the narrow 'PRUDE-encies' of which Anna at one point accuses her (I.188). But prudence is an important part of her character. When Richardson says that prudence may prevail over passion, the function of 'prudence' is to prevent that which exists only as feeling, private to oneself, from crossing over into the area of expression, with its attendant commitments and consequences. To be prudent is to approach with discretion the realm of external action.

We have been told that a passion for an unworthy object is not to be countenanced, and Clarissa does not countenance it: whatever she may privately feel for Lovelace, she would be unable to express love for any but a 'moral Man'. There is something almost circular

here: if it is love, or 'Liking', which motivates her desire to reform Lovelace, it could only be on Lovelace's reformation that Clarissa would wish to own her love to herself, let alone to him. (And of course the novel calls into question, or indeed denies, the very possibility of so hardened a man being capable of reform.) We should consider, moreover, the extent to which the suspect 'preferable favour' is linked from the beginning with 'generous Motives'. It is true that Clarissa is lavish in her later self-accusations, but there is a double edge to these. While one must take seriously her recognition of her spiritual pride, it is also ironic. Clarissa's faults, compared with those of virtually every other character in the novel, are so small as to be insignificant. So it is that Richardson is able to stress the compatibility of her behaviour with the exalted position he has given her in the moral scheme of the novel.

It is this exalted position, and Richardson's conception of its importance to the work as a whole, which must be considered next; but first, let us go back briefly to those 'Two principal Views'. The 'principal Views' of 1746 reappear in the Preface to the first edition of the novel. After discussing the nature of the work, its length, its epistolary technique, and its instructive intent, Richardson concludes:

Thus much in general. But it may not be amiss to add in particular that in the great variety of subjects which this collection contains, it is one of the principal views of the publication: to caution parents against the undue exertion of their natural authority over their children in the great article of marriage: and children against preferring a man of pleasure to a man of probity, upon that dangerous but too commonly received notion, that a reformed rake makes the best husband.¹⁸

As an indication of the significance of Clarissa, certainly this seems inadequate. But Richardson's

phrasing is of interest. That what had been presented to Hill as 'Two principal Views' here become one emphasizes the interdependence of these intentions. That these intentions are 'one of the principal views of the publication' suggests also that Richardson is not attempting an exhaustive catalogue. Yet it is not simply a matter of there being a 'great variety of subjects' contained in his 'collection'. Much as Richardson is concerned with admonishing parents against improper treatment of their children, and exploding pernicious notions about reformed rakes, these seemingly limited aims are crucially linked with, and (as Richardson presents them in his letter to Hill) arise from the fact of Clarissa's exemplariness.

In that letter to Hill, we have seen, Richardson is led on to the subject of his 'Two principal Views' from a consideration of Clarissa's prudence. It is Clarissa's prudence, as well as his 'principal Views', which Richardson goes on to refer to as 'this Foundation':

- And this Foundation laid, I conceived it more natural, and of consequence, more exemplary, that so noble a Creature, when she had been outrag'd by such a Man (by this Time her Preference of him being more Self-apparent and avowed) should be able to refuse him, against the Advice of her best Friend, and rather refuge her self in ye Arms of Death, than in his.

Thus it is that Clarissa's choice of death over worldly compromise is the triumphant demonstration of her exemplary character. Richardson stresses the continuity of her behaviour, her unwavering dedication to virtuous ideals which she is prepared to follow to their ultimate implications.

Richardson's linking of the 'natural' and the 'exemplary' may seem tenuous if considered in the abstract. In Clarissa's case, however, the natural is the exemplary. For Richardson, then, the novel cannot end in any other way than with Clarissa's death: an alternative ending

would vitiate all he had set out to achieve. This is the crucial difference between Clarissa and Richardson's other novels, which do end happily. In Pamela and Sir Charles Grandison, Richardson is concerned with the attainment of perfection in the sublunary sphere; in Clarissa, he seeks to present an ideal of virtue which transcends worldly considerations. The perfection of Pamela and Sir Charles, while moving beyond the merely social, has its focus in their social lives: Clarissa, by contrast, is progressively cut off from the world to the point at which she must declare, shortly before her death, that 'GOD ALMIGHTY WOULD NOT LET ME DEPEND FOR COMFORT UPON ANY BUT HIMSELF' (Cl., IV.339).

The significance of this is that Clarissa's ordeal becomes the test of her perfections - much as Lovelace thought it would, ironically, but not of course with the conclusion he desired. Clarissa's 'shining time' is Richardson's most cogent assertion, in the face of evil and corruption, of the reality of virtue, the possibility of perfection, and the need for faith.

In the next paragraph of his letter, Richardson makes explicit the religious aims of his novel. The theme of the exemplar, which overarches the more local considerations of parental conduct and prudence in love, itself subserves a higher theme:

I had further intended to make her so faultless, that a Reader should find no way to account for the Calamities she met with, and to justify Moral Equity but by looking up to a future Reward; another of my principal Doctrines; and one of my principal Views to inculcate in this Piece. I had not indeed, sat down to scribble on this Subject, but with this View [my emphasis].

Many of Clarissa's biblical meditations in the latter part of the novel derive from the Book of Job. It is evident that Richardson's novel in its most essential aspects is intended as an eighteenth-century

retelling of that story. This is the core of Clarissa as Richardson conceives it.

If we think of this as a core, it may be useful to think of the stages we have moved through in order to reach it as strata or layers. Surrounding the religious affirmation at the heart of the novel, and (as it were) enabling us to reach it, is Clarissa as exemplar of fundamental Christian virtues. Then, in a sense outside, but clearly built upon this theme of idealized virtue, are the issues of correct conduct, of right and wrong choices, of desirable and undesirable behaviour in worldly life.

This model may be of some use in helping us to understand Richardson's understanding of Clarissa - and the many misunderstandings of modern critics, when they consider our author's intentions. In picturing a core with surrounding layers, it must be stressed that I do not imagine the novel to possess some underlying 'symbolic' meaning beneath an apparently trivial surface: for all its wealth of real or apparent symbolism, Clarissa is not a symbolic novel in any essential way. Richardson labours to make his meaning perfectly clear, within the novel as well as without. To push my metaphor further, and perhaps a bit too far, the layers and the core have been cut through the middle and exposed. What I suggest is that Clarissa, as didactic fiction, operates on several levels, and that the movement through these levels may be seen as a movement from the more localized concerns of Richardson's time and place, the issues of marriage, morals, and family life in eighteenth-century society, to the central Christian affirmation of the novel, which (whatever we may think of it today) is thought of by the author as a timeless truth. It is a movement from the particular to the general, or universal, and Richardson, as I have attempted to show, is very much aware of this movement.

This is not to say, however, that Richardson's outermost layer of meaning - the layer in which he is concerned with reformed rakes, forced marriages, and prudent young ladies - is simply so much excess baggage to be stripped away and discarded, or that Richardson, the man, can somehow be 'redeemed' if we insist on his awareness of the depths beneath the surface. In Richardson's conception of the novel, the conduct-book surface cannot be seen as inessential; each of the layers of meaning we have discriminated in Clarissa is integral to the structure of the work.

Richardson's preoccupation with exemplary characters is indicative of a need not only to assert what he believes to be right, but to transmute the outer world in accordance with the inner vision. In Richardson, there can be no separation of 'character' and 'conduct' such as Coleridge perceived in Fielding. This does not mean that, for Richardson, conduct is character - the slick deceptions of a Lovelace make us well aware of this - but rather that virtue must consciously, and constantly, be made manifest in the world in order to have any significant existence: which is to say little more, perhaps, than that Richardson believed in being a good Christian.

As such, he considered the reformation of manners and morals in everyday life - the aim of his obvious, conduct-book didacticism - to be as important as, and certainly related to, the assertion of his great truth. It is for this reason that Richardson sees the several levels of instruction and implication in Clarissa as levels to be moved between easily, without incongruity. Immediately after telling Hill that Clarissa is meant to be so perfect that only 'by looking up to a future Reward' could a reader account for her fate; that he 'had not indeed, sat down to scribble on this Subject, but with this View', Richardson continues, without so

much as starting a new paragraph: 'Going off with a man is, moreover, the Thing I wanted most to make inexcusable ...'

The first edition of Clarissa was published in three instalments between December 1747 and December 1748. Exactly when Richardson had begun work on the novel is unknown. Eaves and Kimpel suggest the summer of 1742 as the earliest probable date, with the first draft being completed perhaps by the middle of 1744, and almost certainly by the end of 1745 (EK/C, pp. 416, 427). While preparing the novel for publication, Richardson requested and received the advice of literary friends including the poet and dramatist Colley Cibber and the poet Edward Young as well as Aaron Hill. Other friends and acquaintances read the novel in manuscript, and offered their remarks.

The chief issue on which Richardson consulted others would appear to have been that of abridgement. 'I have run into such a length! - And am such a sorry pruner, though greatly luxuriant, that I am apt to add three pages for one I take away!' he lamented to Young (SL, p. 61).

In the process of revision, however, Richardson was as much concerned with the subtleties of plot, characterization, and verbal texture as he was with the more prosaic - and, of course, ultimately insoluble - problem of length. From late in 1744 onwards, he was constantly reworking the text; that which appeared in the first edition was at least a third draft. The latter part of the novel was still being revised after the first instalments had appeared (EK/C, pp. 426-7).

There is some evidence to suggest that, during these revisions, the outlines of the story were influenced by the opinions of Richardson's advisors. Aaron Hill, for example, felt that the circumstances of the duel

between Lovelace and James should be altered; in the novel as we have it, the duel is conducted as Hill had suggested. Still, it is possible that Richardson had made the change before he received Hill's comments (EK/C, p. 420).¹⁹

For the most part, it was only on minor issues that Richardson could be swayed from his own design. Eaves and Kimpel write:

He evidently had the general course of the novel firmly fixed in his mind before he showed it to Hill for the first time, as well as his own conception of the characters, and in spite of his pleas for help he never paid much attention to what his friends said on these matters - luckily, since the conception of Clarissa's tragedy is his own creation (EK/C, p. 428).

In the light of this, it may be felt that there was a certain absurdity in Richardson's fondness for literary consultation. McKillop seems to be thinking along these lines when he refers to the novelist's 'troublesome habit of asking his friends for advice about his forthcoming book - advice which he almost always found it impossible to take' (McK, p. 61).

Perhaps these ceaseless requests for advice were secretly designed to solicit praise. From the beginning of his career as a novelist, Richardson had thrived on the favourable responses of audiences, before publication as much as after. He wrote, of Pamela:

While I was writing the two volumes, my worthy-hearted wife, and the young lady who is [staying] with us, when I had read them some part of the story, which I had begun without their knowing it, used to come in to my little closet every night, with - 'Have you any more of Pamela, Mr. R? We are come to hear a little more of Pamela,' &c. This encouraged me to prosecute it ... (SL, p. 41).

During the composition of Clarissa, Richardson received many tributes to the excellence of the project.

After a visit to Cibber in 1745, the authoress Laetitia Pilkington informed Richardson that she had found his advisor engrossed in the manuscript, 'in such real anxiety for Clarissa, as none but so perfect a master of nature could have excited' (Corr., II.127).

Richardson's friend Sarah Wescomb - not the most literary young lady - expressed her hope that Clarissa 'may ever bear upon my Mind direct my future Steps in Life show what is truly comendable for our imitation [sic]' (EK/C, p. 422). In November 1746, Edward Young was aware that the publication of Clarissa was at last imminent. 'I thank you for enabling me, at my time of day, to think with great pleasure of living another year,' he wrote to Richardson (EK/C, p. 421).²⁰

Gratifying as all this may have been, we have seen that the responses which Richardson received were also, at times, frustrating. Much as Richardson explained his intentions, Hill, for example, remained dubious about the circumstances surrounding Clarissa's abduction; Hill objected also to what he saw as the too-extreme moral polarization of Clarissa and Lovelace, suggesting changes to the characterization of both (EK/C, pp. 424-5).

Cibber and Mrs. Pilkington had no objections on this score, but anticipated the reactions of later readers in another important respect. Cibber, then in his seventies, was widely known as a roué, while the notorious Mrs. Pilkington (1712-50) had once been described by Swift as 'the most profligate whore in either Kingdom' (EK, p. 175). Yet neither was of Lovelace's party. 'Spare her virgin purity, dear Sir, spare it!' implored Mrs. Pilkington. 'Consider, if this wounds both Mr. Cibber and me (who neither of us set up for immaculate chastity) what must it do with those who possess that inestimable treasure?' (Corr., II.130-1).

Even the issue of abridgement proved contentious;

at one point Richardson was overwhelmed with advice from several sources at once, all of which was contradictory (EK/C, p. 420). Cibber, it seems, also wondered if the novel ought not to be recast into what Richardson called 'the narrative way'; that is, into a non-epistolary form (EK/C, p. 425). The painter Joseph Highmore thought it anomalous that Lovelace should be given religious principles: 'Let the Dog be an Atheist, or worse, if worse can be' (ibid.).

It is hardly surprising, as the time of publication drew near, to find Richardson having his own doubts about his 'troublesome habit' of consultation. 'What contentions, what disputes have I involved myself in with my poor Clarissa, through my own diffidence, and for want of a will!' he wrote to Edward Young. 'I wish I had never consulted any body but Dr. Young, who so kindly vouchsafed me his ear, and sometimes his opinion' (SL, p. 84). Young (1683-1765), whose great work Night Thoughts had appeared some years earlier, was by far the most talented of Richardson's literary advisors. It also appears that he never offered any adverse criticism (EK/C, p. 425).

Another of Richardson's advisors was the literary anecdotist Joseph Spence (1699-1768). Observing how much his friend had suffered from the 'contrariety of advices' he had received, Spence urged Richardson to put his trust only in his 'own judgment, which I verily believe would direct you better, without any help, than with so much' (Corr., II.320).

Eaves and Kimpel describe this advice - which Richardson, of course, never took - as 'excellent' (EK/C, p. 426). Indeed it is: but only when considered in the abstract. One cannot underestimate the value that Richardson's ceaseless disputes about his work held for him, however distressing they might have been at times.

As a dedicated didactic novelist, Richardson needed to be aware of the responses of readers. At the simplest level, if he wished to attract a wide readership, the length of the novel was an issue about which he had to be concerned. He had no desire to bore his audience, despite what some modern readers may think: it is worth noting that over half of the Preface to the first edition is devoted to a defence of the extraordinary length of the story. The Postscript to the third edition mentions that 'the principal objection with many has lain against the length of the piece' (C1., IV.565).

More to the point here, however, are Richardson's deliberations over questions of motive and behaviour. Of particular importance to him were the credibility of the story and its characters, and the propriety, as well as the general presentation, of his exemplary heroine's behaviour. If his intentions were misunderstood, or appeared to be unclear, Richardson could not simply dismiss the perceptions of his readers, consoling himself with thoughts of his superior understanding as he muttered, 'The plain reader be damned'. For this reason his letter to Young, in which he complains about the 'contentions' and 'disputes' he has involved himself in over his 'poor Clarissa', seems more than a little ironic. The first instalment of the novel was to appear a few weeks later. The contentions and disputes were just beginning.

The nature of the most important of these disputes is indicated in a letter Richardson wrote to Hill in May 1748. Though it is some time yet before the final instalment will appear, it seems that the tragic ending of the novel is already common knowledge among many of Richardson's readers - not surprisingly, given his hardly secretive habits of composition: 'one Friend and another got the Mss. out of my Hands,' he reports, 'and some of them have indiscreetly, tho' without any

bad Intention, talked of it in all places.' Richardson therefore finds 'by many Letters sent me, and by many Opinions given me, that some of the greater Vulgar, as well as all the less, had rather it had had what they call, an Happy Ending' (SL, p. 87).²¹

What was particularly disturbing about these calls for 'an Happy Ending' was that they were related, in many cases, to unfortunate notions about the characters of both Lovelace and Clarissa. Not only did many readers find the rake somewhat less than irredeemable; they found Clarissa's persistent refusal of him perverse, evidence of a prim and haughty nature rather than of exemplary virtue. In the months that followed, much of Richardson's correspondence was to be devoted to defences of Clarissa, novel and heroine - most importantly, in his famous correspondence with Lady Dorothy Bradshaigh.

Lady Bradshaigh (1706?-85), the wife of a Lancashire baronet, had read avidly the first four volumes of Clarissa. On hearing talk of the heroine's impending fate, she was greatly alarmed. Diffidently at first, she wrote to Richardson under the pseudonym 'Belfour' to enquire about the truth of the rumours. Soon she was pleading for a happy ending to the story - in no uncertain terms:

If you disappoint me, attend to my curse: - May the hatred of all the young, beautiful, and virtuous, for ever be your portion! and may your eyes never behold any thing but age and deformity! may you meet with applause only from envious old maids, surly bachelors, and tyrannical parents! may you be doomed to the company of such! and, after death, may their ugly souls haunt you!

Now make Lovelace and Clarissa unhappy if you dare (Corr., IV.181).

Given that this was written by a genteel woman of forty, it may seem a most extreme response to the anticipated outcome of what was, after all, a work of fiction. But if Richardson treated Lady Bradshaigh

with seriousness and respect, the reason for this was not, I think, simply that he was flattered by her ardent attentions. In addition, it seems reasonable to suggest, the sheer intensity of her response to his work convinced him that his mysterious correspondent was among his true, as opposed to his more shallow-minded, readers - despite her apparent unawareness of his novel's 'Design and End'. In other ways Lady Bradshaigh was the ideal Richardsonian reader, entering into the story to the point of obsession, regarding the characters as real, and feeling the heroine's sufferings as her own.

'[F]rom many Passages in your Letters,' Richardson told her, '[I] look upon you as a Daughter of my own Mind' (SL, p. 89). (Presumably he was not thinking of the passage quoted above.) What he had to do was to convince this daughter of his mind that she was wayward in her wishes for Clarissa and Lovelace. He could not, he told her,

go thro' some of the Scenes myself without being sensibly touched ... But yet 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 (SL, p. 90).

Had Clarissa been reconciled to her relations, had she overcome all the persecutions to which she was prey, had she married Lovelace on her own terms, what, asked Richardson, would he have done more than he had done in Pamela? (SL, p. 92). Were Lovelace allowed to reform and marry, what would this be but an inducement to 'another Lovelace' to pass his youth in as profligate a manner as he wished, assuming that whenever he was 'tired with rambling' he had merely to 'extend [his] Hand' to receive not only the blessing of a Clarissa, but eternal forgiveness as well? (SL, p. 93). 'Reformation

is not, can not, be an easy, a sudden thing, in a Man long immersed in Vice,' Richardson insisted (SL, p. 94). He was perhaps forgetting Pamela here; but after all, Mr. B.'s transgressions, he might have pointed out, do not nearly approach the level of Lovelace's.

Evidence of Lovelace's vicious nature could be gleaned from the rake's first letter, Richardson maintained; even in that letter, 'all those Seeds of Wickedness were thick sown, which sprouted up into Action afterwards in his Character' (SL, p. 92; cf. C1., I.144-52). Richardson's early revisions stood him in good stead here; in the early drafts, Lovelace had had no evil intentions towards Clarissa until after she had fallen into his power (SL, p. 81). Lovelace, Richardson went on, 'A Man who knows so much of his Duty, as he is supposed to know, and who is nevertheless wicked upon Principle', cannot be anything but 'an abandoned Man; and even should he reform, an uneasy, and therefore an unhappy one' (SL, p. 95). Even were he to become 'the best of Husbands', it would be a punishment for Clarissa to be married to him, considering all that he had put her through. Besides, Lady Bradshaigh is reminded, the novel does seek to counter the view that a reformed rake makes the best husband - as the Preface to the first edition makes abundantly clear! (SL, p. 94).

As for Clarissa, Richardson refutes the charge that she is 'a Character above Nature'. Has he made her anything that a woman of 'Christian Virtue' could not be? Under the tutelage of Mrs. Norton and Dr. Lewen, Clarissa was an 'early Saint', 'calling out' for a 'heavenly Crown' as much as Lovelace, from the first, was 'calling out for Punishment'. When Lady Bradshaigh pleads that Clarissa be freed from her trials, Richardson counters by asking whether it is in the nature of life 'to be exempt from Calamity?' In Lady Bradshaigh's

scheme, why should 'a Person so good ... be distressed at all?' (SL, pp. 93-4). If Clarissa is to be distressed, and looks upon her early death not as 'an Evil, but on the contrary ... as her consummating Perfection, who shall grudge it her?' Why, Richardson asks, 'is Death painted in such shocking Lights, when it is the common Lot?' (SL, pp. 95-6).

This is the crux of his argument. Most of all, Richardson makes plain, his concern in the novel is with the imminence of death, with the need for the sustaining faith which not only ensures moral conduct during life, but alone makes bearable the sufferings and transience of life. Richardson quotes Clarissa (the emphasis is mine): 'What is even the long Life which in high Health we wish for?' (SL, p. 91; cf. Cl., IV.274). Clarissa, Richardson stresses, is a 'Religious Novel': 'Religion never was at so low an Ebb as at present: And if my Work must be supposed of the Novel kind, I was willing to try if a Religious Novel would do good' (SL, p. 92).

If this is not enough to fortify his correspondent against the coming catastrophe, Richardson refers her to The Spectator, No. 40 (16 April 1711), in which Addison castigates that 'ridiculous Doctrine in Modern Criticism, that [Writers of Tragedy] are obliged to an equal Distribution of Rewards and Punishments, and an impartial Execution of Poetical Justice'.²² '[U]pon this Spectator might I have rested my Cause,' Richardson remarks (SL, p. 96).

It would take more than Addison to reconcile Lady Bradshaigh to the tragic ending of Clarissa. In subsequent letters she resumes her pleadings, claiming that she refuses to continue reading the novel if Richardson will not alter the ending (of course, she continues reading); declaring that she cannot stop herself from hating Richardson if he refuses to revoke

the rape; even proposing, as the heroine's death draws near, a last-minute twist of the plot to bring about her desired denouement. In this, Lovelace, stricken with grief at the realization of his loss of Clarissa, succumbs to a serious illness. Clarissa's heart melts; not only does she come to sit by his bedside, but consents to marry the dying man so that he may go to a peaceful grave. Of course, he recovers (Corr., IV.198, 201, 202-6).

Finally, Lady Bradshaigh knew that she must abandon her desperate campaign. As we might expect, however, she did so with great reluctance. Never, she declared towards the end of 1748, could she so much as look at Clarissa again 'without a sigh; and, I fear, a harsh thought of the author'. She simply could not bring herself to read the last, tragic instalment (Corr., IV.207, 215).

Richardson could only repeat himself, insisting that his 'Catastrophe' was 'from the Premises the only natural one'; that he had a greater view 'in the Publication of so large a Piece' than 'the trite one of perfecting a private Happiness, by the Reformation of a Libertine'; that he could not think of leaving Clarissa 'short of Heaven', or Lovelace unpunished, but had, rather, 'to complete my great End, for the sake of Example and Warning' (SL, pp. 103-4). In earthly life, he suggests, happy endings are never really achieved - and 'a Creature perfected by Sufferings and already ripened for Glory' should not be condemned to the 'Condition of Life':

A Writer who follows Nature and pretends to keep the Christian System in his Eye, cannot make a Heaven in this World for his Favourites; or represent this Life otherwise than as a State of Probation. Clarissa I once more averr [sic] could not be rewarded in this World.... What greater moral Proof can be given of a World after this, for the rewarding of suffering Virtue, and for the punishing of oppressive Vice, than the Inequalities in the Distribution of Rewards and Punishments here below? (SL, p. 108).

It appears that Richardson's 'Repetitions of Questions', occasioned, as he says, by Lady Bradshaigh's 'Repetition of Pleas' (SL, p. 111), were not, in her case, entirely without effect. Though she could never be brought to approve, so to speak, of Clarissa's rape and death, Lady Bradshaigh came eventually to alter her attitude to Lovelace, describing him in her marginalia to the novel as 'a deceitful, practiced villain [sic]'. 'How I hate myself for it,' she remarked of her plan for his reformation and marriage (EK, p. 234).

I have dealt at length with Richardson's letters to Lady Bradshaigh, because the substance of his replies to her is repeated time and again in his subsequent defences of the novel. In a later letter to this favourite correspondent, after their dramatic epistolary debate was over, Richardson quoted with approval the remark of a friend who had said that their letters, collected together, 'wd. make the best Commentary that cd. be written on the History of Clarissa' (SL, p. 336).

It is doubtful that Richardson was ever really irritated by Lady Bradshaigh's attempted interference with his novel; he once told her that, as Colonel Morden said of Anna Howe, he could love her for her very failings (SL, p. 111).

Richardson came to have a similar fondness for Lady Bradshaigh's more sober-minded sister, Lady Elizabeth Echlin, who lived in Ireland. The enterprising Lady Echlin, as dissatisfied as her sister with the latter half of Richardson's novel, proceeded to write her own version in which, though Clarissa and Lovelace still must die, there is no rape, and Lovelace in his last days becomes a sincere penitent, converted by the virtuous example of his beloved. On reading her manuscript in 1755, Richardson refrained from offering any detailed critique of this well-intentioned, if somewhat talentless,

production; as he tactfully wrote to Lady Echlin, 'in every Page of your MS. I see Reason to admire your Religious Sentiments, and the Excellency of your Heart'.²³

For the most part, Richardson was not so indulgent towards renegade readers. This is evident in the comments he makes about the criticisms of Clarissa to some of his less troublesome correspondents. Thanking Aaron Hill's daughters Astraea and Minerva for their 'Approbation of my Clarissa', Richardson asks if they can believe 'that there are Numbers of your Sex, who pity the Lovelace you are affrighted at, and call Clarissa perverse, over-delicate, and Hard-hearted; and contend, that she ought to have married him?' He continues:

If two or three Wicked Men are joined to make one Lovelace, and if he be by that means drawn more excessively wicked than any one single Man has been known to be ... do we not see in these Ladies, that there cannot be a Rake so Vile, if he have Form or Figure, an Air of Generosity, and Fire and Flight, and what is called Wit, and Intrepidity but whom, in his worst Actions, be the object of his Attempts ever so worthy, they can forgive? (SL, pp. 102-3).

To the noted female scholar Elizabeth Carter, Richardson complained of the 'infinite trouble and opposition' he had encountered 'from persons (of both sexes) ... who professed so much love to Clarissa, as to deny her her triumph, and to grudge her her Heaven'. 'What have I not suffered from an affectation of a delicate concern for virtue,' he lamented (SL, p. 117). Not surprisingly, a Postscript was added to the final instalment of the novel, defending its tragic conclusion.

This was in December 1748. By the middle of the following year, Fielding had published Tom Jones, which appears to have become a more popular novel than Clarissa (McK, p. 171). 'While the Taste of the Age can be gratified by a Tom Jones,' wrote Richardson to Aaron Hill, '... I am not to expect that the World will bestow Two Readings, or One indeed, attentive one, on such

a grave Story as Clarissa, which is designed to make those think of Death who endeavour all they can to banish it from their Thoughts' (SL, p. 126). Another Hill family indiscretion occurred at this time, when Astraea and Minerva admitted to Richardson that they had actually enjoyed Fielding's novel. Elizabeth Carter, apparently, liked it too (McK, pp. 171-2; cf. EK, pp. 289, 297).

By the end of the year, Richardson's irritation with the reading public had risen to new heights. 'That there was a Necessity for some such Piece to be written, I have had a Multitude of Proofs since its Publication,' he wrote to Frances Grainger, the daughter of a family friend. 'O that I could not say, that I have met with more Admirers of Lovelace than of Clarissa' (SL, p. 141). In a letter to Susanna Highmore, the painter's daughter, Richardson refers to 'the poor ineffectual History of Clarissa' (SL, p. 132).

Richardson, however, being Richardson, had not been idle in his attempts to ensure the moral efficacy of his novel. Six months after the completion of its original publication, a second edition had appeared, containing numerous alterations designed to fend off misreadings. Richardson's Preface had been removed, as had a Preface to the second instalment written by William Warburton (1698-1779), the theologian and editor of Shakespeare and Pope.²⁴ The reader opening the second edition was confronted with Richardson's astonishing table of contents, which offers not only a detailed synopsis of the story but emphasizes its moral tendency. In later editions, this extraordinary production was printed in parts at the end of each volume; in the second edition it appeared entire, covering forty-three pages of small type, at the beginning of the first volume (EK, p. 309).

Aaron Hill, while marvelling at the effort which had gone into this 'accurate Index', wondered whether it was really necessary. Indeed, was it not even

'dangerous', an inducement to 'mean Book-poachers' to satisfy their curiosity on the table of contents instead of buying the book? (SL, p. 125n).

Richardson agreed that this could be the case, but stressed that his interest was not in the profits which could be reaped from his novel - he wished to ensure its success as a didactic work:

I chose in my Second Edition to give a little Abstract of the Story, that it might be clearly seen what it was, and its Tendency; and to obviate as I went along, tho' covertly, such Objections as I had heard (as I have done by the Italicks) altho' I made many Persons Masters of the Story to my Detriment as to sale (SL, p. 125f).

It was also in the second edition that Richardson added the footnotes, which, complete with cross-references, serve to elucidate the complexities of Clarissa's situation, and emphasize the villainous duplicities of Lovelace (Cl.R?, p. 157). Thus, when Clarissa is about to discover that Lovelace is not, after all, plotting the ruin of the innocent Rosebud - an indication, perhaps, that he is really not so bad - the reader's eyes are directed downwards to an explanation of the rake's ulterior motives in 'sparing his Rosebud'. Richardson adds:

This explanation is the more necessary to be given, as several of our readers (through want of due attention) have attributed to Mr. Lovelace, on his behaviour to his Rosebud, a greater merit than was due to him; and moreover imagined that it was improbable that a man who was capable of acting so generously (as they supposed) in this instance, should be guilty of any atrocious vileness (Cl., I.353-4).

Another note begins:

Clarissa has been censured as behaving to Mr. Lovelace, in their first conversation at St. Albans, and afterwards with too much reserve, and even with haughtiness. Surely those who have thought her to blame on this account, have not paid a due attention to the story.... (I.501).

Richardson's campaign to thwart 'inattentive' readers went still further than this. In the second and third editions, substantial amounts of new material were inserted into the text itself. Richardson claimed that these insertions were 'restorations' from the 'original manuscripts'; Mark Kinkead-Weekes, however, has argued convincingly that 'most of the new passages are not restorations at all, but changes designed to counteract a serious misreading' (C1.R?, p. 157).

In the second edition, Lovelace's evil is more persistently emphasized, while Clarissa's motives are thrown into sharper relief in an attempt to silence the charges that she is a prude, and should have married him (EK, pp. 310-11; C1.R?, p. 161). In addition, Richardson italicizes many more words and phrases in the text, in order, no doubt, to direct the attention of the inattentive to aspects of it which should not be ignored (C1.R?, p. 163).

The second edition of Clarissa consisted only of the first four volumes - copies of the complete work were made up with remaining stocks of Volumes Five to Seven of the original edition.²⁵ For Richardson, it would appear, the alterations of 1749 had been, at best, a stopgap measure. For his next edition he planned a more thoroughgoing revision, which would make still more explicit his didactic intentions.

The new version of Clarissa, which appeared in April 1751, was over two hundred pages longer than the original (C1.R?, p. 156). For the reader unfortunate enough to have purchased one of the earlier editions, the 'restored' material was available in a separate volume, containing not only the most important of the 'restorations' to the text but also the new prefatory and other extra-textual material from the latest version (EK, p. 315). Richardson's new alterations made even more obvious the evil of Lovelace, and the exemplary

virtue of Clarissa. Moral reflections were inserted to advance the didactic tendency of the story, as were the sordid case-histories of characters such as Sally Martin and Polly Horton. After Clarissa's death, the sufferings of the Harlowes were mercilessly heightened, while Anna's eulogy of the excellence of her friend, in her letter to Belford of October 12 (Cl., IV.490-510), was greatly expanded in a final attempt to convince readers of Clarissa's qualifications as an exemplar (Cl.R?, pp. 164-5).

Richardson's novel was now also fortified with a collection of 'Moral Sentiments', gleaned from the text itself, which was printed at the end of the last volume (EK, p. 313). Of this, Richardson had written to David Graham, a student of King's College, Cambridge:

I think to ... insert it at the End of the Work, that so, on a general Retrospection of the whole, it may appear to be, what I had the Presumption to design it, a History of Life and Manners, and not a mere Novel or Romance. By this means, I shall take Advantage of the Plea you have kindly suggested in my Favour, that my Design was not so much to amuse and divert, as to warn and instruct the Youthful, the Gay, the Inconsiderate, of both Sexes, and that, in a manner, from the Cradle to the Grave (SL, pp. 158-9).

The table of contents, we have seen, was dislodged from its place at the beginning of Volume One in the third edition. In its place was a Preface, written by Richardson, which includes some material from his original Preface as well as much that is new. In those parts of the Preface which had appeared in 1747, three alterations are of note. Whereas in 1747, Lovelace, 'in unbosoming himself to a select friend [discovers] wickedness enough to entitle him to general hatred', in 1751 he is entitled, rather, 'to general detestation'. In 1747, it had been one of the 'wicked maxims' of the rakes 'to keep no faith with any of the individuals of [the fair sex] who throw themselves into their power';

now, 'throw themselves' is prudently altered to 'are thrown'.²⁶ Most importantly, Richardson's statement of his 'principal views' is expanded. Earlier we looked at the version of this from the 1747 Preface (p. 18 above); in 1751, Richardson provides a survey of his aims similar to that which he had offered to Aaron Hill. The reader is apprised not only that Clarissa seeks 'to caution parents against the undue exercise of their natural authority over their children in the great article of marriage', and to discredit the 'notion that a reformed rake makes the best husband'; in addition, it aims

to warn the inconsiderate and thoughtless of the one sex against the base arts and designs of specious contrivers of the other ... but above all, to investigate the highest and most important doctrines not only of morality, but of christianity, by showing them thrown into action in the conduct of the worthy characters; while the unworthy, who set those doctrines at defiance, are condignly, and, as may be said, consequentially, punished (Cl., I.xv).

Kinkead-Weekes suggests that the reference here to 'the inconsiderate and thoughtless of the one sex' is aimed at those female readers who had expressed rather too much sympathy for Lovelace. The reference to 'worthy' and 'unworthy' characters would also appear to be aimed at 'thoughtless' readers (Cl.R?, p. 167).

Elsewhere in the Preface, Richardson had replaced his long defence of the length of the novel (offered in 1747) with more explicit directions as to how the story is to be read. Clarissa's role is stated unequivocally: she 'is proposed as an exemplar to her sex'. The novel as a whole is not 'designed only to divert and amuse', readers are informed, but exists 'as a vehicle to the instruction' (Cl., I.xiv, xv). Should readers object to any part of the story, they are referred to the Postscript, much revised since 1748, which offers an extended defence of the tragic

ending, of Clarissa's character, of the length of the novel, of its epistolary method - even Hickman is defended (Cl., IV.552-65). The trouble that Richardson took over his new Preface and Postscript may be discerned from the drafts of much of the material contained therein, preserved in the manuscript 'Hints of Prefaces for Clarissa'.²⁷

Few seem likely to object to Richardson having taken such pains over a Preface or Postscript, let alone a table of contents or a collection of moral sentiments. What is more contentious is his interference in the text of the novel itself. Kinkead-Weekes, in his article 'Clarissa Restored?', is not content merely to describe the alterations made to the novel in the second and third editions. Judgement ensues. 'There is a very marked increase in explicit moralizing,' it is noted of the third edition.

... Richardson was never conspicuous for literary tact, but all sense of it deserts him now. The deplorable additions to Anna's account of the heroine not only show him at his worst, but nearly ruin the final impression the novel had originally made.... [T]he effect of the whole recension is of a lead pencil at work on a chiaroscuro; hardening outlines and converting the blend of light and shadow into a cruder black and white (Cl.R?, pp. 169-70).

This leads Kinkead-Weekes to the question, 'Which represents Richardson's real intention: the novel he wrote expecting an audience capable of appreciating it, or the revision for one he found careless, superficial, and sentimental?' Most modern readers have known the novel, Kinkead-Weekes points out, only as it appeared in the third edition, the basis of all subsequent reprints. Kinkead-Weekes acknowledges that 'there are losses entailed in merely substituting the first edition for the third. Some of the new material does improve upon the original'; but his feeling tends

to be that the novel would be greatly improved if it were relieved of some of its more explicitly didactic baggage (C1.R?, p. 170).

It seems that many readers would agree. Philip Stevick's opinion may be taken as typical: 'The first edition is, without much question, less graceful stylistically than the third. But it is morally less crude and truer to his imagination than Richardson allowed himself to be as he revised.'²⁸

We are fortunate now that the publication of the Penguin Clarissa (1985), which reprints for the first time the text of the first edition, at last makes it easy for all readers to compare the two main versions of the novel. Readers may make up their own minds about the relative merits of the two; it seems to me, however, that no 'return' to the first edition can legitimately be carried out under the banner of representing Richardson's 'real intention'. Consider this passage, from the Postscript of 1751:

In this general depravity, when even the pulpit has lost great part of its weight, and the clergy are considered as a body of interested men, the author thought he should be able to answer it to his own heart, be the success what it would, if he threw in his mite towards introducing a reformation so much wanted. And he imagined, that [if] in an age given up to diversion and entertainment, he could steal in, as may be said, and investigate the great doctrines of Christianity under the fashionable guise of an amusement; he should be most likely to serve his purpose; remembering that of the poet:

A verse may find him who a sermon flies,
And turn delight into a sacrifice (C1., IV.553).²⁹

Elsewhere, Richardson writes of his desire that the age in which he lives 'be awakened and amended' (SL, p. 142).

Whether the eighteenth century needed awakening and amending any more than previous ages is, no doubt,

a moot point; but it is worth remembering that Richardson had profound personal reasons to be concerned with the themes of suffering, death, and religious consolation. In the eighteen-forties, contemplating the portrait of Richardson which hangs in Stationers' Hall, the poet and essayist Leigh Hunt felt that Highmore's painting, while 'not of the first order', showed its subject looking almost as if he were alive. Richardson, Hunt was moved to observe,

instead of being the smooth, satisfied-looking personage he is represented in some engravings of him (which makes his heartrending romance appear unaccountable and cruel), has a face as uneasy as can well be conceived - flushed and shattered with emotion. We recognise the sensitive, enduring man, such as he really was - a heap of bad nerves.³⁰

A hundred years earlier, Richardson had written to Lady Bradshaigh:

By my first Wife I had 5 Sons and one Daughter; some of them living to be delightful Praters, with all the Appearances of sound Health, lovely in their Features and promising as to their Minds, and the Death of one of them, I doubt accelerating from Grief, that of the otherwise laudably afflicted Mother. I have had by my present Wife five Girls and one Boy. I have buried of these the promising Boy and one Girl. Four Girls I have living, all at present good, very good - Their Mother a true and instructing Mother to them.

Thus have I lost six Sons (all my Sons!) and two Daughters with every one of which, to Answer your Question, I parted with great Regret. Other heavy Deprivations of Friends, very near and very dear, have I also suffered. I am very susceptible, I will venture to say, of Impressions of this nature. A Father, an honest, a worthy Father, I lost by the Accident of a broken Thigh, snapt by a sudden Jirk, endeavouring to recover a Slip passing thro' his own Yard. Two Brothers very dear to me I lost abroad. A Friend more valuable than most Brothers was taken from me - No less than Eleven concerning Deaths attacked me in two Years. My Nerves were so affected with these repeated Blows, that I have been for seven Years past forced, after repeated labouring thro the whole Medical Process by Direction of eminent Physicians, to go into a Regimen, not a Cure to be expected, but merely as a Palliative; and for Seven Years

past, have forborn Wine, Flesh, and Fish - And at this Time, I and my Family are in Mourning for a good Sister; with whom neither I would have parted, could I have had my Choice. - From these affecting Dispensations, will you not allow me, Madam, to remind an unthinking World, immersed in Pleasures, what a Life this is of which they are so fond? And to endeavour to arm them against the most affecting Changes and Chances of it?

The Case therefore is not what we should like to bear, but what (such is the Common Lot), we must bear, like it or not. And if we can be prepared by remote Instances, to support ourselves under real Affliction, when it comes to our Turn to suffer such, is the Attempt an unworthy one? O that my own last Hour, and the last Hour of those I love may be such as that I have drawn for my amiable Girl! (SL, pp. 109-11).

It is unfortunate that this important passage has been so often ignored by Richardson's critics.

For Richardson, Clarissa existed - and this is not too strong a word - in order to evoke a certain type of response in the reader. Of course he did not expect every reader to be 'awakened and amended' by his work; writing the novel was something he should be able 'to answer ... to his own heart, be the success what it would'. But blatant misinterpretation of his project - indeed, trivialization - by those who had expected 'a mere Novel or Romance' could not be countenanced. Richardson felt constrained to do everything he could to guide each reader towards the correct interpretation of the story, which alone could bring about the possibility of its 'introducing a reformation so much wanted'. Each revision that he made in order to clarify his aims can therefore be viewed only as a furthering of his 'real intention'. There is a sense in which Clarissa was not so much completed, with the last of Richardson's revisions, as abandoned - in theory, the process of revision could have gone on forever.

A modern reader may well prefer the more subtle novel of 1747-8 to the later, more explicitly didactic

version; it must be recognized, however, that the first published text had already been much altered from the original drafts (which have disappeared) and does not in any way represent an initial, 'pure' intention. Richardson reveals much about the writing of Clarissa in this remark to Aaron Hill, from the letter we examined earlier in which he explains his intentions - a letter written over a year before the first edition began to be published:

Lovelace's Character I intend to be unamiable ... I once read to a young Lady Part of his Character, and then his End; and upon her pitying him, and wishing he had been rather made a Penitent, than to be killed, I made him still more and more odious, by his heighten'd Arrogance and Triumph, as well as by vile Actions, leaving only some Qualities in him, laudable enough to justify her [Clarissa's] first Liking (SL, p. 73f).

The first edition, as much as the third, was a product of those interactions with an audience so essential to Richardson's art. Indeed, given that even the first draft must have been written with thoughts of reforming the reader in mind, it would seem that there was no point during the creation of Clarissa at which the response or presumed response of the reader was absent from Richardson's imagination. From this it follows that his didacticism cannot be thought of as some suffocating blanket wrapped around an innocent and struggling text, the 'pure' product of the creative act. For Richardson, art and didacticism were inextricably meshed. In seeking the significance of his work, we must consider him as much as a didactic as a dramatic novelist.

RICHARDSON'S REPUTATION

Writing to Aaron Hill in 1748, shortly before publication of the final instalment of Clarissa, Richardson offered a perhaps beguiling explanation of his friend's lack of literary success:

Your writings require thought to read, and to take in their whole force; and the world has no thought to bestow. Simplicity is all their cry; yet hardly do these criers know what they mean by the noble word. They may see a thousand beauties obvious to the eye; but if there lie jewels in the mine that require labour to come at, they will not dig. I do not think, that were Milton's Paradise Lost to be now published as a new work, it would be well received. Shakespeare, with all his beauties, would, as a modern writer, be hissed off the stage. Your sentiments, even they will have it who allow them to be noble, are too munificently adorned: and they want you to descend to their level (SL, p. 98).

'They want you to descend to their level': despite the undoubted success of his own work, one suspects that Richardson was thinking as much about himself here as he was about Hill. We have seen that Richardson had much cause to be disturbed by the responses of many of his readers. But just as the 'anti-Pamelist' responses to Pamela should not be allowed to obscure the overwhelming popularity of that novel, so the alleged 'want of attention' of many readers, and Richardson's evident sensitivity to criticism, must be weighed against the approbation which also greeted his second novel on both ethical and literary grounds. Among 'Souls refin'd

from grosser Sense', as the actor David Garrick put it in a commendatory verse on the novel (McK, p. 161), Clarissa was eagerly received as a work of serious moral and religious import; the heroine was accepted as exemplary; and the author's literary powers were lauded in what might strike us as extravagant terms.

If Aaron Hill, like a later fictitious poet, was 'out of key with his time' as a writer - some would offer a more unflattering judgement - as a critic he was very much in tune with it when he wrote to Richardson this impassioned tribute to the tragic power of Clarissa:

You move, through every not to be describ'd Enchantment, of this amiably killing Progress, twenty thousand times more forcibly, than all the Tragedies, of all the Nations in the World; from Athens, down to Otway! ... Good God! - How did your hardly to be pardon'd Modesty find Power, so long, (so cruelly & continently long) to hold in, all the conscious Mastery, of such a Genius, as was never equal'd (SL, p. 13).

The poet and critic Thomas Edwards (1699-1757) wrote a similar encomium to his correspondent Daniel Wray. 'I never was so moved with anything in my life, and was obliged frequently to throw away the book to give vent to those passions which that great Master of the heart had raised,' Edwards attested; 'He seems to me, at lest [sic] next to Shakespear ...' While Clarissa may be 'overlooked or undervalued' by many, Edwards foresees, 'To me it will be a Touchstone, by which I shall judge who of my acquaintance have hearts and who have not' (McK, p. 163).

If Garrick, Hill and Edwards might seem to be somewhat partisan commentators on Clarissa, it is unlikely that this could be said of Henry Fielding. Fielding's letter to Richardson of 15 October 1748 has been described by Eaves and Kimpel as 'one of the warmest letters of praise ever written by one author to a rival' (EK, p. 294). As Fielding himself points out, he cannot

be suspected of flattery:

I know the Value of that too much to throw it away, where I have no Obligation, and where I expect no Reward. And sure the World will not suppose me inclined to flatter one whom they will suppose me to hate if the[y] will be pleased to recollect that we are Rivals for that coy Mrs. Fame.

Fielding had just read the fifth volume of Clarissa, and admits that there were scenes which forced him to 'melt into Compassion, and find what is called an Effeminate Relief for my Terror'. He was 'thunderstruck' by Lovelace's announcement of the rape (Cl., III.196), while Clarissa's next letter to Lovelace (III.210-13) was 'beyond any thing I have ever read. God forbid that the Man who reads this with dry Eyes should be alone with my Daughter when she hath no Assistance within Call' (EK, p. 295).

Unfortunately, Fielding's letter was to disappear from the files of Richardson's correspondence, and remained lost to scholars for many years.¹ But Fielding had also made public his praise of Clarissa, in the Jacobite's Journal of 2 January 1747-8:

Such Simplicity, such Manners, such deep Penetration into Nature; such Power to raise and alarm the Passions, few Writers, either ancient or modern, have been possessed of. ... Sure this Mr. Richardson is Master of all that Art which Horace compares to Witchcraft ...

'With what Indignation do I therefore hear the Criticisms made on this Performance,' Fielding continued, adding the axiom 'That a bad Heart cannot taste the Productions of a good one' (McK, pp. 167-8).

It is ironic, then, that in much literary comment of the eighteenth century - not least of all Richardson's own - Fielding himself should have been seen as the possessor of a very bad 'heart' indeed. To suggest that Fielding was entirely unappreciated by serious

readers in the eighteenth century would be quite wrong;² but the fact remains that he was regarded by many arbiters of taste as a coarse, vicious man whose novels merely reflected his dissolute life. To Johnson, he was a 'blockhead' (LJ, p. 480). It may have been the case that Tom Jones outstripped Clarissa in terms of popular success (McK, p. 171), but Anna Williams, a friend of Johnson's, expressed a sentiment widely held in her verses published in the Gentleman's Magazine of January 1754:

In distant times, when Jones and Booth are lost,
Britannia her Clarissa's name shall boast.³

Johnson would have agreed. Of all the remarks which Johnson himself made about Clarissa and its author, probably the most frequently quoted has been that 'if you were to read Richardson for the story, your impatience would be so much fretted that you would hang yourself'. That this is often quoted, or misquoted, in contexts of dispraise, itself tells us much about Richardson's later critical fortunes.⁴ Johnson - who was perhaps forgetting the extent to which Richardson's novels had indeed been read 'for the story' when they first appeared - in fact said this as part of a defence of the novels against the charge of tediousness, adding that 'you must read him for the sentiment, and consider the story as only giving occasion to the sentiment' (LJ, p. 480).

This was in 1772. In 1751, introducing an issue of The Rambler written by Richardson (No. 97), Johnson had described him as 'an author ... who has enlarged the knowledge of human nature, and taught the passions to move at the command of virtue'. After Johnson's death, the poetess Anna Seward (1747-1809) was to claim that 'the late Dr. Johnson, amidst his too frequent injustice to authors, and general parsimony of praise,

uniformly asserted [Clarissa] to be not only the first novel, but that perhaps it was the first work in the English language'.⁵ It is unfortunate that Johnson never expanded in print on the subject of Richardson - or of Fielding.

The first important critical essay on Clarissa was Remarks on Clarissa, an anonymous pamphlet of January 1749, now believed to have been written by the novelist Sarah Fielding (1710-68), younger sister of Henry.⁶ The pamphlet takes the form, appropriately enough, of a long letter to Richardson, the writer claiming as her object simply to acquaint him with all the objections to the novel she has heard, and the answers its admirers have given to those objections.

In the first conversation she heard on the subject, the writer reveals, 'the whole Book was unanimously condemned'; dismissing 'Such general Censurers' as 'very little worth attending to' (p. 4), she proceeds to the reactions of a less vehement group of critics, presenting three purportedly factual dialogues, each occurring after the publication of one of the instalments of Clarissa.

Not surprisingly, the first objection raised is to the seemingly needless protraction of the story. It is pointed out that length is necessary if we wish to be acquainted not only with an action, but with characters and their motives. When a 'Mr. Singleton' suggests that one might need many volumes to relate the history of Rome, but that knowing what went on at Harlowe Place is hardly of consequence enough to deserve such detail, 'the Lady of the House' informs him that she thinks

the penetrating into the Motives that actuate the Persons in a private Family, of much more general use to be known, than those concerning the Management of any Kingdom or

Empire whatsoever: The latter, Princes, Governors, and Politicians only can be the better for, whilst every Parent, every Child, every Sister, and every Brother, are concerned in the former, and may take example by such who are in the same Situation with themselves (p. 7).

This leads to a discussion of the novel's realism and psychological depth, as they would now be called, which a 'Miss Gibson' - the heroine of the Remarks - seeks to demonstrate in answers to objections to the 'Tameness and Folly' of Mrs. Harlowe, and to 'Mr. Harlowe's arbitrary Usage of such a Wife, as being very unnatural' (pp. 9-10). After brief discussion of Richardson's supposed liberties with the English language - defended by Miss Gibson on the grounds that he is, after all, writing familiar letters - we shift to 'The next Scene of Criticism ... on the Publication of the two succeeding Volumes'. 'The Objections now arose so fast,' we are told, that 'it was impossible to guess where they would end': Clarissa is censured as a prude, a 'Coquet', an undutiful daughter, a daughter 'too strict in her Principles of Obedience to such Parents', 'too fond of a Rake and a Libertine', or as possessed of a heart 'as impenitrable [sic] and unsusceptible of Affection, as the hardest Marble' (p. 13). Clearly she cannot be all of these things at once; a prude, for example, cannot be mistaken for a coquette, 'but a good Woman may be called either, or both, according to the Dispositions of her Censurers,' says Miss Gibson. Such objections have no weight, it is implied, with 'those who [have] attended enough to [Clarissa's] Character'; the mere fact 'that she is treated like an intimate Acquaintance by all her Readers', however, demonstrates the power of Richardson's characterization (pp. 13-14).

A new member of the company, 'Bellario', now faults Clarissa for 'wanting Affection for her Lover ... And as to her whining after her Papa and Mamma, who had

used her so cruelly, (added he) I think 'tis contemptible in her'. Miss Gibson contests this, suggesting that Clarissa can hardly be guilty of 'want of Love' if she is unable 'suddenly to tear from her Bosom' her affection for her parents, despite their treatment of her; as for her 'apparent Indifference to Lovelace', 'let her Situation and his manner of treating her be considered' (pp. 15-16).

A digression then occurs on the subject of 'Emma' - actually 'Henry and Emma' - the narrative poem by Matthew Prior. When 'Mr. Dellincourt' claims that 'nothing less than the lovely Emma's Passion for Henry would be any Satisfaction to him, if he was a Lover', Miss Gibson is moved to remark that Prior's poem should 'long ago' have been 'buried in Oblivion' (p. 19). The ever-constant Emma would have followed Henry anywhere, regardless of whether he were good or evil. Far from being a good example, she was a warning to her sex: 'The love that is not judicious, must be as uncertain as its capricious Foundation.' It is to Clarissa's great credit that she values virtue over passion alone (p. 22).

When 'strong Objection' is raised to Lovelace's delaying for so long to make any attempt on Clarissa's honour 'when she was under the same Roof with him, and so much in his Power', the nature of his character is pointed out - not only is it an article of the 'rake's creed' 'not to destroy their own Schemes by a too precipitate Pursuit', but it is the very fact of Clarissa's virtue which gives him pause. The company retires with Bellario remarking on the rumour that the novel is to have an unhappy ending: if this is the case, he feels, 'it must be a great Error, and destroy all the Pleasure a good-natur'd Reader might already have received' (pp. 23-4).

In December, with Clarissa's story concluded, the

company meet for the last time. A number of minor objections are raised and countered; when one lady laments 'that Miss Howe should be married to so insipid a Man ... as Mr. Hickman', for example, an older lady responds with disapprobation that 'Sobriety intitles a Man to the Character of Insipidity' (p. 25). Most importantly, however, Bellario now repents of his earlier doubts as to Clarissa's capacities for affection; Clarissa, he realizes, is 'LOVE ITSELF'. Her story is 'noble beyond Expression', 'as high a Tragedy as can possibly be wrote'; never again, Bellario vows, will he 'form any Judgment of a Work ... till the whole [is] lain before him' (pp. 30-1).

The Remarks concludes with an exchange of letters between Bellario and Miss Gibson, in which each offers a detailed critique of the novel. Bellario stresses its formal virtues, its realism, its solidity and strength of characterization, and the necessity of attentive reading. The sentimentalism of the novel is emphasized in his remarks on the empathy a reader must feel for the characters, and the tears he is compelled to shed; but the sentimentalism is firmly placed within its didactic framework. Perhaps most impressively, Bellario is made to recognize Richardson's technique of anticipating objections in advance, by having them raised by unworthy characters within the novel:

There is one Thing that has almost astonished me in the Criticisms I have heard on Clarissa's Character; namely, that they are in a Manner a Counterpart to the Reproaches cast on her in her Lifetime.

She has been called perverse and obstinate by many of her Readers; James Harlowe called her so before them. Some say she was romantic; so said Bella; disobedient; all the Harlowes agree in that; a Prude; so said Salley [sic] Martin; had a Mind incapable of Love; Mr. Lovelace's Accusation; for he must found his Brutality on some Shadow of a Pretence, tho' he confesses at last it was but a Shadow, for that he knew the contrary the whole Time. Others say, she was artful and cunning, had the Talent only to move the Passions; the

haughty Brother and spiteful Sister's Plea to banish her from her Parents Presence. I verily think I have not heard Clarissa condemned for any one Fault, but the Author has made some of the Harlowes, or some of Mrs. Sinclair's Family accuse her of it before (p. 41).

Miss Gibson's account emphasizes the baseness of Lovelace, the transcendent goodness of Clarissa, and the need for the tragic ending if 'the grand Moral would [not] have been lost' (p. 54). In Clarissa's character, Miss Gibson maintains, Richardson 'has thrown into Action ... the true Christian Philosophy, shewn its Force to ennoble the human Mind, till it can look with Serenity on all human Misfortunes, and take from Death itself its gloomy Horrors':

Surely the Tears we shed for Clarissa in her last Hours, must be Tears of tender Joy! Whilst we seem to live, and daily converse with her through her last Stage, our Hearts are at once rejoiced and amended, are both soften'd and elevated, till our Sensations grow too strong for any Vent, but that of Tears; nor am I ashamed to confess, that Tears without Number have I shed, whilst Mr. Belford by his Relation has kept me (as I may say) with fixed Attention in her Apartment, and made me perfectly present at her noble exalted Behaviour; nor can I hardly refrain from crying out, 'Farewell, my dear Clarissa! may every Friend I love in this World imitate you in their Lives, and thus joyfully quit all the Cares and Troubles that disturb this mortal Being!'

May Clarissa's Memory be as triumphant as was her Death! May all the World, like Lovelace, bear Testimony to her Virtues, and acknowledge her Triumph! (pp. 55-6).

The author of the pamphlet concludes by remarking that, 'if every thing that Miss Gibson and Bellarion has said, is fairly deducible from the Story, then I am certain, by the candid and good-natured Reader, this will be deemed a fair and impartial Examination, tho' I avow myself the sincere Admirer of Clarissa' (p. 56).

Needless to say, the 'Examination' is hardly 'impartial'. Whether it is 'fair' might be debated by some. Certainly Brian W. Downs, in 1928, had nothing

positive to say about this pamphlet, condemning it as a 'puerile debate', 'meagre' in its discussion of 'non-ethical matters'; 'a kind of Platonic symposium, in which the points criticized are so trifling and so easily controverted [that] one may suspect it of being part of the author's "publicity"'.⁷

As for the last point, we now know that Richardson claimed not to have seen this pamphlet before its publication,⁸ and we have no reason to doubt this. The other allegations seem generally unwarranted. While some of the issues discussed are indeed 'trifling', at least from a modern point of view, the Remarks on the whole is in fact a surprisingly sophisticated piece of work, impressive in its evocation of the impact of Clarissa on its early readers, the psychological realism of Richardson's characters, and the movement from the social to the religious that is so integral to his didactic scheme. 'Bellario', through his Belford-like conversion to Clarissa's party, enacts precisely the type of response that the novel was meant to compel from initially resistant readers such as himself. The Remarks as a whole enacts vividly the required movement of reader response from questioning, through argument, to affirmation.

Less entertaining than Remarks on Clarissa, but ultimately perhaps of more importance, are the later commentaries on the novel by a Mennonite clergyman, Johannes Stinstra (1708-90). In a series of Prefaces to the four instalments of his Dutch edition (1752-55), Stinstra discusses his reasons for translating Clarissa, the way in which the novel is to be read, and the benefits to be derived from it.⁹ To Stinstra, most novels are entirely without merit, at worst exciting 'lustful wishes and obscene desires', at best serving only as a diversion 'from useful and constructive activities' (p. 110).

Clarissa, however, is a novel of 'an entirely different sort' (p. 112), which Stinstra, believing that the most important activity for all of us is to advance in virtue and piety, has no hesitation to recommend:

Clarissa is excellently conducive to this great and essential use. Everything in it is designed to instill in us a love and desire for virtue, to give us a feeling of abhorrence and abomination for vice, although set in such advantageous circumstances, and to put the most powerful light on our various duties in the most important events in life (p. 143).

Like other 'moral writings', Clarissa demands 'an exact attention and regard concerning everything we meet in it' (p. 144). We must first trace accurately the contours of the plot, 'the thread of this history, the wrappings', perceiving the 'ties, incidents, or intentions' which hold the story together (p. 150). We must examine the various characters in the story, understanding the special nature of each so as to be aware of 'the value and the power of the sayings and opinions which appear to us in them, and not to misunderstand the purpose which the author meant by them' (p. 152). The 'serious sayings and moral lessons' must be taken as warnings and guides in the conduct of our own lives (p. 154). 'Finally,' says Stinstra,

we should trace and deliberate the aims of the author with all our attention: what he wants to represent and show regarding human behavior and way[s] of acting by his work in general and in its particular parts and what he wants to teach and point out to us in these revelations regarding our morals and actions. These moral aims of the writer must be clearly distinguished from the aims of the characters whom he introduces through speaking or writing (p. 155).

As Stinstra puts it, 'to comprehend fully the moral aim of the author' is to attend to 'the spiritual sense of the work' (p. 156). If the reader who attains to

this comprehension then compares the pictures of humanity to be found in Clarissa with people he meets in actual life, and improves in his ability to study and judge them (p. 159); if he applies its examples and warnings to his own conduct (p. 161); if he widens and enlarges his thinking on the moral teachings it contains, so as 'to cultivate fruitfully many other similar wholesome thoughts' (p. 164), he will have made good use of the novel. Stinstra recommends Clarissa especially for the perusal of youthful readers, who have the most need to be 'directed towards piety' (p. 128); he recognizes, however - as Richardson, it would seem, did not - that the novel can be morally efficacious only with those already predisposed to benefit from its teachings:

In order to be truly moved by it, readers must have a certain innate taste, as I call it, for virtue, or a quality of power of the imagination which makes them receptive, just as only a person with a musical ear or with an eye for painting can truly perceive all the beauties of voice and strings or beautiful scenes (p. 135f).

Indeed, as far as Stinstra is concerned, 'Those who are devoid of a love of virtue should not touch these relics with their unclean hands' (p. 143).

For those virtuous enough to read the novel but perhaps in doubt as to the desirability of its ending, however, Stinstra concludes his Prefaces with a sermon-like discourse on suffering and death, pointing out that our sublunary sufferings are often incommensurate with our sins, that 'this life', it must be recognized, 'is not immediately rewarding but is, instead, a trial and preparation for another life in which the pious will receive the real reward for their good works' (p. 199). 'May it please the merciful God,' he hopes,

that all the readers of this work, by the viewing of this beautiful picture in the cruelest of her disasters and

misfortunes, might be moved also to prepare themselves for death, according to their circumstances, and might be enabled to undergo that unavoidable fate with contented souls and well-founded hopes! (p. 205).

But where Stinstra is perhaps most impressive is in his discussion of the emotional impact of Clarissa as an agent to 'advance the exercise of virtue and piety' (p. 167). Much is made of Richardson's ability 'to stir and excite the passions' (p. 119) - that is, the emotions; Stinstra draws a firm line, however, between 'reason' and 'imagination' or 'the passions'. 'Reason,' he insists, 'is certainly the basis of all religion' (p. 168). Yet there can be little doubt that in most people 'the imagination has a greater power than the rational intellect' (p. 181). And the imagination is 'the true origin of human failings and sins' (p. 175): 'sin receives its primary power from our imagination, [which] exposes us particularly to temptations and seductions, fires the passions and with their help transports us, in spite of our reason' (p. 178f). The imagination, however, can 'promote virtue as well as vice' (p. 169). Because, therefore, 'our wills are not only ruled by our rational minds, but also [by] the imagination and passions' (p. 174), it is essential that we 'persuade our imagination and passions to the interest of virtue and piety' (p. 180), that we 'stir and inflame our passions in such a way that in their actions they will follow wherever our reason leads us' (p. 184):

We shall then cut off the artery of sin, so to speak, and safeguard ourselves in the strongest possible way against all temptations and seductions from outside, from the world, and from our own flesh, which otherwise come upon us so easily and through which our imagination often betrays us so wretchedly, notwithstanding the fact that our intellect still has such a clear apprehension of our duty (p. 180).

'[O]ur religion must not only reside in our heads but must also inspire our hearts,' Stinstra explains (p. 174); 'The godly revelation itself' works to stir the passions, as do 'the outward rites established in religion' (pp. 172-3). It is the imagination which makes us ardent in love of God and hatred of sin (p. 183). Clarissa, therefore, succeeds as a 'moral work' because it combines its appeal to reason - in its 'serious sayings and moral lessons'; in the evident 'moral aims of the writer' - with a vivid appeal to virtuous passions. Stinstra testifies:

I have never found in a book of devotions, no matter how well written with an understanding of piety, anything which made so great an impression on me as the actions and discourses of the languishing and dying Clarissa. And frankly I confess myself not only extremely delighted through attentive use of this book but also indeed edified - improved in wisdom and love of virtue - and encouraged to practice them steadfastly (p. 119).

It does not seem unreasonable to say that Stinstra, though his Prefaces are undeniably prolix, and hardly suited to modern taste, must rank among the best commentators that Richardson has ever had. Stinstra writes about Clarissa from within, as it were, delivering it to us in a manner revealing his entire understanding of the novel's terms of reference. As McKillop remarks, 'If this discussion had been written in a more accessible language, it would, in spite of its verbosity, have become a locus classicus of Richardson criticism.' I am at a loss to see what McKillop means, however, when he praises Stinstra's 'description of the transition from didacticism to psychology in Richardson's work' (McK, p. 265). Assuming Richardson's starting-point, novelistically speaking, to be always some didactic demonstration, we may well surmise that such a 'transition' occurs for him as he writes; but for a reader such as Stinstra, it is clear, what occurs in the process of

reading is rather a 'transition', so to speak, from psychology to didacticism. It is such a process that Stinstra seems to me to 'describe'; what he shows us, in effect, is just how Richardson 'taught the passions to move at the command of virtue'.

Richardson's influence on other writers has been much discussed;¹⁰ perhaps it would be best here merely to note that it was, in Walter Allen's words, 'so huge as to be incalculable'. Talk of 'influence', however, raises some special problems, the nature of which is evident if we consider Allen's account of that influence:

For the first generation of the novel no writer of fiction could escape him, even if, like Fielding and Smollett, he was writing consciously in reaction against him. When Johnson said that he 'had enlarged the knowledge of human nature', he was speaking simple truth. Richardson had altered men's awareness of themselves even without their knowing it. What he had introduced into fiction, and therefore into the modes of thinking and feeling of countless readers, were the analysis of emotion and motive, introspection in the widest sense, and ultimately the belief in the value of emotion and of feeling for their own sakes. When a felt emotion is valued simply because it is felt, then if we have not already reached sentimentality we shall find it waiting for us just round the corner.¹¹

Leaving aside the issue of whether Richardson invented introspection, or even a new form of it (as Allen would seem to imply), two things should be noted here. First, the prime concern of Richardson himself, we have seen, was to create not merely 'a new species of writing', but one which would 'promote the cause of religion and virtue'. Secondly, it was not at all Richardson's belief that emotion and feeling were to be valued 'for their own sakes'. His concern was rather that the passions, to borrow Johnson's words again, should 'move at the command of virtue', not simply that the passions should move. Whatever widespread influence

Richardson may have had, however, derived not, of course, from his evangelical zeal but from the manner in which he sought to communicate it - from his discovery of a method for 'the analysis of emotion and motive'; from his ability to evoke powerful emotional responses.

This is particularly evident if we consider Richardson's European influence. From a moral and religious standpoint, it might be said, some of the European Richardsonians were hardly Richardsonians at all. Certainly we are not surprised by the anecdote from John Nichols, that when Richardson read Rousseau he 'was so much disgusted at some of the scenes, and the whole tendency of the "New Eloisa," that he secretly criticised the work (as he read it) in marginal notes; and thought, with many others, that this writer "taught the passions to move at the command of Vice"'.¹²

Yet it is in Europe that Richardson's influence is most important. Scholars have charted its course through Goethe and Diderot as well as Rousseau, not to mention Laclos and de Sade. In considering the critical fortunes of Richardson, it is to Diderot that we must now turn. Just as Clarissa achieved her apotheosis in death, so the demise of Samuel Richardson in 1761 occasioned his deification in the ultimate critical tribute, Diderot's astonishing Éloge de Richardson.¹³

'Richardson is no more. What a loss to literature and to humanity,' Diderot writes. 'I felt his death as if he had been my brother. I cherished him in my heart though I had never seen him, and only knew him in his works' (p. 283). Rating Richardson with Moses, Homer, Euripides and Sophocles (p. 272f), Diderot praises the novelist's powers of realistic characterization, defends the massive length of his works, and testifies to their efficacy in inspiring sympathy with the wretched, pity for the wicked, and love of virtue.

This is much the same as what Stinstra and others

had said, of course, but Diderot's praise is of particular interest considering his own atheism - apparently he excused Clarissa's belief in God on the grounds of her youth.¹⁴ In Diderot, we witness the first (and greatest) effusion of humanist praise for Richardson. Richardson's understanding of human nature is profound, Diderot maintains: 'He seems to enter a dark cavern with a flaming torch, which lights up the gloomy depths.' His influence for good operates regardless of one's belief in eternal reward or punishment:

If it is important that men should be impressed with the fact that, without regard to any future state, the best way to be happy is to be virtuous, what a great service Richardson has done to mankind! He has not proved this truth, but he has made us feel it. In every line he writes he makes us choose by preference the side of oppressed virtue rather than that of triumphant vice (pp. 270-1).

As I shall later suggest, such secularizing of Richardson's works has perhaps had unfortunate consequences - as has the often attendant emphasis, to the exclusion of almost all else, on realism and sentimentalism. But these consequences are hardly evident in Diderot's eulogy. Though the number of readers who truly appreciate Richardson will always be small, Diderot suspects (p. 279), he urges us not only to read Richardson, but to read him constantly. Indeed, as far as Diderot is concerned, 'The more one reads him the more one wishes to go on reading him.... Beware of opening these fascinating books when you have some important duties to fulfil' (pp. 270, 272). The model Richardson follows is 'the human heart, which has been, and always will be, the same' (p. 281); and 'The nobler the mind, the more refined and the purer the taste; the more one knows human nature, and the greater the love of truth, the more one will appreciate the works of Richardson' (p. 273). Clearly Diderot possesses these virtues to excess.

Like Thomas Edwards, Diderot discovers the possibility of judging others according to their reactions to Richardson's novels: 'Since I have known them I use them as a touchstone, and when they are not appreciated I know in what esteem to hold such persons' (p. 283). At the climax of the eulogy, Diderot abases himself before Richardson in homage:

I have ... knelt at the feet of your statue to worship you, and I have sought in vain in the depths of my heart for words which might express the admiration I feel for you. And you who read these lines which I have written down hastily and without order and without plan, just as my heart inspired me, if you can express your admiration better than I have, efface my writing. The genius of Richardson has crushed my own; his characters people my imagination. If I wish to write I hear Clementina lamenting, or the ghost of Clarissa appears to me. I see Grandison before me, or Lovelace disturbs me; and then the pen slips from my fingers. And you gentler apparitions, Emily, Charlotte, Pamela, and dear Miss Howe, while I converse with you the days when I might work and gain my laurels glide away, and I approach the close of my life without having attempted anything which will bring me also some fame in years to come (pp. 290-1).

At about this time, Diderot would in fact have been working on the Encyclopédie, La Religieuse, and perhaps Le Neveu de Rameau as well. But the eulogy contains a further and deeper irony. Diderot writes:

Oh, Richardson, if you did not during your life earn all the praise that you deserved how great will be your fame among my descendants when they see you at the distance that that we see Homer. Who will then dare to erase a line of your sublime work? [a reference to Prévost's abridged translation of Clarissa] ... Centuries hasten onward and bring with you the honours that Richardson deserves (p. 290).

Several thousand years may yet have to pass until Richardson can be seen 'at the distance that we see Homer'. Whether Diderot would have been pleased by

the progress of Richardson's reputation to date, however, is doubtful.

Of course Richardson has received many further 'honours' in the centuries since he and Diderot lived. In England alone, major writers such as Jane Austen, George Eliot, Tennyson, Ruskin, Robert Louis Stevenson and Ford Madox Ford have admired Richardson intensely. The French poet Alfred de Musset considered Clarissa to be 'le premier Roman du Monde'. More recently, the novelist Angus Wilson has declared that he 'greatly love[s] and admire[s] Clarissa, almost more than any other novel'.¹⁵

One could add to this roll-call of creative writers who have appreciated Richardson's excellence. Yet, from a broader perspective, Richardson has for a long time been the great unread author of English literature. When Diderot said that only a small number of readers would ever truly appreciate Richardson, he presumably did not expect the numbers to be quite so small as they have been.

It may be that this situation is changing, as the recent appearance of the Penguin edition of Clarissa might suggest. Among academic critics, it is true, interest in Richardson has revived considerably in recent years. Few would now assent to the confident assertion of Q. D. Leavis, writing in the nineteen-thirties, that 'Richardson's interest for the reader of Dostoievsky and Henry James is almost entirely historical'. Still, the later pronouncement of F. R. Leavis, 'it's no use pretending that Richardson can ever be made a current classic again', has yet to be disproved.¹⁶

Angus Ross, introducing the Penguin Clarissa, takes issue with this remark, insisting that Clarissa has always been a classic.¹⁷ Obviously this is true in that it has always been regarded as an important novel,

by those competent to judge. One needs to distinguish, however, between what Leavis calls 'current classics', and what one might term 'historical classics' - for want of a better name. What I take Leavis to mean by 'current classics' are those authors and works with which any educated person is likely to be, or should be, familiar: Shakespeare; Milton; all of the writers in Leavis's 'great tradition'. 'Historical classics', on the other hand, though often of much more than merely 'historical' interest, nowadays - for reasons as various as length, difficulty, subject-matter or style - have little appeal even to the well-educated 'general reader': Lyly, Sidney, Edward Young, and all Old and Middle English works suggest themselves as obvious examples. For many years past, it is in this category that Clarissa has been found.

Of course one must qualify such a view, as the American critic J. Donald Adams had to do in 1948. Adams, in his New York Times Book Review column, was arguing the case - such as it is - for abridgement of the classics, when he was moved to remark:

If there is a living person, aside from a few professors of English literature specializing in the eighteenth century, who has read through the eight volumes of Richardson's "Clarissa," I should like to know his name.

But if Adams thought that no such 'living person' existed, two weeks later he was repentant after receiving 'no less than seven triumphant yelps' from readers of Clarissa, none of whom was, or had been, a teacher of literature. The following fortnight brought this further report:

The members of the Clarissa Club are now numbered at fourteen. An award of some kind should go to Miss Shirley Jackson of North Bennington, Vt., who writes: "I have read all through "Pamela," "Clarissa," and "Sir Charles Grandison" three times each, for pleasure, and hope to have a chance to read them a fourth time before I am 30."¹⁸

Evidently, ardent Richardsonians can always be found.¹⁹ For the most part, however, it is clear that the comment of an early Richardsonian, on the Arcadia, could now also be applied to Clarissa - with the alteration, perhaps, of the initial clause: 'It is a book that all have heard of, that some few possess, but that nobody reads' (Corr., I.xviii).

When, exactly, did this situation come about?

Thackeray, in his Roundabout Papers (1863), passes on a splendid story which he claims was told to him by Macaulay:

I spoke to [Macaulay] once about Clarissa. 'Not read Clarissa!' he cried out. 'If you have once thoroughly entered on Clarissa, and are infected by it, you can't leave it. When I was in India, I passed one hot season at the hills, and there were the governor-general, and the secretary of government, and the commander-in-chief, and their wives. I had Clarissa with me: and, as soon as they began to read, the whole station was in a passion of excitement about Miss Harlowe and her misfortunes, and her scoundrelly Lovelace! The governor's wife seized the book, and the secretary waited for it, and the chief justice could not read it for tears!'²⁰

If Macaulay's point in telling this story was to praise Richardson, Thackeray's in repeating it was rather perhaps to point bemusedly at what he knew his readers would regard as somewhat bizarre behaviour. The incident must have taken place, if indeed it did, in the eighteenth-thirties, near the beginning of Queen Victoria's long reign (Macaulay was in India from 1834 to 1838). As W. A. Trotter remarks in a recent article, 'Clarissa, we may suppose, would have appealed to Victorians.' Yet, as Trotter goes on to observe, this in general was not the case.²¹

'Richardson's appeal to the avenger Time has been heard and dismissed,' opined the Quarterly Review of December 1855; 'few now wipe away the dust which has

gathered upon his voluminous stories.'²² In 1876 we find George Eliot lamenting that 'We have fallen on an evil generation who would not read "Clarissa" even in an abridged form' - a comment used, not apparently as an historical curiosity, as epigraph to an essay on the novel published a century later.²³ In 1883, a few years after George Eliot's death, H. D. Traill in the Contemporary Review invites his reader to 'survey [on] the shelves of any well-found library ... the serried line of Samuel Richardson's works':

Not a soldier in that regiment is missing, or for years past has been missing from morning parade, though a century or more ago there would have been deserters to be found in half the rooms in the house - above stairs, and even surreptitiously perhaps below. No one in the lifetime of the oldest inmate has imitated Pamela's wicked master by disturbing her repose. Sir Charles Grandison is no more called upon to display his courtly graces in any new ceremonies of introduction. There is dust on the edges of "Clarissa Harlowe," instead of tears upon her page.²⁴

Now it is inevitable that almost no author, no matter how popular he may once have been, will indefinitely retain the same level of celebrity. There are many authors, indeed, who hardly deserve to do so: one is not surprised that Henry Mackenzie, for example, whose immortality was once predicted, should have fallen swiftly into oblivion.²⁵ But if one thinks only of writers of incontestable merit, it seems extraordinary that an author such as Richardson - as famous, in his day, as Scott and Dickens in theirs - should have fallen into a state of almost complete neglect a century later.

In attempting to explain this state of affairs, it must first be acknowledged that most of the major eighteenth-century novelists were surprisingly unpopular at this time. Given current attitudes to the Victorian period, it may be that people in every century feel a certain smug superiority over those in the one

immediately before - although (again, given current attitudes to the Victorian period) this need not entail a denigration of its literary achievements. In the Victorian period, there is a feeling of condescension and mild disgust towards the eighteenth century evident even in the work of a serious scholar such as Leslie Stephen - as we shall see. A (justly) less celebrated scholar of the time, William Forsyth, displays such an attitude in a more exaggerated form in his Novels and Novelists of the Eighteenth Century (1871). In his Preface, Forsyth notes that while he is writing not a work of literary history or criticism but an exploration, through its fiction, of the 'manners and morals of the age', he has nevertheless

introduced sketches of the plots and characters of some of the most interesting and once widely popular novels, which for various reasons remain practically unknown to the great mass of readers of the present day, and especially to the female part of them. To do this and give anything like a just idea of the originals, without offending against decorum, is no easy task, nor do I at all flatter myself that I have succeeded. But the very difficulty is in itself a proof of the difference, in one important respect, between the taste and manners of the last and the taste and manners of the present century. In these, I think, it cannot be denied that there has been a great improvement ... 26

Given his very 'Victorian' values, one is hardly surprised to find Forsyth censuring Fielding and Defoe for a lamentable 'insensibility to what is indecent and immodest' (p. 266). But the authors of Tom Jones and Roxana - whose compensating literary powers are generously conceded - are let off lightly compared with the author of Clarissa. To the Scottish scholar Hugh Blair, in his Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres of 1783 - an important work in its time - Richardson had been, clearly, 'The most moral of all our Novel Writers'.²⁷ Such a view would have scandalized Forsyth. Clarissa is 'an unpleasant, not to say odious, book':

I read it through once, many years ago, and I should be sorry to do so again. As to the plot of the story, there is really almost none.... The key-note of the whole composition is libertine pursuit, and we are wearied and disgusted by volume after volume devoted to the single subject of attack on a woman's chastity. It would be bad enough to read this if compressed into a few chapters, but it becomes intolerably repulsive when spun out in myriads of letters. If any book deserved the charge of "sickly sentimentality," it is this, and that it should have once been so widely popular, and thought admirably adapted to instruct young women in lessons of virtue and religion, shows a strange and perverted state of the public taste, not to say public morals.... It is nauseous to find religion ... mixed up with such a story ... What has been said of 'Clarissa' applies almost equally to 'Pamela' ... (pp. 215-18).

And so on. One can only hope that Forsyth never read Fanny Hill.

Lest we think Forsyth a solitary eccentric, a greater figure is on hand to testify that such attitudes to Richardson's work were by no means uncommon in the Victorian era. This is Thackeray, in The Virginians (1858-9), concluding the scene in which Henry Esmond meets - or at least sees - 'the great Richardson' and 'Mr. Johnson' (Ch. XXVI). Dr. Gilbert has just declared Richardson to be 'the supporter of virtue, the preacher of sound morals, the mainstay of religion':

Do not let any young lady trip to her grandpapa's book-case in consequence of this eulogium, and rashly take down Clarissa from the shelf. She would not care to read the volumes, over which her pretty ancestresses wept and thrilled a hundred years ago; which were commended by divines from pulpits, and belauded all Europe over. I wonder, are our women more virtuous than their grandmothers, or only more squeamish? ... Oh, my faithful, good old Samuel Richardson! Hath the news yet reached thee in Hades, that thy sublime novels are huddled away in corners, and that our daughters may no more read Clarissa than Tom Jones?

It is clear, then, that the vagaries of Victorian morality played a significant - and certainly an ironic - part in ensuring Richardson's nineteenth-century

neglect. Still, this tells us nothing about why that neglect should to a large extent have continued into our own time, as that of Fielding, for example, has not. And while Richardson's fame may have reached its nadir in the Victorian period, its decline was noted by Byron (with accompanying facetious remarks) in 1821;²⁸ evidence indicates, indeed, that it began as early as the seventeen-eighties - only two decades after Richardson's death; three since the appearance of his major novels.²⁹

Why did this happen? It would seem reasonable to say that the mid-eighteenth century, the period in which Richardson wrote, was among the most fertile in the history of the English novel (and arguably the most important, at least historically). But it has often been remarked that the novel went through a 'barren period' in the later decades of the eighteenth century.³⁰ Of course the period of Evelina (1778) and Caleb Williams (1794) and Castle Rackrent (1800) was by no means entirely 'barren'; nevertheless, after the astonishing achievements of Richardson, Fielding, Smollett and Sterne, all of whom were dead by 1771, no indisputably major new novelists were to appear until the arrival of Jane Austen and Scott in the second decade of the next century. The major novelists of the eighteenth century, however, had created a demand for fiction which continued unabated, and grew, throughout this 'barren period'. As Q. D. Leavis observed, the later eighteenth century saw an enormous expansion in the readership of novels, and subsequently in the number of novels produced. The new institution of the circulating library was on hand to supply, and fuel, the demand:

Now so long as there were good novels to provide the circulating library was an excellent institution, and, fortunately, for many years there were four serious novelists at work who kept the standard of fiction at a very high level.... [But] when Smollett died and there was no writer of any considerable ability to succeed him, the insatiable demand for fiction - now the publisher's mainstay - had to

be satisfied by the second-rate. Hacks were employed to provide the circulating library, which now became a symbol for worthless fiction, with constant supplies of fresh novels.... The change that the circulating library made in the reading habits of the semi-educated, but particularly of women, the chief novel-readers, had far-reaching effects. A comparison of bestsellers of the 1770-95 period with those of the previous twenty years will reveal a narrowing-down process: Sterne is replaced by Henry Mackenzie and his imitators, Richardson by writers like Mrs Sheridan, Henry Brooke and Richard Cumberland, Fielding and Smollett by Mrs Radcliffe, Mrs Inchbald, Charlotte Smith (and eventually Scott). That is to say, whereas the response of the reader of the fifties had been a complex one, it now became a simple response to the extremely unskilful and clumsy call for tears, pity, shudders, and so forth.... The readiness to read a good novel had become a craving for fiction of any kind, and a habit of reading poor novels not only destroys the ability to distinguish between literature and trash, it creates a positive taste for a certain kind of writing, if only because it does not demand the effort of a fresh response, as the uneducated ear listens with pleasure only to a tune it is familiar with.³¹

The argument that 'the response of the reader of the fifties had been a complex one' is of course dubious when offered, as it is here, as an across-the-board generalization. One might think that many of the readers who pleaded with Richardson for a 'happy ending' to Clarissa, for example, were hardly showing evidence of a 'complex' response to the novel. But it is of more interest for our purposes that a large number of unsophisticated readers should have read the novel at all. When one considers the popular writers of the later eighteenth century named here, it is evident that a 'narrowing-down process' had indeed taken place. It should also be noted that in the late eighteenth century the novel for the most part assumed essentially modern characteristics in terms of scope, length, and narrative pace. Thus we may surmise that, while Richardson's success had a major influence on the subsequent development of popular fiction, the subsequent development of popular fiction contributed

substantially to the decline of Richardson's own popular appeal. That is to say, we may assume that many readers who would once have read Richardson's novels, and read them essentially as popular fiction, would later have found their needs supplied more efficiently, as it were, by some of his less accomplished successors. Later popular novelists - I include in this category writers of genius who also happened to be popular - were to be considerably easier to read, more 'accessible' to the 'general reader', than Richardson had been in his two major novels. Brought up on less demanding fiction than his, many later readers would not have found the prospect of reading Clarissa inviting. Then, when various changes in society and thought had come to make Richardson seem not only difficult or tedious but morally and aesthetically distasteful, there would have been even less reason to disturb the dusty volumes.

The decline of Richardson's fame did not go unnoted by his admirers:

The censure which the Shakespeare of novelists has incurred for the tedious procrastination and the minute details of his fable; his slow unfolding characters, and the slightest gestures of his personages, is extremely unjust; for is it not evident that we could not have his peculiar excellences without these attendant defects?

This is Isaac D'Israeli, writing towards the end of the eighteenth century.³² If it is in this period that Richardson's popular reputation begins to wane, it is in this period also that the critical tide begins to turn against the 'Shakespeare of novelists'.

Of course, high critical estimates of Richardson are to be found for long afterwards, and indeed may always be found. John Dunlop, in his History of Fiction of 1814, which was to remain a standard work until well into the mid-nineteenth century, placed Richardson

'unquestionably' at the forefront of 'serious' novelists.³³ Another once-standard work, David Masson's British Novelists and their Styles (1859), also highly commended Richardson's work, as did Chambers's Cyclopaedia of English Literature, first issued in 1843. Yet Richardson's place in general esteem, as the nineteenth century proceeded, may be seen in an editorial note to the Literary Remains of Thomas Sanderson (1829): 'Some persons will smile at the praise bestowed upon Richardson.' 'The enthusiastic homage rendered to Richardson, if we do not use all historical aids ... is altogether incomprehensible,' wrote J. C. Jeaffreson in his Novels and Novelists (1858).³⁴ The Quarterly Review of 1855, in suggesting that there were few at that time who would 'wipe away the dust' from Richardson's novels, had gone on to claim that the few who did would probably be 'repelled by the tedious trivialities and mawkish prosings' they found therein, and 'prematurely close the book'.³⁵

Such attitudes were to persist for many years. In the nineteen-twenties, a contributor to a later work of literary history had no hesitation in dismissing Richardson 'from the modern point of view' as a 'tiresome mawkish sentimentalist'.³⁶

It is easy enough to say that all this happened because of 'changing taste'. To say why 'taste' changed as it did is a rather more complex task. Needless to say, the decline of Richardson's critical reputation and the decline of his popular fame are not to be thought of as entirely separate phenomena; in discussions of the former, the factors leading to the latter must be borne in mind. Nevertheless, given that the esteem in which an author is held by critics, scholars and literary historians is seldom dependent on the views of the 'general reader', it is clear that there are additional causes to consider.

Richardson's standing at the end of the eighteenth century is indicated in this passage from Sir John Hawkins; of particular interest is the suggestion that Richardson's purchase on the Shakespearean heights had never seemed truly secure:

The character of Richardson as a writer is to this day undecided, otherwise than by the avidity with which his publications are by some readers perused, and the sale of numerous editions. He has been celebrated as a writer similar in genius to Shakespeare, as being acquainted with the inmost recesses of the human heart, and having an absolute command of the passions, so as to be able to affect his readers as himself is affected, and to interest them in the successes and disappointments, the joys and sorrows of his characters. Others there are who think that neither his Pamela, his Clarissa, nor his Sir Charles Grandison are to be numbered among the books of rational and instructive amusement, that they are not just representations of human manners, that in them the turpitude of vice is not strongly enough marked, and that the allurements to it are represented in the gayest colours; that the texture of all his writings is flimsy and thin, and his style mean and feeble; that they have a general tendency to inflame the passions of young people, and to teach them that which they need not to be taught; and that though they pretend to a moral, it often turns out to be a bad one. The cant terms of him and his admirers are sentiment and sentimentality.³⁷

It is not difficult to guess where Hawkins himself stands on the issue; indeed, he presents the case against Richardson in a particularly exaggerated form. If few eminent critics in the nineteenth century were to endorse such a position entirely, nevertheless many were to move towards it. Before examining the opinions of some hostile critics, however, it is necessary to consider the way in which Richardson's works were presented by an ardent admirer at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

From a Richardsonian point of view, the most important event of that century was the publication in 1804 of The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson, in six volumes, edited by Anna Laetitia Barbauld. Mrs.

Barbauld (1743-1825), sister of essayist and biographer John Aikin and wife of a dissenting minister, had achieved celebrity in her time as a poetess, children's writer, and critic.³⁸ As a disciple of Johnson as well as a devotee of Richardson, clearly she was well-suited to her editorial task.

Mrs. Barbauld prefaced her edition of the Correspondence with a long essay on Richardson's life and writings. This was not only the first but the only full-length study of his works to appear before 1900, when the book by Clara Thomson was published, and was to remain, as W. A. Trotter remarks, 'the standard criticism for many decades'.³⁹

Even today, there is much of interest and value in Mrs. Barbauld's work. Her account of the construction of Clarissa, of its magnificence in its 'simplicity and grandeur', remains evocative (Corr., I.lxxxii-iv). Her essay abounds with aphorisms: for example, 'the minuteness of De Foe was more employed about things, and that of Richardson about persons and sentiments' (p. xx); the epistolary form 'is the most natural and the least probable way of telling a story' (p. xxvii). Although Mrs. Barbauld is wrong in asserting that Richardson invented the epistolary form (p. xi) - an error made also by Stinstra, but more surprising in a student of the novel - her discussion of what was new in his new species of writing remains admirable and just. Particularly commendable is her understanding of the blend of the real and the ideal so notable in his work. With the decline of the romance, she explains, which 'referred to an ideal world', fiction turned towards a 'closer imitation of nature' (p. xiv), notably in the picaresque novels of authors such as Le Sage (p. xvi). However,

There was still wanting a mode of writing which should connect the high passion, and delicacy of sentiment of the old romance,

with characters moving in the same sphere of life with ourselves, and brought into action by incidents of daily occurrence.... Richardson was the man who was to introduce a new kind of moral painting; he drew equally from nature and from his own ideas. From the world about him he took the incidents, manners, and general character, of the times in which he lived, and from his own beautiful ideas he copied that sublime of virtue which charms us in his *Clarissa*, and that sublime of passion which interests us in his *Clementina*. ... [In Richardson's novels,] we are not called on to wonder at improbable events, but to be moved by natural passions, and impressed by salutary maxims. The pathos of the story, and the dignity of the sentiments, interest and charm us; simplicity is warned, vice rebuked, and, from our perusal of a novel, we rise better prepared to meet the ills of life with firmness, and to perform our respective parts on the great theatre of life (pp. xvii, xx-xxii).

When Mrs. Barbauld goes on from here to quote Johnson on Richardson's having 'taught the passions to move at the command of virtue' (p. xxii), we may imagine her to have been squarely in line with her eighteenth-century forebears. This was not in fact the case. A shift to a more modern view of Richardson is apparent in many parts of her essay; ardent though Mrs. Barbauld certainly was in her appreciation of his 'true genius', nevertheless it may be said that her critique contributed to subsequent misreadings of his work, and ultimately to the decline of his reputation. This is not to say that we should locate in Mrs. Barbauld, in particular, the 'source' of later critical 'errors'. My concern is rather to take Mrs. Barbauld as representative, and to indicate the extent to which adequate methods of reading Richardson appear to have been lost, even among essentially sympathetic readers, in the passage from the mid-eighteenth to the early nineteenth century.

Her remarks on *Pamela*, for example, are of a piece with the largely negative view of the novel which, taking its cue from eighteenth-century anti-Pamelism, becomes standard in the nineteenth century. When we read of the 'guarded prudence' of Richardson's first

heroine, who 'has an end in view'; when we see Pamela described as 'the conscious possessor of a treasure, which she is wisely resolved not to part with but for its just price', we could be reading almost any account of the novel written in the next hundred and fifty years (pp. lxiii-iv). And while Mrs. Barbauld makes out a marginally better case for Sir Charles Grandison than many later critics have done, she anticipates at least the standard objection - 'Perfection of character, joined to distress, will interest; but prosperous perfection does not greatly engage our sympathy' (p. cxxix) - before breaking off with the apology that 'it is ungrateful to dwell on the faults of genius' (p. cxxxiii) - a comment which few literary critics seem likely to take to heart.

As we might expect, Mrs. Barbauld's more rapturous remarks are reserved for Clarissa, 'The production upon which the fame of Richardson is principally founded' (p. lxxx). The novel is 'a noble temple to female virtue' (p. lxxxii), its heroine accepted unequivocally as the exemplar Richardson intended her to be. Clearly Mrs. Barbauld feels the novel, and the heroine's fate, to have an overwhelming impact upon the reader:

As the work advances, the character rises; the distress is deepened; our hearts are torn with pity and indignation; bursts of grief succeed one another, till at last the mind is composed and harmonized with emotions of milder sorrow; we are calmed into resignation, elevated with pious hope, and dismissed glowing with the conscious triumphs of virtue (p. lxxxiv).

Mrs. Barbauld is at one with her critical forebears in her stress on the affective aspects of Clarissa. It is when she attempts to deal with the moral imperatives behind the novel, however, that she reveals an apparent unawareness of its deeper operations. 'That Clarissa is a highly moral work, has always been allowed; but

what is the moral?' she asks.

Is it that a young lady who places her affections upon a libertine, will be deceived and ruined [?] Though the author, no doubt, intended this as one of the conclusions to be drawn, such a maxim has not dignity or force enough in it, to be the chief moral of this interesting tale. And ... Clarissa can hardly stand as an example of such a choice, as she never fairly made the choice.... Is she, then, exhibited as a rare pattern of chastity? Surely this is an idea very degrading to the sex.... surely, the virtue of Clarissa could never have been in the smallest danger.... It is absurd, therefore, in Lovelace to speak of trying her chastity; and the author is not free from blame in favouring the idea that such resistance had any thing in it uncommon, or peculiarly meritorious. But the real moral of Clarissa is, that virtue is triumphant in every situation; that in circumstances the most painful and degrading, in a prison, in a brothel, in grief, in distraction, in despair, it is still lovely, still commanding, still the object of our veneration, of our fondest affections; that if it is seated on the ground it can still say with Constance,

"Here is my throne, kings come and bow to it!"
(pp. xcix-cii).

'Virtue is triumphant in every situation': what does this mean? Eaves and Kimpel gloss this phrase, with some difficulty, by referring to 'figures in fiction who rise above the most miserable circumstances to assert human dignity and worth' (EK, p. 278). This is a solidly humanist interpretation, which surely evades the crucial word, 'virtue'. Mrs. Barbauld, needless to say, would have thought of 'virtue' in Christian terms; however, her understanding of the religious dimension of Clarissa is limited - 'Sentiments of piety pervade the whole work' (p. xcvi) - and her conclusion as to its 'moral' is, in effect, a significant step towards the secularization of Richardson's 'Religious Novel'.

Clarissa's virtue, it is true, is in a sense 'triumphant in every situation' so long as it remains the object of 'our veneration' as we read. But it should surely be noted that within the novel the heroine is

not always triumphant; indeed, she is triumphant only in her death. Of Clarissa as a novel concerned to 'investigate the great doctrines of Christianity' through examination of the operations of faith in the face of suffering, Mrs. Barbauld has nothing to say. Moreover, in her search for a single, simple, and detachable 'moral' for the story, she appears not adequately to appreciate the nature of Richardson's didacticism, with its complex interaction of sublunary and transcendental concerns. But this should not surprise us: Mrs. Barbauld's emphasis on Richardson's sentimentalism, it is clear, is an over-emphasis, accompanied with a corresponding devaluation of his explicit didacticism. Thus she writes, for example, that Richardson 'always valued himself upon the morality of his pieces, much more than upon his invention, and had partly persuaded himself, and partly been flattered by others, into the idea, that he was the great reformer of the age' (pp. cxxxiv-v).

Of course Richardson was not 'the great reformer of the age', but the best of his eighteenth-century critics would not so swiftly have dismissed his interest in 'the morality of his pieces'. Mrs. Barbauld, to be sure, agrees that Richardson was an 'excellent moral writer'; indeed, there are probably no other novels 'in which virtue and piety are so strongly and uniformly recommended' as his (pp. cxxxv, clxv). But this moral effect functioned 'because his pathetic powers interested the feelings in the cause of virtue' (p. cxxxv); to Mrs. Barbauld, 'it is immaterial what particular maxim is selected under the name of a moral, while such are the reader's feelings' (p. cii).

All of this is not untrue, but Mrs. Barbauld then goes on to say that 'If our feelings are in favour of virtue, the novel is virtuous; if of vice, the novel is vicious' (ibid.). This, in itself, is a rather useful comment which could stand as an epigraph to an anthology

of much subsequent criticism; in the context of Mrs. Barbauld's essay, however, it again reveals the inadequacy of her reading of Richardson as a 'moral writer'. Richardson argues the case for virtue as much as he simply presents it and invites us to weep over its trials. While the purely emotional involvement of the reader is of great significance in his didactic scheme, as Stinstra makes clear, Richardson sought also to 'awaken and amend' through an involving dramatization of moral choices. In Mrs. Barbauld's account, his activity as a moral and religious writer is seen as a matter of simple preaching (the provision of helpful maxims) on the one hand, and the intense manipulation of feeling on the other. It is not surprising, then, that the impact of his works should be for her an essentially emotional one; as W. A. Trotter suggests, a process of catharsis alone. Such a process, Trotter argues, 'has no place for an intellectual engagement in the moral cruxes and dilemmas; the conscious element in the reader's response is under-valued'. As Trotter goes on to say, however, Mrs. Barbauld, in 'subordinating the rational faculty to the emotional ... is of course entirely of her moment'.⁴⁰

The 'moment' to which Trotter refers is, obviously, that of Romanticism. It is no exaggeration to say that, as with so much else, the influence of the Romantic period was crucial in determining the course of Richardson's reputation. If it seems fanciful to see Mrs. Barbauld as a Romantic figure ('Damn them!' Lamb once wrote to Coleridge, ' - I mean the cursed Barbauld Crew, those Blights and Blasts of all that is Human in man and child'),⁴¹ Trotter is right, nevertheless, to suggest that she stands at the gateway to that period in terms of her response to Richardson.

Certainly the ways in which Richardson was regarded

by some of the major English Romantic poets and essayists would hardly have been congenial to Mrs. Barbauld. We must remember, however, that they appear to have shared, and in some cases may even have derived from her, a simplified and inadequate conception of the nature of his work. To Trotter, salient characteristics of Romantic criticism of Clarissa include 'the demythologising of the novel', and the widespread if debatable notion that morality and emotion are necessarily opposed - tendencies that Mrs. Barbauld 'anticipated in spite of herself'.⁴² By the early nineteenth century, appreciation of Richardson as a didactic writer appears largely to have vanished; the writer who 'taught the passions to move at the command of virtue' has become for most readers, it seems, simply a writer who made the passions move (and threw in a few moral tags for good - or bad - measure). To the Romantics, it often seemed that Richardson's own passions had moved at commands other than those of virtue.

Of course one should not speak of 'the Romantics' as united in a single opinion of Richardson, or indeed of anything else. 'Richardson has won my heart,' wrote Blake to William Hayley.⁴³ Wordsworth's attitude to Richardson is unknown, unless anything can be inferred from the reference to 'the distressful parts of Clarissa Harlowe' in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads.⁴⁴ Hazlitt's was essentially admiring, with some equivocal elements - I shall have cause to discuss it later. Of significance here are the remarks of Lamb, Southey, and Coleridge. Take Charles Lamb, writing in 1808. Lamb has been discussing the 'atheistical' Marlowe's presentation of evil in Doctor Faustus:

Barabas the Jew, and Faustus the conjurer, are offsprings of a mind which at least delighted to dally with interdicted subjects. They both talk a language which a believer would have been tender of putting into the mouth of a character

though but in fiction. But the holiest minds have sometimes not thought it reprehensible to counterfeit impiety in the person of another, to bring Vice upon the stage speaking her own dialect; and, themselves being armed with an unction of self-confident impunity, have not scrupled to handle and touch that familiarly, which would be death to others. Milton in the person of Satan has started speculations hardier than any which the feeble armoury of the atheist ever furnished; and the precise, strait-laced Richardson has strengthened Vice, from the mouth of Lovelace, with entangling sophistries and abstruse pleas against her adversary Virtue, which Sedley, Villiers, and Rochester, wanted depth of libertinism enough to have invented.⁴⁵

Lamb here gestures towards the assumption, so often to be made in later criticisms of Richardson, that because Richardson was capable of creating Lovelace, Richardson therefore partook of the characteristics of Lovelace. The inadequacy of this sort of thing is obvious if we apply it, as it were, across the board: 'because Shakespeare was capable of creating Iago ...'; 'because Defoe was capable of creating Roxana ...', and so forth. No doubt these assertions are true up to a point, in so far as we all 'contain multitudes'; but they are hardly valid if offered as general statements, and certainly not verifiable. What Lamb does not mention, too, is that Richardson - like Milton in the case of Satan - has himself provided the framework in which Lovelace is to be evaluated. It makes little sense to speak of Richardson's portrayal of vice in this way without also considering his contrasting presentation of virtue.

But the Romantics often tend to feel that Richardson's interest in virtue is merely a veneer, concealing less salubrious preoccupations. Southey writes:

My own opinion of Richardson is, that for a man of decorous life he had a most impure imagination, and that the immorality of the old drama is far less mischievous than his moral stories of Pamela and Squire Booby (how I like Fielding for making out that name), and of Clarissa.⁴⁶

Coleridge would have agreed with this. Of the Romantics, it is Coleridge whose opinions of Richardson are the most famous, and the most important. It is too simple to say, as has Norman Fruman, that Coleridge 'loathed' Richardson;⁴⁷ rather, Coleridge's attitude was ambivalent, and became increasingly more so as time went on.

This may not always have been the case: in 1798, Coleridge apparently told Hazlitt that he 'liked Richardson, but not Fielding'.⁴⁸ Seven years later, Coleridge wrote his famous description of Richardson's 'vile' mind. This is well-known, but needs to be read in its context:

I confess that it has cost, and still costs, my philosophy some exertion not to be vexed that I must admire, aye, greatly admire, Richardson. His mind is so very vile a mind, so oozy, hypocritical, praise-mad, canting, envious, concupiscent! But to understand and draw him would be to produce a work almost equal to his own; and, in order to do this, "down, proud Heart, down" (as we teach little children to say to themselves, bless them!), all hatred down! and, instead thereof, charity, calmness, a heart fixed on the good part, though the understanding is surveying all.⁴⁹

Now the ambivalence can clearly be seen. It will also be noted that Coleridge objects here not so much to Richardson the writer, as to Richardson the man.

A further comment on Richardson by Coleridge occurs in his Shakespeare lectures of 1813-14. Discussing Shakespeare's 'excellence ... in the language of nature', Coleridge compares the abilities of Richardson and Fielding in the same area:

In observations of living character, such as of landlords and postilions, Fielding had great excellence, but in drawing from his own heart, and depicting that species of character which no observation could teach, he failed in comparison with Richardson, who perpetually placed himself as it were in a day-dream; but Shakspeare excelled in both ...⁵⁰

This idea of the dreamlike quality of Richardson's works was to become, it would seem, a favourite of Coleridge's. It was not, however, always to be seen as a desirable characteristic.

This is evident if we turn to Biographia Literaria (1817). In that work, examining the antecedents of the Gothic drama, Coleridge refers (with clearly pejorative intent) to 'the loaded sensibility, the minute detail, the morbid consciousness of every thought and feeling in the whole flux and reflux of the mind, in short the self-involution and dreamlike continuity of Richardson'.⁵¹ Nine years later, Coleridge develops the idea of Richardson's undesirability in another comparison of Richardson and Fielding. Richardson is now seen not only as morbid but as blatantly pernicious:

I do loathe the cant which can recommend Pamela and Clarissa Harlowe as strictly moral, though they poison the imagination of the young with continued doses of tinct. lyttae, while Tom Jones is prohibited as loose. I do not speak of young women; - but a young man whose heart or feelings can be injured, or even his passions excited, by aught in this novel, is already thoroughly corrupt. There is a cheerful, sun-shiny, breezy spirit that prevails every where, strongly contrasted with the close, hot, day-dreamy continuity of Richardson....⁵²

A further eight years on, in 1834, Coleridge makes his most famous comparison of Richardson and Fielding:

... how charming, how wholesome, Fielding always is! To take him up after Richardson, is like emerging from a sick room heated by stoves, into an open lawn, on a breezy day in May.⁵³

Considering these comments on Richardson as a whole, several things command attention. Take first the insistent linking of Richardson and Fielding. No doubt the two writers would inevitably have been compared because they were the most notable novelists of their

time; the aesthetic opposition between them would have enforced the connection; and it was cemented, one may suppose, by the famous comparisons between them by Johnson, as recorded in Boswell's Life. To Johnson, the difference between Richardson and Fielding was 'between a man who knew how a watch was made, and a man who could tell the hour by looking on the dial-plate'. Boswell was probably right in surmising that Johnson 'had an unreasonable prejudice against Fielding'; it seems evident, however, that Johnson sincerely believed Richardson to be Fielding's superior. 'Sir,' he told Boswell,

there is all the difference in the world between characters of nature and characters of manners; and there is the difference between the characters of Fielding and those of Richardson. Characters of manners are very entertaining; but they are to be understood by a more superficial observer than characters of nature, where a man must dive into the recesses of the human heart (LJ, p. 389).

Here, Richardson is the better writer by virtue of his investigations of 'how a watch was made'. Coleridge, reversing Johnson's evaluation, is repelled by Richardsonian introspection; Richardson's novels appear 'dreamlike', stifling like 'a sick room heated by stoves'. Such an attitude, in such a writer, may strike us as odd, given the inward drives and psychological preoccupations of the Romantic movement as a whole. Norman Fruman suggests that Coleridge's description of Richardson's mind is as much a projection of the poet's own self-loathing as it is an analysis of Richardson;⁵⁴ be this as it may, the suspicion arises that Coleridge's growing distaste for Richardson was influenced by more than purely 'critical' considerations. Coleridge, we might say, had good reason to be repelled by what he perceived as 'self-involution and dreamlike continuity'; to prefer a novel which reminded him of

'an open lawn, on a breezy day in May' to one which made him think of an overheated sick-room.

Yet Coleridge's high regard for Fielding over Richardson was by no means unusual among writers of the Romantic era. It is clear where Southey's sympathies lay; Lamb also was a great Fielding enthusiast. Byron, employing exactly the terms in which Richardson had been praised in the eighteenth century, declared Fielding to be 'the prose Homer of human nature'.⁵⁵

Doubtless we tend to think of Fielding, given his theory of the novel, his manner of presenting his characters, and his general authorial pose, as 'neo-classical'; Richardson, by virtue of his sentimentalism, his formal radicalism, his emphasis on the movements of consciousness, his themes of alienation and individualism, seems pre-Romantic. But it is easy to turn this opposition around, as Sir Walter Raleigh makes us aware:

If terms borrowed from literary criticism could be applied to morals [wrote Raleigh], it might truly be said that Richardson is a classic, and Fielding a romantic moralist. Richardson lays most stress on code, conformity to the social standard, and judges by the deed done; Fielding lays most on native impulse, goodness of heart, the individual's conformity to his better self, and uses a novelist's privilege in judging his creatures by their motives.⁵⁶

There are points that Raleigh makes here which strike one as wrong: it is hardly the social standard to which Clarissa conforms, for example. His remarks are interesting, however, because they show us one way in which the difference between Richardson and Fielding may have appeared to many earlier readers - and perhaps still appears to some.

Certainly Coleridge seems to have made such a distinction; and Coleridge, needless to say, is quite out of sympathy with the moral and religious attitudes he perceives in Richardson. The attention to 'minute detail' and the 'flux and reflux of the mind' in

Richardson's works must be considered in relation to the encompassing moral framework; Coleridge, however, dismissing the ends for which Richardson uses introspection, sees only an unhealthy inwardness and self-absorption. While Johnson saw Richardson's works as aesthetically superior to Fielding's, of course he also regarded them as far superior in their moral tendency: according to Boswell, 'Johnson used to quote with approbation a saying of Richardson's, "that the virtues of Fielding's heroes were the vices of a truly good man"' (LJ, p. 389). Coleridge sees things quite differently. Approval of Richardsonian moralizing is dismissed as 'cant' - not simply because approval of Richardson is usually accompanied with disapproval of Fielding, but because Richardson is not 'moral' at all; his morality is itself only so much hypocritical canting. It is the frank and cheerful Fielding, and not Richardson, who is 'wholesome'.

At this point, an important consideration must be borne in mind. Of the poets and essayists we usually class as 'Romantics', only Hazlitt was to discuss Richardson at any length in a piece of formal criticism, and this piece, moreover, is quite different in tone and emphasis from the remarks of Coleridge, Lamb, and Southey. Coleridge's opinions of Richardson are scattered far and wide in letters, journals, and 'table talk', or offered only as brief asides in his lectures and published criticism. Lamb's comment on Richardson's having 'strengthened Vice' is part of a digression in an article on the Elizabethan drama, while Southey gives his views only in his correspondence. It cannot, then, be assumed that these writers had any sudden or direct influence on Richardson's reputation; indeed we have seen that the conventional estimate of Richardson was by no means suddenly overturned at the beginning of the nineteenth century. We can say two things: first, that the long-

term influence of the views of these writers was to be enormous (consider how often Coleridge has been quoted on the subject of Richardson and Fielding, for example, not to mention on the 'perfect' plot of Tom Jones); secondly, putting aside the question of 'influence', that the Romantics anticipated some important changes in critical perspectives.

The Romantics were not the first serious readers to question received opinion on the subject of Richardson and Fielding, or to offer Fielding superlative praise.⁵⁷ It is with the Romantics, however, that critical opinion first begins significantly to shift. Much as Fielding may have been the sort of writer to be kept under lock and key in respectable Victorian homes, as the century proceeded many critics became increasingly aware of his merits. If the Romantic evaluation had remained unorthodox in its time, clearly it had become standard by the end of the last century, and the beginning of our own. 'The superiority of Fielding is apparent on every page,' even so confirmed a Richardsonian as Augustine Birrell felt compelled to admit; Saintsbury, on more than one occasion, went so far as to suggest that Richardson's greatest claim to distinction was that of having inspired Fielding. Early in this century, John Drinkwater's popular history, The Outline of Literature, offered without qualms the opinion that 'If Richardson invented the English novel, Henry Fielding, the Hogarth of Literature, gave it, for the first time, absolute literary distinction'.⁵⁸ Others even claimed that it was Fielding, in fact, who was the 'father' of the English novel, not to mention the greatest English novelist.

One is not surprised to find such views congenial to Frederic T. Blanchard, in his classic study of Fielding's reputation. What is notable is that Blanchard - in 1927 - can present Fielding's alleged superiority to

Richardson as an obvious and indisputable fact, requiring no argument, much as if he were claiming (say) the superiority of Shakespeare over Beaumont and Fletcher. Later, after Fielding's pre-eminence had been challenged by critics such as F. R. Leavis ('life isn't long enough to permit of one's giving much time to Fielding'),⁵⁹ Robert Alter - invoking 'foaming English ale, cheery English inns' and so forth - was to suggest that Blanchard had had an overly simplified view of Fielding ('Blanchard himself is just the sort of admirer of Fielding that modern revisionist critics like Mr. Leavis find so irksome').⁶⁰ Alter is probably right about this, but if there is a more nagging flaw in Fielding the Novelist, that astonishing work of scholarship, it is Blanchard's insistence on regarding the attitudes to Fielding entertained by various writers and critics, and various periods of literary history, rather as if they were a sure index of spiritual sickness or health. In the world according to Blanchard, to be a Richardsonian is to be, quite simply, wrong. Again and again we find phrases like this: at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the 'difference in altitude between the rival novelists which is now generally conceded was as yet rarely perceived'; in 1820, 'it is obvious that [Coleridge] has not yet fully perceived the difference in altitude between Fielding and that novelist's contemporaries'; 'Hazlitt appears never to have realized the difference in altitude between Fielding and Richardson.'⁶¹ These examples occur within twenty pages of each other.

Now there is much to be said for value-judgements, in general: the currently fashionable idea that it is reprehensibly authoritarian to say that some books are better than others is as tiresome as it is perverse. But whereas one may speak confidently of 'the difference in altitude between Dickens and Charles Reade', say, or George Eliot and Mrs. Humphry Ward, such judgements

are contentious in the extreme when dealing with the very different geniuses of a Richardson and a Fielding.

It is worth recalling the way in which the Romantic poets considered themselves the superiors of their eighteenth-century forebears, as documents such as the Preface to Lyrical Ballads and 'A Defence of Poetry' make us very much aware. Of course, if one regards poetry in Shelleyan terms, one will find a writer such as Pope lacking in that special 'something divine'; this says nothing, however, about the 'real' relative merits of Pope and Shelley. Similarly, whether one thinks that Fielding is a better writer than Richardson, or vice versa, or that Fielding, or Richardson, is the greatest English novelist, depends almost entirely upon the position from which one speaks and the sorts of things one is looking for in novels. It is true, as David Lodge points out, that many readers do in fact enjoy both Fielding and Richardson: 'our moral preferences,' Lodge reminds us, 'are infinitely more elastic in literature than in life.'⁶² Yet this is quite another matter than saying which is better than the other. Richardson and Fielding must be judged by quite different aesthetic and moral criteria, and probably it is impossible for any one critic to attain to the very broad perspective from which any meaningful relative evaluation could ensue. But if one does think of Fielding - as some think of James, or D. H. Lawrence - rather as if he were the paradigmatic novelist, then clearly the ways in which Richardson differs from Fielding may appear to one as at least faintly regrettable, and quite possibly as 'flaws'. In tracing the critical reputation of Richardson through the remainder of the nineteenth century, and into the twentieth, we cannot underestimate the importance of the revaluation of Fielding which occurs during this time.

But there is another factor which must also be

considered. Examining Coleridge's description of Richardson's 'vile' mind, and the remarks of Lamb and Southey, we have seen that the supposedly unwholesome quality of Richardson's work is thought by these writers to spring not merely from deficiencies in the general moral outlook of Richardson's time, but from Richardson's own personal corruption. In part this is just a typically 'Romantic' emphasis on authorial subjectivity; yet it proceeds too from the abundance of information about Richardson's life and character which became available in the early nineteenth century. We have considered the influence of Mrs. Barbauld as a critic of Richardson's works; we must consider also the influence of her portrayal of Richardson's life, and of the Correspondence itself. On its appearance, the Correspondence was reviewed widely and well - but, as Blanchard writes, 'in the long run, [it] did irretrievable damage to its writer's fame'.⁶³ If Mrs. Barbauld 'anticipated in spite of herself' aspects of the Romantic view of Richardson's novels, so, in editing his letters and writing his life, she unwittingly gave ammunition to the anti-Richardsonians.

It was perusal of the Correspondence which caused Blake to say that Richardson had won his heart. Others had a less favourable response. Southey's opinion of Richardson's 'imagination' was written in 1812; in 1804, he had described the Correspondence as 'worse than anything of any celebrity that ever was published, if the life prefixed did not happen to be quite as bad'.⁶⁴ Coleridge's description of Richardson's mind was written in the following year. Evidently, at this point we too must turn our attention to Richardson, the man.

RICHARDSON'S CHARACTER

In a Scrutiny essay of 1939, Q. D. Leavis defends the late Leslie Stephen against attack from the Bloomsbury critic, Desmond McCarthy. Of particular interest is her discussion of Stephen's assumption 'that the character of an author was a factor in his art to be reckoned with'. While McCarthy feels this to be 'a demerit in a critic', Mrs. Leavis has 'to agree with Henry James, that in the last event the value of a work of art depends on the quality of the writer's make-up'.

To say this is not simply to say that whether a book is good or bad depends on how much talent the author had - hardly a riveting proposition. Rather, it is to point to the evident personal characteristics of an author as considerations to be borne in mind in assessing his achievement:

Art is not amoral and everything is not as valuable as everything else. Stephen did not apply a moral touchstone naively. In practice the question at issue is, can we or can we not diagnose Sterne's limitations and George Eliot's only partial success in terms of these writers' make-up? Stephen thought he could and we think he did.¹

Nowadays, the views expressed here would widely be regarded as outmoded. Many readers would sympathize more with Desmond McCarthy - lingering, according to Mrs. Leavis, 'in the aesthetic vacuum of the 'nineties' - than with wielders of the 'moral touchstone' like Stephen and the Leavises. Certainly it has been thought

desirable by some to banish authors from critical consideration; yet surely, in practice, it is impossible not to think about authors, as we read, as the creators of what we read. It has been pointed out that even Roland Barthes, in his very essay announcing 'the Author's' death, cannot resist speaking of Proust's life, and the presumed concerns of 'Proust himself'.² It seems reasonable to surmise that every reader, deliberately or otherwise, in the act of reading gives consideration to 'the character of an author', 'the quality of the writer's make-up'. One need not know anything about the life or personal characteristics of an author in order to do this; naturally one infers much about any author from the types of things he wrote about, and how he wrote about them.

Yet if our readings of an author's works can influence our ideas about his character, at the same time it is apparent that our conceptions, or preconceptions, of his character can influence our readings of his works - our interpretations, and our evaluations. This seems to me simply a statement of fact; nor is there anything necessarily wrong with this. Problems arise, however, if a reader approaches an author's works with a prejudiced or inaccurate view of the author.³

Nowhere, perhaps, is this more clearly demonstrated than in the case of Swift. There can be little doubt that the questionable but long-prevailing image of the 'mad Dean' has played a considerable role in the critical history of Gulliver's Travels - to give only the most obvious example. Thus, even so normally perceptive a critic as George Orwell can appear quite impervious to Swift's abundant ironies. Because Swift, to Orwell, is 'a diseased writer', Gulliver is equated with Swift and the Houyhnhnms are presented, quite simply, as 'Swift's ideal beings'.

Of course - if, for the sake of argument, we may

separate the inseparable - it must be said that Orwell's objections to Swift are as much ideological as they are personal. If much is made of Swift's alleged obsession with 'disease, dirt and deformity', much is made also of 'the reactionary cast of Swift's mind'.⁴ Clearly, in thinking about an author's character, we think as much of his apparent 'philosophy' or 'world view' as we do of his more private idiosyncrasies and obsessions, supposed moral lapses, and so forth. If an author had, or we imagine him to have had, views about life which seem to us in some ways inadequate or offensive, we are likely, if we do not dismiss his work, at least to be a little grudging in our recognition of its merit, or of his merit: criticism, as feminists and Marxists never tire of reminding us, can never be a purely 'aesthetic' matter.

Kipling immediately comes to mind. Almost certainly he is a great writer, yet, as everyone who is interested in literature knows, his reputation has suffered much over the years - at least with the critics - because of his political views, as construed by liberal and leftist commentators. Conversely, we are hardly surprised to find T. S. Eliot and Kingsley Amis amongst Kipling's most ardent apologists.

In Richardson's case, it would appear that nothing has been more influential in determining the course of his 'critical history', subsequent to the century in which he lived, than the ideas about his character - his personal qualities and beliefs - which gained currency in the nineteenth century. By the middle of our own century, Arnold Kettle could accurately observe: 'No considerable writer in our language is so easily made fun of as Richardson.'⁵ In tracing the course of Richardson's reputation, it is necessary therefore to deal as much with the reputation of Richardson himself as with that of his work.

As good a place to begin as any is with Sir Walter Scott. Scott's account of Richardson was written in 1821, as the Introduction to an edition of Richardson in Ballantyne's 'Novelists' Library'. This series, like the firm of Ballantyne itself a few years later, was a failure; Scott's essay, however, achieved wider currency as part of his popular Lives of the Novelists (1825).⁶

After a brief discussion of Richardson's family and business career, Scott turns to the novelist's character. We are presented at first with an exemplary figure: 'the author of "Clarissa" was, in private life, the mild good man which we wish to suppose him.' Indeed, in looking at Richardson's life, 'we find so much to praise, and so very little deserving censure, that we almost think we are reading the description of one of the amiable characters he has drawn in his own works' (p. 388). But though it 'may appear invidious to dwell' on any 'venial speck in a character so fair and amiable' (p. 392), Scott devotes well over a thousand words to Richardson's failings, stressing in particular the 'feminine' aspects of his personality.

Now Scott's life of Richardson, as Scott himself acknowledges (p. 384), is based not on any original research but entirely on Mrs. Barbauld's Introduction to the Correspondence. But while Scott may have nothing to add in terms of facts, he certainly adds much in the way of interpretation. To Mrs. Barbauld, Richardson 'was always fond of female society' and 'lived in a kind of flower-garden of ladies' (Corr., I.clxi); this, however, is not seen as a matter for adverse comment. To Scott, on the other hand, Richardson was not only 'in the daily habit of seeing, conversing, and corresponding with many of the fair sex'; he was himself 'effeminate', mentally 'almost feminine' (pp. 389-90). This is presented not only as a self-evident failing, but indeed

as the root cause of other purported flaws in Richardson's character - as we shall see.

One must not overemphasize Scott's role in establishing negative attitudes towards Richardson's character. One points to his essay rather as an important transitional stage, as it were, in the growth of what was long to remain the standard view. There is no reason to believe that Scott is not genuine in describing Richardson, for the most part, as a 'mild good man'; elsewhere in the essay Richardson appears as 'this amiable and excellent man' (p. 387), and is even commended, in a concluding flourish, for 'his manly and virtuous application of his talents', which 'have been of service to morality, and to human nature in general' (p. 418). It is to Thackeray we must turn to find Richardson first reduced to the caricature which becomes standard among so many later commentators.

Thackeray's lectures, The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century, delivered in 1851 at the height of his fame and published two years later, were, as could be expected, enormously successful and influential. Richardson figures in the fifth lecture, 'Hogarth, Smollett and Fielding'.

Thackeray's influence on prevailing views of Fielding has been noted by a number of critics. 'Others before Thackeray wrote of Fielding, and wrote as he did,' remarked Frederick S. Dickson in 1913, 'but the difference is that Thackeray's views count and count for much, while those of others count for little, or count not at all.'⁷ If it was Thackeray who did more than anyone else to establish the popular image of bluff, hearty 'Harry' Fielding, John Bull incarnate - no saint, it is true, but the manliest of men - it was Thackeray also who was decisive in establishing for Richardson a quite opposite image.

This is Thackeray, on the genesis of Joseph Andrews:

Fielding, no doubt, began to write this novel in ridicule of Pamela, for which work one can understand the hearty contempt and antipathy which such an athletic and boisterous genius as Fielding's must have entertained. He couldn't do otherwise than laugh at the puny Cockney bookseller, pouring out endless volumes of sentimental twaddle, and hold him up to scorn as a moll-coddle and a milksop. His genius had been nursed on sack-posset, and not on dishes of tea. His muse had sung the loudest in tavern choruses, had seen the daylight streaming in over thousands of emptied bowls, and reeled home to chambers on the shoulders of the watchman. Richardson's goddess was attended by old maids and dowagers, and fed on muffins and bohea. 'Milksop!' roars Harry Fielding, clattering at the timid shop-shutters. 'Wretch! Monster! Mohock!' shrieks the sentimental author of Pamela; and all the ladies of his court cackle out an affrighted chorus.

From here on, one may well interpret Thackeray's every exclamatory encomium of Fielding's 'genius', 'vigour', and 'manly relish for life' as implying precisely the opposite characteristics in Richardson.⁸ Now of course all this - Thackeray's portrayal of Fielding as much as of Richardson - is quite absurd if we imagine it offered as dispassionate historical information. Thackeray's Lectures are brilliant rhetorical performances; but we should regard them, for the most part, rather as entertaining additions to his creative output than as earnest exercises in biography or criticism. Yet when we turn to later, more sober students of eighteenth-century literature, we find discussions of Richardson's life and character displaying at times a distinctly Thackerayan cast.

Leslie Stephen's are a good case in point. It would be unwise to ascribe any overly simplified views to Stephen, a considerably more sophisticated thinker - critically speaking - than Thackeray. Stephen's piece on Richardson in the DNB is appropriately sober and judicious; in his essay on the novelist in Hours in a Library, he reminds us that 'our chief faults often lie close to our chief merits'. But whereas in the DNB article we are simply told that Richardson 'was

probably regarded as a milksop, fitter for the society of admiring ladies', in Hours in a Library we soon forget any initial, cautionary clauses as there emerges a sickly and effeminate Richardson 'whose special characteristic it was to be a milksop [my emphasis] - who provoked Fielding to a coarse hearty burst of ridicule - who was steeped in the incense of useless adulation from a throng of middle-aged lady worshippers ...'⁹

The Thackerayan derivation of this is clear. The influence is even more apparent in Gosse's History of Eighteenth Century Literature (1889). In contrast with bluff, hearty Henry Fielding, a 'fine strapping fellow' in 'the ripeness of manhood', Gosse presents a nervous and hypochondriac Richardson, a plump, elderly man whose 'life closed in a sort of perpetual tea-party, in which he, the only male, sat surrounded by be vies of adoring ladies'.¹⁰

Ivor Indyk, in a recent article on Pamela, finds hints of 'feminine art and feminine calculation' in that novel, as well as in Clarissa, which offend against 'conventional norms of feminine virtue and duty'. Indyk argues that objections to the conduct of Richardson's heroines, 'Unresolved in the reading of [his] novels ... achieve resolution elsewhere, in the reading of Richardson's own life'. In the image of a feminine Richardson, he suggests, 'It is tempting to see ... the penalty exacted for the failure of his novels to endorse fully the norms of masculine and feminine conduct entertained by his readers.'

This is perhaps too speculative: the mere fact that Richardson appeared to many male critics as a 'ladies' novelist' - Saintsbury's words - while being himself a man, might well offer sufficient explanation. Nevertheless, as Indyk points out, 'This attitude to Richardson persists well into the present century.'¹¹ Thus Martin Battestin, who has obviously read his

Thackeray, juxtaposes a Fielding 'tall and hale, with a lusty, open-hearted zest for life' with a Richardson 'short and round in stature, shy and fastidious and a little inclined to a quiet pomposity', who 'preferred the salon and the society of the ladies'; while Frank Bradbrook, in The Pelican Guide to English Literature, has Richardson 'Surrounding himself with sycophantic women of second-rate intellect'.¹²

It can hardly be claimed that these accounts of Richardson are entirely untrue: all available evidence informs us that our author was indeed short and fat, and, at the time he wrote his novels, aging and unwell. He was frequently in female company, and wrote many letters to women. Judged by traditional standards of masculinity, Richardson, despite his two wives and twelve children, was hardly the epitome of manly vigour. What strikes one is rather the patronizing or even pejorative tone in which his 'effeminacy' is discussed; and certainly, little perspicacity is required to see that the picture has been touched and heightened.

There is an amusing, and not unprecedented, process of escalation at work here. Scott learns from Mrs. Barbauld that Richardson 'lived in a kind of flower-garden of ladies': this is then presented as an indication of weakness; Thackeray piles on gratuitous details of muffins and bohea, ridicules the ladies as cackling old maids and dowagers, and openly declares Richardson to be a milksop; later critics may not go quite so far as this, but the memory persists of Fielding roaring 'Milksop!'; at the merest mention of Richardson's name (one imagines), tea-parties and trivial women immediately come to mind. We are hardly surprised to find Sir Walter Raleigh, in 1894, rehabilitating the image of the 'flower-garden of ladies' as part of a distinctly unflattering sketch of Richardson's character.¹³

The trouble with the 'flower-garden' view, as

elaborated by Scott, Thackeray, and their successors, is this: first, Richardson's male friends and correspondents, such as Hill, Cibber, Thomas Edwards, and Edward Young, are ignored, as is the fact that Richardson commanded the admiration of Joseph Highmore, David Garrick, Samuel Johnson - 'a pretty frequent visitor at the house of Mr. Richardson' (LJ, p. 106) - and even of Fielding himself after the publication of Clarissa. One wonders if so insipid a milksop could have commanded so much attention and respect, regardless of what he had written: Hill and Cibber, it is true, may appear in literary history as somewhat ludicrous figures, but the claims of the others to be taken seriously are unquestionable, one would think. Gosse's picture of Richardson in domestic life, sole male amongst 'bevvies of adoring ladies', is demonstrably untrue: one need only refer to Susanna Highmore's famous sketch of Richardson reading from Sir Charles Grandison - easily available to nineteenth-century critics, as an engraving made from it appeared in the Correspondence - to observe that of his six auditors, all of whom were close friends, three are male.¹⁴ It is true that Richardson had an especial fondness for female company - he really did have a female coterie - but this should not be taken to mean that he was somehow excluded from the company of intelligent men, even if, as Stephen remarks, he 'was unfit for the coarse festivities of the time' (DNB).

But this is only a minor point, of course, compared with the fact that Richardson's having had such a circle of female friends should be taken, it would seem, as such a bad thing. One notes, too, the way in which these women have been presented. On the most trivial level, consider Thackeray's references to 'old maids and dowagers', and Stephen's to 'middle-aged lady worshippers'. Lady Bradshaigh, though neither an old maid nor a dowager, was forty-one at the time of the

publication of Clarissa. Sarah Fielding was twenty-seven - old enough, perhaps, to be an 'old maid' at that time; and indeed she never married. But among Richardson's other female friends, Frances Grainger, for example, was twenty-one; Hester Mulso was twenty; Sarah Wescomb and Susanna Highmore were seventeen.

If Richardson's women were not all cackling old maids and the like, neither were they as sycophantic or empty-headed as our critics would have us believe. For one thing, we know that several members of the circle openly challenged Richardson's opinions - even on the subject of Tom Jones (EK, pp. 297-8; MCK, pp. 171-2). As for 'useless adulation', any awareness of Richardson's methods of composition, such as may be acquired even from a brief perusal of his letters, soon convinces us that though Richardson's bebies of ladies may have been 'adoring', their attentions were far from 'useless' - to him. In this connection, it is worth putting back into its context the famous remark about the 'flower-garden of ladies'. What Mrs. Barbauld wrote was this:

The author of Clarissa was always fond of female society. He lived in a kind of flower-garden of ladies: they were his inspirers, his critics, his applauders. Connections of business apart, they were his chief correspondents. He had generally a number of young ladies at his house, whom he used to engage in conversation on some subject of sentiment, and provoke, by artful opposition, to display the treasures of intellect they possessed.... He was accustomed to give the young ladies he esteemed the endearing appellation of his daughters. He used to write in a little summer-house, or grotto, as it was called, within his garden, before the family were up; and, when they met at breakfast, he communicated the progress of his story, which, by that means, had every day a fresh and lively interest. Then began the criticisms, the pleadings, for Harriet Byron or Clementina; every turn and every incident was eagerly canvassed, and the author enjoyed the benefit of knowing before-hand how his situations would strike. Their own little partialities and entanglements, too, were developed, and became the subject of grave advice, or lively raillery (Corr., I.clxi-xii).

It is easy to see how this was taken up by later (male)



writers as anti-Richardsonian ammunition!

Of course no one is going to claim that Richardson's adoring ladies were all in fact women of genius. Certainly the interests of many of them were not primarily literary or intellectual. However, as Mrs. Barbauld again reminds us, Richardson's ladies 'were well able to appreciate his works':

They were both his critics and his models, and from their sprightly conversation, and the disquisitions on love and sentiment, which took place, he gathered what was more to his purpose than graver topics would have produced. He was not writing a dictionary, like Johnson, or a history, like Gibbon. He was a novel writer; his business was not only with the human heart, but with the female heart (Corr., I.clxxii).

Still, we have no warrant to conclude that these women were necessarily of 'second-rate intellect'. In the eighteenth century, even Sir John Hawkins - hardly the most sympathetic commentator on Richardson - had to remark that

it is well known, that many ingenious young women, who resorted to his house as to an academy for tuition, became so improved by his conversation and his extemporary commentaries on his own writings, as afterwards to make a considerable figure in the literary world.¹⁵

Whether some of these women owed their 'improvement' solely to Richardson may be doubted; some clearly did not. But it is certainly the case that the novelist's immediate circle included a number of women who would be considered highly accomplished in any era, let alone one of limited female education. One need not expatiate on the distinction of Sarah Fielding, whose David Simple (1744), like her Remarks on Clarissa, remains well worth reading today. Jane Collier (c.1710-54/5) was also a woman of literary interests, an essayist and collaborator with Sarah Fielding on the 'dramatic fable' The Cry (1754).

Another prominent member of the group was Hester Mulso, later Mrs. Chapone (1727-1801). A keen student of Richardson's works, the young Miss Mulso became a great favourite of the novelist's, not for any docile or sycophantic ways but for her incisive wit and independence of mind: she is said to have been the model for Harriet Byron. In 1750, the year of her meeting with Richardson, four of her letters were printed by Johnson in Rambler No. 10. Later she contributed to the Adventurer and the Gentleman's Magazine, but her most important work was Letters on the Improvement of the Mind (1773). Written originally for the benefit of a favourite niece, this enormously successful book was reprinted continually for almost a century, and had a great influence on female education. In his study of the learned women of the eighteenth century, The Bluestocking Ladies (1947), Walter S. Scott writes:

It is impossible to trace out in detail just how far and for how long the Bluestocking influence lasted, but a criticism on Mrs. Chapone's Letters on the Improvement of the Mind may here be quoted. 'Although more than Sixty years have elapsed since this work was first published, its advice does not even yet (1842) wear an antiquated air, and it is as well calculated to improve the rising generation as it was to instruct the youth of their grandmothers.' Some years later, Thackeray conceived Mrs. Chapone to be important enough to deserve mention in both Vanity Fair and The Virginians. What a host of noble women may have owed something to Hester Chapone - Mrs. Browning, Charlotte Brontë, Jean Ingelow and Florence Nightingale, George Eliot and little Christina Rossetti, to mention but a few.¹⁶

Other women associated with Richardson, if not members of the immediate circle, included Charlotte Lennox (1720-1804), author of the comic novel The Female Quixote (1752); the noted bluestocking Mary Delany (1700-88), a great champion of his work; and Elizabeth Carter (1717-1806), author of the 'Ode to Wisdom' in Clarissa, a minor poetess but a scholar of extraordinary achievement. 'Originally backward,' it is said of her,

'she applied herself to study with such perseverance that she became perhaps the most learned Englishwoman of her time, being mistress of Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Arabic, French, Italian, Spanish, German, and Portuguese.'¹⁷ She was celebrated for her translation of Epictetus (1758), which earned her a fortune and remains in use today (in the Everyman edition). Her ability to make puddings was also commended by Samuel Johnson.¹⁸

With the advent of modern feminism, no doubt Richardson's female friends will meet with better treatment from future commentators. Certainly Richardson's own 'feminine' characteristics have of late been seen in a more positive light by some. Carolyn Heilbrun convincingly argues that the novelist's 'androgynous' nature was rather a source of literary strength than a shameful weakness. Katharine Rogers, providing a new slant on the age-old juxtaposition of Richardson and Fielding, contrasts the 'sensitive feminism' of the former, his admirable empathy with women, with what she sees as the disappointingly conventional attitudes of the latter: 'while Richardson was a radical feminist,' we are told, 'Fielding accepted the male chauvinism of his culture.'¹⁹

Be this as it may, the consequences of the earlier, what might still be called the 'orthodox', view of Richardson's 'androgyny', are difficult to exaggerate. It need hardly be said that for most of us, if we imagine our author as a fatuous milksop, surrounded by silly, sycophantic women, we have reason to take him less seriously than we otherwise would: that Richardson should have been such a person, and placed himself in such a position, becomes for us a reflection on his character in general. It is not surprising, then, that the critics should see Richardson's 'effeminacy' as only one of his several offending features. A number of other factors interlock to create the standard, patronizing picture.

Take the issue of Richardson's intelligence: we do not have to spend much time exploring modern writings on our author to find disparaging references to his mental capacities. We need to distinguish, however, between being 'intelligent' and being an 'intellectual'. There is no evidence that Richardson was the latter; the evidence that he was intelligent is, one would think, his novels. We do not need to invoke the difference between the 'conscious' and the 'unconscious' - nor, it seems reasonable to suggest, between the 'rational' and the 'intuitive' - in order to draw a distinction between the type of intelligence many artists appear to have, and that required to write, say, philosophy or literary criticism. The distinction simply seems to exist, as a matter of common observation; but it is just this distinction that Eaves and Kimpel, for example, do not seem to be making when they suggest that Richardson 'certainly had not an intellect like Johnson's' (EK, p. 535). The short answer to this is yes, but, so far as fiction goes, Johnson wrote Rasselas, and Richardson wrote Clarissa. Looking at things from this angle, we might well say, 'Johnson certainly had not the talent of Richardson'. This seems an outrageous statement, and doubtless it is, but it is useful for pointing out the inadequacy of judging what appear to be very differently constituted minds on a single inflexible scale.

We see here one of the many areas in which a double standard is applied to Richardson. Consider Frank Bradbrook, in his book Jane Austen and her Predecessors (1966). It is a commonplace of literary history, as we might expect, that Richardson was less intelligent than Fielding; as Scholes and Kellogg put it in The Nature of Narrative, 'Richardson's intellectual grasp of his own achievement is a slender one. He was a genius of the psyche but in all other things a rather ordinary

individual, with an intellect far inferior to Fielding's.²⁰ Bradbrook too feels no qualms in describing Fielding as 'infinitely more intelligent than Richardson'; yet later in his book, comparing Jane Austen and George Eliot, he admits that 'it would be a mistake to imply that Jane Austen was an intellectual of George Eliot's calibre [my emphasis]'.²¹ Now this is not, of course, to impugn Jane Austen's splendid - and splendidly evident - intelligence. One may wonder why Bradbrook appears entirely oblivious in the one case, and very much aware in the other, of the distinction between types of intelligence we have considered here.

Another commonplace of literary history is that Richardson was inordinately vain. The prevalence of this idea owes much to the pronouncements of Johnson (not one to hide the faults or failings of his friends). Johnson may have been 'a great admirer of Richardson's works', wrote Frances Reynolds in her 'Recollections of Dr. Johnson', 'Yet of the Author I never heard him speak with any degree of cordiality, but rather as if impress'd with some cause of resentment against him'. This, she went on,

has been imputed to something of jealousy, not to say envy, on account of Richardson's having engross'd the attentions and affectionate assiduities of several very ingenious literary ladies, whom he used to call his adopted [sic] daughters, and for whom Dr. Johnson had conceived a paternal affection (particularly for two of them, Miss Carter and Miss Mulso, now Mrs. Chapone), previous to their acquaintance with Richardson; and it was said, that he thought himself neglected by them on his account.²²

The Johnsonian image of Richardson's character is hardly a flattering one. According to Mrs. Piozzi, the former Mrs. Thrale, Johnson described Richardson as a man who 'could not be contented to sail quietly down the stream of reputation, without longing to taste

the froth from every stroke of the oar'. If Richardson had lived until Mrs. Piozzi 'came out', said Johnson, her praises would have lengthened his life: 'For that fellow died merely for want of change among his flatterers; he perished for want of more, like a man obliged to breathe the same air till it is exhausted.'²³ In his Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides, Boswell reports an occasion on which Johnson 'drew the character of Richardson ... with a strong yet delicate pencil':

I lament much that I have not preserved it: I only remember that he expressed a high opinion of his talents and virtues; but observed, that his perpetual study was to ward off petty inconveniencies and procure petty pleasures; that his love of continual superiority was such that he took care to be always surrounded by women, who listened to him implicitly and did not venture to controvert his opinions; and that his desire of distinction was so great that he used to give large vails to the Speaker Onslow's servants that they might treat him with respect.²⁴

As Eaves and Kimpel suggest, the best retort to this is probably that offered in a sketch of Richardson's life, written with the approval of his daughters, in the Universal Magazine:

Of this last circumstance it may be asked, (admitting, for a moment, the representation to be just) where exists that transcendent, that superhuman character, which is in every respect uninfluenced by the littleness of Vanity? And with regard to the motives to which Mr. Richardson's desire for the society of women is imputed, it may be questioned whether this observation is so much a satire upon that great man, as upon the sex in general (EK, p. 534).

This was written in 1786. In the Life of Johnson by Hawkins, published in the following year, much is made - again - of Richardson's discreditable self-absorption:

Richardson could never relate a pleasant story, and hardly relish one told by another: he was ever thinking of his own writings, and listening to the praises which, with an emulous

profusion, his friends were incessantly bestowing on them, he would scarce enter into free conversation with anyone that he thought had not read Clarissa, or Sir Charles Grandison, and at best, he could not be said to be a companionable man.²⁵

Mrs. Barbauld goes to some pains to correct such impressions of Richardson, making much of his kind and charitable nature, his courtesy and hospitality. She records that 'His advice and opinion was greatly valued by all his friends', and stresses that 'The moral qualities of Richardson were crowned with a serious and warm regard for religion' (Corr., I.clvi, clxv). Vanity, it is true, remains 'one fault of which it will not be easy to clear our author' (pp. clxx-xi). Mrs. Barbauld contends, however, that 'No man sought criticism with more diligence, or received it with more candour, than Richardson': the first part of this statement is undoubtedly true, the second perhaps not entirely so. Mrs. Barbauld goes on: 'The fault of his mind was, rather that he was too much occupied with himself, than that he had too high an opinion of his talents.' Certainly he loved praise, but 'when a man of genius is humane, benevolent, temperate, and pious, we may allow in him a little shade of vanity, as a tribute to human weakness' (p. clxxiii).

This defence is repeated, in substance, by Eaves and Kimpel nearly two hundred years later. Rightly, they add that Richardson presents himself in his letters as bashful, inadequate in society, and with a love of solitude and retirement. One acquaintance, they point out, described Richardson as 'a silent plain man'; Aaron Hill, writing not to Richardson but to the poet David Mallett, could find only one fault in his famous friend - modesty. This may seem to contradict the picture of Richardson as vain, Eaves and Kimpel suggest; we should consider, however, that 'An over-lively sensitiveness could account for both'. We should retain an awareness of Richardson's background: 'he was quite

conscious of the fact that till late in life he had been the social inferior of the people who sought him out when he was famous and that he remained the inferior in education of at least the men' (EK, pp. 520-1).

As Leslie Stephen wrote in one of his more benevolent moods, 'Richardson's vanity ... was an appeal for tenderness as much as an excessive estimate of his own merits' (DNB).

But if Richardson was vain - though this is no defence - at least he had something to be vain about. 'Richardson was undoubtedly naive in the openness with which he showed his pride in his achievement and in the recognition it gained for him,' write Eaves and Kimpel. 'Whether his pride was really greater than that of other writers can be questioned.' Richardson was guilty of a 'lack of sophistication, but nothing much more reprehensible', they find, concluding that 'Unless one is to judge Richardson by the standard of the saints, we think that his vanity may well be forgiven him - at least that it is high time for it to be forgotten, since it has certainly received enough attention and to spare' (EK, p. 537).

This is indicated, we may say, by the very fact that Eaves and Kimpel (in 1971) feel called upon to discuss the issue defensively and at length. Clearly, Mrs. Barbauld's earlier defence had had little weight with subsequent critics. 'The predominant failing of Richardson seems certainly to have been vanity,' wrote Sir Walter Scott. Augustine Birrell, in 1892, admitted this, but argued that 'The vanity of a distinguished man, if at the same time he happens to be a good man, is a quality so agreeable in its manifestations that to look for it and not to find it would be to miss a pleasure.... The fact is, it is not vanity, but contending vanities that give pain'. Such benevolence is hardly typical of writers on Richardson. To Coleridge, we

recall, Richardson was 'praise-mad'; to Byron - not himself a modest man - Richardson of all authors was 'the vainest', and clearly we are to see this as a fact to be deplored. For generations, it appears, many critics have been only too eager to do so.²⁶

If the verdict on Richardson's vanity has been harsh, harsher still is that on the deeper and darker vice which is seen to derive from that vanity: his spite towards other writers. While Pope, say, or Fielding, may be allowed unlimited sport with the likes of Colley Cibber, the purportedly talentless Poet Laureate, Richardson has been unfortunate in that the writers he loathed have since been decreed major authors of the eighteenth century: Pope and Fielding themselves; Swift; Sterne; Rousseau.

Of course it is Richardson's attitude to Fielding which is of most importance. Johnson may have quoted Richardson's remarks with approval - but it is Richardson, a figure infinitely more vulnerable to adverse criticism, who has suffered for claiming, for example, that if he did not know who Fielding was, he would have thought him to be an ostler (LJ, p. 480). Fielding may have cast the first stone; but, after his generous praise of Clarissa, it has seemed particularly reprehensible of Richardson to denounce his rival novelist at every turn, ascribing no merit whatsoever to Tom Jones and ascribing to its author 'a perverse and crooked Nature', 'Evil Habits', 'little or no invention', and an inability to portray a virtuous woman because 'He has not been accustomed to such Company' (SL, pp. 127, 197). Such remarks were made, naturally, in private letters: if the publication of the Correspondence was disastrous for Richardson's reputation, it was his vitriol towards Fielding, above all, which was the cause of the disaster.

Mrs. Barbauld passed lightly over the issue.

Richardson, she admitted, spoke 'with a great deal of asperity of Tom Jones, more indeed than was quite graceful in a rival author'. She suggested, however, that Richardson had been 'exceedingly hurt' by Joseph Andrews; 'perhaps it was not in human nature' that he should forgive such a slight. She concluded:

When we see Fielding parodying Pamela, and Richardson asserting, as he does in his letters, that the run of Tom Jones is over, and that it would be soon completely forgotten: we cannot but smile on seeing the two authors placed on the same shelf, and going quietly down to posterity together (Corr., I.lxxix-xxx).

But it appears that many were not at all inclined to smile over Richardson's assertions (whether they smiled at Fielding parodying Pamela is another matter). Discussing the Correspondence in the Edinburgh Review, Francis Jeffrey condemned 'that most absurd and illiberal prejudice' which Richardson 'indulged against all the writings of Fielding'; indeed most readers, according to Blanchard, 'found it difficult to excuse the pettiness and illiberality which the letters revealed'. Behind the familiar Richardson, generous, benevolent, a Grandsonian figure compared with Fielding - whose affinities were more with Tom Jones or Captain Booth - lurked a new Richardson, 'insidious and malignant'.²⁷

We may doubt whether Richardson had really seemed entirely Grandsonian up until 1804; presumably there were readers of both Richardson and Fielding who had also read Boswell and Hawkins. Still, the point seems valid when we consider that it is from this time onward that unflattering views of Richardson begin their ascent towards orthodoxy.

Here it is necessary to consider the relationship between Richardson's various offending qualities. Mrs. Barbauld deals with these as discrete aspects of his character; in Scott's account, however, the novelist's

effeminacy, vanity, and denunciations of other writers are linked in an ingenious and seemingly inevitable causal chain. Richardson, we find, because of his 'effeminate' nature, was therefore particularly susceptible to the 'feminine weakness' of vanity, 'and he fostered and indulged its growth, which a man of firmer character would have crushed and restrained'. Richardson had 'an effeminate love of flattery and applause', 'a want of masculine firmness' in his 'habits of thinking'; these traits 'combined with his natural tenderness of heart in inducing him to prefer the society of women', the incessant flattery of whom instilled in him the 'overweening sense of his own importance' which, in turn, inspired him arrogantly to decry the talents of his contemporaries.²⁸

It is useful to compare this with Thackeray's explanation of Richardson's dislike of Fielding. While veering towards a seeming liberality on the issue, Thackeray nevertheless implies that not to like Fielding, even for 'honest' reasons, is a revelation of defective character:

Richardson's sickening antipathy for Harry Fielding is quite as natural as the other's laughter and contempt at the sentimentalist. I have not learned that these likings and dislikings have ceased in the present day: and every author must lay his account not only to misrepresentation but to honest enmity among critics, and to being hated and abused for good as well as for bad reasons. Richardson disliked Fielding's works quite honestly: Walpole quite honestly spoke of them as vulgar and stupid. Their squeamish stomachs sickened at the rough fare and the rough guests assembled at Fielding's jolly revel.²⁹

Mrs. Barbauld, we have seen, had implied that 'Fielding parodying Pamela' and Richardson condemning Fielding were to be seen, as it were, on the same level. Scott, in his life of Fielding, points to Fielding's commendatory letter on Clarissa in the Jacobite's Journal and remarks that here is a case 'in which one would rather have

sympathized with the thoughtless offender, than with the less liberal and almost ungenerous mind which so long retained its resentment'.³⁰ Thackeray, extending this tradition, speaks of Richardson's 'sickening antipathy'. He also says this:

Fielding proposes to write a book in ridicule of the author, whom he disliked and utterly scorned and laughed at; but he is himself of so generous, jovial, and kindly a turn that he begins to like the characters which he invents, can't help making them manly and pleasant as well as ridiculous, and before he has done with them all loves them heartily every one.³¹

Now the assertion that Fielding 'disliked and utterly scorned and laughed at' Richardson, even during the Pamela period, probably has no basis in fact. We can say, then, even without Thackeray's image of Fielding's good nature overcoming his malice, that Fielding's parodies and Richardson's denunciations are quite different in kind. To go further, we can assume that, while Richardson certainly would have 'disliked Fielding's works quite honestly', there was also an element of pure malice in the things he said: as McKillop points out, 'Richardson's venomous comments on Fielding were called forth by the eagerness of some of his own admirers to point out the merits of Tom Jones' (McK, p. 171). McKillop goes on to say, rightly, that 'The malevolent passages against Fielding inevitably loom too large in a detailed account of Richardson's correspondence' (p. 177). Yet McKillop himself makes much of 'this sorry business', Richardson's shameful 'vanity and jealousy', Richardson's 'disgraceful' conduct (pp. 171-3). Eaves and Kimpel take a less judgemental line ('If Richardson was stung by envy, he was not the first man to feel that passion', and so on), but in their very tone ('few men can bear to be judged by the worst incidents in their lives') we sense the magnitude of

Richardson's transgression (EK, p. 296).

Surely we would do better to smile with Mrs. Barbould. Virtually no one nowadays is going to agree with Richardson's attacks on Fielding, or at least with the specific nature of them, but to regard them as so shocking and shameful seems - really - rather absurd. These things are simply what Richardson felt, interesting and perhaps amusing but no more 'disgraceful' than the often quite outrageous prejudices of many writers and artists. It would seem true to say that the prejudices of Johnson, for example, whether we agree with them or not, strike us rather as engaging expressions of his character than as shameful flaws. But of course attitudes to Richardson's spiteful remarks have been influenced by attitudes to Richardson in general, as well as by attitudes to Fielding.

Perhaps the best defence of Richardson against his critics is that offered by Augustine Birrell, in a lecture of 1892. It is worth quoting at length. Birrell begins by discussing the penchant of certain critical 'Witlings' to dub Richardson 'the "little printer"'; says Birrell, 'had he stood seven feet high in his stockings, these people would never have called him the "big printer"':

Richardson has always been exposed to a strong under current of ridicule.... Fielding, with all his swagger and bounce, gold lace and strong language, has no more of the boldness than he has of the sublimity of the historian of Clarissa Harlowe. But these qualities avail poor Richardson nothing. The taint of afternoon tea still clings to him. The facts - the harmless, nay, I will say the attractive, facts - that he preferred the society of ladies to that of his own sex, and liked to be surrounded by these, surely not strange creatures, in his gardens and grottos ... are still remembered against him. Life is indeed full of pitfalls, if estimates of a man's genius are to be formed by the garden-parties he gave, and the tea he consumed a century and a quarter ago. The real truth I believe to be this: we are annoyed with Richardson because he violates a tradition. The proper

place for an eighteenth-century novelist was either the pot or the sponging-house. He ought to be either disguised in liquor or confined for debt. Richardson was never the one or the other. Let us see how this works: take Dr. Johnson; we all know how to describe him. He is our great moralist, the sturdy, the severe, the pious, the man who, as Carlyle puts it in his striking way, worshipped at St. Clement Danes in the era of Voltaire, or, as he again puts it, was our real primate, the true spiritual edifier and soul's teacher of all England. Well, here is one of his reminiscences: 'I remember writing to Richardson from a sponging-house, and was so sure of my deliverance through his kindness and liberality, that before his reply was brought I knew I could afford to joke with the rascal who had me in custody, and did so over a pint of adulterated wine for which at that moment I had no money to pay.'

Now, there we have the true, warm-hearted literary tradition of the eighteenth century. It is very amusing, it is full of good feeling and fellowship, but the morality of the transaction from the great moralist's point of view is surely, like his linen, a trifle dingy. The soul's teacher of all England, laid by the heels in a sponging-house, and cracking jokes with a sheriff's officer over a pint of wine on the chance of another man paying for it, is a situation which calls for explanation. It is not my place to give it.... All I feel concerned to say here is, that the praise of this anecdote belongs to the little printer, and not to the great lexicographer....

But if you violate traditions, and disturb people's notions as to what it is becoming for you to be, to do, or to suffer, you have to pay for it. An eighteenth-century novelist who first made a fortune by honest labour and the practice of frugality, and wrote his novels afterwards; who was fond of the society of ladies, and a vegetarian in later life; who divided his time between his shop and his villa, and became in due course master of a city company, is not what we have a right to expect, and makes a figure which strongly contrasts with that of Richardson's great contemporary, the entirely manly Henry Fielding, whose very name rings in the true tradition....

It may safely be said of Richardson that, after attaining to independence, he did more good every week of his life - for he was a wise and most charitable man - than Fielding was ever able to do throughout the whole of his; but this cannot alter the case, or excuse a violated tradition.³²

When Birrell speaks here of 'a violated tradition', he touches on what we may legitimately call the gravest of all Richardson's 'flaws' - the 'flaw' which, I would suggest, subsumes the others we have explored: namely, his ineradicably bourgeois nature, evident (so it is

generally believed) in the morality he seeks to inculcate in his works, and (most certainly) in the pattern of his own life.

Richardson's social position was a cause of some adverse comment in the eighteenth century. Much as he may have risen from his humble origins, from the point of view of the aristocracy he remained a lowly figure. 'The doors of the great were never opened to him,' said Lady Mary Wortley Montagu; to which Mrs. Barbauld long ago made the only possible retort: that, if this was so, it was not Richardson, 'a genius whom every Englishman ought to have been proud of', but 'the great' upon whom 'the disgrace' should rest (Corr., I.clxxiv). Discussing Sir Charles Grandison, Lady Mary made much of Richardson's lack of knowledge of the manners of high life, suggesting that he 'should confine his pen to the amours of housemaids, and the conversation at the steward's table, where I imagine he has sometimes intruded, though oftener in the servants' hall'. A similar class animus is apparent when Horace Walpole writes of 'those deplorably tedious lamentations, Clarissa and Sir Charles Grandison, which are pictures of high life as conceived by a bookseller, and romances as they would be spiritualized by a Methodist teacher'.³³

This is just the snobbery of eighteenth-century aristocrats; but we cannot assume that such snobbery did not play a considerable role in the early reaction against Richardson. The towering reputation of a mere 'bookseller' may well have outraged many aristocratic readers. After the publication of the Correspondence, the impudence of that 'bookseller' in arrogating to himself the right to judge the well-born Fielding may also have fuelled in some a desire for retribution. Here I am speculating; what are undeniably important in the history of Richardson's reputation, however, are the attitudes of many later critics, regardless

of their own origins, to the particular type of bourgeois values and bourgeois achievement they find represented in Richardson.

Scott, writing in the eighteen-twenties, saw nothing contemptible in these, commending Richardson's 'unceasingly industrious' nature which 'led him to eminence in his highly respectable profession'. Moreover, while Scott may doubt whether Richardson was always successful in 'inculcating' virtue by presenting exemplary characters, the aim itself goes unquestioned. Stephen, by contrast, towards the end of the century, presents a Richardson 'who lived an obscure life in a petty coterie in fourth-rate London society' and 'wrote his novels expressly to recommend little unimpeachable moral maxims'; a Richardson offensive for 'his second-rate eighteenth-century priggishness and his twopenny-tract morality'. From here it is but a short step to the mid-twentieth century and V. S. Pritchett's 'smug, juicy, pedestrian little printer', 'prim and cosy', who 'sat like some pious old cook in her kitchen, giving advice to the kitchen maids, and when he came to write novels ... was merely continuing this practical office'.³⁴

This image of Richardson as a pompous old woman, canting in a kitchen, is perhaps the culmination of over a hundred years of ridicule. If Pritchett paints a vivid picture, R. F. Brissenden puts it into perspective when he declares Richardson's character 'an affront to every conception of what an artist should be'.³⁵ This is highly emotive language, suggesting - one cannot help but feel - the barely-concealed rage of the urbane modern man confronting the 'smug, juicy, pedestrian little printer'.³⁶

Brissenden's remark is cited, with apparent approval, by Eaves and Kimpel in the opening pages of their biography (EK, p. 2). Later they remark that 'One might not expect to find a powerful novelist in a conventional, poorly

educated printer', but go on to provide a parodic list of ideal backgrounds for novelists which indicates, one supposes, their sense of the futility of contemplating such things (p. 235f). Elizabeth Brophy, introducing her study of Richardson published in 1974, seems to take exception to what Brissenden has said, but finds the 'genesis of the view of the artist' it implies 'a topic too large' to be considered within the bounds of her own discussion.³⁷ Certainly it would be impossible to deal adequately with such a topic outside the scope of an entire book; however, given the resonance of Brissenden's words over so much of the history of Richardson's reputation, it seems worth providing at least a rough sketch of what that book would deal with. From a twentieth-century perspective, it becomes clear, it is not only 'the true, warm-hearted literary tradition of the eighteenth century' that Richardson is felt to have violated.

Brissenden does not actually tell us what an artist should be; but one's mind gravitates naturally to some rather well-worn terrain: the Romantic view of the artist, with his heroic individualism, transcendental strivings, and separation from ordinary society ('Beware! Beware! / His flashing eyes, his floating hair!'); the development, in post-revolutionary France, of the épater les bourgeois attitude among artists, and its subsequent widespread growth; 'nineties aestheticism; the American frontier myth ('I reckon I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me and I can't stand it') and its influence on the stoical, masculine posturings of Hemingway, Kerouac, et al.; the association of the 'artistic temperament' with various forms of perversion, madness, decadence, dissipation, or generally outrageous behaviour: Tchaikovsky, van Gogh, Strindberg, Nijinsky, Dali, Henry Miller, Dylan Thomas; Mailer, Plath,

Tennessee Williams, William Burroughs, 'Saint' Genet (to bring the list up to date). The vein of Romanticism, or debased Romanticism, which runs through all this is clear. It is apparent that these stereotypes have considerable power over the modern imagination; sweeping generalization though it may be, it is not, I think, entirely untrue to say that we expect 'the artist', at the very least, to unsettle the bourgeoisie, not to be a member of it. If this is the case, it is easy to see why a Richardson might enrage us.

Of course, to imply that all artists of the last two centuries have conformed to such stereotypes would be facile; it would be facile, too, to suggest that they must conform to them in order to be acceptable to critics and biographers. It is easy enough to point to writers other than Richardson who do appear to have lived more or less 'bourgeois' lives; Trollope immediately comes to mind. But Trollope is not perhaps considered a writer of the highest seriousness, at least not by those who assent to such things as the Romantic Artist Myth. One could cite numerous female writers; but women, after all, have not traditionally been judged by the same standards as men in areas such as this.

It is in fact difficult to find any suitably 'serious' male writer who appears as utterly and damningly 'bourgeois', in all respects, as Richardson is presented as having been. One might think of Wallace Stevens, an insurance lawyer; of Henry Green, an industrialist who (it is said) wrote his novels in his office during his lunch hour; perhaps of T. S. Eliot, who worked first in Lloyds Bank and later in the offices of Faber and Faber - and whose support for 'establishment' values is well-known. None of these was nearly as 'middling', socially speaking, as Richardson, but one points to them as examples of artists whose lives and characters do not seem to have fitted the post-Romantic bill. Yet while some may have

found these writers rather odd - one recalls the eagerness of Ezra Pound to extricate Eliot from the bank! - no one has suggested that any of them is 'an affront to every conception of what an artist should be'.

This is so, I think, for two reasons. First, because one cannot, in these cases, make any immediate equation between the 'bourgeois' nature of the writer and the 'bourgeois' tendency of the work, as one purportedly can with Richardson. Secondly (but related to this), the evident, and evidently compensating, education and intelligence of these writers must always be conceded.

Further comparisons of this sort can be made. We might parcel up Richardson with Dreiser, for example, as a 'naive' artist - 'naive', that is, without the extenuatingly 'vital' characteristics one tends to demand of such figures - who somehow managed to produce a masterpiece; yet while Dreiser himself might appear 'naive', the bleak naturalism of Sister Carrie does not. Or take Henry James: this eminent author appears to have been no more 'manly' than Richardson (indeed rather less so); but the cosmopolitan and cultured James, whose 'credentials' are everywhere apparent, seems by no means a fit target for ridicule as is the 'little printer' of critical caricature. As for Richardson's vanity, it need hardly be said that that pales by comparison with the arrogance of, say, D. H. Lawrence; but then, that sort of thing is not only accepted but applauded in a man regarded by many as a prophet.

Richardson's problem, so far as the critics are concerned, would seem to be that no such 'extenuating circumstances' are perceived amidst his manifold transgressions. Clearly, too, the phenomenon we have examined here is related to that double standard so obviously at work in relative appraisals of Richardson and Fielding. Johnson's disapprobation of aspects of Richardson's character was accompanied with a far more vehement dislike

of Fielding in general; but in the post-Thackeray period, a quite different picture emerges: 'the manly, the English Harry Fielding' - as Thackeray called him - may be forgiven numerous (real or purported) moral failings; the every (real or purported) weakness of Richardson, that middle-class milksop, will be dwelt on and denounced.³⁸

At this point it becomes necessary to consider the critical fortunes of Richardson's novels during the period we have been discussing. Coleridge, of course, was quite ready to find a concomitant 'vileness' in Richardson's 'mind' and art; Thackeray was similarly prepared to accompany his picture of Richardson the man, a 'milksop', with one of Richardson the writer 'pouring out endless volumes of sentimental twaddle'. But it would be wrong to assume that most critics of the last century made any comparably immediate and absolute equation between the prevailing view of Richardson the man, and the proper view to take of Richardson's work. In the Victorian period, we found objections to Pamela and Clarissa which rendered them as unfit for polite reading as Tom Jones. Later we found Richardson dismissed in a popular guide to literature as a 'tiresome mawkish sentimentalist'. Here, however, our concern must be with evaluative - and, more importantly, interpretative - judgements which may be taken as representative both of serious and of mainstream critical thought.

As we might expect, there is much that is said against Richardson's novels. While Johnson and Diderot had praised Richardson's faithfulness to nature and incomparable knowledge of the human heart, Hazlitt complains that Richardson was neither 'an observer of the characters of human life', like Fielding, nor 'a describer of its various eccentricities', like Smollett. Rather, he 'seemed to spin his materials entirely out of his own brain, as if there had been nothing existing

in the world beyond the little room in which he sat writing'. Richardson's method 'gives an appearance of truth', but on closer inspection one finds that he 'does not appear to have taken advantage of any thing in actual nature'. Hazlitt shows more appreciation of Pamela than most later critics can muster, but notes that 'no girl would write such letters in such circumstances'; he proceeds, indeed, from observing that Richardson 'furnishes his characters, on every occasion, with the presence of mind of the author', to the still more curious charge that 'All actual objects and feelings are blunted and deadened by being presented through a medium which may be true to reason, but is false in nature'. Richardson 'confounds his own point of view with that of the immediate actors in the scene; and hence presents you with a conventional and factitious nature, instead of that which is real'.³⁹

Hazlitt's few pages on Richardson in Lectures on the English Comic Writers (1819) are by far the most brilliant and sophisticated nineteenth-century commentary on the novelist. While Hazlitt perceived problems with point of view in Richardson's works, and questioned (rightly) what would later be called his 'realism of presentation', most critics were more preoccupied with the moral deficiencies of Richardson's supposedly highly moral characters.

In the eighteenth century, the anti-Pamelist view of Pamela was strongly counteracted by the effusions of praise from those who saw no contradiction between the novel's meaning and its prefatory statement of intent. In the following century, the subversive view of the novel becomes predominant - beginning, we have seen, with Mrs. Barbauld. Subsequently we find Scott complaining of 'a strain of cold-blooded prudence' in Pamela's character; for Gosse, Pamela swiftly loses any appeal she may have had when 'she grows conscious of the value

of her charms'; while Stephen simply dismisses her story, finding it neither 'moral' nor 'amusing'. Later, in our own century, Joseph Wood Krutch will see Pamela merely as 'a coarse-minded opportunist'; Frank Bradbrook will discuss the 'hypocrisy and coarse-grained vulgarity' of a heroine who is nothing more than 'a self-righteous equivalent of Roxana or Moll Flanders'; and Martin Battestin, as if uttering a truth universally acknowledged, will declare that Shamela 'exposed once and for all ... the absurdities and pretensions of Pamela'.⁴⁰

Meanwhile, Sir Charles Grandison, once the ideal gentleman, becomes a passionless, moralizing bore. To Hazlitt, he is 'the prince of coxcombs'; to Stephen, 'a prig of the first water'.⁴¹ Even the most sympathetic of Richardson's modern commentators have found it difficult to dismiss these charges.

If accounts of Pamela and Sir Charles Grandison rapidly become occasions for critical iconoclasm, however, Clarissa of course is another story; while some may have scorned it as an 'odious book', many more have seen it as a masterpiece. 'In this book, the novelist put his original crude essay completely into the shade, and added one to the masterpieces of the world,' says Gosse. Clarissa is an 'extraordinary book'; 'The author is entirely inexorable, and the reader must not hope to escape until he is thoroughly purged with terror and pity.' Stephen, after dwelling at length upon the flaws, aesthetic and moral, in Richardson's last novel, must finally 'leave Sir Charles, to say a few words upon that which is Richardson's real masterpiece'. While the plot of Clarissa may be 'utterly incredible', and the epistolary form creates endless improbabilities; while the heroine may be too stiffly formal and the villain absurd, 'designed by a person inexperienced even in the observation of vice'; while the novel is 'so overlaid with twaddle, so unmercifully protracted

and spun out as to be almost unreadable to the present generation', it nevertheless 'will always command the admiration of persons who have courage enough to get through eight volumes of correspondence'. Unlike some earlier critics, Stephen seems in little danger of weeping over the sufferings of Clarissa, and (as could perhaps be expected from this celebrated agnostic) shows no apparent interest in the novel as a Christian work; but its design, and the sense it conveys of 'inexorable fate', are impressive to him, and Richardson, for all that must be said against him, has ultimately 'such power of fascination as is exercised by the greatest writers alone'.⁴²

One could go on almost indefinitely adding to these testimonies to Richardson's masterpiece. If anything is apparent by this point, it is that Richardson's continuing reputation rests almost solely upon Clarissa. Certainly Pamela has become the subject of renewed critical scrutiny in the twentieth century, stemming most probably from the work of Utter and Needham in the 'thirties (Pamela's Daughters), and B. L. Reid's article 'Justice to Pamela', published in 1956. One feels, however, that the recuperation of Pamela would hardly have been carried out with such assiduity had Richardson not also been the author of Clarissa. An apologetic tone is discernible in the writings of many contemporary Pamelists; while much critical ingenuity is called into play to excuse those aspects of Pamela, and Pamela's character, which have so often been regarded as faults, few critics are able to view the novel with unqualified approbation, much as they may be able to pardon the heroine.⁴³

It would be an exaggeration, no doubt, to say that if Richardson had not written Clarissa he would appear in literary history only as a footnote (to discussions of Joseph Andrews); one feels, however, that had he

numbered among his novels only Pamela and Sir Charles he could easily have been dismissed. This is not because these novels are really as silly or tedious as they have sometimes been said to be - they surely are not; but their actual merits or demerits are not here at issue. One merely notes that these novels, construed by successive generations of critics as crude, or immoral, or naive to the point of imbecility, seem unlikely to have survived, except as historical curiosities, if unaccompanied with Clarissa.

But Clarissa itself is a troublesome text; and largely this is so because it is not, as Richardson initially claimed it was, a collection of genuine correspondence, but originated in the allegedly vile, canting mind of the 'little printer' himself. This would present no problem if we were to regard Richardson's entire output as, say, 'sentimental twaddle'; sooner or later, however, it was bound to become a cause of concern - certainly, of irritation - to those who accepted Clarissa as a masterpiece, yet accepted also the standard view of its author as a man. Leslie Stephen seemed to feel some unease about this, remarking that of the 'string of paradoxes, which it would be easy to apply to Richardson', the truly 'odd thing' is that such a man should have written work that is revered, for example, by some of the finest of 'the modern school of French novelists', whom one might expect to reject him 'as a hopeless Philistine'.⁴⁴

In the twentieth century, such musings were to become commonplace. To R. F. Brissenden, Clarissa may be a great book, 'Yet it is impossible to regard Richardson himself as a great man. That this timid, sanctimonious, prudish businessman should somehow have been able to create the sombre and powerful tragedy of Clarissa is one of those embarrassing paradoxes with which history occasionally presents us.' To V. S.

Pritchett, 'That a man like Samuel Richardson should write one of the great European novels is one of those humiliating frolics in the incidence of genius.'⁴⁵

Frank Bradbrook, in The Pelican Guide to English Literature, repeats the usual charges against Richardson and even adds some more. Shakespeare, with his small Latin and less Greek, comes to mind as we learn that Richardson 'was not a cultured man', 'was without any deep first-hand knowledge of the classics', and 'incapable of writing a great comic epic in prose, such as Tom Jones'. This, surely, is the reductio ad absurdum of unfavourable comparisons between Richardson and Fielding: true, of course, but entirely meaningless as grounds for criticism. One may as well say of Pope, 'He was incapable of writing a great religious epic in blank verse, such as Paradise Lost'; or of Jane Austen, 'She was incapable of writing a great Romantic novel set on the Yorkshire moors, such as Wuthering Heights.' Then comes the crucial point. 'Despite all his limitations,' Bradbrook writes, 'this vulgar, complacent little book-seller gained a reputation in his own country and on the Continent second to none, and his influence is still to be seen in more recent times in the novels of Henry James, Mr E. M. Forster, and Proust. How was it done?'⁴⁶

As it happens, Bradbrook does not tell us how 'it' was done at all; rather, he tells us what was done and offers his opinions on the performance. Others have not retired before this perplexing problem. Now such a problem, it might be said, need not perplex us at all. 'How was it done?' The obvious answer is twofold: for one thing, that Richardson has been a victim of unreasonable prejudices and was not, after all, a silly or contemptible man; for another, that short, fat, middle-class printers are as likely to be blessed with literary genius as dissolute aristocrats, opium-addicted intellectuals, Oedipally-fixated sons of 'vital' Nottinghamshire colliers,

and all the rest. The question of how 'a man like Samuel Richardson', in particular, was able to write Clarissa, is misleading: surely, if we think the question worth pursuing at all, we should ask how anyone was able to write it? The 'incidence of genius' is always an ultimately mysterious phenomenon. While biographical factors might explain the direction that genius takes, genius itself remains recalcitrant to critical explanations.

Our critics have had little time for these basic considerations; as Elizabeth Brophy has observed, 'one can only be grateful that Richardson's authorship is too well documented to allow the possibility, say, of Dr. Johnson's having written Clarissa.'⁴⁷ It is here that the view of Richardson as a covertly prurient writer, hiding behind a mask of high-minded morality (or pious cant) assumes a new importance. For a long time this remained an unorthodox view - despite Fielding, even despite Coleridge. Mrs. Barbauld may be seen as representative here: Pamela's 'purity of mind' is questioned; the 'indelicate scenes' in the novel are censured; yet Richardson nevertheless remains, as a writer, strictly on the side of virtue (Corr., I.lxiii, lxvii). It is not explained how this can be the case; what one assumes is that deficiencies in the moral qualities of his works are taken to derive from deficiencies not in his own moral adherence, but in the morality of his time and class: thus Stephen, on Richardson's 'second-rate eighteenth-century priggishness and his twopenny-tract morality'.

The widespread growth of negative views of Richardson's character, however, makes possible a full-scale assault on his personal moral and religious rectitude. 'Boccaccio at his hottest seems to me less pornographical than Pamela or Clarissa Harlowe,' wrote D. H. Lawrence in 1929.⁴⁸ This is Mario Praz, in The Romantic Agony (1933):

It has repeatedly been remarked that the unctuous pietism of Richardson's novels succeeds in covering only in appearance their sensual, turbid background....

Whether this contradiction of intention and result was an inevitable consequence of the author's realistic attitude, which brought him to accept the facts as shown him in his surroundings, or whether it was simply an effect of his own individual psychological situation (Richardson, in consequence of the materialistic philosophy then predominant, was at bottom a supporter of the instinct against whose manifestations he preached in the name of a virtue which he estimated also by materialistic standards), the fact remains that his moralizing reveals itself fully for what it was - namely, little more than a veneer - in his French imitators, who sought in the subject of the persecuted woman chiefly an excuse for situations of heightened sensuality.⁴⁹

How the works of other writers can be said to 'reveal' this sort of thing about Richardson's novels is hardly clear, to say the least. Nevertheless, given that The Romantic Agony was an important and influential work, Praz lends authority to the view of Richardson's moralizing as a mere 'veneer' - as, one is sure, does even a throwaway remark from Lawrence.

While Praz deals with this issue with a coolly academic detachment, the same cannot be said of F. C. Green, in his study of eighteenth-century French and English literary ideas, Minuet (1935). Green obviously loathes Richardson, repeatedly describing him in abusive terms ('this squabby little recluse', 'this fat little sultan of North End'); ascribing to his work 'a facile and maudlin pathos' and 'turgid morality'; denying him not only a valid 'vision of life' but even psychological insight and a 'knowledge of the feminine soul'.⁵⁰ While Green admittedly (and anomalously) has some respectful things to say about Clarissa, it is his account of Pamela which is of particular interest here. Not surprisingly, Green can hardly wait 'to escape from Pamela ... into the clean, virile atmosphere of Fielding's Joseph Andrews' (p. 392), but lingers there long enough to write things like this:

One can visualize Richardson licking his lips as he dwelt over the account of B.'s abortive attempt to rape Pamela in the presence of his housekeeper. He really enjoys writing these scenes and, having absolutely no sense of humour, contrives to invest them with a sliminess of which he and Pamela are blissfully unaware. To make matters worse, his strange and twisted imagination is ever coiling back on itself, harking back to these erotic moments.... Mr. B. is quite obviously invented in order to allow Richardson to indulge his penchant for smug salaciousness. Now, Defoe and Smollett and Fielding, whilst never hesitating to call a spade a spade, never offend any but the prudish and 'nancy-minded.' Richardson, on the contrary, has a positive genius for disgusting the most tolerant; and could make the binomial theorem sound indecent (pp. 381-2).

It goes on. As Eaves and Kimpel remark, this is - simply - silly (EK, p. 519). What we have here, however, are the ingredients necessary for a solution to the mystery of how Richardson wrote Clarissa - a solution with the great advantage of preserving intact the patronizing portrait of the 'little printer', whilst at the same time adding a needed overlay of Romantic squalor.

V. S. Pritchett, writing in the nineteen-forties, is only too eager to provide that solution. To Pritchett, Pamela is merely 'ridiculous'; but in Clarissa Richardson not only 'calmly rises far above' the earlier novel, 'he sets the whole continent weeping'. 'Yet there he is,' Pritchett complains, 'plump, prosaic, the most middling of middling men' - we are to assume that even his being 'plump' militated against Richardson's having had talent, it seems - 'and so domestically fussy that even his gift of weeping hardly guarantees that he will be a major figure. Is there not some other strain in this dull and prodigiously painstaking little man? There is. Samuel Richardson was mad.

'I do not mean that Richardson was a lunatic,' Pritchett hastily explains. Richardson, however, was a 'victim of that powerful cult of the will, duty and conscience by which Puritanism turned life and its human

relations into an incessant war'. The force behind this 'incessant war', the 'mania and obsession' that the Puritan 'cannot get out of his mind' is sex, and Richardson, we find, was 'mad about sex'. Thus it transpires that Richardson's genius, as manifest in his extraordinary novelistic technique, may be regarded (it would appear) simply as a function of his Puritan perversity:

Clarissa ... is a novel written about the world as one sees it through the keyhole. Prurient and obsessed by sex, the prim Richardson creeps on tip-toe nearer and nearer, inch by inch, to that vantage-point; he beckons us on, pausing to make every kind of pious protestation, and then nearer and nearer he creeps again, delaying, arguing with us in whispers, working us up until we catch the obsession too. What are we going to see when we get there? The abduction, the seduction, the lawful deflowering of a virgin in marriage are not enough for him. Nothing short of the rape of Clarissa Harlowe by a man determined on destroying her can satisfy Richardson's phenomenal day-dream with its infinite delays.⁵¹

While Pritchett, like Green and Praz before him, does not explicitly invoke psychoanalysis to account for the supposed coexistence in Richardson's mind of prurience and piety - apparent piety - the implication is plain that he was a prime candidate for the Freudian couch, if not for a padded cell.

There is little to be said for such sensationalistic surmises. Clearly Pritchett, every bit as much as Thackeray before him, is more concerned with a Richardson of his own creation than with the historical Richardson and what can validly be known about him. For subsequent critics, however, the idea of a Richardson driven by perverse unconscious drives becomes increasingly attractive. Walter Allen eagerly follows Pritchett, doubting 'whether it is possible for the critic who comes to Clarissa after reading Freud to deny that the novel must have been written by a man who was, even though unconsciously,

a sadist in the technical sense'. Ian Watt discerns in the novelist 'an obsessional interest in criminal sexuality', while for Morris Golden, the treatment of women in Richardson's novels is (again) a revelation of their author's secret sadism.⁵²

It is Golden's contention that Richardson, for all his reputed effeminacy, was not in fact a novelist primarily concerned with the feminine psyche - as generations of readers have believed. Richardson's women, argues Golden in his 1963 study, Richardson's Characters, are 'less convincingly projected than his men', seen from the outside only (p. 46); in truth, his sympathies lay with his 'bold young men' who seek a perverse dominance over members of the opposite sex. Should a reader ask why, if characters such as Mr. B., Lovelace, and Sir Hargrave Pollexfen are little more than projections of their creator's longings, they do not meet with more success in their wicked designs, Golden's answer is ready: as a concomitant to their sadism, Richardson and his bold young men also display 'the complementary guilt feelings that at times are extreme enough to constitute masochism' (p. 23). Richardson's illicit urges are evident throughout his life and writings. Even Sir Charles Grandison, virtuous as he may seem, conceals a will to power 'almost as absolute as Lovelace's naked enforcing of his demonic urges' (p. 17). Richardson's 'delight in teasing the women whose admiration he sought' again bespeaks his sadistic compulsions (p. 6). And of course we shall have no difficulty in interpreting the fact that he 'seems to have enjoyed the wilfulness of the girls with whom he surrounded himself'; that 'he courted pertness from his adopted daughters and delighted in being attacked by them' (p. 25).

Perhaps the best commentary on this sort of thing is Alfred Kazin's, in a 1959 essay 'Psychoanalysis and

Literary Culture Today'. Kazin cites two abuses of psychoanalysis that are virulent in literary and artistic circles:

One: the myth of universal "creativity," the assumption that every idle housewife was meant to be a painter and that every sexual deviant is really a poet. From this follows the myth that these unproductive people are "blocked"; whereupon how easy for the hack and the quack to get together! Second: the use of psychoanalytical jargon as a static description of the personality of the artist. There is no doubt that although neurosis can cripple creative artistry or hinder it entirely, talent is always quite separate in function - if not in theme - from the emotional chaos of neurosis, which provides no clue whatever to the reality of creative life.... If we approach literature exclusively by way of the writer's personality, psychoanalytically considered, we not only get even farther away from the real experience of literature than we were before, but we obliterate even the fundamental cultural respect for the health of the creative self in our eagerness to label the writer ill.... It is odd that the very people who are so quick to see suppressed and wasted creativity in people who are merely emotionally ill should always wish to deny the fundamental creativity of the greatest writers, like Kafka and Lawrence and Dostoevsky - a mistake that in the case of the latter, Freud pointedly refrained from making.⁵³

Of course not all of Richardson's modern critics have been intent on seeing the novelist as a kind of Freudian psychotic; but the idea of a Richardson somehow divided against himself, unaware of what he was really doing when he wrote, remains and hardens into orthodoxy. 'Richardson is a classic example of a man misreading himself,' writes B. L. Reid.

He thought he was a great moralist serving his texts in a merely adequate bolus of fiction; he was in fact a jejune moralist (not, I shall argue, a dishonest one) but a great shaggy artist who was prevented by his own moral fatuity and that of his readers from ever seeing himself in an adequate mirror, currying his coat, and emerging as the truly first-rate novelist he should have been. In short, it seems to me we have to deal here with a prime case of unconscious genius.⁵⁴

Mark Kinkead-Weekes has little time for the 'unconscious'; yet he must make the distinction between Samuel Richardson, dramatic novelist, transcending himself through art, and 'Mr. Richardson', pious middle-class printer and moralist, who commandeers the story when the dramatic imagination flags.⁵⁵ Eaves and Kimpel juxtapose the author's 'social self', the Richardson who wrote Sir Charles Grandison, with his mysterious alter-ego, 'the Richardson who wrote Clarissa'; the Richardson 'who is most interesting', but who 'hardly appears in his biography' (EK, p. 619).

Looking at such essentially conservative critics as these, we see how widespread is this notion of a divided Richardson. To be sure, it is sometimes maintained that in all authors one finds a similar division between the external social persona and the inner artistic man;⁵⁶ but one expects to see at least some evidence in the outer man of the existence of the inner. There can be little doubt that Richardson is considered a special case - as Reid says, an 'unconscious genius', an artist in spite of himself.

This need not be grounds for denigration. If it is in the years after the Second World War that Richardson begins his slow climb back from the oblivion of merely 'historical' significance, above all it is the perceived psychological interest of his work - what Frank Kermode calls his 'mythopoeic' power - which explains this newfound appreciation.⁵⁷ Not only is there some buried force in Richardson's psyche which breaks through and subverts his conscious intentions whenever he sits down to write, it seems; it is, as Reid makes plain, through this very process that the novelist's work derives whatever value and interest it may have.

But let us look more closely at some of his 'psychological' critics.

RICHARDSON AT THE ANALYST'S

Among the less well-known of the many critical attacks on Richardson is a vitriolic pamphlet of 1754 called Critical Remarks on Sir Charles Grandison, Clarissa and Pamela.¹ Like Remarks on Clarissa or Edward Young's Conjectures on Original Composition (1759), the pamphlet, signed only by 'a Lover of Virtue', is written in the form of an address to Richardson himself.

In his subtitle, the pamphleteer declares his intention to investigate whether his subject's novels 'have a Tendency to corrupt or improve the Public Taste and Morals'. His answer is swift and unequivocal: 'That your writings have in a great measure corrupted our language and taste, is a truth that cannot be denied' (p. 3). Vast tracts of his three novels, Richardson is informed, 'contain nothing else but a minute and circumstantial detail of the most shocking vices and villainous contrivances', which, far from inspiring exemplary virtue, will serve only to 'instruct the weak head and the corrupt heart in the methods how to proceed to their gratification' (p. 43).

But the attack contains a qualification we might not have expected. In Clarissa, it seems, the character of the heroine is

admirable throughout the whole. Nature and propriety are not only strictly observed, but we see the greatest nobleness of soul, generosity of sentiments, filial affection, delicacy, modesty, and every female virtue, finely maintained and consistently conspicuous all along (p. 24)

Here, very early in the history of Richardson criticism, we find in rather exaggerated form a phenomenon we shall often encounter again. There is much for which Richardson must be censured, we are told, but the 'divine Clarissa' is indeed divine. For our pamphleteer, who is appalled to see Clarissa surrounded by the likes of Lovelace and Mrs. Sinclair, the same can hardly be said of the novel in which the heroine appears.² But perhaps his logic leaves something to be desired. To Mrs. Barbauld, we recall, Richardson's novel was 'a noble temple to female virtue' (Corr., I.1xxxii).

So it was to remain throughout the nineteenth century, despite all that happened to Richardson's reputation. Some may have thought even his greatest novel merely 'sentimental twaddle'; some may have considered it actively vicious: among the majority of its critics, however, Clarissa remained, if not the great work of Christian apologetics Richardson had intended it to be, at least the story of a young woman of astonishing excellence, unjustly victimized, who triumphs finally in her saintly death. If Clarissa was taken less seriously as a Christian heroine, still she could stand for the integrity of the individual, for what Ian Watt was to call 'the inner inviolability of the human personality'.³

To Hazlitt, in 1819, 'her purity is dazzling indeed'; Clarissa 'conquers all hearts. I should suppose that never sympathy more deep or sincere was excited than by the heroine of Richardson's romance, except by the calamities of real life.' To Mrs. Margaret Oliphant, in 1869, Clarissa is 'a virgin-martyr, a poetic visionary being'. Gosse, twenty years later, offers a further glowing tribute. To Clara Thomson, in 1900, Clarissa is still 'an exemplar to her sex':

[T]he story of Clarissa still lives ... by reason of the one matchless central figure, who stands unrivalled among the other inventions of her creator. And, as long as the

English language is spoken or its literature read, the "divine Clarissa" will hold her own among the noblest of its ideal women, with Imogen, and Portia, and Cordelia. Torn from the proud pedestal of maidenhood, dragged in an unclean company through foul and miry ways, a sacrifice to vanity rather than to lust, she loses none of her charm or potency. For through her there speaks the authentic voice of the best women of all ages, who refuse to disassociate love and respect from the most sacred of human relationships, or to subject themselves to the humiliation of a union unsanctioned by these motives.⁴

One can only admire Thomson's confidence. Unfortunately, her prediction that the divine Clarissa would forever 'hold her own' was to prove somewhat inaccurate. To the sophisticated minds of later critics, the exemplary characterization as much as the 'Puritan' moralizing of Clarissa appear as necessary to be discredited, it seems, as does the character of Richardson himself. In the mid-twentieth century, contempt for the 'little printer' combines with psychoanalysis - and, perhaps, with New Critical theory - to sanction a complete disregard for whatever authorial intentions the 'conscious' Richardson may have had.

Say we accept that Richardson was the helpless prey of unconscious forces: clearly, the next move is to bring to bear our post-Freudian awareness on the characters he created. After all, it is presumably those characters, and the situations in which they are placed, that have impressed upon us our sense of their creator's perversity.

Of course, no one would be surprised to be told that Lovelace, for example, was seething with psychological corruption. A much more interesting target for the analyst-critic is Clarissa. Thus V. S. Pritchett is moved to observe that 'those who put their price up by the device of reluctance invite the violence of the robber. By setting such a price upon herself' - it supposedly follows - 'Clarissa represents that extreme

of puritanism which desires to be raped. Like Lovelace's, her sexuality is really violent, insatiable in its wish for destruction.'⁵

From this time on, the idea that Clarissa courts her own violation becomes a commonplace among Richardson's critics - though not all are as explicit as R. F. Brissenden, in his British Council pamphlet of 1958, who frankly informs us that 'There is a sense in which Clarissa, like all sentimental heroines, asks to be raped'. In Brissenden's later account of the novel, in his book Virtue in Distress (1974), Clarissa not only 'asks' but 'deserves to be raped'. Brissenden does not elaborate on the criteria by which our heroine actually deserves such a fate, although the rape, we are told, 'is almost a natural consequence of Clarissa's puritanical attempt to deny the existence of sexual desire'.⁶

If Clarissa is to share in responsibility for the rape, it follows, then, that Lovelace cannot be as black as he has been painted. In an essay published in 1956, 'Clarissa: A Study in the Nature of Convention', Norman Rabkin finds on reading Richardson's novel that there is something wrong.⁷ 'Clarissa, we have always been told, is a highly didactic novel,' he observes; but if it is intended as 'a lesson in conventional morality', its ending is hardly adequate. The novel 'does not fulfill its expectations'; yet it is in this failure that its greatness lies. What Rabkin suggests is that we misinterpret Clarissa if we assume it to be 'simply the pathetic story of poor Clary Harlowe and her brutal mishandling by the villainous Lovelace' (p. 204). Rather, the novel dramatizes

the battle in man between the free force of instinct born in him, and the decorum which he finds it necessary to construct in order to live with other men ... the real purpose of the novel is to find the needed balance in this decorum in which animal nature and external regulation may counter each other (pp. 204-5).

Now we know - and Rabkin surely must have known - that Richardson did not intend any such conclusion to be drawn from the novel. It is not clear exactly what Rabkin means when he refers to 'the real purpose of the novel'; just when we might think that he is claiming to have discovered some buried unconscious purpose beneath its author's presumably tawdry waking intentions, we find a very conscious Richardson indeed - the Richardson of the Preface to the third edition of Clarissa - called forth to attest that he intended his heroine to be 'not in all respects a perfect character'. '[N]evertheless critics continue to think of her as a faulty attempt by Richardson to present a morally perfect character,' Rabkin notes reprovably (p. 213n).

This is an extraordinarily crude, or perhaps shameless, use of selective quotation. What Richardson wrote was this:

The principle [sic] of these two young ladies is proposed as an exemplar to her sex. Nor is it any objection to her being so, that she is not in all respects a perfect character. It was not only natural, but it was necessary, that she should have some faults, were it only to show the reader, how laudably she could mistrust and blame herself, and carry to her own heart, divested of self-partiality, the censure which arose from her own convictions, and that even to the acquittal of those, because revered characters, whom no one else would acquit, and to whose much greater faults her errors were owing, and not to a weak or reproachable heart. As far as is consistent with human frailty, and as far as she could be perfect, considering the people she had to deal with and those with whom she was inseparably connected, she is perfect (Cl., I.xiv).

Rabkin, who has no quarrel with those who find 'the virtuous heroine almost intolerable' (p. 204), is obviously not convinced. Clarissa is merely a prim slave to bourgeois convention, who denies 'the just claims of animal nature'. Opposed to her is Lovelace, 'the "natural" man, in whom recognition of the necessary

order of society is virtually absent' (p. 205). In this reading, Clarissa's loyalty is not, 'for all her protestations', to God, but merely to the drab conventionality that is 'rooted in her as a principle, as the very fount of all her thoughts and feelings, as her soul' (p. 206). Not surprisingly, then, with her 'deification of social law' (ibid.), her 'arbitrary rejection of impulse' (p. 212), Clarissa is as much responsible for her tragedy as is Lovelace. The rake, after all, is 'unquestionably not a man of evil character, but is rather admirable in all respects except for his one vice, sexual passion, and those traits which derive from it' (p. 208).

This view of Lovelace as obsessed with sex is not only contradicted in the novel, but by Lovelace himself. His driving passion, he reveals, is not sexual lust but power: he cares little for sexual consummation, asking, 'the fruition, what is there in that?' Though 'nature will not be satisfied without it', it is the 'Preparation and expectation' that excites him, the goading of his victims to what he sees as an admission of his superior authority (Cl., I.172-3). 'More truly delightful to me the seduction progress than the crowning act: for that's a vapour, a bubble!' he exclaims (II.337). As he comments at the time of the 'Rosebud' affair, 'Many and many a pretty rogue had I spared, whom I did not spare, had my power been acknowledged, and my mercy in time implored' (I.170). His fantasies are not of illicit sex but of himself as an imperial figure, bending the world to his will. While he may often evoke Clarissa's physical charms, what he longs for most is to humble or 'subdue' her, reducing her to a level of bland subservience. Lovelace operates by the so-called 'rake's creed', a central tenet of which is 'once subdued - always subdued'. By seducing Clarissa, he thinks, he will liberate her natural impulses, shattering irredeemably

her pretensions to 'virtue'. It is Lovelace, not Richardson, who sees Clarissa merely as the slave of conventional restraint.

It might be wondered whether Clarissa's family would have seen her as so conventional. Rabkin appears to have anticipated this objection, asking us to consider as evidence for his view of things that Clarissa refuses to marry Solmes 'not simply because she dislikes him, but because, despite her distaste for the thought of marriage, she does not want to desecrate the ritual and laws of the institution by marrying a man she cannot love'. In her dread of her father's curse, Clarissa again puts 'abstract social obligation, in this case filial duty, before the action demanded by a clear knowledge of moral right'. As for her early unwillingness to name the day of her marriage to Lovelace, this may be attributed to 'a kind of systematized coyness' (p. 207).

But what of the rape, and its aftermath? In Richardson's novel, when at last Lovelace is reduced to violating a drugged Clarissa, he soon finds that the raped heroine, instead of being forever 'subdued', is in fact strengthened in her resistance to him. After the rape, moreover, far from revealing any exaggerated regard for social decorum, Clarissa not only makes no attempt to conceal her 'dishonour' but rejects all suggestions of a conventional 'reparation' through marriage, declaring to her violator 'That the man who has been the villain to me you have been, shall never make me his wife' (Cl., III.222).

That the possibility of Clarissa's virtue being merely a matter of 'convention' is so explicitly raised in the novel is conveniently ignored by Rabkin, as is the still more important fact that Lovelace himself comes to see the iniquity of this view. Throughout the novel Lovelace's arrogance is jarred by the recognition of Clarissa's excellence; as Richardson observes, in

the same Preface from which Rabkin has so selectively quoted, Clarissa is often esteemed as an angel even 'by the man whose heart was so corrupt that he could hardly believe human nature capable of the purity which, on every trial or temptation, shone out in herself' (I.xiv). Almost the whole point of the tragic relationship of Clarissa and Lovelace, it could be argued, is the latter's shocked realization that, contrary to all his 'rakish maxims', there must indeed be 'something more than a name in virtue!' (III.261).

According to Rabkin, it is after the rape that Clarissa reveals just how deeply conventional she is: 'instead of suddenly awaking to a true sense of herself as an animal being after Lovelace has violated her, Clarissa becomes ill and dies' (p. 211). When she refuses to marry Lovelace, this is because her 'devotion to principle ... too inflexible to allow her any compromise', prevents her from following the one course of action by which she might 'save herself'. '[S]ince she can no longer come pure and undefiled to her wedding,' we are informed, 'she thinks herself unworthy of marriage' (p. 213). To Rabkin, Clarissa's character, as much as Lovelace's, merely reveals the flawed nature of man - the concern of all tragedy, we are reminded (p. 214). Characters such as Belford and Anna Howe are to be preferred to the heroine (pp. 214-16). When Richardson had Anna say to Clarissa, 'Your merit is your crime', or had Belford opine that Clarissa was 'all mind', he surely did not imagine that two hundred years later such phrases would be seized on, bizarrely, as evidence for the prosecution of his heroine! (Cl., I.282, II.243; cf. Rabkin, pp. 213, 206).

Perhaps Rabkin's essay could be seen as an attempt to recuperate Richardson's unacceptably eighteenth-century, unacceptably religious novel for the liberal-minded modern reader, who is after all disinclined to believe

in the reality of good and evil as moral absolutes. Yet as Angus Wilson has said, 'Richardson really did believe in evil and in good.' Wilson adds, speaking as a novelist, 'It is no longer possible to write characters like Clarissa.'⁸ This one can well believe. Still, it remains possible to read about them, and when we read Clarissa - as Wilson, it is clear, would agree - it is better to begin from the assumption that the heroine really is 'proposed as an exemplar to her sex', surely, than sceptically to insist that she must be merely a bourgeois conformist, and to grant her vision no more validity than that of Lovelace.

These are moves which are made, however, in much criticism of Clarissa written in the nineteen-fifties. R. F. Brissenden, for example, though he appreciates Clarissa's 'honesty and courage' in adversity, and perceives the extent to which the novel is concerned with the maintenance of personal integrity, ignores the Christian dimensions of the story and construes it as concerned with a conventional young woman's awakening to the sordid realities of life: 'Lovelace, the Hobbesian man of reason, forces her to acknowledge the truth about herself and other people.'⁹

But the most important study of Richardson which appeared at this time is Ian Watt's. Watt's book The Rise of the Novel (1957) has been often and justly celebrated. Much as one might doubt the claim of one enthusiastic admirer, that Watt, with Leavis, Booth, and Van Ghent, 'permanently changed the way novels were read in England and America',¹⁰ nevertheless it seems probable that his important book, in the thirty years since it was first published, has been and remains the most widely-read critical study of the eighteenth-century English novel.

One might think that Watt had little in common with writers on Richardson such as Brissenden, Rabkin,

and Pritchett: his interest is essentially in the relations between literature and history. Reading The Rise of the Novel, one learns much of value about the eighteenth-century reading public, the middle classes, the rise of individualism, urban life in Richardson's time, contemporary attitudes towards women, the family, sexual morality and so on, and how these things may have impinged upon the nature and development of the novel form. Discussing Clarissa, Watt admirably emphasizes the essentially eighteenth-century qualities of Richardson's work, stressing, for example, that those who find much that is 'incredible or uncongenial in Clarissa's personality' should remember the 'ideals of Richardson's time and class' (p. 221).

The admirer quoted earlier, Daniel R. Schwarz, sees particular importance in the historical nature of Watt's approach, especially given the context in which the book first appeared: 'By arguing that the author might be more profitably understood with reference to historical background and the world reflected in the novel, he took issue with the then fashionable reliance upon Freud and Jung.'¹¹ It seems ironic, then, that the final effect of Watt's discussion of Richardson, at least, should be to sanction precisely the sort of crude psychoanalytic speculation implied in the phrase, 'fashionable reliance upon Freud and Jung'. The concluding pages of his chapter on Clarissa might almost be an object-lesson in how to practise that dubious form of criticism. It is because of this, and because of his evident importance and influence, that I shall take Watt as my prime example of the literary psychoanalyst at work.

For all that he may tarry with such traditional motifs of the Richardson critic as 'the inner inviolability of the human personality' and the like, Watt soon moves

on to explore what he calls the 'much more complex and problematic' aspects of the novel (p. 237). Dealing with the heroine's early interest in Lovelace, Watt perceives, correctly, that 'we are fully entitled to suspect Clarissa herself of not knowing her own feelings' (p. 238). He stresses, however, that 'The minor reticences and confusions revealed in the feminine correspondence are insignificant compared to the much grosser discrepancies between Lovelace's pretended attitudes to Clarissa and the falsehoods and trickeries which his letters reveal'. Far from seeing Richardson's heroine as a sort of Puritan ice-maiden here, Watt notes that 'the code which might seem to make Clarissa too prudent is not prudent enough when measured against the outrageous means which men allow themselves to gain their ends' (p. 239).

One can hardly argue with this. Turning the page, however, we find Watt plunging deeper into the psychological depths to discover in 'the already complex series of dualities embodied in the relationship of Lovelace and Clarissa quite another range of meanings'; these 'may be regarded', it seems, 'as the ultimate and no doubt pathological expression of the dichotomization of the sexual roles in the realm of the unconscious' (p. 240). Examining Richardson's imagery of captive birds, of spiders and flies, Watt informs us that 'Sadism is, no doubt, the ultimate form which the eighteenth-century view of the masculine role involved', while 'The complement of the sadistic and sexual male is the masochistic and asexual female' (pp. 240-1).

Some might see this as a valid view of the relations between the sexes at any time in history; still, leaving this aside, one may legitimately feel jarred by this sudden leap from the particularity of Richardson's novel to 'the realm of the unconscious' and the perversities underlying the 'eighteenth-century view' of sexual roles. Undeterred, however, Watt moves on from here to the

death of Clarissa, suggesting that 'sexual intercourse, apparently, means death for the woman'; that Clarissa's death is the 'working out' of a 'masochistic fantasy' that equates sex with death. The scenes in which the heroine threatens her life with knives or scissors are invoked here to support the assertion that 'Unconsciously, no doubt, Clarissa courts sexual violation as well as death' (pp. 241-2).

Eaves and Kimpel, commenting on this passage, observe that, given the 'very large number of longish-shaped objects used in everyday life', it must be difficult indeed to avoid such supposedly sexual symbolism:

Mr. Watt might have pointed out that Clarissa is unduly fond of writing and must have used a pen. But perhaps it would have posed troublesome problems if he had noticed that Lovelace deliberately courts the duel with Colonel Morden, that both men prefer the short rapier, 'a gentleman's weapon', to the pistol, and that Lovelace 'repeatedly told him' that he valued himself much on his 'skill in that weapon' (EK, p. 258).

Some might dismiss this as merely so much philistine scoffing in the face of the unknown. But Eaves and Kimpel, despite their satirical intention, would appear to have a sound warrant for extending the symbol-hunting quest to such extremes. It is well-known that Freud considered the creative writer to be a species of dreamer or day-dreamer.¹² Here is Freud, in his Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis, explaining sexual symbolism in dreams:

The more striking and for both sexes the more interesting component of the genitals, the male organ, finds symbolic substitutes in the first instance in things that resemble it in shape - things, accordingly, that are long and up-standing, such as sticks, umbrellas, posts, trees and so on; further, in objects which share with the thing they represent the characteristic of penetrating into the body and injuring - thus, sharp weapons of every kind, knives, daggers, spears, sabres, but also fire-arms, rifles, pistols and revolvers (particularly suitable owing to their shape). In the anxiety dreams of girls, being followed by a man with

a knife or a fire-arm plays a large part. This is perhaps the commonest instance of dream-symbolism and you will now be able to translate it easily. Nor is there any difficulty in understanding how it is that the male organ can be replaced by objects from which water flows - water-taps, watering-cans, or fountains - or again by other objects which are capable of being lengthened, such as hanging-lamps, extensible pencils, etc. A no less obvious aspect of the organ explains the fact that pencils, pen-holders, nail-files, hammers, and other instruments are undoubted male sexual symbols.

The remarkable characteristic of the male organ which enables it to rise up in defiance of the laws of gravity, one of the phenomena of erection, leads to it being represented symbolically by balloons, flying-machines and most recently by Zeppelin airships....

The female genitals are represented by a similar abundance and variety of symbols. These include pits, cavities, hollows, vessels, bottles, receptacles, boxes, trunks, cases, chests, pockets, ships, cupboards, stoves, rooms, houses, doors, gates, wood, paper, tables, books, snails, mussels, mouths, churches, chapels, landscapes, gardens, blossoms, and flowers - among other things. And we have not even touched on the various symbols for breasts and pubic hair, not to mention the wide range of representations of sexual intercourse and masturbation.¹³

The trouble with this sort of thing is not that the whole idea of sexual symbolism is ludicrous. But it is one thing to agree that some objects or actions may function as sexual symbols in some contexts; quite another to believe that virtually everything we can dream about or think about is a sexual symbol. Following Freud's logic, it would be difficult not to find some way in which anything at all could resemble sexual desires, organs, or acts. 'Kindling fire, and everything to do with it, is intimately interwoven with sexual symbolism,' says Freud. 'Flame is always a male genital, and the hearth is its female counterpart [emphases mine].'¹⁴ It is this very lack of difficulty which should make one suspicious. Could there not have been other reasons

why even the most sexually-obsessed of psychiatric patients might 'most recently' have been dreaming of Zeppelin airships, for example? The Introductory Lectures were delivered during the First World War, after all.

Undeniably, sexual symbolism does exist, in art as in dreams. When Clarissa, in her delirium after the rape, writes of her wretchedness now that 'the key' has been placed in her 'keyhole' (Cl., III.210-11), we can hardly doubt that it exists in Richardson's novel - and not necessarily on an 'unconscious' level, either. Certainly it is not difficult to see sexual symbolism in Clarissa's dream, earlier in the novel, of Lovelace stabbing her 'to the heart' and throwing her into a grave (I.433); clearly the dream prefigures her own rape and death. But that Watt should see it as 'coloured by the idea that sexual intercourse is a kind of annihilation', meaning sexual intercourse per se - this raises one's doubts (p. 241). They increase when he goes on to claim that 'Clarissa courts sexual violation' (p. 242). Watt is building his case on flimsy foundations, surely, when he asks us to accept, unargued, that when Clarissa begs Lovelace to kill her rather than molest her any further, she is really pleading for further molestation (when this scene takes place, she has already been raped). Here we see that most irritating aspect of psychoanalysis, this determination to insist, against all evidence to the contrary, that one does not really mean what one says, but its opposite. Faced with this, one may well feel justified in wondering whether the person doing the analysis does not have some vested interest in discrediting a particular way of thinking - in convincing us, for example, that a figure of 'exemplary virtue' could not really be so exemplary or virtuous.

Watt would appear to be thinking along these lines. Clarissa's death, he maintains, is owing not only to her supposed masochism but also to her sense of

responsibility for her own violation - as revealed, apparently, in the third of her 'mad papers' written after the rape. I think one has to agree with Terry Eagleton here, that Clarissa's story of the lady who 'took a great fancy' to a wild animal, and was deservedly torn to pieces (Cl., III.206), must 'be read in the light of the irrational guilt women commonly experience after such violations'.¹⁵ Watt sees things quite differently, applauding the insight with which Clarissa is able 'to look within and glimpse the truth'. Her tragedy, then, for him 'reflects the combined effects of Puritanism's spiritual inwardness and its fear of the flesh, effects which tend to prevent the development of the sexual impulse beyond the autistic and masochistic stages' (p. 243).

Should the bemused reader wonder, at this point, if our author could really have been concerned with things like that, Watt is of course quick to inform us that 'Richardson's imagination was not always in touch with his didactic purpose' (p. 244). Thus we are invited to consider such matters as Clarissa's elaborate preparations for death, in which her 'perverse sensuous pleasure', it seems, is easy to detect (p. 243). Better still, we have Richardson's 'unconscious identification' with Lovelace (p. 245). Unlike some of his critical predecessors, Watt is at least willing to bring forth evidence for the alleged 'identification'. It will be illuminating to examine this 'evidence' in some detail.

Shortly before Clarissa's escape to Hampstead, Lovelace is meditating - as he periodically does - on the magnitude of his own wickedness. As usual, he insists that he is really not so bad after all. He exclaims:

Were every rake, nay, were every man, to sit down, as I do, and write all that enters into his head or into his

heart, and to accuse himself with equal freedom and truth, what an army of miscreants should I have to keep me in countenance! (Cl., II.492).

As Watt will have it, Richardson's secret affinity with Lovelace 'left traces in such a remark as this' (p. 245). But it is surely evident that Lovelace's comment is meant to be read ironically. What Lovelace does, here as elsewhere, is to admit to moral failings, but then - in a typically specious piece of reasoning - claim these to be negligible because they are common, indeed universal. Paradoxically, in owning up to his flawed nature, Lovelace lays claim to moral superiority. Others, he suggests, simply refuse to admit the truth about themselves; he, on the other hand, stands nobly devoid of self-delusion, above all deceit in his communings with himself.

On one level, Lovelace himself does not take this sort of thing seriously. He continues:

It is a maxim with some, that if they are left alone with a woman, and make not an attempt upon her, she will think herself affronted. Are not such men as these worse than I am? What an opinion must they have of the whole sex! (II.492).

This is pure comic bluster, and we are meant to recognize it as such. Yet at the same time (and it is here that the complexity of Richardson's tone becomes apparent) we know too that Lovelace really does seem to believe that 'every man', and certainly every woman, is at bottom as wicked as himself, or worse. Earlier he has informed Belford that 'there is more of the savage in human nature' - not, we may be sure, the noble savage - 'than we are commonly aware of'. Using his 'simile of a bird new-caught', he has insisted on seeing his base plans for Clarissa simply as natural, as the way of the world: 'We begin, when boys, with birds, and, when grown up,

go on to women; and both, perhaps, in turn, experience our sportive cruelty.' Grotesque instances of cruelty to animals and birds, by women as well as men, have been adduced to demonstrate the universality of barbarous impulses (II.245-8).

When Lovelace comments on such things, of course we are not meant to regard him simply as wrong. Much of what he says about human nature seems only too alarmingly true. But if, in Lovelace, we are shown the extent and strength of the evil in the heart of man, in *Clarissa* - every bit as vividly - we are presented with a counterbalancing vision of goodness. The novel makes it very clear indeed which is to be preferred. When Lovelace insists that 'every man' must inevitably be as much a 'miscreant' as himself, this, we should realize, is precisely the view of life which it is the purpose of *Clarissa* to question.

To the extent to which Richardson is aware of the reality of human depravity, it might make some sense to see him as endorsing Lovelace's remarks. But it seems merely banal to imply that Richardson in any significant sense is Lovelace here; that Lovelace, so to speak, is telling the whole story. Even if he were literally doing that - if, that is, the novel had been written entirely from his point of view - we would have no obvious warrant for thinking all his various dicta to be inevitably authorial. To confuse author and speaker is supposed to be one of the most elementary errors a student of literature can make, after all. But when we are dealing with a multiple-focus epistolary novel, it seems particularly crude to assume, as does Watt, that anything Lovelace says may be taken as some direct revelation from Richardson's unconscious, some unwitting confession of complicity with his villain. Lovelace's remark is, precisely, Lovelace's remark. On what grounds can it be seen as anything else?

Watt gives two reasons. First, we have 'the prodigious fertility of Lovelace's sexual imagination'. This, Watt remarks,

surely suggests a willing cooperation on the part of his creator's far beyond the call of literary duty: Lovelace's plan, for instance, of wreaking his revenge on Anna Howe, not only by ravishing her, but in having her mother abducted for the same fell purpose [C1., II.418-25] is a monstrously gratuitous fancy which is quite unnecessary so far as the realization of Richardson's didactic intentions are concerned (p. 245).

But that Lovelace should have a 'sexual imagination' of 'prodigious fertility' is simply one of the things that makes Lovelace Lovelace (although, as we have seen, he is by no means so concerned with sex as we might at first think). Are we to assume that an author can create only characters with whom he is in sympathy? There is a difference between an author, in the act of writing, projecting himself into a character - as Richardson himself claimed he did when he wrote (SL, p. 286) - and an author's in any sense 'being', or endorsing the views of, that character. When Flaubert said, 'Madame Bovary, c'est moi!', I doubt that he wanted to be taken literally.

And we can go further than this. Lovelace's plan is 'gratuitous', it is true, in so far as it is never carried out; the letter outlining this plan, however, is highly functional within Richardson's novel.

On the most obvious level, consider it as characterization. It should be noted that this was one of the numerous passages that Richardson 'restored' to his novel after it had first appeared. Unlike many of the other 'restorations', however, this appears to be genuine: Richardson, it seems, on the advice of Sarah Wescomb, had simply omitted the passage from the first edition for purposes of abridgement (EK/C, p. 422). His decision to put it back where it came from might conceivably

have been on aesthetic grounds only, so to speak - in itself, this magnificent passage provides strong argument for preferring the third edition over the first. But, as we have seen, Kinkead-Weekes has demonstrated that almost all of Richardson's 'restorations' were explicitly intended to fend off misreadings. Clearly, Lovelace's letter in which he plans his attack on the Howe party is one of a number of new elements in the novel which serve, as they say, to 'blacken his character'.

The letter gives us one of the best views we have of Lovelace's blend of irrepressible black humour with a driving, almost pathological desire for power and vengeance. Here we are given, too, an unforgettable instance of Lovelace doing what Lovelace does so often and so well - plotting. One of the first things we learn about him in the novel is that he is 'a great plotter' (C1., I.17). To the extent that this letter, as it proceeds, seems less the outline of a serious scheme and more the narrative of a 'monstrously gratuitous fancy' - though with Lovelace, it is not always easy to distinguish such things - we may reflect that it is with such unhealthy thoughts that the wicked are likely to fill their idle hours.

One thing that is vividly apparent in this letter is Lovelace's attitude to other human beings. Consider the imagined fate of Hickman, in all its comedy and cruelty. Hickman is regarded here as if he were merely a character in a cartoon:

Dost not see him, Jack? I do - popping up and down, his wig and hat floating by him; and paddling, pawing, and dashing, like a frightened mongrel - I am afraid he never ventured to learn to swim.

But thou wilt not drown the poor fellow; wilt thou? No, no! That is not necessary to the project. I hate to do mischief supererogatory. The skiff shall be ready to save him, while the vessel keeps its course: he shall be set on shore with the loss of wig and hat only, and of half his little wits, at the place where he embarked, or anywhere else (II.421).

Of course this is very amusing. But such a way of regarding others cannot ultimately be countenanced, in Richardson's novel at least. When Lovelace gives his reasons for wanting to punish Mrs. Howe, one senses strongly the dark depths just beneath the surface of his engaging levity:

But why upon her mother, methinks thou askest; who, unknown to herself, has only acted, by thy impulse, through thy agent Joseph Leman, upon the folly of old Tony the uncle?

No matter for that: she believes she acts upon her own judgment; and deserves to be punished for pretending to judgment, when she has none. Every living soul, but myself, I can tell thee, shall be punished, that treats either cruelly or disrespectfully so adored a lady [as Clarissa]. What a plague! is it not enough that she is teased and tormented in person by me? (II.419).

There are ironies here that Lovelace might not have intended. As his fantasy proceeds, his egomania reaches new and ever more outrageous heights. Imagining himself and his party of rakes on board ship, "'Tis plaguy hard," he remarks, 'if we cannot find, or make, a storm' (II.420). Later, prosecuted for his wicked actions, Lovelace is received by the public more like the 'Robert the Great' he longs to be (cf. III.26) than like any common felon. His march 'from the prison to the Sessions-house' becomes like the 'public entry' of a 'victorious general'; even - perhaps - like 'the grandest parade that can be supposed, a coronation', attended by a 'gathering snowball' of 'street-swarmers' who watch the passing parade of Lovelace and his band not with the aspect of a gaudy mob but 'with all the marks of an awful or silent (at most only a whispering) respect; their mouths distended, as if set open with gags, and their voices generally lost in goggle-eyed admiration'. Lovelace even goes on to compare himself to Caesar and Alexander. If ostensibly he is concerned to emphasize the disparity between himself and such

figures, the tendency of his fantasy is very much to close the gap. The would-be 'Robert the Great', we realize, would not be at all averse to being Caesar, who 'had taken by assault above a thousand towns, and slain near 1,200,000 men', or Alexander, 'dubbed for murders and depredation Magnus' (II.423-4).

What Lovelace is suggesting here, of course, is that genuinely wicked acts may be regarded as heroic if performed by the right sorts of people, as it were, and on a grand enough scale. Though Richardson, no doubt, would never have admitted to it, one detects here the influence of Fielding's Jonathan Wild (1743). Much is made in that work of the nature of the 'greatness' of Caesar and Alexander; and indeed, the behaviour of Richardson's 'Robert the Great' resembles at many points that of the entirely vicious 'great' man, Wild. To see this helps us greatly to see our villain in proper perspective.

Still, the spectacle of Lovelace casting himself as some scourge of the Pharisees should in any case strike us as somewhat absurd. Behind his inflated rhetoric, we glimpse his creator making a serious point; like Fielding, scoring a blow against classically-derived notions of heroism and honour. Where Richardson parts company with Lovelace is when Lovelace suggests, as he does, that the seemingly-sanctioned wickedness of great historical figures somehow excuses his own moral transgressions. That someone else has been a mass-murderer - assuming that a Caesar or Alexander can be so described - obviously does not mean that to be a kidnapper, a rapist, or even (say) a pickpocket, is therefore so trivial as hardly to deserve comment. Lovelace is correct to suggest that he and his compatriots are mere 'babes in swaddling-clothes' compared with Caesar and Alexander (II.424). In having Lovelace say this, however, Richardson invites us to contemplate not the angelic innocence

of this often engaging villain, but rather the frightening extent of the evil that exists in the heart of man if even one so corrupt may be regarded as only a small-time crook.

In saying this, too, Lovelace inadvertently offers an ironic comment on his own pretensions. His letter as a whole reveals itself as profoundly ironic if we consider its place in the complete narrative of which it is a part - that is, its place in the novel. Here, shortly before Clarissa's escape to Hampstead, we see Lovelace indulging in a 'monstrous fancy', the elements of which include travel, disguise, and rape - even the presence of others who help him in his schemes. Speaking of his band of rakes, Lovelace says to Belford: 'I know thou canst not long live without us' (II.419). Under Clarissa's influence, Belford is soon to find quite another way of living. Envisaging the shipboard rapes, Lovelace insists that the women will be easily overcome. Such a thought is no doubt congenial to him by this stage of his relations with Clarissa; it assumes a sour irony, too, when we think of the circumstances under which Lovelace will finally perpetrate rape. In his fantasy, the consequences of such an action are anything but alarming, as we have seen. His richly comic anticipations of glory make a bitter contrast with his eventual fate: Lovelace is not prosecuted for the rape of Clarissa, but finds his action - a joyless one, we should note, compared with the imagined rape of Anna Howe - leading him inexorably only to alienation and death. As an alternative to the prosecution scenario - 'the worst that can happen', as he will have it - Lovelace has his party 'tarry abroad till all is hushed up' (II.424, 421). Later in the letter, 'tarry abroad' becomes 'go into exile'; Lovelace even raises the possibility that he might never return to England (II.425). In all this, he cannot yet know just how right, and how wrong, he is.

We might also consider the implications of this letter not only for Lovelace but for ourselves as readers; the implications, in particular, of Lovelace's 'trial'. This is not merely a perversion of justice; justice is hardly at issue. We see a graphic image of the reversal of moral categories if we compare the triumphant passage of the criminals into the court, 'dressed out each man, as if to his wedding appearance', their leader pursued by the looks and whispers of admiring women, with the inglorious entrance of their humiliated accusers. Says Lovelace:

Then we shall be praised - even the judges, and the whole crowded bench, will acquit us in their hearts; and every single man wish he had been me! - the women, all the time, disclaiming prosecution, were the case to be their own. To be sure, Belford, the sufferers cannot put half so good a face upon the matter as we (II.422).

Even in the unlikely event of being convicted, Lovelace is sure he has nothing to fear:

I know I shall get off for one - were it but for family sake: and being a handsome fellow, I shall have a dozen or two of young maidens, all dressed in white, go to court to beg my life (II.424).

As Lovelace knows, he can be 'sure of all the women' (II.422).

I think we can see, then, just how important Lovelace's 'gratuitous fancy' actually is from the point of view of Richardson's 'didactic intentions'. There is a sense in which the act of reading is reminiscent of a trial, after all. Surely Richardson is anticipating here, and censuring, the way in which Lovelace will be regarded at many another trial - that which takes place before the bench of the reader.

But I said that Watt gave two reasons to justify

his belief in Richardson's unconscious identification with Lovelace. What is the second? It is to be found in a footnote appended to the assertion that 'Lovelace's name - in sound as in etymology - means "loveless"':

Names are often a guide to unconscious attitudes, and those of Richardson's protagonists [sic] tend to confirm the view that he secretly identified himself with his hero [sic] - Robert Lovelace is a pleasant enough name - and even unconsciously collaborated with Lovelace's purpose of abasing the heroine: 'Clarissa' is very close to 'Calista', Rowe's impure heroine; while Harlowe is very close to 'harlot' (pp. 245-6).

One might wonder how 'Lovelace' can be said to mean 'loveless' at one minute, and be merely 'a pleasant enough name' at the next. This is only the first of one's objections to this dubious series of assertions.

It is true that 'Robert Lovelace' seems a pleasant enough name. Indeed its owner, as Watt is so eager to point out, seems in many ways an attractive figure. Yet why should this surprise us? Richardson did after all write Clarissa 'to warn the inconsiderate and thoughtless of the one sex against the base arts and designs of specious contrivers of the other'. And his heroine was 'proposed as an exemplar to her sex'. There would be little merit in a virtue able to resist the advances only of an obviously repulsive man, and what looked from the beginning to be a life of sorrow and degradation.

In resisting Lovelace, Clarissa is rather like the Lady in Comus. The virtue of Milton's Lady lies not in any easy rejection of an obviously abhorrent course, but in her ability to withstand a tempter who claims to offer her a world of endless pleasure. Her resolve is meaningful, too, in that it is genuinely hers: much as the Lady is an allegorical figure, still we are not to see her chastity simply as a static attribute imposed upon her from without. 'Fool,' she says to

Comus, 'Thou canst not touch the freedom of my mind / With all thy charms' (ll. 662-4). Clearly the apparent attractiveness of evil only becomes significant given the fact of man's free will.

In Paradise Lost, Milton's God at one point remarks that He has made man, like 'all th' Ethereal Powers / And Spirits', 'Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall' (III.99-101). This then is to say that, along with the creation of man, some possibility of a fall, some test of allegiance, had also to be devised - hence the Tree of Knowledge. There would have been little point in having that forbidden tree unless it were to seem, as it did to the tempted Eve, a tree to be desired. Of course there is a sense in which the tree really was to be desired, as we learn, with Adam, at the end of Milton's epic. But the significance of the Fall for our purposes is obvious: it is the paradigmatic instance of sin, the classic cautionary tale of what happens to those who allow themselves to be led into temptation. What makes vice such a problem, we realize, is that it is able so often to look appealing - especially to the naive or insufficiently vigilant.

Does Clarissa belong in either of these categories? It may be that the calamity of April 10, her abduction by Lovelace, results from a lapse in her usual extreme vigilance. Certainly she might be seen as naive in so far as she does not recognize, until it is too late, the extent of the evil of those around her. But to see her virtue, in itself, as a form of naivety is wrong: in a world with the knowledge of good and evil, true virtue - the 'paradise within' - is always a form of wisdom.

In Comus, the Lady's virtue is a kind of talisman, protecting her from fear amid the 'envious darkness', shielding her against the encroachments of the 'false traitor' who has captured her. So for Clarissa, as

for Pamela too, virtue is the best protection she can have against the attentions of a perhaps unworthy admirer. Early in the novel, it will be remembered, Anna challenges her friend on 'the true springs and grounds' of her apparent regard for Lovelace (Cl., I.46). For all that she may be unclear about her own feelings, still Clarissa does her best to see Lovelace in proper perspective. Unlike Bella, whose negative feelings towards the rake derive only from spite at his rejection of her, or James, whose similar attitude springs only from jealousy, Clarissa is capable of judicious assessment of Lovelace's character, his vices and his virtues. As early as March 1, she offers Anna a detailed analysis of his failings: his vanity, his 'immoralities', his haughtiness - even his ill-humour with his servants, and what it portends. Clarissa's powers of observation are acute:

... his very politeness, notwithstanding the advantages he must have had from his birth and education, appears to me to be constrained, and with the most remarkably easy and genteel person, something, at times, seems to be behind in his manner that is too studiously kept in.

Clarissa cannot deny, however, that Lovelace is 'a man to be preferred to Mr. Solmes' (I.47). At this stage she cannot know just how desperate her situation is; a choice between two such suitors, as it turns out, is merely a choice between the frying-pan and the fire. Whether Lovelace is ultimately a worse man than Solmes, or vice versa, is, no doubt, a moot point: it is notable, however, that one striking difference between the two men is a difference of outward appearance. The physical characteristics of Solmes are a revelation of his spiritual state; with Lovelace, quite the reverse is the case. The attractiveness of Lovelace's person, as of other aspects of his nature, is effectively as much a form of disguise as any he dons during the course of the

novel. After the rape, Clarissa speaks frankly of her early responses to him:

Paper VIII

At first, I saw something in your air and person that displeased me not. Your birth and fortunes were no small advantages to you. You acted not ignobly by my passionate brother. Everybody said you were brave: everybody said you were generous. A brave man, I thought, could not be a base man: a generous man could not, I believed, be ungenerous, where he acknowledged obligation. Thus prepossessed, all the rest that my soul loved and wished for in your reformation, I hoped! I knew not, but by report, any flagrant instances of your vileness. You seemed frank as well as generous: frankness and generosity ever attracted me: whoever kept up those appearances, I judged of their hearts by my own; and whatever qualities I wished to find in them, I was ready to find; and, when found, I believed them to be natives of the soil.

My fortunes, my rank, my character, I thought a further security. I was in none of those respects unworthy of being the niece of Lord M. and of his two noble sisters. Your vows, your imprecations - But, oh! you have barbarously and basely conspired against that honour, which you ought to have protected: and now you have made me - what is it of vile that you have not made me?

Yet, God knows my heart, I had no culpable inclinations! I honoured virtue! I hated vice! But I knew not that you were vice itself! (III.208).

It might be asked here what meaning it can have to speak of virtue as a talisman, when even a Clarissa is unable to guard herself sufficiently against the depredations of vice. Yet this is one of Richardson's most important points: if the divine Clarissa can be deceived and betrayed, how necessary it is (we are meant to conclude) for young women of less exalted character to guard against the base arts of men! And how necessary for all of us to guard against devilish temptation!

Given the magnitude of Clarissa's virtue, we realize also that it required a suitably formidable opponent to ruin her chances of worldly happiness. Of course Lovelace had to appear attractive: a brave man who was also a base man, a generous man (it seemed) who would

prove himself to be ungenerous in the extreme. That he should have 'a pleasant enough name' is entirely appropriate.

One might be forgiven for wondering if Watt is demanding 'type names' or 'characteristic names' for all fictional personages: 'Mr. Badman', 'Fainall', 'Sir Fopling Flutter', 'Lady Sneerwell' and the like. Earlier in The Rise of the Novel he has remarked on the 'extremely significant break with tradition' by those early novelists who renounced such 'type names', and overt romance names, and instead 'named their characters in such a way as to suggest that they were to be regarded as particular individuals in the contemporary social environment' (p. 19f).

In real life, one suspects, most of us do not pay a great deal of attention to other peoples' names: we are likely simply to take them for granted, unless they strike us as particularly unusual or embarrassing. If we think about it, we may realize that our impressions of others are nevertheless subtly influenced by the looks and sounds of their names. In most cases, however, we are unlikely to see any direct correlation between a person's name and his apparent moral condition. Given that 'Robert Lovelace' is indeed a pleasant-sounding name, could we not regard Richardson as exhibiting, if not an intentional irony, at least a commendable realism, in giving such a name to such a character?

Richardson is doing both of these things. But 'Lovelace' is not just a pleasant-sounding name, as Watt, we know, is well aware. Neither entirely meaningless nor too obviously meaningful, the name - like 'Clarissa Harlowe' or 'Sir Charles Grandison'; indeed, like 'Tom Jones' or 'Jane Eyre' or 'Heathcliff' or 'Becky Sharp' - is one we regard as somehow suited, in sound and connotations, to its owner. If Richardson, naming

a character, will never give anything as obvious in its implications as a type name, still he understands well what Watt has called, aptly, 'a minor but not unimportant problem in novel writing, that of giving names that are subtly appropriate and suggestive, yet sound like ordinary realistic ones' (p. 20). As David Lodge has remarked, 'The point is quickly made if we try to imagine Moll Flanders and Clarissa Harlowe with their names exchanged.'¹⁶

The implications of the name 'Lovelace' are nowhere better indicated than by C. M. Matthews in his book English Surnames (1966):

A name which appears to have a pleasanter interpretation than its real one is Lovelace. It sounds both romantic and well dressed, and seems particularly suitable for a Cavalier poet, but in fact it is just the same in origin as Loveless, which appears several times in the Hundred Rolls. There was no lace in medieval England. It seems an unkind name, but perhaps it was ironic and its owner had many loves. Another of this negative sort is Carless, meaning careless in the sense of carefree....¹⁷

Under 'Lovelace, Loveless, Lowles, Lowless', P. H. Reaney's Dictionary of British Surnames (1958) offers the following information:

OE lufu 'love' and -lēas 'free from, without', 'loveless'. The common form is Loveles. Occasionally we may have 'love lass' from ME las(se). cf. Alan Luveswain 1166 ... 'Love lace', a dandy, is less likely. OFr laz, ME las meant 'cord'. The sense lace is not recorded in England before 1550 (NED).¹⁸

But we are concerned with etymology only in so far as it helps us to see the possible associations of the name in question: Love-less, Love-lass? Love-lass who becomes, in the end, Love-less? What seems certain is that Richardson meant us to see abundant irony in Lovelace's intention, declared in his first letter,

to give Clarissa 'the name of love' (Cl., I.147). Lovelace becomes loveless, perhaps, because he was always really Love-less: 'the man,' as John Preston puts it, 'for whom love has no meaning.' After all, he is only Love-lace: 'Lovelace, as his name indicates, is a mere lover of the clothing (lace) and ignores the essence,' writes Alan Kennedy.¹⁹

Of course, 'lace' need not make us think only of ruffles and Nottingham: it has another meaning, as Reaney reminds us. A lace is 'A string or cord serving to draw together opposite edges (chiefly of articles of clothing, as bodices, stays, boots and shoes) by being passed in and out through eyelet-holes (or over hooks, studs, etc.) and pulled tight' (OED). The OED cites Clarissa: 'when I recovered, [I] found ... my laces cut, my linen scented with hartshorn' (Cl., I.71). In times when a woman had to be 'unlaced' or have her laces cut to be undressed, 'lace' for a lover - or seducer - might have been seen as a barrier through which he loved to break, a cord he longed to cut. On the other hand, 'a mere lover of the clothing (lace)' might well have preferred all laces to be kept pulled tight, metaphorically at least. We should remember that 'lace' may also be used as a verb to refer to the tying of laces. What might it mean, then, to Love-lace? Perhaps we may glimpse a further ironic dimension of our villain's name if we contemplate this unusual image from Hopkins:

How lovely the elder brother's
Life all laced in the other's,
Lóve-laced!

['Brothers']

But we can think of the name in terms other than those suggested by such word-associations. In a paper published in 1912, H. G. Ward - building on earlier hints from Samuel Johnson and Austin Dobson - argued

that 'the chief constituent in the character of the betrayer of Clarissa' must certainly have been Rowe's Lothario. As Ward acknowledges, however, the name of Richardson's character was most probably inspired by the Cavalier poet, Richard Lovelace (1618-58).²⁰ This suggestion was made by Leigh Hunt, in his well-known survey of the 'memorable characters and events' of the city of London, The Town (1848). Hunt noted the poet's connection with the neighbourhood in which Richardson was later to live. Richard Lovelace was buried in St. Bride's Church, Fleet Street - as it happened, the same church in which Richardson was to be buried. Or almost the same: the original church building was destroyed in the Great Fire.²¹

How much Richardson may have known about the Cavalier poet is perhaps now impossible to determine: even the indefatigable Eaves and Kimpel offer no help on this point. Of course, 'Lovelace' may have struck Richardson simply as an appropriately aristocratic name - as Matthews says, 'It sounds both romantic and well dressed.' But Richard Lovelace was hardly an obscure figure, and was in many ways a legendary one. Given this, and given that Richardson must have heard of him, it seems unlikely that the poet's name would have been used in Clarissa without at least some consideration.

Certainly there is much to intrigue us if we think of one Lovelace in the light of the other. Like Richardson's Lovelace, Richard Lovelace was a man blessed not only with great privilege but with extraordinary personal beauty and talent - a man, in short, with every worldly advantage - who was to die in tragic circumstances at an early age. In the standard account of his life, by his contemporary Anthony à Wood, Lovelace at Oxford is said to have been 'accounted the most amiable and beautiful person that ever eye beheld'; 'he was a most beautifull gentleman', begins Aubrey's brief life of

the poet. 'One of the handsomest men of England', not surprisingly he was 'prowd' (continues Aubrey); not surprisingly either (as Wood informs us) he was 'much admired and adored by the female sex'. And Richard Lovelace was a writer of great sophistication and wit - and, often, extravagance. Take the magnificently inflated rhetoric of the ode, 'Calling Lucasta from her Retirement'. Thus it begins:

I.

From the dire Monument of thy black roome
Wher now that vestal flame thou dost intombe
As in the inmost Cell of all Earths Wombe,

II.

Sacred LUCASTA like the pow'rfull ray
Of Heavenly Truth passe this Cimmerian way,
Whilst all the Standards of your beames display.

III.

Arise and climbe our whitest highest Hill,
There your sad thoughts with joy and wonder fill,
And see Seas calm as Earth, Earth as your Will.

And in like fashion it continues. Had Richardson's Lovelace written verse in praise of Clarissa, one feels that he would have written something along similar lines. His prose often sounds like his namesake's verse, as it is.

Yet it seems inadequate simply to say this. After all, the reputation of Lovelace the poet rests not upon the more extravagant of his works, but upon a small number of very fine lyrics. And it is when we turn, say, to the oft-anthologized 'To Althea, From Prison' - the 'Stone Walls doe not a Prison make' poem - that we recognize in the poet a delicacy of perception and depth of feeling which seem beyond the range of a Robert Lovelace.

How much, really, does one Lovelace resemble the

other? Like Richardson's Lovelace, the Cavalier of course placed an enormous value on the sorts of ideas of manly heroism and military honour which Richardson deplored: 'I could not love thee (Deare) so much, / Lov'd I not Honour more.' (It seems appropriate that the poet should appear under the name 'Colonel Lovelace' in older anthologies such as Palgrave's.) Like Richardson's Lovelace too, the Cavalier ruined himself in pursuit of what he saw as a great end. But it is here that the differences between the two figures become more important than any similarities.

Richardson's Lovelace, we have seen, is eager to speak of military heroes, and delights to imagine himself in such a role. He is a handsome young aristocrat with nothing to do; really, with no possibility of glory except among his own limited circle, if not solely in his own mind. Richard Lovelace was a genuine man of arms: his heroism led many to compare him to Sir Philip Sidney. ('On a surer foundation than the permanence of his poetry rests the chivalrous repute in which his life has been held,' opined Thomas Seccombe in the DNB.) The real Lovelace fought for what he would have regarded as a vital and sacred cause: his fictional counterpart is engaged in a gratuitous and obviously evil campaign, undertaken simply to satisfy his own perverse will.

Robert Lovelace dies by the sword of Clarissa's avenging cousin. The demise of Richard Lovelace was a rather different affair. According to Wood, by the age of thirty-one Lovelace had consumed his entire estate in his useless efforts to serve the king's cause (our Lovelace, it seems pertinent to suggest, would at least have been more careful with his money). Not surprisingly, the Cavalier

grew very melancholy, (which brought him at length into a consumption) became very poor in body and purse, was the object of charity, went in ragged cloaths (whereas when he

was in his glory he wore cloth of gold and silver) and mostly lodged in obscure and dirty places, more befitting the worst of beggars, and poorest of servants, &c.

'Obiit in a cellar in Long Acre,' writes Aubrey; in Wood's more accepted account, it was in a sordid lodging in Gunpowder Alley, between Shoe Lane and Fetter Lane, where, in his fortieth year, this once most beautiful of gentlemen expired.²²

Obviously this is a story of considerable mythic power: it could hardly fail to stir the imagination. It seems fitting, then, and instructive, to consider against this story of legendary heroism and suffering the career of our later, fictional Lovelace: nothing could bring home to us more vividly a sense of the constricted stage upon which he moves, the vacuity of his glittering facade, the shallowness and adolescent egotism of his motives.

If it seems stretching credibility to suggest that Lovelace's name implies any secret identification with his villain on Richardson's part, it seems equally unwise (one cannot help but feel) to take Clarissa's name as further evidence for such a view.

Writing on Richard Lovelace, Thomas Seccombe noted the 'ironical destiny' of the surname of the Cavalier, passing as it did 'through the agency of Clarissa into common use in the eighteenth century as a synonym for a libertine'. But though this usage 'still survives in France', Seccombe added, it has since been 'supplanted in England by the older Lothario' (DNB). Watt, in his 1949 essay, 'The Naming of Characters in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding', would appear to take this fact as evidence of some widespread confusion of Richardson's novel with Rowe's play. Much as it might be the case that the names 'Lovelace' and 'Lothario' have been confused in popular memory, however, Watt seems unable to provide

evidence of any like confusion between the pure Clarissa and Rowe's impure Calista. 'Clarissa' is very like 'Calista', it is true, in so far as both names begin with a 'C', end with an 'a', and have four letters in common in between; indeed, 'Clarissa' is rather more like 'Calista' than 'Lovelace' is like 'Lothario'. But of all the things which might be said about the name 'Clarissa', this is surely one of the most trivial.

'Clarissa' is one of a family of names - 'Clarice', 'Claricia' and 'Clarisse' are among the others - derived from 'Clara' or 'Clare', from the Latin clarus: 'bright' or 'clear'.²³ It is this association with purity and light, apparent in the very exalted sound of the name, which is surely what strikes any unprejudiced reader, rather than any sinister overtones of impurity via association with Calista. But the most comprehensive survey of the overtones of the name has been undertaken by Watt himself, in his 1949 essay. After discussing the significance of the name 'Pamela' - the name, he points out, must have been derived from the Arcadia - Watt goes on:

'Clarissa', too, is a romance name, and in his greatest novel Richardson makes us forget it even more completely. It is the name of Huon's sister in Huon of Bordeaux, and it had been used in a 1737 romance whose title may have attracted Richardson - The History of Clorana, the beautiful Arcadian, or Virtue Rewarded. It is used, as a typical romance name, by Pope in The Rape of the Lock, and, in the form 'Claricia', by Scudéry in Clelia. The name had also become debased to some extent and was used as a conventional name for the nymphs of the town; it occurs with this sense in the Tatler, and in Robert Dodsley's 1748 Collection of Poems by Several Hands.

But 'Clarissa' has other connotations. It was used for pathetic heroines of stories in the Female Tatler and the Universal Spectator, and the Clarissa of Young's Night Thoughts dies in giving birth to the rake Lorenzo's child. It also has a more remote religious flavour, well suited to Richardson's chaste bride of Christ, from the Clarisse, an order of nuns founded by Santa Chiara, and still flourishing in the eighteenth century. The root derivation, from clarus, is equally suited to his paragon of virtue.

The name, then, combines an emphatic romance ancestry with mingled overtones of fashionable gallantry, religious abnegation, and the pathos of an early and tragic death. It thus has the same complex and apparently contradictory appropriateness as that of his first heroine.²⁴

A 'complex and apparently contradictory appropriateness': yet Watt's emphasis nevertheless seems to fall more heavily on the connotations of chastity, 'religious abnegation' and the like than it does, say, on the 'debased' uses of the name. And surely the point is this: if the name is indeed 'complex' and 'contradictory' in its overtones, is it not somewhat scandalous of Watt in The Rise of the Novel to direct his readers towards only one - and the least flattering - of these possible implications?

In his determination to link Clarissa and Calista, Watt also appears to have forgotten a fact he must have known: that Richardson himself, within his novel, has already dealt with those who might compare the two heroines. Since The Fair Penitent was one of the most popular works on the eighteenth-century stage, Richardson must have expected such comparisons. No doubt this is why, as Clarissa nears death, Belford writes to Lovelace:

I have frequently thought, in my attendance on this lady, that if Belton's admired author, Nic Rowe, had had such a character before him, he would have drawn another sort of a penitent than he has done, or given his play, which he calls The Fair Penitent, a fitter title. Miss Harlowe is a penitent indeed! I think, if I am not guilty of a contradiction in terms; a penitent without a fault; her parents' conduct towards her from the first considered.

The whole story of the other is a pack of damned stuff. Lothario, 'tis true, seems such another wicked, ungenerous varlet as thou knowest who: the author knew how to draw a rake; but not to paint a penitent. Calista is a desiring luscious wench, and her penitence is nothing else but rage, insolence, and scorn. Her passions are all storm and tumult; nothing of the finer passions of the sex, which, if naturally drawn, will distinguish themselves from the masculine passions by a softness that will even shine through rage and despair.

Her character is made up of deceit and disguise. She has no virtue; is all pride; and her devil is as much within her as without her....

But here is Miss CLARISSA HARLOWE, a virtuous, noble, wise, and pious young lady ... (Cl., IV.118-19).

We are told here what Richardson hopes will be apparent to any unprejudiced reader: that Clarissa only harks back to Rowe's play in so far as it improves upon it. Richardson is quite consciously offering a corrective to Rowe, not obsessively working through some illicit fantasy about an 'impure heroine'. That Rowe should be 'Belton's admired author' says it all.²⁵

As it happens, Watt does refer to this passage in his 1949 essay: Richardson 'went out of his way to bring forward the analogy' between Clarissa and The Fair Penitent, we are told, 'only to reject it scornfully':

'Calista', he makes Belford comment, after a comparison of the story with The Fair Penitent, is 'a luscious, desiring wench' [sic]. But some of the unconscious associations of the names of Richardson's protagonists seem to reinforce the parallel which Richardson wished to exclude.... (p. 333).

If it had looked as though Richardson knew nothing about Calista and The Fair Penitent, Watt could have diagnosed a case of sublimation. But that Richardson should have explicitly discussed the issue is taken by Watt as equally strong evidence for his view! This is a classic instance of the 'heads I win, tails you lose' phenomenon, surely - Watt's methods of analysis could 'prove' anything.²⁶

Watt informs us that 'Harlowe is very close to "harlot"'. This is true, but it is also a respectable English surname.²⁷ Besides, to what extent is Clarissa really a Harlowe? When critics (or readers in general) discuss Richardson's novel, frequently they refer to 'the Harlowes', meaning James, Arabella, Mr. and Mrs.

Harlowe, and the uncles, John and Antony. That we are not to include Clarissa amongst their ranks requires no explanation; after all, much of the novel is concerned with the ways in which she is excluded from their circle. Clarissa even comes to feel that she can no longer use her own surname. In the depths of her despair after the rape, she begins a letter to her 'dear honoured papa': 'I don't presume to think you should receive me - no, indeed! My name is - I don't know what my name is! I never dare to wish to come into your family again!' (Cl., III.205-6). But much as she regrets her exclusion from the family, spiritually Clarissa is not a Harlowe at all. This is why it is not merely pedantic to insist that the novel is called Clarissa, not Clarissa Harlowe. To the extent that 'Harlowe' might mean 'harlot' - and it is not necessarily the case that it does - we might reflect that such a term is better suited to those members of the family who are prepared to sacrifice their loving daughter or sister in marriage to a repulsive man, for the sake of their own financial gain, than it is for one who for so long resists the advances of a notorious rake.

Besides, one can make rather more out of Clarissa's surname than 'harlot'. 'Anagrammatically, it is possible to produce either "a whole" or "a whore" from "Harlowe",' observes Terry Eagleton.²⁸ This is not entirely a facetious observation. After all, much of Richardson's novel revolves around the very issue Eagleton implies: while Clarissa wishes to preserve herself 'whole', Lovelace wants to turn her into his willing 'whore'.

But we can look at 'whole' and 'whore' not just in relation to Clarissa, but to the Harlowe family: a family capable of producing a Clarissa, but capable too of producing an Arabella or a James. At Harlowe Place, the potential for earthly bliss exists side by side with the potential for the greatest degradation.

Indeed, one need not resort to anagrams here: in its very sound, the name 'Harlowe' implies a clash of contradictions, a suggestive opposition of 'high' and 'low'. Here one thinks not only of the nature of Clarissa's spiritual trial - her tragic 'fall', followed by her ultimate rise to heavenly bliss; one thinks also of Clarissa in relation to her Harlowe 'friends': her family on high, casting Clarissa into the depths of despair; and of Clarissa - in a neat reversal - in her spiritual superiority to her family.

It must be said, however, that one hesitates to make too much of this sort of thing: we are dealing with Richardson, not with James Joyce. Theoretically, once one starts such playing with words, one need never stop. Names may indeed be a guide to unconscious attitudes, as Watt suggests, but what is the value of a form of analysis with which it is possible to 'prove' anything and everything?

Take Eagleton's anagrams: both of them will leave 'an excess', Eagleton remarks. What he does not seem to notice is that this excess consists, in one case, of the letter 'r'; in the other, of the letter 'l'. Psychoanalytic critics might wish to ponder the significance of 'rl' - 'Robert Lovelace'? - being in a sense inside, or in the middle of, 'Harlowe': are we to think of RL's wicked act perpetrated on the body of Clarissa, in the middle of Clarissa? Of a secret moral affinity between Clarissa and Lovelace? Or to think, instead, of the connection of sorts which exists between Lovelace and the Harlowes, both of them united to destroy Clarissa?

But 'rl' has another significance, surely. We are left with the 'r' when we make 'a whole', and the 'l' when we make 'a whore': perhaps we should see this in relation to the contrasting images of Clarissa entertained by Richardson on the one hand ('Mr. R.', as he sometimes referred to himself in his correspondence)

and Lovelace on the other. Or must the fact that Richardson and Lovelace are in effect united in the middle of Harlowe be seen instead as offering confirmation of the theory of Richardson's secret depravity? Indeed, when one thinks of it, is it not significant that Samuel Richardson should appear to have appropriated, for Clarissa's rapist, the surname of Richard Lovelace? And what are we to make of the fact that, if we take 'rl' out of 'Harlowe' ('Ha/rl/owe'), the letters that we are left with can be rearranged to make 'A. Howe'? These things may be significant; or then again they may not. There are only so many letters in the alphabet, after all.

Take another example: the name 'Sinclair'. The most obvious interpretation would emphasize the first syllable, 'sin'. And one might go further. Given the etymological link between 'Clarissa' and 'Clare', which is obvious enough, it seems also reasonable to assume that 'Sinclair', in the context of Richardson's novel, connotes one who sins against Clarissa, clarus. But a browse through the Oxford Dictionary of English Christian Names reveals a more fascinating link between our heroine's Christian name, and the brothel-keeper's surname. Clarus, one finds, was 'the name of at least two saints, a 3rd-C Bishop of Nantes and a 7th-C Norman saint; the latter gave his name to St. Clair in Normandy, from which came the well-known family of St. Clair or Sinclair' (p. 63). So: Clarissa and Mrs. Sinclair, it transpires, are really - in a manner of speaking - one and the same! Here is evidence indeed for the 'Clarissa as whore' theory! Never mind that Richardson was almost certainly unaware of this etymological curiosity; never mind, either, the manifestly huge differences in the ways in which Clarissa and Mrs. Sinclair are portrayed in his novel. And we can ignore too the fact that the name Clarus or Clare in all its permutations is persistently associated with religion and purity.²⁹

In a later discussion of Richardson, in the BBC radio series 'The Novelist as Innovator' (1965), Watt had no hesitation in presenting Clarissa as essentially a study of the ambiguities and duplicities of the inner life of the mind: thus the heroine, for example, 'unwittingly reveals our tendency to love those we know we should not, and not to act as we know we should to those we do love'.³⁰ As he puts it in The Rise of the Novel, in the character of Clarissa we witness 'the frightening reality of the unconscious life which lies hidden in the most virtuous heart' (p. 244).

Watt's case for this psychoanalytic view of Clarissa is, we have seen, demonstrably paper-thin. In his guise of analyst-critic, Watt feels little need, it seems, to submit the supposed evidence for his opinions to any rigorous tests, or even to any tests, of credibility. But proof, after all, is hardly at issue: Watt has not only made up his mind in advance about the novel and its author, but would appear to feel sure of our easy concurrence.

We have looked in detail at Watt's dealings with issues such as Richardson's alleged 'identification' with Lovelace. It should not be thought that Watt conducts these enquiries in any spirit of triumphant iconoclasm, or journalistic exposé. That Richardson unknowingly subverts his 'didactic intentions' is of course to Watt an excellent thing, to be applauded 'from an aesthetic point of view' (p. 245). As Watt will have it,

Richardson's strong tendency towards making his characters exemplifications of some rather obvious moral lesson is to a large extent redeemed by his equally strong if not stronger tendency towards a very powerful imaginative projection into a much more complicated psychological and literary world (p. 222).

Richardson should not be censured too harshly for his

didactic inclinations; if regrettable, they were unavoidable, Watt concedes:

The decorous exterior, the ponderous voice of the lay bishop, expresses an important part of Richardson's mind, but not all of it; and, his subjects being what they were, it is likely that only a very safe ethical surface, combined with the anonymity of print, and a certain tendency to self-righteous sophistry, were able to pacify his inner censor and thus leave his imagination free to express its profound interest in other areas of experience (p. 244f).

We are left, finally, with a novel which sounds less and less like the work of Richardson, and more and more like the work of Watt. Clarissa, we are to understand, is really concerned with what might strike us as a strangely contemporary quest for personal fulfillment through liberation from the constraining shackles of society - the shackles, in particular, of sexual mores. Thus Lovelace has become a man basically good but tragically blinded 'to his own deepest feelings' by his adherence to the 'code ... of the rake', while Clarissa, who 'dies rather than recognize the flesh', is prevented by her feminine code of delicacy from unleashing the sexual woman within her. Clarissa, we are told, 'could perhaps have married Lovelace, very much on her own terms, had she known her own feelings earlier'; Lovelace, on the other hand, 'need not have lost Clarissa, if he had known and been willing to recognize the gentler elements in his personality'. But they are both in the grip of 'false sexual ideology', and the novel shows 'the havoc brought about by two codes which doom their holders to a psychological attitude which makes human love impossible'. In a concluding flourish, Clarissa and Lovelace, separated by barriers 'subjective and in part unconscious', become 'Richardson's star-crossed lovers', and are compared with Tristan and Isolde, with Romeo and Juliet.

It is interesting to note that these very comparisons, accompanied with references to 'rich ambiguities', sex, psychology, 'self-deception', and the description of Clarissa and Lovelace as 'that fatally attracted pair', are to be found on the back cover of the 1985 Penguin edition of the novel. This may say something about the continuing popularity of Watt's account; or perhaps just about marketing strategies. In either case, it is an indication of the strong appeal, to the modern reader, of the psychoanalytical approach to Clarissa. It may be that this approach is the most profitable one for a publisher, in one sense at least; its value to the student of literature, we have seen, is very doubtful indeed.

RICHARDSON AND HIS TIMES

Richardson's works have long been regarded as suitable source material for the study of eighteenth-century history and society. To Ian Watt, the unconscious author betrayed not only his own psychological make-up, but 'acted as a sounding board for the dominant notes of his age'. Morris Golden, while finding Richardson's 'perception of the hidden bases of character' to be most important, agrees nevertheless that the novelist is 'revealing as an unconscious reflecter [sic] of issues pervasive in his time, place, and class'.¹ If it is the 'psychological' Richardson who is generally regarded as the most important, it is the feeling of the critics we shall encounter in this chapter that it is Richardson the social historian who is ultimately the more interesting.

To what extent can Richardson be seen as a reflector of his times? We shall approach this question through the work of five critics in particular: Arnold Kettle, William M. Sale, Jr., Christopher Hill, Dorothy Van Ghent, and Leslie Fiedler.² In the work of Kettle, Sale, and Hill, Richardson figures essentially as a reporter of social and political reality. It is the assumption of these critics that the works of an author such as Richardson may be taken as a reasonably accurate record of the sorts of things which really went on in the society of his time. A more complex assumption is that the way in which an author represents particular events or characters tells us much about the beliefs

and values of his age, regardless of whether his work can be considered 'realistic'. At its most extreme this approach becomes an almost anthropological one, which seeks in fiction not any obvious or direct access to a past world, but the mythic expression of its underlying social and psychological tensions. It is such an approach that we shall witness in the work of Van Ghent and Fiedler.

But let us begin at a more basic level.

Arnold Kettle's account of Clarissa appears in his well-known study, An Introduction to the English Novel (1951-3). Like many a critic before and since, Kettle finds Richardson to be a profoundly equivocal figure. His first novel, we are to understand, was devoid of all redeeming merit, remaining of interest 'only as a record of a peculiarly loathsome aspect of bourgeois puritan morality' (p. 65). Nor is Clarissa without its serious flaws:

There are strands and tints in this second and greater novel which weaken it, sometimes quite disastrously. The religiosity is still there; the moral distribution of reward and punishment is offensive; the dwelling almost ad nauseum on the affecting moments (particularly in the last volumes) is distasteful, so is the prurient playing on the reader's anticipation of the rape (p. 66).

Yet Clarissa, for all this, is 'a novel of quite astonishing subtlety and fascination' (p. 65). How are we to account for this remarkable fact?

Kettle's explanation is not quite the same as V. S. Pritchett's. Of course there can be little doubt that Richardson's success was 'less than fully conscious' (p. 69). To Kettle, Richardson's conscious ends as a writer may be described, quite adequately, as 'the titillation of emotion for its own sake and the explicit recommendation of a bogus philosophy of life'. What

appears to have happened, however, is this: somehow, in the midst of his religious musings and his 'search for the easily pathetic', Richardson 'stumbled on a situation fully tragic' (p. 70). Richardson 'is the first tragic novelist, and this is where the power of Clarissa lies' (p. 66).

We may be surprised to be told that Richardson merely 'stumbled on' Clarissa's tragic situation. But it would appear that the novel, as its author thought of it, had little in the way of tragic credentials. Kettle refers approvingly here to the 1928 study of Richardson by Brian W. Downs. In that book, Downs had found Clarissa to be morally unsatisfactory in one major respect. The deathbed theme, he argued, far from representing an advance on Pamela (as is sometimes claimed), is merely another version of 'Virtue Rewarded', vulgarly substituting 'a transcendental for a sublunary audit'. The significance of the novel lies in quite another direction: 'It is the irrevocability of human action that Clarissa inculcates, the stern truth that no reparation is possible to cancel out selfish cruelty, wantonly devised to give the maximum of anguish. As ruthlessly as Hebbel or Ibsen [Richardson] shows how unpardonable is the sin of violating personality.'³ Of course this is true so far as it goes; the trouble is, it does not go far enough. Richardson is to be valued, it would appear, only to the extent that he fills the secular, humanist mould that Downs has prepared for him.

Like Downs, Kettle is concerned to drag Clarissa forward, as it were, into an essentially nineteenth-century tradition:

The conflict of Clarissa - the individual heart versus the conventional standards of the property-owning class - is one of the essential, recurring conflicts of the modern novel, as of all literature of class society. It is the

conflict of love (i.e. human dignity, sympathy, independence), versus money (i.e. property, position, 'respectability,' prejudice), which lies at the heart of almost all the novels of Fielding, Jane Austen, the Brontës, Thackeray, unlike as they are in almost every other respect (p. 66f).

The giveaway references to 'class society' and 'the property-owning class' here alert us to a further fact: whereas the Downs interpretation seems solidly in the tradition of liberal humanism, Kettle's is fundamentally Marxist in orientation. It is this which most seriously distorts his reading of Richardson's novel.

Kettle ends his discussion with some thoughts on the way in which the novel should be read:

We shall not enjoy Clarissa unless we approach it sympathetically, through history. But if we approach it only through history we shall not enjoy it either. The past and the present are at once different and inseparable. It is precisely because he stumbled on one of the real, contemporary dilemmas of his own time that Richardson achieved an art which has relevance to ours (p. 71).

What Kettle suggests is that we approach Clarissa - and, by implication, all our classics - simultaneously from two angles: that we are aware of its roots in the historical past, reading it as something linked inextricably with the conditions of its age; but that we perceive too its timelessness, its ability to speak to ages other than its own. To describe such a process is not, of course, to delineate any high-flying 'theoretical' programme: one feels it to be simply a description of what goes on in any case in most intelligent reading. As Kettle implies, it is this quality of being somehow poised between the present and the past which often distinguishes a classic. 'The past and the present are at once different and inseparable': it would be difficult to improve upon this formulation.

One feels uneasy, however, with Kettle's own dealings

with the historical part of this relationship. It is difficult to see to what extent Kettle is approaching Clarissa 'sympathetically, through history' when he does not hesitate to dismiss its author's apparent 'philosophy of life' as 'bogus', for example. Kettle, moreover, neither informs us of what he takes this 'philosophy of life' to be - though we may surmise it has something to do with that doctrine of future rewards - nor provides explicit grounds for its rejection. Far from appreciating Clarissa 'historically', Kettle would appear to be more concerned with ensuring that the novel is directed, in effect, towards his own pre-ordained political ends.

It is significant that Kettle has nothing positive to say about Pamela. (He does not mention Sir Charles Grandison.) Some years after Kettle's book appeared, Walter Allen, in The English Novel, was to argue that Richardson's first novel gained much of its power and popularity precisely through its having dealt with a significant contemporary political theme: the problem of 'the existence at all levels of inordinate, arbitrary, and irresponsible power against which the ordinary private citizen was helpless'.⁴ Now probably this is true to a large extent; certainly anyone hunting for a 'class' theme in Pamela would not have to look for long. But Pamela, in so far as it deals with the issue of class, presents after all a reconciliation of classes in the marriage of servant and master.

One can see why Clarissa is much more congenial to a critic of a Marxist persuasion. Kettle seems almost to argue that there is in this novel something in the 'material' itself - the basic constituents of the story - which seems naturally to organize itself in a worthily 'powerful' way; like other critics, Kettle would appear to imply that the creation of Clarissa could only have been hindered by Richardson's interfering presence.

Thus what we might call Kettle's Paradox: 'that though Richardson is sentimental Clarissa, by and large, is not' (p. 68). But what of that 'dwelling almost ad nauseum on the affecting moments', mentioned earlier - one of the novel's perhaps disastrous flaws? Kettle seems dangerously close to contradicting himself when he informs us, later, that this does not really matter: Richardson, he writes, 'squeezes every atom of emotion (and sometimes more) out of every incident, yet because the central conflict is so strong and true and because the scene he has built is so real and solid, the book can in fact, to an astonishing measure, bear such treatment' (ibid.). Indeed, if Kettle at one point claims that the novel is not sentimental, only a paragraph later he informs us that Richardson 'achieved in Clarissa a situation so truly impressive that his sentimental approach is not ridiculous' (p. 69).

By this stage, we may well be confused: is Clarissa, 'by and large', sentimental or not? Kettle's Paradox surely belongs in the too-clever-by-half category. Certainly it does not add to our understanding of the novel's evident 'power'.

It is all rather vague, of course, to speak simply of 'power'. For all the faults he may find in Clarissa, Kettle is not a critic to stint on praise for other aspects of the novel. In what is possibly one of the best brief discussions of Richardson's novelistic virtues, much is made of his 'extremely realistic' mode of presentation, his 'psychological insight and subtlety', 'the solidity of his scene' (pp. 67-8). Richardson, Kettle notes, 'did almost all that was to be done with the epistolary form' (p. 70). Most of all, what is remarkable in Clarissa is the 'intensity', the 'intimate involvement of the reader which is quite outside anything previously achieved in the English novel' (p. 65). With Richardson's characters, 'We are involved in a way in which we are

seldom involved in the lives of others in actual life'; reading Clarissa, we experience 'the actual tensions of life in motion' (pp. 65, 70).

This is generous indeed, and just: yet Kettle's appreciation of these things serves only to make more odd his apparent contention that these virtues derive from some bizarrely fortuitous analysis of the tensions of class society. Richardson 'stumbled on a situation fully tragic': are we to believe that excellence in such abundance can flow merely from a kind of ideological accident? Is it not the case that Pamela, not to mention Sir Charles Grandison, possesses at least some of the virtues that Kettle ascribes to Clarissa? Kettle's answer to the perennial question, 'How was it done?', seems not only patently self-serving, but barely able to stand the light of logic. He has set up a version of literary history in which it is not only considered desirable for a writer to be 'political' (after the prescribed fashion, of course); to be 'political' is the price of entrance. Clearly Richardson, taken on his own terms, can have no place in the Kettle canon.

I have said that Kettle takes little trouble over the question of Richardson's intentions: the author's apparent aims are simply stated in the most reductive terms, in order to be swiftly brushed aside. Yet Kettle at least acknowledges that Clarissa as he presents it, and Clarissa as it appeared to Richardson, are two different things. Such acknowledgement has not always been made by critics of a similarly 'sociological' bent.

Kettle, early in his account, is concerned to stress that Richardson was 'not just an "important" writer, interesting only to literary historians' (p. 63). Both Sale, in his essay 'From Pamela to Clarissa' (1949), and Hill, in 'Clarissa Harlowe and her Times' (1955), begin from a similar premise: that Clarissa, despite

all we may have heard, is a novel of much more than merely 'historical' interest. 'On the contrary, it seems to me one of the greatest of the unread novels,' writes Hill (p. 315).

Sale claims as the purpose of his essay 'to urge a close examination of Richardson's novels in their own terms'; an examination, however, 'from a somewhat different point of view than that of the critics who have found little in his fiction but historical significance' (p. 128). This sounds promising. Unfortunately, one is somewhat taken aback to discover just what it means to Sale to read Richardson's novels 'in their own terms'. The novels, one gathers, are almost exclusively concerned with the subject of class differences. And what form did Richardson's interest in class differences take? Richardson, we are told, like W. D. Howells, James, and Scott Fitzgerald, was a writer who desired to make 'some degree of common cause with a social class superior to his own' (*ibid.*). Of course he was repelled by aristocrats as well as attracted to them; but his alleged 'common cause' was necessary 'if his vision of human potentialities was to extend beyond the narrow confines of his own middle-class world' (p. 136).

Sale makes much of the notion of the 'image' in literature, as distinct from the 'idea' it represents; in reading Richardson, and other writers of the past, it may at times be the case that a gap has opened between the image and the idea. This leaves us in danger of apprehending a work only on the presumably vulgar level of 'image', mistaking for the tenor that which was only the vehicle. In Richardson's time, we are to understand, the 'vital social problem was the interpenetration of the emergent middle class and the surviving aristocracy' (p. 129). Richardson chose to deal with this problem through the theme of 'the new women, products of a time

when a new freedom seemed attainable but was certainly not attained':

Richardson brought his heroines into the orbit of the aristocrat, just as Henry James brought the morally sensitive products of a new American civilization into the ancient and enchantedly evil gardens of Europe. He chose, as central symbolic incident, the real or threatened seduction of his heroines, just as Meredith chose the curious psychological violation of his heroine for the central incident of Diana of the Crossways, and just as James again and again exposed his heroines to a violation of the spirit, a deflowering of the human soul. Like James's heroines, Richardson's sought union with, not opposition to, those aristocrats who threatened their integrity (pp. 130-1).

Sale's emphasis on the symbolic function of 'seduction' here is useful, especially given the trouble Richardson has brought upon himself from his decision to deal with such a theme. To see Richardson's heroines in the role of 'new women', however, seems difficult, not to say faintly comic. Sale's final comparison of Richardson's heroines with those of James also seems contentious. Pamela only 'sought union' with Mr. B. if we subscribe to the Shamelist theory. Harriet Byron wanted anything but union with Sir Hargrave Pollexfen, while Sir Charles Grandison, with whom she was eager to unite, would be the last person to threaten her integrity - quite the opposite. It is he who saves her from the villainous Sir Hargrave, after all. And what of Clarissa? Did she really seek to be united with Lovelace?

She did, apparently. Stultifying in the bourgeois atmosphere of Harlowe Place, Clarissa is 'attracted by the free spirit of Lovelace':

Lovelace moves in a world of larger freedoms, of wider spaces. His values, however reprehensible, are not the countinghouse values of the Harlowes. Clarissa allows herself to hope that in union with him she will in some way complete her life. She knows and tells us in so many words that in marriage with Solmes, her family's choice, her life will stop. So this passionate pilgrim, like Isabel Archer, is driven to link her destiny with her Osmond (p. 135).

Yet Clarissa and Lovelace are representatives of different modes of life - a volatile combination. Not surprisingly, Lovelace had to decide that to marry Clarissa 'would compromise his principles', while Clarissa, after the rape, 'knew that marriage with Lovelace was no resolution of her dilemma' (p. 136). How the rape figures in all this, and what it means, we are not specifically told; one gathers that we are to take it as demonstrating the incompatibility of the classes. For Richardson, the desired transcendence - a vision of the union of classes; a sort of 'Only connect' situation - cannot yet be achieved in the real world: to imply that it could, as in Pamela, was to have been guilty of a 'specious optimism' (ibid.). We are offered the character of Clarissa, however, as a symbol of Richardson's noble but thwarted aspiration:

It is not love for which Clarissa's old pious world is well lost; it is for a chance to live life more completely in conformity with an ideal of conduct. Clarissa is no more a girl in search of a husband than is Isabel Archer. She is - if I may risk a dangerous abstraction - humanity desperately if futilely seeking freedom in a world where duty and responsibility are constant limitations upon that search (p. 137).

Sale's notion of a Clarissa seeking to live her life 'in conformity with an ideal of conduct' seems an excellent, even definitive, description of her character. But Sale should not have risked that 'dangerous abstraction': surely it betrays a complete misunderstanding of Clarissa's nature. Far from seeking 'freedom' from duty and responsibility, Clarissa is duty incarnate - and wants to stay that way. That is what her 'ideal of conduct' is all about. Her problems arise largely because others have failed in their duty towards her. It is ironic that Sale has earlier (and rightly) censured those readers who refuse to look at Richardson except through the screen of Romanticism: 'It is somewhat provincial to

impose upon his art the strictures of the romantic aesthetic,' he has aptly observed (p. 131). His own ultimate image of Clarissa seems very Romantic indeed.

Christopher Hill contends that it is the purpose of Clarissa 'to examine the effect on individuals of property marriage and all that goes with it' (p. 321). Through his heroine's tragic story, Richardson presents 'the supreme criticism of property marriage' (p. 330).

What does this mean? Citing the researches of the historian H. J. Habakkuk, Hill begins by alleging the prevalence of property marriage in the eighteenth century; that is, marriage for the purpose of increasing landed wealth.⁵ This is related to the 'elaborately described point of departure' of Richardson's novel; according to Hill, the rapacious desire of the already rich Harlowes to raise themselves to the aristocracy. Says Hill:

The whole family strategy was planned with this end in mind. The uncles, one enriched by the discovery of minerals on his property, the other by the East India trade, intended not to marry. The eldest (and only) son, James, the real power in the family, thought that his two sisters might be provided for with £10-15,000 apiece; and then all the real estate - their grandfather's, father's, uncles' - and the remainder of their personal estates would descend on him (p. 316).

With his godmother's estate as well, James hoped to be so rich that he would be awarded a peerage.

But before the novel has even begun, this 'family strategy' has run into trouble. As Clarissa puts it, her grandfather's will has 'lopped off one branch' of her brother's 'expectation' (C1., I.54). Wishing to prevent conflict, Clarissa has given up her unexpected inheritance into her father's management. It is to no avail: the wakened jealousy of her spiteful siblings cannot be allayed. Then Lovelace enters into the family's

midst. At first his suit is to Arabella: this proposal is acceptable to the family, writes Hill, 'because they hoped that this connection might help to gain a peerage'. But the turn of Lovelace's attentions to Clarissa gives cause for much alarm:

[T]he design to concentrate the estates and aggrandize the family was seriously endangered. There was always the possibility that the uncles might follow their father's example and their own inclinations. Lovelace had a good clear estate, and prospects of a peerage; if he married Clarissa, why should not the family property be concentrated on them, since James could no longer have it all? 'This little syren is in a fair way to out-uncle, as she has already out-grandfather'd us both!' said James anxiously to Arabella [Cl., I.58]. He and Arabella both had good reason to wish to 'digrace and keep down' Clarissa quite apart from Arabella's jealousy of her sister, arising from Lovelace's transfer of his addresses (p. 317).

So it is proposed to throw the virtuous Clarissa into the arms of the odious Solmes: and the great drama begins in earnest.

The conflict between love and money as motives for marriage is perennial, Hill suggests; but these warring alternatives 'were especially topical in Richardson's day; and with them the related problems of parental authority, of the daughter's right of choice'. We might choose to see the Harlowes only as figures of melodrama, but 'Professor Habakkuk's conclusions suggest that [Richardson] was depicting, even if in a heightened form, a typical attitude among the bigger landowners' (pp. 318-19).

It might be said here that Hill is depending heavily on the presumed soundness of Habakkuk's findings. If we are to believe some recent commentators, they are not sound at all: Lawrence Stone, for example, maintains that the eighteenth century in fact saw a decline in property marriage, as the modern ideal of 'companionate marriage' came into full force. John Allen Stevenson

remarks that 'Richardson's opposition to property marriage - undeniably a feature of the novel - was about as startling an attitude in his day as patriotism or religious faith'.⁶ Of course historians, like literary critics, tend to disagree on many things. It would seem only too easy to discredit Hill and Habakkuk, at least to one's own satisfaction, by pitting other accounts against theirs. Our concern, however, is not primarily with what actually went on in Richardson's time; rather, we must consider the adequacy of Hill's explication of Clarissa, not to our view of the facts of history, but to our sense of the novel as a work of art.

Nowhere does Hill's approach appear more reductive than in his discussion of Lovelace. As far as Hill is concerned, much of the rake's behaviour is attributable to the rampant corruption of his society in the sphere of marital arrangements:

Schemes for property marriage lead to breakdown of respect for the institution ... Faced by the fact that marriage is a matter of money, not affection; that society trains women to trap men into matrimony, Lovelace hits back at the sex indiscriminately and without mercy (pp. 322, 324).

Hill makes much of the Miss Betterton affair (Cl., II.147-9); that is reasonable enough. But one doubts that a man of Lovelace's character would have had much respect for the institution of marriage in any case. A Lovelace hitting out against property marriage, it might also be observed, is somewhat less compelling than the frightening figure of whom Clarissa must declare, 'O Lovelace, you are Satan himself; or he helps you out in everything; and that's as bad!' (III.210). What seems most dubious is Hill's suggestion that Richardson 'sets [Lovelace] firmly in the social context by putting some curiously radical political views into his mouth' (p. 324). To characterize such things as Lovelace's plan for annual marriages as a radical political view,

as does Hill (p. 325; cf. C1., III.181-4), is surely to miss entirely the point of such passages - and their humour.

But let us look more closely at Hill's discussion of the Harlowe 'family strategy'. His account of this is drawn mostly from Clarissa's letter to Anna of Wednesday 1 March. Clarissa writes:

I have more than once mentioned to you the darling view some of us have long had of raising a family, as it is called; a reflection, as I have often thought, upon our own, which is no inconsiderable or upstart one on either side; of my mother's especially. A view too frequently, it seems, entertained by families which having great substance, cannot be satisfied without rank and title.

My uncles had once extended this view to each of us three children, urging, that as they themselves intended not to marry, we each of us might be so portioned, and so advantageously matched, as that our posterity, if not ourselves, might make a first figure in our country. While my brother, as the only son, thought the two girls might be very well provided for by ten or fifteen thousand pounds apiece; and that all the real estates in the family: to wit, my grandfather's, father's, and two uncles', and the remainder of their respective personal estates, together with what he had an expectation of from his godmother, would make such a noble fortune, and give him such an interest, as might entitle him to hope for a peerage. Nothing less would satisfy his ambition.

With this view he gave himself airs very early: "That his grandfather and uncles were his stewards; that no man ever had better; that daughters were but encumbrances and drawbacks upon a family" (I.53-4).

It is a moot point as to whether we see here anything which qualifies as a 'family strategy' in Hill's terms. Do the uncles decide not to marry out of altruism towards their brother's offspring, or towards 'the family' conceived as an ongoing institution? Or are they leaving their wealth to James Snr.'s children more because, not happening to have children of their own, there is (as it were) nothing else they can do with it? It appears that the uncles do wish to 'raise' the family. But note that they 'had once extended' this view to the children. The meaning of that 'once' is worth pondering.

Are we to think of their action here as some great moment in Harlowe history, a moment when destiny was forged - or more as a casually-offered assurance, such as might well be given to the children of a rich family? Clarissa says that 'some' of the family have long held the 'darling view'; but clearly it is James, mostly, who is obsessed with the idea. Clarissa says too that she has 'more than once mentioned' the 'darling view' to Anna: this, we might assume, is because James is continually, maddeningly talking about it.

The uncles had envisaged that each of the three children would be very well provided for. It is James, 'as the only son', who has decided that any worldly advancement coming the Harlowe way should be his, and his alone. If James has no wish to share all of that wealth with his sisters - portioned, indeed! - he certainly cannot tolerate that 'posterity' should enjoy benefits denied to him. James is out for himself: there is no evidence to suggest that he cares in the slightest, really, for the good of the family - except in so far as it involves the good of James. It is James, too, who brings up the idea of the peerage.

We might also consider what happened when the Harlowes learnt of Clarissa's inheritance. James, says Clarissa, was 'extremely dissatisfied' with her. So was everyone else in the family - but this, Clarissa's account suggests, had more to do with their sheer jealousy over her unexpected good fortune than with despair over the fate of some 'family strategy':

Nobody indeed was pleased; for although every one loved me, yet being the youngest child, father, uncles, brother, sister, all thought themselves postponed, as to matter of right and power (who loves not power?); and my father himself could not bear that I should be made sole, as I may call it, and independent, for such the will, as to that estate and the powers it gave (unaccountably as they all said), made me (I.54).

Perhaps, in that James has usurped too great an authority over the Harlowes, we may indeed speak of his self-exalting scheme as a 'family strategy'. Yet this seems hardly satisfactory. That opposition to property marriage might have been no more unusual in Richardson's day than patriotism or religious faith does not, of course, prove that Clarissa is not fundamentally concerned with this theme. There was propaganda enough for patriotism and religious faith at times when there might have been little doubt that most people were in favour of those things: that is probably why they were. Had Richardson wished to mount a 'supreme criticism of property marriage', however, he would not appear to have gone about it in the most logical fashion. Why, we might ask, does the persecution of his heroine seem to derive less from cold-hearted parental calculation than from something more akin to a slighted authoritarianism, mixed with lashings of sibling rivalry?

If Hill's thesis is to hold together, he must insist that the Harlowes are more or less adequate representatives of the real-life society of their times. In their treatment of Clarissa, we are to understand, Richardson is depicting behaviour which was common, even generally accepted, among the affluent families of his day. Yet how typical are the Harlowes intended to be? One of the most notable features of Clarissa is that all of its major characters are rather unusual people. As Clarissa is better, so the Harlowes - and certainly Lovelace - are, one hopes, rather worse than most people. The same could be said of most of the great villains of literature. Few of us are likely to assume that Richard III, say, or Iago, is intended to represent the average man in the street. Yet the extreme evil we witness in such characters seems only too clearly to represent actual human impulses; to illuminate for

us the nature of evil thoughts and actions of all kinds. Literature, in its relationship to life, works largely by analogy, after all. It should not be thought that we have dealt any crushing blow to Richardson as a didactic novelist if we can show that his evil characters, any more than his good ones, are not exact copies of persons in his contemporary social environment. Such a fact does not vitiate his didactic intentions: quite the reverse. But this is because his didactic intentions are moral and religious in essence. Clearly Richardson would have run into difficulties had he wished to offer the sort of direct criticism of a specific class of people which Hill has in mind.

In what is by far the best discussion of the issue of class in Clarissa, Diana Spearman finds the Harlowes to be quite inadequate as representatives of the bourgeoisie. Demonstrating that the 'exact status' of the family is difficult to determine from what we are told in the novel, Spearman argues that Richardson does not make nearly as much of any disparity in rank between his heroine and villain as some modern critics have done.⁷ The very scheme for family advancement which convinces Hill of the novel's socio-political implications is shaky on credibility, Spearman maintains. Both Richardson and Hill are to be faulted if they believe that the Harlowes would have been likely to achieve their objectives - their alleged objectives - with such a plan. Take the question of why James is determined that Clarissa should not marry Lovelace:

[T]he main reason given by Richardson, and the one seized on by critics who are determined to see a photographic representation of eighteenth-century life in the book, is that as the grandfather had left the bulk of his estate to Clarissa, James is afraid that if she marries Lovelace the uncles will leave her their property to support the dignity of her husband's peerage. Surely this is a complete misunderstanding of the psychology of landowners. Family pride was tied up with the family name.... Only if the male line

failed would any one ambitious for his family have left money to his niece's husband in preference to his own nephew (p. 182).

Deciding that 'The conduct of everyone in the first part of Clarissa is highly improbable from start to finish' (p. 183), Spearman concludes that what happened at Harlowe Place must be explained by rather different reasons than any 'indignation at the prevailing view of marriage' on Richardson's part:

As Robinson Crusoe had to be got to the desert island, so must Clarissa be raped. The most serious of all Richardson's intentions, that of showing virtue triumphant in the most adverse circumstances, demanded it. But in the eighteenth century it was difficult to invent incidents which would put a virtuous young lady sufficiently into Lovelace's power. Pamela was a servant in her master's house when faced with a somewhat similar threat. Ladies of position, however, did not go about alone; they were attended by maids, maid-servants, and generally by some of their relations as well. Moreover, Richardson was determined that Clarissa should not be so passionately in love that she was prepared to risk everything. And even if she had been, no such self-respecting young woman would have eloped, and in the ordinary way no one as virtuous as Clarissa would have met Lovelace alone. She had to be so persecuted by her family that the abduction by Lovelace should appear probable. And a further difficulty then arose: why should parents persecute a daughter as good, as affectionate as Clarissa? Some reason had to be invented ... (pp. 186-7).

Perhaps it is going too far to explain the behaviour of the Harlowes only in terms of the exigencies of plot. But certainly such considerations should never be far from our minds when discussing works of fiction. One must applaud the sheer common sense of Spearman's approach. I would only add that if Clarissa was intended as a tract against property marriage, we might be forgiven for wondering if Richardson needed quite so much space to make his point. Surely it is well and truly made by the time we are just a few hundred pages into the story.

It is difficult to see how Hill has yet convinced us that Clarissa is a novel of more than merely 'historical' interest. Doubtless property marriage of a sort remains common enough today, but the eighteenth-century English version of it hardly seems of such riveting importance, in itself, as to inspire us to read a very long novel all about it.

There is more to Clarissa, Hill admits. We are invited to consider the novel's relationship to the 'Puritan tradition' (p. 328). Pointing to writers such as Milton, Bunyan, and Defoe, Hill discusses the Puritan desire 'to cut the individual free from the inherited traditions, customs and laws of society, to set him alone to work out his personal salvation in the sight of God only, in a state of "freedom"' (p. 329). Such freedom is unlikely to be found in the real world. Lovelace and Clarissa, with all their advantages of wealth and station, might seem at first to be '"free" individuals shaping their own morality' (p. 326f). Yet both in the end are as constrained as if they had been members of the lower orders: 'The individual cannot escape from his society.' Lovelace gets the come-uppance he has long deserved, while the virtuous Clarissa too has been 'cut off from all possibility of living in her society' (p. 328).

Hill emphasizes Clarissa's exemplary status. Her standards, as opposed to the 'conventional market morality' of her family, 'are those of the Puritan ideal':

From the beginning she had consoled herself in her desperate situation by the purity of her motives.... Clarissa's attitude is a logical application of the protestant theory of justification by faith, with its emphasis on the inner intention of the believer rather than on his external actions (pp. 331-2).

By Richardson's time, however, 'the Puritan revolution had failed: the bourgeois revolution had succeeded' (p. 338).

There is no room for Puritan ideals in a corrupt capitalist society: 'justification by faith was for Sundays only.' The raped heroine finds herself to be 'flawed goods', that is all. What is left for her but to die? What the novel reveals, if unintentionally, is the 'fundamental flaw in Puritan morality' (p. 332). In theory women, like men, had a direct personal relationship with God; yet Puritan double standards combined with capitalism to leave them as oppressed as ever. In living up to her Puritan ideal, Clarissa in effect follows, to the letter, her society's official standards. In doing so, she exposes the hypocrisy of her society. Richardson may have set out to write Clarissa in order 'to assert the bourgeois and Puritan conception of marriage against the feudal-cavalier standards of Lovelace and the Harlowe emphasis on concentration of property'; what he did, however, was 'to push the Puritan code forward to the point at which its flaw was completely revealed, at which it broke down as a standard of conduct for this world' (p. 335). His appeals to 'other-worldly sanctions' should not fool us: these we should regard only as a measure of his naivety, or self-deception (ibid.). The contradictions he had uncovered in his society were too much for him - no wonder 'Richardson was reduced, in defending the only conscious positive morality he depicts, to call in the next world to redress the balance of this' (p. 328; my emphasis). Still, we have the novel, and what Richardson had written, whether he knew it or not, is a 'damning indictment of his society' (p. 332).

Yet it is more than an indictment of his society. In Richardson's time, there were things such as 'Puritan' morality, not to mention archaic notions of marriage and the family, which no longer exist to so great an extent today. But capitalism is flourishing as much as ever in many parts of the world, and we still live

in a 'bourgeois' society - or so we are always told. It is therefore only logical to assume that Richardson's indictment of his society must be applicable to our own times as well - indeed, to capitalism and to 'bourgeois' society in general. His 'supreme criticism of property marriage', it transpires, is in the end a supreme criticism of property. We can see, then, how Hill's historical approach has helped him to uncover what he, at least, considers to be the enduring value of the novel.

Of course Richardson is offering an indictment of his society in so far as his society, or members of it, are guilty of the sorts of behaviour for which we are to fault the wicked characters in Clarissa. Where Hill goes wrong, however, is in his eagerness to move so swiftly from a general ethical and religious level to a solely political or economic plane. We might note here that Hill misinterprets what appears to have been the one-time working title of the novel, The Lady's Legacy.⁸ Clarissa's 'legacy' is her story itself, as recorded in the letters she leaves behind. Significantly, Hill assumes this would-be title to refer to her inheritance of her grandfather's estate (p. 318). This says a great deal about the way in which he chooses to look at Richardson's novel.

Richardson is an imaginative writer; a novelist, not a social historian. It is pertinent to observe that this supposed 'sounding board for the dominant notes of his age' does not in fact appear to have been particularly representative of his time or class at all. Diana Spearman argues that the best demonstration of this is to be seen in the responses of many of his early readers: 'If his audience is unable to understand an author, is he still to be regarded as representative or typical of those who misunderstood him?' Spearman asks (p. 197). As we reject the notion of Richardson

as a passive reflector of his times, however, it is necessary to look at least briefly at a question which does not much impinge upon Spearman's discussion: the question of whether Richardson is a 'realistic' novelist. (What is realism? If I refrain from at once offering a definition, my reasons for this will soon be apparent.)

It will be recalled that Richardson, writing Clarissa, was much concerned with the credibility of his story. In the Postscript to the novel, he speaks of 'that air of probability, which is necessary to be maintained in a story designed to represent real life' (Cl., IV.564). Real life? At first we may think this view of the novel to be incompatible not only with Spearman's but with Richardson's own intentions - we have said that he is not aiming at any obvious, slice-of-life realism in his presentation of his major characters.

Richardson's remark occurs in a discussion of why he had to be so 'very circumstantial and minute'. As has often been remarked, it is in their famous 'minute particulars' that the distinctive effect of Richardson's novels resides. Minute particulars are slippery things: if they may seem at times to offer us a notation of actual life, so too they may be used to create a narrative which looks realistic, but is not. 'Clarissa is a Piece from first to last, that owes its Being to Invention,' wrote Richardson proudly to Stinstra (SL, p. 233).

In considering Richardson's insistence on the importance of both 'real life' and 'invention' in his writings, we confront what is perhaps the major dilemma of the relationship between any more or less 'realistic' novel and the 'reality' from which it springs. According to Diana Spearman, Richardson is an 'untrustworthy guide' to eighteenth-century life, not only because of his inadequate knowledge of how certain types of people would have been likely to behave, but because 'The nature of his books also tend[s] to distortion. Clarissa,

his greatest novel, in some ways anticipates a modern form of literature, the thriller, and even Pamela has something of it.' Spearman likens the search for sociological information in Richardson to taking 'John Buchan's books as a source for what was likely to happen in Scotland between the wars' (p. 176).

Whether Clarissa would satisfy the average admirer of John Buchan may be doubted. Yet, in its nightmarish pattern of pursuit and capture, in its endlessly maintained tension and prevailing atmosphere of strangeness, in the significance it gives to small details, not to mention in its pretence, in its form, of offering documentary evidence for its events, the novel clearly contains numerous elements which would not be at all out of place in a thriller. If there is one point about the thriller it is essential to grasp, however, it is that the genre does not necessarily belong outside the domain of realism. Unlike the gothic novel, for example, or science fiction or 'fantasy', the thriller (like the crime or detective novel) in fact achieves much of its impact by not breaking with realistic conventions.

It is worth recalling the Dedication to that most famous of Buchan's thrillers, The Thirty-Nine Steps. Buchan offers two considerations which are basic to the genre. He does not use the term 'thriller', but defines his book as an attempt at what he calls the 'shocker': 'the romance where the incidents defy the probabilities, and march just inside the borders of the possible.' Bizarre as Buchan's story is - and this is our first consideration - still it contains nothing which is completely unbelievable. And this leads us to our second consideration: just where do 'the borders of the possible' lie? It is significant that Buchan introduces doubt on this very score, referring to 'these days' - it was 1915 - 'when the wildest fictions are so much less improbable than the facts'.⁹

Of course, one could be forgiven for thinking that most thrillers stray rather too close to 'the borders of the possible' for comfort, wherever those borders may be. But one is speaking here of the 'possible' only in so far as it pertains to 'plot' or story - and 'plot' is not all that realism is about. John Braine writes:

A thriller won't be a thriller if it concerns itself about credibility. That is, as far as the story is concerned. The details, the background, the time-table, must be meticulously planned. We don't want to be told; we want to be shown exactly. We want to know about the kind of gun, the kind of knife, the meals eaten, the journeys taken, the physical appearance of every character. We don't want ever to be in any doubt as to when anything happened; part of the pleasure, as for example in Frederick Forsyth's The Day of the Jackal, is to be told the day, the date and the hour. And we want real cities and towns and villages, real hotels and shops and public places; we're going to put ourselves into the hero's shoes, we're reading for escape, and to use places that we have visited ourselves or are able to visit makes that escape authentic, augments the fantasy.¹⁰

Braine is not being perverse in speaking of 'escape' and 'fantasy' virtually in the same breath as he demands the utmost realistic detail. To be successful, he points out, the thriller must seem both 'real' and 'unreal': real in its unreality, unreal in its reality. These remarks help us to see that there is a sense in which the thriller is not so different from novels in general. It is a fact about novels, all novels, that they are never simply 'realistic' or 'unrealistic'. For this reason it seems to me misconceived to demand some water-tight definition of 'realism' before discussing the phenomenon. There are situations in which our commonsense understanding of how things are is our best guide. In the last analysis, the 'realistic' is simply what we perceive as such: and it would appear that one must always be in two minds on the question of realism.

If we ask to what extent 'the novel' is a 'reflection

of society', there can be no unequivocal answer: it is and it is not. We must guard against two errors: on the one hand, the notion that because a work of literature cannot be exactly like life, it therefore has nothing to do with life, or is incapable of in some way representing the world from which it springs; on the other, the equally inadequate idea that because a work looks more or less 'realistic' on the surface it can therefore be used, with little especial caution, as a sort of sociological source-book on the author's times. A work might really be such a sociological source-book; but one should hardly assume that this will inevitably be the case. As far as Clarissa is concerned, the evidence seems to be weighted rather heavily on the other side of the scale. Raymond Williams seems far more perceptive than his fellow Marxist critics when he sees the novel as 'in the end not a criticism of a period or structure of society, but of what can be abstracted as "the world"'.¹¹ It is useful to set this alongside Diana Spearman's observation that 'Clarissa might have been set in almost any period of human history except the present, and some of the incidents would seem to belong to the Middle Ages rather than the eighteenth century'. If this may strike us as overstated, Spearman is surely right to insist on the importance of 'another element in both Pamela and Clarissa which, while it undoubtedly increased their popularity and still gives them a perennial attraction, diminishes their contemporary flavour: this is the ageless nature of their basic story. Pamela is a variation of Cinderella, and Clarissa of the story of the persecuted maiden' (p. 178). Perhaps, if we take away the abusive connotations, there is truth after all in Horace Walpole's description of Richardson's novels: 'pictures of high life as conceived by a bookseller, and romances as they would be spiritualized by a Methodist teacher.'¹²

It is likely that there is also truth in the notion of the novels as repositories of bourgeois myth. What seems less likely is the view of the matter taken by critics such as Dorothy Van Ghent and Leslie Fiedler. Van Ghent's The English Novel: Form and Function (1953) and Fiedler's Love and Death in the American Novel (1960) are among the most famous works of Anglo-American criticism to have appeared in the post-War period. For all their verve and intellectual liveliness, however, it seems unfortunate that one or other of these books has probably given many readers their first introduction to Clarissa.

Van Ghent's account of the novel is immediately notable for what appears to be a cynical and patronizing attitude towards its subject-matter:

The central event of the novel, over which the interminable series of letters hovers so cherishingly, is, considered in the abstract, a singularly thin and unrewarding piece of action - the deflowering of a young lady - and one which scarcely seems to deserve the universal uproar which it provokes in the book (p. 47).

Determined to maintain an aloof distance from the work under discussion, Van Ghent parades an illusion of scientific method. Inviting us to consider what she calls 'the "Clarissa-symbol"' (p. 48), she employs a kind of 'freeze-frame' technique, picking out 'images' of Clarissa from specific moments in the story and offering these to us rather as if they expressed the spirit of the novel in emblematic or 'symbolic' form. Much is made of the scenes in which Clarissa is seen through a keyhole; this, we are to understand, is a form of 'optical framing', which focusses for us the Clarissa-symbol. Clarissa, 'pale, debilitated, and distraught, with heaving bosom', is to be seen as an example of 'attractive, desirable womanhood' (p. 49). She is 'an ideal of the sexual woman', 'the love goddess of the Puritan middle class of the English eighteenth

century, of the bourgeois family, and of mercantile society'. '[T]o be paraded for the sight as an expensive chattel', the Clarissa-symbol appears to us today as the woman on the cover of Vogue magazine, 'a wraith of clothes' to be seen but not touched; we see her, too,

on the covers of True Confessions and True Detective Stories, in the many-breasted woman with torn dishabille and rolling eyeballs, a dagger pointing at her, a Venus as abstract as the Vogue Venus in her appeal to the eye and the idea alone, but differing in that she is to be vicariously ripped and murdered. Clarissa is a powerful symbol because she is both (pp. 50-1).

Given that Van Ghent is dealing with Clarissa not in some passing paragraph but as one of the 'eighteen classical novels' about which she offers to edify us (p. vii), one may find her attitude to Richardson's novel somewhat curious. For Van Ghent, however, the alleged absurdities of Clarissa are inseparable from what we might as well call its appeal. Not only is she concerned to show how Richardson reflects the society of his time; in addition, she 'must certainly acquiesce' in a reading of Clarissa as a 'psychological study' (p. 63). Her own approach transcends these, however, in seeking to understand the novel as 'myth'. Where a critic such as Hill is concerned to see in Clarissa a more or less realistic representation of early bourgeois society, for Van Ghent the realism or lack of realism of the novel is irrelevant to its sociological interest. Pritchett, in outlining Richardson's perversities, had seen fit to describe the author not only as the 'little printer' but as 'the Puritan'. While Pritchett makes little of the generalizing implications of this, Van Ghent is eager indeed to hold up the novelist as a representative case. Clarissa, it seems, reveals not merely the private perversities of one plump printer but 'the ideals of a culture and a race'; it is 'a

construct of irrationals similar to a dream', but 'the myth-maker is "dreaming" not only his own dream, but society's dream as well' (pp. 63, 61). To understand the novel, we must appreciate 'its significance as a projection of a social dream' (p. 50).

Given that the myth of Clarissa, like myth itself, is 'a construct of irrationals', naturally it is not amenable to easy definition. Van Ghent's method is 'to see it in several different aspects', to point to a series of mythological 'sub-systems' which, though too 'mingled and fused' in the novel to be really prized apart, may nevertheless be isolated by the critic for purposes of examination (p. 53). According to Van Ghent, we find four of these interlocking myths in Clarissa: the Puritan religious myth, the myth of social caste or class, the myth of the family, and the sexual myth.

If Van Ghent is not much enamoured of Richardson's presentation of 'woman', neither does she see much to recommend his depiction of 'the man'. Like the Harlowe males, the odious Solmes is 'economic man, desexualized man'; his function, Van Ghent aptly observes, is simply 'to be repellent'. '"The man" proper' is Lovelace, 'the sexual threat'; as Van Ghent will have it, 'a creature obsessed with the desire to violate virginal, high-minded, helpless womanhood' (p. 51). The Puritan myth is that dimension of the novel which opposes this figure of evil to the exemplary Clarissa; in which Richardson's paragon of virtue must be tempted, like Job, by the devil (p. 54).

Now no one would deny that this myth is present in the novel. One is disturbed, however, by Van Ghent's immediate reduction to sexual terms of what is evidently a spiritual struggle. For the Puritan, we are told, 'sex is the culmination of all evil'; so it is that the Satanic Lovelace is obsessed with sex while the virtuous Clarissa's obsession is with her chastity (ibid.).

We have considered earlier this overly simple juxtaposition. But Van Ghent's simplification of Richardson's novel goes further than this. Consider her discussion of its ending: 'Potent as the devil is, the universe is well loaded against him, and when the crisis is over, Providence begins distributing rewards and punishments with remarkable accuracy to everyone in the book, thoroughly satisfying poetic justice' (ibid.).

Perhaps Richardson would have been pleased to hear this, given the pages he spent in his Postscript trying to convince his readers that the rules of 'poetical justice' really had been 'strictly observed' in Clarissa (Cl., IV.557). But of course Van Ghent's implication is that this 'poetical justice' is a crude or mechanical affair. To be sure, it could be argued that there is too much obvious string-pulling in the latter part of the novel. Yet if some manipulation is evident so far as the edifying deaths are concerned, it is difficult to see any too-intrusive authorial hand behind the fates of the survivors. When Van Ghent, in a litany of the 'rewards and punishments', informs us that 'James becomes involved in insupportable financial difficulties', for example (p. 54), one's response must be to say that this is not presented in the novel merely as the result of some sudden stroke of Providence. In the 'Conclusion Supposed to be written by Mr. Belford', what we are told is that James has married, against the advice of his parents and uncles, 'a woman of family, an orphan; and is obliged, at a very great expense, to support her claim to estates which were his principal inducement to make his addresses to her; but which, to this day, he has not recovered; nor is likely to recover' (Cl., IV.535). Surely this is not only a fitting fate for Clarissa's insufferable brother, but a likely one - just the sort of thing that would happen to a money-hungry and arrogant, but rather stupid, young man like him.

I do not think it false to say that action flows from character in Richardson's work - for all that 'plot' may initially determine 'character'. If Van Ghent's flippancy tends to conceal this fact, so too it lends credence to a still grosser falsification of the nature of Clarissa. Like Brian W. Downs, Van Ghent sees the heroine's saintly death as only a facile variant on the 'Virtue Rewarded' theme. Far from being the tragedy that Richardson 'worked hard to make it', to Van Ghent 'the novel is really a comedy': it has a 'happy ending', after all (p. 55).

It may be helpful here to think of Anna at Clarissa's coffin. '[W]hy do I thus lament the HAPPY?' the distraught Anna wonders. The answer comes easily: 'I loved the dear creature, as never woman loved another. Excuse my frantic grief,' she says to Colonel Morden. 'How has the glory of her sex fallen a victim to villainy and to hard-heartedness!' (Cl., IV.403). To be sure, Clarissa has been taken to eternal bliss. Those who were good to her, we discover, are to be made happy in this world. But this does not eradicate all that has happened in the novel. 'Is Clarissa a tragedy?' asks Jean H. Hagstrum.

Not if Christian hope and triumphant virtue completely exclude the memory of what might have been and completely reconcile the reader as well as the heroine to the loss and punishment of a brilliant and potentially satisfying lover. But the reader is not so reconciled: quite the contrary. He grieves deeply over the irretrievably lost opportunities and censures society for producing those very real and menacing creatures that can blight the promise of happiness. Richardson was clearly not one of those who found Christianity and tragedy irreconcilable.¹³

To Van Ghent, however, it would appear that Richardson's 'Puritan world view' made inevitable just such an attitude, regardless of evidence that this was not the case. (p. 55).

Van Ghent's determination to see Clarissa as a

'comedy' is acknowledged only in relation to the 'Puritan' myth; but one senses its presence behind the subsequent sections of her discussion. In the 'myth of social caste or class', Van Ghent draws on Sale's notion that Richardson in Clarissa expresses a yearning for some unattainable union of the classes. Like Sale, Van Ghent sees the mooted marriage of Clarissa and Lovelace as 'a symbolic act, uniting middle class and aristocracy', conferring on the middle class aristocratic graces and freedoms. But if Richardson thus indulges 'the middle-class wish to be aristocratic', according to Van Ghent he finally negates this wish with 'a counterwish, the wish to embody in the middle class itself the universal order, both divine and social'. In her triumphant death, Clarissa

symbolically ... makes great her class, gives supernatural sanction to its code, donates to it her mana, making of it an embodiment of the order of the universe.... implicitly, what Richardson tells his readers is that the middle class, to see an image of what is socially and morally desirable, need not look beyond itself, but will find that image in what it already is (pp. 56-7).

We might reflect here that Clarissa is imprisoned and tormented by her bourgeois family for refusing to assent to their presumably bourgeois demands; that the aristocratic Belford and the lowly Mrs. Norton are among her closest allies; in general, that her standards of conduct are anything but those of the 'middle class' as depicted in the novel - if, as Van Ghent maintains, we are to take the Harlowe family as 'representatives' of that class (p. 55).

Van Ghent remarks that 'Clarissa, on her way to heaven, bestows blessings that assuredly have magical virtue' on her family and bourgeois friends (p. 56). One might wonder here what became of those unerringly accurate providential punishments, quite a few of which

were last seen plummeting in the direction of Harlowe Place. Van Ghent is not to be caught out in such seeming contradictions:

Myth has its power and fertility not in singleness of meaning (like allegory) but in multiplicity of meaning - meaning that changes historically with social changes, and that changes at any one glance with the center one chooses to see in it (p. 57).

This allows Van Ghent to ring a series of changes on her presentation of Lovelace as she proceeds through her argument. If in the religious myth the rake appears simply 'to represent evil', in the class myth he is given 'an ambivalent status'; while finally he must be rejected, still 'he exerts a powerful attraction' (*ibid.*). This attraction becomes more powerful still in the 'myth of family life and its sanctions', in which Lovelace now appears in the guise of 'the lover'.

Like the Harlowes, Van Ghent regards Clarissa's refusal to marry Solmes as evidence of an illicit love for Lovelace. The 'family' myth presents a grossly simplified Clarissa who 'goes off with a man' in an act of daughterly rebellion, 'a symbolical alliance of daughter with lover against family'. But the family exerts a strong hold over the rebellious heroine. As the novel proceeds, filial obedience assumes thematic predominance over rebellion: '[Clarissa's] father's curse is far more effective emotionally upon her than the attraction of the lover, or than her desire to escape the sterile and brutal cash alliance with the suitor approved by the family' (p. 59).

While Van Ghent is correct to stress this obedience theme, her insistence that 'acquiescence in parental values' is the 'paramount motif' of the novel strikes one as merely bizarre. Van Ghent makes much here of Clarissa's image of Heaven as her 'father's house' (*Cl.*,

IV.157); in this, it seems, we are to see that 'the Puritan myth and the myth of family life coincide'. As Van Ghent will have it, 'Mr. Harlowe is proxy for God':

The values that are given final sanction here are the typical values of the right-thinking bourgeois family: the father's authority is supreme; the daughter must not wed for satisfaction of personal impulse, but, if she weds, must do so for the further consolidation and enrichment of the clan; the lover is condemned; there must, in a word, be no love, except insofar as love can serve the family economy (p. 60).

At this point one begins to see Van Ghent's 'multiplicity of meaning' proviso as a rather too-convenient escape hatch - from logic, as much as from anything else. Can we accept an account of the Harlowes in which we are to see them as providentially punished at one moment, and as showered with what looks like heavenly approval at the next? It is difficult to see how Clarissa's death in any way 'sanctions' the values of the Harlowes, or of Van Ghent's cash-calculating bourgeoisie in general. In so far as Clarissa and her story are 'bourgeois', however, it is useful to remember this remark of Terry Eagleton's: 'The more the novel underwrites those values, the more it exposes the Harlowes; the more meekly bourgeois Clarissa is revealed to be, the more devastating grows the critique of those who did her to death.'¹⁴

If Van Ghent is determined to see only unsavoury implications in the ending of the novel, this is perhaps because she finds so repellent the 'scene in the death room'. 'The mourning is as public as possible,' she complains; 'every sigh, every groan, every tear is recorded.' A 'common orgy' of suffering, offering 'macabre satisfaction', it is this 'festival of death' which 'crowns the value system of Clarissa, triumphantly capping a code of Puritanism in morals, parental authoritarianism in the family, and the cash nexus as the only binding tie for society at large - a cult, in short, of death' (pp. 60-1).

It is here that the myth of the family meets the 'sexual myth'. To Van Ghent, Clarissa becomes in the end her society's image of daughterly perfection: 'the sexless daughter, the dead daughter'. But we are not to see the heroine as representing only some bourgeois aspiration to do away with sex altogether: if that is thought desirable, at the same time 'society' longs also for illicit carnal gratifications. Thus we are to see in the rape a 'forbidden wish ... indulged under a disguise of nonindulgence' (p. 61). Van Ghent's distaste here is prompted not only by the perceived prurience in the novel, but by what she calls its 'constant identification of sex and death'. The novel, she claims, formulates a perverse 'love myth' in which 'love' appears only as 'physical violation, an act of stabbing or ripping, with no implication of any aspect of sexual passion except a passion to murder and be murdered' (p. 62).

Considered as a whole, Clarissa is 'a paean to death', a revelation of 'the desire for destruction' underlying the bourgeois world with which it deals - a desire, Van Ghent reminds us, which has since led to the development and proliferation of nuclear weapons (pp. 62-3). For Van Ghent, the fact that Richardson's early readers would not have seen the novel in this way is in a sense the whole point: 'a multileveled construct' expressing 'vast social dreams', Clarissa (it is implied) was not only written by an 'unconscious' author but read, as it were, by unconscious readers - representatives of 'a Puritan-capitalistic culture', seeking eagerly but uncomprehendingly their 'mysterious indulgences in the forbidden' (p. 63).

If Dorothy Van Ghent's criticism pretends to a certain scientific method, Leslie Fiedler's might best be described with reference to Romantic inspirationism. In 1967, looking back on his own work in an essay notable

for its extraordinary lack of modesty, Fiedler castigated 'middlebrow' critics who make even the most 'exciting' or 'outrageous' books appear dull; in Love and Death in the American Novel, he claimed, he had rejected 'the conventional reasonable voice of our typical criticism' in favour of a 'novelistic' or creative method combining 'Marxist analysis ... with a free-wheeling analytic approach synthesized out of Freud, Jung and D. H. Lawrence'.¹⁵

Earlier, introducing the first edition of his famous book, Fiedler had claimed for himself what might seem a laudable aim: 'To redeem our great books from the commentaries on them is one of the chief functions of this study' (p. 12). Whether his allegations of concealed homosexuality, incest, castration complexes and infantile longings in American fiction have so 'redeemed' it must perhaps be left to Americans to decide. His account of Clarissa, if by no means dull, is only yet another commentary from which the novel requires redemption.

The account occurs within an examination of the growth of the sentimental novel. To Fiedler, the novel form itself is a profoundly duplicitous one, pretending to a matter-of-fact verisimilitude but concealing an 'irrational essence' (p. 39), a mythic undertow:

Best-sellers are by and large holy books ... Though the novel merely seemed to serve the thin, rigid Protestantism that threatened it, it paid allegiance in fact to that secret religion of the bourgeoisie in which tears are considered a truer service of God than prayers, the Pure Young Girl replaces Christ as the saviour, marriage becomes the equivalent of bliss eternal, and the seducer is the only Devil (p. 44).

Seeking the origins of this 'secret religion', Fiedler plunges back into prehistory to uncover an archetypal conflict between father and mother, male and female, as objects of worship. Christianity, as a religion in which God the Father reigns supreme,

throughout history breeds illicit counter-religions which elevate the female - the medieval enthusiasm for 'courtly love' is an example. The Catholic Church is able to absorb this 'break-through of the mother image into the under-mind of Europe' through the cult of the Virgin (p. 51). Protestantism, however, breeds a new demand for the Great Mother, and 'bootlegged madonnas' are smuggled in through the 'Sentimental Love Religion' which finds expression in the novel, an 'essentially ... Protestant genre' (pp. 54, 44, 43).

Like 'courtly love', the Sentimental Love Religion holds to the 'belief in love between man and woman as the supreme happiness' (p. 45). Where it differs is in insisting that love be sanctified by the bonds of marriage. In the Sentimental Love Religion, the idea of 'the wife as a secular madonna' assumes the special status which the Mother of God has in Catholicism (p. 57).

The problem for writers of fiction is that marital bliss is not the most promising of raw material: 'Quite early, the bourgeois sentimental novelists discovered that their proper subject was not marriage itself but what leads up to it: courtship, or its travesty, seduction' (p. 58). It is here that Richardson's significance becomes apparent: 'In Clarissa, the mythology of the Sentimental Love Religion, the bourgeois Liebestod is defined once and for all' (p. 59). Bringing seducer and Pure Maiden 'face to face in a ritual combat destined to end in marriage or death', the novel is 'the first sacred book of the bourgeoisie', presenting in the character of its heroine 'a female principle equal and opposite to the male force of Don Juan' (pp. 59, 61, 63). In the world of Clarissa, 'there are only man and woman in eternal conflict; for the divine principle has been subsumed in the female even as the diabolic has been in the male'. The name of God may be often invoked in the novel, but for Fiedler 'It is tempting

... to say that there is no God (certainly, no God the Father!) in the world of Richardson' (p. 63).

In Van Ghent's account, Mr. Harlowe is proxy for God; now we find God subsumed into Clarissa. A 'projection of male guilt before the female treated as a mere sexual object', she offers salvation as the Pure Maiden 'whose virginity is the emblem of the ethical purity of her class, the soul of a world whose body is money; and upon her triumph and fall the fate of that class symbolically depends' (p. 63f).

Fiedler maintains that Clarissa and her virginity are 'indistinguishable'. But Clarissa's virginity is not a 'supreme good' in itself; rather, 'it is the sign that she has been tried and found worthy of fulfilment in marriage'. Marriage is the salvation that Clarissa promises, and marriage - in a society in which goodness and morality are associated almost exclusively with chastity - 'is of no effect unless woman brings intact to her wedding day the magic of her maidenhead' (p. 64).

In this situation, seduction is blasphemy, 'the denial of the saviour and of salvation' (p. 67). Here Fiedler's argument becomes confused. As Clarissa's status in the myth depends on her virginity, the rape '[takes] away her mana as Maiden-saviour'; for Richardson, we are later told, she is 'as "ruined" as if she had consented' (p. 81). Yet Fiedler clearly regards Clarissa's death as a triumph; how the death of the ruined saviour can appear as such is not explained. In eliminating God the Father from the world of the novel, elevating Clarissa herself to saviour, and effacing all distinction between Clarissa and her virginity, Fiedler runs up against serious problems of which he is either not aware, or is content to ignore.

Rather, he darts off into further ramifications of the myth of Clarissa. The conflict between Clarissa and Lovelace, we learn, represents 'the notion of love

as the war of the sexes'; the struggle between the man who wants sex but not marriage, and the woman who wants marriage, preferably with as little sex as possible. Fiedler sees, however, that this battle of the sexes is also a battle between the socially powerful and the socially powerless: so it is that we encounter yet again the 'class war in eighteenth-century England' (p. 67).

But the novel's meaning cannot be limited to this. Lovelace and Clarissa, Fiedler goes on, represent not only 'the male principle and the female, Devil and saviour, aristocracy and bourgeoisie', but also 'a psychological division in the soul of man itself' - the head and the heart; as Fiedler will have it, what we would now call the super-ego and the id. This attempt to assimilate the sentimental notions of 'head' and 'heart' to the concepts of Freudian psychology is notably unsuccessful. Lovelace, 'above all things an intellectual', is the 'head', while Clarissa, 'a sentimental Christian', is the 'heart' (p. 68). The trouble with this opposition is what it ignores. Lovelace, for example, though extremely intelligent, is frequently driven by passions which have nothing to do with reason, the province of the 'head'. Given that he is continually spinning outrageous fantasies, often acting them out, and most of all that he becomes a rapist, it is difficult to see how he is to be aligned with that internalized voice of parental restraint that Freud called the super-ego. It is still more difficult to see Clarissa as a representative of the id, even if only 'in somewhat expurgated form', as Fiedler cautiously notes (*ibid.*). (The id is by definition the province of unrestrained desires: can an id be at all 'expurgated' and still be an id?) Far from seeing Lovelace as the super-ego and Clarissa as the id, one could just as easily reverse the opposition. Through much of the novel it is Clarissa, sentimental Christian or not, who appears the more 'intellectual'

of the two, regardless of the keen wit and learning which suffuse Lovelace's letters.

This is of no moment to Fiedler. Insisting that Clarissa represents (in his simplistic sense) the heart, the way is then open for him to present Richardson as 'a champion of the heart over the head, a secret enemy of Reason ... the philistines' Rousseau, the Jean-Jacques of the timid bourgeoisie'. Like Rousseau, Fiedler contends, Richardson 'exacts from his reader the supreme tribute of tears.... Whoever weeps is saved' (*ibid.*). What Fiedler ignores is the complexity of Richardson's sentimental ethos: while he insists on the value of tears, Richardson is not merely a champion of heart over head, a proto-Romantic exalting 'all that lies beyond mere rationalism' (*ibid.*). Richardson greatly values the 'heart', but he is only too well aware of its dangers - and he certainly does not suggest that his eighteenth-century bourgeois audience abandon the 'head'. Once more, Fiedler loses himself amid simplifications and confusions.¹⁶

It might be objected that I am approaching Fiedler from the wrong angle. Opening Love and Death in the American Novel, one is warned that it is not to be read as 'a conventional scholarly book'; rather, it is to be seen as 'a kind of gothic novel ... whose subject is the American experience' (p. 9f). The point of Fiedler's 'novelistic' technique is to seek 'the kind of validity which depends not on faithfulness to "fact" but on insight and sensitivity to nuance' (p. 11).

It is not entirely clear what this 'kind of validity' is; still, it is apparent that Fiedler does not see his presumed insights as merely arbitrary, let alone false. Quite the reverse: clearly he is serious in wishing to communicate what he calls 'some major meanings of our literature and our culture' (p. 14). It can

hardly be claimed that his presentation of these 'meanings' should be shielded from critical scrutiny.

Kingsley Amis has written of Fiedler, 'If he often, as he must by now be weary of being told, "goes too far", he as often goes in a new and illuminating direction.'¹⁷ Considering Fiedler's book as a whole, this cannot be denied. Yet we might wonder whether we receive many of these illuminations because or in spite of what Fiedler calls his 'largely depth-psychological and anthropological' method (p. 12). It is all very well to seek the realities beneath the surface, but the tendency of Fiedler's method is to pummel out of literature all of the rich reality and life which makes us want to read it in the first place. The books and writers he discusses are to be valued, one might assume, only as springboards for sweeping generalizations about American history and society, or Western civilization in general. Take the following passage, apropos of Mark Twain's historical romance, Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc:

For a good American like Twain, all offences are offences against the woman; to be born is to rack the mother with pain; to be married is to blaspheme against purity; to have a child is to set a seal on such blasphemy, publish it to the world. Simply to be a man is to be impure, to betray; and there is nothing to do but to kneel at the feet of the offended female and cry for forgiveness. Twain's study is more an act of expiation than a book; and for this reason he worked at it as he worked at no other work. It is, however, precisely the piety of Joan of Arc which makes it unreadable to all but the most grossly sentimental. When it appeared in 1896 it was already absurdly old-fashioned, a piece of romantic medievalism that out-Scotted Scott. Yet Maggie - A Girl of the Streets [a naturalistic novel by Stephen Crane] had already been published, and Sister Carrie was only three years off; and while such books did not destroy Sentimentalism by any means, they replaced the Good Good Girl with the Good Bad one - the sanctified virgin with the hoyden or the whore with a heart of gold (p. 276).

Whether Fiedler's picture of Twain's psychopathology is correct need not concern us. It seems fair to say that 'Twain' figures here, not so much as the writer

who called himself by that name, as a sort of paradigmatic American male. If one is to psychoanalyse a nation, doubtless one must rely on the works of writers and artists for much of one's knowledge of the pre-twentieth-century psyche - ordinary people did not leave convenient records of their dreams or neurotic symptoms or reactions to Rorschach blots. But the interesting thing about a person such as Twain, the reason we discuss him at all, is precisely that he was not ordinary. Is it reasonable that the works of a great artist - even his not-so-great works - should be treated only as symptoms of a general social condition, signs of Protestant perversity flung up willy-nilly from the murky mass consciousness?

Fiedler sees Twain's Joan as the very 'image of Clarissa Harlowe' (ibid.). In the Index to the second edition of Love and Death in the American Novel there are forty-four references to Richardson, Samuel, and nineteen to Clarissa. It is a pity that the compiler of this Index had not also counted every occurrence of the names 'Clarissa' and 'Lovelace'. The entire book seems pervaded by the presence of these characters; titles of later chapters even include 'Clarissa in America: Towards Marjorie Morningstar' and 'Good Good Girls and Good Bad Boys: Clarissa as a Juvenile'.

One learns much of interest from Fiedler's discussion of Richardson's success and influence in colonial America and the early United States. As his book proceeds, however, one may come to think of Fiedler as a man who, having decided what he wants to see, has begun to see it everywhere - at one stage he even detects 'the archetypal figures of Clarissa and Lovelace' behind 'the farmer's daughter and the travelling salesman of a thousand dirty jokes' (p. 84). Fiedler's analytic equipment, we realize, can be applied to anything - anything at all.

One consequence of this which annoys Mark Kinkead-Weekes is Fiedler's 'treatment of pop-works alongside good ones'; his insensitivity, it seems, to the 'huge gulf' that separates Clarissa from Marjorie Morningstar.¹⁸ As it happens, Fiedler at no stage suggests any equivalence of value between Richardson's masterpiece and Herman Wouk's slushy bestseller. His point is precisely that Wouk's novel represents a degradation or debasement of the Richardsonian tradition; in the doomed relationship of Marjorie and her bohemian seducer, Noel Airman, we are to see the persistence through the centuries and at different cultural levels of the 'archetype' expressed first and most cogently in the story of Clarissa and Lovelace. (It seems that Wouk, a Jewish writer, had no difficulty in picking up on Richardson's 'essentially' Protestant mythology!)

Fiedler has claimed a high place for evaluation in his own critical scheme of things.¹⁹ One does not doubt it; but Kinkead-Weekes is right, nevertheless, to see the issue of evaluation as a problem in a book such as Love and Death in the American Novel. For all his derogatory remarks about the talents of some of the lesser authors under consideration, the effect of Fiedler's analyses is in the end to dissolve any distinctions between great novels and trash.

This problem of evaluation is still more acute in Van Ghent's essay. Van Ghent at one point declares Clarissa to be 'a great and powerful piece of fiction' (p. 52). It takes little perspicacity to see that her own analysis does anything but convince us of the novel's greatness.' This is not only because of her obvious condemnation of the bourgeois myths she examines. Van Ghent does not make clear whether she regards the novel's greatness as permanent, as it were, or whether it was great and powerful only for Richardson's time. If it

is possible to regard the novel as great without assenting to its myths, how is this to be done? A few stock remarks on the virtues of the epistolary form, early in Van Ghent's essay (pp. 46-7), do not begin to answer this question. And before we can assume that Clarissa remains great in some aesthetic sense, because what it expresses it expresses so well, we find Van Ghent informing us that the novel may not provide for us the 'recognition scenes' that myth is supposed to supply: 'Hollywood has elaborated subtler stratagems of wish fulfillment' (p. 62; my emphasis).

Earlier, we have seen, Van Ghent has likened Clarissa to the covers of Vogue, True Confessions, and True Detective Stories. Such comparisons are surely prime examples of what we might call the 'building blocks' fallacy. The most notorious recent example of this is Catherine Belsey's comparison of the images of women presented in a series of perfume advertisements, and George Eliot's portrayal of Dorothea Brooke: both, we are to understand, are constructed from the same 'signifying systems'. But as Peter Barry has argued,

even if we accepted the popular mechanistic jargon about 'codes' and 'systems' we would still not have to accept that there is any significant parallel between Middlemarch and the advertisements, for nothing of any interest is proved by pointing out (or finding out) that an anonymous row of semis and an architectural masterpiece are made of bricks bought from the same builder's merchant - such information is only of interest to those who are more interested in bricks than in buildings.²⁰

In the case of Clarissa, it is difficult indeed to believe that the raw materials are of more interest than the finished product, even if (to echo Barry) we assume the accuracy of an analysis of the raw materials such as Van Ghent's: and that is a large assumption. The drawbacks of the 'myth' method, I would contend, are nowhere better demonstrated than in what logic

dictates must be Van Ghent's final position: that Clarissa, a great work of art, does nothing to us that a Hollywood movie (any Hollywood movie) could not do equally well - or better.

THE DEATH OF CLARISSA

In Elizabeth Bowen's novel The Death of the Heart, the adolescent heroine, Portia, brought up in shabby gentility in the south of France, has been sent after the death of her parents to live in London with her half-brother Thomas and his wife Anna. Portia, very much a stranger in their sophisticated milieu, keeps a diary in which she records her impressions of her new life. The novel opens when a disturbed Anna confides to her friend, the urbane novelist St. Quentin, that she has accidentally found the diary - and not so accidentally read it. Portia's account of things, Anna declares, is 'completely distorted and distorting. As I read I thought, either this girl or I are mad. And I don't think I am, do you?'

Much later, St. Quentin decides to tell Portia that Anna has been reading the diary. Portia has maintained that the diary 'is simply a thing of mine'. St. Quentin demurs:

"No, that's where you're wrong. Nothing like that stops with oneself. You do a most dangerous thing. All the time, you go making connections - and that can be a vice."

"I don't know what you mean."

"You're working on us, making us into something. Which is not fair - we are not on our guard with you. For instance, now I know you keep this book, I shall always feel involved in some sort of plan. You precipitate things. I daresay," said St. Quentin kindly, "that what you write is quite silly, but all the same, you are taking a liberty. You set traps for us. You ruin our free will."

"I write what has happened. I don't invent."

"You put constructions on things. You are a most dangerous girl."¹

But by this stage of the novel we do not take seriously the hyperbolic suggestions that Portia is 'mad' or 'dangerous'. The diary has shocked Anna, we realize, precisely because it has shown her a true reflection of herself and the life she leads.

Elizabeth Bowen once remarked that 'all succeeding English novelists' had descended from either Richardson or Fielding.² In that case, it is not difficult to guess which of these early masters was Bowen's spiritual ancestor. If The Death of the Heart strikes one as a particularly Richardsonian novel, one reason for this is that the affair of the diary is not only reminiscent of Richardson's use of letters, but dramatizes, in Richardsonian fashion, those problems of perception which always face us in our dealings with the world: the tendency to see in others the faults one wishes to deny in oneself; the denial of what one knows to be the truth, when the truth is unpalatable; the shock of being forced to see things from a different point of view; the problem of when, in looking at others, one sees simply what is there ('I don't invent'), and when it is that one 'puts constructions on things'.

The issue of putting constructions on things is fundamental in Clarissa. The first thing we learn about the heroine is that she has 'become the subject of the public talk': speculation is rife about the happenings at Harlowe Place. Asking her friend to provide a full account of what has been going on, Anna Howe wishes to ensure that the truth will be on record, should 'anything unhappy fall out' (C1., I.1-2). When something unhappy does fall out, the question of true and false interpretations comes dramatically to the fore. The Harlowes justify their persecution of Clarissa by refusing to believe, in effect, that she is who she really is. Lovelace does the same thing: judging others by the standard of himself, he finds it impossible to

believe in the reality of Clarissa's virtue. Clarissa herself comes to realize that she has judged the hearts of others by her own, finding in them the qualities she wished to find.

In these ways, Clarissa is a novel about what psychologists call 'projection'. Yet it is also a novel about the discovery of truth. As Lovelace comes to find, to his cost, that he has been disastrously wrong about Clarissa, so Clarissa must realize the extent of the evil which exists in the human heart. Far from shattering her faith, however, this realization confirms her in her exemplary course. In dying as she does, she declares to the world what is, for Richardson, the most profound truth of all. In portraying her tragic but triumphant death, Richardson sends a serious call to his readers to put the correct construction on things - before it is too late.

The often vigorous resistance to this call by many of the novel's readers demonstrates well the point made by one of the critics we shall consider in this chapter: that the interpretative dilemmas within the novel have always in a sense been reflected in the responses of different readers outside the novel. As characters within the novel strive to impose on others what they regard as the correct 'reading' of their experience, so the novel's critical interpreters, whatever their particular points of view, attempt to convince other readers of what they consider to be the truth about the novel's characters and events.

This always was the case, at least: in their radical relativism, some recent critics would have it that any such desire to tell the truth can no longer be countenanced. It is the effort of adherents of 'deconstruction', in particular, both to resist the 'constructions' of others, as we might expect, and to repudiate, so far as that is possible, the very idea of the construction of meaning.

As a novel which not only dramatizes, in effect, a vivid conflict of interpretations, but which is itself made up of a series of rival 'texts' by virtue of its epistolary form, it is easy to see why Clarissa should have become a popular site of deconstructive scrutiny. That it has long been the subject of critical disagreement makes it more attractive still. It need hardly be said that the view of the novel's action I have sketched here would be dismissed by critics of this sort as regressively bourgeois. 'The novel seems to be one of those texts which begs to be read against itself,' writes Jonathan Loesberg; '... Lovelace and Clarissa enact in their experiences and in the letters through which they interpret their experiences the conflicts of language and intent which permeate the text as a whole.' To Paul Coates, the novel consists of 'a series of re-readings of a very few actions', which becomes in the end an 'indecipherable palimpsest', while Patricia McKee finds that 'The multiple vision of the text itself, in which it is impossible to identify a single controlling voice, insists on the power of differing representations and differing meanings to extend meaning beyond the control of authority'.³

Deconstructionist approaches to Clarissa have been attempted most notably in the full-length studies by William Beatty Warner and Terry Castle.⁴ While sharing essentially the same theoretical assumptions, the two critics would seem to approach the novel from very different directions. Whether they are finally more alike than they at first appear is an issue well worth pondering.

The question which engages both critics is one that has long been debated: is Clarissa really all she is cracked up to be? The answer is of course in both cases 'no', if to answer 'yes' entails accepting her as an exemplar of virtue and a Christian heroine. Put in poststructuralist terms, however, the question becomes

one of whether Clarissa is merely the innocent victim of the interpretations of others, or whether she is herself a victimizer of those around her. Does Clarissa in her letters, as Bowen's Portia is alleged to have done in her diary, in fact 'put constructions on things' in the negative sense suggested by St. Quentin? Is she, indeed, a 'dangerous girl'?

Warner would have it that she is very dangerous indeed. If his book Reading 'Clarissa': The Struggles of Interpretation (1979) is the most controversial study of Richardson to have appeared in recent years, one reason for this is easy to see: for Warner, reading Richardson's novel entails taking Lovelace as the hero and Clarissa as the villain - and the rape as an admirable thing.

It is ironic, then, that Warner's grasp of Richardson's intentions often seems superior to that of many more sympathetic or conservative commentators. At times beneath the deconstructive theorizing and postmodernist polemics one glimpses the lineaments of a briefer and more modest book - as when it is suggested, for example, that 'Richardson welcomed the disease of misreading so he might fortify the text with antibodies against its recurrence' (p. 146); that 'Richardson expected the reader to become a moral detective' (p. 182); that 'the idea of life as the scene of judgment' was meant to be crucial in Clarissa (p. 175)

Warner at no time claims these intentions to be insincere or false; they are, however, irrelevant. True to the teachings of la nouvelle critique, Warner takes for granted a facile equation between authorship and authoritarianism. We must be constantly on our guard against the tyranny of meaning, he maintains; to assent to the 'meaning' proffered by another is a humiliating admission of servitude. Reading Clarissa

is an activity fraught with danger: 'To enter a space of rival signification is to be threatened with being a passive receiver of meanings, an audience and nothing more' (p. 59f). 'There may be no resisting the seductions of this text,' Warner warns, 'but we can send in our minesweepers, and be suspicious of everything' (p. 3). The novel is 'a design against the credulity of the reader', 'a "con game"' (p. 115) which seeks to entrap us 'in the coils of the fiction' only to send us hurtling relentlessly towards 'Christian ideals of virtue' (p. 123). The desire to bring about the reformation of others is 'the megalomaniac dream of Richardson's art' (p. 138).

Against the dictatorial author, Warner heroically asserts the arbitrariness of signification. Authors can only pretend to be in charge of their own meanings; an author's interpretation of his own work is simply one among many possible interpretations, deserving of no special consideration. '[W]ho is Richardson to be assessing the true value of Clarissa and Lovelace?' Warner even asks (p. 178).

One is tempted simply to throw back the question at Warner himself: who is he to be assessing their value? Granting him his own logic - such as it is - isn't he just another authoritarian interpreter? As it happens, Warner might say that he was not. His concern, he claims at one point, is rather 'to raise general questions and perspectives on the act of interpretation' than to advance any accurate or definitive reading of Richardson's novel (p. 260). One implication of this is that Warner cares little for the truth or falsehood of his own contentions; another is that it is futile, in any case, to talk about their truth or falsehood. Interpretation, we are told, is guided merely by the 'will and desire' of the interpreter, nothing more (p. 264). To challenge such a critic on issues of truth, consistency

and the like might therefore seem foolhardy, or perhaps just a waste of time: why bother with his book at all?

I would suggest three reasons. First, Warner's dismissal of the notion of valid interpretation seems often unconvincing; everywhere the tone of his argument makes its claim on truth, seeking to compel our assent (he has even published an article in which he defends his book against detractors, as we shall see). Secondly, for all his proclaimed distrust of authors, Warner - like other critics of his ilk - continually appeals to the presumed authority of certain philosophers and literary theorists, whose views, one gathers, are self-evidently correct: 'Nietzsche, Derrida, Barthes, and others' (p. ix). The theoretical underpinnings of Warner's arguments require our close scrutiny. Thirdly, Warner's book has been taken very seriously indeed by other critics. If some, such as Terry Eagleton, have denounced it on moral grounds, others have offered warm words of praise: the book is 'fascinating', 'intellectually challenging', 'a skilfully written book' with 'many merits'; it is soundly 'scholarly'; it is 'the best book of 1979 on the eighteenth-century novel'; it is even - I take this from an eminent American journal - 'the best account we have to date' of Richardson's novel.⁵ This seems reason enough to examine it in some detail.

One can see why an author such as Richardson - so insistent on having his own way, interpretatively speaking - should arouse the ire of the deconstructionist critic. It is also the case that Clarissa contains, in the form of its heroine and villain, exactly the sort of binary or 'hierarchical' opposition that deconstruction delights to dismantle. Terry Eagleton explains:

'Deconstruction' is the name given to the critical operation by which such oppositions can be partly undermined, or by

which they can be shown partly to undermine each other in the process of textual meaning. Woman is the opposite, the 'other' of man: she is non-man, defective man, assigned a chiefly negative value in relation to the male first principle. But equally man is what he is only by virtue of ceaselessly shutting out this other or opposite, defining himself in antithesis to it, and his whole identity is therefore caught up and put at risk in the very gesture by which he seeks to assert his unique, autonomous existence.... Deconstruction tries to show how such oppositions, in order to hold themselves in place, are sometimes betrayed into inverting or collapsing themselves, or need to banish to the text's margins certain niggling details which can be made to return and plague them.... The tactic of deconstructive criticism, that is to say, is to show how texts come to embarrass their own ruling systems of logic; and deconstruction shows this by fastening on the 'symptomatic' points, the aporia or impasses of meaning, where texts get into trouble, come unstuck, offer to contradict themselves.⁶

Deconstruction, one gathers, can make short shrift not only of any arrogant valuation of man over woman, but also of our supposedly cherished oppositions between speech and writing, presence and absence, nature and culture, cause and effect, essence and appearance, fact and fiction - even sexual intercourse and masturbation. Richardson's attempts to elevate Clarissa over Lovelace stand little chance, it is clear, against this sophisticated equipment. After all, it could be said that Clarissa required a Lovelace in order to assume her saintly status; as Lovelace himself remarks, on at last realizing her true nature, 'This one merit is, however, left me, that I have laid all her sex under obligation to me, by putting this noble creature to trials, which, so gloriously supported, have done honour to them all' (Cl., III.261). It can certainly be said that good is defined in relation to evil. Thus Warner, in the manner of one producing a trump card, sees fit to suggest that, because Clarissa is in a sense dependent on Lovelace, she is therefore not any better than Lovelace (p. 263).

This is reasoning along the lines of 'The King of France is a man; I am a man; therefore I am the King

of France'. The procedure used by Warner here has its roots in Saussurean linguistic theory, from whence derives the doctrine of the so-called 'arbitrariness' of the sign. Deconstructionists seem startled by this apparent 'groundlessness' of language; 'cat' is only 'cat' because it's not 'bat', and so forth. One might remark that 'cat' is also 'cat' because it is C-A-T 'cat', not just because it is not a lot of other words. But this is to miss the point, of course, which is that each 'signifier' is ultimately intelligible only in terms of its differences from all the other signifiers. This is true, but also banal; it necessitates no change in our most commonsense ways of apprehending the world. Certainly it will not do to jump from this sort of theoretical observation about language to the radical assertion that moral hierarchies, or oppositions of value, are necessarily invalid because their elements can be shown to be reciprocally related.

What is there that is not 'reciprocally related' to something else? We do not float blindly, senselessly and alone in a formless void but live in a world made up of many different things: that is why we need language. We are able to function in the world at all only because we can compare these various things and notice the differences between them - it helps to be able to distinguish between a door and an upstairs window, for example. But what meaning would the word 'door' have, or 'window', if there were not other things in the world which were not doors, or windows - no walls, ceilings, floors, rooms, houses, streets, rocks, trees? The world only exists as it does because it is made up of many different parts existing in relation to one another. How did God create the heaven and the earth (we are told) but by dividing things, one from the other - the light from the dark, the land from the sea, and so on? 'Day' came into being at the same time as 'night'; the

reason we have either is because we have both.

It is the same with the concepts of good and evil. In our world - the 'fallen' world, if you will - it is simply the case that we cannot know good without evil, that we cannot experience any absolute or transcendent good existing entirely 'in itself': it is an unintelligible idea. When Warner informs us that a Clarissa is only 'good' because a Lovelace is 'evil', one can only agree. But to assume that this makes any such moral judgements impossible is absurd. One might as well claim that the land is really the sea, that the day is really the night. Warner's argument is the emptiest of sophistry, proving nothing at all.

But thus far we have touched on only part of his book. Reading Warner, one soon forgets these pseudo-scientific issues of binary oppositions and their reciprocal relations, implicit as they may be in much of what he says. The very qualities of Clarissa and Lovelace as characters, one discovers, might almost be calculated to raise deconstructive interest.

In that 'groundless' place, deconstructionist Topsy-Turvy Land, where rival 'significations' clash continually but none must ultimately prevail, naturally Clarissa will have little appeal, assuming as she does 'a God-centered universe where human events are meaningfully linked to God's judgment of man' (p. 30). But Lovelace may be seen 'to acknowledge the ultimate groundlessness of his situation' (p. 36); he may be celebrated, therefore, as a proto-Derrida whose assault on Clarissa is an excellent piece of deconstruction-work. As Warner will have it, Lovelace moves towards the rape 'with an inexorable necessity' (p. 52), helping us 'to undo the matrix of truth and value through which Clarissa would have us see, know, and judge' (p. 30) with his various lies and stratagems. Given the importance

of 'free play' in the poststructuralist view of things, of course Lovelace at first 'defers any drastic step, like rape or marriage, that might simplify their relationship' (p. 39); nevertheless rape, we are told, 'is the most cogent response to Clarissa's fictional projection of her self as a whole unified body "full of light"' (p. 49).

It is Clarissa's conception of an immanent 'self' that most enrages Warner:

This "self" is what makes Clarissa entirely unique, richer than the imaginings of those who know her, and quite beyond the range of their weak ideas. A short sketch of the form and activity of Clarissa's "self," implicit in her language, goes something like this: At the center of the self is the heart, the purest and most precious part of the self, which will not admit of the entrance of any foreign matter. The heart becomes the locus of virtue by being planted with principles that are the laws of God and man. If these principles are strictly adhered to, the self may become a paragon of virtue which shines in the eyes of men. But to do this the self must encourage the natural inclinations of the heart, those feelings of "pity" and compassion that link it with all men. All these activities require an immense and patient investment of time and energy, and a willingness to make headway slowly. Sometimes, quite unexpectedly, external adversity reveals something is wrong with the self. An examination of the heart leads to the discovery of a flaw or stain, which can only be removed through an arduous act of meditation. This act reintegrates the self and puts it back on course (p. 17).

Not only is this self 'a fiction', however; more than that, it is 'an arbitrary construct' (ibid.), apparently slapped together by Clarissa in the course of her troubles with her family and with Lovelace. Clarissa 'creates' her self in 'the simple but momentous gesture with which she marks the boundary between inside and outside', defining everything which is not pure and virtuous as external to her 'self' (p. 18). How this squares with those arduous acts of meditation, mentioned on Warner's previous page, is not explained; it seems now that Clarissa requires only a 'quick glance

at her own heart' to read 'the text of her own innocence' (ibid.).

One may wonder how Clarissa, trusting in this transparent fiction, stands any chance at all when the boa-deconstructor comes to tempt her - and how she remains so obstinately constructed after the ultimate application of his critical method. But as Warner puts it, 'even the commonest slut knows how to weave new veils to cover the body with a seeming freshness. And Clarissa is not common' (p. 50). Far from it: in a daring comeback, she reveals herself able to recuperate her every loss through her 'interpretive system predicated on God's final judgment of man' (p. 69). So it is that Warner discusses 'Clarissa's use of the myth of the Fall' (p. 103), her arrangement of her life into a 'fictional form' (p. 93) in which 'Clarissa must fall so that virtue may be tested and finally reign triumphant' (p. 112). And what of her death? This is Clarissa's 'last and most crucial act as an artist', it seems, her 'final signification of herself as virtue' (p. 26).

It need hardly be said that this 'signification' is false. Clarissa may have sought 'to realize the self as paragon and exemplar' (p. 22); Warner, however, on the authority of no less than Nietzsche, finds her guilty of something close to megalomania in seeking not only to communicate a meaning but to '[force] all to do homage to that meaning' (p. 112).

One might have thought that such behaviour was considered admirable in Nietzsche's way of looking at things; but it is unseemly, no doubt, for sentimental heroines to arrogate to themselves the rights of supermen. (Nietzsche's intemperate attitudes towards women, Christianity, and anything which smacks of sentimentality should here be borne in mind.) Certainly Warner can only condemn Clarissa's conduct. 'Lovelace's violence against Clarissa,' he informs us, 'plants the seed for

a more insidious will to power over others: Clarissa's idea for a book that will tell her story' (p. 75; my emphasis). In planning the editorship of the book we read, Clarissa makes the 'climactic move' in the interpretative struggle (p. 95); her book 'will enact a revenge', attempting 'to fix the meaning of Clarissa's life and story for all time' (p. 75). Far from planning the book 'because she is going to die', Clarissa dies, we discover, 'so that she may produce the book that will guarantee her triumph' (p. 76).

Now this is reprehensible enough; but the very act of writing at all is a revelation of Clarissa's will to power:

When Clarissa narrates, her subject hovers over the world, makes it an array of inferior objects, a set of knowable entities, which the subject grasps, arranges in a coherent pattern, and presents to the reader (p. 88).

Her pernicious desire to fix single significations may be seen throughout the novel. She assumes 'a godlike authority' in regarding her brother James as avaricious and ambitious, for example (p. 13). Her crazed logocentrism reaches its height after Lovelace has raped her: 'For Clarissa, the rape has unalterably fixed Lovelace's meaning - he simply is evil' (p. 73). Like Richardson, Clarissa is a 'spoilsport' (p. 271).

In spoiling the sport, an essential part of her activity is the suppression of the 'contingent and arbitrary' moments in her interactions with Lovelace, presenting her life instead 'as an inexorable movement toward death, where alternate paths are only acknowledged to make death seem more poignant' (p. 86f). To demonstrate this, Warner examines those scenes in the novel in which Lovelace, with apparent sincerity, proposes marriage to Clarissa (Cl., II.135-43; 175-6; 182-4; 209-10). Clarissa, who wishes 'to make her past appear as an

inevitable-looking cause-and-effect sequence', naturally refuses to acknowledge 'the chancy moments in the genuine proposal scenes where [her] story ... suddenly opens out to comedy and love', where she and Lovelace 'seem ready to forget their struggles and marry'. These 'comic' moments, Warner claims, 'persist in the text and continue to resist the impositions of Clarissa's (and Richardson's) tragic design' (pp. x-xi). It is only a 'bit of contingency' which prevents Clarissa from giving herself to Lovelace and 'a life where her stiff separateness would cease to be necessary' (pp. 82-3). Clarissa, however, must ultimately assert 'her radical autonomy, an existence quite apart from all human ties' (p. 39).

It may startle us to find Warner appealing to such untheoretical things as 'love' and 'human ties'. Yet it would appear that his reassessments of Clarissa and Lovelace can be justified even on old-fashioned moral grounds. Clarissa, he asserts, is 'irreducibly self-centered'; and should we point to her friendship with Anna Howe, he is quick to dismiss it as 'chill and uninteresting' (pp. 38-9). '[I]t is Lovelace, not Clarissa, who gives us the novel's most convincing versions of human attachment,' Warner maintains (p. 37); 'Lovelace's displacement of self and other, and his invention of a game' - that is, his abduction of Clarissa and subsequent dealings with her - 'combine to engender a pervasive theatricality that becomes a gift for the other so as to give himself reality [sic].' I am at a loss to know what that means; still, we are to understand that 'His way of operating engenders something shared and mutual' (p. 38).

But of course it is Lovelace's prowess as a critical theorist that is most praiseworthy. While Richardson's novel as a whole may trick us - Warner believes - 'out of the genuine openness and excitement we expected' (p. 113), still Lovelace remains as 'a deconstructive

counterforce' to Clarissa's story (p. 117). Through his mere presence in the book, it seems, he demonstrates the great truth that 'even texts which seem to invite a humanist reading, like Clarissa, carry their own protest and antidote against that ideology' (p. 256). They deconstruct themselves. They fall apart at the seams.

What are we to make of all this?

We have seen that Clarissa is condemned for the very act of writing, in which 'her subject hovers over the world, makes it an array of inferior objects, a set of knowable entities' (p. 88). One's first response to this is to say that if Clarissa is to be condemned, so is everyone who has ever set pen to paper; but more than this, even Richardson's most inattentive readers will have noticed that Lovelace writes as many letters as Clarissa. Surely, in the ways in which he 'constructs' his world in these letters, he is every bit as 'authoritarian' as Clarissa, indeed even more so. Clarissa, it seems, is to be castigated because she purports to tell the truth in her letters, thus perniciously 'naturalizing' what is not really natural at all - as Terry Eagleton has put it, she 'holds to a severely representational ideology of writing'.⁷ But much as Lovelace may wander off into fantasy or parody for pages, and take a delight in language for its own sake which Clarissa does not, we must remember that vast tracts of his correspondence function first and foremost as reports to Belford of events which have happened - he does carry on the narrative for about a third of the novel, after all. Even if one is not particularly sympathetic to Clarissa, little perspicacity is required to see that the Prosecution is hardly playing fair.

Warner claims that Clarissa 'creates' her 'self'. This may be true in a sense; becoming an exemplar to one's sex must, after all, require a great deal of

conscious effort. But it is also true that one's character is very much constituted by forces outside of oneself. Clarissa's nature has been much influenced by her Christian training, particularly by the 'care, wisdom, and example' of the pious Mrs. Norton (Cl., IV.505). And this fact within the novel naturally points us outside the novel: since Clarissa's conception of the self is a Christian and sentimental one, it hardly seems sensible to discuss it at all without reference to its origins in the actual world. But Warner's approach is relentlessly ahistorical; he has set up the terms of his argument in such a way that no recourse is possible to a world outside 'the text', in which the values that inform 'the text' may be discerned and understood. Isolated in a vacuum of Theory, the novel enacts only 'struggles of interpretation'.

To Warner, every action of Clarissa's is simply an expression of a superiority complex. It would seem pointless, then, to suggest that when Clarissa seeks 'to realize the self as paragon and exemplar' this might be owing to her adherence to sincerely-held Christian values, or that if she seeks out patterns in her experience this is similarly owing to her Christian assumptions rather than to some crazed psychological drive. Even if Clarissa is everything Warner says she is, however, there is surely something dubious about a theory which renders her desire to tell her story inherently more reprehensible than Lovelace's act in raping her.

It is of course his cavalier treatment of the rape which is the most immediately offensive aspect of Warner's book. In a 1983 article in Diacritics, a bemused Warner casually brushes aside the disapprobation of those too humourless, or perhaps not sufficiently 'theoretically advanced', to realize that 'all representations of rape are not equivalent to the crime of rape'.⁸ 'Art does not equal Life', he insists; against the likes of Eagleton and Terry Castle, who persist, it seems, in

'judging Lovelace as though he were a real person', Warner points to 'the fictionality of the fiction':

Of course, there is nothing abstract or funny about the crime of rape. If the letters contained in Clarissa were documents held in evidence by the London Police Department, reading these letters could draw me into joining Castle and Eagleton in a repudiation of the senseless suffering caused by this crime, and urging a swift conviction of the perpetrator. In looking through those police records, I might also find Gloucester's gruesome blinding by his bastard son [sic: actually it is Cornwall who blinds him], Tess's murder of Alex [sic: his name is Alec] d'Urberville in revenge for his rape/ seduction of her, and perhaps, in the misdemeanor section, even the "rape" of a lock. Now considering these as real events, I would wish they never happened. But considering these crimes as fictional actions by characters who have inhabited no space but the text that gives them life, I am glad for Alex's murder, Cordelia's slaughter, Gloucester's blinding, and, yes, Clarissa's rape too (pp. 27-8).

In so far as Warner suggests that the depiction of events in art need not compel from us a moral response equivalent to that which we would have towards such events in life, obviously he is correct. In some cases our responses are not even comparable. If we would join Warner in relishing the 'rape' of Belinda's lock, so too we are hardly likely to lose much sleep over the sufferings of (say) the Vicar of Wakefield. On a different plane, the gruesome bloodbath that is Titus Andronicus is likely to perturb us little more than the screams of Dracula's victims, or the various inventive ways in which Agatha Christie disposes of her 'ten little niggers'. But the examples I have chosen indicate what I think is wrong with Warner's reasoning here. 'Art does not equal Life,' he says (p. 28): this is true enough, but one cannot simply draw a line between art and life and declare that on one side our response is this; on the other, that. How we respond to the imitation of an action in art depends entirely on the way in which that imitation is made; considerations of genre, tone,

and style are vital, as is the question of accomplishment: how good is the work? The sufferings of Lear are not inherently worse than those of Titus; it is the quality of evocation of experience in the later work which makes it so much more powerful a tragedy.

Given that most of us regard Lear as a great work of art, in a sense we are indeed 'glad' for everything that happens in it. But to say this in Warner's crude manner is to show little awareness of what tragedy is and does. This is not the place to rehearse the complexities inherent in the notion of 'catharsis'; Warner, however, would seem to gesture towards the vulgar view that 'Cordelia's slaughter, Gloucester's blinding' and so on are to be valued only to the extent that they enact our own suppressed desires at a safe remove from reality (we are to respond to Lear, it seems, like sex offenders to 'therapeutic' pornography). Yet surely a major reason for the power of a great tragedy such as Lear is that we do feel ourselves to inhabit a moral universe continuous with that of the work. We do not respond to Lear exactly as we would to such events in our own lives, because of course we do not mistake the play for reality; nevertheless, as Johnson would say, this 'imitation' certainly brings realities to mind.

Warner admits that Clarissa and Lovelace may at first strike one as 'vivid representations of people'. But one should soon progress beyond this stage: 'almost immediately they evolved for me into two reciprocally dependent terms of a much more abstract nature.' Thus we are invited to see in these characters - or in place of these characters - such things as 'the will to faithful mimetic representation, and the will to ironic, parodic, fictive subversion'; 'the seriousness of the moral and the laughter of the nonmoral', and so on (ibid.).

If we turn back now to Reading 'Clarissa', however, it need hardly be said that Warner does not approach

Richardson's characters in these coolly rational, abstract terms. Quoting Clarissa, indeed, he cannot resist such cheap sarcasms as 'you can hear the violins of suffering building in this prose' (p. 211). Certainly when he asks us to imagine Clarissa 'hiding something unsavory beneath her garments' (p. 26), or reveals his 'anger and irritation' with all the ways in which she 'shapes, tames, and controls her world' (p. 113), Warner seems to have forgotten that he is dealing only with something as abstract as 'the will to faithful mimetic representation'. Lovelace, too, may be only a symbol of 'the will to ironic, parodic, fictive subversion', but this does not stop Warner from going so far as to castigate other critics for their 'slanderous characterizations of Lovelace' (p. 268).

It seems ironic, then, that Warner should also convict others of obliviousness to 'the fictionality of the fiction'. His own obliviousness on this score is only too frequently evident. Take his account of what he calls the 'climactic move' in the interpretative struggle, 'Clarissa's idea for a book that will tell her story'. Since at one point he shows considerable interest in Richardson's pose as 'editor' of the novel (pp. 125-30), it is extraordinary that Warner should seem to forget one important thing: that Clarissa was not originally supposed to look like a novel at all; like many another work of fiction of its time, it was intended, rather, to appear to be 'a just history of fact'.

This is one reason why the novel opens with Anna asking Clarissa for a full account of the recent 'disturbances' in the Harlowe family; an account, moreover, written 'in so full a manner as may satisfy those who know not so much of your affairs as I do' (Cl., I.1-2). For us, her request conveniently serves the purpose of explaining how the ensuing letters came to be written,

and written as they are.

Much later, it is surely the case that Clarissa's instructions to Anna and Belford about what is to be done with 'the materials' which tell her story constitute largely another convenient credibility-enforcing device on the author's part. Richardson placed much value, it is clear, on what he described to William Warburton as 'that kind of Historical Faith which Fiction itself is generally read with, tho' we know it to be Fiction' (SL, p. 85). If he soon found that his characters looked 'real' enough to readers who obviously knew them to be fictional, still he felt it necessary to insert into his novel some explanation of how this great collection of correspondence came not only to be written, but to appear before the public.

If this casts doubt on the notion of 'the book' as Clarissa's revenge, so too do the actual circumstances under which this project is begun. It is true that the dying Clarissa is seen planning the editorship of the novel we read; to say that the idea was hers, however, is a half-truth at best. Anna has urged Clarissa to write her memoirs: 'my mother has put me in mind to press you to it, with a view that one day, if it might be published under feigned names, it would be of as much use as honour to the sex' (Cl., IV.46). Clarissa's idea is that the story should be told instead by means of the letters she and others have already written (and are still to write): 'I had begun the particulars of my tragical story,' she writes to Anna, 'but it is so painful a task, and I have so many more important things to do, and, as I apprehend, so little time to do them in, that could I avoid it, I would go no further in it' (IV.61).

Still, given all that Clarissa is accused of by Warner, it is hardly likely that he would believe her innocent in the affair of 'the book'. As Warner will

have it, Clarissa 'lets Anna initiate the idea', but of course we know (it seems) that she had already thought of it herself (p. 94). Warner points to evidence in Richardson's letters to suggest that Clarissa originally was to have been responsible for 'organizing the book' (p. 95). In January 1746/7 Richardson was discussing with Aaron Hill the problem of the title of the novel: 'The Lady's Legacy, it cannot now be properly called, as it might at first,' he wrote, 'because in the last Revisal, I have made the Sollicitude for the Publication, to be rather Miss Howe's than hers' (SL, p. 77).

Richardson does not explain why he did this; I would surmise, however, that he quite properly realized that it would be not only more credible for his dying heroine to be above such worldly concerns, but more seemly too for the suggestion to come from another source. Richardson in this way also adds a further and valuable stroke to his characterization of both Anna and Mrs. Howe, as well as increasing our sense of the exemplary nature of Clarissa's story. Anna adds:

My mother says she cannot help admiring you for the propriety of your resentment in your refusal of the wretch; and she would be extremely glad to have her advice of penning your sad story complied with. And then, she says, your noble conduct throughout your trials and calamities will afford not only a shining example to your sex, but at the same time (those calamities befalling SUCH a person) a fearful warning to the inconsiderate young creatures of it (Cl., IV.46).

It is perhaps worth noting that this paragraph is the same in the first edition as it is in the third. So is this earlier passage, from Belford:

She then stepped to her closet, and brought to me a parcel sealed up with three seals: Be so kind, said she, as to give this to your friend. A very grateful present it ought to be to him: for, sir, this packet contains all his letters to me. Such letters they are, as, compared with his actions, would reflect dishonour upon all his sex, were they to fall into other hands (IV.10).

It would be interesting to know if Richardson wrote this before or after he decided to diminish Clarissa's responsibility for 'the book'. As Eric Rothstein has said, 'Clarissa, far from planning a book, has already given away important documents.'⁹ We should note also her subsequent remark, apropos of Lovelace: 'As to my letters to him, they are not many. He may either keep or destroy them, as he pleases' (Cl., IV.10).

But one need not consider facts such as these in order to object to what Warner has said about that 'last Revisal'. 'Why does Richardson make this change?' Warner asks.

It is in keeping with Clarissa's decision to produce her book by means of collaboration. Clarissa and Richardson know that urgent first-person attempts at self-justification often lead to the most strident and dubious forms of discourse. If they can disperse the responsibility for this book into several hands, if they can create the impression that it is an objectlike assemblage of letters, they can remove Clarissa from the fray of authorship and assertion. Then this book will seem "unmotivated." It will seem to stand outside, or at least have an even-handed relationship, with the struggle it records (p. 95).

What does this mean? Obviously Clarissa does not and never has viewed her 'struggle' with Lovelace with even a semblance of disinterested objectivity; it would be bizarre if she had. How will the book appear 'unmotivated' if it is compiled on the initiative of Anna and her mother, rather than of Clarissa herself? When Warner talks about 'the book', often it is unclear whether he means the proposed collection of correspondence mentioned within the novel, or the novel Clarissa itself. These are not quite the same thing: much as we may think of the letters in Clarissa as 'real' from the point of view of the characters, at the same time we know that the book we read is a work of fiction, written by a single author. If the people within the novel are hardly likely to perceive Clarissa's 'book' as

'unmotivated', those of us on the outside are less likely still to see it only as some 'objectlike assemblage of letters'. Of course the novel has no 'even-handed relationship with the struggle it records'. Yet Warner continually alludes to this fact in the manner of one making some shocking and damning revelation. Later in his book, discussing Richardson's 'restorations' in the third edition, Warner remarks: 'With the addenda, Richardson finally plays his hand - in fact he overplays his hand - and shows us something that's been there all along: an active alliance between Clarissa and Richardson, which makes itself felt in every phase of the text's operation' (p. 209).

Most of us knew about this before we opened the book. As for Richardson 'finally' playing his hand, this is silly: his cards were face up on the table from the start. What seems most absurd in Warner's argument, however, is his apparent supposition that it might have been possible to have had a Clarissa free from the influence of that interfering and prejudiced Richardson. No doubt Warner would agree in theory that the novel could never have existed in a 'state of nature', so to speak, untouched by its author's hands. But the effect of his analysis is often to suggest that Clarissa and Lovelace are real figures of history, whose story has been brutally appropriated by an ignorant and bigoted historian for his own vulgar ends.

Warner's obliviousness to the fictionality of Richardson's novel is also evident in his assumption that Clarissa and Lovelace could have married. He claims that the action turns around a few 'contingent' moments when Clarissa just might have said 'yes' if Lovelace had asked. Later, it is one of Clarissa's many sins to try and repress the memory of these moments and impose a 'fateful', tragic design on her history, speciously

presenting it as 'an inevitable-looking cause-and-effect sequence' (p. x).¹⁰

This is hardly a meaningful proposition. For one thing, it is not being at all facetious to say that the events fall into the pattern in which they do because Samuel Richardson put them there. What this means is that the fateful design exists in the story itself as well as in Clarissa's pattern-making mind. Earlier we examined the fallacy in which the various dicta of a fictional personage are seen as some sort of direct expression of his creator. Here, at least, Warner would appear to be guilty of an opposite illogicality; it simply will not do to consider Clarissa or Lovelace as always acting, as it were, independently.

One example will suffice. Early in the novel, it will be recalled, Clarissa has a terrifying dream in which Lovelace seizes her and carries her into a churchyard, stabbing her in the heart and tumbling her into a grave filled with rotting corpses, 'throwing in the dirt and earth upon me with his hands, and trampling it down with his feet' (C1., I.433). Much later - when, in a sense, the tables have turned - Lovelace has a similarly disturbing dream in which he is about to clasp Clarissa in his arms when suddenly she is swept up beyond him into 'the region of seraphims', while he finds himself falling 'into a hole more frightful than that of Elden' (IV.136).

Like most dreams in fiction, both of these seem unsatisfying if considered on a strictly realistic level; Lovelace's bizarre 'metamorphosis' dream (III.248-51) seems far more reminiscent of actual dreams in its strange displacements of the novel's events, its odd extrapolations from 'reality'. Clarissa ascribes her dream only to her 'disturbed imagination' (I.433). While clearly this is correct from her point of view, we as readers may look beyond this 'realistic' explanation. If we

already know what is going to happen in the novel - even, perhaps, if we do not - we shall sense at once in this dream, as in Lovelace's, a dire foreboding of future events: certainly Lovelace's rather hopeful interpretation of his dream (IV.158) is unlikely to convince anyone but himself. An interesting thing about these dreams is that both in effect come true; whereas in Clarissa's we see her own worldly degradation and the seeming triumph of Lovelace, Lovelace's dream shows by contrast Clarissa's ultimate spiritual elevation, and his own damnation. It might be said that the dreams juxtapose a 'spiritual' as against a 'materialist' or worldly interpretation of the death of Clarissa. What may certainly be said is that their function is symbolic or 'thematic' - enactments of the novel in compressed form, neither dream can be seen as simply, or only, a revelation of a character's psychology. Behind the immediate realities of characters speaking, we hear, as it were, the meta-voice of the novel, communicating the author's insights.

Given that this shaping presence may be felt behind every other aspect of the novel as well, it seems absurd to speak pejoratively of Clarissa's desire to pattern her experience, as if her 'experience' really were only an inchoate mass thrown willy-nilly onto the page: by virtue of the fact that she is a character in a novel, Clarissa really does inhabit an ordered and patterned universe. In addition, we must again remember that, in the terms of Richardson's novel, such a universe does after all correspond to the real world; for Richardson, as for Clarissa, the world we live in is also ordered and patterned, by God. In this light, the activity of author or character in constructing a 'book' is not to invent gratuitously or arbitrarily, as Warner will have it, but rather to trace the lineaments of the divine plan which is seen (not unreasonably) as everywhere

evident in creation. If to assume this is only to project a consoling fantasy onto the messy flux of things, such a fantasy is at least hardly idiosyncratic to Richardson, or Clarissa.

But we can leave aside the issue of religion: regardless of one's beliefs, it is surely not so odd to see one's life as patterned or ordered. No doubt it is the case that one's life is full of contingencies or chance occurrences, some of which have a decisive influence on one's future - the 'accident of birth', to begin with. Yet if most things that happen to us tend to seem inevitable in retrospect - one gathers it is common experience that they do - it is difficult to say whether this is merely a comforting delusion or whether the 'causes' to which we ascribe events were really so determining as we might like to think. Once something has happened it does not much matter whether we think of it as 'arbitrary' or not; the fact that one can ask a series of 'What if?' questions about any situation in literature or in life does not, after all, render the events which occurred any less solid or actual. Applying Warner's logic to other works of literature, one would expect Desdemona's 'arbitrary' action in dropping the handkerchief to send Shakespeare's tragic edifice toppling. And what are the deconstructive implications of that 'contingent' moment when Tess, delivering her letter to Angel Clare, unknowingly slips the vital epistle not only under his door but under the carpet too? These events are themselves aspects of tragedy, not mischievous forces that resist or deconstruct it. To Warner, it seems, anything that looks like a contingency is necessarily in opposition to pattern or order, not something that can be subsumed within it. He does not allow for the sense one can have of the containment or accommodation of the seemingly contingent within an overarching design.¹¹

But are some of Warner's 'contingent moments' really as 'contingent' as he claims? It is difficult not to feel that he makes rather more of his 'genuine proposal scenes' than they warrant.

In the first of these scenes, Lovelace seems at first to taunt Clarissa with a strangely 'recriminating' proposal - hardly one she could accept. Thrown into confusion, Clarissa bursts into tears and is about to fling herself from the room when Lovelace restrains her. Encircling, as he says, 'the finest waist in the world', he speaks tenderly to her, protesting his sincerity. Clarissa again bursts into tears; declaring herself to be 'very unhappy', she sinks into Lovelace's arms: he later remarks, 'the dear creature [was] so absent that she knew not the honour she permitted me.' Recollecting herself, Clarissa breaks away from him. It is at that moment that Lovelace suddenly abases himself before her and (earnestly now) beseeches her hand in marriage (Cl., II.137, 141-2). Warner comments:

That Lovelace reaches Clarissa, with a genuine proposal and a new and fervid opening toward her, just moments after she has pivoted away, that their timing is off, that they are out of "synch" (coming so near but never touching), is the bit of contingency upon which the whole comedy of Clarissa and Lovelace turns toward tragedy (p. 82f).

But how seriously can we believe that Clarissa would have said 'yes', even in that brief moment? She seems 'absent' from herself, for one thing. Besides, throughout his book Warner is insistent on the struggle for power between Clarissa and Lovelace. How is it that he now says they might so easily give up their struggles, and marry? Could Lovelace have succeeded here in getting Clarissa not only to agree to marry him, but also to name the day? Would he have named the day? Warner seems to forget that, shortly afterwards, Clarissa does more or less agree to marriage: it is

the question of when that is the stumbling-block for both parties. One wonders, too, how Warner can extrapolate a future of wedded bliss for this ill-starred pair, on the basis of Clarissa's imagined consent at this point. Describing to Belford this 'proposal scene', Lovelace at once exclaims: 'Was the devil in me! I no more intended all this ecstatic nonsense than I thought the same moment of flying in the air!' He is speaking from frustration, of course - but what he goes on to say is revealing: 'All power is with this charming creature. It is I, not she, at this rate, that must fail in the arduous trial' (Cl., II.142). Lovelace wants no more to capitulate to Clarissa than she does to him; we may doubt whether at this stage he really wants to marry her at all.

Does Clarissa want to marry Lovelace? While it is true that she is attracted to him, it will be seen that her attitude towards him is most ambivalent. She writes to Anna, a little later:

I must acquaint you that his kind behaviour and my low-spiritedness, co-operating with your former advice and my unhappy situation, made me that very Sunday evening receive unreservedly his declarations; and now indeed I am more in his power than ever (II.175).

Clarissa would rather be at home than with Lovelace; but there can be no going back now - especially after the devastating news of her father's curse (II.169-70).

It should be noted that all of Warner's 'genuine proposal scenes' take place within the first three weeks after Clarissa's supposed elopement; here, as elsewhere, Clarissa is in a state of desperate suspense and uncertainty, unsure of her own future, and unsure too of how she should respond to the sudden attentions and demands of an often perverse and perplexing suitor. To a large extent Clarissa simply does not know what to do; she wants to do what is right, but what is right

here? how should she conduct herself now? 'I have no resolution at all,' she writes to Anna. 'Abandoned thus of all my natural friends, of whose returning favour I have now no hopes, and only you to pity me, and you restrained, as I may say, I have been forced to turn my desolate heart to such protection as I could find' (II.175).

It is Richardson's great achievement in the early volumes of Clarissa to convey unforgettably the tightening grasp of a truly impossible situation. Given the magnitude of the heroine's distresses, even before the abduction, we may well find it hard to believe that any 'bit of contingency' in the (original) third volume sends the novel suddenly swerving from comedy to tragedy; at times we may wonder if we were ever in a comic universe at all.

The argument that Clarissa and Lovelace could have married also depends, we have seen, on the assumption that the novel is of no certain genre. For Warner, 'Clarissa is neither a comedy, nor a tragedy, nor a clearly definable hybrid'; rather, it is like a version of King Lear shot through with 'half the fun and romance of As You Like It', but still ending tragically - if we can imagine such a thing. Of course it is not unprecedented to find both comic and tragic qualities in the same work; their conjunction in Clarissa, however, is 'violent and inharmonious'; here, Warner believes, is evidence indeed 'that this text is not a unified organic body dominated by a single mythic design' (pp. 77-8).

It is undeniable that there are problems of generic definition in parts of Richardson's work. In Sir Charles Grandison, for example, the harrowing story of Clementina is interwoven with the bright comedy of manners of Sir Charles and Harriet Byron. But whereas Richardson appears to have literally made up that novel as he went along, unaware of how it would end,¹² Clarissa by contrast -

like the first part of Pamela - seems to have been conceived as a whole. For all that Richardson claims to have written even Clarissa without a plan (SL, p. 71; cf. p. 182), nevertheless the novel coheres into an intricately structured whole, as has been brilliantly demonstrated by Frederick W. Hilles. It is notable that Warner makes no mention of Hilles's important essay; at times, indeed, Warner would appear to favour precisely that dubious but once-popular view, voiced most strongly by Clara Thomson, which Hilles sought to combat: that Richardson, as Thomson put it, 'probably never gave a moment to the consideration of form'; that typically he merely 'rambles on from one event to another, without troubling much about their coherence'.¹³

One should certainly not dismiss the idea that there are elements of comedy in Clarissa, much as one might reject Dorothy Van Ghent's view that the novel is 'a comedy', pure and simple. As a matter of fact, parts of it are extremely funny; some of Lovelace's letters, for example, not to mention the trials of Hickman at the hands of Anna Howe. Another once-popular view, that Richardson was devoid of a sense of humour, says more about the tone-deafness of the critics who propounded it than about anything else.

Warner is also correct to discern elements of what might be seen as comic form in the very nature of Richardson's story:

When the story opens, a beautiful young lady is being courted by a handsome young man over the strenuous objections of her family. An awkward and jealous elder sister, an ambitious younger brother [sic], and an ugly suitor named Solmes all contribute to the heroine's distress. A duel has just been fought which attests to the bravery and magnanimity of the hero [sic]. Lovelace and Clarissa dwarf those around them, and though the heroine's sentiments about the hero are delicately veiled, her jealousy on hearing of Rosebud, and the electricity given off by their brief encounter at the wood-house, invite the reader to complete a very romantic tableau (p. 78f).

This may be so; but when he suggested, two paragraphs earlier, that Clarissa reads like an amalgam of Lear and As You Like It, Warner pointed out that those particular plays, as originally written, 'both commence with court intrigue, sibling rivalries, banishments, and the removal to a natural world where a realignment of the social order can begin'. In asserting, as he did, that 'Shakespearean drama shows how a comedy or a tragedy can emerge from a single situation', Warner offered an argument that can easily be turned back against himself (p. 78).

It can hardly have escaped Warner's notice, moreover, that some of the grimmest Shakespearean tragedies have undeniably comic aspects. Even Macbeth has the Porter scene: that is just a funny or vulgar interlude, perhaps, but the very structure of Othello is in a sense 'comic' in its use of such themes as the dissension between lovers caused by misunderstanding, and the gulling of the innocent by a practised rogue. To say that a work contains elements of comedy is not to say much at all about the nature of the work as a whole. It might be said, however, that one does not apprehend any work of literature 'as a whole' (the 'spatial form' fallacy); rather, one reads the work over time, possibly with no initial sense of what 'the whole' may be like. 'The first readers of Clarissa can hardly be blamed if they thought they were reading a comedy that would end in marriage,' Warner maintains (*ibid.*). Susan G. Auty, in her study of eighteenth-century comic fiction, suggests that 'Richardson, with the help of such characters as Anna Howe and Belford, could have turned Clarissa into an ordinary domestic comedy at almost any point in the narrative' - the first half of the narrative, she presumably means.¹⁴

How far are such statements true? To demonstrate adequately the tonal qualities of Clarissa would be, I suppose, to quote it all; I would suggest, however,

that it may be perceived from the beginning that Clarissa is not to be an essentially comic work. Above the partly comic situation with which the novel begins, one should be aware very early of ominous clouds rolling into view. Almost the first thing Clarissa says in the novel is that she has 'sometimes wished that it had pleased God to have taken me in my last fever' (I.4). Soon after we find her lamenting the fallen state of a world which should be 'one great family' (I.34). 'I am fitter for this world than you; you for the next than me,' Anna tells Clarissa (I.43); again and again deeper undertones break through the surface of even the first part of the novel. And it is not simply a matter of undertones: consider the grim reception which awaits Clarissa on her return from her stay with Anna (I.28-32). Consider her confrontation with her father at breakfast, when one by one the rest of the family slip away, leaving them alone (I.35-7). Consider her later tearful conference with her mother, who urges her to sacrifice herself in marriage to Solmes (I.69-77); not to mention the subsequent sufferings of the imprisoned and victimized heroine. From the first, Richardson's novel plunges us into a situation of crisis which goes far beyond the bounds of domestic comedy in the intensity of its rendering and its evident implications. There is more to be said for Richardson's theory of readerly 'want of attention' than Warner is prepared to admit.

The notion of comedy subverting or 'deconstructing' tragedy is fallacious in much the same way as the theory of 'contingent' moments undermining the wholeness of Clarissa's 'book'; Warner - whose approach to these issues seems simply crude - does not consider the ways in which comedy or the comic may be accommodated within tragedy, just as tragic suffering and loss can be contained within what is in essence a redeeming comic vision,

as in Shakespeare's late romances.

It should also be noted that Warner's conception of comedy is limited. He insists on pushing Clarissa into the mould of the romantic comedy or comedy of manners. We have seen that he speaks of the novel in relation to As You Like It; in addition, he invokes Much Ado About Nothing and The Way of the World (pp. 78-9). What he does not consider is that Richardson's novel, to the extent that it is a comedy, might actually be a satiric comedy. Unlike those more benevolent forms which present us with an attractive pair of lovers overcoming various vicissitudes on the path to marital bliss, the satiric comedy aims principally to scourge folly and vice, seeking not merely to amuse us - or present us with a vision of redeeming order - but to arouse our indignation against ridiculous or repellent behaviour. Volpone and The Alchemist are usually cited as the classic English examples of this form. While satiric comedy of course moves towards the restitution of order, that order is thought to have been achieved when the wrongdoers have been exposed and rejected; marriage is not the inevitable ending. It could be argued that characters such as James Harlowe, Arabella, Belton, Mrs. Sinclair, Solmes, the pedant Brand, and certainly Lovelace himself in the depths of his wickedness, are figures of satiric comedy in so far as they are obviously offered to us for our vociferous disapproval. It is true that the situation in the early part of Clarissa in many ways resembles that which we would expect to find in a romantic comedy, but Warner again seems limited in that he does not consider the possibility of irony here. His method is rather to seize on anything in the novel which looks like an element of romantic comedy and consider it as if in isolation from its function in the developing narrative. His disregard of any shaping authorial presence blinds him to the possibility that

the co-presence of comedy and tragedy in the novel might be owing to something other than the inevitable, dreary clash of discourses in the deconstructionist void.

Warner, no doubt, would say that I am missing the point if I insist that the elements of comedy in Clarissa do not subvert the tragic design but counterpoint and enforce it; still, I would maintain that the modulation from comedy to tragedy is actually a significant part of the novel's meaning. Warner barely even mentions Pamela, but we should not forget that Clarissa was after all written against the background of that novel, and is in some ways a complement or even a corrective to it. In contrast to the cheerful vision of the earlier novel, Clarissa is about the way in which things might not turn out all right in the end, about the seriousness, the tragedy, which must inevitably break through any consoling comedy as long as we live in this world.

Warner's notion of an 'axis of comedy' in Clarissa (p. 76ff) is helpful up to a point, to be sure. Certainly he is right to see that Lovelace, hoping as he is for a 'happy ending', tries to impose a 'comic design' on the development of his relationship with Clarissa. But Warner seems simply perverse in his refusal to see that Lovelace is wrong about Clarissa, and is shown to be wrong - not through the rhetorical violence of a book-building heroine, but through his own fate, through the indisputable facts of the story. By the end of the novel - within the terms of the novel - 'comedy' has been shown to be a defence against the realities of life, even a culpable evasion of responsibility, rather than just one of a pair of arbitrary alternatives.

Warner makes much of those early readers who clamoured for a comic resolution to the story. It is likely that almost all modern readers, whatever they may think of Richardson's intentions, would agree that he was right

in refusing to alter the ending of the novel. Warner does not simply take the opposite view; his argument is rather that Clarissa is a chaos of irreconcilable forces than that it is an essentially comic novel twisted out of shape by a perverse author and heroine. If Clarissa did end happily, logically this would not be any more satisfactory to Warner than the ending we already have; the mere fact of 'closure' would offend his postmodernist sensibilities.

Yet Warner does appear to give active support to the views of Richardson's renegade readers. He describes Lady Bradshaigh's proposed ending as 'outrageously sentimental', it is true, and as not the most 'plausible conclusion to the story'; nevertheless we are to perceive it as 'an interpretation of the text', it seems (pp. 164, 167). That Lady Bradshaigh would certainly have disapproved of much of Warner's 'interpretation' of Clarissa is perhaps not relevant to his argument; but he might have considered that she did eventually change her mind about the ending, coming to see that her earlier wishes had been wrong-headed after all. For Warner they were never any such thing: in desiring to bring about the marriage of Lovelace and Clarissa, Lady Bradshaigh rather displays her deconstructive prowess and 'reactivates the comic strata of the text' (p. 165).

This is a shaky proposition. It is surely the case that Lady Bradshaigh and others, in demanding that Richardson supply their desired ending for the novel, are not so much displaying some Barthes-like desire to depose the tyrannical author, as revealing just how great is their sense of his God-like authority: the fate of the characters lies in his hands, they admit. Lady Echlin, who expressed her dissatisfaction with the ending of Clarissa by writing her own version, is perhaps rather more of a deconstructor, in Warner's terms, than her sister. If we follow Warner's logic,

presumably Nahum Tate is to be congratulated for his revisions of King Lear; by Warner's criteria, Tate's notorious reworking of Shakespeare (which admittedly is probably no worse than many modern productions of his work) obviously qualifies as a valid 'interpretation of the text'.

To want Clarissa to marry Lovelace, we might think, is not a desire inherently different from the wish that Cordelia had not been hanged; from the wish (say) that Romeo and Juliet could have enjoyed a long and happy future, or that Heathcliff and Catherine had been the ideal young couple. It is not at all contemptible to entertain such wishes; it is precisely because one cares about these characters enough to feel regret at what becomes of them that their stories achieve the impact that they do. But to demand that the endings of these stories, being painful, should therefore be changed, is of course to miss the point entirely; it is an undeniably naive reaction. It is difficult to see that the warm-hearted wishes of readers such as Lady Bradshaigh tell us anything more about Clarissa than what Tate's version of Lear tells us about Shakespeare's original play - namely, that it is a very powerful and painful tragedy.

I have argued at some length against the notion that Clarissa and Lovelace could have married. An extraordinary fact I have not yet remarked upon is that Warner himself seems at times to agree with me. We have seen that he makes much of what he calls the 'genuine proposal scenes'. But consider the following quotations from Warner's book: '[Lovelace] is forever adjusting his masks and roles according to the exigencies of the moment' (p. 33); 'Lovelace's activity implies the absence of any ground upon which to posit a nature or identity for the self' (p. 34); 'Lovelace escapes into language,

displacing himself and his situation not into a form or a space' - whatever that means - 'but onto the next page of his letter, or the next moment of the game. Thus no motive is stabilized to explain an action, no clear cause can be found for his effects' (p. 54). Clearly, the idea that anything Lovelace says or does is 'genuine' is emphatically disavowed by Warner himself; the very grounds upon which Lovelace is held up for our admiration preclude the possibility of a 'genuine proposal'.

But how solid are those grounds? The view of Lovelace as a deconstructionist seems to have originated with Warner, and is rapidly on its way to becoming a commonplace of Richardson criticism. Whether the rake's 'deconstructions' are seen in a positive light or not, the use of the term is not only a source of needless obfuscation; it might also be seen to lend an air of specious glamour to a character who is deserving of rather harsher treatment. When critics call Lovelace a deconstructionist, what they basically mean is that he is largely devoid of moral scruples, is filled with self-important fantasies, and is a pathological liar. Now this last bespeaks, perhaps, an awareness of the arbitrariness of signification - if we must use such terminology - and in this sense it may be permissible to speak of him as a deconstructionist, as other critics have done. But to go on from there, as Warner does, to see Lovelace as a sort of deconstructed 'subject' whose 'activity implies the absence of any ground upon which to posit a nature or identity for the self' is hardly tenable. Lovelace, it could be argued, is only too obviously 'logocentric' in his endless desire to grasp and hold Clarissa and discover the truth about her. All his activities are directed towards this end; they are the result of one obsession, originating in a 'self' only too centred, a 'subject' only too constructed,

a psychology only too firmly grounded and fixed. One wonders what Warner makes of Terry Eagleton's claim, in the poststructuralist part of his book, that Clarissa functions for Lovelace as the 'transcendental signifier'!¹⁵

To present Lovelace only as a gleeful deconstructor, moreover, is to disregard the tragic dimensions of his character and the extent to which he becomes aware of his depravity and his loss. This is evident in Warner's discussion of what he considers to be a chief example of Lovelace's deconstructive activities. Warner quotes the following passage in which, we are told, 'Lovelace offers a direct challenge to the authority of Clarissa's version of her life' (p. 115):

It is certainly as much my misfortune to have fallen in with Miss Clarissa Harlowe, were I to have valued my reputation or ease, as it is that of Miss Harlowe to have been acquainted with me. And, after all, what have I done more than prosecute the maxims by which thou and I and every rake are governed, and which, before I knew this lady, we have pursued from pretty girl to pretty girl, as fast as we had set one down, taking another up; just as the fellows do with the flying coaches and flying horses at a country fair, with a Who rides next! Who rides next!

But here, in the present case, to carry on the volant metaphor (for I must either be merry, or mad), is a pretty little miss just come out of her hanging-sleeve coat, brought to buy a pretty little fairing; for the world, Jack, is but a great fair, thou knowest; and, to give thee serious reflection for serious, all its toys but tinselled hobby-horses, gilt gingerbread, squeaking trumpets, painted drums, and so forth.

Now behold this pretty little miss skimming from booth to booth, in a very pretty manner. One pretty little fellow called Wyerley perhaps; another jiggeting rascal called Biron, a third simpering varlet of the name of Symmes, and a more hideous villain than any of the rest, with a long bag under his arm, and parchment settlements tagged to his heels, ycleped Solmes; pursue her from raree-show to raree-show, shouldering upon one another at every turning, stopping when she stops, and set a spinning again when she moves. And thus dangled after, but still in the eye of her watchful guardians, traverses the pretty little miss through the whole fair, equally delighted and delighting; till at last, taken with the invitation of the laced-hat orator, and seeing several pretty little bib-wearers stuck together in the flying coaches, cutting safely the yielding air, in the one go-up the other go-down picture-of-the-world vehicle, and all with as little fear as wit,

is tempted to ride next.

In then suppose she slyly pops, when none of her friends are near her: and if, after two or three ups and downs, her pretty head turns giddy, and she throws herself out of the coach when at its elevation, and so dashes out her pretty little brains, who can help it? And would you hang the poor fellow whose professed trade it was to set the pretty little creatures a flying?

'Tis true, this pretty little miss, being a very pretty little miss, being a very much-admired little miss, being a very good little miss, who always minded her book, and had passed through her sampler doctrine with high applause; had even stitched out in gaudy propriety of colours, an Abraham offering up Isaac, a Samson and the Philistines, and flowers, and knots, and trees, and the sun and the moon, and the seven stars, all hung up in frames with glasses before them, for the admiration of her future grandchildren: who likewise was entitled to a very pretty little estate: who was descended from a pretty little family upwards of one hundred years' gentility; which lived in a very pretty little manner, respected a very little on their own accounts, a great deal on hers:--

For such a pretty little miss as this to come to so great a misfortune, must be a very sad thing: but, tell me, would not the losing of any ordinary child, of any other less considerable family, of less shining or amiable qualities, have been as great and as heavy a loss to that family, as the losing of this pretty little miss could be to hers? (Cl., III.316-17).

So far as Warner is concerned, Lovelace here indulges in an 'amusing parody' of Clarissa's story, a deconstructive 'displacement' which has the effect of 'placing in question those fictions - the subject, the cause-effect plotting of events, the paragon of virtue - that give Clarissa's "book" its structural cohesiveness and authority' (p. 117). Warner prizes Lovelace here for '[mocking] the very idea of real personal distinction, the very possibility of an exemplary paragon of virtue.... [The] pretty little heroine is, after all, quite commonplace, and her story carries no distinctive meaning or value' (p. 120).

One must agree that the purportedly 'deconstructive' implications are by no means absent from this passage; Warner's reading of it, however, is misleadingly partial and reductive in the extreme.

It is notable that Warner entirely ignores the context of the passage. It comes from a letter to Belford of Friday June 30 (the first letter of the original Volume VI), in which Lovelace responds to the intelligence that, during his absence at M. Hall, Clarissa has again escaped from the brothel. In the previous letter (which concluded Volume V), Belford, suggesting that the raped heroine will now 'choose to expose her disgrace to the whole world', has taunted Lovelace with the thought that he will now be 'inevitably blown up', that his 'punishment is but beginning' (III.314, 307). Lovelace seems at first to agree: 'I am ruined, undone, blown up, destroyed, and worse than annihilated, that's certain!' begins his reply (III.315). But his tone soon changes - and changes again.

The quoted passage opens, we can see, not in a mood of blustering frustration but rather in one of serious reflection as Lovelace contemplates his - and Clarissa's - 'misfortune'. This is followed by a hint of defensive self-justification of a type we have seen before ('And, after all, what have I done ...'), which soon gives way - ostensibly at least - to the brittle, alienated and alienating tone of the story of the 'pretty little miss', the comedy of which seems both insouciant and slashingly savage. Lovelace begins this story when he decides to carry on his 'volant metaphor', and one way to see his activity here would be to regard him as in flight; it is a flight out of himself and his situation, to a point far above the world of human affairs at which 'Miss Clarissa Harlowe' loses all distinguishing characteristics, becoming just a 'pretty little miss' like any other, whose death will mean neither more nor less than that of 'any ordinary child' - indeed whose death, Lovelace implies, will be meaningless.

Warner gleefully acknowledges this aspect of the passage; we need to consider, however, that Lovelace

in thus taking flight on the page does not really leave himself at all. We might also consider the irony of Lovelace seeming to take flight, when really, his future direction is down. In a sense there are two Lovelaces here: one soaring upwards, laughing - if rather coldly - as he goes; the other crumpled on the ground below. To be at all adequate, a reading of this passage must also in effect be a reading around and through, considering the complex interplay of tragic and comic perspectives which each seeks to qualify the other. If we take Lovelace seriously, his idea of the world as 'a great fair', filled only with 'tinselled hobby-horses' and the like, is an evocation of the meaninglessness of life obviously reminiscent of Macbeth's:

Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

(V.v.24-8)

It would be wrong to say that Lovelace here is 'like' Macbeth in any simple sense; Lovelace's observation appears to be made, after all, in the spirit of comedy. The Lovelace of our passage, it might be said, is almost a parody of Macbeth. Yet one is aware also of serious parallels between the two figures. Like Macbeth's great soliloquy, Lovelace's extrapolation from his 'volant metaphor' is not merely a contemptuous dismissal of life; it is that, but it is also a revelation of loss, of the anguish and despair of one sunk irredeemably in corruption, caught in his own contrivances, realizing finally the futility of his schemes. In asking 'who can help it?' if the 'pretty little miss' dashes out her brains, we see Lovelace poised between obvious irony and the strained jollity of one trying, not quite successfully, to convince himself that he is not to

blame. In referring to Clarissa only as his 'pretty little miss', we have seen that Lovelace puts himself at an infinite distance from her, effacing all differences between Clarissa and the numerous anonymous 'pretty girls' of the days when he and Belford 'pursued from pretty girl to pretty girl'. But Clarissa has been Lovelace's sole obsession for months, the goal of a driving passion which has resulted, we know, in the worldly ruin not only of Clarissa but of himself as well: the old life of the carefree rake, evoked earlier, will never be his again.

If the passage as a whole may be seen as a movement towards ever greater denial, of all that has happened, of its significance, of Lovelace's own responsibility, and of any meaning that Clarissa may have for him, this very denial is a revelation of regret. When Lovelace says that he 'must either be merry, or mad', he provides the key to our understanding of this passage. Merriment, or the pretence that nothing has changed, that nothing important has happened or can happen, here fights for supremacy with madness, meaning despair or the realization of loss. As we watch these contraries battle it out, we realize that in a sense they are not contraries at all - one inheres in the other in Lovelace's mind; as he is being most merry we may sense the madness beneath. Perceiving tragedy to be imminent, Lovelace proclaims his denial of the tragic. It is in the very desperation with which he beckons towards the comic, however, that he reveals himself as a tragic figure.

The Lovelace who writes glibly of his 'pretty little miss' has but a week before penned this rather different effusion:

Oh, that she would forgive me! Would she but generously forgive me, and receive my vows at the altar, at the instant of her forgiving me, that I might not have time to relapse into my old prejudices! By my soul, Belford, this dear girl

gives the lie to all our rakish maxims. There must be something more than a name in virtue! I now see that there is! Once subdued, always subdued - 'tis an egregious falsehood! But oh, Jack, she never was subdued. What have I obtained but an increase of shame and confusion! While her glory has been established by her sufferings! (III.261).

One notes, moreover, that the fantasy inspired by the 'volant metaphor' comes to an end with the confession that 'all this' does not, after all, avail much: Lovelace is 'stung to the very soul' by the loss of Clarissa; and speaking of 'the sincerity of my contrition' he vows still to marry her if Belford 'canst by any means find her' and 'prevail upon her to consent' (III.318-19). It is all very well to speak of Lovelace's inconsistency and lack of sincerity - but this is to ignore the Lovelace of the latter part of the novel, whose despairing and even insane longing for the lost Clarissa remains always apparent. Even if we leave aside the issue of authorial intentions, surely it is possible to perceive Lovelace as Warner does only if we are radically insensitive to complexities of tone, to irony in particular. It is not only Clarissa, but Lovelace too who is misrepresented and impoverished as a character in Warner's reading.

In the latter part of his book, Warner turns his attention to those critics who, as he sees it, have shown themselves to be reprehensibly partisan to Clarissa's cause. In dealing with Richardson's novel, not only must we contend with Clarissa's insidious attempts to deceive us, it seems, and Richardson's eagerness to assist her: in addition, at any moment we may be overwhelmed by the massed weight of the tradition of 'humanist criticism'. It is one of his key contentions, Warner explains, 'that Richardson's effort to reinterpret his text so as to control its reception lays down an authorized interpretation of the novel'; and that this 'authorized' view comes to be 'perfected by a group of eighteenth-

and twentieth-century readers of the novel I have chosen to call "humanist" (p. vii). Guided by a belief in the inner integrity of man and the absolute value of the individual, the humanist critic apparently makes use of the literary work - though he would deny that he made 'use' of it, of course - to inculcate these notions, 'to enforce a particular conception of man, and to uplift and "humanize" the reader' (p. 220). For all his parade of 'liberal' and 'enlightened' principles, however (p. 231), the humanist is nevertheless 'deeply respectful of authority, and has nothing but contempt for those who are not' (p. 236). The 'text' for the humanist is therefore an object of surpassing value, an idol to which the critic comes as a humble handmaiden to receive - and deliver to a league of similarly servile readers - the all-important 'theme', that 'precious fragment of moral and spiritual truth written by a great man (the genius, the author), and put into his masterpiece for the benefit of all men' (p. 250). Yet, absurd as he may sound, the humanist is not to be taken lightly: the humanist 'interpretive alliance', we are told, 'is so powerful that it has obscured its own operation and made it difficult to think the possibility of a radically different way of knowing Clarissa'. In the face of this moribund orthodoxy, it is the purpose of Warner's study 'to liberate Clarissa for another kind of reading' (p. vii).

For all this revolutionary rhetoric, it is difficult to see that the so-called 'interpretive alliance' is as powerful as Warner claims: in fact it simply is not, as our own discussion of the history of Clarissa criticism has made clear. As it happens, Warner does admit the existence of what he calls 'a body of valuable criticism', written by Leslie Fiedler, Morris Golden and others (pp. 271-2). It seems significant, however, that he makes this acknowledgement only in the notes at the

back of his book; presumably he wishes to maintain an image of himself as a lonely rebel courageously storming the barricades of bourgeois repression. Still, one wonders how Warner squares this alleged humanist dominance of the criticism with other assertions he makes in the course of his argument: for example, that Richardson's fiction will evoke 'a predictable reader response' only 'if the reader feels the aspiration toward virtue shared by Richardson and Clarissa' (p. 134); or that Richardson's experiences with Clarissa demonstrate that it is 'easier to provoke a reader's perverse independence than to win his docile compliance' (p. 124).

The assertion that the humanists necessarily follow some 'authorized interpretation' of the novel is also contradicted by Warner himself: while the humanists, we are told, are 'not hostile to the interests and categories Clarissa and Richardson bring to bear on the text', nevertheless they somehow 'displace the text away from many of the concerns and ideals' of its author and heroine (p. 220). While of course it is possible to have such a thing as a 'Christian humanist', a defining characteristic of a humanist for Warner is in fact not just a 'moral interest' but 'a secular, non-Christian moral interest in man' (p. 219; my emphasis).

In the light of this, one may feel in some doubt as to the inclusion of Henry and 'Sara' [sic] Fielding amongst Warner's 'humanist critics'. That Warner should also include in the roll-call such diverse figures as 'Dennis' [sic] Diderot, William Sale, Ian Watt and Mark Kinkead-Weekes (p. 220) makes the category virtually meaningless. While one has no doubt that all of these writers do indeed share certain moral assumptions, there are also great and in some cases irreconcilable differences between them - look at Kinkead-Weekes's remarks on Ian Watt, for example.¹⁶ It seems merely ironic that Warner should go on to castigate the 'tedious repetitiveness'

of humanist criticism (p. 258). Clearly his typical humanist is only a convenient straw man of his own devising. It is difficult, indeed, to see more than a gratuitous outrageousness in much of Warner's argument here; for example, humanist notions of the 'wholeness' and 'integrity' of the text are taken as evidence of a perverse fetishism, of 'an eccentric erotic relationship between the humanist critic and Clarissa' (p. 235). Thus Kinkead-Weekes, in mooting the possibility of a return to the first edition of the novel, is envisaged as wanting 'to return the text to its original chasteness and virtue, by undressing it' (p. 239). We are back in the land of easy, prove-anything pop psychology, it seems.

Similarly dubious are Warner's attempts to expose what he imagines to be damning contradictions in the 'humanist ideology'. We have seen that much is made of the humanist's allegedly specious humility before the text; if we are to believe Warner, this leaves the hypocritical humanist with 'no way to account for his own activity, because his notion of the work of art's transcendent value makes the reader and his reading irrelevant' (p. 257).

This does not make sense. There is no logical contradiction between assuming a work of art to be of great, even of 'transcendent' value, and wanting to discuss it critically - quite the reverse. It is notable here that Warner considers the humanist to have 'over-valued' Richardson's novel 'by any normative standard' - something humanists always do to the books they are discussing, apparently (p. 243). But how can there be any 'normative' valuation of Clarissa - or of anything else - in Warner's world of absolute relativism? What - where - is this 'normative standard' to which he now so suddenly and conveniently appeals?

Warner makes much of the claim that humanists -

Diderot, for example, in his enthusiasm for Richardson's characterization - illogically assert the rich uniqueness of individual human beings at the same time as they claim to believe in the essential sameness of all men, in 'a unified general conception of Man' (p. 227). As a matter of fact they do, but there is really nothing perverse about this. All of us may not assent to the humanist view of man; the assumption that all people are at once different and the same, however, is surely basic to all human intercourse. The mere fact that we engage in activities such as speech and writing is evidence of this. We might think of others around us as mere automata programmed identically by bourgeois society, but this does not stop us from wanting to communicate with at least some of them, and occasionally even being surprised at what they say or do. Conversely, if we think of The Other as unknowable, still we assume that he will not merely look at us blankly when we talk to him (say) about Man's Existential Alienation in a Meaningless Universe.

It is Warner's dismissal of the 'humanist' view of man, clearly, which underlies his cavalier treatment of Richardson's heroine. Given this, we are not surprised that a critic such as Terry Eagleton should have found Warner's book to be 'an ominous exposé of the truly reactionary nature of much deconstructionist "radicalism"'.¹⁷ This is not entirely true: many of the views expressed in Warner's book would not be at all out of place in the writings of certain of the 'New Accents' critics, if not of Eagleton himself. In describing Richardson's extraordinary index-summary of Clarissa, for example, Warner reminds us that a 'summary' of a text by definition offers a selection of its most 'essential' or 'significant' elements. 'But essential for what? significant for whom?' comes the immediate paranoid question (p. 187). This is pure Catherine Belsey or Antony Easthope, as

is the use of the straw-man humanist. But take this typical piece of Warnerism:

Humanist critics like Diderot and Kinkead-Weekes are reluctant to acknowledge the political implications of their criticism. But if they did, I doubt they would favor an unruly struggle of interpretations. Instead, they would be most comfortable with a benign dictatorship where the author would sit enthroned like a king at the center of a dominion of loyal readers, to guarantee a continuity of response to his book (p. 232).

It seems absurd to imagine Diderot, that great figure of the French Enlightenment, as some sort of crypto-fascist. We have remarked before on the strategy Warner uses here, and often in his book: it is one of the commonest moves in contemporary literary theory, this insistence on a simple-minded analogy between interpretative 'freedom' for readers of books, and political freedom in the real world.

What is this 'freedom' that Warner wants? One may well wonder about the political analogies to be drawn from a 'freedom' to disregard truth, evidence, proof, consistency of argument, and respect for the intentions and views of others. It is Warner, not Kinkead-Weekes, who should be contemplating the 'political implications' of his criticism, especially given his effusive praise for the 'subversive critique of humanism' offered by 'figures like de Sade and Nietzsche' (p. 256). Warner notes that 'it is not easy to move outside the system of knowing and feeling and valuing called humanism'; in explaining why this is so, however, he does not seem to notice the irony in his observation that this 'powerful ideology' is not only 'affiliated with central precepts of Christianity' but has 'its roots in the sentimental movement of the eighteenth century, and the democratic revolutions late in that century' (*ibid.*). Warner's attack on 'humanism' becomes in the end an attack on

democracy itself. After all, what meaning can we attach to such things as the right to vote, say, the right to a fair trial, the right not to be arbitrarily detained, and so on, unless we assume that all people are unique individuals who matter simply because of that fact? It is worth remembering some famous words from one of those 'democratic revolutions' of the late eighteenth century: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness....' This is exactly the sort of sentimental slush that Warner so derides. Those who take the 'deconstruction' of meaning as their model of liberation should perhaps ponder these profoundly deconstructive phrases - and recall their source:

WAR IS PEACE
FREEDOM IS SLAVERY
IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH

One could not have a better demonstration of the meaninglessness of meaning, of the arbitrary nature of the sign.

Such remarks apply as much to Castle as to Warner. But Terry Castle's Clarissa's Ciphers: Meaning and Disruption in Richardson's "Clarissa" (1982) is not, as its title implies, only a further exploration of the novel from a poststructuralist perspective. It is also, in part, a feminist answer to Warner's.

Castle presents her study as a 'gloss for a single line of Clarissa'; the line, 'I am but a cypher, to give him significance, and myself pain' (p. 15; cf. Cl., II.264). These are Clarissa's words, written while Lovelace has her in his clutches. As Sean French has pointed out, the word 'cypher' in this context has a

double meaning, referring first to 'a person [or thing] of no importance, or worth', and secondly (and more importantly) to the numerical symbol zero. The remaining numerals, one to nine, are known as 'significant' numbers. The zero, while of no value in itself, multiplies by ten the value of any other figure after which it is placed, thus increasing the signified quantity. So it is that Clarissa here imagines herself as a zero, nothing in herself, but giving Lovelace added significance or status if placed beside him, in a subordinate relationship to him.¹⁸

But to insist on this sensible interpretation is to reckon without that solipsism now so epidemic in our English departments, which naturally assumes that any book worth reading must (of course) be an allegory of the activities of literary critics. Castle, in a burst of poststructuralist enthusiasm, assumes therefore that 'cypher' as Clarissa uses it refers to a 'sign' or 'text' in the poststructuralist sense. Clarissa has discovered 'the crucial metaphor of reading ... a precise symbol for her bondage. She has become a cipher to Lovelace, a sort of text - and he, her exegete' (p. 15).

Now a text, for Castle (whose own text contains more than a little intertextuality), is a metaphor for virtually everything, and a text is a notoriously 'denatured artifact' (p. 45). We may think, naively, that meaning is somehow immanent in a text, 'like ore awaiting excavation' (p. 51); we must realize, however, that 'meanings are generated, arbitrarily, by different readers' (p. 45). It has been declared that there is nothing outside 'the text'; apparently there is nothing inside it either. Readers project meaning onto the text, 'according only, finally, to the shape of their desire' (ibid.); and for us, as for the characters in Clarissa, 'the act of reading is a paradigm for the way in which

[we] interpret the world' (p. 48).

It is true that readers in a sense 'project' themselves onto the books they read. If even the greatest novels, for example, are to be for us anything more than so many words, obviously it is necessary that we use our imaginations to bring the characters and the 'world' of the fiction into being. Given this, one person's picture of what goes on in a book may well differ from that of other readers, as our exploration of the criticism of Clarissa makes us very much aware. But to suggest that reading is therefore a totally subjective matter, as does Castle, is absurd. If it were, there would be no possibility of our discussing a book with other readers; the notion that two people had read 'the same book' would be meaningless. But then, who would bother with books anyway, those expensive and space-consuming things? Blank pages would do nicely for our arbitrary projections.

Castle recognizes that particular meanings often do appear to be generally accepted. If there is no such thing as immanent meaning, how is it, then, that some meanings seem more meaningful than others? It is 'a truth about meaning', says Castle (no doubt projecting arbitrarily but 'naturalizing' her reading), that 'The power to determine the significance of events, to articulate one's reading of experience and impose it on others, is a function of political advantage alone, and identified finally with physical force' (p. 116).

Herein lies her argument with Warner. What is 'surprising and disturbing about Warner's study', Castle contends, is that 'he seems unaware of the political dimensions of hermeneutic struggle. The battles of interpretation, in the text, in the world, are seldom fair fights.' Clarissa and Lovelace are not 'equal combatants', but 'Lovelace has available to him a kind of "force" Clarissa does not - all the institutionalized advantages of patriarchal power, including the power

of sexual intimidation' (p. 193). In one of the best parts of her book, Castle goes on to expose Warner's 'startlingly primitive misogyny' (p. 194). Unfortunately, she continues in this vein:

What Warner seems unable to accept is the possibility, implicitly raised, though never fulfilled in Clarissa, of power located in a female voice.... The truly radical, deconstructive reader, he implies, must needs be Lovelacean, for to belong to "Clarissa's party" is automatically to invest one's own discourse, bathetically, with this transparently mythological "humanism." What Warner misses is that it is possible to speak for Clarissa without adhering to her (or Richardson's) specific values, without advocating her "apotheosis" as Christian heroine, without invoking simplistic humanist notions of the "real."

What Castle tries to do, then, is to show that one can 'speak for Clarissa', against Warner and Lovelace, but 'without sacrificing one whit of one's poststructuralist consciousness' (p. 195).

For Castle, Clarissa may best be regarded as an investigation of the highest and most important doctrines not of Christianity, as Richardson blindly believed, but of poststructuralism. As a multiple-focus epistolary novel, the text is indeterminate, a sort of early nouveau roman in which 'The reader must take over the functions of the storyteller' (p. 168); but, if it may be said to be 'about' anything, it is itself about indeterminacy, the drama of a young woman's confrontation with the arbitrariness of the sign.

One notes that the supposed 'indeterminacy' of the novel - it is, we are told, 'a plethora of contradictory messages' (p. 29) - has not prevented Castle from somehow perceiving in it its author's 'specific values'. Since a nouveau roman or postmodernist novel is apparently the best sort of book one can have, however - Barthes' 'writerly' as opposed to 'readerly' text - it is perhaps a good thing for Richardson's reputation that he should now be discovered to have written such

a work.

But this notion of indeterminacy is hardly tenable. Like John Preston, who finds Clarissa to be 'not an imitation of life, but rather of writing', a novel 'in which the actual process of writing, the text itself, is the action', Castle simply makes too much of Richardson's epistolary form.¹⁹ Nothing could be more wrong than to see in Richardson's use of letters only some fashionably postmodernist toying with 'textuality' and the ambiguous relations between signifier and signified. If we forget that the point of 'writing to the moment' is to explore 'the heart', and in so doing to create in the reader a vivid sense of the human reality of the characters and their story, we forget one of the most important things about Richardson as a writer - and the most important thing about his contribution to the novel as an ongoing form. Clarissa is no more an early Last Year at Marienbad than is Middlemarch or Barchester Towers; the fact that the book is made up of letters, purportedly by divers hands, does not make it simply 'a plethora of contradictory messages' any more than a play, for example, is necessarily indeterminate because it is made up only of the speeches of different characters. The point has been made admirably by Donald R. Wehrs:

[T]he effect of an interplay of many voices in Clarissa is not the same as the interplay in Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre or a William Gaddis novel. Richardson makes his presence felt through the irony his story imposes upon the various correspondents. The worth or referentiality of the characters' readings of experience is judged by what happens to them, a matter over which Richardson has some say. Clarissa's fearsome determination to accept death rather than endure moral compromise justifies her interpretation not of the world (which was grievously misguided) but of herself; it gives the lie to the readings imposed by the Harlowes and Lovelace. After all the welter of words about Clarissa, she defines herself by her conduct, a conduct that ultimately discloses her true character, the signified that all the signifiers have been clamoring to describe and penetrate.

The gradual unfolding of Clarissa's story provides a context for irony toward the various correspondents' assertions, a frame of reference that is complete only when the "History of a Young Lady" has made Clarissa's true self fully present by demonstrating that she means what she has always said, that moral integrity is more important to her than anything in this world, including life itself.²⁰

Such a view would hardly appeal to Castle, to whom the novel discloses only a vision of the world as a 'drama of exegesis' without end (p. 19). Clarissa's problems, we are to understand, stem from the fact that she is a 'naive exegete', reading the world, says Castle in an unfortunate choice of phrase, like 'an "open book" - a transparent source of meaning' (p. 57). Assuming that 'words embody, absolutely and transparently, the inner life of the speaker', Clarissa trusts in the discourse of the 'heart' (p. 67); so it is that when the Harlowes, who employ an 'active, Barthesian' model of reading (p. 71), interpret her only according to their own desires, Clarissa begins the long process of 'semiotic defamiliarization' which culminates in the rape (p. 58). Clarissa, who has been credulous enough to believe that parents naturally love their children and that sisters should 'be sisters to each other' (Cl., I.62), has her 'sentimental ideology of kinship' rudely undermined by the happenings at Harlowe Place, finding that her family wilfully misconstrue her at every point, and that her own 'readings' are devoid of any privileged force (p. 74). Denied her great desire for discourse, Clarissa is driven to Lovelace 'because he lets her speak' (p. 81) - although we must not discount the pernicious influence here of Anna Howe, who, in asking if Clarissa is attracted to Lovelace, unwittingly 'writes' her friend into an 'erotic scenario', in which 'The "construction" does not reflect reality, but creates it' (p. 78).

Lovelace, of course, is far removed from 'Clarissa's

persistent logocentrism' (p. 84). He is an eighteenth-century Derrida, revelling in the groundlessness of meaning; but he is also - strangely enough - a critical terrorist of the worst kind, rivalling even the Harlowes, and after trapping Clarissa in his 'hermeneutic snare' (p. 82) he inscribes the captive cipher with 'the text of "Woman"', 'the sign of untrammelled sexuality, vulnerability, inner corruption, thrilling and debased weakness' (p. 87). The world in which Clarissa now finds herself, moreover, is utterly denatured, created by Lovelace, who can make a brothel look like a respectable house and whores appear as his genteel relations; everywhere Clarissa encounters false constructions and assumes them to be real.

Castle is at her best when describing the heroine's victimization; rightly, she stresses that Lovelace and the Harlowes are united in forcing inaccurate constructions onto Clarissa, misreading her and making her misread. It seems wrong, however, to make Clarissa out to be as passive as Castle does, convicting her of 'an absolutely uncritical mode of interpretation' (p. 95). Clarissa is considerably more vigilant than Castle would have us believe. If she is deceived and betrayed it is more owing to the depravity of others than to what Castle calls her 'devastating naiveté' (p. 111).

As we might expect, Castle refrains almost entirely from considering Clarissa in the context of eighteenth-century literature. The way in which one is to understand the sufferings of victimized protagonists in sentimental fiction (take David Simple, for example, or Mackenzie's Harley) is as an illustration of the wickedness of 'the world', not of the contemptible weakness or stupidity of the protagonists. Castle's presentation of Clarissa as a kind of hermeneutic imbecile gestures, albeit unwittingly, in the direction of the 'she-was-asking-for-it' school. And more than this, if the Harlowes

are a kind of collective Roland Barthes, and Lovelace is Derrida, as Castle implies, while Clarissa (one assumes) is the unenlightened liberal humanist, then - given that Castle claims allegiance with deconstruction, while seeking also to speak for Clarissa - should it not have caused her some concern that the novel's 'deconstructionists' are the very villains who victimize Clarissa? Castle leaves unexamined this curious paradox.²¹

It is with her account of the rape, however, that her problems really begin. It is crucial to Richardson's design that the rape, which Lovelace expected to be the defeat of Clarissa, be no such thing. As Elizabeth R. Napier has pointed out, there is an 'inversion of power' in the latter part of the novel.²² Castle, who has no time for 'an isolated and sentimentalized theme of female "Virtue"' (p. 116), sees the rape rather as a 'hermeneutic defeat' (p. 117), after which Clarissa wastes away in voluntary 'self-expulsion from the realm of signification' (p. 109).

Castle works hard to make her case convincing here, claiming that Clarissa's new-found rhetorical strength after her madness, in the magnificent scene in which she overwhelms Lovelace and his whores with vehement denunciation (Cl., III.287-91), results from 'radicalized perceptions' of the status of words (p. 124). Castle is unclear on this crucial point; but, given her credo that every reading is a misreading, that every interpretation is an act of brutality, she implies that nothing that Clarissa now says will have any more validity than the words of Lovelace, or Mrs. Sinclair, or James and Arabella. After spending over a hundred pages discussing the ways in which these characters have terrorized Clarissa with interpretation, how Clarissa has been deceived and imprisoned and raped, finally, when Clarissa will be victimized no longer and sees her oppressors for what they are, Castle refuses to 'privilege' Clarissa's voice.

Her 'reading' is just another 'construction'. What the rape has revealed is 'the violence inherent in reading itself' (p. 115).

It is not surprising, then, that Clarissa, recognizing this, descends into 'a kind of hermeneutic malaise' (p. 124). The 'radicalization of her relationship to language' is seen in her denunciations of Lovelace and her 'allegorical letter', but Clarissa is 'profoundly uneasy with ... this Lovelacean discourse of the "head"', and resolves to leave behind the world of reading (pp. 133, 135). In startling contrast to Warner's Clarissa, Castle's wants neither to read nor be read. The fact that the dying Clarissa spends hours engaged in writing should have given Castle pause; she does not bother about it, however, except to discern a weary poststructuralist awareness in the late productions of Clarissa's pen. Her anthology of biblical meditations, apparently a work of 'metacriticism' (p. 130), leads Castle to the question: 'what is the epistemological status of Scripture, given the compromised vision of the text operating in Clarissa?' It is a rhetorical question, of course. As Castle is quick to remind us, 'no text can claim transcendent authority' (p. 131).

Presumably Clarissa now recognizes this too and only reads the Bible in a deconstructionist spirit. Silliest of all, however, is the claim that the white dress Clarissa wears in her last days is evidence of her abdication from the world of 'sartorial signs'. Clarissa 'makes herself unavailable to interpretation according to dress', with the 'single white garment' suggesting 'blankness, absence, [and] opacity'. Should we burst in on Clarissa here crying 'Innocence! Humility! Shroud! Heavenly bride!' and so on, Castle anticipates our hermeneutic violence in a footnote informing us that 'It is dubious, of course, how successful this effort at self-neutralization is, for to clothe oneself

at all is always to clothe oneself in potential significance'. She could have added that even nakedness invites interpretation. Clarissa's white dress, she goes on, is an almost irresistible temptation to interpreters to "write it over" with thematic significance' (p. 125).

One can hardly accept that what Castle says about the gown is any less of a 'writing over' than if she had talked about Christian humility or the bride of Christ; to insist that the dress signifies nothing is not, after all, to say it has no significance. Castle's anti-reading is just as much a reading as any other, and is certainly charged with 'thematic significance' for her. Yet Castle claims to repudiate a 'constructive' approach to Clarissa, advocating instead the 'deconstructionist' stance she regards herself as having. One would have thought that Castle was aware that deconstructionists - take Warner, for example - can be just as much terrorists as any band of marauding Leavisites. It is difficult to see anything truly deconstructive in her own work anyway, which after all merely takes 'interpretation' as its theme and reads the novel accordingly. More than this, if validity in interpretation is impossible with a shabby system of signifiers mediating always between self and not-self, Castle, one must observe, is remarkably certain about her own ability to reach conclusions. Reading her book, we are instructed as if about matters of indisputable fact that interpretation is always and only arbitrary; that the great book of phenomena yields no transparent meanings; that no text can claim transcendent authority. But it is obvious, if one may be allowed to use that word, that if truth is inaccessible there can be no possibility of our discovering that it is, for to say, unequivocally, that truth is inaccessible is to claim access to truth. Like Catherine Belsey, who can spend pages demolishing the concept of the 'real', then begin her next paragraph

with the words 'In reality', Castle has it both ways, denying the possibility of locating any truth with a rhetoric which insists on the truth of her claim.

Castle also has a tendency, as will by now be evident, to dress up the most simple or commonplace observations in theoretical fancy dress: so does Warner, but Castle is much worse in this regard. Much of her analysis of Clarissa could have been carried out under the heading of that old examiner's standby, the 'appearance and reality' theme. But the 'poststructuralist consciousness' which causes Castle to make absurd claims for the epistolary form of Clarissa - forgetting such basic things as that all those letters do, after all, tell an exciting story - leads her also to ignore the ways in which its 'drama of exegesis', while undoubtedly vivid, is really nothing unique.

What does it mean to say that a novel is about 'interpretation'? Novels as diverse as Crime and Punishment, Madame Bovary, Rebecca, A Passage to India, and A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man are all in a sense about this theme - the problem of judging correctly. So are all detective stories. Probably all novels - all fictional narratives - are in some way or another, at some point, concerned with the misinterpretation of one character by another, or some analogous interpretative problem. This is because of the requirements of plot construction as much as because morality - which is what so many novels are about - is, after all, a matter of interpretation. One need only consider the naivety of the Vicar of Wakefield, or the misadventures of Emma Woodhouse. The young Pendennis provides a good example, in his relations with Miss Fotheringay: 'He supplied the meaning which her words wanted; and created the divinity which he loved' (Ch. V). Many a James heroine must learn to interpret correctly, or finds herself wrongly interpreted

by others. And surely no woman was more victimized with interpretation than Hawthorne's Hester Prynne, tethered, as she was to her scarlet signifier.

It is difficult to see how Castle's sheer pretentiousness does not radically compromise her protestations of libertarian principles in the field of interpretation. Willed obfuscation - the attempt to jack up one's intellectual image with needless jargon, designed no doubt to impress the credulous reader - is a virulent form of the will to power, surely. As much as Warner or Lovelace, Castle is a critical terrorist. She tells us, however, that we must turn away from this terrorism, this effort to define and penetrate which is always 'founded on the death of the other'. Clarissa offers only tragic options, the choice between the violence of Lovelace and Clarissean abdication from the world of reading; yet, in exposing the way in which constructions are made, the text points to a way out of this bind in forcing us 'to analyze reading itself', 'to consider the grounds upon which we perform our own acts of "construction"' (p. 186).

Literary criticism has been founded upon violence: 'New readings of a given work typically affirm their claim on truth by destroying previous readings' (p. 184). The possibility that a previous critic may have said something demonstrably wrong does not, of course, occur to Castle, who cannot accept the existence of such a category. This is a convenient belief to hold; she may therefore discount in advance all adverse criticism of her own work. Earlier in her book, however, Castle has described the rape as a 'despicable' and 'idiotic' act (p. 108); she castigates previous critics who have refused to regard it 'with any direct opprobrium' (p. 184); and she writes in pejorative terms of 'traditionally sanctioned masculine attitudes' (p. 185).

It is the clash between this engagé feminism and

her 'poststructuralist consciousness' which seems, in the end, most unacceptable in Castle's book. In the world as she has presented it, denatured, lacking in the Logos, there is only an endless struggle for power where as soon as one speaks one is tainted with evil. The weak are trammelled everywhere by the hermeneutic violence of the strong, but should the weak be weak no longer they will only replicate this violence. Castle should have considered here that Clarissa's reading of the world, even at its most powerful in her denunciations of Lovelace, will not culminate in the same way as his. Certainly Lovelace, as Castle does say, has methods of intimidation available to him which Clarissa, as a woman, does not; but even with penknives and scissors at her disposal Clarissa will not enforce her conviction that her soul is above his with what would be, one assumes, the ultimate rhetorical flourish. It is difficult to sort out the problems involved in Castle's literal and metaphorical usages of the term 'violence'; the main problem is that she does not stop at equating 'violence' only with the savagely patriarchal readings of Clarissa's oppressors. Rather, Castle presents the rape as a natural extension of all reading; indeed, as a metaphor for reading: it is 'an ultimate demonstration of the violence inherent in reading itself' (p. 115).

So it is that Castle, who set herself up in opposition to Warner, is led by the logic of her theoretical position to follow him in effacing all distinction between rape and the construction of meaning. All interpretation is rape; therefore, if all of us are equally culpable when we try to 'read' the world, surely we must ask whether it matters who prevails? We must also ask whether feminism, if pursued with any conviction, is not as incompatible with deconstruction as Christianity. Castle seems to feel some unease about this. On the last page of her book, Roland Barthes - whom the anti-authoritarian

Castle of course has no compunction in citing as an authority on such things - is called forth to support the idea that 'though ... we may no longer concern ourselves with a dynamics of "truth" and "falsehood," we can still concern ourselves - both within the text and without - with the dynamics of oppression' (p. 196). But what meaning can it have to talk about oppression, if one has annihilated all grounds for making moral judgements? As Janet Radcliffe Richards has pointed out,

'Oppression' is not a morally neutral word. To claim that women are oppressed by men is not simply to say that men are in a position of advantage or power over women, but to imply that that power is unjustly held.²³

What is disturbing - perhaps even poignant - about Castle's book is that one senses, beneath her 'poststructuralist consciousness', a firmly entrenched logocentric unconscious.

It has been suggested by at least one reviewer that her book is meant to be read ironically.²⁴ If this is so, it is certainly an amusing if somewhat esoteric entertainment; unfortunately, it does not seem likely. Still, one could always ignore authorial intentions and read it as a parody.

'New critic is but old scholar writ large, as a general thing,' wrote Randall Jarrell over thirty years ago.

[T]he same gifts which used to go into proving that the Wife of Bath was really an aunt of Chaucer's named Alys Persë now go into proving that all of Henry James's work is really a Swedenborgian allegory. Criticism will soon have reached the state of scholarship, and the most obviously absurd theory - if it is maintained intensively, exhaustively, and professionally - will do the theorist no harm in the eyes of his colleagues.²⁵

Needless to say, that time is now with us.

CONCLUSION: RICHARDSON AND OUR TIMES

Several years ago the American critic Jean H. Hagstrum published his book Sex and Sensibility: Ideal and Erotic Love from Milton to Mozart. Among its reviewers was the noted Blakean Alicia Ostriker, who took issue with a number of aspects of Hagstrum's treatment of his subject. What particularly irked Ostriker was Hagstrum's evident admiration of Clarissa:

That man must have a heart of stone, says Oscar Wilde, who can read through the death of Little Nell without laughing. This has always been my sentiment about the death of Richardson's Clarissa; Clarissa as a whole has always struck me as the greatest, most sustained piece of soft-core pornographic soap opera in English.

Finding her fellow critic to be 'not so much a theoretical analyst of the cult of sensibility as a member of it in good standing', Ostriker, not surprisingly, provoked Hagstrum to reply.

Hagstrum admitted that he had once shared Ostriker's 'brisk and "emancipated"' attitude to Richardson's novel:

This prejudice - for I now so regard what I once believed - I doubtless inherited from a learned and witty teacher at Yale, who used to wonder aloud whether anyone could possibly learn anything from that middle-class printer with a paunch. But when I came to read Richardson entire, from within, as it were, I came to see how unfair to Richardson and other great masters of sensibility the usual epithets about tearful, moralistic sentimentalism really were.

While Ostriker may regard his view of the novel as 'solemn, priggish, or otherwise old-fashioned', Hagstrum suggested, as it happens it is hers that is 'traditional or conventional'.¹

Hagstrum is among the most important of those critics who have challenged long-prevailing attitudes to Richardson in recent years. One would be mistaken, however, to assume that the impressions of the novelist which lie behind Ostriker's denigration of his work are now only seldom to be found. If few critics today would describe Richardson's great novel simply as a 'pornographic soap opera', the tendency to dismiss his conscious artistry and the validity of his intentions nevertheless remains strong. Richardson's deconstructionist critics provide only the most notable illustration of this. We have examined the earlier radicalisms of critics such as Ian Watt and Dorothy Van Ghent; it should not be thought that the writings of these commentators are now, as Clarissa itself was once said to be, of merely 'historical' interest. Neither the 'psychological' nor the 'sociological' approach to Richardson is by any means a thing of the past.

Take the idea that Clarissa is a novel essentially concerned with sex - and perverse sex at that. '[O]f course the major theme of the novel is sexual,' writes A. D. Harvey. 'The whole interest of the narrative turns on the question of female virginity, and one female's virginity in particular.' Elizabeth Hardwick finds Clarissa to be 'concerned with a purely sexual conception of virtue and villainy, a conception heavily under our suspicion', while Janet Butler, in an essay published as recently as 1984, writes confidently of 'the sexuality which is the font of the novel'.²

Still common also is the assumption that Eagleton perceives, rightly, beneath Watt's comparison of Clarissa and Lovelace with the likes of Tristan and Isolde: that

'Richardson's star-crossed lovers' are 'equally cocooned in false consciousness, mutually thwarting and travesty-ing'.³ Leo Braudy, in a well-known essay, finds both characters to be warped by their fear of sexuality: 'To compensate for his weakness, Lovelace makes his sexuality into a weapon, and Clarissa's refusal of sexuality is the shield she fashions from the same impulses.'⁴ In what seems to be almost a paraphrase of Watt, Patricia Reid Eldredge perceives a Clarissa and Lovelace in conflict with their true selves, denying their 'deepest yearnings':

Proud heroine and proud villain are two vulnerable and defensive human beings, trying to protect themselves through pride systems that can only ultimately destroy them. They are incapable of the mutual yielding up of pride that would make love between them possible.⁵

It is not necessary to assume that Clarissa deserves to be raped in order for one to feel that she and Lovelace exist, in a sense, on the same moral plane. One should not underestimate the continuing popularity of the 'she-was-asking-for-it' school, however, the excesses of which have been catalogued most exhaustively by Sue Warrick Doederlein.⁶ Typical here are John A. Dussinger's view that Richardson's supposed exemplar is in fact 'a complex neurotic personality driven by unknown and uncontrollable desires', or Frederick R. Karl's image of a Clarissa who seeks 'to project her hidden desires even while martyring herself to a social vision of chastity'.⁷ Nor is it only male critics who have revelled in the 'spicy news', as Eagleton puts it, 'that the madonna has feet of clay'.⁸ To Janet Butler, the character of Clarissa is 'a study in self-deception'. It is the purpose of Butler's essay 'The Garden: Early Symbol of Clarissa's Complicity' to attempt to prove the point of those readers who have found the heroine's supposed 'abduction' to be rather an 'Eve-like capitulation to temptation'.⁹

Eagleton is right to say that 'The view of Clarissa as neurotic prude has become the merest commonplace of Richardson criticism'. Yet much as one applauds his spurning of this commonplace, one may feel uneasy about his own rather dubious speculations on issues such as anal eroticism in the Harlowe family, or Clarissa's significance for Lovelace as the 'phallic woman'.¹⁰ Another commonplace of Richardson criticism, one realizes, is the tendency to indulge, regardless of one's view of Clarissa and Lovelace, in what can only be seen as gratuitous psychoanalysis. The rule here would appear to be that anything, anything at all in Richardson's fiction which might possibly be explained in Freudian terms should be: and that is that. One can perhaps excuse John Allen Stevenson's allegations of incestuous longings in the Harlowe family, occurring, as they do, in the course of an otherwise illuminating discussion of the early part of the novel. One has little patience with another critic's attempts to see in Clarissa's supposed repression of sexual urges a fear of 'vaginal rot and decay', however, or his view that Lovelace, raping the drugged Clarissa, and Anna, embracing her dead friend, are alike revealing a secret necrophilia.¹¹ This is Frederick R. Karl; but probably the worst offenders in this regard are John A. Dussinger and Gerald Levin.

Dussinger was once the author of a number of useful articles on Richardson's intentions and religious background.¹² In his 1974 study The Discourse of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century Fiction he takes a different approach, reading Clarissa's story as 'a vicarious enactment of the Oedipus conflict' (p. 101). The view that Richardson perversely associates sex with death is, of course, common enough; Dussinger, more daringly, adds that 'For Clarissa, sexual union is death because it is felt as an Oedipal relationship' (p. 109n):

The sexual act destroys her because in her mind Lovelace was to replace the father of wrath with an ego-ideal of benevolent paternity (her grandfather remembered); the rape is experienced, therefore, as the nightmare orgy of incest with the father, the unspeakable crime that severs her forever from society. Clarissa's hysteria, however, is not simply the result of the rape itself but a general fascination with sexual differentiation and penis envy (p. 101).

If this is not enough, Dussinger sees in the relationship of Clarissa and Mrs. Harlowe 'a classical illustration of Freud's theory of the castration complex in women' (p. 87), while Anna Howe, one gathers, is secretly a lesbian (p. 99). Clarissa's rebellion against her family is not simply an assertion of self but 'a clitoral assertion of self' (p. 93; my emphasis), in which the garden in which she conducts her illicit correspondences 'locates her development from oral and anal fixations to genital libido' (p. 105).

Levin's Richardson the Novelist: The Psychological Patterns (1978) continues this tradition.¹³ Certainly it seems typical of such an approach that Levin, after an interesting survey of 'the compelling sense of fatality' that haunts many of Richardson's characters, should plummet at once to the bathetic conclusion that 'it resembles the fate associated with the Oedipus complex, and more generally is associated with the incestuous object-choices men and women undergo in the course of maturation' (pp. 12, 17). Later we learn that 'Lovelace's need to prove the virtue of his "beloved" is, psychoanalytically, a disguised wish to prove the virtue of the mother - in fantasy to free her of the father' (p. 76). Since rape of the mother must be punished with castration, it appears, then (given his 'earlier identification with the woman'), that the sad fate of Mrs. Sinclair's leg in fact represents a displaced enactment of Lovelace's compulsion to be castrated (pp. 78-9). In Richardson's novels, 'a rhetoric of concealment'

masks 'the deeper interests of character and action' (p. 26). In truth, his plots are 'energized' by lurking 'Oedipal and masochistic' fantasies, in which 'erotic feeling is courted and inevitably punished' (pp. 20-1).

One might bother to take all this seriously if Levin offered any proof or evidence for the validity of these conclusions. But the Freudian formulas are simply stated, their truth seen as self-evident - and our assent taken as read. Doubtless Levin will convince those who want to be convinced. The present writer, for his part, finds little of interest in an approach which offers, as if it were a profound insight, the intelligence that sentimentality, psychoanalytically considered, is 'inseparable from the enjoyment of suffering' (p. 85), or propounds the view that the treatment of character in Richardson and D. H. Lawrence is 'identical' (p. 138). Perhaps there are times when the surface should be pondered more closely than the depths.

It may be that Levin's brand of Freudian equation-solving is becoming somewhat passé. The psychoanalytic approach to literature has gained renewed life in recent years, however, through the advent of feminist criticism. Of all feminist accounts of Richardson's work, by far the most controversial is Judith Wilt's 'He Could Go No Farther: A Modest Proposal about Lovelace and Clarissa' (1977).¹⁴

Wilt's 'modest proposal', like Swift's, is actually quite outrageous: according to Wilt, the most famous, or infamous, rape since the rape of Lucretia did not really happen at all. Most readers, of course, have assumed that the rape occurs, if it does, when Lovelace, through one of his typically complicated stratagems, lures Clarissa back to the brothel in London after her escape to Hampstead. Clarissa returns in the afternoon;

she is taken inside the house and drugged; and that night the 'black transaction' takes place. Through a series of long letters from Lovelace to Belford, the tension builds unbearably as we approach this point, until finally, in one of Richardson's most brilliant strokes, we are confronted with this sudden announcement: 'And now, Belford, I can go no farther. The affair is over. Clarissa lives' (Cl., III.196). When we next see Clarissa she is insane, and we must wait for well over a hundred pages for her vague reconstruction of the event.

It is doubtful, then, whether one could find conclusive 'proof' that Lovelace really did rape Clarissa: later, when he expresses the hope that Clarissa may be pregnant, for example (IV.38), this could be dismissed, as Wilt dismisses it, as only so much empty bravado on his part. Yet if Lovelace cannot definitely be convicted, neither is it easy to acquit him: it is certainly likely that he is guilty; Clarissa's later attitude towards him indicates this; in general, it is infinitely more plausible to assume that he is than that he is not. But, just suppose that he did not rape Clarissa - what really did happen on that night?

Richardson, as we know, has often been regarded as more than a little androgynous. This view tends to lose ground, however, if we assume, with Golden and others, that his sympathies lie not with his heroines but with the men who have power over them. Wilt, in an ingenious move, identifies Lovelace with his creator and then suggests that Lovelace himself is androgynous. His masculine side, it transpires, is presented as 'courageous, resourceful [and] intelligent' (p. 22). But, Wilt informs us,

there is another side to him, an aspect that "drives at" unceasing sexual relationship, that suffers ungovernable rage and will not be reasoned out of obsession ... [his]

"masculine" qualities of fairness, chivalry and rational humor are attacked and finally overwhelmed by that female side of him, the disguiser, contriver, weaver of webs, the vengeful, sensual, flesh-eating fury.... (pp. 22, 30).

As other commentators have noted, Mrs. Sinclair, the brothel-keeper, and her whores, whom Lovelace supposedly has firmly under his control, are rather more ardent than is he in desiring the rape of Clarissa. Lovelace's hesitancy can be explained by his desire to gain Clarissa's consent to the sexual act, which (he thinks) would demonstrate his dominance more effectively than force. Rape is his last resort. Analysing the eagerness of the whores to see Clarissa reduced to their level, as they think she will be, Wilt concludes that they are presented by Richardson as more depraved than Lovelace; that it is they who are the true focus of evil in the novel.

Clarissa, in her vague account of the rape scene, thinks she can recall their presence:

I was so senseless, that I dare not aver that the horrid creatures of the house were personally aiding and abetting; but some visionary remembrances I have of female figures, flitting, as I may say, before my sight (Cl., III.372).

This is generally taken to mean that the whores were in the room while Lovelace was raping her, cheering him on, as it were, or that the door was left open. Judith Wilt has other ideas: when really put to the test, the effeminate Lovelace was incapable of proceeding, and Clarissa instead was sexually abused by a gang of depraved lesbians. To Richardson, who presumably recognizes and hates the woman in himself, nothing is more disgusting than femininity. For this reason Clarissa must reject her sexuality and die, for female sexuality is always 'tending to the corrupt, tending to the vile, tending to the unspeakably foul'. Richardson, who

declared his intention to exalt the female sex, in fact regards women as untrustworthy and disgusting, and this unconscious hatred everywhere overwhelms his characterization of Clarissa. Says Wilt: 'You cannot so undermine, so fear, so despair of, so envy, so repugn woman as Richardson in all his guises does in this novel and still present her, as woman, leading to salvation' (p. 30).

Wilt puts her case strongly, to say the least: but is it really as devastating as she appears to think? If one wishes to discuss Richardson's attitudes to femininity, it hardly seems just to base one's claims almost entirely on his presentation of prostitutes. Leaving aside Clarissa herself, Wilt completely ignores such positive female figures as Mrs. Norton, for example, while Anna Howe, who would be essential to any such discussion, is mentioned only in passing. If the novel presents all women as untrustworthy and corrupt, and it was women who perpetrated the rape, one wonders why Clarissa loads the very word 'man' with such pejorative force in the latter part of the novel, and orders that, after her death, her body is not to be touched by any but members of her own sex (Cl., IV.416). There are some female characters who are presented as physically as well as morally disgusting, it is true, but so too, unmistakably, is the 'odious Solmes'. Moreover, if Lovelace's vices derive from his 'feminine' side, as Wilt bizarrely claims, one wonders how she explains the obvious corruption of other male characters in the novel: or are Mr. Harlowe, Belton, James, et al. also secretly androgynous? These are only a few objections to Wilt's account. As in so much Richardson criticism, sweeping claims are made on the basis of 'evidence' that is radically, and absurdly, insufficient.

I have had cause a number of times in the course

of this study to cite the views of Terry Eagleton. It would seem reasonable to say that Eagleton's book The Rape of Clarissa - because it is by Eagleton, of course - has become by now the most widely-known critical study of Richardson: in recent years, the assertion that one is, as they say, 'working on' Richardson has been likely to be met with the question, 'Have you read Eagleton's book?' - followed, sometimes, by a curious 'What is it like?'

What is it like? The reception of the book, if that is any indication, might best be described as mixed. Praised on the one hand as 'lively and provocative', 'truly illuminating', 'salutary' in its 'revisionism', it has also been seen - at times by the same reviewers - as an 'exercise in Procrustean surgery' which 'grossly simplifies Richardson's novel'; 'a vigorous and sometimes brilliant book' unfortunately warped by Eagleton's 'dogmatic intensity'.¹⁵

Such critical ambivalence is inevitable, no doubt, given that the book itself seems often a bewildering mélange of disparate elements. It is Eagleton's contention that, if a contemporary rehabilitation of Richardson's reputation is to take place, it will be because of 'certain new ways of reading developed in our own time' which, one gathers, must necessarily send us back to the books with a quickened interest: 'post-structuralist theories of textuality', feminism, psychoanalysis, and Marxist 'historical materialism' (p. viii). Eagleton attempts to use all of these methods.

It might be asked whether he really needed this gleaming theoretical tool-kit in order to write the best parts of his book - his defence of Clarissa as a 'saint and martyr', for example (p. 74). As others have remarked, Eagleton has many valuable things to say. It is unfortunate that finding them should involve wading through emptily trendy explorations of Clarissa's

'ideology of representation', or the presumed desire on Richardson's part 'to abolish the materiality of the sign' (pp. 40-1). One can only applaud Eagleton's exposé of the role of an 'avenging male iconoclasm' in Richardson criticism (p. 71). His later assertion that 'a modern Clarissa would not need to die', thanks to 'the advent of the women's movement' (p. 94), strikes one only as an appeal to the most banal undergraduate notions of 'relevance'. Regardless of one's opinions of Eagleton's various approaches, moreover, it must be said that it seems odd to find them all used in the same book. As one reviewer has remarked, 'The experience of reading a book like The Rape of Clarissa is one of constantly switching hobby horses mid-stream.'¹⁶

What has not been remarked is that Eagleton is not as avant-garde as he would like us to believe. His parade of 'post-structuralist theories of textuality' and the like seems in the end little more than an outward show, designed perhaps to entice the fashion-conscious student. If, by the end of his book, we have not quite fallen back into some fifty-year-old world of cloth caps and socialist realism, still it is clear that it is 'historical materialism' which engages his real interests: and there is nothing new about that. To Eagleton, as to other critics before him, Clarissa is ultimately to be valued for what it can tell us about class society. While some may seek 'to fend off the sheer radicalism of this astonishing text' (p. 72), Eagleton finds in the novel a devastating critique of its author's times, a powerful dramatization of 'a key phase of English class history' (p. 89).

It is in his affirmations of solidarity with the 'women's movement', however, that Eagleton seems most in tune with the interests of many contemporary readers of Richardson. In recent years it has been feminist critics who have paid most attention to the subject

of Richardson and his times, substituting 'women' and 'patriarchy' for 'aristocracy' and 'bourgeoisie' as the key terms for their understanding of Clarissa.

Among the most notable of these critics is Rachel Brownstein. Brownstein's account of the novel, in her book Becoming a Heroine (1982), resembles at many points Dorothy Van Ghent's 'myth' analysis, which Brownstein describes in a note as 'excellent' (p. 304). According to Brownstein, 'Clarissa is about the complex relationships of art to the actual and the true, about the reflexive connections between the self and its idea of itself' (p. 42). Her book as a whole explores the ways in which fictional heroines view themselves, which, she warns, may seduce the female reader into a dangerous acquiescence.

Clarissa, as an 'exemplar to her sex', represents the feminine ideal of Richardson's time, 'the ideal of a materialistic society based on the preservation of private property through monogamy' (p. 43). Both Clarissa and Lovelace, Brownstein explains, are warped by their conceptions of Woman; both 'seek to make art out of the materials of life by identifying real women with an ideal: the difference between them is that Clarissa is herself a woman' (p. 68). In attempting to impose their ideals on life, Clarissa and Lovelace struggle for power; but Lovelace, naturally, is the stronger.

As Clarissa languishes, waiting for death, her elaborate preparations reflect a desire for freedom: 'She no more wants to die than she wants to be raped; but she wills her death, in order to assert the capacity to direct and dispose the self that the rape brutally mocked' (p. 74). Yet even in death Clarissa is 'bound as ever to see herself as others see her' (p. 76). As Brownstein will have it, Clarissa in dying is ultimately doing only what she is supposed to do, becoming the

'exemplar to her sex' everyone expects her to be. What Brownstein fails to perceive is that Clarissa is an exemplar in spite of her family and her society, not because of them. Lending credence, it seems, to Van Ghent's suggestion that the novel is not a tragedy but a comedy, Brownstein concludes that 'The story of [Clarissa's] becoming a heroine ends happily; Clarissa herself dies. The limits of her transcendence are worth pondering.' Perhaps they are, but so is Brownstein's claim that 'the God [Clarissa] dies for is made in Mr. Harlowe's image' (p. 77).

Another notable feminist reading of the novel is Janet Todd's. In her book Women's Friendship in Literature (1980), Todd discovers three groups of characters in Clarissa: 'Men Within Patriarchy', 'Women Within Patriarchy', and 'Women Outside Patriarchy', a powerless group whose sole member is Anna Howe. These three groups surround Clarissa, who is

at once the humble maiden and dutiful daughter of the patriarchal family and the exemplary and virtuous woman of the female world.... By her womanly excellence she has set up a hierarchy of values at odds with the male familial one, so incurring the vengeful violence that is the patriarchy in action.¹⁷

As Todd presents it, 'Clarissa's conflict [is] between two variously accepted goods, patriarchal obedience and female autonomy.' Her movement away from her 'subordinate condition' is too partial to succeed, for 'The two schemes are opposed and no-one can straddle them. Clarissa's ambivalence toward patriarchy results in its reaffirmation' (p. 68). As we might expect, Todd regards the death of Clarissa as a defeat, which is echoed, symbolically, in Anna's marriage to Hickman.

It is difficult to say whether Todd believes the novel to offer an essentially sympathetic view of women's lives and struggles. Some, of course, have no doubt

on this score. While Katharine Rogers hails Richardson as a 'radical feminist', Terry Eagleton refers to Clarissa as 'arguably the major feminist text of the language'. Mark Kinkead-Weekes goes so far as to call Richardson 'the greatest feminist of the eighteenth century'.¹⁸

It is not only Judith Wilt who would contest such a view. While Wilt, in her controversial account of Clarissa, is interested essentially in the personal psychology of its author, Nancy K. Miller sees in the novels of Richardson and his contemporaries a clear reflection of the sexism of the age. In the eighteenth-century novel, Miller suggests,

the heroine's ultimate fate correlates directly with her performance in the sexual arena.... the exercise of female sexuality is rarely perceived as anything but degradation: having given herself to Saint-Preux, Julie sees herself as worthless; by resisting Mr. B., Pamela proves her worth.... In Clarissa the sense of degradation is so powerful that only death can restore value and meaning.¹⁹

It was Ian Watt, not a feminist critic, who noted that 'Clarissa is, among other things, the supreme embodiment of the new feminine stereotype, a very paragon of delicacy'. A. D. Harvey, claiming that 'Victorian' notions of femininity and sexual morality were already becoming prevalent in Richardson's time, has suggested that it was 'part of Richardson's cultural importance that he helped establish these features in the public consciousness'.²⁰

To Watt and Harvey, these are incidental remarks. In the wake of recent interest in eighteenth-century ideas of sexuality and sexual roles, however, such observations have come to seem of vital importance. This can be seen in Sue Warrick Doederlein's article 'Clarissa in the Hands of the Critics' (1983). Building, she informs us, on the work of writers such as Foucault, Kristeva, and Lawrence Stone, Doederlein urges a re-

examination of Richardson in the light of 'the centrality of the eighteenth century in creating modern notions of sexuality' (p. 404). Insisting, with Kristeva, that the idealization of women in literature is a 'devalorizing valorization' (p. 403), Doederlein - far from applauding his 'sensitive feminism' - is outraged by Richardson's presentation of exemplary womanhood and female 'virtue'.

The image of a 'feminine' Richardson with 'an acute perception of female psychology' must now be contemptuously dismissed: 'the femininity that Richardson espouses is in fact a negative, destructive concept in his hands' (pp. 401, 405). Where Eagleton sees the unfortunate treatment of Clarissa at the hands of some critics as evidence only of the sexist assumptions of those critics, Doederlein has the hapless critics actually pushed into such a position by the book itself:

The supposedly "feminine" Richardson has in his creation of a feminine exemplar crafted into "her text" elements that will contribute to the development of a discourse which devalues women and mythologizes rape. The beautiful victim who "asks for it," who secretly enjoys the event, who is in fact responsible for it (along with all other women, equally culpable) - critics harvest from the text the poisoned vegetation that Richardson planted when the "history of sexuality" began (p. 412).

By the end of Doederlein's essay one almost comes to feel that Richardson (surely the most unfortunate of authors!) is now to be convicted of having single-handedly brought sexism into the world and all the feminists' woes. Even if one were convinced that the position of women took a substantial turn for the worse in the eighteenth century - Doederlein writes as if the human race had only then suffered some catastrophic fall from a paradise of sexual non-differentiation - such a view hardly strikes one as plausible. Katharine Rogers has argued that Richardson's heroines, while indeed 'virtuous in the approved mode - delicate, modest,

and dutiful', can nevertheless be seen in positive terms, even by contemporary feminists:

His heroines shine in the conventional womanly virtues, but they have intelligence, strength, and integrity as well. Chastity, a virtue enforced by patriarchy and usually implying men's property right in women, becomes an assertion of feminine integrity for his Clarissa when she refuses to capitulate to her own sexual attraction to Lovelace or to the world's pressure to marry him. Moreover, Richardson did not merely present her suffering as a beautiful object for contemplation, but used it to provoke indignation at the oppression of women. He replaced self-indulgent compassion with genuine empathy, putting himself in a woman's place and seeing through her eyes. Because of this total involvement, he applied sense as well as sensibility to his presentation of women. Clarissa and the others are distinguished by and suffer from exceptional sensitivity, but they also suffer objectively from oppressive social attitudes and institutions. Morality in the novels is determined by rational law and responsibility as well as emotion, and thus provides a basis for arguing women's rights. Though Richardson had all three of his heroines censure Swift for coarse views of women, he shared Swift's respect for women's minds and his disenchantment with conventional sexual roles.

The fact that eighteenth-century women found Richardson to be by no means a pernicious influence would doubtless be dismissed as irrelevant by Doederlein, but as Rogers points out, 'Richardson's work was enormously helpful to women - affirming the worth of their feelings and their interests, developing a form that women writers could follow'.²¹ This vision of Richardson's relationship to feminism surely has more to offer us than Doederlein's intolerant witch-hunting.

It should also be said that Doederlein's profoundly unliterary approach to literature leaves much to be desired. Of course not every aspect of Richardson's treatment of women will be acceptable to contemporary feminists: that is reasonable enough. But such critics should take note of Ruth Yeazell's warning against 'sacrificing literature to polemic'. In an excellent essay, 'Fictional Heroines and Feminist Critics' (1974),

Yeazell counselled her fellow critics on the need to distinguish life from art and to 'read metaphorically': 'If in our real lives many of us would choose not to follow Isabel Archer back to Osmond, we can still recognize in her decision a metaphor for the acceptance of responsibility and the attainment of inner freedom.'²² By the same token, she could also have said, we can see the life and death of Richardson's 'exemplar to her sex' in terms other than those suggested by the plans and priorities of today's women's movement. To judge every work of art according to the degree to which it measures up ideologically to our own current demands is ultimately as tiresome as it is reductive - if, that is, we value literature for reasons other than the political use we can make of it.

It seems pertinent here to recall a remark C. S. Lewis once made, that the modern popularity of 'English' as an academic subject had enticed to the study of literature a great many talented people whose interests were not primarily literary at all. 'Forced to talk incessantly about books, what can they do but try to make books into the sort of things they can talk about?' Lewis asked. 'Hence literature becomes for them a religion, a philosophy, a school of ethics, a psychotherapy, a sociology - anything rather than a collection of works of art.'²³

It might also be observed that a profound distrust of imaginative literature has dogged English as a subject from the beginning. In the late nineteenth century, during the campaign to establish the English School at Oxford, such a field was widely thought unsuitable to be taught at university; to study the literature of one's own language, it was felt, was a fey, dilettantish pursuit devoid of academic rigour. A good stiff dose of Anglo-Saxon philology was prescribed to toughen up

the discredibly flabby and effeminate subject.²⁴

It need hardly be said that the attitude to literature evinced by those powers that were of a hundred years ago remains very much in evidence today; in evidence, strange as it may seem, among many of the inhabitants of English Departments themselves. Now it is 'semiotics', 'communication studies', 'hermeneutics', 'gender studies', 'reception theory', 'materialist criticism' or some similar variety of castor oil for which English, it seems, must open wide and swallow down. Essentially, what is demanded by these clamorous proponents of a 'progressive pedagogy' is what is fashionably known as 'relevance'.

It may strike one as odd that literature, qua literature, is apparently thought so lacking in 'relevance' by many of those who have, one might have thought, dedicated their lives to the study of it. As Leonie Kramer reminds us in a recent article, the true, the enduring 'relevance' of great works of the imagination such as Hamlet and Crime and Punishment lies in their dealing with what can only be called 'universal human experience'. 'But relevance, at the moment,' Kramer goes on, 'means something quite different, it means what is up-to-date, topical, controversial, expedient, entertaining and utilitarian. Trivial relevance of this kind has now become the central principle governing educational policy.'²⁵ Never mind that often it is precisely the lack of this obvious or immediate relevance in our objects of study that is what is most valuable about them; that it is this which expands our awareness of life beyond the confines of our own inevitably limited horizons.

In an essay on current criticism in the New Pelican Guide to English Literature, Martin Dodsworth argues that the much-vaunted 'crisis in English studies' brought about by the acolytes of Derrida, Barthes et al. is

not, in itself, of much ultimate consequence. It is, however, symptomatic of a broader and more serious crisis which has overtaken not merely 'English studies', but English literature:

English literature is ceasing to be read; it is increasingly only studied. It follows that the ordinary-language criticism of the English tradition, which is represented by writers like C. S. Lewis or A. J. [A.] Waldock or William Empson as well as by F. R. Leavis or T. S. Eliot, is being left behind: for that was, and still is, in so far as it survives, written from within the experience of English literature as a living thing, a form of pleasure whose roots lay both in a sense of historical and social reality and in an ethical being which shaped the future in accord with its sense of the past. The continuance of an English tradition of literary criticism depends on the continuance of an English literary tradition.

The significance of the false 'crisis' in English studies lies here. The uneasy sense that many teachers of English have that they should really be learning about language-systems and the 'inscription' in them of 'ideologies' rather than talking about plays, poems and novels is a sign that they are less than sure that imaginative literature exists for their students as anything more than a complex of data to be analysed. The philosophical and scientific pretensions of the new style of talk flatters that view and helps make the change in the subject of study an irreversible one: poetry dies as 'poetics' takes over.²⁶

It is difficult not to share Dodsworth's pessimism about the future of the tradition he describes. What is to be done? It may be that there is little that can be done: the problem is a cultural one in the broadest sense of the term. As T. S. Eliot long ago pointed out, questions of education cannot be discussed in a void. To talk about the sort of education we want is to talk about the sort of society we want: and that is a large topic.²⁷ In so far as one is a literary person, perhaps one has enough to do merely in continuing to read and write in the manner one believes to be best. Against the claims of a 'progressive pedagogy' and a crassly mechanistic notion of 'research in the humanities', which sees value even in literature only to the extent

that it offers an endless vista of new 'readings' to be found out, or made up, this study has been undertaken in a belief in the continuing importance, and certainly the superiority, of the older tradition.

A tradition, it is true, is not a fixed and static thing; but one significance of the idea of tradition, of continuity, is that there is no necessary or inherent merit in the new. There is nothing to be said for critical originality as such. Great literature is in the first instance a body of invaluable knowledge and experience to be handed on to each new generation, to be discovered and rediscovered again and again: this would have been considered axiomatic in all ages but our own. It follows that the value of literature is not to be found in the occasion it gives for the raising of 'relevant' issues, the free associations of the critical solipsists, the arcane experiments of the pseudo-scientists on their latterday Laputa. The way to understand literature is not to make up theories about it but to read it, and read a lot of it, not at first in any coolly analytic manner but with an intelligence and sensibility alive to the human origins and implications of what is to be found there. To read a book is often to encounter another time and place. It is always to encounter another mind. If the literature of the past is to speak to us, as it can, it will do so only if we cultivate that spirit of historical sympathy, of imaginative acceptance, that readiness to be taken out of ourselves which makes all good reading worthwhile. It is in this spirit, this study has argued, that we should learn to read Clarissa.

NOTES

1 SAMUEL RICHARDSON: DIDACTIC NOVELIST

1. The comparison first became prevalent in the nineteen-twenties. See Percy Lubbock, The Craft of Fiction (London: Jonathan Cape, 1921), p. 152; E. M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel [1927], ed. Oliver Stallybrass (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p. 32; Ford Madox Ford, The English Novel (1930; repr. Manchester: Carcanet, 1983), p. 75.
2. See, for example, Walter Allen, The English Novel (1954; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958), p. 53; R. F. Brissenden, Samuel Richardson, Writers and their Work: No. 101 (London: Longmans, Green, 1958), p. 34; Morris Golden, Richardson's Characters (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963), p. viii.
3. Carter, 'The Greatest English Novelist', University of Toronto Quarterly, 17 (1948), p. 390. The phrase, 'To mend the heart and improve the understanding', is derived from Richardson's Preface to his Familiar Letters on Important Occasions (1741; repr. London: Routledge, 1928), p. xxvii.
4. Watt, The Rise of the Novel (1957; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), p. 248.
5. Whether Richardson really thought that Pamela might 'introduce a new species of writing' is, however, open to doubt. The passage I have quoted comes from a letter to Aaron Hill of early 1741, a month or so after the publication of the novel; five years later Richardson writes, again to Hill: 'They [sic] were those Friends, that complimented my Scribbling as being a New Species of Writing. I never had the Assurance to think it any-thing extraordinary - Only knew my Intention; and thought the Stories might do some Good, if not ill-received. - For twenty Years I had proposed to different Persons (who thought the Subject too humble for them) that of Pamela; and it was owing to an Accident (The writing the little Piece of Familiar Letters) that I entered upon it myself. And its strange Success at Publication is still my Surprize ...' (SL, p. 78).
6. The original full title of this work was: Letters Written To and For Particular Friends, On the most Important Occasions.

Directing not only the Requisite Style and Forms To be Observed in Writing Familiar Letters; But How to Think and Act Justly and Prudently, in the Common Concerns of Human Life. Containing One Hundred and Seventy-three Letters.

7. This is certainly true as regards Clarissa and Sir Charles Grandison; Pamela, admittedly, is an equivocal case here. Against the numerous adverse criticisms of that novel, Augustine Birrell sensibly argued that 'The book's origin ought not to be overlooked'; that Pamela in fact 'was intended for Pamelas'. Richardson's revisions of the novel in later editions reveal his own dissatisfaction with the insufficiently 'elevated' tone and style of the original version. See Birrell, 'Samuel Richardson: A Lecture', Men, Women, and Books and Res Judicatae (1892-4; repr. London: Duckworth, 1912), p. 138; Eaves and Kimpel, 'Richardson's Revisions of Pamela', Studies in Bibliography, 20 (1967), 61-88; Philip Gaskell, 'Richardson, Pamela, 1741', From Writer to Reader (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. 63-79.
8. Eagleton, The Rape of Clarissa (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), p. 24.
9. Cf. Watt, The Rise of the Novel, p. 228.
10. Cf. Elizabeth Bergen Brophy, Samuel Richardson: The Triumph of Craft (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1974); esp. Ch. 3, 'Engaging the Reader'.
11. Lawrence, Selected Literary Criticism, ed. Anthony Beal (London: Heinemann, 1956), p. 297. Lawrence continues, 'The proper function of a critic is to save the tale from the artist who created it.'
12. Wimsatt and Beardsley, 'The Intentional Fallacy', 20th Century Literary Criticism: A Reader, ed. David Lodge (London: Longman, 1972), p. 335.
13. Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', Image-Music-Text, ed., trans. Stephen Heath (Glasgow: Fontana, 1977), p. 146.
14. Ibid., p. 143.
15. David Daiches gives an amusing summary of the critical clichés about Richardson in his 1954 lecture on the novelist. See Daiches, Literary Essays (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1956), p. 26.
16. Cf., for example, Brissenden, Samuel Richardson, pp. 21-2; Brophy, Samuel Richardson: The Triumph of Craft, Part I passim.
17. Leavis, The Great Tradition (1948; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), p. 16.
18. Richardson, Clarissa, ed. Angus Ross (Harmondsworth: Penguin,

- 1985), p. 36. The Penguin Clarissa is a reprint of the first edition. The original text of the first edition Preface is reprinted in facsimile in Clarissa: Preface, Hints of Prefaces, and Postscript, ed. R. F. Brissenden, Augustan Reprint Society, Publication No. 103 (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1964).
19. Hill advised 'softening Lovelace's conduct by making him less arrogant and insulting in and after his duel with James Harlowe and [suggested] that the duel be forced on him by James's objections to his continued correspondence with Clarissa' (EK/C, p. 420).
 20. Young was sixty-three at the time; only six years older than Richardson. As it happened, he lived to the age of eighty-one, dying in 1765 - four years after Richardson's death.
 21. A later letter reveals that these 'greater Vulgar' included not only Cibber and Mrs. Pilkington, whose desires in this direction have already been noted, but Henry Fielding, George Lyttleton - the Lord Commissioner of the Treasury to whom Fielding dedicated Tom Jones - as well as James Thomson, the poet of The Seasons (SL, p. 99). As it transpired, Thomson was one of the few readers to be spared the tragic ending of Clarissa; he died before publication was complete.
 22. Addison and Steele, Selections from 'The Tatler' and 'The Spectator', ed. Robert J. Allen (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1957), p. 87. Richardson was writing to Lady Bradshaigh in October 1748; he also makes use of Addison in the Postscript to the final volume of Clarissa, published two months later: cf. Penguin edition, pp. 1495-7 for the original text; or R. F. Brissenden's Augustan Reprint Society pamphlet (cited in note 18 above).
 23. Echlin, An Alternative Ending to Richardson's 'Clarissa', ed. Dimiter Daphinoff, Swiss Studies in English, 107 (Berne: Francke Verlag, 1982), p. 179. If we are unlikely to prefer this 'alternative ending' to the original, at least two of Lady Echlin's objections to Richardson's conduct of the story may nevertheless be allowed some weight. The circumstances of Clarissa's recapture at Hampstead were incredible, she argued, especially that the delicate heroine should be fooled by 'two flirting strumpets' imitating ladies of quality; while as for the death of Lovelace at the hands of 'Mordent', Lady Echlin maintained that 'no good instruction, either moral, or Religious, can be drawn from any thing so contredictory [*sic*] to christianity' (*ibid.*, p. 171). Lady Echlin, we can see, had no quarrel with Richardson's didactic intentions. So far as she was concerned, her version of the story was actually more likely to inspire virtue and religion than his.

On Richardson's relations with Lady Echlin, see Daphinoff's Introduction to the Alternative Ending, and EK, pp. 447-50.

24. For an account of Warburton's Preface, and Richardson's (somewhat unfortunate) relations with Warburton, see EK, pp. 193-6.
25. This was apparently because more copies had been printed of the final volumes of the first edition: see EK, p. 310. However, cf. McK, p. 154: 'Since the second edition, June, 1749, used at least in part the original sheets of Volumes V-VII, it appears that the sales of these volumes may have fallen off.'
26. Cf. Penguin edition, p. 35; Everyman, I.xiii.
27. Reprinted in R. F. Brissenden's Augustan Reprint Society pamphlet; see note 18 above.
28. See Stevick's Introduction to his abridged edition of Clarissa - in which he worked from the first edition - in the Rinehart Editions series (San Francisco: Rinehart Press, 1971), p. xxiv.
29. The lines are from George Herbert's 'The Church-porch'. Richardson also quotes them to Lady Bradshaigh; cf. SL, p. 91.
30. Hunt, The Town (1848; repr. London: Unit Library, 1903), p. 74. This portrait is reproduced as the frontispiece to EK, unfortunately only in black and white.

2 RICHARDSON'S REPUTATION

1. See E. L. McAdam, Jr., 'A New Letter from Fielding', Yale Review, 38 (1948), 300-10.
2. See, for example, the pamphlet perhaps written by Francis Coventry, An Essay on the New Species of Writing Founded by Mr. Fielding (1751); this appears in the Augustan Reprint Society series, No. 95, edited with an Introduction by A. D. McKillop (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1962). The most detailed discussion of Fielding's reputation is Frederic T. Blanchard, Fielding the Novelist (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1927: see esp. Ch. 2, 'Tom Jones: The Riddle of Its Vogue').
3. Cit. Brian W. Downs, Richardson (London: Routledge, 1928), p. 52; cf. p. 40.
4. See, for example, Leslie Stephen: 'In England, Richardson's tediousness was felt from the first. "You would hang yourself from impatience," as Johnson said to Boswell (6 April 1772), if you read him for the story. The impatience, in spite of warm eulogies by orthodox critics, has probably grown stronger' (DNB).
5. Cit. Blanchard, Fielding the Novelist, p. 189. Another member

- of the Johnsonian circle, Frances Reynolds (1729-1807), wrote that Johnson 'was a great admirer of Richardson's works in general, but of Clarissa he always spoke with the highest enthusiastic praise. He used to say, that it was the first Book in the world for the knowledge it displays of the human Heart.' See Johnsonian Miscellanies, ed. George Birkbeck Hill, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1897), II.251.
6. A facsimile of this pamphlet appears in the 'English Literary Criticism of the Eighteenth Century' series (New York: Garland, 1970); on its attribution to Sarah Fielding, see Eaves and Kimpel, 'Richardsoniana', Studies in Bibliography, 14 (1961), p. 232. Two other early critiques of Clarissa appeared in the Gentleman's Magazine; by 'Charles Easy' (Dec. 1748) and Albrecht von Haller (two parts, June, Aug. 1749). The latter was originally published in French in an Amsterdam periodical; in the Gentleman's Magazine, the second part was followed by a reply to its adverse criticisms, possibly written by Richardson himself. See EK, pp. 290-1, for descriptions of these items.
 7. Downs, Richardson, pp. 81-3.
 8. See Richardson to Stinstra, Dec. 6 1752, in The Richardson-Stinstra Correspondence and Stinstra's Prefaces to Clarissa, ed. William C. Slattery (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), p. 6.
 9. The Prefaces are translated by Slattery in The Richardson-Stinstra Correspondence, pp. 105-205. See Slattery's Introduction (esp. pp. xv-xvii) for an account of Stinstra's life and work.
 10. See, for example, Wm. Lyon Phelps, 'Richardson's Influence', The Complete Novels of Samuel Richardson, 19 vols. (London: Heinemann, 1902), V.ix-xvi; Downs, Richardson, pp. 193-234; F. S. Boas, 'Richardson's Novels and their Influence', Essays and Studies, 2 (1911), 37-70; McK, pp. 226-83; R. P. Utter and G. B. Needham, Pamela's Daughters (1936; repr. New York: Russell and Russell, 1972).
 11. Allen, The English Novel, p. 52.
 12. Nichols, Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century, ed. Colin Clair (Fontwell, Sussex: Centaur Press, 1967), p. 301.
 13. Cited here from Diderot's Thoughts on Art and Style, ed., trans. Beatrix L. Tollemache (London: Remington, 1893), pp. 266-91.
 14. See Leslie Stephen, 'Richardson's Novels', Hours in a Library, 3 vols. (1877; repr. London: Smith, Elder, 1899), I.49.
 15. See J. E. Austen-Leigh, 'A Memoir of Jane Austen' [1870], repr. in Persuasion, ed. D. W. Harding (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p. 331 [Ch. 5]; George Eliot, Letters, ed. Gordon S. Haight, 9 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954-78), I.240,

- II.65, VI.320; Hallam Lord Tennyson, Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1897), II.372; Ruskin, Works, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols. (London: George Allen, 1903-12), XV.227, XXV.355, XXXIV.588, XXXV.308, XXXVI.193; Stevenson, Letters, ed. Sidney Colvin, 4 vols. (London: Methuen, 1911), I.221; Ford, The English Novel, pp. 71-5. Musset's estimate of Clarissa is too well-known to need documentation; Wilson's I take from a 1979 interview with Christopher Bigsby in The Radical Imagination and the Liberal Tradition, ed. Heide Ziegler and Christopher Bigsby (London: Junction Books, 1982), p. 254.
16. Q. D. Leavis, Fiction and the Reading Public (1932; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 88; F. R. Leavis, The Great Tradition, p. 13. While Richardson may be unsuitable as 'current classic' material - he is, we are to understand, 'extremely limited in range and variety' - F. R. Leavis insists, nevertheless, on the superiority of Richardson to Fielding: 'there is more to be said for Johnson's preference, and his emphatic way of expressing it at Fielding's expense, than is generally recognized'; 'Clarissa is a really impressive work'; 'I don't know that I wouldn't sooner read through again Clarissa than À la recherche du temps perdu' (pp. 12-13). It should perhaps be noted that Mrs. Leavis may also have been responsible for these remarks: after Leavis's death, she claimed to have written the first chapter of The Great Tradition, as well as all the notes (as one commentator has remarked, the best parts of the book): see Nora Crook, 'Taking tea with Mrs Leavis', The Leavises: Recollections and Impressions, ed. Denys Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 129. Be this as it may, Mrs. Leavis certainly seems to have revised her early view of Clarissa: cf. her lecture, 'The Englishness of the English Novel' [1980], Collected Essays, ed. G. Singh, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983-[?]), I.312: 'Clarissa, as a highly integrated and thoughtfully-constructed work of art, on a large scale in order to convey the author's insights into the family relations of his age and the position of the individual in its social system and the sexual conflicts between man and woman, was an important advance towards the great Victorian novel.... In spite of the disadvantages of the epistolary form, Richardson ... provided his successors with the model of a major novel.'
17. Penguin Clarissa, p. 18.
18. Adams, 'Speaking of Books', New York Times Book Review, Dec. 12 1948, Dec. 26 1948, Jan. 9 1949.
19. Cf. Ford Madox Ford, The English Novel, pp. 73-4: 'Only to-day [Ford was writing in 1927] an American left the ship on which I am writing in the port of Lisbon and, I happening to mention because he was in my mind the name of Richardson, this American - professor at that and practitioner of a sister art - this American gentleman assured me solemnly that he read Clarissa

Harlowe at least twice every year and cried often during each reading.' Ford goes on to say: 'Now there must be some reason for this phenomenon, which appears very singular. It is not, however, rare, for the hottest literary discussions I have ever had in England - where, of course, the discussion of literature is not in good form - have been with laymen like professors or lawyers as to the relative merits of Pamela and Clarissa.' Claiming even to have 'met persons who were engrossed by the conversations in the Cedar Parlour of Sir Charles Grandison', Ford insists that 'Samuel Richardson is still read and read with enthusiasm'. It is pleasant to think that this was the case amongst Ford's friends and acquaintances; as my own research indicates, however, such enthusiasm for Richardson hardly seems to have been widespread in the nineteen-twenties, or for many decades before or since. It should perhaps be noted that Ford had something of a reputation for exaggerating things.

20. Thackeray, 'Nil Nisi Bonum', Roundabout Papers, The Oxford Thackeray, ed. George Saintsbury, 17 vols. (London: Henry Frowde, Oxford University Press, n.d. [1908]), XVII.364.
21. Trotter, 'Richardson and the "new lights": "Clarissa" among Victorians', English, 33 (1984), p. 117.
22. Review of The Life of Henry Fielding, by Frederick Lawrence; Quarterly Review, 98 (1855), p. 118. Articles in this journal appeared anonymously, but the author of this one was in fact the Rev. Whitwell Elwin (1816-1900), the distinguished editor of the journal: see Blanchard, Fielding the Novelist, p. 431.
23. 'It is a solace to hear of any one's reading and enjoying Richardson. We have fallen on an evil generation who would not read "Clarissa" even in an abridged form. The French have been its most enthusiastic admirers, but I don't know whether their present admiration is more than traditional, like their set phrases about their own classics.' To Mrs. Charles Bray, 21 Dec. 1876: Eliot, Letters, VI.320; cf. Rachel M. Brownstein, 'An Exemplar to Her Sex', Becoming a Heroine (New York: Viking, 1982), p. 41.
24. Traill, 'Samuel Richardson', Contemporary Review, 44 (1883), pp. 529-30.
25. Cf. Brian Vickers's Introduction to his edition of The Man of Feeling (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. vii.
26. Forsyth, The Novels and Novelists of the Eighteenth Century (London: John Murray, 1871), p. iv. Just how much Forsyth thought things had improved since the eighteenth century may be gathered from his first chapter in particular, most of which is given over to blistering attacks on the moral degeneracy of that era. As for its novels, all but a few of them are 'deplorably dull', with 'contemptible' plots and 'detestable' styles (p. 3); worse still, to read them 'We have to face an

amount of coarseness which is in the highest degree repulsive. It is like raking a dirt heap to discover grains of gold' (p. 5).

27. Blair, Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres (repr. New York: Garland, 1970), p. 82; cf. the comments on Blair in Blanchard, Fielding the Novelist, pp. 234-5.
28. See his diary entry for Jan. 4 1821: Byron, Works: Letters and Journals, ed. Rowland E. Prothero, 6 vols. (London: John Murray, 1898-1901), v.147-9.
29. See, for example, Blanchard, Fielding the Novelist, p. 243 and passim; cf. McK, pp. 226-50.
30. See, for example, Allen, The English Novel, p. 81.
31. Leavis, Fiction and the Reading Public, pp. 111-13, 115. Lawrence Stone writes: 'There was an explosion of novels published in the late eighteenth century, stimulated by a reduction in book costs made possible by cheaper paper and larger sales. The latter were made possible because of the new demand provided by the growing army of educated and leisured women, whose needs were met by the invention and spread of the circulating subscription library. The first such library was set up in Bath in 1725, the next was in London in 1739, and by the 1780s they were to be found in all the major market towns of England. These libraries were by then buying some four hundred copies of an average printing of about one thousand. As one heroine of a novel said in 1786: "I subscribed to a circulating library and read, or rather devoured ... from ten to fourteen novels a week." ... [T]he development of the novel of sensibility, and the enormous growth of novel-reading thanks to the generalized institution of circulating libraries, were especially English phenomena.' Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800, abridged edition (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), pp. 156, 179.
32. D'Israeli, Curiosities of Literature (1791-1823; repr. London: Routledge, n.d. [mid-C19]), p. 199.
33. Dunlop, History of Fiction, ed. Henry Wilson, 2 vols. (London: George Bell, 1888), II.569.
34. Cit. Blanchard, Fielding the Novelist, pp. 433, 383, 271, 427.
35. [Elwin], Review of The Life of Henry Fielding, p. 118.
36. John Drinkwater (ed.), The Outline of Literature (London: George Newnes, n.d. [1923?]), p. 412.
37. Hawkins, The Life of Samuel Johnson LL.D. [1787], abridged edition, ed. Bertram H. Davis (London: Jonathan Cape, 1962), p. 96. Cf. Encyclopaedia Britannica, 4th ed. (1810), XVIII.19: '[Richardson's novels] show an uncommon knowledge of human

nature. His purpose being to promote virtue, his pictures of moral excellence are by much too highly coloured; and he has described his favourite characters such rather as we might wish them to be, than as they are to be found in reality. It is also objected by some, that his writings have not always the good effect intended: for that, instead of improving natural characters, they have fashioned many artificial ones; and have taught delicate and refined ladies and gentlemen to despise every one but their own self-exalted persons. But after all that can be urged of the ill effects of Mr Richardson's novels on weak minds, eager to adopt characters they can only burlesque; a sensible reader will improve more by studying such models of perfection, than of those nearer to the natural standard of human frailty, and where those frailties are artfully exaggerated so as to fix and misemploy the attention on them. ... [Richardson] is said from his childhood to have delighted in letter-writing; and therefore was the more easily led to throw his romances into that form; which, if it enlivens the history in some respects, yet lengthens it with uninteresting prate, and formalities that mean nothing, and on that account is sometimes found a little tedious and fatiguing.'

38. See the article by Arthur Aikin Brodrigg in the DNB.
39. Trotter, 'Richardson and the "new lights"', p. 117.
40. Ibid., p. 119.
41. Lamb, Works, ed. E. V. Lucas, 7 vols. (London: Methuen, 1903-5), VI.253.
42. Trotter, 'Richardson and the "new lights"', pp. 119, 121.
43. Blake, Complete Writings, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 934.
44. Wordsworth, 'Preface to Lyrical Ballads', English Critical Texts, ed. D. J. Enright and Ernst de Chickera (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 179.
45. Lamb, Works, I.42-3.
46. Cit. Blanchard, Fielding the Novelist, p. 344.
47. Fruman, Coleridge, the Damaged Archangel (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1971), p. 430.
48. Cit. Blanchard, Fielding the Novelist, p. 315.
49. Coleridge, Anima Poetae, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge (London: Heinemann, 1895), p. 166.
50. Coleridge, Lectures and Notes on Shakspeare and Other English Poets, ed. T. Ashe (London: George Bell, 1885), pp. 465-6.

According to Crabb Robinson (cit. Blanchard, Fielding the Novelist, p. 316), Coleridge also made mention of Richardson in an earlier Shakespeare lecture of 1808. Quoting Mrs. Barbauld - who had once asked him to explain in what respects Richardson was inferior to Shakespeare - Coleridge asserted that Richardson 'evinces an exquisite perception of minute feeling, but there is a want of harmony, a vulgarity in his sentiment; he is only interesting. Shakspeare on the contrary elevates and instructs.' Coleridge, moreover, took this occasion to express his opinion of the 'immorality' of Richardson's novels: 'The lower passions of our nature are kept through seven or eight volumes in a hot-bed of interest. Fielding's [immorality] is far less pernicious; "for the gusts of laughter drive away sensuality."'

51. Coleridge, Biographia Literaria (London: Dent, 1906), p. 305.
52. Coleridge, Miscellaneous Criticism, ed. Thomas Middleton Raysor (London: Constable, 1936), pp. 302-3.
53. Ibid., p. 437.
54. Fruman, Coleridge, the Damaged Archangel, p. 430.
55. Byron, Works: Letters and Journals, V.149.
56. Raleigh, The English Novel (London: John Murray, 1894), p. 172.
57. See the early chapters of Blanchard's Fielding the Novelist.
58. Birrell, 'Samuel Richardson', p. 141; Letters from Sir Charles Grandison, ed. Saintsbury, 2 vols. (London: George Allen, 1895), I.xv; Saintsbury, The English Novel (London: Dent, 1913), p. 98; Drinkwater, The Outline of Literature, p. 413.
59. Leavis, The Great Tradition, p. 11.
60. Alter, Fielding and the Nature of the Novel (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 4.
61. Blanchard, Fielding the Novelist, pp. 300, 318, 306.
62. Lodge, Language of Fiction (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 68.
63. Blanchard, Fielding the Novelist, p. 280.
64. Cit. ibid., p. 280.

3 RICHARDSON'S CHARACTER

1. Q. D. Leavis, 'Leslie Stephen: Cambridge Critic', A Selection from Scrutiny, ed. F. R. Leavis, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), I.25. The phrase quoted in the next paragraph is also from this page.
2. Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 144; cf. Cedric Watts, 'Bottom's Children: the Fallacies of Structuralist, Post-structuralist and Deconstructionist Literary Theory', Reconstructing Literature, ed. Laurence Lerner (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), p. 27.
3. It may be said at this point that I presuppose the possibility of an unprejudiced and accurate view of 'the character of an author'. Clearly there will be numerous traits in the character of any author - of any person - which inspire conflicting assessments; how one sees them will depend almost entirely on one's own attitudes and values. We are all aware, moreover, that there is much in the character of any person, living or dead, which is not at all available for inspection by others. Strictly speaking, then, no scientific accuracy is possible in this area. It can be recognized, however, that some ideas of 'the character of an author' have less basis in discernible fact than others, or no basis at all; accretions of prejudice or exaggeration can be stripped away. If we can never arrive at the 'whole truth', we can at least attempt to create as fair and accurate a picture as available information will allow.
4. Orwell, 'Politics vs. Literature: An Examination of Gulliver's Travels', Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, 4 vols. (1968; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), IV.259, 246, 260, 245.
5. Kettle, An Introduction to the English Novel, 2 vols. (London: Hutchinson, 1951-3), I.63.
6. Scott, 'Samuel Richardson', Lives of Eminent Novelists and Dramatists (repr. London: Frederick Warne, n.d. [late C19]), pp. 384-418.
7. Cit. Blanchard, Fielding the Novelist, pp. 417-18.
8. Thackeray, The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century, The Oxford Thackeray, XIII.647-8, 652.
9. Stephen, Hours in a Library, I.47-8. Cf. Stephen's English Literature and Society in the Eighteenth Century (London: Duckworth, 1904), p. 162: 'We know ... how [Richardson's novels] affected one great contemporary. This incessant strain upon the moral in question (a very questionable moral it is) struck Fielding as mawkish and unmanly. Richardson seemed to be a narrow, straitlaced preacher, who could look at human nature only from the conventional point of view, and thought that because he was virtuous there should be no more cakes and ale.'

10. Gosse, A History of Eighteenth Century Literature (1660-1780) (London: Macmillan, 1889), pp. 251, 258, 250.
11. Indyk, 'Interpretative Relevance, and Richardson's Pamela', Southern Review, 16 (1983), pp. 33-4. Saintsbury's remark appears in his Introduction to Letters from Sir Charles Grandison, I.xx.
12. See Battestin's Introduction to the Riverside edition of Joseph Andrews and Shamela (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), p. v; and Bradbrook's 'Samuel Richardson', The Pelican Guide to English Literature, ed. Boris Ford, 7 vols. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1954-61), IV.294. Bradbrook's essay, it should be noted, is reprinted with no significant alterations in The New Pelican Guide (1982-4): IV.286-304.
13. Raleigh, The English Novel, p. 146.
14. See the frontispiece to Corr., Vol. 2. The engraving also appears in Clara Thomson, Samuel Richardson: A Biographical and Critical Study (London: Horace Marshall, 1900), facing p. 226, and Downs, Richardson (frontispiece); the original sketch is reproduced in EK, plate 11.
15. Hawkins, Life of Samuel Johnson, p. 162.
16. Scott, The Bluestocking Ladies (London: John Green, 1947), p. 200. This useful book includes biographical chapters on Mary Delany and Elizabeth Carter as well as Hester Chapone. Besides EK, another excellent source of information on Richardson's female circle is Katharine Rogers, Feminism in Eighteenth-Century England (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982): see esp. the Appendix, 'Women Writers in Britain, 1660-1800', pp. 249-84. Elizabeth Brophy's 'Brief Biographies of Richardson's Principal Correspondents' (Samuel Richardson: The Triumph of Craft, pp. 116-20) are also useful, but not entirely reliable: Mrs. Sarah Chapone (mother-in-law of Hester) was not born in 1725 but 1699; 1725 was the year she married. Readers should also be aware that the 'Sophia Westcomb' referred to by Brophy, John Carroll, McKillop and others is the same person as the 'Sarah Wescomb' discussed by Eaves and Kimpel: the latter would appear to have been her actual name. She was later Mrs. John Scudamore.

An earlier - probably the earliest - reference to Mrs. Chapone in literature occurs in Sheridan's The Rivals (1775), Act I, Sc. 2: LYDIA: 'Here, my dear Lucy, hide these books - quick, quick - fling Peregrine Pickle under the toilet - throw Roderick Random into the closet - put The Innocent Adultery into The Whole Duty of Man - thrust Lord Aimworth under the sofa - cram Ovid behind the bolster - there - put The Man of Feeling into your pocket - so, so, now lay Mrs Chapone in sight, and leave Fordyce's Sermons open on the table.'
17. D. C. Browning, Everyman's Dictionary of Literary Biography,

English and American (London: Dent, 1958), p. 122.

18. Johnsonian Miscellanies, II.11; cf. Richardson to Lady Bradshaigh (SL, p. 177f): 'Miss C[arter] is an example, that women may be trusted with Latin and even Greek, and yet not think themselves above their domestic duties.... I acknowledge that the great and indispensable duties of women are of the domestic kind; and that, if a woman neglects these, or despises them, for the sake of science itself, which I call learning, she is good for nothing.' Lady Bradshaigh did not approve of learned women.
19. Heilbrun, Toward a Recognition of Androgyny (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), pp. 50, 54-62; Rogers, 'Sensitive Feminism vs. Conventional Sympathy: Richardson and Fielding on Women', Novel, 9 (1976), p. 257. Rogers' portrayal of Fielding has provoked controversy: see Anthony J. Hassall, 'Critical Exchange: Women in Richardson and Fielding', Novel, 14 (1981), 168-74; Margaret Lenta, 'Comedy, Tragedy and Feminism: The Novels of Richardson and Fielding', English Studies in Africa, 26 (1983), 13-25.
20. Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, The Nature of Narrative (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 102.
21. Bradbrook, Jane Austen and her Predecessors (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), pp. 89, 139.
22. Johnsonian Miscellanies, II.251-2.
23. Ibid., I.273-4.
24. Boswell, Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides, ed. Frederick A. Pottle and Charles H. Bennett (London: Heinemann, 1963), pp. 386-7.
25. Hawkins, Life of Samuel Johnson, p. 162; but cf. Leigh Hunt, The Town, p. 118: 'Agreeably to his natural bashfulness, [Richardson] was apt to be reserved with strangers. Sir John Hawkins tells us, that he once happened to get into the Fulham stage when Richardson was in it (most likely he got in on purpose); and he endeavoured to bring the novelist into conversation, but could not succeed, and was vexed at it. But Sir John was one of that numerous class of persons who, for reasons better known to others than to themselves,

"Demeen gladly to the badder end,"

as the old poet says; and Richardson probably knew this pragmatical person, and did not want his acquaintance.' Like Mrs. Barbauld, Hunt also stresses Richardson's social virtues, pointing out that 'he was a most kind-hearted, generous man; kept his pocket full of plums for children, like another Mr Burchell: gave a great deal of money away in charity, very handsomely too; and was so fond of inviting friends to stay with him,

that when they were ill, he and his family must needs have them to be nursed. Several actually died at his house at Fulham, as at an hospital for sick friends' (p. 114). Of course Hunt, who was born in 1784, had no personal knowledge of Richardson; his assertions - and Mrs. Barbauld's - are amply supported, however, by the document he goes on to quote (pp. 119-22): the account of Richardson's character, and life in the Richardson household, communicated to Mrs. Barbauld by a lady who had stayed with the Richardsons as a child. This originally appeared in Corr., I.clxxxiii-cxc.

26. Scott, Lives of Eminent Novelists and Dramatists, p. 389; Birrell, Men, Women, and Books and Res Judicatae, p. 153; Coleridge, Anima Poetae, p. 166; Byron, Works: Letters and Journals, IV.148.
27. Blanchard, Fielding the Novelist, pp. 279-80.
28. Scott, Lives of Eminent Novelists and Dramatists, pp. 389-91.
29. Thackeray, English Humourists, p. 648.
30. Scott, 'Henry Fielding', Lives of Eminent Novelists and Dramatists, p. 427.
31. Thackeray, English Humourists, p. 648.
32. Birrell, Men, Women, and Books and Res Judicatae, pp. 130-33. For Birrell's anecdote about Johnson, see Johnsonian Miscellanies, II.323.
33. See Lewis Melville, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: Her Life and Letters (London: Hutchinson, n.d. [1925?]), p. 229; Walpole, Correspondence, ed. W. S. Lewis, 48 vols. (London, Oxford, New Haven: Oxford University Press, Yale University Press, 1937-83), XXII.271.
34. Scott, Lives of Eminent Novelists and Dramatists, pp. 387-8; Stephen, Hours in a Library, I.48-9; Pritchett, 'Clarissa', The Living Novel (London: Chatto and Windus, 1946), pp. 9-10.
35. Brissenden, Samuel Richardson, p. 9.
36. It may be germane here to remind ourselves that Richardson was in fact a highly distinguished member of his profession: a successful Master Printer who rose in due course to become Master of the Stationers' Company, he was responsible for printing many important books and journals, including the works of James Thomson and Edward Young as well as, for many years, the Journals of the House of Commons. His printing career has been described in detail by William M. Sale, Jr.; see his Samuel Richardson: Master Printer, Cornell Studies in English, Vol. 37 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1950).

37. Brophy, Samuel Richardson: The Triumph of Craft, p. xi.
38. Thackeray, English Humourists, p. 655. The most amusing and incisive commentary known to me on the myth of Fielding's 'manliness', and its significance for the critics who laud it, is to be found in Fifty Works of English Literature we could do without, the brilliantly provocative book by Brigid Brophy, Michael Levey and Charles Osborne (London: Rapp and Carroll, 1967): see the essay on Tom Jones, pp. 19-22.
39. Hazlitt, Lectures on the English Comic Writers, Complete Works, ed. P. P. Howe, 21 vols. (London: Dent, 1930-34), VI.117-19. In Hazlitt's account, we see the consequences of the 'secularizing' of Richardson's works. Obviously aware of the extent to which Richardson's 'realism' had been praised in the eighteenth century, Hazlitt judges the novels by this criterion - to the exclusion of all others, it seems - but, unlike his forebears, finds them wanting in this very regard.
- Nowadays, many would no longer see this as a serious objection. Cf. John Barth, interviewed by Heide Ziegler: 'Hazlitt made a wonderful remark about Richardson that I came across when I was doing a little homework on Richardson. He said that, for all of Richardson's much touted realism, he, Hazlitt, suspected that Richardson's characters weren't drawn from life at all. Hazlitt's phrase was that Richardson simply spun them out of his own head. I'm sure that's true. Hazlitt meant it as a criticism, but I regard it as a marvellous truth. And I'm sure that, as soon as you have heard that remark, you cannot read through any of Pamela or Clarissa and for a moment believe in the reality of those characters in the sense that Mr B. is carefully modeled after so and so, etc. They are as absolutely make-believe characters as ever came down the pages of literature, I'm sure. I would regard it as a tribute if somebody made that Hazlitt kind of remark about LETTERS. I would be delighted' (The Radical Imagination and the Liberal Tradition, p. 33). It should perhaps be observed, however, that Richardson's novels, much as they may have been 'spun out of his own head', were by no means written with as little concern for realistic credibility as is evident in Barth's fiction since The End of the Road: quite the reverse. See my Ch. 5 above for further discussion of Richardson and realism.
40. Scott, Lives of Eminent Novelists and Dramatists, p. 398; Gosse, A History of Eighteenth Century Literature, p. 246; Stephen, Hours in a Library, I.64; Krutch, Five Masters (1930; repr. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1959), p. 129; Bradbrook, 'Samuel Richardson', pp. 298-9; Battestin, Introduction to Joseph Andrews and Shamela, p. xi.
41. Hazlitt, Complete Works, VI.120; Stephen, Hours in a Library, I.76.
42. Gosse, A History of Eighteenth Century Literature, pp. 247-9;

Stephen, Hours in a Library, I.80, 86, 89, 92, 80, 83, 93. Stephen's ambivalence about Richardson was nevertheless great; cf. English Literature and Society in the Eighteenth Century, pp. 161-2: 'I will confess that the last time I read Clarissa Harlowe it affected me with a kind of disgust. We wonder sometimes at the coarse nerves of our ancestors, who could see on the stage any quantity of murders and ghosts and miscellaneous horrors. Richardson gave me the same shock from the elaborate detail in which he tells the story of Clarissa; rubbing our noses, if I may say so, in all her agony, and squeezing the last drop of bitterness out of every incident. I should have liked some symptom that he was anxious to turn his eyes from the tragedy instead of giving it so minutely as to suggest that he enjoys the spectacle. Books sometimes owe part of their success, as I fear we must admit, to the very fact that they are in bad taste....'

43. Notable modern defences of Pamela include: B. L. Reid, 'Justice to Pamela', Hudson Review, 9 (1956-7), 516-33; Robert A. Donovan, 'The Problem of Pamela, or, Virtue Unrewarded', Studies in English Literature 1500-1900, 3 (1963), 377-95; Dorothy Parker, 'The Time Scheme of Pamela and the Character of B.', Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 11 (1969), 695-704; Gwendolyn B. Needham, 'Richardson's Characterization of Mr. B. and Double Purpose in Pamela', Eighteenth-Century Studies, 3 (1970), 433-74; Mark Kinkead-Weekes, Samuel Richardson: Dramatic Novelist (London: Methuen, 1973), pp. 7-120; Stuart Wilson, 'Richardson's Pamela: An Interpretation', PMLA, 88 (1973), 79-91; Margaret Anne Doody, A Natural Passion: A Study of the Novels of Samuel Richardson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), esp. Ch. III: 'Pamela: The Pastoral Comedy'.
44. Stephen, Hours in a Library, I.48-9.
45. Brissenden, Samuel Richardson, p. 9; Pritchett, The Living Novel, p. 9.
46. Bradbrook, 'Samuel Richardson', pp. 293-4.
47. Brophy, Samuel Richardson: The Triumph of Craft, p. xi.
48. Lawrence, Selected Literary Criticism, p. 36.
49. Praz, The Romantic Agony [1933], 2nd ed. (1951; repr. London: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 98-9.
50. Green, Minuet (London: Dent, 1935), pp. 385, 386, 387, 389, 385.
51. Pritchett, The Living Novel, pp. 9-11. Pritchett's remark that 'even [Richardson's] gift of weeping hardly guarantees that he will be a major figure' is perhaps an allusion to Leslie Stephen: cf. English Literature and Society in the Eighteenth Century, pp. 159-60: 'Richardson was a typical tradesman of [his] period ... And yet this mild little man,

with the very narrowest intellectual limitations, writes a book which makes a mark not only in England but in Europe, and is imitated by Rousseau in the book which set more than one generation weeping; Clarissa Harlowe, moreover, was accepted as the masterpiece of its kind, and she moved not only Englishmen but Germans and Frenchmen to sympathetic tears. One explanation is that Richardson is regarded as the inventor of "sentimentalism." ...'

52. Allen, The English Novel, p. 49; Watt, 'The Naming of Characters in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding', Review of English Studies, 25 (1949), p. 333; Golden, Richardson's Characters: see esp. Ch. 1, 'Richardson and the Bold Young Men'.

Elizabeth Brophy has some remarks to make on the way in which these psychoanalytical preoccupations have distorted our view of Richardson's character: 'This fascination with Richardson's unconscious even extends to attributing Richardson's chronic illness to neurosis: he was afflicted, Watt tells us, with "the eighteenth-century version of anxiety neurosis, the typical derangement of the urban Psyche," [The Rise of the Novel, p. 190f] and Golden cites Richardson's "nervous hypersensitivity, which led to such finger shaking that in his last few years he [c]ould never be sure that when he sat down to write a letter he would be able to hold the pen." [Richardson's Characters, p. 26f] Richardson did suffer from a "nervous complaint" which plagued his later years, but I believe that the evidence strongly indicates his ailment was Parkinson's disease, a condition that indeed affects the nervous system - as, for example, does poliomyelitis - without being a neurotic disorder in the psychological meaning of the word.... [P]re-occupation with Richardson's unconscious has resulted in misleading inferences.' Samuel Richardson: The Triumph of Craft, p. xii: and see Brophy's fascinating Appendix, 'The Nature of Richardson's Illness' (pp. 113-15).

On psychoanalytical distortions of Richardson's character, see also Ian Watt's passage on Richardson's supposed fear of mice (The Rise of the Novel, p. 159), and the commentary on that passage by Rita Goldberg in her book Sex and Enlightenment (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 8.

53. Kazin, 'Psychoanalysis and Literary Culture Today', Partisan Review, 26 (1959), pp. 53-4.
54. Reid, 'Justice to Pamela', p. 522.
55. Kinkead-Weekes, Samuel Richardson: Dramatic Novelist, passim.
56. Eaves and Kimpel quote Proust's attack on Sainte-Beuve's biographical criticism, which - so Proust alleges - 'fails to recognize what a moderately profound acquaintance with ourselves teaches us: that a book is the product of another "me" than the one we manifest in our habits, in society, in our vices ... the "me" who has waited while we were with others, which we feel is the only real "me," for which in the end only artists live' (EK, pp. 618-19n).

57. Kermode, 'Richardson and Fielding' [1950], Essays on the Eighteenth-Century Novel, ed. Robert Donald Spector (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965), p. 71.

4 RICHARDSON AT THE ANALYST'S

1. The pamphlet is included in the Augustan Reprint Society series, No. 21 (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1950), with a helpful introduction by A. D. McKillop.
2. The pamphleteer in fact compares Richardson unfavourably with the 'ingenious authoress of David Simple, perhaps the best moral romance that we have, in which there is not one loose expression, one impure, one unchaste idea; from the perusal of which, no man can rise unimproved' (p. 19).
3. Watt, The Rise of the Novel, p. 234.
4. Hazlitt, Complete Works, VI.120; Oliphant, cit. Indyk, 'Interpretative Relevance, and Richardson's Pamela', p. 33; Gosse, A History of Eighteenth Century Literature, p. 248; Thomson, Samuel Richardson, pp. 207-8.
5. Pritchett, The Living Novel, p. 13.
6. Brissenden, Samuel Richardson, p. 26; Virtue in Distress (London: Macmillan, 1974), p. 184.
7. Rabkin's essay appears in ELH, 23 (1956), 204-17.
8. The Radical Imagination and the Liberal Tradition, p. 254. The recent selection of Wilson's criticism, Diversity and Depth in Fiction, ed. Kerry McSweeney (New York: Viking, 1983), usefully brings together this distinguished novelist's other published remarks on Richardson: in the 1963 lecture 'Evil in the English Novel' (see esp. pp. 3-4); and 'Richardson's Clarissa' (1975), a good introduction to the novel (pp. 25-33). Wilson discusses Richardson's influence on his own fiction in a 1972 interview with Frederick P. W. McDowell, reprinted in the same volume (see esp. pp. 265-6).
9. Brissenden, Samuel Richardson, p. 27.
10. Daniel R. Schwarz, The Humanistic Heritage (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 101. Schwarz's book includes critical considerations of the work not only of Ian Watt but of, among others, Dorothy Van Ghent and Arnold Kettle; it is recommended to those seeking a broader as well as a more sympathetic view of the work of these critics than that to be found in the present study.
11. Ibid., p. 103.

12. See Freud's 1907 paper, 'Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming', Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works, gen. ed. James Strachey, 24 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1966-74), IX.143-53. In adult life, Freud suggests, the day-dream replaces the role of play in childhood. His argument that literary creativity is not essentially different in kind from day-dreaming seems to me entirely convincing. What is perhaps more contentious is the view that the day-dream, which has its origins in wish-fulfilment, is not fundamentally different from the night-dream.
13. Freud, Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis [1915-17], Standard Edition, XV.154-8.
14. Ibid., p. 162.
15. Eagleton, The Rape of Clarissa, p. 69.
16. Lodge, Language of Fiction, p. 45. In this and the preceding paragraph, I have benefited from Lodge's discussion of the use of names in fiction. Excellent treatments of the subject are also to be found in George Watson, The Story of the Novel (London: Macmillan, 1979), pp. 56-60, and Basil Cottle, Names (London: Thames and Hudson, 1983): Ch. 10, 'Names in Fiction'.
17. Matthews, English Surnames (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), p. 188. The implications of the Christian name 'Robert' would appear to be unambiguously favourable, so far as etymology goes. According to E. G. Withycombe, 'Old English Hreodbeorht was reinforced at the time of the Norman Conquest by French Robert from the cognate Old German Hrodebert, a compound of hrothi "fame" and berhta "bright". It occurs frequently in DB [the Domesday Book], and has been a favourite name ever since': The Oxford Dictionary of English Christian Names, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), p. 243. The name seems appropriate to Lovelace, however, in that it combines these seemingly desirable overtones with a suggestion, in its sound, of 'robber'.
18. Reaney, A Dictionary of British Surnames (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), p. 205.
19. Preston, The Created Self (London: Heinemann, 1970), p. 81; Kennedy, Meaning and Signs in Fiction (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 30.
20. Ward, 'Richardson's Character of Lovelace', Modern Language Review, 7 (1912), 494-8.
21. Hunt, The Town, pp. 110, 122.
22. Wood's account is cited from his Athenae Oxonienses [1691-2], ed. Philip Bliss, 4 vols. (1817; repr. New York: Burt Franklin, 1967), III.460-3; Aubrey's I quote from the edition of Brief Lives edited by Andrew Clark, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press,

1898), II.39-40. I have also drawn on Thomas Seccombe's article on Lovelace in the DNB.

23. The Oxford Dictionary of English Christian Names, pp. 63-5.

24. Watt, 'The Naming of Characters in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding', p. 330f.

25. Cf. Johnson's remarks on this play in his life of Rowe; see also an interesting note by John A. Dussinger, 'Richardson and Johnson: Critical Agreement on Rowe's The Fair Penitent', English Studies, 49 (1968), 45-7.

As modern readers we may feel that Richardson is somewhat less than fair to Rowe's unfortunate heroine. It might be considered, however, that The Fair Penitent, though first performed in 1703, is a strikingly Romantic work in its treatment of Calista's unending passion for her seducer - a fact of some interest in the light of the eighteenth-century popularity of the play. While Richardson's work too anticipates Romanticism in many ways, his disapproval of The Fair Penitent is one measure of the extent to which he also remains a pre-Romantic figure.

26. Cf. Kinkead-Weekes: 'This is a very closed and self-confirming system: heads I win, tails you lose. If Richardson writes about rape he is prurient; but if he seems concerned about purity he is also prurient. Yet it never seems to work the other way round: one has not yet come across the Freudian essay that claims Fanny Hill as the product of an intense longing for purity.' Samuel Richardson: Dramatic Novelist, p. 494. The 'closed and self-confirming system' of psychoanalysis as a whole - 'real' psychoanalysis - is discussed in an excellent and entertaining book by Ernest Gellner, The Psychoanalytic Movement (London: Paladin, 1985). Freud himself defends psychoanalysis against the 'heads I win, tails you lose' charge - he uses the English idiom - in a 1937 paper, 'Constructions in Analysis' (Standard Edition, XXIII.257-69). The essay, however, deals only with how a psychoanalyst responds to the 'yes' or 'no' which a patient under analysis gives to the analyst's suggestions - neither answer is seen as valid unless additional information is forthcoming, Freud explains. Certainly his argument does not exonerate those literary critics who have allowed themselves to become carried away, it seems to me, with a popularized and too-easy version of Freudian theory.

27. Etymological research does not turn up much of particular interest, for our purposes, in relation to this name. The usual spelling is 'Harlow', and it appears to derive from a village in Essex, the name of which is said to mean 'mound', 'army mound', 'mound of the people', or 'meeting place of a hundred'. There is a Harlow Hill in Northumberland, and the name is also to be found in the West Riding, where it seems to have meant 'grey hill'. Cf. Harlow Car Gardens etc. in present-day Harrogate: it may be, indeed, that Harrogate was originally 'Harlogate'. In Scotland, the name 'Harlaw' meant

'boundary hill'; there is a place of that name in Aberdeen. 'Harlaw' also occurs in Scotland as a family name. A sixteenth-century William Harlau, a burghess of Edinburgh, is also recorded under the name William Harlow. See Eilert Ekwall, The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), p. 210; John Field, Place-Names of Great Britain and Ireland (London: David and Charles, 1980), p. 83; James B. Johnston, The Place-Names of England and Wales (London: John Murray, 1915), p. 292; and Place-Names of Scotland, 3rd ed. (London: John Murray, 1934), p. 200; George F. Black, The Surnames of Scotland (New York: New York Public Library, 1946), pp. 343-4.

28. Eagleton, The Rape of Clarissa, p. 86.
29. It should not be thought that I am indulging merely in absurd or grossly exaggerated satire in this and the preceding paragraph. My name-analyses seem sober indeed compared with those offered in Terry Castle's feminist reading of Pamela, for example, in which much is made of the fact that Pamela's name starts with a P while her admirer's initial is B. That extra stroke of the pen which makes the difference between a capital P and a capital B represents, it seems, nothing less than that vital thing which he has and she hasn't, the phallus: 'Symbolic plot in Pamela resolves into a sexual ideogram concealed at the most primitive level of the text. P and B are primary signs in the novel's mythic code: the opposition P/B marks off iconographically the basic sexual dialectic of absence/presence, woman/man. Pamela's P, to adapt Roland Barthes, is an "initial of castration." P lacks what B shows; P(amela) reconstitutes, metaphorically, her missing part by becoming (Lady) B. The transformation across the narrative of P into B thus models the larger symbolic process of Oedipal displacement, and the heroine's final appropriation, vicariously, of the object of desire.' Castle, 'P/B: Pamela as Sexual Fiction', Studies in English Literature 1500-1900, 22 (1982), pp. 487-8. I discuss Castle's work on Clarissa in Ch. 6.
30. Watt, 'The novelist as innovator: Samuel Richardson', The Listener, Feb. 4 1965, p. 180.

5 RICHARDSON AND HIS TIMES

1. Watt, The Rise of the Novel, p. 225; Golden, Richardson's Characters, p. viii.
2. See Kettle, An Introduction to the English Novel, I.63-71; Sale, 'From Pamela to Clarissa', The Age of Johnson: Essays Presented to Chauncey Brewster Tinker (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949), pp. 127-38; Hill, 'Clarissa Harlowe and her Times', Essays in Criticism, 5 (1955), 315-40; Van Ghent, 'On Clarissa

Harlowe', The English Novel: Form and Function (New York: Rinehart and Co., 1953), pp. 45-63; Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel [1960], 2nd ed. (1967; repr. London: Paladin, 1970). These are the texts cited in this chapter; see the Bibliography for details of other locations of the essays by Sale, Hill, and Van Ghent.

3. Downs, Richardson, p. 76.
4. Allen, The English Novel, p. 45.
5. See Habakkuk, 'English Landownership, 1680-1740', Economic History Review, 10 (1939-40), 2-17; 'Marriage Settlements in the Eighteenth Century', Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 4th series, 32 (1950), 15-30.
6. Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800: Ch. 8, 'The Companionate Marriage'; Stevenson, 'The Courtship of the Family: Clarissa and the Harlowes Once More', ELH, 48 (1981), p. 758.
7. Spearman, The Novel and Society (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), pp. 183-4. Spearman's examination of 'what Richardson really thought about marriage' (pp. 179-81) is also pertinent to our argument. Another good discussion of the problem of 'literature and society' - to what extent the former reflects the latter - is an essay by Peter Laslett, 'The wrong way through the telescope: a note on literary evidence in sociology and in historical sociology', British Journal of Sociology, 27 (1976), 319-42.
8. This title was suggested by Aaron Hill (EK/C, p. 422); the full title was to be: 'The Lady's Legacy: or, the whole gay and serious Compass of the Human Heart laid open, for the Service of Both Sexes. In the History of the Life and Ruin of a lately celebrated Beauty, Miss Clarissa Harlowe. Including great variety of other lives and characters, occasionally interested in the moving story. Detecting and exposing the most secret arts and subtlest practices, of that endangering species of triumphant rakes called Women's Men, assisted by corrupt and vicious engines of the sex they plot against. Published in compliance with the lady's order on her death-bed, as a warning to unguarded, vain, or credulous innocence' (SL, p. 77n).
9. Cf. the similar dedicatory epistle to Buchan's Greenmantle (1916): 'Let no man or woman call its events improbable. The war has driven that word from our vocabulary, and melodrama has become the prosiest realism. Things unimagined before happen daily to our friends by sea and land. The one chance in a thousand is habitually taken, and as often as not succeeds. Coincidence, like some new Briareus, stretches a hundred long arms hourly across the earth. Some day, when the full history is written - sober history with ample documents - the poor romancer will give up business and fall to reading Miss Austen in a hermitage.'

10. Braine, Writing a Novel (London: Eyre Methuen, 1974), pp. 126-7.
11. Williams, The Country and the City (London: Chatto and Windus, 1973), p. 65.
12. Walpole, Correspondence, XXII.271.
13. Hagstrum, Sex and Sensibility (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 212.
14. Eagleton, The Rape of Clarissa, p. 76.
15. Fiedler, 'Second Thoughts on Love and Death in the American Novel: My First Gothic Novel', Novel, 1 (1967), pp. 9-10.
An insight into Fiedler's critical style might perhaps be gleaned from the following: 'Now in his late sixties, Fiedler is still scandalizing the academic elitists ... and delighting his students at SUNY-Buffalo. Dropping in on a session of his undergraduate science fiction class in late 1983, David Gates observes: "It has been an hourlong improvisation - on such themes as 'E.T.,' Freud, Cabbage Patch dolls, the legends of Faust and Don Giovanni, Biblical prophecy, the history of feminism, Mary Shelley's 'Frankenstein,' the National Council of Churches' unisex lectionary, ABC-TV's 'The Day After' - which finally arrived at the ostensible topic, androgyny in the work of Ursula Le Guin, with five minutes left." "He has been doing these high-wire acts," Gates reminds us, "for the past four decades."' Mark Royden Winchell, Leslie Fiedler, Twayne's United States Authors Series (Boston: Twayne, 1985), p. 12.
16. Fiedler's crude picture of Richardson's relationship to the Sentimental and Romantic ethos is all the more surprising considering the sophisticated and genuinely illuminating observations on the development of the novel of sensibility to be found later in his book: see esp. Ch. 5, 'The Beginnings of the Anti-Bourgeois Sentimental Novel in America', p. 99ff. His familiarity with Richardson's work would appear to leave much to be desired. At one stage, insisting on the crucial importance of Clarissa to an understanding of American fiction, the 'ignorance of the novel' displayed by another critic is castigated as 'unpardonable' (p. 61). Yet only a few paragraphs earlier, having informed us that 'the bare outline of its plot, its mythos, at least, should be familiar to anyone interested in the history of the novel' (p. 59), Fiedler has offered a synopsis of Clarissa which reveals that he does not even know the plot very well at all! This has led Frederick W. Hilles, for one, to speak scathingly of 'careless readers like Leslie Fiedler, if indeed he should be called a reader of the book'. But the comment of Kinkead-Weekes is perhaps more useful: 'The significance of Fiedler's splendid gaffes, like the belief that Pamela is a governess (later corrected [in the second edition]), and that Lovelace is killed by Belford (uncorrected), is not merely the strong suspicion that he has not read the

books; it is that for this kind of criticism the barest plot outline, or less, will suffice.' See Hilles, 'The Plan of Clarissa', Philological Quarterly, 45 (1966), p. 242; Kinkead-Weekes, Samuel Richardson: Dramatic Novelist, p. 500n.

17. Amis, 'Men Without Women', What Became of Jane Austen? And Other Questions (1970; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), p. 100. This largely favourable review of Fiedler's book points out well its many positive features; features which, of course, it is outside my scope to deal with here.
18. Kinkead-Weekes, Samuel Richardson: Dramatic Novelist, p. 500.
19. Fiedler, 'Second Thoughts on Love and Death in the American Novel', p. 10.
20. Barry, 'Is there life after Structuralism?', Critical Quarterly, 23 (3) 1981, p. 72; cf. Belsey, Critical Practice (London: Methuen, 1980), pp. 47-51.

6 THE DEATH OF CLARISSA

1. Bowen, The Death of the Heart (London: Victor Gollancz, 1938), pp. 13, 348-9.
2. Bowen, 'English Novelists', Impressions of English Literature, ed. W. J. Turner (London: Collins, 1944), p. 240.
3. Loesberg, 'Allegory and Narrative in Clarissa', Novel, 15 (1981), pp. 54, 59; Coates, The Realist Fantasy: Fiction and Reality Since 'Clarissa' (London: Macmillan, 1983), p. 48; McKee, 'Unmastered Exchanges in Richardson and Freud', boundary 2, Winter 1984, p. 173. McKee's arguments have been extended in her book, Heroic Commitment in Richardson, Eliot and James (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).
4. Warner, Reading 'Clarissa': The Struggles of Interpretation (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979); Castle, Clarissa's Ciphers: Meaning and Disruption in Richardson's "Clarissa" (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982). A version of part of Warner's book also appeared in his essay, 'Proposal and Habitation: The Temporality and Authority of Interpretation in and about a Scene of Richardson's Clarissa', boundary 2, Winter 1979, pp. 169-99. In the early stages of my work on Warner, I gained a number of useful insights from a perceptive review by Eric Rothstein, in Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 79 (1980), 253-6.
5. Eagleton, The Rape of Clarissa, pp. 65-8; Peter Sabor, 'The Seductions of Clarissa', Queen's Quarterly, 87 (1980), 452-7 ('fascinating'; 'intellectually challenging'); Rita Goldberg,

Sex and Enlightenment, p. 12 ('a skilfully written book'; 'The book has many merits'; 'indeed it is quite scholarly'); Susan Staves, 'Studies in Eighteenth-Century Fiction, 1979', Philological Quarterly, 59 (1980), p. 479 ('The best book of 1979 on the eighteenth-century novel'); John Traugott, 'Molesting Clarissa', Novel, 15 (1982), p. 164 ('the best account we have to date of what is going on the novel'). Most of those whose positive views I have quoted also have reservations about aspects of Warner's book (see esp. Sabor, on the deplorable number of errors it contains). But of course it is the extent of the praise meted out to such a book, and the fact that it has been taken so seriously by reputable scholars, which must command our attention here.

6. Eagleton, Literary Theory: An Introduction (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), pp. 132-4.
7. Eagleton, The Rape of Clarissa, p. 65f.
8. Warner, 'Reading Rape: Marxist-Feminist Figurations of the Literal', Diacritics, Winter 1983, pp. 22, 13.
9. Rothstein, review of Warner, p. 255f.
10. Warner's argument here would appear to be based on Nietzsche's 'deconstruction' of causality. Jonathan Culler explains: 'Suppose one feels a pain. This causes one to look for a cause and spying, perhaps, a pin, one posits a link and reverses the perceptual or phenomenal order, pain ... pin, to produce a causal sequence, pin ... pain.... [T]he experience of pain, it is claimed, causes us to discover the pin and thus causes the production of a cause.... The distinction between cause and effect makes the cause an origin, logically and temporally prior. The effect is derived, secondary, dependent upon the cause.... If the effect is what causes the cause to become a cause, then the effect, not the cause, should be treated as the origin.' Culler, On Deconstruction (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), pp. 86-8. This argument has been convincingly demolished by the philosopher John Searle ('The Word Turned Upside Down', New York Review of Books, Oct. 27 1983, pp. 74-9). Still, if Culler will have it that an experience of pain which causes us to discover a pin 'thus causes the production of a cause', at least he does not deny that we really have both pain and a pin, and that there is some connection between them. Warner's argument would appear to go a stage further. Clarissa, it seems, in her rage for order, ascribes blatantly spurious reasons for the course her life has taken; she invents seemingly inevitable 'causes' which have no basis in reality. It would be pointless to argue that anything or any one actually did bring about Clarissa's tragedy, it seems; the mere act of seeking to explain things in this way is unpardonable logocentrism. Never mind that Warner's own book purports to offer an extended explanation of why Clarissa behaves as she does, as well as attempting to trace various supposed

critical heresies to their source; never mind either that it would be impossible to say anything coherent about the world at all without the concepts of 'cause' and 'origin'. But that is another argument.

11. In discussing what he calls the 'character-plot-theme' interpretation of Clarissa's life, Warner quotes Aristotle's Poetics on the proper construction of a plot (pp. 215-16). It seems we are to see Aristotle in much the same light as Warner would have us view Clarissa and Richardson. In regarding Aristotle's dicta as if they were inspired only by some gratuitous authoritarianism, however, Warner does not deal with one of the most important of Aristotle's arguments: that the well-constructed plot is not some arbitrary aesthetic technique, to be valued arbitrarily, but in fact fulfils profound human needs. Whether or not we agree that plot should be the principle of unity in works of fiction and drama, a unity of some sort is surely desirable: postmodernists of all sorts might do well to contemplate Aristotle's almost prophetic remark, that 'the most beautiful pigments smeared on at random will not give as much pleasure as a black-and-white outline picture'. See Poetics, trans. Gerald F. Else (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967), p. 28.
12. 'Clementina's Fate is not yet come to my Knowledge,' Richardson confessed at one point, well into the composition of the novel; later, we find him teasing Hester Mulso about the possibility of ending the novel with the tragic death of Sir Charles: 'What distress might be exhibited! What resignation of the hero! What parting scenes drawn! ... What a surprise would this great catastrophe occasion!' (SL, pp. 194, 216). Jocelyn Harris discusses the composition of the novel in her Introduction to the Oxford English Novels edition, 3 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1972).
13. Thomson, Samuel Richardson, pp. 242, 248; cf. Hilles, 'The Plan of Clarissa', p. 236.
14. Auty, The Comic Spirit of Eighteenth-Century Novels (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1975), p. 4.
15. Eagleton, The Rape of Clarissa, p. 57.
16. Kinkead-Weekes, Samuel Richardson: Dramatic Novelist, pp. 494-5 and passim.
17. Eagleton, The Rape of Clarissa, p. 67.
18. French, 'Zero summing up', Times Literary Supplement, Dec. 24 1982, p. 1416.
19. See Preston, The Created Self, pp. 46, 91.
20. Wehrs, 'Irony, Storytelling, and the Conflict of Interpretations in Clarissa', ELH, 53 (1986), p. 760.

21. Cf. Sean French: 'The most revealing aspect of Castle's theory of linguistic indeterminacy (and one that should have caused her at least some disquiet) is that it forces her to side with all the novel's villains. Lovelace and Arabella (Clarissa's sister) are well aware of the arbitrariness of signification because they make use of it by lying all the time. Castle has the nerve to support her argument against Clarissa by quoting Arabella, which is like convicting Cinderella on the evidence of the Ugly Sisters. Throughout she reserves her strictest censure for any form of decent behaviour. Clarissa's kind nature is "compulsive benevolism", her conviction about the value of "being a sister" is part of a "sentimental ideology of kinship". As far as the rape goes, it is clear that hermeneutically speaking Clarissa was asking for it' ('Zero summing up').
22. Napier, "'Tremble and Reform': The Inversion of Power in Richardson's Clarissa", ELH, 42 (1975), 214-23.
23. Richards, The Sceptical Feminist (1980; repr. Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1982), p. 23f.
24. Leland E. Warren, review article, Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 82 (1983), p. 562: 'Not the least interesting aspect of this book ... is the curious spectacle it offers of a critic arguing vigorously that true readings are impossible, while insisting with equal strength that her own reading of the novel in which she locates this message is the correct one.
'Perhaps this paradox is the book's point. Certainly Castle wants us to think her more concerned with the problematics of interpreting than with offering an interpretation; and for her, interpreting - or reading - is work both hard and perilous. Castle may want us to take what appear to be her lapses in taste or logic as evidence of the pitfalls readers always face.'
25. Jarrell, 'The Age of Criticism', Poetry and the Age (1953; repr. New York: Vintage Books, 1955), p. 75.

7 CONCLUSION: RICHARDSON AND OUR TIMES

1. Ostriker's review appears in Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly, 18 (1) 1984, pp. 52-3; for Hagstrum's reply and several further remarks by Ostriker, see pp. 236-8, No. 4 of the same volume.
2. Harvey, 'Clarissa and the Puritan Tradition', Essays in Criticism, 28 (1978), pp. 39-40; Hardwick, Seduction and Betrayal (New York: Random House, 1974), p. 197; Butler, 'The Garden: Early Symbol of Clarissa's Complicity', Studies in English Literature 1500-1900, 24 (1984), p. 542.
3. Eagleton, The Rape of Clarissa, p. 68.

4. Braudy, 'Penetration and Impenetrability in Clarissa', New Approaches to Eighteenth-Century Literature, ed. Phillip Harth (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), p. 191.
5. Eldredge, 'Karen Horney and Clarissa: The Tragedy of Neurotic Pride', American Journal of Psychoanalysis, 42 (1982), pp. 54, 55-6. Karen Horney (1885-1952) was an eminent German psychoanalyst. Eldredge's paper, delivered at a symposium on 'Horney Theory and Literature' in New York in 1981, describes her planned 'psychological study' of Clarissa in the light of Horney's theories of pride and interpersonal conflict. Eldredge makes much of the special illuminating powers of the Horneyan approach, but her demonstration of these powers is anticlimactic. My quotation above is typical of her paper as a whole: did we really need 'careful use of Horney's dynamic system of intrapsychic conflict' (p. 54) for that? Another contributor to the symposium, Karen Ann Butery, in her paper 'The Contributions of Horneyan Psychology to the Study of Literature' (ibid., pp. 39-50), explains that the Horneyan approach encourages none of the regressive identification with heroes and contempt for villains in which readers are usually thought to indulge: 'Horneyan interpretations of character, on the contrary, promote neither a veneration of heroes nor an aversion for villains, but an empathy with human beings and an understanding of human problems which can help us to live better lives' (p. 47). One sympathizes with this humanist aim - a rare thing in contemporary literary criticism - but the implied relativism here, which naturally leads Eldredge to discount Richardson's 'vision of a world in which good can be sharply distinguished from evil' (p. 57), is surely open to question, at least in so far as it pertains to the reading of fiction. Besides, despite a number of references to earlier critics, Eldredge seems insufficiently aware that there is hardly anything new in faulting Richardson for refusing to give his 'two great characters ... equal status as troubled human beings' (ibid.).
6. Doederlein, 'Clarissa in the Hands of the Critics', Eighteenth-Century Studies, 16 (1983), 401-14.
7. Dussinger, The Discourse of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century Fiction, Studies in English Literature, No. 80 (The Hague: Mouton, 1974), p. 79; Karl, A Reader's Guide to the Eighteenth-Century English Novel (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974), p. 122.
8. Eagleton, The Rape of Clarissa, p. 71.
9. Butler, 'The Garden', pp. 539, 531. Butler attempts to do this through analysis of the circumstances of Clarissa's clandestine correspondence with Lovelace, and of the significance of the image of the Harlowe garden (through the wall of which the letters are sent and received). Given that Butler at one point admits that 'the image' is 'disorganized and undeveloped', it seems stretching things somewhat to maintain

that the Harlowes' stiffly formal 'Dutch' garden became for the unconscious Richardson - and becomes for his unconscious readers - 'the Garden, quintessential symbol of temptation, disobedience, and death' (p. 530): 'All Richardson's difficulties in the creation of Clarissa's character rose out of his having unnecessarily located her disobedience within the garden. The image not only betrays his own suspicions of her but works symbolically [subliminally?] on general reader and critic alike to foster in them a stubborn intuition of Clarissa's complicity' (p. 543). When Butler goes on to say that 'the mere existence of the image, no matter how tenuous, points to Richardson's own fascination with the anguished waverings of his heroine' - enabling him, among other things, to participate vicariously in her 'erotic excitement' - we may feel that she is rather too obviously desperate to prove her thesis (p. 544). 'In reproducing Richardson's letters,' she writes at one point, 'John Carroll used dagger-marks to indicate words which Richardson inserted as he read over what he had written.' Examining the text of Richardson's letter to Aaron Hill of 26 Jan. 1746/7 (SL, p. 83), Butler reports Richardson as saying 'that he had designed in Clarissa "no Voluntary Fault, but that of meeting him, tho' resolved †not† to go †off with him.†" In other words,' she continues, 'what Richardson first wrote was a revealing slip: "tho' resolved to go" (p. 543). In Freudian psychology, slips of the tongue or pen are of course very revealing indeed. But Butler's claim is actually quite wrong. Carroll's text reads, 'tho' resolved †not† to go †off with him† ~~back~~'. Carroll's angle brackets indicate words deleted by Richardson. What Richardson first wrote was 'resolved to go back'. He then deleted 'back', inserting 'not' and 'off with him', thus making the phrase 'tho' resolved not to go off with him', which, in its context, makes his meaning clearer:

not off with him
tho' resolved \wedge to go \wedge ~~back~~

It is Butler, not Richardson, who has made the 'revealing slip'!

10. Eagleton, The Rape of Clarissa, pp. 70, 55-6, 58.
11. Stevenson, 'The Courtship of the Family', p. 760ff; Karl, A Reader's Guide to the Eighteenth-Century English Novel, pp. 128, 137.
12. See Dussinger's essays 'Conscience and the Pattern of Christian Perfection in Clarissa', PMLA, 81 (1966), 236-45; 'Richardson's "Christian Vocation"', Papers on Language and Literature, 3 (1967), 3-19; 'Richardson's Tragic Muse', Philological Quarterly, 46 (1967), 18-33.
13. The book appears in the Dutch series of monographs Costerus: Essays in English and American Language and Literature, NS 9 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1978).

14. See PMLA, 92 (1977), 19-32. A response to Wilt by Robert M. Schmitz, with Wilt's reply, appears on pp. 1005-6 of the same volume. Aspects of Wilt's argument have been taken further in an essay by Tassie Gwilliam, '"Like Tiresias": Metamorphosis and Gender in Clarissa', Novel, 19 (1986), 101-17.
15. See Ian Donaldson, in Yearbook of English Studies, 16 (1986), 262-4 ('This lively and provocative book'); Paul-Gabriel Boucé, in Review of English Studies, NS 36 (1985), 94-5 ('a truly illuminating book'; 'an exclusive exercise in Procrustean surgery'); Merritt Moseley, 'Sex and Class in "Clarissa"', Sewanee Review, 92 (1984), xlvii-viii ('Eagleton's passionate attachment to the novel and his revisionism, though lacking in balance, are salutary'); Anne Barton, 'What's a Girl to Do?', New York Review of Books, July 21 1983, pp. 30-2 (Eagleton's account of the death of Clarissa 'grossly simplifies Richardson's novel'); Geoffrey Thurley, 'Phallic Woman', New Statesman, Sept. 24 1982, p. 28 ('This is a vigorous and sometimes brilliant book, but the underlying problems it attacks require to be inspected without the sort of dogmatic intensity Dr Eagleton brings to them').
16. Lennard J. Davis, 'Contemporary Images of Richardson: The Poststructuralist-Marxist-Feminist in the Closet', Review, 6 (1984), p. 248.
17. Todd, Women's Friendship in Literature (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 11.
18. Rogers, 'Sensitive Feminism vs. Conventional Sympathy', p. 257; Eagleton, The Rape of Clarissa, p. viii; Kinkead-Weekes, Samuel Richardson: Dramatic Novelist, p. 63. See note 19, Ch. 3 above.
19. Miller, 'The Exquisite Cadavers: Women in Eighteenth-Century Fiction', Diacritics, Winter 1975, p. 39.
20. Watt, The Rise of the Novel, p. 234; Harvey, 'Clarissa and the Puritan Tradition', pp. 43-4.
21. Rogers, Feminism in Eighteenth-Century England, pp. 125-6.
22. Yeazell, 'Fictional Heroines and Feminist Critics', Novel, 8 (1974), pp. 30, 36.
23. Lewis, An Experiment in Criticism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), p. 86.
24. To my knowledge, by far the best account of the early days of English studies is still Stephen Potter's The Muse in Chains (London: Jonathan Cape, 1937). Potter's 'study in education' is a classic of English belles-lettres which should be more widely known.

25. Kramer, 'The Tyranny of Relevance', Quadrant, May 1986, p. 12. Other eminent scholars who have offered similar reflections on the subject of 'relevance' include Northrop Frye and Helen Gardner. See Frye, 'The University and Personal Life', Spiritus Mundi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), esp. p. 43; Gardner, In Defence of the Imagination (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982): Ch. 2, 'The Relevance of Literature'.
26. Dodsworth, 'Criticism Now: The Abandonment of Tradition?', The New Pelican Guide to English Literature, ed. Boris Ford, 10 vols. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982-4), VIII.491-2.
27. See Eliot, Selected Prose, ed. John Hayward (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953), pp. 221-2.

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At present, the most comprehensive guide to Richardson criticism is R. G. Hannaford's Samuel Richardson: An Annotated Bibliography of Critical Studies (New York: Garland, 1980). An excellent brief introduction to Richardsonian secondary sources is John Carroll's article in The English Novel: Select Bibliographical Guides, ed. A. E. Dyson (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 56-70. For information on early editions of Richardson's works, the reader should consult William M. Sale, Jr., Samuel Richardson: A Bibliographical Record of his Literary Career with Historical Notes (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1936).

The bibliography which follows aims simply to provide a list of works consulted in the preparation of the present study. It is divided into six sections:

- I. RICHARDSON'S WRITINGS
- II. GENERAL LITERARY SOURCES
- III. GENERAL CRITICAL SOURCES
- IV. GENERAL HISTORICAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL SOURCES
- V. GENERAL SCHOLARLY SOURCES
- VI. RICHARDSON'S CRITICS AND COMMENTATORS

Section II lists novels, plays and poems by writers other than Richardson which have been quoted in the text and notes, or suggested to be of direct interest in connection with the concerns of this study. In Sections III-V, 'general' critical, historical, biographical and scholarly sources are taken to be those which do not pertain directly to Richardson's work, or which have not been cited for what they say about Richardson. Critical works which deal in large part with subjects other than Richardson, but which have been found useful for the present project only in so far as they deal with Richardson, are included in Section VI.

Sections I-V list only those works to which reference is made in the text and notes. In Section VI, which

lists only Richardson materials, or materials directly pertaining to Richardson and his works, I have thought it desirable to provide a full list of the sources consulted. Richardson's critics and commentators are listed under three sub-headings: (i) Eighteenth Century; (ii) Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries: To 1920; (iii) Modern: From 1920.

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Review of Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel [No. 225]. Cf. No. 45.
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