

Beth Swan

## Clarissa: Saint or Sinner? Richardson and Eighteenth-Century Ideologies of Virtue

The eighteenth century, no less than the twentieth, was happy to espouse the ethos of salvation by works. Focusing on the moral ego, the idea of 'virtue' supported flattering notions of self; it was a religion of the respectable, which manifested itself in moral pragmatism, and shunned what it perceived to be theological imponderables. There was of course another, less comfortable vision: 'For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God',<sup>i</sup> a doctrine not of self-validation through promotion of a public moral persona but of vicarious grace, a doctrine which precluded self-elevation because it underlined man's eternal inadequacies. It is this which Richardson presents in *Clarissa* (1747-8), a narrative structured around the spiritual progress of its eponymous heroine, perhaps the most famous and certainly the most controversial Christian figure in eighteenth-century fiction. Clarissa enables Richardson to highlight and comment on issues from a Christian perspective and by implication, to challenge fundamental aspects of eighteenth-century culture and behaviour. As Eaves and Kimpel point out, 'Clarissa is unconventional in taking seriously the doctrines her society [only] professed to believe'.<sup>ii</sup>

Fielding articulates popular eighteenth-century attitudes towards the faith versus works dialectic in *Joseph Andrews* (1742): 'when [Whitfield] began to call Nonsense and Enthusiasm to his Aid, and to set up the detestable Doctrine of Faith against good Works, I was his Friend no longer', arguing that he cannot 'imagine that the All-wise Being will hereafter say to the Good and Virtuous, *Notwithstanding the Purity of thy Life...as thou did'st not believe every thing in the true Orthodox manner, thy want of Faith shall condemn thee*'.<sup>iii</sup>

There is a cultural tendency, in resolute opposition to socio-historical fact, to assume that our forefathers were morally superior to ourselves and therefore closer to God. However, if one studies the literature and culture of earlier periods, what becomes apparent is not a progressive alienation from Christian doctrine but consistent tension between notional or socialised Christianity and biblical doctrine. What does appear to have occurred is a kind of specialisation of religious values: nominal Christianity is less popular in the twentieth century than it was in earlier periods, presumably as a result of the increasing intellectual respectability of atheism. Hence Christian discourse is now more likely to be appropriated by Christians, as opposed to being common currency.

It is worth remembering that in pre-twentieth century and particularly pre-television English society, church-going was often a primarily social activity, an opportunity to gossip, to search for a spouse and, of course, to assert one's place in the social hierarchy. In Medieval times, church proceedings had definite entertainment value, complete with bogus 'reliques' such as rags claimed to be part of Mary's garments, all with much vaunted magical powers of healing.<sup>iv</sup> Sermons often took the form of dramatic monologues and morality plays were frequently the only form of religious instruction.<sup>v</sup>

In the eighteenth century prostitutes used church gatherings to find clients. Richard King explains that older prostitutes would go to church with younger women: 'the old creature...simulates piety and utters hypocritical prayers...When the service is over, the old woman on going out stumbles suddenly, falls down or

faints'; a young man escorts the supposed mother and daughter home and falls prey to their machinations.<sup>vi</sup>

This paper seeks to reconstruct the eighteenth-century context to the issue of virtue, focusing on Richardson's *Clarissa* not as a romantic heroine but as a Christian. *Clarissa* is an eighteenth-century *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) but with a female protagonist who faces feminine trials of virtue. It is designed to make the reader empathise with *Clarissa*, to participate vicariously in her trials and to examine his or her own spiritual state. *Clarissa*'s dilemma is not one which will be familiar to young women today but the truths which lie behind the narrative conventions are timeless. In an age which valued the reputation for virtue and charity above actual virtue and which was sceptical, even hostile, to the doctrine 'For by grace are ye saved through faith...Not of works, lest any man should boast',<sup>vii</sup> *Clarissa* is intended as a stark reminder of biblical precept.

Eighteenth-century society appears to have been obsessed with morality: its literature contains frequent allusions to the importance of virtue and conduct books, giving moral instruction for every conceivable area of life, were very popular.<sup>viii</sup> Supporting these apparently strenuous efforts to safeguard public morality was an impressive body of legislature seemingly designed to promote virtuous behaviour, particularly in sexual matters, penalising behaviour such as pre-marital sexual relations, seduction and adultery.<sup>ix</sup> Yet closer inspection of the law reveals a society obsessed not with virtue *per se*, but with property.

Bernard Mandeville argued in 1723 that honour, a word used almost synonymously with virtue, is 'a Chimera...an Invention of Moralists and Politicians', which 'signifies a certain Principle of Vertue not related to Religion'.<sup>x</sup> While Mandeville is not an entirely reliable mouthpiece for eighteenth-century thinking, he does highlight the disparity between twentieth-century assumptions about eighteenth-century morality and those which actually framed eighteenth-century behaviour.

Eighteenth-century legislation was designed to protect patrilineal blood lines, not to promote moral behaviour. What is perhaps surprising is that the reduction of Christian morality to part of the property mechanism was universally acknowledged but by no means universally criticised. Attitudes varied from discomfort, sometimes anger, to dark amusement at the outrageousness of moral issues being viewed, directly or otherwise, in terms of property. Christian writers such as Richardson and later Catherine Macaulay, who argued that virtue required spiritual conviction and rationality, were challenging by implication the basic assumptions of English law and custom.

Nowhere is eighteenth-century moral ideology more clearly expressed than in the concept of female virtue. A woman's moral stature was determined by her reputation for chastity, a term which ostensibly indicated many moral qualities but which ultimately ensured that brides would be chaste and that heirs would thus be legitimate. Fundamental to this concept was the view of women as masculine property. Unmarried women under twenty one were the legal property of their fathers. On marriage, the wife's identity was subsumed into that of the husband. Blackstone, an eighteenth-century legal historian, explained: 'By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law';<sup>xi</sup> in effect, she became his property.<sup>xii</sup>

In view of the huge importance attached to chastity, reputation became a valuable economic asset, without which women could not hope to make a good marriage. Wollstonecraft quotes Rousseau in *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792): 'reputation is no less indispensable than chastity' for women because while a man, 'secure in his own conduct...may brave the public opinion...a woman, in behaving well,

performs but half her duty; as what is thought of her, is as important to her as what she really is'. Wollstonecraft argued that 'a constant attention to keep the varnish of the character fresh' is 'often inculcated as the sum total of female duty'. Hence 'If the honor of a woman, as it is absurdly called, be safe, she may neglect every social duty'.<sup>xiii</sup>

Mandeville argued that even elements of genuine virtue may be based on economically determined social precepts, commenting that women grow up to 'find their worldly Interest entirely depending upon the Reputation of their Chastity' and arguing, 'it is upon this Compound of natural and artificial Chastity, that every Woman's real actual Chastity depends'.<sup>xiv</sup> Mandeville is unduly cynical in claiming that religion plays no part in eighteenth-century constructs of virtue but he reveals a very real problem: the dichotomy between genuine virtue based on spiritual conviction, and 'social' virtue, usually discussed in terms of chastity and reputation. In *Remarks* he distinguishes humorously but pertinently between the two: 'Virtue bids us subdue, but good Breeding only requires we should hide our Appetites'(p.106).

Richardson explores moral issues throughout his fiction but in *Clarissa* he mounts his most serious attack on 'social morality'. Clarissa is an embodiment of Christian values, existing in contradistinction to society's often hypocritical notions of virtue. Anna Howe recognises that Clarissa's virtue is not simply sexual, as society perceives it, but a form of spiritual and moral strength, referring to it as 'majesty', '*native dignity*' and '*heroism*'.<sup>xv</sup> It is part of Clarissa's personal tragedy that most of the characters around her fail to understand and even to recognise her spiritual values. Her emphasis on individual moral responsibility and human fallibility is both political and profoundly spiritual.

Clarissa is an extraordinarily well disciplined young woman, renowned for her charity and her study of the Bible.<sup>xvi</sup> Believing herself to be well armed against the wiles of the world, she trusts to her own judgement when determining her moral conduct. She is imprisoned in her room by her family because she refuses to marry the wealthy but repulsive Solmes. They threaten to force her to marry him and she flees the house, placing herself under the protection of the only person willing to help her: Lovelace. He tricks her into lodging with a prostitute and endeavours to seduce her; this fails and so he drugs and rapes her. Clarissa escapes but ultimately dies, apparently from shame and grief.<sup>xvii</sup>

This catalogue of disasters is familiar in eighteenth-century fiction: the threat of forced marriage, seduction and rape are commonplace narrative conventions. However, *Clarissa* transcends the very conventions it employs, following its heroine's progress not towards marital bliss but greater spiritual awareness. I do not accept Erickson's reading of *Clarissa* as a progression from 'the prophet with divine sanction - to the prophet deified'.<sup>xviii</sup> There are many instances in the text where characters are awed by Clarissa's spirituality and thus refer to her as saintly<sup>xix</sup> but it is unwise to accept at face value narrative conventions such as religious epithets for virtuous women. Clarissa is referred to in religious terms to emphasise her purity and piety, not because Richardson intended us to see her as in any way divine. On the contrary, the text establishes very clearly that in spite of her piety, Clarissa is flawed.

Richardson's own comments in the *Postscript* suggest that the novel is a traditional drama of sin and repentance, perhaps all the more powerful because its protagonist is in human terms almost impossibly virtuous. Richardson tells the reader that *Clarissa* 'is formed on [a] religious plan', based on the 'dispensation...with which God by Revelation teaches us he has thought fit to exercise mankind; whom, placing here only in a state of *probation*, he hath so intermingled good and evil as to necessitate them to look

forward for a more equal distribution of both'(p.1495).

At the beginning of the novel *Clarissa* embodies all that eighteenth-century moralists could desire, a seeming endorsement of the notion of salvation by works. Her only flaw appears to have been a degree of naïveté and pride in her own spiritual strength before she 'fell', something she learns to repent of as she reassesses the events of the last few months while waiting to die.<sup>xx</sup> She becomes painfully aware of the change in her situation: she used to give moral teaching to the poor but admits, 'how should I be able...to say to [the cottagers' daughters] Fly the delusions of men, who had been supposed to have run away with one?'(p.1117).

After her escape from her parents' home to avoid marriage to the loathsome Solmes, *Clarissa* is caught in the grip of apparent opposing moral absolutes: aversion to marriage to a man she cannot honour and obey versus filial obedience. She admits to Anna, her confidante, 'I am in a wilderness of doubt and error'(p.566) and turns to prayer; she tells Anna subsequently, 'I know not how I came by such an uncommon elevation of mind, if it were not given me in answer to my earnest prayers'(p.1117). *Clarissa* writes her own spiritual meditations: 'How art thou now humbled in the dust, thou proud *Clarissa Harlowe*...Who wert wont...to plume thyself upon the expected applauses of all that beheld thee...It must have been so! My fall had not else been permitted'(p.891).<sup>xxi</sup> *Clarissa* is a daring example of mankind's inability to determine their ultimate spiritual condition: even she, whom 'everybody almost worshipped'(p.578), 'proposed by every father and mother for a pattern for their daughters'(p.975), is revealed as a sinner.

*Clarissa* clearly sites itself within contemporary debate concerning the nature of female virtue and whether it required rationality or was simply a sentimental quality, an expression of a 'good heart'. This issue is reflected in twentieth-century literary criticism. Commentators are characteristically reluctant to deal with Christian issues in fiction beyond vague quasi-philosophical references to 'religion'. Eaves and Kimpel are representative of those who recognise *Clarissa*'s spirituality but ascribe it to sensibility: 'the vital element in *Clarissa*'s religion is her sensibility'(p.279).<sup>xxii</sup> *Clarissa* is of course a sentimental heroine but we must not confuse this with her Christian values, which are predicated not on sentiment but biblical doctrine. Frequent allusions to scripture indicate clearly that Richardson intended the reader to be conscious of a biblical as well as a romantic context.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Eighteenth-century debate concerning the rôle of sensibility as opposed to rationality in religious conviction was in turn closely related to the question of whether or not women had souls. Lovelace articulates the views of many eighteenth-century men: 'We have held that women have no souls: I am...willing to believe they have not'(p.704). This apparently religious issue has socio-political implications: if women have souls and are capable of rationality and individual moral responsibility, the argument that feminine virtue is simply expressed in chastity, so useful to the patriarchal inheritance system, becomes increasingly untenable. Richardson repudiates the socio-legal view through Lovelace, who comes to respect *Clarissa*'s spiritual identity: 'she seemed...to be all soul'(p.949).

In *Clarissa* Richardson subjects socialised virtue to Christian scrutiny and presents the potentially tragic consequences of morality without conviction. One obvious example is *Clarissa*'s mother, who equates virtue with wifely submission, even when it involves participating in her family's cruelty to her daughter. After *Clarissa*'s death, Mrs Harlowe admits, 'I have been too passive...The temporary quiet I have been so studious all my life to preserve has cost me everlasting disquiet'(p.1396). Her lack of individual moral

judgement and courage leads indirectly to the assault and death of her daughter, forced to leave the comparative safety of her home to avoid imprisonment and forced marriage and to put her trust in the man who will betray her: Lovelace.

The relationship between Lovelace and Clarissa is a symbolic battle between Richardson's conception of the ultimate rake and the ultimate Christian; imagery throughout the novel represents Lovelace as 'a devil, and [Clarissa] a saint'(p.995). Their power struggle culminates in the ultimate test of female virtue in eighteenth-century narrative terms: rape. Clarissa has passed all the earlier sexual 'tests' Lovelace has designed for her, by resisting seduction, and so he drugs and rapes her. Throughout *Clarissa*, Lovelace appropriates the idea of spiritual testing and twists it to his own ends by paralleling it with sexual 'tests'. He comments, 'have I not known twenty and twenty of the sex, who have seemed to carry their notions of virtue high; yet, when brought to the test, have abated of their severity?', arguing, 'how should we be convinced that *any* of them are proof, till they are tried?'(p.886).

Mrs Norton tells Clarissa after the rape, 'Your moral character is untainted'(p.990) and Anna reassures her that she has 'a virtue unsullied; a will wholly faultless'(p.1020). This issue was debated throughout the century. Antonia argues in *The Virgin Unmask'd* (1709) that a virtuous woman cannot 'lose her Honour, unless she be ravish'd; and then 'tis a Question, whether she loses it or not'. Lucinda replies, echoing popular views, 'a Woman that is murder'd, loses her Life as much as she that dies of a Fever.'<sup>xxiv</sup> Wollstonecraft criticised such attitudes later in the century in *Rights of Woman*: 'miserable beyond all names of misery is the condition of a being, who could be degraded without its own consent!'(p.166).

Lovelace testifies to the dichotomy between socio-legal concepts of virtue and genuine moral absolutes, admitting 'incredulity that there could be such virtue (virtue for *virtue's* sake) in the sex'(p.1344). He argues that Clarissa's virtue is exceptional and so claims, 'how knew we, till the theft was *committed*, that the miser did actually set so romantic a value upon the treasure?'(p.1438). His use of language shows that, like many others, he regards female virtue as a 'treasure' kept by a 'miser', as property. Yet he also dismisses it as 'romantic', viewing it in sentimental terms rather than from a Christian stance.

Lovelace's cynical attitude towards feminine virtue is not entirely without foundation, for he has seen numerous examples of female hypocrisy under the guise of virtue: he knows 'some of the haughtiest and most *ensorious* spirits...now passing for chaste wives, of whom strange stories might be told'((pp.869-70). He refers to Clarissa's virtue as 'a niceness that has no example either in ancient or modern story'(p.886). The word 'niceness' suggests fastidiousness and manners, rather than serious moral concern. Lovelace's language and assumptions may be appropriate to hypocritical 'society ladies' but they are inadequate in reference to Clarissa.

Clarissa's vigorous defence of her virtue owes much to the traditions of romance, for example, when she threatens to kill herself with scissors, warning 'my honour is dearer to me than my life!'(p.725). Lovelace refers to her behaviour as 'romancing' and argues deprecatingly, 'At this rate of romancing, how many *flourishing ruins* dost thou, as well as I, know?'(p.869). Yet Clarissa is presented very much as a Christian heroine and consequently, her motivation is more complex and her moral position more absolute than those of heroines from purely romantic traditions. Her heroic virtue derives largely from the Christian tradition of fortitude in the face of temptation and suffering. Lovelace explains after the rape: 'I had prepared myself for high passions, raving...But such a majestic composure...No Lucretia-like<sup>xxv</sup> vengeance upon herself in her

thought'(p.900) confounds him.

It may be helpful to consider briefly an example of a romantic heroine resisting rape, since this tradition provides an implicit standard of reference for much of *Clarissa*. In Aubin's *The Strange Adventures of the Count de Vinevil* (1721), the Count of Longueville tells his wife Ardelisa, 'remember both your Duty to yourself and me. Permit not a vile Infidel to dishonour you, resist to death'. Romantic convention determined that heroines should protect their virtue with their lives. However, the Count's language must have seemed rather excessive even in the 1720s: 'let me not be so compleatly curs'd, to hear you live, and are debauch'd'.<sup>xxvi</sup>

Violetta in the same novel feels that she has not lived up to the romantic ideal of chastity: 'I submitted to the fatal necessity of my Circumstances'(p.91). She forgives her rapist and 'saw him with a Wife's Eyes, and thought [herself] oblig'd to do so'. Through Father Francis, Aubin provides a somewhat ironic view of Catholic precepts, on which English canon law was based. He tells her, 'as you were single, a Virgin, and made his by the Chance of War, it was no Sin in you to yield to him, and it would have been...a Sin not to have been faithful to his Bed, whilst he is living you ought not to marry'(p.92), as if she had married him.

What differentiates Violetta's case from Ardelisa's is that when Violetta was raped, she did not already belong to a man: 'in *Ardelisa*, who was marry'd to another, it would have been a horrid Crime to suffer another Man for to possess her'(p.92). Ironically, the 'horrid crime' refers not to the rape but to the possibility of a woman not dying in an attempt to defend her husband's property rights vested in her. Aubin, like Richardson, uses the narrative convention of trials of virtue in order to question her society's values. Her stand-point is resolutely moral, providing an implicit indictment on the legal system and its focus on property.

Both Richardson and Aubin use the conventions of romance tradition to present their heroines as symbols of strength. In eighteenth-century terms, opportunities for women to express moral strength were limited; the greatest proof was deemed to be the defence of chastity. *Clarissa*'s attitude to the rape provides a moral standard by which to judge other characters' views. Most of the other characters view the rape principally in its material aspects, seemingly blind to the moral issue and denying the personal assault on *Clarissa*. They regard it as a slur on family honour, reflecting the legal view that rape was a violation of masculine property rights. Blackstone explains that by law, rape is an injury to the father 'to his family, and to his honour and happiness'<sup>xxvii</sup> because it destroyed the daughter's property value.

*Clarissa* sees the rape as a personal injury, an attack on her virtue, not on her father's 'property'. Her stand is primarily moral but it inevitably has political implications because in the eighteenth-century scheme of things moral issues were also legal and economic. Increasingly, she retreats into her inner moral self, acting 'so as that [her] own heart shall not reproach' her but realising 'As to the world's censure, I must be content to suffer that'.<sup>xxviii</sup>

*Clarissa* is a Christian response to a serious eighteenth-century problem: what to do with 'ruined' women. Women were 'ruined' after sexual experience not because of moral principles but because they were no longer marriageable. Since women from the upper classes could not realistically expect to earn a living, the only 'heroinely' option after seduction or rape was to die. Ruined maidens, often rape victims, could have a husband bought for them if the family was sympathetic and could afford it but all too often, they were sent

to the workhouse or sometimes incarcerated in private madhouses, even thrown into prostitution. Steeves notes usefully, 'The fears and compunctions of the heroines of fiction were not illusions and not mere pietistic sentiments' but 'practical wisdom', commenting that 'ruin' generally meant prostitution.<sup>xxxix</sup>

It is difficult for twentieth-century readers to appreciate just how daring Richardson's presentation of Clarissa is: the rape makes her a social outcast and yet Richardson emphasises her moral authority; throughout the novel she holds the moral and spiritual high ground. Richardson's response is problematic in that he does not provide an answer to the dilemma; he simply removes Clarissa from the problem by having her die and promising reward in the afterlife. He thus appears to bow to social convention, which determined that once sullied, women had to be removed from their immediate social environment. Death was an ideal answer to the problem; it alone could blot out the transgression from the moral record of society by removing the ruined woman, the objective correlative of sexual sin.

Clarissa's death has been variously interpreted. Terry Castle discusses it in relation to what she believes the novel tells us about the activities of reading and interpretation, arguing: 'Clarissa foregoes discourse - and by extension leaves behind the world of reading'.<sup>xxx</sup> Eagleton politicises it into a conscious refusal of 'sexual oppression, bourgeois patriarchy and libertine aristocracy'.<sup>xxxi</sup> Watt dismisses it as part of 'a long tradition of funeral literature'.<sup>xxxii</sup> Hill emphasises the economic aspects of the rape, arguing: 'How could she have lived? There was no room in a commercial society for flawed goods'.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

It seems clear, however, that Richardson intended the death to be a religious symbol; hence the white gown representing not only the purity of an unviolated will but reminiscent of the garments of a novice nun.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Clarissa herself refers to her clothes as 'wedding garments', describing them as 'the *happiest* suit, that ever bridal maiden wore'(p.1339). She insists, 'death will be welcomer to me than rest to the most wearied traveller'(p.1106).

For Richardson, Clarissa's death may derive meaning from contemporary devotional literature, much of which concerned dying a 'Christian' death.<sup>xxxv</sup> Belford begins to reform through watching Clarissa's death process: he tells Lovelace, 'Thou tellest me that thou seest reformation is coming swiftly upon me. I hope it is'(p.1123). Clarissa's death provides an obvious counterpart to the terrifying deaths of Belton, a rake, and Mrs Sinclair, a prostitute who helps Lovelace to rape Clarissa.<sup>xxxvi</sup> However, twentieth-century readers in particular may be rather less happy about a character almost willing herself to die,<sup>xxxvii</sup> using her coffin as a writing desk.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Castle observes, 'It does not occur to [Richardson]...that a female reader - even a moderately pious one - might not necessarily take an unalloyed pleasure in seeing one of her sex made over into a decomposing emblem of martyred Christian womanhood'(p.173).

Clarissa has been accused of self-indulgence and yet this is clearly not what Richardson had in mind. Her death is presented as an affirmation of spiritual values: she is an object lesson in Christian hope, quoting 'O death, where is thy sting?'<sup>xxxix</sup> and sighing 'come - blessed Lord - JESUS'(p.1362) as she dies. Clarissa has always lived with her eyes fixed firmly on her eternal rather than her temporal home; Richardson himself comments in the *Postscript*, 'who that are in earnest in their profession of Christianity but will rather envy than regret the triumphant death of CLARISSA'(p.1498).

Clarissa is very much an eighteenth-century heroine, whose strength is expressed largely in obedience and resignation. She feels sullied by the rape and perhaps partly responsible for it because had she obeyed her parents and not communicated with Lovelace, he would not have been able to trick her into

leaving their house. It would be wrong to judge her, as is often the case, from a twentieth-century perspective. She is a response to an eighteenth-century dilemma regarding the nature of virtue and whatever her flaws, she provides a powerful comment on her society's ethics and laws.

Watt, like many critics, has difficulty with what he terms Clarissa's 'frigid virtue'(p.295). Eagleton dismisses her 'unflawed identity' similarly as 'a fetish'(p.87), a 'grave parody of official moral ideology' which, when taken to extremes, reveals 'its corrupt reality'(p.77). He claims that her 'spiritual individualism is the acceptable face of the very system which kills'(p.87) her but this is clearly not the case. Social constructs of virtue indeed had 'corrupt' roots, as Eagleton argues, but Clarissa's virtue defines itself in opposition to such ideas rather than being a sublime presentation of them. He seems to confuse social morality masquerading as religious piety with Clarissa's genuine piety.

Eagleton's argument seems to redefine Richardson's ideological stance in terms of his own interpretation of the eighteenth-century philosophy of virtue; in so doing, he fails to recognise fundamental aspects of Richardson's narrative strategy. Richardson's concept of virtue is not simply class-related: it transcends bourgeois ethics, which often had economic roots and is based more closely on Christian teaching.

Clarissa is not simply a virtuous bourgeois heroine but a profoundly Christian one who, by her spiritual identity, implicitly criticises false piety. Her language reveals that she interprets issues in a Christian context: 'I would not bind my soul in covenant with such a man for a thousand worlds!(p.914). She lives on a different spiritual plane to Lovelace: 'My soul is above thee, man!(p.646). In Clarissa, Richardson created a heroine whose life and death would reveal the hypocrisy implicit in his society's moral values and point the way to individual spiritual and moral responsibility.

Richardson explains in the *Postscript* that the narrative is 'designed to inculcate upon the human mind, under the guise of an amusement, the great lessons of Christianity, in an age like *the present*'(p.1495). The *Postscript* reflects Richardson's spiritual concerns but it is also reminiscent of traditional justifications of fiction, in response to criticisms that novels were unworthy, even morally harmful.<sup>x1</sup> The Doctor in Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752) articulates popular eighteenth-century criticism of novels as 'senseless Fictions; which at once vitiate the Mind, and pervert the Understanding; and which if they are at any Time read with Safety, owe their Innocence only to their Absurdity'.<sup>xli</sup>

*Clarissa* is part of a Christian narrative tradition which sought to appropriate fictional discourse for Christians. Rather than simply condemning the novel as pernicious, writers such as Aubin and Richardson endeavoured to give it a moral purpose, using popular narrative motifs as tools to explore moral and spiritual issues, to recuperate romance for the Christian. Aubin argues in the *Preface to Count de Vinevil*: 'Since...Religious Treatises grow mouldy on the Booksellers Shelves...the few that honour Virtue...ought to study to reclaim our Giddy Youth...[to] try to win them to Vertue, by methods where Delight and Instruction may go together. With this Design I present this Book...in which you will find a Story, where Divine Providence manifests itself in every Transaction, where Vertue is try'd with Misfortunes, and rewarded with Blessings: In fine, where Men behave themselves like Christians, and Women are really vertuous, and such as we ought to imitate'(pp.5-6). The rationale behind her fiction is simple but profound: 'Would Men trust in Providence...they need not to fear any thing; but whilst they defy God...their Ends [are] such as they deserve, surprizing and infamous'(p.7).



Erickson notes pertinently: 'Richardson...saw himself as part of a literary tradition (which included Chaucer, Spenser, and Milton) in which the author...is at times an interpreter of God's word by means of his fictional creations'(p.28). Indeed at times *Clarissa* reads like a sermon, an eighteenth-century equivalent to the Medieval morality plays, charting Clarissa's spiritual learning process, a process Richardson hopes will find a parallel in the spiritual consciousness of the interpretive reader.

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<sup>i</sup> Romans 3:23. All biblical references are to the King James version.

<sup>ii</sup> See *Samuel Richardson: A Biography*, by T.C.Eaves and B.D.Kimpel, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971, p.271; C.Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution*, London, 1958.

<sup>iii</sup> H.Fielding, *Joseph Andrews* (1741), edited by D.Brooks-Davies, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986, p.72.

<sup>iv</sup> See the *Prologue* to Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale*. Chaucer exposes worldliness and hypocrisy throughout the *Canterbury Tales* (1387-1400); see in particular the *General Prologue*, where he introduces us to the characters who will narrate the *Tales*, many of whom are representatives of the church.

<sup>v</sup> Morality plays, which derived from the Medieval mystery plays, which dramatised biblical episodes, were so-called because they dramatised moral arguments, often using characters who embodied qualities such as youth, wisdom, virtue and vice. Their plots were often colourful and sometimes downright risqué; they were extremely popular.

<sup>vi</sup> R.King, *The Frauds of London Detected*, London, 1770, pp.13-14.

<sup>vii</sup> *Ephesians* 2:8-9.

<sup>viii</sup> See for example J.Gregory, *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1774); C.Macaulay, *Letters On Education*, (1790); S.Richardson, *Familiar Letters on Important Occasions* (1741); E.Rowe, *Letters Moral and Entertaining, in Prose and Verse* (1728); W.Wilkes, *A Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice to a Young Lady* (1740).

<sup>ix</sup> See L.Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977.

<sup>x</sup> B.Mandeville, *Remarks* (1723), in *The Fable of the Bees*, edited by Phillip Harth, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970, p.212.

<sup>xi</sup> Sir W.Blackstone, *Commentaries On The Laws of England* (1753), sixth edition, 4 vols, Dublin, 1775, I,p.442.

<sup>xii</sup> Women were not regarded as chattels but as 'belonging' to their husbands in some ill-defined way. T.Sheridan defines 'property' in *A General Dictionary of the English Language* (1780) not simply as an object but as a 'right of possession'. His definition of 'to possess' is particularly relevant to eighteenth-century attitudes to women: 'To have as an owner, to be master of; to enjoy; to have power over'. T.Sheridan, *A General Dictionary of the English Language* (1780), 2 vols, Menston, England: The Scholar Press, 1967.

<sup>xiii</sup> M.Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), edited by M.Brody, London: Penguin, 1988, pp.336-7.

<sup>xiv</sup> B.Mandeville, *A Modest Defence of Public Stews* (1724). Quoted in *Women in the Eighteenth Century: Constructions of Femininity*, ed.V.Jones, London: Routledge, 1990, p.65.

<sup>xv</sup> S.Richardson, *Clarissa, or The History of A Young Lady* (1747-8), edited by A.Ross, London: Penguin, 1985, p.749.

All references are to this edition unless otherwise stated.

<sup>xvi</sup> Anna Howe explains Clarissa's daily schedule to Belford on pp.1470-1.

<sup>xvii</sup> See *Clarissa* p.1075.

<sup>xviii</sup> R.Erickson, "'Written in the Heart": *Clarissa* and Scripture', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, II, no.1, October 1989, pp.17-52 (p.50).

<sup>xix</sup> See for example *Clarissa* pp.429,555,578,722,726,1103.

<sup>xx</sup> See *Samuel Richardson: A Biography*, by T.C.Eaves and B.D.Kimpel, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971, pp.268-71.

<sup>xxi</sup> Erickson comments usefully on Clarissa's spiritual meditations in relation to Puritan practices in "'Written in the Heart": *Clarissa* and Scripture', pp.39,44-5.

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- <sup>xxii</sup> See also J.Dussinger, 'Conscience and the Pattern of Christian Perfection In *Clarissa*', *PMLA*, LXXXI (1966), pp.236-45.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Erickson provides an interesting introduction to Richardson's use of scripture in "'Written in the Heart": *Clarissa* and Scripture'.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> B.Mandeville, *The Virgin Unmask'd* (1709), New York: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1975, p.183.
- <sup>xxv</sup> According to Roman legend, in 500 BC Lucretia, wife of Tarquinius Collatinus, was raped by Sextus while she was asleep; she committed suicide. Her name became a byword for wifely virtue.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> P.Aubin, *The Strange Adventures of the Count de Vinevil* (1721), London: Garland, 1973, pp.27-8.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Sir W.Blackstone, *Commentaries* (1753), 1793 edition, III,p.142.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> S.Richardson, *Clarissa* (1747-8), edited by B.A.Wright, 4 vols, London: Dent, 1967, II,p.378.
- <sup>xxix</sup> H.R.Steeves, *Before Jane Austen: The Shaping of The English Novel in The Eighteenth Century*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965, p.99.
- <sup>xxx</sup> T.Castle, *Clarissa's Ciphers*, London: Cornell University Press, 1982, p.26.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> T.Eagleton, *The Rape of Clarissa: Writing, Sexuality and Class Struggle in Samuel Richardson*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982, p.76.
- <sup>xxxii</sup> I.Watt, *The Rise of The Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1963, p.225.
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> C.Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution*, London, 1958, p.386.
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> Calls were made throughout the century for Protestant convents, a proposal Richardson shows some sympathy for in *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753-4).
- <sup>xxxv</sup> Clarissa reads Taylor's popular *Holy Living and Dying* (pp.1001-2). M.Doody discusses Clarissa's death in relation to contemporary devotional literature in *A Natural Passion: A Study of the Novels of Samuel Richardson*, London: Oxford University Press, 1974, pp.151-87.
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> See *Clarissa*, pp.1088-90,1226-31,1242-3;1378,1387-94.
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> Clarissa insists, 'For what end should I wish to live?...I will neither eat nor drink'(p.895).
- <sup>xxxviii</sup> See *Clarissa* pp.1304-5,1316,1352.
- <sup>xxxix</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:55.
- <sup>xl</sup> See also D.J.Templeton, 'In Defence of Dragons: A Case for the Literature of the Imagination', *The Glass*, Summer 1995, pp.24-31.
- <sup>xli</sup> C.Lennox, *The Female Quixote* (1752), edited by M.Dalziel, London: Oxford University Press, 1970, p.374.