

Sensibility and Samuel Richardson

By

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There are tears for things, and what men suffer touches
The human heart.¹

Aeneas weeps at the recollection of the human misery during the all-annihilating Trojan War. Pamela swoons in the excess of her suffering and fear, and Clarissa supplicates for pity, each prostrate at the feet of *the* man! Samuel Richardson, with all his boast of his mastery in the delineation of sentiments, especially of the feminine mind, has been provoking a "mingled fascination and repulsion"² for two centuries. Critics have been arguing whether his professed aim, in his editorial comments on his first two novels — *Pamela*, and *Clarissa Harlowe* — to propagate "the doctrines not only of Morality, but of Christianity"³ is compatible with the effect and nature of the novels themselves. They have been doubting if it is really Pamela's virtue that was rewarded and if *Clarissa* is primarily a treatise on the "enlightened governance of daughters"⁴ or an admirable exemplum to rebuke "the too commonly-received notion That a reformed Rake makes the best Husband."⁵ Thus chances are that the battlefield over these "she-tragedies"⁶ might be effectively narrowed down if we bring into focus the quality of sensibility in Richardson, in accordance with his just claim to be the first novelist of sensibility in English literature.

Pamela was published in 1740 and *Clarissa* in 1747-1748, subtle reflections of the mental culture of the day. For we recall sometime around this time there was noted a change in the outward expression of the didactic impulse to set things right for which the century they belong to has been famous. Men of reason became men of sentiment, and presently men of sensibility

began to weep. In proportion as the age felt the *ennui* brought about by excessive formalism and decorum, men came to put more and more value on the evidence of natural goodness offered by the spontaneous movement and expressing of the feelings. At this point John Locke's sensationalism which had set the tone of the previous half of the century — the notion of sensation as the prime source of knowledge and his distinction of the secondary characteristic in objects of sensible reality from the primary as more subjective⁷ — was pushed to its logical extreme by David Hume. He was out to destroy the Hobbesian theory that self-interest is the single motive behind all behavior. He argued that nothing can finally be established about an evil or a good act, and that its quality cannot be ascertained by reason, but only by the feeling of the observer. That is, the determining factors in morality, according to Hume, are not understanding, but passions, for "Reason is, and ought only to be, the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them."⁸ It followed that there developed the cult of sensibility, the doctrine that value lies in feeling as such, with a belief in the innate benevolence of man.

It was accompanied by the literary corollary that the depiction of such benevolence engaged in philanthropic action or generous tears was the writer's goal, which ultimately ruined man's sense of proportion and led him away from the symmetry and moderation of neoclassicism. To weep for the suffering was the sure proof that he had a soul. Richard Steele abhorred the "Hardness of the Head" and praised "the Softness of the Heart." He earnestly pleaded: "To be apt to give way to the Impressions of Humanity is the Excellence of a right Disposition, and the natural Working of a well-turn'd Spirit."⁹ An avowedly anti-Hobbesian benevolist, Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, contended:

It is impossible to suppose a mere sensible creature originally so ill-constituted and unnatural as that, from the

moment he comes to be tried by sensible objects, he should have no one good passion towards his kind, no foundation either of pity, love, kindness, or social affection.

People's enthusiasm over sensibility was such that the first use of its related word, "sentimental," is recorded in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, quoting Lady Bradshaigh writing to Samuel Richardson in 1749:

What in your opinion is the meaning of the word *sentimental*, so much in vogue among the polite..... Everything clever and agreeable is comprehended in that word..... I am frequently astonished to hear such a one is a *sentimental* man; we were a *sentimental* party; I have been taking a *sentimental* walk.

This introduces to us the term in its first usage. It meant "characterized by sentiment," "sentiment" being Locke's sensation in its personal aspect,¹¹ alongside of "an opinion" (OED). By the middle of the eighteenth century a "sentiment" had evolved into "a refined or tender feeling" or "a verbal expression of sensibility" (OED), but the emphasis was on the refinement, as is witnessed in Lady Bradshaigh's interpretation. "Sensibility," in its turn, was used as "capability for refined emotion, delicate sensitiveness of taste, also readiness to feel compassion for suffering, and to be moved by the pathetic in literature and art" (OED). "Sentimentalism," in Laurence Sterne's sense of the term, different from its present-day connotation, turned out to be: "By sensory apprehension of the behavior of other persons, and by comparing the behavior by the association of ideas with our own, we conceive a sympathy with other persons."¹²

Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary* deals with "sentiment" and "sensibility" but does not include "sentimental" or "sentimentalism." His comments on "sentiment" are no different from what we have already had, but those on "sensibility" and "sensible" are worth notice. "Sensibility," according to the neoclassicist, means merely "quickness of sensation," and "sensible" "convinced or persuaded," but this interpretation is

"of a low use," because "in low conversation it has sometimes the sense of reasonable ; judicious ; wise."

"Sentiment," "sentimental," "sentimentalism," and "sensitivity" are all related to the Latin word "sentio" — "to feel." They involve delicate feelings, and nowadays the first three can be employed for extreme stages of over-reliance upon emotion, having undergone a rapid degeneration in the course of T. S. Eliot's phrase "dissociation of sensibility"¹³ — the disunion of thought and feeling, although his "sensitivity" demonstrates a radically different phase, designating "highly developed emotional intellectual apprehension and particular responsiveness to esthetic phenomena." Sterne's unsentimental *sentimental* novels set aside, many of the manifestations of eighteenth century "sensitivity" could be viewed, in consequence, as making a perilous balance between reason and feeling, tipping the scale to some degree in favour of the latter toward twentieth century sentimentality — "the suspense of the activities of the intelligence, of the power of ethical and intellectual judgment. With these power in suspense, the reader accepts the sentimentalist's simplified view, usually one in which humanity appears as essentially virtuous and consequently indulges in emotions, unimpeded by thought" (*Dictionary for Literary Terms*).

In the Age of Sensibility the reading public, through sentimental fads and crazes, wanted a form of literature that adequately presented contemporary life as it was, addressing to the heart rather than to the head, the prevailing form, satire, being for a small minority of intellectual aristocrats.¹⁴ *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* supplied the people with just the thing. It was received "with resounding acclaim and with scattered critical laughter."¹⁵ With all its close kinship with the the romance of roguery in choosing a humble maid-servant as its heroine and its concern with low life, it departs from it, like Prevost's *Manon Lescaut*, by portraying low life very sentimentally.¹⁶ As a confirmed moralist, Richardson wrote *Pamela* as a sort of conduct

book for young women in his endeavor to convey moral instructions through letters that told a story.

Whereas the Earl of Shaftesbury is claimed to have called ridicule "the test of truth,"¹⁷ Richardson seems as if to advocate the test lies in sensibility in the eighteenth century sense of the term. His success in creating a simple and ideal situation, in order to try the readers' sensibility and evoke in them a sense of pity and compassion, depends mainly upon two things — his presentation of an ingénue as the heroine and his adoption of the epistolary form of the novel. The author lowers the conventional aristocratic background for fiction in previous literary works to the domestic scenes that everybody of his day knew. Pamela is not a princess but a humble maid of fifteen and she is to go through the trial of seduction by her master Mr. B. The theme of the pursuing rake and the innocent maid prevalent on the contemporary stage¹⁸ is to be put into action and narrated from the innocent's point of view.

Pamela gives a touching self-portrait:

I am but a silly girl, set up by the gambol of Fortune, for a May-game; and now I am to be something, and now nothing, just as Fortune thinks fit to sport with me.¹⁹

She is kind to her fellow-servants and obedient to her parents who are virtuous enough "to choose to starve in a ditch or rot in a noisome dungeon, [rather] than live better at the price of [their] child's ruin" (I, 3). Pamela treasures her "virtue" or chastity and in its praise she employs an analogy of jewelry:

To lose the best jewel, my virtue, would be poorly recompensed by those [Mr. B.] proposes to give me, what should I think, when I looked upon my finger, or saw, in the glass, those diamonds on my neck, and in my ears, but that they were the price of my honesty, that I wore those jewels outwardly, because I had none inwardly? (I. 166)

Such an innocent and honest girl is thrown into such a situation as to stand in the midst of the social caste problem and

undergo amorous temptations and cruelties, narrowly escaping by weeping and falling into fits. The epithets she adorns herself with indicate various stages of seduction: she starts with "innocent," "dutiful," "virtuous," and then switches to "afflicted," "miserable," and toward the end, back to "happy," and "dutiful." She is, in short, pictured as an ideal suffering beauty, endowed with streaks of Puritan morality. She gives, in the present tense, such a full exposition of her heart — love, fear, sorrow, distress, joy, etc. — through her letters, each dated precisely, that the readers feel that she is one of them, emotionally involved and that her sentiments become their own as Denis Diderot eulogizes:

O Richardson! on prend, malgré qu'on en ait, un rôle dans tes ouvrages, on se mêle à la conversation, on approuve, on blâme, on admire, on s'irrite, on s'indigne. Combien de fois ne me suis-je pas surpris, comme il est arrivé à des enfants qu'on avait menés au spectacle pour la première fois, criant: *Ne le croyez pas, il vous trompe... Si vous allez là, vous êtes perdu.*²⁰

The letter vehicle, in its "writing to the moment" technique, not only builds an air of verisimilitude and a sense of immediacy but also confines the range of the readers' view within that of the heroine's subjective reactions to the situation. They are forbidden to see otherwise. That is, they are constantly in danger of being pulled by the nose, as Mr. B. is, by the *innocent* Pamela, with their esthetic and ethical judgment of the probability of the fiction thrown aside.

When we recover from our marvel at the maid-servant's capability to find time to write such long letters at any time of the day even in the age noted for letter writing and stand a little outside the spell of the author's urge for sentimental responses, we begin to wonder how far Pamela preserves her virtue and innocence, and at the same time suspect that her sufferings are of her own making. Depending upon whether they show sympathy with her affliction or not, all the characters are divided into two groups — good and bad. The good people have a feeling heart,

which is testified by their tears, prayers, virtuous and self-sacrificing speeches, illness, swoons, and madness. The evil ones lack feeling or are unable to excite tender feeling. Mrs. Jewkes and Monsieur Colbrand, two accomplices in Mr. B. 's sex-obsessed schemes against Pamela suffer a hedious distortion to the extent that they appear non-human, caricature-like as we often see in some of Charles Dickens' characters. Here is Pamela's description of Mrs. Jewkes :

She is a broad, squat, pursy, *fat thing*, quite ugly, if any thing human can be so called ; about forty years old. She has a huge hand, and an arm as thick as my waist, I believe. Her nose is flat and crooked, and her brows grow down over her eyes ; a dead, spiteful, grey, goggling eye, to be sure she has ; and her face flat and broad : and as to colour, looks as if it had been pickled a month in salt-petre : I dare say she drinks. She has a hoarse man-like voice, and is as thick as she's long : and yet looks so deadly strong, that I am afraid she would dash me at her foot in an instant, if I was to vex her. So that with a heart more ugly than her face, she frightens me sadly ; and I am undone, to be sure, if God does not protect me ; for she is very, very wicked — indeed she is. (I, 97)

Monsieur Colbrand is painted as a stereo-typed rascal :

He is a giant of a man for stature....., and large-boned, scraggy, and has a hand ! — I never saw such an one in my life. He has great staring eyes, like the bull's that frightened me so ; vast jaw-bones sticking out ; eyebrows hanging over his eyes ; two great scars upon his fore-head, and one on his left cheek ; two large whiskers, and a monstrous wide mouth ; blubber lips, long yellow teeth, and a hideous grin. He wears his own frightful long hair, tied up in a great black bag ; a black crape neckcloth, about a long ugly neck ; and his throat sticking out like a wen. (I, 145)

Both impress Pamela with their physical appearances : they are strongly built and have large hands. They are as ugly as they are bad. She could certainly have cited :

Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,
As, to be hated, needs but to be seen.²¹

The realities, physical and psychological, we are aware, become distorted to the same degree through Pamela's subjective interpretation, namely, through her sensibility. Her failure in fleeing from her prison room is improbable in the modern eyes, but she somehow vindicates her too prolonged exposure of herself to seduction. When she actually attempts to run away, she is prevented because she has no courage to pass by two bulls, "nasty grim" watching her "with fiery saucer eyes," like Lucifer incarnate. However, her fear is refuted as ridiculous by her own words: "When I saw [these supposed bulls] were only two cows grazing in distant places, [I understood] that my fears had made all this rout about" (I, 131-132). She has wished, "If I must suffer, let me not be long a mournful survivor!" (I, 173). But at the very verge of throwning herself into the pond to get rid of both Mr. B. and the world, even at this intensified moment she has composure enough to imagine herself as a heroine in "ballads and elegies" and then reflects suicide does not pay for her affliction: "Because men persecute thee, wilt thou fly in the face of the Almighty, and distrust his grace and goodness, who can *still* turn all these sufferings into benefit?" (I, 151). She will lie in wait for gathering proper profits out of her predicament, her religious sentiment veneering all her utilitarian casuistry. The more pathetically she reports, the more ridiculous becomes the scene: in fact, with the disclosing of her intentions, it is seen worse than those of mere sentimentality. The juxtaposition of Mrs. Jewkes and Monsieur Colbrand desperately searching her body in the pond with Pamela herself shivering in the outhouse, with her head, shins and ankle bruised, is far from providing any sentimental response. It has fallen into a farce, this tragedy in her own eyes.

Then, we puzzle over what she is trying to escape from. She is manifestly afflicted by Mr. B. 's repeated assaults on her

"innocence," but she does not dislike him from the start. Her vanity admires him in rich array and he is "this angel of a master! and this gracious benefactor to poor Pamela!" (I, 10). She shrewdly reads his mind in conflict between pride and love, for she reports he has told her:

My pride of birth and fortune, (damn them both! ... since they cannot obtain credit with you, but only add to your suspicion) will not let me descend all at once. (I, 70)

Whether stimulated or not by Mrs. Jewkes' prophecy: "You may be soon mistress of us all" (I, 93), Pamela develops her art of love. After Mr. B. has attempted her bosom, she wants to leave him partly because she is not sure whether she can withstand his temptation, but stays on because she can not decide what to do with the expensive dresses he has given her. When she is ready to go at long last with his permission, she shows herself off in her country clothes and easily falls into his arms while he pretends he cannot recognize her. The result is that she has to stay two weeks more. All in confusion, she weeps, "What have I done to be treated worse than if I had robbed you!" Naturally her master glares, "Yes, you've robbed me!" The innocent maid professes ignorance of the meaning and feels distressed at herself thus suspected of theft!

After he has tried to rape her, had her kidnapped, and placed the odious Mrs. Jewkes over her, she hears that he has nearly been drowned while hunting. She bursts out her prayer: "O what an angel would he be in my eyes yet, if he would cease his attempts and reform!" (I, 156). Again, when he sends to her proposals for making her his mistress, she answers, "I know not the man breathing I would wish to marry; ... the only one I could honour more than another, is the gentleman, who, of all others, seeks my everlasting dishonour" (I, 165).

Her abhorrence of him arises from her conscious possession of a treasure which he tries to rob her of without paying its due price. It is no wonder that poor Mr. B. should groan and call

her "a fool's plaything, artful creature, painted bauble, gewgaw, speaking picture" against which she complains and which make her think "whether she has not done vile things" (I, 142). He warns Mrs. Jewkes: "The artful *creature* is enough to corrupt a nation by her seeming innocence and simplicity" (I, 141). He is fully aware that she skilfully yields to him all but essentials and that she is edging him into the stronghold of matrimony with her virtue as the bait. Mr. B. is not, after all, an insensible man; he fails in his amorous adventures, affected by Pamela's tears, supplications, and faints. He is, therefore, reformed. His pride and the social barrier between master and maid-servant are crushed and her tender and humble heart is filled with gratitude and happiness.

However, it has been perceived all along that her sensibility is a means to her end, which assiduously distorts and converts all sense experience into utilitarian value. Her virtue is, in truth, a jewel, a commodity: its possessor is called the better merchant, the dearer she sells it. Her mentality is anything but innocent, obsessed with vulgar images and expectations,²² as lustful as Mr. B. Her and the author's praise of her virtue is constantly turned inside out by his unguarded parallelling of her behavior with her own reflections and other characters' comments on the main action of the story. The evils here are domestic trifles, criminal sexuality, unlike those of the *Aeneid*, and lack horror and, along with Richardson's mock moral instruction, only provoke sneer and obscene curiosity. It is not a story where the innocent's virtue is rewarded but rather one where the rake is caught in her trap. It is no malicious perversion that Henry Fielding called Pamela's only asset "her vartue."²³

Richardson's second novel, *Clarissa*, in many ways, represents the unhappy alternative to *Pamela* — the seducer "unfeeling" and unredeemable and the heroine a perpetual sufferer. For Richardson must have taken considerable attention to contemporary criticisms of *Pamela*, and thought that the sentimental effect of

virtue carried from one distress to another would be greater and that the morals would be purer and the emotion greater if the heroine were to die. Thus, the new heroine starts from the social status that Pamela has reached, only "to be vicariously ripped and murdered"²⁴ and rewarded, not with a marriage with an aristocrat, but with the Eternal Bliss.

As Richardson has been noted for his tendency to "use similar character types and involve them in similar situations,"²⁵ *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady; Comprehending the Most Important Concerns of Private Life, and Particularly Shewing, the Distress That May Attend the Misconduct Both of Parents and children, in Relation to Marriage* offers another ingénue with the level of her epithets raised to that of unearthly ones, indicative of a higher quality of her sensibility and virtue, far above money value, for the very terms—sensibility and virtue—should not be loaded with any utilitarian interest. She is, consequently, hailed as "the divine Clarissa" (I, 147) and "the angel of a woman" (I, 145). She is eighteen, a bit older and as dutiful to her parents and has as firm a belief in God's Grace as her predecessor. Clarissa's principle, however, "the man who has been the villain to me that [Lovelace] has been shall never make me his wife" (III, 222), is the assertion of a woman's dignity within the world of arranged marriage and hypocritical prostitution. It is certainly the very antithesis of Pamela's message.

Clarissa's world is more complex, the evils are greater, and the conflict copes not only with the sentimental analysis but with the vital human problems which lie at the heart of almost all the great novels. That is, the Clarissa story must be read in the context of a multiplicity of what Prof. Dorothy Van Ghent calls "myth"—the myth of social caste, the myth of family life, the myth of Puritan ethics and the myth of the love-death identification.²⁶

The central action is, however, again a rape. "The rape is in the offing, it is at hand, it is here, it is over, Clarissa sickens and dies, and that is all."²⁷ The event is reported from a variety

of points of view, all subjective, of several characters in the letter form, again, none of whom is allowed to penetrate into the matter objectively. Nonetheless, all the points of view put into clear focus the figure of Clarissa — pale, debilitated and distraught — the very image of “a half-broken-stalked lily, top-heavy with the over hanging dew of the morning” (III, 193).

Richardson's presentation of Clarissa's situation is *tragic*, for contrary to Pamela's the rape is performed here, and “the moral, social, economic attitudes of the day demanded that a ruined woman be treated as a tragic figure.”²⁸ However, Ian Kott says that “it is really the situation that defines the tragedy,” a situation being a relationship between the hero and the world, between the hero and other characters, independent of the character of the hero.²⁹ The multiple myth and other characters, indeed, constitute Clarissa's destiny, a pressure exerted upon her “from outside.”³⁰ Her situation is, after all, a situation of choice: she has to choose; first, either to accept the forced betrothal or to declare independence on parental authority and second, whether to submit to temptation or to reject it. For all its tragic elements prepared for her situation, nevertheless, the story does not rise up to the level of a true tragedy. In either case, the heroine's choice is to escape: she evades making her free decision which to take, ultimately to hope for an exulted marriage in Heaven, leaving the world of flesh and blood, which is the result of her sensibility, but not forced “from outside.”

The pen-knife scene is all illustrative of the nature of the novel. Lovelace is the reporter. Clarissa comes from her prison room holding a pen-knife, to where Lovelace, Mrs. Sinclair and others sit in conference.

“Approach me, Lovelace, with resentment, if thou wilt. I dare die. It is in defence of my honour. God will be merciful to my poor soul! I expect no mercy from thee! I have gained this distance, and two steps nearer me, and thou shalt see what I dare do!”

Leave me, women, to myself, and to my angel! They

retired at a distance. O my beloved creature, how you terrify me! Holding out my arms, and kneeling on one knee — Not a step, not a step further, except to receive the death myself at that injured hand that threatens its own. I am a villain! the blackest of villains! Say you will sheathe your knife in the injurer's, not the injured's, heart; and then will I indeed approach you, but not else.

The mother twanged her damned nose; and Sally and Polly pulled out their handkerchiefs, and turned from us. They never in their lives, they told me afterwards, beheld such a scene.....

Innocence so triumphant: villainy so debased, they must mean!

Unawares to myself, I had moved onward to my angel. "And dost thou, dost thou, *still* disclaiming, *still* advancing, dost thou, dost thou, *still* insidiously move towards me?" [and her hand was extended]. "I dare — I dare — not rashly neither — my heart from *principle* abhors the act, which *thou* makest *necessary*! God, in Thy mercy! [lifting up her eyes and hands] God, in Thy mercy!

I threw myself to the further end of the room my voice was utterly broken; nor knew I what I said, or whether to the purpose or not — and her charming cheeks, that were all in a glow before, turned pale, as if terrified at her own purpose: and lifting up her eyes — "Thank God! — Thank God! said the angel — delivered *for the present*; for the *present* delivered — from myself! Keep, sir, keep that distance" [looking down towards me, who was prostrate on the floor, my heart pierced as with a hundred daggers!] (III, 289-290)

The high-flown language is fit for a heroic tragedy, a repetition of the same phrases and incoherent exclamations are Richardson's rhetorical device to show realistically the disturbed state of mind in the participants. Nevertheless, the juxtaposition of the heroine avoiding the shameful treatment by hoding a pen-knife to her breast and the wicked fop prostrate on the floor in the presence of the twanging female accomplices does not make both the visual and the auditory image by any means so tragic as Richardson has intended them to be, with all the terror and and pathos expressed on the side of the characters. Clarissa's

tearing her clothes, with a pen-knife pointed to "her heaving bosom" is, at the plot level, a representation of desperation, but the emotions evoked here are not from the anxiety as to whether or not she will really commit suicide. The more forcefully are the passions described, the more sexually desirous she appears, for Lovelace concludes his letter by swearing: "I admire her, more than ever! I must have her. I *will* have her still — *with* honour, or *without*, as I have often vowed" (III, 292).

There are, we come to acknowledge, two levels of reading, at least, in *Clarissa*, which are constantly in conflict, killing off the sense of the tragic. One is, of course, on the plot level and the other beneath it with the implication that Clarissa is, indeed, delineated throughout in an extremely erotic context. Her sensibility, in relation to "quickness of sensation," is readily stimulated by "the man." Solmes is felt, physically, odious, the more so because once he has pressed her on the hoop with "his ugly weight" (I, 68). Early in the story, she nearly swoons at a man coming out of the dark though he turns out to be Lovelace (I, 175-176). Her elopement with Lovelace is motivated on the plot level by her brother and relatives' malicious intrigue to force her to marry Solmes, although she herself seems, somehow, tricked by Lovelace into this cursed action. However, she is an intelligent, proud and financially independent woman, unlike Pamela. She will never unwittingly go with a man she does not love or contemplate a possible marriage with. She writes to Lovelace later:

At first, I saw something in your air and person that displeased me not. Your birth and fortunes were no small advantages to you..... 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., of his two noble sisters. (III, 208)

Even after the rape has been performed, she shows some tenderness toward her "unchained Beelzebub" (III, 202). In her death-bed she still prays, "Would he have permitted me to have:

become a humble instrument to have made him good, I think I could have made him happy" (IV, 306). Indeed, she confesses she "might have loved him if he was worthy of [her] love" (IV, 306). For all his enormities and for all her distresses she loves Lovelace. But her love of him is usually stated beginning with "if." Her "conditional kind of liking" (I, 235) is a haughty and cruel test of sensibility and its eventual ill success causes her to die of "a broken heart" as is diagnosed by Dr. Goddard (III, 468). In short, Clarissa has expected in Lovelace a husband who treats her sensibly and with honour, but found out "he wants a *heart*" (I, 202). She is repulsed by such a "hardened insensibility" (IV, 449), manifest in his "vile opinion of her" (IV, 250).

The unfeeling Lovelace is presented as the worthy antagonist over against the sensitive Clarissa, so as to accumulate suspense after suspense in the love adventure. The very name Lovelace may have been derived from the names of such heartless rakes in the drama as Loveless in Colly Cibber's *Love's Last Shift* (1696) and Wronglove in Charles Johnson's *Caelia* (1732).³¹ He is a charming gentleman, "too handsome a man with his noble birth, fortune in possession, presumptive heir to [a] Nobleman's large estate, but very wild, very gay; loved intrigues" (I, 5). He is full of romantic notions of *amor courtois*: "Matrimony [he] does not heartily love" (III, 474).³² Besides, since he was crossed in love in his early manhood, he has sworn "to revenge upon as many of the sex as shall come upon [his] power. Pride, revenge, love, ambition or a desire of conquest are his avowedly predominant passions (I, 145). Clarissa excites his desire of conquest and revenge because of her seeming divine nature. Fully aware of the dichotomy of the flesh and the soul in man, he decides to test and see whether his lady is really an angel or a woman and whether, "if once subdued, she will be always subdued" (II, 41). If he can subdue her, moreover, it will be such a triumph over the whole sex and over the Harlows who have treated him with uncivility and Clarissa with inhumanity (I, 510). From the start he is

confident that she loves him as much as he believes he loves her (I, 146), and fancies, "by her circumspection and her continual grief, that she *expects* some mischief from [him]." He does not care to disappoint anybody he has a value for (I, 514) and strives in "a game" of love (I, 513). The more difficult it is to gain, the more desirable becomes the object of love. As he knows too well that while her intellect is awake, he is too much awed to use force upon her, he drugs her. He succeeds and reports to a friend: "The affair is over. Clarissa lives" (III, 196), only to discover himself situated ten times worse than before. Not only he has learned that she is an angel upon full proof, but all that he has actually gained are "detection, disgrace, fresh guilt by repeated perjuries, and to be despised by her [he] *dotes upon*; and what is still worse to a proud heart, by [himself]" (III, 292), and he does not see "whose triumph now! Hers or [His]!" (III, 221). Belford, one of his fellow rakes, has been reformed, affected by Clarissa's magnanimity, but Lovelace's pride and insensibility do not let him condescend to become such another: "If I give up my contrivances, my joy in stratagem, and plot, and inventions, I shall be but a common man" (III, 129). The pitiless knight-errant keeps on the even tenor of his way, assured that "a church rite will at any time repair that injury" (III, 281). But there is his lady's bourgeois and Puritan code of decorum: "The man who has been the villain to me that [Lovelace] has been shall never make me his wife". His dream a few months before his losing duel foretells his future and compels him to *recognize* the reality of his affair with Clarissa. He dreams that while she is raised to heaven, leaving only her azure robe in his arms, he himself tumbles down into hell (IV, 136). He has accomplished his vile ends only with her flesh, but her soul, being drugged, was not there, her perception of sensation numb and her virtue intact. Furthermore, her death and ensuing canonization nullify the whole affair.

Whereas her demon lover sticks to the flesh, a perpetual

sufferer in hell, although with some psychologically plausible motives, Clarissa, indeed, in death "returns to her Father's house" and attains a heavenly marriage on the plot level. However, on the one hand, she says, "I have much more pleasure in thinking of death than of such a husband" (III, 519) and orders her coffin to be placed in her sickroom and concerns herself with its decoration, but on the other her attitude toward death can be explained away only through the love-death imagery:

As for me, never bride was so ready as I am. My wedding garments are bought. Though not fine and gaudy to the sight....., yet will they be the easiest, the happiest suit, that ever bridal maiden wore. (IV, 303)

Hitherto, Lovelace has complained she has "no passions; that is to say, none of the passions that [he] wants her to have" (III, 215), but her erotic concept of death indicates her sexual passion within is really violent if we interpret death as the consummation of sexual intercourse, one of the oldest puns and one of the oldest myth motifs. The forbidden wish by the Puritan code of life can be given free play to in the guise of nonindulgence in dreams. Before her elopement she dreams that her brother, her uncle, and Solmes are forming an intrigue to kill Lovelace, and that he decides to attack her in revenge, puts them to rout, stabs her in a churchyard for all her prayers and tears, throws her into a grave with other corpses, and tramples dirt upon her (I, 433). The dream is a foreshadowing of what does happen as well as a fulfilling of her subconscious desire for Lovelace.

In this love-death imagery alone all the conflicts of the Clarissa situation find their synthesis (or, rather, they are dissolved into it) — body vs. soul, aristocracy vs. bourgeoisie, Puritan denunciation of sex vs. *amor courtois*, individual vs. family, romance vs. historical realities of a mercantile, man-dominated society. She dies, not in a rebellious defeat but happy at the final gratification of the subconscious portion of her emotional life, with holy sanctions, which she is too proud to admit while confined within

her "situation," her "vile, hated self" (III, 321), conscious of her one misstep — the tragic flaw — her voluntary removal from the the authority of her parents and of her father's curse operating upon her through the tool named Lovelace (III, 219). The story is, in fact, a "divine comedy,"⁸³ if the struggle between good and evil be exemplified by that between "the divine Clarissa" and the eighteenth century Lucifer, Lovelace, degenerate to the extent that "in the pages of *Clarissa* heaven is continually being offered cheap to hell".⁸⁴

Richardson's purpose is to test sensibility, to extol virtue and evoke sensation of pity and sympathy, rather than terror and fear, in the readers by placing all the emphasis, not upon the strength of the heroine, but upon her whiteness and pitiful helplessness and by substituting goodness for greatness. The evils, other than sexual — the tyranny of the religious, social and family life mores — are employed as a means by which to show the pressure upon her "from outside" is formidable enough to set in vivid contrast her sentimental attitude toward them and give some rationale for her frequent unsuccessful "escape" from them, and yet temporal enough to crumple down under her feet too readily, confronted with her death.

The sentimentalist's forte of playing on the feeling of the readers is, supposedly, reinforced by the letter vehicle. The rape is performed around the middle of the book and the heroine's lingering death occupies one-third of the whole length of the novel. The story of her failing away is reported by several observers over and over again. She has her shroud, coffin, and the inscription on her grave-stone ready. She has made her will, paid the undertaker's bill, yet she does not die. Disappointed to hear that she may *still* live for a few days, she has a devout *memento mori*;⁸⁵ conversation with Dr. H., "as if death were an occurrence as familiar to her as dressing and undressing" (IV, 215). The engraving, on her monument, of the "head of a white lily snapped short off, and just falling from the stalk" (IV, 450), with the date

of death, April 10, the fatal day of her leaving her father's house, represents what Clarissa stands for and wrings the tears from the spectators. Even dying she begs of her hard-hearted family to pity and forgive her. Clarissa and her creator vigorously channel all the readers' sensory response toward a passive acceptance of her sentimental judgment of her own behavior that when her story is known, she "will be entitled to more compassion than blame, even on the score of going away with Lovelace" (III, 327). This epistolary form of the novel, in one way, impresses the readers with a sort of dramatic narrative, told by the actors, living and weeping on the stage, but in another, the same event is committed to examination and cross-examination, as if to insist that brevity is harmful to sentimentalism. As a result, though it succeeds in obtaining what José Ortega y Gasset terms, as necessary qualifications of the modern novel, "sluggishness" and close "feeling-participation,"³⁶ by the time when she actually dies, happy and triumphant, surrounded by lamenting friends, our sensibility has already been exhausted. We may feel a little melancholy but we never feel tragic awe and fear at the death of the "blameless" Clarissa, "more sinn'd against than sinning"³⁷ and at the poetic justice done to her antagonist and his accomplices.

Indeed, the story is tedious. This criticism seems to be the same whether the readers live in the eighteenth century or in the twentieth. For Samuel Johnson subtly states: "Why, Sir, if you were to read Richardson for the story, your impatience would be so much fretted that you would hang yourself. But you must read him for the sentiment, and consider the story only giving occasion to the sentiment."³⁸ Through the two levels of reading, however, we have already seen that we have to look askant at either Richardson's or Clarissa's sentiment. Clarissa's affliction, as Lovelace justly perceives, arises from her "extreme sensibility" (III, 281) — her maudlin sensitiveness to sex and decorum. Her feeling heart works more for self-pity than for divine forgiveness and compassion. Her helplessness and captivity are only sham.

Does not her contemporary, Sophia, in Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*, leave home alone, in defiance of parental tyranny and enforced betrothal? Realistically speaking, it is not probable that a robust girl of eighteen, even in the eighteenth century, (for Clarissa is, by no means, so fragile as a white lily dangling its head with the weight of morning dews, at least, before her elopement) can be long held captive in a prison room. We must remember, besides, how violently she taunts Lovelace! Her proud "conditional kind of liking" plan and her subconscious passion for her seducer keep her from running away from him. Furthermore, to such a rich bourgeois daughter the barrier between aristocracy and the merchant class means nothing. She need not trade on her "virtue" as her sister Pamela has done. By setting a heavenly price upon her "virtue," however, in many ways, she is instrumental in the same manner as Pamela, in provoking her tempter to resort to force and, contrary to the preceding story, bringing destruction upon him and herself. She is also instrumental to Richardson in engaging his readers to share his and Lovelace's psychological and sexual experiment with the heroine and their "dubious delights of voyeurism"³⁹ resulting from it. These suggest the author's obsessional interest in sexual evils and the kind of sadistic experience that Mr. B. and Lovelace represent. We come to suspect that the sentiments that Richardson tries to depict are of "a lower order" unqualified for those of a true tragedy and that his sensibility is that of a second-rate person who is unable to control his emotions. The sentimentalism he endeavors to create is really twentieth century sentimentality where the activities of the intelligence, the power of ethical and intellectual judgment, are in suspense, only to be dictated by the sentimentalist's emotional view of life. We must use "suspect" here because *Clarissa*, nevertheless, can forcefully challenge our perception of some aspects of human nature and exhibit a perspective, though slantly, on sense experience.

After all, Richardson never intended to make romantic ideas

out of his characters; he never meant to advocate that love was the best of all good nor that feeling should be estimated above all decorum and convention. He only aimed to recommend "virtue", the one that was conceived by the Puritan bourgeoisie of the eighteenth century. He was at much pains to achieve this goal by examining and re-examining each throb and flutter of the heart, though with a morbid and dubious interest. He succeeded in building up a sort of "quasi reality" by supplying a wealth of detail through "a microscopic analysis of human souls."⁴⁰ During his search for the easily pathetic he touched, even if temporarily, upon the fundamental and tragic problem of choice in the human situation. He grew up finally to obtain the lasting fame of being the prototype of the modern novel defined by Ortega y Gasset and others.⁴¹

Although his cult of sensibility and his method of the application of sentimental analysis were doomed to result in the disconcerting contempt for the moral instruction which he had wished above all else to propagate, he has taught us that "virtue equalizes all ranks."⁴² If the virtuous soul is the most *nearly* truthful, and the most *nearly* worthy of a heavenly reward, of all earthly things, it is in the throbs and flutters of such a feeling heart, rather than in the conventions of a corrupt society febrile with self-love and unremitting competition that true goodness and genuine tears for the suffering can be found. Sensibility in Richardson, though of such a maudlin and equivocal nature, indeed, assumes a higher tone with Pamela's plea:

O Sir! my *soul* is of equal importance with the soul of a princess, though my quality is inferior to that of the meanest slave.⁴³

Notes

1. Virgil, *The Aeneid of Virgil*, trans. Rolfe Humphries (New York, 1951), I, 462-463.
2. Frank Bradbrook, "Samuel Richardson," *From Dryden to Johnson*, ed. Boris Ford (Baltimore, 1965), p. 293.
3. Samuel Richardson, "Author's Preface", *Clarissa*, ed. George Sherburn (Boston, 1962), p. xx.
4. Morris Golden, *Richardson's Characters* (Ann Arbor, 1963), p. 1.
5. Richardson, p. xx.
6. Ira Konigsberg, "The Dramatic Background of Richardson's Plots and Characters" *PMLA*, LXXXIII (March 1968), 48.
7. John Locke, *Locke's Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Mary whiton Calkins (Chicago, 1917), pp. 58-59. Locke holds that the objects of sensible reality have two distinct characteristics, primary and secondary: the primary characteristics are objective and inherent in the object while the secondary exist only in the mind of the perceiver and so are more subjective than primary. Thus the neoclassical antipathy to originality and subjective feeling embraced selfcontradictions within from the start.
8. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (London, 1960), pp. 125-127.
9. Richard Steele, "Preface to *The Conscious Lovers*," *English Criticism: Restoration and 18th Century*, ed. Samuel Hynes (New York, 1963), p. 197.
10. Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, "An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit," *Eighteenth Century Poetry and Prose*, ed. Louis I. Bredvold et al. (New York, 1956), p. 310.
11. Herbert Read, "Sterne," *Collected Essays in Literary Criticism* (London, 1962), p. 256.
12. John Traugott, "Introduction," *Laurence Sterne: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood cliffs, N. J., 1968), p. 4.

13. T. S. Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets," *Selected Essays* (London, 1966), p. 288.
14. David Worcester, *The Art of Satire* (Cambridge, Mass., 1940), p. 165.
15. George Sherburn, "Introduction," *Clarissa*, ed. George Sherburn (Boston, 1962), p. v. Some of its manifestations are Denis Diderot's *Éloge de Richardson* on the one hand and on the other Henry Fielding's *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews* in which he parodies *Pamela*.
16. Frederick Olds Bissell, Jr., *Fielding's Theory of the Novel* (New York, 1969), p. 5.
17. See Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, etc.*, ed. John M. Robertson (New York, 1900), pp. 10, and 57-58.
18. Königsberg, p. 45.
19. Samuel Richardson, *Pamela* (London, 1961), I, 93. In the absence of standard texts, I use the widely available Everyman editions of *Pamela* and *Clarissa* in this paper. All quotation from these works will be taken from these editions. As to *Pamela*, the paper is concerned only with its first part as in my opinion Richardson so foolishly added a sequel after the success of the first.
20. Denis Diderot, "Éloge de Richardson", *Oeuvres Esthétiques* (Paris, 1959), p. 30.
21. Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Man*, II, 218-219.
22. *Pamela*, I, 145. Pamela has a nightmare in which Mr. B. and his huge servant, Colbrand, come to her bedside "with the worst designs".
23. See Henry Fielding, "An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews."
24. Dorothy Van Ghent, *The English Novel: Form and Function* (New York, 1955), p. 51.
25. Morris Golden, "Richardson's Repetitions," *PMLA*, LXXXII (March 1967), 64.

26. Ghent, p. 62.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
28. Konigsberg, p. 47.
29. Ian Kott, "Hamlet and Orestes" *PMLA* LXXXII (October 1967), 303.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 307.
31. Konigsberg, p. 49.
32. C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (New York, 1958), pp. 2-3. Lewis enumerates as the characteristics of such love "Humility, Courtesy, Adultery, and the Religion of Love." This love is always what the nineteenth century called "dishonourable" love. The man normally addresses another man's wife and he is ethically careless about her husband or his own marriage.
33. Ghent, p. 55.
34. André Gide, quoted from Ghent, p. 52.
35. It means, "Remember that you must die." This concept is one of the manifestations of the medieval heritage of European literature. For details see Willard Farnham, *The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy* (Oxford, 1956).
36. José Ortega y Gasset, *The Dehumanization of Art and Other Essays on Art, Culture, and Literature* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1968), pp. 79 & 17.
37. William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, III, ii, 60.
38. James Boswell, *The Life of Dr. Johnson* (London, 1960), p. 427.
39. Ghent, p. 49.
40. Ortega y Gasset, p. 81.
41. Ronald Paulson, *Satire and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York, 1967), p. 100.
42. Konigsberg, p. 44.
43. *Pamela*, I, 137.

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