

Writing in Character: Ethics, Plot, and Emphasis in Samuel Richardson's Clarissa

I. "Rules to THINK and ACT by, as well as Forms to WRITE after": Ethics and Form in Clarissa.

In the Preface published with the first two volumes of Clarissa (1747) Samuel Richardson describes the response of some of his earliest readers to the related questions of his novel's form and ethical purpose. While "one gentleman" advised that Richardson should "give a narrative turn to the letters" and set aside the novel's epistolary profuseness and variety to concentrate on Clarissa's "affecting story" other readers disagreed:

They insisted that the story could not be reduced to a dramatic unity, nor thrown into the narrative way, without divesting it of its warmth and of a great part of its efficacy, as very few of the reflections and observations, which they looked upon as the most useful part of the collection, would then find a place.

They were of opinion that in all works of this, and of the dramatic kind, story or amusement should be considered as little more than the vehicle to the more necessary instruction[.]¹

The italics of antithesis draw attention to a pair of related polarities that were essential to Richardson's understanding of his novel as well as the responses of his readers from the earliest circulation of extracts to the present day: first, a polarity of style that opposes "story" and "narrative" to "reflections and observations"; second, a polarity of efficacy or value that opposes "amusement" to "instruction". It is important to note that even in this early manifesto these antitheses are not entirely secure. The question of how feeling and sympathy might map

onto these stylistic and ethical structures is mooted, for example. For Richardson's recalcitrant reader, it is an interest in Clarissa's "affecting" story that motivates him to suggest that the novel be recast in an abridged, narrative form. For Richardson's other readers, by contrast, these changes could not be made without divesting the narrative of its "warmth". The operation of feeling, here, across both plot-focused and discursive narrative forms mirrors an ethical complexity within the main body of the novel, where feeling is the foundation of both the libertine pleasure principle and vital ethical imperatives.

Readers of Clarissa have always tended to be swayed more by story than reflection and have pursued readerly satisfaction at the expense of their moral instruction. Early respondents wrote to Richardson demanding a happy ending, and offered their own versions that included Clarissa's survival, Lovelace's repentance, and the final reconciliation of the two central protagonists.² Modern readers and critics have castigated Richardson for the changes he made to the second (1749) and third (1751) editions of the novel, prompted by what he considered to be the alarming ethical misreadings that had propagated among the readers of his first edition.³ In general terms, these changes can be seen to move the novel much more emphatically towards observation and instruction, at the expense of both story and readerly pleasure. Additions and clarifications reduce the ethical complexity of Clarissa and Lovelace's behavior, especially in the early volumes, and the voice of the narrator becomes more prominent, diverting the reader's attention from the experiences and attitudes of individual characters towards interpretations that claim, in their unparticularized neutrality, something of the status of objective truth. These movements both culminate in A Collection of the Moral and Instructive Sentiments Contained in the History of Clarissa, first published as an appendix to the third edition, which culls maxims and ethical observations from the novel and organizes them into appropriate moral categories ("Gaming", "Honesty", "Remorse") arranged alphabetically. Even here, it should

be noted, story is not completely lost. Richardson often finds it necessary to note that a particular moral sentiment is expressed by a particular character, and the volume and page numbers by which each quotation is identified suggest that the work was intended, at least initially, to be used alongside the novel rather than in place of it. Leah Price notes that within four years, however, the moral sentiments had been printed on “a set of entertaining cards” that could be shuffled and reordered at will in an emphatic rejection of narrative and plot.⁴

The close relationship between moral thinking and prose styling in the multiple versions of Clarissa is found in the texts that precede, as well as those that develop from, the novel. In Letters to and for Particular Friends (1741), the letter-writing manual that acted as the urtext for Pamela, moral improvement and improvement in writing are combined into a single endeavor: “the Letters may serve for Rules to THINK and ACT by, as well as Forms to WRITE after” Richardson asserts in his preface to the volume.⁵ The sustained association of ways of writing and modes of moral reasoning across Richardson’s novelistic writings influences the development of both. For example, by associating moral instruction with a reflective style of narration that pulls away from the particularities of plot Richardson suggests that the best kind of ethical thinking is that which is absolute, theoretical, permanent, and unswayed by narrative justification (the shadowy ends whose probable and anticipated benefit is sometimes used to palliate morally questionable means). Conversely, by associating an emphatic, departicularized, and authoritative prose style with moral instruction, Richardson implies that writing of this kind is ethically superior. Yet in the textured particularity of Clarissa’s epistolary fiction neither of these suggestions is entirely secure. Throughout the novel, Richardson explores the ways in which absolute moral values are compromised and rendered ineffectual and explores the validity and even necessity of an ethical schema that is comparative, practical, and circumstantial. This is particularly visible in Richardson’s use and then rejection of the

problematic category of the moral example, discussed in sections II and III of this article. Richardson also repeatedly calls into question the moral authority of modes of writing that seem to claim the kinds of authority and unequivocal moral security associated with the rule or maxim. Section IV illustrates this tendency with particular reference to some moments of intertextuality in the final volumes of the novel. Nor is it enough to say that Richardson does these things as well as, or in spite of, his commitment to a project of moral and social improvement that encompasses the dissemination of both generally appropriate standards of behavior and what Eve Tavor Bannet has called the conventions of polite “letteracy”.⁶ Sections V and VI explore how, in the third edition of Clarissa, Richardson uses italicization, a mode often associated with generalized assertion and unnuanced certainty, to emphasize the continuing importance of particular circumstances and individual voice to his novel and its moral values.

II. Clarissa and the Paradox of Exemplarity.

For Ian Watt in The Rise of the Novel, Clarissa’s reconciliation of story and instruction was a feature of its formal coherence: “a literary structure in which narrative mode, plot, characters and moral theme were organised into a unified whole”.⁷ Recent criticism, however, has more often argued that a fundamental incompatibility divides the spheres of action and reflection in the novel. This has coincided with a predominant shift away from interpretations of the work that view its primary conflicts as ethical or spiritual towards those that read these same conflicts as legal or philosophic. Stephanie Hershinow, for example, for whom Clarissa’s commitment to the subjunctive realms of “should” and “ought” is expressive of her relationship to the literary and philosophic forms of eighteenth-century conjectural history rather than her

participation in a narrative of Christian struggle, argues that the heroine's idealism is entirely incompatible with experience in a text which "subordinat[es] empiricism to the level of subplot".⁸ Critics who have examined the legal frameworks that inform the interpretation of rape at the heart of the novel have shown how these frameworks can be used to expose the gap this text opens up between the ethical and psychological realms of intention and desire, and the plot-based, agentive world of action and event. This is a novel in which Clarissa's own belief "that actions may be explained by an agent's reason for acting, and that reasons for acting have no dependence on external circumstance", as Jonathan Kramnick describes it, begins to look hopelessly naïve.⁹ Instead characters are made responsible for acts and outcomes that they never intended (as Sandra Macpherson's examination of the novel's structures of strict liability and felony murder indicates) and actions are given statutory meanings that can overwrite the mental states of their agents (as Frances Ferguson's exploration of Clarissa's constitutive non-consent describes).¹⁰

One characteristic of this important strand in criticism of Clarissa is its tendency to deny or elide individual personhood within the novel. For Joy Kyunghae Lee, Clarissa's "abstract embodiment of virtue" makes her a transferable cipher in a patriarchal system of chaste value, and for Ferguson, individuality is shaped and given value by its resistance to representation, and consequent absence from the novel.¹¹ Macpherson is most explicit, arguing that both Richardson and eighteenth-century law "are ultimately indifferent to the claims of the person and her exculpating idiosyncrasies".¹² The law, of course, must be indifferent to persons, and the suggestion that any set of actors who performed the actions outlined in the novel would suffer the same consequences and bear the same responsibility is an ethically as well as intellectually coherent position. It is not, however, a position that the novel itself supports. Macpherson notes that Lovelace dedicates considerable efforts, in the last volumes

of the novel, to limiting the sphere of his own moral responsibility (he did not intend to kill Clarissa, he did not think she would be so hurt by his actions, he intends to marry her, the drugging wasn't his idea) but Lovelace also repeatedly questions why, since he has seduced, abducted, and raped countless women before, it is only Clarissa for whom he is being held morally responsible?¹³ The answer to this question requires us to consider whether any space for personhood is maintained at the end of Clarissa. Does Lovelace's guilt stem from the particular circumstances of his action and the personal qualities of his victim or, conversely, does the emblematic value that Clarissa embodies make his attack on her an attack on virtue itself? Throughout the novel, Lovelace's engagement with Clarissa is informed by a question, asked with varying degrees of sincerity and facetiousness: "what makes her so special?". In the novel's ethical explorations of exemplarity this question becomes the reader's as well, informing not only our interpretation of the text but the mode of our engagement with it.

The first letter of Clarissa contains the novel's first reference to Clarissa's exemplarity, a theme that will become one of the ethical touchstones of the text as well as one of its most contested moral concepts:

You see what you draw upon yourself by excelling all your sex. Every individual of it who knows you, or has heard of you, seems to think you answerable to her for your conduct in points so very delicate and concerning.

Every eye, in short, is upon you with the expectation of an example. (40 [1.1])

Here Anna Howe introduces a paradox that informs the novel's entire discussion of Clarissa's moral behavior. Clarissa's exemplarity makes her ethical justification into a matter of public import; her actions and opinions, and her epistolary accounts of them, act as rules by which those who observe her, or who read her letters, can govern their own behavior. Clarissa is qualified to perform this role, however, by virtue of "excelling" all other women. The exceptional quality of her moral decision-making sets her apart from others even as it confirms her as a model to be imitated by them. Her moral excellence is thus assured by two, if not absolutely contradictory, at least competing aspects: first, an integrity and theoretical soundness that makes her ethical behavior suitable to act as a model for others, in similar but not identical circumstances, to follow; second, a superlative excellence that elevates her ethical standard above that to which any other individual can aspire.¹⁴ Despite the obvious tensions between these two different moral qualities, they are also mutually necessary to one another: it is only because Clarissa is exceptional that she is required to act as a moral example; and it is only while Clarissa is able to produce a satisfactory, narrative account of "the particulars" (as Anna describes them) that she will be able to vindicate her moral excellence (39 [1.1]). William Warner has described Clarissa as a paragon "imprisoned in the mundane actuality of [...] prosaic activity" and Leo Damrosch has written about the "painfully inimitable" heroine who, utterly alien to the fallen world in which she finds herself, is nevertheless forced to operate within it.¹⁵ What Anna's letter suggests, however, is that Clarissa's status as an ideal is constituted by the same narrative justifications and social conditions with which such idealism will ultimately prove to be in conflict.

Clarissa rejects a circumstantial understanding of morality and is celebrated for the synthetic quality of her ethical judgement throughout the novel (capable "of judging what a

hundred things are, by seeing one of a like nature” (523 [3.61])). The uniqueness of her moral gift poses its own difficulties, however:

Were it not YOU, I should know how (barbarously used as you are used) to advise you in a moment. But such a noble character to suffer from a (supposed) rashness and indiscretion of such a nature would be a wound to the sex, as I have heretofore observed. (239 [2.11])

The difficulty that Anna experiences in advising her friend stems from the paradoxical position of the paragon, who is unparticular in her embodiment of transcendent and absolute virtues but particular because subject to ethical standards that do not apply to any other individual. Clarissa’s excellence, as Anna seems to acknowledge here, threatens to introduce moral relativism even as it is designed to counter it. At the level of plot, Clarissa’s inability to find a course of action that suits her exceptional circumstances without compromising the unyielding standards that her behavior is supposed to exemplify involves her initially in an enforced passivity that prevents her from countering any of the misery inflicted upon her by others (her “absolutism made her helpless” as Mark Kinkead-Weekes argues) and subsequently in error which can, as Watt suggests, be attributed, with tragic irony, to the influence of “Clarissa’s very excellencies”.¹⁶ Clarissa’s lack of action in the novel, indeed her total incapacity to act, does not protect her from blame. This is not only because she holds herself responsible for events, like her flight with Lovelace, which she does not willingly perform, but also because her dysfunctional excellence itself attracts censure. We may see this in the implicitly accusatory rhetoric of Anna’s opening letter (“[y]ou see what you draw upon yourself by excelling all your sex”), in the unravelling of a plot in which the manifestation of this excellence will lead inexorably to suffering, or in the criticisms of readers who, Martha J. Koehler suggests, respond

to the pain of their own exclusion from Clarissa's "transcendent category" by attacking the paragon from whose perfections they are axiomatically excluded.¹⁷ Until her death (and perhaps not even then, if we take into consideration the judgements and renarrativizations inflicted on Richardson's heroine by readers following the publication of the final volumes) Clarissa is not able to transcend the particularity of the story with which she is involved. Her passivity is not the ideal stillness of one who exists beyond the sphere of plot and event but the frustrated inactivity of one who, forced to contend with sublunary particularity, can nevertheless not find a way to operate within it.

III. Singled out to be Signally Unhappy: Clarissa's plotting and unplotting.

The complicated interactions of observation and action, or theory and practice, or the ideal and the particular, negotiated by Richardson's characters, are also an issue for the author as he balances the demands of reflection and narrative in the shaping of his novel's form. As Tom Keymer has noted, moral maxims and the ethical problems of individuals, although brought together by the seventeenth-century casuist tradition, were, by the 1740s, beginning to be separated into opposing prose structures: with works of spiritual or practical self-improvement (including sermons and letter-writing manuals) addressing the former and the novel increasingly exploring the latter.¹⁸ The problem of generic mixing, seemingly required by Clarissa's ethical motives, is given comic expression by Richardson in a small detail in his second instalment. Hearing that Clarissa's family have refused to send on her books, jewels, and money following her departure with Lovelace, Anna writes to her friend "I send fifty guineas by the bearer, enclosed in single papers in my Norris's Miscellanies" (512 [3.55]). This is one of very few occasions in the novel where a letter is sent with an accompanying object,

in this case A Collection of Miscellanies: Consisting of Poems, Essays, Discourses & Letters, Occasionally Written by John Norris, first published in 1684 with a ninth edition appearing in 1730. Into this miscellany, a genre that privileges the celebration of decontextualized literary or moral beauties in the place of connected plot or narrative, Anna interleaves bank notes as a way of concealing the substantial sum of money she is conveying to her friend. Making the miscellany collection a direct vehicle of plot creates a comic irony that is heightened when Lovelace later steals another letter that mentions the Norris device:

She says in it, I hope you have no cause to repent returning my Norris—it is forthcoming on demand. Now, what the devil can this mean!—Her Norris is forthcoming on demand!—The devil take me, if I am out-Norrised!—If such innocents can allow themselves to plot, to Norris, well may I. (634 [4.24])

In transforming the word “Norris” from a noun into a verb, and thus relocating it within the sphere of action rather than reflection, Lovelace also makes it into a synonym for “plot”, the very thing that, in its original state and as a literary object, the volume of Norris’ Miscellanies cannot accommodate.

The playful conflation of reflection and plot in the Norris episode tends, ultimately, to emphasize their incompatibility: Clarissa does not accept the money and use it to escape, and Anna’s device is discovered by Lovelace, the very person whom it was intended to circumvent. In microcosm, it dramatizes the difficulty felt in the novel when moral truth is required to assert itself in response to narrative particularity. Unsurprisingly for a novel that extends to over 2,500 pages in the first edition, repetition is one of the major narrative movements of the text: the

progression of the plot is frequently retarded by local moments of repetitive argument that create a retrogressive, eddying motion. The frustrations of this narrative structure are felt by the characters of the novel as well as its reader. Clarissa, in particular, complains that she is forced to repeat herself both when she insists to her family that she will not marry Solmes and, later, when she asks Lovelace to leave her to pursue her own course of action when he has taken her away from Harlowe Place. The exhaustion that stems from having to operate in an iterative narrative structure is evident in her complaint to her aunt shortly before her abduction by Lovelace: “Astonishing persistence, said I!—I am tired with making declarations and pleadings on this subject; and had hoped that my resolution being so well known, I should not have been further urged upon it” (344 [2.39]). This complaint also indicates the source of these moments of narrative repetition. Clarissa, who knows that her moral behavior and decision-making are governed by absolute and unyielding standards, cannot understand why, having declared her resolution, others continue to contend with her in matters of moral principle: her intention being fixed, to suggest that the marriage may nevertheless take place becomes, as Kramnick describes it, “a kind of metaphysical impossibility, like a five-sided triangle”.¹⁹ Her family, by contrast, who see moral action as flexible and contingent, cannot understand why Clarissa persists in her refusal to marry Solmes even as she is entreated, commanded, and bullied. Clarissa’s repeated assertion of her determination, unaffected by the passing of time or changes in circumstance, is ironically interpreted by her family as itself morally suspect: the result of willful obstinacy or the sign of some ulterior motive, such as a desire for Lovelace.

The repetitive structure of Clarissa’s plot and the pressure this exerts on its heroine and indeed its narrative, both of which are stretched to breaking point by its protracted sufferings, illustrate the consequences of any attempt to make ideal virtue function in the contingent environment of particular circumstance. Clarissa’s death is one response to this impasse since

it allows her and the moral ideal that she represents to withdraw beyond the sphere of worldly activity to a heaven where her excellence can be accommodated and rewarded. As she approaches her death Clarissa ceases to function at all at the level of novelistic particularity. Her interventions in the text are increasingly symbolic, such as the emblems and designs she orders for her coffin, or typological, such as the allegorical letter she sends to Lovelace telling him that she is “setting out with all diligence for my father’s house” (1233 [7.3]).²⁰ Writings of these kinds present meaning as permanent and total, however obscure and subjective their interpretation might be in the fallen, sublunary realm. Clarissa’s death offers a solution, of sorts, to the narrative and ethical problem of Clarissa’s virtue and its didactic value, by directing readers to contemplate God’s providential dispensation, in which “placing [mankind] 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” (1495) as Richardson writes in his postscript to the novel. By deferring the moral resolution of his text to a state that exists beyond the boundaries not only of his novel but of human experience Richardson risks promoting a bleak vision of both as places of undeserved suffering that cannot be combatted, only endured. He also begs the question of what those who are left behind, whether characters within the novel or its readers, are supposed to learn from Clarissa’s suffering. In his postscript, Richardson asserts that his heroine’s suffering and death are necessary to the elaboration of his novel’s moral instruction and tragic plan. He quotes René Rapin on Aristotle’s *Poetics*, who argues that tragedy “prepares and arms [man] against disgraces, by showing them so frequent in the most considerable persons; and he will cease to fear extraordinary accidents, when he sees them happen to the highest (and still more efficacious, we may add, the example will be, when he sees them happen to the best) part of mankind” (1497). Richardson returns to the language of exemplarity, here, but its meaning has shifted from the way in which it functioned in the first part of *Clarissa*. Here, the efficacy of the “example” is not in conflict with the superlative

excellence of the exemplar, quite the opposite, in fact. That is because Richardson is using the word “example”, here, not to describe an object of imitation but an object of contrast. In this case, the distance between the observer and the tragic protagonist supports the moral lesson: if even this individual, so much above me, must contend with extraordinary misfortunes, then I do not need to fear the sufferings and disgraces, necessarily much more domestic and ordinary in scale, that I am likely to encounter in the course of my life.

This variation on exemplary discourse, which is really an inversion of it, is found throughout the latter volumes of Clarissa, where it is described under the vocabulary of “warning”. Clarissa introduces this new ethical touchstone in a letter to Anna shortly after she has left Harlowe Place: “[h]ow am I punished, as I frequently think, for my vanity in hoping to be an example to young persons of my sex! Let me be but a warning, and I will now be contented” (453 [3.27]). This introduces a series of discussions concerning the commensurability, or otherwise, of being an “example” and being a “warning”. In her letters written in response to Clarissa’s account of her rape, Anna asks her to produce a narrative version of her story:

The villainy of the worst of men, and the virtue of the most excellent of women, I expect will be exemplified in it, were it to be written in the same connected and particular manner that you used to write to me in. Try for it, my dearest friend; and since you cannot give the example without the warning, give both, for the sakes of all those who shall hear of your unhappy fate[.] (1017 [6.14])

Anna's suggestion that Clarissa's narrative will "exemplify" (in the sense of perfectly embody) Clarissa's superlative excellence and Lovelace's superlative degradation allows her to propose a mutually reinforcing relationship between Clarissa's story as a battle of abstract archetypes and as a "connected" and "particular" narrative. This, in turn, allows her to suggest a reconciliation between the modes of "example" and "warning" ("give both") which refutes the paradox of exemplarity that has pitted the ideal of virtue against its particular iterations throughout the text. This reconciliation is only achieved by a linguistic sleight of hand, however, which by exploiting the semantic range of the term "example" to mean both the inimitable ideal (OED 2a) and the model worthy of imitation (OED 1), both the archetype (OED 2a) and its particular embodiment (OED 3b), deflects rather than resolves the novel's ethical conflicts.²¹

The transition from the ethical system of exemplarity to the ethical system of warning solves, at least in part, the problem of how to manage Clarissa's moral status as a woman apart. However, it does so by emphasizing one of the most insistent moral problems of the novel: that Clarissa's moral value is only confirmed by her suffering. The fact that Clarissa's virtues can only find unambiguous expression when she is placed in circumstances that will destroy her makes the reader of the novel, and Richardson as its didactic instigator, beneficiaries of Clarissa's misery. The value of Clarissa's suffering to her own moral excellence and the broader ethical value of her story is repeated more and more frequently as the novel progresses. The references to Clarissa's adversity as her "SHINING-TIME" emphasize how closely related her suffering is to her journey towards typification: the language of "shining" elaborates the emblematic possibilities that are inherent in Clarissa's name, limiting her status as an individuated moral agent (579 [4.4]). It also uncomfortably echoes Lovelace's spurious argument that his harassment and rape of Clarissa are justified as a moral test that will prove,

or destroy, her virtue. For the most part, though, the connection between Clarissa's suffering and her superlative moral excellence is not instigated by the particulars of the plot, either Richardson's or Lovelace's. Rather, it is a relationship that exists beyond narrative, as a function of fate or providence:

I am afraid I am singled out, either for my own faults or for the faults of my family, or for the faults of both, to be a very unhappy creature!—signally unhappy! For see you not how irresistibly the waves of affliction come tumbling down upon me? (332 [2.37])

Clarissa is both single and signal, and the two are functions of each other: it is because she functions as a symbol that she must be singled out for extraordinary suffering proportioned to her excellencies; it is because she is an entirely isolated figure of unassailable and inimitable virtue that she is able to function as a symbol. Clarissa's isolation is a necessary consequence of the novel's ethical narrative, at once the source and proof of her triumph, yet it is also, at the level of the text's psychological particularity, a source of emotional pain felt by the heroine and, vicariously, by the novel's readers.

IV. The Right Way to Read in Clarissa.

While Clarissa is singled out for suffering, her individuality is never fully sublimated from the pages of Richardson's novel. Sympathy, which remains an important ethical impulse throughout the work, is associated with particularity in eighteenth-century moral philosophy: it "does not arise so much from the view of the passion, as from that of the situation which

excites it”, as Adam Smith argues in The Theory of Moral Sentiments.²² In the later volumes of Clarissa, Richardson schools his readers in the importance of personal story by building object lessons on the dangers of impersonal, emphatic, and decontextualized reading into his narrative. A reliance on maxims and quoted or proverbial wisdom is characteristic of several minor characters including Antony Harlowe, Lovelace’s uncle Lord M., and the clergyman Mr Brand. Each of these characters is held up to ridicule for a mode of writing that is inelegant and impolite, beset by digression and irrelevance, and tainted by dogma and banality. These comic attacks are supported by less frequent but more incisive attacks on the morally questionable uses to which this type of writing, and the type of reading it invites, can be put. While under false arrest for debt, Clarissa is visited by Sally Martin and Polly Horton from Sinclair’s house:

Well, but, Miss Harlowe, cried Sally, do you think these forlorn airs pretty? You are a good Christian, child. Mrs Rowland tells me she has got you a Bible book—Oh there it lies!—I make no doubt but you have doubled down the useful places, as honest Matt Prior says.

Then rising, and taking it up—Ay, so you have—The Book of Job! One opens naturally here, I see—My mamma made me a fine Bible scholar.—Ecclesiasticus too!—That’s Apocrypha, as they call it!—You see, Miss Horton, I know something of the book. (1061 [6.40])

Sally’s inappropriate quotation from Matthew Prior’s “Hans Carvel”, a bawdy poem in which a husband supplies “Sermons, Psalms, and Graces,/ And doubled down the useful Places” for an unfaithful wife, acts as a double reflection on the habits of selective, maxim-led reading and injudicious quotation.²³ It also illustrates the futility of conveying moral instruction by means of heavy-handed emphasis: the turned-down corners of Hans’s psalms and sermons are a

comically ineffectual attempt to reclaim his unchaste wife, already bearing witness to his lack of faith in her willingness to absorb his message. These reflections are borne out in the superficial way in which Sally engages with Clarissa's Bible, boasting of her knowledge while apparently missing the relevance to Clarissa's situation of the two books in which she has been reading. Inappropriate quotation and emphatic, decontextualized speech or writing can be evidence of superficial, nonlinear reading of the kind particularly encouraged by miscellanies and anthologies. When Belford later calls the Bible an "all-excelling collection of beauties" we are supposed to take his new appreciation for the sacred text seriously as an indication of his progress towards reformation (1126 [6.71]). Yet Belford's formulation is uncomfortably trivializing, suggesting an aestheticized as well as fragmented approach to scripture that may even problematize Clarissa's habit, merely noted and commented upon by Sally, of reading the Bible unevenly and selectively. We are certainly not meant to think that Clarissa's reading of sacred text is tainted by the same qualities of superficiality or pedantry that afflict other selective readers in the novel. Yet the fact that her practice resembles that of other, less intelligent, or less virtuous characters does provide an opportunity for figures like Lovelace to misinterpret her habits of allusion and quotation in her meditations and final letters. In her posthumous letter to Lovelace she quotes extensively from the Book of Job, marshalling selected passages into a warning of the punishment that awaits the wicked man. Lovelace comments:

What an army of texts has seen drawn up in array against me [...]!—But yet, Jack, do they not show me that, two or three thousand years ago, there were as wicked fellows as myself?—They do—and that's some consolation. (1473 [7.112]).

Lovelace's determination to read Clarissa's quotations from scripture, and their relevance to himself, as evidence for the unremarkable and quotidian nature of his own misdeeds is of a piece with his understanding of her allegorical letter as deceptively indirect rather than typologically true. He is incapable of understanding that as she approaches God Clarissa assumes a wholeness of vision that makes all the elements of her own speech and story merely elements in the only story that now matters. She does not compare Lovelace to the wicked man in Job, she recognizes that Job's transgressor and Lovelace are manifestations of the same type, the ever-present evildoer whose punishment is as sure and certain as Clarissa's providential salvation. Yet Clarissa's vision, which we might term as being beyond narrative, bears a superficial but troubling resemblance to those kinds of disjointed writing and reading that work against narrative coherence, promoting habits of inattention and consequent misunderstanding.

The character whose letters most fully illustrate the limitations of sententious writing in Clarissa is the clergyman Mr Brand. He is first introduced in the second volume of the novel as an unscrupulous officiant who will preside over Clarissa's coerced marriage to Solmes. He returns in the final volumes as an officious spy of the Harlowe family whose enquiries into Clarissa's situation in London misinterpret her reliance on Belford, and even her Church attendance, as evidence of her continued sexual impropriety. He is a terrible misreader, as the density of irrelevant and pedantic quotation in his letters makes clear. Richardson uses Brand to introduce a note of comic satire into his novel, directed particularly at emphatic, maxim-laden writing and the kinds of reading it invites. He also uses Brand to connect these problems of writing and reading explicitly with the novel's ethical tensions. In a section of reported speech, Brand discusses, with a characteristic lack of subtlety, the question of the imitation of Clarissa that Richardson has examined at such length:

“[...]it was pleasant to see ladies imitate her in dress and behaviour who, being unable to come up to her in grace and ease, exposed but their own affectation and awkwardness, at the time that they thought themselves secure of a general approbation because they wore the same things, and put them on in the same manner that she did, who had everybody’s admiration; little considering, that were her person like theirs, or if she had had their defects, she would have brought up a very different fashion; for that nature was her guide in everything, and ease her study; which, joined with a mingled dignity and condescension in her air and manner, whether she received or paid a compliment, distinguished her above all her sex.

“He spoke not, he said, his own sentiments only on this occasion, but those of everybody: for that the praises of Miss Clarissa Harlowe were such a favourite topic, that a person who could not speak well upon any other subject was sure to speak well upon that; because he could say nothing but what he had heard repeated and applauded twenty times over.” (1190 [6.106])

Brand describes those who imitate Clarissa as awkward and affected copiers who fail to appreciate the distance between themselves and the ideal she represents, but he does so in a way that proves that he has spectacularly failed to appreciate the significance of his own anecdote. Like the women who dress themselves in the same styles that Clarissa has made fashionable and “feel secure of a general approbation” because they put on clothes that she has made so generally admired, Brand assumes the praise of Clarissa, not because he has any capacity to appreciate her qualities and virtues, but because he feels confident that he will be

able to shine in a topic he has “heard repeated and applauded twenty times over”. His reductive sense of speaking well as a kind of repetitive mimicry of the best models is directly at odds with established eighteenth-century models of good literary and conversational practice.²⁴

Brand’s role is significantly expanded by Richardson in the third edition of *Clarissa* where he is given two additional letters and others are extended. This, along with the fact that he only emerges as a letter writer in the last instalment of the first edition, means that he is ideally placed to act as a mouthpiece for Richardson’s reflections on the practices of his own readers; Brand’s letters are introduced at moments in the novel’s development at which Richardson was thinking about and responding to his readers’ views and criticisms. This passage is from one of the letters added to the third edition:

You will perhaps, Mr. Walton, wonder at the meaning of the lines drawn under many of the words and sentences (UNDERSCORING we call it); and were my Letters to be printed, those would be put in a different character. Now, you must know, Sir, that we learned men do this to point out to the readers who are not so learned, where the jet of our arguments lieth, and the emphasis they are to lay upon those words; whereby they will take in readily our sense and cogency. Some pragmatical people have said, that an author who doth a great deal of this, either calleth his readers fools, or tacitly condemneth his own style, as supposing his meaning would be dark without it, or that all his force lay in words.²⁵

As a printer, Richardson maintained unusual control over the typography of his texts, and features such as font, decoration, and layout provide an insight into his intentions in a way that

cannot be claimed to the same extent for any other eighteenth-century novelist.²⁶ Among the most significant alterations that Richardson made to the third edition of his novel, in sheer quantity if not in other respects, were over 2,000 additional italicizations, added to a text that was already unusually heavily italicized.²⁷ Brand's comments can thus be understood as a rueful, satirical jibe at the novel's readers. The steadfastly decorous Richardson may stop short of calling his readers fools, but in this passage he allows himself to come pretty close. Yet the satire does not only cut one way. Brand, insulated by his smugness, may not take the criticism of the writer of italics to heart, but the more intelligent and sensitive Richardson must feel the force of the accusation that a writer who relies heavily on italicization must be either a dogmatic pedant who insults his readers or an obscure didact whose force lies "in words" rather than in the validity of his arguments. The word "underscoring" is interesting in this context. The Gale Eighteenth-Century Collections Online database has this as the only usage of the term in any work published 1700–1800. Cognates, such as "underscore" appear significantly in handbooks intended to be used by printers. The Printer's Grammar (1755), for example, asks authors to underscore the initial capitals of the "emphatical expressions" in their manuscripts to distinguish them from capitals used for substantives.²⁸ Richardson has Brand express himself using peculiar jargon, but peculiar jargon that is characteristic of members of his own profession. Additionally, the qualities of his writing and reasoning – which privilege emphatic, generalized expression and celebrate generic platitudes – perform to a comically exaggerated degree the same practices that readers and critics have associated with Richardson's interventions in the third edition of his novel. The alterations that Richardson made to his text are illuminated by this context of self-satire.

V. Clarissa's Emphatic Emendations.

The changes of italicization that Richardson made to his third edition have only received cursory attention from his readers and critics, even from those few who have made a particular study of Clarissa's typography.²⁹ Kinkead-Weekes, in the study which first argued that Richardson's changes to the third edition of Clarissa ought to be understood as targeted emendations rather than as restitutions of original content, notes the proliferation of italics in the third edition, but although he acknowledges that italicization is not only used by Richardson for simple emphasis, he does not consider that these emendations generate any complexity in the novel, characterizing them as "unnecessary, though harmless".³⁰ The implicit assumption underlying this, and much of the criticism of Richardson's changes to the third edition of Clarissa, is that the kind of emphasis provided by the italic character is essentially simple and proscriptive. This view, that a word or sentence in italics says the same thing as the word or sentence in ordinary roman type, only louder, is not, however, supported by the grammars and writing guides that were available to the novel's original readership:

Q. Is the observing the Emphasis of any great Use?

A. Yes; A Speaker, that would move his Hearers, must be (or at least seem) moved himself with what he says: But, by speaking without any Emphasis, you will appear either not to understand, or to be unconcerned about, what you utter, and so render it obscure or unaffected; and, by placing it upon a wrong Word you will (at least obscure, but) often change the Meaning of your Sentence, and make your Intention appear quite different to what you designed it, as will appear by this Sentence; Will¹ you² ride³ to London⁴ To-day⁵?

1. If the Emphasis be laid on will; the Answer may be, Yes; in spite of all you can say or do.
2. If upon You; the Answer may be, No; but my Brother will.
3. If upon ride; the Answer may be, No; I will walk.
4. If upon London; the Answer may be, No; I will ride into the Country.
5. If upon To-day; the Answer may be, No; I will go To-morrow.³¹

This exercise from A New English Grammar, by Question and Answer (1746) discusses the use of emphasis in speech, but this is made synonymous with italicization within the published text. The usual understanding of emphasis as an indicator of the intensity with which a speaker or author urges a particular statement is here made secondary to an understanding of emphasis that makes it central to meaning rather than mode. Although each version of the question posed solicits a response that addresses the speaker's particular concerns, the total effect is to create a sense of the instability and rich ambiguity of language, which can be made to alter its meaning with a simple change in vocal modulation. These examples might also counter the suggestion that italicization is associated with modes of writing that are opposed to narrative, such as Richardson's editorial pronouncements or moral maxims. From an unremarkable question, the writer of this grammar elaborates a series of mini stories because (counter, perhaps, to our first assumptions) italic emphasis does not narrow meaning so much as enlarge it, creating implicit or explicit space for unstated alternatives. A small example from the first volume of Clarissa illustrates this point. In her first letter, Clarissa describes Lovelace's character:

Indeed, gay and lively as he is, he has not the look of an impudent man.

But I fancy it is many, many years ago, since he was bashful. (42 [1.2])

In the third edition of the novel this is changed to:

Indeed, gay and lively as he is, he has not the Look of an impudent man.

But I fansy [sic], it is many, many years ago since he was bashful.³²

In this change to his italicization, Richardson supports his project of absolving Clarissa from blame in her engagements with Lovelace. In the first edition, Clarissa's assertion that Lovelace does not seem like an "impudent" man raises the question of what he does seem like to her. The implication is that Clarissa has perceived some sort of flaw in Lovelace's character, not impudence exactly, but something like it, perhaps something even more shocking. Whatever it is that the Clarissa of the first edition has noticed about Lovelace, her subsequent affection for and behavior towards him must be understood in this context. In the third edition, Clarissa's assertion that Lovelace does not "look" like an impudent man means that her willingness to trust him can be attributed to her naïve but ultimately virtuous willingness to believe in other people's self-performances, despite her own misgivings. The reader of the first edition may blame Clarissa for her conduct towards Lovelace; the reader of the third edition is given less interpretive space for counter-readings of this kind, but the reader who compares the first and third editions has a very different experience. Far from limiting interpretive flexibility, an awareness of the shift in meaning effected by the altered typography of a single word gives a sense of language's almost limitless interpretive scope. Of course, it is not clear that this third reader is one that Richardson could have anticipated, except, of course, to the extent that he is

himself that reader, curtailing the interpretive freedom of his readership using tools and devices that rely on his own appreciation for the malleability of written communication.

The idea of italicization as something that limits or controls meaning and supports the use of text to convey an uncompromising moral message is contradicted by the heterogeneous, frequently conflicting, ways in which italics are used in *Clarissa*. In all editions of the novel italics are used to mark editorial interjections, as well as apparatus such as letter headings, footnote markers, and summaries. However, the use of italics in these impersonal, editorial contexts is matched by a corresponding use of italics to emphasize the unique qualities of individual voice. Italics are used to convey high emotion in a speaker or writer and to indicate tone of voice and sarcasm. They are alternatives to quotation marks in direct and indirect speech, in the latter case often drawing attention to verbatim words or phrases in a kind of free indirect discourse.³³ The association of the italic font with personal and impersonal registers allows Richardson to use this character to draw attention to kinds of writing that are located ambiguously, even troublingly, between the particular and the general, destabilizing the ethical and intellectual distinctions between the two. The most obvious example of this is Lovelace's appropriation of the editorial register in the middle volumes of the novel, in which he manipulates those around him into mistaking his deceptive, self-interested articulation of his relationship with Clarissa for an objective account of their situation. His letters use italics as well as other typographical devices that mimic Richardson's own editorial interventions in the novel. The speech prefixes which Lovelace uses in his faux-dramatic transcriptions of dialogue are in italics, for example, and his inclusion of this kind of editorial apparatus within his personal correspondence illustrates his disturbing capacity to achieve an ironic distance from his text at moments which ought to demand his emotional investment.

These moments also draw attention to the ways in which italicization can mediate between personal and general, or partial and impartial, modes of discourse, illuminating the novel's larger concerns with the ethical elaborations of particular personhood and abstract moral truth. A subtler example might be found in the frequent asides that Clarissa and Lovelace use in their letters:

Charming creature! thought I (But I charge thee, that thou let not any of the Sex know my exultation) Is it so soon come to this?

“[Y]et not have the requisite command over the passion itself in steps of the highest consequence to her honour, as she thinks” (I am trying her, Jack, by her own thoughts) “but suffer herself to be provoked to promise to abandon her Father's house, and go off with him, knowing his character[.]”]

No matter for that, the wretch said (To be sure, my dear, he must design to make me afraid of him): The decree was gone out[.]

To wave, Madam, what I would say till I have more courage to speak out (More courage—Mr Lovelace more courage, my dear!)—I will only propose what I think will be most agreeable to you[.]

Every woman of discernment, I am confident, knowing what I know of you now, would say as I say (I had a mind to mortify a pride, that I am

sure deserves to be mortified); that your politeness is not regular, nor constant.³⁴

These parenthetical asides, all taken from a run of a few letters in the third volume of *Clarissa*, were italicized by Richardson in the third edition. Each offers an example of highly personalized communication expressing sentiments that are unsuitable for overt or public expression. However, each is also characterized by some kind of reflective distance and the italics coincide, here, with moments at which the writer is able to step outside the immediate context of the events or conversations they are describing to offer some comment or analysis. In the last example, Clarissa's explanation for her criticism of Lovelace justifies the severity of her attack to a third-party observer (since he deserves to be mortified) but also hints at an acknowledgement, in the moment of retelling, of the more complicated emotional or even erotic impulses governing her conflict with Lovelace ("I had a mind to mortify..."). These quasi-dramatic asides thus act ambiguously as both intimately confessional and self-consciously declarative or analytical statements, and Richardson's decision to use italics to mark phrases of this kind in his editorial adjustments to the third edition show his willingness to use this character to draw attention to moments of hesitation between partial and impartial, or particular and general points of view.

VI. Writing in Character

It would be plausible if Clarissa's withdrawal from narrative and Richardson's withdrawal from the ethical system of imitative exemplarity represented permanent and unidirectional moves away from "story" that could be traced through the instalments of the

first edition and on into Richardson's subsequent emendations. Yet in the italic character Richardson finds a mode which, even when used to point emphatic assertion, seems to call up explicit or unstated alternatives which draw attention to the complicity of moral choice. We might consider, for example, the novel's use of italics of antithesis. This well-established variety of emphasis, which is particularly prevalent in Clarissa, uses italics to mark distinctions, especially in the behavior, actual or ideal, of individuals. Examples can be found in almost every letter of the novel. Letter 56 gives us:

You can no more change your nature, than your persecutors can theirs.

(237 [2.11])

[I]t should be his care to perpetuate the occasion for that fear, if he could not think he had the love. (238)

Either a Scylla or a Charybdis! (238)

[H]ow will that justify their conduct to you (which nothing else can), as well as their resentments against him? (239)

For why should a person who delights to find out and admire everything that is praise-worthy in another be supposed ignorant of like perfections in herself [...]? (240)

And why may not I give her those praises, which she would give to any other, who had but half of her excellencies?—Especially when she is

incapable of pride and vainglory; and neither despises others for the want of her fine qualities, nor over-values herself upon them?³⁵

This letter is not unusual in the number of italicized antitheses or distinctions it contains. All the examples are from the first edition except for the last, in which the italicized pair “others...herself” is added in the third edition (replacing the first-edition italicization “which she would give to any other”). It is impossible to think that Richardson could have anticipated any clearer or more secure reading of Clarissa’s moral character emerging from this emendation.³⁶ What this addition and changes like it do demonstrate, however, is Richardson’s continuing and reiterated commitment to a pattern of using italics to create distinctions, particularly between moral choices or moral agents. It is unsurprising that in four of these examples it is pronouns that are italicized. They are among the most commonly italicized words in Clarissa, supporting a prose in which emphasis is not a tool of didactic moral absolutes but an agent of moral distinction through which the particular characters and circumstances of individuals are constantly making themselves felt. Richardson’s repeated use of italics for this purpose creates a register of opposition that affects even his unqualified, emphatic pronouncements; italics in the novel that are not used to point antithesis seem to anticipate their own qualification, disturbing any sense of the italic character as a mode for unproblematized assertion.

Italics in Clarissa dramatize in microcosm what Keymer has called the novel’s “adversarial narratives”. The emphatic assertion (“this is what I say”) is undermined not only by an awareness of the unavoidable subjectivity of all interpretation (“that is what you say”) or the willed and unwilled deceptions propagated by all writers (“that is what you say”) but by the fundamental impossibility of accessing any kind of objective truth that exists prior to its

inevitably limited articulation in language: “one is driven to think not of competing versions of an identical reality,” Keymer notes, “but of reality's displacement by the force of competing fictions”.³⁷ These concerns are encapsulated by the exchange between Anna and Clarissa, in the first volume of the novel, in which the two argue about whether or not Clarissa is in love with Lovelace. Italics are used to mark mutual and self-quotation as well as emphatic assertion within the exchange as the two letter writers grapple to secure the meaning of their own and each other's words. Clarissa's original examination of her feelings for Lovelace is entirely unstressed:

For my regards are not so much engaged (upon my word they are not; I know not myself if they be) to another person, as some of my friends suppose; and as you, giving way to your lively vein, upon his last visits affected to suppose. What preferable favour I may have for him to any other person is owing more to the usage he has received, and for my sake borne, than to any personal consideration. (66 [1.9])

In the following letter, Anna's analysis of Clarissa's assertion is presented with an explosion of italicized emphasis:

You are pleased to say, and upon your word too!—that your regards (a mighty quaint word for affections) are not so much engaged, as some of your friends suppose, to another person. What need you give one to imagine, my dear, that the last month or two has been a period extremely favourable to that other person!—whom it has made an obliger of the niece for his patience with the uncles.

But, to pass that by—So much engaged!—How much, my dear? Shall I infer? Some of your friends suppose a great deal—You seem to own a little.

[...]

But further you say, what PREFERABLE favour you may have for him to any other person is owing more to the usage he has received, and for your sake borne, than to any personal consideration.

This is generously said. It is in character. But, oh my friend, depend upon it you are in danger. (70 [1.10])

In Anna's response, italics that look as though they may simply be being used to indicate the quotation of Clarissa's own words are instead used to challenge her assertions, demonstrating the ways in which Clarissa's writing makes space for a reading counter to that which she avows. "Upon your word" might be a direct quotation from Clarissa's letter but the inclusion of the word "too" makes this into a facetious expression of shock and surprise. The italicization of "regards" is used to introduce a reflection on possible synonyms rather than a simple repetition of Clarissa's own word choices, and the dwelling on "so much" indicates the ways in which emphasis, by drawing attention to the narrow specificity of an assertion, can conversely create space for speculation on the possibilities that lie just outside its limits.

Later in the same letter Anna continues her practice of revision:

To be sure Lovelace is a charming fellow—And were he only—But I will not make you glow as you read!—Upon my word, I won't—Yet, my dear, don't you find your heart somewhat unusual make it go throb,

throb, throb, as you read just here?—If you do, don't be ashamed to own it—It is your generosity, my love! that's all—But, as the Roman augur said, Caesar, beware the ides of March! (71 [1.10])

“Generosity” is Anna’s word, not Clarissa’s, and its italicization here shows her willingness to extend the practices of qualifying emphasis to her own writing. While her assertion that Clarissa’s gratitude towards Lovelace is “generously said” is (relatively) sincere in its first placement, its recurrence here in italicized form clearly signals its ironic redefinition as a euphemism for love or attraction. Anna’s appropriation of Clarissa’s own phrase “upon my word” also encompasses a change of meaning. Clarissa’s oath of personal sincerity is undermined by Anna’s use of the same phrase to make a promise that she immediately reneges on (her speculations on Clarissa’s throbbing heart surely will make her blush, as the equivocal “yet” seems to acknowledge), as well as by the suggestion, implicit in Anna’s shifting of the security of the oath from Clarissa’s word to her own, that “words” are vehicles of subjective opinion rather than the secure basis for avowal that Clarissa would like them to be. Clarissa’s response to Anna picks up on this detail:

Let me enter into the close examination of myself which my beloved friend advises.

I did so, and cannot own any of the glow, any of the throbs you mention—Upon my word, I will repeat, I cannot. And yet the passages in my letter upon which you are so humorously severe lay me fairly open to your agreeable raillery. I own they do. And I cannot tell what turn my mind had taken to dictate so oddly to my pen.

But pray now, is it saying so much, when one who has no very particular regard to any man says, there are some who are preferable to others?

[...]

Indeed, my dear, THIS man is not THE man. I have great objections to him. My heart throbs not after him; I glow not, but with indignation against myself for having given room for such an imputation—But you must not, my dearest friend, construe common gratitude into love. I cannot bear that you should. But if ever I should have the misfortune to think it love, I promise you, upon my word, which is the same as upon my honour, that I will acquaint you with it. (72–73 [1.11])

Clarissa reclaims the phrase “upon my word” as her own, and the italicizations here operate as close to simple emphases as anything we find in this exchange. Her willingness to double down on the validity of this phrase requires her to perform some intellectual contortions, however. She acknowledges that the words of her first letter were open to the construction that Anna has placed upon them, but she does not excuse herself from the accusation of concealment by pointing to the expansive ambiguity of language, which might contain meaning for the reader that the writer never intended. Instead, protecting the security of the language on which her oath relies, she locates the troubling ambiguity in an undetected part of herself: “I cannot tell what turn my mind had taken to dictate so oddly to my pen”. Elsewhere in her reply she uses italics in the same way as Anna, to reshape the words and phrases of her friend’s letter in order to assert new meaning. The “glow” that Anna intended as the blush of a virtuous young woman acknowledging romantic feeling is transformed, by Clarissa, into a blush of mortification at having inadvertently misled her friend. Her love for that “other”, which Anna had given sole

emphasis, is resituated, by Clarissa, in a comparative antithesis, where the stress laid on the “others” (made generically plural, here) only serves to distinguish them from the “some”.

In the third edition of Clarissa, Richardson fortifies the text of his novel with explicit moral comment designed to support the correct, didactic reading of his text. He does so, however, in an explosion of italicized emphasis which shows how this mode of authoritative moral assertion is itself uniquely vulnerable to qualification and critique. Richardson’s decision to make italicization such a prominent part of his editorial intervention supports those critics, Keymer most prominently, who see interpretive complexity as central to Richardson’s didactic intentions, and offers a counterpoint to those readers who have assumed that the changes of the third edition are simply reductive. What, however, of personhood and Clarissa’s “affecting story”? The novel’s adversarial narratives dramatize competing subjectivities but may also create a hostile environment for the articulation of personhood. Terry Castle has called Clarissa, in a telling phrase, “an exemplary victim of hermeneutic violence”, and it is possible to see the italic character as marking places in texts which are particularly vulnerable to this violence.³⁸ Yet italicization is not just the mode of interpretation, exegesis, and editorial gloss. It is also, as Clarissa’s response to Anna above indicates, the mode of self-assertion, albeit one that illustrates the ways in which authoritative, self-determining articulation draws close to depersonalized moral assessment. The italic character is particularly well suited to a novel in which introspection is the best source of moral truth, but in which the best kind of introspection is that which most closely resembles an enquiry carried out by an objective, external observer.³⁹ The way in which the italic character hesitates between first- and third-person perspectives reflects a novel in which personhood is discovered through analysis rather than revealed by confession.

With this wider context in mind, we might dwell for a moment on a phrase from Anna's first response to her friend's assertion of indifference to Lovelace: "[t]his is generously said. It is in character". Immediately following on from a quotation of Clarissa's own words, now rendered in an italic font, Anna's ironic reflection on the ability of words to express our interior motives and desires finds its locus in the shifting significations of the word "character". The moral transparency at which Clarissa aims in this exchange, whereby her writing would unambiguously express her emotional equanimity, is undermined by the suggestion that Clarissa's writing is expressive in unintended and unacknowledged ways: an ambiguity ideally suited to the multivalence of the italic character into which her words have been transposed. This suggestiveness is supported by the wider context of the novel, in which to act "in character" means to act in a way that reflects the qualities of one's inner life (as when Clarissa reproaches Anna: "[h]ad you rallied me by word of mouth in the manner you do, it might have been more in character" (185–86 [1.40])) but in which to write "in character" invariably means to write in code (as when Lovelace warns Belford: "[y]ou must hereafter write to me in character, as I shall do to you" (417 [3.12])). Irony is felt in the potential slippage between these two definitions of the term: it is when Clarissa writes "in character", attempting to give unmediated voice to her sense of self, that she writes most "in character", in a mode heavy with oblique and hidden meanings; it is when Lovelace writes "in character", using the full arsenal of misdirection, obfuscation and ironic play at his disposal, that he writes most "in character", in a mode that exposes the fatalistic working out of his most essential impulses. However, this conflation of authentic acting and deliberate or unintended performance is not always ironic: it is also a sincerely promoted aspect of ethical practice. In the second volume of the novel Anna refers to an occasion on which Clarissa wrote a letter "personating an anonymous elderly lady" to the mother of young woman who was attempting to restrain her daughter from an imprudent marriage:

[I]f persons of your experience would have young people look forward, in order to be wiser and better by their advice, it would be kind in them to look backward, and allow for their children's youth and natural vivacity [...] If the young lady knows her heart to be right, however defective her head may be for want of years and experience, she will be apt to be very tenacious. And if she believes her friends to be wrong, although perhaps they may be only so in their methods of treating her, how much will every unkind circumstance on the parent's part, or heedless one on the child's, though ever so slight in itself, widen the difference? The parent's prejudice in dis-favour will confirm the daughter's in favour, of the same person; and the best reasonings in the world on either side will be attributed to that prejudice. (246–7 [2.13])

Any attempt to urge one's own reasonings, no matter how sound they may be or how grounded in the analytical wisdom of experience, will, instead of granting the speaker the authority of depersonalized moral truth, leave them stranded in prejudicial subjectivity. Only through imaginative identification with the circumstances of another, by assuming character as Clarissa herself does, will didactic instruction meet with success. The truth of instruction and the circumstances of story are brought together in a missive in which the antitheses of character (both psychological and typographic) represent not an unassailable isolation but a challenge of interpretive empathy. In the flexibility of the italic character, Richardson finds a mode that allows him to convey Clarissa's belief and his own that ethical reflection and moral instruction demand the combination of both objective judgement and personal story.

¹ Samuel Richardson, Clarissa, or The History of a Young Lady, ed. Angus Ross (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2004; first published, 1985), 36. References to Clarissa in this chapter will be to this edition, based on Richardson's first edition, unless otherwise stated, and will be cited parenthetically by page number. I will also include, in square brackets, the volume and letter number in which the quotation can be found in the first edition, to aid users of other versions of the text.

² Some of the alternative endings to the novel, and Richardson's response to them, are outlined in Peter Sabor, "Rewriting Clarissa: Alternative Endings by Lady Echlin, Lady Bradshaigh, and Samuel Richardson," Eighteenth-Century Fiction 29, no. 2 (2016–17): 131–50.

³ This argument was first proposed by Mark Kinkead-Weekes, "Clarissa Restored?", Review of English Studies 10, no. 38 (1959): 156–71.

⁴ See Leah Price, The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel: From Richardson to George Eliot (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 17–18.

⁵ Samuel Richardson, Letters written to and for particular Friends, on the most Important Occasions (London: 1741).

⁶ Eve Tavor Bannet, Empire of Letters: Letter Manuals and Transatlantic Correspondence, 1688–1820 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), xvii and throughout.

⁷ Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957), 208.

⁸ Stephanie Hershinow, "Clarissa's Conjectural History: The Novel and the Novice", The Eighteenth Century 56, no. 3 (2015): 298.

⁹ Jonathan Kramnick, Actions and Objects from Hobbes to Richardson (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 195.

¹⁰ See Sandra Macpherson, Harm's Way: Tragic Responsibility and the Novel Form (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010) and Frances Ferguson, "Rape and the Rise of the Novel", Representations 20 (1987), 88–112.

¹¹ Joy Kyunghae Lee, "The Commodification of Virtue: Chastity and the Virginal Body in Richardson's Clarissa", The Eighteenth Century 36, no. 1 (1995): 39; Ferguson, "Rape and the Rise of the Novel", 99.

¹² Macpherson, Harm's Way, 94.

¹³ Macpherson, Harm's Way, 80–81.

¹⁴ The paradox of exemplarity in *Clarissa* has been examined particularly by Martha J. Koehler, *Models of Reading: Paragons and Parasites in Richardson, Burney and Laoclos* (Cranbury NJ: Bucknell University Press, 2005).

¹⁵ William Beaty Warner, *Reading Clarissa: The Struggles of Interpretation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), xii; Leopold Damrosch, Jr., *God's Plot and Man's Stories: Studies in the Fictional Imagination from Milton to Fielding* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1985), 221–22.

¹⁶ Mark Kinkead-Weekes, *Samuel Richardson: Dramatic Novelist* (London: Methuen, 1973), 187; Watt, *Rise of the Novel*, 213.

¹⁷ Koehler, *Models of Reading*, 12, 48, and throughout.

¹⁸ Thomas Keymer, *Richardson's Clarissa and the Eighteenth-Century Reader* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), especially chapter 2.

¹⁹ Kramnick, *Actions and Objects*, 201.

²⁰ For a discussion of *Clarissa's* allegorical letter, and its significance for negotiating both psychologically particular and allegorical readings of *Clarissa*, see Jonathan Loesberg, "Allegory and Narrative in *Clarissa*", *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 15, no. 1 (1981): 39–59.

²¹ "example, n." OED Online. June 2020. Oxford University Press. <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/65593?rskey=CXbbju&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed June 16, 2020).

²² Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (London, 1759), 9. Although I differ somewhat from the conclusions, I have benefitted from the scholarship and analysis of Adam Budd, "Why *Clarissa* Must Die: Richardson's Tragedy and Editorial Heroism", *Eighteenth-Century Life* 31, no. 3 (2007): 1–28.

²³ Matthew Prior, "Hans Carvel", in *The Literary Works of Matthew Prior*, ed. H. Bunker Wright and Monroe K. Spears, 2 vol., second edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971; first published, 1959), vol. 1, lines 51–52. Oxford Scholarly Editions Online (2013). doi:10.1093/actrade/9780199670161.book.1.

²⁴ Some eighteenth-century iterations of the argument for imitation as a vehicle for inspiration, set against slavish replication, are collected by Daniel Cook, "On Genius and Authorship: Addison to Hazlitt", *The Review of English Studies* 64, no. 266 (2013): 610–29 (624).

²⁵ Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa. Or, the History of a Young Lady*, 8 vol., 3rd edition (London, 1750–51), 7.386–87.

²⁶ See Steven R. Price, "The Autograph Manuscript in Print: Samuel Richardson's Type Font Manipulation in *Clarissa*", in *Illuminating Letters: Typography and Literary Interpretation*, ed. Paul C. Gutjahr and Megan L.

Benton (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 117–35, and Janine Barchas, Graphic Design, Print Culture, and the Eighteenth-Century Novel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

²⁷ This additional italicisation is in keeping with changes Richardson made to subsequent editions of his other novels. See Robert Craig Pierson, “The Revisions of Richardson’s Sir Charles Grandison”, Studies in Bibliography 21 (1968): 163–89 (164, 168); Joe Bray, “Attending to the Minute: Richardson’s Revisions of Italics in Pamela”, in Ma(r)king the Text: The Presentation of Meaning on the Literary Page, ed. Joe Bray, Miriam Handley, and Anne C. Henry (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2000), 105–19.

²⁸ John Smith, The Printer’s Grammar (London, 1755), 51.

²⁹ For some brief discussions, see Steven Price, “The Autograph Manuscript in Print”, Illuminating Letters, 128; Leah Price, Anthology and the Rise of the Novel, 31; Bray, “Attending to the Minute: Richardson’s Revisions of Italics in Pamela”, Ma(r)king the Text, 105–19.

³⁰ Kinkead-Weekes, “Clarissa Restored?”, 163.

³¹ A New English Grammar, by Question and Answer (London, 1746), 85–86.

³² Richardson, Clarissa, 3rd edition, 1.8.

³³ The use italicisation to mark both the most general and the most personal kinds of utterance can be understood as the articulation of an ambiguous overlap of quoted and quotable speech that has been identified as characteristic of eighteenth-century literary culture. See Leah Price, Anthology and the Rise of the Novel, 116, and Margreta de Grazia, “Sanctioning Voice: Quotation Marks, the Abolition of Torture, and the Fifth Amendment”, in The Construction of Authorship: Textual Appropriation in Law and Literature, ed. Martha Woodmansee and Peter Jaszi (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994), 281–302.

³⁴ Richardson, Clarissa, 3rd edition, 3.77, 3.83, 3.103, 3.108, 3.151–52.

³⁵ Richardson, Clarissa, 3rd edition, 2.66.

³⁶ Shirley Van Marter, in an early study of revisions made to the third and fourth editions of Clarissa, notes that “the changes we can pinpoint with any certainty as arising from the objections of a hostile, critical audience are an extremely small proportion of the author’s complete endeavor”. “Richardson’s Revisions of Clarissa in the Third and Fourth Editions”, Studies in Bibliography 28 (1975): 120.

³⁷ Keymer, Clarissa and the Eighteenth-Century Reader, 47.

³⁸ Terry Castle, Clarissa’s Ciphers: Meaning and Disruption in Richardson’s Clarissa (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1982), 22.

³⁹ A discussion of Clarissa’s combination of introspection with “a socialized paradigm of judgment” can be found in Hina Nazar, “Judging Clarissa’s Heart”, in Enlightened Sentiments: Judgment and Autonomy in the Age of Sensibility (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 59–80 (62).