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Between Desire and Reality: Samuel Richardson's Clarissa and the Single Woman in Eighteenth- Century England

Jessica L. Cook
Longwood University

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Between Desire and Reality: Samuel Richardson's Clarissa and the Single Woman in
Eighteenth-Century England

Jessica L. Cook

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in English

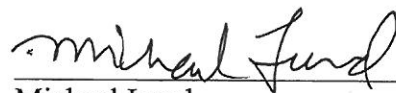
Longwood University

Department of English and Modern Languages

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E. Derek Taylor
Professor of English, Thesis Director



Michael Lund
Professor of English, First Reader



Martha E. Cook
Professor of English, Second Reader

May 3, 2007

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Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Chapter 1 The Single Woman in Eighteenth-Century England	10
Chapter 2 Clarissa's Desire for the Single Life	31
Chapter 3 Reverberations of <i>Clarissa</i> in Other English Novels	68
Conclusion	90
Works Cited	94

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Introduction

In Samuel Richardson's third and final novel, *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753-54), the title character famously proclaims, "I am for having every-body marry" (2.428). Sir Charles' approbation of the marital state is representative of Richardson's own feelings on the matter, and is indicative of the typical plot of the eighteenth-century English novel as well. The early English novel frequently traced in its principal characters the beginnings of love and followed the growth of that love through to its logical conclusion—marriage. In Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749), Tom follows his love Sophia Western to London, where he is revealed to be Squire Allworthy's rightful heir and deserving of Sophia's hand. Evelina finds both an identity and a loving husband in Frances Burney's *Evelina* (1778), and Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy overcome their negative first impressions of each other and are married by the end of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). The trend to conclude one's novel with a marriage is characteristic of Richardson as well; in his first novel *Pamela* (1740-41), the virtuous servant girl Pamela is rewarded with marriage to Mr. B, and the exemplary Sir Charles Grandison is united with Harriet Byron at the conclusion of *Sir Charles Grandison*. Since marriage is so frequently the focus of eighteenth-century novels, and typically the desired end for the characters found within them, the existence of a character such as Clarissa Harlowe is an intriguing anomaly. Though Sir Charles Grandison is "for having every-body marry," in Richardson's *Clarissa, or, The History of a Young Lady*, Clarissa asks instead to remain single: "Let not your Clarissa be precipitated into a state she wishes not to enter into with any man!" (91). Richardson's decision to create a female character who

makes a convincing plea to remain single reveals his interest in exploring an existence for women outside of marriage in eighteenth-century England.

If left to herself, Clarissa Harlowe would choose to reject her unwanted suitors in favor of the single life; she is an unusual eighteenth-century heroine because of this desire, and especially because she appears to be sincere. Not only does Richardson allow his heroine to state her avowed preference to live single; he also carefully constructs her reasons for choosing such a life so that her preference cannot be misconstrued as capricious or ill-planned. Clarissa's preference for the single life is thus significant in the development of the English novel. One aspect of the novel, as a genre, that distinguishes it as a new literary genre is its specific interest in the lives of individuals; novels do not describe the rise and fall of civilizations, but of ordinary individuals. Ian Watt analyzes the role of individualism in forming the novel in his seminal work, *The Rise of the Novel* (1957): "The novel's serious concern with the daily lives of ordinary people seems to depend upon two important general conditions: the society must value every individual highly enough to consider him the proper subject of its serious literature: and there must be enough variety of belief and action among ordinary people for a detailed account of them to be of interest to other ordinary people, the readers of novels" (60). Focusing on the lives of individuals had special significance for eighteenth-century women. Women were frequently the heroines of eighteenth-century novels, and the actions and feelings of these heroines drive the plots of their respective novels. Ruth Perry points out in *Novel Relations* (2004) that these heroines necessarily implied the importance of ordinary women's own actions and feelings: "[T]his new ideology licensed women to regard themselves as individuals, to put themselves at the center of their own dramas, to pay

self-conscious attention to their fates and feelings, and to imagine themselves as the heroines of their own lives” (221). Since an eighteenth-century woman’s lifestyle and future were largely determined by the man she married, her choice of that man is of crucial importance to her. The full implications of Clarissa’s choice of the single life, then, are clear and understandably worrisome to her society—to choose to remain single means that Clarissa will continue to direct her own fate and be an autonomous individual, instead of turning that responsibility over to her husband.

Clarissa’s choice of the single life is a significant decision, in other words, precisely because she is a woman; for a man to choose to live single grants him no special independence he would not already have. Without a husband’s authority to obey, a woman could be considered independent and autonomous, free to make her own decisions and to pursue her own destiny. Clarissa asks Lovelace, one of her potential husbands, late in the novel when she is his captive, “Let me therefore know whether I am to be controlled in the future disposal of myself. . . . Whether, in a word, you intend to hinder me from going whither my destiny shall lead me?” (901). Clarissa’s preference and the implications it has for society both fascinate and alarm Richardson, and though he is willing thoughtfully to consider the possibility of the single life, he ultimately cannot endorse such a decision for women, even one as exceptional as Clarissa.

But even his serious consideration of this possibility is atypical. Whereas Clarissa truly sees the single life as the preferable state for herself, and Richardson is willing to pursue that interest, the eighteenth-century novel more commonly indicates that to remain single is an undesirable state for a young woman. The female characters in novels are warned to be prudent in their refusals of marriage as another offer is not guaranteed, and

they are teased with the possibility of becoming an “old maid.” When Charlotte Lucas marries Mr. Collins in Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, her brothers are “relieved from their apprehension of Charlotte’s dying an old maid” (163). In the same novel, Lydia Bennet is dismayed to see her older sisters Jane and Elizabeth return from their respective journeys still single: “I was in great hopes that one of you would have got a husband before you came back. Jane will be quite an old maid soon, I declare. She is almost three and twenty! Lord, how ashamed I should be of not being married before three and twenty!” (249). Of course, by the conclusion of the novel, both Jane and Elizabeth marry before they are in any danger of being deemed old maids. By way of contrast, Squire Allworthy’s sister Bridget in Fielding’s *Tom Jones* is described as “somewhat past the age of thirty, an era at which, in the opinion of the malicious, the title of Old Maid may, with no impropriety, be assumed” (32). Though Bridget does marry later in the novel, Fielding’s decision to term her an “old maid” reveals much about the attitude of his day toward unmarried women. Bridget’s age is what determines her to be a single woman, as she is considered to be past the age at which a woman can still be expected to marry. A younger woman, such as Sophia Western of the same novel or Jane Bennet, who is a mere “three and twenty,” is not considered “single” in the sense of a lifestyle—she is simply not married yet. It is important to note that the term single, as understood today, had very different connotations for men like Fielding and Richardson. A single woman is one who did not marry, whether she ever received the option to or not, and does not have much hope of ever marrying in the future. She is the woman who earns the derisive title of old maid.

The old maid is an obnoxious character type in eighteenth-century literature who is frequently the object of ridicule and satire. Tobias Smollett introduces one such a character in *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771). Tabitha Bramble, who travels with her unmarried brother Matthew, is referred to by Robert Utter and Gwendolyn Needham in *Pamela's Daughters* (1936) as “the major of the eighteenth century battalion of old maids” (216). Her nephew Jerry delivers a rather unflattering portrait of his maiden aunt:

Mrs. Tabitha Bramble is a maiden of forty-five. In her person, she is tall, raw-boned, awkward, flat-chested, and stooping; her complexion is sallow and freckled; her eyes are not grey, but greenish, like those of a cat, and generally inflamed; her hair is of a sandy, or rather dusty hue; her forehead low; her nose long, sharp, and, towards the extremity, always red in cool weather; her lips skinny, her mouth extensive, her teeth straggling and loose, of various colours and conformation; and her long neck shrivelled into a thousand wrinkles—In her temper, she is proud, stiff, vain, imperious, prying, malicious, greedy, and uncharitable. In all likelihood, her natural austerity has been soured by disappointment in love; for her long celibacy is by no means owing to her dislike of matrimony: on the contrary, she has left no stone unturned to avoid the reproachful epithet of old maid. (Smollett 60)

Jerry goes on to detail the several failed attempts Tabitha has made to find a husband. Jerry's observation is not unique; throughout the novel, Tabitha Bramble is essentially a ridiculous, comedic figure. Tabitha's name itself is rooted in derogatory etymology:

“Tabby was the type name for the old maid before it was the name of the striped cat, and it was the name of the striped cat before it was the name of the female cat. . . . Smollett found the name no less ready to his purpose than the figure itself. He put the two together and gave the novel a type figure with a type name, the sort of thing which has been the mainstay of low comedy from its beginning” (Utter and Needham 217). It is not to be wondered that the young, female characters in early English novels would despair of becoming such a figure, which again underscores the singularity and significance of Clarissa’s preference.

Ian Watt suggests that the negative connotations associated with old maids in literature are indicative of the low public opinion of their real counterparts in eighteenth-century society (145). If eighteenth-century novels are any proof, then the single life was not one many women would purposefully choose. If a woman did choose to live single, then she would most likely be aware of the financial and social difficulties that would attend that choice. Surely, Richardson knew and understood the difficult reality of the single life for women; though he sympathizes with Clarissa, and even finds her preference tempting enough that he gives her the financial means of achieving it, he ultimately determines against granting her desire. In fact, Clarissa dies at the conclusion of the novel, and modern readers of *Clarissa* tend to look for no further proof of Richardson’s decisive denial of Clarissa’s preference. However, Richardson’s feelings about young women choosing to live single are certainly conflicted and his attempt to resolve Clarissa’s fate is not as easy as her death may imply. The very fact that Richardson is willing to examine in such depth a young woman’s choice, and to give that choice such great reason and weight, reveals that he is interested in the single life for

women and in exploring just what that choice implies for both women and the society they occupy. Clarissa's preference for the single life, it should be noted, is treated as an intelligent and reasonable request. Perhaps what is most important about Richardson's exploration of the single life in *Clarissa* is not that he determines against such a choice, but that he is willing seriously to consider it at all. Both Richardson and Clarissa struggle with the practical and moral implications of her preference; neither the author nor his heroine is able to resolve the problem of how to grant her a single life without likewise granting her an independence neither is quite comfortable with. In *Richardson's Clarissa and the Eighteenth-Century Reader* (1992), Tom Keymer provides a thoughtful analysis of just how conflicted both author and protagonist are about reconciling her sense of duty with her personal desires: "Caught between equal and potentially opposite allegiances to patriarchal authority and individual liberty, and combining an evident horror at the implications of Clarissa's transgression with an almost idolatrous attachment to the transgressor herself, he found her case simply insoluble" (122). The problems presented by Clarissa's preference raise difficult questions that Richardson struggles to answer—for him, her situation is, in fact, impossible to extricate her from.

In order fully to understand why both Richardson and Clarissa find her situation so difficult to resolve, several key elements must be examined. First, a consideration of the historical context of the single woman in eighteenth-century England is necessary. Richardson's novel may be fiction, but the conflicts of opinion and feeling surrounding Clarissa's choice are representative of the social reality of Richardson's time. Second, the text of *Clarissa* is vitally important. Richardson provides extensive examples of the seriousness of Clarissa's preference, as well as the characters and events that inform her

decision; he reveals a commitment to explore nearly every facet and detail of Clarissa's choice to remain single, as well as why it is a choice he cannot allow. Finally, other eighteenth-century novels published after *Clarissa* reveal that novel's impact on Richardson's contemporary novelists. Several of Richardson's fellow novelists rework elements of *Clarissa* in their own works, and they discover alternative ways to solve the "simply insoluble" problems faced by Clarissa. Though Richardson determines, like Sir Charles Grandison, that everybody (and especially young women) should marry, he is nonetheless willing thoughtfully and thoroughly to examine why the single life would appeal to a woman like Clarissa, as well as how her desire for that life and the subsequent reality that would follow that choice create a conflict that is difficult to resolve, both in Richardson's fiction and in eighteenth-century reality.

Chapter One:

The Single Woman in Eighteenth-Century England

In order to understand the full implications of Clarissa's desire for the single life, and especially why both she and Richardson do not see it as a viable option, one must take into consideration the historical context of single women in eighteenth-century England. One does not need to be a historian to suspect that women's options then were far fewer than they are today. In studying the single woman in eighteenth-century England, several key questions arise: Was the single life a realistic or desirable choice for the eighteenth-century woman? How would she support herself? Could she ever hope to achieve a measure of independence apart from a father, brother, or husband? In *Clarissa*, Samuel Richardson interestingly provides the financial means for Clarissa to live single through her grandfather's estate; and yet, he ultimately decides that Clarissa's ideal single life is not a realistic possibility, nor is it one that he as a moralist thinks should be encouraged. An examination of Richardson's time and the thoughts of his contemporaries can enlighten a twenty-first century audience that often finds Richardson's novel puzzling and even frustrating on this point. The questions asked above were very real to Richardson's eighteenth-century readers, and the answers to them were vital to their lives and reality.

The single woman was certainly a reality in eighteenth-century England, a fact to which both history and literature can attest. Though exact census demographics are not readily available, sufficient evidence exists suggesting that the single woman was a matter of conversation and concern in eighteenth-century England for good reason. In Lawrence Stone's massive study titled *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-*

1800 (1977), the author analyzes the distinct cultural and social changes that assisted in developing the modern family in England. According to Stone, the number of single upper-class women rose from under five percent in the sixteenth century to twenty to twenty-five percent in the eighteenth century (380). Though the number of unmarried men was high as well, the bachelor does not seem to be of as much concern or importance in eighteenth-century England as his female counterpart. For one, unmarried women vastly outnumbered unmarried men. One of Stone's graphs, *Proportion of Peers' Children (Aged 50+) Who Never Married*, charts the demographics of unmarried children of English Peers from 1575-1824. Stone's graph shows the number of unmarried women over the course of the eighteenth century to be greater than that of unmarried men (47). Watt similarly points out the surplus of women revealed in the 1801 census, and concludes the same conditions most likely existed for most of the century (147).

Though single women may have been a significant part of the English population, they were by no means popular. Single women beyond the expected marriageable age were derided as "old maids" and were frequently the object of scorn in print. Within Richardson's own correspondence, the topic of single women occurs frequently. One of his regular correspondents, Mrs. Anne Donnellan, protested the negative reputation of old maids in a letter to the author in 1752: "Now you will say, I am concerned for the old maids—perhaps I am. . . . But seriously, my good Sir, I think the ridicule thrown upon old maids has often hurried women into wrong and imprudent matches, from the fear of being left to that despised state, and so has had a bad effect" (Barbauld 4.77). Lady Bradshaigh, writing as Mrs. Belfour, informed Richardson in 1749 that she had known "two or three good-natured old maids in my life, and no more; wives and widows without

number” (Barbauld 4.247). Richardson replied with a gentle admonishment to his earnest correspondent: “Now, dear Madam, I must take the liberty to say, that I Have a great quarrel with you for your severity, more than once expressed to that class of females called *old maids*” (Barbauld 4.250). Obviously, the topic of the single woman was not an uncommon one, with much debate given as to whether the derogatory title of “old maid” was just.

The terms “old maid” and “spinster” for unmarried women are an indication of the contempt felt for the single woman in eighteenth-century England. Watt suggests that the negative terminology associated with single women is symptomatic of their decline in public opinion: “The major cause of the decline in status of unmarried women is suggested by the word ‘spinster’” (145). Watt points out that though the *Oxford English Dictionary* first defined “spinster” as “an unmarried woman beyond the usual age for marriage” in 1719, the term had other connotations earlier in history (145). He cites Richard Steele’s recollection that the word “spinster” was not originally derogatory, but simply referred to the “industry of female manufacturers,” literally women who could spin yarn for a living (145). The reason for the dramatic shift, according to Watt, was that the single woman was not as able as she was in the past to contribute economically; rather, she became a financial burden: “[U]nmarried women were no longer positive economic assets to the household because there was less need for their labour in spinning, weaving, and other economic tasks; as a result many unmarried women were faced with the unpleasant choice between working for very low wages, or becoming largely superfluous dependents on someone else” (145). Utter and Needham similarly state that the label “old maid” acts as an “index of the changes in woman’s status brought about by

the economic changes of the time” (219). Utter and Needham, like Watt, suggest the negative connotations associated with single women are directly tied to their inability to contribute economically: “If unmarried women had always been economically independent, we should never have had old maids, for wealth would have commanded respect which would have protected unmarried women from the odium which begets the caricature” (221). The inability to contribute economically forced unmarried women into lives of dependence on others, negatively impacting public opinion of single women while simultaneously undermining their ability to live independently.

The problem of how financially to support oneself was an issue for all single women, regardless of whether they belonged to the lower, middle, or upper classes. Though women of the lower classes more frequently worked outside the home, this fact did not result in increased independence. In the essay “Clarissa Harlowe and Her Times” (1955), Christopher Hill points out that eighteenth-century England was very much a patriarchal society, especially economically: “In the family farm or small business, although there was partnership between man and wife, the husband was still the senior partner. He for the market only, she for the market through him” (118). Hill reveals that though the lower class woman might work, she does so within the context of family; she contributes to the family economy by helping with the family business or farm. She works alongside her husband to support the family as a whole, as distinguished from the idea of the single woman working to support herself alone. Ruth Perry also considers the opportunity to work for lower class women in *Novel Relations*. She points out that lower class families that worked in factories began to be paid as individuals in the eighteenth century, and not collectively as a family unit. Despite this transition to receiving

individual payment, the lower class woman would still not be able to support herself: “Since women made less than half the wages that men earned, and those wages were insufficient to support them, it was difficult for a woman to survive alone” (Perry 326). Though it may have been socially acceptable for a lower class woman to work, the unmarried woman would find it extremely difficult to support herself financially without the assistance of a family.

Middle and upper class women were allowed almost no professional opportunities to work, and were typically as financially dependent on their families as lower class women despite a vast difference in wealth. Hill points out that the emerging middle class saw the extinction of the woman who would work with the family business, as it was no longer necessary for her to help financially support the family: “But the wife in the lower middle-class family became less a helpmeet in the business and more tied to domestic duties: among the new upper middle class she became a sentimentalized angel of the home excluded from all other interests, a lady of leisure—and a novel reader” (118). Hill underscores the double problem for middle and upper class women—not only were they prohibited from working outside the home, but they also did not have any work within the home to occupy them. In a letter to her daughter, Lady Bute, in 1753, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu instructed her to educate her own daughters so they would be able constructively to fill their time, both now and in the future: “Whoever will cultivate their own mind will find full employment. . . . My only Design is to point out to my Grand Daughters the method of being contented with that retreat to which probably their circumstances will oblige them, and which is perhaps preferable to all the show of public Life” (Halsband 3.25, 27). Lady Mary was aware of the lack of domestic occupation for

upper class women, and she suspected her granddaughters' meager fortune would cause them to remain single; thus, she recommended they be educated in order to occupy and engage their time so that they could make such a state bearable, perhaps even enjoyable.

The early English feminist, Mary Astell, also noted the lack of occupation for middle and upper class women. In *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (1694), she states that the apparent uselessness of women, whether married or single, is an "acquired not natural state" and can be directly attributed to their lack of education (10). Astell criticizes her society for rendering women completely unable to contribute: "Neither God nor Nature have excluded them [women] from being Ornaments to their Families and useful in their Generation; there is therefore no reason they should be content to be Cyphers in the World, useless at the best, and in a little time a burden and nuisance to all about them" (10). Far from being considered an "Ornament" to their families, single women were more frequently a burden in eighteenth-century England. If a middle or upper class woman did not marry, then her financial support fell to her family to provide. The single woman would commonly find a place in a relative's home as "part companion, part housekeeper and part child-minder" (Stone 382). Often, this type of situation became a source of misery for all in the household, exciting jealousy on the part of a sister-in-law or other female relative who viewed the single woman as usurping her role as mistress of the home. Stone points out that the situation could be even more dismal for single women who were not invited to live with relatives: "For them, very often the only solution was a life on a small pension in obscure and lonely lodgings in a town" (382-83). The option for the middle or upper class woman to find work as a

governess with a family other than her own did not really exist until the end of the century (Stone 384).

However, not all single women in the eighteenth century suffered such a dreary fate. Examples do exist of unmarried women who were able to live with a measure of financial independence. Several women were able partially to support themselves as writers during the period, such as Mary Astell, Frances Burney, Hannah More, and Mary Wollstonecraft. Astell, for example, enjoyed a modest amount of fame in her time as a writer, though she also received financial support from a group of female patrons, who became some of her closest friends. Her patrons included Lady Ann Coventry, Lady Elizabeth Hastings, and Lady Catherine Jones; all three women were very intelligent and enjoyed generous inheritances, allowing them a greater independence than was typical for women of their day. In *The Eloquence of Mary Astell* (2005), Christine Mason Sutherland points out that all the ladies, except Lady Ann Coventry, were unmarried, “preferring the independence provided them by their fortunes to the loss of freedom and fortune that marriage at that time entailed” (xiv). Even Lady Ann Coventry spent most of her life as an independent woman. In *The Celebrated Mary Astell* (1986), Ruth Perry points out that Lady Ann was only married to her husband for fifteen years before he died, leaving her a widow for fifty-three years until her own death (244).

However, the experiences of Astell’s patrons were certainly atypical of eighteenth-century women, as Perry’s explanation in *Novel Relations* of how Lady Elizabeth Hastings came to her independent fortune illustrates. When her brother, George Hastings, eighth Earl of Huntingdon, inherited the estate Ledston Hall from their maternal grandfather, he instead signed the estate over to Lady Elizabeth. She in turn

signed away her interest in her father's estate, except the £600 she received annually as long as she remained unmarried. Lady Elizabeth and George Hastings' father had remarried and had several children, including sons, with his second wife. Perry underscores the importance of George Hastings' actions: "Meanwhile, her brother had secured for her an estate independent of his [their father's] pleasure or future heirs—just what the idealized hero of an eighteenth-century novel might have done" (160). Though Lady Elizabeth did not entirely approve of her brother's entailing an important estate away from his own heirs, his decision to do so is what granted her independence. Perry points out that sibling attachment was often very strong in eighteenth-century England; such feelings could account for Lady Elizabeth's decision to remain single. However, she also suggests it could be the financial independence itself that influenced her: "On the other hand, her spinsterhood may have been a function of the financial independence Ledston Hall assured her" (161). In turn, the financial independence that Lady Elizabeth enjoyed also allowed her to support her friend, and fellow single woman, Mary Astell. Not all of Astell's single friends were independently wealthy, however. Her close friend Elizabeth Elstob was also a very intelligent, single woman. Elstob was educated by her older brother, William, who actually took his sister to Oxford with him after their parents' death and privately tutored her in Latin and Anglo-Saxon (Perry, *Novel* 183). William Elstob later took a position as a rector and Elizabeth lived with him. The two encouraged each other in their love of learning, and worked on translating several Saxon works together. Elizabeth even published her own translations of several Saxon works in the early eighteenth century (Perry, *Novel* 184). Not only did William Elstob provide a

home for his sister, but he also took great pains to educate her and encouraged her to use her intellectual talents.

Both the very wealthy Hastings siblings and the more middle class Elstob siblings highlight the complexity of being an independent single woman in eighteenth-century England. The paradox is that this independence is actually dependent on what amounts to the goodness of others. Mary Astell, a fine writer and arguably one of the first feminists, was able to support herself by writing and promoting female education, but only because of the support of her patrons. Though her patrons were mostly wealthy, aristocratic single women, Lady Elizabeth Hastings' situation reveals that she herself enjoyed this financial independence because of her brother's goodness and recognition that for his sister, relying on family wealth and preference was a precarious and uncertain means of financial support. Though the Elstobs were not nearly as wealthy or as titled as the Hastings family, Elizabeth Elstob enjoyed a moderate financial independence that allowed her to write and study literature, but only because her brother was willing to support her, both financially and intellectually, in such pursuits. A similar example of this paradoxical independence achieved through dependence is found in the eighteenth-century writer Hannah More. Mary Alden Hopkins explains in *Hannah More and Her Circle* (1947), that while More was paid for her published works, the majority of her income came from a yearly annuity settled on the writer by her fiancée Edward Turner, after he reneged on their seven-year engagement for the third and final time in 1773 (35). More refused to accept the annuity at first, but her family intervened and secretly secured the £200 a year without informing her. More was eventually convinced to accept the annuity as a means of securing her financial independence: "For a time Hannah refused to

use the money, but time, her friends' persuasion, and her own practical sense overcame her humiliation and she became an independent gentlewoman with a fairly comfortable income of her own" (Hopkins 35). More's situation is certainly ironic—she was made financially secure because a man would not marry her, rather than the reverse. More achieved a steady income, what so few single women could boast, and yet only did so because of the generosity, or guilt, of the man who jilted her. Though Hopkins suggests More's financial compensation from Turner was not altogether uncommon at the time, neither was it considered his obligation in such a circumstance. Similarly, the support exhibited by both George Hastings and William Elstob was not typical of the time. Though sibling attachment was considered a virtue, the kind of financial and intellectual independence Hastings and Elstob made available to their sisters was not the norm.

Perry cites two other famous brother-sister examples in *Novel Relations* who do not reveal the same kind of unwavering support. The painter Sir Joshua Reynolds was rather infamously unkind to his single sister, Frances Reynolds, who was also an accomplished painter. Frances and Sir Joshua were both in the same circle of talented and influential friends, which included her close friend Dr. Samuel Johnson. Sir Joshua was reportedly jealous of his sister's talent and tried to limit her opportunities by pointing out her deficiencies and suggesting the display of her work was socially embarrassing for the family. Mrs. Hester Thrale, a member of the Reynolds siblings social circle, commented on the situation in her diary: "[H]e certainly does not love her as one should expect a Man to love a Sister he has so much reason to be proud of; perhaps She paints too well, or has learned too much Latin, and is a better Scholar than her Brother: and upon more Reflection I fancy it must be so, for if he only did not like her as an Inmate why should

not he give her a genteel Annuity, & let her live where and how She likes“ (qtd. in Perry 175). Frances Reynolds was her brother’s dependent, and he did not grant her the same financial freedom George Hastings gave his sister. Sir Joshua actually left the majority of his estate to his nieces, bequeathing more than £10,000 to one niece and £100,000 to another. In comparison, he left a paltry £2,500 in trust for his sister Frances (181).

If Sir Joshua Reynolds’ treatment of his sister did nothing for others’ estimations of his character, neither was his financial assistance considered mandatory. The other example Perry gives is that of Henry and Sarah Fielding. Though Mrs. Thrale again speculates in her diary that Henry was jealous of his sister’s intelligence, particularly her aptitude for Classical literature, the two siblings did not experience the same strained relationship exhibited by the Reynolds siblings. Perry reveals that Sarah Fielding did not rely on her brother’s financial assistance, “aided as she was by a succession of wealthy maternal relatives, her sisters, Samuel Richardson, and then her own publications and her bluestocking friends” (*Novel* 179). Perry also points out that neither Sarah nor Henry seems to have harbored any resentment for the other. Though Fielding did not mistreat any of his sisters, he also cannot be accused of over-generosity on their behalf: “If he [Fielding] was less cold and condescending than Sir Joshua Reynolds, his sisters were also less needy. He lived his own life to the hilt and let them manage theirs as best they could” (Perry, *Novel* 183). The examples provided by Reynolds and Fielding reveal that the actions of George Hastings were not typical for the time. Though Frances Reynolds and Sarah Fielding both experienced more independence than most women, they also did not have nearly the freedom that Lady Elizabeth Hastings enjoyed. Of course, the reality is that Lady Elizabeth was financially independent because her brother made her so. The

deep irony is that in order for the single woman to live independently, in the positive and self-autonomous sense of the word, she is actually dependent on someone else—parent, sibling, uncle, or patron.

Those who did not receive the financial support of others were often more likely to struggle financially. Perry points out that though the novelist Frances Burney earned money for her novels, she also had a royal pension from her rather unhappy days at court to support her (*Novel* 327). Before she was able to completely support herself by writing, Mary Wollstonecraft worked as both a companion to a wealthy family and a governess. She later described both positions as utterly degrading, specifically calling the governess position “humiliating” (Stone 384-85). Elizabeth Elstob lived well as long as her brother survived to support her; however, after his death, “she endured long years of poverty before finding congenial work as governess to the daughters of the Duke of Portland” (Sutherland 54). Elstob’s living arrangements continued to decline as she aged, and when Sarah Chapone decided to introduce the writer George Ballard to Elstob upon discovering his interest to learn Anglo-Saxon, the two found the former scholar in a miserable state. In Perry’s introduction to Ballard’s *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain* (1752), she states the writer and Mrs. Chapone were “appalled” by Elstob’s diminished condition as an overworked schoolteacher and quickly tried to find a better situation for the elderly woman (23). Elstob inspired Ballard to write his collection of the lives of famous intellectual women in British history, many of whom may have experienced the same unfortunate fate as herself. Elstob’s friend Mary Astell also struggled financially when she first moved to London at the age of twenty-one to try to live as a writer. She eventually wrote to William Sancroft, Archbishop of Canterbury, to ask for his charity

(Sutherland xii). He in turn helped Astell find a bookseller, and thus begin her burgeoning literary career, before she also came to be supported by her lady patrons. Though all these women did manage to live single and somehow support themselves, the single life certainly was not always an easy choice.

What is interesting to note about all the women mentioned who managed in some form to live with a measure of financial independence, whether it was difficult or not, is that they were all extremely well-educated women for their time. It appears that the desire to be single is almost entirely intertwined with the ability to be financially independent and educated. The women who were largely able to support themselves, though they may also have had to accept assistance from others, were all able to do so because they were considerably educated. This fact is all the more important to note as women's education was not considered a priority in eighteenth-century England. However, the need for proper female education was growing as an important topic. One could reasonably argue that feminism, the notion of equality for women in all areas of life, arose out of the argument that women have minds capable of learning and should be educated. Though men like Daniel Defoe often argued that women should be educated, the typical end sought was for women to become better companions for their husbands. However, women like Mary Astell, and later Mary Wollstonecraft, began to argue that women should be educated for their own sakes, not simply to make them better companions for men. Several of Richardson's female correspondents addressed the sad lack of education for women in their letters. Mrs. Mary Delany complained to Richardson in 1751 that marriage was typically the only object sought after by women, prized above all else: "I wish mothers were less anxious about marrying their daughters. When they set

them forward in their race, a husband is to be the prize. I wish they were taught to aim at a higher reward than even that of a husband: to fill their different stations as they succeed one another, and to act virtuously and right from the only principle that can make their actions meritorious” (Barbauld 4.43-44). Women like Mrs. Delany and Mary Astell understood the importance of education for women, and viewed it as an end to be obtained whether a woman was married or single.

Astell’s focus on the desperate need for female education helped influenced her to write her first major work, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, which reflects her concern for single women in a culture that placed such a high value on marriage. Sutherland examines the situation of the single woman in eighteenth-century England and why it would prompt such concern for Astell:

The occasion of the proposal was Astell’s perception of the enormous problems encountered by single women in a culture that had no place for them. The Protestant celebration of marriage necessarily disvalued the woman who failed to find a husband. She was seen as an anomaly—a burden to society in general and to her family in particular. Without a specific role to fulfill, she was deprived not only of sufficient income but also of a nourishing social community in which she might prosper. The unmarried lady, therefore, too often lived a life of poverty and loneliness.

(53)

Astell understood the reality of the single woman—that she struggled to support herself financially and emotionally. Astell’s proposal was to remedy the situation by creating a type of Protestant nunnery, where women could live together and grow both spiritually

and intellectually: “Now as to the proposal it is to erect a *Monastery*, or if you will . . . we will call it a *Religious Retirement*, and such as shall have a double aspect, being not only a Retreat from the World for those who desire that advantage, but likewise an institution and previous discipline, to fit us to do the greatest good in it” (18). Astell uses her proposal to describe the type of instruction women would find there, as well as how her plan could be financed. Sutherland describes Astell’s ultimate goal: “Astell, then, intends her monastery to serve both as a refuge for single women and as a school for young girls who will later become—she hopes—sensible wives and mothers, willing and able to give a suitable education to their own children, particularly their daughters” (59). Astell envisions both a sanctuary from the world’s ills and a means of allowing women to contribute to society by helping to improve other members of their sex. Though Astell’s monastery for women was never actualized, her proposal did excite the curiosity and support of others.

Samuel Richardson often lamented that a refuge such as Astell’s did not exist. He informed Lady Bradshaigh of his own wish for single women to have a refuge from a world that often neglected and mistreated them:

I have heretofore told you, Madam, what unhappy creatures of your sex I would (were I able) build an hospital for; and at the time I thought to have mentioned, that I would have had worthy old maids, of slender or no fortunes, employed as their guardians, sisters, and directresses, in the particular wards of it. And indeed, Madam, I would wish to see, and have often said so, a public and genteel benefaction erected for the support of

decayed old maids, of such, in particular, who had never had it in their power to marry with prudence, or who had been perfidiously deserted by our sex, on the score of small fortune, or the like. (Barbauld 4.252)

Richardson again proves that he was intently aware of the need for single women to belong to and be actively involved in society; instead of sending them to the homes of relatives who did not want them, or to forgotten corners of a city to live in obscure lodgings, Richardson proposes that they be respected members of society, not cast-off creatures to be the subject of jokes and ridicule. Indeed, his paragon of the exemplary man, Sir Charles Grandison, makes a proposal very similar to Astell's: "We want to see established in every county, *Protestant Nunneries*; in which single women of small or no fortunes might live with all manner of freedom, under such regulations as it would be a disgrace for a modest or good woman not to comply with, were she absolutely on her own hands; and to be allowed to quit it whenever they pleased" (4.355). Grandison also repeats Richardson's own idea of a hospital for unfortunate women: "I have another scheme . . . An Hospital for Female Penitents; for such unhappy women, as having been once drawn in, and betrayed by the perfidy of men" (4.356). Richardson was obviously interested in the fate of single women, and did not view them as objects of scorn or of ridicule, but of pity.

Clearly, the life of the single woman was not always ideal. She was not simply to go wherever she pleased, or to do whatever she wanted; rather, the lack of monetary funds and an often hostile social climate limited her freedom. Excluding the women who remained single because no prudent marriage offer was ever made to them, one might seriously wonder why an eighteenth-century woman would state a preference to remain

single as both Clarissa Harlowe and Anna Howe do in *Clarissa*. However, the difficulties already mentioned were not necessarily limited to single women alone; married women also experienced a decided lack of opportunity. Although Stone contends that the rise of the “companionate marriage” in eighteenth-century England assisted in “equalizing relationships between husband and wife” (325), Perry takes exception to Stone’s theory. Stone defines the companionate marriage as prospective spouses choosing to marry not for financial gain or increased social status, but out of affection and a desire for life-long companionship (325). Essentially, the husband chooses his wife not because of her dowry or family, but because she will make a good companion. Perry concedes that there is truth to Stone’s description of the rise of the companionate marriage, but disagrees that it created any kind of equality between husband and wife. She chooses instead to describe eighteenth-century English marriages as “privatized”:

The invisible bonds of love came increasingly to be substituted for the social expectations of wives in earlier times: a husband’s love came to be a woman’s only protection and her only law. The newly privatized marriage—privatized in the sense of private ownership as well as seclusion in domestic space—detached a woman from her family of origin and from her pre-existing friendships and concerns in order to put her at the service of being a companion to her new husband. (*Novel* 197)

Privatized marriage was actually about defining the wife for the husband, which destroyed a woman’s sense of self and personal autonomy. According to Perry, the romantic aspect of marriage that is sentimentalized in eighteenth-century novels serves as a poor consolation prize to women who give their entire selves to marriage. She also

suggests that the rise of sentimentalism reveals that eighteenth-century English attitudes toward marriage were suspect: “Sentimentalizing, as a literary device, occurs when the culture no longer *really* takes something seriously as a matter of sentiment—in this case marriage. . . . Because sentimentality ultimately debases and cheapens feeling, infusions of this cloying, hyperemotional attitude make one suspect that whatever is being sentimentalized is in actuality governed by rational, calculating motivation that is moving beyond the reach of feeling” (*Novel* 209). Perry’s conclusion that eighteenth-century marriages were not all based on love and companionship is also supported by Watt, who focuses on the mercenary aspect of marriage. Watt states, “There is much evidence to suggest that marriage became a much more commercial matter in the eighteenth century than had previously been the case. Newspapers carried on marriage marts, with advertisements offering or demanding specified dowries and jointures; and young girls were driven into flagrantly unsuitable marriages on grounds of economic advantage” (142-43). Both Watt and Perry cite Mrs. Mary Delany as an example of a young woman forced into a ridiculously unsuitable marriage based on wealth. Mrs. Delany was merely seventeen when she was married to a man nearly sixty years old, whom Perry describes as being “fat and physically repellent” (*Novel* 133).

Mary Astell actually addresses many of the same problems in *Some Reflections on Marriage* (1700). Astell recognizes that eighteenth-century English marriages are rarely based on true, sentimental companionship: “But if Marriage be such a blessed State, how comes it, may you say, that there are so few happy Marriages? Now in answer to this, it is not to be wonder’d that so few succeed; we should rather be surpriz’d to find so many do” (19-20). Marriages, she notes, were still mostly about money: “What

Qualifications do [men] look after in a Spouse? What will she bring? Is the first Enquiry: How many Acres? Or how much ready Coin?" (20). Astell also points out that male-female relationships are certainly not equalized as Stone suggests; rather, when a woman marries, she gives up all her power and surrenders it to her husband. Astell does not view this submission as wrong. She was, in fact, a determined Tory who argues that a king has the divine right of rule over his people just as the husband has a divine right of rule over his wife, and she revealingly describes a wife as "[s]he who elects a Monarch for Life, who gives him an Authority, she cannot recall, however he misapply it" (37-38). Perry states in *The Celebrated Mary Astell* that the early feminist had no difficulty reconciling her unwavering acceptance of authority with her belief that women were better off living single than married: "In other words, it was *because* she believed in authority that Astell advised women not to marry. If one married, one was bound to submit to one's husband in all things, and no self-respecting woman need saddle herself with a supererogatory tyrant" (165). Astell doubts the chances of finding a man worth obeying in everything, but wryly admits the impractical result of her opinion that women should remain single: "[F]or if none were to marry, but Men of strict Vertue and Honour, I doubt the World would be but thinly peopled" (40). Though Astell's feelings about marriage were extremely harsh, the reality for the eighteenth-century wife was that she put her entire life into the hands of her husband—her property, her financial security, a home for her children, and his respect and love were all within his power to command and bestow as he pleased. Astell dismally sums up the state: "[A] reasonable man can't deny that she has by much the harder Bargain: because she puts herself entirely into her Husband's Power, and if the Matrimonial Yoke be grievous, neither Law nor Custom afford her that

Redress which a Man obtains” (34). One can easily understand why a woman such as Mary Astell, Elizabeth Elstob, or Lady Elizabeth Hastings would choose not to marry under such terms.

Richardson was certainly aware of all these factors. In a series of letters with Jane Collier in 1755, the two discuss how often women of intellect and talent experience the derision of men who do not know how to appreciate them. Richardson responded to Miss Collier that men who cannot appreciate a woman of genius do not deserve to be in such superior company: “Unworthy of such blessings, let such men not dare to look up to merits so superior to their own; and let them enter into contract with women, whose sense is as diminutive as their own souls. What loss would a woman of high attainments and of genius have, in a man of a character so low, as to be afraid of the perfections of the woman who would give him the honour of calling her his!” (Barbauld 2.82-83). Richardson enjoyed entering into debates with intelligent, and often fiery, female correspondents like Lady Bradshaigh, Jane Collier, Mrs. Mary Delany, Mrs. Anne Donnellann and others. He also, like Astell, disliked how single women were often treated and wished they had a refuge to turn to. Where he departed from Astell, however, is that he was never able to advocate for the single life.

After receiving a letter in 1754 from Mr. Edwards containing high praise of Richardson’s daughters, the author responded, “Send them *out* by degrees to plant new colonies!—They are good girls, that’s true; but, I am afraid, are neither rich enough, nor handsome enough, to attract lovers. How should I rejoice to see my eldest happily married!” (Barbauld 3.104). Richardson himself was married twice, and both times happily. He wished the same for his own children, as well as for his many young female

correspondents. He wrote to Miss Sutton in 1752 of meeting one of her former admirers, now married, who expressed the hope she could soon be happily married too. Richardson informed Miss Sutton, “I wish so too, thought I to myself; in these racketing times I wish all good girls in that state” (Barbauld 4.136). Richardson certainly had reason to worry about the single “good girls” he knew. As shown, the social and financial reality for single women was not always particularly easy or pleasant, and usually required the support of someone else to help maintain. The fact that Anna Howe is married by the end of *Clarissa*, and that Clarissa dies instead of marrying or remaining single, reveals much about Richardson’s views of marriage and the single life, and about what it meant to be a single woman in eighteenth-century England.

Chapter Two:

Clarissa's Desire for the Single Life

Since Richardson considered marriage to be the most prudent choice for a young woman, it is all the more interesting that he would create Clarissa—a young woman who for the entirety of his novel consistently argues her preference for the single life. Richardson is clearly interested in considering the possibility of a young woman living single, though he ultimately concludes that for a young woman to live single by choice and not necessity is practically and morally inadvisable. Nonetheless, Clarissa is an articulate, intelligent, and virtuous character; her preference to live single is not a youthful impulse, nor is it the result of a lack of thought or foresight. Though Richardson hesitates to endorse the single life, he does not allow Clarissa's preference to be misconstrued as silly or impetuous. Clarissa's decision to remain single is formed by her experiences and opportunities; Richardson takes great care to reveal why such a life would seem preferable to Clarissa, as well as why it is an impossibility in her situation. In order to understand why Richardson can simultaneously sympathize with Clarissa, and yet decisively determine against her single life, one must analyze the characters and events that inform both her decision and Richardson's reluctance to allow her to live single. Just as Clarissa's desire to live single is not a careless whim, neither is Richardson's decision that the single life cannot and should not be encouraged a rash or prejudiced judgment from the author. Instead, Richardson uses Clarissa's fictional story to consider the very real practical and moral implications of a young woman choosing to live single. Richardson explores his conflicted feelings about young women living single

through Clarissa's story, ultimately struggling to satisfactorily resolve the fates of both his protagonist and her closest friend, Anna Howe, within his novel. Richardson's difficulty in resolving the fates of the two young women is indicative of the actual struggle single women in eighteenth-century England faced in trying to find a place for themselves within their own society.

Clarissa's inclination for the single life is not the mere whim of a young woman, nor is it simply a plot device used by Richardson to impel the story. Though the novel begins after Lovelace has begun his courtship of Clarissa, he is only one gentleman in a string of suitors. The single Clarissa is of great interest to the single men acquainted with her, and for good reason. Clarissa is an exceptional young woman—beautiful, rich, virtuous, and extremely intelligent. The novel begins with Anna Howe's inquiry of how Clarissa is faring after the duel between her brother, James, Jr., and her suitor, Mr. Lovelace. Clarissa responds to Anna's letter by providing a brief background of the events leading up to the duel. Clarissa explains that Lovelace is not her first suitor; he has been preceded by Mr. Wyerley, whom Clarissa rejected for his "*free opinions*" (47). Though Clarissa does not provide an exact time frame of events, she does explain that her rejection of Mr. Wyerley occurred before her brother James, Jr., left for Scotland to view an estate left to him by his godmother, as well as before Lovelace's first appearance at Harlowe Place to court her older sister Arabella (52). Thus, a significant amount of time would have passed between Mr. Wyerley's suit, Lovelace's courtship first of Arabella and then of Clarissa, and his subsequent duel with his old college rival James, Jr., Nor does the duel occur immediately upon James, Jr.,'s return; in the interim before the duel, he encourages two more suitors for Clarissa, Mr. Symmes and Mr. Mullins, since as

Clarissa states, “nobody thought me over-forward in Mr. Lovelace’s favour” (51-2).

Clarissa turns down Mr. Symmes and Mr. Mullins, as she did Mr. Wyrley before them.

Clarissa’s attitude toward her suitors, as well as the timing by which all three are turned down, is of vital importance in understanding her stated preference of the single life and her stubborn refusal to marry Mr. Solmes.

Mr. Solmes writes to the Harlowes of his interest in Clarissa after the other three men have been rejected. Solmes’ suit is not immediately accepted; James, Jr., first suggests Clarissa go with him to Scotland to help put his new estate in order. Mrs. Harlowe rejects this plan, as does Clarissa, who is well aware of the life she would have there: “And if *she* did not oppose it, *I* should; for believe me, I have no mind to be his housekeeper; and I am sure, were I to go with him, I should be treated rather as a servant than a sister—perhaps not the better because I *am* his sister” (56). James, Jr.’s suggestion would have been a typical eighteenth-century arrangement for a single sister. Sarah Fielding, for example, lived with her brother Henry and kept house for him after the death of his first wife until he married Mary Daniel (Perry, *Novel Relations* 170). Clarissa is clearly uninterested in this scenario; however, she is also wary of voicing her own proposal—that she go to her “dairy-house,” as her grandfather called the estate he left her—out of fear that her family will misconstrue her wish: “[F]or I am now afraid of being thought to have a wish to enjoy that independence to which his will has entitled me: and as matters are situated, such a wish would be imputed to my favour to the man whom they have now so great an antipathy to” (56). To voice her desire to live single in an independent situation, which she significantly states she is “entitled” to, would cause an upheaval in the family that has already begun to see her as a distinct threat. Clarissa

soon learns that her family has found its solution—to marry her to Solmes, regardless of her extreme antipathy for the man.

It is not until Solmes' offer is seriously entertained by her family that Clarissa explicitly voices her desire to remain single; she writes in a letter to Anna, "But why (as I have also expostulated with my aunt) must I be pushed into a state which, although I reverence, I have no wish to enter into?" (67). The timing of Clarissa's avowed preference for the single life could easily be interpreted as a reaction to her family's insistence on Solmes and her loss of the far more attractive Lovelace; however, Clarissa's previous actions and statements suggest otherwise. Clarissa has turned down three suitors prior to her family's acceptance of Solmes. While she does not provide as many details about the three men as she does for Solmes, they do not appear to engender the same disgust as he does. Clarissa later gives a brief reason why she rejected the others when she writes Mr. Wyerley to decline his renewed suit after he learns how Lovelace has mistreated her. Of her past suitors she only states that she "had reason to believe that there was not one of them against whose morals or principles there lay not some exception" (1268). Her answer may not fully satisfy the reader's curiosity, but it clearly lacks the same tincture of loathing evident in her comments on Solmes, leaving the reader to infer that the other suitors were not as personally objectionable to her. Though the Harlowes believe Clarissa's fierce rejection of Solmes is a sign of her partiality for Lovelace, Clarissa insists that is not just Solmes she objects to or Lovelace she prefers; rather, she would prefer not to marry at all. Her desire for the single life is based on more than hatred for her family's choice of a husband for her. Clarissa tells Anna how she bluntly apprised Lovelace of this very point: "I had more than once told him that the

single life was my choice; and this before Mr Solmes was introduced as a visitor in our family: that Mr Wyerley, and other gentlemen, knew it well to be my choice, before *he* was acquainted with any of us” (127). In other words, there seems little reason to doubt that Clarissa’s desire to remain single existed even when Mr. Wyerley first proposed: “At the time you distinguished me by your favourable opinion, I told you, sir, that my choice was the single life. And most *truly* did I tell you so” (1268). Richardson takes care to show that Clarissa has seriously thought about the topic of marriage, and has chosen to remain single.

Richardson also provides several reasons why his heroine would view such a life as preferable to marriage. Richardson himself clearly thought marriage was the best option for virtually any young woman of his time, and he strongly believed in the role of parental authority in dictating a child’s choice. *Clarissa* raised many debates among Richardson and his correspondents concerning the duties both parent and child owe to each other, most notably with Hester Mulso in 1750-51 (Keymer 97). In one letter, the spirited Miss Mulso sarcastically charged unfeeling fathers (perhaps thinking of Mr. Harlowe) with making “mere Smithfield bargains, so much ready money for so much land, and my daughter flung in into the bargain” (qtd. in Keymer 131). As both *Clarissa* and Richardson’s correspondence attest, the author’s feelings on the matter of young women and marriage were certainly conflicted. Keymer points out that in the Mulso-Richardson correspondence, Richardson “sedulously avoided giving a conclusive ruling, and the most that Hester Mulso could draw from him in defence of Clarissa was an ambiguous acknowledgement that her case ‘stands by itself’ and entitles no daughter ‘to plead her example for *non-compliance*, till they have *her reasons*’” (122). Richardson

also reveals his ambivalence concerning women and the single life through both the very strong and very weak women surrounding Clarissa. Her mother's overly meek, often servile attitude, for example, is a major cause of frustration for Clarissa. Though Clarissa values obedience, she is apprehensive of her mother's complete lack of self. Clarissa knows she is like her mother in temperament, and that her family is aware of this likeness as well. However, she twice tells Anna that they are all mistaken if they think that she will also sacrifice herself to appease them: "[T]hey have all an absolute dependence upon what they suppose to be a meekness in my temper. But in this they may be mistaken, for I verily think upon a strict examination of myself that I have almost as much in me of my father's as of my mother's family" (65). She repeats the same sentiment in a later letter, even as her family's animosity is mounting: "My temper, I know, is depended upon; but I have heretofore said that I have something in me of my father's family, as well as of my mother's" (105). Clarissa is loath to admit she is completely her mother's daughter—she is also her father's daughter, she insists.

The daughter's insistence on her biological and emotional connection with her father is a frequent motif in early English novels. Perry suggests that the father-daughter relationship is possibly the most prominent relationship in eighteenth-century literature: "Indeed, if the literature a society produces can be said to reflect its obsessions, eighteenth-century England was obsessed with fathers and daughters" (*Novel* 77). To be sure, Clarissa is much more distraught about regaining her father's love and acceptance than her mother's. A woman's power in courtship, Perry states, is largely a reflection of her father's status. The importance of the father to the single daughter is illuminated by the fact that Lovelace knows he must trick Clarissa out of her father's home in order to

triumph over her—she must go from being under her father’s power to being under his power, but without the legal sanction of marriage to give Clarissa any power of her own. Clarissa’s attempt to cling to her father is representative of what Perry says is a general shift away from consanguineal ties to conjugal ones in eighteenth-century England, a shift she terms “the great disinheritance” of daughters (*Novel* 38). Throughout English history, daughters were typically not excluded from family inheritance, the most obvious example being that women could inherit the English throne; however, during the seventeenth century the first-born son became the focus of lineage (Perry, *Novel* 40). James Harlowe, Jr., snidely refers to daughters as “chickens brought up for the tables of other men” (77), an illustration for Perry of “the reconception of the daughter’s place in the family as temporary, partial, and burdensome” (*Novel* 42). Clarissa, a representative eighteenth-century daughter, struggles to maintain her tenuous position as her father’s daughter in the Harlowe family.

Clarissa’s decision to remain single, then, is not really about forsaking dependence on a man; she is simply choosing to submit to a father instead of a husband. Clarissa, much like the conservative Mary Astell, believes in hierarchal structure and does not suppose herself exempt from it. Neither Clarissa nor Astell will argue that wives are not to submit to their husbands. Clarissa’s issue is not with submission but with whom she must submit to, as Janet Todd points out in *Women’s Friendship in Literature*: “Clarissa’s uneasiness in her obedient role appears when she is reluctant to extend to a husband the patriarchal principle she accepts in the father; she will not move from daughter to wife” (11-12). Astell similarly experienced a reluctance to submit to a husband. Sutherland proposes that though Astell lacked a sufficient dowry to entice a

husband, her intelligence and personality also may have influenced her decision to remain single: “[T]here is nothing to suggest that she would have made a happy or successful wife to a man of her time” (xii). Where Astell differs from Clarissa is that, even before she was of marriageable age, she did not have a father to whom her obedience was due. Astell’s father died when she was twelve years old, and in *The Celebrated Mary Astell*, Perry suggests the absence of her father gave Astell a very different fate than many of her contemporaries: “In asserting that a woman, in marrying, tacitly agreed to obey a possibly unworthy authority, Astell seems never to have considered what obedience a woman owed her father, apart from what she thought children of both sexes owed ‘parents’ or ‘family’” (162). Whereas Clarissa is intently aware that by choosing to live single she is choosing to obey her father instead of a husband, Astell grew up with only a mother and aunt as her authorities. Astell actually resembles the fatherless Anna Howe in this aspect, who likewise only answers to her widowed mother. As Perry explains, living in a largely female household “made it possible for her [Astell] to regard male power as an unnecessary trespass on the freedom of women—a thought that might not have occurred to a woman who had grown up subject to the regular exercise of power by her father or other male relatives” (*Celebrated* 163). Astell’s decision to remain single, then, meant for her a degree of independence not readily available to a young woman like Clarissa. Anna’s similar situation as a fatherless daughter likewise influences her arguments with Clarissa about marriage and parental authority in dictating one’s choice.

Unlike Astell or Anna, Clarissa cannot escape her role as daughter, nor does she appear to desire to do so; instead, she laments her parents’, and specifically her father’s,

lack of parental authority and protection. She tells Mrs. Norton, “[N]othing less than the intervention of the paternal authority . . . could have saved me from the effect of his [Lovelace’s] deep machinations” (989). Clarissa’s desperation to align herself with her father and his family can be read as an attempt to associate herself with his authority and power in order to regain control over herself from Lovelace. Perry states, “As a member of a patrilineal family or tribe, her [a daughter’s] power derives from her father’s backing. In other words, a daughter’s connection to her father enhances her power insofar as she is his representative or the representative of his family” (*Novel* 89). Clarissa’s insistence on her similarity to her father may not simply be a matter of family personality, then; it could also be a metaphor for her need for protection from the forces attempting to remove her from her family—her unwanted suitors. In order for Clarissa to remain single, she must have her father’s support and backing authoritatively to send her suitors away. Clarissa’s insistence on claiming she is her father’s daughter could also be an attempt to claim authority for herself in a situation that grows increasingly out of her control. Unfortunately for Clarissa, the very protector she is trying to align herself with is the same man who relinquishes his power as father to his son, her brother.

Brian McCrea examines the idea of the absentee father in *Impotent Fathers* (1998); for him, the true patriarchs in *Clarissa* are all powerless and fail Clarissa by allowing their imposters to subject her to their wills: “The treatment Clarissa receives from her grandfather and would receive from Lord M. shows clearly that she is not the victim of ‘patriarchal power.’ Rather, she is the victim of the fictive versions of kinship that her brother and then Robert Lovelace would impose upon her—those fictive versions of kinship operating only because the patriarch is either dead (her grandfather), severely

impaired (Lord M.), or at risk (her father, who must submit to James Jr.'s various depredations because on him 'the name depends')" (125). Clarissa herself lectures James, Jr., for exerting an authority over her that he does not have, and implores her parents not to relinquish that power. She firmly tells her brother, "I am independent of *you*, sir; though I never desire to be so of my father" (312) and argues with her uncle Antony, "as for my *brother*; he is *but* my brother; he shall not constrain me" (307). Clarissa refuses to take orders from her brother, but she does not react the same way to her father; in fact, she almost begs for him to do his duty as it concerns her. She writes to him, "Transfer not, I beseech you, to a brother and sister your own authority over your child" (221-22). Mr. Harlowe has transferred power to his son, a fact parodied when James, Jr., forcefully takes Clarissa's hand and offers it to Solmes: "Here, sir . . . take the rebel daughter's hand" (306). James, Jr., significantly calls Clarissa a rebel, but she quickly points out that her brother is actually the one rebelling from his proper role as son and brother: "What right have YOU to dispose of my hand?—If you govern everybody else, you shall not govern *me*; especially in a point so immediately relative to myself, and in which you neither have, nor ever shall have, anything to do" (306). Clarissa is thus not rebellious—she simply asks for authority to come from the appropriate family member. As some critics have pointed out, the struggle for authority and the question of who has the legitimate right to power in the Harlowe family is a reflection of the political climate at the time Richardson was writing *Clarissa*. Keymer states, "Recent criticism has begun to recognise some such political dimension in which the heroine's predicament comes to reflect a larger pattern in the theory or history of government" (116).¹ Clarissa pleads to

¹ Keymer points to Jocelyn Harris, Angus Ross, and Jay Fliegelman for further reading on the topic of *Clarissa* and politics. In the Introduction to the 1985 Penguin edition of *Clarissa*, Ross does suggest the

obey the only legitimate authority over herself, but her father abdicates his duty to his son. Mr. Harlowe fails to wield his authority and protection, instead literally signing them away to others: “Son James, to you and to Bella, and to you, brother, do I wholly commit this matter” (327). Mr. Harlowe fails to act the proper role of father, and Clarissa keenly feels his absence until her death. Throughout the novel, Clarissa continues to reassert her desire to remain single and to reclaim her position as her father’s daughter; she embraces her role as daughter, despite her father’s refusal to acknowledge her, and renounces the opportunity to become Lovelace’s wife.

Though Clarissa tends to focus on her father’s rejection, she is also disturbed by her mother’s lack of intervention. Clarissa repeatedly asks her mother to intercede, and Mrs. Harlowe continually refuses out of fear of disturbing the already tense household. During a long conversation with Clarissa, Mrs. Harlowe beseeches her daughter to agree to the family’s wishes. Significantly, Mrs. Harlowe does not mention any approbation for Solmes or any encouraging words considering matrimony. She essentially asks Clarissa to marry Solmes merely to keep the peace which she has long struggled to maintain:

You know, my dear, what I every day forgo and undergo, for the sake of peace. Your papa is a very good man and means well; but he will not be controlled, nor yet persuaded. You have seemed to pity *me* sometimes, that I am obliged to give up every point. Poor man! his reputation the less for it; *mine* the greater; yet would I not have this credit, if I could help it, at so dear a rate to *him* and to *myself*. You are a dutiful, a prudent and wise child, she was pleased to say (in hope, no doubt, to make me so);

name “James” used for father and son in the Harlowe family could reference the two Stuart monarchs, James I and James II and the “conflict of legitimacies” (19).

you would not add, I am sure, to my trouble. You would not willfully break that peace which costs your mamma so much to preserve.

(89)

One can easily imagine why the single life would appeal to Clarissa. Her mother's example only tells Clarissa that marriage entails a submission that is closer to self-annihilation: "Would anybody, my dear Miss Howe, wish to marry, when one sees a necessity for such a sweet temper as my mamma's either to be ruined or deprived of all power?" (92). Todd affirms that "she [Clarissa] senses that the dynamics of marriage allow all men to become Mr. Harlowes and all women passive and subsumed wives" (16). Anna continually warns Clarissa that her mother's fate may well be hers if she does not prove her own strength of mind soon. Later, the conversation in which Mrs. Harlowe begs Clarissa to uphold the peace by marrying Solmes continues to haunt Anna's mind. She angrily replies to Mrs. Norton's expression of pity for Mrs. Harlowe, "*You* pity her mother!—so don't *I*!—I pity nobody that puts it out of their power to show maternal love and humanity, in order to patch up for themselves a precarious and sorry quiet, which every blast of wind shall disturb!" (83). Mrs. Harlowe's subjugation of her will to those of her husband and children does not entice either Clarissa or Anna into a positive view of matrimony.

Despite her desperate encouragement for Clarissa to marry, then, Mrs. Harlowe actually reinforces her desire to remain single. The arguments against marriage come from Anna Howe, who is probably the novel's most vocal opponent of marriage; ironically, it is she, and not Clarissa, who is married by the end of the novel. Anna, like Clarissa, argues her preference to remain single, though she typically exhibits a more

vehement support of the single life and revulsion for marriage than Clarissa: “How charmingly might you and I live together and despite them all!—But to be cajoled, wire-drawn, and ensnared, like silly birds, into a state of bondage or vile subordination: to be courted as princesses for a few weeks, in order to be treated as slaves for the rest of our lives—Indeed, my dear, as you say of Solmes, I cannot endure them!” (133). Not only does Anna view marriage as a kind of entrapment, but she also despises the idea that her own will and understanding will be subsumed to that of her husband. Anna also has an unwanted suitor, the slightly bumbling but kind Mr. Hickman. Mrs. Howe encourages Hickman in his suit of Anna, though Anna frequently treats him with humorous disdain. Anna’s situation is a reflection of Clarissa’s, as Jocelyn Harris states in *Samuel Richardson*: “Anna Howe’s resistance to a good man whom she does not like reflects Clarissa’s to a bad one whom she might like” (50). Anna is outspoken concerning her resistance to Mr. Hickman; even after she has accepted the reality that she will marry him, she bitterly asks Clarissa, “And is it to be expected that I, who could hardly bear control from a mother, should take it from a husband?—from one too, who has neither more wit, nor more understanding, than myself? Yet he to be my instructor!—So he will, I suppose; but more by the insolence of his will than by the merit of his counsel. It is vain to think of it—I cannot be a wife to any man breathing whom I at present know” (1312). Anna’s argument about why she does not want to marry Hickman is a reflection of why Clarissa does not want to marry Lovelace. Both women sense a superiority to the men they would submit to—Clarissa, that she is morally superior to Lovelace, and Anna, that she is intellectually superior to Hickman.

Anna and Clarissa's stated reluctance to marry is not unique to them or to Richardson's novel, as the popularity of Mary Astell's *Some Reflections on Marriage* suggests. Anna and Clarissa doubt whether they can be obedient wives to men whom they cannot respect. Though the single Astell had little esteem for notions of romantic love and marriage, she is able to empathize with the woman who must marry a man inferior to herself. Astell even surmises what a woman's thoughts might be when she considers such a marriage: "Is this the Lord and Master to whom I am to promise Love, Honour, and Obedience? . . . How then can I Love? And if not Love, much less Honour" (39). Astell then deduces, "And if a Woman can neither Love nor Honour, she does ill in promising to Obey" (39-40). Astell's answer is similar to Anna's reasoning that she cannot promise to obey a man she cannot respect as her superior. What causes Anna even more dismay is the knowledge that her inability to respect, love, or obey Hickman will not alter her fate. She painfully recognizes that her own opinions and desires really do not matter much in marriage: "But proud as we are, the proudest of us all can *only* refuse, and many of us accept the but half-worthy for fear a still worse should offer" (515). Anna is clearly referring to herself and Clarissa, and yet she speaks so well for all young, marriageable women of her time. Astell makes a nearly identical observation on the lack of choice for women: "A Woman, indeed, can't properly be said to Choose; all that is allow'd her, is to Refuse or Accept what is offer'd" (*Some Reflections* 29). Astell's statement indicates that Anna's estimation of the marital state is not gross exaggeration or based only on her singular experience. Anna's heated arguments against marriage often lack the sincerity or reason of Clarissa's, nor is Anna as consistent in her preference. At the very beginning of the novel, Anna reveals that she has been in love, though not

wisely, and that Clarissa's reasonable influence saved her from an imprudent relationship. She responds to Clarissa's assertion that she does not love Lovelace, "I have been tinctured, you know. Nor, on the coolest reflection, could I account how and when the jaundice began; but had been over head and ears, as the saying is, but for some of that advice from you which I now return you. Yet *my* man was not half so—so *what*, my dear?—To be sure Lovelace is a charming fellow—And were he only—But I will not make you *glow* as you read!" (71). Despite the inconsistency she sometimes displays, Anna's opinions cannot be completely discounted since they appear to be very much steeped in the reality of her time.

The fact that Anna is more forthright about her inclination for the single life and her disdain for marriage, and even for all men in general, is perhaps not only a result of a fundamental difference in personality from Clarissa, but also because Anna is embedded in a predominantly female world. Todd describes Clarissa as "trapped in the patriarchal scheme far more tightly than Anna" (52). Anna is not subject to a father, but only to her widowed mother, a situation which reflects Astell's girlhood. Though Mrs. Howe is a fierce advocate of the parent's right to be obeyed by his or her offspring and frequently defends the Harlowes' actions, she maintains only a tenuous rein over Anna. Anna also has no siblings with whom to compete for an inheritance. Though an outspoken opponent of marriage, she has no example within her own home to resist. In fact, Mrs. Howe as a widow with a sufficient income may be the only truly autonomous woman in the entire novel. Mrs. Howe is not financially indebted to a family like Clarissa's childhood nurse, Mrs. Norton, or like her Aunt Hervey whose husband has been assisted financially by James, Jr., (212). Just as Mrs. Harlowe's example is an incentive for Clarissa not to

marry, Mrs. Howe's example may be Anna's best reason to remain single. Despite their frequent squabbles, Mrs. Howe and Anna really are kindred spirits. Anna recalls Clarissa's assertion that she has more of her father in her than most give her credit for; Anna makes a similar claim, but instead compares herself with her mother. Anna tells Clarissa of her mother's frequent comment, "Ah! Nancy! You are so lively! so quick! I wish you were less like your papa, child!" (245). Anna points out that the resemblance actually lies elsewhere: "I pay it off with thinking, that my mamma has no reason to disclaim her share in her Nancy" (245). Anna aligns herself with the feminine and claims the closest kinship with her mother; in fact, little is known or mentioned about the deceased Mr. Howe. He is simply not as important in Anna's life as her mother—the mother is a vital presence; the father is dead to his family both literally and figuratively.

Though Mrs. Howe insists Anna marry Hickman, she makes a different choice for herself after receiving a marriage proposal from Clarissa's uncle Antony. In the essay "Maternal Guardianship by 'Nature' and 'Nurture,'" Cheryl Nixon considers the important role Mrs. Howe plays in the novel and compares her with the relatively weak Mrs. Harlowe: "While Mrs. Howe's power has not been fully recognized by literary critics, it is recognized by the characters faced with that power: the threat of Mrs. Howe's model of empowered maternity must be neutralized by her conversion to the Harlowe's [sic] familial philosophy, as evidenced by the family's attempted annexation of Mrs. Howe through a proposed marriage to Antony Harlowe" (2). Nixon suggests Mrs. Howe may be interpreted as a threat to the Harlowes; certainly Anna does try to convince her mother to allow Clarissa to use their home as a refuge from her family. Mrs. Howe denies her daughter's request and declares for herself the same parental authority the Harlowes

claim; however, when Antony presents himself as a potential authority over her, Mrs. Howe quickly declines his proposal. Within Mrs. Howe's polite letter of rejection is the implication that her refusal may not be based on a personal objection to Antony, but rather the reality of having to renounce her own independence. She informs him, "I have now been a widow these ten years; nobody to control me—And I am said not to bear control: so, sir, you and I are best as we are, I believe—nay I am sure of it" (631). As Nixon points out, Mrs. Howe's decision is crucial for both herself and Anna: "Mrs. Howe could potentially be another Mrs. Harlowe, failing to secure either her daughter's economic or emotional future, failing to be either 'natural' or 'nurturing,' and failing to be her daughter's legal guardian or mother. The potential transformation of Mrs. Howe into Mrs. Harlowe signifies the restructuring of the entire novel: the figure of patriarchy would be given control over the figure of the independent woman" (15). Mrs. Howe significantly chooses for herself what she will not allow Anna to have—an independent life.

The episode between Mrs. Howe and Antony Harlowe is a strange one for Richardson to include since it appears to go against his own theory that marriage is the better state for women. However, Mrs. Howe is a widow, which is a far different state than a single woman who has never married, and she has been financially provided for by her deceased husband. Also, the position of widow is certainly more socially acceptable than that of an old maid. The fact that Mrs. Howe chooses to remain a widow is most interesting as a point of contrast to Anna's marriage. Mrs. Howe's phrase, "I am said not to bear control," could very well have come from her daughter instead. Of course, though Mrs. Howe is no Mrs. Harlowe, her own successes as a mother are debatable. Mrs. Howe

and Anna have a tempestuous relationship, and she is not always able to govern her feisty daughter. Though Mrs. Howe successfully marries her daughter to a decent and wealthy man, she does so at the cost of a good relationship with Anna. Nixon states that Richardson's conflicted views about Mrs. Howe's success as a mother are representative of his own society's views about independent women and the power they exert: "Clarissa's need to mask Mrs. Howe's economic successes with her emotional failures does reveal a 'true' cultural anxiety surrounding real women's real power" (17). Though Mrs. Howe is a secondary character in the novel, Richardson explores his mixed fascination with female independence through her role and the episode with Antony Harlowe's proposal.

Mrs. Howe does not marry and remains a widow, but Anna is married by the novel's end. Richardson certainly wished readers to approve of, even to celebrate, Anna's marriage; he gives Anna a playful, and for many readers a maddening, benediction to end her story and includes her own approbation as his defense in the Conclusion to *Clarissa*. The Conclusion is a paratextual device, similar in its function to Richardson's Preface and Postscript to *Clarissa*; all three are used to explain and defend his novel, as well as direct his reader toward the intended moral and meaning of his work. The Conclusion is both a part of the novel and outside the novel. While *Clarissa* is an epistolary novel, the Conclusion is "Supposed to be written by Mr Belford," an odd choice of words since if it was a part of the novel it would simply be "Written by Mr. Belford." However, the Conclusion is not written from any one character's perspective; instead, the "supposed Mr. Belford" is an omniscient, third-person narrator that appears to know the fates of all characters involved until it curiously allows Anna to speak for herself to reveal her own

fate. Anna's own voice takes over the text as she states her marital felicity: "Mrs Hickman, she sometimes as pleasantly as generously tells him [Mr. Hickman], must not *quite* forget that she was once Miss Howe, because if he had not loved her as such, and with all her foibles, she had never been Mrs *Hickman*. Nevertheless she seriously, on all occasions and that to others, as well as to himself, confesses, that she owes him *unreturnable* obligations for his patience *with* her in HER day, and for his generous behaviour *to* her in HIS" (1492). Richardson allows Anna to speak for herself so that her happiness cannot be disputed, but her fate is not resolved *within* the novel. The Conclusion as paratext is distinguishable from the text of the novel, as are Richardson's Preface and Postscript; however, the Conclusion directly follows the text of the novel and is certainly intended to support and elaborate upon the plot of the novel itself. The decision to resolve Anna's story through the Conclusion, as opposed to a letter within the novel, reveals Richardson's struggle to find a place for the married Anna in his novel.

Richardson provides no concrete examples to prove that Anna has grown to love Hickman, but fully expects his readers faithfully to accept Anna's successful conversion to the marital state. The fate Richardson chooses for Anna Howe is probably the closest the novel comes to revealing Richardson's own views of marriage, and the particular words emphasized in Anna's approbation are very telling. The time of Hickman's courtship was "HER [Anna's] day" and their marriage is "HIS," and Anna claims she "owes" Hickman "*unreturnable* obligations." Anna is not only happy to be married to a man she originally despised; she appears to be grateful that he was willing to marry her. Anna seems to be implying by the words "owes," "obligations," and "generous" that she no longer views herself as stooping to marry Hickman, an idea especially puzzling when

Anna so clearly believes herself to be Hickman's intellectual superior. Anna's transformation in the Conclusion again underscores how this text simultaneously belongs with the novel and yet seems to exist outside the novel itself.

Whether Richardson's readers accept this happy, matrimonial ending for Anna may well be a matter of personal inclination. Indeed, Richardson's attempted moral may suffer from his own skill in portraying Anna's disinterest in Hickman, so that her sudden reversal seems false to many readers, or at least, that she is being somehow punished through marriage. Anna appears to object to Hickman throughout *Clarissa*, not necessarily out of a genuine preference for the single life, but because he does not inspire any love or passion in her. Anna compares him, tellingly enough, to Lovelace on several occasions. She admits to Clarissa that Hickman is "so good a sort of man in the main," but that he lacks the charming qualities Lovelace has in abundance (207). She even compares the two men's physical appearances, stating, "But Hickman, with strong lines, and big cheek and chin bones, has not the manliness in his aspect, which Lovelace has with the most regular and agreeable features" (208). She laments that she and Clarissa have so few options in their choice of suitors, telling her friend, "Only that all men are monkeys more or less, or else that you and I should have such baboons as these to choose out of is a mortifying thing, my dear" (210). Anna's desire to remain single, in short, has more to do with her disinterest in Hickman and concern for Clarissa's plight than a true preference for the single life. In his own day, Richardson received criticism for marrying Anna to the good but unexciting Hickman. In 1750 Mrs. Anne Donnellan complained to Richardson, "But, Sir, you will say, I, that can a little despise Mr. Hickman, seem to favour those ladies in not liking a mild man: I think not. You did not design him a fine

character. . . . But in a character that I should like, I would, even in a lover, have him shew those qualities that I should willingly submit to be governed by as a wife: and if a man let me use him with contempt as a lover, I don't know whether I should ever rightly respect him as a husband and friend" (Barbauld 4.17-18). Mrs. Donnellan echoes Anna's own objections to Hickman. In a letter from 1749, Lady Bradshaigh likewise seems to have been frustrated by Anna's decision to marry Hickman: "And indeed she [Anna] visibly and confessedly marries with reluctance, which no power on earth could have made me do; no, nor yet with indifference.—Strange romantic notions!" (Barbauld 4.260). Despite the protests of his trusted correspondents, Richardson still insists that Anna's fate is a happy one; in fact, he refuses to leave the matter to conjecture.

Richardson uses the Conclusion to inform his reader very firmly that Anna is quite content in her marriage and even considers herself a very fortunate woman to be married to Hickman. Richardson resolutely concludes his novel with Anna's successful conversion to the conjugal state, with her own approbation as his defense.

If Richardson allowed Anna Howe to have her way, however, she would choose to live single with Clarissa at her own estate. Though Richardson does not allow Anna's preference to live single to become a truly feasible option for her, he does explore such a possibility for Clarissa. Richardson gives Clarissa's choice to remain single both weight and reason; her preference appears to be something she has long considered, including in relation to other men apart from Lovelace or Solmes. Her parents' marriage and her friend Anna's opinions also underscore why Clarissa feels a natural disinclination for marriage. Richardson does not stop there, however. He also provides the potential resource for Clarissa to remain single. Clarissa's grandfather makes the unorthodox

decision when writing his will to leave his estate not to any of his three sons, his only grandson, or even his eldest granddaughter. Instead, he leaves it to his youngest, female grandchild. His decision is intended to benefit Clarissa, and it would seem to provide the potential means of making her single life a reality. If Clarissa has her own estate then she is financially independent and has no monetary need of a father or husband. Though Clarissa quickly gives the responsibility of the estate to her father, the damage has already been done. Her grandfather's decision excites family jealousies and the estate, instead of providing for Clarissa's independence, actually seals her fate as the real impetus behind the proposed marriage to Solmes.

Clarissa explains to Anna why the estate has engendered such hostility in her family. She states, "I have more than once mentioned to you the darling view some of us have long had of *raising a family*, as it is called. . . . A view too frequently, it seems, entertained by families which having great substance, cannot be satisfied without rank and title" (77). Her brother James, Jr., in particular, has grand views for himself. Since his uncles have remained unmarried and childless, Clarissa explains, James, Jr., naturally assumed that he would inherit quite a portion: "[T]o wit, my grandfather's, father's, and two uncles', and the remainder of their respective personal estates, together with what he had an expectancy of from his godmother, would make such a noble fortune and give him such an interest as might entitle him to hope for a peerage" (77). James, Jr.,'s plan is obviously dealt a harsh blow when Clarissa inherits their grandfather's estate instead of him. The entrance of Lovelace causes James, Jr., to worry even more for his own wealth and position. Hill explains why the situation is so dire for James, Jr., when Lovelace transfers his affections from Arabella to Clarissa:

The family had been in favour of Lovelace's proposals to the elder sister, because they hoped that this connection might help to gain a peerage. But when he switched his attentions to Clarissa, the design to concentrate the estates and aggrandize the family was seriously endangered. There was always the possibility that the uncles might follow their father's example and their own inclinations. Lovelace had a good clear estate, and prospects of a peerage; if he married Clarissa, why should not the family property be concentrated on them, since James could no longer have it all? (104)

James, Jr., quickly realizes that his grand schemes to advance himself are in danger of utterly collapsing, and he shrilly exclaims to Arabella, "This little siren is in a fair way to *out-uncle* as well as *out-grandfather* us both" (80). In the jilted Arabella he finds a ready accomplice, and the two become an angry and jealous force against Clarissa. Solmes is the perfect means to their end; his estate joins the Harlowes, allowing them to keep the land in the family. He is also, according to Clarissa, "mean enough" and "wicked enough to propose to *rob* of their just expectations, his own family . . . in order to settle all he is worth upon me" (81). The grandfather's estate, far from providing Clarissa with the resources to live single, then, instead destroys family affection and propels her into the world away from her family home.

For her part, Anna is unable truly to understand Clarissa's dire situation. She constantly urges Clarissa to "resume" her estate: "If I have not been clear enough in my advice about what you shall do, let me say that I can give it in one word: it is only by *re-urging* you to RESUME" (133). Anna continues to give Clarissa this advice throughout the novel, and she grows increasingly more frustrated when Clarissa continues to leave

the estate in her father's hands. The result of Clarissa's regaining her estate, after all, would not only be her independence, but Anna's as well. After encouraging Clarissa to regain her estate, Anna tells her, "How charmingly might you and I live together and despite them all!" (133). The estate does tempt Clarissa as the answer to her problems; she is also aware that it is her legal right to go there. She even pointedly writes to James, Jr., when she is to be forcibly carried to her uncle's house: "I should think it very hard to be carried by force to anybody's house when I have one of *my own* to go to" (226). Her desire to leave Harlowe Place and her implacable family is never strong enough to overcome her fear of actually doing so, however. She, much better than Anna, understands the full implications of what will happen should she leave. She asks Anna, "In the first place, let me ask you, my dear, supposing I were inclined to follow your advice, whom have I to support me in my demand?" (235). Clarissa hopes the arrival of her cousin Morden will likewise bring his support, but she has no guarantee of whose side he will choose. Her concerns are not only practical though; she is also wary of the moral implications of resuming the estate against her parents' will, giving voice to her author's favorite maxim, "the want of duty on one side, justifies not the non-performance of it on the other, where there is a reciprocal duty" (qtd. in Keymer 122). Clarissa unequivocally tells Anna, "I would sooner beg my bread than litigate for my right with my papa: since I am convinced that whether or not the parent do his duty by the child, the child cannot be exempted from doing hers to him" (235). Clarissa accepts as a given her parents', and particularly her father's, right to authority over her.

Clarissa remains steadfast in both her refusal to go against her father's will and her desire to remain single. While Clarissa argues she should be allowed to remain single,

she never argues, it is important to note, for her independence. Clarissa accepts the fact that she must remain dependent, whether to a father or a husband; she is only arguing that she be allowed to choose to whom she will owe her obedience. Clarissa frequently argues that she is independent of Lovelace, and since he is not her husband, her argument is logically and legally sound. However, even at her lowest moments after Lovelace rapes her, Clarissa never argues that she should be independent from her family. Her troubled writings after her rape reveal that she still clings to the fact that she belongs to her family. In an uncompleted letter to her father, Clarissa ponders, “[M]y name is—I don’t know what my name is!—I never dare to wish to come into your family again!—But your heavy curse, my papa—Yes, I *will* call you papa, and help yourself as you can—for you are my own dear papa, whether you will or not—And though I am an unworthy child—yet I *am* your child—“ (890). Clarissa refuses to sever ties to her family, even though they will not acknowledge her. Her stubborn insistence that she is her father’s child underscores Clarissa’s refusal to be independent from him. Her feverish writings after the rape reveal Clarissa is experiencing a type of identity crisis (“I don’t know what my name is!”), but she recovers by again claiming kinship to her father. Though he will not do his duty by her, she will still perform her duty to him. Clarissa’s desire to remain single, then, cannot be separated from her decision to be a dependent daughter instead of a dependent wife. In fact, her very identity is bound up in the idea that she is her father’s daughter, an identity that will eventually have religious signification for Clarissa.

Though Richardson offers the grandfather’s estate as a possible means to support Clarissa’s single life, he never allows it to emerge as a feasible option. He also offers Clarissa the only alternative to remaining single—marriage; but, like the single life,

marriage to Lovelace is an option that neither Clarissa nor, interestingly enough, Richardson can endorse.

Clarissa certainly appears to have feelings for Lovelace. At the beginning of the novel a teasing Anna tries to get Clarissa to admit her interest in him. Clarissa stubbornly maintains her indifference, though she does eventually admit, “Why then, my dear, if you will have it, I think that, with all his preponderating faults, I like him better than I ever thought I should like him; and, those faults considered, better perhaps than I *ought* to like him” (185). After her many trials with Lovelace, including the rape, Clarissa becomes even more aware of how her own feelings for Lovelace may have clouded her judgment in continuing to write him and in leaving Harlowe Place with him. She is deeply disturbed by the knowledge that she could have cared for a man who has proven to be capable of premeditated evil. She writes to Mrs. Norton with both sadness and bitterness, “I will own to you that once I could have loved him—ungrateful man!—had he permitted me, I *once* could have loved him. Yet he never deserved my love” (992). If Clarissa’s feelings for Lovelace are conflicted, she is even more troubled when she considers marriage to him. Even when she flees Harlowe Place with him, Clarissa gives no indication that she plans to marry him. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu found Clarissa’s character suspect for this very reason: “Even that model of Perfection, Clarissa, is so faulty in her behavior as to deserve little Compassion. Any Girl that runs away with a young Fellow without intending to marry him should be carry’d to Bridewell or Bedlam the next day” (Halsband 3.9). (Of course, when Clarissa meets Lovelace in the garden she does not intend to leave with him. Lady Mary typically is never willing to give Richardson the benefit of the doubt in anything).

Despite whatever feelings Clarissa may have for Lovelace and the precarious situation she is in, she is wary of placing herself too much in his power and is distinctly apprehensive about becoming his wife. Lovelace's original plan is to convince Clarissa to cohabit with him, but not to marry. However, just as Clarissa admits that she could have once loved Lovelace, he similarly finds that he is capable of loving her and more than once finds his plans could go awry for this very reason. Even before Lovelace hurries her away from Harlowe Place, he admits to his friend and correspondent Belford that he is so charmed by Clarissa that he could think of "forgoing the *life of honour* for the *life of shackles*" (144). Once he and Clarissa leave together, Lovelace continues to have moments when he finds himself surprisingly willing to marry her. He tells Belford, "Never was man in greater danger of being caught in his own snares" (492) and that on one particular instance, "had a parson been there, I had certainly been a gone man" (492). Though Lovelace first proposes to Clarissa much in the same manner in which he proposed to Arabella, by making such an offer that she cannot possibly accept him, he subsequently finds himself sincerely offering marriage to her and is actually taken aback when she does not accept: "Wouldst thou not think I was taken at my offer?—an offer so solemnly made, and on one knee too? No such thing!—The pretty trifler let me off as easily as I could have wished" (493). Clarissa is not interested in aligning herself with Lovelace or his family and admits to Lovelace that her mind is too troubled about a reunion with her family to consider his proposal (493). Even though Clarissa admires Lovelace's family and a part of her hopes for his reform, she informs Anna that she will not accept any aid from them: "But after all, I had rather be independent of him, and of his family, although I have an high opinion of them. . . . Otherwise I think it were best for

me, at once, to cast myself into Lady Betty's protection. All would then be conducted with decency, and perhaps many mortifications would be spared me. But then I must be *his*, at all adventures, and be thought to defy my own family" (452). Clarissa continues to hope her cousin Morden's arrival could initiate a reconciliation with her family, and she refuses even financial assistance from Lovelace or his family. She writes to Arabella to request her clothes and some money she had saved be sent to her: "Nor shall I be in any sort of dependence upon the person by whose means I have taken this truly reluctant step" (411). Clarissa's desire to remain single does not wane while she remains Lovelace's captive; if anything, her resolve to stay single actually strengthens the more she becomes aware of the true nature of the man she could marry.

Since Clarissa admits that she is more attracted to Lovelace than she reasonably should be, and later that she was once capable of loving him, her extreme antipathy towards marrying him warrants examination. Clarissa never fully trusts Lovelace; she confides in Anna that what concerns her most about Lovelace is her suspicion that "he wants a *heart*: and if he does, he wants everything" (184). Despite her attraction to him, Clarissa is not convinced of his worthiness as a husband. Clarissa's ability to recognize that Lovelace would not make a good husband is just what Astell and Richardson hoped young women would learn to discern for themselves. Astell states in *Some Reflections on Marriage*, "If a Woman were duly principled, and taught to know the World, especially the true Sentiments that Men have of her, and the Traps they lay for her under so may gilded Compliments, and such a seemingly great Respect, that Disgrace would be prevented which is brought upon too many Families; Women would Marry more discreetly, and demean themselves better in a married State, than some People say they

do” (82). Astell cautions women against becoming too enamored with the praise their suitors offer, urging them instead to use their heads to determine the true worth of the men who seek their hands. In 1755, Richardson and Jane Collier discussed at length the difficulty excellent young women have in finding men worthy enough to marry them. Richardson concedes to Miss Collier that many men are uninterested in marrying a woman of superior intelligence. However, when Richardson discussed the same topic with Hester Mulso in 1751, Richardson suggested that women can be equally uninterested in marrying a man who actually deserves them: “I have known women who professed to admire good men; but have chosen to marry men—not so good; when lovers of both sorts have tendered themselves to their acceptance. There is something very pretty in the sound of the word wild, added to the word fellow; and good sense is a very grateful victim to be sacrificed on the altar of love” (Barbauld 3.179). Richardson was well aware of the appeal of the rake, and in his portrayal of Lovelace, provides a superb illustration of a very bad man who is still irresistible. However, Clarissa is also too good for Lovelace, a fact even Lovelace recognizes in the end: “But I am overmatched, egregiously overmatched, by this lady” (907). Though Clarissa initially misreads Lovelace when she fails to see his truly malicious nature, Lovelace also misreads Clarissa when he inaccurately judges just how sincere is her virtue.

Richardson also intentionally allowed his audience to misread Lovelace’s character at first; but he always intended for them to correct this error in judgment, just as Clarissa corrects hers. Richardson explicitly states in the Preface to *Clarissa* that his novel is meant to correct “that dangerous but too commonly received notion, *that a reformed rake makes the best husband*” (36). Clarissa then, does exactly what

Richardson would have any young woman do—she rejects a man who is unworthy of her affections. While Richardson may whole-heartedly have wished that his young female acquaintances could avoid such a tragedy as Clarissa's, he also wished to see them avoid marrying men so little deserving of their affections. The reason Clarissa cannot and will not marry Lovelace is that she is aware of her moral superiority; she frequently tells him, "My soul is above thee, man!" (646). Even after the rape, when virtually all around her try to convince her that marriage is her best option, Clarissa refuses to marry a man who could commit such a crime. Richardson attacks the notion that marriage can cover all—that Lovelace's actions can be forgiven if he marries Clarissa. Lovelace himself is aware of society's willingness to pardon him should he marry her: "Besides, am I not in earnest as to marriage?—Will not the generality of the world acquit me, if I *do* marry? And what is that injury which a *church rite* will at any time repair? Is not *the catastrophe of every story that ends in wedlock accounted happy*, be the difficulties in the progress to it ever so great?" (944). Clarissa is not so willing to excuse Lovelace's actions; though she forgives him, neither she nor Richardson is ready to embrace Lovelace's philosophy that marriage can remedy the situation. If Clarissa is reluctant from the beginning of the novel to grant obedience to a husband, her experience with Lovelace only solidifies her refusal to pledge her obedience to a man who shows a complete disregard for her own integrity and person. Even more important to Clarissa is her belief that marriage vows are sacred, and that to pledge one's love and obedience to a man one despises would be dishonest and morally reprehensible. Clarissa suggests such an idea to her parents about marriage to Solmes, but the sentiment behind her appeal could also be applied to Lovelace: "Permit me to repeat, that I cannot *honestly* be his. Had I a slighter notion of the matrimonial duty

than I have, perhaps I might. But when I am to bear all the misery, and that for *life*; when my *heart* is less concerned in this matter than my *soul*; my *temporal* perhaps than my *future* good; why should I be denied the liberty of *refusing*?" (221). Hester Mulso likewise agreed with Clarissa that vowing to love and honor where she does not would be sinful—such a marriage “would not only have plunged her into misery but guilt; a guilt no less black than that of solemn perjury before the altar of God” (qtd. in Keymer 131). Instead of putting Clarissa in a situation where marriage is her only option, Lovelace actually confirms for Clarissa that marriage is a fate she morally cannot accept for herself.

Even Anna tries in vain to persuade Clarissa to marry Lovelace, arguing that “marriage is now the only means left to make your future life tolerably easy” (1087). Clarissa, however, refuses to agree with Lovelace or Anna; she will not cover up the truth of his character with the falsehood that marriage would imply. She tells Anna kindly but firmly that her mind is made up:

My pride, then my dearest friend, although a great deal mortified, is not *sufficiently* mortified if it be necessary for me to submit to make that man my choice, whose actions are, and ought to be, my abhorrence. . . . Do you think your Clarissa Harlowe so lost, so *sunk* at least, as that she could for the sake of patching up in the world’s eye a broken reputation, meanly appear indebted to the generosity, or *compassion* perhaps, of a man who has, by means so inhuman, robbed her of it? Indeed, my dear, I should not think my penitence for the rash step I took anything better than a specious delusion, if I had not got above the least wish to have Mr Lovelace for my

husband. (1116)

Clarissa's language here is very specific. She refuses "to submit to make that man my choice." Clarissa's use of the word "submit" invokes the image of Mrs. Harlowe and her message to Clarissa to submit in order to maintain peace, despite any personal cost.

Clarissa did not follow her mother's example while at Harlowe Place, nor will she begin to do so now. She refuses to submit to a man whom she cannot honor or respect. Also of note is her phrase, "the sake of patching up in the world's eye a broken reputation." The phrase recalls an earlier statement made by Anna, though addressed to Mrs. Norton and not Clarissa. Anna witheringly refers to Mrs. Harlowe's futile attempts to maintain the status quo in her home as a pathetic endeavor "to patch up for [herself] a precarious and sorry quiet, which every blast of wind shall disturb" (583). Clarissa differs from her mother in that she recognizes that denying her own sense of self and integrity would be a far greater loss than what the world may assume is a worse fate. Clarissa can forgive Lovelace, but she will not allow marriage to negate what has happened to her or to somehow gild his intolerable actions.

Clarissa ends with the protagonist's death, a plot point that dismayed and angered its eighteenth-century audience and continues to affect readers today. Lady Bradshaigh pleaded with Richardson to change the ending, even suggesting alternate endings herself. She suggested first that Lovelace reform and marry Clarissa, and later proposed that the rape could fail, Clarissa could be allowed to live single, and Lovelace could still reform (even if they did not marry). Her sister, Lady Echlin, went even further with her own alternative ending to *Clarissa* by writing an actual manuscript that she sent to Richardson for his perusal in 1755. Lady Echlin was willing to allow for the deaths of both Clarissa

and Lovelace, but like Lady Bradshaigh, suggests the rape could fail and that Lovelace could still reform before he dies (Keymer 214). Though these two ladies may be extreme examples of discontent with the outcome of *Clarissa*, they do typify the dissatisfaction felt by many of Richardson's readers concerning the resolution of his novel. While Richardson's eighteenth-century audience was eager to see Lovelace reformed and even married to Clarissa, contemporary readers tend to be interested in a more progressive conclusion. Many critics see Clarissa's death as a sign of her weakness and failure; because she dies, she does not triumph. Terry Castle, in *Clarissa's Ciphers* (1982), views Clarissa as utterly powerless to maintain control over her own story. Castle avers, "Clarissa is without force: as a woman she is without the kinds of power available to Lovelace—all those perquisites of masculinity institutionalized within the 'old Patriarchal system,' including a certain basic physical freedom, the power to defend oneself from abuse" (25). In the essay "Christian Form and Anti-Feminism in *Clarissa*" (2003), Lois Chaber states, "the first half of the novel is meant to be read as a *Christian* tragedy in which the heroine draws down the providential punishment of rape upon herself through her own sinful transgressions" (517). Chaber admits she admires Richardson's skill, yet deplores his opinions of women. This interpretation functions only if Richardson's own vindication of Clarissa is ignored. Lovelace does wrest control of the narrative away from Clarissa at one point; but Richardson does not allow the novel to remain that way. Clarissa escapes Lovelace and once again returns to her prolific writing, even rather triumphantly announcing to Mrs. Norton, "I RESUME my pen!" (987). Again, Clarissa's word choice is telling; Anna repeatedly advises Clarissa to "resume" her grandfather's estate in the beginning of the novel. The word is continually associated

with the idea of independence and autonomy. Once Clarissa is safe in the home of the kindly Mr. and Mrs. Smith, all of the action in the novel is driven by her. Though she is basically bed-ridden, Clarissa directs the writing of her will, purchases her own coffin, and continues her vast amount of letter writing; it is Lovelace who is relegated to the waiting game, waiting on news from Belford and for Clarissa to change her mind.

Though Lovelace began his attempt on Clarissa in order to triumph over her, she instead views herself as the victor, as does he. She tells Dr. Lewen, “I have, through grace, triumphed over the deepest machinations. I have escaped from him. I have renounced him. The man whom once I could have loved, I have been enabled to despise: and shall not *charity* complete my triumph? And shall I not *enjoy* it? And where would be my triumph if he *deserved* my forgiveness?” (1254). Clarissa recognizes her own triumph, and Lovelace’s loss. She tells Dr. Lewen that Lovelace has lost her, but she has lost nothing in him (1254).

Clarissa’s death is often seen as Richardson’s definitive “no” to her desire to live single, and in many ways that view is correct. Richardson dearly loved Clarissa as a character and considered her a pious example to emulate; however, the example Clarissa actually provides is how nobly and bravely to face tragedy and death—she is an example in death, not in life. Clarissa is his Christian hero, but Anna Howe is his convert. Even before Anna marries, Clarissa’s experiences deeply affect her, and she begins to see the benefits of marriage: “With what comfort must those parents reflect these things, who have happily disposed of their daughters in marriage to a virtuous man! And how happy the young women who find themselves safe in a worthy protection!” (1015-16). Anna’s statement in favor of marriage to a good man is probably as close to Richardson’s own

opinion as occurs in *Clarissa*; in it she reaffirms Richardson's best hopes for his own daughters, and his female correspondents. Despite Richardson's conclusion in favor of marriage, he still struggles to find a satisfying conclusion for both Clarissa and Anna within the context of the novel that does *not* leave each character to herself. What Anna and Clarissa do have in common, in spite of their vastly different fates, is that neither woman's true happiness can be proven within the world of the novel. The reader must share, or at least accept, Richardson's belief in the Christian system that Clarissa does indeed receive her reward in heaven. Anna's fate is even more difficult to resolve, and frequently more difficult for readers to accept. Most of Richardson's readers find Clarissa to be a deeply sympathetic character. Even Lady Mary Wortley Montagu admitted to her daughter in 1752, "I was such an old Fool as to weep over Clarissa Harlowe like any milk maid of sixteen over the Ballad of the Ladie's Fall" (Halsband 3.9). However, the reaction to Clarissa's death tends to be the mournful loss of a beloved character; the reaction to Anna's marriage is frequently bewilderment and frustration, as the reactions of Mrs. Donnellan and Lady Bradshaigh can attest. Perhaps because neither character's fate is fully satisfied within the text of the novel, Richardson's readers frequently express their disappointment and frustration with his conclusion.

Though Richardson struggles to resolve the fates of the two friends and is unable to come to a truly satisfying conclusion for either woman, his attempt at concluding Clarissa's story does reveal much about his own opinions about the single life, as well as the difficult reality for single women of his time. At the beginning of the novel, Anna tells Clarissa, "I am fitter for *this* world than you, you for the *next* than me" (69), unwittingly foreshadowing each character's fate. Clarissa cannot find a protective home

on earth; her family abandons her and Lovelace is incapable of providing such a home, instead taking her to a mockery of a home, the whore house in London. Clarissa must find her home in the afterlife. Her famous letter to Lovelace, which the master of deception ironically misreads, states, "I am setting out with all diligence for my father's house" (1233). Clarissa explains to Belford that the phrase "my father's house" (which Lovelace reads to literally mean Harlowe Place) is a religious metaphor for heaven, but Clarissa's word choice is typically very significant. She has come to accept that her earthly home and father are lost to her, and she now sees heaven as her home and God as her father. Anna, in contrast, remains very much bound to earth. The women begin to sharply differ toward the novel's close, as Anna focuses on life and Clarissa on death.

Toward the end of the novel, both Anna and Clarissa associate living in the world with marriage. Anna views marriage with Lovelace as Clarissa's only option to live in the world, while Clarissa, eyes turned toward the next world, tells Anna their views must now be different and urges her to marry Hickman. Clarissa dies a single woman, but perhaps only because she has rejected this world for the next. Anna lives as a married woman, as she acknowledges she is "fitter for *this* world" than Clarissa. Richardson illustrates that the most realistic possibility for a woman to live happy and secure in this world is through marriage. Utter and Needham point out just how difficult Clarissa's situation is to resolve: "To Clarissa the problem is insoluble; no move than she can make is in every sense right; anything she can do is in some sense wrong" (267). Keymer similarly states that Richardson found Clarissa's case "simply insoluble" (122); perhaps for this reason he finds it difficult to bring his heroine's story to a satisfactory end. Nor is he really pleased with Anna's fate; he is still trying to improve the Anna-Hickman plot in

his final novel *Sir Charles Grandison* through the characters of Charlotte Grandison and Lord G. Harriet Byron calls Charlotte “[a] very Miss Howe;” Charlotte teasingly replies, “[t]o a *very* Mr. Hickman” (2.229). Richardson is not the only eighteenth-century novelist to struggle with the conclusion to *Clarissa*, however. Several of his contemporary novelists consider the same topic—single young women in an often hostile world—but rework various elements of the plot of *Clarissa*, perhaps attempting to improve upon that novel’s premise and conclusion. What is certain about Richardson and his novel is that he engaged his eighteenth-century audience in an intriguing debate about female autonomy and destiny, particularly as concerns the young woman of marriageable age who is increasingly able to make her own choice about if and whom she will marry.

Chapter Three:

Reverberations of *Clarissa* in Other English Novels

Clarissa had a profound impact on its readers, sparking debates between them and often with the novel's author himself. If other English novels published after *Clarissa* are any proof, then the subjects entered upon in *Clarissa* captured the interest and imagination of Richardson's fellow novelists as well. Henry Fielding, Frances Burney, and Jane Austen appear to be likewise interested in revisiting the story of *Clarissa*; each author takes up important ideas from that novel and reconsiders them within his or her own works—ideas such as the notion of the reformed rake, the virtuous heroine in a hostile situation, powerless father figures, and marriages of convenience. All three novelists attempt to solve various problems posed by *Clarissa*: Fielding recreates the love story of a reformed rake and a virtuous woman in *Tom Jones*, Burney attempts to find an appropriate father for a young woman who is essentially orphaned in *Evelina*, and Austen finds a good husband for an exceptional woman whose best friend chooses for herself an unromantic marriage of convenience in *Pride and Prejudice*. The continued interest in the subjects and conclusion of *Clarissa* reveals how much Richardson shaped his eighteenth-century audience, and underscores the reality of the problems posed by *Clarissa*.

Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding are often cast as polar opposites in the history of the English novel. While Richardson certainly did not take kindly to Fielding's *Shamela*, a parody of Richardson's first novel *Pamela*, the two authors exhibit an interest in many of the same topics. Fielding's first novel *Joseph Andrews* (1742) has an obvious

and widely acknowledged debt to Richardson's *Pamela*; however, Fielding's second novel, *Tom Jones*, also features remnants of *Clarissa* and reveals that Fielding is still reacting to ideas originally featured in Richardson's novel. *Tom Jones* was published in 1749, a year after the final installment of *Clarissa*, which was published serially from 1747-48. Fielding read *Clarissa*, and appears to be thinking of her when he creates the heroine of *Tom Jones*, Sophia Western. The two women are certainly not identical—they possess some similar traits, but Fielding invests his heroine with particular characteristics that seem purposefully designed to contrast with *Clarissa*. Utter and Needham propose that “[t]he difference between Richardson and Fielding, then, is in degree rather than in kind” (115), a point illustrated by Fielding's reconception of his own virtuous heroine.

Sophia is like *Clarissa* in as much as both women are beautiful, intelligent, and virtuous. The women are also placed in similar situations; they both have intractable fathers who insist they marry men they do not love, and even despise. Fielding's Blifil is as despicable a character as Richardson's Solmes, and Sophia pleads with as much emotion as *Clarissa* when begging her father not to force her to marry him. Sophia tells her father that “[t]o force me into this marriage would be killing me,” and that “such a marriage is worse than death.—He is not even indifferent; I hate and detest him” (257-58). When Sophia and *Clarissa* refuse to marry the men chosen for them, they are kept prisoners in their rooms, specifically forbidden the use of pen and paper. Just as Mr. Harlowe fails in his role as father to *Clarissa*, Sophia also lacks a truly paternal figure in her father. Sophia struggles to regain her father's affection much like *Clarissa* does with her own father: “I will give you the most solemn promise never to marry him [Tom Jones], nor any other, while my papa lives, without his consent. Let me dedicate my

whole life to your service; let me be again your poor Sophy, and my whole business and pleasure be, as it hath been to please and divert you” (740). Fielding clearly has Clarissa in mind when forming the character of Sophia, but he does so through the women’s differences, as well as their similarities.

Sophia Western is not a complete replica of Clarissa Harlowe, but even her significant differences invite a comparison to Richardson’s heroine. Both women are physically beautiful, but Fielding makes some important variations when describing his heroine. Utter and Needham point out that Clarissa is more often pictured as delicate or fragile than is Sophia. Lovelace describes Clarissa’s “wax-like flesh” and must remind himself that she is actually human: “[F]or, after all, flesh and blood I think she is!” (400). Fielding portrays Sophia as less of a delicate angel and more like a beautiful but vibrantly alive woman: “Her complexion had rather more of the lily than of the rose; but when exercise, or modesty, increased her natural colour, no vermilion could equal it” (135). Lovelace informs Belford that Clarissa has maintained her health in spite of “an originally tender constitution,” but states that when he embraces her in the garden before they leave Harlowe Place “[s]he was even fainting” at that moment (400). Clarissa’s health begins to fail after the rape, and Belford finds her in a severely diminished state at Mrs. Sinclair’s: “And offering to rise, she sunk down through excess of weakness and grief, in a fainting fit” (1067). Utter and Needham consider Clarissa’s fainting fits and Sophia’s fortitude as the major point of contrast between the two women. Sophia is not a fainting heroine; Utter and Needham point out that the only time Sophia faints is when she sees Tom’s broken arm after he rescues her when she is thrown from her horse. Sophia exhibits remarkable calm after her frightening ordeal: “She soon after, however,

recovered her spirits, assured him she was safe, and thanked him for the care he had taken of her” (Fielding 173). Once Tom is certain of Sophia’s safety, he reveals that he may have broken his arm in the attempt to assist her. Sophia then notices Tom’s “dangling” arm and her relative calm evaporates: “She now grew much paler than her fears for herself had made her before. All her limbs were seized with a trembling, insomuch that Jones could scarce support her” (Fielding 174). If fainting is an index of fear or overwhelming emotion, Sophia exhibits the greatest amount of fear and emotion for someone other than herself. Utter and Needham explain, “Sophia is never sick of self-love. Being guiltless, she has not fear for herself; being generous, she fears for others. Her fainting fits are not the only index of her character, but they mark it clearly, and Fielding uses them consistently” (156). When Squire Western insists the surgeon also see Sophia, she again regains her composure. When the surgeon tells her not to be afraid during the bleeding of her arm, Sophia calmly reassures him she has no fears: “If you open an artery, I promise you I’ll forgive you” (176). Sophia shows more emotion and concern for Tom’s safety and well-being than she does for her own.

When Utter and Needham state, “Fielding’s taste is, as a matter of course, more robust than Richardson’s” (176), they refer to fundamental differences in both the physical nature and personality of the two women. Sophia’s physical fortitude is significant in that it reflects her moral fortitude; she is certainly a virtuous woman, but is less morally delicate than Clarissa.

The manner in which the two women flee their homes again reveals the subtle way in which Fielding distinguishes his heroine. Clarissa does not plan to leave Harlowe Place when she meets with Lovelace; instead, she runs away with him after he scares her

into thinking they are being chased. Sophia, in a marked contrast that cannot be incidental, purposefully chooses to leave her home and does so with only her waiting-maid as a companion. When her father still insists she marry Blifil, Sophia firmly declares to her servant, "Honour, I am come to a resolution. I am determined to leave my father's house this very night" (305). It is a statement which one cannot imagine ever proceeding from the mouth of Clarissa Harlowe, who gives a heavy religious weight to the same phrase. Fielding highly esteems Sophia's moral and physical assurance; she never questions her right or ability to protect her virtue and person from her father's unreasonable demands and Blifil's malice. Fielding's narrator applauds Sophia's bravery: "Notwithstanding the many pretty arts which ladies sometimes practice, to display their fears on every little occasion (almost as many as the other sex uses to conceal theirs), certainly there is a degree of courage which not only becomes a woman, but is often necessary to enable her to discharge her duty. . . . Sophia, with all the gentleness which a woman can have, had all the spirit which she ought to have" (485). Thus, Sophia sets off on the dangerous road to London with only her maid to accompany her. The two women ride horseback and stay at inns along the way; it is a long, arduous, and decidedly unpleasant journey. Fielding admired Richardson's *Clarissa*, but he deliberately chose to create a heroine who decisively determines "to leave my father's house" until he "can be brought to some reason" (306). Sophia's use of the phrase "my father's house" could very well be a pointed reference to Clarissa; perhaps Fielding is suggesting how her story could have turned out differently.

Fielding not only creates a different kind of virtuous heroine through Sophia Western; he also creates an improved rake through the character of Tom Jones. Tom is

far from perfect; in fact, even as a child, “it was the universal opinion of all Mr Allworthy’s family that he was certainly born to be hanged” (103). Tom has many moments of mischief, even immorality; his particular weakness is women and his many sexual escapades provide some of the novel’s most amusing moments. Though Tom is something of a rake, Fielding distinguishes the good-natured Tom from the more malicious Lovelace. To borrow Utter and Needham’s phrase again, the difference between Fielding and Richardson is in “degree rather than in kind.” When Tom’s lower class paramour Molly Seagrim is found to be with child and is brought to Squire Allworthy, Tom gallantly comes to her defense: “[H]e caught Molly in his arms, and embracing her tenderly before them all, swore he would murder the first man who offered to lay hold of her” (166). Tom then confesses to be the father of Molly’s child (without requesting any proof of her own fidelity) and implores Allworthy not to send her away. Tom’s first thought is for Molly and he places her well-being before his own, which is perhaps the first sure sign that he deserves the similarly selfless Sophia. In sharp contrast is Lovelace’s behavior to Miss Betterton. The servant Joseph Lemman learns that the family of Miss Betterton is attempting to prosecute Lovelace for her rape. According to their reports, Lovelace raped Miss Betterton who then died while delivering a son Lovelace will not acknowledge as his. Lovelace merely shrugs the story off when Joseph confronts him with it and gives him his personal honor code for how to treat the various women he has ruined: “[T]o shun common women: to marry off a former mistress before he took a new one: to set the mother above what if her friends were cruel: to maintain a lady handsomely in her lying-in: to provide for the little one according to the mother’s degree: and to go in mourning for her if she died in childbed” (495). Lovelace conducts

his love affairs with cold detachment, and exhibits no pity for any of his former lovers in distress. Fielding does not deny that Tom Jones displays an often imprudent lack of self-control, but he never questions Tom's heart.

While the most serious accusation that Clarissa levels against Lovelace is that "he wants a *heart*" (184), Tom Jones' most redeeming quality is his heart; in fact, he is almost universally adored for his natural generosity and goodness. When Mrs. Miller tells Tom of a poor family related to her, he is so moved by the tale that he draws her aside and gives her £50 to give to the family. Mrs. Miller asks, "Good heavens! Is there such a man in the world?" (631). The ever tender-hearted Tom responds, "I hope madam . . . there are many who have common humanity; for to relieve such distresses in our fellow creatures can hardly be called more" (631). Tom is portrayed as a noble character in spite of his sexual peccadilloes, and Fielding clearly sees the good in Tom as outweighing any of the bad. Fielding's narrator admonishes his readers, "not to condemn a character as a bad one, because it is not perfectly a good one" (454). Fielding does not expect either his hero or his heroine to be paragons of virtue; Tom is a rake who is truly good at heart, and Sophia is a moral woman whose sense of propriety still has room for some allowances. Fielding rewrites the Clarissa and Lovelace love story by allowing his hero to actually deserve the heroine, and he creates a heroine who is able to love the hero in spite of his faults. Fielding pleasantly closes his novel with Tom and Sophia's marriage and concludes that "there are not to be found a worthier man and woman than this fond couple, so neither can any be imagined more happy" (871). Fielding is able to confidently conclude his novel because he has created two characters who actually deserve each other, and their marriage is the obvious and natural conclusion. Fielding rewrites the

story of *Clarissa* the way many of *Clarissa's* readers may have wished of Richardson—the rake reforms, the virtuous heroine is happy to accept him, and “there is not a neighbour, a tenant, or a servant, who doth not most gratefully bless the day when Mr Jones was married to his Sophia” (871).

The tendency of the eighteenth-century novel to end happily in wedlock is proof that Richardson was not the only author to feel uneasy about a woman choosing to live single. The idea that the world is a dangerous and hostile environment for the young, inexperienced, unmarried woman is a theme that Frances Burney reiterates in her novel *Evelina*, published in 1778, thirty years after the publication of *Clarissa* and *Tom Jones*. Burney's heroine, *Evelina*, is beautiful and virtuous, but naïve. Her innocence, or ignorance, of the world's ways is observed by her guardian, Reverend Villars: “She is quite a little rustic, and knows nothing of the world” (21). When *Evelina* attends her first ball in London, she is both in awe of the scene and very aware of how she is different, confiding in Villars, “for anyone brought up in the great world, and accustomed to its ways, can have no idea of such sort of fears as mine” (32). *Evelina* quickly discovers that the wide world of London is not just large or intimidating—a young woman with little protection such as herself is open prey. While attending a large party with her silly and ill-mannered cousins, the Branghtons, she and the female Branghtons are openly accosted by a group of men. *Evelina* describes her panicked reaction when one man physically grabs her: “Terrified to death, I struggled with such vehemence to disengage myself from him, that I succeeded, in spite of his efforts to detain me; and immediately, and with a swiftness which fear only could have given me, I flew rather than ran up the walk, hoping to secure my safety by returning to the lights and company we had so foolishly left”

(197). Evelina's frightening experience underscores the importance of protection for a young, single woman. Evelina, like Clarissa, is in desperate need of protection—particularly male, paternal protection—in a hostile world in which her virtue alone may not be enough to protect her.

Both Clarissa and Evelina need a father to protect them from conniving rakes, but both women are essentially fatherless. Neither Mr. Harlowe nor Sir Belmont will assume his proper role as a father; instead, both men reject their daughters and sign their paternal authority away. Sir Belmont will not even own Evelina as his biological offspring; instead, he has denied his marriage to Evelina's mother as legitimate and refuses to own Evelina as his rightful daughter and heir. Evelina's mother died in childbirth, leaving Evelina an illegitimate orphan to be raised by the kindly Reverend Villars. Evelina's rejection by her birth father and subsequent disinheritance causes a crisis of identity for her. Reverend Villars instructs her to go by the last name of Annville, but her absence of a legitimate name is deeply troubling to Evelina. She acknowledges her lack of a true identity to Villars when she writes, "I cannot to *you* sign *Annville*, and what other name may I claim?" (26). The moment recalls Clarissa's own identity crisis after the rape, when she questions to whom she belongs: "I don't know what my name is!" (890). Evelina's lack of an identity continues to plague her when she joins polite society in London, as Perry observes in *Novel Relations*: "Since degrees of birth, family, and social position are key to her reception in that corrupt world, her biological father's refusal to recognize her as his daughter is a profound problem" (86). Thus, the words of Mr. Lovel deliver a particular sting when he snidely comments of Evelina, "but really, for a person who is nobody, to give herself such airs" (37). Evelina does indeed feel like nobody, and

when she is again in Mr. Lovel's company later in the novel, she remembers his cruel comment and acts accordingly: "Since I, as Mr. Lovel says, am *Nobody*, I seated myself quietly on a window, and not very near to any body" (288). Evelina does not go unnoticed, though she may feel like nobody; Lord Orville converses with Evelina, and his kind attention succeeds in removing Evelina's feelings of inferiority: "But, when Lord Orville appeared, the scene changed: he came up stairs last, and seeing me sit alone, not only spoke to me directly, but drew a chair next mine, and honoured me with his entire attention" (289). Evelina falls in love with Lord Orville, but her orphaned state is again a problem. Lord Orville confesses he has fallen in love with Evelina, and he asks her whether she is free to give her own hand in marriage or if he needs to make such a request elsewhere. Evelina confusedly replies, "I hardly know, my Lord, I hardly know myself to whom I most belong!" (353). Evelina's fatherless state is distressing to her not only because of the protection she is missing, but also for the guidance and direction she is lacking. Lord Orville's question of whom he must petition for Evelina's hand again recalls the moment when James, Jr., attempts to forcibly give Clarissa's hand to Solmes. Clarissa reminds her brother that he has no authority to give her away to any man. Evelina likewise longs for her real father to give her hand to Lord Orville, to both legitimize and bless her choice of a husband.

Since Burney clearly establishes Evelina's need for a father as the true impetus behind most of her distress in the novel, she must first restore Evelina to her rightful father before she can alleviate any of her suffering. Mrs. Selwyn arranges a meeting between Evelina and Sir Belmont, as she is sure he will not be able to deny Evelina as his daughter once he sees her. Before Evelina even glimpses Sir Belmont, she is almost

overcome with emotion when she hears him speak from another room: “The voice of a *father*—Oh dear and revered name!—which then, for the first time, struck my ears, affected me in a manner I cannot describe” (371). Sir Belmont indeed cannot deny Evelina as his legitimate daughter once he sees her, and admits she is nearly identical to her deceased mother. Evelina discovers that Sir Belmont has been duped into thinking another child is his, and that he has raised the girl as his rightful daughter. He agrees to allow Evelina and his false daughter to marry their respective loves as quickly as possible, to avoid any potential scandal. Mrs. Selwyn informs Evelina of the plan: “[W]e agreed, that the most eligible scheme for all parties, would be to have both the real and fictitious daughter married without delay. Therefore, if either of you have any inclination to pull caps for the title of Miss Belmont, you must do it with all speed, as next week will take from both of you all pretensions to it” (377). Evelina, who has long felt like nobody, is suddenly privy to two identities, as Sir Belmont’s daughter and Lord Orville’s wife.

Though Sir Belmont acknowledges Evelina as his rightful daughter and heir, he is so overcome by the strange situation and Evelina’s striking resemblance to her mother that he is unable to have a real relationship with her. Evelina gains the authority associated with her wealthy and titled father, but not the emotional connection she has craved. However, Evelina has increasingly begun to see how Reverend Villars has acted the role of a surrogate father for her. Evelina asks Villars, “for am I not *your* child?—the creature of your own forming—Yet, oh Sir, friend, parent of my heart!” (336). Evelina realizes that though Sir Belmont can give her a legitimate name, Villars has already supplied her with a legitimate fatherly love. When Villars tells Evelina he will now commit her to her rightful parent, Evelina responds, “You *commit me to my real parent*,--

Ah, Guardian, Friend, Protector of my youth!—by whom my helpless infancy was cherished, my mind formed, my very life preserved,—*you* are the Parent my heart acknowledges, and to you do I vow eternal duty, gratitude, and affection” (350). Evelina, like Clarissa, suffers because her father will not do his proper duty by her; however, Burney attempts to solve the problem of the fatherless heroine by giving her a different, better father. In fact, the novel ends with Evelina literally enveloped by male protection—her biological father claims her as his true heir, Lord Orville claims her as his wife, and Villars claims her as the daughter of his heart. The last letter of the novel is Evelina’s brief missive to Villars concerning her nuptials: “All is over, my dearest Sir, and the fate of your Evelina is decided! This morning, with fearful joy, and trembling gratitude, she united herself for ever with the object of her dearest, her eternal affection! I have time for no more; the chaise now waits which is to conduct me to Berry Hill, and to the arms of the best of men” (406). Evelina states she is “united” with her love, Lord Orville, and is also returning to her childhood home “to the arms of the best of men,” Villars. Not only does Burney provide Evelina with a stable marriage, but she allows Evelina to maintain her title of daughter to, not one, but two fathers. Burney’s Evelina finds protection as both a daughter and a wife, and reaffirms the dangers to be found by the single woman alone in the world.

Jane Austen is perhaps the prime example of an English novelist who focuses on young women and the serious implications of if and whom they choose to marry. Though Austen is not technically an eighteenth-century novelist (she was born in 1775 and all her novels were published in the early nineteenth century), she is an invaluable source in any study of single women and marriage in the English novel. Austen is very much a product

of the eighteenth century; her novels illustrate the changing attitudes concerning love and marriage, and women. Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* was published in 1813, over sixty years after the publication of *Clarissa* and *Tom Jones* and about thirty-five years after the publication of *Evelina*. The novel's heroine, Elizabeth Bennet, for all her wonderful differences, does share some traits with the other exceptional young heroines who came before her. Elizabeth shares her intelligence with *Clarissa* and her spirit with *Sophia*; like *Evelina*, her social position is not inferior, but neither is it impressive, and her lack of fortune could impede her chances of finding a husband. As in these three earlier novels, Elizabeth's father shirks his responsibility and authority, and her family is known to behave in a ridiculous or embarrassing manner, not unlike *Squire Western* or *Evelina's* cousins. The basic elements of plot in *Pride and Prejudice* show that Austen is also reconsidering *Clarissa*; indeed, she actually seems more attuned to *Clarissa* than do *Fielding* or *Burney*. While *Fielding* focuses on the love story of the reformed rake and the virtuous heroine and *Burney* on the fatherless daughter in need of male protection, Austen incorporates even more of the concerns of *Richardson's* novel: she considers the important role a father plays in his daughter's life, the task of finding a husband for an exceptional woman, and the unromantic reality of a marriage of convenience. Austen reveals that the questions raised by *Richardson* in 1747 are still, fifty years later, pressing.

The Bennet family is comprised of five daughters, and Mrs. Bennet considers it her chief duty to find husbands for each of them: "The business of her life was to get her daughters married" (53). Mr. Bennet is not as concerned with his daughters' futures as is his wife. When Mrs. Bennet pleads with her husband to visit their new, very rich neighbor Mr. Bingley, with the fervent hope that he may marry one of their girls, Mr.

Bennet casually replies, “I will send a few lines by you to assure him of my hearty consent to his marrying whichever he chooses of the girls” (52). Mr. Bennet’s droll detachment from family affairs may be humorous, but his lack of concern is also detrimental to his family. When he brushes aside Elizabeth’s concerns about the silly and immature Lydia traveling with the Forsters to Brighton, Elizabeth urges him to reconsider: “If you, my dear father, will not take the trouble of checking her exuberant spirits, and of teaching her that her present pursuits are not to be the business of her life, she will soon be beyond the reach of amendment” (258). The need for caution is later proven when Lydia elopes with Wickham, potentially damaging her family’s reputation forever and ruining the other girls’ chances for marriage. Mr. Bennet is yet another father in the English novel who fails to do his proper duty to his daughters. Though Elizabeth and her father share a very close relationship, she is in need of a husband who will behave differently than her father, just as Lord Orville is a proper husband for Evelina because he is more like Reverend Villars than Sir Belmont. Elizabeth likewise needs to find a husband who will provide for her the respect, protection, and authority that her own father does not give his daughters. Burney focuses on finding a better father for her heroine in *Evelina*, and Austen is similarly aware that Elizabeth Bennet deserves a better family than the one she is born into. With the exception of her older sister Jane, Elizabeth’s parents and sisters are frequently guilty of impropriety and general silliness. In fact, Elizabeth is not entirely sad to leave her family home to marry Mr. Darcy: “[S]he looked forward with delight to the time when they should be removed from society so little pleasing to either, to all the comfort and elegance of their family party at Pemberley” (392).

Elizabeth's willingness to leave her family is representative of the shift in emphasis to conjugal ties rather than familial ties as described by Perry in *Novel Relations*. Whereas Clarissa is very sensitive about retaining her family ties, Elizabeth is almost eager to sever hers in favor of marriage to Mr. Darcy. Clarissa argues to remain single and live as her father's daughter; though Elizabeth arguably has a better relationship with her father than does Clarissa, she is happy to exchange her role as Mr. Bennet's daughter for that of Mr. Darcy's wife. However, Elizabeth is conscious of Mr. Bennet's failures as a father, and like Clarissa, she is also aware of her father's failures as a husband: "Elizabeth, however, had never been blind to the impropriety of her father's behaviour as a husband. . . . But she had never felt so strongly as now, the disadvantages which must attend the children of so unsuitable a marriage" (262). While Clarissa views her parents' troubled marriage as an argument against the conjugal state, Elizabeth looks to positive unions, such as her uncle and aunt Gardiner's marriage, as her example. She also learns from her father's example of marrying a woman who is his intellectual inferior, and instead chooses to marry a man whom she respects as much as she loves. Austen reconsiders the problem of the powerless father by creating a heroine who loves her father while also acknowledging his shortcomings, and who ultimately turns to her husband to supply the mutually respecting and loving family she needs.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, marriage to Mr. Darcy is a far better option for Elizabeth than remaining a single daughter in her family's home. Mrs. Bennet would surely have been pained to have to support an old maid daughter, and the grief Elizabeth could expect to receive from her mother would alone be an incentive for marriage. However, in all of Austen's novels, marriages are not portrayed as uniformly positive or negative—there are

good marriages and bad ones, imprudent matches and carefully calculated ones. Austen's novels are of interest because they mark a transition in attitudes toward marriage—attitudes perhaps best exemplified by Elizabeth Bennet and Charlotte Lucas. Though the two women are best friends, Austen uncovers their marked differences in attitudes toward marriage for her readers before Elizabeth is able to discover them for herself. When Charlotte remarks to Elizabeth that Jane should be more active in obtaining Mr. Bingley's affections, Elizabeth replies, "Your plan is a good one . . . where nothing is in question but the desire of being well married; and if I were determined to get a rich husband, or any husband, I dare say I should adopt it" (69). Elizabeth's tone is teasing, but she is unaware of just how serious her friend really is: "You make me laugh, Charlotte; but it is not sound. You know it is not sound, and that you would never act in this way yourself" (70). What Elizabeth does not realize is that Charlotte is being perfectly serious, and will, in fact, act in just such a way herself. Charlotte's decision to marry Mr. Collins is a purely practical measure, as carefully and coolly considered as a business venture: "Her reflections were in general satisfactory. Mr Collins to be sure was neither sensible nor agreeable; his society was irksome, and his attachment to her must be imaginary. But still he would be her husband.—Without thinking highly either of men or of matrimony, marriage had always been her object; it was the only honourable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want" (163). Though Charlotte is content with her choice and exhibits no qualms about marrying without any real affection, Elizabeth is appalled by her friend's behavior. She tells Jane, "Mr Collins is a conceited, pompous, narrow-minded, silly man; you know he is, as well as I do; and you must feel, as well as I

do, that the woman who marries him, cannot have a proper way of thinking. You shall not defend her, though it is Charlotte Lucas. You shall not, for the sake of one individual, change the meaning of principle and integrity, nor endeavour to persuade yourself or me, that selfishness is prudence, and insensibility of danger, security for happiness” (174).

Given Elizabeth’s harsh estimation of her friend, one suspects that she would feel much the same about Anna Howe’s decision to marry Hickman. Like Hickman, Mr. Collins is not a morally objectionable character (as opposed to Lovelace or Wickham), but Elizabeth clearly senses her friend’s superiority in intelligence and personality. Austen’s inclusion of the Charlotte and Mr. Collins subplot is perhaps an attempt to revise the Anna and Hickman relationship. Richardson attempts to resolve the problem caused by marrying Anna to a man she openly dislikes by abruptly changing her opinion of him in the Conclusion to *Clarissa*. Richardson’s endeavor to remedy the situation is not entirely successful or satisfying, even for the author himself. Austen, however, chooses to reconfigure the Anna-Hickman marriage in a very different and intriguing way. Charlotte Lucas cannot confess any real admiration or affection for Mr. Collins, just as Anna cannot proclaim any enthusiasm in marrying Hickman. However, instead of attempting to create a believable romance between two such unlikely characters, Austen portrays instead a marriage of convenience. Mr. Collins is simply in search of a wife, as the quick transfer of his affections from Jane to Elizabeth to Charlotte in the course of a few days demonstrates, and Charlotte accepts him “solely from the pure and disinterested desire of an establishment” (163). Sir William and Lady Lucas quickly give their consent as they view the marriage as “a most eligible match for their daughter, to whom they could give little fortune” and Charlotte’s brothers are “relieved from their apprehension

of Charlotte's dying an old maid" (163). The union of Charlotte Lucas and Mr. Collins is unromantic; Austen makes no attempt to portray the marriage as anything other than a purely practical decision by which Charlotte, her family, and Mr. Collins all gain something they desire. Anna and Hickman are recast as two characters who do not seek love, but merely the vaguest form of respectable companionship. Thus, Austen solves the problem of uniting two people in marriage who do not really like each other by simply making that fact not a major concern for either of them.

Though the Collinses' marriage is certainly not appealing, Austen interestingly refuses to condemn them too harshly. Elizabeth's anger with her friend subsides and she soon discovers, "Absence had increased her desire of seeing Charlotte again, and weakened her disgust of Mr Collins" (187). She agrees to visit her friend and upon first arriving at the Collins home, Elizabeth finds the newlyweds to be comfortable and content: "Elizabeth in the solitude of her chamber had to meditate upon Charlotte's degree of contentment, to understand her address in guiding, and composure in bearing with her husband, and to acknowledge that it was all done very well" (193). In the essay "Sleeping with Mr. Collins," Ruth Perry states that both Austen and Elizabeth are willing to acquit Charlotte for marrying the ridiculous Mr. Collins. Despite the vehemence of Elizabeth's first protestations against the match, Perry observes, "Both Jane Austen and her character, Elizabeth Bennet, are sympathetic to Charlotte's cheerful adjustment and genuinely glad to see her make the best of 'her home and her housekeeping, her parish and her poultry'" (214). Neither Austen nor Elizabeth is insensitive to the unpleasant reality of life for the single woman; being neither a great beauty nor a wealthy woman, Charlotte has made the best choice she knows to make. She refuses to judge ill of herself

for doing so, and even Elizabeth cannot think badly of her for long. She remarks to Mr. Darcy, “My friend has an excellent understanding—though I am not certain that I consider her marrying Mr Collins as the wisest thing she ever did. She seems perfectly happy, however, and in a prudential light, it is certainly a very good match for her” (212). Perry points out that Elizabeth’s eventual acceptance of her friend’s decision actually reveals Austen’s own attitude on the subject: “In this, as in so much else, Austen reveals her eighteenth-century sensibility because Charlotte Lucas Collins is a vestigial character, left over from an era of pragmatic rather than romantic matches, before the discourse of the later eighteenth century created unbridgeable moral conflict over arranged or prudential marriages” (“Sleeping” 215). As stated before, Austen’s novels are really a transition between two periods and two sensibilities—marrying for love or marrying for practical reasons.

If Charlotte represents the purely practical, Elizabeth represents the transition to the focus on mutual love and respect in marriage. Though Austen is willing to forgive Charlotte Lucas for marrying for practical reasons, she refuses to allow Elizabeth Bennet to do so. Elizabeth is certainly not ignorant of the practical aspect of marriage for a young woman of little financial means. After she rejects Mr. Darcy’s first proposal, she later receives the opportunity to view his vast estate Pemberley and reflects on what she has lost: “[A]t that moment she felt, that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something!”(267). Though Elizabeth does fall in love with Mr. Darcy, she is also aware that he is conveniently rich. When Jane asks Elizabeth how long she has loved him, Elizabeth slyly replies, “I believe I must date it from my first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley” (382). Elizabeth, then, is not completely unaware of the practical aspect of

marriage; however, both Jane and Mr. Bennet warn Elizabeth against marrying for purely pecuniary reasons. Jane asks her sister, “And do you really love him quite well enough? Oh, Lizzy! do any thing rather than marry without affection. Are you quite sure that you feel what you ought to do?” (382). Whereas Charlotte marries a man clearly her intellectual inferior, Mr. Bennet does not desire the same for Elizabeth: “I know your disposition, Lizzy. I know that you could be neither happy nor respectable, unless you truly esteemed your husband; unless you looked up to him as a superior. Your lively talents would place you in the greatest danger in an unequal marriage” (385). Elizabeth assures them that not only does she love Mr. Darcy, but she is sure he is the only man who could ever make her truly happy. The predicament of *Clarissa* and *Anna* continues to be resolved in later heroines that come after them; Elizabeth, like *Sophia Western* and *Evelina*, marries a man who truly deserves her. While Austen is able to understand *Charlotte Lucas*, she chooses to give the exceptional Elizabeth a husband worthy of her talents.

What tends to distinguish these later heroines from *Clarissa* is that they are allowed to find husbands who are all essentially good men. *Lord Orville* is arguably the least reproachable, while *Tom Jones* is unchaste and *Mr. Darcy* is prideful; but each man possesses a good and generous heart, in stark contrast to *Lovelace*, who “wants a heart.” However, one does wonder what would have become of *Sophia*, *Evelina*, and *Elizabeth* if the heroes of their stories were not such good men. Though *Fielding*, *Burney*, and *Austen* are all interested in solving some of the issues that *Richardson* struggled to resolve in *Clarissa*, they avoid considering the most difficult question *Richardson* raises—can, or should, a young woman choose to live single? These three authors are able to avoid that

question because they give their female protagonists appropriate husbands by their respective novels' conclusions.

In true Richardson form, readers can find an example of the difficult question of whether a woman should choose to stay single outside the novel. Austen's own life may provide the best example of the difficult dichotomy between the single woman's desires and the reality of her society. Carol Shields relates a famous incident in Austen's life in her biography of the author, *Jane Austen* (2001). While visiting family friends, the Bigg-Wither family, in 1802, the twenty-seven year old Austen received a surprising marriage proposal from Harris Bigg-Wither, whom Shields describes as "a rather shy and shambling young man of twenty-one, with a serious stutter and an oddly blunted intelligence" (106). Just as surprisingly, Austen accepted him. One must assume Austen had her reasons; she had, after all, known Bigg-Wither most of her life and was certainly fond of him. He stood to inherit the family estate, so she would have been financially secure. She was also fast approaching the irreversible age of the old maid, and the idea of a secure marriage and comfortable home must have appealed to her, as Shields points out: "Jane Austen also longed for a home; all her novels concern themselves with this longing" (107). However, if Austen's acceptance of Bigg-Wither was an attempt to convince herself that she could make a marriage of convenience like Charlotte Lucas, she ultimately failed. The morning after Austen accepted Bigg-Wither's proposal, she informed him that she had changed her mind. Shields states that the incident has become a part of the "Austen legend" and that the author's family members had their own opinions and conjectures about the situation: "Each family member had a theory, an explanation, about why Jane, normally so determined in her resolutions, so *sensible*,

should have entered into a hasty agreement and then, with great clumsiness, extricated herself. What a pity, some of them must have said. Her life would have been more comfortable, more rewarding, and there might even have been children. An averted catastrophe, others must have said; for Jane Austen was not Charlotte Lucas. She was not a woman who could marry without love and without even a measure of respect” (109). Austen herself illustrates the difficult choice for single women just as eloquently as do Charlotte Lucas and Clarissa Harlowe: Does one marry and sacrifice personal integrity and feeling in exchange for a home, financial security, and social standing? Or, does one remain single and possibly struggle financially and remain forever dependent on a parent, a sibling, or other family member? Austen’s novels do not really provide an answer to the questions; instead, her heroines find husbands they can marry without an affront to integrity and self-worth. The problem first encountered by Clarissa Harlowe remains the same for Richardson’s contemporaries and beyond. Fielding, Burney, and Austen all provide their heroines with better options than Lovelace or Hickman, but the message is still the same—marriage is the better option, though Austen at least may not have been able to apply that principle to her own life. What these three authors do illustrate is how deeply the topics Richardson addressed in *Clarissa* affected their society, and especially their importance to single women. The inability of Richardson, Fielding, Burney, and Austen to find a place for the single woman within their novels reflects the struggle of the single woman in eighteenth-century England to find a fulfilling role within the context of her own society.

Conclusion

The single woman held a precarious position within eighteenth-century English society, just as the protagonist of Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* maintains an insecure role within the Harlowe family when she refuses to marry the man they choose for her. When she voices instead her desire to remain single, their worst fears are confirmed. Arabella peevishly claims, "I do not doubt but it is Miss Clary's aim, if she does not fly to her Lovelace, to get her estate into her own hands, and go to live at *The Grove* [the grandfather's estate], in that independence upon which she builds all her perverseness" (199). Arabella insinuates that all of the family's discontent with Clarissa results from her wish to be independent of them. Mr. Harlowe likewise fears the result of Clarissa's inheritance and readily accepts Arabella's and James, Jr.,'s malevolent hints that Clarissa is a rebel to his authority: "We will not appear like fools in this matter, and as if we had no authority over our own daughter. We will not, in short, be bullied out of our child by a cursed rake, who had like to have killed our only son!—And so she had better make a merit of her obedience: for comply she shall, if I live; independent as she thinks my father's indiscreet bounty hath made her of me, her father. Indeed since that, she has never been what she was before" (177). Clarissa's desperate attempts to bring her family to reason and her continued appeals to be reconciled to them after her departure from home reveal that the change did not occur in Clarissa after her inheritance; rather, the change is in her family as they now fear her potential independence as damaging to their own desire to raise the family to the level of the nobility. Clarissa's desire to live single is not a threat until she receives her inheritance; otherwise, she will be a single, dependent daughter who has a variety of relatives to support her. Like any other eighteenth-century

unmarried woman, she could have assisted her aging parents, brother, or uncles in managing their homes. Clarissa becomes a threat once she receives an independent fortune, because she can live on her own at her estate, and can manage that estate as she sees fit; most likely, not ceding it to James, Jr., to propel the family closer to its ambition of gaining a peerage.

Once Clarissa leaves Harlowe Place with Lovelace, the impossibility of resolving her story is sealed. As Utter and Needham have pointed out, every possibility Clarissa considers is a dead end; her situation cannot be remedied by any of the outs Richardson attempts to give her. She cannot marry Solmes or Lovelace because either marriage would be a moral affront to her own sense of integrity and the sacredness of the marriage vows. She cannot litigate for her right to resume her estate because she cannot morally justify neglecting her duty to her father, despite his refusal of his fatherly duties to her. Richardson also does not allow for a hero to rescue Clarissa; no Sir Charles Grandison, Lord Orville, or Mr. Darcy enters the scene to be a husband deserving of Clarissa and her merits. Richardson easily could have allowed Clarissa's preference for the single life to dissipate by finding a worthy man; but Richardson is not interested in finding a husband for Clarissa. He is interested in pursuing her desire for the single life, even to the difficult conclusion at which he eventually arrives. Richardson finds he has an impossible situation from which to extricate his heroine; he cannot find a place for Clarissa within the context of his novel, ultimately choosing to end with her death. A Protestant nunnery of the type suggested by Astell or the fictional Sir Charles Grandison does not exist, though the deeply religious and contemplative Clarissa could find no more welcome refuge. Richardson, both in his correspondence and in *Sir Charles Grandison*, expresses

the need for a type of hospital for women “betrayed by the perfidy of men” (*Sir Charles* 4.356), another appropriate place for the charitable and compassionate Clarissa. One can easily imagine her in the role of empathetic nurse to a woman such as the ruined Miss Betterton. However, the reality for Richardson is that no such places exist in his society. If they did, then the end of Clarissa’s fictional life could perhaps have been a different.

In 1748, Richardson responded to Lady Bradshaigh’s pleas to save Clarissa by reminding her of the imperfect world they both occupy and mentioning the significant losses he has endured with the deaths of his first wife and eight of his children: “The case, therefore, is not what we should like to bear, but what (such is the common lot) we must bear, like it or not” (Barbauld 4.228). Richardson is committed to realism in the story of Clarissa, and it stands to reason that if he could not find a place for a woman like her in reality, neither could he do so in fiction. In the same letter to Lady Bradshaigh, Richardson remarked, “A writer who follows nature, and pretends to keep the Christian system in his eye, cannot make a heaven in this world for his favourites, or represent this life otherwise than as a state of probation. Clarissa, I once more aver, could not be rewarded in this world” (Barbauld 4.225). Richardson depends on Heaven to give Clarissa her reward for suffering on earth, and it is the only conclusion he can give his readers. Even Clarissa’s final words highlight her unfinished life, as Belford says her final exclamation of “Jesus” is “but half-pronounced” (1362); he must actually fill in the missing word “Jesus” just as the reader must fill in the missing blanks of Clarissa’s fate. Richardson’s inability to resolve Clarissa’s fate in his novel is likewise representative of the single woman’s struggle to find a fulfilling role within the context of eighteenth-century English society.

Richardson's novel is really a reflection of his own society, as the nonfiction works of Mary Astell can attest. Though Richardson and Astell come to different conclusions—Richardson arguing that women should not stay single and Astell arguing that women should not marry—they actually uncover the same predicament. Astell significantly terms her female monastery as “a Retreat from the World for those who desire that advantage” (*Serious* 18); Astell's remark reveals that she cannot find a place for single women within the context of her own society, leaving her to propose “a Retreat from the World.” The reason Richardson must marry his character Anna Howe to Hickman at the conclusion of *Clarissa* is that Anna lives; if she is to continue to live, to be a part of “this world,” then the best fate Richardson can find for her is marriage. Richardson uses the story of Clarissa to show why she practically and morally cannot do what she, and Richardson himself, find so tempting—to live on her own estate as a single woman. If Richardson is conflicted about how to resolve Clarissa's situation, then it is because his own society is similarly conflicted about the idea of independent women. The novel is representative of an increasing focus on the individual, and the heroines of eighteenth-century novels must be considered as individuals as well. The notions of independence and autonomy are closely associated with individualism, and the idea that single women could be privy to such both attracts and disconcerts Richardson. In fact, Clarissa herself is torn between her desire for the single life and her sense of personal duty and obedience. What Richardson actually discovers is the difficult dichotomy of the single woman—that her desires for independence, autonomy, and a fulfilling role in society are frequently frustrated by reality.

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